

“Where did the handsome beloved go?”

By Jalal al-Din Rumi

Translated by Brad Gooch

Where did the handsome beloved go?
I wonder, where did that tall, shapely cypress tree go?

He spread his light among us like a candle.
Where did he go? So strange, where did he go without me?

All day long my heart trembles like a leaf.
All alone at midnight, where did that beloved go?

Go to the road, and ask any passing traveler —
That soul-stirring companion, where did he go?

Go to the garden, and ask the gardener —
That tall, shapely rose stem, where did he go?

Go to the rooftop, and ask the watchman —
That unique sultan, where did he go?

Like a madman, I search in the meadows!
That deer in the meadows, where did he go?

My tearful eyes overflow like a river —
That pearl in the vast sea, where did he go?

All night long, I implore both moon and Venus —
That lovely face, like a moon, where did he go?

If he is mine, why is he with others?
Since he’s not here, to what “there” did he go?

If his heart and soul are joined with God,
And he left this realm of earth and water, where did he go?

Tell me clearly, Shams of Tabriz,
Of whom it is said, “The sun never dies” — where did he go?

Translated from the Persian

Notes:

The translator of this poem was originally omitted in the changeover to the new website. Because of this, reciting the epigraph is optional for the 2019-2020 Poetry Out Loud season.

Source: *Poetry* (November 2017)



Sufi mystic Jalal al-Din Rumi was born Jalal al-Din Mohammad-e Balkhi on the edge of the Persian Empire, in Balkh in modern-day Afghanistan (though another birthplace in Tajikistan is also claimed). Rumi's family fled the Mongols, settling in Samarkand and then Anatolia. Rumi's discovery of poetry is generally dated to his midlife friendship with the mystic Shams al-Din Tabrizi. Around 1244, Shams arrived in Konya, preaching the possibility and necessity of direct communion with God. Rumi became a disciple and intimate friend to Shams; the two were rarely apart. It is said that Rumi's sons and followers were jealous of Shams and drove him from the city. Whatever the cause, after Shams' disappearance, Rumi consoled himself with writing poetry, chanting, and performing dance, in particular the circling dances set to music that became known as the whirling dervish. Rumi quickly gained a reputation as an ecstatic visionary, and devoted the rest of his life to writing and worship. Rumi's fame during his own lifetime was notable, and his death was widely mourned. Rumi remains one of the world's most popular poets.