

MAJDA GAMA
Bride of the Red Sea

In Jeddah, city of Eve, weeks flew,
calendar days as useless as money
pegged to the dollar, as useless to me

as a passport without a guardian's signature,
as trivial as the marriage proposal
from the middle-aged man whose room

I was led to by a scheming sister after
a ladies' luncheon. The latest in a line of eligible
girls to be snared so. And she from an old family.

When I confided to the Red Sea, the pipes
in my bathroom burst. Hajjaj, our handyman
with Nile Delta wisdom, scratched his head.

To the sure earth of Arabia I entrusted myself
on my carpet at noon, envisioned a Nabatean
door carved into rock, entered there.

The pulse of my heart a tether unwinding
behind me. In the rose chamber before me
a man, no, what smokeless fire perceives to be man,

form not as crisp as his sharp yellow eyes.
Here was an ally. If you have nothing
to say to the jinn, then say nothing.

All those long days of two calendars,
the sun pressed in as the virtue police patrolled
the seashore and shops, cafés, and malls.

I chose my veils, my perfume, and my jewelry
with care, then my face and fingernails
became provocative. And then a fatwa

forbade women to be alone with male jinn.
Tedious are the days behind a woman's
gilded ribcage, awaiting the key to be let out.