

CHAPTER 1

Everyone agreed that Kircke was one of the most gifted men in the kingdom, unlike his brother, Otto, who sided with Eric Ploughpenny. Infinitely more reasonable than either his cousin Kirch, who earned his bread by trade and fishing at Nykoby, or poor, confused Mandern, three years in the monastery and still uncertain of his lot in life.

Because of the prestige in his home district of Schleswig, he had been elected by his peers to represent them at Viborg, the national assembly of the kingdom. And because he continued to show himself to be wise beyond his years, he had been selected by his contemporaries at Viborg to help draft the document which had developed from a seed of an idea from Harald of Acknoby. Harald, incidental to a related topic of controlling future kings' powers, made note of the fact it was unfortunate that there were no written rules of conduct by which the people could judge the king's policies. For decades now, their cousins, the English, had restricted the authority of their monarchs with the *Magna Carta*. "After all," Harald argued, pounding his fist on the table, "are we less than English men!"

A slap in the face by an armored gauntlet would not have stung so much. It was only necessary for Harald to make the comparison between the two peoples to invite bedlam in the meeting hall. And without further discussion, it was concluded that such a document should represent the will of the people in Denmark.

"Do you mind," Otto asked picking up the first page of the charter before Kircke. Otto, like his brother, had been elected from the Schleswig *Ting* to represent that region's interest at Viborg. But unlike the older brother, he was elected by lesser, petty men who had no sense of the future of the kingdom and had little in the way of vision to help guide the nation.

"By law shall this land be built," Otto read from the page. "Were every man content with what is his and granted to other men the same rights, no law would be needed . . . ," he stopped abruptly. "Handsome words, brother. If the rest of the document is as well written, this will serve well to protect the rights of all the people of the kingdom."

Kircke sighed. "Certainly, Otto, this could be meant to mean that, but I think the practical application is that it will protect the land owners and wealthy. They will in turn protect the interests - what would be the interests if they had a better outlook, of the lower classes."

Kircke had been down this road many times before with his younger brother, hence the confrontation. Despite the fact he had explained it often enough, Otto failed to comprehend that only the wealthy - the nobles, had training and education enough to make decisions - the right decisions, for the kingdom. Otto's failure to grasp this simple bit of logic often distressed his older brother. It was as if he had been born with a major character flaw.

"Brother," Otto reproached him softly, "do *you* not understand? It is the people: the small farmer, the shop owner, the day laborer, who makes up this country. Not the noble ones of the nation. Without them, who would plow your fields or load your ships or build your houses? Indeed, who would there be for you to order about as if you were the King of Hedeby?"

"And would you have had these ideas," Kircke said feeling his temper rise and struggling to restrain himself, "had you been born first and inherited father's holdings?"

There it was the disparity between Kircke and Otto. Oodam, Kunger's son, had been a sickly child and had done nothing more than fathered two sons before passing away. The first was spectacular. Ogsdamn was one of those rare men who combined intelligence with warrior-like aggressiveness. No venture was undertaken which was not profitable, no goal too lofty, and no desire beyond his grasp. These qualities he instilled in his son, Kircke, who was the glory of

his father. Tall, strong, fair, the very epitome of Nordic manhood, the older son emulated Ogsdamn as all fathers everywhere dreamed they would.

But Otto was different. Perhaps it was because, as Kircke said, that he really didn't have much of a future to look forward to. Under Salic Law, the oldest son reaped the benefits of the father's hard work, female children were found acceptable marriages, but younger males of the family were often left to fend for themselves. Rivalry was not uncommon; fratricide a familiar occurrence from the commonest peasant to the monarchs of the kingdom.

The uncertainty of Otto's future, his struggle to find a place for himself in a society which saw him denied a natural share of property and prosperity allowed - forced actually - him to dwell on the events not from the position of the great nobles, but of the peasants.

