

A Light on the Horizon

(Beltane: Feast of Fire and Rebirth)

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The young man standing on the dais wept, and his tears shone in the profligate light filling the great hall. Handheld candlelamps banished shadows to the farthest corners of the cavern, using up weeks' worth of precious oil and wax. All the residents of Hill Keep had contributed their rations to illuminate this ceremony of mourning.

Adrian, assisting Father Gilles in a painful pronouncement of Exile as the first official act in his new--and he hoped temporary--home, tried to keep his face impassive, but he couldn't help one bitter thought: *There, but for Goddess' grace and Abbot Esperanza, go I.*

"Baldwin Chandlersson." Each word Father Gilles spoke was clear in the hushed, crowded Hall. "You stand convicted of the crime of trespassing against Father Church for stealing from the Chapel Library and learning to read. Let us invoke the mercy of the Goddess. Have you polluted any other souls in this Keep?"

"No one else." The blond youth, his newly-tattooed cheek catching the lamplight like a banner of defiance, looked helplessly toward his family.

Baldwin's father the Chandler, who was the highest-ranking elder of the Keep, stood grim-faced. His wife clung to his hand, tears glistening on grief-blotched cheeks. And the girl, Baldwin's twin sister—it took Adrian a moment to identify her expression: rage mixed with terror. As Baldwin uttered his denial, her lips parted, but then she slumped and cast down her gaze.

Father Gilles sighed and the sound echoed. "For your crimes against the Goddess and the Church, we Exile you. From this hour forward, neither kin nor clan nor any of the pious folk of Newhome's Keeps may recognize your presence nor offer you aid. From this moment on, you are dead."

Two of the Keep elders stepped up to the dais and stripped Baldwin of his clothing and shoes. They wrapped the youth's shivering form in a woolen shroud and took him away to the postern gate.

"Goddess keep the soul of the departed in the hollow of her hand." Father Gilles raised his hands in the dismissal blessing.

"Goddess keep all our souls." As one, the people extinguished their candlelamps. Although the Season of Dawn had begun outside, night ruled the hall and Adrian's heart.

"Have some wine. It's local, and really quite good," Gilles said several hours later. They'd

finally retired to the chambers set aside for the traveling priest, chambers which would become Adrian's after Gilles left. The older priest raised the bottle, refilled his own glass, and gestured grandly. "And how do you like your new home?" He chuckled at his own small joke.

Adrian tasted the wine and grimaced. "Other than the fact that it's the backside of the world and these people sleep with their livestock?"

"With the weather they get here, it's no wonder." Gilles laughed. "Just remember this: if you don't do anything stupid, young man, you may be able to return to Monastery Keep one Day. And you won't wind up outside in the cold with no shoes."

Adrian shivered.

"Well, you'll make a good priest--some Day." He leaned over and refilled Adrian's glass with a wink. "Nothing like removing the source of temptation, eh? Nothing to read here except the Approved Books in the chapel library."

Adrian's face heated. Had *everyone* heard the story?

They finished the wine in uncomfortable silence. Then Gilles rose and Adrian followed suit. "I'll take my leave, young Adrian." He gathered his snow gear, packs, and fur-lined parka. "My dogs and I should arrive at River Keep in plenty of time to preside over marriage blessings, memorial services, and confessions before Dawn's end. If nothing else, these Hill Keep folk ought to be grateful to have a full-time priest!"

"I'll do my best, sir." Adrian knelt.

Gilles placed his hand on Adrian's head. "Goddess keep you well and wise, my son. If She wills it, you'll celebrate a happier Beltane tomorrow."

The season of Dawn was terrible as storms lashed snow in fierce squalls, and beautiful as darkness began to lift, the eastern sky lightening shift by shift to blue iridescence.

Boda couldn't appreciate the season. The shame of her cowardice ate away at her, disturbing her sleep with monstrous dreams. One gray and stormy Graveyard shift, she scuttled down empty corridors, feeling only half the person she used to be, without Baldwin.

Poor, protective Baldwin. If only she'd never found that hidden cave, and that ancient, magical, Unapproved Book. Foolish, outspoken Baldwin! If only he hadn't read the Chapel books and debated Father Gilles on their contents!

At one intersection, she met a few animal tenders and nightsoil collectors, carrying their own small candlelamps, coming together to share some light and conversation before separating to return to their duties. They nodded to her sympathetically, and she continued alone.

She tried to keep her mind off her sorrow, but memories flashed like lightning. She and Baldwin racing each other towards their father, the new Chandler, being tossed above his head to touch the ceiling-sky. She and Baldwin, before their cursed discovery, wondering why an arbitrary seven sets of shifts made a week, and why Day was a shift as well as a season.

It hadn't made sense then—but now her dreams were haunted by images of day and night racing as fast as the shifts changed.

When she caught the first pungent whiff, she realized she was headed toward the stables, quiet and redolent with sleeping Day shift animals. Candlelamps at wide intervals supplemented the pale Dawn light. Faint sounds beyond the doors at the end of the corridor bore witness that the Swing and Graveyard shift herds were at their duties, being milked or combed for fibers and walking the circlerolls that powered the looms and ventilation fans.

She found a pile of hay in the sheep pen and settled in near Yester-Day's lambs, all grown

up now. Firmly, she banished the memory of the new priest, watching her with eyes the color of new grass. Sleep, perfumed by lanolin and clover, claimed her until the screams began.

Trampled and butted and deafened by terrified sheep, Boda jumped up and ran toward the sound, pushing through the stable doors, swiftly brushing hay from her pants and shirt.

All Shifts mingled together during celebrations—and tragedies. This was definitely one of the latter.

