

## ✠ Chapter 46 ✠

Workman had been busy at the site, for the nave was clear of snow, grass and weeds, cleaned to the original granite floor, which was laid out in large squares and rectangles bordered in green marble. "This must have been quite a little church at one time," Cardiel commented. Kelson agreed, looking around him at the partially dismantled walls, which once would have been richly painted. The hole that tripped Ailín had been enlarged, but the masons had sent word that it was merely a small, featureless chamber with a door that had long been bricked over. Kelson had not wanted the door broken through until Deryni examination had assured him that there was nothing important to damage on the other side. That left the altar as the focus for the day.

"Father Thomas," Mairona called. "Have you ever seen an altar like that?" She gestured to the alternating black and white cubes of stone in the east.

"Never," Cardiel admitted. "Duncan?"

"It almost looks like stacked ward cubes," the Deryni bishop commented.

"That is what I thought," Mairona confirmed as she started walking toward the curious structure.

"The bottom half is clipped," Kelson observed as he followed, curiosity piqued.

"The whole thing is too short, like it has sunk," Mairona confirmed, pausing at the edge of the dais. With a little sigh, she bent and swept her right hand across its top. It still hummed. Kelson reached her side and did likewise, raising his eyebrows when he felt the power captured in the stone.

"Incredible," he breathed. "Rothana, do the Servants have anything like this?"

Frowning, the princess shook her head as she came up with the rest of the party. "We have lost much knowledge, Sire, and there is no telling if this were a construct of the Servants of old."

"Well." Kelson swallowed his disappointment. "Shall we see what can be seen?"

"Heard, more like," Mairona commented as Kelson drew her to the northern side of the cubic altar. Duncan took the east, Rothana fell into place for the west, and Dhugal took the south.

"Ailín," the border duke called, holding his hand out to his wife. "Will you try your wings with us?"

"Aye," she smiled, showing only a small hint of her first encounter's fear as she trustingly placed her hand in his to fill out the southern quarter.

"That leaves you, Thomas," Duncan called to his human archbishop. "Would you like me to bring you along for the ride?"

"What should I do?" Cardiel asked, approaching the nearly complete ring around the altar. He had long ago learned there was nothing to fear when the king and his inner circle exercised their skills.

"Stand beside me and let me take your hand. Kelson will take the other."

Cardiel did as was asked of him, and returned Kelson's brief reassuring smile as the king

clasped his fingers. The ring of hands closed round the altar and the Deryni closed their eyes. Cardiel did likewise, following their lead. "Relax, Thomas," Duncan instructed. "When we are joined I will bring you in our link."

Breathing calmly, Kelson fell into easy rapport with Mairona, smiling softly as her presence filled him. Across from the royal pair, Dhugal encouraged Ailín to join her mind with his, which she did, letting herself enjoy his psychic touch without the previous taint of threatened panic. Mairona reached out for Rothana, who hesitated only a little before accepting invitation into the growing link. Dhugal joined with his father as Rothana connected with the less experienced Ailín, bringing all the Deryni together.

"Now it is your turn, Thomas," Duncan said aloud. "Just breathe deeply, and relax. You have done this before." The archbishop nodded, though no one could see, and did as instructed. There was the expected rush as Duncan swooped in, lending Cardiel his own psychic sight. Once Duncan confirmed that he had the archbishop, everyone brought their linked hands over the altar and settled them lightly on its top.

It sang to them, radiating peace and tranquility. *Cunctipotens genitor Deus omncreator eleyson*. Almighty Father, God, Creator of all, have mercy.

*Salvificet pietas tua nos bone rector eleyson*. That Your compassion may save us, good Master, have mercy.

"I can hear it," Cardiel breathed in wonder. "'Tis a form of the Easter Kyrie"

*Plasmatis humanis factor lapsis reparator eleyson*. Creator of humankind, Healer of those who fall, have mercy.

It was the echoing plea of an extinct Deryni community, run underground by deadly persecution. Here, at Druimkyriel, they had found safety for some short time, perhaps led by St. Camber's great-granddaughter, who had married into the Dugains of Druimfada.