"It may just be, Kircke. It may well be," Otto reflected. "But it could just as well be that it sickens me to see those of you who have the wealth abuse it. Those of you who have the power make war without consideration of those who must scratch the land and slop the swine and serve the great lords while nobles plot to destroy their neighbors and themselves and this kingdom!"

"We are a nation of warriors, Otto! Have you forgotten that!" bellowed Kircke. "Do you not remember our history? We have always struggled, both externally and internally. I tell you, it is no less than God's natural plan. I see doubt in your face, brother. Look at the maid who milks the cow. When the bucket settles, where does the cream go? Does it fall to the bottom? Is it a larger amount than the milk? Does it mix with the rest of the contents unless disturbed? No, no, no, and finally NO! It has always been thus, and thus it shall remain. The result? A kingdom of warriors!"

"Those days are past!" Otto exclaimed.

Kircke looked as shocked as if his brother had struck him. "Gone? No! Never! We are stronger now than we have ever been. We've yet to reach our potential as a kingdom."

"For once, we agree, brother," Otto conceded. "But to what end? Where will it lead us to? The Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, and all the rest had their empire at one time. Where are they now? More importantly, where will we be after we've had ours?"

"You've proved my point, Otto," Kircke interjected. "How could a commoner come to this conclusion?"

"I am a commoner," Otto mumbled humbly.

"You? You are no more than I," replied Kircke. "You are from Ogsdamn's family. Not so common after all."

"I am a commoner," he repeated himself. "You are the one left father's property, as you pointed out."

"Is that why you act as you do?" asked Kircke as if he had finally discovered the underlying problem with his sibling. "Fine. Take the land north of Hedeby. Take half the stores in that city. Take all our holdings in Nykoby. This day, I will give all of this to you," Kircke divested himself of half his property in a single sentence.

"You still do not understand do you, Kircke?" replied Otto. "These things are no more yours to give than it is up to me to give you a pleasant day. These *things* you speak of are and should by any right," he rattled the page still clutched in his hand, "be the property of those who sweat to make them work. They are not yours, brother. You are but their temporary custodian!"

Kircke gave his younger brother a look which would have been akin to one he would have cast at a blasphemer. "You are mad!"

"Upset, yes. Angry, perhaps. But insane, no!" countered Otto. "I tell you, brother, one day the people will not be satisfied with the crumbs from your table, they will demand more - more than half the loaf! Then what will your kind do? Behind what piece of paper will you hide then?"

"Behind our swords and shields!"

"Exactly. And to the ruination of our kingdom and our family," Otto exclaimed.

"Get out! You have no more right here than any peasant. You are correct on one matter, brother, you *are* a commoner. You belong with your own kind. Now get out!" Kircke turned his back on his brother who stalked from his tent throwing the first page of the *Jutlandic Code* to the floor.

Kircke returned to his work with the Ting; Otto went about his business organizing labor in Denmark. The wound of words between them continued to fester, fetter and ultimately prove fatal.

Mandern was every mother's dream and the bane of every father. He was kind, attentive, and helpful, but he shunned all work when it came to it. He had no interest in commerce and had no plans for the future. He was not physically strong or intellectually brilliant. Instead, he was convinced God had made him average so that average men would have someone to look up to.

Ogsdamn's brother, Oodamsson, took after more than his illustrious grandfather, Kunger. He was a weak man given to vacillation and agreeing with the last person he spoke with on any given topic. A deeply religious man, he aligned himself with Bishop Valdamir of royal birth who sought to usurp Valdamir the Victorious son's claim to the throne. In disgust, and fear for his life, Ogsdamn sent him to Nykoby to take care of the family's fishing business.

But Oodamsson disdained his responsibility in commerce and it was eventually necessary to hire an overseer to manage the small fleet of boats which fished Koge Bay. The errant younger brother sought no employment, found none by accident, and eventually married a woman from Nykoby whose father had more money than brains. The father's sole interest in the marriage was to divorce himself of an aging daughter and connect himself to an aspiring family for whatever commercial advantage it might offer. If it cost him a small amount to support the couple, he deemed it a worthwhile investment.

