

## 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.