

ix *Il Redentore.*

*(Canaletto, Il Redentore viewed from the Giudecca Canal.)*



They come in the shadows of the night  
on the still water with silent ease  
and whispering breath  
and riveting formalities -  
the shroud eating harbingers of death –

and children open their eyes with fear  
in the dawn's grey light,  
as the jingling limping tune  
of the pizzacamorti draws near.

Out in the lagoon  
on a secluded isle  
I wait for the flesh and bones  
whose whimperings and groans  
have spoken with death as a friend,

but when, with an anxious smile,  
they begged for the end  
to come with speed  
in mercy's name,  
death paid no heed  
and had no shame.

At this grim heartrending hour  
I do what must be done –  
all within my power –  
to move this foul contagion,  
discreetly out of sight.

Sometimes I wonder if you might  
not see, in its full clarity,  
the true nature of the high  
and worshipful esteem  
which you enjoy, while I  
must watch with calm humility,  
as my own efforts go unrecognised.

I am intrigued at how  
the contorted face  
the pitiful scream  
the pale perspiring brow  
are strangely harmonised  
by calling out your name.

They come to an imposing place  
of smiling mysteries  
rising like a flame  
on the Giudecca shore  
and in the elegant display  
of geometric harmonies  
I see your glad arms opening  
to welcome and implore:

*'Come, eat my bread and drink the wine.'*

I hear laughter echoing  
on the serene waterway  
as footsteps, with annual festivity,  
approach in a hesitant line  
along the pontoon's wavering course.

You who hold the gentle source  
of healing in your hands  
need only turn your eyes  
toward the whispering plea  
and a city haunted by death  
can be sweetly spared

and I shall arrange for detailed plans  
by Signor Palladio to be prepared  
and Il Redentore shall rise  
on the new dawn's shimmering breath  
to carry the name of your benevolence.  
This place of worship when finally complete  
will be a monument to my discreet  
and kindly influence.