

ROSENHART

BY

A. ROZ MAR

Book I
'The Sight'

“...they are truly wise. Fettered no more by selfish attachments, they are neither elated by good fortune nor depressed by bad. Such are the seers.”

the Bhagavad Gita

CHAPTER 1

He rode alone, a dark rider gone from his post for over five years. It rained all that first day in the high country across the North Sea where the cold winds were blowing down from the northwest when he left Lothian after spending the past year with Master Hutger. His black horse Calidus halted, sensing the rider's wish to stop, as horse and man were one. The dark green cape blew in a great arc, fluttering the furs beneath which kept him warm as he turned back down the trail by which they had come and took another path he had spied earlier leading to a copse in the wildwood. The whistling wind ushered them toward the shelter of oak and pines where they rested for the night.

He was crossing the northern lands of Scotland from east to west. In between were woodlands and heather strewn moors, scattered huts, sheep grazing amid boulders, and singular *menhir* standing stones. Sometimes the massive stones were in a row, sometimes one stood alone, and sometimes they were in a circle *henge*, or felled over haphazardly. He had taken refuge at the occasional inn when he found one, but more often he inquired to stay in a stable or floor with some local farmer scratching out a living in this harsh landscape, for he preferred to share coin with those most in need.

Although it was in the early spring of the year that he was traveling, it seemed that in this country it got colder as the season progressed, not warmer. Crossing south of the wall of Antonine, he continued thus in a southwest fashion until the scent of salt air became stronger and he knew he was where he needed to be, beside the sea. Further on the horseman came to a precipice of high cliffs with the sea below and scattered islands beyond. Squawking birds danced in the wind and waves embraced the coast. To his left he could see a settlement he believed to be Carlisle where he hoped to find lodging. He spent the night in the town then continued the trek southward the next day.

He rode through a wood dense with fallen leaf and pine needle. It was the second day after leaving Carlisle. The man discovered that if he did not travel too close to the sea it was less barren and better was the chance of finding shelter. He followed a forested ridge aside a narrow valley when he saw an opening through fairly open trees with a deer trod worn through it. Instinctively he followed it. The way climbed through high fern and bracken, thorn bushes, and crowds of tree trunks. Overhead, gusts of wind reverberated down through the canopy of alder, blackthorn, pine, and holly until the trail leveled,

widened a bit, and became rocky. The track went on for a spell then narrowed, ending at a grove of pines and large boulders below a crag to his right. Alighting, he tied his mount to one of the long low-hanging pine branches that reached across the trail. Lifting and then ducking beneath, he found on the other side massive moss bound boulders obscured by an overgrowth of hazel and wild laurel. There was an overhang of a boulder that served as a roof, where within its shelter lay old dry bracken placed around a small ring of blackened stones where once a fire had burned. Feeling that the place might be occupied, for a minute or so he waited and listened, but heard only the muted sounds of the forest. It will do, he thought.

He whistled a call then unsaddled Calidus. Placing the saddle on a small boulder he removed his bedding. Searching the night sky, which was turning a dusky cobalt blue, the first star appeared. It was good to see the night so clear after so many days of gray and rain. Whistling again while gathering kindling to start a fire he spoke aloud. "I know you are there." He turned to find the great horned owl perched atop the saddle. Silently the bird had glided home which was wherever the man rested or resided. He held out his arm and the owl slid onto it in a soft rush of feathers. She was beautiful with large eyes and a gentle face surrounded by gold, white, brown, and black feathers.

"Mira," said the knight and touched her beak. She rubbed her head against his hand and made a peculiar vocal 'prrrr' like that of a cat, which always amused him. Calidus snorted, so he went to the horse. "You too my friend," and moved his shoulder into the neck of the beast rubbing his withers. They were companions of long standing, horse, owl, and man, but there was also another. He put the owl back on the saddle, threw down fodder for the horse, then searched above him and whistled.

In a rapid burst a falcon landed on the highest boulder. He could just make out its light coloured feathers in the twilight. The bird's name was Merlinus. He had named him thus because of his powers to survive, for it had been a miracle and also because the bird had an uncanny ability to arrive at his master's destination before he knew himself where he was going. Merlinus was just a hatchling when, as a boy of nine, he had found him struggling among fallen leaves below a great oak tree. At first he had climbed the oak and put it back in its nest but the following day he once again found the baby bird on the ground. He took it upon himself to nurse and raise the falcon and they remained

companions ever since. The falcon's feathers were blue black and silvery white. The proud bird was not as friendly as the owl but he was fiercely loyal. The man did not realize that the falcon had been willing itself to live beyond its years just for him, its master, for they had been together a long time.

