

Shadab Zeest Hashmi

## I look out the Mughal window

In the last dream the *sanwayan* was hot but no one was hungry. I heard a cackle while I waited for my husband to finish the teakwood shelf, the day already topaz and breaking. Who was it? The washerwoman or a mountain magpie? I looked out the window of the Mughal tower, carved with flowers. For a moment I thought I saw a wisp of yellow hair on the polished tiles down below. Perhaps it was brushed aside by the breeze. Some of the cobalt and turquoise tiles had split. There was much that needed mending. Our sons would fix walls damaged by cherry bombs and doors that were like sieves; so many bullets had passed through them. Our daughters would inscribe from memory all that our burnt books had contained. Long after the attack, the latticed pillars remained scented with *chambeli* buds. We had just begun whitewashing the house for the wedding, when they came again. Later, the bride sifted through the rubble for *Rubaiyat*, the groom washed the *kulha* he had meant to wear for the ceremony, its gold woven cloth grimy for once in hundreds of years. The shadows are bayonets, rhino horns. We are never safe when feasts are offered us on the heads of *nags*. We see shadows darting. What they steal most is our work, so we never have time to sit together and eat. We strain to write down each syllable our elders left us. Our children do not laugh any more. Our supper gets cold, uneaten.