

❖ Chapter 10 ❖

All the ingredients for the scrying attempt had been gathered, and Saraid had returned with some embroidery to occupy herself while she waited, this time more comfortably in the king's bedchamber. Kelson had removed the bear rug from the floor and pushed the chairs back at Mairona's instruction. She cleared the table that had been holding their drinks and moved it with Kelson's help to the middle of the space. The white table cover was carefully draped over it to form a makeshift altar for the working, and the candle, water, salt, and scroll were placed on the table. Mairona held a blue velvet pouch containing her ward cubes in her right hand.

"Are you ready?" she smiled at Kelson.

"As ready as I shall ever be," he grinned in return. "This is very different from anything I have tried before."

"Tis probably only difference in training. The eastern tradition is more advanced than the remnants of working that remain in Gwynedd, and Halek's experimentation led to different approaches than you would find even in the east."

Mairona sat on the floor near the altar, arranging her skirts comfortably around her. Kelson sat across from her, waiting expectantly. "Now I am going to cast the wards. I am certain you have done this a thousand times."

"Actually, I do not have my own set of cubes," Kelson confessed sheepishly.

"What?" Mairona exclaimed. "That is the first working Deryni children are taught!"

"My training has been a bit, ah, unusual," Kelson told her. "Morgan and Duncan have taught me what they know, but it has been far from formal."

"And, if what I heard is correct, neither Morgan nor Duncan were fully trained themselves." She shook her head, unable to believe that a Deryni king crusading to restore the good name of his Deryni people had never erected a Wards Major.

"Well, if I ever needed Wards Major erected, there was always someone nearby," he argued. "And there is more than one way to erect wards."

"Some day there might not be anybody nearby, and the standard Wards Major is the easiest, least draining way to erect wards. Ah, well. I think I could procure you a set. You should learn how to use them." She stared at him stubbornly.

He grinned self-consciously again. "I have no objections, if you would teach me," he told her.

"And that I will, as soon as possible. You are not leaving on campaign until you are proficient with them," she told him defiantly.

"Morgan warned me about this," Kelson laughed. "Here, we are not even married yet and you are already badgering your king."

"If you wanted someone to meekly obey your ever whim, you chose the wrong bride," she dared, staring at him.

"I chose aright," he smiled warmly. "Now, shall we begin?"

Kelson watched her curiously as she hefted the bag of cubes in her hand. They appeared heavier than any set he had seen before, from the way she handled them. Carefully, she loosened the drawstring and poured them into her hand before placing them on the floor. They were the most beautiful cubes Kelson had ever seen, though they were so rounded at the edges they were barely square. The white set was formed of a fiery opal that flared in the firelight, and the black were of onyx. Kelson whistled.

"Where did you get those?" he breathed.

"They belonged to Halek, and he gave them to me when he died. He received them as a gift of service to the Emir Nur Hallaj, I believe."

Kelson sucked in a breath, a funny look on his face. "Nur Hallaj?" he whispered.

"What is the matter?" she asked him, frowning. Kelson smiled wistfully.

"The Emir has a daughter," he replied.

"The eastern princess," Mairona concluded.

"You have heard about her?" He raised an eyebrow. "Her name was Rothana. We intended to marry."

"And she married your traitor cousin instead," she finished for him.

He winced.

"Twas not her fault," he said quietly. "She thought I was dead."

"Then why did you not marry when Conall was executed?" Mairona asked.

"She did not wish it," Kelson replied, looking at the floor. "She was with child by him, and that would have created complications..." he trailed off.

Mairona watched him carefully, her innards tying in unpleasant knots. She knew he had courted before, and that didn't bother her. This reaction to Princess Rothana's memory did.

Kelson held Mairona in deep affection, and she knew it, but was there a rival in his heart? "You still care for Rothana?" It was halfway between a question and a statement.

"The Lord God had something better in mind for me," he told her, grasping her hand. "I love you."

Her breath caught at his startling declaration, wide eyes locked onto his. Her stomach churned at the thought that he may be expecting her to return it, but she was not yet ready. "I have another set of cubes I could use," she told him, changing the subject. This kind of soul searching was inappropriate before a working.

