

THE GARDEN

We said our goodbyes, Helena and I,
More than fifty years ago and now
As we enter our twilight years,
Could we forgive for the decision we made back then?

I had not been to this place since and yet
It remained just as I remember it – roses in bloom climbing and arching
 our gravel walk, rolled lawns and a terrace
Overlooking the Aegean that divided our cultures and our love.
We had spent most of our courtship here in this place,
 one summer, one winter.

I sat down under the trees; the grassy knoll warmed by the summer sun.
And played Beethoven. I had played Beethoven at our parting.
My violin cries now, where I can no longer.
I could still see her walking away, her footprints leading to an old wooden jetty,
 to an awaiting boat that would take across the sea to Greece.

Why now? After all these years. Why now?

My heart was lost back then. And now, it was lost all over again.
So much to say, so many questions, and yet I knew not where to start.
My pride, my honour, both hurt. How could I protect myself at this our reacquaintance?
I had agreed to her request to meet, but what has changed?
The internet has caused this, but she could have found me.
I have always been waiting, hoping, suffering.

The snow flurries falling incessantly at our parting were now laid to rest,
But I could still remember the feeling of those flurries melting with my tears.

My uniform protected me like callous robes
Ensuring my survival against all odds, but now I am being asked to shed
my skin and become exposed,
I will have no armour this time.

Friedrich had been here before us, in this garden terrace.
His lady, sullen in a black dress,
her loss apparent as the going down of the sun.
Her red shawl cast aside as she and I had been.
Had her lover walked through the gate guarded by lions,
And out of her life?

We had similarities, Friedrich's maiden and I.
Did she move on or did she return?
And just how many couples had those silent lions seen torn apart
by cultural forbidden love?
Those same trees whose leaves fell as each couple fell.

The small boat carrying Helena moored
And the kindly boatman helped her onto the jetty.
As she entered the garden receiving the homage of the lions,
she retraced those footsteps carved by the snow.
Life may have aged us, but she had lost none of her carriage.
I arose, dusted down my robes and removed my trilby.

I held out a rose, its bouquet filling the void.
As she touched my cheeks somehow finding the paths of those ancient snow flurried tears
she said,
'You are a wonderful man David and I hurt you.'
'Yes' I whispered. 'But do not concern yourself my love at this our final time.'

Inspired by the song:

'Light of Hope' by Chris Rea, (from his *'On The Beach'* LP, 1986).

Further reference, a painting:

'The Garden Terrace' (c.1811) by Casper David Friedrich (1774 – 1840).