*Ne tua dampnatur Jesu factura benigne eleyson*. So Thy creation is not damned, kind Jesus, have mercy.

Kelson and Mairona shuddered, and could feel Duncan doing the same at the heartfelt prayer of those risking death, unwilling to save themselves by renouncing what they were so their gifts and knowledge would not be lost.

*Procedens fomes vite fons purificans vis eleyson*. Advancing flame, fountain of life, purifying power, have mercy.

*Spirite alme eleyson*. Gracious Spirit, have mercy.

Mairona thought she could feel the breath of passage behind her, and opened her eyes. "Dear Mother of God!" she breathed aloud, bidding the others to see what she did.

"No, Cardiel!" Duncan called when the archbishop's eyelids fluttered. "Keep yours closed and I will show you."

The blue winter sky was gone, shut out by heavy mountain timber supported on complete walls. The church was lovingly painted in jewel-like colors, stars set in a midnight sky on the upper walls, designs of God's creation winding around murals representing Deryni ritual on the bottom. Night's stars twinkled outside the unglazed but complete windows, and moonbeams shone from the south. The nave was ablaze in colored light emanating from the auras and handfire of this wholly Deryni community, celebrating Mass in the shelter of their remote mountain sanctuary. Three priests were chanting the Kyrie, and the middle one arranged a set of ward cubes on top of

the altar as it came to a close. He activated each one with a touch of his finger, Prime to Octave, as all trained Deryni children learned. The next part was different, as he swapped the positions of several pairs as they had never seen before. Before the priest could complete this new permutation of ward cubes, the vision flickered and started to fade, brightening once again to daylight streaming through an open roof, walls falling to ruin, but a hint of sound lingered.

*Primus est Deus, primus in aeternitate.*

"Your scrying wards!" Kelson exclaimed to Mairona as the link dissolved. "That was the invocation you used!"

"Aye," Mairona breathed. "Old Halek was on to something, but what?"

"Too bad we do not have ward cubes," Ailín added, having seen the scrying wards herself. Duncan, Cardiel, Dhugal and Rothana just looked back and forth in puzzlement, having no knowledge of what the three discussed. Mairona raised an eyebrow, reaching into the neck of her gown to pull a cord from around her neck, lifting it over her head. A small, blue velvet pouch hung on its end, catching on the chain holding her cloak about her shoulders. She worked it free and dumped its contents on the altar top.

"I thought these might come in handy after seeing the altar before," she grinned, corralling the tumbled black and white stones in a neat group. "Duncan, if I show you how to raise my scrying wards, would you like to give it a try?"

"Give what a try?" he returned, looking at her as if she were an overly precocious child. "I do not know what I would be doing, so how could I focus properly?"

"The altar has trapped memories of the proper working," Mairona argued. "You can try to tap into its knowledge."

"I do not feel comfortable doing this," Duncan shook his head. "I am not fully trained as it is."

"Well, I cannot do it. I am not a priest," Mairona countered.

Cardiel leaned forward, placing his hands on the smooth stone to interject himself between the two. "What do you hope to find?" he asked the queen.

"Knowledge," Mairona replied immediately, as if it were self-evident. "Learning. Clues. Hints of St. Camber. Whatever there is to find."

"Not power, then?"

"Nay," she shook her head. "God has already gifted the power he intends for me, and it is considerable. I have no need for more."

"Well, then, Mairona," Cardiel continued. "If there were any priest with this knowledge, I would agree with you. However, knowing how knowledge combats ignorant fear and hatred, I would say it is more important to discover and preserve learning than adhere blindly to tradition. Since this altar is technically no longer sanctified, you may try if you wish."

"How can it no longer be sanctified after what we have seen and heard?" she returned.

"I said technically, my lady," Cardiel answered. "I do not believe our Lord would wish us to remain in ignorance simply because there is not an educated priest to be had."

