

Inside the thatched cottage, King Maurice sat in a large, rounded armchair. The purple velvet seat was thick and cushioned his backside, which was sore from riding. He stared at the rags warming strategically by the fireplace, as if waiting for a guest.

The old lady crouched on a black footstool between the fireplace and King Maurice. Just before her bottom touched the seat of the footstool, she tossed a small item into the fireplace, causing the flames to spark up. Maurice glanced immediately at her hands, but they were empty. Her long, bony, crooked fingers reached toward his boots.

He pulled his feet back. "That's not necessary," he said uncomfortably, yet gently, trying not to insult the old lady who had offered him and his steed such hospitality. She let out a sharp laugh, almost like the cackling of a crow, leaned to her left, and yelled into the kitchen.

"Bring it now!"

A glass shattered.

The old lady flared her nostrils as she rose quickly. Dragging her right leg, she hustled to the kitchen. Maurice turned to look as he heard the voice of a distressed younger woman.

"I'm sorry, Nan Margarite. I'm—"

"Give me here!" the old lady said sternly, snatching a small amber bottle from the young woman's grip.

The woman pled, "No, wait, Nan, hold on, I've already—"

"Watch and learn, Maggy Mae," the old lady said. She tipped the amber bottle slowly until three thick drops poured into the hot cup of tea the younger woman had been preparing. Light smoke scattered and twisted upward like a tiny tornado.

"Smell it! Smell it! Quickly!" she whispered softly yet firmly to Maggy Mae as to assure Maurice wouldn't hear, then chanted.

*"The leaves we will take as the branches weave,
we will boil, he will drink, he will never leave."*

Maggy Mae bent over and inhaled slowly as the smoke twisted faster and faster, entering both her nostrils, then took a step back and covered her tearing eyes.

"It will pass," the old lady said, followed by her cackling laugh. She gently shoved Maggy Mae by her waist toward the sitting area. "Let's go now."

Maurice tried to make sense of what he'd heard coming from the kitchen. He tried to focus on the muffled sound of voices on the other side of the wall behind him. He was not sure which he was more confused about: their mysterious chattering or the old lady's accent, which sounded like a blend of French and Scottish.

He heard the women's footsteps coming from kitchen and turned to look. Grinning, the old lady gave the younger woman a slight nudge, moving her next to Maurice. He was surprised at the sight of the flustered young woman offering him a cup of tea but accepted the cup with a small nod of thanks. Both ladies stood tense until he took the first taste.

Margarite let out a sigh of relief and unclenched her hands, letting them relax by her sides.

Maurice watched Maggy Mae as she brushed her black, wavy hair away from her face, exposing her dark black eyes. Her upturned nose reminded him of a piglet's snout.

Margarite grasped the young woman by both shoulders and pressed her forward as she said, "This is my granddaughter, Maggy Mae."

When Maggy Mae extended a trembling hand to Maurice's, the corner of her wide orange sleeve tipped the teacup, spilling some tea onto the saucer. Margarite grabbed the teacup from Maurice and walked quickly into the kitchen, her right leg dragging behind her hurried body. Her wrinkly, crooked fingers shook in anger as she poured more tea to refill the cup, grabbed the small amber bottle of potion, and poured three more drops.

"Maggy!" she yelled, moving toward the sitting room again.

Maggy tripped over the black footstool, recovering quickly to meet Margarite halfway as she walked out of the kitchen.

"Smell it! Smell it!" Margarite whispered as the smoke twisted in an upward spiral.

"No, Nan—" Maggy begged, pushing away the cup her grandmother was forcing on her.

"Smell it, girl! You want to be rich? You want to be queen?"

Maggy grimaced and tipped her head, but a draft came through the cracked window and broke up the spiraling smoke. She covered her mouth in fear of Margarite's reaction, then sighed in relief when she saw her grandmother looking at Maurice, as he had stood up to check on Isiah.

Margarite began to tremble with anguish, afraid the king might escape before she had time to bewitch him. She pushed Maggy out of the way, handing her the teacup, and scurried to Maurice.

“Sit down. You must drink this tea so the wet winds will not sicken your bones.” She laughed a nervous, yet evil, laugh. “Listen to the old lady... she knows best,” she said, patting his arm. “Sit... sit.”

Maurice sat with a confused look on his face, frustrated at the fact that he had lost power over his own will.

“Bring him the tea, Maggy!” Marguarite yelled assertively, with a smile on her face, not losing sight of Maurice. As Maggy approached, the old woman reached for the cup. With a quick hand, she grabbed a hair from Maggy’s curl and dropped it in the tea, then snatched the cup and saucer from the girl and handed it to Maurice. He held the teacup, sat back comfortably in the velvet chair, and drank.

“Thank you, Madam Marguarite,” he said, giving his head a firm bow.

A thumping and scratching sound startled Maurice, making him reach to set his cup down on the mirrored table next to the chair. Marguarite quickly pushed the cup back toward him.

“I will check your steed,” she said. “Maggy! Dry his boots!”