

THE HEALER COLLECTION



CHAR CAULEY



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Char Cauley
The Healer Collection

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v1

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AMANDA'S WOLF



THE HEALER COLLECTION BOOK ONE

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Char Cauley
Amanda's Wolf

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THE MEETING



The king sat at the long table, looking at the six men across from him—wondering if he was doing the right thing. Was he making a wise decision?

The six men on the other side of the table represented the most fearsome lairds ever known, heads of the six most powerful clans in the land.

Wolf, the most powerful of them all, sat directly across from him, drinking his mead, eyeing everyone else, always on the alert. His men were outside with the others, guarding the castle.

Aron, the next most powerful, was next to Wolf, doing the same. Observing, always observing, listening to everyone else. Even though it seemed he cared not what was going on around him, he knew all that was going on, inside and out.

Erich sat on the left of Wolf. Unmannered, but still a force to be reckoned with. Sly, the manipulator of the group, Erich knew how to make men do his bidding, even if they thought better of it.

On both sides, sat the rest—Isaac, the wise, educated in France as a lad and England as a young man, he was a man of learning, powerful and respected for his wisdom in most things.

Isaac, the oldest one, was experienced in most everything. He

held the history of most clans—all the wars and skirmishes, what they were about, when they took place, and how long they lasted.

Samuel, the playboy of the bunch, was next. Handsome and suave, he could turn any woman's eyes to him. He swore never to settle down and marry. His sister lived with him, to play hostess, when needed.

This was the first time all six of them had ever actually sat down together, all at once, which is why the security of the meeting was so sizable and was kept a strict secret from all others. It was the reason they each had their men guarding every square inch of the castle and its lands. It would be a tempting target for other lairds who wanted the power which came with taking them all down. The lairds still had a mistrust of the English, even though this king had been working hard to bring peace, at long last, to the land

As the king looked around him, he decided he was about to do the single most important thing to ensure peace. He was going to put the most important person, besides his precious wife, in danger. He also knew this was long the plan. Years, he had been planning this. Training his precious goddaughter, his wife's niece, to do what most men couldn't do. He was placing her in more danger than she had ever been in. His wife knew of his plans but was afraid. Truth be told, so was he. He loved his goddaughter like a daughter of blood. But this had to be done. His precious Amanda didn't know of the plan yet, and he hated that he would have to tell her. His wife had been hinting at it for days, now, easing her into the idea of marriage.

His lovely Amanda was the only daughter of the queen's sister who died of the sickness, when Amanda was but a baby. Amanda came to live at the castle with them, was taught to be a lady and sent to France, to learn healing. She had been taught healing by the best in the land. At eighteen, she had already spent three years in France, learning from the some of the best doctors there. Healing was her dream, her passion, her life. To help others ease their suffering was her dream.

She was a quiet child, not likely to get into much mischief unless she thought someone else needed help. A lady in a true sense. The king also knew she was stubborn, going her own way, even if it put her in harm's way if she thought she was right. The only two times he'd had to punish her were because she refused to see danger. The king knew he didn't punish her as much as maybe would have benefited her, but her tears caused his own wife's tears, and he couldn't abide either; both together nearly broke his heart. She had grown up headstrong but with a giving heart. He knew the man he was giving her to was a strong laird who would rule not only his clan but his wife and who would insist on being obeyed by all. He also knew Wolf had a sister he loved dearly and she was Amanda's age. Hopefully, she would ease Amanda's way. Wolf was the one who would protect her the best of any of them. He had saved the king's life a couple of times, already; he would protect his Mandy with his own.

It was time to get this meeting started and explain his plan to these strong men.

Food and drink were brought in for all. A side of beef, cooked over a grate of fire until the juices flowed into the fire, lamb, potatoes, vegetables and, for dessert, apple pie from the stores of apples. There were barrels of ale for the men outside, not on guard duty.

Before the meal got started, a knock came on the door. A small woman, not more than five-foot, petite, with long blonde hair in a braid to the back of her knees, dressed in green silk to match her eyes, entered when bade. She approached the king and curtsayed prettily.

"Your Majesty, the queen has asked that I deliver this message before you sup."

"Thank you, Amanda, tell the queen I received her message, if you please. May I introduce you to our quests? This is Wolf, laird of the McKinney clan, Aron, Erich, Isaac, Isaac, and Samuel, all lairds of much respected clans"

"Very pleased to meet you all. May I be excused, Your Majesty? I have a sick child to tend to."

