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Song of the Wrong Response

Stephen Dobyns

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Song of the Wrong Response · *Stephen Dobyns*

The poem is barechested, black and shadowboxing beneath a streetlight. In the rest of the city it is dark. You're out walking your dog. Nervously, you circle the poem. It turns toward you and speaks of a disease of the heart, perhaps anger. You can't make out the words. Never have you seen a face so ugly. Then it steps toward you and swings. You jump. Still, it strikes you once above the heart. On the sidewalk your dog is asleep. The poem returns to shadowboxing. You are that exciting. Once home, you phone the proper authorities. Then I arrive and you describe the attack. All next day you look at mugshots before finding the right picture: a young man with some flowers. This, I say, is a poem about love and the difficulties of friendship. It is about reaching out in dark places. The poem touched you above the heart and you fled. What happened in fact, you have forgotten. What happened in memory will repeat itself and each time you will act falsely and be afraid.