Breaking Bread at Al Qalzam

by Tawnysha Greene

My first time alone
with the women in Saudi Arabia,
abayas, head covers off and I see

their faces, their hair free. Hands touch
me, lead me down
a line of greetings, kisses, whispers

in Arabic that I try
to return, trilled *r*s, long *m*s,
they laugh, because my words are

Egyptian, not Saudi, not
ours, they say. I watch, follow
what they do, sit on the ground, drink gawa

from tiny gold cups, nibble whole fried fish
with my right hand. We break bread, strangers,
now friends, uncovered, naked

in a way, because they speak to me of love.
They motion with their hands, point
to themselves, each other, then

at me, pause to see
if I understand, stop between streams
of Arabic to say *daughter, sister, lover*.

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