"Of course, my dear."

With that, the very pretty, petite Amanda curtsayed again and left, the king watching her until the door shut again.

"That was my goddaughter, Amanda. I plan on her marrying Wolf."

With that statement, all the lairds started arguing.

"Why Wolf? I also have a son who must marry," an angry Isaac yelled.

Everyone was talking louder and louder, stating their case about why she should marry in their clan until, finally, the king had had enough.

"Be still!" He slammed his goblet down, splashing mead on the table. "I am the king and she is my goddaughter. She will marry whom I say. I have thought long and hard about this. Now listen, all of you. If, when I am finished telling you my plan, you don't agree, you may leave, with my blessing. I will not put one of the most precious things in my possession in danger, for any man. I will know who is with me or not. Understood?"

All the men nodded, curious as to the king's plan to bring lasting peace.

"First, I wish my darling Amanda to marry Wolf. I owe him my life, and though I know Mandy will not be an easy ride, she will be interesting, and he will not be bored. She is headstrong and stubborn, sometimes, and very quiet and giving to others. When she is quiet, you must guard her the most. She will be hatching a plan to get her own way. She will think she is right or that she is helping another, but she will put herself in harm's way. I need someone strong enough to tame her, for she has never answered to anyone but my wife or me. She is not malicious or mean but suffers from caring too much, sometimes. She has been trained extensively in nursing. The most modern methods, with the best doctors I could find. What I want is for you six men to talk to your healers and find

a young girl from each of your clans to train with Mandy. I will build an infirmary next to the abbey, a day's ride from Wolf's stronghold. That is in the middle of all of you. The girls may stay at Wolf's keep with Mandy, when she is not in the infirmary, as I want her to have a normal marriage. Treat her the same as you would any of the wives, for that is what she will be. She will teach at the infirmary one week. Find someone your healers recommend—someone who will embrace what they learn, for they will, in turn, teach another the skill of healing. After six months, they will return home to become a healer to your clan. I expect each of you to provide soldiers for Mandy and the girls to go back and forth, but in truth, most of the time will be spent at Wolf's keep. Are you agreeable, Wolf?"

The king looked to his friend, the man to whom he owed his life. "Will you keep her safe, even if you have to punish her severely—something I couldn't bring myself to do? Do the rest of you men agree? For I tell you, now, if any clan causes a problem in this plan, I will think very badly of it and punishments will be very painful, if not fatal. Even if you don't go in with the rest, I expect these girls to be protected. Do I make myself clear?"

They all agreed to the king's plan.

Now, the king and queen needed to convince Mandy.



"PLEASE, my king, I do not want to marry. I am afraid to leave here; this is the only home I know. Please, my queen, do not let this happen." Mandy was in tears, begging them both.

They were in the royal couple's private chambers. A fire in the huge fireplace kept the chamber warm, even on the coldest of winter nights. Murals hung on the walls, in all their splendor, plush furniture scattered around the huge room. In the next room, Mandy knew, was the bedroom, with a huge bed. The king and queen were quite different from many, they loved one another and

slept together. Each side of the bedroom had huge dressing rooms, one for each of them. In this receiving room, on a plush, long lounging chair were the king and queen. Mandy was sitting in a chair opposite them both. The queen was looking to her husband for guidance.

"Mandy, my child, you had to know you would be wed, sooner or later, preferably sooner. You know why this is necessary. It will insure the peace. The plan is ingenious in its simplicity. We need this peace. Wolf saved my life; he, above all others, will protect you. Most of all, he is strong and fair. He will not make your life a misery. I am hoping the two of you can find the love your aunt and I have, little one. If you cannot find love, at least, you will have peace and a goal—to train the other girls to be great healers for all the six clans. It will bring the six clans together. Aron and Wolf grew up as brothers, their fathers having been neighbors and their grandfathers before them. Aron and Wolf trained at the other's keep, as lads. They got into mischief together and fought wars together, watching out for each other—just like brothers. Aron will be marrying Wolf's sister, Melody, right along with you. Of course, Melody has the advantage of growing up with Aron. I believe she has had feelings for him, for years. She is your age and someone you can talk to, when you feel the need. She will help you adjust. Mandy, I hate to see you go, but this is your calling and your duty. We must all sacrifice for peace, even you. Please, Mandy, my little one, can you see how you are upsetting your aunt?" The king tried to explain to Mandy in the gentlest way he could.

