

Water

When it came to water in Algiers,
I could never reason. Perpetual flow
of the Mediterranean, turquoise
silk bathing the port, view from my
terrace. But turn on the tap, fickle
conduit, torrent tiring to stream,
stream to drizzle, to tear evaporating.
A relationship shifting? Deserting
perhaps: passion of the love traveler
no longer a thriving oasis of herders,
cloth, clay vessels. And what about
goat hair carpets, basketry? And those
bright yellow, orange, ochre jewels—
spices cradled in burlap like the place
itself nestled inside the desert hollow
of the M'Zab Valley. Oh Saharan sun
of Ghardafa, city over a thousand years
old. Not one other woman in the main
square that Sunday. Not one *haik* flowing
over clothing, covering for all but one
eye of woman. Here, only the elegance
of men in turbans, their *chèches*: dusty
orange, white, cobalt blue. Marketplace
of men. My photo taken in the shadows
of a slender passageway before ramparts
begin to rise toward Allah. Before
the tourist must halt at the sign picturing

that shorts, short sleeves, uncovered heads,
cameras are forbidden. And farther up,
pink and white houses of clay and sand
surround the ancient mosque like moats.
Tenth century mosque—sturdy shield,
sentry of the fortress. And in the lower
town, the newer mosque, the muezzin
calling at 4AM: rush of shoes echoing
on flat ground, sweeping through
alleyways like the palm frond sweeper
of dreams, the *andante* of his broom
lengthening measures of unrestrained
pleasure. Like water gushing from a tap,
the contours of jerricans flooding. And bath
beads of lavender longing to be swished.

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