

Les Wicks

Lviv, Ukraine

The stone words
verse blood.
Power wheels wail.
Chained on cobblestone
she is never alone. One yappy Australian
whittles in his sand
as crushed guilders dance on an outrage.

This land is a corner, contention.
I shelter in a copse of English.
My new friends are generous pens
spattering 12th C, 15th C
a war fought in tunnels
always an enemy—Turks, Swedes, Reich
now home-grown
the lassitude of the lift as
thieves become baronets
in the familiar carapace.

Always the atrocity
a remembered pain
too easily moving on
Holy Church of the Presumption
the next historic wall.
An argumentative sedan with Florida license plates
outside St George Greek Catholic cathedral.
Saturday is an effluxion of matrimony—
all that solemn, burning white.

Each name is 1cm fitted like stonewalling
the university is a gaudy hat, sometimes
a flag. The polite suicide of local politics
is taking too long.

Boots are made of bread
& bread is made of heavens while
books are still roofs
for those who think too deeply.

The people own the palaces
& their language.
They will not duck as the world is coming.
Sometimes this country moves
on treacherous pavements
in bright high heels—
an assertive self-harm—
corruption on the tiny bones.
Then a not-yet frangible smile
breaks open under colour.

Ukraine Government Spokesman Reports Big Improvement 2.2 Ranking on the International Corruption Scale

We have what we have—Leonid Kravchuk

For anything grows, each bud
the little snip, a percentage.
No one says but plants often
pruned to a point near
moribund, politely
from university grades to playground equipment
one eye on the exits
you live life, yes
though *dobry* (good) is chalked in,
the *mañana* excuse prayer apology—
it all happens here amongst the forage.

This is no sprint.
Generosity
without conditions—
impossibilities sketched in a shrug
dobry, *dobry*
though maybe not ever.
There's a weekend of
mafia sponsored art.
Civic pillage
& a wander in the wings
as clerks occupy the 18th C fortress.

Willow souls
the warfare of language
so many armed with four or five
wanting to keep their own.

Old woman sweeps
says nothing.
Younger women
gold thread, gold how
high heels & make up
sword & crown
life will be more.
Decay dust demolition dust—
the crash of renewal
keeps us awake & prospective.

So here it is
dooms of Habit.
The nice car law.
Love laws & your children.
Rules of the boot
SBU (state security) is discovering the good ol' laws.
The oligarchs eat laws for dinner,
theirs is a cheerful larceny.
No laws for some day
then the greatest law
is the one that bitterns accept.

All those plans of today will be
plans of tomorrow
ruled by courts that mutter
run by suits that matter.
Not Soviet, not European
the conclaves of men
in a country of women.

Life is observed, mocked then cherished.
This clamour somehow rests just outside
a core in every life that continues like
that ruthless optimism of dawn.