

Dulcedine

by [James Owens](#) in the [June 3, 2021](#) issue

—for Prof. George Mason, who tried to teach me Latin

Time permits this: early summer, and on the little deck  
with the round table, just wide enough for a book  
and my mug of coffee, I find pleasure in an hour before the heat,  
in the washed-air freshness that stays from last night's long rain,  
and read a few lines from the *Georgics* (which Dryden calls  
“the best poem of the best poet,” and I think he might be right).  
On mornings like this, Virgil says, the bees build nests  
and cherish their young, *nescio qua dulcedine laetae*.  
The translator of the crib in the Loeb edition, usually precise  
and graceful, calls the bees, “glad with some strange joy.”  
That is fair enough, but on this rare morning I prefer  
something humbler, more literal, at ease with the frank  
noting of human limit in Virgil's *nescio*.  
Here the bees are “happy with I don't know what sweetness.”