

We Who Were Executed

I longed for your lips, dreamed of their roses:
I was hanged from the dry branch of the scaffold.
I wanted to touch your hands, their silver light:
I was murdered in the half-light of dim lanes.

And there where you were crucified,
so far away from my words,
you still were beautiful:
colour kept clinging to your lips—
rapture was still vivid in your hair—
light remained silvering in your hands.

When the night of cruelty merged with the roads you had talked,
I came as far as my feet could bring me,
on my lips the phrase of a song,
my heart lit up only by sorrow.
This sorrow was my testimony to your beauty—
Look! I remained a witness till the end,
I who was killed in the darkest lanes.

It's true— that not to reach you was fate—
but who'll deny that to love you
was entirely in my hands?
So why complain if these matters of desire
brought me inevitably to the execution grounds?

Why complain? Holding up our sorrows as banners,
new lovers will emerge
from the lanes where we were killed
and embark, in caravans, on those highways of desire.
It's because of them that we shortened the distances of sorrow,
it's because of them that we went out to make the world our own,
we who were murdered in the darkest lanes.

Translation by Agha Shahid Ali