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slowly fading in the labyrinth: venice poems

aus *langsames ermatten im labyrinth*. Gedichte, Verlagshaus Berlin, Berlin 2019.

Translated by Caroline Wilcox Reul

back side of a palace: dark, narrow, full of droppings
and power lines, mysterious equipment.

salamanders climb the walls, slip on streams of lime sediment
and catch themselves in the last second, flanks shaking.

spikes rise up like a line of soldiers into the darkness,
threaten any landing: a young dove fallen from the sky,

just half-feathered, tosses on the ground, head twitching, and aims
for a corner, searching for a nest in the universe of the alley.

from above a cat balances behind a barred window,
its hunger stilled in the pantry, stilled for several minutes.

calle corner: now and then a lone man chances through
the passageway, unbuckles his pants, talks to himself

like he hasn't done in years. or sometimes several:
two strangers with umbrellas bump and dance in passing.

the following morning: mound of feathers, glimmer of bone
shafts of sunlight piercing the ground, the sound of screaming children

expelled from the heads of seagulls .. as if torture
chambers hovered in the sky, in a vessel

of brazen blue.

one august evening in 2016: a **summer fly**
consumes its evening meal perched on the scaffolding
of the palazzo dario, no sign of humans.

with its front two legs studded with hairs,
it braces itself against a crumble of gull droppings
and dispatches its proboscis which moistens, liquefies everything.

its two spongy venetian labella, with a system
of tiny channels and even tinier spines, flex against
each other and begin to draw soundlessly – the sun sets.

for several seconds, the windows are aflame, every pane
a luminous orange! at intervals, the feaster stops dabbing
for a moment, looks down at the passing shadowy

figures a thousand times fractured in the optical kettle
of its radiant gem-eyes, and seems to become
a tiny little tourist

or dogaressa
or ghost hunter
drifting through time.

something reaches inside you, your biological scaffolding
like dreams tucked behind every bend
in the track. your trains, your thoughts
derail. your movements
blur. someone seizes the palazzo ducale
of your cells: your shoulders
and legs begin to jerk at night
and increasingly during the day to the rhythm
of a hissing rat fight .. a constant whine
rising from the garbage paradise below
your airshaft window, sleep that won't come,
that makes you pale as the madonna
denied word from the angel. but there is no perpetrator
when you wander, the palaces have committed
no crime: old crones heavy with mascara and lipstick
soak their feet and rasp:
we are peaceful citizens in a peaceful city
yet something moves within you
and you know they are lying. in every church
in every kiosk tintoretto and beaked masks
are the currency. a disaster zone
for every synapse. an unrelenting attack
you find so thrilling—

close your eyes and listen to the symphony of the pontoon
 keep your eyes closed until the squeaks and groans
 prompted by the sea
 harmonize with beethoven like siblings

in an alleyway in dorsoduro a refugee asks for bread

his dark blue t-shirt says:

 I'm proud to be an *ossi*.— now go over to him,
 ossi, and give him some bread or a few coins
 or your honest attention.

at the dock near giardini, three yachts with darkened windows
 rise up three stories, bobbing with self-assurance

now step close and start cursing
 like you used to, start raging
 like you used to, pick an unfair fight
 with your misbehaving heart like you used to

puke on the hull and slowly move on

enter san zaccharia, stand still.
 with your last coin
 light a candle at bellini's *sacra conversazione*
 whisper into the dark: I can't understand

a city born in flight

hundreds of timber bridges
and wooden platforms connected
like dots, locations drilled
into the marsh, gathered in a liquid
herringbone net, a city packed
with refugees slowly spinning beauty
from fear, a holy family giving birth
to gondolas in an watery stall
a city brimming with the up and coming
wedded to palaces and churches
numbering its warships, its unholy naves
a city piled high with candy wrappers
a power source for mad crusaders
a pit stop full of masks

so little sensuality

can be expressed with words: a mere naming
of angels without capturing their faces,
their soft vaults of bone,
their fluid arches of man and woman.

comparisons only begin to shimmer
as if in oil: a metallic suit of wings
like the crumpled aluminum tail
of a lear jet ..

and yet: how impoverished!
no red curtain of words that allow
the eye to comprehend, and the mind. no r-e-d
that can pierce mary, her crystal b-l-u-e

and how will you ever replace light!
here it's absurd to even utter *light*
which crashes and creeps through the window
to almost imperceptibly lift her face

to see the white lily, finally
set eyes on it, in this room
that floats in silence, tumbles through space
in geometric patterns, castle and cloud ..

a poor man's meal, nothing more

a bowl of soup
where words only swim
like feeble hands that can't grasp
but still try, and still pray into a flat spoon.

