He whispered an incantation and they both watched a green flower bud appear in her palm. Slowly it grew larger and changed from green to yellow to a red so dark it looked as though the flower had been dipped in blood. As the petals spread and the bud bloomed, a small, violet butterfly no bigger than a coin came from the middle of it, hovering over Morgana’s hand.

“Magic can be beautiful,” Merlin whispered as Morgana stared at the butterfly. It rose to a point where it was right in front of her face, hovered there for a moment, then moved again to perch on the end of her nose, its wings fluttering softly. From where he sat in front of her Merlin chuckled. “It has a mind of its own, magic.”

Morgana laughed softly as the butterfly flew from her nose and around her head before moving towards the window, vanishing into the night as it flew through the broken glass.

I’m back and this was hell to write but I adore Morgana and shE DESERVED BETTER!!!

But no, seriously, I think this is some of the best writing I have ever done and I’m super proud of it.
Morgana stared at him in confusion.

“What?” she asked, clutching the fabric of her nightgown in her fists from where she sat against her pillows.

“I have magic, Morgana,” Merlin told her, his hand on her arm and her mattress dipping where he sat on it. “I have magic, and I have reason to believe you do, as well.”

She watched him with her lips parted and her eyes wide. “I don’t…” She took in a shaky breath, looking around the room in confusion before her eyes found Merlin’s once again. A chill breeze blew through the shattered window that overlooked the courtyard, and the glass that remained there fell against the floor with the sounds of tinkling bells. “Merlin, I don’t understand.”

She dropped the fabric of her gown from one of her fists and fumbled for Merlin’s hand. He took it quickly and willingly, wincing slightly when she gripped his fingers a bit too tightly.

Merlin had heard her screams as he left Arthur’s chambers, then the unmistakable sound of glass shattering, and he immediately ran to her door and murmured an incantation that had it quietly swinging open on its hinges. He had found Morgana sitting up in her bed, her hair wild from sleep and her eyes wide with fear as she stared at the window opposite of her, the glass cracking and slipping from the frame and onto her chamber floors. She had slowly turned to look at him, her breathing fast and terrified.

“I had a dream,” she had said to him, her voice shaky. “I had another dream, Merlin.” She had then looked over his shoulder at the guards standing behind him – obviously alerted by her screams – and nodded them away. Then Merlin closed the door and sat on the edge of her mattress before uttering the words he had been desperately wanting to say since he arrived in Camelot just the year before.

“I have magic, Morgana, and so do you.”

Now here he sat with Morgana’s hand in his own, her breathing calming but still heavy. “How would I have ma—” The words died on her lips almost as soon as they started.

Merlin stared at her with what she thought was his sad attempt at a reassuring smile. “Your dreams,” he told her, “they are visions of the future. You’re a Seer, Morgana.” He paused and looked over to the shattered window, not taking his eyes off of it as he spoke again. “And apparently there is a deeper, more powerful magic inside of you. One that is very much like my
own.” He paused again, a hint of fear in his voice that he was trying to keep at bay. “I trust you, Morgana. I have seen the way you are towards magic; the way you view sorcerers. I am telling you all of this because I want to help you, my lady.”

Morgana watched Merlin as he took in a deep breath before speaking herself. “I’m frightened, Merlin.”

He squeezed her hand as much as he could through her tight grip. “I know,” he responded, and it was almost a whisper. “I have lived in fear my entire life, even more so since I arrived in Camelot. If anyone can understand what you’re feeling—”

She cut Merlin off by wrenching her hand from his gasp and throwing her arms around his neck. “I’m glad you came to Camelot, Merlin,” she whispered as he slowly hugged her back. It only lasted for a few seconds, but Morgana felt so much comfort in Merlin’s embrace. It was as though she had finally found a sort of peace. “I’m glad I came, too, my lady,” he said.

They smiled at each other as they pulled apart, and Merlin grabbed one of Morgana’s hands, turning it so the palm was facing up. He whispered an incantation and they both watched a green flower bud appear in her palm. Slowly it grew larger and changed from green to yellow to a red so dark it looked as though the flower had been dipped in blood. As the petals spread and the bud bloomed, a small, violet butterfly no bigger than a coin came from the middle of it, hovering over Morgana’s hand.

“Magic can be beautiful,” Merlin whispered as Morgana stared at the butterfly. It rose to a point where it was right in front of her face, hovered there for a moment, then moved again to perch on the end of her nose, its wings fluttering softly. From where he sat in front of her Merlin chuckled. “It has a mind of its own, magic.”

Morgana laughed softly as the butterfly flew from her nose and around her head before moving towards the window, vanishing into the night as it flew through the broken glass. She felt Merlin take the flower from her hand, and she watched him squeeze it in his fist, whispering another incantation. His eyes flashed gold – how had she not noticed that sooner? – and when his fingers fell open, a silver necklace was curled up in the middle of his palm. He held it up by two fingers in between them, allowing Morgana to study the necklace before she took it from him.

The charm was small and dainty, resting much like a feather against her skin. It looked like a small, crystal ball, almost like a bubble, but when she looked closely at it, Morgana saw a black petal in the center of it. It was so small it looked as though someone had touched the tip of a quill in ink and tapped it against the glass. “It’s beautiful,” she told Merlin, looking up at him.

He smiled. “It’s a calling charm,” he told her. “I want to help you, Morgana. I don’t want to see you live in fear any longer. I know barely anything about magic, but I know enough to teach you simple spells.” Merlin paused when Morgana moved to put the necklace on, pushing her hair away from her neck to lock the clasp. “I have a book,” he continued as she pushed her unruly hair behind her. “Gaius gave it to me a few days after I arrived in Camelot. It’s a book of magic. We can study it. Together.”
Morgana felt the smile on her face drop. “Merlin, to study magic right beneath Uther’s nose is suicide,” she said, her voice thick with concern. “It’s too dangerous.”

“No harm shall come to you, my lady,” he told her. “Should we be caught, I will take all the blame. I just... I know what it’s like to be scared of yourself, Morgana. I know what it’s like to keep such a big part of yourself hidden away from the world out of fear.” He paused and grabbed her hand. “I don’t want that for you.”

There was a long pause of silence, and Morgana turned to look at the window. “Can you fix it?” she asked, nodding towards the glass. “It’s getting a bit drafty in here.”

Merlin muttered something beneath his breath, and Morgana focused on his eyes; she focused on the bright flash of gold that was gone almost as soon as it appeared. The glass made a tinkling noise as it lifted from her chamber floors and slotted itself back into the window frame at a turtle’s pace. Merlin then waved his hand in the direction of the fireplace, and a burst of heat filled the room as flames suddenly appeared in the hearth. “Who else knows?” Morgana asked as they stared at the flames. “About you?”

“In Camelot, only Gaius,” Merlin told her. “Back home, only my mother. Will had known, but...”

She assumed it was still difficult for Merlin to talk about his childhood friend.

“To go so long with so few people knowing,” Morgana whispered, her hand on Merlin’s arm. “I’m sorry, Merlin.”