"Very well, then," she conceded, admiring the human archbishop as she began to see how

he had led the Church to not only stop persecuting Deryni, but surreptitiously start to welcome them into its ranks. His beliefs were not led by presupposition or literal interpretation of law and tradition, but by what he saw as God's greater love and the needs of His flock. She moved around to the western side of the altar to face east, as a priest would do. Rothana stepped out of her way as Kelson looked at her nervously.

"Are you certain you want to do this?" he asked.

"Aye," she said firmly, setting her eyes in determination. "The power here is benign, meant for celebration and worship. It will not harm me." Her hands scooped the ward cubes closer and neatly arranged them in their starting pattern, white cubes joined in a square at the middle, black ones set diagonally at the corners. She used the motion as a focus to settle into trance. "The priest had two others assisting. I do not know if it is necessary, but Kel, will you link with me?"

"Aye." He came around to her left side, placing a hand on her shoulder to open their bond. She sighed as he offered loving strength.

"Who else?" Mairona called, sweeping glassy eyes around her husband's friends.

"I will," Rothana offered. "If we are to work in partnership, there is no sense in delay." She stepped up again, placing her hand on Mairona's right shoulder. Her own support was less intense than Kelson's Haldane potential mixed with Deryni blood, but it was nearly as strong.

"Thank you," Mairona said, bringing a finger to rest on the upper left white cube. "*Prime*," she intoned, and the opal came to life with fiery brilliance. "*Seconde*," she continued, then finished the white center of her pattern. "*Tierce. Quarte.*" Her focus shifted slightly as she turned to the black cubes, again starting in the upper left corner. "*Quinte. Sixte. Septime. Octave.*" They glimmered a silvery black as Mairona sank deep into her memory of the vision, trying to touch how the priest had performed this next part. She rested her two hands on each of the upper left cubes, one white and one black. "*Prime et Quinte inversus*," she intoned, switching positions of the two. Next was the diagonally opposing corner. "*Quarte et Octave inversus.*" Now the two outer cubes on the left side. "*Prime et Septime inversus.*" Finally, the rightmost outer cubes. "*Sixte et Quartus inversus.*"

Now she was uncertain how exactly to continue. The cubes were arranged to stack white on white, black on black, polarizing their energies. She had always been taught to balance them by joining white and black to form the four quarters of the wards. *St. Camber, lend me your guidance*, she breathed as she pressed the palms of her hands against the altar's once-polished stone, looking for direction. None came consciously, but there was a niggling hint that this was not right. She did not know what that priest from so long ago was trying to do with this configuration, but the current arrangement of cubes would create two pillars of white and two black. That did not match the design of the altar's construction, which alternated each color. Hadn't Halek always lectured about the importance of balance?

Brows furrowed, Mairona ignored Kelson's growing uneasiness for her safety as she undid the last two position swaps. "*Quartus et Sixte inversus. Septime et Prime inversus.*" Yes, that was better. Now, to build the altar matrix—

*Lord Christ, forgive me for what I attempt, for I am not a priest.* She picked up Prime, which now lay in the uppermost left outside corner, and rested it on Quinte. "*Primus est Deus, Primus in Aeternitate. Amen*," she intoned in a strange sing-song chant, imitating the melody whispered to them as the vision had faded. The two cubes fused, but didn't mingle into the silvery oblong used to erect wards. Curiously, they retained their separate black and white color. On to the next pair, Sixte on Seconde, black on white. "*Secundus est Filius, Coaeternus cum Patre. Amen.*" Now, Septime on Terce. "*Tertius est Trinitas: Pater, Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.*" Finally, the white Quarte on black Octave. "*Quattuor archangeli custodes quadrantibus sunt.*" This was where her invocation of scrying wards had ended, but the long-ago priest's chant whispered a continuation to her as she

called on the altar's memory. "*Quattuor quadrant coram Domino uno. Amen.*" Four archangels guard the quarters. The four quarters stand in the sight of the One God. Preparations were over, time to discover the actual working. *St. Camber, guide me so that I may discover, learn, and pass this on to the Holy Church.*

Mairona sensed a set of hands taking her own in direction, finding peaceful confidence in their touch. *Grandfather*, she sighed, and could feel the loving comfort flowing from his fingers. Kelson's own nervousness stilled at the familiar presence, though Rothana gasped, both at the saint's presence and Mairona's address.

