HOUSES

for Jon Anderson

The man who buries his house in the sand
and digs it up again, each evening,
learns to put it together

quickly and just
as quickly to take it apart.

My parents sleep like children in the dark.
I am too far to hear them breathe
but I remember their house is safe

and I can sleep, the night's hair
black and thick in my hands.

My parents sleep in the dark.

When the moon rises, the night's hair
turns white in my arms.

I am thirteen thousand miles from home.

I comb the moon out of the night,
and my parents are sleeping like children.

"My father is dead," Vidur writes,
and a house in my neighborhood, next
to my parents', has burned down.

I keep reading the letter.

If I wake up,
my body will be water, reflecting the fire.

Agha Shahid Ali

--AGHA SHAHID ALI

My dearest Lala,
I wrote this on hearing of Dadi's house burning down. I think it's good.
Love — Bhaniya
8 May '85

HOUSES

for Jon Anderson

The man who buries his house in the sand
and digs it up again, each evening,
learns to put it together

quickly and just
as quickly to take it apart.

My parents sleep like children in the dark.
I am too far to hear them breathe
but I remember their house is safe

and I can sleep, the night's hair
black and thick in my hands.

My parents sleep in the dark.

When the moon rises, the night's hair
turns white in my arms.

I am thirteen thousand miles from home.

I comb the moon out of the night,
and my parents are sleeping like children.

"My father is dead," Vidur writes,
and a house in my neighborhood, next
to my parents', has burned down.

I keep reading the letter.

If I wake up,
my body will be water, reflecting the fire.

Agha Shahid Ali

--AGHA SHAHID ALI

for Daddy & Mummy —
the years that distance brings — I
am longing to see you —
Love —— Bhaiya