

The Iolaire

A I L E E N S H I R R A

It stole the flower of our island,
 that distant war.
 Full of *joie de vivre*, and bravado of youth
 they left, right fine and bold,
 fresh from heather covered fells,
 the tang of peat smoke in their clothes,
 and returning, so few survivors,
 some seemed... no, not just old
 but defeated, those victors
 dragging ragged limbs, a breath from home,
 aboard the teeming Iolaire,
 with haunted eyes or startled rabbit gaze
 drowning in images unbidden
 of shrieking shells blooming bloody
 in the fields of France
 or flowering in the foaming seas.
 A few would have sacrificed those limbs
 to purge these horror-ridden reels
 in the dying hours of that deadly year

But here no deathly shower descended,
 lashing down from a queasy sky,
 and then such joy! In the lee of Lewis Isle
 with surely nothing left to fear
 except the memories,
 the nightmare memories

...and aye, perhaps the realisation
of all that had been lost
and all that yet may stray
across the eyes of loved ones
welcoming these draggled strangers.
Oh was there ever such an irony as this?
To lose their youth,
to leave their blood
pooling in the trenches of the Western Front
but haul their bodies home... to die,
the heart ripped from the Iolaire,
ravaged by the tearing teeth and claws
of the brutal Beasts of Holm

It stole the flower of our island that distant war...
But a few precious petals washed home on the swell of a New
Year tide