

# Trace Evidence

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)