

Marco Polo's Sleeve Unravels

This is where it begins: a single thread
unravelling as you hike along the trail—
displaced world traveller startled by the sight
of your denuded arm, you turn and wonder,

What, or who, tugs at the other end?

This is where it begins: a single thread,
caught on a thorn, threatens your odyssey,
or, snagged by bird or man, tests your resolve—

a creature like these, perhaps?—white birds, ghost-birds
who look on, half-amused, past time and tense.

Memory fails; words, too. A single thread
unravels time and space, twin revellers,

travelling toward world's end, who call,

Turn back. Stop here, where the gazebo's cupola,
sun-struck behind a ravelin of stone,
glares over river and ravine: one thread

that, plucked, rings out, *The way ahead's too hard.*

Give up. But if you do retrace your steps,
your sleeve sewn whole again, your gray beard black,
then gone entirely, you'll find that all
ends where it starts: your birth, a single thread.



NoraSturges

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2000

oil and acrylic on panel

11x12 inches