"These will be fine," he replied. She sent a questioning tendril of thought his way, but he simply confirmed what he had just said.

Taking a few breaths to center herself and clear the negative emotion, she arranged the cubes in the familiar starting pattern.

"This will be different from what you have seen before," she told him. "Scrying is partway between a normal working and ritual magic, so the warding has elements of both. Halek largely made it up as he went along. I think you will notice an affinity he had for the Book of Genesis. He

always likened the construction of a ritual setting to the creation of the world. It bound the four elements more closely, he said, by referring to their beginning and their one source."

Mairona placed her finger on the first white cube.

"On the first day, the Lord God created light from the void. May we work tonight in the service of the Light. *Prime.*"

The cube glowed a brilliant white, with little rainbows dancing on its surface. It was an effect Kelson hadn't seen before, and he supposed it was due to the opal from which the rounded stone was fashioned. Mairona moved her finger to the next white cube.

"On the second day, the Lord God separated the waters from the heavens. May He command the lords of water and air to aid us in our work. *Secunde.*"

Once again, the second cube shone with the brilliant rainbowed fire of the first. Kelson felt the energy harnessed by the cubes in front of him as Mairona pointed to the next.

"On the third day, the Lord God separated the waters from the earth. May He command the lord of earth to aid us in our work. *Tierce.*"

The third cube came to life, flaring with its partners.

"On the fourth day, the Lord God set the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens to shed their light on the earth. May the Light illumine us for our work. *Quarte.*"

Now all the white cubes were activated, and rainbows danced on their surfaces, intertwining in one another. Kelson watched, fascinated as Mairona shifted the balance of energies before pointing to the first black cube.

"On the fifth day, the Lord God created the fish in the sea, the beasts of the earth, and the birds to fly in the sky. May we fly straight and true in the Lord's service. *Quinte.*"

The onyx flared with a blue-black flame, different from the green-black Kelson was used to seeing in Morgan's or Duncan's set.

"On the sixth day, God created man in His image. May we serve and praise our Creator. *Sixte.* On the seventh day, God proclaimed a day of rest. May we work towards the day we, too, are granted eternal rest in the Lord's presence. *Septime.*"

Kelson wondered where she was going to go from here, since there were only seven days of creation and one more cube remained to be activated. Placing her finger on the final cube, Mairona spoke,

"God saw that his creation was good. May His divine goodness shine as a beacon to guide us. *Octave.*"

Now Mairona turned to the next part of erecting the wards, setting *Prime* on top of *Quinte*.

"*Primus est Deus. Primus in aeternitate.*" *First comes God. He is forever First.*"

The pair of cubes fused into a silvery oblong, rainbows still dancing on the surface, though much subdued. Next *Secunde* topped *Sixte*.

"*Secundus est Filius, coaeternus cum Patre.*" *Second is the Son, eternally coexisting with the Father.* Now *Tierce* and *Septime*. "*Tertius est Trinitas: Pater, Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Third is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* Thus the Trinity is made complete."

She turned to the final pair of cubes.

"Quattuor archangeli custodes quadrantibus sunt. Amen." The four archangels are guardians of the quadrants.

Now four prism-like silver oblongs lay on the floor between Mairona and Kelson. She prepared herself for the completion, the actual raising of the wards.

"Primus archangelorum, Raphael. Lord of the Wind," Mairona chanted. Kelson watched in wonder as the first oblong floated just above the surface of the floor, pulled by unseen forces to the east. *"Fiat lux!"* she commanded, and a pillar of quicksilver shot up from *Primus*.

"Secundus archangelorum, Michael. Lord of Fire." The second oblong moved toward its place in the south. *"Fiat lux!"* Another silvery pillar rose.

"Tertius archangelorum, Gabriel. Lord of the Waters." The third oblong floated to the west. *"Fiat lux!"*

"Quartus archangelorum, Uriel. Lord of Earth." The last oblong took its place in the north. Mairona bade its pillar arise. *"Fiat lux!"*

She paused for a moment to take a deep breath, holding the energies in delicate balance. This required much more effort than the simple Wards Major, but it was also a more powerful combination for such a delicate working.

