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Ryan Turner

THE MATADOR, 1970

His epaulets erupt behind him.
He could extinguish volcanoes
by turning his back on them.
Noticing a burning cigar in his palm,
he lifts it to his ear and scowls,
inhales deeply through one nostril.
Inhaling through one nostril with his palm at his ear,
he notices in it a burning cigar.
He has no idea where the lace
at his wrist comes from.
His glands are tattooed with coconut leaves,
but don't tell him that.
He dips his garlic braids
in wax each morning.
He wants to preserve or burn them,
votive talismans to ward off superstition.
He can tell six different lies at once
without ever contradicting himself.
His lies all contradict each other;
he uses them to make up true stories
about his life as a boy in Malaga.
There, on the southern coast of Spain,
among volcanoes,
he grew up idolizing
the great bullfighters Hernandez, Vallejo,
de la Cruz. He would *surpass their splendor*.
Don't look at his sombrero. He uses it to mesmerize
victims. His victims,
before he kills them, are mesmerized
by looking at his sombrero.
He has eyes on every side of his head.
Don't look into them.

Like unbaked dough of the tortillas
 made by his formidable great-aunt,
 Doña Ignacia Maria Hernandez,
 his face
 stretches, twists, spreads flat.
 He can stretch, twist or spread flat
 his face as if it were made
 of unbaked dough,
 and doing so reminds him of his childhood.
 He labored for years in obscurity
 learning to tie exotic knots.
 Tying himself in exotic knots, he is
 able to entangle within himself his shadow.
 His picadores swear parts of the matador
 are missing. *Dios mio*, they cry,
el toro no puede tocarle! *Cuando el toro quiere*
 tocarle, no puede! Parts of him
 are not there when the bull tries to maul him.
 In springtime, he is Barcelona.
 His economic base is tourism.
 In summer his braided hair smells of
 gasoline.
 He braids his hair in summer,
 when it smells *de gasolina*, his hair, and
 watches out for match-wielding enemies; he'll never
 confess to paranoia, not to anyone human,
 and in his other palm rests the dirt-caked
 blade of his sword. See,
 here it is.
 He holds it toward you for inspection.
 He pretends not to care what you think of it.