

JENNIFER LIGHTY
Shaping the Dark

I didn't know I was afraid of the dark
until it rose off blacktop and ran toward me
as if it had been waiting for me to round the corner
where the last streetlight burned a hole in the jungle night.

By the time I know the dark is a dog,
it's too late to turn. All I can do
is pedal faster and hope my fear
carries me past its teeth.

I could shout, but I don't.
It's only when I realize the dog is silent too,
that I see it's Chaparrita running toward me,
nipples swaying beneath her belly so swollen
it almost drags on the street.

I brake, flip my kickstand down, get off,
and kneel before her. When I press my face
against her neck, I breathe in hunger and dust
and love.

Was she waiting for me?
It doesn't matter. I'm the one
who rode out of the dark
crying her name. *Chaparrita!*