

Escape To, From What?

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Names

I live inside my name,
snugly, like a house. Looking out
through the *a* and *u*, I light a fire
in the *M*'s grate, wait for smoke
to billow from the top
before opening the *s* and inviting you in.
Lovely to see you. This
is where I live. Do come inside.

None of us, after all, really live
where we think we do. Bricks
don't wall us in so safely — hollow
shouting structures, we rattle round inside.
Countries merge like clouds and separate,
light as air. No, we live inside our minds,
bedded safely behind eyes. And in our names.
Go anywhere you like, yours comes behind you.
Write it down: on Pakistani
paper, with a stick in British soil. Always
your face blinking from its lines.

But now, with the May sun
shining on new British leaves,
my mother has taken off *Masud* like a
dupatta — I am amazed at how, beneath,
her maiden name has stayed intact and gleaming,
waiting for this moment. And my sisters,
too, grafting *Grace* over *Masud*
like Caucasian skin. But I cannot see
my eyes behind the lines of *Noreen Grace*:
Masud is where I live. Alone now.

Noreen Masud (H) Madras College