

To Iona

We came from the east. Everywhere in the land was water. Burns became rivers. Rivers rose like dragons, green and glad. Something great gathered our way. It was that kind of winter – the last or the first, we didn't know.

We crossed from Ardnamurchan to Mull without looking back. In the mirror of the strait we saw reflected our faces, unfamiliar after the long road, and the sky. On Mull – rock-stacks like houses and houses like rock. The moor was dark and moved like sea. Ninian had walked these cliffs. A spring told us at Killninian – we lay on the ground to hear. How much is forgotten, wiped, my love! But the water remembers. *There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad –*

The waves cast us on Iona, a one-way ticket due to storm. What was this we found on the shore? Peace. To be still among the churning blood and ocean. The nunnery was roofless. A path of gravestones in the grass, the size of women who knew peace and ruins. We breathed the salt that ate the corner stones, like mildew eats a page. We stepped inside a circle which is a square that circles itself like the page of an old book. Iona is an old book. The Earth is a library of seasons. A child draws a sun, a house, a face, and everything has an eye. Iona is an eye. A snake coils into O, the O is in the B, the B sprouts from the mouth of a Green Man. It's a garden of mating snakes, of squirming stories, an ecology of spirit, a hologram of the whole, a mandala, this island.

Letters are the thing itself, not an idea of the thing. Saffron, turquoise, ochre, vermillion, gold came from Sinai on the Red Sea, from Aegean Athos, from Prespa Lake where women chanted like sirens in limestone rooms and their song travelled on water. Water is feminine, like Mnemosyne. Pigments, words, thoughts, DNA flow like the four rivers of paradise to the four corners of this page. East to west and west to east, we go. We seek, forget, cross stormy seas, sing, meet and depart, then lie under the grass and are forgotten, wiped, my love, except for water. We come on a one-way ticket. No need for words under the roofless sky. Or I might have said –

*I know a palace/ is better than a ruin
but I'm that owl in this world/ who loves to live in the ruins of love*

Kapka Kassabova

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