

In the Moment
by Billy Collins

It was a day in June, all lawn and sky,
the kind that gives you no choice
but to unbutton your shirt
and sit outside in a rough wooden chair.

And if a glass of ice tea and a volume
of seventeenth-century poetry
with a dark blue cover are available,
then the picture can hardly be improved.

I remember a fly kept landing on my wrist,
and two black butterflies
with white and red wing-dots
bobbed around my head in the bright air.

I could feel the day offering itself to me,
and I wanted nothing more
than to be in the moment-but which moment?
Not that one, or that one, or that one,

or any of those that were scuttling by
seemed perfectly right for me.
Plus, I was too knotted up with questions
about the past and his tall, evasive sister, the future.

What churchyard held the bones of George Herbert?
Why did John Donne's wife die so young?
And more pressingly,
what could we serve the vegetarian twins

who were coming to dinner that evening?
Who knew that they would bring their own grapes?
And why was the driver of that pickup
flying down the road toward the lone railroad track?

And so the priceless moments of the day
were squandered one by one –
or more likely a thousand at a time –
with quandary and pointless interrogation.

All I wanted was to be a pea of being
inside the green pod of time,
but that was not going to happen today,
I had to admit to myself

as I closed the book on the face
of Thomas Traherne and returned to the house
where I lit a flame under a pot
full of floating brown eggs,

and, while they cooked in their bubbles,
I stared into a small oval mirror near the sink
to see if that crazy glass
had anything special to tell me today.