Merlin let out a shaking breath, smiling weakly. “There’s been times where I’ve almost told people,” he whispered. “Gwen, for example, though I suspect she already knows more than she lets on. And you, before now. When I first met you and saw how you were towards Uther’s opinions, I wanted desperately to tell you.”

“What about Arthur?” Morgana asked, and Merlin tensed beneath her hand.

“I think about telling Arthur almost every day.”

“Then why haven’t you?”

Merlin let out another shaky breath. “Arthur is my destiny,” Merlin told her, turning from the flames to face her. “It is my duty to protect him no matter what. One day, he shall be a great king, one that is fair and just. Only then can I tell him about my magic, about all the things I’ve done for him. About the things I will always do for him.”
He stopped again and smiled sadly, and Morgana felt as though her heart had contracted in her chest. “He cares a great deal for you, Merlin,” she said, “more than he will ever admit. I’ve seen the way you look at him... the way he looks at you. He needs you, Merlin. Surely you can’t believe he will allow Uther to harm you.”

“I’m not sure what he would do,” Merlin responds almost immediately. “I can’t take that chance, Morgana; the chance that he may allow Uther to kill me. It may be my fate to protect him, but I must protect myself as well.”

Before Morgana could speak again, Merlin was lifting the charm from where it sat against her chest. “Whenever you are ready to begin your lessons, tap this charm three times,” he told her, tapping against the glass with his own finger. A soft, white glow came from the small ball, and Morgana heard what sounded like singing fill her ears. It was soft and slow, and it only lasted for a few seconds, but it sounded just like Gwen when she would sing without realizing it during her duties. “I can hear it too,” Merlin told her. “It will let me know when you want to meet. There is a clearing in the woods only a short distance from the servants’ entrance near the back of the castle. That’s where we’ll have our lessons.”

Morgana nodded, and Merlin smiled before standing from her bed. “Get some rest, my lady,” he said, moving towards the door, but not before whispering one last incantation.

In his hand was a ball of blue light, and Morgana watched it take the shape of a small, glowing song bird. It flew from Merlin’s palm to land on Morgana’s pillow, and she smiled as it sang softly to her. The fire was dying in the hearth, and she pulled the blankets up around her chin, the bird singing into her ear from beside her head.

“Thank you, Merlin,” she said to him, and the boy nodded, a smile on his face, then he walked from the room, the door closing behind him with a soft click. For the first time in years, Morgana’s dreams were not nightmares. In them she saw herself, her eyes glowing gold and winds sweeping at her gowns as butterflies and song birds flew around her in a clearing filled with colorful flowers.

They met in the clearing every evening after dinner, when no one would notice they were gone. Morgana usually got there before Merlin – it’s much easier for her to get away from Gwen than he Arthur – and at first she sat there twiddling her thumbs, but then Merlin taught her the same spell he showed her the night he first told her about the magic, and Morgana found she quite liked to see his reaction when he walked into the clearing to see hundreds of flower buds and butterflies surrounding her.

“I want to tell someone,” she told him one evening, while a small flame was hovering above her index finger. “I want to tell someone about my magic.”

Merlin frowned, and the flame disappeared from her finger as she lowered her hand. “Who?” Merlin asked, and Morgana gripped her gown in her fist.
“Gwen,” she responded, her throat thick. “She’s my best friend, Merlin. I tell her everything. It feels wrong, her not knowing—”

“I know,” Merlin says, cutting her off. “I know how it feels.” He paused, looking at her with so many emotions in his eyes that it was hard to pinpoint a single one. “Do you trust her?” he asked, and Morgana felt her heart speed up slightly.


“Only if you feel safe,” Merlin told her, his eyes flashing gold and his fist opening to reveal a bright red flower, one that she noticed matched the same red strung throughout the palace. “Only if you know she won’t. . . .”

Morgana watched as the petals of the flower wilted against his skin. “If you knew that Arthur would keep your secret – that you would be safe – would you tell him?” she asked, watching as Merlin tilted his hand to let the now brown petals fall to the grass. He doesn’t respond. “Merlin? Would you tell him?”

Merlin nodded, quick and full of jerks, like his neck was filled with knots. “I would,” he whispered, a tear on his face. “I would tell him with no hesitation.” He paused to watch the flower petals decay and disappear into the earth. “I trust Arthur, my lady. I trust him with every ounce of my being. One day – as I’ve told you – Arthur will be the greatest king this land has ever seen. Until that day comes, I can’t let him find out about me or you. Though I feel you will be much safer than me should we be found.”

They both pretend they don’t bump into each other as Merlin is leaving Arthur’s chambers three nights later – long after their lessons have ended – with his clothes askew and his face flushed.

When Uther finds out, it is early in the morning at the beginning of winter. It is also the first time Morgana realized her ability as a Seer never always graced her when it should.

Merlin had returned late the night before from a hunt with Arthur, and he had agreed rather hesitantly to a lesson in the morning. They had been out for an hour or so when Morgana heard footsteps from the woods, and then there was shouting and men running into the clearing. The butterflies fled between the trees as the knights surrounded them in a circle behind their king, and the different colored flowers wilted into the ground that was flush with now slowly dying grass as Uther barked out “Seize them,” and the warmth Merlin had brought into the clearing suddenly vanished in a feeling that made the air feel like it was being pulled from Morgana’s lungs as the knights hauled them to their feet.

She watched in horror as shackles were placed on Merlin’s flailing wrists, shouting at the knights and Uther until they were drug apart and her voice was hoarse. She heard Merlin’s panicked shouts
as he was dragged from the clearing; he yelled viciously, claiming Morgana was innocent, that he had hexed her, that she should not be punished for his mistakes. Her view of him became hidden by knights as Uther came to stand in front of her. “You’ve been practicing magic,” he said, his voice thick with anger, “inside the walls of my kingdom.”

Morgana glared at Uther with a fierce look in her eye, relishing in the way he seemed to cower back slightly. “If you harm him—” she began, only to be stopped with a sharp tug on her arm by the knight restraining her.

“You dare to question the motives of your king? You stupid, foolish girl,” Uther spat as the knights drug Merlin out of sight, leaving them alone in the clearing – if you didn’t include the knights holding Morgana’s arms or the two standing post on either side of the king. “You ought to be grateful that it isn’t your head that will be on the chopping block tomorrow morning.” Then Uther had nodded his head sharply, and Morgana was tugged back to the castle by two of the knights, cursing Uther and his men as she was dragged through the courtyard and locked in her chambers.

“I have to get him out,” she told Gwen three days later when the guards at her door finally were set away, shocking the serving girl with the sudden remark. “He would do the same if it was me.”

Gwen had stared at her for a moment like she was going to argue before nodding her head in agreement. “You’re right,” she said, hanging Morgana’s gown in her wardrobe as though this was an everyday conversation. The serving girl wiped her hand on her apron before placing them on her hips, a devilish smile on her lips that held the regal aspect of a queen. “Just tell me what you need me to do.”

