

# Coming to Rest

## for a woman seen in Piazza San Marco, Venice

BY AVERY K. SLATER

Quick wings and cameras: glancing up at nervous angles,  
then coming to rest. Sheathed.  
And San Marco's archangels hold,  
poised in immobile armor.

Could they know what it means to weaken?

Near me a woman looks out through a haze  
of cancer, advancing. It's taken her hair  
and her color, but not her smile, I see.

Two friends at her sides support her  
while a third snaps open a shutter one splintered second.  
They laugh at the brief exposure,

and she looks up again at the angels  
that stud the basilica's cliff-high curves  
on this sinking island.  
The angels look back, unable to blink.

It seems that they might know what weakening is, as  
above the lagoon their exalted stance  
nightly unfixes itself by an increment's lowering.

Slower than all the suns of eight hundred years,  
but still they will meet the horizon some unheard of evening.  
What is Venice for these, when cameras and wings  
shutter and flutter to blur in the decades' exposures?

And what, for those who no longer may look to recover?  
Another colorful legend out of a brochure?  
Or something less shallow, unglossed- a place complementing  
that slow-sinking, near-imperceptible anxiousness:  
onset of pain. Then, coming to rest.

As it slowly sinks on its imperfect foundations,  
the body, too, is such a place:  
conscientiously maintained and, increasingly,  
colonized by strangers  
until it is rendered unsuitable  
for all the trivialities, small endeavors  
which lend to life its flesh and ligament.  
“Here the doge lived; here he would dine.”  
Here was once no intravenous scar; these arms  
could once do crawl-stroke twenty second laps...

“Napoleon once ruled from this piazza.”  
Seem the faint line where a wedding band  
once snugly fit...

And so on. Lives turn legend, through  
that neat lens of forgetfulness:  
distorting reminiscence, it  
seeks to settle all change has undone.

This smiling at the camera, those  
assembled photo albums, they  
forge armor for the dying, out of distances,  
A glossy likeness held on a square of paper,  
the other image quietly coming to rest  
in an unfamiliar, unremembered place.

what does this woman near me make  
of this passing away, this coming of final distance?  
I watch.  
A pigeon suddenly lights on her wrist.

While she laughs at the boldness of the unexpected  
I find myself unsettled,  
looking away at the square  
through a sudden blurring.

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