



Touch of Power (Healer)

By Maria V. Snyder

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Laying hands upon the injured and dying, Avry of Kazan absorbs their wounds and diseases into herself. But rather than being honored for her skills, she is hunted. Healers like Avry are accused of spreading the plague that has decimated the Fifteen Realms, leaving the survivors in a state of chaos.

Stressed and tired from hiding, Avry is abducted by a band of rogues who, shockingly, value her gift above the golden bounty offered for her capture. Their leader, an enigmatic captor-protector with powers of his own, is unequivocal in his demands: Avry must heal a plague-stricken prince—leader of a campaign against her people. As they traverse the daunting Nine Mountains, beset by mercenaries and magical dangers, Avry must decide who is worth healing and what is worth dying for. Because the price of peace may well be her life....

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Editorial Review

Review

"Fans of high-spirited adventure, intrigue and romance will celebrate."

-Publishers Weekly on Fire Study

"This is one of those rare books that will keep readers dreaming long after they've read it."

-Publishers Weekly Starred Review on Poison Study

"The rare sequel to live up to the promise of its predecessor, Magic Study is a wonderful combination of romance and fantasy."

-Audible.com (Editor's Pick: Best of 2006-Romance)

"Snyder delivers another excellent adventure."

-Publishers Weekly on Fire Study

"...a compelling new fantasy series."

-SFX Magazine on Sea Glass

About the Author

Maria V. Snyder is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the Study series, the Glass series, the Healer series, *Inside Out*, and *Outside In*. Born and raised in Philadelphia, she earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Meteorology from Penn State and a Master of Arts degree in fiction writing from Seton Hill University. Unable to part ways with Seton Hill, Maria is currently a teacher and mentor for the MFA program. Find her on the Web at MariaVSnyder.com.

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The little girl wouldn't stop crying. I didn't blame her. She was dying, after all. Her lungs were so full of fluid she'd drown in another few hours. Tossing and turning on my thin mattress, I listened to her cries as they sawed through the floorboards and through my heart, cutting it in two.

One piece pleaded for me to save her, urging me to heal the girl with the bright smile and ginger curls. The other side pulsed a warning beat. Her family would thank me by turning me in to the town watch. I'd be hanged as a war criminal. No trial needed.

The horrors from the dark years of the plague were still fresh in the survivors' minds. They considered those times a war. A war that had been started by healers, who then spread the deadly disease, and refused to heal it.

Of course it was utter nonsense. We couldn't heal the plague. And we didn't start it. But in the midst of the chaos, no one listened to reason. Someone had to be blamed. Right?

The girl's screams pierced my heart. I couldn't stand it any longer. Three years on the run. Three years of hiding. Three terrible years full of fear and loneliness. For what? My life? Yes, I live and breathe and exist. Nothing else.

Flinging my blankets off, I hurried downstairs. I didn't need to change since I would never sleep in nightclothes or without my boots on. When you were on the run, the possibility of being surprised in the middle of the night was high. There was no time to waste when escaping, so I wore my black travel pants and black shirt to bed every night. The dark color ideal for blending into shadows.

Another trick of being on the run involved finding a second-floor room with both front and back doors and no skeletons. They were hard to find as most towns had burned the plague victims' homes in the misguided attempt to destroy the disease. And many victims died alone. My current hideout was above the family with the dying child.

I knocked on my downstairs neighbors' door loud enough for the sound to be heard over the child's wet wails. When it opened, her mother, Mavis, stared wordlessly at me. She held the two-year-old girl in her strong arms, and the knowledge that her child was dying shone in her brown eyes. Her pale skin clung to her gaunt face. She swayed with pure exhaustion.

Underneath the sheen of tears and red flush of fever, the little girl's skin had death's pale hue. In a few moments, she wouldn't have the breath to scream.

