

The Isle of Jura

(for Andrea)

The pub was a couple of miles from Lochgilphead. Three men and two dogs occupied all the space at the bar, the air was thick with smoke from a badly drawing fireplace, and the look from the owner was far from friendly, but we were not going back out into the rain. There were two empty chairs at the only table, so we joined the two people sitting there. The man was staring out the window, or rather staring at the fogged over window as if imagining a scene outside, and the woman was gazing blankly ahead, nursing a glass of whisky between her hands. She nodded when we asked if we could sit there, and then looked me in the eyes. "You're not from here."

"No. I'm from the only city in Canada as far north as this" I said "Lots of fine bars, and it rarely rains. What's your name?"

"Moirira"

"Moirira as in Irish for Mary?"

"No. Moirira as in fate. You were always going to come here."

I went and got myself a whisky and Marguerite a margarita. I was surprised that I could. When I got back Marguerite was telling Moirira a dream. I suppose it wasn't hard to get there in the ten minutes it took me to get some attention at the bar and negotiate the difference of accents. And the dream was about rain, which must have helped. In the dream Marguerite and I were walking down a road in the rain, and a boat walked by us, walked because it was rowed by a woman in a black gown with a black hood that covered her face, who drew the oars down and along so that at each stroke the boat lifted and moved forward along the road. We got in, and we all continued down the road-stream, each one somehow with an oar with which we pulled ourselves through the rapidly rising water.

"That was me" said Moirira, "I would have taken you further, but I fell asleep."

"So here we all are anyway" I said "but why am I here, since I didn't have this dream?"

"Not yet, not yet." Moirira looked at me over her glass, and a drip slid down from the rim, like a thought very slowly finding its place in a story. "Be patient, you'll find it. Some time when you're in the right place."

"And where's that?" I was getting impatient.

"Not here, to be sure. Nothing's going to come together here." She nudged her companion who continued to stare into the window. "He never makes much sense in here, but he can be so so lucid out there."

I tried to remember dreams of rain. We spoke about the Islanders who once settled northern Alberta. I got us all more drinks. The light faded and the smoke thickened. It no longer seemed clear what we were doing and where we were going next. I touched Marguerite and gestured to the way out. We made our way through the crowded room and opened the door into the dusk, where streams in the road were joining together to form a river overflowing from the ditch. I turned as we left and looked back at our companions, but there was a mirror in the way and all that I could make out in Moira's direction was a face very much like my own.