

The Night She Left Lahore...

*The night she left Lahore
an unstained moon had
risen over the compound walls,
simplifying the sleepless city
plating dross, grime and rage
to the patina of silver
even as warcries rolled across
the hot plain. Indians coagulated
into their religions - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh.*

*As a new country spawned
its amoebic shape within the map: Pakistan.
“Hurry up,” whispered her husband.
“They’re coming.”
It was no time to mention
the loveliness of the moon.*

*Her hands shook, reaching for
his turbans — stiff with starch
over the clothesline. She folded them
by lantern light. Locked them into trunks.
He loaded the guns, gave one to each
young man he’d mustered. And when
they stood ready, one at each window,
some crowded on the roof, he said,
“Hurry up, will you? They’re coming.”*

*She needed to clean the ashes
from the stove. Wanted to sweep
the veranda clean. But she ran to
collect a little money, jewellery,
tied it in a bundle.*

*In the lane outside, the horse pulled at his
traces, snorting in the blood-scented dark.
Her husband gave the reins to
their eldest son, helped her in.*

*She needed to wash her hands
she needed to pray.
Perhaps she should have
tucked more out of sight
Wiped the ground a last time,
lovingly, but she remained
breathless in the loaded cart.
“Hurry up,” he hissed, as he brought
Their little ones. Dream-laden,
their weight moved from his shoulder
to her lap. He flicked the reins
in her son’s hands — “Go now,”
he said, “I’ll come soon.”*

*So she left, and he stayed.
And the border came down.*

*More than fifty years later,
she wonders, would they not be
together now, had she lingered
to wash her hands
had she lingered to pray
If she had found some corner
of the veranda to clean again.
And every night she asks:
“What shall I do now with
the loveliness of the moon?”*

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