

KEVIN IRIE

Dinner at Madonna's

Surely, the world over,
there is a table like this
in some city, village,
camp, canteen: travellers
seated together for dinner,
Let's Go, Lonely Planet,
Eyewitness, The Rough Guide,
placed on the table, pages tucked,
as sights are compared,
dismissed, recommended,
what bus to take, what times are best.

Tonight, it is Venice,
Madonna's restaurant,
rain pouring outside until
a sheet of water crashes down,
surges beneath the shut French windows
and waiters quickly drag mops across the floor
like anemones skewered
at the end of spears.

The menu in English passes from person to person,
opens, closes, a white winged creature
fluttering down the table,
as Adriatic fish is the topic for talk,
as is weather, the German couple worried,
their Lido hotel only reached by ferry.
The Californian who had to give up on Rome,
its roads too fast. And it was raining.

And Canada—
spoken as a destination, a memory.

Odd to hear my country
as a place on a postcard,
odd to discover
the home you left
is a world
others would want to explore—
the English boy who cannot get over the space,
Algonquin, Niagara Falls.
The Americans in love with Vancouver, BC.
As they talk,
my country is a foreign word
even in its native tongue.

Then wine on the palate,
a platter of food, enquiries
as to how is your serving....
English, spiced with differing accents,
mine included, served to guests
up and down the table,
with thoughts on rain, the emptied streets,
myself still thinking
of Canada, country, of travelling abroad
to find parts of home
in places it was never built.