Master and Mate

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/17595326.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>No Archive Warnings Apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Merlin (TV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Merlin/Arthur Pendragon (Merlin), Gwen/Morgana (Merlin), Sophia/Bors/Daegal (Merlin), Cassius/Lancelot, Mordred/Percival (Merlin), Kay/Killian, Su/Hunith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Merlin (Merlin), Arthur Pendragon (Merlin), Roarke, Alaric, Calder, Owain (Merlin), Mithian (Merlin), Killian, Kay - Character, Lucan, Vivian (Merlin), Maeve, Succubus Queen - Character, Hunith (Merlin), Percival (Merlin), Mordred (Merlin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series:</td>
<td>Part 12 of Master And... Series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Master and Mate

by shadowglove88

Summary

Dragonhold has once more returned to what remains of Albion, and with it is the royal family.
The beginning of the end of this series!!!!
Merlin sighed, blinking to his chambers and undoing the clasp of his cloak, his eyes flashing gold as his magic took over instinctively, like it was known to do, lifting the cloak and hanging it up neatly. The king ran his hand over his hair and sat down on the edge of the bed, his gaze fixed upon the wolf fur soft beneath his hands. The day had been stressful, and not for the first time since they’d returned to Albion did Merlin wish they’d remained separated in their own little pocket reality. It had been nicer back then, but it had always been meant to be temporary while he worked on invigorating Avalon and Daobeth. There had never been any getting around returning to Albion, even if it had taken them longer than expected to do so.

It didn’t help that Albion seemed to have deteriorated during their absence. Droughts and wars had ravaged the kingdoms, leaving people hurt, homeless, starving, and incredibly thirsty. For the other kingdoms to see how Dragonhold had prospered during their own decline had been a slap in the face, and while some had tried to seize the kingdom and its bounties for themselves they’d become a feast for the dragon. After that no one else tried to touch Dragonhold, but the more desperate of kingdoms begged to join, and it was only the sight of the hungry, desperate children that had made its monarchs agree.

Magic united the now even more enlarged kingdom, and Dark Magic claimed the warriors of the newly joined citizens, turning their loyalty to the throne and assuring that no mutiny could ever take place. The human part of Merlin still disapproved of his actions, but he would not allow any weakness to put his kingdom - his *family* - in danger. No one else mattered to him. No one. The demon and dragon agreed a hundred per cent, and that helped, especially when they tended to gang up on Merlin’s human side and bully it into acquiesce.

“You didn’t even say hello,” a voice scoffed from behind him on the bed.

Merlin sighed, closing his eyes tighter as he tried to release the pent up frustration inside of him. “Hello.”

The bed moved beneath shifting weight, and then Arthur’s heat enveloped him from behind, his mate not only wrapping his arms tightly around Merlin’s stomach, but resting his cheek against his back while plastering his body to his. “Did something happen today?”

Rubbing his hands against the ones clutched around him, Merlin leaned back into his mate’s comforting warmth. “I missed you so much I couldn’t concentrate on anything, and kept making people have to repeat themselves over and over and over again.” He could feel the smile that curved Arthur’s lips at those words pressed against his back. “Stop being so happy about that. If you’re not around I’m supposed to be present enough for the both of us… not utterly *useless* because I’m too distracted missing you.”

That smile grew against his back before Arthur started to press kisses to his spine. “The fever broke earlier so I should be good to return to the throne room with you tomorrow.” He rubbed his face roughly into Merlin’s back. “You’re not the only one who was missing his mate, you know.”

Merlin brought one of Arthur’s hand to his lips, and began pressing soft kisses to each finger before paying rapt attention to his palm, licking, nibbling and sucking at it.

The hand Arthur still had around him tightened in his clothes as his wife groaned into his back, the sound a low, needy keen that went to Merlin’s cock, and made it hard for him to control himself. Arthur didn’t seem to give a fig about Merlin’s attempt at self control as he loosened his grip on
Merlin’s clothes only to slip his hand into his husband’s trousers to take him in hand and begin stroking him.

“Wife…” Merlin pulled Arthur’s hand out before he slipped away from the blonde and off of the bed, turning to face his queen, who looked highly annoyed with him. The sight made him smile as he leaned down and pressed a kiss to those lips before pulling away right when he knew Arthur would try and yank him into bed. It was hard to control himself and his desires, but he did just that, skirting out of Arthur’s reach to instead walk around to the other side of the large bed. He sat there and smiled down at the raven-haired boy curled up around a pillow, snoring softly. Next to him, another raven-haired boy, the second a little younger than the first, sucked on his thumb in his sleep. Merlin smiled, as he always did whenever he beheld his sons, and reached down to brush his fingers tenderly through their hair.

Neither Alaric nor Calder had their mother’s eyes, and Merlin didn’t understand why Arthur had been so incredibly happy to note that after their births. Both boys looked entirely too much like Merlin sometimes, and the cambion sulkily wished there’d been more of their mother in them. Arthur was by far more attractive than he was, and it would have been better for the boys to have taken after him more, yet at least they hadn’t gotten Merlin’s ears.

“I used to get fevers around this age as well,” Merlin admitted as he fixed his attention on the reason Arthur had been absent for the last couple of days in the throne room. “No doubt Calder will also start to experience them once he gets a little older as well. It’s his magic starting to manifest, as well as his body trying to grow accustomed to it.”

Arthur pressed up against him from behind once more as his arms slipped around Merlin, his palms caressing Merlin’s stomach roughly. “I continue to be glad I wasn’t born a magic-user. My poor husband and sons have to go through so many frustrating situations I thankfully never had to.” He slipped his thumb under the waist of Merlin’s trousers and used that grip to easier reach into it with his other hand and wrap around Merlin once more, stroking him slowly. “The least I can do is… tend to their needs.”

Considering Alaric had been sleeping in their bed the last couple of nights - as well as Calder since he didn’t see why he shouldn’t as well if Alaric was being allowed - Merlin had been unable to lose himself in his mate the way he would normally, and the abstinence was killing him. That being said, he had to be strong, at least until both boys were a little older.

Grabbing Arthur’s hand by the wrist, he did the one thing he didn’t want to do, and forced it out of his pants. “Now now, Arthur, what did we agree on while Alaric’s ill?”

“We didn’t agree on anything,” Arthur grumbled into his back sulkily. “You came up with a stupid plan, and I warned you it wouldn’t work. I’m surprised you’ve lasted this long without desiccating and turning into dust.”


“Since when do I ever listen to your orders or suggestions - or to you in general?” Arthur wanted to know, moving the hand he’d been using to hook the waistband of Merlin’s trousers to instead reach in for him once more.

Merlin barely caught it and yanked it out before Arthur could reach his cock once more. He held onto both wrists tightly, his cock twitching, his demon and dragon snarling, and his control very nearly gone. “Arthur. Stop it.”

“Yes, I’m terribly afraid of you right now.”
Turning around rapidly to face his mate, Merlin grabbed Arthur roughly by the back of his neck, right under where his head met his neck. He saw Arthur’s eyes widen and his body tense immediately at the threatening gesture, and yet he could also see the flush of arousal climbing on his skin, as well as the way Arthur’s nipples were hardening. Merlin could also smell the instantaneous spike in Arthur’s scent, one which grew thicker the second a growl rumbled its way menacingly passed Merlin’s lips.

Arthur’s eyes darkened as Merlin’s fingers dug deeper into the back of his neck, his lips parting as his breaths grew heavier.

Realizing very quickly that this was backfiring on him spectacularly, Merlin let go of his grip on Arthur and was about to turn back to wrap their sons up with he found himself struck unexpectedly across his face with enough force to swing it.

The cambion froze in shocked confusion as he brought a hand up to his throbbing cheek. He looked down at Arthur in time to see the fear on the blonde’s face seconds before the boy started backing away slowly, his chest rising and falling rapidly.

So close to losing control, Merlin could feel his inner predator reacting to this visual stimulus. “Don’t f—.”

Arthur spun on his heel and ran as if his life depended on it.

Merlin fought it - he fought it with every fibre of his being - and yet the predator in him had been provoked, and given how close to the edge he’d been these last couple of days, his inner beast snapped horrifyingly quickly. In fact, he was charging before he’d even realized it, the cambion fighting with the little bit of control left in him not to shift, not to take wing and easily catch up with his fleeing mate. And yet even in this human form he was quickly catching up with the blonde, who’d made it out of the ‘bedroom’ and had already started running through the orchards and crystals.

The hand Merlin reached out towards Arthur was clawed, and he tried to stop it, to pull back, he tried his damnedest, and yet in seconds he’d caught Arthur by the back of his robes and flung him face-first into one of the apple trees - his wings ripping out of his back and curling around Arthur just in time to cushion what would’ve been a violent hit as the blonde slammed into the tree and was pinned there.

Snarling despite himself, Merlin breathed heavily as he buried his face in Arthur’s hair. The talons jutting out from his wings dug deep into the apple tree, completely trapping Arthur against it, with Merlin’s body pressed up behind him for good measure. Those clawed fingers dug into Arthur’s hips warningly yet didn’t pierce through the material or the skin. He just needed to breathe. If he could just breathe—.

Arthur started to struggle as if he were on the brink of being murdered.

“Don’t. Fight.” Merlin begged roughly, his voice thicker, hoarser, betraying how close he was to losing it. “Just stay still. I won’t—.”

The second Arthur struggled even harder Merlin lost it, being overwhelmed by his demonic and draconic natures uniting (as they tended to do more and more often lately) in shared displeasure. His teeth dug into the one bite mark that remained on Arthur’s neck - which Arthur referred to as Merlin’s mark of ownership - and in moments like these the cambion couldn’t agree more with that description as he used one hand to force Arthur’s cheek roughly against the tree and trap him in place, as the other hand freed his pulsating, shifting cock.
Not giving his cock time to truly shift from its human form, Merlin fought Arthur’s Slip to the side and slammed into him viciously all the way to the hilt. He didn’t give his mate time to adjust to him, or to his shifting, growing size, instead he tightened his toothy grip on Arthur’s neck and began to slam his hips into his mate’s, glorying in finally being able to be inside of his body after so many days and nights of being without. Merlin loved their sons - he adored them - but sometimes he missed when he didn’t have to share Arthur with anyone, and he figured that made him a terrible father, which was why he never admitted it out loud no matter how many times he might feel it.

“Gods below!” Arthur’s voice was trembling just as hard as his legs. “I’ve missed you so much.” He caressed the hand forcing his cheek against the bark of the apple tree. “If I couldn’t get us a moment to ourselves soon I was going to seriously h-hurt you!” He let out a tortured keen as his hips arched, his other hand rubbing his stomach as it started to bulge with the shifting, enlarging phallus buried within him. “You feel so good, my love.”

Letting go of his hold on Arthur’s head, Merlin growled in pleasure as his claws returned to Arthur’s hips, holding them captive as he continued to move. “You need to stop… purposefully provoking… my inhuman side. I might… seriously hurt you… one day. And if I do that… I will die.”

“You won’t hurt me.” Arthur sounded so assured of that that it terrified Merlin. “No matter what I do to make you snap, no matter how I incite or fuel the chase, once you catch me you never hurt me.” His voice broke in pleasure as he arched his back. “I love it when you lose control and take me like this.” He glanced over his shoulder at Merlin, betraying not only the flush of arousal climbing up his neck to his neck, but the utter lust in his darkening eyes. “Be rougher with me, Merlin, I will not break.”

He dug his claws in deeper. “Stop underestimating the sort of creature I—!” And yet his warning snarl turned into a choked whimper the second Arthur clenched around him, massaging him with his warmth. The cambion latched onto his wife’s neck once more as his hips slammed into Arthur’s, taking him far rougher than he would’ve liked given they hadn’t been able to be together for a couple of days now.

The sounds Arthur let out were beginning to drive him crazy. Merlin’s breaths and growls sounded less and less human even to himself as he drove himself ever harder, ever deeper, into his beloved. And then he reached around and rubbed his hand over Arthur’s stomach, feeling the way it bulged in betrayal of him, and as always a feeling of ownership, of possession and possessiveness, overcame him.

“Can you feel me inside of you, Arthur?” Merlin rumbled into his ear, feeling the way the blonde shivered at the sound, the proximity, of his voice. “Sorry, that was a silly question, wasn’t it? Of course you can feel me. You are stretched around my cock as it thrusts inside of you and carves out its home once more, as it re-claims your delectable body, as it reminds it who it belongs to.” He chuckled when Arthur started letting out desperate, pitiful whines, the boy’s breathing growing heavier with each word that slipped from Merlin’s lips. “So yes, you can no doubt feel me deep within you, loving you, reminding your body of its master’s form. But Arthur, can you also tell just how desirous I have been for you?”

“Yessssssssssssss.....” Arthur dug his nails into the bark and flung his head back, lips parted and eyes closed tightly, slick dripping so thickly out of him it was puddling on the ground between them. “I feel your every desire, my love, and I want you just as desperately!”

“This part of you belongs only to me, Arthur,” Merlin snarled into his ear. “I’ll never allow anyone else to touch it, to slip passed its tight ring and bury themselves inside of you. Your body, your warmth, your slick passage - it all belongs to me.”
“Yessssss.” Arthur’s voice was wobbly as the flush of desire warming his body grew darker. “It’s yours, Merlin. All yours. Only yours. I—” his words were muffled when Merlin’s fingers slipped into his mouth, but the blonde did not complain, instead sucking and licking those fingers as they thrusted into his mouth the same way that that cock rammed into his body. Drool slipped out and down the sides of Arthur’s mouth, but the usually prideful boy did not seem to care, completely lost to worshipping his husband’s body.

Merlin was close, he was so incredibly close, but he wouldn’t allow himself to find pleasure before his wife did. And yet they’d been apart for too long, and his body had been craving Arthur so desperately that it was terrifyingly close to finding pleasure on its own. He couldn’t - wouldn’t - be the first to find release, not when he knew Arthur had been suffering just as badly as he had from their withdrawal.

Leaning in harder, Merlin spoke deliberately low, rough, into Arthur’s ear. “What a perfect little cocksleeve you are.”

Almost immediately Arthur sobbed as his body clenched instinctively tightly around Merlin. While the cambion loved, adored, worshipped, his blonde, the boy reacted explosively whenever he was called these sorts of names, whenever he was treated this sort of way, so if Merlin was ever in trouble of being the only one to find release, this was the only course of action that could save both him and his pride.

“How did you ever survive these last couple of days without my cock inside of you?” He nibbled roughly on the shell of Arthur’s ear while pressing deeper inside of him seconds before his ridges sharpened, scraping Arthur unexpectedly, causing the boy to scream out around Merlin’s fingers. “Did you spend the whole time imagining that my cock was in its rightful place? That you were being used for your true purpose?” Merlin snarled desperately at the way Arthur was trembling around him, the boy clearly losing control over himself rapidly. “What a hopeless little whore.”

Arthur sobbed something loud and yet muffled around Merlin’s fingers.

“Shut up.” Merlin hissed dangerously into the boy’s ear, using his own desperation to darken his words even as his thrusts grew quicker with his own approaching climax. “I care not for what you have to say. You are not my wife or queen or even the mother of my children right now, you are nothing more than my whore, my cockhole.” He gripped Arthur’s hair viciously and forced his head back, his neck arched, as he snarled into his ear: “All I want from you right now is for you to be quiet, to relax your womb, and take my seed deep inside of your body like a good little bitch.”

Screaming around Merlin’s fingers, Arthur climaxed explosively. His body visibly lost utter control, spasming around Merlin’s, dancing, kissing, caressing, massaging, coaxing, begging for the seed it was being promised.

Relief seared through Merlin as he hooked himself deep into his beloved and finally allowed himself to find completion. He let go of Arthur’s hair and wrapped his arms around the boy, whispering words of love and devotion as he came, filling his lover with his seed and his adoration until they were both breathless.

“MAMA!?” A voice called out from the bedroom. “WHERE ARE YOU?”

Arthur groaned and shifted his head to the side of the tree so he could more clearly call out: “I’LL BE THERE IN A MINUTE!” He then rested his forehead against the trunk and whimpered unhappily. “I don’t think this is going to be enough.” He reached behind him and groaned as he cupped Merlin’s asscheek, pressing him deeper into his body. “I’ve missed you so much, my love. It’s been so painful not to - I’ve felt so empty, I—.”
“I know. I am suffering too.” Pressing kisses to the side of Arthur’s face, Merlin sighed heavily and fought against his instinct to take his mate once more. “Go to them, I will try and relax with a swim.” He sighed heavily. “I’ll return when I am calmed enough not to risk taking you on the same bed as our sons.”

Arthur slammed his fist into the tree. “Do you really think I can—I am not just saying that I am suffering too! That I am desperate for——!”


Despite his previous anger, Arthur began to tremble slightly, and when he spoke there was no trace of annoyance, instead replaced by tremulous need. “Only me. I’ll murder whoever tries to take advantage of this situation to try and get their claws into you. Just because I’m stuck in our quarters does not mean——!”

“How can they ‘get their claws into me’ when my claws are in you?” Merlin whispered into those golden locks.

“I’m sure Lady Mithian must be loving my absence from Court.” Hips beginning to move, Arthur let out choked sobs. “She——.”

“Has a crush on you,” Merlin reminded him, still not able to understand how Arthur did not get that. Mithian had once been the only heir to Nemeth, one of the kingdoms which had recently joined with Dragonhold due to its people starving thanks to the drought, and thanks to Dragonhold acquiring Nemeth she’d lost her claim to the throne and had been downgraded from “Princess” to “Lady”. She was smart, beautiful, and feisty. She was also very clearly attracted to Arthur, and the only reason why Merlin wasn’t aggressively territorial given that was because, well, he was very much confused as to how Arthur didn’t seem to realize her attraction was towards him (even after Merlin told him it point-blank) and instead still seemed to consider Mithian as some sort of threat.

“What difference does that make?” Arthur snapped angrily at him, as if this was all Merlin’s fault somehow.

Despite being a king and a very powerful magic-user, Merlin felt no shame in admitting that his mate left his utterly befuddled most of the time. “Arthur, my love, if you realize that you are the one she is interested in, then why are you jealous?”

“Why aren’t you?” Arthur wanted to know immediately as he slipped free of Merlin so he could turn around and glare at him, gripping at the front of his tunic angrily.

“I am.” Merlin wasn’t lying at all, but he was also far more confused than jealous.

A muscle ticked dangerously in Arthur’s cheek. “You do not act as if you were jealous. You act as if you are amused.” Annoyance darkened in his eyes as he tightened his hold on Merlin. “I cannot think of one good reason why this situation would amuse you… unless you do not care that there is a threat to our relationship.”

“The only way Mithian could ever be a threat to us is if you were attracted to her as well,” Merlin declared with a scoff as he rested his hands on Arthur’s hips. “And you will never be attracted to her.”

Surprise began to overpower Arthur’s previous annoyance. “You sound very sure of that fact, Merlin.”
“Of course I am,” Merlin assured him as he trailed one hand around Arthur’s hip so as to slip a finger between his asscheeks and into his body, watching the way Arthur reacted instinctively, flushing in arousal, his eyes darker, glassier, his breaths quicker, whimpered. “This body of yours belongs to me, my love, and it knows it.” He smiled at the petulant pout curving Arthur’s lips, and leaned in to press a soft kiss against them. “And it’s not just your body that’s all mine, Arthur. Your heart, your soul, your mind, they are all mine. Your love for me is far too strong to be affected by a pretty face, or by swaying hips.” He worked his finger inside of Arthur into a steady rhythm, using magic to elongate his touch and massage his lover deep within. “Plus, out of the both of you it is quite clear who is the better looking one, both of face and of… hips.”

He could feel the reluctant smile curving the lips under his.

“I know I wanted you to become more confident,” Arthur whispered under his mouth, “but it’s unnerving how incredibly attractive you are when you’re like this.” He tightened his hold on Merlin’s tunic and pulled him closer, his breath hot and his voice muffled by Merlin’s lips when he whispered: “Just the thought of the Court being able to see you when I cannot - of them having you all day to themselves without my presence to remind them of their place - I don’t like it, Merlin. I hate it.”

Realizing how unnerved and unhappy his mate truly was, Merlin wrapped his arm around him and whispered soothing sounds into his hair. “Did you not hear how useless I was without you? I doubt anyone has been impressed with me since you have been tending to Alaric.”

Arthur clutched at him so tightly his hands shook. “What if someone tries to steal you away from me like Edwin did?”

Cassius’ assistant had taken Merlin by surprise considering the cambion had kept forgetting he actually existed. He couldn’t even remember which of the kingdoms Edwin had originally come from, and had only ever noted him as being one of Cassius’ favorite interns since Lancelot was jealous of the boy saying that Cassius wouldn’t stop praising him by saying the other man was ‘incredibly clever’.

“What if someone else does something like he did?” Arthur’s voice was low and emotionless, which proved to Merlin just how truly pissed and worried he was. “What if they slip you ground up Dragonsweed to induce an artificial mating fervor while I’m here, unable to do anything - not even knowing what is happening so as to—-?”

“Arthur, if visiting my mothers did not stop you from sensing when I entered that state, I doubt you being in our bedchambers will hinder you from it.” He sighed, knowing that that was truly not the problem. “I was lax, I let my guard down because I felt no ill-will being directed towards me. I apologize for that and the pain it caused you.”

“Pain? I felt no pain.” Arthur was finally starting to actually sound pissed. “I was furious. You will never understand the magnitude of emotions I experienced when I blinked to where you were! You were hurting yourself so that the pain would help keep you from succumbing to the mindless lust that that asshole and his minions had forced you to feel! And all because you were oblivious to them and their desires? Because he wanted to be your mate? He even tried to use my face while you were in that state! He—that asshole—if I hadn’t made it to you when I did they would’ve used your drugged state to force you to rut them - or you would have killed yourself to keep that from happening!”

“Arthur.” Merlin slipped his fingers free to embrace Arthur with both hands, feeling his mate trembling in rage. “Nothing happened. No matter the state I am in, I know my mate.”

“I know that!” Arthur’s voice was muffled. “But that doesn’t make it any better! What if someone
else tries to do what they did!? Or something else equally as deplorable?! You said so yourself! You’re distracted right now because I am not there! They could realize that and try to do something to you, to—-!

Merlin closed his eyes and breathed in his mate’s scent. “If they try to do something like that again, Arthur, then the same thing that happened to Edwin and his conspirators will happen to them.”

Arthur went still immediately. “What do you mean by that?”

Rubbing his face into Arthur’s hair, Merlin let out a heavy breath. “I might have been disoriented due that artificial heat, but even I am not so oblivious as to believe Edwin and his co-horts used your confusion and shock to run away, to disappear into the night. I know you stayed with me, I know you took the brunt of that artificial heat to help me through it, and that Calder was born from it… but I also know that you killed Edwin and the others who’d been in that room with me.” He rubbed Arthur’s back soothingly. “I could smell their blood for months afterwards, although the clean-up was impeccable, so I am assuming Sophia or Bors helped you with that.”

“You knew?” Arthur whispered in a soft voice.

“That my mate will do anything to protect his family?” Merlin purred into Arthur’s hair before he nodded. “I’ve always known that.” He rubbed his cock against Arthur’s, and rumbled happily at the way the smaller rod trembled and gushed at the attention. “Just like I know that they are not the only ones that you have dealt your own special brand of justice to since becoming my Queen.” He bent his head to suck on the pulse racing in Arthur’s neck. “Just as I know that some of the disappearances are my handy-work.”

Arthur leaned back heavily against the tree with a stuttered groan as he angle his neck to give Merlin better access. “Y-yours?”

“I think, my love, that after seven years under our reign, that our kingdom knows its bloodstained monarchs well enough to know better than to do anything to piss us off…” His lips curled in dark delight as that smaller, throbbing cock gushed slick against his own inhuman one. “Especially you.” He scraped his teeth against his mate’s pulse playfully. “Do you know what I’ve overheard you being called in low, scared, incredibly reverent tones?” The cambion smiled sharply. “The Paramount.”

Magic wrapped around their cocks, trapping them together as it stroked them.

Arthur let out a loud, choked sob which forced Merlin to abandon his neck and instead silence his cries with his mouth before the sound ventured to their bedroom and brought their sons out in worry. He kissed his mate, slipping his fingers through that golden hair and grabbing fistfuls to keep his head in place as he consumed him.

“MAMA?!” Alaric could be heard yelling in worry, and sounded much closer to the door than it had the first time. “WHAT WAS THAT NOISE? ARE YOU OKAY?”

Arthur let out a despaired sound.

