As The World Comes to an End

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Relationships:	Merlin/Arthur Pendragon (Merlin), Minor or Background Relationship(s), Gwen & Merlin & Morgana & Arthur Pendragon, Merlin & Will (Merlin)
Characters:	Merlin (Merlin), Arthur Pendragon (Merlin), Gwen (Merlin), Morgana (Merlin), Uther Pendragon (Merlin), Will (Merlin), Leon (Merlin), Gaius (Merlin), Hunith (Merlin), Lancelot (Merlin), Galahad (Arthurian), Kay (Arthurian), Bors (Arthurian), Gareth (Arthurian), Gaheris (Arthurian), Palamedes (Arthurian), Bedivere (Merlin), Lamorak, Lucan, Ewan (Merlin), Original Dog Character(s)
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As The World Comes to an End

by [TheDiamondTiara](#)

Summary

Merlin was sentenced into the world with two gifts:

Blindness.

And magic.

A Dragon's Call

The sounds of the people was the first thing Merlin heard upon stepping foot in the kingdom. Of course, there was the background noises of horse feet hitting the road, the carriages that they pulled along with them. Dogs and birds, metal clashing, clothes swaying. But, the most prominent of all, was the people.

Merlin stood still, unseeing eyes scanning the entryway, then stepped in, head held high.

He bumped into a few people -- though less than most would expect, given his disability -- and dodged the animals in the way.

He heard the sound of horns blaring, and followed the noise, stopping with a newly formed crowd, which were gathered around something. The crowd chattered in whispers, as drums were beat upon, and a man was dragged into the center, the chatter slowly dying down.

"Let this serve as a lesson to all," a voice broke through over everything, halting all chatter and instantly drawing the crowd's attention upwards, "this man, Thomas James Collins is judged guilty of conspiring to use enchantments...and magic. And, pursuant to the laws of Camelot, I, Uther Pendragon, have decreed that such practises are *banned* . On penalty of death."

Merlin gulped, shaking hands tightening on the straps of his bag, as the cause of this gathered crowd begun to make sense.

"I pride myself as a fair and just king, but, for the crime of sorcery, there is but one sentence I can pass."
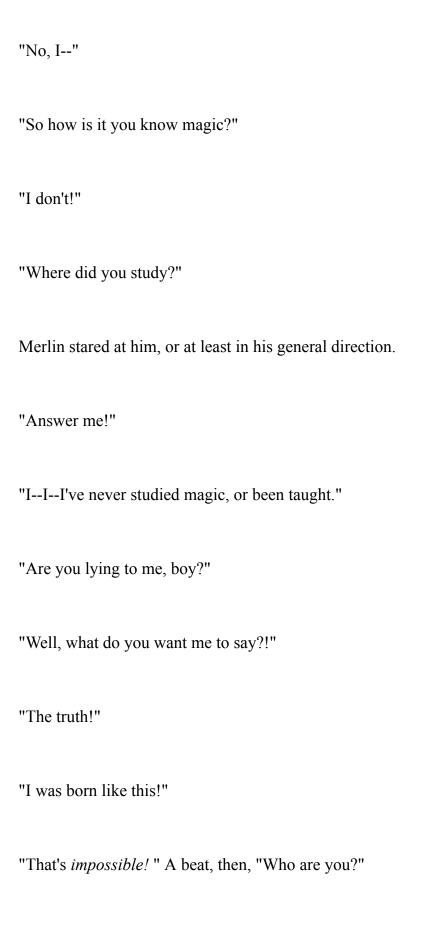
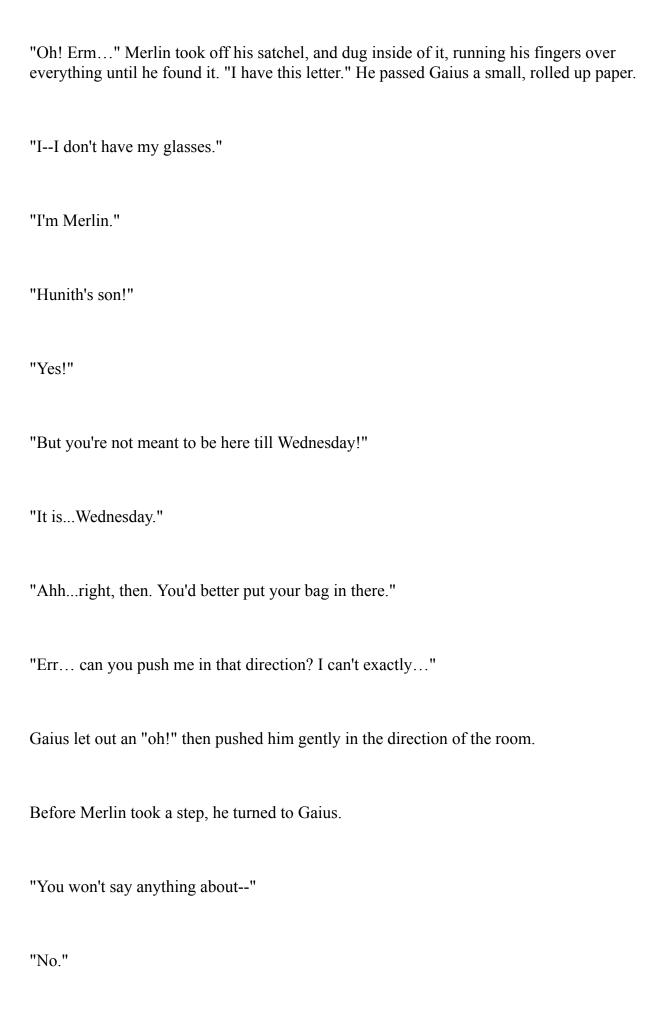The crowd waited in bated breath.

Merlin's heart beat to the beat of the drums as he held his breath.

He flinched as he heard the sound of one's head leaving their shoulders.

"When I came to this land, this kingdom was mired in chaos, but with the people's help, magic was driven from the realm. So I declare a festival, to celebrate 20 years since the great dragon was captured, and Camelot freed from the evil of sorcery. Let the celebrations begin."

The crowd began to disperse.

A woman began to whine quite loudly, making everyone turn.

"There is only one evil in the land and it is not magic! It is *you*. With your hatred...and your ignorance... *you took my son.* " She sucked in a deep breath, and her tone instantly changed, cold and cruel. "I promise you. Before the celebrations are over, you will share my tears. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth...a son for a son!"

"Seize her."

She squealed, and wind came out of nowhere, blowing everyone to back away as she disappeared completely.

Merlin gulped, wondering what fate awaited him in Camelot as he made his way into the castle and used his magic sense and come up to a couple of guards poised in front of a door.

"Um, where would I find Gaius the court physician?"

- ~.

Water bubbled in a beaker nearby as he knocked on the door, which was open a jar. When no response came, he pushed open the door with a creak, and stepped into the chambers.

He smelled a collection of different herbs and spices, and listened for any sound of movement.

He heard a creak, and, through his magic's senses, sensed a man, standing on top of a staircase, sorting through books on a shelf.

"Gaius?" he called, and cleared his throat when Gaius didn't turn or answer verbally.

Gaius turned, but, in doing so, broke the railing at the stairs, and fell.

Merlin, sensing this, slowed down time, and, using his magic to sense a bed nearby, used it to move the bed across the room and underneath the man as he fell onto it.

"I--" the man stammered, "what did you just do?!"

"Um," Merlin answered intelligently.

"Tell me!" The man, Gaius, pushed himself off the bed.

"Well, I--I--I have no idea what happened."

"If anyone had seen that…"

"Oh, no no no, that--that was nothing to do with me, that was--"

"I know what it *was* ! I just want to know where you learned how to do it!"

"No, I--"

"So how is it you know magic?"

"I don't!"

"Where did you study?"

Merlin stared at him, or at least in his general direction.

"Answer me!"

"I--I--I've never studied magic, or been taught."

"Are you lying to me, boy?"

"Well, what do you want me to say?!"

"The truth!"

"I was born like this!"

"That's *impossible!* " A beat, then, "Who are you?"

"Oh! Erm…" Merlin took off his satchel, and dug inside of it, running his fingers over everything until he found it. "I have this letter." He passed Gaius a small, rolled up paper.

"I--I don't have my glasses."

"I'm Merlin."

"Hunith's son!"

"Yes!"

"But you're not meant to be here till Wednesday!"

"It is...Wednesday."

"Ahh...right, then. You'd better put your bag in there."

"Err… can you push me in that direction? I can't exactly…"

Gaius let out an "oh!" then pushed him gently in the direction of the room.

Before Merlin took a step, he turned to Gaius.

"You won't say anything about--"

"No."

Merlin nodded and turned back around.

"Although, Merlin," Merlin turned back to him, "I should say *thank you.* "

- ~.

Merlin was sat in his room, staring blankly at the wall as he listened to the muffled sounds of the kingdom.

A moment passed, then he stood up, felt around for the window, then pushed it open, listening to the kingdom.

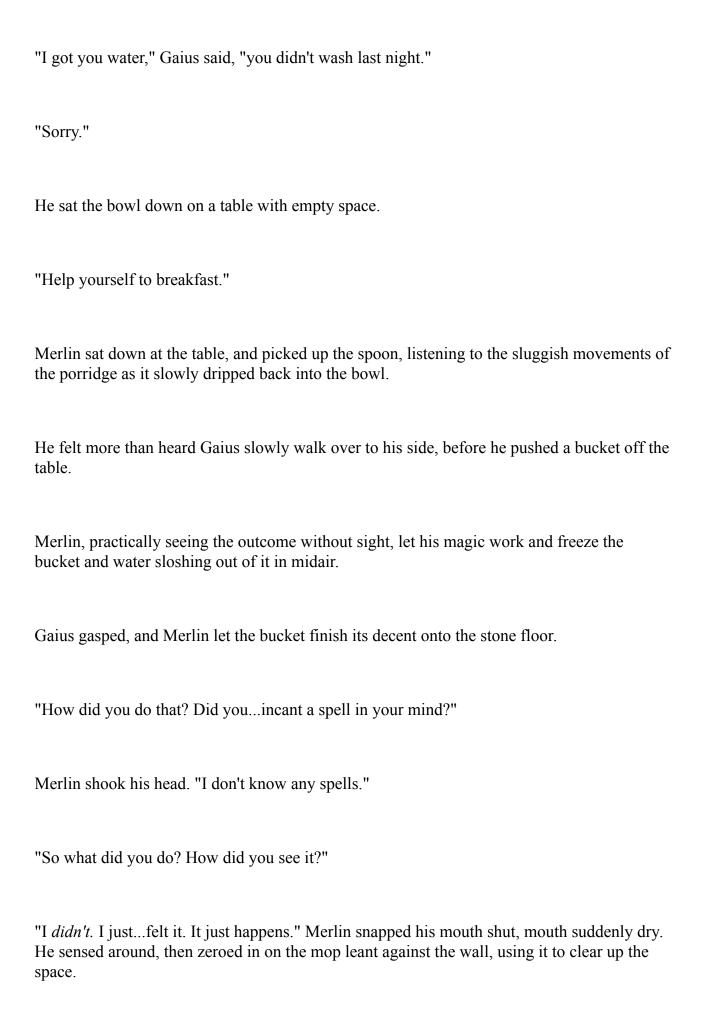People talked, fire cackled, chickens clucked.

Merlin smiled, closing his pale blue eyes and just *listened.*

- ~.

MERLIN…. MERLIN?

Merlin's eyes snapped open at the strange voice, which seemed like it was right next to his ear, but so far away from it at the same time. He closed his eyes, and tried to focus his magic on sensing the being, though felt nothing. He sat up, and decided that it was a good time as any to get ready for the day.

So, there he was, walking down the stairs hesitantly, putting on his jacket as he did so, and listening to the sloppy sounds of porridge being poured into a bowl.

"I got you water," Gaius said, "you didn't wash last night."

"Sorry."

He sat the bowl down on a table with empty space.

"Help yourself to breakfast."

Merlin sat down at the table, and picked up the spoon, listening to the sluggish movements of the porridge as it slowly dripped back into the bowl.

He felt more than heard Gaius slowly walk over to his side, before he pushed a bucket off the table.

Merlin, practically seeing the outcome without sight, let his magic work and freeze the bucket and water sloshing out of it in midair.

Gaius gasped, and Merlin let the bucket finish its decent onto the stone floor.

"How did you do that? Did you...incant a spell in your mind?"

Merlin shook his head. "I don't know any spells."

"So what did you do? How did you see it?"

"I *didn't*. I just...felt it. It just happens." Merlin snapped his mouth shut, mouth suddenly dry. He sensed around, then zeroed in on the mop leant against the wall, using it to clear up the space.

"Well, we better keep you out of trouble. You can help me until I find some paid work for you. Here -- Hollyhock and Feverfew for Lady Percival, and this is for Sir Olwen. He's mostly blind, so warn him not to take it all at once."

"Okay," Merlin muttered, grabbing one of the items in each hand to make sure he knew which was which.

"And here." Gaius pressed something into his hand, and Merlin instantly recognized it as a sandwich. "Off you go." Gaius took the mop from him, and the boy walked around the table, towards the door. "And Merlin." The boy turned around. "I need hardly tell you that the practice of *any form* of enchantments will get you killed."

- ~.

So that's where Merlin found himself, walking blindly *(hardy-har)* in the kingdom, which eventually led him to Sir Olwen's room, the man's medicine gripped safely in hand, and Lady Percival's items tucked in his shirt.

He knocked on the door he was directed to, and it creaked open.

"Um," he said, "I brought you your medicine."

He pressed the item into the man's hand, and turned to walk away, then remembered what Gaius had said.
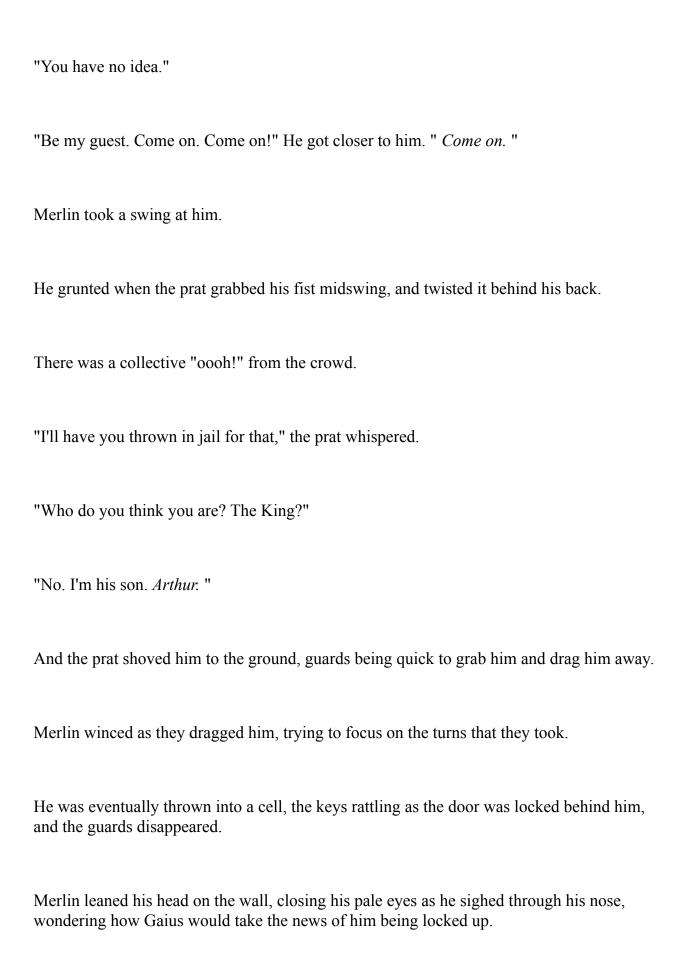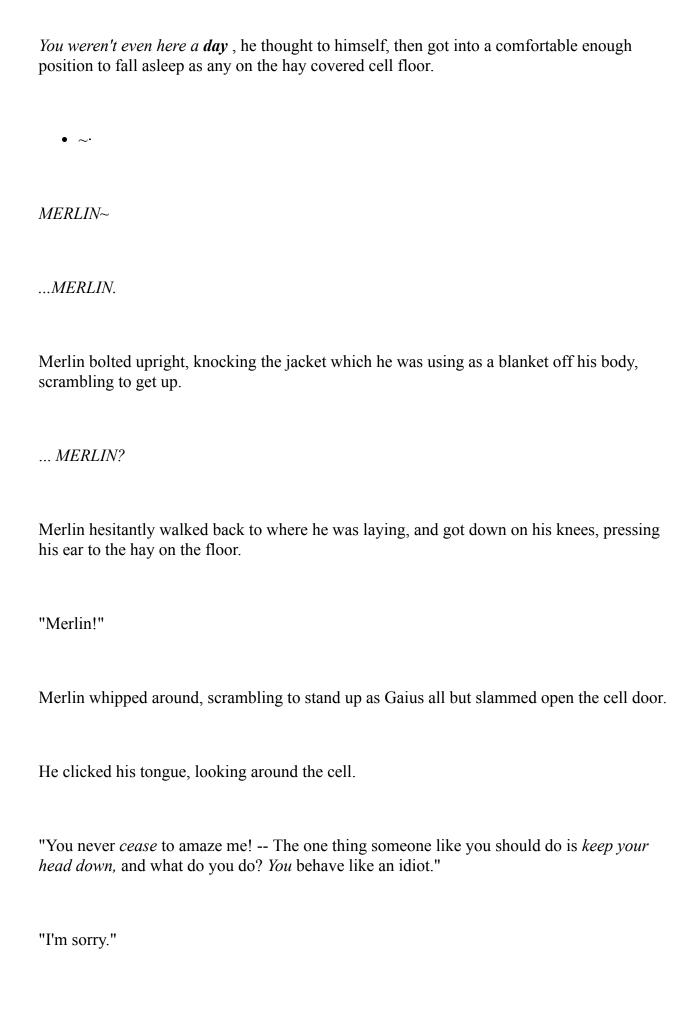
"Um, Gaius said not to drink it all--"

He heard the bottle being unstoppered, and immediately ceased speaking, wincing.

