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VENICE AND THE RICE DIET

I announced I was going to Venice. You interjected:
“Let me know if the canals really stink!”
and then marched me into Daunt’s and made me buy
Jan Morris’s book on Venice: “The best on any city.”

Even if I myself had not been to Venice,
it surprised me—why should it have done?—
that you had never been there.
I was shocked by your lack of reverence.

But as we walked along Marylebone High Street,
me holding the book you’d made me purchase,
the air was as good as London air can be
and I recounted what I had put by for you.

I told you of the diet of rice,
brought to the boil and drained three times;
thus deglutinated, when slowly chewed,
it absorbed impurities like a sponge.

Now I am mortified by my own insensitivity,
my ill-rehearsed babble about thrice-boiled rice,
when, for you, as it turned out
the end was in sight already.

I see you walking very slowly, head bowed,
nodding, as though to give what I’d been saying,
the gravest consideration, compensating maybe
for the earlier slight, your irreverence.

I’d thought only to share this recipe,
an item I knew might interest you. It did.
But what finally I realized
was that it was too late.

Just as well I stopped, letting you depart.
You hailed a cab, climbed in. Before this,
with that blunt yet old-world courtesy of yours,
you offered to drop me off somewhere.