

AZRA ABBAS

Two Poems

WHEN YOU WANT TO WRITE A STORY¹

Whenever you want to write a story
You can
write a story.

Suppose you do want to write
a story,
Then go ahead
and write.

A story is written about living people
All round you,
Going about,
Running here and there,
Leaving their beds in the early morning
Going home at the end of the day
When their wives, mothers, sisters, children
Wait for them,
Or when they quarrel with each other
In the neighborhood, on the road
Over some petty matter,
Or embrace each other
In sheer happiness.

¹“Āp Jab Likhnā Čāhēñ Ik Kāhāñi,” in *Mēñ Lā’inēñ Khēñčī Hūñ* (I Draw the Lines) (Karachi: Jadid Klāsik, 1996), 34–37.

A story can be about young girls and boys,
About any one of them,
Write any which way you want.
A living person can do anything,
Fall in love,
Go for a swim,
Become ill,
Take care of someone ill,
Or anything,
Pondering life too, a story
Can be started.

That person is crossing the road
A shopping bag in one hand,
A child's hand in the other,
The child is holding a flower
And a butterfly.

Now while you're watching
An explosion,
Just like death
Piercing from one side, coming out the other,
The other side
Where
One finger is separated from the others
And a butterfly is trying to move its wings,
In vain.

What happened?
The story has stopped.
Obviously,
How can a story be written
About that ambulance
Carrying dead bodies,
Or the flower
Plucked before its time.

LONELINESS²

Loneliness can catch hold of anyone.
No need
That it be you
Or me
Chosen each time.

It can be anyone.

Even him
Shortly before his death
Dozing on a chair
Almost unconscious in an empty corridor
Remembering those
He always liked to remember

But the only thing left
Is this walking down deserted streets
Thinking
Who can it be
walking down these streets?

—*Translated by Asif Farrukhi*

²“KŌ’ī Ādmī Kahīñ bhī Tanhā Hōsaktā Hai,” in *ibid.*, 66–68.