"...I'm sure it's fine," he said, then disappeared.

A rooster crowed outside, and Merlin was instantly drawn to a voice outside.

" *Where's* the target?"

Merlin frowned, hearing the mocking tone, one that he had heard many times before in Ealdor.

"...There, Sir?" a hesitant voice asked.

"It's into the sun," the mocking voice said. *What a prat.*

"Well, it's not that bright."

"A bit like you, then!"

Men around the prat laughed at that.

"I'll put the target down at the other end, shall I, sir?"

" *Teach him a lesson!* " one man encouraged as the man lifted the target up onto his arm, making his way to the other end.

"This'll teach him," the prat said, smirk in his words, and, the next moment, Merlin flinched at the sound of a knife being impaled into wood.

The man, who must have been a servant, shouted. "Hey, hang on!"

"Don't stop!" The prat encouraged.

The servant grunted, and moved a little bit down.

"Here?,

"I told you to keep moving!"

Another thunk as another knife hit the wood.

"Come on! *Run* !" The servant kept running, the sound of his feet hitting the ground as he did so, and Merlin flinched at each thunk. "We want some *moving*- target practice!"

The servant tripped, dropping the target, which rolled in front of Merlin, who put his boot on it.

"Hey," he said. "Come on, that's enough."

" ...*What?* " The prat asked, sounding scandalized that someone would even suggest such a thing.

"You've had your fun, my friend."

The prat walked right in front of him, then stopped. "Do I know you?"

"Uh, i'm Merlin." He stuck out his hand in the prat's general direction.

"So, I don't know you." The prat didn't take his offered hand.

"...No."

"Yet you called me *'friend'*. "

Merlin clicked his tongue. "That was my mistake."

"Yes, I think so."

"Yeah…" He looked up, from where his eyes were pointed at the ground. "I'd never had a friend who could be such an ass."

The prat chuckled darkly as Merlin turned to walk away.

"Or I one who could be so *stupid*. " Merlin froze in his tracks, and turned his head to the side. "Tell me, *Mer* lin, do you know how to walk on your knees?"

Merlin clicked his tongue. "No."

"Would you like me to help you?"

"I wouldn't if I were you."

The prat laughed. "Why? What're you going to do to me?"

"You have no idea."

"Be my guest. Come on. Come on!" He got closer to him. " *Come on.* "

Merlin took a swing at him.

He grunted when the prat grabbed his fist midswing, and twisted it behind his back.

There was a collective "oooh!" from the crowd.

"I'll have you thrown in jail for that," the prat whispered.

"Who do you think you are? The King?"

"No. I'm his son. *Arthur.* "

And the prat shoved him to the ground, guards being quick to grab him and drag him away.

Merlin winced as they dragged him, trying to focus on the turns that they took.

He was eventually thrown into a cell, the keys rattling as the door was locked behind him, and the guards disappeared.

Merlin leaned his head on the wall, closing his pale eyes as he sighed through his nose, wondering how Gaius would take the news of him being locked up.

*You weren't even here a **day*** , he thought to himself, then got into a comfortable enough position to fall asleep as any on the hay covered cell floor.

- ~.

MERLIN~

...MERLIN.

Merlin bolted upright, knocking the jacket which he was using as a blanket off his body, scrambling to get up.

... MERLIN?

Merlin hesitantly walked back to where he was laying, and got down on his knees, pressing his ear to the hay on the floor.

"Merlin!"

Merlin whipped around, scrambling to stand up as Gaius all but slammed open the cell door.

He clicked his tongue, looking around the cell.

"You never *cease* to amaze me! -- The one thing someone like you should do is *keep your head down,* and what do you do? *You* behave like an idiot."

"I'm sorry."

"You're lucky. I've, eh," he looked around, "managed to pull a few strings to get you released."

Merlin gasped. "Thank you, thank you!" He clasped his hands together. "I won't forget this."

"Well," Gaius drawled, "there is a small price to pay."

- ~.

"Oh, God," Merlin said, before firmly closing his eyes and mouth, as tomatoes and lettuce and a bunch of other fruits in vegetables came flying at him. His form was scrunched up, placed in the stocks, and it took him a lot of willpower in his small village self not to tell them to not throw their food away.

Somewhere, he heard Gaius laughing at him, as he was sure whatever being or beings above were doing.

The crowd slowly dispersed, their food all gone, and Merlin took a big breath in.

His magic told him someone was approaching, and he instinctively ducked his head, ready for more pelting of vegetables.

Instead -- "I'm Guinivere, but most people call me Gwen," a girl, probably around his age, said to his left, and he tilted his head towards her, as much as he could while in the stocks. "I'm the Lady Morgana's maid."

"Right," he stuck out his hand as much as he could towards the voice. "Well, i'm Merlin. Although, most people just call me 'idiot'."

"No no no," the girl said. "I saw what you did. You're so brave!"

"It was stupid."

"Well, i'm glad you walked away -- you weren't going to beat him."

Merlin huffed. "Oh, I could beat him."

"You think? Because you don't look like one of these big muscly kind of fellows."

"Thanks." *It's not like I know what they or I really look like, anyway.*

"No, no! -- I'm sure you're stronger than you look! It's just, um, Arthur's one of these big rough, tough, save-the-world kind of man, and, well…"

"What?"

"You don't look like that."

"I have a secret," he whispered. "I'm in disguise."

A beat, then Gwen busted out laughing.

"Well, it's great you stood up to him."

"You think so?"

"Arthur's a bully, and everyone thought you were a real hero."

"Oh, yeah?"

Gwen hummed, and Merlin listened at the sounds of energetic kids, heading his way.

"Oh -- Excuse me, Guinivere. My fans are waiting."

The girl ran across, just before a tomato came flying at him, hitting the wood right above his head.

- ~.

"Do you want some *vegetables* with that?" Gaius asked as Merlin sat down in front of a bowl, shaking tomato seeds from his hair. Merlin laughed lightly.

"I know you're still angry with me. Your mother asked me to look after you."

Merlin nodded. " *Yes.* "

"What did your mother say to you about your gifts?"

"Well, that I was.. *special.* "

"You *are* special, the likes of which *i've* never seen before."

Merlin sat down his spoon and raised a brow. "What do you mean?"

" *Well,* magic requires incantations, spells; it takes years to study, and what I saw you do was... *elemental,* instinctive."

"What's the point, if it can't be used?"

" *That,* I do not know. You are a question that has never been posed before, Merlin."

"...Did you ever study magic?"

"Uther banned all such work 20 years ago."

"Why?"

"People used magic for the wrong end at that time. It threw the natural order into chaos. Uther made it his mission to destroy everything from back then -- even the dragons."

"What? *All* of them?"

"There was *one* dragon he chose not to kill; He kept it as an example. He imprisoned it in a cave deep beneath the castle… where no one can free it." Gaius sighed. "Eat up. When you're finished, I need you to take a preparation to Lady Helen, she needs it for her voice."

- ~.

He walked through the halls, bottle clasped in hand as he felt along the walls, listening to the footsteps and how close the people were as to not walk into them.

When he got the right door, he knocked, and, when there was no response, opened the door and walked into the room.

He used his magic to find a table, then walked into the middle of the room to set down the bottle.

As he retracted his hand, it bumped into something, knocking it off the table.

He clicked his tongue, and crouched down to pick it up. He felt on the floor, and picked up a doll made of -- straw?

He ran his hand over the doll, setting it back onto the table, and felt around again, knocking into something thick. He felt along it, realizing there was a cloth over it, and pushed it aside, feeling around the hard object, which turned out to be a book. His eyes narrowed, and he ran his hand over the rough cover, made of leather, beads hanging off of it. He felt the sides, lace sticking out of it, and a thin string keeping the book tied together.

A door closed outside the door, and he quickly sat the book down and fumbled with the cloth, settling it back over the book.

The door opened, and someone walked in, and Merlin held his breath.

"...What are you doing in here?" someone -- Lady Helen -- asked.

"I'm --" Merlin stuttered. "Um, I was asked to deliver -- this." He reached back, and clasped his hand around the bottle, thrusting it out to her. He faked a smile at her, then made a quick escape out of the chamber.

- ~.

Merlin breathed a sigh of relief once he was outside, walking through the market quickly, headed towards Gaius chambers.

He ignored the chatter of the market and the baa's of the sheep and goats, ignored the howl of the wind and dangle of chimes. Ignored the scent of fruits and vegetables, pies, and other assortments of food that would normally make his mouth water is he wasn't distracted.

Why would Lady Helen have that doll in her chambers? Why that doll, specifically? What would she use it for? Did she use it on someone already, or was it for a specific person? Did it hold the powers that he thought they did? And what was in that book? Why would she need it?

"How's your knee walking coming along?" a pratishly smug voice interrupted the war going on in his head, and he didn't know whether to be thankful of that or not. "Ahh, don't run *away!* "

Merlin paused. "From you?"

"Ahh, thank the *Gods.* I thought you were deaf as well as *dumb.* "

" *Blind* , actually, and i've told you, you're an *ass.* " He turned to him. "Just didn't realize you were a royal one. Oh, what're you gonna do? You got your Daddy's men to protect you?"

Arthur laughed. "I could take you apart with one *blow.* "

Merlin refrained his flush. "I could take you apart with less than that."

"You sure?"

Merlin shrugged off his jacket, blushing as Arthur laughed and the men let out "oooooh"s in response.

There was a dangling sound, more prominent than the chimes, and a slapping sound as it was smacked into someone's hand.

"Here you go, big man," Arthur said, before it was tossed at Merlin, who fumbled with it to the amusement of the other men. It fell to the ground by his feet, and Merlin reached down to get it, as the dangling sound started up again, and then it was being spun in the air, the wind and rattling of the mace -- that's what it was, he was *sure* -- as it was spun in the air being the focus of Merlin's attention, though it was a forced attention, but it was there, as the Prince got closer towards him. "I must warn you, i've been training to kill since birth."

"Wow… and how long have you been training to be a prat?" Merlin sassed.

Arthur scoffed. "You can't address me like that."

"Sorry. How long have you been training to be a prat, *my Lord?* "

There was a chuckle, then Arthur swung.

Merlin ducked, then jumped out of the way, backing up.

"Come on then, Merlin!" He swung again, nearly hitting beheading him, and Merlin took another set of steps back. "Come on!"

Merlin backed up, tripping over a stand and knocking his head against something, his hands subconsciously going up, and making the mace get caught on the cage that he had just backed into.

He pulled on it, freeing it just as Arthur swung down, breaking the table in his wake.

Merlin backed up as Arthur swung the mace up, jumping back before it hit him in the stomach, and tripped over an apple stand, landing behind it.

Arthur went to jump over it, and Merlin ran to the side, turning back when he heard the Prince land back on the ground.

Arthur hurried towards him, Merlin matching his speed as he went backwards, and tripped over a sack.

"You're in trouble now!" Arthur cheered, swinging the mace in the air.

Merlin sensed what was near, and two hooks came together, just as Arthur passed, his mace getting wrapped into it.

The townspeople laughed, and Merlin backed up quickly, sensing a large and heavy wooden block near as the Prince nearly ran after him, and Merlin pulled with his magic, and it came out, proven by the sound of pain that Merlin heard.

Merlin backed up, and fell onto the ground, and he sensed around, finding a rope just as Arthur passed, and he *pulled* , stringing it out, and he tripped, the mace falling out of his hands.

Merlin felt around on the ground, and picked it up, making his way to Arthur, mimicking what he thought was his moves, spinning the mace.

"Do you want to give up?" Merlin asked, walking up to him as he walked back.

"To you?!"

"Do you? Do you want to give up?"

Arthur tripped over something, and Merlin snorted.

"Merlin!"

Merlin felt his stomach drop at the voice, instantly recognizing it as Gaius'.

Something hit him at the top of his back, and he turned around with a yelp, which was the wrong move, as he next got hit in the stomach, then over the head, and landed on the ground.

Hands pulled him up off the ground, and he struggled to get himself up, worried about another knights in the dungeons of another day in the stocks.

"Wait," the Prince said. "Let him go." The hands left, and Merlin released some of the tension from his shoulders, as Arthur walked around him. "He may be an idiot, but he's a brave one." His footsteps paused in front of him. "There's something about you, Merlin," he whispered. "Can't quite put my finger on it."

- ~.

"How could you be so foolish!?"

Gaius closed the door to his chambers, then hurriedly made his way behind Merlin, the latter feeling the former's glare on his back.

"He needed to be taught a lesson," Merlin breathed.

"Magic must be studied, mastered, and used for good, not for *idiotic pranks!* "

Merlin whipped around towards him.

"What is there to master?! I could move like that before I could talk!"

"Then by now you should know how to control yourself!"

"I don't want to! If I can't use magic, what have I got?" He breathed in through his nose slowly, whiling the magic that he could feel, raging beneath the surface, beneath the skin, and focused, not letting it lash out. He opened his eyes, though it wouldn't help, and looked where he believed Gaius to be, based off the sound of his voice beforehand. "I'm just a nobody. And I always will be." He swallowed. "If I can't use magic, I might as well die."

He made his way to his room, and closed the door behind him, before face planting into his bed, breathing hard and deep, smelling the musty smell of the sheets.

Little did he know how false his statement was…

- ~.

Gaius opened up his chamber door some time later, something sloshing around in his hands.

"Merlin," he said, and the boy turned his face over from trying to suffocate himself with his pillow, listening. "Sit up, take your shirt off."

Merlin pushed himself up with a wince, grabbing the neck of his shirt and raising the item above his head, letting it set along his arms.

He looked to the side, where the trickle of some liquid being taken out then being put back into the container was, and tried to listen to see if he could decipher what it was by sound alone.

"...You don't know why I was born like this, do you?"

"...No," Gaius answered, pressing a cloth of something onto his wound, where he had been whacked by the broom.

"...I'm not a monster...am I?"

Gaius retracted the cloth, and lifted his chin, making sure he could hear him clearly and paying attention.

"Don't. Ever. Think. That."

"But then why am I like this? *Please,* I need to know why."

"Maybe there's...someone with more knowledge than me."

Merlin turned away, dark expression on his face. "If you can't tell me, no one can."

A beat, then the clanging sound of bottles being moved and rustled about, before Gaius clasped his hand, setting an open bottle into his palm.

"Take this," he instructed. "It will help with the pain."

Merlin downed it, then handed the bottle back to Gaius, who eyed him worriedly, then patted his knee before standing up, grabbing the tray of items set to the side, and he left the room, leaving a questioning Merlin in his wake.

How false, indeed…

- ~.

MERLIN…

Merlin pushed himself up with a start, sensing around him for an intruder, before recognizing the voice.

MERLIN…

The boy threw the covers off, and reached over the side of the bed, hurriedly putting on his shoes.

He rushed down the steps of his chambers, trying to stuff his long arms into his coat, and heard a distinctively loud snore, and knew instantly it was the court physician.

He eyed where the sound came from, making sure his footsteps were stealthy as he walked, putting his other arm into his jacket, and knocking down a pan as he went.

He flinched, scaring himself, and froze, listening with bated breath.

There was a sound of rustling, then the snoring started once again.

Merlin breathed a sigh of relief, then sensed around, making sure there was nothing to knock over or run into in his wake.

- ~.

He took pause at a set of steps, listening -- and got a vision, though not one with pictures, as per usual, but of the movement, recognizing two hands, and looked around, realizing there was a pair of die, hitting a board in time with the slight rattle of the board.

He focused on the die, and they went flying off the table. A noise of confusion arrived from the hands -- *knights* -- and they got up, reaching for the die -- which instantly retreated, again.

This cycle went on, until the knights were far enough not to see Merlin, who listened, making sure they weren't coming back, before bolting, edging around the table and into a side cave behind the chairs and table.

There was a set of thick wooden bars, the opening of it propped open, and he made his way down, listening.

MERLIN…

Merlin listened, then took a left, passed a set of porcelain pillars precariously propped up, and walked through cobwebs, which he paid no mind, listening to an echo of a voice.

He walked through what must have been a rusty gate, before he heard a deep chuckle, reverberating around the room, and Merlin paused, focusing, and knew instantly he was in a cave.