A nervous crowd gathered by the pit where they'd been dumping the pig manure since Father Gilles had brought the little piglets Yester-Day. Boda bit her lip to keep from crying out as two horribly filthy bodies were lifted up, and an eye-watering stench rolled out from them.

"It's Hobart and Sweeney!"

"Goddess! Why are they dead?"

A woman started keening in grief. Many voices joined with hers.

Boda knew the tremulous sound, but not its cause, would travel quickly through the Keep. She grabbed the nearest sleeve and demanded, "Has anyone sent for the Chandler yet?" On receiving a negative headshake, she said, "I'll go."

Then she was racing down the corridor toward the Residence, the fetid odor of sulfur and shit clinging to her, no matter how fast she ran.

During the post-mortem, the wake, the funeral, and even as the bodies were burned within the forge and their ashes saved for the Memorial Cairn, Boda worried.

Her father worried, too: about the possibility of disease, or that some other fool would jump into the pit and die. Sweeney had apparently done that, trying to save Hobart after the other had fallen in. It had to be something in the pit. But no one knew what had killed them.

Even the new priest, with his access to the Goddess' books, didn't know. Why wouldn't She reveal the secret of the pit?

That worried Boda worst of all. That left only the Unapproved Book for which Baldwin had given his life.

It would know the answer. In the short time they'd had to read it together, their eyes had been opened. The sheer number of things it was possible to know about was amazing in itself.

She could discover the answer, if she only dared to ask. It would tell her whether they should fear a poison or a plague, or if the manure was safe for use as much-needed fertilizer.

She longed to ask her mother's practical advice or talk to her father, but even though he was the Chandler, her father was bound to turn her over to the priest for impiety if he knew what she had done.

Boda prayed for answers all through the blustery season of Dawn, but the gradually increasing light didn't show her the way. Thank the Goddess no one else died or fell ill, and the pigs themselves remained healthy.

When the sun's disk completely cleared the horizon and the Keep opened the main door to celebrate Beltane, the new priest led the people in the traditional sweet songs of praise. Boda sang hymns with her kin and neighbors, but her heart was silent as they ceremoniously extinguished all the remaining candlelamps.

She still could not decide what to do.

Early Daylight brought the vibrant green hills into sharp focus, leaving chilled shadows

where it couldn't reach. Boda stumbled at the bottom of the cliff, leaving tracks of skin and blood on the icy rock. She rested a while before taking the path that led back to the Keep, remembering how she'd been gathering yellow lichens used for wool-dye when she'd come across the cave of the Ancestors, revealed by a recent rockslide. Frightened, but attracted by the wavering point of green light deep within, she'd crawled inside and found the Book.

She'd brought it to Baldwin, and they'd asked it every question they'd ever had.

She'd hoped a return to that place would help her clear her mind, but the trip had only given her exterior bruises to match the ones imprinted on her soul.

Starting back to the Keep, she realized she had to bring back something in her basket to explain her absence. Her father didn't approve of idleness, or waste. She headed for a fast-growing tangle of tearberry vines. There might be medicinal blossoms among the thorny canes, even this early in the season of Day.

She was just making her way through a screen of scrub willow when she heard her mother speaking. And then, unbelievably, Baldwin's voice in response, pitched low.

Boda stifled her impulse to run, inching silently forward through the branches until she saw her mother's blue woolen gown. And with her--it was Baldwin! Thin, shaggy, but--miracle of the Goddess--alive! Had he met Mother by chance?

No. There was a bundle of woolen blankets at Mother's feet. This meeting was no accident. Mother, of all people, was deliberately flouting the law: ... *neither kin nor clan nor any of the pious folk of Newhome's Keeps may recognize your presence nor offer you aid.*

A fierce joy at Mother's act of rebellion warmed Boda's Night-frozen heart. In the next instant, she shrank back behind a screen of silver-green leaves.

Mother and Baldwin had another watcher.

Father Adrian.

He was walking briskly along the crest of the hill above them, his leather pack of sacred texts slung over one broad shoulder, clearly returning from making an offering at Memorial Cairn. Boda saw him stop to observe the scene below him and held her breath, waiting for him to raise the alarm and point his finger at Mother.

Instead, he shouldered his bag with a half-shrug and continued on to the Keep as if he hadn't seen them at all.

Boda watched apprehensively as Father Adrian entered at the last peal of the Day shift-change bell, gave a hurried blessing and sat down at the Chandler's table.

No denouncement. No reprimand. Not even a mention.

Mother sat spooning her soup with placid grace, chatting with her just-awakened Graveyard shift friends, as if she hadn't courted Exile earlier.

Boda stirred her own portion, her appetite curdled by fear. She stared at Father Adrian, willing him to say something, do something. Anything. She'd lost Baldwin once, would she lose him again, and her mother as well? *Not if she could help it.*

He looked up and met her glare with an uncertain smile, then quickly ducked his head back down, concentrating on crumbling bread into his bowl of bean soup.

Boda puzzled about it through her chores of cleaning and mending during Swing shift. The question haunted her as she stared sleeplessly at the ceiling through a bright, endless Graveyard shift. He wasn't going to say anything! He was just going to let Mother break the Law. But why?

She received an answer at First Meal, when Housekeeper Chella grumbled about the priest being late again, letting good food go cold. Heart pounding, Boda asked, "Why did he come here, then? It's not like Father Gilles was ill, or..."

"He's being punished, lass," Chella volunteered. She knew everything that went on inside the Keep, and most of what happened outside, too. "For the likes of him, this place must seem like Exile. Priests!" she finished sourly.

"Punished?"

Chella gave her a pitying look. "For reading. Same as your brother..." She fell silent. Baldwin had been a favorite of hers.

Her mother's face remained closed and distant, as if she hadn't heard Chella mention the outcast.

