

## THE HEALING WATERS

Alida felt the pressures of the world drain her. He needed to find her strength. The healing waters pulled her within. She felt all warm inside. She didn't want to move. She wanted the whirlpool to rush all over her. She let herself relax. The aching muscles stretched out. She cast off all the hurt. She floated in the total relaxation of the moment. She embraced the total comfort. She floated in the lapse. She let go completely. She remained untouched by the world. She let herself float in the wondrous energy. She gave in completely. There were no cares, no concerns. She was no longer part of the world.

Maedra was a princess of an ancient rite. She ruled over physical and spiritual realms. She had great powers in both domains. The king could hardly assert himself where Maedra was powerful. He recognized his limitations. He lived in the physical world. Maedra was sovereign over waterways and marshes. She lived in the liquid world. She knew metamorphosis. She was from a tradition of sorceresses. All their traditions had been passed down to her.

No one dare cross Maedra. She had the look of a young woman. But her powers ran deep. The king craved an alliance with her. He wanted to control all that she controlled.

His adviser was quite clear, "You need to let her be. She will only bring you woe. What she has, you cannot use. You cannot own the whole world. Be happy with what you have."

The king listened to the advice. His people revered him. His land brought him plenty. He was in good stead with other monarchs. What did he need with dear Maedra?

King Guerdon surveyed his kingdom. He was happy.

"You are a good man. Heaven looks down upon you favorably. Do not damage your moral standing by making an ill-advised decision."

What was his adviser really telling him?

His best knight had just returned from a long campaign. And he brought with him many treasures from his great adventure.

Guerdon and Chance retired to the lake country. And they enjoyed the sites from the castle there. When they were in the tower, they could look down upon the princess. They would see her in the milky waters. And they were both charmed by her.

Chance reminded Guerdon, "She has something that you will never have."

"What are you talking about?"

"I have been around the world. I have seen many things. And you are a great king. One of the greatest. But Maedra still has the soul of your kingdom. As long as she controls the waterways, you will not truly be king.

The king had his navy. And he ran on the seas. But there was a world where he was helpless.

"Maedra controls the nether world."

"Chance, that is the world of dark magic. It is full of superstition. It is part of our past."

"Many of its followers consider it the one true way."

"But they are few and far between in our kingdom."

"I have been around the world. I have seen the view from the outside. And I can see the hole in the kingdom."

Guerdon looked out the window. He saw nothing but grace in the movement of Maedra.

She was the finest creature whom he had ever lay his eyes upon.

When he arrived back at the capital, he met with his adviser.

“Chance talks about a hole in your kingdom.”

“Chance is a lusty adventurer. He does not sit on the throne. He succeeds by taking risks. He lives for the danger. That is why he is a trusted knight. He is a conqueror. But we cannot conquer all realms.”

“I am looking at this place. It is truly a threat to my reign.”

“What kind of threat. Maedra is the ruler of the shadows. See there is nothing there.”

“I have seen her move in the waters. She is substantial.”

His adviser had again spoken. He would not usually run such matters before his queen. But he needed to know her thoughts.

“You are the king of all the land. People respect you because you are not a fool. You do wondrous things. Do not abandon what made you king.”

“Are you telling me not to ally myself with Maedra?”

“She is a formidable opponent. You do not want her an enemy.”

“She is a child. “

”You need what she has. But she can destroy everything that you have.”

The queen’s words intrigued him. He wanted to figure out what this was all about.

The king slept in his own chambers. And he would have terrible dreams. Sometimes, he would sleepwalk. His wandering would take him many places. He feared what might be the end of his nightly journeys.

The king’s wizard was quite clear.

“She controls the world of dreams. As long as she is powerful, you will continue to have these nightmares.”

“I don’t want to have any more nightmares.”

“You have three choices. You can kill her. But that may not work. She may battle you from beyond the dead. You can make an alliance with her. But she is dangerous. She is a mad woman. Or you can live with some harmless nightmares.”

“You have no idea what it is like. I have asked you to help relieve me. And you have done little.”

“I am telling you what the problem is. You need to do what is best.”

He went back to his adviser.

