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Two Poems

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CALIFORNIA

Years ago the suspicious camels
headed north toward the land bridge,
snarling back over their shoulders
at the dawn like a shoe on fire
rising out of the jungle.
in China they took up farming,
hefting the clumsy tools,
cheered by the horses big as
toy balloons that had followed them,
then bored trudged on across
the Gran Desierto, their thin women
wearing bandannas, lips pulled back
against the dust and eyed far off by the Mongols
who remembered a taste like flaked fish, a soft light
in the backs of their throats, but finally
reached the cities of Europe
as true as the pictures in art books,
went into business selling flowers
from stalls in the perpetual shadows of cathedrals,
but were finally caught by the gendarmes
because of their big eyes and leather noses,
their bulimia for eating apples whole,
were sent across the sea on overloaded boats, beaten
each day by the French officers, where
stepping ashore they were set loose
to wander through the forests hunted
by the painted Algonquins, until they
reached the feast of the plains, and
beyond them the desert, where they
stopped, became palm trees, who though
looking at their shadows knew they didn't
look like them spread
one by one across the sand, westward
to the coast, the hillside homes of California.