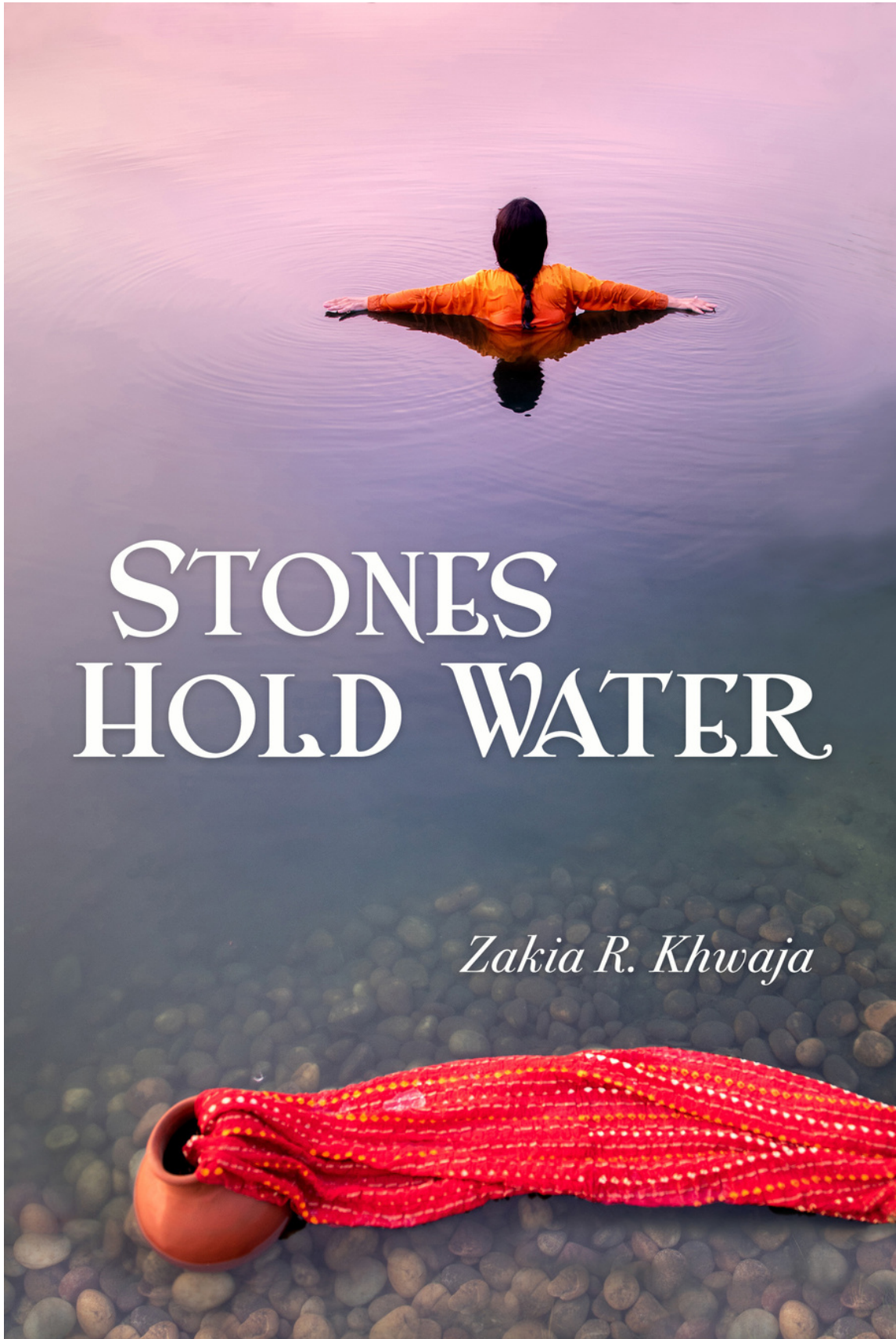


MEDIA KIT



STONES HOLD WATER

Zakia R. Khwaja

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ZAKIA R. KHWAJA



Zakia R. Khwaja is a Pakistani-American poet whose work has appeared in Grey Sparrow Journal, the Alabama Review, the Aleph Review, Forge, Willow Springs among others. Zakia has a Masters in English from the University of Rochester and an MBA from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. She has served as a poetry instructor for Desi Writer's Lounge, an initiative for South Asian poets writing in English. Zakia has given readings for the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) and has been published by the Pakistan Academy of Letters. She writes a blog at www.zakiarkhwaja.com on creativity and writing.

