

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Tishani Doshi**  
**- poems -**

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## Tishani Doshi(9 December 1975 -)

Tishani Doshi is an Indian poet, journalist and dancer based in Chennai. Born in Madras, India, to a Welsh mother and Gujarati father, she received an Eric Gregory Award in 2001. Her first poetry collection, *Countries of the Body*, won the 2006 Forward Poetry Prize for best first has been invited to the poetry galas of the Guardian-sponsored Hay Festival of 2006 and the Cartagena Hay Festival of 2007. Her first novel, *The Pleasure Seekers*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2010 and was long-listed for the Orange Prize in 2011, and shortlisted for The Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2010.

She writes a blog titled "Hit or Miss" on Cricinfo, a cricket-related website. In the blog which she started writing in April 2009, Tishani Doshi makes observations and commentaries as a television viewer of the second season of the Indian Premier League. She is also collaborating with cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan on his biography, to be published when he retires.

She works as a freelance writer and worked with choreographer Chandralekha until the latter's death in December 2006. She graduated with a Masters degree in creative writing from the Johns Hopkins University.

*Countries of the Body* was launched in 2006 at the Hay-on-Wye festival on a platform with Seamus Heaney, Margaret Atwood, and others. The opening poem, *The Day we went to the Sea*, won the 2005 British Council supported All India Poetry Competition; she was also a finalist in the Outlook-Picador Non-Fiction Competition.

Her short story *Lady Cassandra, Spartacus and the dancing man* was published in its entirety in the journal *The Drawbridge* in 2007.

## Aj, Age 15

I once chased my brother  
Down to the edge of the sea.  
We ran past sheets and towels  
Spread like sky on the beach,  
Between strips of cloth,  
Drying chilli and tamarind.  
Past slums shackled to the shore –  
A maze of thatch roofs and cowdung  
Caked walls. And then I lost him,  
Searched loudly for him, called his name.  
Said, Come out or else –  
All the usual tricks.

A woman cleaning rice on her knees  
In a blouse done up with safety pins  
Pointed to a hut with a single weary finger –  
Where he was hiding with a water buffalo.  
The low blue lights of the television flickering.  
He was inside, laughing so hard,  
Shaking his head back and forth,  
I thought the joy would come tearing out from him.  
Afterwards, we sat in something like silence –  
His rare chubby hand in mine,  
Listening to the breath of living water.

Tishani Doshi

# Another Man's Woman

My lover has failed to come to the trysting place,  
It is perhaps that his mind is dazed,  
Or perhaps that he went to another woman,  
Or lured perhaps by festive folk, that he delays,  
Or perhaps along the dark fringe  
Of the forest he wanders lost

- JAYADEVA

If we'd lived in another age,  
I'd have been the kind of woman  
who refused to cast down her eyes.  
The kind of woman  
the other maids in town despise  
because she forgets to tie up the calves  
and split the curds.  
You know the kind -  
with a tilt in her hips  
and hair that slips  
continually  
from her braids.

But since we live in a world  
that's just reflection,  
mere illusions of the mind;  
perhaps I can be her after all -  
the one whose hips defeat the mountains  
with their greatness,  
whose breasts are heavy,  
close and high -  
sandal-pasted;  
who walks through moonless nights  
with lotus skin and lotus feet  
across forbidden boundaries.

I'll be the kind who sallies out  
to wait for love  
with musk-kissed hair  
and navel bared in a thousand secret places -

past the cowsheds  
and the balsam grove,  
across the river,  
to the garden of hibiscus.

And although the night be dark  
and fierce enough to stir  
the seven sleeping oceans,  
I'll deceive the forest  
like a shadow,  
slipping noiselessly past  
evil eyes and serpent tongues  
and the husband who lies inside  
jealous of my devotion.

But if I should reach the river bank  
and see you there -  
combing another woman's hair.  
If I should see the girdle  
loosen from her waist  
while you string jasmine  
round her supine face.  
If you should drink the honeyed sweet  
from the petals  
of her crimsoned lips -

I won't question this betrayal,  
or ask who this other woman is.