"Where are you?!" he called, which was shortly followed by a low growl, and a flap of wings, and Merlin backed up into the rock wall.

I'M HERE, the voice said. *…HOW SMALL YOU ARE, FOR SUCH A GREAT DESTINY.*

"Why?" Merlin breathed. "What do you mean? What destiny?"

There was a settling of rocks, as if the great beast of a thing were sitting down.

YOUR GIFT, MERLIN...WAS GIVEN TO YOU FOR A REASON.

Merlin breathed. "So there *is* a reason."

The beast chuckled.

ARTHUR IS THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING, WHO WILL UNITE THE LAND OF ALBION.

"...Right."

BUT HE FACES MANY THREATS, FROM FRIEND -- AND FOE -- ALIKE.

Merlin shook his head. "I don't see what this has to do with me."

EVERYTHING...WITHOUT YOU, ARTHUR WILL NEVER SUCCEED. WITHOUT YOU, THERE WILL BE NO ALBION.

"No. No, you've got this wrong."

THERE IS NO RIGHT, OR WRONG. ONLY WHAT IS, AND WHAT ISN'T.

"But i'm serious! If anyone wants to kill him, they can go ahead. In fact, i'll give them a hand."

Another chuckle. *NONE OF US CAN CHOOSE OUR DESTINY, MERLIN. ...AND NONE OF US CAN ESCAPE IT.*

Merlin shook his head. "No. No way. No. No, there must be another Arthur, because this one's an idiot."

PERHAPS IT'S YOUR DESTINY TO CHANGE THAT.

Chains rattled and wings flapped, and the dragon flew, flew away from Merlin and his many questions.

"Wait -- Wait! Stop, I need to know *more!* "

And, then, Merlin was alone.

- ~.

Merlin startled awake to a loud "oi!" that had him nearly flop off the top of his bed.

"Have you seen the state of this room!?"

"Actually, Gaius --"

"I swear, Merlin, if the next words out of your mouth are 'i'm not really seeing anything, at all', or anything of the sort, you're sleeping in the stables."

"I--" Merlin shrugged. "It just happens."

"By magic?"

"Yeah."

"Yes. Well, you can clear it up with *out* magic!" A pair of trousers were tossed unceremoniously to Merlin's face. "Then I want you to get me some herbs -- Henbane, Wormwood, and Sorrel. And, deliver this to Morgana--" He passed him a vial, which Merlin fingered along. "Poor girl's been suffering from nightmares." Gaius grunted, then a shirt smacked Merlin in the face.

"I know the feeling," Merlin murmured, then got up to get ready.

- ~.

That's how he found himself in Morgana's chambers.

Merlin instantly paused at the door, feeling an all to familiar force wash over him, that made him wonder if the nightmares were really *nightmares* .

"You know," she said, as Merlin stepped through the doorway, without knocking. "I've been thinking about Arthur. I wouldn't touch him with a lance pole." The footfalls walked away from him, and became fainter as she rounded an area. "Pass me that dress, will you, Gwen?"

Merlin's breath hitched, and wondered how he'd get through what was about to unfurl. He panicked, setting down the vial and feeling around for a dress.

"I mean," Morgana said, the sounds of rustling fabric as she shrugged out of her current clothes prominent in the room, "the man's a total *jester.* Just because i'm the King's ward, that doesn't mean I have to accompany him to the feast...does it?"

Merlin threw the dress over the side of the curtain, ducking down low so she wouldn't see the top of his head.

"Does it?" she repeated.

Merlin let out a high-pitched "uh-uhn!" then scouted around, panicking on what to do.

"If he wants me to go, then he should invite me. And he hasn't. So, do you know what that means?"

He hummed, resting his hand on a chair wondering on where to take it next, as he didn't want Gwen to get in trouble for "leaving".

"...Where are you?"

Merlin lifted up the dress on the back of the chair, covering his face and body with it, letting out a high-pitched "here!"

"It means i'm going by myself."

Merlin sighed, apparently now caught up in the family drama of the castle in one moment, before turning around to leave.

"I need some help with this fastening?"

Merlin paused, a stone settling deep within his stomach.

"...Gwen?"

"I am here."

Merlin whipped around, some of the tension leaving his body and he mouthed his thanks to her, before nearly sprinting out of the room.

- ~.

The bugles started to play as Gaius and Merlin walked in from the side, walking near the food table.

Gaius swatted his hand away as it strayed towards what must have been an apple.

"Remember, you're here to work."

Merlin shook his hand. "Aye."

Gaius walked away, his footsteps fading away with the others.

"She looks great, doesn't she?"

Merlin jumped at Gwen's voice behind him, and whipped around.

"Er…" Merlin said.

"...Oh! ...Sorry, Merlin, I forgot about the…"

He sighed. "I figured as such…"

"...I'm sorry."

"It's fine, Gwen, it's sometimes much worse -- I mean -- I should stop talking…"

"No, no! It's...fine… what I meant about Morgana, some people are just meant to be Queen, though, they don't want to marry each other, of course, they're like siblings, as they both say. And, besides, who would want to marry Arthur?"

That was a great question…

"Oh, come on, Gwen!" Merlin teased. "I thought you like those big, rough-tough, save-the-world kind of men."

"I'm more into ordinary men. Like you! Err -- not *like you* - -!"

Merlin snorted. "Believe me, Gwen, i'm far from ordinary."

"That's not what I -- I meant, I like ordinary men, not you, but, like...you…"

Merlin waited a beat, and, when it seemed like Gwen was done, nodded, and fiddled with the apple he had just took from the table, making his way towards the front, where Gaius had said to go as the physician's apprentice.

- ~.

Trumpets played, and Merlin suspected (correctly) that the king had arrived, as everyone went to stand up, chairs scratching against the floor as they did.

"We have enjoyed 20 years of peace and prosperity," King Uther said. "It has brought the kingdom, and myself, many pleasures. But few can compare with the honor of introducing Lady Helen, of Mora!"

Applause filled the room, then a hush followed suite.

Violins started playing, before a seemingly haunting voice was heard, reverberating around the room. It seemed soft, though the song itself was a language that Merlin could *swear* he'd heard before.

Slowly, nearly silent snores started filling the room, along with wind that seemed to burn every candle, the scent of the smoke of it blowing out rising into the air, along with the familiar persistent stalled odor of cobwebs.

Merlin quickly covered his ears, which knocked out one of his only defense against "Helen" -- oh, wait.

He sensed around, and knew instantly the reason why the unpleasantness of her chambers was so prominent, as she slowly pulled a dagger from her sleeve, and poised to throw it.

Merlin felt around quickly, and sensed a chandelier directly above her head.

The chandelier unscrewed itself, and fell on her.

Merlin listened with bated breath, and released a sigh when he heard movement of the nobles slowly waking up, tearing off the cobwebs from around them.

He tensed, though, when he heard a movement from the middle of the room, and a scream as the knife was thrown from the old woman's hand.

Merlin choked on his breath, and slowed down time, rushing to the Prince and pulling him to the side by the shoulders, collapsing to the side with him, just as the dagger embedded itself in the wood right where he was just sitting.

He was quick to push himself up, and listen in the direction of the middle of the room, and heard the woman give out a gasp, before dying.

"You saved my boy's life," King Uther said. "A debt must be repaid."

"Oh," Merlin had to withhold a cringe. "Well --"

"Don't be so modest. You shall be rewarded."

"No, honestly, you don't have to your Highness --"

"No, absolutely, this merits something quite special. You shall be rewarded with a position in the royal household. You shall be Prince Arthur's manservant!"

Applause filled the room.

"Father!" Arthur exclaimed.

"Well," Merlin thought with a sigh, *"at least this will make it easier to keep an eye on him...sort of."*

Oh, how wrong he'd been there, too…

- ~.

Later, there was a knock on Merlin's door, as he sat in his chambers, viewing the days' events.

"Seems you're a hero," Giaus said.

"Hard to believe, isn't it?"

" *No* . I knew it from the moment i'd met you. Well, you'd saved my life, remember?"

"But -- that was magic."

"And, now, it seems, we've finally found a use for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw how you saved Arthur's life."

He shook his head. "Ah, no."

"Perhaps, that's its purpose."

Merlin sighed. " *My Destiny.* "

" *Indeed* . This book was given to me when I was your age. But, I have a feeling that it'd be of more use to you, than it was to me. Easy to read, the print is embedded into the paper enough to tell what they're trying to say."

Merlin felt along the sides, unclasping both of the clasps and flipping it open, thumbing over the prints.

He laughed, giddy. "But, this is a book of magic."

"Which is why you must keep it hidden."

"I will study every word!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Merlin?" a man called. "Prince Arthur wants you right away!"

"Your destiny's calling. You'd better find out what he wants."

Merlin smiled, setting down the book onto his bed, and walked out of his room.

Destiny...Indeed.

Valiant

Chapter Summary

Valiant comes to Camelot, Merlin casts some incantations, gets a dog, and saves a Knight.

Chapter Notes

Merlin clumsily sheathed his sword, reaching blindly *(hardy-har)* for his helmet, then slammed it onto his head.

"Ready?" Arthur asked, as Merlin reached down, fumbling with the sword to get it out and back in hand.

"Would it make any difference if I said *'no'* ?"

"Not really."

He charged at him, Merlin found from only the quick sound of stomping feet on grass and dirt, and hurried to put his sword in front of him to block the oncoming attack.

"Body." Merlin put his sword up, a sloppy job of blocking the attack, but stopping it nonetheless, "Shield." He put his shield up, nearly smacking himself in the knee when the Prince hit it. "Body." He put the sword up, once again blocking the oncoming swing. "Shield." He rushed to get the shield up, nearly swinging it off his hand. "Head."

" *Head?* "

Merlin heard as well as felt the ding of metal against metal.

" *Ow!* "

"Come on *Mer* lin, you're not even *trying!* "

"I am!"

Arthur tapped him on the back with the end of his sword, and Merlin turned towards him.

"Once more."

"Oh, no," Merlin groaned.

"To the left --" Merlin lifted his sword at his left, dodging the attack, "right," he blocked again with his right, "and left." He blocked to his left, nearly tripping over his feet. " *Head.* "

The metals clashed again, and Merlin heard the ringing coming from every direction of his skull.

"Come on, Merlin, i've got a tournament to win!"

"Can we stop now, please?" he asked, removing his hands from where they were at the helmet, moving it back into place even through the dinging of bells he *swore* he heard.

The sword hit him on his knee, and Merlin jumped back.

"Shield." He lifted the shield, blocking the next attack. "Body. Shield. Shield." Merlin blocked these attacks, but not the ones which finally made him slowly fall to the ground --

three hits to the side of the helmet, then on overtop.

Merlin gasped, breathing hard and sweat dripping everywhere.

"You're braver than you look," Arthur said, and Merlin couldn't tell whether that was the sign of actual impressive remarks or not, his voice clashing with the ringing. "Most servants collapse after the first blow."

"Is it over?" Merlin whispered.

"That was just the warm-up."

The dangling of a mace and the ringing in his ears meshed together.

"How's your mace work coming along?"

- ~.

Gaius laughed as Merlin dropped all the armour he had been wearing onto the ground, breathing heavily.

"So," he started, giddy, "how was your first day as Arthur's servant?"

Merlin slapped his hand onto his head a few times.

"Do you hear *clanging?* " Merlin asked.

He unstrapped the worn but thick leather armour he wore, letting it fall to the ground, rolling his shoulders and wincing at the sore muscles.

Not a moment later, Gaius grabbed his sleeve and pushed him into a chair, hands going to his shoulders and giving him a deep massage there that made him wince for a second before relaxing.

"It was *horrible* !" he whined. "And i've still got to learn all about *tournament etiquette* -- " he spat the words as if they were cursed, "by the morning."

He closed his eyes, and sensed around for the book.

" ***Onhríne achtung bregdan!*** "

Quick as lightning, the etiquette book rushed in front of him, opening up in a flutter of pages.

"Oi!" Gaius smacked him on the back of the head, and Merlin yelped at the spike of pain, swearing he saw stars for a second. "What have I told you about using magic like this?"

"If I could actually *feel* my arms, i'd pick up the book meself!"

"Never mind your arms, what do I do if you get caught?"

"...What would you do?"

"You just make sure it doesn't happen for both our sakes." Then, he grabbed Merlin's arm, and bent it back, a dull pop coming from it.

"I save Arthur from being killed, and I end up as a *servant.* How is that *fair?* "

"I'm not sure *fairness* comes into it. You never know, it might be fun."

Merlin laughed bitterly. "You think mucking out Arthur's horses is going to be *fun* ?" He sighed. "You should hear my list of duties."

"Well, we all have our duties." He let Merlin's arm drop back to his sighed, and moved to the other shoulder. "Even Arthur."

"It must be so *tough* for him. With all the girls, and the lads, and the glory."

"Well, he is a future king. People expect so much of him. He's under a lot of pressure." He bent Merlin's arm back at the shoulder, a snap being released.

"That makes two of us!"

- ~.

"So," Gwen said, as she and Merlin stood inside her father's shop, "you've got *voiders* on the arms."

Merlin hummed.

"The hauberk goes over your chest."

She left his side for a moment, worn shoes clacking on the ground, as Merlin repeated her instructions like a mantra.

"I guess you know what to do with the helmet?"

She pressed it lightly into his chest, and he grabbed it with a relieved sigh.

"Yeah, that was the only bit I figured out." He grabbed it, and, with nothing better to do, put it over his head. "Thanks for helping me with this, Gwen. Being the blacksmith's daughter has its perks, I bet."

She sighed, and cracked a finger, making Merlin wince behind the helmet. "Yeah -- I pretty much know everything there is to know about armour. Which, is actually kind of sad."

"No, it's brilliant!"

- ~.

Merlin could hear the cheering of the crowd as he struggled to put the gauntlets of Arthur's armour on, to the annoyance of his master.

"You do know the tournament started *today?* " Arthur asked with a huff in his voice.

" *Yes, sire* ."

He finally got it on right, and let Arthur's arm fall back to his side, and walked to Arthur's other side, fiddling with the chainmail at the hauberk.

"...Are you nervous?"

"I don't *get* nervous."

" *Really?* I thought everyone got nervous."

" *Will you shut up!?* "

Merlin backed off, nearly running over the table to grab the Pendragon Red Cape (Yes, Merlin felt as this required Capitalization, as Arthur spoke of it, and its color of such pride, and Merlin felt an ounce of sadness that he would never get to see the color his self.), struggling for a few moments with the laces of the cape to get it tied around Arthur's neck.

He walked backwards, slowly, reaching out and grabbing his helmet, then pressed it into Arthur's hands, and backed off, as if admiring his work.

Not bad.

"Great," he muttered, running a mental checklist of everything that Arthur needed in order to not scar too badly in oncoming *"battle"*. "I think you're all set."

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

Merlin's brain came to a halt, going over the checklist again, slowly.

" *My sword* ?"

Merlin flushed, stammering, then forced his mouth closed, realing his words, if they could even be counted that, back in.

Arthur turned him a little to his right, and pushed him a little too harshly in the direction the sword was in, and Merlin sighed, closing his eyes and using his magic to find the one that

would be best, and felt a pull at his fist, his hand wrapping around the hilt of the sword and pulling it out of the stand, and he stumbled his way back to Arthur.

"You'll be needing that --"

Arthur yanked it from his hands, and Merlin put his hands to his hips, breathing irregular.

"That went well," he whispered.

- ~.

The drummers drummed away as Merlin felt and heard the marching of knights entering the arena where the tournament would take place, and sucked in a breath and held it subconsciously.

The marching came to a halt.

"Knights of the realm," Uther drawled. "It's a great pleasure to welcome you to the tournament at Camelot. Over the next three days, you will come to put your bravery to the test, your skills as warriors, and, of course, to challenge the reigning champion -- my son, Prince Arthur. Only one can have the honour of being crowned champion. And he will receive a prize of 1,000 gold pieces."

There was an unlatching sound, and the crowd began to murmur.

"It is in combat that we learn a knight's true nature -- whether he is indeed a warrior. Or a *coward.* " A swoosh of cloth. "The tournament begins!"

The crowd cheered.

- ~.

Merlin, of course, remained at the sidelines, and, in the privacy of his own nook, closed his eyes, and *focused.*

He could practically see the tournament in all but sight -- flutters of fabric that Merlin knew were to be labelled of *red,* clapping and jeers from the crowd that he could almost tell exactly the amount by the noise, the slashing and clanging of metal swords and shields, plus the occasional armour that got hit. He could imagine the apparent lightness of the sun, a contrast to the dark that encompassed Merlin and followed him wherever he may go, shining down on the kingdom as their Prince *won.*

Merlin's eyes fluttered open as uproarious applause filled the air, and he listened with bated breath as the applause continued.

- ~.

"How'd it go?" Merlin asked, breathless, nearly dazed over his vivid imagining of the fight.

A pause, then a small chuckle.

"I won, of course," Arthur answered.

- ~.

"Knight Valiant sounds pretty handy with a sword," Merlin remarked later as the two watched and listened to the fight.

