

Scottish Seas

Douglas M. Jones

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Douglas Jones, *Scottish Seas*

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For Mac —
Douglas McIntosh Jones IV

*Vita tua
risu et vino bono impleatur
dum possides
portas inimicorum Christi*

Other children's books by Douglas Jones:

Huguenot Garden

1-885767-21-X

A children's story of the daily adventurous episodes in the lives of Renée and Albret Martineau, young twin sisters in a seventeenth-century, French Protestant Family.

The episodes follow the twins and the rest of the Martineau family as they work, worship, commune, and suffer persecution together.

The story aims to portray the ideas and historical details common to Huguenot life in La Rochelle, France, 1685, a tragic year whose final quarter brought the full wrath of Louis XIV.

Dutch Color

1-885767-65-X

Amid the golden era of Dutch art, Clara has a passion for painting and life. But the two don't always mix. Her father is long overdue from Italy with the latest paint recipes, but lies, famous art, rare tulips, and sugary girls crowd Clara's search for her father. Someone knows where he might be, but it will cost more than Clara's talents to find out.

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Sabbath Fears

From around the corner of the thatched cottage, a skinny, naked, four-year-old boy carefully watched and waited. The boy preferred being naked, and he removed his clothes at every opportunity. He stood motionless on the pile of his crumpled clothes. At the twilight of every Sabbath, this son—this Mac—would watch as his father and older brothers walked across the plain to the edge of the red cliffs overlooking the sea. Mac didn't know what they did there for so long, but he never took his eyes off them.

The door to the cottage scraped open, and through the warm light from inside stepped Father and the two brothers, Willie and Sy, aged eight and seven. Father knew where to find Mac. He turned and looked at Mac's eye peering around the corner. He spoke above the noise of the wind.

"So Mac, will you be going with us to the cliffs?" asked Father. The older brothers glanced at each other.

"He's still afraid," said Willie.

"Quiet, Willie," said Father.

Father waited for an answer from Mac. He stepped out from behind the cottage corner.

"No, Father. I want to stay here."

"So be it," said Father, already turning. And the three walked toward the cliffs, across the sloping plain of deep green grass, that special green that you can only find in Scotland.

Mac knew all about that sea. He knew that it wanted to gather into a green-blue fist and smash him on the cliffs. He knew that if he stood along the cliffs, the sea would stretch out its fingers and pull him deep, deep, down forever. After all, the sea had no bottom at all. It was like the sky, only going the other way. Mac had heard once how the sea had swallowed one of the Queen's large, wooden ships. The sea had snapped the giant masts like thin twigs.

During the day with his two older brothers, Mac had often visited the quiet, sun-wrinkled fishermen in the nearby fishing village. Of course, Mac thought, fishermen had to be crazy to want to go to sea. Unlike others, Mac was not surprised when a local fisherman never returned from the sea. But nobody bothered to ask Mac.

For a long while that spring twilight of 1707, Father, Willie, and Sy stood silently on the edge of the cliff and stared out over the darkening sea. Some seagulls and puffins circled over them. The wind, mixed with sea spray, blew Father's thin, gray hair back fiercely. He leaned into the wind slightly. He bowed his head and stared at the sea and breathed in the sharp wind. It filled his lungs. Willie and Sy stood side by side with their arms folded loosely across their chests. Mac could see the three of them talking to each other, nodding, gesturing, laughing.

When darkness had finally crowded out the sunlight, Father and brothers returned to the cottage. Mac remained outside, though he could hear laughing from inside. He leaned his ear against the side of the cottage to protect it from the wind. He stared back at the cliff where Father had been.

The cottage door dragged open and closed again quickly. Father stepped out in front and stared northward. Mac moved his naked body back behind the corner of the cottage. Neither of them moved for a long while. Father looked down and with a quick breath started walking toward Mac and then passed right by him without a word.

Mac turned and wanted to say something, but his father went by too quickly. Over the wind, Mac finally shouted, "Father!"

His father stopped and turned and stared at Mac.

"Father," Mac started again. "Will you wrestle with me?" he shouted.

"Not now, son," Father said quickly, with his gravelly voice, and he walked away. Over his shoulder, Father said, "It is time to tend the animals." And instantly, he was gone from Mac's sight, around the back of the cottage to the door of the stable.

The cottage was much like other tenant farmer cottages of that time, a long rectangle. Its walls were made of flat, stacked stones, filled between with peat and mortar. The angled, thatched roof covered the entire rectangle of four walls, and from the outside it looked as if it held a single large room. But inside, it was divided in half – one half for the family to live and cook in, and the other half for the animal stable. The family had two oxen, one named Boat, the other named Gawp, along with a small, chubby, black horse named Thunder.