I'll simply walk  
into the darkness  
where every trunk  
and branch and leaf  
looks like you, feels like you,  
speaks like you: deep-chested  
yellow-limbed  
rain-cloud blue.

And later, while the husband sleeps,  
I'll make my way  
to the town's cremation grounds.  
I'll strip away my clothes and dance among the mounds of ash

to command the churning of a storm.  
For I have been with you  
since you were born  
and will stay with you  
till you return -  
soaked with the lasting dawn.

Tishani Doshi

# At The Rodin Museum

Rilke is following me everywhere  
With his tailor-made suits  
And vegetarian smile.

He says because I'm young,  
I'm always beginning,  
And cannot know love.

He sees how I'm a giant piece  
Of glass again, trying  
To catch the sun

In remote corners of rooms,  
Mountain tops, uncertain  
Places of light.

He speaks of the cruelty  
Of hospitals, the stillness  
Of cathedrals,

Takes me through bodies  
And arms and legs  
Of such extravagant size,

The ancient sky burrows in  
With all the dead words  
We carry and cannot use.

He holds up mirrors  
From which our reflections fall —  
Half-battered existences,

Where we lose ourselves  
For the sake of the other,  
And the others still to come.

Tishani Doshi

# Contract

Dear Reader,  
I agree to turn my skin inside out,  
to reinvent every lost word, to burnish,  
to steal, to do what I must  
in order to singe your lungs.  
I will forgo happiness  
stab myself repeatedly,  
and lower my head into countless ovens.  
I will fade backwards into the future  
and tell you what I see.  
If it is bleak, I will lie  
so that you may live  
seized with wonder.  
If it is miraculous I will  
send messages in your dreams,  
and they will flicker  
as a silvered cottage in the woods,  
choked with vines of moonflower.  
Don't kill me, Reader.  
This neck has been working for years  
to harden itself against the axe.  
This body, meagre as it is,  
has lost so many limbs to wars, so many  
eyes and hearts to romance. But love me,  
and I will follow you everywhere -  
to the dusty corners of childhood,  
to every downfall and resurrection.  
Till your skin becomes my skin.  
Let us be twins, our blood  
thumping after each other  
like thunder and lightning.  
And when you put your soft head  
down to rest, dear Reader,  
I promise to always be there,  
humming in the dungeons  
of your auditory canals—  
an immortal mosquito,  
hastening you towards fury,  
towards incandescence.

Tishani Doshi

# Find the Poets

I arrived in a foreign land yesterday,  
a land that has seen troubles,  
                  (who hasn't, you might say?)

This land  
with its scrubbed white houses  
and blue seas, where everything was born,  
and now, everything seems as if it could vanish.  
I wanted to find out the truth  
about how a great land like this  
could allow ancient columns to crumble  
and organ grinders to disappear.

Find the poets, my friend said.  
If you want to know the truth, find the poets.

But friend, where do I find the poets?  
In the soccer fields,  
at the sea shore,  
in the bars drinking?

Where do the poets live these days,  
                  and what do they sing about?

I looked for them in the streets of Athens,  
at the flea market and by the train station,  
I thought one of them might have sold me a pair of sandals.

But he did not speak to me of poetry,

only of his struggles, of how his house was taken from him  
along with his shiny dreams of the future,  
of all the dangers his children must now be brave enough to face.

Find the poets, my friend said.  
They will not speak of the things you and I speak about.  
They will not speak of economic integration  
or fiscal consolidation.

They could not tell you anything about the burden of adjustment.

But they could sit you down  
and tell you how poems are born in silence  
and sometimes, in moments of great noise,  
of how they arrive like the rain,  
unexpectedly cracking open the sky.

They will talk of love, of course,  
as if it were the only thing that mattered,  
about chestnut trees and mountain tops,  
and how much they miss their dead fathers.

