

TORN APART
THE PARTITION OF INDIA

For my dad

Published in the UK by Scholastic Children's Books, 2021
Euston House, 24 Eversholt Street, London, NW1 1DB
A division of Scholastic Limited

London ~ New York ~ Toronto ~ Sydney ~ Auckland
Mexico City ~ New Delhi ~ Hong Kong

Scholastic Ltd., Ireland Offices at: Unit 89E, Lagan Road,
Dublin Industrial Estate, Glasnevin, Dublin 11

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or
registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

Text © Swapna Haddow, 2021
Cover artwork © Two Dots

The right of Swapna Haddow to be identified as the author of this work has
been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents
Act, 1988.

ISBN 978 0702 30041 7

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or
otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or
cover other than that in which it is published. No part of this publication may
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by
any other means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or
otherwise) without prior written permission of Scholastic Limited.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY
Papers used by Scholastic Children's Books are made from wood grown in
sustainable forests.

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

While this book is based on real characters and actual historical events, some
situations and people are fictional, created by the author.

www.scholastic.co.uk

SWAPNA HADDOW



TORN APART
THE PARTITION OF INDIA

USEFUL WORDS

ABBU: father in Urdu

AMMI: mother in Urdu

CHAI WALLAH: a person who sells and serves tea

JAAN: Urdu for 'loved one' or 'darling'

MAATA: mother in Hindi

AUGUST 1947

PROLOGUE

“The British Raj has ruled India since 1858,” the headmaster’s voiced boomed over the speakers as he addressed us from the podium. “But now they are leaving.” He thrust a finger into the air. “India will have her independence!”

The entire student body erupted with roars of joy, and though the headmaster didn’t tolerate rowdiness usually, he’d allowed us to shout out loud that one time. The blooms on the school lawn seemed to have blossomed especially in the orange, white and green colours of our nation’s flag, nourished by the triumphant news. We felt alive with hope as we danced in the school yard with one another.

The headmaster hushed us quiet and spoke again. This time his voice was sombre.

“Children,” he said. “Independence comes at a cost. The British have decided that India will be divided into two nations, India and Pakistan.” The yard was silent. “I want you all to remember that no matter what happens to our motherland,” he continued, “in this school, we are united.”

In our excitement, we didn’t stop to think about the inevitable changes to come. With the British leaving, the Indian leaders would form a new government. We didn’t realize it then, celebrating together, but the India we knew and loved would be torn apart.

Soon after that assembly, the classrooms started to empty. First the British children left. Then the British teachers. Then the Muslims stopped coming. The headmaster called together the few of us who were left and explained that many of the Muslim staff and students had moved to Pakistan already. He said the New India wasn’t for Muslims. And then he left too.

Abbu had laughed it all off at first and told me, “They will come back tomorrow. Just you see.”

But the world had changed and they didn’t come



back the next day. Nor the day after.

I knew it would be our turn to leave at some point, but I hadn't realized how soon.





OCTOBER 1947

CHAPTER

1

IBRAHIM

“Ibrahim, hurry!”

In the darkness, Ammi grabbed the blanket from my bed.

“Put this on,” she said, shoving my shirt in my hands. *“Quickly!”*

The collar pulled against the back of my neck from the weight of the money Ammi had sewn into the

lining the previous night. I grabbed my *topi* hat from the dresser and tucked it in my shirt pocket.

“Take your sister,” Ammi whispered, pushing Nafia’s tiny clammy hand into mine.

Blinking in the darkness, I pulled Nafia after me. I felt for the wall and then the doorway and stumbled out into the hall.

The marble floor was icy from the cold early morning air and I could feel Nafia pulling hard as she leaped back towards the bedroom.

“We have to go,” I hissed at her, hauling her up on to my back. As she wrapped her arms around my shoulders and held on tight, I could smell the coconut oil Ammi put in her hair.

I followed the low growl of the car outside to where Abbu was lugging large trunks up on to its roof.

Abbu had explained it all last night. We had to leave Delhi. We were going to Pakistan. We had a private car. He and Ammi would pack, and I would get Nafia into the car quickly and quietly. That was my job.

“But why?” I had asked.

“Because it isn’t safe here for us any more,” answered Abbu.

“When will we come back?”

“We won’t.”

“But what about Suleiman and Faisal?”

“We don’t have time to say goodbye to your friends.”

“But I promised Faisal he could have my bike.”

“You shouldn’t make promises you can’t keep, Ibrahim,” Abbu had sighed, scolding me.

“Can I take the bike to him now?”

“No. It’s not safe.”

“Can I send them a letter to say where I’ve gone?”

“No.”

“But why?”

“Because the world is changing,” Abbu had shouted, slamming his hands down on the table between us. Ammi’s sewing kit rattled and bobbins of white thread toppled over the edge and down the table legs. “This is independence, and independence means partition,” he continued as he got to his feet. “And because I’ve told you already that we have to leave Delhi. We are going to Pakistan. We have a private car arriving very early. Ammi will pack

and you need to get Nafia into the car quickly and quietly. *That* is your job.”

