

A Georgian mansion in Cornwall, midsummer

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Where an old man sits, to drink and dream.
Last moments, like fine wines, are to be
both savoured and abhorred. He stares
at tall, black windows, facing east.
It's midsummer, middle of the night,
an hour he knows too well. The house
is mostly silent, the air infused with salt
from a not too distant sea.

Where an old man is remembering
how shells rained down
from bleached grey skies, how rockets
blasted human life to smithereens,
how death fell into the water, that savage
blinding light, how war changes a man
and some things can never be unseen. Oh,
man is capable of wickedness; evil
lives inside us, a beast we're duty-bound
to keep locked inside its cage.

Where an old man sits and thinks of a life
much like the coming dawn, darkness
edged with gold, a life where death
was forever tapping at his shoulder, a life
spent straddling two worlds, never knowing
which was real. A life in which to him colours
appeared deeper, like a field of flowers
after rain. Oh, he's been both blessed and cursed
with a mind that's led him in a heady dance,
taken him to places he never thought he'd see.

Where an old man watches as the sun
comes up behind the trees and remembers
the forest he lived in as boy, that day
when hiding under a soft overhang
of leaves, he saw a beast he knew
was not from here, but had nudged
its heavy antlers at the membrane between worlds;
and how they stared into the other's eyes,
creature and boy. *I am here*, it seemed to say.

Where an old man's tears leak from pale eyes
as he remembers how his boy and he
walked that narrow, coast-like path
between sanity and madness, how the boy
could no longer keep his grip and fell
as though falling from a clifftop onto rocks
and his father couldn't save him
and continued on that path, alone.

Where an old man laughs as he remembers
the young man, dapper in his beret, pipe
clamped between his lips, scarf knotted
at his throat, his family draped in woollens,
as though they'd stepped from the pages
of a knitwear magazine onto a yacht's deck
and forgotten to take life jackets
and oh, how, he – a sailor – lost his boat
one dreadful night, when thick fog
turned into a ship's prow, how the knowledge
of his failure plunged him into depths
of sadness deeper than the sea.

Where in an old man's final, drunken minutes,
as morning light dances over walls,
he hears the cries of English schoolboys
running through school corridors or over sand,
the beasts inside unleashed,
the click-clack of his typewriter, the scratch of pen
on paper, his one love's voice, that day they kissed
and knew they couldn't let the other go, his daughter's
laugh, the rustle of things moving through the forest,
a seagull's cries, the soft roar
of the ever-changing sea
calling him home.