



The Fountain of Eternal Youth

Alina Udrea

Notes:

I want to thank the reader for wasting, oh I mean spending his time to read my book 😊. It may not be the best book, but I surely enjoyed writing it and I for one liked it. I hope so does whoever reads it.

I don't have much time to write as I have a very active 4 year old daughter whom I adore and a job that takes most of my time. But I like to read and write whenever I get the chance.

I want to say “Hi” to my friends from all over the world whom I’ve met by chance due to a video game. I am not going to name them again, but they know who they are. And the reader also knows if he or she has read my other books.

Also I would like to say “Hi” to my colleagues from work, Mrs. A. Miliuta, Romanita, and especially Mrs. Zavoian Gabriela with whom I spend a lot of time talking on the phone as she is a very nice and funny person. So Hi!!

THE FOUNTAIN OF ETERNAL YOUTH

Chapter 1

Long ago, in a land of mist and magic, a land forgotten by time itself, in a small village in Deragon, a county of the kingdom of Karaland, there lived a young boy with big ambitions: he dreamed of becoming a knight in the king's army, king Harold's army. Mark, the young village boy, was an only child. His parents were old and needed him there to help them with the animals and with the work around the house. But he wanted more than that. He didn't want to spend the rest of his life caring for the pigs and goats. He was sure that life meant more than that. It had to. Village life was not for him. He was aware that his parents needed him but on the other hand he couldn't bury himself there.

As years passed by, the boy became a young man. When his mother died he vowed to his father that he would remain there till the end of his days although in his heart he wanted something else. But his father was old and helpless and only had him for support. He made another promise though, a promise to himself that when his father would pass away he wouldn't spend another day in the village but

go out in the world to follow his dreams. So a few more years passed and his father died on a beautiful Sunday morning of old age. Mark buried his father and packed the few things he owned, sold the house and the animals and left Deragon for the first time in his life, not knowing if he would ever come back.

Mark left everything behind in the hope of making a better future in king Harold's army. He had heard rumors about the king and none was good. But what else was there for him?

The king, an old feeble man, was said to be wicked and sly. He had a son, John, and a daughter, Milly. His wife had died while giving birth to Milly. Harold had cherished his wife and in his heart he held his daughter responsible for her premature death. He never remarried but as years went by he realized he didn't want to die. He lost his youth mourning his wife and now he wished he could turn back the time and live his life.

It was a time of magic and witchcraft. So king Harold summoned the most powerful witch in all the kingdom to come before him. She was young but extremely skilled and powerful. Lizzy, the beautiful sorceress, kneeled before the king in a private chamber with only two trusted witnesses. King Harold asked her if she could make him young again and promised her wealth beyond her needs if she could do it. The two witnesses, the king's trusted counsellors, who were just as wicked as him, were standing there by his side, each hoping that she wouldn't succeed and that they could take over the kingdom after the king's death as his only male heir, John, was too young and inexperienced to rule. As for Milly, they didn't even take her into consideration, first of all because she was a girl and second, she was only 20 years old. John was only three years younger than his sister. The kingdom didn't see him fit as a ruler yet. He was still too young.

The two counsellors, Xander and Mario, were only ten years younger than the king but each saw himself as a better ruler after the king's demise. Now, that the king got it into his head that he wanted his wasted youth back and had a will to live more than ever, the two felt their dreams crumbling beneath them like a sand castle hit by a tiny wave. The king still had the power in his hands, he still commanded the army which obeyed him blindly at the memory of a younger king Harold, a ruthless and most influential king among the other kings of the world.

The secret room where Lizzy was met by the three most powerful men in the kingdom seemed too small to house them all. She was strikingly beautiful but everyone in the kingdom knew her reputation as a most powerful sorceress and nobody wanted or dared to mess with her. They feared and respected her. She came from a long line of sorceresses. But now she was all alone in the world as her mother had died (or was lost and haven't be heard of) long ago in a far away land across the seas while on a quest for the same king in front of whom she was now standing. She was wondering if he would ask her to go on the same quest where her mother had failed. She had lost her life while on that quest, or at least that is what everyone thought as she had never returned and nobody knew anything about her anymore.

