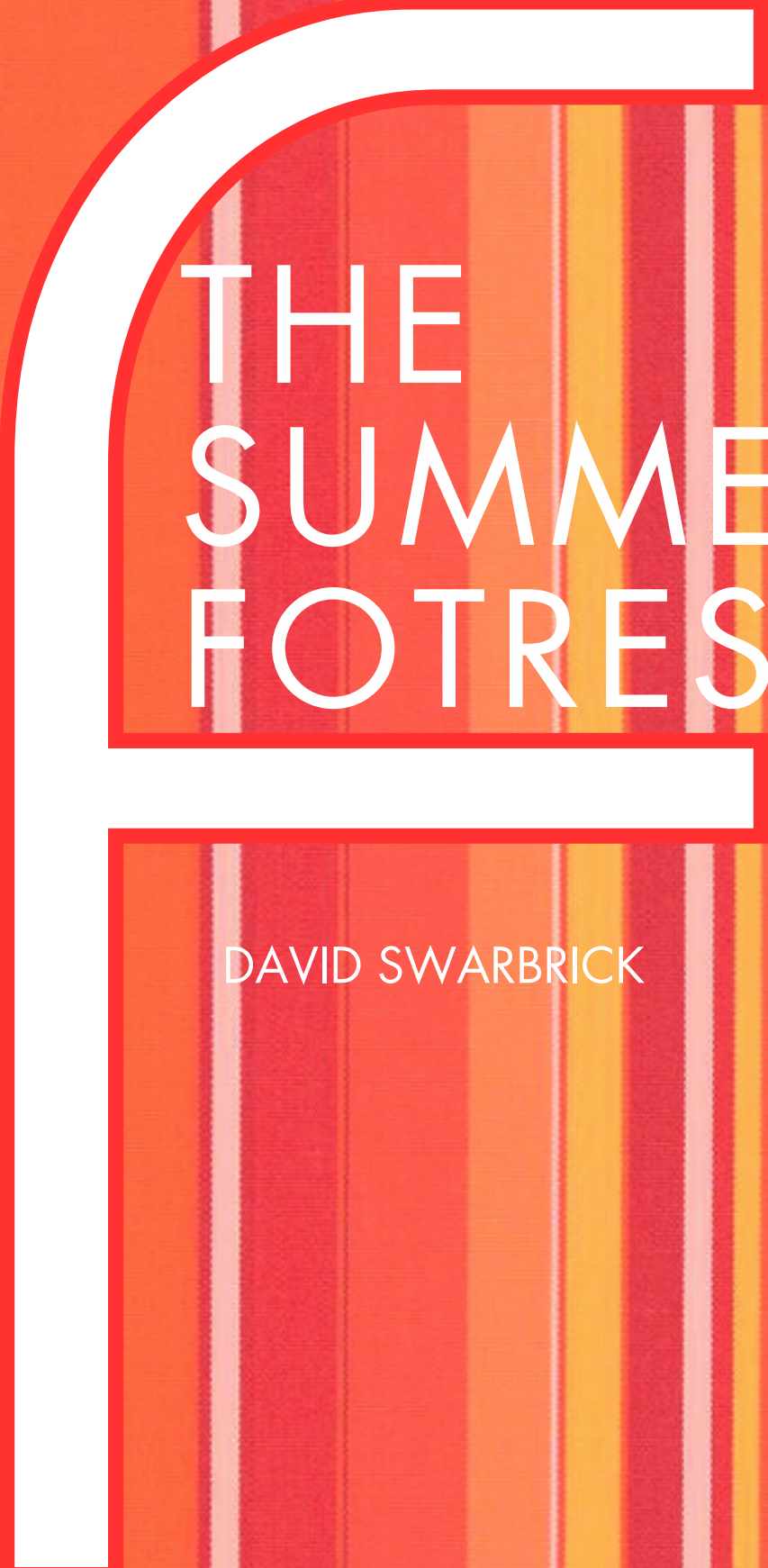




THE SUMMER FORTRESS

DAVID SWARBRICK

THE
CEYLON
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TO

RA

AND REMEMBERING VERITY FORSYTH

I hear you still
clear, sure -
talking to me
now
as you would talk to me
then;

a corner of the garden room;

a long table laid for tea,
books piled up,
shadows of poets and painters
stirring;

listening,
as you hear me say
what I do not say;

