

'How to Distil a Guid Scotch Malt'

Maggie Mackay

Separate the Gross from the Subtle

Hieronymus Brunschwig

Wrap yourself in Mum's dressing gown, its envelope-hug,
pour a dram of uisge beatha, sip peppery Talisker peat.

Hear the barley grain grind in the mill, conjure a mash in the steel tun,
a flow into the wash, stroked by hushes and baloo baleerie.

Gloomings on salty coastlines, sweet kiln smoke, skin oil grams,
cloud the floor of the tumbler, climb the sides, pull you into the cask.

Acids blend with ethanol, transform into esters, fruity and aromatic.
A Hebridean sunset copper-pots your tongue, biscuit-beaches rise in your throat.

There's a nip in the air, a lifetime of goodnights fermenting in a kipper fire.
Her arm entwines in yours. She comes home, full flavoured.

Task begun, the heart of the run is now, my middle years of fear and longing.