Then Father Adrian rushed in, looking thrown together. Boda knew he slept little, spending long hours searching in the Goddess' Library for an answer to why the pig keepers had died. He'd found some methods to abate the noxious odors, but Farmer Verdon was still pressing him to find out if the manure was safe for fertilizer.

Boda bent her head meekly to her buttered bread, her mind spinning with possibilities.

Father Adrian hadn't condemned Mother for helping Baldwin. Maybe he'd be glad if she found the answer...

She made up her mind. She would ask the Book before the end of Swing shift.

Her room was a cubbyhole off the Chandler's Residence. Baldwin's was just on the other side of a stone partition. When they were small, they used to whisper through a speaking tube chiseled ages ago, sharing their thoughts and dreams.

She missed him, powerfully, wishing she could talk to him again. And she might, now. After all, he was still alive. *Thank the Goddess*. When her tears finally dried, it was as if she, too, had returned to life.

Purposefully, she went to the hidey-hole cut in the rock floor and reached underneath her box of keepsakes for the Book. Her fingers scrabbled for purchase on the slick material, then gained a hold. She drew it out, keeping an ear open for footsteps in the corridor.

The Book's green eye winked at her. The cover was blank and white as bone. She riffled the empty pages attached to the heavy black binding, marveling at the texture. How many Days old was it? And still smooth, perfect.

The eye stopped winking and burned now a steady emerald in the bright glow coming through the skylight.

She opened the Book. The first page was a flat mirror, reflecting her face, thinner since Baldwin's exile. She smoothed out the frown line creasing her forehead, and brushed fair hair away from her face. She licked her lips. The reflection in the book looked as scared as she felt. She took a deep breath and asked, "Book, what is it about pig shit that kills people?"

Her face vanished from the silver page, replaced instantly by a set of questions. VISUAL? AUDIO? MULTI-MEDIA?

She touched 'VISUAL,' not wanting to be overheard. Another set of questions appeared: LEVEL OF RESPONSE? CHILDREN: ELEMENTARY? JUNIOR? ADVANCED? ADULT: INTRODUCTORY? SUPERFICIAL? COMMERCIAL? ACADEMIC?

She touched 'ELEMENTARY' and the page went silver again. She turned it. Now there was writing on the formerly blank pages, and a picture of a pig. But it didn't look much like their

pigs. It was huge, and round as a barrel.

She began to read, pausing often, per the Book's first instructions, to touch the page and whisper, "Dictionary," to define words she didn't know. Often, she had to ask for definitions within the definitions, filling up the facing page, but at last, many categories later, she thought she understood.

Gases. Methane. Ammonia. Carbon dioxide. Mercaptans. Hydrogen sulfide. The names rang in her head like the slow tolling of the Exile bell. Or the ringing of the shift-change.

Goddess! Was it Day shift already?

Hurriedly, she shut the Book and hid it again. She pulled on a new shirt and vest and shuffled off to First Meal, wondering how to explain her tiredness to Papa.

And how should she approach Father Adrian?

Adrian, late for First Meal again, didn't welcome the tired beginning of another shift. How could he keep pretending to be the mouthpiece of the All-Knowing, the All-Truthful, when a deadly mystery remained unsolved?

And he was failing his flock. He knew it was his duty to denounce the Chandler's wife for breaking the law of Exile, but how could he, when she personified the Goddess' love for her children?

He stumbled into the great hall and dragged himself to the dais. He bowed apologetically and quickly said the Blessing, "We thank Thee, Goddess, for Thy bountiful gifts, which we receive in true humility from Thy hands." And through the benefits of their own onerous labor, which the Blessing forgot to mention.

He sat down heavily in his place at the Chandler's table and fished some still-warm pastries from the basket. Apple again. At Monastery Keep, there would have been peach pastries, and berry, and cream cheese, too. Here it was the same thing shift after shift. And worse, this meal he was under the baleful eye of the Chandler's daughter.

What had he done to earn such a look from her? As if he were a poisoatoad, or a silverfish.

It took him a few more mouthfuls of food and tea before he connected her look with its most probable cause. He was nearly done before he knew what he should do.

He brushed crumbs from his robe, noticing how badly rumpled and stained it had become lately, and cleared his throat. "Honored Chandler, may I borrow your daughter's labor this shift? I, um, I have some cleaning and, um, reshelving to do in the Goddess's library, and..."

The Chandler beamed. "Of course, Father Adrian. Boda will be most happy to help you."

Boda nodded, keeping her eyes downcast.

Adrian knew what flashed in them, however.

Satisfaction.

The Goddess's library was fragrant with dust, ink, paper, and glue, smells he'd cherished since he was a young acolyte, thinking them the Goddess' own perfume.

He handed her a dust cloth and nerved himself to start his lecture but, in the next breath, she interrupted his plan.

"Father Adrian, why hasn't the All-Seeing vouchsafed us an explanation for why Hobart and Sweeney died?" she asked, holding a sacred text close to her breast.

"Well..." he began, with no idea how to continue.

"Is it a test? Of our faith? We believe in Her goodness, always. Why would she test us?"

She voiced his doubts. He grabbed a text he knew well from many hours of punishing study and opened it unerringly. "The fathers of the Church have said, 'Let the believer trust in Her mercy and goodness. Her light is the light of Truth.'"

"Then why is she silent? If she knows the truth...why can't we know it, too?"

"Well..." He coughed, clearing his throat, hoping to seize inspiration from the air, from the text, from Her Holy Wisdom. "I don't know." If only he'd been a better priest, he'd have been allowed to proceed to the next level of initiation...

"Did the Goddess write these with her own hands?" Boda asked, one of the traditional children's questions. He knew that answer!

"No. In Her goodness, she gave knowledge to the Church fathers, who set it down for Her."