The sound of the horse munching on fodder had his ear, and then he heard another sound like that of tinkling glass. Following it to the other side of the boulders he discovered the noise came from beneath a mound of leaves. Clearing away the dank leaves revealed a crisscrossing of small branches neatly placed there by human hands. Removing them, he found a stone basin worn down by water that was filling from a spring and trickling to the ground. Small stones and pebbles were at the bottom of clear water so he cupped his hands and took a drink, finding it fresh and sweet. Then he saw that half buried amongst the pebbles was a copper coin. He looked around him more cautiously; the coin confirming now that this was indeed someone's secret hideaway, for it also meant that whoever it was had placed it there was a man of means who saw fit to honor the gods while affording alms to the wild ones. There were always hill dwellers who kept to the forests and caves wary of folk. He searched the tree lined crag below the ridge but sensed he was alone. Who knew what ancient god long forgotten was still worshiped in the hidden places such as this. He dug in his pocket and dropped a coin into the bowl, then taking a wine flask from his saddle he poured some on the ground in front of the spring as an offering to the god as was commonly done on the continent. "In gratefulness for all living things," was his whispered salutation.

He placed Calidus before the basin to drink then set about lighting a fire. Squatting before the ring of fire stones preparing the kindling, he felt a cool draught like a cold hand come over his shoulder. "What's this?" Using the cool air to guide him, he discovered a cave further inside the roofed shelter. He entered and within a few paces he felt something crunch beneath his foot, but it was too dark to see anything. Backing out, he would wait to search further with a torch in hand. Quickly he made the fire and a torch and returned to the cave.

First he found his own footsteps in the dust that led to a smashed pile of kindling just inside the opening crushed earlier by his own foot. The light exposed a fairly large room where he could stand fully upright. He held the torch high. There was a rugged chair and

a chest in front of a small hearth that had been carved into the rock. Against a side wall was a thick bed of straw on a pallet with a well worn but dusty wool coverlet neatly spread atop of it. A basket near the bed held many scroll books. Along the far wall was a string hung with dried dusty herbs. "A scholars cave," his voice carried upward into the hollow of the cave in a distinct echo.

Eyeing the scrolls he felt that there was more to this place to discover but something held him back from exploring it further. Though he wanted to see what the books were about, he resisted, feeling that the time was not right. Whoever it was that long ago lived here, or maybe lived here still, he wished to respect. Perhaps the god would one day let him return. For now he was grateful to have discovered it, knowing there was a reason that he had come upon this place. If he was meant to return he would be guided back.

The journey to this country had begun because of a long forgotten memory and a prophetic dream he'd had which so disturbed him that he quit his post with the suzerain of the Counts of Blois at Touraine over five years ago. He had set out for a place he knew only through legend that was handed down from his mother and long ago line of Celtic fathers before her who were of the family Turone. It was this string of occurrences that led him to Master Gules and then Lothian where his master, Francis Hutger, dispatched him on the journey he was now taking.

Lying on his side upon the makeshift bed of bracken watching the fire, he brought to mind the memory of what had come to pass. "Ooh ah ooh" chimed Mira, letting him know that all was well. She stood watch from a tree above where he had placed the saddle; a saddle stamped with the mark of the dove, for he had been accepted into a secret brotherhood and this was its symbol. Master Gules, his spiritual guide and teacher, had chosen him to become a Knight of the Turtledove. After years in apprenticeship with him, he was sent to Master Hutger. The knight had reached a time of life when the sum of wisdom that is earned through experiences within the spirals of time becomes a force within a soul that is ready to transform. The gift of clairvoyance was granted him as a young boy, which meant that he was granted the way of initiation. To be initiated meant that one's life was destined for knowing the higher mysteries of existence; when the soul is purified, and the spirit leads the way, and life's experiences reveal truths of wisdom more important than knowledge. It also meant that when the soul and spirit are ennobled

through one's own efforts, something that is possible for every human being, physical aging is delayed; for an ennobled soul is an ageless soul. One truth he had come to know was that men of the past did more with less than men of the present who have more but accomplish less toward what is meaningful. If a man thinks only of what he can achieve alone he blocks all paths to knowledge, for he fails to understand the spirit in all living things and the communion possible with the spiritual world.

He placed the prophecy dream before his soul and recalled that it had begun with the dazzling colours of yellow and blue. It is warm and the sun is shining brightly. There are temples of immense size unheard of on the continent; larger than a cathedral or a lord's castle. There is a woman in the dream who has long dark hair with hues of gold from the sun. She wears a white chemise like shirt with an animal skin around her waist exposing her tan legs and bare feet. She carries a bow and quiver slung over her shoulder. With a knife in one hand and corn stalks cradled in her arm, she walks up a sandy mound above a turquoise sea. The image fades then Mira, his owl, appears rapidly flying low before him, her feathers changing to pure white. Following her he gallops on his horse at full speed to keep pace when lo` there on the horizon is a ship with full sails. He stops in time to keep from falling off a cliff and onto the rocks and tumultuous seas below. Across the cliff is another summit where there is a high granite stone temple and steep stairs leading to the top. He reaches for it and falls over the cliff. While falling he knows he will survive and not die but he will feel the pain and live the waking death that is life. The vision fades, and abruptly he awakens in the grip of grief and sorrow, but also with a sense of having conquered something.

