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Father of Persian Verse

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The beloved's beauty

Song, rose-colored wine, and beauties like the moon,
 Would make an angel fall in the well.⁴⁴

How can I sew my gaze shut? To see my love
 Only narcissi grow on my grave, not weeds.⁴⁵

For the man who knows love's drunkenness,
 It's a shame to be sober for a moment.

Your eyes can't make out the ceiling beams by day.
 But you spot a straw in someone else's eye at night.⁴⁶

The beloved's curls

Who curled your hair into a “j”?⁴⁷

He who made your mole the dot of that “j”.

And your mouth is so small, as if someone
 Has split a pomegranate seedlet in half.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ In this line, Rudaki is making reference to the story of Hārūt and Mārūt, which has pre-Islamic roots (“Ho'avrutāt” and “Amrotāt” in Avestan literature) and is retold in the Koran. As the story goes, the angels Hārūt and Mārūt were sent to earth to guide mankind. They were seduced by the beautiful Nāhid (“Zohreh” in Arabic) and engaged in singing, drinking wine and merry-making. As punishment, God threw them into the well of Babylon.

⁴⁵ Narcissi represent eyes. Narcissi growing on the grave implies that the poet will see his beloved even after his death.

⁴⁶ The last couplet seems disjointed from the rest of the poem.

⁴⁷ I have translated the Persian letter [ج] “jim” as a “j”. [ج], similar to a “j” in English has a dot. The dot in the [ج], however, is on the inside of the body of the letter, unlike the dot on top of the “j”. The physical description of the dot being the mole surrounded by a curl of the beloved's hair makes more sense in Persian since the dot is surrounded by the body of the letter. The dot on the “j” as the mole, and the body of the letter as a curl of hair, demands a bit of a stretch in the imagination of the English reader. Nevertheless, it's an interesting coincidence that the [ج] and the “j” are similar sounding letters with similar physical shapes. Both are dotted letters with a curved body.

⁴⁸ A small mouth is a sign of feminine beauty.

سماع و بادۀ گلگون و لعبتان چوماه
 اگر فرشته ببیند در اوفتد در چاه
 نظر چگونه بدوزم که بهر دیدن دوست
 ز خاک من همه نرگس دمد به جای گیاه
 کسی که آگهی از ذوق عشق جانان یافت
 ز خویش حیف بود، گر دمی بود آگاه
 به چشمت اندر بالار ننگری تو به روز
 به شب به چشم کسان اندرون بینی کاه

زلف ترا جیم که کرد آن که او
 خال ترا نقطه آن جیم کرد
 و آن دهن تنگ تو گویی کسی
 دانگگی نار به دو نیم کرد