Merlin had been unnaturally quiet since then, those being the first words he had said since Arthur's last fight, and had remarked so upon the current loser falling.

Not a moment later, the knight in question came out of the arena, and up to them, breathing heavily with exhaustion from his last battle.

"May I offer my congratulations on your victories today?" he asked, and Merlin stilled, as if sensing something. Something...off.

"Likewise," Arthur responded.

"I hope to see you at the reception this evening."

He walked off, and Merlin listened to him, cracking his shoulder as he went, chainmail rattling.

" *Creep,* " Merlin hissed, a shiver running down his spine.

Arthur snorted, and Merlin couldn't help the smile that appeared on his face even if he wanted to.

"Ehh, for tomorrow, you need to repair my shield, clean my tunic, wash my boots, sharpen my sword, and polish my chainmail."

Merlin raised his hands with the shake of metal as Arthur walked away, wondering how he'd get all of that done before tomorrow.

- ~.

Merlin sat in his room, surrounded by flying objects, most of which -- besides the cleaning supplies, of course -- belonged to Prince Prat, when Gaius walked in.

Everything in the room instantly dropped to the ground, and Merlin pressed the etiquette book to his chest.

"Are you using magic, *again?* "

"No," Merlin shook his head, pressing the book closer to his chest.

"What's all this, then?"

Merlin shook his head. Gaius sighed.

"I just came to tell you that supper's ready."

The door creaked closed, and Merlin let his head slam into his pillow, releasing a long breath.

- ~.

Later, Merlin walked into the armoury, when he heard a low hissing sound.

"Hello?" He whipped around, listening hard. He reached out with his magic, sensing around, and felt the same thing he did with Valiant around. A shiver ran down his spine at the feeling. There was another hiss, and Merlin moved away from Arthur's things, wandering further into the room.

He listened in on the room, then felt a pull of something down by his feet, a pull of magic.

He crouched as a hiss came, but he heard no other movement.

He strained his ears, holding his breath, and heard the flutter of eyelid.

He reached out with his hand, hesitant.

A sword appeared at his throat.

He hurriedly got up from his crouching, facing the direction of where the tip of the sword was coming from.

"Can I 'elp you w' somethin', boy?" Merlin seemed to tense more at the familiar irish hilt of the knight Valiant.

Merlin slowly shook his head. "Nope." He gave a forced half-smile and strained laugh. "I'm good." He backed up. "I was jus'...gathering my Master's armour." He felt backwards, tapping the table that Arthur's armour lay.

The sword followed him.

"You bes' be on yer way, then."

"Right, ya, no problem!"

Merlin whipped around, knocking his hand against the breastplate and nearly sending it toppling to the floor, but gathered it into his arms along with the rest of the armour, and left the room in a hurry, nearly toppling over Valiant's sword.

- ~.

Merlin listened to Arthur's footsteps as he walked back and forth slowly, looking over his polished armour, as the former lad stood, arms behind his back and breath held in his throat.

"...You did all *this* , on your own?"

"Yes, *sire.* "

A pause passed, and Arthur released a (Merlin's guessing,) pleased sigh.

"Now," Arthur said, "let's see if you can get me into it without *forgetting* anything."

Merlin took a deep breath.

- ~.

The crowd cheered as Arthur walked into the arena, and Merlin took a deep breath, waiting for the start of the fight for his magic to take place and show the most accurate description Merlin would ever have to the actual thing.

"Is it my imagination --" Merlin startled at Gaius voice so close to him, tensing up before forcing himself to take a breath and relax since it was only his *uncle,* "or are you beginning to enjoy yourself?"

"It --" Merlin swallowed, "...It isn't *totally* horrible *all* the time."

Gaius chuckled, and the match started, and Merlin *listened* , though, he could swear he could *watch.*

- ~.

Later, Merlin hurried into the physician chambers, dropping Arthur's chainmail onto what was possibly the only clear table in the whole room.

"How is he?" he asked, hurrying to where he heard Gaius' moving and Ewan's slow breathing.

"It's most odd," Gaius muttered. "Look at this."

Merlin clicked his tongue.

"There are two small wounds, on his neck," Gaius amended, Merlin hearing the wince in his voice. "It looks like a *snakebite.* "

"How could he have been bitten by a *snake* when he was injured in a sword fight?"

"Yet his symptoms are consistent with poisoning -- slow pulse, fever, paralysis."

"Can you heal him?" Merlin worried.

"Well, if it is a snakebite, i'll have to extract venom from the snake to make an antidote."

"What happens if he doesn't get the antidote?"

"Then i'm afraid there's nothing more *I* can do for him. He's going to *die.* "

Merlin held his breath as Gaius sat, willing himself not to panic in front of his uncle. Then, the truth hit him like a sack of stone.

"He was fighting Knight Valiant," Merlin realised, eyes widening."

"Wha's that?" Gaius asked in a murmur, and Merlin knew he didn't look his way, as his voice wasn't as loud.

"Nothing," Merlin answered, walking out the door.

- ~.

Merlin krept along the halls, sliding against it to peak around the corner as Valiant walked by with his shield, the object clinking against his thigh as he walked by.

Merlin listened for him to continue walking, then followed after him, keeping a short distance between so he could hear where he was headed but not be seen or heard himself.

Valiant walked through a door and closed it behind him, though left a little space so he could push it open, which he did.

Merlin listened in, pushing the door open a bit, then recoiled when he heard Valiant's heavy footfalls a little ways ahead, in the view of the door (not that Merlin would see, but if he were to describe, Valiant would be in front of the door, dangerously close but yet in a land far away, and his eyes could have the option of being anywhere or everywhere while Merlin could only do his best to sense without actually seeing, so it made the situation a *bit* worse for him than maybe perhaps anyone else).

There was a squeak, and Merlin listened closer as the sound of a box opening and some rustling came through.

"Dinnertime," Valiant whispered in a voice that Merlin could say was almost loving. He chuckled, and Merlin furrowed deeper into himself, and listened as an echo of hisses came

out of nowhere.

Merlin sucked in a breath, focusing his magic on the *shield,* which had -- *three* snakes coming from it.

The mouse released one final *squeak,* before Merlin heard the sound of swallowing, and knew the snakes must have been humming with desire.

He stepped back slightly, and the door creaked, and Valiant's clothes rustled, and Merlin *ran.*

- ~.

He escaped Valiant (and Merlin couldn't tell if it was *too* easy or not) and ran into Gaius chambers.

"I'm going to assume there are snakes on Valiant's shield, as I just heard three come to *life.* " Merlin took a deep breath, trying to rid himself of his panic and anxiousness bubbling within his gut, and shuddered, releasing a bit of the tension from his shoulders. "Hr's using magic."

"Are you sure?" Gaius asked.

Merlin gulped. "The snake ate a mouse -- one swallow, straight down. Ewan was fighting Valiant when he collapsed. It *must've* been one of the snakes from his shield." He listened to Ewan's slow breathing. "I have to tell Arthur."

Merlin nearly rushed to the door, before Gaius voice halted him in his tracks.

"Is there any chance you might be mistaken?"

"I -- I know magic when I hear and sense it."

"Perhaps, but do you have any proof?"

"Don't you believe me?"

"I fear you'll land yourself in trouble. How will you explain why you were in Valiant's chambers?"

"Why does that matter?! He's using magic to cheat in the tournament!"

"But you can't go accusing a Knight of using magic without proof."

"The king would never accept the word of a servant over the word of a Knight!"

"So what I say doesn't account for anything?"

"I'm afraid it accounts for very little, as far as the King is concerned, that's the way it is."

Merlin groaned, and walked out of the room, the anxiousness and panic coming back.

- ~.

"You're telling me you've got to fight *that* ?"

Merlin blinked at him slowly, after hearing Arthur's account of what his opponent looked like.

"Yes," Arthur said, "he's as strong as a bear. But, he's slow."

"Ah," Merlin said, passing him his shield. "And you're fast!"

"Exactly."

He sheathed Arthur's sword as the crowd in the arena cheered.

As Arthur walked into the arena, Merlin listened to the swishing and clanging of swords, but zeroed in on one Knight in particular, listening to the rattle of chainmail and his other assortments.

"How are you getting on?" Gaius voice whispered from beside him, and Medlin jumped.

I ought to get you a bell, Merlin thought, while what he actually said was, "Fine. Just...doing my job. Minding my own *business.* "

- ~.

Merlin sensed the fight, listening as Arthur and the Jolly Red Giant fought. Arthur was winning, of course, though there were times where Sir Giant parried His Prat's blows, but, as Arrhur said, he was to slow, and Arthur hit him with his shield, knocking him to the ground.

Merlin congratulated him half-heartedly, as he felt a feeling of dread settle deep within his belly, and tried to ignore the rising distress as Valiant and another stepped up into the arena, and the man fell to the ground a bit after the fight began, not moving after.

Merlin held his breath as Gaius came to stand next to him and the man was taken out of the arena.

"Arthur's going to fight Valiant in the final," he rushed, breathless. "And he'll use the shield to kill him."

- ~.

He listened over Ewan, listening to both Ewan's breathing and his own, listened to the near silent flow of candles as the flicks burned, listened to the wind outside as it seemed to create its own song, listened to footsteps. *Listened* .

The door creaked open, but Merlin didn't feel the panic this time, knowing that it was Gaius who had just entered.

"Merlin," Gaius started, "about what I said yesterday -- Look, Uther really wouldn't listen to you *or* me...But you are right. We *can't* let Valiant get away with this."

"But we don't have any proof," Merlin said, leaning forward onto his knees.

"Well, if we could cure Ewan, he could tell the King that Valiant was using magic; The King would believe another Knight. But, how we get the antidote -- well, that's another matter."

Merlin got up in a hurry, and seemed to run out of the chambers in a flurry of motion.

"Merlin?" Gauis called, worryingly, and swore that if the boy got put in the stocks -- or, Gods forbid, dungeons -- again, he'd kill him himself.

- ~.

Merlin listened around the corner, into the Room-With-The-Big-Table (as it was dubbed by Merlin), listening in for Valiant.

"...should stay in Camelot, after the tournament," Uther was saying. "I could do with more knights like you."

"I'd be honoured, My Lord," Valiant said, and Merlin could almost feel the anguish coming from Arthur, though he didn't have time to dwell as he was saving the handsome prat.

He snuck down the hall, listening for footsteps or voices, until he reached the same room Valiant was staying in, and put his hand on the door, pushing it lightly.

Locked.

Merlin sensed around. It might not be abnormal for a servant to be going into a nobles' rooms, but it would be odd to see the Prince's manservant to be casting incantations in the hall.

Not sensing anyone, he put his hand on the door and leaned in.

" *Allinan* ."

The latch on the inside of the door slid open, and Merlin pushed on it, pushing the door close once he entered.

He sensed for a sword, or at least a dagger, and felt a pull to the left.

He reached over, and his hand curled around the hilt of a sword, which Merlin gripped, hesitantly walking forward where he could sense the magic pull of the shield.

He wondered for but a moment how he'd get at least one snake to come to life, before a door opened somewhere down the hall, and Merlin whipped around, listening to footfalls as they

slowly pitter-pattered down the hall.

A faint hissing sound came from right behind him, and Merlin had but a second to think and whipped around, slicing the head clean off the shield and letting the head drop down at his feet.

There was more hissing, so Merlin leant down, grabbed the head, and ran down the hall, praying to the Gods that he didn't run into anybody or anything.

He ran straight by Valiant on his way.

- ~.

Gaius took the head as soon as Merlin burst through the door, and Merlin leant against the wall, breathing heavily.

"...I'll get started preparing the antidote," Gaius said after a moment.

"I'm going to tell Arthur," Merlin said.

"You'll need this!" Gaius grabbed his hand, and placed the snake head in his palm, then safely curled his hand around it. "What you did was very brave, Merlin." Gaius let go of his hand.

- ~.

" *You* ?" Arthur asked, incredulous, sounding as if he were to laugh. "You chopped its head off?"

"Ewan was bitten by a snake from the shield when he was fighting Valiant, you can talk to Gaius, you can see the punctures on Ewan's neck where the snake bit him!" Merlin took a deep breath. " *Ewan was beating him!* He *had* to cheat!"

Arthur sat down his fork. "Valiant wouldn't dare use magic in Camelot."

"Ewan was pinned under Valiant's shield. No one could see the snake bite him."

"I don't like the lad." Arthur stood, the floor creaking slightly under him. "But, that doesn't mean he's cheating."

"Gaius is preparing an antidote to the snake venom. When Ewan's conscious, he'll tell you what happened. If you fight Valiant in the final, he'll use the shield; It's the only way he can beat you. Look at the snake." Merlin reached back, being cautious as he reached for the snakehead in order to not prick his skin. " *Feel* it. Have you ever felt a snake like this, at least native to Camelot?"

Arthur slowly took the head from his hand, and Merlin could hear what was actually there of his brain wiring.

"I know i'm just a servant," Merlin whispered. "And my word doesn't count for anything." He looked where he assumed was the direction of Arthur's eyes. "I *wouldn't* lie to you."

"...I want you to swear to me...that what you're telling me is true."

"I *swear* it is true."

"Then I believe you."

- ~·

Merlin and Arthur stood in the Throne Room, waiting for the other witnesses who had been called to finish coming in.

Arthur had requested an audience with the King, not telling him -- or anyone else, really -- what it was about.

Their plan was simple enough; Call Uther and some of the nobles from the court, along with their servants, to an audience, tell the King about Valiant's lies, and, if he needed more proof besides the head, which he would undoubtedly want, call for Gaius to bring Ewan up to the throne room and have him explain what had happened.

"Why have you summoned the Court?" King Uther asked as he walked in, heels tapping on the ground.

"I believe Knight Valiant," Arthur began to address the room, pausing for extra effect, "is using a magic shield," there was that pause again, "to cheat in the tournament."

"Valiant," the King said. "Is this true?"

"My Lord," Valiant began, and there was a harsh shiver that took over Merlin's spine, "this is ridiculous. I've never used magic. Does your son have any evidence to support this outrageous accusation?"

"Do you have evidence?" Uther asked.

"I do," Arthur confirmed. He reached back, nudging Merlin forwards with his hand, and Merlin walked forward, trying to keep a distance in order not to walk into anything or anybody, and passed the snake head to the King.

"...Let me see the shield," he said after a moment.

Nerlin put his hand lightly on Arthur's arm, leaning up to him to whisper, "Don't let him get too close."

Arthur stepped half an inch to the side, unsheathing his sword with a slash.

"Be careful, My Lord," Arthur said.

The door opened behind them, and a hurried whisper of his name was said.

Merlin turned slightly, recognizing the voice as Gaius'.

Arthur leaned into Merlin.

"We need Ewan," he whispered. "Find out what's happening." He nudged Merlin in the direction of Gaius, and Merlin headed that way, before getting pulled a little to the side by Gaius.

"As you can see, My Lord," Valiant said, "it's just an ordinary shield."

"He's not going to let everyone see the snakes come alive," Arthur stated.

"Then how am I to know what you say is true?" Uther inquired.

"I have a witness. Knight Ewan was bitten by one of snakes from the shield. The venom made him grievously ill. *However* , he has received an antidote. He will confirm that Knight Valiant is using magic."

"Where is this witness?"

"He...should be here…"

Arthur turned to look at where Merlin and Gaius were rapidly conversing, and walked over to him.

"Where's Ewan?" he asked.

Merlin swallowed, ringing his hands. "He has been bitten, again. He's...alive, but…" Merlin swallowed, moving his hands to the bottom of his tunic, "...he won't be able to come if he's unconscious."

"I'm waiting!" King Uther bellowed from the other end of the throne room, irritated.

Arthur walked forwards after a minute of tense silence.

"...I'm afraid the witness is unconscious."

"So," Uther said. "You have no proof to support these allegations? Have you seen Knight Valiant using magic?"

"...No. But, my servant fought the snakes --"

" *Your servant?* You make these outrageous accusations against a knight, on the word of your *servant?* "

"I believe he's telling the truth."

"My Lord," Valiant said. "Am I really to be judged on some hearsay from a boy --"

"I've seen those snakes come alive!" Merlin stated, walking forward to stand by his Masters' side.

"How dare you interrupt?" Uther nearly shouted. "Guards!"

Merlin felt the guards grab him by his arms, and he had to force his panic down in order not to break in front of the whole Court as he began to be dragged from the room.

"My Lord," Valiant said.

"Wait!" Uther called.

"I'm sure he was merely mistaken. I wouldn't want him punished on my account."

"You see? This is how a true knight behaves -- with *gallantry* and *honour* ."

Valiant clicked his tongue. "My Lord, if your son made these accusations because he's afraid to fight me, then...I will graciously accept his withdrawal."

"Is this true?" Merlin heard the King step forward. "Do you wish to withdrawal from the tournament --"

"No!" Arthur interrupted.

"Then what am I to make of these allegations?"

A thick silence filled the room.

"...Obviously there has been a misunderstanding," Arthur muttered. "I withdraw my allegations against Knight Valiant." He re-sheathed his sword. "Please accept my apology."

"...Accepted."

Arthur walked out of the room, and the guards let him go.

Merlin paused for a second, then rushed after him.

