



The butler spies me under the divan, belly bared  
like a tremulous dog, unloads me, one eye  
on the Count, places me high on a shelf.

Their concern for him so touching—how they fuss,  
bandaging his tattered shoulder, propping him,  
cadaverous, on cushions, a basin of broth spooned  
to swollen lips. Why the struggle to preserve?  
They know nothing of him. Such importance,  
as if each is a universe unto himself, rather  
than the truth—they vanish as effortlessly  
as the mist that lifts off the Neva in autumn,  
the needle that pirouettes to the forest floor.

They think he sleeps. They leave us alone.  
Why does he weep through his fingers?  
He looks so abashed. Can a man be humbled  
by kindness, by generosity, the no-nonsense love  
of anonymous people? Listen to him cursing  
his foolishness, ingratitude, vanity, how he swears  
he will live more rationally.

But those  
who give him his future impose no conditions.  
Nothing expected of him, nothing to resent.  
He quiets, lifts his eyes briefly, as if he glimpses  
his pure new life bathing before him, buoyant,  
an exultation, alluring as the elusive beluga,  
snub-nose briny bullet, pale spectre that surfaces,  
blows, then dips back under the deep.

(Pp. 55-56)

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