

Afternoon

by Desmond O'Grady

Afternoon, and the houses are quiet as dust at the foot of a wall,
The tea and the coffee things cleared away from the talk and the thinking,
The magazines flicked through, the telephone tempting, the sand in the hourglass sinking,
The waiting – knowing nothing will happen at all.

Afternoon, and just for the want of something more daring to do
Lunch is being seriously digested in the serious bowels of the town.
The buses are empty, the taxis unwanted and lorries are caught in a brown
Study of idleness. Business is slow.

In the parks and the playgrounds, shifty-eyed watchers in colourless clothes
Are hanging around like agents of death, while professional loungers,
In soft hats and silence, disinterestedly wait for the next observation; and scroungers
And tricksters are nervously watching what goes.

Down by the shipless, motionless docks; abandoned by all
Except for a stray indefinable blur of what must be a man
And the inevitable rake of a pigeon scratching for corn; the cranes
Are struck dead – unable even to fall.

The voice on the radio – remote, unmelodic – gives news of events
And things that are happening – urban expansion, rural improvements,
Revolutions and riots, social reforms and new intellectual movements –
In lands with more future than this one presents.

In the lanes and the archways the children are few, the lovers fewer still
And those who are left have plans and intentions of joining the rest
On emigrant tickets. In the streets there is no one but old men and widows, cursed
With sorry separation and a broken will.

Crack, and the shouts of men go up as a rat breaks cover
To die by the stones and the longhandled sticks of exasperation.
Back of the wagons in the stopped yards of the black, uneventful station –
And just for a moment the waiting is over.