Later that night while the serving girl distracted the guards posted outside of Morgana’s chambers, a small, whispered incantation had the door unlocked and opened with ease. Morgana waved her hand and smiled under her breath when she saw a smirking Gwen playing as though she had fainted into the arms of the stunned guards, giving Morgana just enough time to pull the hood of her cloak over her head and disappear around the corner.

As she took the servants’ stairs down into the dungeon, she tapped her finger against the small, glass ball that rested against her chest, listening with a smile as the soft singing filled her ears. I’m coming, Merlin, she thought as she opened the door to the dungeons. I’m coming, and I will help you.

The warning bells rang loudly throughout the kingdom as Morgana ran through the courtyard with Merlin’s hand clasped tightly in hers, her heart thundering against her breast. “We have to make it to the stables!” she shouted as the sound of men shouting flowed from the castle, Arthur’s voice distinctly barking out order after order in anger.

“Find the sorcerer,” she heard him yell, “and when you do, kill him on sight!” She thought she had
heard him choking over the last part of his sentence, but with the way her blood pounded in her ears it was too hard to tell.

“Run, Merlin!” she shouted when she felt the man’s pace begin to slow, his grip on her hand slacking.

“I can’t, Morgana!” he shouted back, barely audible over his panting breath. “I can’t anymore!”

Morgana turned over her shoulder with a ferocious gaze in her eyes. “Yes, you can!” she exclaimed, tightening her grip on his hand as they made a sharp turn into the stables. The shouting of the men grew louder, and Morgana cursed lightly as Merlin stumbled into her arms, his skin feverish and his body shaking with chills. Grabbing him around the chest, Morgana grabbed the reins of a saddled horse and tugged him to it, knocking her elbow against one of the two bags Gwen had strapped onto it when Morgana had told her about her plan to free Merlin. “Up you go,” she told him, struggling to hold his weight as he climbed onto the horses saddle weakly. Loosening the rope holding the horse to the stall, she jumped onto the saddle in front of Merlin and pulled his arms around her waist just as a voice shouted, “Check the stables!”

With a shout and a crack of the reins, the horse let out a loud whinny and bolted from the stables, knocking a knight standing outside of the entryway to the ground and stomping out his torch as it rode past. The wind blew her hood from her head just as she rode past Arthur, who stared at her in shock before regaining his senses and shouting for a horse of his own. However, Morgana knew the woods of the kingdom, even better than the great hunter prince did thanks to the spell Merlin had taught her, the one that made her able to see the path ahead, and she turned her horses reins away from the lower town and through the trees, Merlin clutching at her cloak the entire time.

After losing Arthur and the knights somewhere along the edge of the tree line, Morgana rode the horse deeper and deeper into the thick horde of trees, feeling as Merlin clutched desperately to her waist. “Where are we going?” he asked, his voice thick and shivering from the cold despite the heavy cloak that now lay across his back, his cheek pressed against her shoulder blade as he rested his head there.

“There is an old cottage at the east edge of the forest,” Morgana told him, her voice soft as she watched the trees ahead of them. “Gwen told me about it. It once belonged to her family and now sits abandoned. That’s where we’re going to stay until there’s someplace safer for us to go.”

Merlin’s breathing was hoarse and pitiful where he rested against her back. “And Gwen?” he asked, his words weak. “What will happen to her? Will she be alright?”

“They don’t know she’s involved,” Morgana assured him. “It turns out Gwen is a pretty great actress. She plays faint very easily.”

Morgana found she didn’t know what to tell him, but it seemed that her silence was all Merlin needed before he was crying softly into the back of her shoulder, his tears soaking into her cloak before he fell asleep restlessly between her shoulder blades.

She was forced to return to Camelot two weeks later, full of fear when nothing she did broke Merlin’s fever. She snuck through the back entrance of the servants’ quarters during the late hours of the night, the same ones she and Arthur used to sneak through when they were children seeking adventures because Uther forgot they existed, and snuck into Gaius’ chambers, watching as the old man fiddled with the various draughts and objects on his bench. Her sudden entrance frightened him, and he jumped slightly before his eyes grew wide in shock. “Morgana, what are you doing here?” he asked quietly, his words rushed and panicked. “Gwen told me about your plan. She said you and Merlin had escaped somewhere—”

“That’s why I’m here, Gaius,” she interrupted, grabbing the man’s hands desperately. “Merlin caught a fever while he was in the dungeons, and nothing I’m doing is helping him.” Morgana tore one hand from Gaius and whispered an enchantment, and they both watched – her with fear, Gaius with a look of familiarity – as a rather large ball of light appeared over her hand, the color of it twisting and morphing from blue to green to clear. She sucked in a breath as an image began to appear in it, and she felt Gaius clutch her fingers slightly harder as the image of Merlin riddled with his fever filled the ball.

“My boy,” the old man whispered, waving his fingers along the edge of the ball. “Oh, my boy.”

Morgana allowed the man to look for a few moments longer before she waved the light away, then she gestured to the numerous vials that sat scattered around the room. “There has to be something you can do, Gaius,” she begged.

It took a few moments, but as the man recovered from seeing what was practically his son lying sick and possibly dying, he nodded and moved as fast as he could towards a shelf along the opposite wall. A bag had been placed on a hook beside the shelf, and Morgana watched Gaius grab it and pull it open, then he reached for four small, blue vials. “These potions are simple,” he said, placing each vial into the bag carefully, “but they are affective. Merlin’s magic should not hinder them in any way.” He also grabbed two bottles of a thick, green paste, and then two bottles of a brown liquid Morgana was sure had to taste foul. “Use these,” the man began, placing the bottles into the bag, “in case the fever doesn’t go away. I would have to observe him for sure, but he could have an infection in the lungs. The paste should be applied every few hours, and only half of the vials should be taken each night.” He paused as he closed the bag and placed it in Morgana’s hands. “If you should need those vials, make absolute sure he doesn’t throw them back up. They are quite vile.”

Morgana threw her arms around Gaius quickly, thanking him in a soft voice and promising to keep Merlin safe. “I know you will, my lady,” he said as she pulled away, a sad smile on his face. “Things haven’t been quite the same without him here.” His face fell suddenly, and Morgana frowned at the sight. “Arthur is terribly upset,” the old man said, his voice low. “Looking at him,
one might even say heartbroken.”

Morgana had to fight back her anger once again. “He is only upset because he lost his father’s prisoner,” she spat, making the old man wince. “I heard what he said the night Merlin and I escaped. ‘Kill him on sight,’ he had told the knights. When Merlin was arrested, Arthur could have freed him. Instead he ordered his men to kill him.” She walked towards the door abruptly, a frown on her face. “I feel no sympathy for a man who could hunt someone so loyal to him – someone who cares so greatly for him – like he was nothing but a wild animal.”

Morgana tried to ignore the look on Gaius’s face as she fled from his chambers and back to her horse, the bag of vials clutched tightly in her hand.