Zakia's poetry focuses on the rich culture of her Indus Valley heritage as well as regional and global socio-political issues. When not writing, Zakia likes to run marathon challenges and has Guinness World Records for participating in the Highest Altitude Road Race and the Highest Altitude Trail Half Marathon in the World. She has epiphanies at 4:27 am, believes in sucking out all the marrow of life and is convinced that writing is a bloodsport.



Contact



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BOOK INFORMATION

Title:

Stones Hold Water

Author:

Zakia R. Khwaja

Publication date:

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Available at:

Finishing Line Press, Amazon.com

ISBN:

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Retail price:

\$19.99

Format:

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Page count:

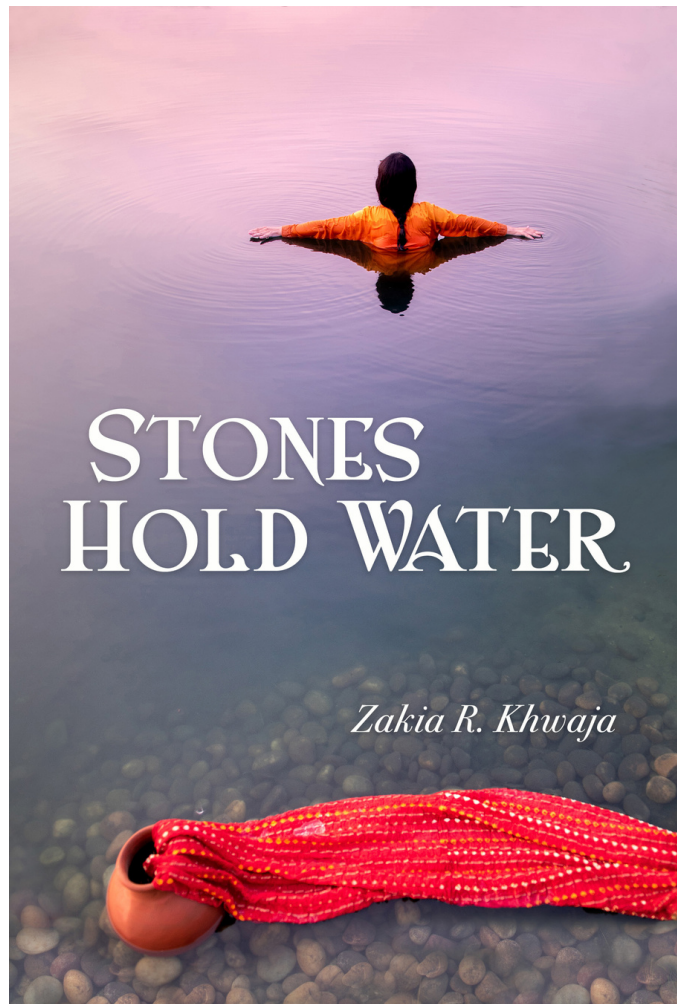
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Genre/Subgenre:

Poetry/South Asian Poetry

Other categories:

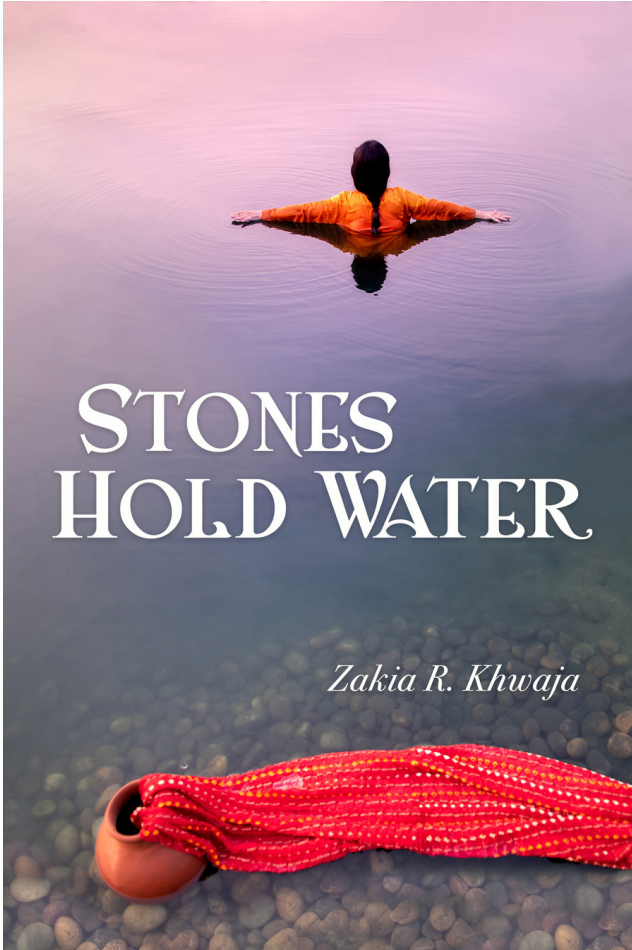
South Asian Women Authors;
Pakistani Poetry; Pakistani Culture