*It is many generations removed, but Mairona is a daughter of his blood, as are Dhugal, Duncan, and Morgan*, Kelson explained to her. Rothana's entranced eyes looked on Mairona with a new awe and respect.

Duncan straightened, viewing what the trio performing the working could not, for the presence stood behind them. "Thomas," he whispered very quietly. "I am going to link with you again. You should see this." The archbishop nodded, and Duncan placed a hand on his friend's shoulder, sharing what only Deryni sight could see. A gray-robed man stood behind Mairona, nearly transparent in the shadow. A cowled, silvery-blond head smiled benignly as it bowed over the queen, arms reaching around to lightly grasp her hands.

"Dhugal!" Ailín exclaimed, clutching at her husband.

"Hush, lass," he whispered. "That is St. Camber. There is naught to fear here."

The queen's hands were guided to hover over and beside the block of ward cubes, arranged to imitate the structure of the altar below. When she chanted again, her voice was eerily overlaid, as it had been when she confronted Jehana in Kelson's chambers.

*"Fiat lux in aeternum."* Let there be light in eternity. The cubes began to glow, shimmering gold to match Mairona's aura.

*"Quasi columna flammae me duces, Altissime, in loca arcane Tua."* Like a pillar of fire You will lead me, Most High, into Your secret places.

The glow brightened, taking form as a pillar of cool light ascending from the ward cubes, rising as tall as Mairona stood.

*"Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis—"* Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth...

As she intoned the Gloria, her hands were pulled into the pillar of fire, turning its upward rise back down to wash over the cubes, then spill over the altar's surface. Pressure forced her hands down, slowly coming to rest on top of the cube matrix as the golden fire raced over the edges of the altar, running down its sides. Still she was pushed downward, pressing firmly against the cubes, and the entire altar shuddered under the immense forces working on it. The marble groaned and scraped, then dropped an inch. Most of the people surrounding jumped back, and her link with Kelson and Rothana was broken as they leaped away, but Mairona leaned forward even more, willing the power she had called to do its work.

*"Selah."* she whispered. Let it be.

The altar trembled, then shook with great force, until something below cracked and snapped, and the great blocks started slowly sinking into the earth. Mairona's hands maintained contact with the ward cubes, pressing down with the altar's progress until she had to kneel to maintain the pressure, and finally scramble onto its top as it drew level with the sanctuary's floor. It continued to descend, and Mairona was swallowed in the shaft of its passage until it shuddered and

snapped to rest ten feet below the ground. The wash of light dimmed and swept back into Mairona's ward cubes, which still glowed as she removed her hands, arranging her flat palms to hover on either side.

*"Ex tenebris vocavi, Domine. Te vocavi, et lucem dedisti. Nunc dimittis servum tuum secundum verbum tuum in pace. Fiat voluntas tua. Amen."*

The glow died, and the carefully arranged cube of alternating black and white stones tumbled to the ground. Mairona shoveled them up in one hand, then peered into the darkness behind her. The dim apparition smiled at her with grandfatherly love.

*Think carefully about what you learn here, young queen, it spoke to her. Knowledge does indeed banish hatred and fear, but only when hearts are open to learning. Some things should remain as they are.*

A shadowy hand pressed against her forehead in benediction, giving her the knowledge to restore the altar to its former position. Blinking, Mairona tried to think of how to phrase her questions about what had just occurred, but the saint was gone. Sighing, she turned to look at the space surrounding her. To the east and north was solid wall, but in the other directions were black void. Closing her fist, Mairona willed golden handfire to existence, and opened her fingers to let it fly free an armspan to the west, revealing a small portion of columned stone in its dim glow. Smiling, she stood and blinked back up the hole she had descended.

"I hope someone thought to bring a ladder, or at least a rope?" she called. "There is another chamber, and it does not look like the one opened by the masons."

At ground level, Dhugal ran to the enlarged opening that the workman had created, pulling out the ladder they left behind. He and his father lowered it down the altar shaft as Mairona started exploring the subterranean space, calling forth another ball of handfire to help light her way.