The next time she returned to Camelot was almost a month later. Merlin’s fever had, in fact, been caused by a lung infection, and the awful smell of the potions mixed with the smell of what she discovered to be mint paste was something Morgana feared would never leave her mind. However, Merlin was weak, though he never seemed to grasp that fact. As soon as he recovered from his fever, he insisted Morgana sleep in the bed he had been in. She had tried to object, but Merlin had just smiled at her and said the floor was no place for a lady of Morgana’s status. It was rare that he slept, and Morgana often awoke to find him sitting against the wall beside the bed, the cloak she had given him the night they escaped wrapped around his shoulders and a thin blanket across his legs, and his eyes flashing gold every so often to keep the fire going. As the winter dragged and the food began to become scarce, Morgana told him that she would be going back to Camelot to gather supplies.

“I’ve written to Gwen,” she told him the day she left. “She’s to be waiting for me at the kingdom with supplies. I should be back in two days at the least.”

Merlin had acted like he wanted to argue, opening his mouth to fight her before closing it and shaking his head. He knew better than to argue with Morgana. “Be careful,” he said to her, lifting her cloak from the back of a dusty chair and throwing it around her shoulders, then buckling it with shaking fingers. “Don’t want you getting found out by Uther, do we?”

She had chuckled and nodded, smiling at him as she walked to the door. “Wait!” Merlin had called, running into the small room where the bed was only to return a moment later with the same bag his medicine bottles had been held in. He stared at it for a few seconds before extending it towards Morgana. “Ask Gwen to give this to Gaius,” Merlin said, and Morgana heard a faint tinkling noise as she took the bag from his hand, whatever was in it banging together softly. “Tell her to let him know I miss him.”

“I will,” Morgana agreed, leaning forward to kiss Merlin’s cheek before riding into the trees.

When she arrived in Camelot that night, Gwen was waiting for her just as she expected, a dark green cloak that had once belonged to her father on her shoulders. Morgana threw her arms around the girl as soon as she stepped off the horse. “It’s so good to see you, Gwen,” she told her, smiling
when Gwen hugged her back just as tightly.

“And I you, my lady,” the girl said before pulling away. She ducked away for a moment before coming back up with two leather sacks and one made from an itchy fabric. “There are a few blankets and two extra cloaks here, as well as some thread and arrow heads just in case you need them,” she told Morgana, holding the two leather sacks up in one hand. The serving girl ushered the two sacks into Morgana’s hands then held up the fabric one as the black-haired girl strung the other two onto the horse’s saddle. “Here’s a few loafs of bread and some salt in case you need to preserve anything,” Gwen told her as Morgana climbed back onto the horse.

“Thank you, Gwen,” she told the girl as she took the fabric sack into her hands, tucking it against her stomach as she untied the small sack Merlin had given her from the saddle. “Merlin asked me to deliver this to Gaius,” she said, handing the bag to Gwen. “Make sure it gets to him.” Gwen nodded as Morgana readied the horse, but not before placing her hand on Morgana’s leg.

“Tell Merlin that Arthur misses him,” she whispered, making anger rise in Morgana’s throat like a knot. “He hasn’t been the same since the two of you left.”

Morgana nodded, turning her back on the girl and cracking the horse’s reins with no intention of telling Merlin that Arthur missed him. The man had led the hunt to kill him, for heaven’s sake. Gwen watched for a moment before slinking back into the servants’ tunnel as the other girl began her race through the trees.

They were able to make it through a large majority of the winter before Morgana had to turn to Camelot once again.

The days were shorter now, and the nights were colder, and Merlin had been sacrificing more and more of his share of the blankets to Morgana. “I can’t take them,” she had told him when he first began putting them on her at night.

Merlin had just smiled and pushed the blanket back into her hands when she tried giving it back. “I’m naturally warm,” he had said. “Besides, we can’t have you catching a cold, can we? It may kill you with the way the cold has been lately.”

He developed another fever during one of the worse nights, and he barely put up a fight as Morgana lifted him from the floor and threw the mound of blankets over him.

When the rest of the blue vials did nothing to soothe the fever, Morgana was filled with fear when she realized a second lung infection had taken over Merlin. Though this time, she could tell it was worse.

The man’s breathing was more ragged and shallow, like taking in any air hurt him, and he was
constantly shivering as a thin layer of cold sweat covered his body. One day his eyes rolled back in his head, and for a few silent, frightening moments, Morgana feared the worse. But then Merlin had taken in a shuddering breath and a sob ripped itself from Morgana’s throat, and then that’s when she realized no ounce of magic she had would be able to save him. After slipping a letter into a cart addressed to Gwen asking to send Gaius to the cottage, Morgana sat beside the bed with bowl of snow at her feet, dipped a cloth into it and dabbed Merlin’s face and neck with it, trying desperately to calm Merlin’s fever.

Gaius arrived three days later, a worried Gwen trailing behind him with a wicker basket on her arm. “Help him, Gaius,” Morgana begged, moving to the opposite side of the bed with the cloth in her hand, continuing to hold it against Merlin’s face as the physician began to observe him. As the man leaned down to press his ear against Merlin’s chest, Morgana heard Gwen gasp from the opposite side of the room.

When Morgana looked up the serving girl was staring at the sheet hanging over the entry way to where the main door of the cabin lay just beyond, where the handle was shaking gently. Morgana dropped the cloth immediately, running up to the girl and grabbing her shoulder. “Get behind me,” she whispered, putting her hand out in front of her as Gwen rushed to Gaius’ side, standing beside the old man as Morgana turned her palm to the door. The handle shook a bit more, and Morgana turned to see her two companions standing beside the bed like a shield, hiding Merlin from sight.

She turned back to the door just as it was thrown open, shouting an incantation that had Arthur flying backwards off his feet.

“Morgana!” she heard Gwen shout as she began her march to the door, her hair whipping behind her as a sudden wind picked up, and her eyes wild. “Morgana, wait!”

“If you’ve come to harm him,” Morgana exclaimed, her palm facing Arthur as the man scrambled away from her in the dirt, his eyes wide with fear, “I will end you before you can even gain the breath to call your men!”

Arthur opened his mouth to speak just as Gwen reached Morgana’s side, the darker girl’s hand reaching up to grab her own. “He won’t harm him, Morgana!” the girl shouted. “He’s alone! He’s come alone!”

The forest fell quiet as the wind came to a slow halt, but Morgana refused to lower her hand.

“He’s come alone,” Gwen repeated, letting go of Morgana’s hand to grab her wrist instead.

“Why are you here?” Morgana asked Arthur, brushing Gwen’s words aside without a second thought. When Arthur didn’t answer, she asked it again, practically shouting the words and making Arthur wince away from her even more.

“I. . .” the prince began, his voice trembling and whispery, “I wan. . . I wanted to—”
“Spit it out!” Morgana shouted, feeling Gwen tug on her arm.

“I wanted to see him!” Arthur shouted back with an equal voice, the trembling gone from his words as a burst of adrenaline hit him. “I needed to see him! When I heard Gwen tell Gaius he was ill, I knew I needed to see him.”

Gwen began to speak beside Morgana, but the ebony haired woman cut her off with a flash. “You will go nowhere near him,” she spat, her voice full of venom, watching Arthur’s face fall.

