

The Last Supper

By Fiona Macleod

The last time that the Fisher of Men was seen in Strath-Nair was not of Alasdair Macleod but of the little child, Art Macarthur, him that was born of the woman Mary Gilchrist, that had known the sorrow of women.

He was a little child, indeed, when, because of his loneliness and having lost his way, he lay sobbing among the bracken by the streamside in the Shadowy Glen.

When he was a man, and had reached the gloaming of his years, he was loved of men and women, for his songs are many and sweet, and his heart was true, and he was a good man and had no evil against any one.

It is he who saw the Fisher of Men when he was but a little lad: and some say that it was on the eve of the day that Alasdair Og died, though of this I know nothing. And what he saw, and what he heard, was a moonbeam that fell into the dark sea of his mind, and sank therein, and filled it with light for all the days of his life. A moonlit mind was that of Art Macarthur: him that is known best as Ian Mòr, Ian Mòr of the Hills, though why he took the name of Ian Cameron is known to none now but one person, and that need not be for the telling here. He had music always in his mind. I asked him once why he heard what so few heard, but he smiled and said only: 'When the heart is full of love, cool dews of peace rise from it and fall upon the mind: and that is when the song of Joy is heard.'

It must have been because of this shining of his soul that some who loved him thought of him as one illumined. His mind was a shell that held the haunting echo of the deep seas: and to know him was to catch a breath of the infinite ocean of wonder and mystery and beauty of which he was the quiet oracle. He has peace now, where he lies under the heather upon a hillside far away: but the Fisher of Men will send him hitherward again, to put a light upon the wave and a gleam upon the brown earth.

I will tell this *sgeul* [tale] as Ian Mòr that was the little child Art Macarthur, told it to me.

Often and often it is to me all as a dream that comes unawares. Often and often have I striven to see into the green glens of the mind whence it comes, and whither, in a flash, in a rainbow gleam, it vanishes. When I seek to draw close to it, to know whether it is a winged glory out of the soul, or was indeed a thing that happened to me in my tender years, lo—it is a dawn drowned in day, a star lost in the sun, the falling of dew.

But I will not be forgetting: no, never: no, not till the silence of the grass is over my eyes: I will not be forgetting that gloaming.

Bitter tears are those that children have. All that we say with vain words is said by them in this welling spray of pain. I had the sorrow that day. Strange hostilities lurked in the familiar bracken. The sighing of the wind among the trees, the wash of the brown water by my side, that had been companionable, were voices of awe. The quiet light upon the grass flamed.

The fierce people that lurked in shadow had eyes for my helplessness. When the dark came I thought I should be dead, devoured of I knew not what wild creature. Would mother never come, never come with saving anus, with eyes like soft candles of home?

Then my sobs grew still, for I heard a step. With dread upon me, poor wee lad that I was, I looked to see who came out of the wilderness. It was a man, tall and thin and worn, with long

hair hanging adown his face. Pale he was as a moonlit cot on the dark moor, and his voice was low and sweet. When I saw his eyes I had no fear upon me at all. I saw the mother-look in the grey shadow of them.

‘And is that you, Art *lennavan mo* [my child]?’ he said, as he stooped and lifted me.

I had no fear. The wet was out of my eyes.

‘What is it you will be listening to now, my little lad?’ he whispered, as he saw me lean, intent, to catch I know not what.

‘Sure,’ I said, ‘I am not for knowing; but I thought I heard a music away down there in the wood.’

I heard it, for sure. It was a wondrous sweet air, as of one playing the feadan in a dream. Callum Dall, the piper, could give no rarer music than that was; and Callum was a seventh son, and was born in the moonshine.

‘Will you come with me this night of the nights, little Art?’ the man asked me, with his lips touching my brow and giving me rest.

‘That I will indeed and indeed,’ I said. And then I fell asleep.

When I awoke we were in the huntsman’s booth, that is at the far end of the Shadowy Glen.

There was a long rough-hewn table in it, and I stared when I saw bowls and a great jug of milk and a plate heaped with oat-cakes, and beside it a brown loaf of rye-bread.

‘Little Art,’ said he who carried me, ‘are you for knowing now who I am?’

‘You are a prince, I’m thinking,’ was the shy word that came to my mouth.

‘Sure, *lennav-aghray* [my dear child], that is so. It is called the Prince of Peace I am.’

