set the dining chairs with their half-moon backs in a row in the middle of
the well-worn carpet and I draped the turbans over their tops the way Gidda
dancers wear their chunnis pinned tight in the centre parting of their hair.
Then I sat on the carpet before them, willing them: dance for me—dance
for us. The chairs stood as stiff and wooden as ignorant Canadians, though
I know maple is softer than chinar.

Soon the hands of cloth regained all their colour, filling the room with
sheer lightness. Their splendour arched upwards, insisting upon notice,
refusing the drabness, refusing obscurity, yielding the curtain rod like the
strut of a defending champion.

From the windows over my head came the sounds of a Montreal after-
noon, and the sure step of purposeful feet on the sidewalk. Somewhere on
a street named in English where the workers speak joual I imagined your
turban making its way in the crowds bringing you home to me.

Once again I climbed on a chair and I let your turbans loose. One by
one, I held them to me, folding in their defiance, hushing their unruly
indignation, gentling them into temporary submission. Finally, I faced
them as they sat before me.

Then I chose my favourite, the red one you wear less and less, and I took
it to the bedroom. I unfurled the gauzy scarlet on our bed and it seemed
as though I'd poured a pool of the sainted blood of all the Sikh martyrs
there. So I took a corner and tied it to the doorknob just as you do in the
mornings instead of waking me to help you. I took the diagonal corner to
the very far end of the room just as you do, and rolled the scarlet inward
as best I could within the cramped four walls. I had to untie it from the
doorknob again to roll the other half, as I used to every day for my father,
then my brother, and now you. Soon the scarlet rope lay ready.

I placed it before the mirror and began to tie it as a Sardar would, one
end clenched between my teeth to anchor it, arms raised to sweep it up to
the forehead, down to the nape of the neck, around again, this time higher.
I wound it swiftly, deftly, till it jutted haughtily forward, adding four inches
to my stature. Only when I had pinned the free end to the peak did I let the
end clenched between my teeth fall. I took the saliva-darkened cord, pulled
it back where my hair bun rested low, and tucked it up over the turban, just
as you do.

In the mirror I saw my father as he must have looked as a boy, my
teenage brother as I remember him, you as you face Canada, myself as I
need to be.

The face beneath the jaunty turban began to smile.

I raised my hands to my turban's roundness, eased it from my head and
brought it before me, setting it down lightly before the mirror. It asked
nothing now but that I be worthy of it.