- Ugh, are you tired? I know it's been a long trip, the king shyly began the conversation while wondering if this beautiful young girl in front of him was as skilled and powerful as her mother had been. Oh yes, Gabriela, her mother.... She had served him well for as long as he remembered. But she had failed on her last mission. Would this young lass succeed where her mother hadn't? Did she have what it took to succeed? He would find out... His life depended on it as well as the fate of his kingdom.
- Nothing that a fresh bed and a nice meal can't fix, my king, said Lizzy letting him know that she was indeed tired and needed some rest before leaving again. She had just got here. Did he want her to leave right away? What was it that he wanted so badly?
- Xander, order the servants to have a room prepared for our honored guest. And also get her something to eat. Ask the chef for whatever he has freshly made and tell him that it better be good. Then, turning back to Lizzy he went on: yes, yes, of course. We can continue our conversation in the morning, there's no rush. Then again he addressed Xander:
- You can show her to her room. I guess we shall talk more in the morning after you will have rested. Then king Harold exited the room with Mario while Xander stayed behind with Lizzy to give orders for her room and for a fresh meal.

Chapter 2

It was a warm evening but Mark knew he had better get to the nearest village soon as he needed shelter for the night and his horse, his most prized possession in the world, was just as tired. Mark had paid a good sum of money for it with the money he got from selling the house but it was an investment which had to be done. He needed a horse to travel if he wanted to get to king Harold's court. It was too far away to make the journey on foot. So he hurried to the first settlement. It was a tiny fishing village by the name of Fish Shore. He steadied his horse and studied the already darkened alleys. Filth was everywhere and the whole village seemed to stink of rotten fish. Two so called ladies were waving at him, blowing kisses and inviting him God knows where. He wasn't curious in such women. When he would find someone, it would be an honest girl. Not this type.

Further down the road he found a small inn which seemed cleaner than the rest of the surrounding buildings. He checked his money pouch to make sure it was all there and then he went inside. Once inside, a smell of freshly cooked fish tickled his senses. This smelled good, not the rotten stench from the outside. His stomach also started to grumble as a response to the nice aroma coming from the kitchen. He decided to take a sit at a table in the corner closest to the entrance to the kitchen. As soon as he took a seat at the table, a young maiden came to take his order.

- What can I get you, sir? The girl asked shyly and stood there waiting for his answer.
- First of all, he answered, please make sure Black Star is well fed and taken care of. Then, seeing that she was staring at him and still standing there he realized she didn't know what or rather who he was talking about.
- My horse, go feed my horse first. Then I'll have some fish and wine for me. And a room for the night.
- Oh, sure, the stable boy will take care of your horse. And I'll get you your food and wine. Then she turned and left in a hurry. Some minutes later

Mark was having dinner and drinking some cheap wine that the girl had brought him. After he finished, he paid for everything and also for the room. He needed some sleep as he was going to ride the next day and the following days until he would get to king Harold's court. He fell asleep that night as soon as his head hit the pillow. His sleep was agitated as he didn't know what he would encounter on his trip and if he would make it to become a knight or a soldier.

Chapter 3

Lizzy woke up in the comfy bed still tired from the road. But she had to meet the king and see what he wanted of her. So there was no point in delaying it any longer.

The king was already in the secret chamber waiting for Lizzy. His two counsellors were also there like two hawks, like scavengers ready to take even the last piece of flesh from the bone. She knocked softly before entering.

- Do you feel better now, Lizzy? Can we get to the subject? The king asked, this time not taking no for an answer.
- Yes, my king, she answered looking straight into his pitch black eyes.
- Good...the king went on glad that the little witch was finally ready to hear him. Have you heard of the Forest of the Lost Souls?, he eventually asked in a low and almost trembling voice. Xander and Mario both looked at her to see if her face betrayed more than she was willing to admit.
- The Forest of the Lost Souls.... Lizzy's voice was like an echo when she finally answered. Yes, she almost hissed the "yes". I know a thing or two about the cursed place...

