



[Home](#) > [Poetry Magazine](#) > [A Summer Garden](#)

## A Summer Garden

BY LOUISE GLÜCK

1

Several weeks ago I discovered a photograph of my mother  
sitting in the sun, her face flushed as with achievement or triumph.  
The sun was shining. The dogs  
were sleeping at her feet where time was also sleeping,  
calm and unmoving as in all photographs.

I wiped the dust from my mother's face.  
Indeed, dust covered everything; it seemed to me the persistent  
haze of nostalgia that protects all relics of childhood.  
In the background, an assortment of park furniture, trees and shrubbery.

The sun moved lower in the sky, the shadows lengthened and darkened.  
The more dust I removed, the more these shadows grew.  
Summer arrived. The children  
leaned over the rose border, their shadows  
merging with the shadows of the roses.

A word came into my head, referring  
to this shifting and changing, these erasures  
that were now obvious—

it appeared, and as quickly vanished.  
Was it blindness or darkness, peril, confusion?

Summer arrived, then autumn. The leaves turning,  
the children bright spots in a mash of bronze and sienna.

2

When I had recovered somewhat from these events,  
I replaced the photograph as I had found it  
between the pages of an ancient paperback,  
many parts of which had been  
annotated in the margins, sometimes in words but more often  
in spirited questions and exclamations  
meaning “I agree” or “I’m unsure, puzzled—”

The ink was faded. Here and there I couldn’t tell  
what thoughts occurred to the reader  
but through the bruise-like blotches I could sense  
urgency, as though tears had fallen.

I held the book awhile.  
It was *Death in Venice* (in translation);  
I had noted the page in case, as Freud believed,  
nothing is an accident.

Thus the little photograph  
was buried again, as the past is buried in the future.  
In the margin there were two words,  
linked by an arrow: “sterility” and, down the page, “oblivion”—

“And it seemed to him the pale and lovely  
summoner out there smiled at him and beckoned...”

## 3

How quiet the garden is;  
no breeze ruffles the Cornelian cherry.  
Summer has come.

How quiet it is  
now that life has triumphed. The rough

pillars of the sycamores  
support the immobile

shelves of the foliage,

the lawn beneath  
lush, iridescent—

And in the middle of the sky,  
the immodest god.

Things are, he says. They are, they do not change;  
response does not change.

How hushed it is, the stage  
as well as the audience; it seems  
breathing is an intrusion.

He must be very close,  
the grass is shadowless.

How quiet it is, how silent,  
like an afternoon in Pompeii.

4

Beatrice took the children to the park in Cedarhurst.  
The sun was shining. Airplanes  
passed back and forth overhead, peaceful because the war was over.

It was the world of her imagination:  
true and false were of no importance.

Freshly polished and glittering—  
that was the world. Dust  
had not yet erupted on the surface of things.

The planes passed back and forth, bound  
for Rome and Paris—you couldn't get there  
unless you flew over the park. Everything  
must pass through, nothing can stop—

The children held hands, leaning  
to smell the roses.  
They were five and seven.

Infinite, infinite—that  
was her perception of time.

She sat on a bench, somewhat hidden by oak trees.  
Far away, fear approached and departed;  
from the train station came the sound it made.

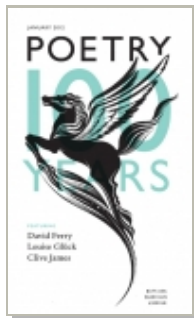
The sky was pink and orange, older because the day was over.

There was no wind. The summer day  
cast oak-shaped shadows on the green grass.

Source: *Poetry* (January 2012).

## MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

This poem originally appeared in the **January 2012** issue of *Poetry* magazine



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