

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Andrew Hudgins

For three calm days he sits in the desert,
quiet beneath a tamarisk tree.
Before moonrise, he's torn the tree apart.

His mother finds him, not for the first time,
curled on the cooling desert earth
and splotched with scabs of sand—tranquil again

under a rising iridescence of green flies.
With a servant's practiced hands, she probes the sores,
rubbing thick oil into his broken skin.

In her lap, his face shines rhythmically
as each breath moves him into moonlight
and each release drops him back into her shadow.

She flicks from his lashes a splinter of heartwood
that catches in the tight curls of his hair.
She picks at it, then leaves it there.

Under the morning stars, they walk back home,
knowing he will start calm and grow wild
like a desert storm that pulls violence into itself,

that whips sand into wind and wind into sand
until the wind's almost a path, until
there is no bottom to your step.

But in the night their tent has fallen,
and while his mother struggles with the ropes
the boy hunkers down among the hungry goats,

intent, dabbing the corner of his cloak
into his sores—coarse wool into the raw flesh.
A kid bumps its nose against his ear.

He braces,
and cracks it on the forehead with a pointed knuckle.
Slouched back, he eats green dates and watches as

another goat comes closer, into reach.
His mother turns and stares at him
as the older goat jumps back, avoids the blow.