Patterns of Departure

I thought you were going to say something else

about how the mail piled up unopened, how many people touched the envelope, how paper feeds grief and yet saves us. I made the font large so you can see the words through your tears.

My eyes were bigger back then. I got sick on planes, boats, cars, playgrounds.

I wore a favorite dress a stewardess might wear. I was skinny and only ate cereal and consommé and ice cream, food in bowls or something small made in a toaster. When you opened your mouth to speak, I never knew whether I’d hear Arabic words or a darkness I couldn’t follow. Where you started a story wasn’t always from the beginning—a river, a woman washing clothes, a hungry man sitting on a mat he’d weaved himself, your mother, a hand on your cheek when you left home,

a yellow piece of fabric, circles of copper. There were rumors you left behind a prison,

that you were the first in a long line, that you left for love or left it behind, that your father was a stain on an envelope where the stamp was once a napkin under the table, your footprint a motif

no one wanted to wash beyond your departure.