

1. Two words from Gurumukhi, to take you to real life, happening elsewhere

ਉਡੀਕ / *udeek*

| wait: remain in readiness for a purpose |

I

Remember, sometimes getting through a day is much like

traveling in circles from one point to the next,
then back to the point from where it all started,

for the next day.

ਉਡੀਕ is not that.

II

You can contain the weight of all the waiting

to be carried out in the universe,
yet you will not be able to measure

the weight of waiting in ਉਡੀਕ,

not if you are the person who's waiting.

III

ਉਡੀਕ is the urge that rests in

each knife-edged crease of your *khadi kurta*,
a loose shirt fraying over the torso

made up of an homespun cotton fabric,

for a touch of its wearer.

ਛੇਤੀ / *chheti*

| hurry: move or act with great haste |

I

It is the speed of sound

approaching with a stranger's hand
to take you to real life, happening elsewhere,

making its way through light and air
to win the race on a thundering night,

but it always fails.

II

It is the sense of urgency

taking birth inside you
when you attempt to locate your home

on the map, after they have re-arranged
all the lines on it, and knowing

you will now never be home again.

III

It is the belief in your rising breath

as you sprint through those mean streets
that no matter how fast you breathe,

you will never share
a single more breath with him.

ਛੇਤੀ ਨਾ ਕਰੋ / *chheti na karo*

Don't hurry up!

2. The women who dine alone, dine alone

I

On my way to a diner on Dame St., I see sixteen-year olds,
singing Barbie anthem on the cobbled paths of Temple Bar,
beer cans in their hands. It was like seeing people see films
in which they wished to be cast as leading actors.

On getting to the diner, I sit with my dinner
in the first-floor seating area, watch a woman
blow-drying another woman's hair
inside a third-storey Georgian window, on the other side.

II

I finish my food quickly, sit there gathering bits
for the film I should be writing,
my actor, an Irishman who wants to get through
the length and breadth of India using trains, only.

His bed on which he sleeps in Dublin
comes from Ikea and is *Made in China*.
When he watched Titanic at the Odeon in 1997,
he yelled to himself, "For fuck's sake, SINK!"

My actress has travelled to fourteen countries
to photograph women who dine alone.
She wants to beat the single-female diner syndrome,
dining alone, for her, not a *tour de force*.

She dines alone too, in her country, in fourteen countries,
not having to come home to cats or dogs.
The women who dine alone, dine alone.
They just do.

III

On my way home, I'm told by a friend
there is something very English about the way
I hold my cigarette between my fingers.
I nod but the words get to my blood and bile.

In my dream, his ghost whispers with a lilt of
Americanness in my ear, correcting my accent.
The following day, I go out wearing the sweet scent
of cigarette ashes on my sweater.

Table for one, please.

3. *Loot*

I've seen you brew goodbye in your mouth,
its g gurgling a nascent cry
I hear, before your tongue
nudges your palate, your lips hanging
as if jinxed, in that instant, when I scream your name.
Hush! Honey, it was a good try.
These half-spoken words have often silenced my silence among
the half-eaten rotten words of my youth.

One day in a mountainous Tibetan suburb
when you'll try saying goodbye again, in a new language
this time, words spilling out of your mouth like a miscarriage,
I'll welcome them through the hubbub
of these exiled streets –
the home of every conscious *loot*.

4. Cinnamon Rolls at Simon's Place

If the sharp edge of
a knife smeared your tongue,

it will not taste like
cinnamon inside

your mouth. It will taste
like garlic butter

that has stayed in the fridge
for more than a year

or like a year old
kiss, my lips inside

yours, when our tongues twirled
perfectly like those

cinnamon rolls at
Simon's Place. But now

your mouth bleeds with mute
words, our lips wait for

the *apocalypse*.