Mandy faced her aunt with tears in her eyes and saw the woman who had been her mother for years. The woman who helped her talk the king into letting her go to France to learn more medicine. The same woman who took her side, even against the king, from time to time. The woman who loved her when she had no one else. The one whom she would give her life for. Sitting next to the king, with tears in her eyes, and for the first time, the queen was not trying to talk the king out of this.

"Aunt Charlotte, do you want me to do this?"

Mandy's aunt looked at her through tearful eyes.

"It is important, little one, it must be done. I have insisted that you be allowed to spend time visiting us, every year, unless, of course, you are expecting a child or it is too dangerous. At least, you will not be totally lost to us. Also, if you are in trouble, the priests at the abbey have been instructed to send word to us, immediately, or deliver you back to us. The priests will be keeping an eye on you for us. They will inform us of how you are doing. You will not be completely alone."

Amanda ran to her aunt and sat between her and the king. Hugging one and, then, the other.

"I trust you both, I am just so afraid of Wolf; he is so...so...big. I am so small."

The king chuckled. He knew this would be new for his darling godchild. She would finally know obedience, structure, safety and, hopefully, love.

"So, it is done; thank you, Mandy, from all of us, you give us the hope of peace. Now, I must talk to Wolf privately then have a meeting with the other five. You and Melody will be wed in two days. This afternoon and tomorrow, the men hunt for the huge feast we will have for, not one, but two young ladies. It will also give your aunt time to fashion a wedding dress to rival all others. It will not be the huge wedding I had envisioned, years ago, but it will be nice, I promise you. I expect you for a late dinner, tonight, to meet your intended."

With that, the king left the ladies. Charlotte hugged Mandy. "Let's get the seamstresses up here to get that beautiful dress ready."



WHILE CHARLOTTE and Mandy were summoning the many women who would sew Mandy's and Melody's dresses, a maid was dispatched to bring Melody to their room. Charlotte decided it was

a good time to have a discussion with both girls about their wedding night. Charlotte knew Melody had not had a mother since she was very young. Both girls, she was sure, would have many questions.

"I know you are afraid, girls, but there is no need. If your husbands care for you at all, they will make sure it is a pleasant experience. They will be patient and explain all you need to know. Please, do not be afraid. We have known Wolf for many years. He will protect you and not hurt you unnecessarily. You are in good hands, Mandy. Melody, I do not know Aron very well, but if he is a friend of Wolf's, I am sure the same applies to you. You also should know they are both lairds and are responsible for very large clans. Both are some of the most powerful clans in Ireland. Wolf and Aron will be obeyed, in all things, or you will find yourself punished severely. They are charged with protecting you and you must obey them always or they cannot properly see to your safety. Do you understand, girls? Amanda, we should have taken a firmer hand with you but I could not do it, nor could the king—not to my poor, motherless niece." The queen gave both girls a hug before continuing with the preparations for two very special weddings.

There were six seamstresses for Mandy and six for Melody.

Fabrics from all over the world were brought for both to look at and choose. Soon enough, everyone was very busy readying for the two weddings.



IN HIS PRIVATE STUDY, behind a huge desk, sat the king. Wolf sat on a plush, comfortable chair, in front of the desk.

"I know you were expecting this wedding, as we had discussed it a couple of years ago, already, but I have to know you are willing. I will not trust my Mandy to someone who doesn't want her. You both deserve better."

The king looked to Wolf, one of his most trusted loyal subjects. He knew Wolf wanted this peace as much as he did.

"I will be honored to wed your godchild, my king. I will protect her with my life, provide for her, and, hopefully, someday, love her. I hope that, in the not so distant future, she will give me a son to guide and teach, to carry on as laird, when I am gone. I am ready to settle down and start a family."

The king smiled. That is what he wanted to hear.

"Mandy can be a handful; you must know it will take a strong hand to tame her but not break her spirit. It will take patience but I trust you to have it. In return, she will be invaluable to you. She is very learned in medicine, very smart, almost too smart for her own good, sometimes. She is many things, but an angel is not one of them. She doesn't think of it as having her own way, she sees it as knowing she is right. You will never be bored, Wolf, I guarantee it." Both men laughed.

"That is exactly what I was hoping for, Your Majesty. Aron is more than ready to wed Melody. He will, also, have his hands full, even though Melody has been across my knee and punished for her willfulness, many times. We will truly be brothers now, even though he has always felt like one."

"I am glad it is settled. You understand you must let her teach these girls and be a healer, it is in her to comfort and heal. I cannot change that."

