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THE DARK NIGHT OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

Translated from the Spanish by Iris Tree

In a dark night I rose
With tremulous love afire
And left my sleeping house.
O blessed wonder, that did so conspire
To lead me forth unseen to my desire.

I was led forth, O wonder!
While all my house lay sleeping,
Disguised, by ladders slender
Down secret pathways creeping
I gave myself into the dark night's keeping.

Into the joyful dark
All silent and unknown
Where there was neither sign nor spark
Save in my heart alone
The fiery flame that shone.

O, brighter than sun's burning
This fiery flame did dart
And pointed to him, ever turning
Toward the long-known of my heart
Who waited for me in a place apart.

O guiding night,
O deep night to discover
Within that darkness dazzling bright
The true, beloved to his lover
So that the one became the other.

Upon my breast of flowering love
He lay in sleep; and all I have
I gave to him, while high above
The winds that through the cedars wave
Leaned down and their sweet odors gave.

Through his hair the high winds streaming
Wakened, and his hand grew tense
Upon my neck, O gentle seeming
Yet falling in its sharp sense
Like pain upon my fainting sense.

And so I lay, forgetting all —
Myself with the beloved linking,
I lost myself — and letting fall
My heavy sorrows all unthinking,
Oblivious among the lilies sinking.