He had stormed off to his office, signalling the end of the conversation.

“But why, Ammi?” I’d asked my mother. She’d wrung her hands and her glass bangles tinkled together. Then she hugged me close.

“This is a new India now,” she said softly. “It’s not *our* India any more.”

We had sat in silence for a while before she too got up and left.

I stayed in the front room a while longer, stroking the soft fabric on Ammi’s favourite chair and staring at the silk throw, trying to memorize the patterns that she had spent the past year embroidering. She’d created outlines, in tiny neat stitches of gold and silver, of kites and camels and horses and tiny dolls; all the things Nafia and I loved. And when we were ill or sad or had had a bad day at school, she would wrap us tightly in the special throw so we were swaddled by all the things that made us happy.

And now we would have to leave the silk throw behind, as we were forced out of our home with only

a few of our possessions and memories of our time together in India.

We were leaving our home and Delhi under the cover of darkness. My chest felt tight, like a clamp being screwed harder and harder into the centre of my body. I balled my hands into fists, crushing Ammi's throw, and squeezed my eyes shut so tightly they stung. I knew in my heart we wouldn't be back tomorrow either, nor the day after, nor *any* day after that.

We have to leave Delhi. We are going to Pakistan. We have a private car. Abbu and Ammi will pack and I will get Nafia into the car quickly and quietly. That is my job. I repeated it over and over in my head like I was memorizing a poem to recite in class.

Abbu had already packed some cases into the back of the car when I helped Nafia in. It wasn't yet dawn and, in the darkness, the only light came from the car lamps, which lit up Abbu's worn face as he counted out wads of rupees for the driver.

"Where are we going?" Nafia asked with a yawn.

I held a finger to my lips and gave her the look Ammi gave me when she meant business.

Nafia squeezed her doll tightly and curled into a ball as I slid in next to her.

Abbu placed the last of our cases by the side of the car and Ammi came out to help him load them in next to us. I pulled my feet up as she pushed a case into the gap by my legs and climbed in after. Abbu grabbed the last trunk and heaved it high on to the roof of the car. It thudded into place on top of the others. The driver tossed a thick rope over the cases, tying them securely to the roof.

“Where are we going?” Nafia asked again, sleepily.

Ammi shushed her quiet and Nafia sat back in a sulk next to me as Abbu climbed into the front seat next to the driver.

He nodded at the driver and the car rumbled to life. As we took off, I looked back and watched our home being swallowed up into the night. It was the place where I had tossed a cricket ball for the first time, and many more times after that. Where Abbu had swung me so high I could touch the ceiling. Where Nafia had got trapped under the bed and Ammi and I had laughed so hard we had tears in our eyes as her podgy legs squirmed to freedom. It was

the place where I was given my very first schoolbooks by Abbu, who was so proud of me as I paraded my schoolbag across the veranda.

I watched out of the window as we drove past my school, past the *chai wallah*, past the potters. The ladies who sold the jasmine garlands for the Hindu temple were not yet up and the moonlight shone upon the empty steps.

Ammi wept and Abbu turned to offer her his hand. She brushed it back and held her *dupatta* shawl up against her mouth to stifle her sobs. I sat still, unsure what to do. Ammi had never cried in front of me before.

Then the car stopped.

Ammi straightened up suddenly, and then went still. I couldn't see her face fully in the darkness. I twisted to see what was going on when the moonlight caught her face. I knew right then that I had to be the most silent I had ever been in my life.

That's when I heard it. The low muffle of voices followed by the slapping of sandals on the road. Quiet at first, then louder and louder. And closer. Faster and faster and faster.

The back window exploded as a rock smashed through, hitting Ammi in the shoulder. Nafia screamed as glass shards shattered on to the back seat. I could taste blood as thick drops trickled down the side of my face.

Ammi threw open the door. She grabbed me and I grabbed Nafia. We tore out of the car. My arm caught the door and I screamed as glass cut through my skin.

“Run!” Abbu yelled, as angry voices grew louder and louder.

They were shouting at us. They snatched the cases off the car. They ripped into them like a pack of hungry wolves.

Abbu seized a trunk. A man with a wooden bat smacked him in the back of his legs and my father crumbled to the ground.

“Abbu!” I screamed for him. “Abbu!”

“Run!” he shouted back.

Ammi gripped me and Nafia and ran, dragging us after her. She swung Nafia up into her arms and we fled, Nafia’s screams ripping through the night air.

I felt the mob behind me, close, like a fire growing, raging and angry.

My legs burned but I willed them on faster.

As we turned the corner on to the next street, I suddenly felt Ammi being wrenched away from me. Our hands struggled to stay connected.

“Run!” she cried, as the group of men grabbed my arms, pulling me away from her.

“Ammi!” I screamed.

“Run, Ibrahim!” Ammi cried again as I saw her and Nafia run free from the mob and tear down the road on the opposite side of the street.

I pulled hard away from the men holding me, thrashing my arms and breaking free. I bolted, fleeing in the opposite direction, Ammi’s terrified cries echoing in my head.