



Kilchiaran Bay, Rhinns of Islay

Angus, his companions and crew passed several agreeable days with the Macleans under mostly fair skies before taking up their journey.

This time they sailed south to the Isle of Colonsay that lay north of Islay. Colonsay was home to the red-haired Macduffies, who were held in high esteem by Angus' father. As the recordkeepers for the Macdonalds, they always attended the Council meetings, but Angus still thought it appropriate to let their chief know where things stood on the quest for the crown.

Malcolm Macduffie had long led his clan, the gray in his red hair a testament to his age. He greeted them warmly with his son, Gilchrist, who was a few years older than Angus. "It has been awhile, Angus," said the Macduffie chief.

"Aye. Duncan and I have been at Dunaverty; only John here has been with my father at Ardtornish."

Inside the keep, the Macduffie chief invited them to sit. "Tell us what brings you to our isle."

"Scotland's future and who will wear the crown."

"There are many Scots who would be king," said Gilchrist, his dark amber eyes hinting of his amusement. "But, to my way of thinking, King Edward manipulates the choosing of our king for his own purposes."

The Macduffie chief nodded.

"My father would invite you to a Council meeting just before Michaelmas."

"Aye," said the Macduffie chief, "we will gladly attend. And whatever the Council decides, we will stand with the Macdonalds." Angus was not surprised to hear this as the Macduffies had ever been loyal to his family.

"We are grateful for your support for the waters into which the lordship is sailing are dangerous."

At the chief's invitation, they stayed a few days on the isle. His son, Gilchrist, joined them on their excursions. One afternoon, they walked across the tidal strait to visit the small isle of Oronsay where there was a monastery established by St. Oran. Angus enjoyed Gilchrist's company, for he

was full of information about the isles that were his home. Above that, the son of Colonsay's chief was good fun.

"The walk is worth it, no?" asked Gilchrist.

Angus gazed at the ancient priory rising from the grassy mound overlooking the blue sea. "Aye. My father spoke of it but I have not been here before."

"Columba stopped here on his way to Iona," said Gilchrist. "For that reason alone, it is worthy of your visit."

They returned to Colonsay and, like the quiet before a storm, the wide golden beaches, heather-covered hills and light breezes lulled Angus to linger. He walked the beach alone early each morning, inhaling deeply of the scent of salt, fish and kelp. At those times, he thought of the future and what role he might have in the lordship. Certain that difficult years lay ahead, he vowed to support his father and elder brother. And, if there came a time when he could take up arms with his friend Robert Bruce, he would hasten to do so.

At night, he often laid on the sand, his hands behind his head, looking up at the sky where thousands of stars twinkled from the black canopy. The sound of the sea lapping at the shore was so familiar to him at times he forgot it altogether. But on Colonsay, he remembered.

Though he could have stayed longer, they had to move on. Bidding goodbye to the Macduffies, Angus and his companions sailed to Islay where Angus intended to visit Alex and his new bride. Beneath a blue sky, the winds picked up as they neared the coast, and he remembered the task his father had given him.

"First, I must pay a visit to Donald Mackay, the old seer my father asked me to visit. He lives on the Rhinns on the west side of the isle."

Angus was to regret finding Mackay at home. The brooding, dark-haired seer with the wizened face was kind enough, inviting them into his cottage set near the large hillfort. There, he lived with an old servant and a great rough-coated hound that Angus thought a handsome beast.

Once Mackay realized they were Macdonalds sent by the Lord of the Isles, he asked no questions. Instead, he invited them to sit and offered them ale, dispatching his servant to offer some to Angus' crew. "I am not surprised Angus Mor has sent you, young Angus, for a cloud hangs over the land and the winds of change are blowing. A wise leader, such as your father, would sense it."

"Do you have words for my father then?" Angus asked, not sure he wanted to hear them for the seer wore a dark expression.

"Aye. There are words I would speak." Mackay paused for a long moment before staring straight ahead, seeing what, Angus could not say.

The old man then began to speak in a quavering voice, drifting into a trance. "A king will rule with uneasy scepter. Scotland will be imperiled as chief attacks chief. Treachery will abound as ancient conflicts are renewed and a foreign ruler will slaughter many. Two chiefs will die before a new one rises with a new king. Only then will Scotland know peace."

The seer's words left Angus stunned. What could it mean but chaos and death?

They did not stay long after that but thanked Mackay and, being assured they would see him at the Council meeting, quickly departed.

“Good Christ,” said Duncan, as they climbed aboard the galley. “What a gloomy vision.”

“Aye,” said Angus. “Mackay paints a dark picture, one I will never forget and which I am loath to share with my father.”

“I would not tell him,” put in John. “The warning of the chiefs’ deaths might make Father ill.”

True though that might be, Angus knew he could not withhold the seer’s vision even though it predicted woe. “I must. After all, Father sent me to the seer and surely knew he might speak of sad tidings.”

Duncan shrugged. “Aye. Mayhap Angus Mor knows all too well what lies in store for the lordship.”