They will talk as they have been talking  
for centuries, about holding the throat of life,  
till all the sunsets and lies are choked out,  
till only the bones of truth remain.

The poets, my friend, are where they have always been—  
living in paper houses without countries,  
along rivers and in forests that are disappearing.

And while you and I go on with life  
remembering and forgetting,

the poets remain: singing, singing

Tishani Doshi

# Girls are coming out of the Woods

Girls are coming out of the woods,  
wrapped in cloaks and hoods,  
carrying iron bars and candles  
and a multitude of scars, collected  
on acres of premature grass and city  
buses, in temples and bars. Girls  
are coming out of the woods  
with panties tied around their lips,  
making such a noise, it's impossible  
to hear. Is the world speaking too?  
Is it really asking, What does it mean  
to give someone a proper resting? Girls are  
coming out of the woods, lifting  
their broken legs high, leaking secrets  
from unfastened thighs, all the lies  
whispered by strangers and swimming  
coaches, and uncles, especially uncles,  
who said spreading would be light  
and easy, who put bullets in their chests  
and fed their pretty faces to fire,  
who sucked the mud clean  
off their ribs, and decorated  
their coffins with brier. Girls are coming  
out of the woods, clearing the ground  
to scatter their stories. Even those girls  
found naked in ditches and wells,  
those forgotten in neglected attics,  
and buried in river beds like sediments  
from a different century. They've crawled  
their way out from behind curtains  
of childhood, the silver-pink weight  
of their bodies pushing against water,  
against the sad, feathered tarnish  
of remembrance. Girls are coming out  
of the woods the way birds arrive  
at morning windows - pecking  
and humming, until all you can hear  
is the smash of their miniscule hearts  
against glass, the bright desperation

of sound - bashing, disappearing.  
Girls are coming out of the woods.  
They're coming. They're coming.

Tishani Doshi

# Immigrant's Song

□

Let us not speak of those days  
when coffee beans filled the morning  
with hope, when our mothers' headscarves  
hung like white flags on washing lines.  
Let us not speak of the long arms of sky  
that used to cradle us at dusk.  
And the baobabs – let us not trace  
the shape of their leaves in our dreams,  
or yearn for the noise of those nameless birds  
that sang and died in the church's eaves.  
Let us not speak of men,  
stolen from their beds at night.  
Let us not say the word disappeared.  
Let us not remember the first smell of rain:  
It will only make us nostalgic for childhood.  
Instead, let us speak of our lives now —  
the gates and bridges and stores.  
And when we break bread  
in cafes and at kitchen tables  
with our new brothers,  
let us not burden them with stories  
of war or abandonment.  
Let us not name our old friends  
who are unravelling like fairytales  
in the forests of the dead.  
Naming them will not bring them back.  
Let us stay here, and wait for the future  
to arrive, for grandchildren to speak  
in forked tongues about the country  
we once came from.  
Tell us about it, they might ask.  
And you might consider telling them  
of the sky and the coffee beans,  
the small white houses and dusty streets.  
You might set your memory afloat  
like a paper boat down a river.  
You might pray that the paper  
whispers your stories to the water,

that the water sings it to the trees,  
that the trees howl and howl  
it to the leaves. If you keep still  
and do not speak, you might hear  
your whole life fill the world  
until the wind is the only word.

Tishani Doshi

## Lament —I

When I see the houses in this city,  
the electric gates and uniformed men  
employed to guard the riches of the rich,  
the gilded columns and gardens,  
the boats on water, I wonder,  
how to describe my home to you:  
the short, mud walls,  
the whispering roof, the veranda  
on which my whole family  
used to spread sheets and sleep.

The year I came to find work in the city,  
my wife painted our house white  
so it would be brighter than the neighbours'.  
I beat her for her foolishness.  
The children are hungry, I said,  
the cow is old,  
the money collector is after my blood,  
and you steal like a magpie—  
half a month's wage—to decorate  
your nest like a shiny jewel?

