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Helical Histories

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But when it's time to pin the blame,
turn your satchel inside out
and you'll shake out only shadows.

His trademark. Next, with vetch and kale, blue-green
travelers' tales, he sows a garden on the beach;
caretaker of crumbling manuscripts, he needs
neither cartridges nor identity cards:
he is the turnings of the maze,
the flickering instants on the screen:
you are the catatonic, he the genius;
he masks himself as you, you face yourself

as him. Kabir weaves a shawl
with no edge:
the horizon
is his garden's boundary.

HELICAL HISTORIES

Osmotic as an agora
open to storm and tide and tread,
to voyagers, merchants, sorcerers, our bed
contrives, though seamless as a skin, to simulate
our every nuance in its creases, until it folds
in one calyx our separate fires, and we forge
a ring of elbow room and breathing space
for our wants to wrestle
(my foot in your slipper, your hands
in my hair) till there is no sense
in which our speaking tongues and wet ears
are any different

from those
of those strange women
washed up at Colchis swaddled in blue silk,
shearing the harbor buzz with their cries.
And how their beads glowed—glowed like the deep eyes
of spectral cats, drunk with mystery, with watching.
And those strange men with windshocked faces
brought off the ships still mumbling spells
to calm the waves, out of mouths fallen open
like torn sandals—men whose legs kept rocking
on land, keeping time
with the sea's perverse, erratic swell.

But stronger, if slower, than the sandblast furnace
of the sea, a tintured speech of gland and seed
unstoppers these jammed refugees in the agora.
From guarded beginnings in the barter of furs
—even a Golden Fleece, taken off a wreck—
they work up to the trading of franker glances.
And then the taut psalm of sail and the salt veins branching
till man and woman are no more than the moment when a tree,
cast adrift, comes abreast of a bridal shore.

So wine-ripe, later, they go
to lock one another in slow, spiraling dances:
helical histories of their old countries,
unscrolled, clenched, wept over, wound tight,
grafted in the warm hiding place of the thighs:
electricities that arc again and again in the gap
between bodies breaching tribal defenses
to conspire against the stone-eyed tyranny of events
in the narrow province of a bed.