The meeting of times, a secret basement press, the beauty of Urdu, a broken god, the Buddhas of Bamiyan, a woman's riotous tresses are some of the lush images that weave the rich and complex tapestry of poems in *Stones Hold Water*. These poems traverse a landscape of love and loss, bringing the past to our present, expressing unfathomable grief and abiding self-discovery through lyrical storytelling. At the heart of this collection, is a speaker who does not shrink from honest excavation of complex facets of female existence: repression, rebellion and resistance. We find portals – through the melding of language and lore – to spaces redolent with the sights and sounds of Pakistan. Spaces that inspire courage and fear, connection and contention.

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release



Finishing Line Press Announces the Publication of *Stones Hold Water* by Pakistani-American Poet

Zakia R. Khwaja celebrates Indus Valley culture, mourns the cost of religious extremism.

In her debut poetry collection, *Stones Hold Water*, Zakia R. Khwaja explores the personal and political through a multilingual, female experience of family vignettes, cultural lore, elegiac grief. Her poetry invites readers into a deeper connection with the rich heritage of Pakistan even as she turns an unflinching lens on its turbulent reality – many of the poems were written when the Pakistani Taliban were carrying out attacks on civilians as well as security forces. At the heart of her work, is a speaker who does not shrink from honest excavation of complex facets of female existence -- repression, rebellion and resistance.

Award-winning poet Alessandra Lynch says “the pulse beats hard in Zakia R. Khwaja’s marvelous *Stones Hold Water* where we inhabit a palpable, multilingual experience of the Indus Valley cultural heritage teeming with elders, soothsayers, kingfishers, Urdu, vulture skies, saffron, a Eurasian Wild Boar, secrets...”

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Zakia R. Khwaja, Author,
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Zakia R. Khwaja often melds Urdu words with English in her work, creating resonant, lyrical rhythms that speak to a seamless amalgamation of South Asian and Western poetic sensibilities. Harris Khalique, recipient of the Presidential Pride of Performance, notes “the poems in this collection demonstrate a powerful facility with words and a sure grasp on the skill of writing poetry. She is a master storyteller in verse of the personal angst brought about by shifting cultural milieus across three generations and three countries.”

Photography for the book cover has been done by Beth Anne Anderson of Anderson Photography in Indiana.

Zakia R. Khwaja is a Pakistani-American poet whose work has appeared in Grey Sparrow Journal, the Alabama Review, the Aleph Review, Forge, Willow Springs among others. She has served as a poetry instructor for Desi Writer’s Lounge, an initiative for South Asian poets writing in English. Zakia has given readings for the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) and has been published by the Pakistan Academy of Letters. She writes a blog at www.zakiarkhwaja.com on creativity and writing.

Finishing Line Press is a poetry publisher based in Georgetown, Kentucky. In addition to the Chapbook Series, it publishes the New Women’s Voices Series and sponsors the Finishing Line Press Open Chapbook Competition.

Stones Hold Water is now available in print through Finishing Line Press and Amazon. com

BLURBS FOR *STONES HOLD WATER*

"In her debut collection, *Stones Hold Water*, Zakia R. Khwaja weaves a tapestry of images – both bright and gloomy – and places it in the frame of endless time. Her craft is solid but unforced because it submits itself to the depth of emotions and a haunted sense of being. The poems in this collection demonstrate a powerful facility with words and a sure grasp on the skill of writing poetry. She is a master storyteller in verse of the personal angst brought about by shifting cultural milieus across three generations and three countries. Zakia R. Khwaja has arrived."

– **Harris Khalique**, author of *No Fortunes to Tell* and recipient of the Presidential Pride of Performance Award, Pakistan.