“Morgana,” Gwen began, her voice soft, “please just let him—”

“No!” Morgana exclaimed, her eyes flashing gold, and a tree cracked and fell somewhere nearby. “No, I will not let him, Gwen!” Her eyes looked back to Arthur in anger. “He tried to kill him!”

“I was wrong,” Arthur said, his voice full of emotion as he stood to his feet. When had Morgana lowered her hand? “I was wrong, Morgana, about so much. But I’m begging you, let me see him.”

Morgana shook her head sharply, looking back into the cabin where she could see the entrance to the small room, watching Gaius’s shadow lean over Merlin’s bed from behind the sheet. “No,” she said again, looking at Arthur. “I’m sorry, Arthur, but no. I’m not risking his life.” She took a step back from him before turning on her heel and going to the door, only turning back when she was in the entryway. Gwen was standing beside Arthur, her hands on his shoulders as he slumped forwards, his blue eyes blank and emotionless. “You can sleep outside,” she told him, making him look up at her, “and then tomorrow you return to Camelot. If you come back with your men, I will kill every single one of you with no hesitation.”

Then she slammed the door behind her, listening as a sob tore from Arthur’s throat outside and feeling nothing in her heart but anger and fear.

Perhaps you should let him in, my lady,” Gwen told her later that night, staring at the door from where she sat beside Morgana on Merlin’s bed. The man’s fever hadn’t gone down, but it hadn’t worsened. The strong smell of mint filled the small cottage, and Morgana watched as Merlin’s chest rose and fell beneath the blankets, his hand trapped tightly in hers.

“You didn’t hear him the night we escaped,” she told Gwen, closing her eyes for a moment when she felt the girl’s hand come to rest on her shoulder. “Arthur commanded the knights to kill Merlin on sight.” She paused when a thump came from the door, and the two woman both turned to stare towards the main room of the cottage.

“I told you once that Arthur cared for Merlin,” Gwen told her when the noise of Arthur rolling against the door in sleep came to a stop, “and I don’t believe he ever stopped.”
Morgana nodded slowly as Merlin took in a shaking breath. “I can’t trust him, Gwen,” she whispered, finally turning away from the boy to look at her servant properly. Gwen squeezed her shoulder for a few seconds and then ran her hand down Morgana’s arm, gripping the space just above her elbow instead as she laid her head on the woman’s shoulder.

“I know,” Gwen mumbled, looking towards the main room of the cabin, “but I think you’re going to have to try.”

She climbed off of the bed a few moments later, falling asleep wrapped in her cloak and a blanket on the floor beside the bed. Morgana stayed awake, listening to the breathing of all the other people in the room to stay awake, holding Merlin’s hand in her own.

Arthur wasn’t gone by the time she left the cottage the next morning. He was sitting beside one of the windows with a fire in front of him, melting the layer of snow that covered the ground into a puddle around him. “I thought I told you to leave in the morning,” she told him, only to receive a short nod in response. “Then why are you still here?” she asked, watching Arthur square his shoulders slightly.

“I’m not leaving,” he told her, his eyes fixed on the tree line, “even if it means I sit out here and freeze to death. I’m not leaving until I see him.” She watched him pull his cloak a bit tighter around his shoulders, and she noticed him trying to hide the chattering of his teeth.

“I think you deserve to sit out here and freeze,” she said to him, watching for any fade in his demeanor. “I heard what you said the night we escaped. You ordered the knights to kill Merlin on sight.” Morgana paused for a moment when she noticed his shoulders slump. “They would have done it, too. Following the orders of a prince who is no better than his blood-thirsty father.”

“It wasn’t like that,” Arthur whispered, his face still stoic.

“What was it like, then!?” Morgana shouted, her hands curling into fists. “He cared about you! He trusted you! Every single time I mentioned him telling you his secret, Merlin would tell me that he wanted to tell you!” She paused to take in a breath when Arthur’s hands curled into fists, and when she spoke again, she was no longer shouting. “He told me that one day you will be the greatest king this land has ever seen. He told me that only after you gained the throne, he would tell you about his magic. The magic he has used to protect you every single day since Uther made him your servant.”

Arthur cringed for a moment, and Morgana almost faltered in her speech when she noticed a tear slip down the blonde’s face. “Merlin was born with his magic,” she spat, “and instead of using it to overthrow your father’s kingdom, he stayed by your side as a servant. He used his magic for you. And then what happened? Your father found us. Merlin was arrested. He got sick in those dungeons. He struggled getting to the stables. He heard you—”
“Stop, Morgana! Please, just sto—”

“He heard you, Arthur!” she screamed over the man’s pleas, barely noticing the way his words came to a sudden halt. “He heard you give the order to kill him! Do you know what he asked me when we were riding here that night? He asked me if Gwen would be alright for helping me, and when I told him yes, he asked me, ‘What about Arthur?’”

Silence flooded the space between them as Morgana’s rant finally came to a close. She watched Arthur furiously wipe the tears from his cheeks as he tried holding back heavy sobs. “I didn’t know what else to do, ‘Gana,’ Arthur finally told her between heaving gasps a few moments later, and for a moment, Morgana felt a twinge of pity for the prince. “I was angry at him. At Merlin. I thought at first that maybe he had tricked me. That maybe he had put some kind of curse on me; used a spell to get me to fall for—”

“Morgana!”

The panicked shout came from inside the cottage, and both Morgana and Arthur’s heads jerked to look at the entryway. Gwen came barreling out the door, grabbing Morgana’s sleeve and tugging it harshly. “Morgana..” she began, her breath fast as tears poured down her cheeks. “Morgana, it’s Merlin. Something’s happening.”

Morgana’s mouth went dry at the words, and her chest felt as though it were caving in. She rushed past Gwen into the cottage, shoving the sheet away and hurrying to Gaius’s side inside the connected room. Merlin was seizing where he lay on the bed, his head thrown back into the raggedly pillow and his lips turning blue as barely any air left his lungs. “Morgana, I need you do the spell Merlin taught you; the one with the red flowers,” Gaius told her, his voice urgent. He stood with one hand pressing a yellowing cloth covered in mint paste onto Merlin’s pale chest, and the other practically forcing a bowl of water into Morgana’s hands. “Place the flower in the water and then light the petals on fire.”

Morgana did as she was told, conjuring the flower into the water and then lighting the petals with an incantation. A swirl of smoke filled the room as the petals were extinguished almost immediately after being lit, and Morgana watched with wide, tear filled eyes as the water turned a bright orange, the burned petals breaking and floating around the bowl as Gaius all but jerked it from her hands.

“What’s happening to him!?” Arthur cried from behind her, and Morgana turned to see Gwen holding him back beside the entryway to the connected room. His eyes were frantic, and for a few seconds Morgana wasn’t sure how Gwen was holding him in place, not with the way the serving girl’s own sobs were making her shake. “Gaius, what’s wrong with him?”