- Good, continued king Harold somehow relieved that he wouldn't have to tell her about it and the dangers lurking there as she seemed to know already. My next question then is this: have you heard of the Fountain of Eternal Youth?

Now it all made sense to her. He wanted to be young again. He would be a young king again if he could get his hands on the magic water from the fountain... Then out loud she spoke emphasizing every word:

- That is a dangerous thing which you are asking, my king.
- Are you afraid, little witch? The king was red in the face with anger. But usually his anger passed just as fast as a summer rain if in the end he got what he wanted.
- No, she answered calmly, I am not afraid... Is that where you sent my mother?
- Watch your tongue, witch! Mario intervened as fast as lightning.
- No, Mario, let her speak freely, the king said thinking that he had better be honest with her if he wanted to have her by his side. Yes, she went on the same quest but she has never returned. I am sorry for your loss as she is probably dead. And yes, I still need that which she hasn't succeeded to bring me. I need water from the Fountain of Eternal Youth. I want to be young again, I want my life back. I want to see my children growing up. Maybe you can even find out what happened to your mother. If you can do this Lizzy, then you can ask for as much wealth as you can possibly want. Just ask and you shall have it. Anything you want. I can even make you queen if you want and we shall both rule the kingdom.... Harold was desperate and was ready to promise her anything just to get his hands on the magic water which would give him his youth back. He hadn't made up his mind if he would keep his promises but that he would decide once he had the water. Till then he was prepared to promise her anything.
- Ok, I will do it, Lizzy finally answered. She knew she couldn't refuse him or he would kill her on the spot. She had no choice really. When I get you your magic water I will tell you my price, she added.
- Ok, fair enough, said Harold with his lips twisted in a large grin. Anything!, he added again to assure her once more. Then this meeting is over. Mario,

give her some gold for the trip, Harold said and exited the secret chamber with a satisfied grin.

Chapter 4

Mark started on his journey again. He got to a dense forest and decided to camp there as he was tired and his horse also needed food and rest. As it was a warm night he decided to put out the fire as soon as his rabbit would be cooked as not to attract unwanted attention. There could be thugs in the forest waiting to ambush lonely travelers like him. He knew they were dangerous and ready to kill for even less than his horse. His horse was strong and healthy and would have made a nice prize for such thugs. He tied his horse to the nearest tree and let it graze there from the tall green grass surrounding it.

He wasn't afraid as he had his trusted sword with him, the one he inherited from his father who had it from his father who had been a feared warrior back in the days of his youth.

So after he finished eating, he put out the fire and fell asleep on the warm and soft ground with only the sound of the crickets around him. He fell asleep immediately and dreamt of fabulous adventures throughout the kingdom. But in the middle of the night he was startled by a faint muffled sound coming from somewhere nearby. He woke up and listened carefully for any sign of someone being there. The night was dark with only a few visible stars above as heavy clouds had gathered. He focused his hearing while he already had his sword in his hands. Black Star was where he left him, tied to a nearby tree sleeping peacefully. So nobody had stolen his horse but he was certain he had heard a noise from behind the bushes.

With the sword held tight in his hands he advanced quietly in the dark of the night to find out what had caused the noise and woke him from his sleep. He carefully advanced through the high grass and pushed the bushes aside to see if there was anyone or anything behind. The moment he got rid of the bushes he bumped into someone. They both fell to the ground with a thud. He immediately got back to his feet but he couldn't find his sword. He started fumbling in the dark, trying to find it when he heard a sweet feminine voice:

- Looking for this?

And he felt the cold steel of his blade touch his right arm. Cold shivers ran through his entire body. Defenseless against a woman...

- Here, she said, take it. I think it belongs to you. And she handed him his sword back to his utmost surprise as he was sure she was going to use it against him and that it was an ambush and that she had friends with her and they would steal his horse and the few belongings he had.

