

**FAISAL
MOHYUDDIN**

The Wooden Balconies of Old Lahore

—for *Tasneem Raja*

When it begins to rain on this summer night, I step out onto the balcony to watch with nostalgia the shirtless boys of our mohalla thrash about in the flooded plaza below. Down each of the three narrow streets that arrives at this triangular juncture hang balconies carved of wood by hands that lived in the century before the last, each enchanted structure a small portal to the past, the fantastic imaginations of the families who commissioned their ornate designs still on display. Some showcase a geometric intricacy on par with the inner trellises of the human brain; others bear the likenesses of bears emerging from massive Ottoman tulips, camels crossing sand dunes shaped like ocean waves, even cat-eyed serpents swallowing their own tails, as if predicting the floundering tomorrows of our fought-for nation. Our balcony, seemingly conceived during a monsoon like tonight's, quite possibly by someone seeing the same splashing scene of playfulness that I am seeing from above, depicts a series of mermaids swimming through coils of seaweed, reaching out to their mirrored twins, seeking rescue. I see I am not alone, that others have come out to delight in the rain rinsing away the dust and longing of another brutal day spent seeking respite in shade. Even the unmarried daughters of the old Haji Ali Samdani look on with their lusting eyes peeking out from dark scarves to see their future husbands frolicking beneath the falling sky, measuring the wildness of each prospective lover to guess at the lastingness of his goodness. Everything seems more perfect, more everlasting, during the rainy season, when instead of noticing the slow but inevitable decay of wooden things, or the dimming vitality of our aging bodies, we feel suddenly young again, held intact within the timelessness of these miniature museums whose magic will inevitably end in collapse, in the kind of crushing stillness that follows the last drop of rain, the last silent grasp of breath.

Faisal Mohyuddin teaches English at Highland Park High School in suburban Chicago, was a 2014–16 fellow in the U.S. Department of State's Teachers for Global Classrooms Program, and received an MFA in creative writing from Columbia College Chicago. His poetry and visual art have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Narrative*, *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *New England Review* (online), *Poet Lore*, *RHINO*, *the minnesota review*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Atlanta Review*, and elsewhere. He was a finalist in *Narrative's* Eighth Annual Poetry Contest in 2016 and the recipient of the 2014 Edward Stanley Award from *Prairie Schooner*. He lives with his wife and son in Chicago, Illinois.

LINDA NUNES

Where's My Ladder, 2017
Encaustic and mixed media
on cradled wood panel, 24 x 30 in



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