The monsoon finally arrived the year I left,  
dripped through the thatch,  
peeled paint off the walls.  
The wells grew full and overflowed.  
The farmers rejoiced in the fields.  
My son sat with his mouth open  
catching drops of water like a frog.  
My wife clung to the walls and wept.

When I fall asleep on the pavements  
in this city, I try to imagine my wife's skin  
against mine, the kohl in her eyes,  
the white walls, the whole village sky  
bearing down upon us  
with all the weight of the stars.  
I think of returning to that life,  
but mostly I try to remember

how the world was once.  
I want to open my mouth like my son,  
and swallow things whole—  
feel water filling all the voids,  
until I am shaped back into existence.

Tishani Doshi

## Love In Carlisle

Girls were crying yesterday in their ball gowns;  
Holding each other up like poles of wilted beanstalks.  
I wanted to carry them into the streets.  
To the unused railroad track in the middle of town,  
Unwrap the past and lay before them  
A fragile girl I once knew, walking toward love  
In a thin, determined way. That she should live here too —  
In this town of carefully-guarded houses  
And old ladies in rocking chairs  
In fake pearls and printed button-down dresses.

Girls are crying in their ball gowns and boys  
Are holding them up and taking them to the streets,  
To warehouses or backs of deserted pick-up trucks.  
A troubadour waits on a wooden porch  
For the faultless girl, to speak her name,  
Undress her, give noise to her that is new and violent.  
The old ladies form a line and hold photographs  
Against their faces where the skin used to be unbroken.  
They step out from their dresses and kick off their shoes,  
Cross over the barren tracks in their solitary dance.

Tishani Doshi

# Love Poem

Ultimately, we will lose each other  
to something. I would hope for grand  
circumstance — death or disaster.  
But it might not be that way at all.  
It might be that you walk out  
one morning after making love  
to buy cigarettes, and never return,  
or I fall in love with another man.  
It might be a slow drift into indifference.  
Either way, we'll have to learn  
to bear the weight of the eventuality  
that we will lose each other to something.  
So why not begin now, while your head  
rests like a perfect moon in my lap,  
and the dogs on the beach are howling?  
Why not reach for the seam in this South Indian  
night and tear it, just a little, so the falling  
can begin? Because later, when we cross  
each other on the streets, and are forced  
to look away, when we've thrown  
the disregarded pieces of our togetherness  
into bedroom drawers and the smell  
of our bodies is disappearing like the sweet  
decay of lilies — what will we call it,  
when it's no longer love?

Tishani Doshi

# Ode To Drowning

is it or is it not  
the cold monsoon  
bearing the shape  
of my dark lord,  
speaking of his cruelty  
his going away?

— Nammalvar

i.

This is an ode  
to be sung  
in the latest hour of night

when the rain clouds  
have gathered  
over shingled roofs

and blue-skinned gods  
with magical flutes  
seduce the virgins to dance

For there is no love  
without music  
No rain

without peacocks  
perched  
in branches

of sandalwood trees  
with plumes  
of angels

and voices of thieves  
pleading for their loves  
to return

ii.

If rain signals  
the lover's return  
then I am lost

in the desert  
burning  
like the brain fever bird

looking for images of you  
through mesquite  
and teak

Because there's no sign  
of you  
or what I know

to be as you  
only clouds adrift  
in a vanquished sky

like vines  
of throbbing arms  
and mouths

drinking at the shore  
intoxicated  
with the night

iii.

There are as many ways  
of yearning  
as there are ways for rain

to fall  
slow  
incessant  
gentle  
squalling  
melancholy  
warm

It's that old idea  
of drowning  
in another to find the self

the compliance  
that water gives in form  
and depth

to something else  
But what if the humming bees  
are quiet

and the garlands of jasmine  
have been laid out  
to dry

How long to wait  
for everything to turn  
heavy with flower  
immodestly green□  
washed of dirt

iv.

