

THE LEGEND OF SAINT URSUL

Part V

Once, in a land far to the south of Aquaterra, there lived an evil wizard who held control of all the lands surrounding his dark tower. But he was not satisfied. Long had he heard of the legendary beauty of a land to the north. Tales had been told of the area's luscious greenery and fertile fields. This made the magician fiercely jealous, and he decided he must destroy this rival land--the beautiful Shire of Aquaterra.

After long deliberation, the wizard set upon a plan. He decided that since Aquaterra owed its beauty to the abundant rainfall, then by that same rainfall Aquaterra's beauty would perish. For ages, it seemed, he gathered moisture from the very air around his tower, ever reaching further for more water. All his lands turned brown; streams dried, and plants withered. In his eagerness to destroy Aquaterra he was quickly laying waste to his own lands as well.

When certain he had gathered enough water, the wizard loosed it to the north upon the unsuspecting people of Aquaterra. The sudden onslaught of rain caught everyone off guard. Torrential rains and high winds ravaged the land. Rivers overran their banks; valleys flooded; animals and people foundered through the rushing waters that engulfed Aquaterra. The situation was dire, and it seemed that nothing would survive this cruel storm.

Through sheets of blinding rain appeared a sight none had seen for a long time. A great bear, walking on his hind legs and carrying a sword and shield, moved through Aquaterra. Rather than frightened, the people were glad, for they knew this bear to be Sir Ursul, the Champion of Aquaterra locked into the shape of a bear by a powerful sorceress. Ursul had come once more at a time of great need to help Aquaterra.

As the waters rose, Ursul strove to save as much of Aquaterra as he could. He aided in building and repairing dikes to stop the rising rivers and helped move many to the safety of higher ground. But through it all, Sir Ursul felt a great foreboding. He could feel, in his heart, that this was no natural storm. The weather had never been so cruel to the Shire of Aquaterra. Ursul knew there must be a powerful evil behind the torrential rains.

After days of heavy downpour, the rain began to slow. The people of Aquaterra tried to put their lives back in order. As Ursul helped to repair homes, bridges, dikes, and roads he knew he must soon leave his beloved land in order to seek out the evil that had attacked Aquaterra before it could do so again.

When Ursul had done all that he thought possible to help the Shire, he set out from his home. Not knowing why, Sir Ursul headed toward the unknown lands to the south. He seemed to be guided by some feeling, some instinct, that led him there. After days of travel, Ursul realized the land around him was becoming drier. The further he traveled, the drier it seemed. The air was less humid; the grass was not as thick, nor were the trees as green. And it grew warmer. As he considered this discovery, Sir Ursul realized the very lack of

moisture was what drove him south. Conscious of it now, Ursul strode ever toward drier air. The grass was dry and brown; plants were smaller; trees were...odd...not the same kind as Aquaterra trees, Ursul thought. The ground itself dried and turned to dust. Ursul knew he was ever closing on Aquaterra's enemy.

The wizard saw Ursul coming from atop his great tower. He had heard the legends but discounted them as the drunken rambling of a romantic minstrel. Now he knew he had been wrong, perhaps for the first time in his entire life. Forewarned of Ursul's approach, the magician set out to "welcome" him. As Sir Ursul drew closer, the wizard gathered his dark forces.

Ursul neared the forbidding tower and knew that here lay the source of Aquaterra's distress. Moving closer, he saw a figure in the shadows. The wizard moved forward, his hands raised. Ursul tensed.

"Ursul of Aquaterra," the magician cried, "know that even as we speak more water, this time as snow, is smothering your beloved land!"

The wizard waved, and a picture of Aquaterra filled Sir Ursul's mind. Snow and freezing rain blanketed the Shire. The icy winds uprooted trees and felled homes. The already flooded valleys froze. Then the entire image turned white.

"NOOOOOOOOOO!!!" Ursul cried, and lunged at the magician.

Forever, it seemed, they fought. Sir Ursul attacked physically, and the wizard combatted with magic. Every spell the magician cast, Ursul fended off with his shield. But the wizard was weak from his attacks upon Aquaterra, and he began to tire. Ursul, weary with days of travel, knew he must end the battle soon. As the magician cast yet another spell, Ursul blocked with his shield and hurled his sword. Mouth gaping in horror, the wizard was impaled on the rushing blade.

Brought to his knees with the force of his throw, Sir Ursul staggered to his feet. Tired beyond measure, he nevertheless was determined to return swiftly to Aquaterra. He knew he must help salvage what he could from the bitter cold.

Through the long trip home, Sir Ursul dreaded what he would find at the end of his journey. In his mind he could still see the frozen waste of the wizard's vision. But as he entered Aquaterra, Ursul's heart soared. The land was green again! Many trees had fallen, and mud seemed to be everywhere, but life was rapidly returning to normal in the Shire of Aquaterra. All thanks, once again, to Sir Ursul, Champion of Aquaterra, the land was refilling with beauty.

~Chronicled by Juliana of Woodbury