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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,

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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