Thrusting his hips harder, quicker, Merlin’s mouth consumed Arthur’s sobs while his magic tortured the boy, working relentlessly on him until Arthur was a blubbering mess barely managing to remain standing. It was wrecking havoc on Merlin, and he nearly cried in relief when Arthur found release once more, and Merlin could finally allow himself to follow.

“MAMA?!!?” Alaric sounded much nearer, as well as worried.
Magicking Arthur and himself, clean, Merlin blinked himself away from Arthur before Alaric could reach them, appearing in the diamond waters, a groan of frustration and disappointment filling him. He loved his sons - he’d give his life for them - but he could not wait until they were old enough to be a bit more independent!

Arthur had spent the last seven years staring at his reflection more than he ever had. It wasn’t because he was particularly vain - despite knowing he was very very attractive. No. That was not the reason for the way he’d started finding his gaze turning towards reflective surfaces more and more often.

It had started with his first pregnancy, the boy unable to dare to believe it every time he’d see a little more of a difference to his body. Every time he’d catch sight of himself he’d seem to find something different - more weight around his midsection being an obvious example - and he’d find himself mesmerized by the sight.

That may have started it, and yet it was not the reason Arthur had continued to find himself observing his reflection. No. That reason was different, was both incredible and saddening at the same time for vastly different reasons.

The reason Arthur continued to stare at his reflection was to make sure that he hadn’t imagined it the first time (and all the times afterwards), and each and every time he looked he confirmed that it was truly what he’d suspected: Arthur had not aged. Just as Merlin seemed trapped in a younger body, so was Arthur, in fact, he looked closer to how he had when he’d first become Merlin’s sex slave - which meant he looked younger than he had when he’d stopped aging. A part of him wondered whether this was the effect of being mated to an immortal being, or whether he would’ve continued to age normally had he not ordered Merlin’s magic to make sure the passage of time never separated them.

Immortal, ‘long-lived’, however it was to be called, he and Merlin were it, and they were it together.

Their sons, however, might not be, and that was what made Arthur sad. He wanted to find a way to change that, but Arthur also knew that if Merlin could have chosen to be normal-lived he would’ve. Arthur, on the hand, would not. Immortality with Merlin still did not seem long enough, but he would take it. He did not know whether his children would feel the same however. Mayhap they would not have to make the choice - mayhap they would stop growing old after a point as their parents had - or maybe they would take more after their human family and age like normal. If they did, it would be their choice once they reached a certain age, whether they wanted to try and expand their lifetimes or not.

Arthur, however, had a feeling that they would not want to, especially Alaric. He’d broached the subject innocently once with his sons, and while Calder had displayed no interest in the subject, Alaric had been very resolute about the fact that if Cassius and Lancelot’s daughter Maeve grew old then he wanted to as well, as he had every intention of marrying her once he ‘grew taller’ than her.

Either way, preparations were being made so that when Alaric was old enough, once he was ready to be king, for Daobeth and Avalon to split away from the rest of Dragonhold so that their son could have his kingdom, while Arthur and Merlin could continue their ‘calling’ of guarding, and tending to, Daobeth and Avalon.

“Is everything alright, Your Highness?”
Glancing at the reflection behind his, Arthur nodded as he sighed and turned to face the newcomer. “Do people truly call me the Paramount?”

Roarke blinked before nodding rapidly. “I did not know you had heard. They tend to never refer to you by that title whenever you are actually present.”

“Merlin told me about it recently,” Arthur admitted, a little flustered at this news for some reason. “Why am I constantly being given new titles?”

“At least they are all flattering,” Roarke declared with a grin. “I also heard that news of your soon return to Court has spread throughout the castle. To say that that news was met with relief is putting it mildly.”

Raising an eyebrow, Arthur huffed. “Oh, I am sure they missed me.”

“My Queen, if I may be frank with you, it has almost been eight years since Dragonhold became a unified kingdom, and in that amount of time the Court has discovered - has cemented as a very well known fact - how dangerous and uncertain things can become when the king misses you. I know that the newly amalgamated kingdoms are quickly discovering that fact for themselves as well.” Roarke snickered as he planted his hands on his hips. “As a whole, the Court has been extremely worried considering that this is the longest period of uninterrupted time you have remained absent from Court in general, and the Throne Room in particular. They can see how depressed and lethargic the king continues to grow day by day, and more than a few of them are beginning to panic.” He raised an eyebrow. “It is more than obvious to all that if they want a functioning king, their queen needs to be present.”

He was not at all ashamed to admit how pleased he was to hear that. “How much of a wreck is he?”

Roarke’s lips twitched. “If I were to answer that question honestly I might get in trouble.”

“That bad?” Arthur grinned, and then grinned wider when Roarke nodded. “Well, Cassius believes Alaric will be ready to return to his normal routine tomorrow, so I will be returning to Court as well. Owain promises to keep a close eye on the boys, especially Alaric, and to be honest I am not very worried. Alaric’s fever is practically gone and I can tell he and Calder both are eager to get back to their training and studies… as well as their usual playtime with Lucan, Maeve and Vivian.”

Arthur couldn’t even begin to explain how relieved he was that Morgana hadn’t seemed interested in giving birth herself, and was more than content to have her and Guinevere’s children be carried by Guinevere. Even now the women were trying to give Vivian a little brother or sister, and thankfully, once more, Guinevere was the one whose genes would be carried down.

So far Mordred didn’t seem interested in fathering a child, and considering how Percy had mentioned something about adoption the other day, Arthur didn’t think he had to worry about them either, which was a true relief for him.

The last thing Arthur needed was the possibility of another Pendragon being born with his color eyes. His own sons, thankfully, were complete miniatures of their father - which made them absolutely adorable to Arthur - made them perfect. Every time Merlin complained on how he’d wished they’d taken after Arthur in some way - especially in their eye color - Arthur barely kept from decking him, instead reminding his husband that he was their mother and he had wanted Mini Merlins…. and Arthur got what Arthur wanted.

“Lucan is very anxious for Prince Alaric to return from his sickbed.” Roarke revealed with a mischievous grin on his face. “Apparently the Heir has been giving him much valued counsel on
how best to woo Owain.”

Arthur’s lips twitched in amusement at the reminder of what he considered one of the cutest (and definitely funniest) things happening in the castle right now. It would appear that Lucan, although young, had declared Owain would be ‘his bride’ when he grew older. Both Lucan and Alaric had already decided who they planned on marrying, and were supporting each other in their endeavors to win over their potential paramours - neither of which seemed very interested in the boys or their ‘wooing’. At least Owain was being extremely nice while doling out his many rejections of Lucan’s many proposals, Maeve (on the other hand) kept telling Alaric she wouldn’t marry a ‘shortie’ and that she instead was going to steal Bors and Sophia from Daegal once she was old enough to ‘take Daegal on’, which she assured them all ‘wouldn’t be too long’ given how ‘tiny’ Daegal was.

Honestly, it was hilarious given Lancelot and Cassius’ own attraction to the Two-In-One. Maeve, it would seem, had the same taste in lovers as her fathers. And yet, despite this, Arthur did not feel too offended at her dismissal of his son’s plans to make her queen, because, well, Alaric and Calder took after Arthur when it came to tenacity and bullheaded determination, so truthfully Maeve was the one who was going to have to suffer through years of Alaric’s quite unique brand of wooing until she finally gave in… because although he might be ‘tiny’, there was no way Daegal would allow anyone to try to steal Bors or Sophia. The last person who’d tried had found themselves mysteriously castrated.

“Talking about disastrous wooing, how is Lord Gwaine’s fumbling going?” Arthur asked curiously with a raised eyebrow.

Roarke flushed and wrung his hands in a rare show of embarrassment. “I wouldn’t call it wooing.”

“No one would call it wooing;” Arthur assured him, still not quite sure how someone stated to have been a grand Casanova back in the day could be so bad at this. Honestly, even Alaric wasn’t doing this poorly. “He gave you a barrel filled with soap. Sure, it was very nice, very flowery, very expensive soap… but it was still soap.”

“I know. I was the one who received that… gift.” Roarke made up his face, clearly still not sure whether he should feel insulted about that gift or not. He shook his head and ran his fingers through his hair as he eyed Arthur. “He’s not even abiding by the mandatory waiting period to allow for mourning.”

That was true. Roarke had been one of the few Swain to find a ‘match’ during the first Dark Week, and he’d been with Lord Duncan until his death a few months ago. Usually there was a mourning period where a Consort who’d lost their master could grieve their loss in peace and tranquility. Gwaine had not only not respected this time of mourning, but had waylaid Roarke right before the funeral to make his intentions to court him very publicly known.

“Mama?” A voice called seconds before Calder peeked around the corner and grinned when he saw Roarke. “Hello Roarke! Alaric and I are going to do our daily swimming in the Diamond Falls!”

It would appear that while the water of the Diamond Falls was toxic to human beings, it was actually invigorating and healing for those of draconic ancestry, which might explain why it had been transplanted from where it’d been in Escetia to their quarters.

“That’s great!” Roarke smiled at him.

Grinning brighter, the five year old turned to Arthur as he hurried over. “Mama, when will papa be back home? Is his Throne Time thingy almost over for the day? We thought he would be finished by now but we haven’t seen him.” He shifted his weight on his feet excitedly. “We want to tell him
about Alaric’s newest strategy before we’re able to see Lucan and tell it to him tomorrow.”

“Wait a minute.” Arthur stared at his son in sudden horror. “Is your father helping those two devise their plans to woo Maeve and Owain?”

“No.” Calder shook his head quickly. “He’s just listening to them, and if it is something he used on you - and it failed - he lets us know so it can be tweaked or scrapped.”

Arthur’s lips parted, a bit horrified and yet even more amused by this revelation. “I see.”

Roarke was very clearly trying to hide the fact that he was snickering by pretending to cough into his fist.

“I don’t know if Alaric should be going to your father for advice,” Arthur admitted with sigh. As far as he was concerned, Merlin had never actively tried to seduce him - Arthur had fallen for him because of how wonderful he was (both as a person and in bed) - so the queen wasn’t sure Merlin would be of any help to those poor boys.

“But of course he should!” Calder declared very faithfully, as well as visibly shocked at those words. “Papa married you! And everyone says you are the most beautiful and capable person in the kingdom!” Calder raised an eyebrow. “Clearly papa is the one to go to if he convinced you to marry him.” He then pursed his lips. “Although, papa did say he is not sure why you married him since you ‘deserve better’…”

Arthur wanted to both punch and kiss his husband, who he knew without a doubt worshipped the ground he walked on… yet still had issues seeing his own self-worth. Merlin was getting better, but he still had a long way to go. At least now, however, while he didn’t understand why Arthur loved him, he clearly was incredibly confident in that fact. And that was monumental progress in Arthur’s eyes.

“Calder! Where are you?” Alaric could be yelling from close by. “Papa’s here! He’s already at the Falls!”

Calder’s eyes widened in excitement. “Bye mama! Bye Roarke!” He then turned and hurried in the direction he’d come from. “Wait for me, Alaric!”

Arthur watched his youngest go before he disappeared around the corner, and then sighed as he shook his head. “If anyone did any wooing it was me.” He turned to Roarke. “You were there. You are my witness. I wooed the stuffing out of him.”

“You definitely... wore him down…” Roarke declared, clearly unable to keep his amusement from his tone. “And, to be quite honest, that would be the best approach for both Prince Alaric and Lucan to take.”

“Exactly.” Arthur folded his arms over his chest. “They’re still young. I’ll give them a couple of years to figure out I’m actually the one they need to be consulting with.”

Roarke nodded with a smile before clearing his throat. “My Queen, the reason I came here to seek an audience with you is actually in regards to the new batch of potential Swain.”

“Oh boy.” Arthur sighed as he folded his arms over his chest. “What have they done now?”

Amusement twitch on Roarke’s lips. “You have no faith in them, Your Majesty.”

Not bothering to deny the fact that he still thought the Swain had things too easy for them to be such
trouble, Arthur raised an eyebrow expectantly.

“Galvin, Owain and I were discussing some potential changes to the way we train the new recruits, and we’d like both your and Bors’ advice - Fionn has already made it clear he wants nothing to do with the Swain’s training, so considering the first Swain had a much more successful ratio of finding committed lovers we’d like to seek counsel with the both of you. Owain says that the both of your input were always very appreciated.”

Sighing, Arthur nodded. “Of course. I will have Bors get back to you on times in which the both of us are available to speak with you.”

“That is much appreciated, My Queen.” Roarke bowed. “I will let the others know.” He then grinned. “I will not keep you from your family any longer.” And with that he smiled and left.

Watching him go, Arthur shook his head before Merlin’s magic anticipated his needs and took him to the edge of the Diamond Falls, where his husband was laughing and talking with their sons as the boys swam around excitedly. Happiness filled Arthur as he just took a moment to stare at his family, the queen still not sure how they’d managed to become this fulfilled. His life reminded him so much of the fantasies he’d cooked up of their future together that he sometimes worried he’d wake up and find out this had all been a dream - and that fear made him understand Merlin better as his husband had shared the same fear over the years.

As if feeling his gaze on him, Merlin looked up and smiled. “Hello, my love.”

Calder and Alaric shared amused looks, sending kissy-noises to each other.

Ignoring their playful mockery, Arthur sat down on the edge of the water and let his feet sink into the depths. “Hello husband.” It was amusing to realize that they were going to have to pretend that this was the first they were seeing of each other for the evening, that they had not been rutting desperately against an apple tree earlier.

“And who says that?” Alaric piped up cheerfully.

“Mama!” Alaric called, capturing his attention. “Papa says that you were the first and only person he ever loved, so I shouldn’t worry too much about what Roger said about people not ending up with their first love.”

Amusement growing, Arthur swung his legs leisurely in the water. “Oh, your father said that, did he?”

“Yes, he did.” Calder nodded rapidly and answered for his older brother. “He also said that you’re his soul, that he’d be incomplete without you, and if Alaric can truly say the same about Maeve then she truly is the one for him.”

“Whether she wants to be, or not!” Alaric piped up cheerfully.

“You need to make sure she wants to be,” Merlin declared very quickly, eyes wide. “I’m not telling you to force yourself on her!”

“No, obviously not, papa.” Alaric rolled his eyes. “You’ve told me this a hundred times already. Non-consensual sex is only okay when it’s consensually non-consensual.”

Merlin’s eyes widened even further as he turned to look at Arthur in horror.

“I’m still not quite sure what that means,” Calder admitted as he scratched his head and peered between his father and brother. “How can someone want your willy inside of them but not want your willy inside of them?”
Merlin’s horror visibly grew.

“It’s like a sexual roleplay,” Alaric informed his younger brother with a sagesness that shocked Arthur. “It’s something you agree with your partner beforehand as something the both of you enjoy doing together while having sex.”

Arthur raised an eyebrow at Merlin, his voice monotone as he declared: “I thought we’d agreed that they were still too young to have these kinds of talks.”

Merlin flinched, clearly uneasy at his monotone. “We live in Dragonhold, my love, they were bound to see something and be curious. I merely answered any questions that they had regarding what they saw.”

“When Maeve and I get married she’s going to have my baby after we have lots of sex,” Alaric informed Arthur proudly. “With her vagina.”

Merlin palmed his face with a whimper.

Honestly, Arthur had no idea how he was going to handle this at all.

“Does mama have a vagina too then?” Calder wanted to know.

Arthur was going to punch Merlin. Hard.

“Of course not, stooooopid!” Alaric shook his head in utter disgust. “We’ve all bathed together! Mama’s got a willy just like us!” He rolled his eyes. ‘Papa says mama is special, that he’s divine, and that is why he could have us since only girls like Maeve and Vivian are supposed to be able to have babies.’

“Ooooooooh.” Calder’s eyes were wide as he nodded.


“You two don’t need to tell your mother everything I say about him,” Merlin mumbled, a flush of embarrassment darkening on his cheeks.

“Why?” Calder asked innocently. “You only ever tell us how much you love mama. Why would mama mind hearing that?”

Body beginning to clench, to tingle, to burn for its mate, Arthur shifted as discreetly as possible on the edge of the water.

“Why don’t you two give your mother and I a moment?” Clearly still embarrassed, Merlin swam to where there was a ledge under water and sat down on it, causing the water to rise to around his chest.

“I bet you I can make it to the far side of the water before you can!” Alaric turned to Calder with competitive excitement burning in his eyes.

“No way! I’ll definitely win!” Calder declared as he started swimming immediately.

“That’s cheating!” Alaric yelled as he hurried after his younger brother.

Watching them go, Arthur shook his head and chuckled before he took advantage of their departure to slip into the water as well and began to swim towards Merlin. “What sort of things are you telling our sons when I’m not around?”
“Arthur, I know that we said we’d keep them innocent as long as we could, but they caught Fionn with Sir Ethan and you know how those two go at it. By the time the boys found me they’d seen far too much for me to try and hide anything so I sat them down and explained things to them, that’s all.” Merlin fidgeted on the ledge. “We both know that it was bound to happen, and look how fast the time has flown. We also don’t know when or how strong their manifest their cambion heritage, so it would have been irresponsible of me to do otherwise.” He sighed heavily, shadows in his eyes. “They could be seriously hurt if they do not understand the danger that having this physiology can bring.”

Hearing it put that way made it impossible for Arthur to remain annoyed. “I understand that, Merlin. What I do not understand is why you are apparently telling our sons all sorts of things about me as if they were ‘one of the boys’.”

“Am I not allowed to brag about my wife?” Merlin was clearly trying to sound annoyed, his breathing grew heavier the closer Arthur got.

Chuckling at his pouting mate, Arthur pulled himself up on the ledge as well and settled himself on the triangle between Merlin’s legs. He brushed himself up against his husband’s already hardened human cock, and while he tried to pass it off as him merely accommodating himself he knew they both were aware of his actions. Still, he leaned back against his husband and smiled when Merlin’s arms wrapped around him immediately, the cambion sucking on the shell of his ear while his cock throbbed against Arthur’s ass.

“What are you doing to me?” Merlin groaned into Arthur’s ear. “Why the torture?”

“Who says I’m torturing you?” Arthur wanted to know as he shifted his hips once more to brush against Merlin’s cock.

“I am,” Merlin whimpered before biting down on Arthur’s ear as his cock gave a more violent throb. “Don’t tease me like this when I am having problems controlling myself, especially when our sons are right there.”

“They are not right there,” Arthur scoffed. “They’re over there.”

The sound Merlin let out was tortured as his fingertips dug into Arthur’s body, his voice low and growled in threat as those lips pressed against his ear: “Do not provoke me any further, mate. I will take you.”

Calder and Alaric squealed with laughter as they began splashing water at each other.

“Do we really have the right to preach to them about consent when we have both embraced very dubious consensual practices?” Arthur wanted to know, only half teasing as he rubbed the cock behind him. “I regularly pretend to fight and try to escape because I know your dragon is going to react to it and force me.”

“Yes, you do.” Merlin snarled, sounding more inhuman. “You like it when your mate forces his cock into your body and uses it like it would a bitch, don’t you?”

A tremor of excitement shuddered its way down Arthur’s spine as he gripped Merlin’s knees and leaned forwards to rub himself rougher against his mate’s cock. “Merlin!” He tried to keep his voice low but it was hard. “Merlin, I need—!”

“What do you need, Arthur?” Merlin rocked his hips, sliding his cock against Arthur while kissing the back of his neck. “Show me.” He scraped his teeth against Arthur’s claiming mark. “If you’re
good, Arthur, you might be rewarded.”

Glancing over towards Calder and Alaric, noting they were still very much preoccupied, Arthur felt his own flush of arousal burning on his flesh as he reached between them and pulled the material of his Slip covering his entrance to the side. He glanced behind him, over his shoulder, at his mate, in supplication.

The demon and dragon flashed over Merlin’s features, and in seconds he’d wrapped a hand over Arthur’s mouth, covering it as he lined up the head of his human cock and then slammed in.

Arthur’s eyes rolled in the back of his head, and he was grateful for Merlin muffling his cries because he would’ve been unable to silence them on his own. Even when Merlin allowed his hand to drop Arthur raised his own to cover his mouth, and it was a good thing too, because when Merlin started rearranging the blonde on his lap it forced his cock to move inside of Arthur, and the boy croaked out a half-sob at the feeling.

Merlin spread Arthur’s legs on the outside of his own, and the second Arthur hooked his feet around Merlin’s calves the cambion snarled and embraced him tightly, keeping him in place as he started to move subtly inside of him.

Lust clouded Arthur’s vision as he melted back into his mate, head tilted upwards as he lost himself in the feeling. The movements were slow and they were subtle so that if their sons peered over in their direction it would not be obvious that their mother’s body was rising and falling over their father’s, and yet Arthur knew that just the look on his face might give it away, even if only to Alaric. It was why he forced his gaze downwards and bit down hard on his bottom lip so that he could drop his hands, instead gripping tightly at the ones wrapped fiercely around him.

“I love you,” Merlin growled in an arousingly threatening tone into his hair. “I love you so much it hurts to be away from you.”

Arthur tried to unclench his teeth from his bottom lip so he could return the sentiment, but he immediately bit back down as a cry nearly escaped. So in lieu of being able to say it with words he caressed the arms holding him tightly and clenched possessively around the cock buried inside of him, massaging the rod loving him from within.

“I missed you so much while Alaric was ill.” Merlin whimpered softly into his hair. “I wanted to stay here with you. I hated the Court for existing, for being the reason I had to leave your side.”

Arthur trembled in awe at the love he could feel wrapped around him like a blanket. When they’d first married Arthur had worried that the years would dim the magnitude of Merlin’s love for him, and yet it seemed that with every year Merlin’s love grew stronger, grew greater, and by now Arthur realized just how greedy he had become - how eager he was for that love to continue growing to the point where Merlin could no longer exist if he were not there.

“I’ll be with you tomorrow onwards,” he promised even as his body started to ripple in pleasure all around Merlin. When the emissary court from Southron arrive I will be there with you to greet them. I am here, Merlin.

“Relax your tight walls, my love,” Merlin begged in his ear. “Your husband has need of your womb.”

Arthur came, spasming around Merlin and in practice doing quite the opposite of what his husband was asking for, and yet warm seed gushed inside of him almost instantaneously, filling him with tingles and pleasure. He collapsed back against his lover and smiled contently as Merlin pressed soft
kisses to his hair before yawning and cuddling around him lovingly.

While he was still speared by his husband’s rod, neither moved, both content to merely be there in each other’s presence while listening to the sounds of their sons’ laughter on the far side of the water.

The blonde sighed as he rubbed his head against Merlin’s cheek. “I suppose we are lucky that they have not caught us despite how many risks we’ve taken around them.”

“Hhhmmmm.” Merlin purred contently.

“You still should have told me when they stumbled onto Fionn and Ethan,” Arthur murmured sleepily. “I should have been told.”

“You’re overprotective, you would have probably castrated Ethan the second you found out,” Merlin yawned just as tiredly.

“I’m not saying that that isn’t true, but you should have told me anyway.” Arthur declared, also yawning. “Have they stumbled onto anyone else?” When Merlin nodded, he groaned. “My poor babies.”

“They weren’t half as traumatized as you seem to believe, more confused and curious than anything else,” Merlin assured him. “They know that it isn’t anything that they should be actively watching, or doing at all for now, and that if anyone tries to touch them, or make them touch them in that sort of way for any reason and no matter how much they might trust that person, that it is wrong. And I will kill that person immediately for trying to harm them - although I doubt that anyone would be foolish enough to do something like that given how many people have ‘gone missing’ in the Court since Dragonhold was formed. If we protect and defend our matehood with savagery I believe our Court is smart enough to know the same ferocity would be extended to any who dared harm our hatchlings.”

Arthur closed his eyes and sighed, wishing, as he always did, that Merlin had not gone through what he had as a child, but he was also incredibly proud of his mate for having come as far as he had. He also knew Merlin would not want to dwell on this subject for long, so he graciously changed it. “By the way, I wooed you. How dare you pretend otherwise to the boys?”

Chuckling into his hair, Merlin did not disagree, merely purred contently.

Enjoying the vibrations of that purr, Arthur settled in a little more comfortably and allowed himself to be petted and loved on by his mate until the relaxing attention slowly lulled him into the best sleep he’d had since Alaric’s fever.
Chapter 2

The nearly eight years since they’d founded the kingdom of Dragonhold had seen many changes, both in the kingdom, the citizens, and the monarchs. It had not been an easy transition, and there had been many cultural differences that had to be merged or accounted for. In many way the Dark Week had been the best way to start off the new kingdom because it threw everyone head-first into the changes, and by the end of the week those who had participated were ‘fully indoctrinated’ (as Bors called it) and considering those on the sanctuary islands hadn’t been completely untouched as well they’d been much more amenable than Arthur had expected them to be.