It was a vivid dream and he knew in his heart that he was shown something of importance. He shared it with Master Gules, who was quite pleased, and who identified the vision as indeed one of truth and prophecy that revealed a long awaited piece of a larger puzzle that had been needed for a quest that could now begin. The years of tutoring, together with the sight that he already possessed, earned him esoteric knighthood. After four years Master Gules had bestowed upon him the honor of becoming one of his "chosen" sons, and then instructed him to go to Lothian to find Master Hutger so to further his tutoring. At the end of a year with Master Hutger he was initiated into a fellowship called the Knights of the Turtledove. He was to be received by

five noblemen who had been patiently waiting for their sixth man to join them so to enter upon the long awaited quest of acquiring sacred knowledge and securing it for the future of mankind.

The hiss of the fire brought his thoughts back to the present. The opening outside the cave where he had set the fire offered rest, warmth, and a guardian; the pagan god of the spring. He added another piece of wood to the glowing embers, pulled his cloak close around him, and fell asleep knowing that whatever was to come would be made known by the divine world and destiny.

CHAPTER 2

The next day dawned early. The sun's rays, which had found their way through the trees, reflected a rippling light off the sacred pool of water and onto the overhanging roof of the cave opening and woke him. Lacey patterns of shadow and light filtered down onto the ground. The gentle coo of turtledoves in the midst of the trill and chirp of wild birds gave a peaceful feel to the morning. Tall grasses that grew meagerly between the trees were gray with frosty rime, giving it a ghostly haze that evaporated into mist as the air warmed. He washed in the chill water of the basin and gathered his belongings. Feeding Calidus then himself, he prepared for the journey ahead. The owl was nowhere in sight but above, past the treetops, Merlinus circled three times then disappeared. About to mount his horse he was reminded of the sacred spring. Replacing the sticks and leaves as he found them he thanked the god for his safekeeping and left.

They took the deer track out of the forest and headed southwest. Soon they were confronted by ocean winds that blew in gusts. He crossed flat, sandy ground, past crashing waves where the wind erased his tracks as quickly as they had been made. There were trails running narrowly through thick wild brambles and crowded woods of pine, hawthorn, oak, and laurel. Taking one of these, he found that the frost still lingered in the shadowy places on the ground. It crunched beneath the horse's hoofs and once in the woods, it was slow going. And thus they took rest twice during the day.

When out of the forest they had to stumble their way across a rough patch of scree which had tumbled down from the ridge they had been traveling on. The loosened rock had almost completely blocked the trail. But he could see that beyond the obstruction the

pass wound down through larger rocks and boulders. Once they got past the rocky part of the trail, he could view a forest on the other side beyond a sandy seaway that lay in between. The descending sun shone dully and when the winds moodily becalmed, a foggy mist overtook everything and grew dense as evening drew near. The fog hung low on the ground creating the illusion of a forested island afloat on a misty sea. Wondering if he should stop and rest for the night, a white swirl of smoke caught his eye. No sooner had it appeared than it quickly disappeared, whipped away by a high breeze. He thought perhaps he was mistaken, that it was only a puff of mist. Pressing on, he again saw the white smoke trail off. This time he knew for certain that it came from within the heart of the green mass of forest ahead.

He crossed the seaway then stopped within the lee of the woods to eat the last rations of raisins, brown bread, and wine and to feed Calidus. He had always found that if one mastered patience that the thing being studied would reveal its secrets. Catching the faint scent of wood smoke, which meant a fire, he waited, and in the next moment he thought he smelled pipe weed, which meant men.

The skies began to turn a darker gray as forbidding rain threatened from the west. He knew what he had to do. As prelude to entering the forest he readied sword and bow and steadied the excitement building in his chest, then got back on his horse. The evening wind seemed to push him forward into the dense woods just as the rain began to fall and dark clouds urged the late afternoon skies prematurely into evening. Whether welcome or battle lay ahead he would soon find out.

Riding a steady pace he again smelled smoke. There followed the low rumble of thunder and he stopped to listen, but it wasn't thunder he had heard, it was the beating of a drum. The black horse shied and resisted until he dismounted. "Calm now boy, calm yourself," he whispered. He patted the horse to quiet him and then walked ahead with reins in hand, leading them toward the sound. Alert and listening intently he withdrew his sword, straining to see ahead. The drum beat stopped, then he stopped. The smell of smoke returned stronger and the drumming presumed. It was dry beneath the trees and the woods felt warm. The path began to narrow becoming only wide enough for a single rider as he moved deeper into the forest. He sensed the presence of others not too far ahead and then he saw a glimmer of light through the trees and undergrowth. The beating

of a drum and the sound of a music pipe being played drifted toward him. The light became brighter as he got closer. Peering through a thick hedge of fern and sprays of low lying pine bough, he saw before him a half circle of three older men sitting on the ground before a fire. One man smoked a pipe another drummed while the third had his eyes closed playing a clay pipe.

Sparks from the fire flew up and spiraled then dispersed toward him where he stood hidden among the fern and bracken. The one smoking his pipe looked toward him without seeing him.

“Come to the fire, friend Rosenhart,” he said.

Caught in surprise at hearing his name, he at first thought that he had only imagined it. The knight understood the language enough to recognize the words as Gaelic, but couldn't understand how the old fellow knew his name. The man who was smoking waved his hand, beckoning him to come near. With his horse in tow he moved out of the darkness and stepped into the radiant light of the fire.

Copyright 2016 A. Roz Mar