“She is a madwoman. Everyone knows that. Do the smart thing. Find some sleeping remedy, lock your door, and let her be.”

The king had already opened door that he needed to explore. He found the wickedest sorceress in the kingdom.

“Even I fear Maedra.”

“What do you mean?”

“She has all the powers of the waters.”

“Do you think that she already clouds my dreams?”

“I think that she does. She is reminding you that you are not king of all the realm.”

“Can you help me with my nightmares?”

“If Maedra is behind this, there is nothing that I can do.”

The king decided that he needed to see Maedra. He needed to ask her his own questions. He spend a couple of days with his adviser. He was preparing himself. He took a number of lesser knights and minor advisers with him. He also brought great gifts from the kingdom. Baskets of fruit. Dainty flowers. Elaborate tapestry.

“I feel honored that you have brought me all these things. What is the occasion?”

The kings slipped with his words.

“I want to make peace.”

He corrected himself, “I want to make friends. Will you be my friend?”

“I am simple girl. I sit here at the loom and knit. I also create great tapestries of light and darkness. I use the waters to create wonderful designs.

The king looked around her castle.

“Indeed, you do.”

“So there is not a great deal to my life. Why do you want to occupy yourself with me.

“You are a great king.”

“You are a formidable princess.”

“Believe your eyes. There is not much to my domain.”

The king wanted to talk about his dreams. But he did not want to reveal his fear to the princess.

“You seem troubled,” she said.

“It is really nothing. There is a lot to wonder about when you are king.”

“I can assume as much.”

“You have your own challenges. I want to learn more about what makes you so wondrous.”

“You are flattering me a lot more than I deserve.”

He caught her reflection in the mirror. He had never observed something so stupendous in his life. He was already drawn to her charms. But this was something else.

“How do you do that?”

“What are you talking about?”

“How do you appear so lovely?”

“I still have no idea what you are asking me.”

“Do you have power over dreams and the supernatural?”

“I am a water princess. A very simple sort.”

“You have answered my question.”

The answer shook the king to the core. In a flash, he saw all things. He was in the presence of a great power. He wasn't sure what to do. He was the king. He was committed to his queen. But he could feel a power rush through him. There was something wicked here, something which could destroy him. He needed to maintain his composure.

Guerdon turned from her. He was summoning his courage. If he was king, this was a virtue that he needed now more than ever. He had never faced such a formidable challenge before. He had met great forces. He had retained his command. This was something new. This pained him. This brought him down to nothing. He was not sure how to counteract the feeling.

When he turned back to Maedra, he was again king. Guerdon could feel the sense of humiliation. This was the feeling which had captivated his dreams. And he had overcome those

terrible influences.

There was no doubt who he was dealing with. As a king, he could not let this stand. He felt the temptations of the flesh. He could sense Maedra toying with him. He fought off the effects.

“You have been a lovely hostess.”

“You have been a noble guest. I want you to return.”

“You will see me again soon.”

Whatever the resolution, he needed to leave soon. He reached for Maedra. He pulled her towards him and embraced her. For that instant, he felt all the power drain from his body. Then he summoned his strength and continued on.

“We are going!”

He gathered up his entourage, and they made their way from the castle. He called on all his nobility as he made his way away.

Guerdon consulted with his wizard.

“I have never experienced anything like it.”

“I warned you about her.”

“You could not have told me everything that I would encounter. She knows things about which you are innocent.”

“She is very powerful.”

“I hated her. And I was also drawn to her. In my heart of hearts, I burn for Princess Maedra. She could be my destruction, but I will not let her take me down.”

That night, he had a lavish dream. He gave himself completely to the princess. All the rich pageantry. All the marvelous revelation. He saw it all. She was a rainbow of knowledge. And he tasted it all. This was shaking him from limb to limb.

“I need to subdue this feeling.”

His adviser was quite clear, “You can’t depose your queen. You will lose half your kingdom.”

“I know that. But I cannot let this be.”

“You are a king. You must rule like a king. Do not show weakness!”

“I will send Chance. Chance is a great knight.”

“Do not do something that you will regret.”

“How is that?”