I held out my arms. "Mavis, go to sleep. I'll watch... Fawn." Finally, I remembered her name. Another rule to being on the run was to avoid getting close to anyone. No friends. But I needed to earn money, and I had to make a few acquaintances in order to keep up with the gossip. I'd stayed with Mavis's children on occasion, which helped with both.

Panicked, Mavis pulled Fawn closer to her.

"The rest of your family needs you, as well. You should rest before you collapse or get sick." She hesitated.

"I will wake you if anything changes. I promise."

Mavis's resistance crumpled and she handed me Fawn. Well beyond lucidity, the little girl didn't notice the change in the arms around her, but my magic sprang to life at the touch, pushing to be released from my core. Fawn's skin burned and her clothes were damp with sweat. I cradled Fawn as I sat in the big wooden rocking chair in the living room. The lantern burned low, casting a weak yellow light over the threadbare furniture. This family hadn't looted from their neighbors, which said much about them.

Next to the window I had a clear view of the street. A half-moon illuminated the burned ruins of buildings huddled along a dirt road. Rainwater had filled the holes and ruts. The plague had killed roughly six million people—two-thirds of the population—so there was no one left to attend to minor tasks like fixing the roads or clearing away the debris. The fact that this town.. Jaxton? Or was it Wola? They all blurred together. Either way, having a local government town watch, basic commerce, no piles of skeletons and a tiny—a few hundred at most—populace was more than many other towns could claim.

I rocked Fawn, humming a tune my mother had sung to me years ago. Tendrils of my magic seeped into Fawn's body. Her cries lost the hysterical edge.

Mavis watched us for a few minutes. Did she suspect? Would she take her child back? Instead, she heeded my advice and went to bed. Waiting for Mavis to fall into a deep sleep, I rocked and hummed. Once I was certain enough time had passed, I stopped the chair. Concentrating on the girl in my arms, I allowed my full power to flow into Fawn until she was saturated with it. The release of magic sent a ripple of contentment through me. This was my area of expertise. What I should be doing.

Then I drew it back into me, cleaning out the sickness inside Fawn. My lungs filled with fluid as hers drained. I broke into a fever as hers cooled.

She hiccupped a few times, then breathed in deep. Her body relaxed and she fell into an exhausted sleep.

The sickness nestled in my chest, causing me to suck in noisy wet breaths. I couldn't pull enough air into my lungs. Goose bumps raced across my skin as a sliver of fear touched my heart. I hadn't healed anyone this sick before. Would I be strong enough? Had I waited too long to help Fawn? My own cowardice would kill me. Fitting.

The effort to breathe consumed my energy. Black and white spots swirled in my vision as I fought to stay conscious. Even though my body healed ten times faster than a regular person's, I was quite aware that it might not be fast enough.

Luckily, this wasn't that time. The crushing tightness around my ribs eased a fraction. I concentrated on the simple act of breathing.

Mavis woke me in the morning. I had fallen asleep with Fawn still in my arms.

"How did you get her to sleep? She hasn't stopped crying in days," Mavis said.

Still groggy, I searched for a good explanation. "My tuneless humming must have bored her." My voice rasped with phlegm and set off a coughing fit.

"Uh-huh." She peered at me with a contemplative purse on her lips.

"Her fever broke last night," I tried between coughs.

Unconvinced, Mavis gently lifted Fawn and transferred the girl to her crib. "You should rest, as well. You look..."

I waved off her concern. "Nothing a couple of hours of sleep won't cure." But my legs betrayed me as I staggered to my feet. Moving with care, I headed toward the door.

When I reached for the knob, Mavis said, "Avry."

I froze and glanced over my shoulder, waiting for the accusation.

"Thank you."

Nodding, I hurried from the room. The climb to my place drained all my strength. I hacked up blood as the sweat poured from my body. I needed to grab my escape bag and leave town. Now. But when I bent to retrieve the knapsack from under the bed, a wave of dizziness overwhelmed me. Instead of fleeing, I

collapsed on the floor.

A part of my mind knew I only required a few hours of sleep to recover, while another part planned the quickest route out of town. A third part still worried. With good reason.

