



AGATHA



THE WIND IS ON MY NOSE AND MY EYES STING. I brought two cloaks today because I am clever. I pull them together with my hands. The tops of my fingers are numb but I don't mind because it is my job and it is an important one.

I look at the sea. The waves are chopping up and down. Sometimes I follow a wave from as far away as I can see, all the way to where I am. I look at it and keep my eyes on it and try not to let it out of my eyes when it comes close and more close until it crashes. It is a hard thing to do and I am good at it.

When I was only young I wanted to go on the sea so much. I asked the Anglers and the Seals lots of times to take me on their boats but they wouldn't. They shoved me away and called me a "good-for-nothing nuisance", which is rude. I made the plan to do it myself and climbed up the wall when no one was looking and

down the other side. It was a hard thing to do but easy for me because I'm good at climbing. The waves went on my legs and my face and I laughed because I liked it and it tasted like soup. Then a bigger wave came and I couldn't hold on any more and I fell. I could have drowned but one of the Hawks saw me and my arms splashing. "You stupid girl," he said when he pulled me out. "You stupid, stupid girl." I'm more clever now and I wouldn't do it again.

After it happened I didn't want to go on the boats any more. I stayed inside the enclave and didn't look at the sea until they gave me my *dreuchd*. I was very happy that day because they made me a Hawk, which is my duty and an important one. One day I will save someone from drowning too like when the Hawk saved me.

"You look cold."

It is Lenox who says that, who is another Hawk. "Go into the turret and warm up. I lit a fire," he says as well. His eyebrows go scrunchy when he talks. They are big ones and black.

"I don't— want to," I say and I shake my head. I don't like going in the turret because when I'm inside I'm not looking at the sea which is what I should be doing.

"Go on, little girl, it's for your own good," he says, and he pushes me on my back. I hate it when he calls me "little girl" because I am not a little girl. I am fifteen so he shouldn't call me that. I do a big frown so he sees it.

When I am in the turret, I kick the fire because I don't want to be there and bits of it fly up to the walls. It's a

small room in a circle. I should not have kicked the fire. Now it might go out, which would be bad. I scrape the bits with my shoe and add some more sticks to make it big again. Even though I didn't want to come, it is nice to be hot and I move my fingers which is nice as well. I undo my first cloak and the other one underneath so I can reach the pocket on my top where Milkwort is. He is warm which is good because I was worried he would be cold. I put him next to the fire because he likes it there. In my trousers is some bread that I saved. I give some to him and keep some for later. He thanks me and eats it while looking at the fire.

"Don't get too close," I warn him.

Milkwort is my friend and a vole and a secret. No one knows about him. Except Maistreas Eilionoir. I don't know how she found out. She is old and knows everything. When she found out she pulled me into her bothan and told me to get rid of him.

"You could be severely punished for this," she said. She was holding on to my arm tight and it hurt a lot even though she is old and her hands are small.

"I know," I said, and I tried to pull my arm away. People think that I'm stupid but I'm not stupid.

"Get rid of it. Before someone finds out who isn't as forgiving as I am." She let go of my arm and I rubbed it and then I left.

"All right, Aggie, my turn."

The voice is a surprise to me. I must have been staring at the fire for longer than I thought. It is Flora who is

there and it is her turn to come in. I am in panic because she may have seen Milkwort. My eyes look to where he was. He's not there.

"I need to do up my cl- cloaks. Give me one— one moment, will you?"

"Of course."

It is lucky that Flora turns away so I can search for Milkwort without her seeing. I want to call for him, but Flora will hear me if I do that, so I only do it in my head. Talking to animals is not *dùth* which means you shouldn't do it. He is nowhere by the fire and there is nothing for him to hide behind. He wouldn't have run away. He would never leave me. Then I spot him in a gap between the stones in the wall. It was clever for him to go there. I hold out my hand. He jumps onto my arm and behind my neck and into the pocket again. That was close. I do up my cloaks the quickest possible.

