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The Wedding

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THE WEDDING

Meloned-out five months and more,
my sister carries her pride, wedges
it through the shuffling corridor
as petty bureaucrats peer over paper hedges
on dismal wooden desks, the hand-me-down
relics from the British Raj:
brass embossers, rubber stamps, pious frowns.

Khadi-clad, the groom trails behind
my mother with her Persian eyes;
my father flings the bitter rind
of an orange into a congregation of flies.
I bring two garlands heavy with jasmine,
and a ring the bearer resurrected
from a drawer at the last moment.

My sister's destination isn't this place
where endless forms are signed,
and resignation repeats itself in every face.
She's looking for what she'll never find:
a man remade by formal acts,
unwavering as a signature,
a man unwedded to the past.

We encircle the snoring clerk.
My mother's sari sweeps his floor
and he awakens angrily, his chin jerks.
My office is my temple, he roars.
No one even snickers.
Our bodies barricade his shouts,
I see one garland begin to wither.

At last the clerk stammers out his task.
My sister's wedding over,
we kiss her over-flushed face and pat
the groom hastily on the shoulder.
He got what he wanted: a violin, a quest.
She, with her belly swelling in the heat,
has laid another part of herself to rest.