

A brilliant fantasy sequel to *The Riddle-Master of Hed*  
**PATRICIA A. MCKILLIP**

# HEIR OF SEA AND FIRE



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**Heir of Sea and Fire**  
**Patricia A. McKillip**

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# 1

In spring, three things came invariably to the house of the King of An: the year's first shipment of Herun wine, the lords of the Three Portions for the spring council, and an argument.

The spring of the year following the strange disappearance of the Prince of Hed, who had, with the High One's harpist, vanished like a mist in Isig Pass, the great house with its seven gates and seven white towers seemed to be cracking like a seed pod out of a long, bitter winter of silence and grief. The season dusted the air with green, set patterns of light like inlay on the cold stone floors, and roused restlessness like sap in the deep heart of An, until Raederle of An, standing in Cyone's garden, which no one had entered for the six months since her death, felt that even the dead of An, their bones plaited with grass root, must be drumming their fingers in their graves.

She stirred after a while, left the tangle of weeds and withered things that had not survived the winter, and went back into the King's hall, whose doors were flung wide to the light. Servants under the eye of Mathom's steward, were shaking the folds out of the lords' banners, hanging them precariously from the high beams. The lords were due any day, and the house was in a turmoil preparing to receive them. Already their gifts had been arriving for her: a milk-white falcon bred in the wild peaks of Osterland from the Lord of Hel; a brooch like a gold wafer from Map Hwillion, who was too poor to afford such things; a flute of polished wood inlaid with silver, which bore no name, and worried Raederle, since whoever had sent it had known what she would love. She watched the banner of Hel unrolling, the ancient boar's head with tusks like black moons on an oak-green field; it rose jerkily on its hangings to survey the broad hall out of its small fiery eyes. She gazed back at it, her arms folded, then turned suddenly and went to find her father.

She found him in his chambers arguing with his land-heir. Their voices were low, and they stopped when she entered, but she saw the faint flush on Duac's cheekbones. In the pale slashes of his brows and his sea-colored eyes, he bore the stamp of Ylon's wild blood, but his patience with Mathom when everyone else had exhausted theirs was considered phenomenal. She

wondered what Mathom had said to upset him.

The King turned a dour crow's eye to her; she said politely, for his mood in the mornings was unpredictable, "I would like to visit Mara Croeg in Aum for a couple of weeks, with your permission. I could pack and leave tomorrow. I've been in Anuin all winter, and I feel—I need to get away."

There was not a flicker of change in his eyes. He said simply, "No," and turned to pick up his wine cup.

She stared at his back, annoyed, and discarded courtesy like an old shoe. "Well, I'm not going to stay here and be argued over like a prize cow out of Aum. Do you know who sent me a gift? Map Hwillion. Only yesterday he was laughing at me for falling out of a pear tree, and now he's got his first beard and an eight-hundred-year-old house with a leaky roof, and he thinks he wants to marry me. You're the one who promised me to the Prince of Hed; can't you put a stop to all this? I'd rather listen to the pig herds of Hel during a thunderstorm than another spring council arguing with you about what to do with me."

"So would I," Duac murmured. Mathom eyed them both. His hair had turned iron-grey seemingly over night; his sorrow over Cyone's death had limned his face to the bone, but it had neither tempered nor bittered his disposition.

"What do you want me to tell them," he asked, "other than what I have told them for nineteen years? I have made a vow, binding beyond life, to marry you to the man winning Peven's game. If you want to run away and live with Map Hwillion under his leaky roof, I can't stop you—they know that."

"I don't want to marry Map Hwillion," she said, exasperated. "I would like to marry the Prince of Hed. Except that I don't know any more who he is, and no one else knows where he is. I am tired of waiting; I am tired of this house; I am tired of listening to the Lord of Hel tell me that I am being ignored and insulted by the Prince of Hed; I want to visit Mara Croeg in Aum, and I don't understand how you can refuse such a simple, reasonable request."

There was a short silence, during which Mathom considered the wine in his cup. An indefinable expression came into his face; he set the cup down

and said, "If you like, you can go to Caithnard."

Her lips parted in surprise. "I can? To visit Rood? Is there a ship—" And then Duac brought his hand down flat on the wine table, rattling cups.

"No."

She stared at him, astonished, and he closed his hand. His eyes were narrowed slightly as he gazed back at Mathom. "He's asked me to go, but I've already refused. He wants Rood home."

"Rood? I don't understand."

Mathom moved away from the window suddenly with an irritated whirl of sleeve. "I might as well have the entire council in here babbling at me at once. I want Rood to take a leave from his studies, come back to Anuin for a while; he'll take that fact best from either Duac or you."