"I'm done," I say to Flora.

"Thanks," she says, and she smiles and comes in and I go back onto the wall.

I like Flora because she is nice. She's my friend. She is a girl like me but her hair is light brown and she is taller. When she was made a Hawk I helped by telling her all the things you have to do to be a good Hawk, like how to tell the difference between a dolphin and a deathfin and the best way to spear a spider crab and what the five chimes mean and how to ring them properly. I am good at helping.

The sea is a grey colour today with only a bit of white.

It looks like broken rocks. When I am looking I have to do walking as well. Otherwise the blood will freeze inside you. That is what Lenox says.

It is one hundred and seventeen steps to walk along this part of the wall which I know because I counted them. I can walk it without looking at my feet which is good because it means I can look at the sea the whole time and don't miss a single thing. When I reach the other side I turn and walk back and then back again the other way the whole day.

Behind me is the enclave. That is where we all live, which is Clann-a-Tuath, which is my clan. It is the best one. There are other clans but they are far away on the other parts of the island. I can't even see them from the wall. That is because Skye is a big island. We are on the north part. Inside our enclave are lots of bothans made of stone which is where we sleep, and a big wall all the way around which means we can see everything that's all around us. Some people might want to come into our enclave but they are not allowed which is why I have to do the looking on the wall to stop them if they try.

It is getting darker now. You have to look more hard when it is darker because it is not so easy. There is something there, on the sea. I saw it because I looked so well. It is far away and it is small but I think it will be a boat. I keep it in my eyes until it is a little bit closer and then I know that yes, it is a boat. I do not know who is in it. Maybe it is a Seal boat coming back. That would be good.

I walk to the turret and keep looking at the boat still. All of the turrets have a set of chimes outside them so we can do warnings and send messages with the sounds. I pick up the hammer and am going to hit the First once at the top which means I can see a boat and it is people but I can't see who it is yet, but the sound comes out before my hammer hits the metal. It makes me jump because I am not expecting it and I am confused how it made a sound without me hitting it first. Then I know that the sound didn't come from my chime. It came from a different chime, from one of the other turrets, and was hit by someone else. It is confusing in my head because I was expecting one sound and then I heard a different one so it is hard to remember what it was I heard. It could have been the Second but no, I think it was the Fourth. That is very not good. The Fourth is for danger and two hits at the top means it is a ship and it is going to attack. My heart is going fast. When you hear the Fourth the most important thing is that you have to act quickly. If you don't then people could die because it is serious. I look in the turret but there is no one there and I can't see anyone further on the wall either. Who was it that hit the chime? I look back at the sea. The boat is coming in fast now and I am the only one who can stop it. I have to stop it. It is my duty and important and I have to protect my clan.

I run to the launcher and wind back the claw until it clicks. The arrow is already inside. It is a big one and a metal one. I've got the flint in my belt because we always

have to have it. I take it out and try to light the moss on the arrow, but it won't do it because it's all wet from when it was raining. I shake my head and tear the moss off and throw it in the sea. I need something else. I look up and it makes me yell because I see how close the boat has got. Think, think, I need to think. Then I know what to do.

I kick off my boot and take off my sock quickly so quickly. I tie the sock to the end of the arrow with one knot and then two knots so it won't come loose. It is a clever plan. The sock is hard to light because you have to hit the flint so fast. My hands are all shaking. I try to do it lots of times and then I do it. The fire goes all big because of the animal fat on the arrow. In my eye there is someone and it is Lenox on the wall far away. He is waving at me to go faster. He knows how fast I need to be because the boat is so close now. I slide the launcher over, making the middle of the boat line up with the tip of the arrow like I was taught.

"Agatha, no!" Lenox's shout is an echo, but my finger has already pressed the trigger. Why did he tell me no?

The arrow goes up into the sky. The boat is more close now so I can see the people inside. That's strange. I squint my eyes because what I see isn't right. I can see their faces and it's not right because I know them.

It means the boat is one of ours. I have done a terrible mistake.