

The Woman from Mecca

by Tawnysha Greene

She is the only woman that speaks
to me of God
in Saudi Arabia.

In the women's tent,
our men next door,
we trade broken phrases

of English, Arabic, our right
hands pointing above
our heads. Your God,

my God, she says, before the call
to evening prayer sounds
across the streets outside, taking me

back to my first hours here,
at night, in the back of a van,
the windows tinted, so men

outside cannot see
my face. Tens of thousands
of workers, shopkeepers, Saudis,

tall in their white
thobes pray side by side,
huddled in groups

hands up, clasped, then down
as they bow, like her,
like the woman from Mecca

is doing now, her body and face
covered, mouth moving
to prayers I do not know,

the only woman praying
in our tent, bowing down,
and I try not to stare,

try not to listen to the others
speaking of the maid who stole
golden bracelets, earrings,

but listen to the woman from Mecca
whisper to God, wanting to know
what she says, what He

whispers back.

