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The Virgin Jocasta

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Paul Stanslaw

for Anita Harkey Stanslaw

THE VIRGIN JOCASTA

I found my father swaying from a tree.
I took his horse.

Suddenly there is beating beneath
the unlucky prey of highway prophets.
And if another carcass is discovered
I won't have to look into its face.

The women of Santiago catch the train
and paw the grave of the child.
Life will look better down the river.

The people have lost interest in your signs.
The little hour is over.
I am left to pick up the rocks and stones.
I carry them home.

My house is built on corpses.
And should they begin to stir
I will leave the garden.

The dead upstairs are unpacking.
The day sets like a burning manger in the bedroom mirror.
I look out across the room for the menthol cigarettes.
A baby purrs somewhere in the corner.

I crawl to your feet, slip off your stockings
and massage the swollen ankles.
Your lipstick on the filter reminds me
of where we met.
You put out the cigarette
ask me to hold it.

You walk across the room, I follow, careful not to step
on the scarf
that grins behind you
through the only nailed window.

AMOS NEEDS TURNING

There's a white in this town that holds
the sun in such a way
it's almost pure.
And ain't it just like God to play
with the small dark look in the face
you've left behind.
Violence is deep with the sleeping.
These sheets have become unbearable.
I kneel to kiss you
the room vanishes and the steps must go in darkness
and I can't help but follow.

Dusk
and his many wounds.
My hand on the holster.
Aren't I the fool?
The proper fool,
the accomplished fool?
And yet I feel what I must call grace.

A tape recorder recites randomly from scripture.
A cup by the door has begun to fall.
A brief thirst still eludes me.

Dawn
and the men walk dogs.
Lillie picks the ticks from strays
and drowns them in a jar
she keeps behind the garage.
With the heel of my boot, I crush