"I do understand, Your Majesty. I will allow her much freedom, if she doesn't put herself in harm's way."

The king stood and summoned a butler to bring in the rest of the lairds.

"Let us bring in the others so we may discuss what I envision for us all."



MICHAEL, the trusted butler, brought in a tray of the finest Irish whiskey and a bottle of the best brandy, along with glasses for all.

"Thank you, Michael, you may go about your duties; this will take some time. I hope everything is set for a late dinner. I would think seven or eight. Please, let us know."

The butler bowed from the waist, backing out of the room.

Soon, every one of the six lairds were seated around the huge desk, drinks in hand. They had come, at the king's command, to listen to his plan, every man exceedingly curious to hear how this could benefit their clan.

He began by saying, "First of all, thank you all for coming when I needed you. I know it was quite a feat. My plan is to have a healer in every clan. One who is educated in the latest in medicines. I want them to work alongside the current healer. I want the old and new to share techniques. I also want each of you to send a girl who is interested in healing to Wolf, as I said before. With the girls living together, I think that will help us all learn about one another, get to know one another. I envision Amanda training them in the newest methods of healing. I expect you all to visit your girls, often, to see that they are healthy and happy. I wish you to send a guard along with the girls to stay at Wolf's keep, as well—a guard you trust. As a reward, I am sending with each of you ten of my purest milk cows, bred to only the cows that produce the most milk. Along with the cows, I will send six bulls. You must rotate these bulls, every year, among the clans. My goal is to have fresh milk for every family with children, in your clan. Take good care of these cows and breed them carefully and, each year, give the calves to a family with children so, someday, they will all have milk. Of course, you must keep some at the keep for everyone. Also, I am sending ten of my best beef cows to each clan. I will send men who will help you understand how to breed them and keep them healthy. That means buildings for them, to keep them safe. Thus, I am sending materials for barns and a greenhouse for medicinal plants. Each clan will need these healing plants. Mandy is selecting and letting

the gardener know which cuttings she will be taking. She also knows their uses and will teach the girls. The green house will be part of the keeps. They must be where they will be kept warm all year and have plenty of light. Mandy suggested a room off the kitchen. If you need more men or anything else I have not thought of, please feel free to contact me. The priests at the abbey are to keep me informed and send messages back and forth, at regular intervals. Are there any questions?"

The king looked to each man for approval or confusion before he continued. The men nodded.

"Most of you will be leaving together, day after tomorrow. If you think of anything, let me know; in the meantime, enjoy all we have to offer. The hunt is at dawn, tomorrow. The weddings, two days from now. That is all, for now."

Michael knocked at the closed door.

"Enter." They all spoke at the same time.

Michael bowed to his king and said, "The cook says seven tonight is good for her. Everything is under control."

"Thank you, Michael." Turning to the men, he added, "Gentlemen, dinner is at seven sharp; good day."



THE DINNER WAS A FORMAL AFFAIR, with all the lairds wearing the plaids of their clan.

The two girls and the queen looked lovely. Mandy was wearing a violet velvet dress with eyelets around the neckline and the hem. The violet matched her eyes. Her long blonde hair was piled in a complicated style that only her maid could create.

Melody's dress was blue, the color of her eyes. Her dark hair was put up in the same way as Mandy's. Both girls had ribbons the color of their dresses and slippers to match. They were both petite girls, topping at five-foot, each. Neither of them weighed more than one-hundred-ten pounds. The queen, of course, was the most

beautiful of them all, with an embroidered velvet dress of a mint green color. She was regal looking but just as petite as the girls.

As they sat at the table together, they discussed the wedding that was to take place the next evening. The fitting was scheduled for tonight, after dinner. Neither girl had the patience to wait but they had no choice.

Both men were well over six-foot, much taller than their brides-to-be. They were warriors, strong and fit and very pleasing to the eye.

The queen smiled; both girls looked so adorable. The hair style gave them each a couple of inches but neither was more than a sprite. She loved her goddaughter so much and had so many doubts, but she trusted the king to do what was right for the girls and the kingdom. She knew he loved Amanda as much as she did.

The girls were stealing glances at their intended husbands. Melody had grown up with her future husband and knew him well. She knew he would love her and protect her and even punish her, if she didn't follow the rules of safety and obedience.

