

To the man whose last name I carry

I watched you at church the other day,
as your lips alternated between song and silence,
palms positioned securely on the pew in front.

You were quiet when the preacher began,
his sermon punctuated by frequent calls
for *amens* and *hallelujahs*.

From the corner of my eye, I saw
you had the same look you did
when you called me a name that wasn't mine;
perhaps you had stored God in the same place
you had your grandchildren's faces.

But a second later, as if to correct me,
you exploded with an *amen*
in response to one of the preacher's punctuations;
perhaps the spirit does not forget like the mind.

Did you ever consider that this person would be you?

The one with clothes that tell of unsteady mealtime hands and an eager bladder.

The one who struggles to find words for things you once gave names.

The man I inherited your name from sees you

in the mirror as age blunts the precision of youth.

I think he has started to wonder,

whether it'll just be his face that turns into yours.

Like stone.

We balance shallow and deep well, Habibi.

In one breath, our lips move
with talk of freedom and injustice,
of love and its absence.

Of things hard like stone.

But in the next, playful words roll off our tongues and soon, we are caught
in the crossfire of the mundane,
as our lips move carelessly, unburdened.

Habibi, we hold the deep and shallow quite well.

Yet, in those times when our lips move,
heavy with caution and the weight of opinion,
it concerns me that I am watching a repeat,
that I am making the mistake of the women before me.

As our teeth crunch stones,

I wonder whether I am falling in love,

with a man lovable,

but unyielding,

like stone.