He was speechless for a moment and then he finally heard himself speak:

- Uh, thank you kind lady... Who are you and what are you doing in the middle of the wilderness all alone? Are you alone? Or lost?
- That is none of your business, she answered cutting him short. But ... she added after a minute of complete silence, I don't see the harm in telling you. You seem lost yourself. I am Lizzy and I am on a quest for the king himself.
- Oh, wow, on a quest for the king? He asked already day-dreaming about numerous adventures by her side. Can I join you? I was on my way to the king's court to enroll in his army or become a knight. But I'd rather join and help you on your quest and then we can both go before the king and maybe he'll hire me as a knight. As I can see, you are travelling alone and could use my blade. I am a skilled blades man... or at least I hope I am. Truth is I never fought a real opponent, just the dummy in the back of my yard back home. But I trained on it every day since as long as I can remember.

Lizzy started laughing at hearing him. So he wanted to accompany her and was offering her his protection but he had never fought anyone besides the training dummy... Well, why not?

- Ok, Lizzy answered him. I guess you can tag along as long as you won't need me to protect you, and she laughed from the bottom of her heart.
He thought she was so sweet although she was making fun of him. But at least she had agreed to take him along.
- I will prove that I am worthy to be one of the king's knights. You'll see...but why would the king send a woman on a quest and not his knights?
- Maybe because he knows I am stronger than an army of his knights. Lizzy answered giggling. She thought he was cute and funny.
- You must be joking, Mark said doubting her words. How can a single woman be stronger than a trained army?
- Simple, because I am a witch, a sorceress. I am Lizzy, the most powerful sorceress that the kingdom has to offer, she said waiting for him to praise her. But instead now it was his turn to laugh as he didn't believe her. This got her real mad.
Lizzy raised her left arm and pointed towards the tree next to the one where Black Star was tied. Next thing a powerful blast of fire that took the shape of a sphere came out of her hand and hit the tree which burnt instantly like a blazing torch. Then, before he could say or do anything, she pointed her right hand towards the still burning tree and sent an ice shard towards it and put out the fire just as fast as she had caused it.
- And this was me just getting warm. This is just a tiny bit of what I can do, Lizzy said boasting now as she had proved she was strong and she felt good. Then she turned towards Mark to see the look on his face but he was down on the ground as he had fainted the moment she had cast fire on the tree. He didn't even see her cast the ice shard. Damn! She shook him and got him back to his senses.
- You, he said, you are a witch!!!
- Doh.... Told you but you wouldn't believe me so I had to show you!
- Tell me not to doubt you again... nice to meet you Lizzy, I am Mark. I think I can still be helpful on your quest.
- Yeah, yeah, she said faking boredom, you are good with the sword but you never killed anyone. Have you at least been in a fight? Have you seen others fight?
- Well, to tell the truth...no. And he felt embarrassed now and stupid for wanting to become a knight.

- Ok, she said seeing the disappointment on his face, it doesn't really matter. I've made up my mind and you can come. Who knows, maybe you will turn out a fine knight one day. Because our journey will be a dangerous one and you will have to draw that sword of yours, understand?
- Yes my lady, thank you for accepting my company.
- Yeah, no worries, would have been a long and lonely journey otherwise so don't mention it.

He smiled content at how things turned out. They packed their things as it was breaking dawn already and each mounted his own horse and started on the rest of the journey together riding side by side.

After a few miles and an aching back from all that riding Mark tried to open up a conversation with her. It was midday now and she really was beautiful, more beautiful even than she had seemed last night in the semidarkness.