“What if Maedra gets Chance to turn against you?”

“I trust Chance as a son.”

“Heed my advice. Do not make someone else do what you need to do yourself.”

“Are you telling me to kill her?”

“Not at all. But Chance cannot be the king for you.”

The king had expended a great effort to unite this kingdom. He could not risk it coming apart before his eyes. He needed to be smart. There was only so much that he could do. He could not fight a war on multiple fronts.

His adviser reminded him, “Maedra is a threat. But the queen has powerful allies. You cannot risk crossing her.”

“I was not thinking of anything so foolish.”

“Listen to my words now more than ever.”

In his dreams, he met with Maedra. He was sure that she was doing this to him. She had a genius for this sort of magic.

“I want to be your queen.”

He felt poisoned by those words. He did not want to think what they might mean.

“I had no idea I would be dealing with this.”

“Maedra has doubled her efforts.”

“There is no way to counteract.”

“Only one!”

He listened well to the counsel of his wizard.

The queen could see that something was wrong. She wanted to help the king. But she took pains to shore up her alliances. This was why she was still the queen.

There were rumors. And the kingdom was being tossed by a minor trifle. The king and queen appeared in public together. But people still wondered. There may have been some other forces driving these rumors.

“Guerdon visited Maedra. We all know what she is about.”

They all knew her secrets.

The king had his horse prepared. Then he disappeared into the night. He was completely alone. There was no doubt where he was going.

“This visit was unannounced.”

“I needed to come.”

“This could be dangerous for you.”

“I am the king. I do what I need to do.”

“Your queen.”

“This is not about that. This is between me and you.”

“How is that?”

“You are haunting me?”

“I do what I do.”

“My dreams.”

“Who do you think I am? Your dream doctor?”

“Maedra, you are toying with me.”

“You appear in my realm in the middle of the night. What do you want me to do?”

“Who are you?”

“I am Princess Maedra of the eternal waters. What do you need from me?”

“I need answers.”

“You need to ask your philosophers for answers. I can only tell you about mysteries.”

“Why are you so confusing?”

“Why are you so rude?”

“You intrigue me.”

“Do you want me? Do you want to sweep me off my feet?”

“I am the king.”

“What does that mean?”

“I do not do stupid things.”

“Greater men have fallen for a lot less. Are you taken by my smooth lips? Do you lose yourself in my wondrous eyes?”

“I am not here for romance. I am here for knowledge.”

“Are you submitting yourself to me?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Knowledge of the flesh!”

“I do not want to be tempted. I want to know the power of the eternal light.”

“Guerdon, I am a fallen creature. Do you want to fall with me?”

“I am not here to lose my immortal soul.”

“Your powers are not universal. Deal with the fact that there are things that you cannot change.”

“Are you here to teach me a lesson?”

“I want knowledge!”

“I could teach you with my body. You would know all that there is to know in heaven and earth.”

“Is that why you rule this watery kingdom?”

“Is that why you want my watery kingdom?”

“I want you to teach me everything that you know.”

“You are willing to risk your world. “

”I want what only you can give me.”

“You think that I will give it up to you that easily.”

“I am not a king for idle reasons.

“Is that a challenge?”

“This is my kingdom. I can take whatever I please.”

“And there are no consequences.”

“My people love me.”

“You will take advantage of their good graces.”

“I need knowledge to rule.”

“There are limits to your powers, places that you cannot go.”

“I do not see that!”

“Look into my eyes. You can never have everything that I see.”

“I am looking in a fog.”

“And so it shall remain.”

“You are so frustrating.”

“You can’t just have what you want because you want it.”

“You like to tease.”

“I am telling you the truth. The truth is supposed to hurt.”

“I need my life back.”

“How is that supposed to happen?”

She was supposed to be his subject, but she was challenging his monarchy.

“By being completely honest with me.”

“How am I supposed to do that? By telling you what you want to hear.”

“By quit playing games.”

“What kind of game are you playing? You come to see me in the middle of the night.

“I want to be able to sleep. What can you do for me?”

“I can give you a sleeping potion. But it will only leave you wanting more.”

