

To Wash Their Shame Away



A poem by Nazik al-Malaika, written in 1949.
Free translation by Rose Ghurayyib

"Ahl Mammal " the fateful cry pierced the air,
A pool of blood submerged the head, the ebony hair,
A final shiver from the corpse, lying inert,
"Ahl Mamma! " Only the executioner heard.

Tomorrow dawn will peep and roses will awake,
A call to youth, to dreams will be heard at daybreak
But the green fields will answer,
the red poppies will say:
Yeal She is gone! to wash their shame away!

The executioner and his friends will meet again.
He'll say, wiping his knife:
"We've done away with shame!
We're again free and honest, our honor is restored!
Bring the cup, barman, fill it and take my gold!
Call the perfumed, the languid,
the sweet cabaret girl,
Her eyes are more precious to me
than gold or pearl! "

Fill the cup, O assassin,
Be merry and be gay!
Thy victim's blood will surely wash
Thy shame away!

O women of our quarter! O maidens far or near,
Tell your lords, tell your men to
be of good cheer
With the tears of our eyes we'll
knead the bread we eat,
We shall cut off our locks and skin
our hands and feet,
So their clothes may remain pure,
shining and white.
No smile, no laugh, no sign, no look
to left or right,

And tomorrow who knows? How can we ever guess
How many of us will be thrown in some wilderness,
To wash their shame away!