Mandy was just now getting a good look at her intended. Wolf was a big man, as she had stated earlier. In fact, all the lairds were big, powerful men, well-muscled and skilled warriors. Wolf and Aron were both broad of shoulder, lean of hip and easy on the eye. All of the lairds were strong and had the look of authority about them, even the older Isaac.

She could tell that Wolf could see her sneaking peeks at him. She knew Aron was also watching Melody carefully.

Both of the women possessed spirit and passion. The men would never have a boring marriage and neither would have it any other way. Both men introduced themselves to Mandy, before dinner. Wolf carried the conversation with his little Amanda throughout the entire meal. He smiled to himself, every time he asked her a question, because her cheeks would get rosy with embarrassment. It was obvious she had little experience talking to men. Though she did travel to France and learn from the best men

of medicine, it was different than talking to a man who would soon be her husband.



AFTER DINNER, the men excused themselves early, claiming an early morning was needed to hunt for food for the wedding and to supply the armies on the march home. There was danger in the forest. Some would do much to hurt the king. If they knew the king's goddaughter rode with them, it would put them in even more danger, therefore, they did not want to stop to hunt on the way. They would eat lightly and sleep cold until they got to the four corners, where most of them would split up to go to their own keeps. Some of the men had already been out hunting, today. The forest outside of the castle grounds went for miles and was plentiful with animals.

The castle gardens were huge and well-tended. Mandy took Melody to the garden to talk to the gardener about the seeds and slips of plants. Both girls were becoming fast friends. Mandy wanted to take along licorice for stomach problems, pain relief and relief from sores, mistletoe to ease heart conditions, blood pressure problems, and to be used for toothaches and pain in the joints. arnica was a member of the sun flower family, used as a cream to sooth muscles, reduce inflammation, treat bruises or prevent them and to treat sprains. She also suggested Indian ginseng, used to speed recovery; the bark is used as an antibiotic and to help with sleep. Also, quite a few young aspen trees; she used the bark to make a tea to treat fever, cough and as an anti-inflammatory. The inner bark was very beneficial. There were many more seedlings and seeds being brought, all with medical properties, and Mandy knew how to use them all.

Mandy was used to sneaking into the forest for moss and other things she could use in her healing. Most of the time, no one knew. She was happy being on her own, not paying attention to anything

but her beloved healing plants. The king forbade it but what he didn't know usually didn't hurt him. Unless, of course, someone came across her and tattled. That had been the cause of her only spankings from the king. It really hurt, but the worst part was it was embarrassing. She knew the king had a hard time punishing her because he couldn't stand to see her cry or to see his queen hurt. She knew it was for her own good but she enjoyed the game of testing the king and winning and she knew his weakness was his lady. Amanda used it to her advantage, usually for the good of her patients, she told herself, many times. It was for the good of the sick and hurt.



TONIGHT, she had her wedding on her mind. The queen waited for both girls to go to Amanda's room, where the seamstresses all waited to start the fittings for the most beautiful wedding dresses in the land. They had been sewing all morning and afternoon, into the evening, and would continue into the night, until everything was perfect.

The queen was just as excited as the girls. "Stop squirming, you two, and let the seamstresses do their jobs," she admonished.

Amanda rolled her eyes at Melody and said, "We *are* standing still but it takes so long."

After what seemed like many hours but really was closer to two, the girls were let go to get their baths and get ready for an early bed. The seamstresses would want another fitting, in the morning, to finish. Amanda gave Melody a hug as they parted, both girls giggling at all the excitement. How would they ever sleep, each girl was thinking.

The queen also wondered how they would rest, as excited as they both were. She sighed and kissed each girl good night as she said, "Right to sleep now, girls, you don't want dark circles under those gorgeous eyes, tomorrow."

"Yes, Your Majesty," they chorused. The girls bathed and, finally, went to sleep, dreaming of their wedding, their wedding nights, and their most handsome grooms.



THE LAIRDS, of course, were dreaming of their beautiful brides and their wedding nights, as well. Aron had waited for his little Melody to grow up, for years. Finally, she would be his.

Wolf had seen Amanda, a time or two, on visits to the king but he didn't know very much about her. The king kept her very well protected.

Both Aron and Wolf had been with other lovers, over the years, when they were in their late teens and late twenties. Both men were healthy males, with healthy sex drives. This was different; these women were going to be their wives, wives to lairds, help-mates and the mother of their children. The wife of a laird was not an easy one. Most lairds were very dominant. They demanded obedience and submission. Their wives would be expected to set a strong example for the people.

And, soon, it was morning. The day of the wedding had arrived.