

## FORUGH FARROKHZAD

### O Bejeweled Realm...

Victory!  
Got myself registered.  
Decorated an ID card with my name and face,  
and my existence took on a number.  
So, long live number 678, precinct 5, Tehran.

No more worries, now I can relax  
in my motherland's bosom,  
suckle on our past glory,  
lulled by lullabies of progress and culture  
and the jingle jangle of the laws' rattle.  
Ah yes, no more worries...

In excitement I go to the window,  
breathe in 678 lungs-full of air smelling  
of shit, garbage, and piss,  
and under 678 IOUs and job applications  
I sign my name: *Forugh Farrokhzad*.

What a blessing to live  
in the land of poetry, roses, and nightingales  
when one's existence is at last noted;  
a land where from behind the curtains  
my first registered glimpse spies 678 poets—  
scoundrels who in the guise of eccentric bums  
scrounge about trash bins for words and rhymes;  
a land where the sound of my first official footsteps

rouses into lazy flight from dark swamps  
and into the edge of day  
678 mystic nightingales who for sheer fun  
have transformed into old crows;  
a land where my first official breath  
mingles with the smell of 678 roses  
manufactured in the grand Plasco Plastic factory.

Yes, it's a blessing to exist  
in the birthplace of the junkie fiddler Sheik Abu Clown,  
and Sheik "O-heart O-heart" Tambourine Player—  
vagrant son of a son of a son of a tambourine player—  
in the city of superstar portly legs, hips, and breasts  
plastered on the covers of *ART*;  
in the cradle of the espousers of "Let it be,  
what has it to do with me?"  
and of Olympic-style intelligence competitions  
where on every media channel  
new prodigies blow their own horns.  
A land where when the nation's elected intelligentsia  
puts in an appearance in adult classes, they tote  
678 faddish electric kebab grills in their arms  
and wear 678 Rolex watches on their wrists  
because they know power comes from  
wealth in wallets, not in minds.

Victory, yes, victory!  
And now in honor of my triumph, proudly I will light  
before the mirror 678 candles bought on credit,  
and I will hop on the window ledge to deliver a few words—  
with your permission of course—  
on the benefits of a legal existence; and I will lift  
the groundbreaking axe of my freshly elevated life

and to thundering applause  
cleave the crown of my own head.

I am alive,  
    yes,  
    alive like the Zende River, which once also lived,  
and I will snatch what I can from the world of the living.

From tomorrow on, I can stroll in the city streets  
overflowing with nationalistic love,  
walk among the lampposts' weightless shadows,  
and on the walls of public toilets pen with pride 678 times:  
    I WRITE THIS TO DARE JACKASSES TO LAUGH.

From tomorrow on, like a bold patriot, I can cherish  
and frantically follow the Wednesday afternoon lottery,  
hoping for a share in its one thousand *rials* and whims—  
a refrigerator, a couch, new curtains, or 678 naturalized votes  
bought in the dark and donated to 678 patriotic men.

From tomorrow on, I can snort a few grams  
of a first rate product in Khachick's backroom,  
consume a few glasses of impure Pepsi,  
and after a few *Ya Allahs*, *Hallelujahs*,  
*whoof whoofs*, and *moo moos*,  
officially join the ranks of high-minded literati,  
intelligentsia's cream of the crop, and the followers  
of the oompah oompah school; and my first masterpiece novel  
will be officially printed by a bankrupt press  
some time in the Tabrizi Solar Year 1678—  
the plot noted on both sides of 678 packets  
of Genuine Quality *Oshnu* cigarettes.  
From tomorrow on, I can with complete confidence

invite myself to 678 velvet-upholstered sessions  
of secure-your-own-future Parliament,  
or kiss-the-royal-hand Senate,  
because I've read every issue of *ART & SCIENCE*—  
and every edition of *SCHMOOZING & SUCKING UP*—  
and have learned how to “skillfully” write.

Now part of a constructive tide, I've stepped into existence,  
one whose amazing technological advances have ushered us  
to synthesized clouds and neon lights—  
all research, of course, conducted at the chicken-kebab stands.

Now part of a constructive tide, I've stepped into existence,  
one that although it pays no bread, yet  
it affords us vast, glorious vistas—  
to the north: the invigorating green of the Bullet Park,  
to the south: the ancient Execution Square,  
the skyline stretching to the congested sections  
where the Artillery Circle stands.

From morning to night, under the canopy  
of a safe and shimmering sky, 678 plump plaster swans  
and 678 angels— not just any angels...  
ones made of genuine earth and clay—  
busily advertise projects of silence and stability.

Victory, yes, victory!  
Long live number 678, register of precinct 5, Tehran,  
who through sheer will and hard work  
has reached such lofty station that she now stands  
on a ledge 678 meters high and has the privilege  
of deliriously diving down towards her motherland,  
without the use of the stairs.

Her last will and testament is only that for 678 coins  
his highness Master Poet Ebrahim Sahba honors her existence  
by penning an elegy that rhymes with bullshit.