- ~.

"I believed you. I... *trusted* you. And you made me look...a complete fool."

"I know it didn't go exactly to plan," Merlin stuttered.

"'Didn't go to plan'?" Arthur hissed. "My father, and the *entire Royal Court* , think i'm a coward!" He came to stand in front of Merlin. "You *humiliated me!* "

"We can still expose Valiant."

"I no longer require your services."

"You're *sacking me?* "

"I need a servant I can trust."

"You *can* trust me!"

"And look where it got me this time! *Get out of my sight!* "

And Merlin left the room, a strange feeling washing over him that he couldn't place, and he wouldn't, for a time.

It was only when he got outside that he knew where he was headed.

- ~.

He walked into the cave, footsteps echoing along the rock. He felt furious, and panic-y, and wanted to cry in frustration all at once, because *how am I supposed to help Arthur now?*

"Where are you?" he called, voice echoing back. He waited a minute, but no answer came. "I just came to tell you; Whatever you think my destiny is -- Whatever you think i'm supposed to do, *you've got the wrong person!* " He waited for a sound of wings flapping, or claws against stone, or the clang of chains, but none came. He swallowed. "That's it." He listened, and the only sound was the background *drip-drip.* "Goodbye."

IF ONLY IT WERE SO EASY TO ESCAPE ONE'S DESTINY.

Merlin turned back at the sound of wings, and the dragon landed across from him, telling by the sound of clanging and claws scraping against rock.

"How can it be my destiny to protect someone who hates me?"

A HALF CANNOT TRULY HATE THAT WHICH MAKES IT WHOLE. VERY SOON, YOU SHALL LEARN THAT.

"Oh, great," Merlin sighed, dropping his hand to hit his thigh. "Just what I needed, another riddle."

*THAT YOUR AND ARTHUR'S PATHS LIE TOGETHER IS BUT THE **TRUTH** !*

"...What is that supposed to mean?"

*YOU KNOW, YOUNG WARLOCK...THIS IS NOT THE END. IT IS THE **BEGINNING** .*

And he flew away.

"Just give me a straight answer!"

The dragon didn't answer back, and Merlin rushed out of the cave, more furious than before.

- ~.

"Hullo, Merlin."

Merlin popped his head up at Gwen's voice, having had it lain across his arms as he sat on the steps to the castle, wondering what the next move of this game that was called His Life was. Oh, you kidnapped a pawn? Another problem for Merlin! He can take it! It'll be *hilarious* seeing him handle it.

"All right?" he whispered.

Her heels stopped clicking beside Merlin, and she sat next to him on the step.

She was quiet for a moment, then, "Is it true what you said about Valiant using magic?"

Merlin nodded wordlessly.

"What are you going to do?"

"Why does everyone seem to think it's down to me to do something about it?"

"Because it is. Isn't it?" Merlin didn't answer. "You have to show everyone that you were right and they were wrong."

"And how do I do that?"

"...I don't know."

Merlin nodded, putting his head back where it was in his knees.

Then, he had an idea.

"That's it," he whispered, remembering.

He got up, walking to the statue he had kept walking into, as if drawn.

"Where are you going?" Gwen asked, and Merlin heard her standing up, and walked after him.

Merlin deemed wrapping his arms around the dog statue was answer enough, trying to lift it.

He sighed when he couldn't, then looked towards Gwen.

"Do you have a wheelbarrow?"

- ~.

"What are you doing with that?!" Gaius asked as Merlin walked into the physician chambers, Dog Statue and a wheelbarrow, both definitely not his, in possession, walking by the still unconscious Knight that lay in the cot.

"I'm going to let everyone see the snakes for themselves!" Merlin said as answer. And he turned, just so, and walked backwards up the stairs, taking both of the items with him.

- ~.

As soon as he was in his room, he sat the wheelbarrow down, leaning it against the wall just so, so the dog was in view of his bed.

Then, he walked around his bed, and fell onto the floor.

He felt around the floor, until feeling the slightly lifted floorboard and lifted it, pulling the book out of its hiding spot.

He jumped up, and sat himself down on his bed, unclasping the book and feeling the writings on the pages.

" *Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum!* "

He listened to the statue for anything, but heard nothing.

He felt the pages, smoothing them out.

" *Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum.* "

He stared in the direction of the statue, but heard nothing.

" *Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum.* "

He repeated the phrase even after he got tired of his own voice, trying different ways to say it; standing on top of a chair, whispering it in the statues' ear (after feeling around for it), saying it in weirdest voices he had possibly ever made, and, when nothing happened, threw the book onto the bed, and crashed down onto it, face first, feet and legs dangling off the edge.

- ~.

He walked into Arthur's open chambers, hearing the cackling fire, and hearing Arthur's breathing near it.

"I thought I told you to get out of my sight," Arthur whispered.

"Don't fight Valiant in the final tomorrow. He'll use the shield against you."

"I know."

" *Then withdraw.* You have to withdraw."

"Don't you understand? I can't withdraw."

"The people expect their Prince to fight, how can I lead men into battle if they think i'm a coward?"

"Valiant will kill you! If you fight, you die!"

"Then I die!"

"How can you go out there and fight like that?"

"Because I have to. It's my duty."

Merlin stayed in the room for a second longer, before frustrated tears welled in his eyes and he left.

- ~·

" ***Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum,*** " he said even as the roosters crowed. " ***Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum.*** "

His eyes drooped, and head slumped, and he would have gone to sleep if there wasn't suddenly something wet and slimy sliding across his face.

His eyes snapped open, and he heard the breathing of something to his right, and reached out his hand, petting down on a slick coat of fur, and felt something akin to giddiness well in his chest.

"I did it!" he cheered, then rushed out of the room, slamming the door before the dog followed him.

He nearly ran out of the door, stopping as it opened.

"Arthur's fighting Valiant!" Gaius stated.

"I know," Merlin said. "I'm on my way." He went to break into a run, but stopped, turning to Gaius. "Whatever you do, don't go into my room. I'll deal with it later!"

- ~.

He arrived mid-fight, listening to the clang and slice of sword against sword, and shut his eyes close tight, using his magic to sense the fight's progress.

There were pieces on the ground, and Merlin supposed they were helmets, as both men still had their shields and swords, and listened to the clang, waiting for both of them to get far enough away from each other to summon the snakes.

One of them landed on the ground, and a sword was brought down, dirt and rock coming up and into the air as they rolled to the side.

The crowd gasped, and Merlin's brain connected it with *Arthur.*

He sensed and listened to the Prince get shoved into the wall, shield being pushed into his chest, before he forcefully pushed Valiant away, and both of them made their way back to the middle of the fighting ground.

There was a gap between them, so Merlin focused his magic, using it to zero in on the thing in Valiant's hands. *Shield,* his mind hissed, directed to his magic, and Merlin *focused.*

" ***Bebeiede þe arisan cwicum.*** "

The snakes began to hiss, and the crowd gasped, and Merlin knew he had proved his *accusation* was correct.

"And now they see you for who you really are!" Arthur said.

Valiant chuckled, and Merlin focused on the snakes, sensing them fall to the ground with a *plop,* and knew they were headed for Arthur.

"Kill him!" Valiant hissed.

There was a moment where Merlin's heart stopped for Arthur, who's sword lay, knocked to the ground and staying. That moment included him wondering what his destiny could possibly be if Arthur was dead before he could fulfill it.

"Arthur!" Morgana screamed, and the sound of a sword being unsheathed relieved some of the panic from Merlin's chest.

The snakes slumped to the ground, and Merlin knew they were dead, then the sword swung, and Valiant was dead, and the people were cheering.

Merlin slumped against the wall, the night's events crashing down on him.

- ~.

Merlin almost crawled back to Gaius chambers, exhausted beyond belief, and was almost instantly tackled to the ground by a big lump as soon as he opened the door.

There were lines of slobber being aimed for his face, getting his ears, chin, and hair more than anything, before Gaius pulled it off of him.

"I fed your dog," Gaius said.

Merlin groaned, staying where he was, half inside the room and half in the halls.

"This is that statue that you brought last night, isn't it?" Gauis asked, and his tone made Merlin groan again, slinging his arm over his eyes and keeping it there. Gaius sighed. "Does he have a name, at least? I'm assuming we're keeping him, now."

Merlin hummed, pushing himself up slowly.

The dog pressed his nose against Merlin's.

"...Cadell."

The dog licked Merlin's nose, and Gaius snorted.

"Cadell," he agreed.

- ~.

"My honoured guests," King Uther exclaimed at the feast, and all conversation came to a halt. "I give you Prince Arthur; Your champion!"

An applause broke out across the crowded nobles and servants, and Merlin sensed Arthur enter the room.

As the applause died down, Arthur nearly scare Merlin into the table by appearing next to him suddenly.

"Can you believe Morgana?" he asked, incredulous. "She says she saved me! Like I needed any help."

Merlin kept quiet.

"I wanted to say," Arthur started with a swallow. "I made a mistake. It was unfair to sack you."

Merlin smiled, and, though he couldn't see, Arthur nearly melted at the sight.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "Buy me a drink and we'll call it even."

"Uh, I can't really be seen buying *drinks* for my servant."

Merlin nodded, turning away, then whipped back to Arthur.

"Your servant?" he asked. "You sacked me."

"And now i'm rehiring you." Merlin let out a breathless laugh. "My chambers are a complete mess, my clothes need washing, my armour needs repairing, my boots need cleaning, my

dogs need exercising, my fireplace needs sweeping, my bed needs changing, and *someone* needs to muck out my stables."

Merlin's smile disappeared as soon Arthur started the list, and he sighed.

At least things were back to normal.

Chapter End Notes

appearantly, if this website is to be believed, Cadell is welsh for "spirit of battle"

Mark of Nimueh

Chapter Summary

A plague falls over the townspeople, Gwen gets wrongly acused of treason, Ewan and Merlin have a talk, and Merin disobeys Gaius (again)

Chapter Notes

The bell tolled in the distance as Gaius knelt on the ground, next to a man who lay still as a statue on the ground, and listened as the gravel made their noises as the physician did so.

"...Aren't you scared?" Merlin asked him, crossing his arms as he listened to the mindless chatter of the townsfolk.

"Of what?"

Merlin felt Gaius look at him.

"That you might catch whatever it is."

"I'm the court physician, Merlin, it's part of my job. Most of the time, there's nothing really to be scared of --" Gaius huffed slightly as he turned the body over, and a horrified silence fell over the two, Merlin listening in on his breathing and the townspeople's chatter to figure what was the matter with the man.

"I suppose I should say 'you were saying?' but I don't exactly know what we're looking at here, as I can't see."

Gaius huffed, the time in exasperation, and stood up with some struggle.

"People mustn't see this," Giaus said by way of answer, and Merlin huffed himself. "They'll panic."

Merlin closed his eyes, leaning his head back, and listened around, and heard the flutter of cloth against wood, higher than someone should have been, and turned, removing the blanket from where it was hung, and sensed around lightly, then threw the blanket over the man's body, making sure he was covered enough so people couldn't see.

·~·

"What are you doing?"

Merlin stumbled, barely catching himself before he took the wheelbarrow and covered bodies inside it with him, and turn to Gwen, walking behind the cart to try and block it from view.

"Uhhh," Merlin said intelligently, "just moving something."

"Looks heavy."

"'S nothing, really." He sniffed the air. "Someone got you flowers?"

"Oh, no," she stuttered. "Would you like one?" Instead of waiting for a response, Merlin heard the rustle of the flowers being jostled, and it was placed in his hand. "A purple one. It suits you. Not that i'm saying red doesn't suit you!"

"Gwen, I have literally no idea what colors actually are or look like, so I take no offense as I don't know which would actually suit me for better or worse or neither." He paused. "Err -- I mean, thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Uh, we better get going."

"Oh, yes! Bye."

"Bye."

Merlin pushed the cart from behind it.

·~·

"I've never seen anything like this before," Giaus muttered.

Cadell whimpered in agreement, laying himself across Merlin's feet.

"Do you think it could be some kind of plague?" Merlin asked.

"No," Gaius clicked his tongue. "I fear something like this could never come from nature. But who has this kind of power?"

"You think it's caused by magic?"

The chamber doors opened, and someone yelled, quite loudly, "Merlin!"

Merlin scrambled to the door, Cadell following him energetically.

"Sorry i'm late," Merlin said, smiling apologetically at Arthur.

"Don't worry," Arthur sighed, exasperation clear in the action. "I'm getting used to it."

Arthur didn't talk after that, and he could feel his eyes burning on his chest -- Flowers.

"Oh!" He carefully removed the flowers, holding the apparently purple item up. "Gwen. She gave them to me."

Merlin couldn't see it, nor could Gaius, but Arthur seethed beneath his skin, an unknown emotion spiking in his chest to cause the act.

On the outside, Arthur's face remained stoic, and his voice, unchanged from the previous tone, said, "Tell Gaius my father wants to see him now."

"Okay," Merlin said breathlessly, and listened as Arthur walked away before swinging the door shut.

"Gaius --"

"I heard."

"Why couldn't he just tell you himself?"

"'Cause that's the way it is; You're a servant."

"I -- If he knew what I was, what i've done --"

"You'd be a dead servant."

Merlin gave him a look.

"Right," Gaius said. "Get this covered up."

"Hey, i'm not your servant."

"No, you're my dogsbody. Come on, hurry up."

Merlin threw the blanket over the man's body as Gaius put away his things, gathering them up to go meet with the King.

Merlin paused at the door, turning in the direction of Cadell as he went to walk in them, before he put his hand up, and gave the command of "Stay."

Merlin didn't dwell in the surprise that it worked.

·~·

Merlin silently walked in after Gaius, expanding his magic to sense around to see what had happened, and knew that it was their problem in the physician chambers.

"What's happened to him?" Uther asked, sounding worried.

"I don't know, sire," Gaius replied as he knelt next to the man. "It's the second case i've seen today."

"Why didn't you report it to me?"

"I was trying to find the cause."

"And what did you conclude?"

"I don't think it's time to hurry to conclusions. The scientific process is a long one."

Uther stepped forward. "What are you concealing from me?"

"Sire, I have seen nothing like it. The victims are dying in 2400 hours and it's spreading fast."

"But what is the cause?"

"I think you should say the cause --" Gaius paused. "The most likely cause is sorcery."

Merlin was suddenly grabbed by the wrist and pulled to the ground, and he knew he wasn't needed anymore, at least by the nobles.

·~·

Merlin stood in the town, sucking in a breath as another door was kicked open, the rhythmic sound of chainmail armour knocking against bodies as they moved forward proving all the answers Merlin would need to know.

Gaius grabbed his shoulder and turned him away, taking him with him as Merlin tried to ease the tension from his body.

Merlin came to a stop, letting Gaius keep walking as he looked towards someone with labored breath, and crouched next to them.

"Gaius -- Gaius, he's still alive."

Gaius came to a halt.

"I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for him."

Merlin looked up at Gaius who came to stand next to him. "But we haven't tried!"

"If we don't know what the disease is, then how can we cure him?"

"With magic."

"Listen, Merlin --" Gaius pulled him up. "They're suspicious of everyone! This is not the time to be using magic.

The old physician pulled him along.

"Science will lead us to the source of the disease."

·~·

Merlin had his hands clasped behind his back, leaning from a side-to-side and back-and-forth motion (which, with his luck combined with his lack of ability to see, was probably not the best of ideas), then walked forward at a bubbling sound.

"...What are you doing?"

"I'm examining the contents of that mans' stomach."

"Will that tell you who did it?"

"No, but might tell us how its spread. One thing I do know -- this is magic of the darkest kind."

Merlin felt anger bubble. "Why would someone use magic like that?"

"Magic corrupts. People use it for their own ends."

"But not all magic is bad." He turned away. "I know it isn't."

"It's neither good nor bad, it's how you use it."

There were footsteps out in the hall before Merlin nearly fell on the floor when the chamber door was kicked open.

"Sorry, Gaius," Arthur's voice said, actually sounding apologetic. "We're searching every room in town."

"What for?" Gaius asked, incredulously.

"The sorcerer."

"Why would they be here?"

"I'm just doing my job."

"Well, we've nothing to hide. Go on then, search."

There was a loud rustling and banging as the chambers were rummaged.

"What are these books and papers?" Arthur asked from the other end of the room.

"My life's work -- Dedicated to the understanding of science," Gaius answered. "You're quite welcome to read through them if you wish."

Arthur sat down the book.

"What's this room up here?"

Merlin could pass out.

"I -- It's mine," Merlin stuttered.

"And what do you expect to find in there?" Gaius inquired.

"'M looking for material or evidence suggesting the use of enchantments."

Gaius leaned in. "What have you done with the magic book I gave you?"

"Merlin," Arthur's voice rang in the room, "come here. Look what i've found."

Merlin nearly fainted, but, instead, rush to follow with the command and rushed into the room.

"I found a place where you can put things!" Arthur exclaimed. "Near your door, as well; It's called a cupboard."

Merlin sniggered, and Arthur went to the other side of the room.

Merlin felt around for the book, finding it on the floor by his bed, and, locating a tunic on the top of his bed, used magic to cover up the book.