"Primus, Secundus, Tertius, et Quartus, fiat, fiat, fiat lux. Fiat voluntas mea!"

The four pillars of quicksilver light bent in toward the center, meeting just below the ceiling. As soon as they touched, they flashed outwards to join horizontally, coalescing into a silvery rainbow dome. Kelson traced its path around him. Mairona stood and cupped her hands over the candle on top of the altar. "Air," she said, blowing on the candle. "Fire." She bade the candle light, and it sputtered into life. "Water." She took the vial of holy water and sprinkled it on the sides of the candle, careful not to put the flame out. "Earth." Picking up the bowl of salt, she took a pinch and poured it in the flame.

"And One True Lord to rule over them. May he govern tonight's work, leading us to the Light. *Quia fecit mihi magna, qui potens est, et sanctum nomen ejus.*"

"Amen," Kelson replied. Mairona turned to him when she had finished.

"I have never seen the wards erected that way," he said in amazement.

"It is something Halek discovered, based on his research. He added that last line from the *Magnificat* for me, thinking it would be appropriate for a lady doing a working. Personally, I think the invocations need more unity in form, but it does the job."

"I would say. From the theatrics, I would think we were doing ritual magic," he said.

"Halek loved ritual," Mairona told him. "He tried to work in into everything he could. I am going to attempt the scrying now. I will need your support like I told you."

Kelson sat on the floor, waiting for Mairona. She picked up the scroll from the table and broke off a little corner, giving it to the candle's flame as an offering. Lifting her skirts, she sat on the floor and leaned against Kelson, relaxing and drinking in his strength to mix with her own. The potential he gave her was immense, much stronger than she expected from his lack of training. Given his Haldane background mixed with his Deryni heritage, he was not someone to be taken

lightly.

Sighing contentedly, Mairona made herself completely comfortable and extended her senses into the scroll resting on her lap, searching through its varying influences for Rolf's signature. It was very faint, but it was there in all its abhorrence. She locked onto that psychic pattern, pulling more energy from Kelson to boost her as she sent herself winging toward that pattern's source, far to the northeast in Druimfada. Her personal grounding in the physical location made it easy to travel there in mind, and there she found Rolf in her chamber arguing with a man in strange dress. There was no sound, though, just vision. Mairona struggled to hear, but there was nothing. She sunk another level into deeper trance, inviting and trusting Kelson to monitor her correctly, and drew more of his energy to her before sinking even deeper. Now Kelson's control over her was vital, because she could easily lose track of her heartbeat and breathing at this level. Slowly the words came in faintly.

"I need more men!" He was arguing. "How am I supposed to defy the Haldane with only five hundred men?"

"My master is unsure that more men will help you," the man replied, voice as smooth as silk. "The lady you have chosen as your queen was rather unwilling to comply, and has fled for Rhemuth. Yes, for the Haldane," the man noted Rolf's lack of surprise. "How does that speak for your ambitions?"

"I sent her there. It has been accounted for," Rolf argued. "But it will make no difference if Duke Mahael does not give me more men!"

"You have already lost much credibility among even your devoted followers, who now have no crown to rally around," the man returned.

"I shall proclaim myself king, if necessary. I do not—" He was cut off when the man raised his hand, demanding silence. The man glanced around the room.

"There is something here, something does not feel right," he said. "A presence that does not belong."

Mairona pulled back quickly when the man began questing for the source of that "presence." She didn't think he would be able to identify or locate her, but she didn't want to take any chances. After all, chances had been slim that anyone would even notice her. Her consciousness soared over the miles to settle back into her own body, more quickly than she was used to. It took a few moments to settle, then she started to surface with Kelson's help, since she had gone under so deeply that it would have been difficult to start rising safely on her own. Once she was at a sufficiently workable level she took control back.

Did you see that? she asked him.

Yes, and I heard every word you did. So, Mahael is involved, he replied.