Water-ravaged murals covered the walls, most featuring a light blond figure in a gray monk's robe. St. Camber, of course, or as he was labeled in fading, peeling text, Sanctus Kyrielus. Even in their secluded refuge, this Deryni community had feared to record his true name. There he was in the familiar image of King Cinhil Haldane's coronation, and here—it was faded and heavily damaged, but he seemed surrounded by other figures with light blond hair. Could it be a family depiction, his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren? Further on his hand was outstretched in benediction over a grouping in Haldane crimson, likely King Cinhil and his queen, Megan de Cameron, with their sons arranged behind them.

To the side of this mural was a blocked doorway, hastily covered over with poorly dressed and laid stone. That must lead to the small, empty chamber the masons had revealed, but why would an empty chamber be closed off, especially so hurriedly? Had it been looted from above after being closed off? Curious. The next mural on the right seemed to be Camber's death, since the saintly figure was arrayed on a bier carried by priests and knights. A woman grieved behind, comforted by an old bishop, and the pair were followed by two tiny figures, all bearing the telltale silvery blond hair. His daughter Evaine and her children, perhaps? *Sancto Kyrielo, ora pro nobis* was the inscription laid around the center of the bier.

"Mairona?" Kelson called. She turned, seeing him release the ladder as he summoned his own scarlet handfire to banish the darkness.

"The walls are covered with pictures," she told him, approaching. "They seem to tell of the life of St. Camber." Brushing his fingers briefly, Mairona used the contact to send him the images she had studied so far in a surge of thought.

"Remarkable!" Kelson delighted, rushing to examine the nearest wall for himself. Mairona joined him at this new mural, which was darker than its forebears were. It depicted the beginning of

the persecutions that had destroyed anyone and anything Deryni for nearly two hundred years. Soldiers in Haldane livery intermixed with priest-warriors of a military order, hunting down and slaying Deryni men, women, and children, marked in the illustration by their telltale auras. In the heavens above, a gray cowled head bowed over his people, human and Deryni alike, and tears fell from his eyes to the ground. Kelson and Mairona both put their fingertips to this fragile image, touching the holy tears, sensing the faded inscription rather than seeing it with physical sight. *The heart which is small and closed serves against the Lord. Open your heart, according to His bidding, and He will show you peace.*

Breath caught audibly in Kelson's throat. Mairona turned to him, seeing tears glittering in his eyes, sparkling in the glowing handfire. Slipping her arm around his waist, she leaned her head on his shoulder, prompting him to share.

*I had not thought my own ancestor Haldanes had taken part in this evil, he told her in mind-speech, bowing his head. History does not speak of this. The forebear kings I have revered condoned and assisted this Deryni massacre!*

*Perhaps it was not by choice, she offered in comfort. When Cinhil died, his sons were still minors.*

*As was I!* he shot back, wiping away the salty wetness that betrayed his emotion.

*For you, it was only a few days until your fourteenth birthday and the attainment of your majority, she returned. You also had the support of good, loyal, powerful men who wished to see you rule in your own right. Camber was dead, his family and allies forced into hiding, and Cinhil's sons were left friendless and alone, a means for small men to increase their power. Her other arm wrapped around him until she could link her hands, enclosing him with support and delighting that he accepted it. What would happen to Liam if he did not have you as champion? What would have happened to you, if not for Alaric Morgan Duke of Corwyn, or Howard Duncan McLain then Duke of Cassan, or Prince Nigel Duke of Carthmoor in your first tenuous years on the throne?*

*Ahhh, a stóirín. Smiling through his brief misery, Kelson kissed the top of his wife's head. To think, I nearly discarded your level head.*

*With good cause, she returned, though there was a hint of lightness permeating the usual regret. Thank you for not following the letter of law. My head prefers to remain firmly attached to my shoulders.*

Kelson gasped, shrinking back from her arms. He had not meant his words in that context, and was horrified at her interpretation. Her mouth curled up in humor, though, and her eyes sparkled with laughter in the handfire, prompting his own lips to quirk into a smile. *You do keep me dancing on my toes. I also prefer your head to remain where it may do me the most good. Do you think the others have made it down yet?*

Shrugging, Mairona turned to the shaft of light spilling down from above. Cardiel and Duncan were visible by handfire in the room's opposite side, joined by Rothana as they also studied the wall murals. In the shaft itself, Dhugal was helping Ailín down the last few ladder rungs. When she turned to him, their eyes sparked with flame that had nothing to do with being Deryni, and they held each other's gaze for a brief moment before heading off to the opposite side of the chamber, where no one yet explored.

