

Trieste

I crisscrossed the whole city.
Afterwards I climbed a slope,
crowded at first, but deserted here,
closed off by a low wall,
a confined space in which I sit alone,
and it seems to me that where it ends
the city ends.

Trieste has a peevish grace.
If you please, it's like
a sharp-tongued, ever-hungry, street smart boy
with blue eyes and hands too big
to offer up a flower,
like a love
with jealousy.
From this slope, I can distinguish
every church and every lane,
whether it leads to the cluttered seashore
or along the ridge to the summit
where one house, the last one, clings onto it –
on every side
flowing through everything
a strange air, a tormenting air,
the native air.

My hometown, which thrives in every part,
has framed a narrow corner for me,
for my bashful and thought-worn life.

Umberto Saba (1911)
Translated by Will Wells
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