Camelot had surprised him, especially the knights and lords, who’d all rallied behind him and his cause with a loyalty that had been shocking and heart-warming. Sure, there’d been a few who had still fought the changes, but nearly eight years in and there was no longer anyone who voiced a complaint.

‘Humans are adaptable,’ is what Sophia had mumbled when Arthur commented this observation to her.

Arthur wasn’t sure whether humans were adaptable, or corruptible.

All over the Court the lords and knights were showing favor to their lovers, a sight which had become common place. And it made sense, especially given the way their monarchs behaved on a daily basis.

Even now, Arthur sat on his husband’s lap, speared by his cock, which visibly bulged his stomach for all to see. It had shocked and terrified the people of the Court at first, and yet nearly eight years later that bulge was not even paid attention to, nor was the way their queen was melted back against their king, who had his teeth buried in his wife’s neck while he played roughly with Arthur’s nipples, which were red and swollen from his constant abuse.

Merlin had lived up to his threat of making Arthur still wear the Slip even as queen, although Arthur himself had had a hand in it as well as the other options had been too restrictive for his liking. The style of the Slip he now wore was different than that of a common sex slave, definitely more regal, and yet obviously had been designed for the purpose of allowing Merlin constant access to his mate. And Merlin used that access. A lot. Even now his cock was not only buried deep inside of Arthur, but those barbs were hooked in deep, trapping the boy on his cock and keeping him from being able to escape. Not that Arthur had any desire to.

Oh no.

The boy rested completely against Merlin’s chest, his head tilted back and resting against Merlin’s shoulder, his eyes nearly rolled in his head at the pleasure he was being subjected to. One hand stroked the bulge pressing out from his stomach while the other reached back to caress Merlin’s hair, silently encouraging him to continue. He couldn’t understand how Merlin sinking his teeth into his mark of ownership on Arthur’s neck could give him such amazing pleasure, pleasure which only intensified that which he was already feeling thanks to those delicious barbs and expertly teasing fingers.

He’d missed this - he’d missed this so much.

And it was clear he wasn’t the only one, not with the way Merlin focused his attention hellishly on him.
What was funny, though, was despite the fact that Merlin was so visibly distracted and paying attention solely to Arthur - that the Court not only didn’t seem annoyed, but appeared incredibly relieved. They chuckled and were in genuinely good moods, continuing the day as per usual, and yet Arthur kept catching little smiles and sighs of relief being passed between the Courtiers every so often.

Just how bad had Merlin been while Arthur had been gone that they were so relieved to have him in this utterly engrossed-in-Arthur state?

He could feel eyes on him, multiple in fact, and yet he followed one specific gaze to sneer at the owner of those eyes. Lady Mithian might fancy him and not Merlin, but the fact that she still fancied him despite how obvious it was that he belonged to Merlin really annoyed him. The blonde had learnt many interesting things when Daobeth had showed them Sophia’s past, but what had really stuck with him was how turning a blind eye on potential threats could ruin happiness. It was why he’d been responsible for so many disappearances over the last seven years, and why he knew he’d be responsible for more in the future. No one threatened his relationship and family, no matter how that threat may manifest.

The barbs inside of Arthur began to retract before sinking back in, kneading him from within in randomized patterns that made his insides dance, and slick to seep even thicker around the cock buried deep inside of him. Merlin’s weight grew heavier on his back, forcing him to lean forwards more and more until he was awkwardly doubled over on his husband’s lap. It was clear this was what Merlin had planned for, though, because as soon as the first whimper escaped Arthur’s lips, his husband began to rock his hips up into him in quick succession.

Pleasure rippled out of Arthur, and almost instantly the lovers in the court sobbed out as they were handled rougher, more urgently, by their masters. Those without their lovers were turning towards the attendants, tugging them onto their laps to fulfill the job they’d come to the castle to do.

“The emissary court of Southron are here, Your Majesties,” Quintin, their chamberlain, declared with a little bow. “Shall I let them in or would you prefer to make them wait while you partake of each other? With Our Queen having been indisposed for so long it seems almost rude of the Southronians to arrive today.”

Arthur gripped at the handrests and whimpered as Merlin snapped his hips rougher and rougher into his. It was obvious that his mate had no intention of answering, and was leaving that all up to him.

“Thank you for your thoughtfulness, Quintin, but if we—!” Arthur’s voice broke as he screwed his eyes shut when Merlin’s cock began to scrape him rougher, something his body knew very well by now meant Merlin’s body was preparing his own to be seeded. Just the realization had Arthur’s insides overly sensitive, and made his words slightly breathy and high-pitched, barely heard over the increased revelry in the room as the Court seemed to be rutting in hellish need as well.

It had not taken Arthur and Merlin long to realize that their rutting seemed to affect those around them, able to send those in their vicinity into a frenzy. It was almost as if their rutting was like a mini Dark Moon, and while it had shocked Arthur at first, it drove him wild to know that his husband desired him so greatly that it affected those around them. Another thing they had soon discovered was that those affected by their lovemaking fed Merlin. He could feed off of them without having to do anything to them, which meant Arthur had Merlin all to himself… except for the nights in which Arthur brought a village boy or two in order to watch his husband feed more traditionally.

“B—bring them in!” Arthur’s voice broke as he gulped in air desperately.

He wanted the newcomers to know right off the bat who Merlin belonged to, and what better way to show them but this?
“Of course, Your Highness,” Quintin acknowledged with another little bow before doing as told, motioning for the large doors to be opened and thus allowing the newcomers within. “The Emissary Court of Southron, My Graces.”

Just like every emissary court that had come to Dragonhold after it had returned to Albion, the Southron Court was doing its best to look extravagant, yet their clothes did nothing to hide the overly thin bodies beneath it, and their quite gaudy hats could not hide their gaunt faces. This was yet another kingdom seeking some sort of alliance, and honestly, Arthur was getting sick of them all. They’d had to go through this so many times he already knew what would happen.

First, the emissary court would seek to broker an alliance with Dragonhold, a trade agreement, and would try to skew it in their favor. They’d also try to use past connections to try and guilt a better deal. When that wouldn’t work egos would be hurt and tempers flare, and there’d be harsh, condemning words. They’d get thrown out, and within three months would come back much humbler than before, begging to be absorbed into Dragonhold.

Merlin completely ignored the procession, as well as their shocked and horrified expressions of what was not only happening in the room but on the throne, and continued to thrust into Arthur before hooking him deeply.

The second Arthur’s body welcomed the gush of warmth spewing inside of him, the blonde climaxed, sobbing and twisting on his lover, who clamped down on his mark of ownership while simultaneously gripping and holding Arthur’s hips down, trapping him still and forcing him to be bred.

Honestly, if it wasn’t for the fact that Arthur had realized Merlin’s magic listened to him when it came to whether he became impregnated or not… he’d live pregnant. Many times he doubted Merlin even realized he was very obviously trying to breed his wife again, but it was obvious to Arthur himself. Maybe he’d allow it again, but not for many years, after he’d had Merlin to himself again for a long while and was able and willing to share him once more. For right now, though, Arthur was more than content to raise the children they already had until they were old enough to not want to hang around with their parents anymore - after which Merlin wouldn’t know what hit him as Arthur made up for the last couple of years of holding back.

*I’ll ride him till he’s absolutely dry.*

The thought alone made Arthur smirk evilly.

“King Merlin Dragonlord,” Quintin motioned to Merlin, who was licking the blood from Arthur’s mark of ownership, “and Queen Arthur, I present to you the Emissary Court of Southron.” He turned his blank expression on the emissary court as he clasped his hands behind his back, his eyes slowly showing his disapproval of them. “You are honored to be in their presence.” His eyes narrowed. “Bow.”

The emissary court did as asked while sharing quick looks with each other.

Suddenly Merlin froze behind Arthur, going extremely tense, causing the blonde to frown and glance over his shoulder at his lover. The sight that met his gaze caused him to tense and frown. Merlin’s eyes were wide, his skin pale, and while others mightn’t realize it because he covered it up very quickly, he was obviously not only horrified, but nervous.

Just what the hell was up with that?

Turning his attention back towards the emissary court, Arthur’s eyes narrowed on them as he eyed
them one by one, wondering which was the reason for Merlin’s odd behavior. He didn’t recognize any of them, but one seemed oddly familiar. He was a blonde, quite a bit older than Arthur, and while Arthur knew for a fact he’d never met this guy before there was some part of him that felt that he’d seen him before. But where? He’d never gone to Southron, so had this man been to Camelot? Or Mercia?

Who is he?

“What does this Emissary Court wish to speak to us about that they would come here without sending a messenger first?” That was Merlin, his voice low, incredibly alert, visibly surprising members of their own Court. Up until seconds ago he’d been very clearly ignoring everything and anyone who wasn’t Arthur, so his complete attention, his low tone, shocked all.

“My King,” that blonde that seemed far too familiar was the one who spoke, “you probably do not remember me, but we met when you visited my village with King Bayard and his men. This was many years ago when you were Mercia’s newly appointed Court Sorcerer.”

“I remember,” Merlin replied in a monotone way.

“I am happy to hear that.” The man smiled and wrung his hands together. “I know that this may be unorthodox of me, but considering our history, I would like to ask for an audience with you… alone.”

Arthur sneered and opened his mouth to let the blonde know exactly where he could stick that request.

“I will grant you your request,” Merlin declared from behind him.

Shock filtered not only throughout the Court, but throughout Arthur’s body as he turned his head to look back at Merlin in confusion. “What—?”

“Stay here, Arthur.” Merlin would not meet his gaze as his eyes flashed gold, and in a blink of an eye Arthur found himself seated on the throne alone, while Merlin and that whore were no longer there.

It took Arthur a couple of seconds to realize what had happened, and a snarl escaped his lips, causing almost every single Courtier to flinch in utter terror, but he failed to notice this as he gripped the throne’s armrests tightly. Who the hell was that blonde? Merlin was usually more than happy to leave any decisions or regal intrigue to Arthur, because despite being a king himself Merlin was more used to (and comfortable with) the role of an advisor, while Arthur had been raised to lead. This action was incredibly out of character for Merlin, and every one in their Court knew it, which meant they all knew that this mystery man was different.

While some would be embarrassed at having been so openly sidelined for another man, Arthur, on the other hand, was simmering in their throne for a different reason. He honestly didn’t care what the Court saw or thought about anything, they were very far down on his list of priorities, a list which topped with his mate… a mate who had left him behind to go somewhere with that whore.

It wasn’t that Arthur was jealous or insecure - but he was hella possessive, and he wasn’t an idiot. That blonde had been one of Merlin’s past lovers, and for some reason his presence had unnerved Merlin.

“So…” Sophia sashayed towards Arthur with Daegal very close behind her, the redhead eyeing Arthur curiously. “How would you like to handle this?”
“Soph.” Daegal gripped her hand, his expression clearly showing how uncomfortable he was with her asking this so openly in front of both the Dragonhold and emissary Courts. “I am sure that—.”

“You are sure that what?” She raised an eyebrow and turned to him. “So if I just took one of those men and disappeared, leaving you here by yourself, you’d be fine with that?”

Daegal glared at her and tightened his grip on her hand, yanking her closer. “Don’t even think about it.”

Her lips twitched before she glanced over to Arthur. “What are you still doing here, Your Highness?”

Sophia and Bors were the only ones who understood Arthur completely, and he smirked at her seconds before he blinked away, appearing in the gardens behind a statue, able to hear Merlin’s voice nearby (but not so near that he’d be caught).

“You don’t look as if you’ve aged,” the whore declared in an awed tone. “I, on the other hand, can’t help but notice my own wrinkles.”

“I have always thought about you,” Merlin declared, clearly choosing to ignore the comment on his agelessness.

Shock raced through Arthur’s body at those words, fueling darkness and viciousness as he clenched his hands tightly into fists.

“And I of you,” the man admitted just as softly.

“I have wanted to find you but I haven’t had the nerve,” Merlin informed him with a heavy, tortured sounding sigh. “But the need to find you, see you, and apologize for everything I did to you, never left me.”

Arthur blinked in confusion. **Apologize?** Why did Merlin feel the need to **apologize**?

Clearly the older blonde didn’t understand it either. “Why would you feel that you need to apologize to me?”

“When I met you I was a different person than I am today, and as such I did horrible things to you, and I put you through painful experiences that you did not deserve,” Merlin explained in that same apologetic, tortured tone. “It was due to my own inhumanity, my anger, my resentment, my need to prove to myself that I was not—.” He sighed very heavily once more. “I ruined your marriage, Evan, and I destroyed the love that you’d had for your wife from the time you were both children. If I had not appeared in your village, you and Imogen would still be married now, would have children, would—.”

“I do not understand,” Evan interrupted in obvious confusion. “Merlin, I do not regret the time you and I spent together. In fact… I look back at it very fondly.” There was a pause. “I miss it, greatly.”

“I regret what I did to you both,” Merlin pressed on, seemingly completely ignoring that last piece. “I did not believe in love back in those days, especially not between man and wife, and because of that I targeted you. You were so besotted with her, everyone all around talked about you and Imogen, and how your love was truer than any anyone had ever seen. I hated it, hated the fact that you might have something I didn’t, might be experiencing something I wasn’t able to, so I targeted the both of you to prove to myself that I wasn’t lacking, that I wasn’t… that I wasn’t a monster. And yet by doing what I did to the both of you I proved just the opposite - that I was a monster.”
“I never saw you as a monster,” Evan muttered.

“I didn’t truly understand the damage I’d done to you both until I met Arthur,” Merlin explained sadly. “It was only after he taught me to love, taught me what it meant to love and be loved in return, that I truly understood the wrong I had done to you. I wanted to find you then, wanted to try and make amends, but I was too ashamed to show my face. How could I go to you after all I’d done - after I’d taught you that love did not exist - only to reveal that I myself was not only fully committed to someone else, but utterly in love with them?”

Arthur leaned back heavily against the statue and inhaled deeply. His vicious anger from before subsided somewhat as he listened to his mate’s words, very easily understanding Merlin’s actions now that he had this background information. He also now remembered who Evan was and how Arthur had seen him before. This was the man that Simon had shown him, the one that Merlin had ruined the marriage of by first seducing the wife, and then seducing the husband and purposefully making the wife catch them, thus ruining the marriage on both fronts. The reason Arthur hadn’t recognized Evan was that he had aged quite a bit since then, which only reminded him just how Merlin did not age.

There was silence, and then Evan spoke. “I heard rumors that you married Uther Pendragon’s son, but I believed that it was to better unify Camelot and Mercia…. Are you telling me that it was a… love… match?”

“Yes,” Merlin answered immediately without any hesitation whatsoever. “I love him with every fibre of my being. I loved him before I even understood what loving someone else meant, before I realized that I was capable of feeling those emotions. He’s my soul, my mate, my Consort, my wife, my Queen, the mother of my children. He’s my all. He’s my everything. I would die without him.” His breathing came out rapid, pained. “And it’s because of my love for Arthur that I cannot bare to look you in the eyes right now. I have done you tremendous wrong. I live in ecstatic happiness with the love of my life, despite having robbed you of the chance to live your life in the same blissful manner.” There was the sound of movement. “I humbly beg your forgiveness for my past actions.”

“You are the king! You do not need to bow!” Evan sounded shocked and a little terrified. “Much less to someone like me!”

“I committed a grave injustice against you,” Merlin informed him. “And yet I do not have any shame to beg a favor of you despite this.”

“A… favor…?” Evan asked in confusion.

Arthur’s eyebrows nearly touched in a frown. What in the world was that idiot cambion doing now?

“I am asking - begging - for you not to tell Arthur about our shared history,” Merlin supplicated. “I have done horrible things in my past, and he has somehow managed to look passed each and every one, but what I did to you was monstrous. Even he would have problems seeing me in the same light if he were to know some of the worse things I did, such as what I did to you, and I ask that you please do not let him see that ugly side to me.”

Leaning his head back against the statue, Arthur just barely kept from groaning out loud at Merlin’s inability to understand that there wasn’t anything he could’ve ever done that would make Arthur leave him. Sure, Arthur might grow furious, but there was no way he was allowing Merlin to escape from him, or for anyone else to have him. Merlin was his. That wasn’t going to change, no matter what, but especially not because of something that happened in Merlin’s past.

“He would not leave me,” Merlin added, surprising Arthur with the assurance in his tone. “But I
would disappoint him, and that is something I could not bear.”

There was silence, and then a calculating: “What would you offer me in exchange for my silence, Merlin?”

There was a pause, and then a resigned: “What is it that Southron has come to speak to Dragonhold about?”

“We wish to become one with Dragonhold.”

Arthur blinked in shock.

“You are not seeking a trade agreement? An alliance?” Merlin sounded just as confused and shocked as Arthur felt. “I do not understand why Southron would so quickly and easily wish to be absorbed into Dragonhold.”

“We are starving, Merlin,” Evan declared evenly. “We also border Nemeth and see how they have prospered since becoming a part of Dragonhold. Our people are too hungry to be proud, to try to negotiate. We want food for our families, as well as security from the bandits that have become more and more prevalent as more kingdoms join Dragonhold, leaving them with less and less territory to terrorize.”

“I see.” Merlin took in a deep breath. “As long as Southron agrees to the same terms that the other kingdoms have, they will be welcomed as a part of Dragonhold.”

“Thank you, Merlin.” Evan let out a breath of relief before he cleared his throat. “And should you wish to truly make it up to me, I could find it in me to forgive you if you would turn to me on the nights that your husband is indisposed.”

Arthur clenched his fists tightly.

“I cannot and will not do that,” Merlin informed him in a monotonous way, all previous guilt completely erased from his tone. “My wiжe is all that I need, and should he become ‘indisposed’, I would use him nonetheless.”

Despite the anger simmering inside of him, Arthur’s lips twitched in amusement at those callous sounding words.

“Merlin, I do not understand why you are trying to play monogamous,” Evan announced in confusion. “I have heard stories of how you visit villages in Dragonhold and tup with the village boys until the whole village is in a frenzy.” A dark tone took over. “Or are you saying that I am no longer attractive?”

“I am not saying that,” Merlin assured him immediately. “But that is different. I do not go to the villages, Arthur and I go together, and if I ever tup with someone who is not him… it is someone of his choosing.”

“He controls who you are allowed to tup?” Evan’s voice squeaked in obvious surprise. “You’ve given him that level of control over you? I can not - I do not - understand. Do you not feel restricted? Suffocated?”

Arthur’s fists trembled.

“Of course not.” Merlin sounded like he thought that was dumbest thing he’d ever heard. “Arthur is the only one I desire, Evan. If he ordered me to never sleep with another again I would happily do
so… but I would miss that look in his eyes whenever I do.” Merlin’s voice lowered into aroused gravel. “Arthur takes great care in picking, in choosing, and when he brings his choice to me he is shivering in desire, his scent spikes, and it is so delicious I nearly lose my head.”

The queen bit down on his bottom lip.

“He used to demand monogamy, and while a part of me does miss that, I am addicted to the look on his face when I am with someone else,” Merlin admitted hoarsely. “He is so beautiful, Evan, so unearthly beautiful. And yet somehow in those moments he grows more alluring as he orders me, as he watches, as he orchestrates the evening, all the while his flush grows, his scent spikes. It is all I can do to not shove the one with me away so I can have my mate under me instead. I love him so much, I crave him so desperately…”

Arthur rubbed his thighs together as he gripped the edges of his Slip.

“You… you’re truly in love with him,” Evan whispered hoarsely to himself, sounding incredibly disappointed and a little sad.

The sound made Arthur smirk.

“I’m in love with him. I’m obsessed with him. I’m in awe of him.”

Bringing a hand to his face, Arthur could feel the heat from his own face, as well as the way his lips curled in a smile against his palm.

“I—-I don’t know what to say, I never thought—not you.” Evan sounded very frustrated, very disappointed. “Merlin, I—when I realized that you were the king of Dragonhold I was so excited at the possibility of seeing you again, of—-.”

“Thank you for not holding my past misdeeds against me, Evan, you are a far better person than I will ever be.” And yet it was very obvious that Merlin had cut him off on purpose to keep him from saying what they all knew he’d been about to. “We should return to the Throne Room to renew discussions regarding this matter. My Queen will be unhappy with me for having left him behind, and I do not want to leave him alone for very long.” There was a pause. “He is so enthralling it is dangerous to leave him unattended at the Court. There are far too many pests to keep reminding who he belongs to.”

Arthur’s smile was painfully large.

Evan sighed unhappily. “I understand.”

Like usual, Merlin’s magic anticipated Arthur’s needs and blinked him back to the Throne Room, upon the throne. Unlike when he’d left, Arthur was very content as he sat on the throne, and could tell that the looks of worry that had covered everyones’ faces were quickly turning to relief as the groups of people broke away to eye him, apparently quickly noticing his good mood.

Seconds later Merlin and Evan reappeared, with the blonde man looking incredibly disappointed and a bit heartbroken.

Merlin, on the other hand, merely had eyes for Arthur as he hurried up the steps to the throne and lowered to his knees before Arthur, raising the blonde’s foot (which was bare except for an anklet) to press a reverent kiss to it. “Do not be vexed at me for leaving you behind, my love, I had my reasons.”

Had Arthur not followed after he would’ve used that foot to push Merlin away angrily, but given he
had followed and now understood Merlin’s actions, the blonde smiled as he leaned his cheek against his fist and instead traced Merlin’s lips with his toe.

Immediately Merlin licked Arthur’s toe before grabbing his ankle and lifting Arthur’s leg upwards so he could better kiss his way down the inside of Arthur’s foot to his calf. He shifted on his knees, his gaze raising to Arthur and flashing gold in open desire as he sucked and nibbled his way up, hooking Arthur’s calf over his shoulder so he concentrate on leaving marks on his inner thigh.

Evan’s gaze was heavy on them, as was Mithian’s, and while Arthur gloried in flaunting his husband’s open adoration, he wondered whether they’d mend their ways, or whether they were going to force him to have to deal with them.

Sophia gripped fistfuls of her red curls and groaned as she rocked her hips, the skirt of her dress hiding where her body joined Daegal’s. Even she was surprised that she and Bors had gotten with Daegal a couple of months after the first Dark Week, and even more surprised that they were still with him. Sure, sometimes Lancelot and Cassius came to play with them, but otherwise it was just Daegal, and neither her nor Bors were bored as yet. That was not only surprising, but terrifying.

The years had matured Daegal’s face somewhat, but not truly by much, his fae and Dragonlord blood slowing down his aging but not stopping it. So while she’d have more time with him than she would with a normal human being she knew that one day she’d have to say goodbye to him, would be parted by the cold hands of death, but she tried not to think about that. It would be a long time away, and as she continuously reminded Arthur, the ‘now’ was more important than the ‘then’. She’d missed out on what could have been with Sein, but she refused to do the same with Daegal.

A growl vibrated against her skin. “He’s still looking at you.”

Her lips twitched in amusement as she let go of her own locks to instead cup Daegal’s face and shift his gaze away from the man from Southron that had him so up in arms, up to her. They were celebrating that Southron would become a part of Dragonhold, and while they were far from the only couple who were celebrating so vigorously, they were being watched more than the others. Red hair seemed to be coveted in Southron because more than a couple of the emissary court appeared fascinated by her, much to Daegal’s growing frustration.

“You need to get over this.”

Daegal glared up at her. “No. I don’t.”

Giggling, Sophia shook her head. “Daegal, don’t you dare pout right now. I’m trying to be serious, so you can’t get out of it by being adorable.”

“I’m not adorable.” Daegal pouted adorably. “I’m dashing.”

“So adorable,” she gushed as she swooped down and kissed him hungrily, swallowing his whimpered groan as she rocked herself harder on him. His grip on her tightened as he lost himself to the pleasure, with Sophia losing herself soon after.

“That Lady Mithian really has no shame.”

Killian raised an eyebrow as he glanced towards the lady in question to find her sighing unhappily while watching the queen with clear infatuation. Honestly, he was a little surprised Lady Mithian
was still alive given how open she was about her attraction to Queen Arthur, and he wondered whether King Merlin hadn’t done anything about it because she was a woman… or because she hadn’t done anything but look and sigh wistfully.

“I mean, isn’t it obvious that Arthur’s in love with Merlin?” Kay folded his arms over his chest and snorted in disgust. “Is she blind or stupid or just in denial?”

