

Take your white dress off
 don't stay wrapped up
 my ruffled petal.
 Plucked like this
 You become a garden,
 And every flower cluster glitters.
 Let the glass swan swim on.
 Let him swim to me.
 Not oblivious
 let the swan circle ceaselessly.

The Clerk's Love Song or the Love Song of the Clerk

My night spent.
 All night I labour at dreams and sleep
 then, when morning, my mistress appears
 I rise off my bed and wash.
 Yesterday I bought a slice of bread
 I ate half, leaving the rest for breakfast today
 The world I live in is washed in the colours of strangeness
 a man who lives right in front of me has a woman at home
 on my right is a single storied house, now empty
 the voluptuary who lives on my left, has a mistress at home
 and among all this, I sit,
 I sit without you
 I and you: I, with every comfort, and one thing missing,
 The perfume of your tangled hair.
 I disentangle myself from breakfast, slip out of the house
 walk the road to the office,
 and on the way, pass the elegance of the town,
 a horse carriage, two cars,
 children passing by toward school,

what more can I say about horse carriages?
 the cars, on the other hand, are sparking lightning,
 how can I bear the arrows slung at me from those carriages passing by
 in the time of similitude, this,

this is the wealth pouring from the houses of proper gentry, this,
 this is an illusion, a mischief, a moment of innocence perhaps,
 but I on the road, I walk, my fate unturned, sorrowful, sad
 the sharp smile of electricity lighting up the carriages
 the amiable modulation of conversation
 this recognition hangs, waiting for me to come to it: does God have
 any compassion?

everything lives here close by me, but for you,
 and I,
 I whose eyes no longer have the courage to cry.

The road cuts back and forth, the prison passes by,
 perhaps I should lose my heart in work, unless someone grasps me,
 I carry my heart slowly into the office,
 my heart is simply innocent, foolish, a child—I give it away elsewhere,
 and the river of work pulls me into its flow, my senses damping
 When half the day has angled by, lost in its time,
 Our chief officer saunters in from his home
 summons me to his office,
 I am his servant, called to will
 he talks forwards and then sidles sideways,
 his conversation quite without worth.

I tire of his words,
 Leave them for a moment, to come back to my room
 to find a file,
 a fire sparks my heart: were I also an officer like him
 my house would distance itself from the town's dirt,
 the town's dusty streets would be far away, and I
 I'd have you,
 but I'm merely a munshi, and you:

you're the queen of wealth, a purveyor of fame
and this,
this merely the story of my desire, more seasoned than the earth.

Translated by Geeta Patel



Ali Sardar Jafri

(1913–2000)

Ali Sardar Jafri was a freedom fighter, radical activist, short story writer, critic, and documentary film maker. But above all, he was a poet, one of the brightest stars of the Progressive Writers' Movement. He began his career as a short story writer, but with the publication of *Parvaz* (Flight) in 1943, he established himself as a poet of distinction. He has eight collections of poetry. His early poems were heavily imbued with Marxist ideology. But, in *Pairahan-e Sharar* (Garment of Sparks), 1966, one can see a noticeable shift in his poetry, which becomes less strident, more subdued, and artistically modulated. Sardar Jafri edited selections from Kabir, Mir, and Ghalib, and wrote critical introductions to each volume. Later these introductions were collected together and published in one volume as *Paighambaran-e Sukhan* (Messengers of Eloquence), 1970.

The poem presented here, *Mera Safar* (My Voyage) is a common favourite and displays his romanticism. It is from the collection *Pathar ki Divar* (Wall of Stone).

My Voyage

'Like grass, I've sprouted again and again.'

—Rumi

One such day will come again
When stars in eyes are extinguished
When lotuses in hands are wilted
And from tongue's leaf