“Give me whatever you can give me.”

“What do I get?”

“I leave you alone.”

“Quite an elegant bargain.”

“Why did you really come to see me?”

“I had no choice. You no that.”

“Do you have a choice to leave me?”

“I must leave you, but that is entirely something else.”

“You haven’t even tried to kiss me.”

“I am not here for that.”

“Why are you here?”

“I want knowledge.”

“That is the basis of temptation. Do you want to be tempted?”

“I want to know how you turn the water so.”

“You want my powers and more.”

“I want whatever you will give me.”

“Give me your love.”

“It is not mine to give.”

“You come to me in the middle of the night, and you will not give me your love.”

“I am a man of virtue.”

“But you came here.”

“I was on a mission.”

“You are a mystery.”

“I am the king.”

The king started to seem more erratic. Maybe, it was his lack of sleep. The queen knew where he was the night before. She stored the information in case that it might come in handy.

“Chance, I need you to visit Maedra. You will figure out what is best.”

When Chance arrived, Maedra expressed her displeasure: “He cannot come himself so he sends me a second-rate shadow.”

“You do not know of my reputation.”

“You do not know of mine.”

She was trying his patience. He had done a favor to his king. Now he was being mocked.

“I can leave.”

He looked at her in the eyes. He was less able than the king to decipher the mystery. As he turned, he looked at her image in the mirror. What was he seeing? He began to feel feverish. He needed to brace himself.

“Are doing okay?”

“What is it?”

“You are not looking good?”

“I will recover. Get me some water.”

He sat himself down and drank the water. As he gazed at the princess, he was full of the most amazing power.

“Do you have a suitor?”

“What are you talking about, Chance?”

“Give me your hand.”

He squeezed her hand.

“Are you losing your mind?”

“I am completely sane.”

The color was coming back to his face.

“I feel much better.”

“That is good. You can go now!”

“I want to be around you forever.”

“You are beginning to annoy me.”

“I want some kind of resolution.”

“You need to be on your way.”

He was still lost in his trance.

“I want a whole lot more.”

“Chance, you are insufferable.”

“Then you will have to get used to my pain. It is love.”

“Leave now. If you feel the same way in a week, I will agree to see you.”

Her lovely image burned on his brain. In a week, his feeling was much stronger.

The king wondered what to do.

“You knew that this was going to happen.”

“I knew nothing of the sort.”

“Let him do his bidding. It will distract her. And you will feel so much better.”

“What about my spell?”

“She cannot preoccupy herself with you if she thinks that she is in love.”

The king was a little afraid.

He told Chance, “If you leave her, you will threaten my kingdom.”

“I know what I am doing.

Guerdon doubted Chance.

Chance felt his love grow. He brought Maedra wonderful gifts. He blessed her with poetry and song.

“Is this the warrior that we have known?”

The king wondered what his wife thought about these events.”

“Is he making you jealous?”

“Is his love real?”

“If it is not?”

“I do not want him breaking her heart.”

“Why are you so concerned about Maedra? You barely think about me.”

“She can destroy our kingdom. Is that not reason to be afraid?”

“She is nothing!”

“She is a sorceress. I know all about her!”



Guerdon continued to argue with his wife. She felt that he was only being jealous.

“Mark my words. I know what is happening.”

A wild storm hit the kingdom. There were great rains. Rivers flooded their banks. They were lucky to have been spared from worse destruction.

“This is a sign. I need to see Chance.”

“What is it, Guerdon.”

“I don’t want you marrying her. It is the surest thing that I know.”

“I am in love with Maedra. She is the fairest thing that walks the earth.”

“She does not walk. She floats on air. And she has you deluded by her charms.”

“I know what I am doing.”

“That storm is a warning. Maedra can do a whole lot worse.”

“You are really jealous of me.”

“I am the king. I would not be so petty.”

Chance would not yield. The king had only one choice.

“You come back to plead for your knight. Do you not like the peace that I have granted you.”

“Quit playing games with my heart!”

“Guerdon, this is not about you.”

“Tell me what it is about, my fair Maedra.”

“You do not want anyone else to be happy.”

