Back Cover: Marthy & Mary

Kate Marshall Flaherty

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Martha

Punctuated by the chop chop
sleek knife on the cutting block
what I make out is this:
the hush of a breath drawn in
and the creak of dry rattan
as they lean their dusthot bodies
closer into the silent circle.
A murmur of amazement,
a gasp, then the ascending chant
of agreement, “yes yes it is so!”
Sounds in the far room —
like a zephyr wind in the desert.
And I, garlic and oil to my elbows,
mix and pound and knead
with agitation like
tea-water rolling to a boil.
When they have eaten my lamb and honeycakes
to their fill
I shall have missed
the stories I long for.

Mary

All I can see is his foot —
palesmooth and blue-veined,
harnessed with a weary sandal.
Peeping out from under a coarse robe
it seems vulnerable,
like an egg in a dusty nest.
I want to touch this foot
that has trod in the ruts of the marketplace,
has rested on a wave,
drawn circles in the sand.
Although a breath-hum of words now
stirs me like bellows fanning the embers,
I long only to kiss this foot —
to whisper my whisper my
words he knows already
into the graceful curve of his anklebone.
I smooth my cheek to his instep,
like an infant’s breath,
barely touching.
But in this brush a taste
of the rust nail that will pierce it.

— Kate Marshall Flaherty