

brother, elsewhere

Yahia Alsallag

after Agim Shala, before Alan Shenu, far from the World Trade Center

my brother loved watermelons, our home
was modest, with praying rugs. we locked
our doors, our eyes bound by ropes; the sun
could never seep
in.

my brother slept with tealights scattered around
our home. we'd walk carefully, afraid to
disturb their flames, our shadows flicker
in distress, a lighthouse devoured by
our fears.

my brother spoke of our childhood, a whisper
lost in the roar, shockwaves, broken
glass. family portraits on the
wall, the windows blown
off.

my brother learned how to swim, he'd
dream in strokes, burying a
friend, imitating the butterfly
he caught in a jar, last
July.

my brother grew his hair out, he touches
his split ends, weaving towards
the tips, he inherited father's
love, but not, his bald
spots.

my brother touches his curls, remembers drones
humming, memorizing the smell of
missiles, thermally guided
our cold feet tread *another*
day.

He speaks broken tongues, his
lips scarred from words of foreignness,
he read constitutions white and tall, he
cannot enunciate my name, without a
splutter,
anymore.

He lives elsewhere, uproots hairs from his
unibrow, touches grass as
not to threaten, plows
land that is never
his.

shifting from arab to a-rab,
family photographs in wallet.
refugee, never expat
stands tall, palm stem
in god he trusts.

morphing into your cast
of him.

my brother once asked, as mothers were lamenting other brothers,
"what makes us Palestinians?"

I said nothing.