Fate/Black Dawn

by Lobb

Summary

There are many things Emiya, Shirou thought would happen when he somehow managed to find the right time, place, thing, and amount to make an attempt to reunite with Saber.

Winding up in the amorous arms of her sister was not one of them. ShirouxMorgan ShirouxArtoria (Time Travel-fic, AU Fate-ending)
Prologue

A Sheath Without A Sword

For a single, bloodless moment, she stares. Transfixed at the sight of the arrow as it flies true, right at his head. And, for a moment, she is as numb as the dead.

And then she screams, while another voice not her own raises the chorus. Her chest feels something it has not felt in awhile-

Pure, unadulterated horror. That feeling in her heart that had started to blossom out of control has become in such utter jeopardy. He is dead---

"SHIROUUUUUUUU--!!!"

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There are certain rules to be upheld by the nature of Magic- or Magecraft, since True Magic was something no modern magi could even glimpse let alone comprehend. One such trait was that it was beyond impossible to do something so radically against the "planet's sense" that making objects appear- something considered a basic Magecraft- was viewed as pointless because the construct would vanish in mere moments due to the interference of Gaia.

Disclaimer: The Nasuverse, Fate properties, and characters therein are not my property. This is a DNA-based work, please support the official release. . . Wankers.

Also, I am not an expert on Nasuverse mechanics, so more studied fans of the franchise will have to suspend their disbelief sometimes. As well, while I will be posting this on FFN, the primary source will likely move over to AO3 due to the fact it will contain adult content and FFN has always been a bit weary of it. Twins, as well, will have a place there for adult content.
There were ways to circumvent this, but that was the sign of- to more traditional magi- a truly insipid character.

In that moment, Emiya, Shirou would not have minded being called all the names in the world. For twenty years he had hunted and searched for anything that could have brought him to what he wanted- an attitude bearing that of a proper Magus, ironically despite a change in goal. Nearing forty, he'd finally found what some would have called a miracle.

But, in the eyes of creatures beyond the senses of humans, it was his very concept. The very item supplanted into him and turning him -different- had finally mustered a response that it could not contain.

But neither could Shirou, as the ritual he pursued on a clear sunny day, at the edge of a pristine blue lake in the countryside of England, tore open the world around him and sent him into unconsciousness as his magic circuits overloaded and sent him awry with pain, Avalon's own dregs dragging him through and into the land where it should still exist.

It was, in layman’s terms, an absolutely huge spit on the face of Magi fundamentals everywhere.

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It was the worst of all possible outcomes, he thought to himself as he steadied his hips and planted his feet. Staring across from him, the long haired man held his sword loosely, the weapon's design leaving Shirou very aware of whom the man he faced down was-

Even if he didn't already know from prior experience and research. Lancelot was not like Gilgamesh, a foe he could face down with pure guts and refusal to lose. He could not hope to win without Morgan there, and so the best he would have to hope for was that he could get away rather than fuss about honorable combat.

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Rin's face had contorted into a grimace beyond what could even be called discomfort when he had worn the traditional purples and greens of Atlas Academy's uniform. It had not been a dig, or a declaration, against the dark haired magus . . .

But it had been taken that way. She had offered him tutelage and comfort after he had helped her to win the Grail and they had . . . Ended up destroying it. He had grown to understand- much too late- that said comfort had been in the form of romance.
He could not do that to her. It was unfair to them both. Shirou loved Rin, but he had not been in love with her. There was only one person whom had ever made Shirou feel that way.

So he could not- WOULD not- let her do that to herself. Tohsaka deserved better, as did Sakura. He was too selfish.

"Let her out." His voice was level, quiet even. He was aware, for the first time, that he was furious. It wasn't an emotion Shirou could say he'd felt often, but right then it was roiling in his gut in a way that made him scared of what he was doing.

"Why?" It was accompanied by a look that screamed of mistrust- of wariness- but he was also aware that she would not have even asked someone else who had made such a demand of her. They would have been paste on the wall.

"Because she is not a tool, she is your child."

