

## Adieu, Summer

This morning, a sneak preview of autumn arrived with a thud, long before summer's grand finale is due. Unprepared, I awakened to a crisp, fall-like day with a breeze in the air. When I flung open the windows, I was suddenly surprised.

Last evening, the air conditioner hummed, tricking me into believing that outside the night air lay over us like a gauzy quilt. During the night, the humidity rose high and then, come morning, as if by magic, everything changed. Sometime during the wee hours, August was lifted up and carried off on fairy wings, leaving with it a prelude to a new season.

I am not ready. I am still in summer mode both physically and mentally. I have not yet worn a favorite cotton dress nor have I breathed in enough summer days. While the temperature drops this morning to a pleasant sixty-five degrees, I am unaccustomed to feeling cool.

For some, this change comes as a welcome relief. For me, there is melancholy attached to it. I prefer awakening to a summer morning where the air hangs a bit heavy - when going outside to retrieve the newspaper means being bathed in droplets of perspiration that quickly evaporates when I come inside. I like knowing that once I venture forth into my day, I will not be disappointed. Summer is consistent - an uncontrollably hot lady, that irritates some, but pleases me. On a mid-July morning, the mercury has already reached ninety degrees, enveloping me in the kind of heat that permeates my entire body. I find it comforting to be wrapped in warmth so intense I can hardly breathe. The biggest allure of summer is not feeling cold, a condition I dread. Summer provides a brief reprieve - lets us off the hook for a while where we no longer have to think about coats or socks or counting the days until spring.

In that way, she is a gift, a diversion from the norm - the norm being the other three seasons. Autumn lets us in gently, captivating us with its brilliance, laying a red and gold carpet at our feet and charming us with its provocative beauty. Then, on an ordinary day when we least expect it, winter howls and roars, and it's all over for a while as we retreat inside, closing a door on the world, leaving civilization as we know it, behind. Like bears, we settle in to our caves. Pulling blankets tightly around us, we adjust our bodies and snuggle beneath them. Jack Frost's artwork occasionally appears on the window panes, alerting us to the fact that this is no joke, and if we are not careful or don't dress accordingly, we'll be nipped and covered in frost as well.

Then somewhere around April, sporadic rumblings occur as if the earth is laboriously trying to push through and give birth to a new season. The occasional robin flies by, landing on a roof, a harbinger of what is to come. Springtime invites us in, teases us with the promise of change, but quickly reverts back, reminding us that it's not quite summer, and we had better not get our hopes up too soon.

And so I wait, patiently at first, but then by May, I find myself becoming restless and longing for something new. I mentally begin making plans: walks at the beach in shorts and T-shirts, picnics on the grass, a good book read under my favorite tree, an ice cream cone, dripping wet and licked to completion as I sit on a stone wall watching the sun set over Long Island Sound. My list is endless. On a typical spring day, I begin sorting through my winter clothes and packing them up, I make my temporary goodbyes. This ritual is the most pro-active statement I have made all year. Coats are gathered up and brought to the cleaners; wool sweaters are piled into boxes and placed on high shelves out of reach. Black and brown pants and skirts give way to muted pastels, and the first touch of linen feels strange in my hands, but oh-so-full of promise.

I resort to fantasy, picturing myself dressed in summer attire: a print skirt perhaps with nothing but a tank top or blouse over it, a pair of jeans and a white T-shirt, my favorite, with flats on my feet that saunter along a green path without fear of being covered in snow. And then one morning in June, I open the front door and it's warm – not the torrid fever pitch warmth of summer, but that first, sweet non-descript, haziness that I haven't known for quite some time. I look up, see a bouquet of crocuses at the end of my driveway, and smile.

And so, summer arrives, and once again, I am reborn and elevated to another place which, in some inexplicable way, alters my mood. I actually believe I become nicer in summer: friendlier, more accepting and patient. Conversely, on cold mornings, like winter itself, I howl and roar. From June through early September, I seem to float and move through my days unencumbered. In that way, I am summer's mistress and I fall prey to her allure.

But this morning in mid-August the branches sway and I can hear the breeze softly rustling the leaves as if to warn them that their days are numbered. The outside air smells differently. Soon, acorns will drop on my deck like loud footsteps - unwelcome intruders, reminding me that another season is upon us. I tremble slightly at the thought and dismiss it as quickly as it came.

I choose to ignore the signs that pop up unannounced. Instead, I slip into a pair of shorts, shirt and sneakers. I will go to the beach for walk and file away any notions of autumn. Who cares that there is a slight chill in the air or that goose bumps decorate my arms and legs? For now, I hold on tightly to summer, and won't let go.