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Bacchus

Maria Nazos

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Maria Nazos

Bacchus

—for Allen Scher, 1953–2013

Put a crown of vines on his head plucked from the one good garden
on the block.

Drape him in a king-sized bedsheet, still not large enough to cover
his swollen belly. Rub his belly, his bald head.

Tell him to fuck off when he says your tits are in his face. Ignore
the porn that blares from a small TV.

When he scoops up his black-and-white rescue cat named
either 8-Ball or Crackhead, depending on the day, laugh

when he takes the animal in his mouth so it hangs by its scruff.
Remember that apartment complex he oversaw:

the hallways stacked with dusty newspapers and corners of cat shit.
Focus not on making this man into a god that night

of the Greeks-and-Romans party. Instead, recall how he was
the keeper of broken things: Vanity,

the tragically beautiful stripper who ran, bruised, from her ex-lover
and into his bed. The guy he called Ron Jeremy,

who bore an uncanny resemblance to the star, whose canceled eyes
and slow speech didn't stop your slumlord

from giving him odd jobs. The ex-con upstairs, whose hands
were registered deadly weapons, whose sad eyes

trapped him more than the bars he'd lived behind. You: the naive,
mouthy Midwestern girl,

sprung into the city like a happy rat. It was he, your landlord,
who always picked you up from the airport.

Who said nothing for months, when you couldn't pay your rent.
Who listened, toilet plunger

in hand, while you sobbed after a date with a man whose hands
you managed to pry

off your thighs and send home. Despite his filthy jokes, never
did he touch you.

Years later, you'd learn his heart gave out like a dung-pressed
diamond. His life, an Olympus,

piled high with pills and booze and lap-dances. That night before
that party, you put the crown

of wild vines on his bald head. You realize this is the god, the father,
and the holy ghost

you've always wanted: flawed and forgiving and dying from his own
dirty sweetness.