The hapless pair contributed nothing to the society of Nykoby, save a pair of children, Rignea and Mandern, and it was with a sigh of relief in the community when the couple's benefactor died, he bequeathed his business to an ambitious son, leaving Oodamsson nothing in the way of compensation.

Rather late in life, the husband and wife decided they would need to support themselves now that their financial security was uncertain. The two delivered noon meals to the workmen on the wharves and in that way remained solvent.

The daughter, Rignea, seemed to have inherited the total sum of intelligence of the couple. Before she was sixteen, Rignea married a fisherman from the village who owned his own boat. Of course, they could not hope to fish the same, more profitable waters in which Uncle Ogsdam's vessels sailed, but their needs were few and their meager living was enough for them to get by on.

Mandern was a greater problem for the family. He could not join the family business, because it barely supported Oodamsson and his wife. The extended-family business, now run indirectly by Kircke, was unlikely to give the young man an opportunity based on the good

principle of "son-like-father." Mandern's chances, at fifteen, were limited, and looking bleaker still.

As luck would have it, the couple was serving lunch on the docks when Otto arrived on the request of his brother to inspect the herring operation. While the couple recognized their relative, they made no attempt to contact Otto until he sent for them. It wasn't that they hadn't asked for favors over the years. Indeed, a month seldom went by without a petition of one sort or another. But this was the first one for which the couple would not receive direct benefit.

Otto listened patiently while the couple explained their problem and sought a solution from the Hedeby family. In the end, it was a simple solution to a simple problem of what to do with Mandern.

Two years after Valdamir became sole ruler of Denmark, a larger, more noticeable division occurred in Europe. The head of the reform movement in the church, Alexander III, was elected Pope. Unfortunately, so was Victor. The Archbishop of Lund, and therefore the ecclesiastical ruler of Denmark, Eskil, immediately aligned himself and the Danish Church with Alexander. The new king, Valdamir, on the other hand, seeing a chance to break his oath of fealty to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, recognized Victor as the Pope. A friend of both, Absalon attempted to negotiate reconciliation between the two, but to no avail.

Unwilling to recant his support for what Valdamir called the "false Pope," Eskil of Lund found his residence at Soborg under siege by the king's forces. The archbishop, like Alexander III, found he had no other recourse but to flee to France and await and pray for a change in events.

But Kunger had counseled Valdamir against supporting Victor, convinced he would eventually lose in the struggle for the throne of Saint Peter. When Valdamir went to Jean de

Lone to pledge himself to the new pope and asked Kunger to attend him, the Hedebian refused, saying the matter was in the hands of God and not for mortals to tamper with in their earthly dwelling.

Kunger had gone, received Alexander's blessing, and pledged anew his service to the Emperor. The entire Danish Church, save the Cistercian Order established by Eskil in Denmark, applauded the journey as did most of Kunger's countrymen.

Events in Europe, like the hands of a clock, turned relentlessly though and the victory of Victor was soon vanquished by those who supported Alexander. Kunger, who suffered the king's wrath for his reluctance to accept the counterfeit pope, was quickly pressed into the service of the monarch to reconcile Valdamir and Eskil.

The negotiations were intense for a short time, but in the end a truce was achieved. Eskil was to be regarded second only to the king in Denmark. Additionally, Ringsted received a new cathedral constructed by a new technology - fired brick. Valdamir obtained the support of the Archbishop, who was present for Valdamir's seven-year-old coronation, thus setting a precedent of hereditary rule. Last, and mutually beneficial, the bones of St. Knut were deposited under the altar of the new church. For Eskil, this cemented the relationship of the monarch to the church; for Valdamir, it meant the celestial advancement of the monarch.

The deal was struck. The gratitude of both the state and church was showered on Kunger for his role in finding a peaceful solution. But there was nothing in this kingdom Kunger wanted, his wife, Kristinia, having died the year before. He asked only that if a favor was needed in the future by the family, it would be bestowed immediately.