Atlas, in comparison to the Clock Tower, had been an interesting time in his life. Rin had warned him a long time ago about the dangers of Magi society, of politics and backstabbing that was rampant and perhaps even encouraged.

He had made only one friend there, and if he had known at the time who she was, he would have wondered what kind of thing he'd done to have such powerful bad karma when it came to women.

Sion Eltnam Sokaris had been a very upbeat girl, but she was brilliant all the same. Of course, it went without saying that he hadn't known that the girl was so . . . important.

Not that he had particularly deep knowledge of the Moonlit World in the first place, but it would have explained a great deal of why he had proceeded to be ignored even more by the Alchemists there.

That had been fine, however. He was at the Academy to study, not to make friends. He doubted many of the scholarly types could put up with his own quirks. Perhaps she found his companionship entertaining.

Shirou just liked that she knew when to give him space.

She holds a wrapped blade, not offering it to him, but clearly about to. His eyes wander over her veil-covered face and he wishes, just for a moment, that she would trust him more than this. He can see it’s colors, and knows that doing this is akin to offering him everything that she had denied him
Until this point.

“If you are to do what I want of you,” she starts, and for a moment pauses. He can mentally see her teeth worrying her lower lip, “- you will need this. And, in all of my graciousness, I give it to you.”

He takes it, and unveils it with all the ceremony that she deserves from him. Holding the darkened blade aloft, he studies the way it refuses to accept the light and instead only refracts it. It is a weapon that he understands she has put her all into. It is not a Holy Sword or a Demonic Sword, he knows with just a touch even without his own special brand of Magecraft, it is a weapon that conceptually reigns in Darkness- it is her attempt to provide him with the weapon she thinks will combat Excalibur, or the weapons of the Knights of the Round.

He knows better, but he also knows that her worries are unfounded.

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The vertigo began to lessen. The dreams and images tearing away as his mind reacclimated to his own body. He came to, and sat up slowly. The feeling of silken shifts crossing his chest made him aware of his own nudity. One of his arms came up, and he watched studiously as his fingers flexed and he realized that, for the first time in many years, his circuits did not feel so weak. Worse than that, he recognized that his build had regressed.

Shirou had never stopped being physically fit, half because of Avalon and half because he had long since learned it was uncommonly necessary to be ready to defend oneself- to kill- in the Moonlit World. But, he had also been nearing forty.

Age changes things, especially when you have spent a good portion of those years trying to find a way to make a path not to the Root, like most Magi, but to the person you loved. Reinforcement was no longer needed to feel the tension of each muscle as his fingers curled. No need for the lines of his circuits to ignite on his skin around his eyes as he honed them to see like a hawk.

In short, Shirou felt . . . Amazing. Youthful, even.

But, in the moment, it was time to take in the surroundings of the world he had travelled to through a very . . . Inappropriate . . loophole of the Second Magic.

He just had to hope that Zelretch would find his bastardization more amusing than offensive. Shirou wasn’t sure he could do it again anyway, as someone he couldn’t remember the name of had said: The Right Time, The Right Place, The Right Person. Shirou had to add a few extra variables to that little equation.
A set of black covers, silken and soft. The kind that he expected only someone like Rin would put up with, despite not knowing the secret of Rin’s morning maladies. Those who had finery like this rarely had sensible hearts- it was just a bias he had developed since his time at Atlas- and the few times he and Tohsaka had warred and traded barbs (mostly her to him, since he’d been nothing but professional with her as far as he could understand). Coming from a mundane background had made him woefully underprepared for dealing with the Aristocracy.

For a moment, he feels a sudden heat under him, and he turns his gaze from his own body down unto the sigil that is carefully drawn into the sheets of the bed. The language is not one he knows, but he also knows that he has seen it before. And, better than that, he at least knows why he does not know it- save for it’s similarities to something he’d seen enough in his life that he could still picture it vividly in his head.

Fae script. Rather, all of his scholastic prejudice termed it “Elemental Language”, even though he personally felt that was just an excuse at categorizing something that was beyond them as it was. He had no idea what the circle was, but he was sure he would find out shortly as the glow dissipated and the sound of footsteps filled the corridor beyond the room he was in.

