

ADIL JUSSAWALLA

## New Poems

### House

Wake up. Don't you want to see me go?  
What you heard in your sleep were sledgehammers.  
Did you think it would never happen?  
You'd read the notice.  
Good morning.

I was condemned for no fault I can remember.  
*You* remember, you have memory,  
The room into which everything you once see goes.  
Houses don't come with that extra  
Where do the things we see go?

See my rooms now, staring,  
Their outer walls gone: my secret eyes  
With nothing left in them.

See my still-polished staircase rising  
To ends that can never be met—  
Doorways that draw a blank.

I was raised to think I'm no pushover,  
But you see, I am.  
All houses are fall guys.  
The plans you lay to set us up  
Touch our very foundations.

Wake up, sleeper who dreams of building  
But will never build. Sit up in your bed-sit  
Or better still, stand.

I'm setting you free.  
You future's got nothing to do with what's happening to me.

Your universe was built to dance on a pin,  
Mine, to stay still. Tell your guru  
That stillness did a house in.

Balance, though you've lost heart, lost ground,  
Balance, nonetheless, groundless, balance.

## English Lesson

This stick means carnage. See,  
white powder spilling away from  
the side of its mouth  
is drawing a skull.  
Say it please... skull.  
It can't draw a rose.

Young Europeans, mostly, in class.  
Across their faces, my wry reflections  
run like water on glass.

This is a tank.  
This is a skull.  
This is—

This is a stick of chalk.  
With it I draw pictures.

My country's at war.

There's only one God,  
there's only one Good,  
and both must be learned without pictures.

# Wristwatch

Stare into my stonehenge of radium  
as much as you want.  
Walk into it if you can  
but you can't.

We age unsynchronized,  
differently.

It's only three o' clock in the morning  
that spells exactly the same thing  
for both of us.

## An American Professor in the 70's

1

The American professor asks me where I stand  
on Peace and Love, then adds, “that sixties’ shit.”  
“Put in a corner, bottled for war,  
as touchy as petrol, sir, I sit.”

2

The American professor asks how long I plan  
to continue living this way. “Now and forever,” I say.  
“Try Pandit Pankaja’s pink pills for piles  
and laughter! laughter! laughter!”

3

The American professor knows there’s something wrong  
with me, with the city, the moon too strong  
like the drinks—a white-hot kettle  
that’s run out of steam and astronauts touch with a yelp.  
We stand on the balcony side by side,  
every lit window a cry for help.

## Government Country \*

### **Paradise**

Sufficient unto the day its anaesthetics.  
More than sufficient if I take any more.  
Who's dead, who's sick?

The walls have multiple bruises,  
The floor's out cold.  
This place can't take any more hurt.  
I'm off.

Ahmed turns up,  
He smells of an empty bottle.  
I inhale the stars,  
They smell of boxing gloves.

### **Lucky**

What made them sick? Why are they doubled up?  
Call an ambulance. Take me in too.

*It's Friday namaz, you fool, and that's a mosque.*

Call an ambulance all the same.  
I'll pray like that woman I saw at St. Michael's,  
Shaking all over, bare-headed, crying.

I'll pray I get out alive. The press said  
Bottles were sealed at the Tardeo bar,  
That spacious, high-windowed Tardeo bar  
Last night, ten souls too late. A star  
Burst yesterday. The press has photos.

### **Picnic**

We came to government country  
Seeking asylum.

Some of us want to leave,  
Some of us had to.

We got carried away like Subbu,  
Like Ron, like Jal, like Ahmed.

We got carried away early.

## **Famous Trinity**

Calendar Katy's the guru of Trinity.  
Those at the table below her  
Get covered in talc when she breathes.

Her disciples at other tables  
Pay her better attention.  
Their eyes grow round and wet.  
They're sure to get powdered too.

The missal that's Pandu's special  
The papads he thappads  
Aren't the magnets that draw us back.

When calendar Katy does her pranayam,  
When calendar Katy takes a deep breath,  
The air is filled with blessing,  
The room smells of her talc.

*\* Government country is cheap liquor manufactured by the state and sold in special bars.  
The names of four such bars make the poems' titles.*