

Summer Day

Zehra Naqvi

You never imagined you would use your grandmother's scarf like this. Tied around the doorknob and then around your neck. You sit against your bedroom door, let your head drop, eyes roll, the scarf tugging at your jugular; you like the way the circulation stops. Suspended arms hanging by your side. Enough to numb, not enough to kill. You don't want to die but you want to.

You won't be able to talk about it till you leave him.

It's a summer day and you're running from him and he catches you and throws you to the sidewalk. He yells that he's going to kill you. There are children playing in the park. Your palms burn. And you feel the worst thing you can do is bring attention to yourself, so you ask him to quiet down. *Stop* never works. You pull your headscarf away because you don't want a muslim woman to be seen like this. A drunk white man slurring runs up and yells at him to *stop* and now he's got this look of confusion. And then a brown brother runs up too and he's pulling the white guy away and he's saying, *it's between these two, leave it* and the brother looks as if he recognizes this scene and you have never felt this betrayed. And you look at that white man. He looks like he has been sleeping rough, on the streets. *Don't hurt her*, he yells, and he doesn't move, and he keeps yelling at him. *You can't touch a woman like that*. The brother backs away, returns to his kids at the swings. He shakes his head, calls you a bitch, and stalks off. The drunk white guy stays. *Do you have anywhere to go?* he manages to say, slurring, his breath reeking of alcohol. *Can I get you anywhere?* You don't know the answer to that, so you say the first thing pounding through your head. *No, thank you*.

After a while you stopped telling him to stop. Just to be quiet so the neighbours wouldn't hear.

In the mirror: you hold yourself. Hands touching arms. Your lips to your own skin. Slip your hand into your other hand and hold it tight. *Aloneness is the stuff of prophethood. Hajar, Maryam, Zainab.* It is warm here, in the years later, and the sun is shining on your arms, your breath alive and full, and your eyelids heavy like honey.