"The pulse beats hard in Zakia R. Khwaja's marvelous *Stones Hold Water* where we inhabit a palpable, multilingual experience of the Indus Valley cultural heritage teeming with elders, soothsayers, kingfishers, Urdu, vulture skies, saffron, a Eurasian Wild Boar, secrets...These poems are alive and hungry! They carry authentic wonderment and love, lamentation and longing, and especially later in the book, deep grief over human violence. At the heart of the book, the female speaker seeks, reveals, questions, and celebrates complex layers of female identity. Turn to any page, and you will find in these narratives incredibly lush lyricism and powerful rhythms. I have so much admiration for this poet and her rich, urgent connection with language. By the end of our journey, the speaker shake[s] out the bare bones / of [her] wings. The reader, still breathless from her flight, is ready to read more."

– **Alessandra Lynch**, author of *Pretty Tripwire*

INTERVIEW RESOURCES

What does poetry mean to you?

At its heart, poetry is revelation. It makes the universal, unique and the unique, universal. I am attracted to how poems convey depth and meaning without exposition, where the spatial relationship of lines on a page is just as important as word choice and can give rise to multiple ways of reading the same poem. For me, poetry is best described by the Urdu idiom *samandar ko koozay main band karna*. To enclose an ocean in a cup.

“Stones Hold Water has a glossary of the Urdu words used in the poems. How do you amalgamate and use Urdu words in English poetry?”

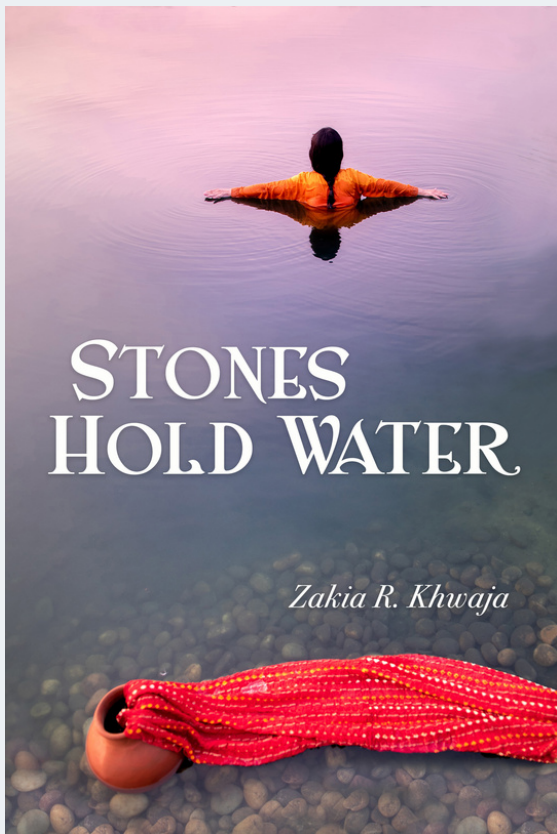
I actually don't find my expression in Urdu to be incompatible with my expression in English. I have grown up bilingual so it is very natural for me to use a mix of Urdu and English when speaking. Oftentimes I get asked about how I reconcile the treatment of culturally-specific content with writing in English. As someone who has grown up with both eastern and western exposure, I have never considered my writing as a suturing of two binaries, rather I experience it as a seamless whole of South Asian sensibilities in English – an extension of a multilingual identity. There are times when I feel the English translation of a word dilutes the verse, I wish to retain the original weight, nuance and rhythm of the Urdu word, so I do.

What makes a poem powerful?

I believe the power of a poem lies in saying the unsayable. I am drawn to the intersection where silence becomes voice, where language that is denied can be claimed. It is where something is becoming another thing, where transformation takes place.

Why do you write poetry?

I love how poetry lends itself to myriad interpretations, layering of meaning, opens us to receive and experience connections of image, language, rhythm that are uncommon. Writing poetry has brought me into deeper engagement with myself and the world, opened portals to interior and exterior spaces of the human condition.



STONES HOLD WATER

Zakia R. Khwaja

**STONES HOLD WATER
CELEBRATES INDUS VALLEY
CULTURE, MOURNS THE COST
OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM.**

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STONES HOLD WATER EXPLORES COMPLEX KALEIDOSCOPE OF PAKISTANI CULTURE AND POLITICS

In this collection of over 50 poems, Zakia R. Khwaja takes you on a journey both mythic and real, joyful and tragic. She celebrates her Indus Valley heritage even as she unflinchingly holds a candle to hostility and tragedy in the subcontinent. These are stories of culture and lore, of turmoil — political and personal — of triumphant self-discovery threaded with a love of language and literature.

The speaker in *Stones Hold Water* seamlessly claims a multilingual identity, creating portals to culturally-specific spaces of strength and fragility that resonate with the lush lyricism of oral storytelling traditions.