Arthur left the room, and Merlin followed behind him, leaving the door open.

"How long do you think it may be before you find a cure?" the Prince inquired.

"Depends on how many interruptions I get," Gaius stated, dryly.

"Of course. I'm sorry." A creak showed he turned away. "We're finished here!"

Gaius slammed the door behind them.

"We have to hide that book," he stated.

"No," Merlin said, "we must use it."

"Don't be stupid."

"If I have this legacy, then what is it for? You -- you keep telling me; It's not for playing tricks."

"You want to practice magic whilst the King is hunting for sorcerers? Are you mad?" Gaiud turned away. "Merlin, your life is destined for more important things."

"But if I don't practise, then how will I get to be this…. great warlock?!"

"There will come a time when your skills will be recognized."

"When?" He threw up his arms. "How long do I have to wait?"

"Patience is a virtue, Merlin."

"What, sitting by, and doing nothing, that's a virtue?"

"Your time will come."

Merlin leaned forward on the table. "I could cure that man we saw."

"I know it's tempting to use the way you find easiest, Merlin."

"It is when it would save a life."

"It's no good just saving one person; We have to discover how this illness is spreading."

"Arthur is out there right now looking for the sorcerer."

"A sorcerer who is powerful enough to do this will never be found searching the town."

Merlin backed off a moment later with a sigh.

"So," he whispered, "what can we do?"

"Hope that science can find an answer before this kills us all."

·~·

The bodies continued to add up as time progressed.

There was currently another body laid out on one of the work benches.

"What's different about this victim?" Gaius asked.

"Um…" Merlin couldn't exactly decipher anything.

"She's a courtier," Gaius stated.

"But how does that help us?"

"Courtiers seldom go down to the lower town. So what does that mean?"

"Um...That she hasn't spoken to any townspeople?"

"Yes," Gaius answered, sounding pained. "It suggests that the disease is not spread by contact."

"Oh. And they probably eat different food."

"Good. Anything else?"

"I doubt they breathe the same air."

"So what's the only thing they do share?"

"Water -- You think the disease is spread through water?"

"Merlin. You're a prodigy."

Gaius grabbed his hand and pressed a bucket into it.

·~·

Merlin was just finishing putting the water in the bucket and went to grab the handle when someone ran by, crying, in the way of Gaius' chambers.

Merlin put two and two together, and gripped the handle before running after them, trying not to spill the water.

He heard a tail of the conversation coming from inside of the room.

"Gwen, I have no cure," Gaius said. Merlin's heart broke for his friend when he realised who it was.

"I am begging you," she pleaded, sounding so heart broken.

"I wish there was something -- anything, but, so far, the remedy is beyond what I can achieve. I'm sorry, Gwen."

Gwen ran out of the room.

"There must be something we can do," Merlin pleaded, passing the bucket to Gaius.

"My best. Let's hope that this can provide some answers."

"But that'll be too late for Gwen's father."

"I fear you may be right. For now, I need you to take this antivenin to Ewan -- I'm sure he's feeling better, but just to be sure since he's supposed to start training again early tomorrow."

Gaius pressed the bottle into his hand, and Merlin sighed, but was thankful for the distraction.

·~·

It took Merlin a moment to find the chambers that Ewan stayed in, since it was separate from his mothers' home and that almost caused a bit of mix up, but Merlin eventually came to the door.

He knocked on it after remembering that this wasn't like Arthur's, and that he couldn't just come in whenever he saw fit with or without permission, and walked in when there was a response.

He could Ewan was healthier by the sound of his voice, now more sturdy and stronger than it had been only a few days prior, and he walked in, hesitant, using his magic a bit to probe around to make sure there wasn't anything in the way as he walked.

"Ah, Merlin!" Ewan greeted, somewhat cheerfully. "What brings you here, of all places?"

Merlin wordlessly handed him the bottle, and, unbeknownst to him, Ewan gave him a worried look.

"Something the matter? You look kind of saddened."

Merlin sighed, then cleared his throat.

"I'm guessing you've heard of the plague overtaking the town?"

"Oh, yes," Ewan said, sitting up in his bed. Needless to say he was glad he would be off of bed rest soon. "It's truly tragic. One of the knights had come by earlier to tell me of Lord Tryst's unfortunate passing."

"Don't drink the water from the lower town," Merlin advised, helpfully. "We believe that it's coming from there."

Ewan looked into Merlin's pale eyes.

He could tell that something else was bothering the boy, but, being a Knight and the son of a noble he wasn't supposed to care.

The problem was, he did. (Along with almost everyone else.)

He wasn't there when the Prince and Merlin had met, but it had certainly been talked about; About how the servant's first words were a command of him to stop, about how Merlin had swung at Arthur -- though with the Prince's training, he had easily stopped it from landing a blow. It was all anyone had been able to talk about that night -- The blind peasant boy who had stood up to the Prince and called him out on his, admittedly, prattish behaviour.

Needless to say, Ewan was impressed.

Ewan hummed.

"I hope you find out what is causing it, and, hopefully, a cure."

Merlin gave him a tired smile, then left.

Ewan watched him go, and stared at the bottle from where it lay in his palm.

He sighed, then gulped down most of its contents.

·~·

Merlin lay awake that night, Cadell lay comfortably asleep at his feet.

When Merlin heard a loud snore from the chambers, he slowly stood up, opening the door and sensed out.

When he sensed that Gaius was out of it, he slowly closed the door, and crouch down on the the ground, lifting up the loose floorboard and taking out his book.

He felt the pages, thumbing over the words slowly, until he stopped.

Poultice.

·~·

Merlin ran through the castle, ducking behind pillars when he heard someone coming and continuing to run after they'd pass.

He breathed hard when he got to the lower town.

"What about that one? In there?" someone asked, and Merlin scrambled to run to the wall, pressing his body flush against it.

"It's empty, Sir," someone else answered.

Merlin listened as the first man got closer and closer to him, and in a rush of panic, let his mind cast a spell to make a door nearby creak.

The man stopped, and Merlin heard him turn to it.

He walked closer to it, and, when he was close enough, let it slam open and knock the man to the ground.

When he didn't hear him get back up, he ran forward and to the blacksmiths house.

He felt around, humming softly, and his magic illuminated a outline, one that Merlin was sure was Gwen, laying by her father's side as he lay in the bed, unmoving and breathing irregular.

He silently nudged open the door, and tip-toed in, cringing every time he heard a creak, until he got to Tom's bed, and took the wrapped poultice out of his coat, then stuffed it under his pillow.

He slowly backed up with an enchantment on his tongue.

"Þu fornimest adl fram guman!"

A dark shadow snuck its way into his senses, and Merlin shivered.

He backed out of the house, listening in from the window.

There was rustling.

"Father?" Gwen slurred with sleep still leaving its nest on her tongue, though not for long. "What's happened? I can't believe it!"

Merlin smiled, and backed away from the window, a huge weight being risen from his shoulders with a sigh.

·~·

The weight returned when more bodies joined the others.

Still, that wasn't an excuse enough not to go see the person who was rapidly becoming one of his best friends.

"How's your Father?" he asked upon stepping into Morgana's chambers. "Is he feeling better?"

"Yes!" she replied, cheerful. "It's incredible! It's a miracle."

"His skin's clear, back to normal?"

"Yes!"

"Great."

"You don't seem surprised," she remarked before he could leave the room.

"No, no, I am. It's a miracle."

"But...how did you know he was well."

"Erm...because you seem happy?"

"That's really weird, since I haven't told anyone, but you know? ...How could you know?"

A bead of sweat trickled down the side of Merlin's face.

"Yeah," Merlin sighed. "You've finally found out. I'll tell you." He swallowed. "I'm psychic."

Gwen laughed outright. "No you're not."

"It's true!"

"All right, what am I thinking?"

"That i'm not psychic."

"You're strange. N -- Not in a nasty way. You're just...funny. I like that."

Merlin shrugged. "I'm pleased for you."

"Thank you," she blurted.

"What for?"

"Don't know, just for asking."

"I didn't like for you to seem upset. I have to… get on."

He waved at her and went out of the room.

·~·

He walked out of the rooms later on just to hear Gwen's screams for her release.

Gaius pulled him back and into his chambers.

"What have you done?!" he exclaimed.

"What?" Merlin asked.

"I warned you! Oh, I understand, you thought you were doing good."

"I couldn't just let her father die knowing I could cure him!"

"Do you not understand that it might be suspicious, the curing of one man!"

"Well, then, all I have to do is -- ! ...I'll cure everyone! No one will ever have to know it was magic."

"It's too late! They think Gwen's a sorcerer! They think she caused the disease!"

"But she didn't!"

Merlin rushed for the handle.

"Oh, and how are you going to prove that?"

Merlin paused, then rushed out of the door without an answer.

·~·

"Why will no one believe me?!" Merlin heard Gwen cry as he stepped into the doorway. "He got better, he just recovered, I didn't do anything!"

"I believe you," the cool voice of Morgana responded, sounding calm though there was an edge. "Perhaps this is a disease that is not always fatal. Have you thought of that? Perhaps he recovered naturally."

"Then what of this poultice that was found?"

Merlin choked.

"What poultice?!" Gwen cried. "I don't know anything about a poultice!"

"It was found in your house." There was a clank of metal and Merlin knew the king had stood up. "Undo this enchantment, put an end to this contagion."

"I can't."

"Then I show you no mercy."

"I am not a wizard! I don't know how to stop the illness!"

"If you will not undo your sorcery, then you force my hand, and I must find you guilty."

"But i've told you, I --"

"It is therefore my duty to pronounce judgement. And under the circumstance I have no choice. But to sentence you to death."

"No!"

"I can only hope that when you die, this evil plague dies with you. Take her away."

"Please, no, i'm innocent!"

The doors shut behind her, and Merlin banged his head against the wall.

Merlin walked down the hall, tears appearing in his pale eyes as he ignored the pleas of Gwen and the bickering of Uther and Morgana instead choosing to head for one location.

·~·

"I thought I was doing good…" Merlin whispered, "and that...curing Gwen's father would help her. I thought… I was saving a life. It.. It seemed so simple."

"An easy solution is like a light in a storm, Merlin," Gaius stated. "Rush for it at your peril, for it may not always lead you to a safe harbor."

"I can see that now."

"How many times have I warned you about the responsibilities of being a Warlock?"

Merlin remained silent.

He stood up.

"I must see her."

·~·

He walked by a sobbing Morgana (he assumed by the smell of her perfume).

"Gwen?" he whispered.

There were chains rattling, and Merlin went in the direction of the sound.

"Merlin!" she whispered. "Thank you."

"What for?"

"For coming to see me."

"...I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault."

"Well…"

"It's alright! Don't worry about me. There's no point crying about it… I mean -- I'm not saying that you were going to cry about me, obviously I don't think that!"

"Oh, Gwen!" He sniffed. "I can't have this happen."

"Please… One thing. You -- you don't have to, but…"

"...What?"

"Remember me."

"You're not going to die," Merlin swore. "I'm not going to let this happen."

·~·

"It was me!"

Merlin paused as everyone in the room turned to him, varying emotions.

"It was me who used magic to cure Gwen's father." He paused a moment to catch his breath. Running up the stairs and through halls really took a number on a thin blind man. "Gwen is not the sorcerer, I am!"

"Merlin!" Gaius stated. "Are you mad?"

"I cannot let her die for me." He turned to where he knew the head of the table was, where he knew the king was. "I place myself at your mercy."

"He doesn't know what he's talking about --"

"I do."

"Then arrest him," Uther called.

"Father!" Arthur's voice rang throughout the room. "Please I can't allow this madness, there's no way Merlin is a sorcerer."

"Did you not hear him?"

"Yes!"

"He's admitted it."

"...He saved my life, remember."

"Why should he fabricate such a story?"

"As...Gaius said...he's...got a grave...mental disease."

"Really?"

"He's in love."

"What?" Merlin asked when he realized what had been said.

"With Gwen," Arthur ignored him.

"I am not!"

"Yes you are," Arthur snapped.

"No way."

"I...saw you yesterday with that flower she'd given you."

"W --" Merlin laughed. "I'm not in love with her."

"It's allll right," Arthur stated, and Merlin jumped when he hooked his arm around his shoulders. "You can admit it."

"I don't even think of her like that!"

"Perhaps she cast a spell on you."

The whole room burst into laughs.

Arthur patted a hand on his chest.

"Merlin is a wonder. But the wonder is that he's such an idiot." Arthur rubbed his knuckles into the top of Merlin head. "There's no way he's a sorcerer."

"Don't waste my time again," Uther said. "Let him go."

The guards released his arms, and Merlin slowly backed up out of the room, a new sense of dread washing over him.

·~·

"Arthur's the idiot," Merlin stated once him an Gaius entered the latter's chambers.

"No," Gaius stated in a reprimanding tone, "he was right to do what he did, and thankfully he saved you from your own stupidity."

"What else could I do? It's my fault Gwen's going to die."

"Yes. But you don't prove her innocence by offering to jump into the flames, you do it by finding out what's causing the disease!"

"Well, whatever it is, one thing's for sure: Arthur's not going to find it. He thinks he's so sharp. Even when I told him I was a wizard, he still couldn't see it."

Ha.

"Sometimes they're pretty hard to spot," Gaius muttered.

"Well, maybe I should around wearing a pointy hat."

Gaius grabbed something that dangled on a chain. "I don't think you'll find one big enough. Anyway," he verbally dismissed the argument, "forget that. If we're going to save Gwen, we have to find out what's contaminating the water."

·~·

Gaius led them both around the castle and walls to a door, which he unlocked with some struggle.

Merlin could hear a small fire on a torch crackling to the side, and reached out, grabbing a longer torch so Gaius could see with help of the flame.

He led them both to a drip drip sound that Merlin knew must have been a well.

"The water from here supplies the whole town," Gaius said. He pushed him forward a bit. "Take a sample and be careful of the steps, they're slippery."

Merlin walked forward, kneeling when he got to the edge of the well and uncorked the vial, then put it underwater.

He backed up a second later, making sure the stopper wasn't going to let a drop out, and put it into his pocket, him and Gaius turning around.

Merlin nearly crashed into the wall when he heard a low but loud roar behind them, water splashing.

He turned around, but only heard a loud splash in return before silence overtook the place again.

"What the hell was that?!" Merlin nearly shouted.

Gaius pushed him out.

·~·

"It was an afanc," Gaius explained.

"An -- a what?" Merlin muttered.

"A beast born of clay, and conjured up only by the most powerful sorcerer." Gaius sighed. "Now we have to find a way to defeat it. But where?"

Merlin didn't know how many books there were in the room, but knew it came down to a lot.

"That could take days, Gwen will be dead by then, along with more of the people."

"Have you got a better idea?"

·~·

"Gwen?..."

Merlin didn't receive a response, and didn't think he'd get one, which wasn't altogether surprising given the circumstances.

"I'm going to get you out," he whispered. "I will."

If it was the last thing he did.

·~·

"Hello?"

Merlin's voice echoed in the cave.

HELLO!

There was a fluttering of wings from above.

THE GREAT WARLOCK RETURNS, a crack sounded as he landed on the rocks, AS I KNEW HE WOULD.

"I need to know how to defeat an afanc."

YES, I SUPPOSE YOU DO.

"Will you help me?"

TRUST THE ELEMENTS THAT ARE AT YOUR COMMAND.

"'Elements'? But what is it I have to do?"

YOU CANNOT DO THIS ALONE. YOU ARE BUT ONE SIDE OF A COIN. ARTHUR IS THE OTHER.

"I -- I don't understand, just tell me what it is that I have to do." Merlin heard a flap of wings. "No!"

The dragon was gone.

"Please, help me!"

I HAVE!

He laughed and Merlin didn't hear anything else besides his own breathing and the echoes of the cave.

"Oh," he said mockingly, "yeah, right. Thanks."

·~·

Merlin had practically all the books off the wall layed out in front of him.

"Merlin?" Gaius called as he walked through the door. Merlin felt along the side of the book, but didn't find what he was looking for, pushing the book aside. "What are you doing?"

"'M looking for a book," he muttered distractedly.

"Care to tell me which one?"

"Elements."

"Elements?"

"Yessss, which one would I find them in?"

"Well, the study of base elements is at the very heart of the scientific process."

Merlin paused. "But how would they help me kill the afanc?"

"Well, the afanc is a creature made of earth and water, that's two of the four base elements."

Merlin leaned forward, dropping the papers in his hands.

"What about the other two?"

"Well, perhaps they would destroy it? You want fire -- wind and fire." Merlin slapped his thighs and stood up, dusting himself off. "How did you find this out?"

"Um," Merlin said very intelligently. "I just knew, you know; part of my powers."

"What else do your powers tell you?"

"That I am only one side of a coin. The brighter side, obviously."

"And who's the other side?"

"I think that might be Arthur."

Gaius couldn't answer as the doors burst open.

"They're bringing forth the execution," Morgana cut right to the chase. "We have to prove Gwen's innocence."

"We're trying," Gaius said.

"Please, just tell me what I can do to help."

"I suppose…" Merlin hummed, "we need Arthur."

"Arthur?"

