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A PLACE FOR POETRY

Teaching *Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan*

i. London E7

Walking to work from the tube,
 the High Road rattles with metal shutters
 rolling upwards. Pavements become coastlines
 from elsewhere: boxes of plantains, dudhi, arvee;
 hunks of watermelon piled in a crate.
 Long rolls of sari cloth lean against shopfronts,
 offcut squares in baskets. One day I buy one,
 unfold it in class like a map, pass it round.
 Its blue is that of schoolroom globes;
 silver threads cross it like shipping lanes.
 I ask about their aunts, their gifts
 from Lagos, Ilford, Manila:
 lifelines cast from somewhere to now.

ii. Cumbria

I drive to work down hedgerowed lanes,
 recycling lesson plans in my head.
 This morning, I found the fabric,
 a fragment from a decade ago,
 pressed in a ringbinder marked *Poems*.
 Different pupils run it through their fingers.
 I show them Googled images
 of salwaar kameez, Lahore.
 We are answering questions –
Discuss. Compare and contrast.
 I try to answer them, see myself,
 then and now, staring through vertical blinds
 in Year 10 English classrooms.

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