"Does She know things She doesn't share with the Church?"

Adrian stood stone-still, locked in battle with the Adversary's own question. He'd wrestled with it in the depths of Monastery Keep that Night not so long ago, when he had first seen the Moon and the moving stars through the Eye of the Goddess. A door had opened in his mind then. If the moving stars themselves had moons, unseen to naked eyes, what else was hidden to sight? What else did the Church conceal from the uninitiated?

He'd seen for himself the round, almost stationary shadow on the bright Moon. And the idea, ridiculous according to the teachings of the Church, had seized him that it was *Newhome's* shadow. He'd searched in vain for corroborating texts, and one day, he'd been caught with one above his initiation level.

But how did Boda think to question? There was only one possibility. "What did Baldwin tell you about what he read?"

Boda studied her feet. "Nothing."

"And how exactly did he learn to read? There are no *primers* in the Goddess' library."

Boda started guiltily. "I don't know."

Adrian moved, trapping her in the corner where the shelves came together. He put his hand on her shoulder to restrain her and felt the frantic beating of her heart drumming on his skin. "Can you read, too, Boda?"

"I never read any of the Goddess' books," she asserted.

"But you do read?" He fingered her long fair hair, wanting her secret as much as he might want her favors if he were an ordinary man and not a celibate priest. "Where are the unapproved books?"

"There are no *books*."

"It's only one, then? What's it about?"

She jerked as if to break and run, but he held her fast, until she answered.

"It's a magical book. It's always changing."

Adrian's hand tightened on her shoulder, thinking of the rumored Books of Congress that only the highest level priests could ever gaze upon. He'd give his soul to read one. "Is it about Astronomy? Mathematics? Chemistry?" The words rolled from his tongue like stolen jewels.

"How do you know—" Boda's eyes went wide. Oh, she was quick, with a lively intelligence hidden behind that beautiful face.

"I want to read it, too." He whispered, as if to keep the secret from the Goddess, whose sacred library was filled with the falsehoods of men. "What's in it?"

"Everything."

Adrian handled the Book with awe. The Table of Contents alone filled the Book's many pages to the very end, with more after that. Boda showed him how she'd asked for information about the fatal pig shit. The answers that appeared gave rise to marvelous opportunities, because one of the gases given off was a *fuel*. Could they use it next Night? Asking the book for practical help in collecting the fuel produced diagrams, model drawings, and step-by-step instructions.

Adrian was in love. He wanted to spend all his time reading the Book, except he also needed time to do all he'd read about. And, as Boda reminded him, they needed the Keep folks' cooperation.

"I'm glad you confided in me, Boda," Adrian said several shifts later, hurrying along so quickly she had to skip to keep up. He was carrying an armful of parchment rolls.

"Well, they wouldn't have listened to just me, would they?"

Daylight pierced the great hall through the thick glass skylights. The tapestries of bygone Days that kept the walls warm by Night blazed with color. All the assembled elders of Hill Keep awaited them.

Adrian hurried to the head table and dumped the rolls upon it. He let Boda catch up and bowed briefly to the Elders. "Thank you all for agreeing to hear me. I believe—" He took a breath, knowing it wouldn't calm the knocking of his heart, and said, "I have been granted a revelation from the Goddess."

In the outcry that followed, the most important communication was silent, passing from the Chandler to his daughter. Her answer was a small, knowing smile.

"I believe we should let Father Adrian have his say," said the Chandler mildly, and--for a wonder--the rest of them fell silent.

Adrian unrolled his first plan. "We can remove the deadly element from the pig waste."

Everyone wanted to know how.

"Let me show you," Adrian said and proceeded to explain how the waste converter, borrowing warm water from the hot springs that kept them alive through the darkest, coldest shifts of Night, would produce *methane* for use in *gas* lamps, and safe, odor-free fertilizer.

"This is a very complicated revelation!" exclaimed Smith Rambert. "Usually the Goddess only expresses her anger."

"And the priests tell us how we've sinned," complained Chella.

"Can't you duplicate the drawn parts?" inquired the Chandler.

"But...but, of course, I can!" blustered the Smith, his professional pride injured. "Here, let me see those again."

After a long discussion, the Elders took their plans and left, filled with excitement as if they'd only been awaiting a spark to catch fire. At last, only the Chandler, Boda, and Adrian remained as the kitchen staff began to prepare for the next meal. Chandler Hendrik was looking over the plans copied from the Book, only altered enough to prevent any open contradiction of the Church's references. His eyebrows knit together in a frown, and his finger tapped twice on a scrawled figure.

Adrian's heart paused. Did the Chandler suspect his lie?

"You say this...*gas*...burns. Tell me, priest. Is it like pitch? Does it also...explode?"

Adrian gulped, relieved. "Yes, sir. It can."

The Chandler smiled, and rolled up the parchment plans, handing them to Adrian. "Well,

then. Best see that it doesn't--inside the Keep."

"Y-yes, sir."

With a last benevolent nod, the Chandler left.

"That went well!" chirped Boda.

Adrian wiped sweat from his brow. "It's only the beginning."

Day was a long season of unending labor in the fields and orchards as the Keep folk planted, harvested, and preserved as much food as they could. Even the children worked in the blistering heat in the hottest weeks, ranging out past the cultivated fields in the valley to gather herbs, nuts, and berries from the forest.

Boda and Adrian performed the tasks assigned to them during their work shifts, then stole precious hours from sleep to open the Book and uncover more marvels. The spread of knowledge was an infection, just as Monastery Keep warned, but it brought life and enthusiasm to Hill Keep as the ideas of the Ancestors sparked innovation in their descendants.

