

JEREMY BASS
Ruskin in Venice

—*for my mother*

1
City of rivers

Witnessing its dissolution
Years later he would say

*Among buried fragments
Pieces of sculpture
Lost melancholy clearness of space*

A bed. Washbasin. Desk and chair.
His room that winter, drafts
Piled in drifts, sounds of the stones
Settling into their own traces.

*There is an emptiness now
That touches all things. If you are quiet
You can almost hear it*

The barn, alone in the ploughed fields.
First winter snow sifting down.

2
*Not to illustrate
The thing itself, but to illustrate
The impossibility of illustration*

*Ornaments on the archivolt
Lanterns hanging over the water at night*
The statue of the lion
Lifted over the square, St. Theodore
Said to have stood there

Staring across the Lido
When the piazza was just a scrub
Of grassy plain
Lapped by water, unable to support a rafter, a stone.

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*Now lavished upon walls
Whose foundations are beaten by the sea*

This morning
It is the furthest thing away.

3

*At night, from the smoking ruins
Of the city, on rafts*

*No one would miss them
If they drowned*

Tonight, each house
Becomes an island. The snow outside
Its sea. *The red house*

*And the yellow house, the port
With its ships*

4

In Room 42 at the Grand Hotel
He wrote the opening
To his life's work

*The greatest thing
Is to see something, and to tell
What one saw*

*And to see clearly
Is poetry*

White lines
Stenciled against
The black bark of trees, sun

Falling in patches, gleams
Over the dusty snow.

So the world
For a moment, mirrors
My grief.

It does not make anything easier.

5

*Simple and tender
Effort to recover*

Voice bent on saving
Something it is unable to save

Pathless, comfortless, infirm

Voice unwilling to accept
What rises beneath its own utterance

Silence

Can I say it now,
That she did not always
Lead a happy life?

*O world,
Canals of light rivering
Through the broken arms of trees,*

*There is a spot
On the other side of darkness
That will not wash away*