

Summer's Long

1976

It was a long summer, a borrowing
sent from another place like a postcard.
We lifted it from the mat, pinned it fast.
The sun came early and it would last
for ever. Days piled one upon the other,
layers and layers of yellow, gold to lemon.
Nights moon-short in blue spectrum,
sheets trapping damp bodies, wrapping
sun-burst hearts. The mercury hit 100
as term-time soughed into holiday
and school windows glinted disapproval.
But time was a tuppence lucky bag
treasure-full of freedom. We cast clothes
like a caterpillar casts cocoon, watched
our bright limbs darken as pavements whitened,
knees grazed to scabs by lawns once baby-soft.
Waterways and sea poured into sky and finally,
like heels cracked from epochs of dust and sandals,
ground opened. Flies teemed from it,
a carcass disturbed, picked not quite clean
under the hovering sky.
We ran river beds suddenly naked,
kicked up earth in desiccated reservoirs.
Bathing was a jug of water thrown over the head
above an outside drain. News washed over us.
Record temperatures, standpipes,
crop-fields become dusty plains.
Hospitals filled with the sun-struck.
But we knew only this summer life
burgeoning inside. Then, late August,
the sky changed, became grey-glowing,
old as beaten pewter. We lay sweating
under starved bushes like tired dogs panting
glutinous air. Water broke in fat, cold drops,
the sky brimful, worn muslin rent in two.
We danced like dervishes on the lawn,
mouths opened to the sky.
Such a strange new knowledge, this,
the death of the long summer,
grief and joy stumbling hand in hand.

Alison L. Craig



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