“He is worse than I originally believed,” the physician answered, gesturing for Morgana to hold the paste-covered cloth in place on Merlin’s chest. “It had to have been present for at least two weeks before you discovered it, Morgana. The infection has started to block his airways.”
Morgana watched Gaius grab a dried bit of witch hazel from the wicker basket Gwen had brought when they first arrived, crushing it in his fist and dropping it into the bowl. Then he grabbed the same brown vial he had given her during Merlin’s first fever, the smell potent as he poured all of it into the bowl. She then looked back to Merlin, who was still seizing on the bed, his lips almost completely purple. She could feel his heart racing beneath the cloth. The bowl was then held out in front of her, blocking Merlin from her view. “Cast a heating spell on it,” Gaius told her, and Morgana stuttered over the incantation three times before it finally came out clearly, tears rolling down her cheeks as steam began rising from the liquid.

“I need someone else to hold him down,” Gaius said, turning to look at Gwen and Arthur who had both collapsed on the floor of the cottage, “that way I can get him to drink the potion properly.”

Through her tears Gwen nodded, letting go of Arthur and rushing to the bedside, placing one hand on the side of Merlin’s face and the other on the back of his head. She held him still as best as she could while Gaius forced the liquid past the boy’s lips, and Morgana cried out when the cloth she was holding against the boy’s chest suddenly heated beneath her touch. The smell of mint was heavy in the room as Morgana unintentionally warmed the cloth beneath her touch, and Merlin’s seizing came to a slow stop as Gaius forced the liquid down the boy’s throat.

The room became suddenly quiet as Gaius took the bowl from Merlin’s mouth, none of them daring to do anything but breathe and wipe their tears as they all stared at the boy on the bed. It seemed like an eternity passed before Merlin gasped in his sleep, his chest rising with a sudden, wheezing inhale. From where she stood beside the bed, Morgana watched Gwen fall to her knees on the floor, her face buried in the blankets draped across Merlin and muffled sobs coming from her lips. Gaius breathed out a sigh of relief beside her, reaching down to grab Merlin’s hand. The floor creaked behind her as Arthur stood to his feet, his hands pulled into his chest as he tried desperately to see the sleeping man over Morgana’s shoulder. “Is he . . .” the man began to question, his Adams apple bobbing in his throat as he swallowed nervously.

Gaius nodded, turning to look at Arthur. “I believe he’ll be alright,” the physician said, nodding to Morgana. “It seems our young witch’s idea to heat the mint paste loosened whatever part of the infection was blocking Merlin’s airways. Given time and the proper treatments, he should be awake and healed in a few weeks’ time.”

“I didn’t say a spell,” Morgana whispered, feeling as all the eyes in the room went to her. She kept her eyes on the cloth she was still pressing into Merlin’s chest, the fabric still warm beneath her palm. “I didn’t say a spell, Gaius,” she repeated shakily, turning to look at the man. “How was I able to do that without a spell?”

The physician reached down and grabbed Morgana’s hand, pulling it and the rag from Merlin’s chest. “Sometimes magic has a mind of its own,” Gaius told her, spreading a bit of the paste on Merlin’s chest and then pulling the blankets back up to the man’s neck. “It probably sensed something was wrong and acted on its own accord.” He shook his head for a moment, looking from Merlin to Morgana and then back again. “It seems as though every sorcerer that enters my life is using their magic to protect others, even if they aren’t doing it intentionally.”
Arthur took another step forward, and Morgana shot him a threatening glare. He froze in his advancements when he noticed it, then took another step towards them. “Please just let me see him breathing,” Arthur begged, his eyes fixed solely on Morgana. “That’s all I ask of you, Morgana. Just let me see him breathing.”

She went to protest, only to stop when Gaius’ wizened hand covered her own. She looked up to see him frowning, his eyebrows lowered in a stern glare. “I know you aren’t ready to trust him, Morgana,” he told her, patting her hand, “but I do. And I know you trust me.” He paused to look at Arthur and then Merlin, and then his eyes focused back on Morgana, who could not understand why Gaius could trust the man who tried killing the boy who was practically his son so easily. “I know about your necklace,” he remarked suddenly, and Morgana slowly reached up to grab the chain around her throat. “Merlin gave it to you. The night you came to get supplies from Camelot, you gave Gwen a bag Merlin asked you to give to me, isn’t that right?”

Morgana nodded as Arthur took another step towards them.

“Do you know what was in that bag?” Gaius asked, and Morgana shook her head.

“I didn’t look. I assumed it was some sort of trinket for you,” she answered. “Merlin had just asked me to get it to you.”

She watched as Gaius reached up to grab a chain from beneath his tunic and pulled it out to reveal a charm almost identical to the one she wore around her throat. “There was one for me,” he began, then reached across the bed to grab Gwen’s hand where she had finally sat up and was staring between them, a small smile on her face, “and there was one for Gwen, and –” He paused and took a breath. “There was one for Arthur.”

Arthur let out a noise of confusion, and they all turned to look at him. “I never received a necklace,” he choked out, and Gaius shook his head.

“No, I’m afraid you didn’t,” he responded, moving his hand off of Morgana’s to reach into the wicker basket. When he pulled it back out, clasped in his grasp was a chain.

Unlike Morgana’s silver necklace, Arthur’s was golden and seemed to shine even when the sun wasn’t hitting it. The charm on Morgana’s necklace was also been a sphere, while the one on Arthur’s was a small oval. The biggest difference between the two necklaces, however, had to have been the flower petals in the center of each charm. While Morgana’s was black, the charm in Arthur’s necklace was same rich, Pendragon red color Merlin had made the flowers the night he told her about the magic.

“I should have given this to you sooner, my lord,” Gaius said, reaching for Arthur’s hand. When the young prince hesitantly reached the bedside, the physician dropped the necklace onto his extended palm. “I hope you can forgive my decision. I was only focused on Merlin’s safety.” Arthur went to say something, only to have Gaius continue speaking. “Touch the charm, my lord. I
promise it will cause you no harm.”

Arthur eyed the necklace for a moment then pressed his fingers against it, and Morgana watched his eyes grow wide. “I hear him,” he whispered, looking at Gaius. “It’s his laugh. I hear his laugh.”

“The necklace lets us hear the thing we love the most from the person we care about the most,” Gaius said, looking from Arthur to Morgana. “Merlin didn’t tell you that, did he, Morgana?” She shook her head. “Merlin told me you hear singing, specifically a woman. Does it sound like anyone specific?”

“Gwen,” Morgana answered almost immediately, a slight blush on her cheeks. She looked to the serving girl to see her smiling at her. “It’s sounds exactly like her when she doesn’t notice she’s singing. I’ve heard her since the beginning.”

“I hear my father’s chuckle,” Gwen admitted sheepishly, pulling out her own necklace. The center of hers was a deep purple. “It was the one he did while he was focusing on work but still trying to talk to my brother and me.”

“I hear Merlin,” Gaius said, nodding towards the prince. “Just like Arthur.”

Morgana took note of the fact the physician did not name a specific sound he heard. Just that he heard Merlin.

