



## I Have a Cottage in the Country (translated by Carmine Di Biase and Rashad Ahmed)

Abdul Aziz Al-Maqalih

Abdul Aziz Al-Maqalih was one of Yemen's finest modern poets. Born in 1937, he died recently, in November of 2022, having published over fifteen collections of poetry. He worked in education and served as cultural adviser to the Yemeni government. His poetry is known for at once embracing and transforming Yemeni tradition.

Dr. Rashad Ahmed is an assistant professor of English at Jacksonville State University in northeast Alabama. He is a linguist with a multidisciplinary background in TESOL and Composition Studies. He has been granted several awards, fellowships, and scholarships, which included his Fulbright scholarship 2013 to 2017, the Applied Linguistics Concentration Award, and a Summer Fellowship from the University of Memphis.

### **I Have a Cottage in the Country**

(translated by Carmine Di Biase and Rashad Ahmed)

I have a cottage in the country,  
as broad as its garden  
and cosseted by the scent of roses.  
At midnight  
I climb up to the roof  
and listen to the stars as they make their  
dreamy music for me, for my soul.  
The stars hold the sky's night-time face  
and write such sweet words  
on it that the heart  
yearns for it.

I have a cottage in the country  
unmatched in its beauty,  
which satisfies the hungry soul.  
The stones I gathered with my own hands  
and built the walls and rooms  
like the stanzas of a poem,  
but free of any rules of form.  
And to adorn the façade it was  
Picasso himself who helped me, lending  
me his greens and blues.

I have a cottage in the country,  
only a few humble, square meters.  
The front door is of cedar.  
Every dawn, the windows lead my  
gaze towards mountains suspended from the sun's  
interlaced beams, towards valleys whose fingers,  
covered in crystalline blades of grass,  
fill with clear water

that flows proudly, like a scarf  
woven by breezes  
from the greenish light's rays.

I have a cottage in the country,  
tasteful and luminous,  
bathed clean every morning by the sun  
and again in the evening by the darkness.  
When sadness engulfs me  
and tightens round my heart,  
I run there,  
where I can free my soul  
of the burdens it carries  
from diseased and decadent cities.

I have a cottage in the country.  
The shepherd passes every morning  
under my windows  
as he makes his way to the valley,  
walking behind his flocks,  
which grow more numerous by the day.  
At noon, when the sun is too bright, too hot,  
stillness and silence shade the village,  
and wafting over from the far edge  
of the valley come soft, enchanting melodies,  
from the mouth of the shepherd's pipe.

I have a cottage in the country  
that has no lock or key.  
At night, stars that have gone astray  
can come inside, where whole flocks  
of pigeons find their shelter.  
The cottage is open to light,  
open to shadow,  
open every dawn  
to the music  
of chirping birds  
which wakes the deer  
and the water of the sleeping stream.

I have a cottage in the country.  
If I go back there  
I shall be greeted by the cypresses,  
by the warmth of the cedar door  
and the green grass of the walkway,  
by the butterflies dancing to the rhythm

of the water, which keeps time as it rumbles  
down the valley's fingers, rubbing  
their gravel beds smooth.

I have a cottage in the country,  
on the village's rising slope,  
seen by no one but me  
and built by hand in a dream,  
by a patient hand,  
a hand that painted the stones  
with the colors of tranquility,  
and all of it resting on a paper  
foundation, on the marble of words.

Can you believe, my dears,  
that I own a cottage in the country,  
a cottage which delights in the play of the sun's beams  
and is cosseted by the scent of roses,  
and that, right under its windows, a shepherd passes by?  
O this ... sweet, beckoning dream.  
It has lifted the veil from my heart's eyes  
with the breath of poetry, made my soul see  
again, from the highest peak  
of God's kingdom,  
what cannot be seen.