

Post-hijab memoir

A salute to my sisters still in scarves proving the goodness in us and for us. Thank you.

My mother cried, “You just put a target on your head,”
when at fifteen I placed a green veil over my hair.
Cotton-woven courage kept me contained

because even before this declaration of faith,
I was afraid. Fear and guilt both light fires in the chest,
one red, one blue. I was too young to know

the difference and so they burned all the same,
wanted to say *sorry* though no Muslim I knew was ever
on the news. *Sorry anyway*. With my new uniform,

I was an unelected ambassador of my people:
sharpened my English with fine diction, accentuated
my native accent, sewed on a smile, wore my kindness

like armor, folded the flag into a hijab on 9/11,
pleated so not a single white star was stolen,
pleaded *I’m one of you*. But this was the summer

when America saw ISIS in me, and like Jenny’s
green ribbon, you wanted it undone, my hair
uncovered. Oil and water and patriotism and Islam,

even when I religiously adhered to a black scarf
draped so loosely it almost wasn’t there;
we Muslims, we burn all the same.

My mother cried, “Thank you” when I again
let the wind bless my head, let the neighbors witness
my bare hair, and though I unveiled because I missed,

not dismissed God, what a sigh of relief
my mother released; you’d wonder how Muslim
could we be, definitely not *that* Muslim,

definitely not *those Muslims*. I unfolded the flag
-scented coconut shampoo, hung it across our porch.