Killian’s lips twitched in dark amusement, wondering whether he should remind Kay that he had been the ‘Lady Mithian’ of his days? Everything that Kay was bitching about were things that people had bitched in the past about him. Hell, their relationship had started because Bors had been sure (and had been right) that Kay would do something monumentally stupid during the Dark Week if someone didn’t ‘keep him busy’.

“And why is Merlin allowing this?” Kay continued on his rant. “She’s going to cause problems. Mark my words: People like her need to be taken care of immediately otherwise they will be nothing but a pain in the ass.”

“I think she just needs to find a man, or woman, who can get her mind off of Arthur,” Killian responded coolly as he eyed the lady in question. “I don’t think it will be too hard to find someone up for the task. She’s quite beautiful.” He noted the many lovesick looks being sent to the woman in question by men and women of the Court before he finally felt the glare now trained on him. “What is it?”

“I think you’re a little too preoccupied with her,” Kay grumbled darkly.

Killian blinked, not exactly sure how the hell this misunderstanding had come about. “Excuse me?”

“You always talk about her,” Kay accused.

The knight stared at his annoying brat of a lover in disbelief. “I ‘always talk about her’ because you are always talking about her!”

“You think she’s beautiful,” Kay snarled unhappily.

“I’m not blind,” Killian reminded with a snicker. “I also think Queen Arthur is beautiful, but I have no interest in him either!”

“You think Arthur is beautiful?!” Kay’s voice rose in scandal.

“Gods below.” Killian reached out and grabbed a fistful of Kay’s hair, pulling the unprepared knight’s head back viciously. “You’re getting on my nerves, boy.”

Defiance mixed with arousal in Kay’s eyes as his body shifted closer to Killian’s instinctively. “I’m not apologizing. You’re in the wrong.”

“Fine.” He shoved Kay away and walked towards the table where Lady Mithian sat, the knight sitting down next to her and purposely turning to keep his back to Kay. “Milady, I believe you and I need to speak, alone.”

She looked up at him and frowned. “What could we have to speak about?”

He leaned in close and whispered in her ear. “The way you are courting disaster by so openly lusting after our queen.”

“I—I don’t—!” Mithian flushed darkly before taking in a deep breath. “Where would you like to
speak, Sir Killian?"

Standing, Killian offered her his arm and then escorted her out to the balcony, closing the door behind them to give them some privacy as he joined her at the railing, the both of them bathed in moonlight.

“I do not ‘openly lust’ after Arthur,” Mithian denied heatedly - yet softly - the second he joined her side. She then sighed heavily and lowered her head as she leaned heavily against the railing. “I just do not understand why… how…” She dug her nails into the railing. “He’s a man, Killian. A man. I understand how things were in Mercia - and how they are now in Dragonhold - but Arthur Pendragon was meant to be King… He was not born to be so universally feminized in the way that he is now.” She made up her face. “They don’t even give him the respect of calling him a king as well! They call him queen. They call him a wife. He wears skirts. He was raised a warrior, a king, and yet he is used as a hole in front of everyone!” She let out a little growl. “And if there was any doubt about his worth - just look at how - and pardon what I am going to say but - look at how useless Merlin was this whole time that Arthur was away! Clearly Arthur is the true king and yet he is not being treated as such!”

Killian leaned against the railing and tilted his head to the side to look at her. “So you believe he is being looked down on.”

“He is being looked down on!” Mithian cried out, clearly affronted by this. “Just because he bore children does not make him any less of a man, and he should be given the same respect as Merlin! But instead he’s treated as an inferior, and I cannot help but be insulted on his behalf for that treatment. He could be king, he could be so much more.”

“I do not understand the way you think,” Killian admitted after a moment’s contemplation. “The queen is not only respected, but is feared, and in many senses he is revered. Everyone knows that this kingdom would not run smoothly if he was not co-leading with the king.” He snickered. “In many ways he is the only one leading, with the king advising, and/or giving the queen his power and might when the queen wishes for or needs it. If there is anyone with true power and utter respect it is the queen.”

“How can you say that?” Mithian shook her head. “He is not only not important enough in the eyes of Court to have his own throne, but he is not even allowed to wear proper robes, Sir Killian. He is treated like a harlot.”

“You were not with us from the beginning so your ignorance of certain facts is forgivable,” Killian decided after a second’s contemplation, “but the one who chooses the queen’s wardrobe… is the queen.”

Mithian’s eyes widened. “You lie.”

“I do not,” he assured her. “For the first couple of days of rulership after the Dark Week and his first heat passed the queen wore something a bit more… expected of royalty… during Court, but very quickly it became apparent to all how frustrated and confined he felt in the robes. It was especially obvious how restricted he felt when he ordered his throne be taken away, tore the seat of his pants, and straddled the king seconds before freeing him and impaling himself on his member.”

Mithian’s lips parted in shock.

“It was the queen who ordered his throne be cast aside and stated that his ‘seat of power’ was the king’s lap.” Killian could see just how blown away Mithian was by this, and so he pressed on. “It was the queen who - the day after what I just told you - started coming to Court wearing the
garments he used the king’s magic to design for himself. It was the queen who used the king for pleasure in front of the Court and who continued to do so to the point where - if they are not tupping - the Court as a whole becomes very uneasy and wary. From what I have heard, the king calls the queen his wife because the queen bade him do so. Similarly to his being queen. The king had assumed Queen Arthur would wish to be called King as well, but it was Queen Arthur who chose the Mercian title instead of that of Camelot. It is the queen who called himself the mother of the king’s children. You say that the Court has forced a feminization of sorts on the queen, but we have not, we merely respect his desires.”

“That makes no sense.” Mithian brought a hand to her forehead. “Why would he do something like that to himself? Degrade himself like that?”

“I do not see how it is degrading him,” Killian admitted, wondering if the difference in how they perceived things was due to their sexes. “Mercia adopted those sorts of titles to help those from the other kingdoms better understand the position, the scaredness, of their partners. It is not just a thing of sexual pleasure - although there is that as well. The queen is the king’s partner, both in life and in rulership. Arthur is the queen to Merlin’s king, the wife to his husband, the consort to his master, the soul to his body, the mother to his children… The queen has taken every single important position in the king’s life and made them his. And each title proves it. He continuously earned new titles from the moment he gained his first. He was a slave, a lover, a prince, an emissary…” he chuckled, thinking of the many titles Arthur had been given. “…an ally, a knight, a crusader, a champion, a commander, an explorer, a lunatic…. But most importantly, he is the king’s mate. We all know that the king would personally burn this kingdom to the ground before ever risking the queen.”

Mithian opened her mouth before closing it and staring into the distance, a disturbed expression on her face. “I still find it very hard to understand, to accept.” She let out a heavy sigh. “I am also wounded of pride to realize that I was obvious enough that you would pick up on it and take me aside to speak to.”

“Not to be insensitive, Lady Mithian, but I am genuinely surprised that you have not ‘gone missing’ as of yet,” he admitted.

A dark huff escaped her lips as she half turned to face him once more, eyebrow raised. “Is the king so insecure that a lady may not even look at his queen?”

“Once more, you misunderstand, milady,” Killian assured her. “The one I am warning you against is not the king, it is the queen.” At her disbelieving, and frankly confused expression, Killian hurried on. “You would not be the first person in the Court to vanish suddenly, never to be seen or heard from again, and you would not be the last.”

“What are you insinuating, Sir Killian?” Lady Mithian asked in a dangerous and unhappy tone as she fully turned to face him.

“I insinuate nothing, milady,” Killian assured her once more. “I am telling you, outright, that if you do not correct the course you are on, the queen will make you disappear the same way that he has others.”

“Surely you mean the king,” Mithian pushed in obvious shell-shock.

“Oh, while the king has been behind a few disappearances in the past, he has only resorted to that sort of drastic action once the perpetrators pushed far too hard,” Killian explained, remembering quite a couple of those people and having been shocked the king had tolerated them, and their behavior, as long as he had. “The queen, on the other hand, is far less patient, understanding, or forgiving. If the queen sees you as a threat of any kind towards his relationship with the king you will disappear.”
“But I am not interested in the king!” Mithian squeaked, clearly stuck between doubt and slight fear.

“That does not matter,” Killian responded with a shrug. “If you are interested in the queen you are a threat to their relationship. Not because he would ever be interested in you, mind you, and that is not to say you are not beautiful because you are. But he is far more beautiful than you.” He pushed on despite the insult obvious on her face at his words. “And even if you were not - the queen is blind to any but the king. He is, very obviously, possessive and obsessed with his husband. It is also clear that the king has moments of deep insecurity concerning his worthiness of being with the queen, and the queen knows this better than anyone, so he will not suffer anyone around them to be a stumbling block or a trigger for the king’s insecurities.” He eyed the woman critically. “Let me give you a scenario as an example: the king, who has clearly realized your interest in the queen, starts to become morose, because you remind him that the queen was once a young warrior boy who had his pick of women, and the only reason they were together in the beginning was because of reasons out of the boy’s hands. In other words, had things not happened the way they had, the boy would have found himself a beautiful woman such as yourself, and would be married and fathering children instead of going through the arduous task of having those children himself. He’d be king of Camelot. His parents might very well still be alive. The king would then start to wonder whether he robbed the boy of a destiny that should have been his - of parents - of normality.”

Lady Mithian shifted uncomfortably on her feet yet didn’t seem able to look any from Killian as he continued.

“Due to these melancholic thoughts the king would subconsciously pull away, feeling guilty and unworthy and ashamed, and if there is one thing that can cause the queen to go murderous, it is the slightest of hints that his husband is pulling away from him or putting up any sort of wall between them.” Killian shivered in memory of a few such moments which he could very easily remember due to how terrifying those times had become. “The queen will not take it sitting down, he will push and prod and force those walls down - that distance to disappear - and he will bully the king into not only going back to how they have always been, but of disclosing the reason as to why he behaved in such a manner. The king will do his best to evade, but the queen will see through him.” Killian raised an eyebrow. “And when it becomes apparent to him that your existence, your presence in Court, your apparent inability to stop fluttering your eyelashes at him, makes his mate ‘deny him’… that is when you will disappear.”

Dark eyes were wide as she gulped loudly.

“The king is godlike in power and might, Lady Mithian, but it is the queen who you should fear,” Killian warned her, not quite sure how she had not figured this out on her own as she seemed quite intelligent otherwise. “You seem to believe that his being the queen, the mother, the wife, is a sign of degradation, but those are titles he has fought to attain. They are titles he is proud of, and it is you who are looking down on him by seeing them as such.”

Conflict raced over her expression as she took this in, before lowering her gaze and biting her bottom lip.

“You look at the queen constantly, Lady Mithian, but you are not truly seeing him,” Killian sighed with a shake of his head. “I advise that you refrain from ogling him, and instead actually observe him and the king together. It will clear up many of the misunderstandings that you seem to have, which are probably derived from cultural differences. As I said before, you and the rest of Nemeth are still very new to Dragonhold and our customs, it will take a while for you to truly assimilate into our way of life and understand how things work here. But if you wish to live long enough to do so, heed my warnings. Otherwise, that face you love so much will be the last one you see.”
Lady Mithian gripped the railing tightly, clearly trying to digest all she’d learnt tonight and having some trouble doing so. “Why did you warn me about this, Sir Killian? You could have stayed silent and just watched until I ‘disappeared’.”

“If I’m being honest, milady, my lover is an idiot,” Killian admitted with slumped shoulders. “He was also annoying the hell out of me.” He noted her curiosity on what one topic had to do with the other, so he obliged by clarifying. “My lover used to be obsessed with the queen similarly to yourself, and yet while he has shifted his fixation onto me, he also became oddly obsessed with them. It might be a bit of a prideful ‘I couldn’t break them up so I will not allow anyone else to’. Either way, if I did not bring you aside I had a sinking feeling he would do something monumentally stupid concerning you.”

Lady’s Mithian’s lips twitched in amusement. “You must love him a lot if you are going to all this trouble to keep him out of trouble.”

Killian shrugged and looked away, a bit embarrassed. “I’ve trained him into my perfect sexual partner. It would be a nuisance to have to start all over again with someone new if the idiot got himself killed.”

She giggled.

Suddenly the doors were flung open and loud stomps could be heard storming towards him. “Get your claws out of my man!”

Killian and Mithian exchanged looks before half turning to stare at Kay, who was glaring furiously at her.

“You can’t have him! Or Arthur! But especially him!” Kay pointed angrily at her. “He’s mine! His cock is mine! Find your own man!”

“That’s enough,” Killian warned Kay in annoyance.

“No! Why are you so interested in her?” Kay snapped at him. “You took her away from the banquet, secluded yourself with her out here in this romantic setting, and then were flirting with her right in front of my eyes!” He stormed to Killian and grabbed him by the front of his tunic. “You are mine!”

In seconds Killian had not only gripped Kay’s hair and viciously yanked his head backwards, but had bit deep into Kay’s neck, drawing blood.

Immediately all fight seeped from Kay’s body as he collapsed into Killian’s, trembling and whimpering as he rubbed himself against the older man. “Killian…”

Mithian chuckled darkly as she turned and headed towards the doors. “I will leave you two alone.”

Teeth still deep into Kay’s neck, Killian urged them both down to the floor.

All too eagerly, Kay obeyed.

Maeve pursed her lips and folded her arms over her chest. “You can’t make me.”

Alaric pouted. “No, I can’t make you, papa says that would be wrong.” He then narrowed his eyes on her. “But you will marry me.”
“Give up on me, shortie,” Maeve ordered as she turned her back on him and sat down. “I am never going to marry you, I’m going to marry Bors and Sophia.”

“Daegal is going to cas—cat—,” Calder tried before shaking his head. “Daegal’s going to cut off your balls.”

“I do not have balls,” Maeve assured him with a scandalized expression. “Boys have balls. I have breasts.” She then looked down at her flat chest and then looked back up at them and tightened her crossed arms. “Or I will.”

“Don’t say breasts in front of him!” Lucan gasped in horror as he covered Calder’s ears and reproached his sister.

“Why not?” Vivian wanted to know in confusion. “Is it a bad word?”

“What can I say balls but not breasts?” Maeve chimed in angrily.

“Please stop talking about your future breasts with other guys!” Alaric whined.

“He’s my brother!” Maeve squeaked at him, cheeks flushing.

“And I’m your future husband!” Alaric stomped his foot. “If you want to talk about them, talk about them with me.”

“I’m not marrying you!” Maeve threw her hands in the air. “If I was forced to have to marry one of you it would be Calder!”

Alaric’s mouth fell open in utter outrage at that prospect.

“I don’t want you!” Calder exclaimed in horror, apparently able to hear despite Lucan covering his ears.

“I don’t want you either!” Maeve assured him angrily.

“I want you!” Alaric yelled for no apparent reason other than maybe because Calder and Maeve had been yelling at each other.

“I refuse to marry someone shorter than me!” Maeve yelled back.

“Calder is shorter than you!” Alaric yelled once more as he pointed towards his younger brother.

“I don’t want her!” Calder continued yelling.

“Is breasts a bad word?” Vivian tried to clarify loudly once more.

“Stop saying that word!” Lucan begged.

Owain leaned back on his seat and watched this scene unfold was what was probably evil enjoyment. Honestly, he did not miss being an active part of the Court at all, these kids were far more interesting and amusing than the adults could ever dream to be!

“If Maeve is marrying Alaric then I am marrying Lucan,” Vivian decided, apparently giving up on trying to figure out if ‘breasts’ was a bad word.

“No you are not! I’m marrying Owain!” Lucan informed her immediately. “He is my bride!”
Owain opened his mouth to deny that.

Vivian promptly began to cry. “I want to be your bride! I want to marry you!”

“I don’t want to marry you!” Lucan declared, apparently horrified at the prospect.

“I don’t want to marry Maeve!” Calder seemed to think that was still an option and was dead set against it.

“NO ONE WANTS TO MARRY YOU!” Maeve yelled at him before turning back to Alaric. “OR YOU!”

Owain snickered and shook his head.

The kids were definitely more entertaining than the adults ever could dream to be.
“Just kill them.”

That, as always, was the advice he tended to receive from his mother-in-law whenever he went to her with an issue he might be having.

“Su...” Hunith sighed and shook her head in what seemed like eternal reproach. “Not every problem is fixed with murder.”

“Of course not,” Su agreed with a huff from where she leaned back into Hunith’s touch as the brunette massaged her shoulders dutifully. “Sex is usually the answer, but if it’s a situation that cannot be solved with sex, then you turn to murder.”

Hunith shook her head and glanced up at Arthur from over Su’s blood-red hair. “Don’t listen to her.”

“He’s the mother of my grandchildren,” Su slapped Hunith’s thigh. “Don’t tell him not to listen to me.” She kept talking to Hunith while she pointed a delicate finger at Arthur. “You might have ruined Emrys with your insistence on making him ‘treasure’ something as foolish as his humanity, but this boy takes after me.” She eyed Arthur with a raised eyebrow. “You have my son not only wrapped around your finger, but gagging for you like a virgin. You have managed to make Emrys, a cambion, heir to Cambia, act like a pathetically addicted human, have brought him down low to your feet. You have reduced him to nothing but primal desire and animalistic urges.” Her lips curled in a sly smile. “I could not have even dreamed up a better daughter-in-law.”

It had taken Arthur a long time to finally win Su over, but once he had, the difference had been incredible. He’d always suspected that he could relate more to the demoness than to Hunith, and the more he’d actually learnt of Su - had spent time with her - he’d realized that was truly the case. He could understand her and what she did - and why she did it - far better than Merlin ever could, and in many ways Su had (oddly enough) filled the void that his mother’s death had left. She’d never replace Ygraine, but she made the pain of her loss that more bearable for Arthur.

“That means a lot to me, mother,” Arthur admitted, using the title she’d ordered him long ago to refer to her by. He got more comfortable in his lounge chair as he eyed his husband’s mothers. “It has come to my attention that Alaric is going to Merlin for advice in regards to wooing Lancelot and Cassius’ daughter Maeve.”

Hunith bit her bottom lip yet couldn’t hide her amusement.

“Why Emrys?” Su wanted to know in confusion. “My son is, quite sadly, terrible when it comes to such things. Look at how many times he nearly lost you due to his own actions, or lack of actions. Surely Alaric should be going to you for advice.” She tilted her head. “Or, he should follow Calder’s example and ask me.”

Arthur blinked in shock. “Calder has come to you for advice?”

“Am I not his grandmother?” Su asked, all puffed up in pride as she twirled some of Hunith’s dark hair around her finger. “Alaric might be the heir to Albion, but I very much would like Calder to be the heir apparent to Cambria while he lives. He is a conniving little scoundrel who is up to no good while displaying sweet innocence - you raised him well.”

To be quite honest, Arthur had no idea how to handle that knowledge. “What has Calder asked your advice on, mother?”
“From what my grandson told me, he plans on marrying that sweet boy that watches over them, but Calder says he has competition who is older and thus has a couple of years ‘head start’ on him, and he also knows he himself is far too young to be considered as a potential husband as yet.” Su tilted her head and chuckled as she traced a fingernail against her plump bottom lip. “He wanted advice on how to lay the foundation so that he could woo Bayard’s lover once he was older, but also keep his rival from taking advantage of his head start.” She chuckled. “So I gave him advice on how to steal and keep Owain’s attention solely on him, while also cockblocking Lucan.”

Arthur just stared at his mother-in-law. “Calder is in love with Owain as well?” He ran his fingers through his hair, unable to understand what exactly the boys found so attractive about Owain. Was it just because he took care of them and was their tutor? Was this just a phase? Or did Arthur genuinely have to consider the possibility of having Owain as a daughter-in-law? “I cannot believe Calder. He’s only five!”

“He knows what he wants,” Su declared in obvious pride. “He also is smarter and more observant than anyone realizes.” She leaned forwards. “Apparently he overheard you talking to the Two-In-One, and knows that you have done away with competition for Emrys.” She chuckled. “He said he did not want it to get to that point with Lucan, since Lucan was ‘nice’, but that if he got Owain before Calder could be old enough ‘to even be in the competition’ then he might have to consider it as a last recourse.”

Hunith sighed heavily, clearly not happy - yet not surprised - at that news. “I tried to to tell him that that was not something he should be considering, especially since the other party was his friend, but he said something along the lines of: ‘anyone who goes after my mate is begging for death’.”

A groan escaped Arthur’s lips as he palmed his face, hearing his own words being thrown back at him like that. Just how much had Calder overheard? Obviously it was more than Arthur had ever suspected. “How is it that I never even had an inkling that this was going on? It was more than obvious when Alaric fell in love with Maeve, but I never noticed anything concerning Calder.”

“He said that he’s learnt from Lucan’s mistakes,” Hunith announced with a shake of her head and a very obviously reluctantly amused smile on her face. “Apparently Lucan is throwing himself head-first into his attempts to woo Owain, but the older boy isn’t taking Lucan seriously and has basically dismissed his feelings and any attempt at him. According to your youngest son, his best chance would probably be a sneak attack once he is old enough to take Owain off guard.”

Peeking through his fingers, Arthur was caught between being absolutely shocked at his youngest son’s plans, and being reluctantly impressed because, well, they weren’t half-bad. Hell, if he’d been in Calder’s place - had he met Merlin while he was so young and clearly unable to truly express his intentions (and be taken seriously) this was exactly the sort of thing that Arthur himself would have come up with. “I always thought Alaric was the one who took after me… but it might actually be Calder.”

“They take after you in different ways,” Su declared as she waved that off. “Alaric has your hellish tenacity, while Calder has your devious and underhanded inclinations.” She grinned. “As I said, I could not have dreamed up a better daughter-in-law, because had it not been for you my grandsons would have been… horrifyingly human.”

“There is nothing wrong with being human,” Hunith sighed with the tiredness of someone who lived softly rebuking her lover.

“When they aren’t human it is!” Su countered immediately with a huff. “When it is time for Avalon and Daobeth to secede it is Alaric who will rule Albion while Calder will rule Cambria. They need to be more than human if they are to survive what will come.” She sighed and tilted her head. “Even
if they are not long-lived.”

Sighing, Arthur leaned forwards and rested his elbows on his knees, clasping his hands together. “Do you believe they will be mortal, mother?”

There was an uncharacteristic moment of hesitation, before Su nodded. “Yes, Arthur. They are mortal. They will be longer lived than most humans thanks to what flows through their veins, but they are not long-lived in the true sense of the word, nor do I believe either would want to be. Not when both of them are so clearly determined to be mated to humans. And that desire is more powerful than you could ever begin to understand. Halfling children have a much greater chance of taking after their human biology than their inhuman one, Emrys being born long-lived was very close to being a miracle. It is not one that your children share.” She leaned back against Hunith, who looked sad. “I believe they will age, will have children, and will die as old men. I believe your and my son’s bloodline will continue to live on through your descendants, but I do not believe any of those descendants will be long-lived either.”

It was hard to hear this, but Arthur breathed out heavily and forced himself to remain emotionless, at least for now. “Why do you believe Alaric and Calder will not be long lived? I was not born that way and yet I am one now.”

“It is not something that I can explain in detail, but those who are long-lived give off a feeling to other long-lived beings, which is how I was able to tell immediately when you transitioned to become one of us.” She tilted her head as she eyed him curiously. “I am still not quite sure how you did that, but with that change any issues I had with you as my daughter-in-law vanished. It will not be easy, Arthur, I can promise you that, but unlike many of our kind, your mate is long-lived as well. You may lose many, you may lose most, but you will not lose him.”

He stared into her eyes, realizing she could not say the same, and realized that she was telling the truth. In many ways he would be lucky. He’d be able to watch over his children, would see them grow up and have their own families, and then, when the time came, he could be there with them and let them join their ancestors with the assurance that he would always watch over their children, and their children’s children. It would hurt, it would be agony, he would never truly get over the loss, but he’d have Merlin.

“Who knows,” Hunith mumbled softly. “Maybe whatever changed you will change them in the future as well.”

“It will not,” Su countered immediately. “While I cannot say for certain how Arthur became long-lived, I know for a fact that it not only has to do with his being mated to someone as godlike in power as Emrys, but Intent. From both of them. Both Arthur and Emrys wished for Arthur to be long-lived, they both desired it with all their might, and they both made this happen.” She continued on when Hunith opened her mouth. “Just as when Emrys came to me seeking a way to become short-lived so that he could grow old and die with Arthur—-,”

Arthur looked up with wide eyes at that, never having heard that before, and being completely overwhelmed with emotion at this revelation.