‘And who is to be eating all this?’ I asked.

‘This is the last supper,’ the prince said, so low that I could scarce hear; and it seemed to me that he whispered, ‘For I die daily, and ever ere I die the Twelve break bread with me.’

It was then I saw that there were six bowls of porridge on the one side and six on the other.

‘What is your name, O prince?’

‘Iosa.’

‘And will you have no other name than that?’

‘I am called Iosa mac Dhe [Jesus, Son of God].’

‘And is it living in this house you are?’

‘Ay. But Art, my little lad, I will kiss your eyes, and you shall see who sup with me.’

And with that the prince that was called Iosa kissed me on the eyes, and I saw.

‘You will never be quite blind again,’ he whispered, and that is why all the long years of my years I have been glad in my soul.

What I saw was a thing strange and wonderful. Twelve men sat at that table, and all had eyes of love upon Iosa. But they were not like any men I had ever seen. Tall and fair and terrible they were, like morning in a desert place; all save one, who was dark, and had a shadow upon him and in his wild eyes.

It seemed to me that each was clad in radiant mist. The eyes of them were as stars through that mist.

And each, before he broke bread, or put spoon to the porridge that was in the bowl before him, laid down upon the table three shuttles.

Long I looked upon that company, but Iosa held me in his anus, and I had no fear.

‘Who are these men?’ he asked me.

‘The Sons of God,’ I said, I not knowing what I said, for it was but a child I was.

He smiled at that. 'Behold,' he spoke to the twelve men who sat at the table, 'behold the little one is wiser than the wisest of ye.' At that all smiled with the gladness and the joy, save one; him that was in the shadow. He looked at me, and I remembered two black lonely tarns upon the hillside, black with the terror because of the kelpie and the drowner.

'Who are these men?' I whispered, with the tremor on me that was come of the awe I had.

'They are the Twelve Weavers, Art, my little child.'

'And what is their weaving?'

'They weave for my Father, whose web I am.'

At that I looked upon the prince, but I could see no web. 'Are you not Iosa the Prince?'

'I am the Web of Life, Art *lennavan-mo*.'

'And what are the three shuffles that are beside each Weaver?'

I know now that when I turned my child's-eyes upon these shuffles I saw that they were alive and wonderful, and never the same to the seeing.

'They are called *Beauty* and *Wonder* and *Mystery*.'

And with that Iosa mac Dhe sat down and talked with the Twelve. All were passing fair, save him who looked sidelong out of dark eyes. I thought each, as I looked at him, more beautiful than any of his fellows; but most I loved to look at the twain who sat on either side of Iosa.

'He will be a Dreamer among men,' said the prince; 'so tell him who ye are.'

Then he who was on the right turned his eyes upon me. I leaned to him, laughing low with the glad pleasure I had because of his eyes and shining hair, and the flame as of the blue sky that was his robe.

'I am the Weaver of Joy,' he said. And with that he took his three shuffles that were called Beauty and Wonder and Mystery, and he wove an immortal shape, and it went forth of the room and out into the green world, singing a rapturous sweet song.

Then he that was upon the left of Iosa the Life looked at me, and my heart leaped. He, too, had shining hair, but I could not tell the colour of his eyes for the glory that was in them. 'I am the Weaver of Love,' he said, 'and I sit next the heart of Iosa.' And with that he took his three shuffles that were called Beauty and Wonder and Mystery and he wove an immortal shape, and it went forth of the room and into the green world singing a rapturous sweet song.

Even then, child as I was, I wished to look on no other. None could be so passing fair, I thought, as the Weaver of Joy and the Weaver of Love.

But a wondrous sweet voice sang in my ears, and a cool, soft hand laid itself upon my head, and the beautiful lordly one who had spoken said, 'I am the Weaver of Death,' and the lovely whispering one who had lulled me with rest said, 'I am the Weaver of Sleep.' And each wove with the shuffles of Beauty and Wonder and Mystery, and I knew not which was the more fair, and Death seemed to me as Love, and in the eyes of Dream I saw Joy.