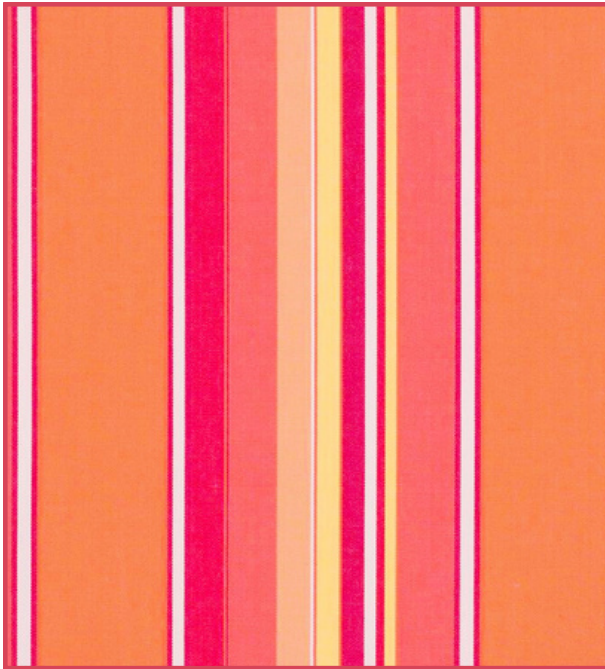
as you tell me
what I need to hear
but would not:

I hear you still
I hear you now,
I hear you.

Skona, July 1997

DATE

This cycle of poems was written in the Weald of Kent between March and September 1979; the last one 18 years later in July 1997, in Skona.



1

for this
there is always
time –

your fragmentary will
concocts hours
where the day
has none,

etches

a far horizon
forever
in the sun.

2

take only touch

and that electric guess,

hand to hand,
till hearts
rest within flesh;

till your touch
upon my face

moves inside.

3

you would stretch out,
draw me apart,
for though
you do not know it
your time
is mine.
would you want more?
would you change
the tide
that carries us,
evenly,
sand within a stream,
toward the sea?

4

loving you:

the picture

safe

in the cabinet -

mine,
the dare to remove;

the white palms
stick with sweat
now summer comes.

knives cut -
and death's unknowing,

cells grow -
and bones will break,

and still,

the starting point -
your face,
ghosts all the change;

leaves

-

silence,

a space for shadows;

a space to turn within;

and lie at bay.

6

your cry

hollows the hour,
touches stars
that won't explode:

but I

can hurl javelins
up at space

and break their hold.

7

you may not believe it but,
after the battle,
rain washed the blood
onto the village streets,
into the Weald.

night falls
on the Bloody Mountain;
a bird pulls
against empty light;

bats fold into the
outline of trees,

black on black.

above us
a harvest moon
burns a circle in the sky.

let us stay,
smoke awhile
walk between the silver trees
of the Cinders track.

night holds us;
we lie
beside a water tank,
listening;

water
dripping
drop by drop

waiting
where
the air
is cool
and grassy

where nothing moves
the moment on,
where nothing moves.

9

your heart is high,

sweeping high:

tempers,
slackens, on again,

states of difference -
not by joining
I, in love,
would move.

10

in
your awkward beauty

I rest
I play;

the landscape breathes
with you;

in skies
the peacocks fly.

