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Roman fountain

by Karl Kirchwey

for Rosanna Warren

A girl yawns like a cat beside the fountain,
an old Pope's muscle in the gout and spatter,
love-muscle in the plashing and the glitter.

Girl and fountain do not love each other.
Both are beautiful and both are vain.
She loves the water for her reflection.

A black cat stretches indolent in the sun
that gloves it lithely as if in silver
against the scarred volutes of travertine

on an old church. The young priest at the corner
stands in a quandary in his soutane,
caught in the glowing throat of afternoon,

clasped to her breast by Rome the giant mother
as is the pleb near the Gemonian Stair,
at his feet lute-shaped seeds of the sail pine,

beads of sweat like jewels in his black hair,
and the young man dressed in a wedding gown
and track shoes who, past flowering oleander,

unsteadily waltzes a mannequin,
busty and nude, down a runway of beer

while his friends shout *O carità Romana!*

Each private soul, carried to full and over-
full, falls at last to its disintegration
beyond the rolled edge of a starry crown

with little subsiding noises of passion,
applause that fades in a descending patter,
as evening comes and once more sacks the town.

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