Smith Rambert and his crew painstakingly hand-crafted stirring arms, a floating cover, and the simple pump shown in Adrian's copy of the Book's diagrams, but after a week he gave up struggling with the problem of how to create airtight metal tubing. It was Physician Courtney who suggested using the thick, long hollow stems of harra creeper, cured with tanninweed, to keep them flexible without rotting. After all, the Keep already used harra stems to pipe water from the cisterns to the kitchen and livestock caverns.

The solution worked, and soon the pump was busy removing noxious gases from the pig pit. Collecting fertilizer was still an unpleasant task reserved for those being punished for minor infractions, but, at least no one died while doing it.

Then Housekeeper Chella asked whether the flammable *methane gas* might be used for fuel for a kitchen stove as well as in lamps. Smith Rambert suggested adapting the design of the lamp burners to accommodate a ring to hold pots a fixed distance above the base of the flame, and thus was born a spindly-legged contraption that soon graced the Keep kitchen.

The twenty-six weeks of Day passed quickly. As the sun began to sink lower and lower on the horizon, all hands in the Keep were mustered in the harvest race against the first storms of Twilight.

Everyone, even Adrian, worked double shifts, cutting and threshing grain, gleaned apples, tearberries, acorns, and trufflenuts, crushing the bounty of the grapevines that flourished on the hillside slopes above the hot springs. For nearly three weeks, no time or energy was left over at the end of Swing shift for Adrian to do anything but wearily wash, eat, and fall instantly asleep.

They finished harvesting the grain just ahead of the first storm. Then they turned their efforts to the muddy work of digging potatoes, beets, and turnips from the ground while more of the sun vanished below the horizon with each shift.

Adrian spent most of the last week of Day helping to load the tithe wagons, and he was sore all over. He had known that sixty percent of each Keep's produce was sent away to Monastery Keep, but he'd never known before exactly how much the tithe represented.

"S not fair," complained Smith Rambert's husky son as he dumped another heavy sack of grain onto the wagon bed with a thump, raising a cloud of chaff-dust. "We work so those fat

parasites at the Monastery--oh, begging your pardon, Father Adrian!" he added hastily as he noticed the priest.

Adrian's lips thinned. What *did* the Monastery do in return for their tithes? "How can you call Father Gilles a parasite? He travels all Day 'round—"

"Father Gilles eats here!" retorted a youth who'd just arrived, rolling a small wine cask before him. "And he only stays for two weeks. Why should we have to pay so much? "

"I've been here for nearly an entire Day—" Adrian began.

"But you'll be gone some Day. Then what?"

Adrian didn't know the answer or how to address the injustice.

The disappearance of the last sparks of the sun marked the beginning of Twilight.

That shift, under a clear sky the color of blood, the Keep community gathered at Memorial Cairn to remember those who'd died since the previous Samhain. Adrian read the roll call of the dead and sang the ritual, heart full of mingled joy and sorrow, offering bread, salt, and wine for those who were now Ancestors.

As he intoned the last prayer for Hobart and Sweeney, a commotion arose as everyone noticed Boda climbing the path up the side of the hill, hand-in-hand with Baldwin.

Adrian tried to think what to say, what to do. How could Boda force his hand this way? When they stood before him, as custom demanded, Adrian didn't address the Exiled youth or even look at him. "What's the meaning of this, Boda?"

"He's not dead! The Church—Father Gilles—cast him out but the Goddess hasn't taken him. I'd say that's a sign of Her will." She looked directly at Adrian, her eyes bright with challenge and unmistakable hope.

Adrian searched his conscience. Like Adrian, Baldwin had done nothing but search for knowledge and truth. But overturning Father Gilles' pronouncement would mean a complete break from the Church's standing policy. How could Adrian justify that?

If he believed that the Goddess had shown the Book to Boda, then Baldwin must also be Her instrument... It became painfully clear to Adrian that serving the Goddess and serving the Church were two different things.

Adrian stepped forward and pitched his voice to carry. "Father Gilles Exiled Baldwin for breaking the law about reading. We all know that Exile means certain death, outside a Keep. Yet Baldwin is alive! The Goddess has indeed blessed him."

As Adrian spoke, Chandler Hendrik's normally stern expression collapsed into incredulous longing. "Father Adrian," he said, in a choked voice. "If you feel it should be done, then... please..."

"My son!" Isabeau began to weep. "My son!"

"Kneel, Baldwin Chandlersson," Adrian said, putting his hand on the boy's dirty, matted hair. "Baldwin, I welcome you back to life and your Keep. Your punishment is complete, your Exile is ended." How right it felt to exercise the priestly power of life and death and to choose life!

The following shift, the Keep folk gathered at trestle tables and prepared to eat the feast of Harvest Thanksgiving. Silence filled the great hall when Adrian struck a sacred match while Boda opened the valve on the first gas jet. There was a whoosh, then several sputters as the flame

wavered between gold and silver, reflected and redoubled in the mirrored backing. Other Elders, conscious of the honor, did the same with ten more of the jets installed along the walls. The steady, bluish-white light of the lamps gave the awed faces in the Hall a whole new aspect.

Housekeeper Chella had organized the cooking staff to serve as many different hot dishes as they could devise this holiday. In the past, the need to hoard fuel had meant most of the feast was served cold. But this Twilight celebration, there were loaves of bread stuffed with trufflenuts, platters of steamed harra shoots served with herb-butter, tearberry pastries, potatoes fried with bacon, onions, and cheese, and, of course, roast pork and beef with gravy.

"O Goddess of the giving earth, we thank You for the bounty of this harvest." Adrian stood on the dais, his arms raised for the blessing. They were all anticipating a season of rest and leisure, thankful they had enough to eat until Day came again. "Goddess bless us."

"Goddess bless us," echoed five hundred—and one—reverent voices.