Of all the farmers in that group of cottages, only Mac's family – the Aytons – had a horse. It had been a special gift from the landowner – the laird – the Earl of Northesk, whose land Father and the others

farmed. As Mac remembered it, the Earl had given Agnes, Mac's sister, the horse for when she married. The laird had done this, as Mac remembered it, because Father had defended the Earl against twelve attackers with giant swords. In truth, it had been only one attacker with a club.

Most of the families living in this circle of cottages were also named Ayton. They were cousins, uncles, and aunts from various lines. They all lived just up the slope from the fishing village, Auchmithie, which rested on the eastern edge of Scotland. The village itself sat on the cliffs, overlooking what was then called the German Sea and later called the North Sea, that often fierce, gray blast of churning water and wind. For the past thirty years, thieves and bandits – called reivers – had been a regular menace in that area, so the tenant farmers would build their cottages in a wide circle, the better to join together in defense against reivers.

Mac heard Father swing open the stable doors at the back of the cottage. The boy picked at some peat on the cottage wall and then skipped away in a big circle in front of the cottage. Mac rarely just walked, and he did not truly skip; it was more of a swift, stiff-legged, forward hop which he had proudly perfected by himself.

He hopped-skipped over to the door, and laughter jumped out from the room when he strained the door open, letting some of the inside glow escape out into the darkening evening. Willie and Sy sat on Grandfather's knees. His sister, Agnes, the eldest child at eighteen, sat beside Grandfather, leaning lightly against him. Mother stood against the far wall, scrub-

bing a black pot while listening. Grandfather wore a thick brown patch over his left eye, an eye he had lost in battle, but his one good eye danced through another story. His voice sometimes slowed and then would run; first high and then deep. His hands would mold his characters in the air. Sometimes the children would sit in captivated silence, their minds locked fast onto the story. Sometimes their silence would break into shouts or groans or laughter on the floor.

Mac ran over to join in. He started to push Sy off Grandfather's knee, but with a "Weesht, laddie" and a glare, Grandfather pinched Mac's stomach and pulled him around to his side. Mac rubbed his stomach. Grandfather's stories went on for quite a while, but they always seemed too short. Mac just caught the end of this one.

Grandfather spoke slowly, saying, "...A quiet voice then told that boy to blow the horn a *third* time. He set down his torch but could still see the three warrior shadows at the back of the cave. They kept staring at him but didn't move." Grandfather looked at each child, continuing, "The boy lifted the end of the giant horn again to his lips and blew. The three ancient traitors now rose and moved toward him. The boy couldn't breathe for fright. He stood frozen, then dropped the horn and ran out of the cave through the open doors. Then he turned around and pushed and pushed the big wooden doors closed over the cave and turned the key in the lock. As he ran from the cave, he could hear the warriors pounding on the doors from inside, yelling, 'You have left us worse than before!' The boy kept running, and when he came to the top of the cliff, with all his strength, he

threw that wicked key into the ocean.” Grandfather paused and coughed a deep cough. “But it didn’t reach the water. . . it bounced down the cliff and fell in front of that same old woman mending nets – the village *witch*. The boy yelled in despair, and the old woman screamed with delight at finding her key again. She picked up the key and headed straight for that high cave. She *had* to open those doors. But the boy reached the cave before she could, and when she arrived they wrestled over the key as they moved along the edge of the cliff. He finally wrenched it from her hands and started pounding the key with a rock, destroying its shape. The village hag screamed and jumped on his back. As the boy tried to wrestle her off, they slipped, she lost her grip, and fell backwards, down, down, down the cliff, crashing in to the water and rocks below. The boy had won. He was breathing hard, but he still pounded that key into tiny bits and then threw the bits down into the sea.”

When Grandfather finished, the boys cheered. Then Mac asked, “What happened to the key?”

“The boy smashed it!” said Sy.

“Why? I like keys,” said Mac.

Willie frowned. “But that key would have let the evil warriors free again,” said Willie.

Mac looked down, still standing there naked as an apple. “But I’ve never had a key. I would like to have that key,” said Mac. The other boys groaned.

“Easy now, easy,” said Grandfather to the older boys.

Mother pointed at Mac and then pointed outside. “Young Mac, would you mind keeping our company with your clothes on? You’re not one of those high-

land savages now, are you? Go fetch your clothes in from outside and then put on your nightshirt.”

Mac stood right up. From the corner of this eye, Mac could see his father through the thick wooden gate that divided the cottage. Father was sitting with the oxen and horse. Mac hop-skipped outside as ordered. The other children giggled as he left.

When he returned, Mac had not only put on all his clothes, but he now wore a long stick in his cloth belt and a thick strip of moss on his head.

“And what is all this?” asked Grandfather.

“Sword and helmet,” said Mac.

“I guessed that,” said Grandfather.

“I can make a face like a lion,” Mac added, and he contorted his face to do just that.