My gaze was still upon the fair wonderful shapes that went forth from these twain—from the Weaver of Sleep, an immortal shape of star-eyed Silence, and from the Weaver of Death a lovely Dusk with a heart of hidden flame—when I heard the voice of two others of the Twelve. They were like the laughter of the wind in the corn, and like the golden fire upon that corn. And the one said, 'I am the Weaver of Passion,' and when he spoke I thought that he was both Love and Joy, and Death and Life, and I put out my hands. 'It is Strength I give,' he said, and he took and kissed me. Then, while Iosa took me again upon his knee, I saw the Weaver of Passion turn to the white glory beside him, him that Iosa whispered to me was the secret of the world, and that was called 'The Weaver of Youth.' I know not whence nor how it came, but there was a singing of skiey birds when these twain took the shuffles of Beauty and Wonder and Mystery, and wove

each an immortal shape, and bade i go forth out of the room into the green world, to sing there for ever and ever in the ears of man a rapturous sweet song.

‘O Iosa,’ I cried, ‘Are these all thy brethren? for each is fair as thee, and all have lit their eyes at the white fire I see now in thy heart.’

But, before he spake, the room was filled with music. I trembled with the joy, and in my ears it has lingered ever, nor shall ever go. Then I saw that it was the breathing of the seventh and eighth, of the ninth and the tenth of those star-eyed ministers of Iosa whom he called the Twelve: and the names of them were the Weaver of Laughter, the Weaver of Tears, the Weaver of Prayer, and the Weaver of Peace. Each rose and kissed me there. ‘We shall be with you to the end, little Art,’ they said: and I took hold of the hand of one, and cried, ‘O beautiful one, be likewise with the woman my mother,’ and there came back to me the whisper of the Weaver of Tears: ‘I will, unto the end.’

Then, wonderingly, I watched him likewise take the shuffles that were ever the same and yet never the same, and weave an immortal shape. And when this Soul of Tears went forth of the room, I thought it was my mother’s voice singing that rapturous sweet song, and I cried out to it.

The fair immortal turned and waved to me. ‘I shall never be far from thee, little Art,’ it sighed, like summer rain falling on leaves: ‘but I go now to my home in the heart of women.’

There were now but two out of the Twelve. Oh the gladness and the joy when I looked at him who had his eyes fixed on the face of Iosa that was the Life! He lifted the three shuffles of Beauty and Wonder and Mystery, and he wove a Mist of Rainbows in that room; and in the glory I saw that even the dark twelfth one lifted up his eyes and smiled.

‘O what will the name of you be?’ I cried, straining my anus to the beautiful lordly one. But he did not hear, for he wrought Rainbow after Rainbow out of the mist of glory that he made, and sent each out into the green world, to be for ever before the eyes of men.

‘He is the Weaver of Hope,’ whispered Iosa mac Dhe; ‘and he is the soul of each that is here.’

Then I turned to the twelfth, and said ‘Who art thou, O lordly one with the shadow in the eyes.’

But he answered not, and there was silence in the room. And all there, from the Weaver of Joy to the Weaver of Peace, looked down, and said nought. Only the Weaver of Hope wrought a rainbow, and it drifted into the heart of the lonely Weaver that was twelfth.

‘And who will this man be, O Iosa mac Dhe?’ I whispered.

‘Answer the little child,’ said Iosa, and his voice was sad.

Then the Weaver answered:

‘I am the Weaver of Glory—,’ he began, but Iosa looked at him, and he said no more.

‘Art, little lad,’ said the Prince of Peace, ‘he is the one who betrayeth me for ever. He is Judas, the Weaver of Fear.’

And at that the sorrowful shadow-eyed man that was the twelfth took up the three shuffles that were before him.

‘And what are these, O Judas?’ I cried eagerly, for I saw that they were black.

When he answered not, one of the Twelve leaned forward and looked at him. It was the Weaver of Death who did this thing.

‘The three shuttles of Judas the Fear-Weaver, O little Art,’ said the Weaver of Death, ‘are called Mystery, and Despair, and the Grave.’

And with that Judas rose and left the room. But the shape that he had woven went forth with him as his shadow: and each fared out into the dim world, and the Shadow entered into the minds and into the hearts of men, and betrayed Iosa that was the Prince of Peace.

Thereupon, Iosa rose and took me by the hand, and led me out of that room. When, once, I looked back I saw none of the Twelve save only the Weaver of Hope, and he sat singing a wild sweet song that he had learned of the Weaver of Joy, sat singing amid a mist of rainbows and weaving a radiant glory that was dazzling as the sun.

And at that I woke, and was against my mother's heart, and she with the tears upon me, and her lips moving in a prayer.