It's desire after all  
that spins us  
Demands to be praised

as though it were new  
like the stillness  
before the first monsoon

when the hymen  
of the earth  
is torn into

and the brazen smell  
of damp  
fills the air

Must there be surprise

after we've thundered  
and rolled

and appeased our thirst  
when the silence returns  
again

In truth  
isn't it a waiting  
that never ends

like the chasm between  
the cycles of the world  
Between separation

and union  
longing and abandonment  
And somewhere

between the waning  
isn't this what  
we're left with

the music  
of uncertainty  
the aftertaste of rain

Tishani Doshi

# Ode To The Walking Woman

(After Alberto Giacometti )

Sit -

you must be tired  
of walking,  
of losing yourself  
this way:

a bronzed rib  
of exhaustion  
thinned out  
against the dark.

Sit -

there are still things  
to believe in;  
like civilizations  
and birthing  
and love.

And ancestors  
who move  
like silent tributaries  
from red-earthed villages  
with history cradled  
in their mythical arms.

But listen,  
what if they swell  
through the gates  
of your glistening city?

Will you walk down  
to the water's edge,  
immerse your feet  
so you can feel them  
dancing underneath?  
Mohenjodaro's brassy girls  
with bangled wrists  
and cinnabar lips;  
turbaned Harappan mothers  
standing wide  
on terracotta legs;  
egg-breasted Artemis –

Inana, Istar, Cybele, clutching their bounteous hearts  
in the unrepentant dark,  
crying: 'Daughter,  
where have the granaries  
and great baths disappeared?  
Won't you resurrect yourself,  
make love to the sky,  
reclaim the world.'

Tishani Doshi

# Open Hands

In Nairobi, an albino boy followed me everywhere  
Peering at me from behind cupboards and trees,  
Chortling with glee: Hello fine!  
Here is space. Here is space.

It is open and large and dark here  
And I feel open and large and dark.

I'm moving into a scene already imagined,  
A life already waiting under the topaz sky,  
Under the blue lacquered trees where the dust  
Is spiralling up to hide it.

The boy teaches me names of animals.  
They are spread out and running under us:  
Giraffe, lion, hippopotamus — Twiga, simba, kiboko.

What if it isn't true that we inherit our homes?  
It's lovely here isn't, the boy says.  
It's lovely.

So we must make meanings of things:  
A carcass of a jackal in a baobab tree,  
A man's fingers pushing up the straps of your maroon dress,  
A low wood-beamed room full of misgivings.

The boy holds me in his lanolin arms,  
Looks at me as though I were a sheet of glass,  
A single antelope facing a row of acacias,  
An unending ruinous landscape.

It's the hardest thing to do —  
To take him aside, feel his pigmentless skin —  
Explain how there's so much space  
I've lost myself.

How I cannot be this woman  
Looking to a foreign sky for the day,  
Disappeared again, leaving only a dim glow

In my hands to remember it by.

Tishani Doshi

# The Affair

These days men on curbs are curved  
Like farm tools or bits of wire,  
Like unruly saucers of tea flung  
Into the trees, the walls, the breeze.

Houses are shifting too —  
Up and going on emerald shoes,  
Colliding on streets, spitting  
Bits of brick and splinter on our sleeves.

This one holds a wife  
Standing at the bleak stairway of a dream,  
Grappling with her wedding veil;  
With mothballs and pearls and girls.

See, the husband is rising — a shipwreck  
Disappearing against a photograph  
Of beaten love. He's separating pink  
From dark, fodder from cloud,

Movement from half-movement.  
We can throw away these things:  
The sweat, the chests, the hair,  
The dead weight of despair dropping

Into the living rooms of our lives;  
The broken furniture, the cracked foundations.  
I claim you back, the wife says to him.  
She claims him back.

But what of this youngest one  
Inching along the sinew of the floor?  
He knows nothing- little kernel of snail —  
Except to unfurl along his silver trail.