“That looks like a monkey,” said Sy.

“Like a dead fish,” said Willie.

Mac stopped contorting and stared at them as if they were the strange ones.

Mac then shouted, “Lions eat soldiers! Lions eat soldiers! Lions eat water!” as he hop-skipped around Grandfather’s chair. Grandfather shook his head slowly.

“Margaret, dear,” started Grandfather, catching Mother’s attention. “You’ve given me some very odd grandchildren, I must say.”

Mother dropped her head crookedly, looking at Grandfather though arched eyebrows. “Don’t try to deny it now, Grandfather. You know that all that strange blood came right through you – through the Aytons.”

“No, Margaret dear.” Grandfather cleared his throat and explained slowly, “I’m quite sure that far

back your side got married to some screeching highlanders who couldn't even read their names. Aytons could never scream like these children here."

The boys all yelled and pulled on Grandfather.

"I give up!" yelled Grandfather, raising his hands, coughing hard. The boys barreled their heads into his stomach.

"See," he called to Mother between lunges. "Just like cowardly highlanders to punish an unarmed man who is surrendering." Then he started pinching all three boys very hard – legs, necks, stomachs, ears. Soon they were all trying to get away from the pain.

"No Grandfather!" shouted Sy and Willie whose ears were caught mercilessly in Grandfather's grip. "No pinching!" they shouted. Slowly Willie crumpled to his knees.

"Ah, now you cry like little girls, do you?" said Grandfather. "That'll teach you to go after an unarmed man."

"Lions eat Grandfathers!" shouted Mac, who was trapped between Grandfather's knees.

Grandfather pushed his nose down to Mac's. "Grandfathers pinch lions!" shouted Grandfather. And soon Mac was writhing and laughing on the floor under a dozen pinches.

Grandfather released his pinches and rested. All three boys immediately wrestled for his bald head, and in the tussle one of the boys knocked the patch off Grandfather's eye. They had never done that before. They stood frozen, not knowing what to do. Grandfather didn't move. His smile fell. They stared at the small, twisted hole that the patch had covered. They couldn't speak. No one breathed.

Grandfather froze for a moment, then lunged at them with an animal growl, and all the boys recoiled from that eye and fell backward. Grandfather slapped his knees and laughed and laughed. He put his patch back on and rose slowly to his feet.

Agnes, who had quickly scooted away during the battle, smiled at him. Grandfather approached her with his arm held level for her to grasp.

“My princess,” said Grandfather, “I have once again successfully fought off those wicked reivers who threatened you.”

“Thank you, kind sir,” said Agnes, taking his arm. “But I’m not so sure I can tell who was the crazy savage in that battle,” Agnes said with a curtsy. Grandfather stared at her wide-eyed.

Several hours later, life had slowed down in the cottage as night hung over everything. Inside was quiet, except for the long snores coming from Grandfather’s corner, where he slept on a blanket and straw. The three brothers slept in a bed that had tall legs that also held up part of the roof. Under their bed was part of the kitchen and Agnes’s sleeping box. Mother and Father slept in a bed against the other wall, a bed surrounded by a coarse curtain. But Father wasn’t there at the moment. He still sat in the stable next to Thunder the horse and smoked his pipe in silence. As he smoked and meditated, he stroked Thunder gently. Father looked up when he heard a short shout coming from the boys’ bed. Soon he heard blankets and straw rustling as Mac climbed down from the bed. Rubbing his eyes, Mac walked toward Father’s smoke.

Mac stood by Thunder. "Father, what are you doing?" Father sat silent for a moment.

"Did you have a fright, son?" asked Father.

Mac nodded and looked down. His eyes started to well up with tears. Father pulled him onto his lap.

"Was it about that key?" asked Father.

Mac shook his head no.

"Was it about the sea?" Mac shook his head no again.

"The witch," said Mac. "I was visiting the fishermen and a witch stared at me. She slapped me with a fish and then she took her pipe and poked me in the stomach."

"Och, that's not very frightening," said Father with a scowl. "Why would you cry about that?"

"Then she stared at me and made me float up in the air and then she made me float into some big waves and I went under the sea."

"Ah, now *that* could be a little frightening," said Father, "I can see that. That's certainly worse than being slapped with a fish and poked in the stomach."

Mac asked, "Is there a witch in the fishing village?"

Father took a draw on his pipe and sat back. "Aye, probably," said Father, as if he were just talking about the weather. Mac's eyes widened. "The fisher folk are very superstitious."

"What's 'sishus'?" asked Mac.

"That means some of them believe that magic and not Christ rules the world. Some of them think rocks and trees and words are alive with evil spirits. You know, they think it's evil to call some animals by their names. They won't call pigs, *pigs*, or rats, *rats*, or salmon, *salmon*. And they think it's very bad to step