

Three Streets

In Trieste there's a street where I see myself reflected
in the long days of shuttered sadness.
It's called the Via del Lazzaretto Vecchio.
Among homes like ancient almshouses,
it has one note, just one, of cheerfulness:
the sea perpendicular at its base.
Scents of spices and sea tar are rising
from forlorn warehouses facing out
to trade in netting and rigging
for boats; a flag shop flies a pennant
as its sign; on the inside, it floats
against the passerby, barely worth a glance;
with bloodless faces bowed down
to the colors of every nation,
the workers take the harsh sentence
of life, innocent prisoners,
their gloom stitched across the merry banners.

In Trieste where much sadness and beauty
mingle in neighborhood and skyline,
there's a steep path called Via del Monte.
It starts with a synagogue
and ends at a convent, and half way down
a chapel, where the gloomy fugue
through life allows a glimpse of pasture
and promontory and the sea with its ships
and the market awnings and crowded shore.
However, flanking the incline is an abandoned
holy ground, where no funeral groups
enter, and no burials have occurred for as long
as I remember; the ancient cemetery
of the Jews, so dear to my memory;
if I think of them, they are my elders, after bargaining
much and suffering much, entombed here,
a fellowship of souls and faces everywhere.

Via del Monte is the street of holy
affection, but the street of joy and ardor
is Via Domenico Rossetti, always.
This green suburban neighborhood,
which loses, every day, some of its color,
forever a little more city, a little less field,

still retains much charm from its era
of beauty, with skinny rows
of saplings, and the first scattered villas.
It passes her on these final, summer
evenings, when all the windows
are wide open and everyone gathers
on the terrace, where darning or reading, she awaits.
Perhaps she daydreams that her delight
will rekindle the long lost pleasures
of living, of loving him, him alone,
as well as the more ruddy health of her son.

Umberto Saba, 1911
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