

THE LEGEND OF SAINT URSUL Part II

For ten years Ursul wandered throughout the woods of Aquaterra while rumors of an arms-bearing bear floated about the countryside. Every year Ursul attended the festival the Lady of Aquaterra held in his honor, an invisible observer from the edge of the woods.

It was in the tenth winter of his transformation when his ever-faithful Lady came to him in a dream.

“I have come to give you my final wish,” the vision said, “for I am no longer of the living. It is my wish that you continue as Champion of Aquaterra to protect both the ladies and their possessions until we may meet again.”

Ursul agreed to honor his Lady’s wish and was saddened by her words.

With the death of the Lady of Aquaterra, who had never married or had heirs, the fair land passed to the Lady’s sister who was presently betrothed to a younger son of a nobleman in a neighboring kingdom.

News of the change of heiresses quickly reached the ears of the ruler of the nearby kingdom. For many years his eye had been on the land of Aquaterra, but the former Lady had spurned him, and his knights had been quelling a border revolt. With Aquaterra’s lady now young and unmarried and peace on his border, the knight saw his chance. However, this Lady of Aquaterra also refused the king. Angry and determined, he decided to use force.

One of the king’s knights was the new Lady of Aquaterra’s betrothed. Learning of his lord’s plans, he took to his steed and sped to his betrothed’s castle to warn her of her danger.

After telling her of the invasion—an unexpected move because winter still reigned—the young knight offered to lead what little defense Aquaterra could muster. Unwilling to defend her land with a small force, the Lady began preparations for her household to flee in the night to the lands of her powerful cousin to the south, planning on enlisting her cousin’s help.

But luck was not with the young couple, for the king’s son, knowing of their relationship and eager to discredit the knight, saw the knight leave the royal castle and followed him. Overhearing the couple’s plans at the Lady’s castle, the prince swiftly returned to the royal castle and informed his father. The king quickly organized his army determined to keep the Lady from asking for her cousin’s help.

The king and his invaders arrived at the Lady’s castle at twilight, just as her household was passing through the village near her castle. As her household guard, led by her noble

knight, met the invaders, the new Lady of Aquaterra and her ladies fled southward. Seeing her flee, the prince and four knights broke from the fight to pursue her.

Ursul was wandering along the bank of the frozen river that marked the southern boundary of Aquaterra when the white palfrey bearing the new Lady of Aquaterra burst from the woods with five knights in pursuit. Watching as the Lady, hoping that the ice had frozen solid enough to bear the weight of both herself and her mount, urged the palfrey onto the ice, Ursul heard his Love's final wish sound once more in his mind as the ice broke plunging horse and rider into the water. The prince and his knights, seeing the Lady drag herself up on a rock in the center of the river, stopped at the bank, then turned and left. She called out promising to submit to the king's demands if they rescued her, but the five knights did not return. She could just watch helplessly as a bear swam toward her.

When he reached her, Ursul told her to climb up onto his shoulders. Not knowing what else to do, she did as the talking bear suggested. Unable to swim with the Lady on his shoulders, Ursul was forced to walk to the bank on his hind legs, the water up to his chest. The cold waters, the current, the additional weight, and the strain of walking upright combined to steal his strength. He stumbled three times, throwing the Lady from his shoulders the third time. She recovered and waded to the bank just as her knight and guard appeared. As she was escorted back to her castle, she noted that the bear had not moved.

At first Ursul was aware of nothing, then he gradually saw a figure of a woman in his mind. "Champion of Aquaterra," she said, "I am the Lady of the River. Your faithfulness to your Love and Aquaterra shall be rewarded, for you have made many sacrifices to uphold your honor. You shall be eternal Champion of Aquaterra, keeping the shape of a bear both as a symbol of your fidelity and as a disguise. Your Lady Love shall always be at your side. Now, Ursul, arise!"

The figure faded replaced by the wintery riverbank. Now, however, his Love stood before him. Together they walked into the woods.

Four days after her rescue, the new Lady of Aquaterra and her noble knight were married in a lavish ceremony attended by two invisible guests—Ursul and his Lady Love.

~Chronicled by Dianna of the Silver Shore