

THE FRIENDSHIP

They said that while love could win over the miles,
friendship could never stand the test of distance,
so when I said good-by at age fifteen
to head for alien soil
and we found ourselves thus separated
in two countries which were, though not quite at war,
at war for many purposes
others believed that promises to write
were nothing more than a slim formality
like those of summer friends come time to part.
We both became most miserable
for neither could withstand to see the death
of that world which we had come to love
of which the other was a central point.
One of us found
the freedom that he breathed in distant climates
a poor substitute for his beloved land,
for though he loved this freedom much
he also loved his soil
and saw in every elm and oak and maple
the eerie ghosts of royal palms in chains
and would have gladly traded all the mountains
that form the Appalachian Range
for one last look at the Turquino Peak.
The one who stayed behind
loved freedom with such passion
that he was like a leopard who was placed
within a cage inside his native jungle
beating his head against the bars
and gladly trading the majesty of the forest
for the unfettered freedom of the desert.
And thus the lad who, free, so missed his home
wrote to the one who, home, so missed his freedom,
and he in turn wrote back
and life became a parallel duet,
one note played at a time from either side
of the Florida Strait.
Both grew, both studied much, both chose the same
profession, and both shared the same passion
to pour their hearts upon the written word,
thus one wrote poems, the other stories,
and both wrote letters that seemed to have no end.
Each married and had children
to which each could relate those endless tales
of the adventures shared with the other
when both would ride their bicycles
together on the roads that hugged the western margin
of the Almedares River.

THE FRIENDSHIP (continued)

And then the cage was opened!
The leopard with his family escaped
amidst the torrent pouring from the island
across the very minor port of El Mariel.
That reunion
after twenty long years of separation
was among the most emotional occasions
that either had experienced.
Their wives loved each other at first sight
as if it had been they
who were the long-lost friends, now reunited.
Last year he became my youngest daughter's
godfather.
He lives in Syracuse, that is appropriate.
That was the home of Damon and of Pythias.

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