"You tell him," Duac said inflexibly. Under the King's eye he yielded, sat down, gripping the arms of his chair as though he were holding fast to his patience. "Then will you explain so I can understand? Rood has just taken the Red of Apprenticeship; if he stays he'll take the Black at a younger age than any living Master. He's done fine work there; he deserves the chance to stay."

"There are more riddles in the world than those in the locked books behind the walls of that College in Caithnard."

"Yes. I've never studied riddle-mastery, but I have an idea that you can't answer them all at once. He's doing the best he can. What do you want him to do? Go lose himself at Erlenstar Mountain like the Prince of Hed?"

"No. I want him here."

"For what, in Hel's name? Are you planning to die or something?"

"Duac," Raederle breathed, but he waited stubbornly for the King to answer. She felt, like a live thing beneath the irritation and obstinacy in them both, the binding between them beyond all definition. Then Duac heaved himself to his feet at Mathom's silence and snapped before he slammed the door behind him so hard the stones seemed to rattle, "By Madir's bones, I wish I could see into that peatbog you call a mind!"

Raederle sighed. She looked at Mathom, who seemed in spite of the rich robe he wore, black and impervious as a wizard's curse in the sunlight. "I'm beginning to hate spring. I won't ask you to explain the world to me, just why

I can't go visit Mara Croeg while Cyn Croeg is here at the council."

"Who was Thanet Ross and why did he play a harp without strings?"

She stood a moment, dredging the answer out of interminable, half-forgotten hours of riddlery. Then she turned; she heard his voice again, just before the door slammed once more, "And stay out of Hel."

She found Duac in the library, staring out the window. She joined him, leaning against the window, looking down at the city that sloped gently away from the King's house to spill around the rim of the harbor. Trade-ships were drifting in with the midmorning tide, their colored sails deflating in the wind like weary sighs. She saw the white and green of Danan Isig's ships bringing the marvellous crafts from Isig Mountain; and a hope stirred in her that the northern Kingdom had sent news more valuable than all its beautiful cargo. Duac stirred beside her, as the peace of the ancient library with its smell of hide, wax and the iron of old shields returned the composure to his face. He said softly, "He is the most pig-headed, arbitrary and exasperating man in the Three Portions of An."

"I know."

"Something's going on in his head; something's bubbling behind his eyes like a bad spell... It worries me. Because if it came to a choice between a blind step into a bottomless pit with him and a walk across the apple orchards with the Lords of An at their finest, I would shut my eyes and step. But what is he thinking?"

"I don't know." She dropped her chin in her palms. "I don't know why he wants us all home now. I don't understand him. I asked him why I couldn't leave, and he asked me why Thanet Ross played a harp with no strings."

"Who?" Duac looked at her. "How could... Why did he play a harp with no strings?"

"For the same reason he walked backward and shaved his head instead of his beard. For no reason except that there was no reason. He was a sad man and died backward."

"Oh."

"He was walking backward for no reason and fell in a river. Nobody ever saw him again, but they assumed he died since there was no reason—"

"All right." Duac protested mildly. "You could spin that one into yarn."

She smiled. "See what education you missed, not being destined to marry a riddle-master." Then her smile faded; she bowed her head, traced a crack in the old mortar. "I feel as though I'm waiting for a legend to come down from the north, breaking out of winter with the spring water... Then I remember the farmer's son who used to put shells to my ears so I could hear the sea, and, Duac, that's when I become afraid for him. He has been gone so long; there has not been one word from him for a year, and no one in the realm has heard so much as a harp-note from the High One's harpist. Surely the High One would never keep Morgon so long from his land. I think something must have happened to them in Isig Pass."

"As far as anyone knows, the land-rule hasn't passed from Morgon," Duac said comfortingly, but she only shifted restlessly.

"Then where is he? At least he could get a message to his own land. The traders say that every time they stop at Tol, Tristan and Eliard are there at the dock waiting, hoping for news. Even at Isig, with all they say happened to him, he managed to write. They say he has scars on his hands like vesta-horns, and he can take the shape of trees..."

Duac glanced down at his own hands as if he expected to see the withered moons of white horns in them. "I know... The simplest thing to do would be to go to Erlenstar Mountain and ask the High One where he is. It's spring; the Pass should be clearing. Eliard might do it."

"Leave Hed? He's Morgon's land-heir; they'd never let him leave."

"Maybe. But they say there's a streak of stubbornness long as a witch's nose in the people of Hed. He might." He leaned over the ledge suddenly; his head turned towards a distant, double-column of riders making their way across the meadows. "Here they come. In full plumage."

