

The New Ordinance

1-

Someone has decreed
That all the winds
Must first
Announce their direction
Before blowing

The winds must first also inform
That when they blow what would be their
speed
For, storms are no longer permitted
And all these ramparts that we have built of
sand
These paper palaces that have been made
It is important to protect them
The storm is their old foe
As everyone knows

2-

Someone has decreed
That the waves in the river
Must curb their rebellion
They must stay within their limits
Their dashing and rising and dashing yet again
Only to rise
It is wrong of them to be so wilful
It is nothing but a portent of madness
An augury of rebellion

A rebellion will not be tolerated
This madness will not be accepted
If the waves want to stay in the river
They must now flow quietly

3-

Someone has decreed
That all the flowers will henceforth be of one
colour

There will be some officers who will decide
How the gardens of tomorrow will take shape

Certainly the flowers will all be of one colour
But how deep the colour or how light
Will be decided by the officers

4-How is one to tell them

That in no garden anywhere are all the flowers
of one colour
They cannot be
For, many colours live together hiding in one
colour
Look at the fate of those who have
Tried to make their garden all of one colour
See how a hundred colours have seeped into a
single colour
How troubled they are
How worried they look

5-How is one to tell them

When have the winds and the waves ever
heeded anyone's decree
The winds do not stay
In the clenched fists of the rulers
In prisons
And in handcuffs

6-When these waves are stopped

The river, no matter how placid
Becomes restless
And this restlessness is a step away
From a flood

How is one to tell them...

Translated from the Urdu by Rakhshanda Jalil