

JAVED AKHTAR

ME AND MY WANDERING LIFE

Ambling aimlessly from door to door,
from place to place:
each other's fellow travelers, me and my
wandering life.

On path after unknown path, through
glance after hostile glance:
not knowing where we are going, me
and my wandering life.

One day we too prospered—now we
are destitute—
we were careless and easy and cheerful
and hearty.

He walked such a walk! But now we're
extinguished, heart-burned,
leaving we set our house on fire, me and
my wandering life.

He was a moon-eyed moon-face,
exactly like a full moon,
whose voice was omnipresent, whose
discourse was transcendent.

It so happened that this was lost, but I
grew stubborn then:
we'll find it and bring it back, me and
my wandering life.

The selfsame heart bore the blow, and
the what was said was said.

What else was there to say? A river of
tears burst out!

On having his say, he left. Heart-
snatcher, I died for your sake,
we weep for you through the night, me
and my wandering life.

For whom do we take this pain, for
 whom do we burn the heart,
 for whom do we shed our tears, for
 whom do we give our lives?
 For him in whom there's no tyranny,
 for love that does not oppress!
 I know that one day we'll find it: me
 and my wandering life.
 All indications are faulty, all signs are
 the scars of wounds,
 all house doors are locked, all silly
 charms and remedies spent.
 Such is the play of fate, as dark as dark
 can be,
 it renders both of us powerless: me and
 my wandering life.
 When he was my soul-mate companion
 he was a different sort,
 what was song is now sorrow, what was
 vanity now is shame.
 Even if I could, what could I do? Were
 he even with me, then what?
 A helpless and an impatient, oh me and
 my wandering life.

O MERCHANTS OF THE TOWN

O merchants of the town, in these
 dealings in love,
 what is profit, what is loss you will
 never know!
 The pricing of a heart, the expense of a
 dream
 and the currency of life you will never
 know!
 How a lover meets his love, how a
 flower blooms,
 how eye shies away from eye, how a
 breath is held,

and how a path runs on and on,
 conversation flows
in a tongue of longing, too, you will
 never know!
Nor the calm of lovers' arms, nor the
 madness of their parting,
beauty's powerful bewitchments, all
 that stuff of love.
You know ailments of the flesh and the
 welfare of the flesh,
but the striving of the spirit you will
 never know.
How wounds fester, how the brand
 stings,
What is pain and what lament,
 wilderness, sore feet,
what a sigh and what a plaint you will
 never know.
I know you foam with poetry,
your form of self-embellishment,
but you see only letters and you hear
 only words—
and what hides behind them you will
 never know!

—*Translated by Philip Nikolayev*