“—so will those boys not wish to outlive their lovers - whoever they may end up being,” Su continued on as if she hadn’t just revealed something so earth-shattering as she had. “It is something that must be respected.”

A sigh escaped Hunith’s lips as she hid her face in Su’s hair, clearly unhappy at that but having to accept it since it was true.
“Merlin tried to become short-lived for me?” Arthur couldn’t let that go, he needed confirmation that he hadn’t misheard that somehow.

“Yes, it was shortly after you established Dragonhold,” Su responded with a curt nod. “He came to me, begging me to help him find a way to rid himself of his long-life as he could not bare the thought of living after you had grown old and died.” She tilted her head and observed Arthur. “To say I was unhappy is an understatement, especially when I had already warned the both of you that the difference in your lifespans would bring you nothing but sorrow.”

“I can’t believe he’d do that, and that he wouldn’t even tell me.” Arthur ran his fingers through his hair, second-hand terror filling him at the thought of his idiot cambion somehow succeeding right as Arthur became long-lived - leaving Arthur to be the one to lose Merlin to death and have to live on without him. I wouldn’t be able to do it.

“You know your mate, Arthur,” Su mumbled unhappily. “He’s an idiot.”

“Su,” Hunith scolded softly into her hair. “You’re talking about our son.”

“He is though,” Su insisted, not backing down. “It hurts me to say this, but Emrys is a fool, especially when it comes to his wife.” She raised an eyebrow at Arthur. “You have no idea how relieved I was when you suddenly started to feel like kind. When I realized you were transitioning to being long-lived I told him immediately because I was afraid he’d do something idiotic in the name of ‘love’.”

“Thank you,” Arthur whispered in choked emotion. “If he had found a way, if he had done something stupid like that only to—.”

“I do not want to even think about what that idiot would have done. I used to have nightmares of him committing suicide after you’d breathed your last breath,” Su grumbled with a shake of her head, and a little shiver. “I’ve stopped trying to give him advice because he never listens to it or takes it. You are far more amenable to sensible advice than he is. He and Hunith are bleeding hearts, that’s what they are.”

“You’re complaining a lot today,” Hunith mumbled into her hair with a snort. “More so than usual, even.”

“I have a lover and a son who are infuriating,” Su muttered. “I have every right to complain about the both of you.”

Hunith retaliated by biting Su’s cheek.

The Succubus Queen tried to look annoyed but Arthur could tell she was enjoying the treatment.

Honestly, this was the one thing he could not relate to when it came to his mother-in-law. In mostly every other aspect - if not every other aspect - he completely related to her and could see himself doing the same thing. But not when it came to Hunith. Su had believed Balinor her mate, and even if he’d chosen Hunith over her…

Not for the first time Arthur put himself in Su’s place, replacing Balinor with Merlin, and Hunith with Freya. It was even easier to do so after having had Alaric.

Had he been in Su’s position, and Merlin had taken Alaric from him after birth to raise him with Freya - with anyone, but especially with Freya - Arthur would have killed her. And he would’ve hurt Merlin. But he would not have murdered Merlin, and he would not have later on gotten with Freya. No. Merlin was his mate. Merlin was his. Even if Merlin had never accepted or acknowledged
Arthur as his mate that would not have changed anything for the blonde. Merlin was the only one he could abide touching him, and that had only gotten worse after Daobeth for some reason - probably because that was when Merlin’s mark of ownership first appeared on his body. Either way, Arthur would never be able to be with someone else, and he didn’t want it, the mere thought made him violently sick.

So in this one aspect he could not understand his mother-in-law, and he could not help but become a little more possessive and worried for Merlin. Seeing Su and Hunith together reminded Arthur that death could change so much - and the thought of something happening to Merlin… it terrified him. Just the realization that Merlin had, in essence, been trying to find a way to slowly kill himself made Arthur both furious and frightened.

He glanced out of the corner of his eye to the large mural that adorned Su’s hosting room. Magic had clearly been used in its creation because it was lifelike - just like the portrait in the locket that Arthur still kept, the one that his uncle had worn till his death. In this mural, however, the main characters were Arthur and Merlin, and the event itself was vividly portrayed, making him feel like he was reliving the event itself.

His wedding hadn’t been the lavish affair that it probably should have been. It hadn’t been drawn-out and a grandiose affair - that wasn’t to say it hadn’t been beautiful and a spectacle for the kingdom - but it just hadn’t had the extravagance that Pendragon weddings usually did. In many aspects it had been far more low-scaled, with their clothes as good examples. Neither of them had been decked out in the over-the-top fineries expected of royal weddings. Merlin wore elegant robes of Mercian blue while Arthur wore flattering robes of Camelot red. The most extravagant thing they ‘wore’ was the golden cord wrapped around their wrists, anchoring one to the other, as well as the crowns upon their heads.

In the mural Arthur and Merlin were on the dais, facing Cassius as he conducted the ceremony, with the large royal courtyard filled with onlookers quite visible behind them. The painted version of Arthur smiled up at Cassius, eyes wide and twinkling in excitement and happiness, while Merlin’s eyes and attention were solely on Arthur, a tender expression on his face as he smiled down at him.

Sighing, Arthur covered the bottom half of his face with his hands and stared at the mural intently. Like always he was missing his husband, but the horrifying realization that he could’ve lost Merlin without even realizing it made him miss him even more, made him start to shake his leg as he fought the desire to leave his husband’s mothers to instead search for Merlin and make sure that he wasn’t doing something else monumentally stupid.

“Arthur, do you ever get tired of being with Merlin?” Hunith asked an odd question after releasing her toothy grip on Su’s cheek.

“Of course not!” Arthur frowned darkly at the stupid, and frankly insulting, question. “I’m barely keeping myself from running out on the both of you to go after him right now.”

“I loved Balinor,” Hunith muttered softly as she rested her cheek against Su’s head, “but there were many times where I would leave him and Merlin in the estate alone because I needed to see other people, to have my own space, to be my own person… to be more than a wife and mother.” She eyed him curiously. “Do you not feel that way ever?”

“No.” Arthur had stopped trying to find ways to relate to Hunith for Merlin’s sake, and questions like this only emphasized how he had nothing in common with the woman who Merlin revered so greatly. “I don’t see it as not being ‘my own person’, I see it as being one half of a whole, of being incomplete if I am not with him. I never feel the need for anyone else.” He tightened his hands into fists. “Sometimes it makes me feel like a terrible mother because you should love your children more
than your spouse, but I do not. I adore my sons, I will kill for them and I would die to protect them… but I couldn’t live without Merlin.” His hands went shaky at the very thought. “Whenever I even think about the possibility of being without him I feel like there’s a fist tightening its grip around my lungs.”

There was silence, and then a soft: “That is very similar to what Merlin answered when I asked him that question.”

Arthur looked up at her in surprise. “Really?”

“In fact, he said the exact same thing in regards to you being two halves of one whole.” Hunith was smiling sweetly at him. “You are like two sides of one coin, Arthur.” She shook her head, a moment’s sadness on her countenance. “You say you feel like a terrible mother… but you make me feel like one.” Her smile was tinged with regret. “I failed Merlin when he was a child in so many ways, it hurts me to start to count the ways I could have been a better mother to him. I know he loves me and never holds my faults and mistakes against me, but I also believe they are part of why he not only loves you, but worships you.” She tightened her grip around Su. “Unlike me, you do not just blindly trust your children to be safe, not even with those you believe your closest allies. Merlin has told me how you have his magic checking in on the boys constantly to assure that no one you trust is abusing that trust to hurt them.”

Merlin knew about that?

“All Merlin ever talks about is how wonderful a parent you are, how strong and capable, how loving yet authoritative.” Hunith rubbed her cheek against Su’s head. “And your sons have followed in their father’s footsteps and sing only praises about you. The closest thing to a complaint I have heard is from Calder, was when he told us that he wanted to be an older brother, but that he doubted it would ever happen because ‘mama needs papa too much to risk losing more of his attention’.”

“He also knew that he and Alaric staying with you in your bed while Alaric was sick was ‘making mama miss his alone time with papa’,” Su chimed in with a snicker. “According to Calder, he chose to stay with you as well so that whenever you and Emrys managed to sneak a couple of moments alone he could distract Alaric from interrupting.” Her expression was pure evil. “He says whenever you come back from ‘alone time with papa’ you are always in a much better mood, so he tried to buy you more time but that Alaric doesn’t seem to realize so he makes it hard.”

Face flushed in embarrassment, Arthur let out a little groan. “He’s only five. He shouldn’t be so… so…”

“He’s a cambion, even if not quite as much as one as his father, but clearly he takes more after the incubus in him while Alaric takes after the Dragonlord.” Su brought the hands Hunith had around her to cup her breasts, egging them on to massage her, and when Hunith did so obediently Su purred as she leaned back heavier against her. “I believe his cambion side will present itself earlier than it will for Alaric, you will need to keep a very close eye in anticipation for when that happens.”

Embarrassment turned to worry as Arthur steeled his determination. “I know. I will never allow anyone to hurt—.”

“Oh, we know that, Arthur,” Su interrupted with a scoff. “No one is worried about that.” She rolled her eyes, as if Arthur had been ridiculous to question that. “I mean that you will have to keep an eye out for poor Owain,” Su explained. “Calder will no doubt use the advantages being a cambion will give him indiscriminately on the poor boy, and I like Owain, after all he’s been through he at least deserves some wooing before he is thoroughly tupped.”
“Why do you keep assuming Calder will Top him?” Hunith wanted to know curiously. “Calder might actually turn out to be a Bottom. He is younger, and by the time he is old enough to hound Owain Owain will not be a boy any longer.”

Su snorted in dark amusement. “Please, Hunith, do not make me laugh. I am the Queen of the Succubi, I know about these sorts of things. Calder is a Top.” She raised an eyebrow. “Alaric is a Bottom though.”

“Alaric’s in love with a girl,” Arthur reminded.

“And that little girl will Top the hell out of him,” Su informed Arthur with a snicker. “I don’t think you really need to keep an eye on Alaric when he presents, cambion pheromones or not that girl is definitely going to be the one calling the shots.”

Honestly, Arthur still had no idea how to handle any of this. It helped that they were still far too young for this to be an issue, but years did go by quickly. This would be an issue soon enough, even if it didn’t seem so at the time.

_Gods below, I wish I was inside Arthur right now._

Shivering as that thought groaned in his mind, Arthur bit down on his bottom lip as his body instantaneously reacted to its’ mate’s desire. He pressed his thighs together and shifted slightly, taking advantage of Su and Hunith’s growing distraction to cast a peek in on what his husband was doing, and the flash that appeared before him for a split second showed Merlin very obviously ignoring the conversation going around him in disinterest as the Courtiers chatted in a very lively manner, obviously trying to make those from Southron feel welcomed and a part of Dragonhold.

That quick glance showed Merlin rubbing the runes on his arms and shifting to glance down at his crotch, which was completely soft, yet the desire was clear on his face - as was the source of that desire if his thoughts, and his rubbing of their shared runes, were anything to go by.

As the image disappeared, Arthur found himself shifting on the lounge chair, a throb of desire jolting down his body.

He glanced down at the runes on his arm, both at the ones he had which matched Merlin’s, and his own ones. They had appeared on his husband and him during their first coupling in Merlin’s true form, after Merlin had finally opened his heart up to Arthur and had told him he loved him for the first time. For the longest time the couple had not understood the meaning behind the symbols, merely that they were clearly binding and linking each other together. It had taken a while for them to understand the true meaning behind them, and even then it had only been with Hunith’s help.

The runes they shared in common (and which linked them to each other) were the Gebo, the Raidho, the Ehwaz, the Othala, and the Mannaz runes - each of which had their own special meanings.

**Gebo:** Exchanged powers, sacrifice, dissolution of barriers through gifting, as well as denoted a mystical union and ‘Sacred Marriage’ between partners.

**Raidho:** the journey of Life, means of transportation, taking charge, leadership, kingship, nobility held by merit.

**Ehwaz:** harmonious teamwork and trust. Pairs of entities working together for a common goal, as well as trust between individual entities, and sexuality.

**Othala:** ancestral spiritual power, divine inheritance and earthly estate.
Mannaz: psychic order of the gods reflected in humankind, projection of Self into time.

In other words, according to Hunith, the runes which connected and bonded Merlin and Arthur together, when deciphered using the context of their having been granted - as well as other factors - held a special meaning.

‘Arthur, Merlin,’ Hunith had whispered in awe as she looked up from their identical runes up to their anxious expressions, ‘this is beautiful. Dragonlord magic - Old Magic - was branded upon the two of you through your connection with Excalibur. These runes talk about the ancestral spiritual power and divine inheritance, as well as earthly estate that Merlin inherited as the Heir (Raidho & Othala), which has become shared between the two of you as you have become one in body, soul, and purpose (Gebo & Ehwaz). What I find intriguing is Mannaz, as it hints to Merlin’s being descended from the Old Ones, as well as his being long-lived, and yet it makes it seem as if Arthur is as well, but Su says he is not… so I am not sure exactly how to take it. Maybe that even after death - all throughout time - Arthur will be the only one for Merlin, and vice versa.”

There was no way for them to have known back then that that rune had been hinting that Arthur would share in his husband’s long life.

The Mannaz hadn’t been the only rune that had been hiding quite a lot from them.

Arthur rubbed his personal runes yet thought about the ones that were burned on his husband’s body.

Tiwaz: balance and justice ruled from a higher rationality. The rune of sacrifice of the individual (self) for well-being of the whole (society).

Thurisaz: complexities of aggression, conflicts, psychological problems, lightning, breakthrough, aggressive male sexuality, thorn of awakening, trouble, and enthusiasm.

Basically, both runes had encapsulated Merlin as a person, noting his willingness to sacrifice himself for the better of those he loved, as well as the psychological issues he was facing, the issues those would bring, as well as denoting his raw sexual energy.

Arthur’s runes had been a little different.

Jera: harvest and reward for positive action, plenty, peace, patience and right effort.

Berkano: continued growth and continual rebirth or renewal in all things. The rune of becoming. Container/releaser, female fertility, motherhood, healing, child raising, and the womb

In other words, Arthur’s runes had shown all along that from the moment Arthur had finally won Merlin’s complete trust, had finally broken down his barriers and been told he loved him - from the moment they’d connected in that tub, words of love being whispered desperately between them for the first time ever - that he had been marked as Merlin’s true mate, and as the mother of his future children.

So much had ridden on that morning turning out the way it had, and as always Arthur was grateful to Sophia and the role she’d played in preparing Arthur so that he could face his confused and hurting mate, and get through to him, to finally show him that Arthur truly loved him - loved all of him. There were nights where he still had nightmares of how things might be so very different right now if that morning encounter had ended in any other way. He’d wake up sweating and gasping, reaching for Merlin, assuring himself that his mate was still there, that the nightmare hadn’t been how things had happened. Arthur would snuggle up in Merlin, and only when the sleepy cambion curled instinctively around him would he be able to sleep.
Despite that, even while he was awake, whenever Arthur thought back to that morning - and the many other crucial times in their relationship where one wrong move could’ve destroyed everything - couldn’t toppled down everything Arthur had fought so hard to build - it made him queasy.

*Arthur’s lips are by far sweeter than this.*

Shivering at that, Arthur’s mind flashed, his mate’s magic showing him Merlin staring unhappily at a cluster of grapes. The cambion sighed and passed the cluster to Lancelot before blinking away, reappearing in the royal gardens, clearly bored and unhappy.

*If you’re too clingy Arthur is going to annoyed,* Merlin was thinking to himself as he strolled through the gardens. *Don’t bother him while he is visiting mother and Hunith. He is his own person who needs space and time to himself. Don’t intrude on his own time. He hasn’t seen mother and Hunith in a while, they will have much to talk about.*

That idiot cambion.

Arthur palmed his face even as his nipples hardened in betrayal of his own arousal. Similar situations had tortured him during his time away from court because not only had he been having to battle his own overwhelming arousal and desperate need, but he’d been constantly barraged by his husband’s lovesick musings and desirous inner monologue.

*I want my wife.* Merlin leaned against a statue heavily and tilted his head so that he was looking up at the sky.

Su let out a stuttered groan which broke Arthur from his magically-induced vision of Merlin, and allowed the boy to see that sometime during said vision Hunith’s hand had snuck under the tiny skirt Su wore and was clearly thrusting her fingers inside of her.

Despite his magical connection having already been broken, Arthur could still feel Merlin’s desire and loneliness as if Merlin was in the same room with him. Arthur’s fingers dug into his own thighs, and yet the pulsating need vibrating from his core nearly ripped a whimper from his lips.

As always, Merlin’s magic anticipated his needs and took him away.

In a blink he found himself away from Cambria and instead found himself standing in front of his cambion.

Merlin’s gaze lowered from the sky to Arthur in surprise seconds before his face twisted in beaming happiness. “I was just thinking about you.”

Shaking his head while being unable to keep the smile was curving on his lips as well, Arthur sashayed slowly towards his husband, watching the cambion’s beaming smile turn more than a little delirious as those eyes lowered from Arthur’s face to rest on the swing of his hips, which he made a little more pronounced in order to tease his mate. Merlin licked his lips and gulped, his gaze raising back up to Arthur’s face right before the queen reached his husband and leaned completely against him, wrapping his arms around the taller man’s neck as he tilted his head back and smiled up at Merlin.

“How are mother and Hunith?” Merlin asked as he anchored his grip on Arthur’s hips and pressed a kiss to his forehead.
“The same as they always are,” Arthur responded, not too interested in talking about his mother-in-laws. “You were missing me.”

“Aren’t I always?” Merlin asked against his forehead.

Lips twitching, Arthur tilted his head back and pressed up on to toes, bringing his lips up to meet Merlin’s, eagerly swallowing his husband’s throaty groan. Merlin’s tongue flicked against his, and Arthur’s met his, the blonde arching into the cambion and rubbing against him. A chuckle escaped his lips when he found himself now pressed back against the statue Merlin had been leaning onto seconds before, and yet that chuckle turned into a groan when Merlin’s hand trailed roughly from his hip to his ass cheek, squeezing, kneading, only to slowly - even more roughly - make its way down the back of Arthur’s thigh before hooking around the back of Arthur’s knee. In seconds Arthur’s leg was raised and his lower body pressed tightly against Merlin so that Arthur could feel his husband’s cock, which was far from the limp softness it’d been earlier.

Hooking his leg more securely around his lover’s back, Arthur leaned heavily into the statue and raised his hands up Merlin’s chest to his shoulders, his neck, his jaw, and then buried his fingers in those black locks, clenching them tightly in their silken length.

Mine. Merlin’s mind was purring happily. All mine.

Smiling into the kiss, Arthur unhooked his leg from around Merlin, and the second it touched the ground he shoved Merlin roughly, his smile growing as the unprepared cambion stumbled and fell to the ground. The blonde moved to stand over his mate, and as Merlin’s eyes darkened in desire Arthur lowered himself to his knees, straddling Merlin’s lap, never losing eye-contact with his husband.

Freeing Merlin from his trousers, Arthur reached behind him to shift the material of the Slip, revealing his quivering wetness. He shivered in reaction to the way Merlin’s eyes were bleeding black, and Arthur could barely keep the eager whine from escaping his lips as he guided that human-sized cock to the place that desired it the most. The queen’s knees dug into the grass and he shifted his position slightly to allow him to better bare his own weight down slowly to aid his own penetration.

Usually Merlin would’ve forced his hips down by now, but the cambion was smirking up lecherously at him while cushioning the back of his head with his own arms, apparently content to allow Arthur to have full control.

When the cockhead slowly stretched him open, Arthur threw his head back and groaned. His fingers remained on the rod slowly filling him as he lowered on his knees, pressing down while eagerly welcoming that length inside of him.

“So beautiful,” Merlin whispered reverently.

Flushing, as usual, at just how open Merlin was in his admiration of him, Arthur sunk completely onto his knees, his ass spread as he was filled to the hilt. “Flattery will get you everywhere with me,” he teased, the sound breathy as he circled his hips, his insides fluttering as Merlin’s cock carved him out.

“It is not flattery if it is true,” Merlin told him in all seriousness.

Unable to keep his amusement from his lips, Arthur chuckled, yet the sound became distorted into a groan when Merlin grave a single yet incredibly rough thrust up into him, his cock shifting inside of Arthur, lengthening, widening, nearly splitting him in half and forcing him to spread his own legs.
apart further to try and accommodate the massive size invading him. A tortured sound escaped Arthur’s lips as he grabbed his own hair tightly and bucked once, twice, three times, more, and every time he could feel more of his husband’s shape within him.

At the first sensation of his husband’s true form finally settling into place within him - Arthur’s thighs trembled and he tightened his grip on his hair. He threw his head back, parted his lips, and then closed eyes so he could fully concentrate on the feeling of that multi-tiered, barbed cock as it moved inside of him. Arthur pushed up on his knees as far as the massive rod inside of him would allow, and then lowered himself fully, whimpering every time one of those ever-thicker tiers popped deeper and deeper into him. He turned his head and bit into the meaty part of his own palm, digging his teeth in deeply to try and silence his sob.

Merlin stared up hungrily at Arthur, clearly fighting his desire to thrust up into him again, to allow Arthur the control of their rutting. The muscles in the arms he had pillowing the back of his head were taut, betraying just how badly he wanted to move them, to grab at Arthur, and yet his hands were where they were to not only cushion his head, but to pin them down as well.

Rising up and down on his knees, Arthur only unclenched his teeth from his palm when he tasted metallic, and yet instead of worrying about the blood that ran down his forearms from where his teeth had punctured his own skin, Arthur kept his gaze on Merlin as he licked his own blood. His lips curled at the way those eyes bled completely black, a hint of scales appearing on Merlin’s cheekbones, the cock inside of Arthur throbbing so roughly it rocked inside of him and moved his hips.

“What’s wrong, my love?” Arthur teased as he saw the demonic sigils flickering over his husband’s skin, further betraying how quickly Merlin was losing control over himself. “Does the sight of my blood make you hungry?” He reached out his arm temptingly towards Merlin. “Does it make you want to take a lick?”

“Yes.” Merlin’s voice was low, gravelled as he turned his head and flicked his tongue against the source of the crimson flow. “Even your blood is delicious,” he purred as his tongue played against the place where Arthur’s teeth had broken through the skin. “Even this belongs to me, Arthur.”

Shivering in arousal at those words, Arthur felt the tickle deep within him that he craved. “Yes.”

“This sweet blood, this perfect vessel,” Merlin’s gaze was as physical as a caress, “those hard nubs just begging for my lips… are all mine.” He chuckled when goosebumps immediately erupted on Arthur’s skin, as his already hard nipples hardened even further. “Ride me sweetly, wife.” Merlin finally freed his hands from behind his own head, but instead of taking control, he threaded his fingers through Arthur’s bleeding hand, and held his other one out to the blonde, fingers splayed.

Only too happy to thread the fingers of his other hand through Merlin’s as well, Arthur squeezed the hands he now held, staring down at his husband, using his grip on his hand for balance as he undulated his hips, loving himself on Merlin’s body. That tickle deep inside of him grew rapidly, those tiers popping in and out of him, those ridges tickling him deep within, urging his body to open up and accept more of its girth inside.

Merlin shifted slightly to bite down on Arthur’s Berkano rune, the one that denoted him as a container, as a vessel, for Merlin’s cock and his seed.

At the dangerous look in the cambion’s eyes Arthur threw his head back and screamed as the tickle exploded inside of him, setting off a violent chain reaction which ended in the boy serving his purpose and milking his husband’s seed from him.
Whenever Mordred had a moment he liked to go and check on the orchards. Even though he was not a Dragonlord, and was not connected to the orchards or the crystals the way that Merlin, Arthur, and their children were, Mordred was a druid, and as such he had a special connection with mother earth. Also, as a magic-user, he understood the importance of these things, especially the orchards and Avalon. When he'd heard the orchards had been withering he’d nearly had a heart attack, and it was due to this that he had developed this fixation of going to the different villages and other places where bits of the orchard (and the crystals as well) had scattered.

Daobeth had quickly re-invigorated itself after the merge, but Avalon had taken longer to do the same. Now, though, the orchards weren’t withering anymore, in fact, they looked to almost glow like the crystals did, which was a very good sign. It helped that the crystals and orchards seemed to have merged in many instances, and the crystals fed constantly on the energy being generated in Dragonhold, and appeared to be feeding some of that energy into the orchard as well.

Then again, there was a lot to feed off of.

