

By Lughnasa, the Grail Castle was complete. This would be the first time the people would see the Grail, so Arthur made certain to plan a spectacle that would be remembered fondly for generations.

We processed into the Grail castle behind the Maidens, Marius, Galahad and Peredur. As the one who found the Grail, Galahad had the honor of carrying it to its place of permanent enshrinement. We slowly made our way through the press of people gathered at the head of the causeway, yelling, reaching out and seeking benediction from both relic and King. Someone plucked at my cloak, seeking to remove a tassel, while a woman held out a deformed child for me to bless.

“Please, My Lady, in the name of Brigga.”

I touched the child’s bulbous forehead, oddly curled lips and heart. “May the Lady cure you of all ills.”

Up ahead of us, Bishop Marius was bestowing his own blessings and happily collecting coins contributed by the people for the upkeep of the castle.

*He should be giving those back to the poor.*

The causeway stretched out before us, a serpent sunning itself amid the tide. The stones were slippery and uneven beneath our feet. There was no rail on either side of the causeway, so one false move would send a person tumbling into the surf. Anyone who came to seek the Grail would have to be brave and surefooted, that was certain.

The procession stopped at the outmost wall so that the Bishop could bless it. I was too far away to hear his words, but suspected they were mumbled Latin. He smeared some sort of oil on the gateposts before allowing the rest of us to pass through.

Inside the walls were a few buildings necessary for the survival of long-term residents – a boathouse, kitchen, mill, storehouse, goat pen, and even a sunny patch of land which sprouted the beginnings of a small garden.

As we passed into the inner chapel, I caught a whiff of the oil Marius was pasting on the walls at each of the cardinal directions. It was olive oil laced with some sweet, incense-like spice. It reminded me of faraway lands. Maybe it had even come from the land of his Christ.

The inner chapel was sparse, meant to induce meditation and shunning of worldly things. The walls were unadorned plaster and wood. Two levels of sleeping rooms lined the inner courtyard, each with a view of the main temple. One had its door open, and as I passed, I peeked inside. A simple straw mat served as the bed, a stool and table with pitcher and basin the only other furniture. Pegs on the wall would hold a few items of clothing.

The formal chapel for Mass and private devotions was a little more ornate, with silver candlesticks, a lace cloth over the altar with a finely carved wooden cross on the wall behind. I was surprised to note that the statue of the Virgin and Child we had used in the Candlemas ceremony so many years ago was tucked into an alcove, dozens of tallow candles burning brightly before it. But the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Elaine and Galahad were indeed part of the Grail prophecy, so it only made sense that their family would be represented here. I wondered if this was a provision in Lyonesse's will and if the painting of the Holy Family was nearby as well. It was a shame she didn't live to see the chapel completed. She would have loved it, and no doubt taken credit for it.

When we finally reached the palladium, our party fanned out inside the six columns. The grail guardians stood around a central pedestal, on which Galahad placed the Grail. Marius mumbled his prayers over the structure and made a cross with the oil, while the women with the

vase and censer performed their purification rituals. Then Marius stood back and proclaimed, “May all who seek peace, find it here. May all who question, find answers in the Grail. For our Lord said, ‘Seek and ye shall find. Ask and ye shall receive. Knock, and it shall be opened it you.’ Behold, Lord and Savior, in this holy place, we seek, we ask and we knock. Be not stingy with your grace. This we ask *in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*. Amen.” He made the Sign of the Cross over us, and the Christians among us bowed.

Then, silently, the Grail maidens fell to one knee. Morgan, Grainne and I followed suit, making the sign of appreciation to the Goddess and God.

Galahad reached up and unveiled the Grail. The crowd gasped.

“The cup of our Lord!” Someone yelled.

“I see no cup, but a cauldron,” someone else argued.

“You are both blind, it is a resplendent chalice.”

Soon, the crowd inside the inner sanctum was arguing and the tension was growing. Soon they would come to blows over who was right.

Arthur stepped in front of the Grail. “My people.” He had to yell it a few times before the crowd quieted. “My people, you are all correct in what you are seeing. This is the mystery of the Grail. Each person sees it according to his or her own beliefs. I do not claim to understand it, nor do any of us. But I will tell you this. I know it to be true from my own experience. I never know what I will see when I look upon the Grail. As many of you know, I was trained by the Druids and a follower of Mithras before I discovered Christ. For that reason, sometimes I see a cauldron, a drinking horn or the Chalice. I know not what causes my perception to change, but I can testify that I receive the same amount of grace, no matter what form my eyes perceive. The Grail is but one holy object, open to all who seek it.”

The crowd murmured, but Arthur's words seem to have calmed them, filled them with a sense of awe instead of anger.

He leaned over to me. "I will remain here to watch over the crowd and explain this phenomenon as best I can. Take the rest of the party back to the castle and prepare for tonight's feast."

"I will." I took Arthur's hand. "Be careful."

He squeezed it back. "No one will harm me, especially not here."

I signaled to the procession and we turned and departed, allowing those who wished to remain in adoration to do so.