A fist pounded on the door hard enough that I felt the vibrations through my cheek. Waking with a jolt, I scrambled to my feet. A male voice ordered me to surrender. Darkness filled the room and pressed against the windowpane. I had slept all day.

Unfortunately, this situation wasn't new to me. I scooped up my escape bag and exited through the back door. Pausing on the landing, I scanned the area. Moonlight lit the wooden steps. No one blocked them. Hurrying down, I shouldered my pack and ran through the empty alley that reeked of cat urine.

A figure stood at the alley's southern exit so I turned around. Except the northern route was also blocked. The only way out was through the tight space between buildings to the street where there would no doubt be more town watchmen.

The crash of a door echoed off the bricks. Upon my landing, a man called, "Do you have her?"

The two in the alley closed in. Guess I would take my chances. I darted through the narrow opening and right into a waiting town watchman's arms.

Voices yelled, "Don't touch her skin."

"Take her pack."

"Cuff her quick."

The drowning sickness had rendered me too weak to put up much of a fight. In mere seconds, my hands were manacled behind my back. My three years on the run had ended. It was hard to tell if fear or relief dominated. At this point, both had equal sway.

The captain of the watchmen yanked my shirt off my right shoulder, exposing my healer tattoo to the crowd. It appeared as if the entire town had gathered to witness my arrest. As expected, they gasped at the proof of the monster in their midst. And to think, I had once been proud of the symbol of my profession—a simple circle of hands. From a few feet away, it resembled a daisy with hand-shaped petals.

I scanned faces as the watchmen congratulated themselves on their *catch*. Mavis and her husband stood among the gawkers. He glared and approached me, dragging Mavis along. She wouldn't meet my gaze. Little Fawn clung to her mother's leg.

"It doesn't matter that you saved my girl's life," the husband said. "Your kind is responsible for millions of deaths. And the gold your execution will bring this town is sorely needed."

True. Tohon of Sogra placed a bounty of twenty golds for every healer caught and executed. I suspect the plague killed one or more of his loved ones. Otherwise, why would a powerful life magician care? The disease certainly didn't care, eliminating people without rhyme or reason.

Right before I was escorted to the jail, Fawn waved bye-bye to me. I smiled. My empty, pointless life for

hers. Not bad.

Inside the town watch's station house I endured endless rounds of questions. They wanted me to turn over my healer cohorts. I almost laughed at that. I hadn't encountered another healer in three years. In fact, I'd guessed they had been smarter than me and had found a nice refuge to hide in while they waited for this current madness to pass.

I refused to answer their ridiculous queries, letting their voices flow past me as I concentrated on Fawn's healthy face. Eventually they removed the manacles, measured me for my coffin and locked me in a cell below ground level, promising tomorrow would be my last day. I had an appointment with the guillotine. Lovely.

At least the guards left a lantern hanging on the stone wall opposite my cell—a basic cube with iron bars on three sides and one stone wall. Equipped with a slop pot and metal bed, I had the space to myself. And no neighbors in the adjoining cells. The bedsprings squealed under my weight. My lungs wheezed in the damp air thanks to Fawn's stubborn sickness.

I wasn't as terrified as I had imagined. In fact, I was looking forward to my first solid night's sleep in three years. Ah, the little things in life.

Too bad, I didn't even get my last wish.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Brian Bottoms:

Here thing why this kind of Touch of Power (Healer) are different and trusted to be yours. First of all studying a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content of it which is the content is as tasty as food or not. Touch of Power (Healer) giving you information deeper and in different ways, you can find any e-book out there but there is no publication that similar with Touch of Power (Healer). It gives you thrill reading through journey, its open up your personal eyes about the thing that happened in the world which is probably can be happened around you. You can bring everywhere like in area, café, or even in your approach home by train. When you are having difficulties in bringing the imprinted book maybe the form of Touch of Power (Healer) in e-book can be your alternate.

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James Fulk:

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