Tishani Doshi

# The Art of Losing

It begins with the death  
of the childhood pet -  
the dog who refuses to eat  
for days, the bird or fish  
found sideways, dead.  
And you think the hole  
in the universe,  
caused by the emission  
of your grief, is so deep  
it will never be rectified.  
But it's only the start  
of an endless litany  
of betrayals:  
the cruelty of school,  
your first bastard boyfriend,  
the neighbour's son  
going slowly mad.  
You catch hold of losing,  
and suddenly, it's everywhere -  
the beggars in the street,  
the ravage of a distant war  
in your sleep.  
And when grandfather  
hobbles up to the commode  
to relieve himself like a girl  
without bothering to shut  
the door, you begin to realize  
what it means to exist  
in a world without.  
People around you grow old  
and die, and it's explained  
as a kind of going away -  
to God, or rot, or to return  
as an ant. And once again,  
you're expected to be calm  
about the fact that you'll never see  
the dead again,  
never hear them enter a room  
or leave it,

never have them touch  
the soft parting of your hair.  
Let it be, your parents advise:  
it's nothing.  
Wait till your favourite aunt  
keels over in a shopping mall,  
or the only boy you loved  
drives off a cliff and survives,  
but will never walk again.  
That'll really do you in,  
make you want to slit your wrists  
(in a metaphorical way, of course,  
because you're strong and know  
that life is about surviving these things).  
And almost all of it might  
be bearable if it would just end  
at this. But one day your parents  
will sneak into the garden  
to stand under the stars,  
and fade, like the lawn,  
into a mossy kind of grey.  
And you must let them.  
Not just that.  
You must let them pass  
into that wilderness  
and understand that soon,  
you'll be called aside  
to put away your paper wings,  
to fall into that same oblivion  
with nothing.  
As if it were nothing.

Tishani Doshi

# The Day We Went To The Sea

The day we went to the sea  
mothers in Madras were mining  
the Marina for missing children.  
Thatch flew in the sky, prisoners  
ran free, houses danced like danger  
in the wind. I saw a woman hold  
the tattered edge of the world  
in her hand, look past the temple  
which was still standing, as she was —  
miraculously whole in the debris of gaudy  
South Indian sun. When she moved  
her other hand across her brow,  
in a single arcing sweep of grace,  
it was as if she alone could alter things,  
bring us to the wordless safety of our beds.

Tishani Doshi

# Turning Into Men Again

This morning men are returning to the world,  
Waiting on the sides of blackened pavements  
For a rickshaw to carry them away  
On the sharp pins and soles of their dancing feet.

They must go to the houses of their childhoods  
To be soothed. They must wait for the wheels  
To appear from the thin arm of road.  
They must catch the crack in the sky

Where the light shifts from light to dark  
To light again, like the body in the first stages of love;  
Angering, heightening, spreading:  
Bent knees, bent breath.

Now they are moving, changing colours.  
Women are standing at the thresholds of doors  
Holding jars of oil, buckets of hot water and salt,  
Calamine, crushed mint and drink.

Some crawl into their mother's laps,  
Collapse against the heavy bosoms of old nannies,  
Search for the girl who climbed with them  
To the tin roof for the first time.

Inside, in the shadows of pillars,  
Fathers and grandfathers are stepping down  
From picture frames with secrets on their lips,  
Calling the lost in from their voyages.

Tishani Doshi

# Undertwo

I.

I hold my husband in plastic bags.  
He's whispering like a soft, worn thing,  
dropp me here, dropp me gently.

Everything is terribly light — incense,  
Ash, the thinness of his voice falling  
Into waves, disappearing.

II.

The sea picks up my life,  
Empties it across itself.  
I see it spilling over, dissolving.  
Here are the forgotten parts —  
A pink night sky, broken bangles,  
A fisherman walking away from the light.

There you are, held up with wind and sails.  
If you would turn, you would hear me say,  
Come back, my arms ache from all the carrying.  
Underneath, you're lost in a place  
Where everything is scraped together  
And nothing is thrown back.