There was a soft choking noise behind them – like someone was holding back a sob – and when they all looked towards the prince, he was completely ignoring them. At some point during their conversation, his eyes had finally been able to make it around Morgana and Gaius, and he was staring at Merlin with tears in his eyes. Morgana felt guilt growing in her chest at the sight. Slowly she moved away from the bed to the man that was practically her brother and placed her hands on his shoulders lightly, trying as best as she could to apologize wordlessly. “I’m so sorry, Arthur,” she whispered, making the blonde shake his head. “I still don’t trust you – not completely – but I’m sorry for causing you this pain.”

“I don’t blame you, ‘Gana,” he told her, tears slipping from his eyes as he stared at the warlock’s face. “I would have done the same thing if I had been in your position. I should have done the same thing from the very start.” Gaius moved from the bed as the prince spoke, and Gwen moved with him, leaving the connected room to Arthur and Morgana. Morgana pushed Arthur’s shoulders softly, trying to make him move towards the bed. His feet stayed rooted to the ground, and his eyes stayed on Merlin. “I should have protected him,” he whispered, choking back a sob as more tears came down his face. “I should have protected him and instead I let my father lock him up. I left him in the dungeons. I let him get sick. I gave the order to kill him.”

His eyes seemed to grow wide, and out of nowhere his knees buckled. Morgana gave out a faint cry as Arthur suddenly became a dead weight in her arms, struggling slightly as she lowered him to the ground. “Oh gods, Morgana,” he whimpered, a sob tearing from him. His eyes stayed fixed on Merlin as he choked out, “He could have died.”
They sat there on the floor until Arthur finally was able to stand again, both of them just staring at Merlin with teary eyes. Arthur slowly made his way to the bed to sit on the side of the mattress beside Merlin’s head while Morgana sat closer to the end where his feet were. She watched Arthur push his hand beneath the edge of the blankets to grab Merlin’s, the cloth raising around the spot their hands met. Either he didn’t care or completely forgot she was there, but Arthur completely ignored Morgana as he bent down the press a lingering kiss to Merlin’s sweaty forehead, tears still running down his cheeks as he brushed the tip of his nose against Merlin’s. “I am so sorry, Merlin,” he whispered, turning his face so Morgana could not see him and placing his cheek against the warlock’s. “I am so, so sorry.”

The necklace that had been left for him was clutched tightly in his other hand.

Morgana slept for the first time in days that night – though it was fitfully, as a part of her still did not trust the prince – and when she woke up in the middle of the night with Gwen beside her on the floor, she pretended she didn’t hear the muffled apologies and the whispered declarations of love coming from the prince where he sat on the edge of Merlin’s bed, their hands still clasped together tightly beneath the blankets.

It was Gwen who finally got an exhausted Arthur (he had refused to sleep for more than an hour each night) to leave Merlin’s side three days later. With a kiss on Morgana’s cheek, the serving girl pulled Arthur from the room, whispering softly to him about helping her find something for them to eat until she could steal back to Camelot.

Morgana immediately took Arthur’s place beside Merlin, and a few minutes later Gaius came to rest at his other side, each of them reaching out to hold onto the warlock’s hands. “Why were you able to trust Arthur so quickly?” she asked him after a few moments of silence.

Gaius did not respond immediately. He stared at Merlin for a few more moments before looking up at Morgana. “There were many things about the two of them that Merlin did not tell you,” he told her, reaching across the sleeping boy to grab Morgana’s hand. “I didn’t notice anything until I began to realize there were many nights where Merlin was not sleeping in his bed. He would always come back from tending to Arthur with this stupid, lovestruck look on his face, and after a few weeks, I began to see Arthur wearing the exact same look whenever Merlin was mentioned or around him.”

“I saw him leaving Arthur’s chambers once,” Morgana told him, recalling the night she had ran into a flushed Merlin outside the prince’s doors. “I had assumed he had just been finishing his duties.”

Gaius shook his head. “You ask me why I was able to trust Arthur so quickly? It’s because I know how he feels about Merlin. I know how sorrowful and heartbroken he was when you and Merlin left Camelot. I also know that no one would face your wrath and sleep out in the winter in nothing but a cloak just to kill a sorcerer.”
Before Morgana could respond, however, there was a soft groan from the head of the bed. Merlin’s fingers weakly squeezed her hand, and Morgana chuckled as his eyes slowly opened. “Hello, sleepy head,” Morgana laughed as Merlin’s eyes adjusted to the light in the room, a few tears slipping out of her eyes.

“What happened?” Merlin groaned, his voice croaking harshly from disuse as he attempted to sit up. “I feel like someone snatched my lungs out of my body and then told a horse to kick me in the chest after they put them back in.”

“A horrendous lung infection, my boy,” Gaius said, making Merlin’s eyes light up as he noticed the physician for the first time. “You gave us quite the scare.”

“Gaius!” Merlin shouted, his voice cracking as a massive cough overtook him. Morgana placed her hand on his back as the coughing died down, and Gaius stood to grab the mint paste from a shelf beside the bed.

“Careful not to talk too much, Merlin,” the physician warned, rubbing the paste onto Merlin’s chest. “I know it may be difficult for you, but you need to let your throat warm back up to speaking. You may hurt yourself more if you try speaking more than two sentences.”

Merlin nodded silently, resting his head back on the pillow as Morgana stood. “I’ll get you some water,” she told him, squeezing his hand before letting it go. She grabbed a bowl from the table in the main room in the cabin and went outside to the well to fill it. Just as she stepped outside of the door, Gwen and Arthur broke through the tree line of the forest.

Gwen’s basket was filled with different herbs and wild mushrooms, and Arthur had three rabbits strung together with thin rope slung over his shoulder. The two of them were laughing – no doubt Gwen had been cracking jokes to make him feel better – and Morgana smiled at the sight of them. Gwen’s eyes moved from Arthur and found Morgana’s, and the serving girl smiled widely and waved. Morgana watched as Arthur moved to do the same, only to see his face fall and pale in panic. Morgana dropped the bucket of water back into the well and held the bowl of water tightly in her hands as the prince placed the rabbits in Gwen’s basket and walked quickly towards Morgana.

“Is he...?” Arthur began, fearing the worst. His shoulders lost their tension and he took a deep breath as Morgana shook her head.

“He’s awake,” she told him, watching Arthur’s eyes shoot towards the cabin and then back to her. “I was just getting him some water.”

Arthur nodded, looking between her and the cabin once again. “Can I see him?” the prince asked, his voice shaking. Morgana smiled and held the bowl of water towards him. Arthur placed his shaking hands on either side of the wood, and Morgana let hers fall.
“Don’t spill it,” she joked, and the shaky prince nodded and moved to walk into the cabin just as Gwen made it up to Morgana.

“How is he?” the serving girl asked as she placed her basket on the edge of the well wall and threw the rabbits across a rope that ran from the house to the top of the well. She then linked her arm with Morgana’s and the two of them followed after Arthur.

“He’s okay,” Morgana told her. “He can’t speak a lot at once. Gaius said he needs to warm his voice back up first.”