So it seems. Damn the man! I want my castle back, she spat.

Patience, love. It will be yours again. What did Rolf mean that he sent you here? Kelson wondered, forcing suspicion away from her awareness.

I do not know, unless he means that by trying to force marriage he drove me to flee, Mairona wondered. *He made a huge blunder, so perhaps he makes it sound planned?* That was perfectly reasonable, and Kelson's fears were alleviated by her truthfulness.

Mairona fully awakened and opened her eyes to a spinning room. Kelson clutched her, worried, as she closed her eyes again.

"I am fine," she reassured him. "That was a deeper working than I expected, and I pulled out faster than I should have. I only need a moment."

Kelson rubbed her arm lightly as she took the time to ground herself properly. When she finally opened her eyes a final time, he helped her sit up. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Aye. I was just careless, that is all," she smiled, taking a deep breath. "I had better disperse the wards."

"Are you in any condition to do that?" Her paleness was a cause for concern.

"I am in a better condition than *you* would be dispersing my wards, with your lack of experience," she pointed out. "There is not much of a choice." Gathering herself, she lurched to her feet and stumbled to the altar, leaning heavily on the table. Kelson rose to support her. "I am fine," she reiterated.

"You are too exhausted to be fine," he countered.

"I shall collapse into your arms when I am through, I promise," she smiled tiredly, pushing herself away from the table and Kelson. It took a moment of swaying to find a steady balance, then she drew herself up, most outwardly visible signs of her exhaustion gone.

Spreading her arms out at waist level, she spoke the words of dispersement.

"Hail to the Quarters, and to the Lords of the Elements that rule over them. I bid thee thanks for thy guardianship. *Ex tenebris te vocavi, Domine. Te vocavi, et lucem dedisti. Nunc dimittis servum tuum secundum verbum tuum in pace. Fiat voluntas tua. Amen.*" *From the darkness I have called thee, Lord. I have called Thee, and You gave light. Now allow Thy servant to depart in peace, according to Thy word. Let it be done according to Thy will.*

The iridescent dome arcing above shrank to form two arches crossing over the altar, then the arches themselves shrank back into the silver oblongs from which they sprung. The oblongs were suddenly gone, becoming four neat little stacks of cubes, one white one black. Mairona leaned over to blow the candle out, and staggered against the table. Kelson rushed forward to catch her as she fell.

"See? I keep my promises," she whispered. Kelson probed her quickly to make sure that she was only physically exhausted, and was very reassured when he discovered that was indeed the case.

"That was one you did not have to keep," he replied.

"My ward cubes," she said, reaching halfheartedly to the nearest pair.

"No one will disturb them," he promised her, laying her gently on the ground. He removed his cloak and bunched it under her head for a pillow.

"It seems you have me at your mercy," she smiled sleepily. "I cannot very well resist you now."

"Indeed, you cannot," he grinned back, leaning down to kiss her affectionately. She was asleep before he even touched her lips. "But I would rather hope you were awake for that," he said, even though she couldn't hear. Smiling down at her lovingly, he brushed her cheek and watched her peaceful breath for several minutes. How wonderful it would be in three weeks when he could carry her to his own bed, but alas, tonight that could not be the case. With a contented sigh, Kelson retrieved the eight cubes and saw them safely placed in the blue velvet pouch.

"Saraid?" he called the maid in the study.

"Aye, your Highness?" he appeared quickly in the doorway, gasping when she saw Mairona on the ground.

"She is alright, merely sleeping," Kelson reassured her. "The working was deeper than she expected, I think. I shall carry her to her room, but I need assistance with doors on the way."

"Aye, your Highness." Saraid quickly gathered her sewing and took the pouch of ward cubes. Kelson gently picked Mairona up, careful not to disturb her. Saraid reflected on the near-effortless grace with which he took Mairona into his arms, the tenderness with which he cradled her mistress to his chest, then thought bitterly that she would never see such kindness from her own husband. Dismissing the thought as unworthy, Saraid opened the door to the solar and prepared the way for her king and his burden.