

## Pen and Ink

SHIRIN SABRI

The work begins with ink made of the lamp's light,  
from dark smoke caked on glass, that clear-edged clarity  
drawn from bright flame; ink soot black, the paper, white.  
There are other tints—perhaps saffron, the sweet familiarity  
of her mother's rice; henna breathed from scented hair;  
the tender walnut's bitter skin (sorrow's shade); swollen galls  
that blight a budding leaf—all these, ground down to prepare  
ink, to write. These, or heart's blood, if there is nothing else.

The pen is readied, hollowed; clogging debris  
reamed with a long flight feather. The pliant reed lies  
on the block, ready to be cut, smoothed, pared free  
of its old self, flexed strength revealed. The nib cries,  
trills across the sheet, tells of what is lost and sought,  
scribes upon the page a soaring line, a point, a dot.