Dragonhold was probably the only kingdom left in Albion that didn’t have a whorehouse or any sort of prostitution, and that was because there was no need to go searching for sexual partners. With each Dark Week less and less people stayed in the sanctuary islands, and more and more evidences of this could be seen even during normal days. This was very obviously Merlin’s and Arthur’s ‘fault’, as the Ley lines fed from the Heart of Darkness, which in turn was connected to them. That meant the the more ravenous Merlin and Arthur were for each other, the more in heat their kingdom became.

It did not help that the citizens of Cambria spent an inordinate amount of time in Dragonhold, or that those of Avalon and Daobeth were very much affected by the reigning element.

A glance towards the marketplace was all that was needed to confirm this.

Crystals and orchards could be found at the heart of each and every village and city of Dragonhold, each in the middle of the busiest part, each glowing with the energy it was taking from the inhabitants.

The baker was ignoring his loaves and instead was whispering filthy promises to one of his customers, who was pinned against the wall and whimpering as his body was being taken by the burly man. “You’re so tight, boy,” he growled happily. “You feel so good.”

The younger male shivered, the sounds he made growing harder as pre-cum dripped down the wall from where his hard cock was pressed against it.

Not too far away the baker’s wife wrapped her arms another customer, holding him tightly as he rammed his hips into hers violently, fucking her against the same wall that her husband was the customer.

“Harder!” She ordered dug her nails into his shoulders. “Fill me with your seed!”

The man snarled and did as ordered, slamming his mouth to hers and muffling his animalistic roar as he bred her.

Mordred squeaked as suddenly he was lifted effortlessly into the air and immediately found himself resting over a burly shoulder as he captor turned and walked them away from the rutting going on in the bakery. If it wasn’t for the fact that he recognized that heat, that scent, that broad and muscely
back, he would’ve really hurt his captor. Instead, however, he smirked and shook his head as he instead took advantage of this position to caress the man’s back, scraping him with his nails through the material of his tunic.

Almost immediately he could feel one of those large hands caressing his ass lecherously.

A low whimper escaped his lips yet he tried to keep his arousal from his voice when he finally spoke. “I had no plans of joining in, you know.”

“I know that,” Percy assured him in a genuine tone that still did not hide his annoyance, or arousal. “But you’re my wife, and I do not like the idea of you being around all of this without my cock to distract you.”

A snicker escaped Mordred’s lips as he shook his head. While at first he hadn’t understood why Arthur had chosen to be called ‘wife’ instead of ‘husband’, he’d quickly grown to see the appeal once he and Percy had married. There was a strange possessiveness that filled Percy’s tone whenever he said that word, and arousal was never too far behind. “I was checking on the orchards.”

“Are there orchards growing in the bakery?” Percy asked in faux innocence before slapping Mordred’s ass reproachfully.

The druid’s grin grew mischievous. “There sure was a lot of wood.”

Percy nearly stumbled in shock at that before he slapped Mordred’s ass once more. “I see I was right not to leave you alone.”

Chuckling and shaking his head, Mordred smile in contentment, as he always did, at his husband’s possessive adoration and constant need to stake his claim on him. “I came from seeing Gertie,” he admitted softly.

This time Percy stopped outright, his body tense, his voice low when he asked: “And?” When Mordred hesitated, Percy shifted him so that the druid was now longer flung over his shoulder, and instead was facing him, his legs around Percy’s hips. “And?”

Staring into his husband’s worried face, Mordred cupped it and leaned in to press a soft peck to his lips, before whispering against them: “She’s expecting.”

Percy didn’t react for a moment, and then there was a soft: “We’re going to have a child?”

Mordred grinned and nodded. “We are going to have a child.”

In seconds Percy was kissing him roughly, and Mordred barely held on as he returned it. Birdie’s older sister Gertrude had taken to the Dark Week (as well as the lifestyle in Dragonhold) like a fish to water, and had promised Percy and Mordred that if ‘anything ever came of her fun’ that she would happily gift them the child as she was not ready to be a mother while they were very ready to be parents. And now, finally, after worrying that maybe Gertie wasn’t able to have children either, it was finally happening.


I know.

Mordred smiled happily. “Love you too.”
Sweat dripped down Arthur’s body, his hair so wet it stuck to his face and neck, but he didn’t notice any of this. The boy was on his stomach, his upper body held up as he dug his elbows into the ground, his fingers clutching fistfuls of grass. He was pinned down into the ground by his mate, whose body was plastered over his back, whose teeth were deep in his mark of ownership, whose hips were slamming into his so violently that Arthur would’ve been punted forwards if it wasn’t for the arm wrapped around his shoulders, keeping him trapped and unable to move away, to escape.

Knowing his expression could not come even close to expressing just how blissful he felt, how pleasurable this was, how much his body was begging for more… Arthur let out sounds only possible whenever he was with his mate.

And then, suddenly, Merlin stopped moving, merely remained deep inside of him, licking his mark of ownership.

“Nooooooooo,” Arthur sobbed as he gripped the grass beneath him tighter as tried to roll his hips back against his mate, yet Merlin’s weight kept him pinned down and in place. “Merlinnn!”

Merlin ignored his begging and merely continued bathing Arthur’s neck with kisses and licks instead of moving inside of him anymore. Despite that, his barbs retracted and hooked in over and over inside of Arthur, granting him some of the stimulation he was begging for.

“Uhn!” Arthur arched his back further and gripped the grass so tightly multiple blades were ripped out from the ground.

“I love you,” Merlin whispered into his neck. “So much.” The arm he had around Arthur tightened. “I’ll destroy this world before I ever let you escape.”

Arthur’s eyes were wide at the pleasure surging through him. “M-Mer—-!”

“Mine,” Merlin snarled into his neck. “You’re mine.”

That intimate tickle began to spark deep inside of him. “Always.” He lowered his head so as to bite the arm wrapped around his shoulders. “Mine.”

He could feel Merlin’s smile against his neck. “Only yours. Always.”

“Always,” Arthur echoed the promise seconds before the pleasure erupted like white heat inside of him.
The kingdom of Dragonhold was in the middle of intense celebration, every corner of the kingdom celebrating the wedding of its new king to the woman who had taken much longer than anyone had expected her to take to be convinced to become queen of the kingdom of Dragonhold, which was now comprised of every single kingdom of Albion minus Caerleon (which was being ruled by Gwaine and Roarke - the latter of which many truly believed only accepted Gwaine’s proposal to get him to stop ‘wooing’ him with his gods’ awful gifts). There had been many ups and down, and Alaric had had quite a couple of rivals for the fair Maeve’s hand, but it had helped that she’d been more interested in becoming a warrior instead of ‘a man’s breeding tool’ so all of the other men who had tried to woo her had been just as unsuccessful as Alaric had.

Considering both Cassius and Lancelot supported Maeve’s decision not to marry at the ‘appropriate age’ despite the fact that this had left her becoming an ‘old maid’ in the eyes of the kingdom, there was nothing that the many men interested in her could do. In the end Alaric had finally been able to win Maeve over, slowly - very slowly - by supporting her desires to become a warrior, and by training with her, and treating her the same way he would any other warrior… and then by finally becoming a fighting unit with her.

And now, so many years after having told Maeve she’d one day marry him, the 30 year old king was finally making true on his promise, his similarly aged wife proving to the kingdom how being an ‘old maid’ truly was nothing terrible given the kingdom’s ‘old maid’ was now the kingdom’s queen.

Unlike his brother, Calder had not had to wait as long to finally get his mate. As predicted by his grandmother, the second he’d come into his cambion heritage he’d used every single one of his charms (both human and inhuman) against a completely unprepared and very quickly overwhelmed Owain. Despite Arthur’s attempts to try and rein in his youngest (and get him not to so obviously cheat by using his inhuman skills) it had taken a mere year for the 17 year old to ‘finally entrap’ (Calder’s words) Owain. The now 28 year old (who lived with Owain in Cambria) kept telling his older brother it was his fault that it’d taken him this long to finally convince Maeve to have pity on him and marry him.

To say Lucan was heartbroken after Owain finally gave in to Calder was understating it, but considering that he himself had been fending off Peyt’s many advances, no one had been too surprised when, six months after the heartbreak, Mordred and Percival’s younger twin had finally won over Lancelot and Cassius’ son. That hadn’t meant that Peyt’s insecurity towards Owain had subsided, it had only gotten better after Calder and Owain moved to Cambria, but even now the 23 years old acted jealous and possessive whenever Owain came back for visits, which was obvious as he kept close to 33 year old Lucan, keeping a hawk-like eye on him despite the fact that it was more than obvious to all that the love Lucan had towards Owain had stopped being the ‘special’ sort a very long time ago.

Vivian, for her part, had quickly moved on from her desire to marry Lucan. By the time she’d turned eight years old she’d already declared she’d marry two other boys, and unlike Lucan those boys had been heartbroken when she moved on to another potential future husband. By the time she reached the age to actually get married she was - quite unlike Maeve - not only entertaining all the attention she was getting, but taking cues from her mothers on which best to choose. When she finally chose the man who did become her husband, she’d broken the hearts of an enviable amount of men. Now,
the 29 year old was the mother of three children, and was very well known for having her husband wrapped around her cunning little finger.

That left Morgause, the second to last of the “Inner Court Children”, and Peyt’s twin. Being one of the younger girls had left her spending time with Guinevere and Morgana’s youngest daughter Eislyn, and while she’d treated the younger girl as her personal slave most of the time Eislyn’s lover. Even now, years later, the 23 year old might have settled into her relationship with the 20 year old, but the dynamics were skewed because while she was still bossy and at times incredibly arrogant, it was clearly Eislyn who was somehow in charge.

Arthur leaned against the railing and smiled down at the celebration still very much underway, with the whole kingdom seeming to be dancing and merrymaking. None were as festive or jolly as Alaric though, and the love and adoration in his eyes as he watched Maeve made Arthur’s heart clench, both in happiness that his eldest had finally gotten the love of his life - and in sadness, because it was more than obvious that not only had Alaric not inherited his father’s long-life, but he would never want to.

It was hard to accept the fact that his sons would grow old and die… but already it was becoming obvious the difference between their sons and themselves. When your sons looked older than you it was… confusing, to say the least. It wasn’t only seeing his sons grow up while his own aging had ceased, but there was also the fact that his peers were all much older now, many sporting streaks of gray. The only one as unchanged by time as Merlin and Arthur was Sophia/Bors, who likewise remained the same, although her partner Daegal had aged somewhat. His fae blood, mixed with his Dragonlord heritage, meant that he had not aged half as much as the others, but it was obvious that he had.

One day Daegal would die, would leave Sophia and Bors behind, the two-in-one stuck ageless, bound to Excalibur for eternity. The thought terrified Arthur, not for Sophia or Bors because they were much stronger than Arthur could even begin to understand, but he put himself in their position and just the mere thought made him feel a little insane.

Warmth encircled him as Merlin wrapped his arms around his waist from behind and buried his face in Arthur’s hair. “What’s wrong, my love?”

Resting one of his hands on the hands Merlin had wrapped around him, Arthur kept his gaze on the festivities below. “I was thinking about our sons’ mortality, and of Daegal’s. At least our sons will live and die with their mates, but Sophia and Bors will have to live on long after losing the one person who taught them what it felt like to be the recipient of devoted love.” He pressed his hand against Merlin’s. “It made me think about us.”

A sigh escaped Merlin’s lips as he hugged Arthur tighter. “If I could save you from the pain of having to one day bury our sons I would do so.”

“I know that.” Arthur leaned back against him, knowing he’d never be able to explain to Merlin exactly what about this situation tortured him. “Let us not think of these things tonight. It is Alaric’s big day. He is finally king.”

Merlin must’ve heard a wistful sound in his voice, because he sighed softly and rubbed his nose against the shell of Arthur’s ear. “We can postpone the seceding for a few more days, Arthur. We can wait until you are ready.”

“Do not be ridiculous.” Arthur scoffed at the very idea while instinctively tilting his head to offer his
neck. “Alaric is ready to be king, this is his and Maeve’s time now. And just because we will be seceding does not mean we will never see them again. They can always come to see us and we can always go to visit them.” His eyes momentarily rolled in the back of his skull in pleasure when Merlin started to tease the claiming mark on Arthur’s neck with his tongue. “O-our eldest is finally ready to become his own man and to forge his own path in life, like Calder has in Cambria with Owain. We owe it to Alaric to give him the space he needs, but also to be there for him if he needs any advice.”

“You are so strong, Arthur.” Merlin ran his tongue against the mark of ownership.

Arthur huffed despite the way his lips were twitching. “Of course I am.” His smile slipped slightly as he leaned back heavier against Merlin, a whimper escaping his lips as Merlin’s fingers slipped between his thighs and began to rub against him from below.

Merlin pressed a kiss to his hair, his action tender even as he slipped his middle finger deep into his lover’s body. “I am not going anywhere, Arthur.”

Emotions conflicting inside of him, Arthur squeezed Merlin’s forearm tightly and nodded, soft gasps escaping his lips as Merlin added another finger inside of him and thrust them slowly into his body, establishing a torturously slow and deep rhythm that distracted his mind from its darker thoughts - which he was sure had been Merlin’s design all along. The blonde turned his head and lifted his face up in silent supplication, a groan low and pleased escaping his lips when Merlin obeyed the silent order and lowered down to kiss his parted lips.

This was their last night as king and queen of Dragonhold, and as the kingdom celebrated beneath them, the monarchs - as always - were consumed by each other.

The little boy squealed happily as he ran down the meadow filled with fiery flowers.

“He truly does love it here, he never wants to go back home when it is time to return,” his father chuckled in amusement with a shake of his head. “Do you know that he told me the other day he has no interest in inheriting Dragonhold? He wants to move to, and inherit, this kingdom instead.”

Arthur snickered in amusement as he sat against one of the many beautiful trees in the glowingly healthy orchard. “What can I say? He clearly has good taste.”

“Grandmother,” Willem chuckled with a shake of his head. “Do not be encouraging him! George is our sole heir!” He raised an eyebrow as he eyed Arthur in amusement. “Also, I doubt you want him clinging to you and grandfather all day, every day, either. Father and Uncle Calder both told me, multiple times, about the ‘unending need’ you and grandfather have for each other. It was the basis of their search for their own partners, as was my own. We had hoped to find people we’d desire - and who would desire us - as desperately as the two of you do.” He glanced over to where George was now long on his back in the meadow, gaze directed at the sky above him. “It is what I hope George will find one day as well.”

“What do you think you will do now that Genevieve is no longer with us?” Arthur asked his grandson carefully, figuring that enough time had passed for the man to be able to speak about his wife’s passing, and what it meant.

The smile dropped from Willem’s face, replaced by a wistful expression. “I will always love her, she was an important person to me and she gave me George. But I would be lying if I said I have kept
faithful to her memory since her passing. The Dark Weeks might not be as strong now that the Heart of Darkness and such have moved from Dragonhold to Avalon, but they still affect us, and I have spent them with multiple men and women… and not just Dark Weeks.” He chuckled darkly, clearly feeling guilty for this. “Even before her death I had started to…” He sighed and glanced over at Arthur. “Lord Everett’s nephew has come to Court to train as a knight, and I want the boy for myself.” His expression went blank. “I have a manservant already, and it would be disloyal and unfair to dismiss him, and it would be a demotion from potential knight… but I will have that boy. I am in the process of recycling one of the laws that used to be in effect in what used to be Gogoddin.”

Arthur did not have to ask which law his grandson was referring to. “The kingdom might not be pleased with their king enacting an edict that allows him to tup whoever he wishes, whenever he wishes.”

Willem remained stone-faced. “I will have him, grandmother.”

The blonde eyed his grandson and sighed. “This law might be abused by future generations, Willem, think it over very carefully.”

And yet, from the expression on the man’s face, Arthur knew the decision had already been made and that there’s be no going back.

The next time they went to visit Dragonhold their grandson had given them flashes of their own past as he took the groaning knight while on the throne for all to see.

It would appear that - human or not - the dark desire, and need to claim for all to see, was still very strong in their bloodline.

With each subsequent generation contact with Dragonhold grew more and more scarce until it stopped all-together. Merlin wasn’t sure how Arthur felt about the separation, but the cambion did worry about it. He wasn’t worried about the separation itself, no, that was not it. Unlike with him, longevity wasn’t natural when it came to Arthur, and he worried about him and what sort of effect this separation might have on him. Arthur could act spoiled at times but there were also times where he tended to pretend things did not bother him when they clearly did, and Merlin didn’t want this to be one of those times. He knew Arthur had grown increasingly unhappy with what their descendants had chosen to do as kings, the laws and such they had passed, yet they were still their descendants - descendants of their eldest son - and while Merlin had managed to distance himself from the lineage without much issue he hadn’t been the one to carry Alaric, that had been Arthur, who had always had a stronger connection with their children than he had ever been able to experience.

That was why he worried about Arthur. Arthur had conceived Alaric and Calder, had gone through a less than pleasant birth. He’d raised both boys and had spent far more time with them than Merlin ever had. If anyone would feel some sort of connection, some sort of loss, it would be him.

For his credit, Arthur appeared more annoyed than anything else, but again, Arthur was good at hiding things from Merlin.

“I am disappointed,” Arthur finally admitted as he leaned back against the edge of the Heart of Darkness.

Merlin flinched immediately at those words.

Confusion colored Arthur’s expression as his gaze shifted onto Merlin, before understanding
suddenly dawned on his countenance. “Not with you, idiot cambion.” He shook his head before letting it fall back with a sigh as he stared up at the ceiling. “With Alaric’s progeny.”

Tilting his head, Merlin floated in the darkness. “You mean our progeny.”

“No.” Arthur seemed resolute as he shook his head and fixed a glare at Merlin. “Alaric was our progeny. The rest were his. We had good sons. He, on the other hand—-.”

“Willem and George—-,” Merlin began.

“Willem started the decline, Merlin,” Arthur interrupted with an impassioned counter immediately. “And George quickly followed after him in his ways. Dragonhold was always a kingdom that reveled in the sexual, but they started taking things too far, and their descendants only continued to take it further and further.”

Unable to deny those words, Merlin sighed as he swam to the edge and folded his arms on it, resting his chin on them. He wanted with all of his might to defend their descendants but what Arthur was saying wasn’t untrue. Still, in many ways Merlin could not see that he had a right to judge anyone, especially not due to all that he had done in his life before meeting Arthur and settling down.

“You are not going to like what I am going to say,” Arthur warned in a soft voice.

Merlin remained silent, staring ahead, bracing himself for whatever it was that his mate was about to tell him.

“I want to bar access to the Isle,” Arthur informed him in a voice that betrayed his unhappiness and determination. “Even to those of Dragonlord blood.”

Eyes narrowing in confusion, Merlin couldn’t quite understand Arthur’s drastic actions. Merlin himself did not truly care what happened to their descendants, at this point they were strangers in every sense of the word, and yet he’d never would have considered barring access to any descendant who might wish to come to the Isle - what had once been Avalon and Daobeth - to seek their help, or to meet them.

“This is our oasis, Merlin, our sanctuary, our home,” Arthur continued on in that tone of voice that allowed no argument. “I do not want it to be sullied by the filth that will try to crawl its way over our doorstep.”

“You are talking about our descendants, Arthur,” Merlin reminded softly, wondering exactly what he didn’t know. It was obvious that Arthur knew something about their descendants that he did not, something terrible enough that he wanted to fully separate the Isle from Dragonhold. But just what could it be? With Dragonlord blood in them the prospects were endless.

The darkness shifted behind him, betraying movement, an approach, so it was not a surprise when Arthur wrapped his arms around Merlin’s body and rested his forehead against his back. “I know you think that I am being unnecessarily harsh.”

Merlin could feel the slight tremble to Arthur, and his frown darkened as he reached down and placed his larger hand over the ones Arthur had closed around his waist. Whatever it was that Arthur was keeping to himself was truly bothering him. Merlin knew not to ask, knew that if Arthur was keeping silent on key details he was doing so out of a need to protect Merlin, and that meant he’d never budge on his stance, would never explain. They’d been mated long enough for Merlin to understand his mate and the reasons behind why he did whatever he did, what Merlin sometimes floundered on were the triggers that propelled those actions forwards into motion.
“I have had Sophia and Bors keeping an eye on Dragonhold during our absence because Cali has been acting up worse and worse as time goes by, her connection with your bloodline leaving her incredibly uneasy and restless,” Arthur admitted against Merlin’s back, surprising the cambion by the fact that he was actually admitting this much to him. “Bors and Sophia have discovered things that explain why Excalibur has been acting the way she has… things I do not want to tell you about.” He tightened his grip around Merlin’s body, the action both comforting and seeking comfort. “I do not want that sort of filth desecrating our haven.” He shifted his hands, digging his nails deep into Merlin’s skin. “If they did not have Alaric’s blood I’d—-.” The blonde didn’t continue his words and instead pressed his face harder into Merlin’s back. “Please, Merlin.”

Sighing, knowing he would not be getting to the bottom of this today, Merlin nodded as he rubbed his hand over Arthur’s tight hold. “I will start on it immediately.” And yet when he tried to pull himself out of the Heart of Darkness, Arthur tightened his grip around him and clung to him tightly.

It was then that Merlin confirmed that this was truly bothering Arthur more than he wanted to let on. Arthur had always had a closer relationship with their sons and their descendants, whether that was because he’d carried their children or not was not the issue. He was closer to them, always had been, that was what mattered. Even when Merlin had long-since lost interest in the descendants Arthur had kept a protective eye on them from afar. Only an idiot would not understand what it meant for Arthur to be the one asking for the barriers between the realms to be closed permanently, even to those of their bloodline. It meant Arthur had finally given up on their descendants, had been horribly disappointed, and in many ways, had only now truly lost Alaric.

Heart hurting for his grieving mate, Merlin eased himself around and wrapped his arms around Arthur tightly, pressing a kiss to his forehead. Arthur’s embrace was tight, his face hidden in Merlin’s chest, his body trembling slightly in repressed emotion.

Pressing soft kisses to that gold hair, Merlin comforted his mate, who was too proud to show just how hard that decision had been for him, and how much this hurt.

Every marriage had its secrets.

Thiers was no different.

Arthur kept secret what he’d found out about their descendants that had so thoroughly disappointed him into breaking all possible ties with them.

Merlin kept secret that he found out for himself.

Times had changed since his last visit to Dragonhold, and Merlin had barely recognized the kingdom that had once been his home. Not only had the buildings and the scenery changed with the course of time, but the people and their customs were different as well, as was their relationship with the monarchy.

The things Merlin saw in Dragonhold sickened him to the core as he realized just what those infected with darkness yet completely consumed by it were capable of doing. These were humans. These were people with souls, and yet the demon in their midst found himself disgusted, and with his own kin most of all.

Fire rained down from the sky on Dragonhold, consuming the filth that had infested the kingdom he had bequeathed to his eldest born. He felt nothing as he rained fire and brimstone on all, his voice
booming in everyone’s heads, condemning them for their actions, telling all why those being killed were dying so horribly.

Only once it was over did Merlin turn to the bruised woman and the boy and girl huddled around her. He recognized the look in those children’s eyes way too well, which was why he did not approach them, and instead lowered to his knees to appear less intimidating to them.

“I apologize for what was done, for what this kingdom became during our absence,” he said softly, making sure to keep his tone light yet have the genuine sadness be heard. “When we created this kingdom this was not what we wanted it to become.”

The little boy with bright blue eyes and golden hair stared up at him in shock. “You—you created Dragonhold?”

“My wife and I did, it was as much our child as your ancestor was,” Merlin informed him with a slow nod of his head. “This kingdom was meant to be a refuge, to be a sanctuary, it was never meant to take advantage of the weak. My descendants lost themselves to the call of darkness, which is incredibly strong in our family, and through them the kingdom was lost as well.” He stared into the boy’s eyes. “From this day forwards you will be king.”

The boy stared up at him in awe.

“King of what?” The mother asked shakily, tears in her eyes and fear in her voice. “The kingdom burns.”

“I have given him a fresh lump of clay,” Merlin answered her despite not breaking eye contact with the boy, who had to be around twelve years old, yet with eyes that were haunted and far too old for his face. “It is now his to decide how best to mold.” His gaze bore into that of the boy. “Create something better.” He stood and turned to leave. “I am removing magic from this realm. It has been abused too greatly by those who would use it to their advantage against those without.”

“How do I do it?” The boy called after him worried. “How do I create something better? I couldn’t even stop—.” He hung his head in shame. “I am not fit to be king.”