"Who is it?"

"I can't... blue. Blue and black retinue; that would be Cyn Croeg. He appears to have met someone green..."

"Hel."

"No. Green and cream; very small following."

She sighed. "Map Hwillion."

She stood by the window after Duac left to tell Mathom, watching the riders veer around the nut orchards, flickering in and out of the lacework of

black, bare branches. They appeared again at a corner of the old city wall, to take the main road through the city, which led twisting and curving through the market and old high houses and shops whose windows would be wide open like eyes, full of watchers. By the time they disappeared through the gates of the city, she had decided what to do.

Three days later, she sat beside the pig-woman of the Lord of Hel under an oak tree, weaving grass blades into a net. From all around her in the placid afternoon came the vast snort and grumble of the great pig herds of Hel as they stirred through the tangled roots and shadows of oak. The pig-woman, whom no one had ever bothered to name, was smoking a meditative pipe. She was a tall, bony, nervous woman, with long, dishevelled grey hair and dark grey eyes; she had tended the pigs as long as anyone could remember. They were related, she and Raederle, through the witch Madir, in some obscure way they were trying to figure out. The pig-woman's great gift was with pigs; she was abrupt and shy with people, but the beautiful, fiery Cyone had inherited Madir's interest in pigs and had become friends with the taciturn pig-woman. But not even Cyone had discovered what Raederle knew: the odd store of knowledge that the pig-woman had also inherited from Madir.

Raederle picked another tough stem of grass, sent it snaking in and out of the small, square weave. "Am I doing this right?"

The pig-woman touched the tight strands and nodded. "You could carry water in that," she said, in her plain, rugged voice. "Now, then, I think King Oen had a pigherder whom Madir might have been fond of, in Anuin."

"I thought she might have been fond of Oen."

The pig-woman looked surprised. "After he built the tower to trap her? You told me that. Besides, he had a wife." She waved the words and her pipe smoke away at once with her hand. "I'm not thinking."

"No king I ever heard of married Madir," Raederle said wryly. "Yet somehow the blood got into the king's line. Let's see: she lived nearly two hundred years, and there were seven kings. I believe we can forget Fenel; he was too busy fighting almost to father a land-heir, let alone a bastard. I don't even know if he kept pigs. It is possible," she added, struck, "that you are a descendant of a child of Madir and one of the Kings."

The pig-woman gave a rare chuckle. "Oh, I doubt it. Me with my bare

feet. Madir liked pig-herders as much as she liked kings.”

“That’s true.” She finished with the grass blade and pushed the stems close, frowning down at them absently. “It is also possible that Oen might have grown fond of Madir after he realized she wasn’t his enemy, but that seems a little scandalous, since it was through him that Ylon’s blood came into the Kings’ line. Oen was furious enough about that.”

“Ylon.”

“You know that tale.”

The pig-woman shook her head. “I know the name, but no one ever told me the tale.”

“Well.” She sat back against the tree trunk, the sun shimmering in and out of her eyes. Her own shoes were off; her hair was loose; and there was a small spider making a bewildered foray up one strand. She brushed it off without noticing. “It’s the first riddle I ever learned. Oen’s land-heir was not his own son, but the son of some strange sea-lord, who came into Oen’s bed disguised as the king. Nine months afterward, Oen’s wife bore Ylon, with skin like foam and eyes like green seaweed. So Oen in his anger built a tower by the sea for this sea-child, with orders that he should never come out of it. One night, fifteen years after his birth, Ylon heard a strange harping from the sea, and such was his love of it, and desire to find its source, that he broke the bars on his window with his hands and leaped into the sea and vanished. Ten years later Oen died, and to his other sons’ surprise, the land-rule passed to Ylon. Ylon was driven by his own nature back to claim his heritage. He reigned only long enough to marry and beget a son who was as dark and practical as Oen, and then he went back to the tower Oen had built for him and leaped to his death on the rocks below.” She touched the tiny net, squared a corner. “It’s a sad tale.” A frown strayed into her eyes, absent, puzzled, as if she had almost remembered something, but not quite.

“Anyway, Ylon’s face appears once or twice a century, and sometimes his wildness, but never his terrible torment, because no one with his nature has ever again inherited the land-rule. Which is fortunate.”

“That’s true.” The pig-woman looked down at the pipe in her hand, which had gone out during her listening. She tapped it absently against the tree root. Raederle watched an enormous black sow nudge her way through the clearing in front of them to loll panting in the shade. “It’s almost Dis’s time.”