

A Dance through the Veils

Prose by Potia
Poetry by Vanora

The Spirit of the Place

In the half-light of distant memory
I sense the shape of the place
Its outline upon a vague horizon
And a knowing voice calling,
Urging
Remember me, remember me....

We went to the Isle of Arran for the Summer Solstice. I had done a vigil the night before and watched the sky in Glasgow lighten. I did my own ritual at dawn and then went out for a walk in the early morning light. By the river I got my first peek of the sun rising between the buildings - what a glorious sight! I did some Tai Chi there by the river with the sun's golden rays growing and spreading from the tops of the trees down. I then went home and had some breakfast and got ready to meet Ann for our day out to Arran.

I hadn't been to Arran before and in fact I had only recently seen it from Ardrossan, the closest point of the coast to it. Ann, however, had been several times and it was at her suggestion that we went there that day.

Arran is also known by some as the Avalon of the West Coast of Scotland. It is an island that seems both further and closer to the shore than it really is. Often it is partially or completely concealed by the gentle grey mists that cover it and Holy Isle which lies just in front of it.

We got the first train and then the ferry across to Arran (you cross part of the Firth of Clyde but it seems more like the sea, if you look on a map you will see why). We arrived at Brodick harbour at about 10.30 in the morning. As we walked down the gangplank of the ferry and onto the island itself I felt as if we had crossed a veil of time and entered another world, not because of the surroundings but because of the energy of the place.

In the clear light of day
The reality of the place is so much more
An air of ancient serenity
Settles upon the earth,
Whispering
Come to me, come to me....

We had decided that we would go to Machrie Moor first and got on a bus which we thought would take us there. Before it left the bus station we realised that it wouldn't but decided to see where it would take us - we had plenty of time. The bus was an open top tour bus with a short route down the coast to Whiting Bay where at certain times of the year you can get a ferry to Holy Isle.

We saw a walk sign posted near the bus stop at Whiting Bay and went to have a closer look at the sign. "Giant's Graves 1/2 mile" and "Waterfalls 1 mile" and a board gave a bit more information. We thought the shorter walk would be about right and the board said the Giant's Graves are

chambered cairns. We didn't notice the bit about the 256 steps! If we had we might not have followed that route, which is probably why we didn't see it. Somebody wanted us to take that path.

The walk was beautiful but the steps, made from rough earth and wood in a steep wooded hillside, were hard work. The path and steps twisted and turned as we rose higher and higher. At the top of the hill the path went through a part of Forestry Commission Fir trees.

We faced a much darker avenue with a patch of light at the end. When we reached that patch of light we were greeted with a beautiful sight. We both instinctively paused before slowly moving into the base of a rounded triangular clearing with wild grasses, brambles and three chambered cairns in a rough line from the base to the tip of the triangle. No one else was there although we had passed a group of four people coming down as we went up.

In the fading light of dusk
I step upon the holy ground
Bound to past and future
The stones tell their own tales,
Murmuring
Be with me, be with me....

I was drawn to circle the clearing deosil, greeting each cairn as I passed. I then offered a small libation of water at each cairn to the ancestral spirits, pouring the water onto earth by the stones. While I did this Ann moved slowly to the central area greeting the place in her own way. When I sat down in the central area after doing this I looked at my watch, it was just after midday. We sat in this high beautiful place, with the midsummer sun beating down on us from a clear, blue sky. We felt the presence of the ancestors all around, welcoming us and happy for the acknowledgement we had paid them. Ann broke off a small piece from a bannock she had brought for us to eat later and placed it in the undergrowth where it wouldn't be seen but the smaller wildlife of the area would find it. We sat there in peace, both of us silently marvelling at the powerful yet gentle presences of this special place tucked away in the hills.

There we sat, at this point where Earth meets Sky, where the wild meets with the cultivated, two followers of the old ways in modern times meeting the ancient spirits of the site at the noon of the longest day of the year. We knew we had been led there.