Adrian took his place at the head table next to Boda. She was clad in her holiday best and for once her tangled fair hair was combed and braided. Next to her sat Baldwin, freshly scrubbed and shining. Boda smiled at Adrian as he served himself from the platters on the table, and he returned her smile.

"Father Adrian," said the Chandler, "thank you for giving back my son."

"Has anyone ever canceled an Exile before?" asked Baldwin, his voice hoarse with disuse.

"I don't know," replied Adrian, sheepishly.

Baldwin continued. "What are you going to tell Father Gilles when he returns? Do you think he'll believe all this is the Goddess' will?"

Chella fixed Adrian with a sharp glance. "But I thought—you said—" she sputtered. "Are we going to get into trouble?"

"Housekeeper Chella," Adrian said, carefully. "Haven't you always said that the Monastery is serving its own interests, not necessarily the Goddess'?"

"Well, that's true enough," Chella agreed bitterly. "The priests take the best for themselves."

"It would be best to avoid open conflict," said the Chandler.

"Perhaps we could take down the lamps before Father Gilles visits us," Isabeau suggested. "And hide Baldwin." She seized her son's hand and squeezed it.

Adrian said with more conviction than he felt, "These lamps are the gifts of the Goddess, so all Her people may live in comfort and joy."

"Besides, I don't think anyone here is willing to turn out the lights," Boda said. "No matter what Father Gilles says—or does."

While Farmer Verdon and his crews prepared the orchards and fields for the coming cold of Night, Adrian and Boda spent the shifts of Twilight frantically writing plans and diagrams. There were so many things left to do before Father Gilles returned at Dawn! Take the *steam turbine*, for example. The Book explained how to harness the power of the steam from the hot spring to power the looms and mills and ventilation fans. Such a device would be tireless, and require far less supervision than forcing animals to tread the circlemills for hours on end.

Meanwhile, the story of how Baldwin had questioned Adrian's revelations spread quickly throughout Hill Keep and its folk argued and speculated passionately during communal meals. How would the Church respond to the changes they were making?

Like Chella, many resented priestly power and privileges, but worried about the consequences of defying Monastery Keep's authority. The memory of Blackglass Lake was an unspoken concern. Once a notorious heretic keep condemned by the Peacekeepers, it had been utterly destroyed by a bolt from heaven, hundreds of Days ago.

Would Hill Keep suffer the same cleansing fate? Or would Adrian be vindicated?

Eight weeks later, at the end of Twilight, as the great doors of the Hill Keep were closed and barred for the duration of the season of Night, Adrian was still wondering the same thing. What would Father Gilles do when he saw the changes Adrian had made? Would he be allowed to stay here for another Day? If not, perhaps he could petition to return. But would his request make the Monastery authorities suspicious about the source of his inventions?

These were questions the Book couldn't answer.

The sky had barely turned gray with the earliest signs of Dawn when Father Gilles rang the keep's Visitor Bell, weeks earlier than expected.

Adrian ran to the postern gate, his heart pounding. There'd only been time to send Baldwin to the safety of the lower storehouses. All the *gas* lamps were still burning against the dark.

Their initial greetings were warm, colleague to colleague, as Adrian helped Father Gilles remove his heavy parka, powdered with snow, and settle his fractious sled dogs with the animal tenders.

All too soon, Father Gilles spied the lamps in the great hall. "What have you done?" he demanded, his face suffused.

"One of—of the vapors from the pig manure burns, and we devised a way to use it," Adrian replied defensively.

Father Gilles shook his head. "Goddess, give the blind sight! Adrian, you *fool*."

"Is it a sin to give these humble folk things to make their lives easier?" Adrian snapped.

Gilles scowled, and his sour expression only deepened as he sat receiving a stream of well-wishers. Almost all of them praised Father Adrian and requested his permanent assignment to Hill Keep. To each petition, Gilles merely spoke a noncommittal acknowledgment: "I hear your words and give the Goddess thanks."

His glance kept returning to the bluish lamp flames, but when the reception line dried to a trickle, Gilles said merely: "It has been a long journey, Adrian, and I'm weary. Please have Housekeeper Chella show me to my new quarters."

The next Day shift, Adrian called upon Gilles in the visitor's chambers.

The older priest was eating from a laden tray. He said around a mouthful of fried ham, "It's been a long time since I saw more than just my quarters and the Hall. Why don't you show me around, Adrian? Tell me all that's been happening here."

Adrian forced himself to flatten his sweaty palms against the nubbled wool of his robe. "I would be happy to."

The first part of the tour went smoothly. In the nursery, the children dutifully repeated their memorized Law verses at Gilles' prompting and sang a hymn, which seemed to please.

Adrian let out a silent breath of relief as they entered the Keep kitchen and found it clean, bustling with activity, and minus the gas stove. No evidence remained except for the harra-creeper tube, carefully capped off and coiled inconspicuously behind a pile of turnip-sacks.

They passed through the spinning and weaving chambers, stopping to chat with the cloth makers, and passed hastily through the ill-smelling dyeworks.

Then, Gilles asked to be taken to the lower storerooms, and although Adrian tried to distract him, he would not be dissuaded. Adrian's hopes collapsed when they entered the dim cavern and caught sight of Baldwin, asleep on a pile of blankets.

Gilles didn't seem astonished, just sorrowful. "Oh, Adrian. I'd hoped it wasn't true—"

Baldwin sprang up, and crouched, blinking at them. "Father Adrian! You said—"

Chandler Hendrik's voice interrupted, booming from the entrance. "Father Gilles, I'm sorry you saw this. Take hold of him," he ordered the two big men accompanying him.

"How dare you lay hands on a priest! " Gilles exclaimed, thrashing ineffectually. "I'll see you Exiled for this!"