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*Translator's Notes*

**Bejeweled Realm** — *Marz-i por Ghoobar*, in Persian, refers to the motherland Iran, and was a term used in the national anthem during the Pahlavi era.

**ID card** — Iran adopted a birth registration law in 1976 stipulating that all births had to be registered within 15 days. Before 1976, many did not register their children. These children later were obliged to register themselves in order to apply for a passport or for other national services.

*678 mystic nightingales who for sheer fun/ have transformed into old crows* — Here the poet is perhaps referring to the erudite men who in the early part of the 20th century became members of the newly formed Majlis (Parliament) in order to bring democracy to Iran. As members of the Majlis, these men had to wear suits—an image reminiscent of penguins in the Western culture. However, penguins were unfamiliar to many Iranians at the time and therefore the poet used the more familiar image of crows.

**Plasco factory** — Plasco was a five story building located in Ferdowsi Square, Tehran. Its first few floors were a factory where plastic products such as sieves, bowls, and watering cans were manufactured. These items had come to replace their copper and china counterparts imported from other parts of the world, and were often sold by wandering merchants who traditionally sold salt or produce from the backs of their donkeys.

**Junkie fiddler Sheik Abu Clown** — *Abu* means “father of”. The poet is using the word: *kamancheh kesh* which basically means one who plays *Kamancheh*, a stringed instrument which can be likened to a fiddle. But by adding *kesh* to *kamancheh*, she is saying that the musician is an amateur and not a very good one at that.

**Sheik “O-heart O-heart” Tambourine Player** — Here the poet is poking fun at the sheiks who although they attended religious schools, nevertheless could not get away from their family trade. In this case, the reference is to one of generations of vagrant tambourine players who wandered the streets singing *aye del aye del*, which literally means, “O heart, O heart”. Farrokhzad is also playing with words here. The son of a vagrant music player is often referred to as *bacheh motreb*. The term also means “one who gives ass”—not a homosexual, but a prostitute. Additionally, it was generally assumed that boys who went to religious schools to become sheiks, were sometimes forced into anal sex.

**The cradle of the espousers of: *Let it be, / what has it to do with me?*** — The prevalent passive tendency of the pacifist intellectuals of the time, who “removed” themselves from their surroundings.

**Electric Kebab Grill** — Traditionally kebabs were prepared over coal. But these electric gadgets suddenly became the rave in Tehran, and they were advertised relentlessly. Possessing one became a status symbol.

**Zendeh River** — At one point known as Zayandeh Rood, Zendeh Rood literally means “living river”. It is a snow-fed River on which the Shah Abbas Dam was constructed in the mid-1960. Although the presence of the dam reduced flood damage and provided hydroelectric power for regional industrial development, it also resulted in diminished water flow and in secondary salinization in the lower part of the Basin.

***I WRITE THIS TO DARE JACKASSES TO LAUGH*** — This is a line usually followed by: *gooz-eh kâteb beh reesh-eh khânandeh* which means, “The author farts in the reader’s beard.” Perhaps the point Farrokhzad is making here is that the reader may laugh at what she has written, but it is because the reader does not understand, and she couldn’t give a damn about it.

**Khachik's backroom** — Khachik is an Armenian name, and at the time many of the liquor stores in Iran were owned by the Armenians. At the back of many of these liquor stores were rooms where the clientele could relax, smoke and drink.

**Impure Pepsi** — Pepsi with Vodka

**Tabrizi solar year** — In Persian, *shamsi* means solar, as opposed to *ghamari*, which is lunar. Tabriz is a city in Iran. Farrokhzad is playing with words here, hinting at Shams-e-Tabrizi, the Iranian mystic Sufi who initiated Rumi into Islamic mysticism and was immortalized by Rumi in his collection of poems, *Diwan-i Shams-i Tabriz-i*. She is poking fun at how every writer seems to seek a Shams of his own.

**“The plot noted on both sides of 678 packets/ of Genuine Quality Oshnu cigarettes”** — A famous and respected Iranian Novelist, Sadeq Hedayat, was in the habit of frequenting Café Naderi with his friends. When inspired, he would write the plot of his stories on the back of cigarette packets.

**Plaster swans and mud angels** — At the time, there was abundant statuary in Tehran and in this poem they connote silence, as in a place where people are like the mute statues, never speaking against the political and social status quo.

**Ebrahim Sahba** — A popular poet in the 1960s Iran who wrote in verse and could write rhyming poems on the spot on any given topic. He imagined himself a superior poet to Farrokhzad, but was in fact ridiculed by the literati of the time.

**Penning an elegy that rhymes with bullshit** — *Kashk* in Persian can be translated as “bullshit.” *Kashk* is salty dried whey to which water is added and is then rubbed until it melts by oozing and forming a thick liquid. To achieve this, much rubbing is required. Another term, not mentioned in the poem but important to understand is *Khayeh māl*. It is a term commonly used to describe one who bullshits or flatters (literally it means one who rubs another person's balls.) So the idea here is not the whey substance, but the act of rubbing.