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THE WOMEN IN MY HOUSEHOLD

Anis Shivani

They showed me how to tie silken scarves over my head.
They cried on Friday nights, after the ill muezzin's beat.
I heard them through shuttered windows, as I threw stones
in the garden. The heat, the buzzing flies, the moldering

moon, it hurt to plan existence beyond the duration
of the next lesson. Language was passage to euphemism.
I used to say, for instance, when asking for a kiss or hug:
What more did the prince discover about Cinderella

when he had done with the meal? A cramp, an ache,
a sudden gripe in the bones, they thought of as punishment
deserved, from almighty Allah whose business it was
to be on the watch. I only begged to be one of them.