A messenger was dispatched to the nearest Cistercian monastery and before the day was out, Mandern was accepted into the order. Mother and father were wet-eyed with gratitude.

Otto was pleased he was able to do something for this peripheral part of his family. The holy fathers of the order were delighted that they could re-pay an old debt. Only Mandern was not ecstatic with his new home, but his opinion would have counted little, and he didn't bother voicing it.

Within two days of his arrival at the monastery, it became readily apparent to both Mandern and the chief monk that the deal had been a dreadful mistake. For the hapless youth, his introduction into an order which practiced self-flagellation and wore hair shirts to suffer for the sins on earth was all together too much for the young man. To the monks' way of thinking, Mandern's apparent lack of devotion to the serious work of the church was evidence of the boy's poor preparation for a life of suffering and humility.

However, a favor had been asked and acted upon, and it would be unethical to make an exception now. Besides which, not even a monastic order wanted to irritate even an insignificant member of the powerful Kunger family. After all, a deal's a deal.

Following much prayer and contemplation, the good fathers of the monastery at Nykoby, as quickly as deemed prudent, placed Mandern in a religious habit of the order, handed him a hoe, and placed him in charge of weeding the garden. During the winter, he was promoted to cleaning the stalls and pens of the farm animals.

At last, Mandern found a vocation in life. Far from feeling slighted by the Cistercians, he was immensely proud of the role he played in providing food for the monastery. During the summers which followed, it was his hands which provided the green vegetables for the tables and wheat which other, more capable hands, ground into flour and baked into bread. In the winter, he busied himself with the livestock, learning to milk during his second year with the brotherhood.

During his third year, in 1250, he assumed the additional responsibility of harvesting the grain. It was a small field outside the gates of the monastery, and Mandern took a special pride in the fact he was one of the few, besides missionaries, who left in ones and twos, but never seemed to return, to be allowed access outside the walls of the compound. He wondered if it was because he had not been allowed to take any vows, nor hear any confessions, hence could betray no secrets. But, again, this question he refused to ask.

The scythe was much older than Mandern, its handle worn smooth by hard hands which swung the shaft for countless years. The blade was still sturdy though and it kept a keen edge despite the number of seasons it had seen.

The task was really mindless, but this didn't seem to bother the young man. He turned half around at the waist and let the force of his movement to the other side slice the stalks of the plant. He stepped forward and repeated the process. Again and again he used the implement with the skill its designer had intended.

"Damn, if you swing that any harder, you'll make a woman of me in your next stroke!"

Mandern stopped in awe. He had heard that God often spoke to the brothers during moments of silent contemplation, but he had never expected it to happen to him.

"Lord? Is that you?" Mandern asked in a whispered excitement, the anticipation of conversing with God Almighty was more than he could stand.

"No, you fool," Otto whispered back. "It is I, Otto of Hedeby," the man responsible for his vocation rolled free of the entangling stalks of grain.

Mandern stooped quickly to help his benefactor to his feet. As he rose, he brushed particles of dust and grain from his fine cloak.

"My goodness, you startled me, Uncle," Mandern mumbled a quick apology.

Otto grasped Mandern's brushing hands and held them still. "Who else is about?"

"Why, no one, Uncle. I work out here by myself," the simple lad stated.

Otto quickly assessed his situation. The monastery was not far away, but distant enough that no one would recognize him from the wall. There were no roads close to the field and he doubted he would encounter anyone traveling through the grain. His situation was desperate, and time to find an acceptable, alternate route of escape was quickly running out. He made his decision.

"I'm in need of your services," Otto declared quite suddenly.

This was it, Mandern knew. The moment he had waited for his entire life: the time when someone needed him. He had prayed to God daily for the opportunity, and now the Lord saw fit to reward his three years of dedication. Unconsciously, he brushed his habit of rough cloth, smoothing it as if he were to stand before the Bishop . . . no, the Pope himself!

"I'm always here to serve you, Uncle," the youth answered in his slow, thick tongue.

