

# Recollections

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All photographs in this collection were taken by the author - James Gardener

*For all those who find themselves in  
these lines, above all, Amanda*



## Contents

Richard	7
Cleopatra	8
Evening cold	9
Hunter's Moon	10
Elba's Rose	11
Trampled wizard	12
The Volscian	13
Antigone	14
Exam fever	15
Antonio's monologue	16
Train writing	18
Christmas in Augsburg	19
Rhine Night	20
Flame lily	21
Napoleon at the Battle of Eylau	22
Venetian Morning	23
Medea	24
Amongst the ruins of Knossos	25
Autumn love	27
Loose ends	28
Beer Cellar	29
Two silly soliloquies	30
Breaking up	31
Laingsburg	32
Changing Trains	33
Our Wasteland	34
Night and Day	35
Chains of gold	36
Poem for Pete	37
On Salisbury Plain	38
In the Bear	39

Soweto sunrise	41
Rust	42
From Africa	43
Homecoming	44
The accident	45
Cape of songs	46
Restless	47
Karaoke Singer	49
Sing to me	50
Facilitator	51
The Girl from Asmara	52
Omduraman market	53
Matisse	54
Ireland	55
Unknown	56
Baby cat	57
Dubrovnik Duet	58
Morning Market	59
Tears in the wind	61
My Man in All Seasons	63
Squirrel	64
New Orleans	65
The Emperor	66
Harbour House	67
Poem for Doreen	68
Lakeside station	69

## Recollections

I first started to write poetry in my last year at school in Cape Town, 1975.

In retrospect, I can isolate three things that came together to spark me off. The first was the loss of my younger brother, Richard, who died after the last in a lifelong series of asthma attacks. Then I fell stage-struck in love with the leading lady in my school drama production. And finally there was an uneasy sense of having to move on beyond the comfort zone of an unremittingly happy set of schooldays.

Ever since those years, some confluence of these forces - loss, love and change - has found me reaching for verse and metre, word picture and jagged rhyme to help me navigate their undercurrents. The resulting paddle strokes are set down in these pages.

This re-collection of material from amongst drifts of notebooks, exam papers, till slips, beer mats, theatre programmes, train timetables and air-sickness bags has given me much pleasure and pause for thought. Emotion recollected in tranquillity.

'Enjoy!' as André, the waiter in the *Cat's Pyjamas*, Melville, Johannesburg, first taught me how to say with meaning.



## Richard

Feel the rasping bark  
Of the single stone pine  
That survived the great storm.  
Clean the fingers  
Of their sticky resin film.  
Hear the sharp crack  
Of the needles brittle blanket.  
Kick the empty cone  
And watch a squirrel run for cover.  
Listen to the wind's high panting  
In the grey torn branches.  
Clear the ground below  
Of last year's ashes,  
And touch the earth  
That holds my brother.

*December, 1975*

*Richard Gardener, 1960 –1974*

*There is a spot on the pine lined avenue leading to my old school  
in the leafy Cape Town suburb of Rondebosch, where I will always  
pause to breathe and think of Richard and his brave fight.*

## Cleopatra

The snake-queen steals in lissom silence  
    Across the whispering sands,  
        Pink-hot body pulsing,  
Hair coursing over bared blades.  
    While in her dancing eyes,  
    The midnight river shimmers.

In her step, the queen ripples once  
    And the girl slips naked,  
    From the discarded robe-skin.  
Through the desert papyrus fibres,  
    Her slender path opens  
    And in one moment of  
    suspended frailty,  
    She breaks the trance  
    of the glassy Nile.

    Glistening at her slave,  
Engraved together in the moonlight,  
    She pauses, half-beckoning,  
        half-forbidding,  
    Eyes stone-still.  
Till Ra boils over the bloody horizon,  
Summioned to attend his mistress' call.

    The queen enrobed, enthroned,  
        Enchanting,  
    Sails north to rule,  
    Past the Sphinx unwinking.

*24th April 1975*

*In the school drama society's production of G. B. Shaw's 'Caesar and Cleopatra', I was originally cast as Rufio, a rebarbative Roman bully. When Julian, an urbane choice as Caesar, fell ill the week before the production, I was bumped up and smoothed down to play Caesar alongside the utterly fragrant Cleopatra.*

## Evening cold

The shades close quietly on the afternoon  
Through the lines of darkling pine  
And fading ash.

The charcoal shadows gather  
As the fine grey mist of broken fires  
Slowly douses the dancing pollen light.

Sun-spawned leaves now fallen, smeared  
Beneath speared trees huddled  
Under the lash of night-winds.  
They shudder trunks and tremble me.

Darkness and onwards, ever darkness,  
Fuelled by memories, filled with dreams,  
Darkness falls and will there ever,  
Will there ever be another dawn?

*4th August 1976*

## Hunter's Moon

What are the death-drawn chasms  
That separate the Mother-moon  
From the hunter's candle?

The truth-torn hunter,  
Bound by infinite possibility,  
Screams in a darkened room.

Stirred by the moon-wind,  
The true form of evergreen  
Scrapes at his window.

The verse, unbounded, bounding song,  
Throbs and spills down the caresses of the night  
And all the moon long.

*14th September, 1975*