

Tiimiaoq, something carried,

—for Joan Naviyuk Kane

in a book
we read about these things
in a book
carved figures
aḵun, aḡnaq, miḡiqliq

each word I know
as a dictionary
entry
take this away
and give paper
in return

my tongue against the ink
is English
naluḡmiut
sucking in the flimsy fibers
spewing out a stumbling word
I teach them to Sinḡuk and Paniataaq
all wrong
they round the words in their small mouths
small rivers, small stones
don't pity me, they are heavy stones
but they are the small rivers
I drop the stones into

*Classrooms stand between us, Aakaḡ
but their language classes taught me
how to learn from books.*

*The years I spent away at college
bring me back, Aakaḡ.
This is how to learn a foreign tongue
from books.*

still, from a leather pouch small figures
tumble out—aḵun—perhaps aaḡauraq or iḡmi—his hood around his shoulders
aḡnak—perhaps nuliaq—how tenderly her brown atigi is distinguished

atausiq qituḡnaklu atausiq paniklu
one and one
tiimiaoq in a small pouch, in a pocket or aḡḡinaq,
like portraits on my phone
in case of long separation
the ice floe shakes loose and tumbles him south

a village, elsewhere, all winter
they are remembered
just so, tenderly, the small figures,
placeholders, bringing to mind his beloved.
even now the residual tenderness
travels across the sterile page
the image of the images
of the beloved
love refracted through the making cannot be contained
in the dry clinical photo, even now,
the beloved tug patiently across the distant page
at the thread strung between their hearts
even the collection
the price of the sale
of the figures
their storage in a catalogued archive (or disposal)
cannot undo the stringing of that tenderness and memory
it strums a note familiar, but unique,
one reaching toward four
the hands that carved them to remember
and distance that memory traveled
and tugged at his heart, remain.

just so, I carry this memory with me,
of Ugiuvak, of four women and a man climbing
a steep ice cliff

and a small gathering of poets
each of us making, just so, our small figures
to be carried
what we are making cannot be undone

—Carrie Ayagaduk Ojanen