Turning on his heel, Merlin eyed the boy who looked so much like Arthur it hurt. “Your father was not fit to be king. You are.” His gaze met the boy’s when the child looked up at him in surprise at that. “I have left those who were not rotting with corruption, there are still good people in this kingdom - many in fact - and they will be just as eager as you to build a better kingdom where all can be happy and safe.” He hesitated a second before smiling down at the kid. “And if you need me, call my name, I will help you as long as you deserve it.”

The boy’s chest raised and fell with his rapid breaths. “What is your name?”

He tilted his head, thinking back to himself as a child as he answered: “Merlin Wylt. Remember that name.”

“Merlin Wylt, Merlin Wylt,” the boy whispered rapidly to himself, chanting the name as if to ingrain it into his head. He then looked up at Merlin. “Thank you.”

Smiling, Merlin blinked away back to the Isle.

This was yet another secret he kept from his wife until he could assure himself that Arthur had progeny - and a legacy - to once more be proud of.
The next couple of centuries were tough ones because Arthur was the smartest person he knew, and because Arthur could usually figure him out scarily quickly. Yet somehow, somehow, Merlin managed to keep his involvement with Dragonhold and their descendants a secret from his lover - which was probably only thanks to the fact that he’d ordered Sophia and Bors not to tell Arthur the truth, and to stall so as to give him time to work on course correcting whatever had gone wrong. It wasn’t easy to change the abuse that had become a normality, and it took quite a couple of fire and brimstone events for things to truly change.

It helped that Regan, the king, had been a victim of said abuse and like Merlin, had no interest in furthering that sort of agenda, in allowing others to be hurt the way he - and so many others - had been. For the first time since Alaric, Merlin had hope for the descendant seated upon the throne, and he may have doted on him a little to not only give him the advice and confidence he needed - but to scare the shit out of any who would try to hurt him - especially when he’d first become king. He could no longer keep track of how many people had burst into flames spontaneously before the kingdom finally realized that anyone who tried to go against Regan had to deal with ‘Merlin the Wild One’ (as he liked to call himself), or ‘the Old One’ as he was being called despite not looking old and very clearly not aging (he still was a bit annoyed at that title).

Merlin didn’t want this to end up like it had with Alaric - with each generation getting worse and worse - so he did not tell Arthur about the progress he’d made so far. Instead he spent the continuing generations making sure to rein in the populace - as well as the kings themselves - and he found as time went on that it kept getting easier. Not only did the kingdom know of ‘The Old One’, but with their magic having been gone for many generations their connection to its source had also withered, and with it the utter darkness they’d fallen so happily for. That did not mean to say that there were not those within whom darkness lived naturally, but as a kingdom it was no longer a threat, and those within whom it did dwell Merlin could sense and could keep an eye on - could deal with if necessary.

He didn’t care how many times he had to destroy almost to the brink of extinction only to start molding again. This was for Arthur. His efforts needed to result in something that would bring his mate happiness. It was with this drive that he continued sneaking away to Dragonhold whenever Arthur was busy - or being distracted by Bors and Sophia - so he could continue to mold the kingdom, the people, their descendants, into something that would make up for all the pain Arthur had gone through - into something that would make Arthur happy.

Playing the distraction also helped Sophia and Bors, who soon afterwards lost Daegal. The halfling had lasted much longer than any of them would’ve anticipated given his mixed heritage, and it was obvious that while the two-in-one tried to act as if they were fine, as if they’d known this would happen and had prepared themselves for it - it was obvious that Sophia and Bors both needed the distraction as much as Merlin did.

“I do not want a celebration in my honor,” Merlin mumbled for the hundredth time. “I am not doing any of this to be celebrated. I am doing this for my wife.”

“Dragonhold has had generations of peace and harmony since you stepped in and punished our ancestors for their evil deeds,” Desdemona, Queen of Dragonhold, announced upon her throne as she shook the leg she had crossed over the other. “Whether you like it or not, Merlin, you have become our people’s god.” Her lips twitched. “Both you and your wife.” She leaned her elbow on her armrest and rested her cheek against her closed fist. “Have you truly not heard the legends that have been spun about the Wild God and the Primordial Goddess? You may have created Dragonhold, and given birth to the royal lineage, but generations of word of mouth have spun those
truths into fantastical tales of the God and Goddess who created the world and birthed to its first people.”

Desdemona reminded him a lot of Morgana, which was probably why he enjoyed her company as much as he did. Also, unlike some of the other descendants he’d molded since taking a more hands-on approach to Dragonhold’s management, she did not gaze at him in brainless wonder, yet still clearly trusted him, genuinely respected him and his advice, and also very obviously found him incredibly amusing.

She raised an eyebrow while smirking. “You cannot blame them, surely. Especially once the old, walled up section of the castle was discovered only to reveal a treasure trove of portraits of the first king and queen of Dragonhold preserved behind it… Merlin Wylt and his male queen… the male mother of his children… the male goddess…” She waggled her eyebrows as she motioned towards one of the more intimate portraits, which showed Merlin on a knee in front of Arthur, kissing his foot and staring up at him in adoration, a sentiment which was clearly reciprocated by his smiling mate. “Surely you must have realized that the revelation that the mother of the Dragonlord lineage was a male not only cemented without a doubt the kingdom’s belief that your wife is a goddess, but also made him a most revered one? Those wishing to wed pray to him, as do those wishing to give birth, or those who wish for their surrogates to birth them healthy children.” She eyed Merlin. “You should bring your wife with you the next time you visit us, Merlin.”

“Not yet.” Merlin wanted to, he really did, but he couldn’t risk it. Not yet.

“You mean you do not trust that we will not disappoint him the way our ancestors did,” Desdemona read between the lines once more, remaining him even greater of Morgana Pendragon.

Merlin met her gaze and nodded. “Yes.”

She smiled a sad smile, yet did not push it any further.

Arthur had been very uncharacteristically distracted of late. He realized that now, and he felt terrible because of it.

Sure, Sophia and Bors had had a rough patch after Daegal’s death, and Arthur had felt the need to help them through it because every time he thought about how that could have very well been him dying with Merlin being left alone to mourn… it had rend his heart in two. So he might have doted a bit too much and too frequently on the two-in-one, but Merlin had been very supportive of it, and it was due to this that it took far longer than it would’ve otherwise for Arthur to realize that not only had he spent far too long concentrating fully on Sophia and Bors… but that he’d also unintentionally ignored his husband while doing so.

The worse part was that he couldn’t even be too sure how long exactly this had been going on. Time passed differently on the Isle, which was something he’d realized when they’d still be in contact with Dragonhold, because what could seem like mere days for them might actually be a century to the outside world. Due to this Arthur never did quite trust the passage of time (or at least his perception of it) but it had never truly bothered him until right now as he wondered when exactly he’d last pampered his husband.

He had not ignored his husband nor his needs, neither one of them would have been able to survive going too long without uniting their bodies and spirits - partaking in each other - but it had not been to the feverish degree that Arthur (and his body) was used to and desired fiercely. And it had all been
his own fault. Had it been Merlin who had subjected Arthur to this sort of treatment, to this level of abandonment, to being constantly and consistently ignored in favor of another person… the blonde knew that he would’ve been up in arms and incredibly murderous because of it, and he also knew that even if Merlin had been missing Arthur like one did oxygen, the cambion would’ve never complained, would’ve suffered through it all silently. It was not in his mate’s nature to cause a scene or make a fuss about anything, plus Merlin was compassionate, and he would’ve understood the reasoning behind Arthur’s actions - had wanted Sophia and Bors to get through this situation as well.

And yet, despite knowing this to be a fact, the blonde could not help but grow a little frantic as he desperately tried to think back to the last time he’d truly given Merlin the attention he deserved.

That frantic feeling only increased when he ordered Merlin’s magic to take him to his mate so he could remedy that terrible fact… only for Merlin’s magic to ignore him. It never ignored him. It always anticipated his desires and did whatever was needed to fulfill them before he even had to ask. And yet… and yet no matter how hard he asked (demanded, cajoled, pleaded), Merlin’s magic ignored his wishes, and there could only be one reason that Arthur could come up with for its behavior: Merlin didn’t want Arthur to be around him right now, and had put in a monumental effort to make sure his magic did not work against him.

Wherever Merlin was - whatever he was doing - Merlin didn’t want Arthur there.

It was either that or Merlin was more hurt at being ignored than Arthur had worried he’d be. For the cambion’s magic to rebel against Arthur to this degree it must also feel slighted, feel abandoned, by him.

The shock caused him to collapse back against one of the apple trees and grip it tightly behind him.

Memories returned, unbidden, of another time in which Merlin’s magic had shown its displeasure with him. Back then it had also felt abandoned, betrayed, by Arthur, and he remembered the sting of its rejection because magic very much betrayed the essence of its user, and even though Merlin’s magic acted quite independently of him and his desires most of the time, they were always very singular in their core beliefs and desires. Either they both adored Arthur with every ounce of life and magic within them - or they both hardened against him at what was perceived as betrayal and abandonment.

Merlin. He reached out mentally, amazed at how steady and unaffected his voice sounded in his head despite the war of nerves battling deep inside of him and filing him with growing nausea.

Yes, Arthur? Merlin asked curiously.

Fighting the relief that Merlin was answering him, Arthur dug his fingertips into the tree’s bark even tighter, the crystals around him glowing brighter in betrayal of his storm-like emotions. Where are you?

There was a very obvious pause. Wherever he was, Merlin didn’t want Arthur knowing. That, coupled with the fact that his magic was keeping Arthur from blinking to his side, made Arthur’s stomach flip-flop sickly.

Where was Merlin? What was he doing?

Arthur froze.

Was… was Merlin with someone else? Was he feeding without telling Arthur? Was someone else
giving Merlin the attention Arthur had slacked off on?

Was… was it *more* than just *feeding*?

Had some whore managed to use Arthur’s distraction to weasel their way into Merlin’s affection?

Did Merlin prefer this other person?

For the first time in thousands of years, Arthur felt a cold sense of fear and insecurity tightening in his gut.

*Are you okay?* In seconds Merlin stood in front of him, looking worried. “You do not look very well, Arthur.” He raised his hand and cupped Arthur’s cheek. “Let us have a swim in the Diamond Falls to revitalize you, you have a long evening awaiting you, I have asked the Fae to treat both you and Sophia to something special. It would be a shame for you to have to cancel because you didn’t take a moment to rest and reinvigorate yourself.”

Even as Arthur leaned into the touch, his nausea grew as he realized that Merlin was not only failing to answer his question, but attempting to distract him… as well as keep him occupied and get him out of the way.

Fighting the nausea, Arthur trained his expression to a lust-filled smile as he reached out a hand to trace designs against Merlin’s chest. “Why do we not forgo any other obligation we might have for the rest of the day and just,” he glanced up at his mate through his eyelashes, “enjoy each other’s company for a while.”

Merlin’s eyes flickered black in betrayal of his arousal before suddenly returning to their human form as he smiled a bit forcedly at Arthur. “We will enjoy each other’s company tonight after your special treat. Like I said, it would be a shame for you to miss out on it, especially when the Fae have gone to such trouble.”

“Of course, you’re right.” It was all Arthur could do to keep the smile on his face despite the darkness bubbling deep inside of him at the realization that Merlin truly *was* trying to get rid of him. Never before would Merlin have *ever* passed up an opportunity to lock himself and Arthur in their chambers in carnal bliss. No matter *what* was happening, no matter its importance, Arthur and his desires had always come first. It never been a question of whether Merlin would accept or not, and obviously Arthur had taken it, and Merlin’s feelings, for granted, and was paying the price for it now.

“Come now, let us get you ready.” Merlin smiled more genuinely before blinking them away to the Diamond Falls.

When Merlin later very unsubtly pretended not to realize that Arthur was doing his damndest to use the ‘invigorating bath’ to seduce him, the darkness inside of Arthur welled up even thicker, even quicker.

And then, when he realized just how equally unsubtle Merlin was while ushering him out of their chambers quickly, how absent-minded Merlin was while ‘hmmming’ answers to Arthur’s questions or comments, how clearly anxious and eager he was for Arthur to just go already so he could get back to whatever he’d been doing when Arthur had called out to him… the blonde started plotting murder.
Now that he paid attention, Arthur cursed viciously at just how obvious it was that the reason Merlin hadn’t complained about Arthur barely paying him any attention was because he was definitely doing something he didn’t want Arthur knowing about. Not only wasn’t he bothered by Arthur’s absence, but every single time Arthur tried to do something with him, tried to spend time with him, to get back to the way they’d once been - Merlin had found some excuse as to why he wouldn’t be available or why Arthur couldn’t be available either (despite the many times Arthur insisted that yes, he could damned well be available!).

Merlin’s magic was also remaining fixedly distant. It behaved normally in every other matter than Merlin. It listened to Arthur, it anticipated his needs, it obeyed without question… except for certain times where he could not only not blink to his mate’s side, but the magic wasn’t showing him glances of where his mate was or what he was doing like it usually would.

Whatever Merlin was doing, whoever he was doing it with, was not only being hidden from Arthur, but was being protected from Arthur.

And that meant it (or him/her) was important to Merlin.

As he lay alone in the darkness of their bedroom, in their bed, Arthur wondered how many nights Merlin had actually been coming back this late and Arthur just had not noticed because he’d been gone as well doing his own thing, expecting Merlin to be waiting for him patiently and obediently like some sort of puppy. He hugged a pillow tightly to his chest as he stared ahead of him in the darkness, curling up into a ball at the uncertainty that tugged at his core. How many nights had Merlin lay alone in bed like this, waiting for Arthur to deign to return to him? How many nights had he been lonely and wondering when Arthur would come to bed? How many nights did it take for Merlin to stop waiting for him and to instead find whatever - or whoever - was keeping him away so late into the night (early into the morning)?

Why hadn’t Arthur learnt his lesson? Something like this had happened before, hadn’t it? He’d taken Merlin and his love for him for granted, and he’d paid for it by nearly losing Merlin due to the cambion starving himself to near death. Hadn’t Arthur sworn he’d never do something so stupid again? And yet a couple thousand years had been enough to make him forget that event and there he was, committing the same damned mistake, and yet this time he mightn’t lose Merlin to death… he might lose him to someone else.

Merlin loved him, Arthur had no doubt about that, and yet he couldn’t help but think back to their own fathers.

Uther had been obsessed with Igraine to the point where he’d used a love potion to keep her trapped with him forever, and yet despite that he’d made a mistress out of Mordred and Morgana’s mother and had not only had children with her, but had kept those children in court, had recognized them as his own before said court, and had flaunted their existence in Igraine’s face every single day.

Balinor, on the other hand, clearly had considered Hunith his mate, one could say that everything he’d done since he’d met her had been for her in one way or the other… and yet he’d not only apparently had quite a couple of affairs on her (which she’d apparently known about and had been okay with) but they hadn’t only been affairs of the body. No matter what he’d ultimately done to Su, Hunith had admitted that he’d obviously felt something for the Queen of the Succubi but that it hadn’t ‘been enough’. There were also the frenzies he’d go into with the fae. And there’d been Tauren.

Even now Arthur felt sick to his stomach at the thought of that monster, but what he never could admit to Merlin was that while he hated Tauren for what he’d done, Arthur also quite hated Balinor, and blamed him, as well as Hunith, for what had happened. Hunith had admitted to being absent a
lot as she wished to be ‘more than a wife and a mother’ and had found that sense of self in affairs of her own. Balinor, on the other hand, had clearly become dependent on Tauren, and, to some degree, had even seemed in love with him.

That was something else that Arthur could never quite admit to Merlin, but from what he’d seen in those visions, Arthur believed Balinor was like Uther - obsessed with his wife, yet incredibly drawn to someone else. Balinor had been like a dog in heat around Tauren, begging to be allowed to fuck him, and groaning and moaning like a whore as he’d taken the man who was secretly abusing Balinor’s son.

Growling, Arthur shoved his own face harder into the cushion.

Merlin blinked back into the room, and Arthur felt it immediately, instinctively pretending to be asleep. He hated that show of cowardice, and as Merlin disrobed and slipped into bed Arthur debated on whether to turn around and talk to Merlin, to confront him, and yet he couldn’t find the anger to do so when he knew he was at fault. There was no way any of this would’ve happened if he hadn’t ignored Merlin for so long.

The cambion slipped against him and wrapped his arms around Arthur’s body, snuggling in against him, skin incredibly cold to the touch, proving he’d been outside somewhere. “Love you, Arthur,” he whispered softly into his hair, clearly not wanting to wake up Arthur.

Merlin quickly fell asleep, snoring.

Arthur stared ahead of him in the darkness.

Merlin loved him.

He knew it.

But he also knew that the scent wafting off of Merlin was that of a woman’s perfume.

It was getting harder to sneak away, and Merlin realized he’d have to tell Arthur about what he was doing soon, but he was worried that not enough time had passed for his will to have been truly cemented in the people’s minds and souls. He didn’t want to give Arthur hope for descendants he could be proud of, only to watch his mate grow slowly disillusioned with them all over again. He never wanted to see Arthur the way he’d been that day in the Heart of Darkness, never, and he’d do all he could to make sure he never did.

But it was growing increasingly harder to do what he had to do now that Arthur apparently believed Sophia and Bors ready and able to go on by themselves. Arthur kept trying to slip back into how they’d once been, and Merlin wanted nothing more than to do so himself, but he couldn’t allow himself to be distracted, not when he was so close to achieving his goal and making Arthur happy again. It was why he had to continue sneaking around for a little bit longer, just until he could be sure - beyond a reasonable doubt - that his work wouldn’t backfire, that he could present the fruits of his efforts to Arthur with pride and without a doubt that the blonde would be let down.

It was why he’d asked his mother to ‘call upon’ Arthur and keep him busy in Cambria with her, to take Sophia along as well. Su understood Sophia’s pain as she too had lost Hunith to the passage of time, and like Sophia she wasn’t one to talk about her feelings or to open up in that sort of way - and like Sophia the only one she tended to open up to was Arthur. So yes, it was a bit of emotional manipulation on Merlin’s part, but it got him what he needed: Arthur distracted and too busy to start
to get suspicious.

“You appear to be speechless in astonishment,” Igraine announced with a snicker as she placed her hands on her hips, hellish pride burning in her eyes. Like her grandmother, this young queen reminded him very much of someone from his past, but this time it was actually her namesake - Arthur’s mother, even if only in looks. That meant she also looked a lot like Arthur, which in itself made Merlin feel more tender regard for her than he had for most of her ancestors, other than Regan of course. “Our greatest artists used the portraits we keep in the castle, as well as the ones in the temples, and our own special - usually unseen by those not of royal blood - to make sure the resemblance could be transferred correctly to stone, and I do believe allowing them into the royal archive was worth it.”

Merlin stared at the large statue of ‘The Wild God And The Primordial Goddess’, which depicted people who were clearly Arthur and himself. And yet… “I have several questions.”

“Question away,” she declared in total confidence, standing as tall as her tiny stature could manage.

“First off, why do I have a beard and mustache? And why am I naked other than that piece of Arthur’s cloak that just barely covers my cock?” Merlin had many more questions regarding the piece, but figured this was the most pressing right now. “I might go around naked on the Isle at times, but I’ve always worn clothes here - and I’m clean shaven.”

“Artistic expression,” Igraine explained immediately with a flippant shrug. “You are the Wild God, so they wanted you to look… wild.”

“Then why is Arthur naked under a cloak that’s barely there, which only serves to cover his crotch and mine?” Merlin wanted to know. “And what does he have breasts?”

“He is the Primordial Goddess, he gave birth to children and fed them, did he not?” Igraine raised an eyebrow, as if saying she was young, but not dumb. “They are supposed to be heavy with milk… although, yes, I can see why you would think that they are the breasts of a less than graciously endowed female given the artists gave him longer hair than in the portraits, but once more, he is the deity over childbirth, marriage, love… these artists have romanticized him their whole lives so they took some… liberties.”

“Why does it look like I am going to rape him?” Merlin took issues with that, as Arthur was being held up by Merlin, and was visibly trying to twist away and even had one hand by the side of Merlin’s head as if to try and push him away. “I would never rape Arthur.”

“You are not going to rape him,” Igraine huffed with the exasperation of someone dealing with someone else who had no artistic vision. “You have a dog and your scepter in the statue. Clearly you are already home and in your chambers.” Her expression turned incredibly lecherous. “We have read counts of what the court life was like when King Merlin and Queen Arthur ruled… how we all see it, our poor Goddess probably had quite a couple of nights when he was sore from being seated on his husband’s cock… but said husband still desired his wife and threw him on their bed to ravish his seed into him.” She snickered. “Plus, Mammoth wrote about his time in your court and he clearly said that ‘the queen delights in teasing the king, riling his feverish desire of him to the point where the king loses all sense and thought, and aggressively takes the queen like a common whore - which is something that our queen quite visibly delights in’. He also noted: ‘the queen’s happiness is the kingdom’s happiness,’ and ‘no matter how brutal or aggressive the king may appear to be, the kingdom knows that even on the days where the queen is chained to him like a slave meant solely for pleasure, that it is truly the king who is chained to the queen, and not the other way around’.” She pointed to the statue. “Thus this was born.”
That… was not untrue. Still, given her young age Merlin was highly uncomfortable that she had read Geoffrey’s accounts to the point where she could be quoting passages of it back to him like that.

“Come now, Merlin, there are more statues for you to see!” Igraine declared like a commander leading her troops to battle as she looped an arm around him and began to drag him away. “My uncle and his husband especially commissioned a new portrait in the temple that I am sure you will enjoy!”

Sighing, still unable to believe that no one listened to him when he continuously told them he and Arthur weren’t gods and didn’t need a temple or statues or altars or prayers being said to them… Merlin allowed himself to be led away.

Arthur knew Merlin was trying to keep him distracted, but to use his own mother in his obvious schemes was low.

That was why he’d ditched Sophia with Su and had doubled back, and it was a good thing too because that was when he’d overheard one of the fae mentioning the amount of time Merlin was spending ‘in the other realm’. And that was when he realized Merlin had gone over to that hell hole, that terrible—!

He’d blinked himself to Dragonhold before even realizing he’d done so, and although he’d prepared himself for what he knew awaited him on the other side… once he actually manifested over there, Arthur found himself confused and completely unprepared.

Even within the first couple of seconds he could tell something was very different. There weren’t any sounds of wails and suffering - of cruel laughter - echoing around him, and the stench of blood was completely gone. There was laughter (nice sounding laughter - happy laughter) and liveliness, and…

…and a statue.

Of Arthur.

Arthur’s eyes widened as he stared at the statue in utter confusion. He cast his gaze as far as the eye could see other statues of him and Merlin scattered all around in key areas. These had not been in Dragonhold while he’d been queen and they definitely hadn’t been here the last time he’d come to see whether what Bors had told him was true.

Just what had happened between that horribly disgusting, disappointing night… and now?

“It’s the Primordial Goddess!” Someone cried out, causing gasps to ring out all around him as suddenly people prostrated to their knees all around him.

Arthur’s eyes widened further as he slowly turned around, seeing every single person on their knees, heads bowed, with many whispers of ‘the Goddess has finally visited us’, ‘we are truly blessed’, ‘surely this is an omen of good!’, and ‘how blessed are we to have lived to see this day?’ circling all around him.

Wait. Was he supposed to be this ‘Primordial Goddess’?

A quick glance towards the closest statue proved that yes, that was what was etched into the bottom of it.
Why do I have another title? He wondered in absolute befuddlement.

“You have finally come to visit us, Primal Goddess!” One of the people cried out in relief. “Does this mean that the Wild God is finally satisfied with our progress? Does he finally have faith in us?”

Wild God?

Were they talking about Merlin?

“It must mean that!” Another exclaimed to the one who had said it. “He must truly believe we will not backslide into the Dark Ages once more.”

“Bless my marriage, Primordial Goddess!” A young male who looked like he should be a swain pleaded while grabbing tight hold of the hand of the burly man next to him.

“Please bless my children!” A matronly woman clamored.

Completely overwhelmed and increasingly confused, Arthur stared around him in growing panic. MERLIN EMRY DRAGONLORD! His mind yelled instinctively. WHAT THE INFERNO HAVE YOU DONE?

In seconds Merlin blinked in front of him, looking worried and confused, and then he realized where Arthur was and what was happening around him, and the cambion looked utterly terrified. Good. Because Arthur was going to kill him.