"There's a monster," Merlin stated, walking around the table to stand in front of her, and felt magic that wasn't his rolling under skin, subdued, "an afanc, in the water supply. That's what's causing the plague."

"We must tell Uther."

"The afanc's a creature forged by magic," Gaius said. "Telling Uther wouldn't save Gwen, he'd just blame her for conjuring it."

"So, what are we to do?"

"We need to destroy it," Merlin said, "then the plague would stop, and Uther may see sense."

"And that's why you need Arthur?"

"He's our best chance. But he won't want to disobey the king."

"...Leave that to me."

·~·

About five minutes later someone grabbed Merlin's arm to turn him around and Merlin nearly backhanded them across the face in his scare.

"It's me," Arthur sighed, pulling Merlin along while he unsheathed his sword.

Merlin sighed, releasing some of the tension from his shoulders before he was dragged to the door that Gaius had taken him to before and plucked the hand from his arm, planting the keys into Arthur's hand.

He heard Arthur unlock the door and push it open.

Merlin walked forward as Morgana and Arthur tried to light the torches.

"You better be right about this, Merlin," Arthur hissed from his side.

There was a low growl from up ahead, and Morgana gasped from behind them.

"...You two should stay here," Arthur said.

"I'm coming with you," Morgana stated. "Merlin, maybe you should stay here."

"Why?" Merlin muttered, still listening for the afanc.

"You're blind, Merlin," Arthur reminded.

Merlin didn't hear him, instead walking forward towards the sounds of growling.

"So," Morgana's voice startled him from his side, "how do we find it?"

"I don't know," Merlin whispered truthfully as a pitter-patter of feet came walking beside him. "Just hope we do before it finds us."

There was a hissing sound behind them.

"Stop," Merlin hissed, whipping around.

"What?" Arthur whispered.

There was a prolonged silence.

"...'S just a shadow."

Merlin followed after them after a second.

They came in front of the well.

"Spread out," Arthur commanded, turning Merlin around the way they had came. "Merlin, if you hear anything, just…scream. We'll hear."

Merlin thought of what the consequences of kicking him were.

He turned back around when he heard a roar.

"Did you see it?" he asked.

"Yes," Arthur stated.

"What did it look like?"

"It -- It's quick."

Morgana screamed.

The afanc roared, and Morgana came to stand next to him and Arthur must have flickered the light around, the thwap of it doing so sounding in the air.

"Where is it?!" Arthur shouted.

Merlin listened to the growling echoing against the cave walls.

"I think it's gone this way!" he pointed down the hall he had been sent to check.

Arthur nudged passed him and the three listened, pressed against the wall to hear the afanc from down the hall.

It snarled, looming closer until it tried to take a swipe at Arthur.

"Arthur, use the torch!" Merlin yelled.

Arthur swung.

"Lyft sy þe in bælwylm ac forhienan se wiðere!"

Merlin listened as the afanc let out one last roar and burned.

·~·

The guard unlocked the door and Tom charged forward and hugged his daughter.

"Thank you!" Gwen said, coming up to Merlin and Morgana.

"Oh, don't thank me," Morgana said. "It was mostly Merlin."

"Thank you so much, Merlin!"

"I -- I didn't do anything."

"I -- I'm grateful to you all," Tom said. "Come on, Gwen."

They walked out, their shoes clacking on the stone floor.

"Merlin," Morgana's voice rang out as he turned to walk out, and he turned back towards her, "I wanted you to know -- Your secret is safe with me."

Merlin shut down.

"What secret?" he whispered.

"Come on, don't pretend. I know what you did."

"You do?"

"Saw it with my own eyes."

"You did?"

"I understand why you don't want anyone to know."

"Well, obviously…"

"But I won't tell anyone. You don't mind me talking to you about it."

Merlin laughed, giddy. "No, it's -- You have no idea how hard it is to keep this hidden."

"Well, you can continue to deny it, but...I think Arthur's a lucky man."

Gwen's smile disappeared.

"'Arthur'?"

Morgana shushed him. "It's our secret."

She left and Merlin let out a strangled sigh.

·~·

Merlin poked at his dinner, smelling it.

"...This fish didn't come from the water, did it?"

"Well, where else is it going to come from," Gaius snarked. "The water's fine now, that's not your worry. This was the work of a very powerful sorcerer. I only hope that you didn't come to her attention."

"Doubt it." He could feel Gaius stare. "I just want someone to see me for who I am."

"One day, Merlin." Gaius pushed himself off his chair. "One day."

"'One day' what?"

"One day people won't believe what an idiot you were."

Gaius clapped him on the back and sat back down with his recently filled goblet.

"...Thanks."

They both laughed.

One day...

Chapter End Notes

    i had a depressive episode lol

The Poisoned Chalice

Chapter Summary

> Bayard comes to Camelot, gets wrongly accused of almost-treason, Morgana and Gwen continue to prove to be the best, Merlin meets a new enemy, and the Knights finally have a (drunken) discussion.

Chapter Notes

"Camelot welcomes you," Uther drawled, pausing for dramatic effect, "Lord Bayard of Mercia."

Merlin listened from the far left of the King, holding his breath to listen more closely.

"The treaty we sign today marks an end to war and a beginning to a new friendship between our people."

The other nobles in the room began to clap as the Kings must have joined hands.

Merlin didn't exactly know why, but he had a bad feeling; The calm before the storm.

.~.

Merlin grunted, carrying in bags of saddles and armour.

"Why do I always get loaded with donkey work?" he asked Gaius as he felt the familiar presence of the old man.

"You're a servant, Merlin," Gaius laughed, "it's what you do."

Merlin groaned, dropping the bags. "My arms'll be a foot longer by the time I get this lot inside!"

"It's character building. As the old proverb says, 'Hard work breeds…'" Gaius paused, and Merlin gave him a look, "...'a harder soul'."

"There is no way that's a proverb, you just made that up."

Before Gaius could respond, somebody crashed into Merlin and nearly knocked him to the ground.

"Sorry," what sounded like a woman said, and Merlin heard her(?) drop down next to him.

"'S alright," Merlin replied dazedly, dropping down next to her. "I'll help with that."

The woman said a small thanks and they both pushed themselves up.

"I'm Kara," the introduced as Merlin passed her back her things.

"Merlin," he muttered, righting his neckerchief.

"You're Arthur's servant. That must be such an honour."

Merlin cringed and cleared his throat to hide it. "Erm, yeah, it is. Someone's gotta keep the place running."

"Thank you, Merlin."

"Uh, no problem."

"It was nice meeting you."

Merlin nodded, but, as she walked away, felt a startling creep of magic come from her -- dark magic.

"Shouldn't you be busy 'running the place'?" Gaius inquired, snorting.

Merlin glanced back at him, and that feeling of unease returned.

·~·

Merlin sat the felted clothes out on the table and nearly gagged from the smell.

"When was the last time these were cleaned?" he asked, picking up the piece at the top. He shook it and nearly gagged.

"Last year, some time," Arthur replied, sounding thoughtful. Before the feast of Beltane."

"Did it end in a food fight?" Merlin finally found the arms, and straightened the tunic up once more before walking to where Arthur had been standing last, knowing not to move in case his servant wasn't using his magic or wasn't listening for the direction of Arthur's breathing.

(Oh, of course Arthur knew about Merlin's magic! In fact, the prince wouldn't be surprised if the whole kingdom didn't know it already.

Though, not his father, otherwise Merlin would've already been flogged and banished, beheaded, hanged, or some combination of either, or had something entirely new as punishment for the boy.)

"Don't all feasts?" Arthur responded, putting his arms through.

"I wouldn't know," Merlin snarked back almost instantly, "the airs and graces of the court are a mystery to me." Merlin sweeped off the tunic, making sure there wasn't anything that he could feel on it that shouldn't have been there.

"Tonight they won't be," Arthur said offhandedly, looking at the red cloth and making sure everything was in place at the arms, frowning at an undefined spot on metal.

Merlin paused right where he was, unmoving.

"...I'm going to be at the banquet?" Merlin asked slowly.

"...Not quite." Arthur looked at him, which Merlin would more hear than see, and the former gave the latter a look that held a specific emotion the blonde wouldn't be able to guess for a while, but he would surely kick himself when he found it.

Arthur shrugged off the tunic, struggling with the sleeves.

"You'll be there to make sure my cup doesn't run dry." He fixed the sleeves, making sure they weren't inside out. "If I have to sit through Bayard's boring speeches, I don't see why you should get out of it." He thrusted the coat into Merlin's hands. "Be sure to polish the buttons."

Merlin felt the coat as Arthur walked around his curtain, the former trying to locate the buttons whereabouts but forgetting that he has magic, and didn't he use that for most of his chores already?

"Do you want to see what you'll be wearing?" Arthur asked, then winced when he realized.

"Ignoring that --" and Merlin did catch on, making Arthur sigh, "won't this do?"

Arthur's heels clacked then gave pause, showing that he had stepped back to look at Merlin, who already knew the answer with that dramatic response, followed by a "tsk" that made Merlin want to claw at his hair from the noise. "No, you'll be wearing the official ceremonial robes of the servants of Camelot."

Merlin sighed.

Bullshite.

·~·

It was!

Gwen snorted from his left.

"Nice hat," she commented, as if Merlin didn't already Not like the feeling of the most likely just cloth feather that made Merlin itch and want to stab at his own eyes --

Ahem.

Merlin nodded at her. "Thanks."

Merlin felt eyes on him that made him feel even more uncomfortable than he already was feeling, so he tore off the hat, trying to keep his breathing level as he smoothed out his hair.

The people applauded soon, and Gwen grabbed Merlin lightly by the sleeve, pulling him a little ways away behind where the royals were about to sit then kept on walking.

"People of Camelot," Bayard started, and Merlin knew that Arthur may have been right about one thing he had said, "for a great many years, we have been mortal enemies. The blood of our men stains the ground from the walls of Camelot, to the gates of Mercia. And, though we remember those who have died, we must not allow any more to join them.

"As a symbol of our goodwill, and of our newfound friendship, I present these ceremonial goblets," there was a pause, and Merlin suspected he was removing the goblets, "to you, Uther," there was another as he removed the other, "and to your son, Arthur in the hope that our friendship may last."

"Merlin," a distressed voice startled Merlin from his left, and he glanced over to show he was listening, "I need to speak to you."

"...What is it?"

"Not here, please. I don't know who else to tell."

Merlin heard Kara turn around, and he sat the feathered hat on a side table that he made sure had nothing on it before heading out with her, leaving Bayard's speech behind.

Merlin nearly ran into her when she stopped all of a sudden, though he supposed they were a good enough distance from others so they wouldn't hear.

Her heels clanked as she whipped around to him.

"It wasn't until I saw him give the goblet to Arthur that I realized --"

Merlin held up an open palm towards her. "Whoa, whoa, whoa," he soothed, "slow down and start from the beginning."

"Two days ago, I was bringing Bayard his evening meal. I was supposed to knock, he didn't expect me to walk in --"

"What are you trying to say?"

She released a strangled breath. "If he knows I said anything, he will kill me."

"I will not let that happen to you; I promise." He released a stuttered breath of his own. "Please tell me what you saw."

"Bayard is no friend of Camelot. He craves the kingdom for himself."

"Kara --"

There was a set of footfalls that Merlin had not noticed earlier that made him tense and listen as they passed, giving an extra moment as they faded to turn his head back to her.

"Tell me; What has Bayard done with the goblet?"

"He believes that if he kills Arthur, Uther's spirit will be broken and Camelot will fall."

"What has he done with the goblet?"

"I saw him putting something in it."

"What?"

She groaned. "I shouldn't, he'll kill me!"

"Please," Merlin all but begged, "tell me!" There wasn't an answer. "...Is it poison?"

Kara's stuttered breaths were all the confirmation he needed, and he ran back into the room.

He ran in time to hear the last of Bayard's toast, and knew he had to put a stop to it.

"Stop!" he yelled, uncaring of the eyes on him. "It's poison, don't drink it."

He grabbed the cup out of Arthur's hand, remembering the distance of the table in the room and that Arthur had been sitting at the far right of the table, with Uther in the middle and Morgana at the left.

"What?" Uther snapped.

"Merlin, what are you doing?" Merlin heard what sounded like Ewan from somewhere farther into the room, with the rest of Camelot's (Uther's) most trusted knights.

"Bayard laced Arthur's goblet with poison," Merlin stated, glaring at where he suspected Mercia's king to be.

"This is an outrage!" Bayard cried, and Merlin nearly flinched when he heard the sound of an unsheathing of a sword, but stood his ground.

The rest of the knights from both kingdoms drew their own in succession.

"Order your men to put down their swords," Uther commanded. Merlin heard guards rush forward. "You're outnumbered."

"I will not allow this insult to go unchallenged!" Bayard yelled.

"On what grounds do you base this accusation?" Uther inquired, and Merlin knew the question was directed to him.

"I'll handle this," Arthur growled. "Merlin, you idiot," Merlin flinched when Arthur grabbed his shoulder, pushing him forwards, "we've been at the sloe gin again?"

"Unless you want to be strung up," Uther started, and Arthur paused in his urgent pushing, "you'll tell me why you think it's poisoned, now."

Merlin swallowed. "He was seen lacing it."

"By whom?"

He'll kill me!

Merlin swallowed again, looking down. "I can't say."

"I won't listen to this anymore," Bayard growled.

"Pass me the goblet," Uther commanded, heels clacking.

Arthur carefully took the goblet from Merlin's hands, passed it to his father.

"If you're telling the truth --"

"I am."

"-- then you have nothing to fear, do you?"

Merlin listened as one sword instead of a loud applause of them was resheathed.

"No," Uther said. "If this does prove to be poisoned, I want the pleasure of killing you myself."

Merlin felt one more set of eyes, filled with such hate for many in the known world (though, may remain unseen, unfelt, unspoken, to many, though gratelly subdued for the time being) settle on him.

Merlin felt a harsh shiver of unease coil around him like a wild snake disturbed from its home.

"He'll drink it."

"But," Arthur said instantly, "if it is poisoned, he'll die."

"Then we'll know he was telling the truth."

"And what if he lives?" Bayard inquired.

"Then you'll have my apologies," the set of eyes finally finally finally moved on from Merlin and onto a new target, "and you can do with him as you will."

"Uther, please, he's just a boy, he doesn't know what he's saying," Gaius pleaded, a sharp edge to it that came from years of life and having to deal with the same sets of people with the same issues and problems as everyone else that just decided they were a special case worthy enough not to have to live with them.

"Then you should have schooled him better."

"Merlin, apologize," Arthur hissed, a near desperate plea forming at the end. "This is a mistake, i'll drink it!"

Arthur crowded into his space, trying to make a desperate swat at the cup but Merlin pulled away, putting a hand over the top while the other clutched it in a white knuckled grip.

"No no no no," Merlin said, and Arthur stopped, not taking any breaths. "It's alright," he soothed.

Merlin raised the cup up with a shaking hand towards where he believed Ewan to be, then turned around, facing where Gaius stood over Morgana and Uther's shoulders, staring intently at the scene.

He raised it to his lips, closed his eyes, and slowly drank the warm liquid down.

He lowered it slowly, the room full of bated breath.

"...It's fine," he said.

The room collectively released its breath.

"He's all yours," Uther said dismissively.

Merlin choked, the hand not gripping the goblet reaching up to grab desperately at his throat, as if that would stop it, and he saw black spots appearing in his vision.

By the time he had reached the floor, the black spots were the only thing he could see, and the last thing he heard was someone's scream and the goblet falling limply from his hand.

·~·

Arthur had turned around with a relieved sigh when Merlin had said that it wasn't poisoned, and he swore later on he would either strangle him or hug him so that it seemed like he was trying to strangle him, when Merlin had choked and the whole room had taken a horrified collective gasp.

Gwen screamed as Merlin fell, and Ewan and a few other knights jumped over the table at Uther's command and seized Bayard, but Arthur wasn't paying attention to them.

Instead, he focused on Merlin's rise and fall of his chest that just seemed so Godsdamn small.

Gaius appeared over his shoulder, crouching down by the two and pressing his hand to Merlin's forehead.

"Merlin," Giaus said clearly, "do you hear me?"

The only answer he received was Merlin's short breaths.

Gaius whipped around to face him and Gwen, who was looking worriedly over the two, tears falling off her lashes.

"We have to get him back to my chambers," Gaius stated.

Arthur didn't need to be told twice, lifting up the limp boy over his shoulder as if he were nothing.

"Bring the goblet," he added, "we need to identify the poison."

Arthur left the two and the rest of the courts behind, running through the halls to Gaius chambers.

Stay with me, Merlin, he thought desperately, and swore he felt a pull towards Merlin even as he still lay unconscious, stay with me.

·~·

Arthur laid him on the cot as gently as he could with how fast he was going, struggling to regain his own breath as he listened to Merlin's short breaths.

Gaius burst in after him, Gwen rushing to grab water and a towel, which Gaius must have asked for.

"Is he going to be alright?" Arthur asked, worried.

Gaius pressed a hand to Merlin's forehead. "He's burning up."

"You can heal him, can't you, Gaius?" Gwen asked, frantically, passing the waterskin and towel to the physician.

