

Suez War

Alexandria, 1956

The sirens were wailing,
someone was shouting in the street,
and my father
was putting out the lights.

From a window, I watched straggler cars
heading home, their headlamps
painted blue and night becoming darker.

Everywhere, shades were drawn,
shutters closed and latched.

In the cold basement we sat
under blankets below the steel bracings
my father had welded for shelter.

Soon there was the sound of artillery
far away, maybe in Aboukir,
maybe shells aimed toward the canal
where already ships had been sunk.

"Hush, now," my mother whispered
cradling me in her arms,
the commotion of her heart
against my ear, and the radio's static
sounding like sharp bursts
of gunfire in the desert.

I imagined the apartment house shaking.
I imagined something like a large bird
curving perfectly toward our roof
and everyone suddenly taking flight.

“Hush, now,” my mother said
in the flickering candle light, the shadows
moving like dark wings along the wall
and the sound of guns in the distance
thundered in my blood
as my mother held me tight

as if I could disappear
like water through the fingers
or the flimsiest cloth,
or like a hand in the night
slipping away from another hand.