Just as quickly Arthur found himself transported from that place to the inside of the Dragonhold castle, and like with the marketplace, it seemed much different than it had when he’d last come to this place. The servants seemed happy and unafraid, and there were no bruises to be seen. Surprise and awe appeared on their faces, along with soft gasps of ‘the goddess is finally here!’; but unlike those at the marketplace they did not crowd around Arthur, instead bowed quickly and hurried along on their way to allow Merlin and Arthur privacy.

Arthur’s mouth opened and closed before turning to Merlin - mouth open once more - only to blink in shock when he saw the painting on the wall behind his mate. It wasn’t one he remembered posing for - or ever having seen before - and yet it was clearly him and Merlin. The painting portrayed Merlin seated upon his throne, a court session clearly in progress, and yet Merlin’s devoted attention was fixed fully on Arthur, who sat on his lap, facing him, hands on Merlin’s shoulders and head tilted back slightly so he was smiling up at Merlin.

“I never posed for that,” Arthur insisted as he moved passed Merlin to instead stare at it in confusion, only to realize seconds later that there more portraits, paintings, and statues, these statues much smaller than the ones out in the courtyard and marketplace. Each new marvel he saw was clearly created by a different artist as the styles were all different, and yet the subject matter were always the same, either him, or Merlin, but almost exclusively him and Merlin together, more than not locked in some sort of intimate or carnal pose.

“You are correct, you did not not pose for any of these.” A heavy sigh escaped Merlin’s lips as he came to stand next to him. “The artists of this renaissance have been heavily influenced by Geoffrey’s accounts of our time on the throne, as well as by the few paintings that remained in Dragonhold during Alaric’s reign, which were discovered a while back and put up in a private viewing wing.”

There were many paintings of a somewhat more feminized version of himself with a more masculinized version of Merlin, clearly the two of them representing two different sides. Many times
Merlin was surrounded with war or death or weapons while Arthur himself seemed surrounded by different symbols of life such as the harvest, or people merrymaking, or children. And yet despite the stark contrast between them it was more than obvious that he and Merlin were supposed to represent two sides of the same coin.

Merlin must've picked up on what Arthur had because he sighed heavily. “The people have come to associate me with death and war, whereas they associate you with life, family, and marriage.”

“Why do I have female breasts in most of these?” Arthur wanted to know, very bothered by this as he noticed more and more of them.

A flush of embarrassment colored Merlin’s face. “I am told they are meant to be ‘heavy with milk’ and convey the fact that you are the All-Mother, so there must be something to suckle from. As I said, you are meant to represent family, and that includes childbirth.” Despite his clear worry there was a hint of arousal to his tone when he murmured: “To be fair, my love, when you were wet-nursing our sons your breasts were swollen, even if not to the degree in some of these paintings and statues.” He ran his fingers through his messy mop of black hair. “If you notice your lap is always obscured by something, it is meant to protect you from being portrayed indecently.”

Blinking slowly, trying to digest this, Arthur swept his hand towards one of the paintings. “Why is there a little winged boy in some of these?”

Merlin flinched. “He is meant to represent Alaric.”

“What about Calder?” Arthur asked with a frown.

“Well, there are some pictures with two winged children, but you must remember, my love, that these are descendants of our eldest born, and it is his connection to us - and through him their own - that they wish to celebrate and immortalize.”

It was as he was trying to digest this that Arthur noticed one painting in particular and growled. “Why is there a picture of him.”

Merlin sighed heavily and turned to look at the picture of him and Arthur together, with Tauren off to the side, clearly unhappy and jealous. “As I said, Geoffrey’s writings are incredibly popular, they know of him.” He licked his lips. “He is the Great Villain, which is obvious in his portrayal in their creations, a force trying to come between the God and Goddess, yet ultimately unsuccessful.”

“Merlin…” the more that Arthur looked around, the surer he was that he had been very wrong in his assumption of what Merlin had been doing during the time he’d spent away, and yet Arthur was still very confused as to what exactly had actually been going on. “…the last time I came to Dragonhold the whole kingdom - but especially the capital, the castle - had degenerated into a sickening heap of filth that left me wishing to destroy it and everyone within it.” He sent his husband a curious sideways look. “What exactly have you been doing while I have been distracted?”

Embarrassment and nerves clearly played on Merlin’s face as he kept his gaze on the large portrait they stood in front of. “I could not stand the look on your face when you asked me to bar access to our descendants.” The hands he had clasped behind his back shook with how tightly he held them. “I had to do something.” He closed his eyes. “I did not want to tell you what I was doing until I was sure that they would not disappoint you the way their ancestors did.”

Heart-strings tugging like crazy, Arthur was relieved Merlin had his eyes closed because there was no way the blonde could hide just how much he absolutely loved this man. “What did you do, Merlin?”
The cambion’s eyes closed tighter, his husband clearly bracing himself. “I burned the kingdom to the ground.”

Eyes widening, Arthur turned to fully face his husband. “What?”

“The kingdom was like a body which was diseased,” Merlin responded. “To save the whole body I had to amputate every rotten piece.” He took in a deep breath. “You said that if they were not Alaric’s descendants you would’ve killed them…” He paused, clearly worried as he finally turned to look at Arthur. “I did not have that problem.”

Arthur’s eyes widened as he stared up at Merlin in absolute shock.

“I burned the kingdom to the ground,” Merlin repeated with no emotion on his face, “and I took a more hands-on approach to how the survivors of this kingdom ran it than we did with Alaric and his descendants. I removed all magic from this realm and with it, removed their connection to its source, to the darkness. If they started to stray, if they disobeyed my commands, fire and brimstone returned, as did floods, or draughts, until they did as I commanded, as I willed.” His expressionless face would be chilling to anyone else, but Arthur knew it was a facade, that deep inside Merlin’s emotions were in a turmoil. “The only thing I will apologize for is the misunderstanding that my magic and long life has created in the civilians. No matter how many times I tell them I am not a god they do not believe me, and due to that you have also been dragged into this odd fixation of theirs.”

Arthur bit down on his bottom lip as he stared up at his defiant mate. “Is that the only thing you will apologize for?”

Merlin’s coldhearted facade slipped for a second to reveal his nervousness before it was back up. “I have done nothing wrong.”

“Nothing?” Arthur asked once more.

“Nothing.” Merlin met his gaze.

Raising an eyebrow, Arthur folded his arms over his chest as he tilted his head slightly, opening his mouth to ask him exactly whose perfume had been on him the other night.

“The rumors were right,” a voice whispered in shock.

Arthur turned on his heel to see, in utter surprise, a child no older than twelve who bore an uncanny resemblance to his mother.

“Arthur,” she whispered to herself, eyes wide in excitement, before she very clearly forced herself to portray a more regal appearance as she sauntered into the room. “Considering Merlin does not believe us ready to not disappoint you, I am going to assume that you discovered his deeds on your own.” She came to stand in front of them, and it was only then that Arthur saw the crown on her head.

This child was the Queen of Dragonhold?

“Arthur, allow me to present you to Queen Igraine Dragonlord, our many-times great grand daughter,” Merlin declared with tired fondness for the child queen. “Her father, Reginald, died in a riding accident when she was very young, yet she stepped up and has been the queen of Dragonhold for five years now.”

“I was lucky to have Merlin as an advisor,” Igraine admitted. “In many ways I lived a similar circumstance to King Regan the Kind.”
Arthur had no idea what that meant. “Your perfume…”

“Ah!” She flushed happily. “It is my own creation, only I wear this. I could give you a bottle of your own if you would like.”

“Thank you,” Arthur accepted mostly because he was shocked to realize that the person he’d been so jealous of had been his own (many times great) grand daughter. “You have the same name as my mother.”

“I know.” Igraine beamed up at him. “My parents chose that name especially as it belonged to the one who gave birth to the ‘All-Mother’.”

All-Mother? Did he have yet another title? How many new ones were there?!? He was a little too afraid to ask.

“Come, Arthur, I must show you the temple,” Igraine declared, her previous excitement returning rapidly. “Merlin has no appreciation for it but I know you will!”

Merlin sighed heavily. “Igraine, Arthur—.”

“I would love to,” Arthur interrupted, morbidly curious as to what was in this temple.

He allowed Igraine to lead him away, and only after making sure that Merlin was following after them, looking incredibly embarrassed, did he actually start to enjoy himself.

Of course, once he got to the temple he understood why Merlin had looked so embarrassed, and he himself was not immune to the emotion as he allowed the very excited and proud child lead him through the incredibly exquisitely built temple which housed more works of art which portrayed Arthur and Merlin and their love… many of them very explicit in nature. It appears there was even some sort of religion based around their relationship, the people seeing Merlin as a disciplinarian yet protective and guiding figure, whereas Arthur had been romanticized as the pinnacle of beauty, the arts, family, and seduction.

By the time they returned to the Isle, Arthur was a little exhausted from all he’d been subjected to on Dragonhold, and yet, when Merlin turned to him with clear worry, the blonde silenced his mouth with his own, and made exhausting use of the idiot husband a whole kingdom worshipped.

Now, whenever Merlin ventured towards Dragonhold, Arthur was by his side. He was still not completely sure how to handle the deistic worship conferred upon the two of them, but he used it to assist Merlin in shaping the kingdom into something that they both could be proud of.

Every time he thought back to that night where he’d lost all faith in his son’s descendants Arthur fell more in love with Merlin at the realization of just how much his happiness meant to his husband. Merlin had not only allowed Arthur the time to dedicate to someone else (Sophia and Bors) but had used the time that Arthur had left him alone to do something to make Arthur happy. Honestly, Arthur hadn’t been able to believe he could possibly love Merlin any more than he’d already had, and yet every day he loved him more and more.

Unlike before, when left to their own devices, Dragonhold flourished under Merlin and Arthur’s guidance, and when it was obvious that no one would believe they weren’t gods (and Arthur could understand that given the centuries that went by without them aging) Arthur stopped trying to dissuade them from thinking so. Merlin tried (quite unsuccessfully) sometimes, yet Arthur used the
power that that belief gave him to make sure that his son’s descendants - and the kingdom that had been left to them - never became the cesspool they had once been.

Times changed, centuries rolled on, and while it was never easy to say goodbye to those who died, Arthur had a purpose now, a goal, and it helped him. Each generation brought with it a goodbye, but also brought new challenges and if there was anything Arthur enjoyed, it was utterly dominating any sort of challenge.

It wasn’t until Igraine’s great great great great great grandson died, and another assumed the throne, that Arthur realized he could do this. It had taken a while, but he’d learnt that removing himself from the situation had not helped, would not help. Some might see long-life as a curse, might go insane, but Arthur had never seen it that way. What would have been a curse, what would have driven him insane, would have been being separated from Merlin.

Arthur could lose anyone and everyone and survive - just not Merlin - and it was more and more obvious just how reciprocated those feelings were in his husband and mate.

No matter how many centuries passed, no matter how many people they lost, as long as they still had each other, they’d be happy.

“Will you two ever get out of the honeymoon phase?” Bors asked with a snicker as he snapped a photo of them with his polaroid camera.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to say.” Merlin’s voice was muffled given the fact that he was pressing kisses to the crown of Arthur’s head, his arm the blonde as he stood behind him, holding him close to him under the guise of ‘helping him remain warm’.

Arthur, for his part, was flushed in obvious arousal from his husband’s constant attention and unintentional teasing. He was incredibly grateful that by now the people of Dragonhold were used to seeing their gods (and the gods’ ‘messenger’) around, because he did not want anyone interrupting right now, even if it was to be worshipful.

Then again, the people of Dragonhold knew by now that the statues and the paintings had never held a candle to the actual devotion and feverish desire between the immortal husband and wife, especially not now. If they had been held as a role model after which the citizens had modeled their own relationships, it had increased ever since they’d realized the secret that their gods had been keeping from them.

Even before it had become noticeable rumors had started to swirl in the kingdom, and with more and more pictures showing up in newspapers, magazines and tabloids of Merlin’s increasingly clingy, possessive, hands-on behavior, those rumors had continued to be hyped until finally it had become noticeable enough to confirm the rumors to be true.

Merlin’s hands were on Arthur’s midsection, his long fingers splayed possessively over the barely noticeable yet very much there ‘baby bump’ being featured on the covers of far too many newspapers and magazines to be counted.

“Mine.” Merlin growled in obvious pride into Arthur’s hair as his grip tightened on Arthur’s midsection, but not enough to hurt.

Arthur’s breath escaped his lips loudly as his body reacted instinctively, back arching, bringing his
ass to Merlin’s crotch, able to feel his length throbbing viciously through the material between them. His eyes widened and he let out a choked whimper as his hands raised to his own nipples, feeling them so hard and poking through the material of his shirt.

Off to the side someone could be heard groaning lustfully, and Arthur cast his gaze in that direction, noting quite resentfully that the alleyway was completely filled by citizens who were enjoying trysts with their lovers - while he was stuck being tortured by the assault of his husband’s growing need.

Alleyways were always extremely popular in Dragonhold as they gave a semblance of privacy for those partners who wished to indulge in each other without being too obvious about it, with the more adventurous choosing to remain where they were. It would seem that even though Dragonhold was no longer connected to the leylines - to the magic - of the Isle, they were still affected by endless generations of being subjected to Merlin and Arthur’s never-ending hunger for each other, with it shaping the kingdom’s culture and customs.

The art of the era reflected this, as did the behavior.

“**Mine.**” Merlin snarled again seconds before the sound of the back of Arthur’s trousers ripping rung in the blonde’s ears like a symphony. “**Mine.**”

Arthur’s eyes rolled in the back of his head as he felt his husband’s heat pressing against his quivering, eager hole. “**Yours.**”

Growling like an animal, Merlin shifted to be able to lean down and sink his teeth into Arthur’s claiming mark before beginning to ease forwards and sink yet another part of him into Arthur just as claimingly.

Hands going to the ones over his baby bump, Arthur shuddered in need as Merlin used a torturously slow and careful speed to ease himself inside. While the life inside of Arthur was protected within a literal egg, Merlin always managed to somehow control himself and his aggressive need despite the fact that Arthur was quite sure he and the egg could take Merlin’s viciousness, and the blonde desperately needed it.

This would be the third time Arthur was pregnant with Merlin’s child, and just like he had been with Alaric and Calder, the pregnancy made him even hornier than usual. It also, however, made Merlin not only more possessive, but more protective, than usual, which meant that no matter how much Arthur begged, his lover wouldn’t take him roughly, viciously, like he usually would, and instead lathered him with kisses and took him torturously slow and carefully.

Just like he was doing now.

Merlin also refused to use anything but his human shaped cock to love Arthur during his pregnancy, and even though it always brought Arthur mind-numbing pleasure, his body was used to his mate’s true form and felt cheated whenever it was denied the sensation of being claimed by that massive, multi-tiered, barbed cock.

“**Merlinnnnnn!**” Arthur complained in a whine, begging with just the tone of his voice.

“**Shhhhh, wife, you know the answer to your pleas,**” Merlin whispered into his hair. “**Relax your body and allow me to love into you sweetly.**”

Even though he parted his lips to beg, Arthur lost all words and merely sobbed as Merlin and his magic took that moment to use the centuries that they’d been together and teased him to mindless pleasure.
The egg’s shell had now completely hardened, as it tended to do once having passed through Arthur’s ‘birthing canal’ and no longer needing to be elastic enough to do so. Now it was hard, as its purpose was to protect until the actual birth would occur.

Despite having done this twice already, Arthur was still in awe at this very inhuman process, as the fact that while he had, in technical terms, already given birth, he would still have to wait a while for their child to be hatched. Until then he kept the egg on him at all times, keeping it warm, speaking to the child growing within the slowly enlarging egg, and making sure to keep it safe and sound.

As with Alaric and Calder, Merlin grew impossible protective around this time, and they were locked into the room, the two of them guarding over the egg and each other. They wouldn’t emerge until the egg had hatched and their child been born, and even then it would take a while for Merlin to calm down.

The only one allowed in and out during this time was the two-in-one, who was also the only one allowed to guard the egg during the rare moments in which its parents were not around - such as when they need to bathe, to eat, and to mate - the latter of which was the most common reason for their absence.

It was as if all the pent up aggression Merlin had been holing up inside of him during the pregnancy was let loose, and Arthur could barely keep up as it was all showered relentlessly on him.

“Sweet bitch,” Merlin purred into Arthur’s ear as he loomed over the boy who was on his hands and knees, the larger male slamming his hips into his ruthlessly. “Good bitch. My bitch. MY. BITCH.”

Arthur dug his nails into the ground and sobbed out as the translucent betrayal of his desire not only gushed from his cockhead, but down his inner thighs from that place which welcomed Merlin’s cock and was stretched happily around it. “Give me more, master!” It might sound like he was begging but it was quite truly an order. “Harder, please, master! Leave your little bitch aching and unable to stand!”

The dragon side of Merlin roared as he began to slam himself so hard into Arthur that he would’ve punted him away if it weren’t for the demon’s claws being buried in his hips - all three simultaneously punishing their mate for expertly riling them up like this.

Barely able to hold on, Arthur couldn’t keep the smile of utter bliss off of his face.

“You are terrible at this,” Sophia mumbled as she stared at her reflection, as well as the one of the boy seated behind her, in the front camera view provided by her much beloved - and never far away - iPhone.

“Shut up,” Belus grumbled embarrassedly with a pout, a red flush on his cheeks as the ten year old started on the twelfth, highly messy braid. He himself kept glancing down at an online tutorial that he was trying very hard to follow, yet very clearly his efforts weren’t yielding the results of the beauty guru on his own iPhone’s screen, and that fact was greatly annoying him. “I am not done yet.”

“I know,” she assured him with astonishment in her tone. “And what you’ve done so far is terrible.”
Despite pouting even further at the criticism, Belus continued on stubbornly. He kept glancing down at his phone and then back up at Sophia’s hair, and pouting bigger and bigger, clearly very close to calling it quits and giving up. And yet every time he seemed about to give in he’d catch a glimpse of a photo on his screensaver of a three year old version of him smiling up at Sophia, who was kneeling behind him, arms wrapped around his neck and smiling at the camera - her hair up in these half braids he was trying so hard to replicate - and it would apparently give him the drive to continue on.

Sophia seemed to notice this because she sighed heavily, very obviously resigning herself to allow this to continue. “Bors and I have decided that we will have to allow you to do this more often so that you can get better, because if you stay at this terrible skill level it will all be our fault.”

In seconds Belus’ smile appeared with beaming intensity, his eyes flashing reptile in betrayal of just how happy this news had made him. “Really? You and Bors will let me practice on you more?”

Sophia folded her arms over her chest. “Well, you’re long-lived like the rest of us, we can’t have you be a ridiculously bad braider for eternity, now, can we?”

“Thank you Bors, thank you Sophia!” Still beaming, Belus returned to the task with renewed vigor. “You both have the prettiest hair,” he praised softly.

“We know,” Sophia assured him with utter pride.

Smiling brighter, Belus returned to the task at hand.

Unnoticed in the doorway, Arthur leaned back heavier against Merlin and whispered softly so as to remain unnoticed by their son and his ‘babysitter’. “Should we warn them?”

Arms wrapped around Arthur, Merlin snorted as he pressed kisses up his wife’s neck. “We didn’t warn Owain, what makes Bors and Sophia so special?”

Arthur’s lips curled in amusement as he closed the door silently before turning in his husband’s hold and reaching up to connect his hands behind Merlin’s neck. “Because this time our son is long-lived, as is the person he has clearly decided is his mate. Sophia nor Bors have been serious with anyone since Daegal - and it’s been so long since his death - I think we owe it to them to give them time to get used to the idea.”

“I think, Arthur, that you need to leave the two-in-one to Belus,” Merlin informed him as he lowered his head to press his lips to Arthur’s. “I also think you need to pay more attention to me.”

“Oh, you think that, do you?” Arthur chuckled as he tightened his grip around Merlin’s neck and pressed up on his tiptoes to press butterfly kisses against Merlin’s lips. “What else do you think, husband?”

Growling, Merlin pulled Arthur tightly to him so he could feel his desire throbbing against him and figure the answer out himself. “I think you’re going into heat soon again.” He took deep whiffs, his voice turning more gravelly. “I think it’s a good thing the two-in-one are here because we won’t be seeing Belus for a very long time, but if Bors is around to ogle or Sophia to be spoilt by, our son won’t even notice we’re gone.”

Arthur shivered, finding it incredibly sexy how his husband could sniff out and know he was going to go into heat in this manner. It was inhuman, it was animalistic, and he was very sure it always aroused him into going into heat even that much quicker. Even now he was rubbing his thighs together, feeling the slick starting to trail its way down their inner sides. “A long time, you said?”

“No, I said a very long time,” Merlin corrected with dark menace before grabbing Arthur and
throwing him over his shoulder.

Hanging over said shoulder, Arthur gripped Merlin’s back for balance, only to whimper when he felt his mate’s finger slipping into his wet passage and begin to thrust into him, to torture him by promising that warmth what his cock would soon be doing.

“A very long time?” Arthur clenched around that finger and laughed throatily at the choked sound Merlin let out at the feeling.

A snarl escaped Merlin’s lips. “I am going to fuck another baby into you,” and with that fevered threat they blinked away.

The sound of laughter and merriment rung throughout the Isle.

Su had come to visit from Cambria, bringing her latest lovers, who were doting on her hand and feet as she clearly expected them to. As always she appeared to be the youngest of the group despite being by far the eldest, and the smile on her face was genuine as she lounged by the lake and soaked in the sun in her skimpy little teeny weeny yellow polka dot bikini.

Bors, for his part, was swimming in the middle of the lake, or, well, he had been swimming. Belus had quickly caught up with him and, like he had since the moment he’d been old enough to present his cambion inheritance, completely dominated Bors’ attention. The young prince was clearly Arthur’s son despite looking (as had his brothers) like a miniature Merlin, and was currently floating in the water with Bors, his legs wrapped around Bors’ waist, his fingers deep in that red hair, and his lips claiming Bors’ hungrily, temptingly.

Merlin felt no shame for not having warned Bors and Sophia about his son or his intentions, and to be honest, had felt some dark amusement to see the usually emotionally unavailable and unshakable two-in-one completely taken-aback and overwhelmed. Arthur called Merlin evil for enjoying the floundering redhead. Merlin didn’t see it that way and instead figured that since Bors and Sophia quite often ganged up with Arthur against him that it was only fair he and Belus do the same.

Warmth encircled Merlin as Arthur appeared at his side and leaned into him, wrapping his arms around Merlin’s waist.

Smiling up at Merlin, Arthur was brighter than the sun. “You look smug.”

Chuckling, Merlin wrapped an arm around Arthur’s shoulders and glanced back towards his family. “I’m happy, Arthur, there’s a difference.”

“You’re also smug though,” Arthur insisted as he pressed a kiss to Merlin’s shoulder. “But that’s fine, I like it when you’re smug. It’s attractive on you.”

Lips twitching, Merlin’s gaze returned to Arthur. “Is it?” When Arthur nodded Merlin’s smile grew as he leaned down to press a slow kiss to his lips, swallowing Arthur’s tiny keen, and issuing his own little growl when he felt the way his mate pressed himself harder into him. “Behave, wife,” he begged against Arthur’s lips, able to feel them curling up into a smile under his own. “Tonight I will ——.” He then groaned when he felt Arthur’s hand slip into his pants and take him expertly in hand. “Arthur.”

“Fine.” Arthur huffed despite the smile on his face as he cuddled closer and turned his gaze towards the scene Merlin had been admiring seconds before. “Love me forever, Merlin,” he ordered softly,
contentedly, as he tended to do whenever he was at his happiest.

Smiling, Merlin pressed a kiss to the crown of his head, unable to believe how incredibly lucky he was to be here right now, and living this life with Arthur. Whenever he thought back to their more than rocky beginnings it awed him to see how far they'd gone, and it made him appreciate Arthur even more than he already did, made him love him even fiercer.

They'd be together forever, and Merlin would love Arthur a little more each and every day of it.

Arthur tore his gaze from their family and instead glanced back up at him with a quirk of his eyebrow, and a teasing slant to his lips. "I gave you an order, Merlin."

Smiling down adoringly, Merlin leaned back down to capture his honeysuckle lips with his own, and right before he tasted heaven he whispered: “As my master wishes, so mote it be.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh wow, it's crazy that it's finally over!

I want to take this moment to thank everyone who made it this far - you're the reason I was able to finish this series!

Not sure what I'll be doing now that this series is over, such as whether I'll actually do the 'What If' series, but we shall see!

Either way, thank you for giving this story so much of your time, I love you all!

SG

BTW - check out the gift ohmerthurcharm made for me/this series: https://archiveofourown.org/works/17863877

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!