

Meeting at an Airport

By Taha Muhammad Ali

You asked me once,
on our way back
from the midmorning
trip to the spring:
“What do you hate,
and *who* do you love?”

And I answered,
from behind the eyelashes
of my surprise,
my blood rushing
like the shadow
cast by a cloud of starlings:
“I hate departure . . .
I love the spring
and the path to the spring,
and I worship the middle
hours of morning.”
And you laughed . . .
and the almond tree blossomed
and the thicket grew loud with nightingales.

. . . A question
now four decades old:
I salute that question’s answer;
and an answer
as old as your departure;
I salute that answer’s question . . .

And today,
it’s preposterous,
here we are at a friendly airport
by the slimmest of chances,
and we meet.
Ah, Lord!
we meet.
And here you are
asking—again,
it’s absolutely preposterous—
I recognized you
but you didn’t recognize me.

"Is it you?!"

But you wouldn't believe it.

And suddenly

you burst out and asked:

"If you're really you,

What do you hate

and *who* do you love?!"

And I answered—

my blood

fleeing the hall,

rushing in me

like the shadow

cast by a cloud of starlings:

"I hate departure,

and I love the spring,

and the path to the spring,

and I worship the middle

hours of morning."

And you wept,

and flowers bowed their heads,

and doves in the silk of their sorrow stumbled.

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