

On fire

Maya Angelou // Haji Chilonga's *On Red Dress*

by [Annette Sisson](#) in the [May 4, 2022](#) issue

Her voice legato, détaché, a violinist stroking
desire, dissonance, her gliding fiery tongue:

*Have enough courage to trust love one
more time.* His canvas a Pentecostal torch,

the central flame a rose, white-centered.

Red and blue spiral the flower head,

spirit descending, baptism of blaze. These petals
forge the heart of the man, of the image. Angles

gather, melt into mottled light, layered
blocks of burnt orange. A scorching background,

like her rising, rising again, the caged
bird not a dove, not a cry—

daring as danger, holy as sass, sorrow's
silence burned to ash. Her story's blight

turned to praise, bloom of tongue, red-
hot vibrato, ferocious sacrament of love.