Saber had drilled it into him, never let the enemy have you as they want you. But right then, Shirou didn’t have the time to do more than give the room the sudden intense glance to make stock of what he could and couldn’t do. And the sad truth was, not much. It was a bedroom, and the bed was truly the most ostentatious thing about it. A four-poster thing that he was sure would have been considered dated by modern standards, but looked finely carved. Beyond that, a vanity and chair, a few side-tables, and a desk. It was- well- like some kind of guest room. Except the only lighting was a series of candles and a glimmering orb of some kind.

He would later decide the orb was hilariously stereotypical, but that was when the door slid open and a figure walked in and stole his breath away. For some, that was considered metaphorical, but right in that moment Shirou felt his heartbeat -stop-. A blue gown trailed along the floor while blonde hair spilled from her head. Emerald eyes quirked in a sharpness that reminded him of some of his teachers rather than the wide-eyed young-looking girl, but his brain was willing to fill in the details and make his heart ache. Saber?

But it was not her, and he knew simply by virtue of how -different- she was. For one, Saber could -never- smirk like that. That looked like an expression that belonged better on Caster’s face, whom for a second he could not help but want to punch. Some things just never changed.

“So you are awake.” The voice is even different. Saber’s voice had always been placid, demure. It had a soft, but hard edge, that made him feel like if she touched him the way she spoke, he would only be at risk of her cutting him if he had forced her to. This woman’s voice was . . .

Tinkling. There was no other way to describe it. It was more mature, certainly, but her voice sounded like bells rather than a glove. He recognized the language, at least. English- but perhaps it wasn’t even necessary for him to rely on his knowledge of it. The way her lips moved seemed out of sync.

Gaia was his friend today, it seemed. He would not argue.

“`I am.” He tried responding, amber eyes fixed on THAT face that brought him back so many memories and so much heartache. He’d swore he’d wait forever for her, hunt forever for her, and . . . he’d done something insensible and crazy. Yes, Shirou was prone to such things, he already knew.
The slight curl of her brows said that he was understood. She was irritated, it was an expression he was terribly familiar with— and it made him want to apologize without even a thought attached to the action. "It is rare for a Familiar to take the form of a human. Even more so when he reeks of something that should not be in his hands." She is probing him, he can tell. Not yet using magic he knows she possesses, she roils with magical energy in a way that even his almost-blind preternatural senses can see. In preparation for this "foolhardy stunt", he had done countless days of research.

And it made him scared of what the only possibility was. Which only made his desire to respond to her as if she was Rin, and not the Witch he suspected her to be, even more strong. Let it never be said that Shirou was good with women, because he certainly was not.

“It is even more rare,” He had to actually pause and swallow past a mouth filled with spittle all of a sudden. Teasing, playful remarks were not things he was used to putting out, but he had a feeling that showing her the weakness of embarrassment was... unwise. “For a man to wake up in the bed of a woman and not know what happened.”

The pause, the correction of her thoughts, it played across her face and for a moment Shirou couldn’t help but smile internally. He would never have said anything so crass and unbelievably—playful—when he was younger and actually had women who enjoyed spending time with him. He could admit that he would have stuck his foot in his mouth before she’d even walked in the room. Shirou had a lot of time for self-reflection while he was... immersed.

“You risk much.” She said, an edge in her voice that he knew was a good sign, since she hadn’t immediately leapt to trying to kill him. He had put her off guard, even if only in a miniscule way. Never let them keep their footing, Saber had said, and he had taken that lesson to heart as well. “Saying such things as that.”

For a moment, he tried to think of how to respond, how to keep this moment in his control, but he let his nature take over and— with a shy little smile that felt strange to his more mature soul— rubbed the nape of his neck with a hand. “I apologize. You remind me of someone dear to me, and so I teased you.”

Her eyes narrowed, but the slow way her shoulders relaxed said that he would get to survive at least a few minutes longer. Either he’d caught her in a good mood, or she was invested in him. Neither was a particularly good concept at the moment, but it was better than the other options.