"I won't know until I can identify the poison. Pass me the goblet."

While Gwen walked off, going after the goblet she'd sat down on the table near where she'd gotten the water and towel from, Gaius poured the former item onto the towel, and pressed it to Merlin's forehead.

When Gwen retreated back with the cup, Gaius stood, abandoning Merlin and leaving Arthur and Gwen in his place, the former not having left his side yet. Arthur placed his hand where Gaius' had previously been as Gwen sat where Gaius had.

Gaius studied the goblet, then let out a small satisfied noise. "There's something stuck on the inside."

Arthur gave one last glance to Merlin, before standing up, Gwen's hand replacing where his was on the towel.

"What is it?"

"Looks like a flower petal of some kind." Gaius grabbed pliers off a nearby table, using it to reach into the cup and produce the petal.

"His brows on fire," Gwen hissed, dissatisfied.

"Keep him cool, it'll help control his fever."

Gaius sat the goblet back on the table, favouring a heavy sounding book from one of the shelves instead, so Arthur took the task of studying it, looking for any other clues as to help his friend.

He swore if Merlin died before he told him his secret --

Well, Arthur would rather not think of that.

Gaius hummed.

Arthur went to his side, looking at the neat handwriting on the page.

"The petal comes from the mortaeus flower," Gaius said, dejectedly. "Someone poisoned by the mortaeus flower can only be saved by a potion made from a leaf of the very same flower. It can only be found in the caves deep beneath the forest of Baloch…" Gaius flipped the page. "The flower grows on the roots of the mortaeus tree."

Arthur stared at the snarling...animal (?) on the page, pointing to it.

"That doesn't look particularly friendly."

"A cockatrice -- it guards the forest. The venom is potent, a single drop would mean certain death. 'Few that have passed in search of the mortaeus flower have made it back alive'."

Arthur sighed, crossing his arms over his chest, eyes searching the room.

They soon landed on Merlin.

That could've been you, a voice that sounded suspiciously like Morgana whispered in his mind, echoing, it could've been you, he saved you, Arthur. And he doesn't even know.

He doesn't even know, Arthur's brain hissed back.

"Sounds like fun," Arthur decided.

"Arthur," Gaius interrupted him walking out, "it's too dangerous."

He doesn't even know.

"If I don't get the antidote, what happens to Merlin?" Arthur asked.

"...The mortaeus induces a slow and painful death. He may hold out for four -- maybe, five -- days, but not for much longer. Eventually, he will die."

They both looked at Merlin, who took a gasping breath, brow furrowed, and Arthur knew what to do.

·~·

"What's the point of having people to test it for you if you're just going to get yourself killed, anyway?" Uther muttered as he and Arthur walked through the halls, chainmail rattling and cloaks fluttering in the wind.

"I won't fail, no matter what you think," Arthur growched back.

"Arthur, you are my only son and heir, I can't risk losing you for the sake of some serving boy."

"Because his life's worthless?"

"No," here, Uther stopped, slowly turning to him, "because it's worth less than yours."

"I can save him. Let me take some men."

"No."

"We'll find the antidote and bring it back!"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because one day i'll be dead and Camelot will need a King. I'm going to let you jeopardize this kingdom over some fools errand."

"It's not a 'fools errand' -- Gaius says that --"

"Gaius says?! That's exactly what makes it so!"

"Please, Father. He saved my life. I can't stand by and watch him die."

Uther looked him in the eyes, "Then don't look."

Arthur felt his whole body shut down, mind going blank.

"This boy won't be the last to die on your behalf. You're going to be King. It's something you're going to have to get used to."

"I can't accept that."

Uther whipped around, fury written in his eyes. "You're not going."

"You can't stop me."

"Damn it, Arthur, that's an end to it! You're not leaving this castle tonight."

·~·

Arthur threw his sheathed sword onto the table and walked in front of the fireplace, placing both fisted hands on the stone.

Heels clacked in the halls, coming closer, and Arthur didn't look up when they sounded in his room.

"Say what'd you like about the food, but…" Morgana trailed, "you can't beat our feasts for entertainment."

"Morgana," Arthur greeted. "Sorry, should've made sure that you were alright."

"Disappointed, actually," she walked up behind him, "I was looking forward to clumping a couple around the head with a ladle."

Arthur smirked, since he'd been on the wrong end of Morgana's fighting before. "I'm sure the guards could've handled Bayard and his men."

"Yeah, but why let the boys have all the fun?"

"Oh, I have no doubt that you would've fought a few, but Father would've gone on about how dangerous it was."

Morgana groaned, "Spare me that lecture, i've already had it."

"Well," Arthur muttered, "you weren't the only one."

"Not that I listened to him. Sometimes you've got to do what you think is right, and damn the consequences."

Arthur turned to her. "You think I should go."

She shook her head. "It doesn't matter what I think."

Arthur sighed. "If I don't make it back, who will be the next King of Camelot? There's more than just my life at stake."

"And what kind of King would Camelot want?" She looked over, and unsheathed his sword. "One that would risk his life to save that of a lowly servant? Or one that does what his father tells him to?"

She presented him his sword.

·~·

Arthur's horse nearly trampled the guards, who jumped out of the way just before they got crushed.

·~·

He had rode the horse to the forest until daylight had broken through the horizon and kept going until he had reached the forest.

He jumped off Passelande, grabbing her reigns and walking with her through the forest, looking down a clearing, where the trees were thin and their leaves on the floor, the wood surrounded by a fog.

He kept walking, and stopped when he heard sobbing.

He looked over, spotting who must have been a girl with long black hair and a red dress that was cut into strips at the legs.

He tied up Passelande, patting her neck, then slowly made his way to the woman.

"...Hello?" he asked, and she flinched.

When he got closer, he noticed three bloody scratches on her arm.

He crouched down a little way away from her.

"Are you alright?"

It looked as if she went to go answer, which was instead replaced with a scream as something roared behind Arthur, who whipped around, spotting a creature make its way toward him.

It had scales and sharp teeth, claws that Arthur was betting what had done that to the woman, and two fins on the back, which stood up.

It roared again.

Arthur held up a hand. "Stay back," he instructed as a guttural growl pierced the air.

Arthur snuck forward, unsheathing his sword and twisting his wrist.

The creature stood on its hind legs, and took a jump at him, and Arthur ducked, rolling on the ground forward, and threw his sword at the creature, watching as it spun in the air and pierced it in its heart, dropping dead.

He looked up at the woman, who stood and backed away from the log she was sitting on, leaving her coat behind.

Arthur held up his hands. "It's alright," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He pointed to the scratches on her arm.

"Who did that to you?"

"...My Master," she said, voice a whisper. "I--I ran away from him, but then I got lost." She gave him a pleading look. "Please don't leave me."

Arthur shook his head. "I won't. I'm not going to."

"You can take me away from here?"

Arthur shook his head, Merlin's barely breathing body flashing in his mind. "Not yet. There's something I have to do first." He looked back at the cave, which wasn't far from where they stood.

"Why have you come to the caves?"

"I'm looking for something," Arthur said, unwrapping the lead from the wood. "It can only be found here."

"What is it?"

Arthur looked at her, then turned away.

"I know this place. I could help you."

Arthur sighed. "It's a type of flower, which only grows inside the cave. 'S very rare."

"The mortaeus flower?" She nodded at him. "I know where they are. I'll show you." She looked at him one last time, then turned around, toward the caves.

Passelande gave a disgruntled snort.

·~·

He and the woman grabbed two torches off the wall and lit them, then went further into the cave.

They rounded a corner, then she pointed up.

"There they are," she said, her finger pointing toward a set of flowers growing into the wall.

Arthur looked at the small walkway leading to the flowers, where the rock was hanging over a deep ledge that Arthur was sure never stopped falling.

He walked on it, hearing the woman whisper something that he didn't pay attention to.

Her voice suddenly got louder, nearly shouting an incantation.

He whipped around to her, the rocks shaking.

"What are you doing?!" he practically screamed, before the rock fell out from underneath his feet and Arthur had to jump across the ledge and grab onto the rock wall, letting the torch go to do so.

"I expected so much more," the woman hissed, her friendly demeanor gone.

"Who are you?!"

She lowered her hood. "The last face you'll ever see."

There was a loud hiss, and they both looked over to see a cluster of spiders.

"It seems we have a visitor," the woman remarked.

Arthur groaned, moving to the left of the wall as the spider jumped down, closer to him, and he let go of the wall with one hand, gripping his sword and unsheathing it, slicing the spider as it jumped at him, and it fell with a shriek into the void.

"Very good." She looked up. "But he won't be the last."

Arthur groaned, heaving his arm up to throw the sword over the wall and onto a landing.

"I'll let his friend finish you off, Arthur Pendragon." Arthur looked up at her. "It's not your destiny to die at my hand." She turned away, the light of the torch disappearing behind the wall of the cave.

"Who are you?!" Arthur screamed after her.

He got no answer.

Suddenly, a blue light flew straight up to him, and Arthur felt a sense of hope watch over him, and he knew, instantly, the light was Merlin.

He pulled himself up, grabbing his sword and resheathing it.

The light flew up, and toward the ledge, but, Arthur looked up, and, seeing the flower that would save his manservant, grabbed onto another jagged piece of rock, and climbed up, and kept climbing until he got to the flower, groaning when an echo of hisses was heard in the cave.

He stretched his arm up, until he felt the leaves of the flower, and kept stretching until he felt the stem, then grabbed that and snapped the stem, then leaned against the wall, stuffing the flower into the pouch on his belt.

He looked up at the light, which flickered in the cave like fire, then climbed up and up, the spiders following close behind, until he looked up at the shine of the moonlight, the light disappearing with the moons shine, until he could push himself up and out of the cave, where he sighed, resting his head on the grass.

Then, he pushed himself up, and went to look for his horse.

.~.

The horse galloped all the way to Camelot, and Arthur knew she was as exhausted as he was, especially when he had to almost run straight into the guards to make them move out of his way.

He left Passelande by the stables, knowing one of the stable hands would deal with her, as she was notably his.

(She was the only horse in the stables that had a long scratch near the eye, which had happened when she was barely a year old, but Arthur had seen it, wondered what had been

the cause of it, and hurriedly got help.)

Arthur hid behind one of the walls as two guards appeared at the end, and thought about when he and Morgana were kids, and how they'd both sneak through the tunnels to escape late at night.

Well, it was obvious where he was going.

·~·

He nearly burst through Gaius door, shutting it hurriedly and placing the lock onto it, then ran beside Gaius.

"Here," he panted, then hurried to Merlin's side, the one not currently occupied by Gwen.

"His breathing is much worse," Gaius sighed. "We have to hurry."

Arthur stared at Merlin, his face coated in sweat, his eyelids an unnatural red, and the rest of his face unnaturally pale.

Arthur was going to hit him for this.

He looked up as Gaius stopped what he was doing, pausing beside Merlin's bed.

"...Why've you stopped?" Gwen asked.

"The potion, it was created using magic. We may need magic to form an antidote."

The two glanced at him.

"But we can't," Gwen sighed, dropping her hands to fiddle in her lap. "It's forbidden, even if we could."

"...I'll try and make it work out --"

"Do it," Arthur insisted. The two looked at him in surprise. "If it'll save Merlin, then we should." He looked at Gwen. "We won't tell. Whatever happens doesn't leave this room."

He kept looking at Gwen, who eventually nodded, turning to Gaius.

Gaius sighed, then cupped his hands around the cup, hissing out words that Arthur didn't know, but could relate to the Lady in the Caves.

The potion hissed, and Gaius sat the cup down.

He grabbed a small vial from the bench, pouring the potion into it, then walked back over to Gwen and Arthur.

"Hold his nose," Gaius commanded, and Arthur hurried to comply.

Merlin swallowed it all.

...And stopped breathing.

"Gaius?!" Arthur muttered warily.

"What's happening?" Gwen panicked.

Gaius pushed them out of the way and put his ear to Merlin's chest.

"...He's stopped breathing."

"No," Arthur hissed, pressing a hand to his face.

"He's dead?" Gwen whispered.

"He can't be!"

"It was his destiny," Gaius whispered.

"It's my fault, if i'd gotten here sooner -- If i'd been quicker -- "

"No," Gaius interrupted. "It was me. I should've looked after him better… It's my fault."

"...Who's fault about what?"

Arthur's head shot up from where it was previously resting near Merlin's arm on the bed.

"You're alive!" Arthur whispered.

"No," Merlin corrected. "'M the ghost come back to haunt you. Ehh, what happened exactly?" His face donned a trademarked kitten look. "The last thing I remember is drinking the wine..."

·~·

"You disobeyed me," the King shouted angrily, pacing in front of Arthur.

They were in Arthur's chambers, his father and the guards having found him there after he'd left Merlin and Gauis to their own.

"Of course I did," Arthur said. "A man's life was at stake."

"Why do you care so much?" Uther stopped in his pacing, and turned to Arthur. The boy's just a servant?"

"He saved my life. Is that not enough? But there's more. There was a woman, at the mountain. She knew I was there for the flower. I don't think it was Bayard who tried to poison me, and you can ask Gaius, the potion was enforced with magic, so Merlin'd die sooner."

Uther furrowed his brows together.

"Then, who did it?"

"Gaius didn't say," that had been the most infuriating part, since he obviously knew who it was, "he just said -- "

"That it wasn't Bayard," Uther finished.

·~·

"Still alive, then."

Merlin blinked, and nearly choked on his water before remembering it wasn't that good of an idea to talk like that.

"Oh," Merlin snickered, whipping the water from his chin. "Just about." He could practically see Arthur come to stand beside him, above his shoulder. What he couldn't see was the adoring look that Arghur gave him, or the way he looked grateful that he'd actually made it back.

Gaius rolled his eyes and looked away.

"I understand that I have you to think for that."

"Yeah, well," Arthur psshed, "it was nothing."

Lie!

Shush!

"A half-decent servant is hard to come by… Was only dropping by to make sure you're alright."

Gaius whipped around at that.

"...And to say I expect you to be back to work tomorrow."

"Oh," Merlin blinked. "Oh, yeah, of course. Uh, bright and early."

This, of course, was a lie.

"Um, Arthur!"

Merlin heard Arthur pause.

"...Thank you."

"...Of course. Get some rest."

He heard Arthur leave, then, shoes clacking on the way out.

"...Arthur may give you a hard time, but, at heart, he's a man of honour." Gaius sat something in front of him, sitting down across from him. "There aren't many who'd do something like that for a servant."

"It all would have been for nothing if you didn't know how to make the antidote."

"Eat your dinner."

Merlin went to pick up his spoon, which he saw with his minds eye, before pausing.

"What I don't understand is why she went through all this trouble when she could've just kept quiet and killed Arthur."

"Destroying Arthur and Camelot wasn't all she was after. She knew you'd be forced to drink that wine. It was you she wanted to kill."

·~·

Much later, when the sun had set and some were having dinner, a group of knights sat in a tavern, some verging on slightly tipsy, some verging on overly drunk, talking about the somewhat new addition to the castle.

"Ewan!" Bors excitedly called, making the man nearly jump out of his seat. "Y'know M'rlin, r'ght?"

Well, that's one down on overly drunk.

"...Yes?"

Who didn't know Merlin by this point? He'd just saved their prince's life!

"I think he means, you knew Merlin before this?" Lucan muttered from beside Ewan, scratching at his arm.

"Ya!" Bors beamed.

"Well," Ewan said, "yes."

The other knights leaned in.

"Is he as nice as he seems?" Bedivere stage whispered.

"Yes," Ewan sighed, realizing what he'd started.

"He saved your life, right?" Lamorak asked, his brows raised high. "Knew that Valiant wasn't what he seemed?"

"Yes."

The table suddenly grew silent, and Ewan looked at his brothers-in-arms in question.

"We sh' --" Galahad hiccuped, "'e sh' make a -- a pact."

"What kind of pact?" Palamedes asked, one of the only coherent ones left.

"Ta protec' M'rlin?"

The table got quiet once more, before a loud and joyous rumble of agreement echoed in the room, earning them a few side-stares from the other patrons, and an apologetic look from Ewan.

"To protect Merlin!"

Chapter End Notes

so in the span of this and the last one being uploaded, i got sick 3 times at least, i have two people moving into my house, and i had four mental breakdowns about school

Also -- whenever I say that Merlin sees "nothing" or how everything is entirely black, thats technically not the case, as he can see sort of static, but since that isn't a thing quite yet, he doesn't call it that.

A/N

so, i've been gone for a while -- which, let me tell ya'll, was not my intentions.

so, i'm just going to say: i'm fine, and i'm going to delete this work -- BUT -- it is just so i can edit the hell out of it, THEN post it again.

i (hopefully) won't have y'all waiting this long again, and will have the new story up within the next month or so. So, with that, stay safe and healthy, and i'll try and finish this asap.

A/N

...
Y'all.
It doesn't even feel like it's been 3 years since I last updated this, and I am so sorry!
I started this story my freshman year of high school and I'm going to graduate in just a few weeks!
If there's anybody still reading this story, I'm trying my best to have the first chapter of the COMPLETELY FINISHED BOOK up.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!