"Then you shall," Otto assured him. "First, two promises you must make to me."

"Anything," Mandern responded instantly.

"Swear, before God, that you will never . . . never tell anyone you saw me," Otto required.

Mandern looked quizzically at his uncle a moment before shaking his head to the affirmative and finally saying, "Yes, I swear."

"Second, I'm in need of a boat. Not a coastal, but something which can follow the seas and it will need to be crewed," Otto ordered.

Mandern looked at him as if he had just ordered him to walk to Constantinople, as may he well have. "How . . .," he left the rest of the question dangling.

Now it was Otto's turn to squirm. He had used all the coins he had with him to bribe a ship's captain to carry him from Lubeck to Nykoby, and hove to long enough for him to swim ashore before they made land, outside of the village.

"I don't know," he said dejectedly. "I don't know how, but it must be done. Done quietly and quickly."

Otto was far more troubled than he seemed, although his distress was apparent enough for even Mandern to easily detect. To put himself into the hands of this dolt was almost more than he could bear, but he realized he had little real choice in the matter. His benefactor - the man he supported, Erik - was dead, assassinated by his brother, Abel. *Now that's an appropriate end to a tyrant, even Biblical by design.*

Otto had supported the old monarch based on what he thought at the time, was common sense: Kircke opposed the king; therefore, Otto supported him, despite the fact he knew him to be a tyrant of the worst kind and totally opposed to the reforming ideas he himself favored.

The *Jydske Lov*, the Jutland Code, had been the last important instrument enacted by the last king to bear the name Valdamir, in March 1241. Before this time, kings of the realm held a *hof*," or court, during the middle of Lent. Valdamir had avoided those national *Tings*, preferring to use nobles and bishops to govern the nation. The *Drost*, whose task prior to this had been to serve the king meals, was made a minister of finance. The *Marsh*, or Master of the House, became the commander of the military. However, the most important position was that of chancellor, something akin to a modern-day chief of staff.

A modern government, however, costs a great deal of money to operate. Not only were there the castles to build and armies to feed and ships to outfit, the complexity of war had changed the manner in which combat was conducted. No longer were men mobilized to conduct

war. Warfare of the thirteenth century required mounted forces, not foot soldiers and only the rich could afford horses. Indeed, many peasants found it more efficient to pay a large land owner a portion of their crops in exchange for protection and to avoid paying property tax to the crown. So instead of being marshaled to combat, the peasant paid a tax under the third Valdamir. If the king traveled, the region he visited paid a *stud* for his maintenance. If they drank a beer or consumed imported goods or any of a hundred other daily activities, they paid a tax. But Valdamir provided good government and if it cost to be secure, so be it.

Erik Ploughpenny, his successor and son, was a different matter all together. Not nearly as popular as his father, Erik infuriated a nation already bled by taxes. Not only had he continued the practices of his father, but he added a tax on any plough owned in the kingdom, hence his nickname. When even this proved incapable of satisfying his lavish needs, he took to seizing individual church treasuries containing the tithes of the community.

It was the story of Cain and Abel repeated. Abel slew his brother, and Otto was forced to flee before the vengeance of the new king. He had been in hiding, scampering from one port to the next, for many months, but the pressure to capture him was still consuming. Perhaps the pursuit would not have been so hot if his brother was not with the new king fanning the flames.

As if in his great pain to reach a decision, Mandern finally found his voice. "I will find the help we need, Uncle," he stammered at last. He did not understand at that moment the impact of his words in the future of Kunger's house.

The *grande*, or neighborhood, meetings were a common political subunit of every Danish town during the thirteenth century. As needed, men with complaints would meet before the *oldermand* for dispensation of their litigation. But it was more than a trial court; in fact, it really

didn't serve *that* purpose. The *grande* determined when and how crops were to be planted, and when and how they would be harvested. Communal life was part and parcel of any town in Denmark and would not change for another five hundred years.