(after »Angel of the Annunciation and Virgin Annunciate« by Giovanni Bellini, Accademia)

slowly fading in the labyrinth

the laboratory mouse slumps
 urinates
clutches at a frayed cable
in the calle

you've tasted the water
there are fountains in every campo
bubbling from mountain springs
 yes water, but water
that reflects your image from the inside:

you drink, look into your self
and see your organs
the decaying remains of grandeur
swimming in a canal grande of blood
 as if your sewage system had failed

bones totter on every wave of light ..

no one can be rescued
in this constellation

 not the doges or the popes
 not you or your child

everything disappears
in this onslaught of beauty

 everything fails, and succeeds

you stood too long on
softly rocking pontoons
and now you also sway
back and forth, rock
through salty alleys
that twist and turn
into wings of gulls
even in sleep
you sway
even in dreams
a translucent trash bag
on your head
flutters in the vaporetto
and softly collapses on you
your temples
everything you see
is an illusion
meant to skin your eyes
before you notice
your operation performed
on the piazza
before you realize
deep within your cones
there are fledglings
lodged in a palace
that receives you
so it can tell you
your parents
are invented
and even you
are a fabrication
your brothers and sisters
are gondolas and dayliners
churches and rodents
that's why you sway
this city is a particle accelerator
it shatters you
allows you to see
your eternal particles
you can never scramble
back to the waiting room
with its pile of glossies

the shrouds are torn

from his hands, feet
the *sudarium* from his face
he still doesn't know
where he is

or who
perched on a cliff
he is moved by others
like a puppet
undressed.

only his eyes are his own.
he closes them tight
squeezes them shut
yet feels the sunlight on them
like beetles

spots of warmth
that crawl inward
then back
into his neck

now the urge to yawn
though his mouth is motionless
untouched by all the
words, monsters
or so it seems

but that is all appearance
he is no longer an infant
nothing is small
about him (he can sense that)
and nothing new

he can smell the corpse
that he is
no, was! suddenly bursting forth:
a scream of joy
a wild cheer
uncomfortably close to his ear
his two sisters

like tornados!
his heart
chokes on its own blood
with every stroke

almost strangles.
 he wants to be alone
 by himself! no celebration!
but no one can hear him
and no one listens
 from all sides
 hands flit
mouths snap!
as if he was still
the chance
piece of flesh
 someone finds on the roadside
and devours.

(after »The Raising of Lazarus« by Jacopo Tintoretto, Scuola Grande di San Rocco)

you enter a prison that receives you with beauty
no one in the waterbus, no one in the prison van

resists and neither do you. you put your cloths on,
airy linens without stripes because stripes are reserved

for your jailors who numb you with gondolas. released to the yard,
you stumble from palace to palace across plazas, stark

and rippling in the sun's beam path. – all of your fuses
blow, all of your defenses. your eyes begin to swell

into invisible sugared quinces that burst painlessly
and the narrow streets bottleneck with their black seeds,

charred rods and cones. but inside your skull, a shrivelling
takes place. inside your boney palazzo, a raisin rolls

here and there, sees a bonbon of murano glass and squeals
in desire and delight.

the practice waits till dark to open

an x-ray technician walks through rows of palaces,
releases rays that expose their ribs,

their lusters, while a physician in a water bus quietly sails past
and offers a diagnosis: too many paintings on the skullcaps,

the eye sockets full of plaster and gold, diseased,
parasites here and there secreting brilliant substances

that shine like the crown jewels of the queen
swallowed by a mob of children in a game of madness ..

now the bowels seize, stain the water with scat
and poverty in the outer districts .. and over there a count

stumbles home from his ancestral cocktail lounge ..
and over here a doctor who has never been a doctor and can't heal

silently sails by.

on torcello an unexpected declaration of love from an english mastiff
head like a watermelon with pleading eyes ..

I laid my hands on his forehead and drew the love
from his powerful skull to stop him from suffering

when I go, when he remains alone at the laguna
of this faraway island, guarding a little pile of olives.

then he began to speak: please stay! or at least leave your hand
here! that's when I understood: suffering cannot be erased.

I sailed back to san marco, staring
past swimming meadows, crumbling fortresses.

the piazza is cemented in silence: doves, or people,
lie on the ground, all gray, only a palace manages to smile

from its eternal botox of neogothic arches. at the basilica
my head flickers up in a puddle, surprisingly powerful

a watermelon with pleading eyes and I shrink back
just one step .. in an olive grove on torcello

I lay my paws on my forehead