11

do not hold back;

you should not fear

for you

have the brightest light;

you shine

and shine

as life.

come,
we will evade this,

armour ourselves
as night checks day;

and a smooth sly light
slides through the orchards.

the
last bird songs
drain the day
into a shoal of trees.

we can evade all this.

we will become fond of these days;

go over them tirelessly
as armchair generals
over maps.

we lay down
the living death
like bottles
in a cellar;

effortlessly.

the abacus moves
but I will not;

its beads have a sort of rhythm,
a pretended order.

do not listen.

silence has a safer sound;

even calls the directions
of a hidden road,

easily missed.

i 'd rather not
think;
or imagine,
know,
or even
suspect,

grieve,
celebrate,
wonder.

I want to

live easy.

why
should I be troubled?

yours

is the gift that brings together,

that calls me in
that keeps me here;

your arms
open;

your imprint
haunts

your body,
is a barrier of words.

the train passes places
where nothing has changed,
 where life has gone on
 just the same
 all the time
I have been
so caught up.

it will go on the same
when this ends;

I.

daily

the state deepens
and I concede
to this round
and to that

the bets I place

the game I play,

the cards that fall
far short
of what I make.

you smile:

I saw you

walking in fields,

a dancer,
naked,

slender as a scorpion.

the knife you wield
opens the knot
the quickest way,

dares all

do you know
what we do?

20

lost time
is life's regret:

death guilds its share,

the days
rob and bleed,
and time
smashes easily as glass.

the calendar

breaks a little more each day.

I
love in distance,

you
do not know

and,
all the time
I know
that behind me

he kisses you;

his blooded lips
smear and

conquer.

each return
you see
gets closer.

you turn
your eyes,
catch up my glance;

hold it

like a mirror,
distorting
by all

it cannot see.

he had made
a plaything of fear;

caught it in the mirror
with the sun.

autumn will rush
before the Kentish hops
to dredge his glass -

and the image,
unreflected,

noiselessly dies out.

death kisses you;

the offering of suns
gluts in your heart;

an unaccounting change
removes your hand.

you wake;

but the rage for life
sleeps on.

we shall devour
each other
or forget;

the simplest of glances,
the easiest look
or touch,

torture

each ordinary phrase
and twist it;

take

till we can never tell

what it was
of all we said.

26

scorpion,

let me lie
in your claws.

let us see
whose poison
poisons first.

27

the wake of summer
empties you;

shadows the seas
with a corrected light.

the storm of Galilee
saw its path on water

but the touch of faith
has strangled you:

now the leaves knit together
with a bellyfull of love.

28

summer

stumbles to a car;

say goodbye -

give it your hand,
before it drives away,

before you say
good-bye

- not at the station -
alone;

I want to stand alone
with my bags
and people
I do not know.

cycling in the Weald,
 freewheeling down the hill;
 buying cherries at orchards
 brimming still:
 even as the term ends
 I know it;
 even as we pack,
 this last weekend
 burns me
 like a firebrand

all life long.

30

sun leaves over sky;

the blue,
denied,

commands outside
this amber home.

sitting here,

I have this image of summer,

the fortress filled
with all that nearly was,

with all that once had been,

that has no end,

that has not ended.

uninterrupted,

a single thread
links that summer
to this;

connects the blue Weald
to this house
high in the birch forests
above the bay of swans
where you swim in the sun.

nothing comes between,
nothing claims
the space

that separates

a parting from a meeting,

an ending
from a beginning.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, and writer.

He was born in Colombo and raised, with few concessions to modernity, in India, Singapore, and the Middle East. Cornish, he gained his degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales, and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as was decently possible.

Having worked at News Corp's HarperCollins UK as board director for various otherwise homeless departments including sales, marketing; and HarperCollins India, he ran Hachette's consumer learning division. Prior to this, he launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom bawls, bottom lines, and divas diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as the Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest and most professional of hospitality teams; and overseen by several small schnauzers.

It also helps fund The Ceylon Press, set up to make Sri Lanka's rich and complicated story, a mystery to many, and a secret to most, more accessible. The Press' books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com. The Press also publishes Poetry from the Jungle, a podcast that recasts the orthodox view of the world's best poets and poems.