*Dhugal told me he regards Ailín with affection rather than love, Kelson told Mairona. I am not certain I believe him.*

*Perhaps the child changed things? Mairona mused. Something happened between them when we left them before. I have never seen Ailín so solid in Deryni working as she was when we probed the altar.*

*I would not know*, Kelson mumbled, pulling her further along the dark chamber to examine the remaining history it had to offer.

"There is a door here!" Dhugal called from the wall opposite the altar shaft. It rattled as he tried his hand at the latch, prompting it to open by physical and then Deryni means. The latter attempt forced him back, and he cried out as he shook his hand. "Bloody hell!" he muttered, rubbing numb fingers.

"Dhugal!" Duncan said sharply, reprimanding his son's language as he swooped over to make sure he didn't need Healing help.

"Sorry, Father," the border duke grinned sheepishly. "I did not expect the door to bite. At least it seems to intend warning rather than harm. No permanent damage has been done." By then all had gathered around the heavy wooden door, which was bound by iron bars and set with a Camber seal.

"This I have seen before," Rothana stated, pushing her way forward to run her fingers tentatively across the seal. "We have its like at our own St. Kyriell's."

"Can you open it?" Kelson asked.

"I can try," she offered, sinking into trance with an effortless breath. Her silky black braid shimmered in the various multi-colored globes of handfire as she pulled a silver chain from her gray gown, revealing a Camber medal similar to the ones Kelson, Duncan, and Dhugal sometimes wore. Bowing her head over the medal, Rothana spoke a silent prayer, lips moving without sound as the medal began to glow blue. The princess crossed herself, then pressed the medal against the seal in the door. While holding the disk to its iron counterpart, she set her hand to the latch and swung the door away, breaking contact with her medal. Her lips moved again, and the light dancing around her medal died. Tentatively, she waved her hand through the doorway, then stepped through.

"The door was the only barrier," she informed everyone. "Tis safe to pass."

Kelson and Mairona were the next to enter, progressing just far enough to allow the others passage before looking around them, gasping in wonder. "Tis filled with stars!" he exclaimed. Indeed, the walls and ceiling were painted a deep cobalt blue, studded with gold gilt stars that glittered in the handfire light. Some sparkled more than others, and on closer inspection they appeared to be set with small shiral crystals.

On impulse, Mairona brushed one of the tiny stones and bade it glow. Pleased when it flickered with amber light, she touched a few more until a square that spanned an arm's length twinkled in dark golden flame. Curious, Kelson watched her and tried a few himself, followed by Rothana, Duncan, and Dhugal, who also guided his wife to work on one or two. Soon, most of the walls shimmered with glittering stars.

"Look to the heavens for the Holy Shiral," Mairona recited from memory.

"Hmmm?" Kelson prompted.

"Tis from the Camber scroll I was reading when you arrived. It was all cryptic, but one of the passages reads, 'Look to the heavens for the Holy Shiral.' I imagine it is the same Holy Shiral mentioned in your own book."

"Then it could be here!" Kelson looked so much like a giddy page boy that Mairona had to giggle. "But which one? Or are they all Holy Shirals?"

"It may not be a stone," Rothana interjected. "I did not know that is what you seek here."

The Servants teach that as shiral is a focus for Deryni power, the Holy Shiral is a focus for those seeking to restore St. Camber and Deryni learning."

"Then what do we look for?" Kelson asked her.

"I do not know," she shrugged. "Perhaps our ban-aba does, but initiates such as I are not given that knowledge."