“I am the king. Happiness is paramount for my subjects.”

“You are daft.”

“I am the king!”

“For now!”

“You are challenging me. What would you have me do? Abdicate?”

“Act like a king.”

There was nothing that Guerdon could do. The wedding went forward. Chance was the happiest man in the world. Maedra was radiant. She had scored her courageous knight.

At the wedding, Maedra told Guerdon, “It is your turn now. Deal with your rancor.”

“I am not a rancorous man.”

The queen told him, “That was a lovely wedding! I am truly proud of you.”

“For what. For doing nothing.”

The queen had her own plans for Chance. He had hardly been with Maedra very long when she started to make a play for him. She felt that the king’s hand had been strengthened too much by Maedra.

“You are married to my king.”

“I can give you something that no other woman can give you.”

“You are forgetting that I am married to a goddess.”

“Maedra is but a water nymph.”

Maedra knitted a great tapestry. In it, she depicted her betrayal at the hands of the queen.

“Did you know that she would do this?”

The king answered Maedra, “She completely surprised me!”

It didn’t take Chance long to create his own defense.

“You made me marry this crazy woman! You have no idea what she is capable of.”

The king told him, “I wanted you to leave her.”

“I am going to leave her now.”

A great freeze hit the kingdom. All the rivers were frozen solid.

“Chance, do you know what I can do. Take a look at yourself. Enjoy what you see!”

“Maedra, I have no idea what you are talking about.”

The giant mirror in Maedra’s castle cracked from end to end.

“It is the cold.”

“It is a spell.”

As the ice started to melt, Maedra took to the waters. Her being was becoming one with these waters.

The king protected himself in his castle. There was no way to pierce these walls. But Maedra used these waters to make her entry.

“They said that I was mad.”

“I trusted in you. I warned Chance.”

“This was not about Chance. It was all you and I.”

“You are more arrogant than I am.”

“Words will not save you now, Guerdon.”

“I have my honor. That is more than a word.”

“Honor to what? To your wife. She betrayed you with your best man.”

“It is not like you think.”

“Explain it to me!”

The melting waters were covering the whole kingdom. She was taking what was rightfully hers.

“You have made everyone mad.”

“Are you mad? Am I mad?”

“You are insane now. You are ruthless.”

“What are you going to do to stop me? You have no resources left.”

“Are you ready to govern?”

“I am here to destroy. It is not up to me to figure out what comes after.”

“Have you no mercy?”

“Where was Chance’s mercy?”

“I could not help it that my queen would betray me.”

“Why did you ever trust her?”

The princess got back on her ship and faded in the mist. When the waters finally subsided, the king surveyed the wreckage of the kingdom.

He wanted to return to Maedra’s castle one last time. He lost himself in the broken mirror. Here all the dreams had been dashed.

Then he looked at the tapestries one by one.

He looked truly dashing in his first visit to the castle. There were images of him and his conniving queen. Maedra depicted the wizard with all his devious power. And there was the flighty Chance. Each image had been rendered perfectly. The last panel depicted the realization by the princess that she had been betrayed. He wanted an epilogue.

Alida absorbed all the relaxation of the healing waters. She had contemplated a wondrous story, one that was so much part of her. She could feel herself floating down the stream with the fair Maedra.

What happened next?

“Do you think that you could gain some kind of satisfaction by coming back here?”

“I wanted to know what motivated you? Was it love or envy?”

“I have always known who I am. What about you?”

“I am a king. I was chosen to rule my subjects. But you would not be ruled.”

“You tried to use me as a pawn. You passed me off to Chance.”

“Chance was a great knight. He was smitten by you.”

“Even you did not trust him.”

“He made his own fate.”

“You left him little choice.”

“I gave him to you. What greater reward could he expect?”

“He wanted to be king. And you did not even realize that. That was why he moved on your queen.”

“I trusted him.”

“And where did your trust take you?”

“I trusted you. You did not love him enough.”

“I loved you.”

“It was not up to you to love me.”

“We cannot choose who we love.”

“We can chose who we do not love.”

“Tell that to your philosophers.”

“They are all that I have.”