

Two Women

Two women stood upon the bridge watching the waterfall making its perilous descent into Loch Lomond. Water. Inexorable. Bringing life, begetting death.

They stood in silence, the day nearly spent. Two strangers on the path of the West Highland Way, a popular destination for Scot and tourist. I was the last tourist on the trail and she, a lone Scot, standing apart from a group gathered in a nearby glade.

Two women, staring as the water fell, alone with their thoughts. I gestured toward the glade and suggested to the woman that the people gathered were having some sort of ceremony. She nodded and looked their way, "Aye. My family." She noted softly, "They're mourning my son and grandson."

"The boys and their dads were hiking the trail from Loch Arklet. Having a lark, they were." She continued, "My grandson fell off this bridge, into the rushing waters below. His dad jumped in to save him." Both died.

I expressed my condolences. "I know full well what it is to have your children die." I continued, "An infant son, and a daughter who died four years ago. Her thirty-one-year-old heart just stopped beating. Her plans to start a family, on hold. Evermore."

"Aye, forevermore. I canna get my mind around it," she lamented. "Charlie was but seven. Oh, what a bonnie lad! And full of mischief." She continued, with a breaking voice, "He was the apple of Jamie's eye. Very smart man, my son. There was nothing he would not do for his family." Her anguish was apparent. "I should not talk this way. It's not healthy to dwell on it."

“Nonsense!” I interjected. “They lived and you loved them. Never be ashamed to show your pain and longing. They are not dead in your mind or in your heart. If it gives you comfort to share your treasured memories, do so.” I paused, “Sometimes.”

Our eyes met, no need for words. We had held them close, with open arms. Now empty arms. Could we but press them close one last time? The waters whisper, “Nevermore.”

The wee bird sing and the wildflowers spring

And in sunshine the waters are sleeping

But the broken heart it kens, nae second spring again

Though the woeful may cease from their grieving (*Loch Lomond*. Traditional, lines 17-20)

Two mothers suspended within the interstice between acquiescence and acceptance.

Two women stood upon the bridge as lifelong assumptions fell away, submerged in the water as it rushed inexorably on to meet the bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.