The Giant's Graves

*Hidden within a dark forest, at the end of a spiral stairway
Lies a glade of vibrant green where ancestors meet on Midsummer's eve.
Between the visible and the hidden, the white track winds between the worlds
At its centre, surrounded by mists, we find our sacred space.*

*These granite monuments built by our ancestors to honour their dead
People who walked upon the Earth and named the myriad stars.
Spirits which linger still, their voices carried in the wind
And by the crashing waves upon the sandy shore.*

*In this sanctuary, amongst the stones, sheltered from the world outside
We touch the veils which stand between us, the veils which separate the worlds.
From out of the stillness, awen flows, a new awareness is born
In our solitude within the circle, a longed-for peace of mind is found.*

After a time we left, both of us turning at the entrance to the clearing to pay our respects before turning once more to walk among the trees on a path that seemed lighter now than it did before. With each step we took it felt as if we passed through another veil. We had not noticed passing

through them on the way up the hillside but we felt it strongly as we left. As we walked we started to talk and realised that we were thinking almost the same thoughts. Gently we had been awoken to our sisterhood in spirit.

When we arrived back at the road it was later than we had anticipated when we started up the path to the Giant's Graves. We had missed a bus and had a while before the next one. So we took a walk on the half-sandy and half-pebbled beach, taking our boots and socks off to walk barefoot on the sand at the surf's edge. It was wonderfully refreshing to walk in the warm, damp sand and to feel the cool sea washing over our feet. I moved further up the sandy area of the beach and drew a labyrinth in the sand. While Ann looked at pebbles and shells I walked the labyrinth meshing together within me the energies of Fire, Air, Water and Earth of that magical time and place. After I came out I sprawled out on the sand next to the labyrinth while Ann walked it. Holy Isle looked lovely standing off the shore to one side, gulls wheeled overhead and the sun continued to beat down on us from a sky that was now slowly filling with grey clouds.

We caught the bus back to Brodick and this time checked more carefully for one to Machrie Moor. We had enough of a gap in between for a bag of chips each, good ones too! We arrived at Machrie Moor at about 3.45 in the afternoon. Ann had been here several times before and visiting the moor was the main reason we had planned a visit to Arran.

On the moor are several stone circles, some of granite boulders, some of tall sandstone slabs several of those slabs missing from their original places. As we walked the mile or so onto the moor to reach the circles we passed several people leaving. The energy built once more and again we moved through the veils of time and place. When we got to the main group of circles we were the only ones there in body.

We walked round for a while greeting the stones in our own ways. Ann greeting old friends, me saying hello for the first time. We sat down in the centre of one of the circles with alternating huge granite boulders and smaller stones. I opened the bottle of mead I had brought with me for this very purpose and Ann got out the bannock. Before pouring the first cup I poured a small libation from the bottle to the spirits of the place. Ann broke off a small chunk of the bannock to put into a hedge nearby when we left. I had brought the wooden cup I use in my rituals with me, I filled it and we shared the mead. We took turns to drink and re-filled the cup until the bottle was finished. For each new cup of mead we proposed a toast. We toasted Gods and Goddesses, both the ones we follow and the ones of the people that built the circles, we toasted spirits of animals, birds, fish, plants, the threatening clouds and other things. In between mouthfuls of mead we ate the bannock. We talked of the wonderful, yet mysterious day we had experienced and of Ann's previous visits to Arran. We also had an impromptu Eisteddfod although neither of us could remember much to recite or sing.

In the darkness of the night
The moon-shadows flit from tree to tree
And the spirits move
Touching the soul with joy,
Inviting
Stay with me, stay with me....

We were welcomed by the spirits of the place and made to feel very at home. In the end we left after having thanked the place in our own ways for the very special welcome we had received. As we left (with our rubbish) we again experienced the sensation of returning to another world.

Just as we reached the road a bus going to Brodick pulled up for us. It wasn't the bus we had originally thought about getting back but an earlier one that took a longer route back round the

north coast of the island. It was a beautiful ride although by this time I could hardly keep my eyes open and drowsed part of the way back to the harbour.

Our visit to the world of Arran was over and we walked up the gangplank of the last to the mainland for that day to return home. After a light meal in the ferry's restaurant we went on deck and watched Arran recede into the mists once more. As it faded we felt as if we were being slowly returned to the rest of the world. When we set foot on the mainland again our whole visit had become like a dream to us. It seemed we had been there much longer than the day, so much so that I checked my watch for the date and time, just to be sure. We parted as sisters in spirit, we who had started the day as friends.

In the cold light of dawn
The embers die, fading red
Knowledge gained is stored away
Until the time comes again,
Renewing
Dream of me, dream of me....

Now as I finish writing this I feel I am beginning to absorb that glorious and mystical dance through the veils of time and place between this world and another more sacred place that we were privileged to experience.