

# Nina Rubinstein Alonso

## Casbah Guide

1.

We follow the guide  
an earthbound shadow  
with a stiff-kneed shuffle  
and pointy yellow shoes  
I snap a photo with his hand  
on Fernando's shoulder  
fifteen minute Casbah friends  
near a shop selling red carpets

"That's the Tangier jail" a fenced yard  
with men in pajamas dragging buckets  
"there's millionaire Hutton's house"  
thick-legged guards by the door  
frilly pink flowers hang from vines  
over a vendor's smoky brazier

then at a sweet tea hippie place  
with rose striped walls  
the guide confides he's fifty-six  
coarse wrinkles and sores on his hands  
he flicks a bug off the table  
whispering he married a girl of thirteen

his mother picked for him  
then sighs at memories  
of their first wedded month so shy  
they spent the nights talking  
but now their grown son's lazy  
and useless hanging around smoking kif.

2.

Up the hill a turbaned man  
lifts a cobra for the crowd  
the hooded shape rippling  
so close I jump back

my first snake sunned itself  
on a dusty road as I skipped  
to my piano lesson I'm six  
running away screaming

though this cobra's probably  
half dead de-venomed  
poison ducts slit I'm  
sinking to void center

the wooden flute scraping my mind  
the goatskin drum's murderous banging  
what a bargain for five dirham  
a Casbah guide and a death charm.

**Nina Rubinstein Alonso's** poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Boston Review*, *U. Mass. Review*, *Sumac*, etc., and her book *This Body* was published by Godine Press. Her story "Fire Pit" will appear in the next *Southern Women's Review*. She's the editor of *Constellations, a Journal of Poetry and Fiction* as well as the director of Fresh Pond Ballet School, and a former teacher at Boston Ballet. She's been to India, meditates, and has a daughter in college.