Recognition

I had heard somewhere that most significant stories begin with someone coming to town or someone leaving town. In the case to be taken up here, it was both. I had left the Island of Crete – for me a family, professional and touristic trip. I came to London and checked into the Hotel Imperial near Russell Square. Having settled down a bit, I took out my little trip book and found: Persons to call in London: Trevor MacDonald, Kate Lorentz, Euduardo and Suzanna Ortega. I struck out on the first two calls; succeeded on the second: I reached Suzanna.

“Wonderful to hear from you.Will you be here long?”

“A week or so. I have to run up to Cambridge to visit some friends there. Is Eduardo around?”

“Well, that’s wonderful. No he’s not around. He’s back in Argentina. He’s with his father who is ill. Are you free tomorrow afternoon? We could have tea at the Flammarion. ”

Though I’d never been there, I recognized the Flammarion as a posh hotel near Hyde Park Gate. But who were Eduardo and Suzanna?

Eduardo was Professor of Mathematics at University College in Bloomsbury. Suzanna was Professor of Chemistry at the same school. They probably met there. They’d been married for about fifteen years; no children. I first met Eduardo about ten years ago. Jim Riley, Curator of the John Carter Brown Rare Book Library called me up and said he had someone I might like to meet; a visiting scholar who’s been probing the JCB holdings for South American scientists. Friendship ensued.Then later, friendship with Suzanna.

The Hotel Flammarion – quite near the Hyde Park Gate Tube Station – had, in addition to a formal dining room, had an area where one might relax with a newspaper, order a drink, or meet friends. Several comfortable chairs, end tables, and where, at a slightly lower but adjacent level, a pianist was playing.

Suzanna arrived. We embraced. It’d been a long time and we caught up on the intervening years. The pianist, a lady in her late fifties, I should estimate, dressed in an evening gown, played on without the necessity of music. Light stuff.

A waiter came to where we were sitting and took out order for tea. The pianist played on.

Eventually ,the waiter returned pushing a tea wagon on which were an elegant silver tea service, china cups, and an etagere loaded with a variety of small, rectangular tea cakes. We talked, ate, drank, and the time passed pleasantly.

The pianist played on. I recognized the piece she was playing as by Debussy. When she finished the piece, I reached over a bit and said to her

“That was very nice. Debussy?”

She turned, looked at me hard and replied

“Yes. Debussy. You know that all the years I’ve been here, you are the first person who ever said a word to me; the first person who ever noticed me. Thanks much. I guess I’m just part of the furniture.”

P.J. Davis, February, 2014.