- So, Mark uttered in a shy voice, where are we heading?
- To the Forest of the Lost Souls. Know where that is? She asked looking at him and wondering if he knew anything about the Fountain of Youth.
- Hmm, he said pensive. Soundsinteresting, he finally said. Isn't that where the Fountain of Youth is supposed to be? I thought it was just a myth. I heard stories about the magic of the place. Then it dawned on him and he said, after checking her out again with more attention:
- So, Miss Lizzy, how old are you? One hundred, two hundred?
- What? She said wondering what he was talking about. Then she realized and decided to play along so she went on: oh, you are not even close. I am 600 years old but it doesn't show, does it? Now she couldn't refrain herself anymore and started laughing until her eyes stung and tears were rolling down her cheeks. Yep, you should definitely accompany me, she said making fun of him. I can use a man with such a keen perception.
- 600 hundred years old? Oh ...wow...he said thinking that the water from the fountain was indeed magical as she didn't look older than 17. But 600? Wow.
- Fooled you, you silly oaf. The water is not for me, told you I am on a quest for the king. He needs it, not me. And she laughed again but this time he also started laughing relieved that she was in fact young as she seemed.
- I am only 19, she said giggling.

Chapter 5

Milly had seen Lizzy going to her father's secret chamber. But she knew about that room. She knew her father, the king, used it when he had secret meetings, secret agendas on his mind which didn't necessarily concern the well-being of the kingdom but rather his own. So she followed Lizzy and eavesdropped on the conversation. Milly knew the two counsellors his father trusted were only trying to take his place and that nobody even cared about her right to the throne as she was a girl. But she was first born. So what if she was a girl? She had every right to rule the kingdom. She hated her own brother because she knew in case their father died, John, her brother, would be anointed king and not her. This was so unfair. She couldn't just stand by while her younger brother would be made king and not her. Or even worse, one of the two old buffoons who called themselves counsellors. They couldn't even counsel a sinking duck and ducks don't sink so hell no! But she would have to be smart about it if she wanted to grab the throne for herself.

If Lizzy managed to bring water from the fountain of youth, then her father would go on being king. That would be better than have John on the throne. Or even worse, Xander or Mario. That would be unacceptable. She had to do something about those two. They had poured venom in her father's ears for too long.

But the more she thought about it, the more she wanted the throne for herself. No, her father's time as king had passed. Now it was her time to shine. She would get rid of everyone who dared to stand in her way. Even her father and brother. First she would get rid of Xander and Mario and then her father was next. She couldn't get rid of her father first because then the two counsellors would take his place. So the wisest thing to do was to hire an assassin to kill the two and then she'd see how and when she would get rid of her father too and grab the reign of the kingdom. And she knew just the man for the job. As a matter of fact, he was rotting in one of her father's cells for some unauthorized assassination. He had killed some member of his father's war council for some private reason. So her father, king Harold, had him imprisoned as a punishment until he saw it fit to release him or he needed his services again.

Milly put on a cloak and descended the steps of the dungeons till she got to the lowest level where her father had imprisoned the most dangerous scums of society. All the guards knew her so she had no trouble in getting there. The more she descended, the darker it got and the more unbreathable the air became. But she had to release and hire Roman. He was the most skilled assassin in all the kingdom of Karaland, her father's kingdom....for now.

There, in the semidarkness, she lit her way with a torch she took from one of the guards until she found Roman's cell. She lit his cell with the torch to try and distinguish his features. He was skinny but not feeble. Quite the contrary: he was all muscles and fiber. He looked dangerous all in all. Like someone you wouldn't want to mess with. It was as if he had danger written all over his face.

She thought about what she was going to ask him one more time and then she eventually addressed him in an authoritative voice:

- Hi Roman, she began, you don't know me but I know who you are...and what you are.
- Oh, she heard his voice, is that so? And who am I, princess Milly?

She blushed at hearing him and realizing that he knew who she was. It didn't matter though. She would still have things her way or no way.

