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Sunday morning in Ithaca

Adin Ljuca

The city opens up in the morning, when, giddy from sleep, it throws off the covers of night. It greets passers-by with a gap-toothed asphalt smile full of holes and fillings and hugs them with its enchanting tree-lined streets which aren't so easy to categorize in English. But I adore sidewalks, even when they are humpbacked. They are the blood vessels of the city. I penetrate them not knowing if I am a virus or an antibody. Step after step. Street by street. Gardens in bloom veil the run-down houses, power cables hang like quipus....sending hidden messages in a forgotten tongue or betraying bungled installation? Slipshodness as a fashion, like new blue jeans with rips. Stagnant air, a whiff of a joint, a dazzling percentage of humidity in the air. A city as sad as my old aunt, once an enchanting beauty, who can't renounce her girlish gestures and seductive manners... A summer rain washes the dirt from the wrinkled streets,

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youth dries up and decays in the herbarium of memory. I admire the number of churches, but it's too early for services... Nothing is happening. Just a person or two carrying their coffee in throwaway plastic cups. One house has a sign Resistance, but it turns out to be the name of a hairdresser's shop. No other signs of disagreement, just strings of banners. All of a sudden, here's a man! With a signboard: Seeking human kindness. Finally someone has a message to convey and the courage to bring it out before the eyes of the nameless crowd. But no one turns to watch.... people walk dogs, passers-by pass by.... The proper place for me: a city that lives by inertia the same way I do. I stroll along. Birds on branches tweet, I no longer keep track of what. I look for a way past the feeling of impasse. I love poems like this one, that come with pain, start with the stomach and can't be held back... Downtown next to the sidewalk a beet grows like a flower. A momentary smell of linden, though linden season was back in June.

Translated by Wayles Browne

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