Gwen nodded as they entered the cabin, only to stop in her walking as soon as they made it through the door. Morgana followed Gwen’s gaze to let her eyes fall on Arthur. He was standing just outside of the connected room, and splashes of water were spilling over his fingertips where his hands were shaking.

Morgana unhooked her arm from Gwen’s and walked up to the prince, taking the bowl gently from his hands. She passed it to Gwen, who took it and nodded.

Merlin shouted her name when she disappeared behind the sheet, and it was followed by a nasty cough and a chuckle from Gwen. “It’s good to see you, too, Merlin,” they heard the girl laugh.

“It’s all right, Arthur,” Morgana whispered, covering Arthur’s fists with her hands. She gripped them softly. “You can go inside.”

Arthur shook his head. “What if he doesn’t want me to see him?” the prince questioned in a whisper, his voice cracking as he stared at the shadows moving on the other side of the sheet. “What if he wants me nowhere near him?” A flash of panic rushes through his face. “What if he hates me, Morgana?”

“He won’t,” she promised softly, moving one of her hands to grab Arthur’s shoulder. He was tense. “The night we left, he heard what you said,” she continued. “As soon as we escaped into the forest, he asked me what would happen to you.; he asked me if you would be alright.”

A tear ran down the prince’s face, and Morgana reached up to wipe it away. “He sent you that necklace, Arthur,” she continued. “Whenever you touch it – the charm, specifically – Merlin can hear the magic you hear.” She watched Arthur reach up like he was going to grab the charm, only to watch his hand fall limply back to his side. “He wanted to know you were safe, so he sent that necklace to you.” She paused as Arthur turned to face her. “I promise,” she whispered, squeezing the blonde’s shoulder, “that he will not hate you.”

Arthur was still shaking as he nodded his head and reached towards the sheet, his fingers trembling as he grabbed the fabric between them. As the sheet lifted in Arthur’s hand, Morgana’s eyes landed on Merlin. He was sitting up completely against the pillows of the bed, laughing at something Gwen was saying. His eyes were crinkled and his smile was wide, and Morgana’s heart ached
when she realized just how much she had missed that look on his face.

Merlin’s eyes broke with Gwen’s as the serving girl looked towards Arthur and Morgana, and when his gaze landed on Arthur, his face fell. A deep silence took over the room.

Morgana felt as a thick layer of tension run between all parties in the room as warlock and prince stared at each other with millions of unspoken words between them. Then Merlin sat up a bit higher, and tears brimmed in his eyes. “Arthur?” he whispered, and all the tension dissolved like smoke as the prince surged forward and collapsed beside Gwen on the bed, pulling Merlin into his arms with the desperation of a drowning man trying to pull himself to shore.

There was a loud sob as Merlin’s buried his face in Arthur’s neck and threw his arms around the prince’s neck, though it wasn’t clear who the sound came from. “I’m sorry,” Morgana heard Arthur choke out, though it was muffled from where the prince had his nose pressed against Merlin’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry—”

“It’s alright, Arthur,” Merlin told him as Gwen and Gaius stood to leave the room. “I promise you, it’s alright.”

Gwen paused beside Morgana to grab her hand as she walked past, pulling softly on Morgana’s fingers as held back the sheet. “Let’s leave them be, yeah?” the girl whispered, smiling at Morgana, who nodded and squeezed her hand back.

She allowed Gwen to pull her from the room after one last glance at Arthur and Merlin, who sat clutching at each other like they never wanted to let go.

Morgana didn’t go back into the connected room until the sun began to set that night. She spent the afternoon helping Gwen prepare dinner from the rabbits and herbs she and Arthur had collected earlier that day, the she and Gaius sorted Merlin’s proper throat medications. After the three of them had eaten their fill with plenty left over for Merlin and Arthur, she finally went back into the room. The scene she walked in on was not the one she suspected.

Arthur had fallen asleep with his head against Merlin’s stomach. His legs hung from the bed, and his fingers clutched Merlin’s tightly, even in sleep. Morgana watched for a moment as the sorcerer carded his fingers through Arthur’s hair with a loving smile on his face before speaking up. “He hasn’t been sleeping much,” she said, and Merlin nodded as Arthur shifted against him and then fell still.

“How long has he been here?” Merlin asked her without taking his eyes off of Arthur.

“How long has he been here?” Morgana asked, moving around the bed to sit on Merlin’s opposite side. She followed his gaze to Arthur and fixed her eyes on the top of his head. “He followed Gwen and
Gaius after I wrote to them saying they needed to come. I didn’t let him in the first night.”

That got Merlin’s attention. His fingers froze in Arthur’s hair as he looked up at Morgana. “You made him stay outside?” the boy questioned, a small smile on his face.

Morgana shrugged in response. “I didn’t trust him,” she said. “I thought he had come to kill you.”

“He wouldn’t,” Merlin said quickly, and she saw slight worry course through his eyes. “Not now. Not after everything that’s happened. Even that night in Camelot, when he gave the order to the knights. He never would have let them go through with it.”

“How can you be so sure?”

Merlin’s eyes fell from hers and once again stared lovingly onto Arthur’s face, and Morgana understood. “I just know,” Merlin said, and it was all Morgana needed to hear.

“Dinner is ready,” she finally told him, leaning forward to kiss his temple.


“There’s no need to thank me, Merlin,” she whispers as Arthur stirs again, his face twisting to hide against Merlin’s stomach before he falls still again. “No need at all.” After a few more moments of sitting at Merlin’s side, she moves to stand. “By the way,” she says before she leaves the room, “why didn’t you tell me about you and Arthur?”

Merlin opens his mouth like he’s going to respond, only to close it again and tilt his head to the side. “I don’t know,” he admits after a moment, a small smile on his face. “I guess because it never came up.” He pauses to look down at Arthur and runs his fingers through the prince’s hair once more. “Maybe I was frightened, or maybe I felt better hiding it. It was like we couldn’t be touched if no one knew. I don’t even want to know what Uther would have done if. . .”

The words go unspoken, but Morgana understands. “You love him?” she asks, hooking her arm through Merlin’s. They both stare at Arthur where he sleeps nuzzled into the sorcerer’s tunic.

“Yes,” Merlin whispers, finally tearing his gaze from the prince to look Morgana in the eyes. “I really, really do.”

Morgana smiles and kisses his temple again, then leans her head against his softly just as Gwen enters the room. “I was getting worried,” the girl tells them, walking to stand beside Morgana, who wraps her free arm around the servant’s waist and pulls her closer.
“We’re fine, love,” Morgana replies, smiling as Gwen bends over to kiss the top of her head. She looks at Merlin again and sees him smiling at Arthur’s sleeping form once again, watching as the same green flower bud she had seen almost a year ago appear in his palm. She watched as if shifted from green to yellow, to orange, to a deep, bloody red. Though this time, instead of wilting against the skin, the flower began to shift, and the petals spread, and a bright blue butterfly flew from its center, hovering just over Arthur’s head. She watched it and squeezed Gwen’s waist just a bit tighter. “Everything is perfectly fine.”

End Notes

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