

By Charif Shanahan

When I say *But mother, Black or not Black,*
Of course you are polyethnic, your look does not change
Though it does harden, a drying clay bust
Abandoned or deliberately incomplete,
All the features carved in
Except the eyes. *What I'm trying—*
I mean—You are an Arab, yes,
By culture, by language, and in part by blood; by blood
You are also Black African—and when, then, I say
And also probably a fair amount of European, too—the lights,
Though we're standing at the corner of 195th and Jerome,

Turn up somehow

Tracing an outline of you onto the armory's sharp red brick, the El
Barreling up from the tunnel like a surge of magma reaching
For air and as I wait for it to pass so that you can
Hear me again, so that I can hear myself at last
Say *But here, for me, that doesn't exactly matter. Don't you see—?*
Your face hangs on the *fair of fair amount*—heavy drops
Of oil, or old rain, falling onto us from the tracks—almost willing away
The layer of long-dead men flattened onto it, and the desperate
Rest of you, until I say with my looking
Through the unbearable human noise, *My darling sweet mother, it is*
Fine, it is fine. For us here now I will be the first of our line.

Source: *Poetry* (May 2019)