Under the preceding three monarchs, the commercial center of the kingdom had shifted east, centered around the Sound. Towns which were merely hamlets the century before sprang up as major commercial centers. Many grew next to castles of notable size, some constructed by Absalon, others expanded where trading and fishing required it, including Kobenhavn.

Nykoby had gleaned some of the wealth developed by this change in the commercial world, but since there was neither castle nor walls to protect it, the town did not prosper as greatly as others. All burghs of the realm were on the king's property and nominally entitled to his protection. Reality, however, superseded legality. Although most pirates had long been vanquished from this part of the Baltic, it was generally left to the individual towns to defend their property. As a result, guilds, councils, and, of course, the *grande* were given wide latitude in matters of local jurisdiction. If any of the royals noticed that this local control was making the burghers more independent, it happened so slowly that none cried the alarm.

Kirch stood before his neighbors at the *grande* and tried to explain the problems as he saw them. It was difficult since so many of the villagers of Nykoby were in the employ of Kunger's family enterprises, and he was not all that sure he was not wasting his breath trying to obtain a verdict contrary to common convention. Even so, he knew it was a matter of persuading his fellow townsmen or selling his boat and finding a new vocation.

"You Olf, and you Ditmeir, you have both said to me in days past how difficult it is to return some afternoons with a full boat, even when the herring are running strong in the bay," he named two of the more prosperous, although that was a relative term, fisherman in the audience

on purpose. Although they might not agree with him publicly, perhaps invoking their names may make others think that they agreed with his plan.

"All I am saying is that we should have a fair opportunity to catch what we can during the fall season," he pleaded reasonably. "If we don't earn enough during this time of the year, we will have a difficult time until the next."

"What is it you have in mind," inquired Didrik, the oldermand of the village.

"I recommend that larger craft fish no closer to the shore than Damen's Point," he spoke of the rock outcropping of the shore to the north of the town. "And that they must keep well south of this area. It is true that we will fill our boats quickly, but the larger, faster ships will be free to catch what we miss, and besides, they can always snare their fill further out in the bay."

Kirch's plan was audacious. The waterway between what the local people called Damen's Point and the shore was actually a funnel. As the herring followed the coast south, they were compressed into the narrows so tightly that a man could reach his hands down into the water and pull them back clutching fish.

"Kirch asks too much," said Hagbard, the manager of Kunger's family business. He had gotten wind of the meeting and decided to be present in order that none of the burghers may become too brave when voting. He had watched patiently for Kirch to finish, making note of the villagers who seemed to agree with him.

"Kirch asks too much," Hagbard repeated himself. "What if he is wrong and there are not enough herring escaping past the point, or if we are unable to catch what we should further off shore. What then?" he asked rhetorically. The villagers knew well *what then*. They'd be unable to obtain enough seasonal work for their wives who scaled, salted, and packed the herring in

casks for shipment as far away as Flanders. The difference between this seasonal work and unemployment were the extras which changed life into living.

"Besides which," Hagbard continued, "even if we were able to find what we wanted elsewhere, why should we? Why should we work longer hours? Who will pay my men the extra money for the additional time? You? You?" he pointed an accusing finger at the audience.

"No one is suggesting we are trying to deprive you of your livelihood, Hagbard," counseled the oldermand who hoped to regain control of the meeting. He favored young Kirch's proposal, but he learned long ago that people voted their purse, not their hearts.

"It seems as if Kirch is, Didrik," answered the manager.

"Not so, Hagbard. It is merely a matter worthy of discussion," replied the oldermand.

"We have discussed it. Now, we can turn to other matters."

"But what of this season, Dit . . . !" cried Kirch.

"We have discussed it," said the oldermand cutting him off. "It requires no vote. That is my decision," he said gruffly.

Unaware that Didrik had saved him not only from a defeat at the meeting, but also the pain of ostracism, Kirch stormed from the hostel where the villagers routinely held their meetings. His first thought was just to go home, but Rignea was there and she would be quick to tell him what a fool he had been for bringing the question up in the first place. *Her and her sharp tongue.* The thought of going home soured his stomach. Instead, he found himself walking past his house and continuing north. The road eventually led directly toward the new and sprawling city of Copenhagen, but it also ran past the ruins of the old church destroyed during the War of the Three Princes: Knut, Swein and the victor, Valdamir.

