



THE  
SUMMER  
FORTRESS

DAVID SWARBRICK

THE  
CEYLON  
PRESS

THE  
SUMMER  
FORTRESS

# THE SUMMER FORTRESS

DAVID SWARBRICK



Published By The Ceylon Press  
2024

## COPYRIGHT

2024 David Swarbrick

## ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

## THIS BOOK IS PUBLISHED BY

The Ceylon Press  
The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel  
Mudunhena Walawwa,  
Galagedera 20100,  
Kandy,  
Sri Lanka.

[www.theceylonpress.com](http://www.theceylonpress.com)



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;

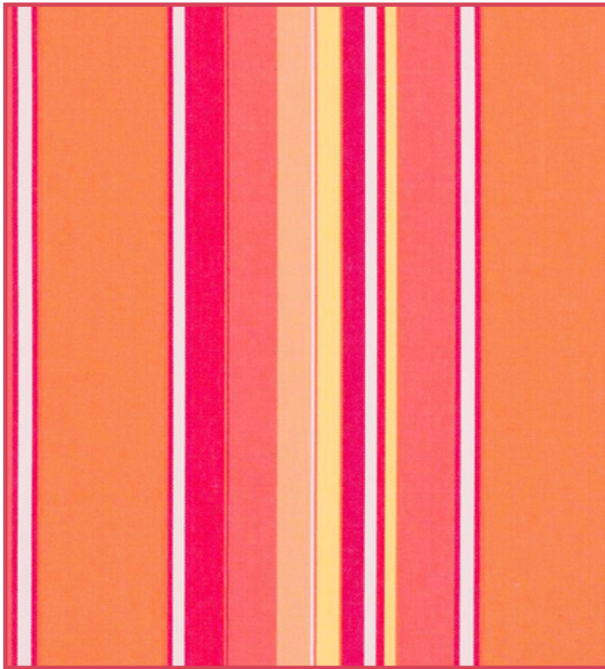
as you tell me  
what I need to hear  
but would not:

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.

5

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.

8

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

your awkward beauty                    in

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.



13

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.

21

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,

each ordinary phrase  
and twist it;

till we can never tell

what it was  
of all we said.

torture

take

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](http://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.

# DISCOVER MORE

## A HISTORY LIKE NO OTHER

Contrary & creative, Sri Lanka built a tropical Versailles as the West constructed in wattle & daub. When the Cold War ebbed, its own began. The Ceylon Press History Of Sri Lanka Podcast unpicks its serpentine history.

## BEHIND EACH GREAT STORY

From elephants to sapphires, tea to cricket, Island Stories: The Sri Lanka Podcast explores the things that make Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan.

## OFF PISTE

The Ceylon Press' Alternative eGuides go to the places without crowds; forgotten as they are by most academics, historians, and modern travellers.

## LESS IS MORE

The Ceylon Press' Tiny eBooks fillet the essentials of their subject from nature to history, culture to travel.

## INSTANT OVERVIEWS

With their short, and readable introductions, The Ceylon Press' Pocket Professor eBooks illuminate Sri Lankan subjects from ancient dynasties to endemic mammals.

## COMPANIONABLE LOOK-UPS

The Ceylon Press Companion to Sri Lanka and its subject Companions makes visible the whole island – from its arts, wildlife, & landmarks to religion, food, & history.

## A LITTLE LIGHT RELIEF

And in case it all gets too serious, The Ceylon Press offers the off-grid Jungle Diaries blog and Podcast and Archaeologies, the blank verse diaries of an occasional hermit.

# ABOUT THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

“It’s absolute paradise,” wrote one guest recently; “I would fly back to Sri Lanka simply to stay in this place for a couple more days.”

Centred on a 25-acre organic spice and timber plantation, The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel has been renovated and furnished with art & antiques; its healthy menus fusing street food with fine dining.

Its 1,000 high rocky hills stalled the Dutch army in 1765; and until the civil war the estate stretched over 100 acres with 3 working elephants.

Today its restored plantations grow cardamom, turmeric, ginger, cloves, pepper, cocoa; rubber, coffee, vanilla; cinnamon, coconuts - and scores of trees from ebony to sapu – best enjoyed from the vantage point of the hotel’s infinity pool. Visit [www.flametreeestate.com](http://www.flametreeestate.com).

It also houses and funds The Ceylon Press whose books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at [theceylonpress.com](http://theceylonpress.com).

## A GIFT FOR READERS

As a reader of this book, you naturally qualify for special treatment should your holiday ever bring you to Sri Lanka and The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel. Simply drop the general manager a note to tell him how you came across us and to make arrangements to best suit your time and budget:

[GeneralManager@flametreeestate.com](mailto:GeneralManager@flametreeestate.com)