Someone gasped from the far side of the room. As all turned, they witnessed Duncan facing a deep niche, trembling as he fell to his knees.

"Father!" Dhugal called, rushing to his assistance. He also stopped short, frozen by what Duncan has seen.

"Dhugal!" Ailín and Kelson exclaimed in tandem, but they were now hesitant to approach. The border duke stood motionless for a moment, then spoke very quietly and reverently as he, too knelt.

"I think we found it."

Mairona felt her stomach leap into her throat as she rushed over, wondering what Kelson must be experiencing, if she felt this strongly. After all, this was his quest, not hers. As they crossed the room, he brushed her fingers lightly to link in rapport, desiring to share this experience and discovery. She smiled at him briefly before they came to the deep, shadowed niche, which contained a beautiful, painted sculpture of the archangel Michael, holding his mighty warrior's sword in a guarding pose. The statue rested on a simple, marble rectangular base, narrow in width but extending far into the deep niche. The front of the base had a painted inscription that had been scratched away almost entirely. *Hic iac... Sa... Camb... rius... nso... inu... esto... Idan... Resq... pac...*

She felt the full measure of Kelson's awe as they knelt together, and his heart nearly burst with thanksgiving. It was easy to fill in first of the missing letters, at least enough to understand their import. *Here lies St. Camber...* This was his final resting place. Tears of profound elation streamed down Kelson's cheeks as he slowly reached for the marble sarcophagus, fingers shaking as they came to rest on its edge. The Holy Shiral, the focus of those seeking to restore St. Camber and the Deryni, was the mortal remains of the saint himself. Without his holy assistance, Kelson would never have lived to restore peace between Deryni and human in his kingdom. He would have been murdered at his own coronation by the last Festillic heir, succumbed to Wencit of Torenth in his first war, or died of serious injury in the caverns surrounding St. Kyriell's-of-the-North. He owed his heritage, his life, his crown, and his kingdom to God and this single Deryni saint, who seemed to have an affinity for the royal House he restored to Gwynedd's throne.

*I never dared hope to find this, he sent Mairona. This is the supreme relic to reestablish his cult.*

*No, Mairona countered, and felt rather than saw him raise an eyebrow in question even as he formed his protest. I do not think he wishes to be moved, or to have this become a shrine. Briefly, she sent him her memory of the saint's words to her, especially his last thought.*

*Some things should remain as they are.*

*Ah, well, Kelson sighed. It is still a tremendous gift.*

Each member of the party had arrayed themselves around the tomb, individually lost in their own meditation and devotion. As time passed, and every person finished their prayer, they left the room one by one until all that remained were the king and queen. Kelson grew increasingly desirous of solitude, so Mairona withdrew from their rapport and rose to begin snuffing out the shiral crystals as he pressed both palms flat against the sarcophagus top, leaning forward to rest his forehead on

the cool stone. His tears spilt freely over the marble.

*St. Camber. I thank the Lord God every day for the multitude of blessings in my life, but you deserve my deep gratitude as well, for I see your hand in many of them. Thank you for the extraordinary opportunity to lead my people to peace and harmony. Thank you for awakening my Haldane heritage. Thank you for my tremendous friends and allies, for you must have sent them, since Dhugal, Duncan, and Morgan are all heirs of your blood. Thank you for the gift of Mairona, a remarkable daughter of your line who fills me with extraordinary joy and love. Thank you for showing me how to forgive her and restore her fully to my side as beloved wife, helpmate, and queen. Ask God to grant me the strength and wisdom to wield my power to Gwynedd's benefit, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Sighing, Kelson straightened and made the sign of the cross, then turned as a sharp *ping* startled him. Something rattled against the floor. Mairona crouched to pick that something up, held it between two fingers to examine it, then shrugged to herself as she moved to join him.

"It fell out of the wall when I extinguished it," she told him, extending it in offering. He took it from her, a simple, circular shiral crystal with a nearly flat back. "A Holy Shiral relic for your St. Camber chapel?" she ventured. He grinned at her, then at the crystal, and then closed his fist on the stone as he leaned forward to kiss her soundly.