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Concentrating on Photographs: the Vatican

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Concentrating on Photographs: The Vatican

On folds of cloth, in sunlight,
I am alive, awaiting the miracle
of modern aspirin. I am remembering
the painless way daylight fell
for hours to a marble floor,
the way voices diffused and rang
inside the chambers. I can almost see
the Pieta. And though sponged with booze,
side splitting with vice, I don’t in the least
resemble the Christ of Michaelangelo,
though he has died and I have simply
failed to live, a cowering atheist among women,
a drone ten years at work, though it’s pitiful,
a child’s fantasy, I know how it would feel
to lie back in the Mother’s arms
to have those eyes look down so tenderly
all failure wouldn’t matter, as if mercy
poured forth from the chiseled rock,

white sky, round stars in a perfect
human face. But the pain is slowly
resurrecting, and the Italian crowd is shifting,

dredging up the burning issue of our time—
pleasure— and whatever vision might have sated me
decays into the luxurious flesh

of the figures, into rippling stone composed
in ordinary space. And with the click
of a camera’s shutter, it’s over,

a wishful, full-color myth recalled
from a sickbed, labeled with the year
of hostages, of failed international pacts,

the year our modern hero—
madman, deconstructionist—
took a hammer to the Virgin’s face.