- Yeah, she answered acknowledging that she was indeed the one and only Milly. You are a paid assassin. My father's paid assassin that is. Well, I have a job for you.
- Hmm, that is so funny, he said teasing her.
- Why is it funny? Don't test my patience, Milly said clearly annoyed by his audacity and by the fact that she couldn't do anything about it as she was the one who needed his services and not the other way around.
- Because, Roman answered emphasizing every word, you are not your father. You are not queen, not as long as he is king anyway and not while your brother John is still alive. So what do you want? It must be something...tricky. Who needs to die? He then asked her bluntly waiting for her response. And what's in it for me?
- How dare you? She almost yelled at him but then she feared one of the guards on duty might hear her and accuse her of treason so she instantly lowered her voice. Yes, you are right, she admitted. Two certain counsellors have to go...if you know what I mean.
- Of course, he started laughing at her. Go under! Die! I am an assassin, not a nurse so of course I know what you mean. But I ask you one last time, what's in it for me?
- Well, your freedom for starters. What do you say?
- Freedom without money is useless. You will have to pay me. Or we have no deal and I can sit here a little longer until your father needs me and then I will be free andwell, with money in my pockets, too.
- Ok, Milly agreed. I will get you money and freedom. Just see that you do your part and keep me out of trouble while you do it. Ok?
- Yes Miss, we have a deal.

Chapter 6

Mark and Lizzy were riding side by side, each wondering what the other was thinking and if they would complete their task. They would have to work as a team for their chances of success to increase. Team work. That was the keyword.

Night was slowly descending upon the kingdom, enveloping everything in its darkness and our two heroes as well. They were still a very long way from the Forest of the Lost Souls. They would have to camp soon though as their horses were just as tired and famished as the masters. They had to find shelter for the night or maybe just camp out in the open as usual.

- Lizzy, Mark began, shouldn't we allow our horses a break? And ourselves as well? The moon has been up on the sky for some time already...
- Ok, we find a good place near the river and we camp.
- What river? I don't see any rivers... Mark said wondering if she knew something which he didn't.
- I don't see any rivers either, Lizzy answered chuckling, but I can hear one. Do you know anything about the world you live in?
- Oh, he said embarrassed once again, I know you are afraid of snakes...
- Huh? How'd..? She said in a jiffy and with certain nervousness in her voice. But then she said in a calmer and lower tone: how did you know? I never told anyone about this.
- Well, I am a good observer. I saw how you scanned the grass before you jumped back on your horse. And I figured you weren't scanning the grass for crickets so...
- Ok, ok, I got it. You are right. Can we change the subject now? Lizzy said evidently annoyed by his observations.
- Sure, if you heard a river then maybe you can lead us to it so we can finally set up camp?
- Ok, follow me and keep quiet. We might have company.
- Company? What do you mean?

- What do you think? Try to make a wild guess, she said giggling again. You, you are funny but if we have company we should be on our guard.
- What? Mark said looking all around but not seeing or hearing anything he thought she was just trying to scare him.
- Ok, enough! She said in a very high pitched tone. Come out so we can see you.
- Who are you talking to? Mark asked her puzzled as he still couldn't see anyone.
- If you don't come out, Lizzy went on totally ignoring Mark's remark, I'll just have to make you come out. Your choice but first choice would have been less painful...for you! And she raised her hand and sent a fireball into the darkness. No sooner had she sent the fireball when screams and shouts were heard from behind the burning trees.
- So, smart guy, if those aren't talking trees then I bet they are the thugs that have been on our tails for the last few hours. But now they got a little too close not to get burnt if I may say so. They won't be troubling us anymore.
- You just killed someone? Was all Mark could say. He was staring at the burning trees.
- Better them than us. But I didn't kill them. Just scared them away.
- Oh, ok if you say so.
- Let's find the river and camp. And Lizzy led the way towards the murmuring sound of the river until they found it. Ok, we can camp here. Tomorrow we should arrive at the outskirts of the land of the savage tribe known as Mekeke. We will have to go through it to get to the Forest of the Lost Souls.
- That seems dangerous. Isn't there any way around? I mean I am not afraid but we are clearly outnumbered. We are only two and they are a whole tribe of savages...
- No, this is the shortest way. We have to go through their land. If we see any, we will have to fight our way out. They are not known for their diplomacy or mercy towards their prisoners.
- So what happens to the prisoners? Mark asked curious and intrigued.
- Well, they are the main course on the leader of the tribe's dinner table. They are cannibals. Lizzy said it all without a twitch on her beautiful face.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