Whether raised in joy or lament, the female voice at the heart of this collection carries the reader to moments we might not have imagined - a streetwalker looking up at a veiled window; the haunted recognition of a beggar child grasping at a coattail; women dancing behind closed doors. The reader is brought through these moments, trusted with vulnerability that opens the door to deeper insights and understanding of a culture and its people.

ADVANCE PRAISE

"The pulse beats hard in Zakia R. Khwaja's marvelous *Stones Hold Water* where we inhabit a palpable, multilingual experience of the Indus Valley cultural heritage teeming with elders, soothsayers, kingfishers, Urdu, vulture skies, saffron, a Eurasian Wild Boar, secrets...These poems are alive and hungry!

-- Alessandra Lynch, author of *Pretty Tripwire*.

"The poems in this collection demonstrate a powerful facility with words and a sure grasp on the skill of writing poetry. She is a master storyteller in verse of the personal angst brought about by shifting cultural milieus across three generations and three countries. Zakia R. Khwaja has arrived."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zakia R. Khwaja is a Pakistani-American poet whose work has appeared in *Grey Sparrow Journal*, the *Alabama Review*, the *Aleph Review*, *Forge*, *Willow Springs* among others. Zakia has a Masters in English from the University of Rochester and an MBA from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. She has also given readings for the South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) and been published by the Pakistan Academy of Letters. She writes a blog at www.zakiarkhwaja.com



EXCERPT

LORE

At dusk, the women come to the courtyard
between the huts and cast stories around the fire
feeding on the slow roast of their days. Time to forget

the heavy sun they carried for hours,
rattling in dry pitchers, until they flushed it out
at the nearest well two villages away. Now,

in the night, they pull thorns from their tread
and tuck secrets down each other's breasts
while the men sleep off moonshine and truck shifts.

The crones pass on their lives to the tribe
and teach gypsy girls how to curve flesh against
stopping desert winds without mislaying themselves.

Clan songs of dusty lands with vulture skies
lift off the drum and swirl into constellations.

DREAMERS OF THE HILLS

For Kashmir

Once again curfews shutter the valley of markhor and saffron.
The sour sharpness of snipers and stone-pelters, teargassers and
pellet-dodgers thickens borders. Barred behind windows we mourn

as jungle crows and turtle doves take flight from the chenar tops.
Our waterfalls run rust from yesterday's veins. Some days, in rebellion,
we escape up hillsides and on summer evenings rest our shoulders against

the stone edging of mountain roads. Sweat drips off our bared necks
as we gaze, upside down, at home-pyres far below. Nights smoke
with ashed futures as we dream of galaxies far from armies, pretend

bootprints are not appearing on our throats and our slopes
are not choked with soldiers. In freedom, there had been no sting
deeper than the slice of wind across our jugulars.

EXCERPT

STONES HOLD WATER

I learn dolomite before doll,
gripping my father's fingers
as we wade into the heart of rocks.

An ocean beats in all of us,

he says, dripping lithified
shells from his pockets.

He hands me a rose
quartz and curls my fist
around the universe
within a petrified star-

fish. The truth of mountains is:

They will become pebbles
on windowsills.

JIDDOJOHAD

I read the Roznama Jang
to my grandfather's cataracts,
seer-white in sunlight.

"JIDDojohad, not JADDojohad," he corrects
as my eleven years struggle with the careful Urdu
of journalists, while beneath our feet
a secret basement press hums
words dying on tongues, welted off backs,
choked into cuffed hands.

A bulb sparks over democratized
print, ink-smudged fingers screw clean
from acetone-soaked muslin. Man-high piles
of foolscap lean against foundations. I learn

how to crease sentences into books
that get transported in the hushed dark
by tarp-covered wheelbarrows.

EXCERPT

JHAROKA

Three evenings, you and I have
emptied our shoes of desert sand and
leaned against the Rajasthani balcony that hovers
over dune valleys and camel trails,
an Alif Layla Wa Layla magic carpet.

We need this pink city at seven stories,
between sun glare and darkness, and time
to unmask the quiet behind the distant
chatter of nine-to-five days.

Cushioned against the world, you
follow a map of rivers and I
bind verses into raft logs. The hookah
gurgles in the silence, slides from one wall
to the other, charcoal in our mouths.
We will kiss the smoky taste away

when the moon is no longer a fingernail
edge jammed in a palm but a white-hot scythe
slivering our nakedness and
the dry wind brings the rasps
of gypsies to our bed.

We lie face-to-face and stuff
pillows with secrets. Slowly, knit
the night a net of fractured stars.