

1994

# First Love

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FROM GIUSEPPE UNGARETTI

PHASE

*Mariano, 25 June 1916*

On the road on the road  
I've rediscovered  
the well of love

In its thousand-and-  
one-nights eye  
I've rested

Upon the abandoned gardens  
she alit  
like a dove

Within the air  
of a noontide  
that was one long swoon  
I picked her  
oranges and jasmine

FIRST LOVE

It was a city night,  
Rosy and yellowish the wan light  
Out of which, as if from a shift in the darkness,  
There seemed to have arisen form.

It was a sultry night  
When I saw teeth I had not foreseen, violet  
In a juncture of limbs that pretended peace.

Out of that unaccustomed, unhappy night  
And from the depth of my own estranged blood  
I have brought to light the stuff of which  
I shall make my own arcana.  
[1929]

*from* 1914–1915

I have seen you, Alexandria  
Crumbling on your ghostly foundations  
Become a memory for me  
In a half-completed embrace of lights.

Not long since, you eluded me; and I've no regrets  
For the seawrack thrown up by your tepid surf,  
Passing upon the sexes its sentence of frenzy,  
Nor the limitless and deaf full moon  
Of the dry nights that lay seige to you,  
Nor, amidst the howling dogs,  
Under a taut canopy,  
Cupids and dreams sprawling across the carpets.

I belong to another blood and have not missed you,  
But in this shipboard solitude  
More than usually the melancholy  
Delusion has come back, stranger,  
That you might be the city where I was born.  
[1932]