The Chandler's men hesitated, looking to Adrian for direction.

All he could do was raise his own hands, palms out, relinquishing his right to command them. They disappeared down the shadowed corridor. After a few steps, Father Gilles' shouting stopped abruptly.

Worse and worse. Now what?

Soon everyone knew Father Gilles was being imprisoned because he'd threatened to take away all the new and wonderful things the keep folk had made last Night. As storms raged outside, emotional arguments erupted over what they'd done and should do. Were the lamps and other devices truly from the Goddess, or merely from Adrian and Boda?

Nobody argued that they should give up the gifts.

Weeks passed, the sky continuing to lighten as they counted off the shifts till Beltane and the beginning of Day. Out in the rain and wind, Farmer Verdon's crews began clearing broken branches from the orchards, mending the fences around the fields, and battling the cold mildew that grew ferociously on every living surface. Not a shift went by that someone didn't thank the Goddess for the gift of light and good hot food.

Then the unthinkable happened. Instead of growing brighter with the coming Day, the cloud-covered sky began to darken again. Shifts passed, the darkness deepening as if it were Twilight rather than Dawn. Adrian longed to see whether the sun had indeed reversed its course as the more superstitious keep folk were convinced, but the rainstorms didn't slacken.

Boda spent many off-shift hours with Adrian, searching the Book to discover what they might do for the crops if the sun failed to return in a week or two weeks...or never.

The clouds finally cleared one Swing shift as Adrian was out helping Farmer Verdon to mix fertilizer by candlelamp light into a sea of mud that would, Goddess willing, eventually become a wheat field.

"Goddess' mercy!" someone gasped.

Adrian looked up at the eastern horizon and his knees threatened to buckle. Where the half-risen sun ought to be there was only a black semicircle surrounded by white flames in a starry sky.

"The sun's gone out!"

"Forgive my sin, Father," Chella whispered fearfully as she unlocked Gilles' cell door. "At first I believed Father Adrian. But now the sun's gone away. I'm afraid it will be Night forever!"

"The sun has vanished? Things are worse than I thought. All within this Keep stand in grave peril." Gilles emerged, stiff from his many shifts of confinement. He laid a hand briefly on her head. "The blessing of the Goddess upon you, daughter."

His guards snored peacefully in the corridor. "Ale with sleepweed," Chella explained. "No one will miss you for a while."

She thrust a bundle at him—warm clothing, gloves, and boots. "Safe journey, Father. And please, oh please, beg the Goddess to restore the sun!"

Search parties found no trace of Father Gilles, though they went as far as the boundary to River Keep. Nobody wanted to believe he'd gotten away—or been helped to escape. Adrian said a private Memorial Service and tried to quash the thought that he was actually praying for his superior's death.

Unlike his searches in the Book, his prayers went unanswered. During what should have been Beltane week, Father Gilles was spotted approaching Hill Keep, accompanied by five mounted horsemen in red.

Adrian's spirits quailed when he heard about the Peacekeepers, warrior-priests dedicated to routing out heresy. He tried to think of a way out of this dilemma but could only redouble his prayers, not for his sake, but for his flock.

Father Gilles and his party thundered to a stop before the still-locked doors of the Keep. They broke down the postern gate and rang the alarm bell. Soon enough, the community gathered in the great hall to find that Father Gilles had hung the scarlet-and-white flag of Anathema over the dais. "The Goddess has set her face from the land because of the heresy of the false priest Adrian! Even in those lands where no clouds form, there is yet no sun!"

Someone giggled nervously, but most were silent, listening. Many looked up at the Night-dark skylight.

"Nothing but darkness," Gilles continued. "There is no sun because you, Adrian of Fairvalley Keep, in collusion with Baldwin Chandlersson and Boda Chandlersdatir, have defied the Goddess and her servants."

The Peacekeepers came toward them. As they clasped an unresisting Adrian by the elbows, Father Gilles proclaimed, "Chandler, under your care this entire Keep has been infected with the poison of heresy!" He swung toward the unconsciously gathered Council members, standing in a ragged group like a nervous flock of sheep. "And what do you do, Housekeeper Chella, when rats infest your storerooms?"

"Why Father G-Gilles," Chella stammered, flushing. "I take a few handfuls of grain, soak them in a solution of ratsbane, then leave the poisoned grain in the storerooms for the rats to eat."

"Where the vermin, having been deceived into thinking you've provided them with a wholesome feast, gorge themselves—and then die." Gilles turned to the Council. "Elders, I beg you. Stop this terrible blasphemy. Exile them, and the Goddess will uncover Her face once more."

Adrian saw uncertainty appear on people's faces, and Boda's fury as she stood confined in a Peacekeeper's rough grip. "That's a very clever play on words, Father Gilles," he declared,

finally knowing exactly what he had to say. "But people aren't rats. And you and I both know what's happening is only an eclipse of the sun. It will begin to pass in about six shifts, whether you Exile us or not."

"Heretic!" Gilles recoiled dramatically.

"No, it's the truth. All we have to do is wait and the sun will return," Boda added, trying to convince the crowd.

"And if we're wrong," offered Baldwin recklessly, "then you can Exile us."

Farmer Verdon stepped forward. "Seems to me," he said with his usual calm, "we won't lose anything by waiting six shifts before acting. I've seen frost on the ground much later in the Day before. We'll still have plenty of time to plant after that." A murmur of agreement rose like smoke in the Hall.

Father Gilles shouted, "I don't believe this! You can't impose conditions—"

The Peacekeepers glanced around, assessing. Five of them. Five hundred keep folk.

Adrian took a breath, about to speak over the murmurs, but the foremost Peacekeeper stepped forward and drew his sidearm.