He often came here as a boy, less often as a man with a man's responsibilities. Despite the demolished buildings and scattered remains of what must have once been a pleasant chapel, he found it particularly peaceful, rising up on a little mound so that he could hear, if not see, the bay to the east.

It was here that Kirch contemplated all matters of importance. He had decided to become a fisherman here rather than follow in his father's footsteps and become a shop keeper, which infuriated his parent. Here he had decided to marry Rignea, despite the fact she had no dowry. But she had other gifts and if the truth were told was more than incidentally responsible for his success in the herring trade. It was also here where he rejoiced the birth of his first daughter . . . again, with his second. And it was here where he could be alone. Alone with the stars and his God and his thoughts. Undisturbed by mortals, he often felt himself drifting among the heavens, especially after an evening at the hostel when he was unwilling to face Rignea and slept among the ruins.

"God, this must be the finest place in all the world!" Kirch shouted his joy.

"Surely, it must be," whispered a dark, shadowy figure lost in the murk of the night.

"Who is there?" Kirch called to the darkness, his hand reaching to the sheath on his belt.

"I, your brother-in-law," the voice called softly.

"Mandern? Is that you?" Kirch called letting his hand drop to his side.

"Yes, Kirch," said the shadow slipping closer to him.

"What are you doing out at night? For that matter, what are you doing out at all? I thought they had rules about that?" he asked in rapid succession.

"Yes, they do. But God commands me on this mission," Mandern answered in his simple fashion.

"Won't you get into trouble?" his brother-in-law asked genuinely concerned for him.

"Only if . . . when they find out," Mandern responded when he was next to Kirch.

The fisherman was able to see his face by the bright moon which bathed the island with strong light. It was a true harvest moon. Mandern was, but wasn't, the same boy he had been when he last saw him. He was stronger now. Oh, his physical features hadn't changed much, but the authority with which he held himself spoke volumes of a new determination.

"Here, sit with me, Mandern, and tell me why you have left the monastery," Kirch said offering the remnants of a low wall on which he could recline.

"Thank you," he said simply.

Kirch waited politely for the monk to begin, but became impatient and eventually rejoined the conversation. "Why are you here?"

Mandern lifted his head from the contemplation of the rubble beneath his feet and stared at Kirch. "I will tell you," he said after a moment and recounted his meeting with Otto.

"So you want my boat," Kirch said when he was finished. It was not difficult to figure out why Mandern had sought him out.

"I will have your boat," the monk said in finality. "But I also want you. You and Rignea. We will serve as your crew, my sister and I. I was thinking Norway would be best, but you know the sea better than me. I must defer to your counsel," he said as if the journey was already completed.

"What makes you think Rignea, let alone I, will go with you?" Kirch asked.

"You will go," Mandern said forcefully.

"So?"

"Yes. You will go," he repeated himself.

"How can you be so certain?" Kirch said in mild sarcasm.

Mandern turned so he could look him fully in the face before he answered. "God has told me this. I have received my instructions from Him. He introduced me to the spirit of Holgar Danske and we share this body. He has commanded me; I command you in His name."

Kirch considered for a moment that his brother-in-law had become a raving lunatic during his stay with the monks, but the more he looked into his face, the more he dispelled that theory in his own mind. There was such a quiet determination surrounding the presence of Mandern he could hardly discount it. Kirch inhaled the cool night air of autumn deeply as if to stifle a yawn and having breathed it out said, "I will go."

"I knew you would," Mandern said with conviction. "Let's go tell my sister."

"All right," Kirch said getting to his feet. *I wonder why I agreed, and I wonder what Rignea will say?* he asked himself the twin questions as he followed behind as Mandern led the way back to Nykoby.