Walls Mating

(Todesangst)

Under such a sun the dazzled northern mind reflects, on luck
or love lasting till we strike together the closing rhyme
for breath, or some such cutting short of our tendrils
of allegiance; on sex in August, or the lost comedies of Sophocles,
on the heat of a stone where butterflies give themselves up
to slow applause. This morning I couldn’t get an edge
on the rusty sickle, so left it long, the grass the wind
was worrying into underwater hair. O lucky man
whose languour mid-afternoon so halts
a relentless tidy mind, the blind lurch to cultivate.
I honour with incompetent smile the wild lawn, the sky
vaguely rimmed by blue sea, the untrimmed
waving bliss of the day. It’s not the place, surely,
this little Walden a mile from the nearest of Norfolk’s
anywheres, or the time, to be thinking about death?
Wavering pairs of wings come to park their fragility by me
and I see tangerine with veins of chocolate shadow,
wafers of peach under heavy net. Their touching flutters.
I watch tissues greeting, then the slow hyphenation of male
to female, back to back. They don’t know these days
as I know them, on this one of their twenty, lovely days.
He was just the one to pick up her pheromones today
(signals that make irresistible sense of air),
maybe a mile away, across the pale-bristled fields.

Now here they are, Wall-to-Wall, near the rosemary bush
in the hot face of extinction. A second’s delicate shudder
eases their wings, as if pleasure came by a conceit both airy
and conjugal: a draught of perpetuation, it might be…

probably the breeze. Soon there will be, one at a time,
almost invisible pearly seeds from her in the grass.
Suddenly these canny amateurs are away – she’s tugging him into the air, the dirigible one, still coherent but lightly lumbering. They’re not weighed down by the baggage of our big ideas – so why are they already back to earth, apart, shaking?

(Flying Blues; Carcanet)