You sink. Colours dissolve.  
You move hair from your forehead,  
Salt from your eyes. You're left with greys —  
Calling out to me, bubbles  
Instead of words. It is a silent death:  
One I feel before it happens.

III.

Was there a child then? The child I could not have?  
With hair that shakes and shines as though a sun  
Were gleaming under her roots. I want to stroke her.

Lean over and touch her. Come here, let me hold you.  
I want only daughters — a thick rope of black  
Around her neck. She calls; the beginning of your name.

If I were really a mother, I would do it quick  
And painless, out of love. Take the hair —  
Twist, yank, drop; tilt her over like a bag of sand.

It would be done then. There would be less  
To clean up. She will never be like me.  
The death of her child will kill her.

IV.

If you must collect pictures, take them  
When I'm looking away. Here's a beach again —  
The nets spread on the sand drying,  
A fish in the corner slapping its tail.

Nothing matters then,  
We'll meet when we're warm and dry.  
Take this picture — my shoulders, the bone,  
The shine, the criss-cross of white straps.

V.

I'm eight-years-old, running into the sea.  
Run in, my mother says, Go on then like a naked girl.  
Nobody cares, nobody's watching.

The sea pulls me in around the ankles,  
Grabs the sand from underneath, shows me  
A glimpse of my life, what it will be like later.

It was all calm once, long ago, a teardropp  
Between apartment buildings. But here in my life;  
Hiss hiss. This one is no good.

This one doesn't love you.  
This one doesn't know what you need.  
Leave, let go, stop.

The frothy fingers at my throat,  
The voice pouring into me,  
A terrace of vanishing blue.

You will leave this one.  
You will leave this place.  
For a while you will know nothing.

Tishani Doshi

## Walking Around after Neruda

It happens that I am tired of being a woman.  
It happens that I cannot walk past country clubs  
or consulates without considering the hags,  
skinny as guitar strings, foraging in the rubbish.

All along the streets there are forlorn mansions  
where girls have grown up and vanished.  
I am vanishing too. I want nothing to do with gates  
nor balconies nor flat-screen TVs.

It happens that I am tired of my veins and my hips,  
and my navel and my sorrows.  
It happens that I am tired of being a woman.

Just the same it would be joyous  
To flash my legs at the drivers playing chess,  
to lead the old man at house 38  
onto the tarred road to lie down  
under the laburnum dripping gold.

I do not want to keep growing in this skin,  
to swell to the size of a mausoleum.  
I do not want to be matriarch or mother.  
Understand, I am only in love  
with these undrunk breasts.

And when Monday arrives with the usual  
battalion of pear-shaped wives who do battle  
in grocery store aisles,  
I'll be stalking the fields of concrete and ash,

the days pushing me from street  
to street, leading me elsewhere -  
to houses without ceiling fans  
where daughters disappear and the walls weep.

I will weep too for high-heeled beauty queens,  
for sewing machines and chickens in cages.  
I will walk with my harness

and exiled feet through cravings  
and renunciations, through heaps  
of midnight wreckages  
where magistrates of crows gather  
to sing the same broken song  
of unforgiving loss.

Tishani Doshi

# What The Body Knows

The body dances in a darkened room  
Turning itself inside out  
So that skin can face the light in fractures,  
Slip like shadow through skeleton walls,  
Begin to cry — really — to scream  
About the tarnished weight of dreams.

This has been a drift after all.  
The body returns to its original place,  
Moves from one to the other — creeps —  
Tries to flee itself, lone trunk,  
Searches for remain of bark,  
Hints of what it used to be.

Perhaps an ocean framed in bone,  
A pair of birds in early white,  
Flying from this dream to the next  
Fixing the gaps between memory  
And reverberation; binding spine  
On vein, feather to lesion.

The body collects its wandering parts,  
Leans back through layers  
Of thickening water; roots above  
Boughs beneath, feet caving in to wonder.  
It's how the world reverses itself,  
How the distant sky finds the earth.

Tishani Doshi