

If drowning is a kind of slumber, then Venice is deep, deep into a state of tidal dreaming. She imagines that her hundred-strong army will battle its way back to the surface and her tenaciousness will be rewarded, at last, with reverence, patronage, protection. She fantasizes, even while being swept off her feet, that if she can just awaken with her heart intact, those professing love will understand she must now be feted from afar only, that the behemoths must retreat, their decks festooned with shame, never to return.

At this moment, Venice is the somnambulist. She has taken to crossing the Piazza San Marco after midnight, moved to tears by the memory of an opera singer's impromptu aria, sung only for the stillness and for Venice's precious citizens. Fighting tides the height of horses, she smells the politicians' toxic currents as they swell around her waders. She peers into crypts, glimpses glowing fish who have travelled so far to plague her. She decides to believe they are a new species that will survive and evolve into tesserae of small golden promise.

In her dream, Venice believes the Acqua Alta will not return, that the country she adorns with such splendour will post men and women of honour in the dark rooms where decisions are made. She believes that she will be allowed to heal.

Then Venice will bare the sleeves of her new tide-line with the pugilist's defiance. Her stucco will reveal hues never before imagined. Her stone will again receive the soft step of leather soles with grace.

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