

# ECLOGUE I: SUMMER

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## I

There's less to put down in the diary, dear.  
The days are drowsy and lousy with bottles of beer.  
It's June, where osiers retreat into lilac,  
and in a hammock, or flat on one's back,  
the "soons" quickly dwindle into "maybes,"  
"I'm not too sures," and "I'll get back to you on thats."  
June's when women pat their bellies, expecting babies,  
in the lazy milieu of the yards.  
When life seems less like the sum of our "trifling motions,"  
and more like an empty dance card.

## II

At an outdoor café, some tidy place,  
the odd, angular gestures of my watch-face  
suffer fewer glances. Summer's romance is where time becomes space  
in its most direct sense—i.e., distance,  
the span in an old heap between hot sand  
and a boy's boisterous leap into the blue-green expanse.  
And to be honest, I miss it. The happenstance. The dutiful cries  
of "Che bellaaaa!" at the beautiful passersby.  
And meetings of lips, about whose lips one lies.  
They'd never guess it.

## III

Season of fathers hoping, at last, to realize what the work's been for!  
Of windows and door cast open, of jostled verandahs!  
Flies, more than kites even, agree to your confusion of breezes.  
Season of everygreens and azures!  
Of whole scenes disguised as contours to our vision!  
I admire the economy of your lines, summer,  
and your imagination's precision.  
What more can be said?  
I certainly applaud your decision to have included the odd sparrow,  
a red wheelbarrow, newlyweds.

## IV

From a window, mopping at the bared head,  
catching the scent of freshly baked breads down below,  
one wonders just how bakers manage in such temperatures.  
For here, one knows his neighbor, not by name,  
but by the color of the kerchief he prefers,  
by the sameness of his hours-long purchase on the scene next to yours.  
And behind you, the fall of your wife's white dress,  
her call, the sight of her small, brown breasts,  
holds you less and less in thrall.  
To be honest, it's the heat. It's hard to bother.

## V

In June, the streets are less familiar: a legion of strange feet and wares,  
mostly from regions I've never seen stamped in a visa.  
From everywhere, it seems,  
a thousand unsure tongues test what they've gleaned from Pisa.  
"You're looking for the toilet, sir?" "Ach, no, you fool! Vere's the pizza?"  
What should we denizens care? Who else would trade for some old air,  
the promise of a dull colonnade in ruins;  
a side of the city that's mottled with age?  
It happens: having steered through some space,  
all your life, you can't imagine the place through a lens.

## VI

Summer's where the sky and sea abandon their usual geometry  
and agree, at least for the duration, to a flat line.  
When, slumped in the dunes,  
a body's inclined to let whole hours,  
undivided by one's attentions, slip by.  
And a boy, his lids half shut,  
becomes something of a cosmonaut,  
exploring motion in its purest, frictionless state: as time.  
Space, in *this* sense, far from being cold,  
equates itself with persistence and gets hard to hold.

## VII

Gulls, in pairs, pitch like a sharp high above the horizon.  
And the clouds, the very color of the air,  
its variegated blues, tend to crowd in from everywhere,  
confusing one's vision of the scene with what seems,  
more and more, a plausibly posthumous view.  
Before too long, however, you'll recall some morsel of tenderness,  
an address stamped Rome, or London, or Paris,  
and, wondering what's become of her,

you're hauled back from it all—into a plain, present tense.  
The telephone rings. The usual things, you'd guess.

## VII

Dear, the daylight, for what it's worth, is receding  
like "a chambermaid given notice,"  
or the white page conceding empty spaces to darkening verse.  
A lone cricket's creaking B-flat, somewhere,  
to the tune of the clock on your mantle,  
and mercury, that's been scaling the glass all day,  
peters out into far-from-cold. You read,  
"Oh, all the instruments agree,"  
and take a few measurements—adding, here and there,  
to what, you're convinced, will be subtracted later.

## IX

Now night perches on the rooftops with a stony indifference,  
while the bells of the clock tower are hushed.  
The wind's in no mood to take you into its confidences,  
and scurries off for an ear it can trust.  
There are no stars to speak of. All the arcades are emptied.  
A bald moon buries its face from the view.  
And yet, having guarded these scenes with your pen like a sentry,  
you get the sense that your life's been renewed.  
What you need now, you know, is a rendezvous with the wife,  
just the sight of her at the head of the stair—lithe, vivid, slow.  
So you might make the most of the first cool air that you've tasted in a day or so.

## X

Thus, night divides the sum of summer's words  
into its remainders: her shadow and yours,  
hurtling towards one another from a backward glance,  
ignoring the hurt and the failed romance for an instant,  
closing in on that last, best dance by instinct.  
Thus, summer reaches into a man and woos back the best of him:  
the secrets he's known, his plans. Dreams he only thought he'd forgotten.  
Thus, an hourglass is breached, and the undammed run of precious sand passed back.  
And thus memory, dear, despite the gnawing years, for us remains intact.