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.