

## **A Prison Evening**

Each star a rung,  
night comes down the spiral  
staircase of the evening.  
The breeze passes by so very close  
as if someone just happened to speak of love.  
In the courtyard,  
the trees are absorbed refugees  
embroidering maps of return on the sky.  
On the roof,  
the moon - lovingly, generously -  
is turning the stars  
into a dust of sheen.  
From every corner, dark-green shadows,  
in ripples, come towards me.  
At any moment they may break over me,  
like the waves of pain each time I remember  
this separation from my lover.

This thought keeps consoling me:  
though tyrants may command that lamps be smashed  
in rooms where lovers are destined to meet,  
they cannot snuff out the moon, so today,  
nor tomorrow, no tyranny will succeed,  
no poison of torture make me bitter,  
if just one evening in prison  
can be so strangely sweet,  
if just one moment anywhere on this earth.

*Translation by Agha Shahid Ali*