

Chapel Arts Creative Writing Group

presents

“The Secret Gardens”

Celebrating 150 Years of the Pavilion Gardens

in stories, poems and a short play



VOLUME 2

Texts of the second YouTube video

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Across the Veil

Julie Harratt

I look with sadness at the empty bandstand, placed on the very spot that means everything to me. Just one moment in time, from which my soul can't break free. It was just a field when I stood here beside the girl who filled my heart with love and hope, the one who was my destiny, my present, my future. How could we have known that our journey back to our village would be the last I would ever take in this mortal form? We returned with hope and dreams of our future to a village in fear. A piece of cloth had brought disease and horror from the metropolis to our door. People fell ill with painful swellings, sickness and a raging fever before death claimed them. I fell first, seeing your face drift away from me. I called out to you, I waited; you ailed but survived. I could only watch from beyond the veil while you carried on first with tears and heartbreak until another stole your heart.

I watched as 200 years later the exact spot of our betrothal was chosen as the site for the bandstand. Did they know, could they sense the power of the emotion that saturated that piece of ground?

I have watched unseen but anchored to this spot for many many years, seen the heartbreak, joy and sorrow in the faces of generations of people as they passed by. I watched the young men's bravado at the call to war, the devastation of many when they didn't return. I saw the despair as another call to war echoed across this land: more lives gone, more broken souls left behind. I have seen generations of families play out their lives; joy and laughter, sorrow and heartbreak, the cycle of life goes on.

Now I watch as the park lies silent and empty, people once again living in fear of an unseen assassin hiding in the breath of their neighbours, friends and the people they most love and hold dear.

This is just one spot in the park, swamped with emotions from lives and loves long gone. I cannot leave here until you cross my path again. I am destined to remain and watch the circle of life play out from beyond the veil.

At Seventeen

Caroline Hardwick

I watch the children laugh and scream,
They play and frolic by the stream.
The train they board is safe and small;
It takes them there and back, that's all.
I sit and wait with time to dream.

The teens they stroll, so cool they seem,
Pretending that they haven't seen,
But then they turn and sneak a glance
At those they wouldn't take the chance
Of speaking to, at seventeen.

I think of Henry, long since gone.
Of what he wrote, kept by his mum.
He'd watch the soldiers at the lake
As Pontoon bridges they learnt to make,
And how it looked such fun.

So soon it made him want to try
And help when they renewed the cry
For our young men to please enlist;
And though he knew he would be missed,
His age became the lie.

The train he took would not return,
And very soon these men would learn
That letters home must never tell
Of the fear, the pain, the hell;
They mustn't cause concern.

And so they suffered, unheard, unseen
In battles we now think obscene.
Those telegrams their parents read:
He served us well, your son is dead.
Lost at only seventeen.

The gardens were his happy place;
His image there, an impish face.
He had no time that love to show,

And all about him that we know
Are letters wrapped in lace.

I keep them safe, a box at home,
Unwrap them when I'm all alone.
Imagine, if he'd lived and wed,
Had children even, and instead
Seen them fully grown.

The gardens now have boats again.
I want to show him and explain.
My son, young Henry, loves this place.
And there in him an older face:
You didn't die in vain.

Around us all the gardens green,
Bandstand, music and ice cream.
I hope young Henry, my son so dear,
Will remember playing here
When he is seventeen.

Five Poetic Snippets

Jill Radcliffe

Once, in the Pavilion Gardens,
a man said he wanted to kiss me.
I told him he couldn't
and that was that.

Once, in the Pavilion Gardens,
I heard a brass band playing.
Another day, I heard a different band.
So diverse - it's quite remarkable.

Once, in the Pavilion Gardens,
I saw a famous actress.
But I can't remember her name.

Once, in the Pavilion Gardens,
I climbed up a tree
to retrieve my kite.
This isn't true,
but it would have been
quite a sight.

Once, in the Pavilion Gardens,
I got on the children;s train.
It didn't go anywhere
because the driver,
sensibly,
had gone to Spain.

Buxton Brass Band Festival Widow

Julie Harratt

The meal was a great success, a regular occurrence to keep us brass band widows sweet. I saw Marie, Max's wife - pronounced 'Marry', of course – casting envious glances at my Karen Miller dress. I must admit I did look good tonight. Shame my nail polish colour of choice, pink shimmer, turned out to look a bit insipid. I must make a bolder choice next time, if not quite scarlet fury; although Carrie, my nail technician, tells me I do have the hands to carry it off.

Henry was tired again at the end of the night, so no discussion forthcoming about my evening's observations. Henry used to enjoy what he now calls my derogatory analytical nonsense.

I think the defence case he has taken on is proving challenging and draining him. Two young reprobates charged with drug offences; something to do with county line dealing, whatever that is. Young lads with so much potential who'd taken the wrong path, according to Imogen, the firm's unsurprisingly single paralegal. She is a leading light on the youth action charity committee and an avid member of the brass band, so she always pitches up for the socials.

She might have what Henry calls an admirable social consciousness and be an accomplished cornet player, but her nails have never seen the benefit of a good manicure, let alone a swipe of nail polish. Tonight's outfit of choice was a kilt, would you believe, even though she has no Scottish connections that I know of. She paired it with a blouse buttoned to the top and so tightly tucked in it proved an effective bust minimiser.

Henry has always admired the subtle glimpse of decollate afforded by the cut of a Karen Miller day dress, although no comments on that front lately. I told Henry that at least Imogen's outfit tonight hid the lack of acquaintance with a lady shave or a good waxing. The underarm and leg hair on display at the summer barbeque was quite shocking. Even if you're a career woman, surely good grooming doesn't need to be totally off the agenda. No comment from Henry. Strange, really.

There is a bit of alpha male competition going on at the moment between Max the Senior Partner, who is always beautifully turned out, and Henry. So, Henry's upped his game on the presentation front, going for a smart casual look now. He could never understand why new underwear was a must if you wore a new outfit; he found it quite amusing. But to judge from

his recent purchases he's started to see the sense in this, so that's progress. You see, he does listen sometimes.

Henry's gone off for the weekend to start rehearsing for the Buxton Brass Band Festival, so an opportunity for a couple of days' spa break for me. I love the actual event; the Octagon in the Pavilion Gardens is such a beautiful theatre that a completely new outfit is an absolute must. But all the tuneless cacophony of the practice sessions is something I prefer to avoid. Quite an early start to the practice sessions this year. They must be planning to perform some new pieces.

I was just getting into the car when I noticed Henry had left his tuba and case in the garage. This drug dealing defence case was really taking its toll on him. But no matter; it was only a short diversion for me to drop them off at the hotel on the way to the Spa.

The boy on reception blushed and mumbled when I insisted on Henry's room number. Extremely poor teeth and the remnants of acne. Front of house wasn't the best career choice.

It took a few knocks before the door opened to reveal a rather damp and flustered Imogen sitting on the bed. Henry gripped the door handle and just stared at his tuba case. A tsunami of images - people's knowing looks, pity and scorn - overwhelmed me as I gripped the tuba case and swung it until it made contact with Henry's tousled hair.

The colour flooding across the carpet reminded me of scarlet fury. Might have to give that a try now I really am a brass band widow.