The weapon barked and sparks struck off the rocky ceiling. Everybody ducked, and into the shocked quiet afterward the Peacekeeper spoke in a harsh, deep voice. "You are all sinners in the eyes of the Goddess!" he denounced them. "The Book of Good says, 'Let the believer trust in Her mercy and goodness. Her light is the light of Truth.' But Her light is dark and you have been seduced." He gestured and the other unencumbered Peacekeeper tore the nearest burning lamp from the wall, dashing the mirror backing into shards on the floor, leaving the ragged-ended harra creeper dangling.

"Don't do that!" Boda warned. The Peacekeeper holding her covered her mouth with his large gloved hand. The light in the hall dimmed as, one by one, the other lamps flickered and went out. Boda jerked and shouted against the muffling palm, but no intelligible sound emerged.

Adrian stared at the broken tube, spewing invisible gas into the hall. Then he choked as a meaty forearm throttled him, nearly lifting him from the ground.

As the last of the lamps died, the Peacekeeper aimed his weapon at the center of the crowd, where the Chandler stood. In a low voice, he instructed his attendant, "Light a candlelamp." The scratch of the striking match was as loud as the thunder of his blood in Adrian's ears. The flame wavered, then burned steadily, the one source of light in the hall now.

The Peacekeeper in his red armor glowed like a tongue of fire. He spoke quietly, firmly. "You have believed the lies of the false priest. He told you his gifts were a revelation from the Goddess, didn't he? But our Goddess is merciful. She gives Her gifts through the Church to all Her people. Only the Adversary tempts us one at a time. Adrian was tempted--weren't you?"

The voice went straight for Adrian's guilty conscience. He kept trying, by grimaces and shrugs and sheer telepathy, to get his captor to let him speak. To no avail. He tried to catch the Chandler's eye, Farmer Verdon's, Chella's, anybody's, but no one would look at him. He had to speak. He had to be allowed to speak. It didn't matter what they did to him, afterward.

"Adrian was tempted by forbidden knowledge. He should not have been able to find any here, in the heart of pious Hill Keep. But he found something—*didn't you?*"

The shout was like a sudden blow. Adrian flinched. He mouthed words, hoping the Peacekeeper could see him: "I'll confess! Just let me speak!"

The red warrior smiled grimly and motioned to Adrian's captor. As Adrian took his first easy breath, filling his lungs, the Peacekeeper said, "And he'll tell you himself."

Adrian yelled, "Everybody drop to the floor! Out of the hall! Somebody turn off—"

The gas ignited then, expanding in a blazing fireball almost too fast to see, too loud to hear. It knocked the Peacekeepers off their feet, burning their red robes away. The sidearm discharged indiscriminately, and when Adrian, singed and shaken, crawled out from underneath the limp body of his former captor some numb time later, the great hall was dark and full of the sounds of pain.

"Boda?" he called. "Baldwin? Chandler?"

"Father Adrian," Baldwin said in his hoarse voice. "Boda and Smith Rambert have gone to shut down the pump. I'm trying to cap the pipe here."

"Whatever you do--don't light a match!" Adrian cautioned.

"No chance of that!" Baldwin agreed.

When the devastation was finally visible and tallied, three of the Peacekeepers were dead, including the foremost, and the other two badly burned. Eight keep folk had also died, among them Housekeeper Chella and Isabeau Chandlerswyf. The hall was scorched and bloody, and the remaining keep folk were not minded to be gentle to either side of the Goddess' dispute.

"Six shifts, Father Gilles," announced Chandler Hendrik. Adrian shared the torment the Chandler revealed as he gazed at his daughter. "You've always taught that patience is a virtue loved by the Goddess. The truth will be revealed—one way or the other." He gestured. "Detain them—all that are left—and let the Goddess decide!"

Father Gilles' shoulders slumped. "I must abide by the Council's dicta. But the Goddess has already shown Her wrath. What will you do if the sun disappears forever because She cannot bear to look down on your wickedness?"

"Then we'll starve...and so will you," retorted the Chandler.

Shifts passed, marked only by the ringing of the shift-change bell and by the appearance, at intervals, of cold food.

Boda found it hard to be brave in the motherless dark. Tears eventually failed. Only the low murmur of Father Adrian's prayers drifted through the chink in the stone dividing wall.

"Father Adrian, what if you and the Book calculated wrong? What if the eclipse lasts another week? What if the Goddess really is angry at us?" *My mother...*

"Do you believe the Goddess loves us?" he asked, softly.

"I used to" Boda said. "But—" Salt tears burned as they fell, inexhaustible.

"Dear Boda, don't fear the Goddess's anger, only the stupidity of the men who serve Her."

Finally, the Elders came to take them from the storeroom. Dizzy with grief and fear, Boda stumbled into the great hall and saw the assembled keep folk, many clad in traditional white Beltane clothes. It was suddenly easier to walk to the main gates of the keep.

Father Gilles and the two Peacekeepers were already in place, their hands bound. Gilles didn't look up as Adrian began the song of Opening the Gates, his voice steady and solemn. The Chandler shifted the heavy bar and opened the doors.

Outside, it was still cold and dark, but—

Boda looked up and gasped.

"Don't look directly at it!" Adrian warned, sharply.

But Boda had seen the thin crescent of light emerging along one edge of the eclipse.

When the Beltane songs of praise were done, Physician Courtney approached Father Gilles with his tattooing needle.

"You can't Exile me!" Father Gilles screeched.

"We can. We cast you out for lying to us, attempting to divide us and endangering our community," said Chandler Hendrik. "Our lights will not be extinguished."

Boda ducked her head and impulsively embraced Adrian.

"We've won a little time," Adrian murmured as his arms came around her. "Time to teach the others. Time to read the Book."