

## Building Furniture

The nails disappear into the furniture:  
 He offers to hold my bones together:  
 I accept.

A light walnut upholstery —  
 The polish dries on me:  
 A reborn antique,  
 my fine veneer  
 will outlast me —  
 This he assures.

A sand-papered slave on his  
 walnut-crucifix,  
 my skin is  
 not Spartacus,  
 nor Jesus, resurrection  
 guaranteed. I'm  
 made to last, but only  
 in your drawing-room —  
 Paper-backs litter me —  
 Poetry reviews, glossy horoscopes  
 decorate me,  
 happiness promised, wealth,  
 eternity —  
 (But the beggar  
 had an astounding  
 fate line: you whispered  
 he should've been a king!  
 Here in my palm,  
 the left-overs of a previous life,  
 the delicate garbage  
 of last evening,

my mouth-tray filled  
with the ash of your kiss,  
my veins scratched

by your cocktail-glass,  
no difference now  
between blood & whisky.

I glisten  
under the brass-lamp,  
my face scarred,

the conversation guillotined  
on my skin —  
The night runs

to a close,  
a refugee from your sympathy —  
I offer you the morning.

Agha Shahid Ali

## School Bus

On the school bus  
the children exchange sandwiches,  
watch the river  
that always runs to meet them,  
or compare movies  
flashing by their windows.

They never see the driver  
frozen in the last frame,  
the ooze of painkillers  
gathering like pools of lead  
in the bottom of his boots  
or  
the revolver  
cradled in his lunch bucket.

Mel Dagg