

The Sainthood of St. Ursul
As told at Ursulmas XXIV by Lady Liadain inghean Brignagh from Blatha an Oir.

Word has spread and reached my ears through tales and songs and pleas. You seek the knowledge of your Blessed Saint Ursul's rise to Canonization and at My Lord's Command, so I have come to you today. I am but a representative of my kindred, come to offer you my wisdom and a comfort no book can give you. I bring to you the gift of peace in my storytelling. If you can learn from what I have to tell you, you will live a happy life and go to your death with gladness and never a thought to trouble your dreams.

I am but a descendant of the peasant girl that bore word of a stolen relic. In gratitude was she raised up and rewarded and as a result so were her family and descendants. Through many a year we passed tale from mother to daughter, father to son as is the burden and privilege of those born to do great things. One of us became, in years that passed, a bard of some renown. He lived to collect the tales of St. Ursul and, in time was considered to be the best wellspring of such to be found. Is it so odd then that he would stand in the presence of destiny whilst it at last vanquished the long standing evil of a sorceress most malignant?

It so happened that after many years of watching and brooding from afar, the sorceress whom had been the sorrow of so many and the heartache of Ursul, decided that he had found a measure of peace that she could not, in her evil heart reconcile herself to. As such magical creatures are wont to do, she still to this day remained in the full flower of her youth. Traveling from the land she called home, a desolate and fear-wracked land, she made her way to Aquaterra. Here it was where she had conceived of her obsession and this tale of woe first had its opening lines.

Disguise had ever been this woman's dog to call and a faithful one it was. Clad in robes of wool and linen with the wimple of the Christ Bride upon her head; she made her way back to the now peaceful lands of Ursul's heart. In false humility and with means foul and debased she sought and gained entrance to the holy order of sisters in Aquaterra. There she spent her time in sowing the seeds of her vengeance. Raiders came to the land, brought by lavishly spent gold and loosed the hounds of war and destruction upon the good people of the shire. "Where," they cried aloud in the blaze of fire and blood, "where is Sir Ursul? Where is our champion?"

>From out of the night he came. A great, shaggy beast limned in the crimson light of fire with sword and shield in glorious array for battle. Aloud did the great bear's voice ring in righteous wrath and warning. He would see this battle ended and his people at peace and safe rest. Mighty were his blows and so fierce his anger that the raiders fell before him even as sheaves of wheat before the sharpened scythe. He fought his way through broken bodies and wailing innocents to the very door of the Sister's refuge where more raiders dragged the praying and pleading women into the night to do as they would with them. Silhouetted against the candles of the lit stone manor stood the sorceress, now revealed in all her evil glory. Hatred glowed in sickly, golden power from her eyes, bleeding out in malicious flames to lick at her hair and shoulders. In anticipation she watched Ursul fight his way to her, watched as his great beast's face recognized the source of all his pain and despair and that of his beloved lands.

"Hear me Ursul," she cried aloud as he drew near to her. "Slay me and all hope of humanity in its

lowest form, that of the mortal man will be ripped from your grasp forever. But, heed my words and bow to my desires and you shall have all that and more returned to you." Ursul bellowed out his denial of her words. "Never! Foul minion of all that fights against the good lives of loving people...never would I lie down with you or traffic in your mayhem." Rage suffused her face and she pulled from her waist a clear, crystal spirit jar. Therein lay the spirit of his beloved lady wife, helpless in her anguish and grieving for her lord. "I have desecrated this holy shrine and into its tomb she will be interred. Never again will she walk by your side and you will be denied the afterlife you might have had with her. Recant your oath, swear to me now and I will release her and make you mine slave as you ever should have been.?" The great bear, defender of his lands, Lord of unceasing loyalty felt defeat, tasted its bitter poison on his tongue and knew eternal loss.

Secure in her victory the sorceress smashed the clay bear charm that had held him these many long years and watched as Ursul, young and fair once again, the prime warrior in youthful form returned to her hungry gaze. "Crawl to me Ursul. Come and place your oath upon my lips and I will make all as I have promised to you." Slowly, Ursul crawled to her, inch by painful inch across the hot timbers and crumbled masonry all around him. His blood slicked hands scrabbled for purchase on the steps of the manor as he made his way to her. Slowly he arose and drew near to her lips. "Sorceress, I hear your words?and I...deny you!" One sweep of his hand smashed the spirit jar and loosed his Lady to the afterlife. Another sweep and the evil woman's throat was in his hand: She could see her death in his eyes and knew victory of another sort for she had at last vanquished his honour and chivalry. "My love?MY LOVE YOU MUST NOT!" His lady wife hovered near, fighting the pull of her awaited rest. A moment was all the sorceress needed. With words foul and archaic she transformed Ursul back into the beast he'd been for so long and turned to make the chapel hers. One hand reached to destroy the statue in the chapel that had stood as its guardian for so long, a lady with a crown of stars and a simple blue gown. The Lady of the Chapel. The Spirit of the Lake. All that which was sacred and good lay within the Sorceress' reach. Its destruction would be her victory. Wounded and in despair, Ursul reared onto his hind legs and threw himself between the sorceress and the Lady. A roar of agony was torn from his throat as the flames of her hatred and vengeance took his life. Brighter he burned and brighter still until he and the sorceress were masked from sight by the inferno of hatred.

The glow faded. In the little chapel at the front of the manor, clear, cool water washed away the ashes of destruction, overflowing from a small fountain in the shape of a bear rampant. Next to the fountain lay a small girl child but hours old, her young/old face creased in puzzlement. As the people of Aquaterra gathered round to mourn and gaze in wonder, a voice came. "Where evil grew now innocence is born, where curses were hurled now healing is wrought. Let no-one break the sacred peace that is Saint Ursul's gift to you all." Around the head of the bear, there did appear a glowing ring of light for a moment or two, no more then faded.

In time, the chapel was forgotten, fading through the years in people's memories. Stories kept the love alive though and there were tales of miracles large and small that came of drinking from the small stream nearby. Some even say the stone in the middle does hold some small resemblance to a bear.

And the child? My ancestor, being a minstrel and no fit father for a child, took her home to our family where she was raised with love and kindness and went on to marry the youngest son in

the family. With love and respect she was regarded by all around not just for her devotion to her husband and children but also for all the healing and herb craft she brought to any whom required it.

So from my lips to your ears, passed through years of tore and the march of time ...the story of Saint Ursul. The story of innocence lost and found, curses made and broken and the ever-present power of love and selfless devotion.