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## Thursday Afternoon

by Garf Collins

“I hope it doesn’t rain in Carlisle this afternoon,” I think as we emerge from the house justifiably called The Observatory. But no observation today - it is dreich and the sea breaking on the shore is a faint white line. Calzein Castle in which General Eisenhower planned the Normandy invasion is invisible. Ailsa Craig, source of most curling stones, cannot be seen - so no temptation to buy it at the asking price of £1.5M.

Moira drives rapidly along the winding coast road. New car smell. Hope she’s got the hang of this vehicle. Glimpses of Arran through the mist and the sun shining on Troon harbour. Expect to see the old lady we always see cycling in the opposite direction whatever the weather. “Where is she going,” we wonder. No sign of her today. I hope she is alright.

1<sup>st</sup> Virgin to Carlisle. Not a reward for a jihadi from Northern England but a train ticket. Virgin logo reminds me of our nephew who is working at Richard Branson’s luxury resort on Necker Island in the British Virgin Islands (not named after him!) The island was devastated in the hurricane which swept through the Caribbean. James, with many summer’s experience at sailing resorts, was recruited by Branson to re-establish his sailing centre and run it for a couple of years.

Thursday afternoon. I arrive and Carlisle is not welcoming. Rain and dark clouds. Carlisle seems obstinately English even though it’s so near the Scottish border. Romans, Vikings and for the last millennium, the English have held it. The Scots had two failed attempts - that is if you don’t count the reivers - the marauding bands who pillaged throughout the border territory. No wonder it developed defences like the imposing castle.

I walk along the walls and visit the majestic cathedral. Not high gothic but still very elevated with substantial pillars inside and a sky blue ceiling. A wonderful organ and ornately carved choir stalls and huge colourful stained glass windows.

The choir is busy rehearsing to the accompaniment of the huge organ. Fascinating to watch a choirmaster with perfect pitch able to sing any part at will. He says. "Let's do the Gloria." At the end he jokes. "That was alright but unfortunately not ALL RIGHT." They laugh and do it again.

Tullie House museum has much detail about the city and its history. One memorable fact. The Roman Empire had 10% of its military manpower in Britain covering just 3% of its territory. So we have been giving Europe problems for at least two thousand years. I look for the Pre-Raphaelite paintings reputed to be there but I am told they have been sent to Japan for an art show. In a swap, they have been replaced by Japanese woodcuts.

I walk the side streets and find a nice looking small restaurant and book for the evening. An appropriate end to a Thursday afternoon which although wet and windy has been most enjoyable.