“You remain lucky to be in my good grace, as a guest of my home.” Ah-hah, she was startlingly easy to deal with. Of course, he only thought that in that moment out of a memory to a much more... friendly... blonde woman. He willed down the blush that wanted to touch his cheeks. “Your name.” In good timing, too, since it seemed this little game of word tennis was going to come to an end. She had demanded it, there was no give in her stance now. He was playing with fire, but that was something he was used to.

“Shirou.” He gives it, bowing his head in full politeness since he is bedridden and has at least enough awareness of himself to know that standing at that moment would be unwise. “And you, My Lady?” It is natural to say, he has learned enough from his time at Atlas— even if countless other students had laughed at him when he would inevitably upset some Aristocrat. Magi were one
thing, but Alchemists were another.

For a moment, he is sure she will not answer. In fact, she damn near looks ready to walk out of the room in that moment. He is presuming again, in her eyes- that he is of value or interest enough to even know that tidbit of personal information. But, he also knows that she was raised to a certain expectation- and that he at least has what little he did find out about Camelot to wield as a sword in this arena. “Shirou,” She tests his name on her tongue, and he sees her tongue and teeth as her face-nearly like Saber’s- grimaces for a moment as she is stuck between politeness in the face of similar, or continuing this interrogation-like dialogue. “You do not know of me?” She asks, putting herself above him in station, and making it look like his own failing. It is not clumsy, like he remembers some students, but well-practised. He respects her for that. She is not belittling him, only strengthening herself.

She and her sister are very alike, even if one walks in the Light and the other in the Shadows. “I think I do.” Shirou answers, relying on his own honesty in the face of someone he considered an enemy. Certainly, perhaps she could have been Artoria’s mother, Queen Igraine, but Shirou had learned to put two and two together many years ago. “Lady Morgan Pendragon, daughter of Uther Pendragon, King of Britain. Am I right?”

His query sees her face return to that steady, controlled smirk that tells him much of what he needs to know about the woman who is his beloved’s sister. It makes him feel like a success as a Magus, as well- which is both heartening and depressing. Shirou had never developed the ability to lie, only to control the way he shared the truth.

“Just so, Shirou.” Her teeth show, and for a moment she looks much cuter than he is sure she thinks she appears. He is unsure if its her own charm, or him overlapping her with her sister. He would, of course, never share this thought willingly. “Then, you ought to know how gracious I have been in letting you lay in a bed in my home, let alone after you have done something as disgraceful as flirt with me.”

He paused. Did he flirt with her? He’d teased her, certainly, but-

“My Lady---” He starts, but the dainty hand she raises tells him that she isn’t interested in hearing him speak.

“I am gracious,” She repeats, and he can’t help but smile at her. “- and I will forgive you being vexed with my beauty. In exchange, I will demand an answer from you. How did you come into the possession of Fae constructs?” He knows she means the remnants of Avalon’s magic in his body, but even the truth would be unbelievable.

“The remnants of an heirloom.” He says. It is the truth, in a selective way. He knows it is not enough when she glowers at him, but he simply rolls his shoulders in a shrug.
“You will not enjoy life long by denying me.” Morgan warns, and he finds himself glad that she seems to still find him interesting. No matter how many times he thought it, a warning was better than the alternative. She could- or perhaps already had- try to take him apart and figure it out herself, but she had not resorted to that. Why, he could not yet say.

He dares again, “My life is not my own to live, it is for someone else.”

“Whom.” His gaze treats with her face again, that serious look once again in place. She is interrogating him again, not standing on her own amusement and ceremony. The pleasant reprieve had lasted longer than he’d thought, to be honest. This was the truly dangerous part. Honesty would win him no favors- and in fact likely wind up getting him killed. But lying would be bald-faced, and he would fail utterly. So, rather than answer her, he would play on something he understood.

Her love of power, of being treated with regality. “If you will give me time, I will show you that I am worth your while to allow near you, My Lady.” He was treading dangerous waters again, and he knew it from the way her eyes narrowed and her lips pulled back into a sneer. He couldn’t help but compare it to Rin, moments before she’d started firing Gandr shots at him again. Bad memories this way and that, especially now.

“And you will answer?” She poised.

“With my actions.” He agreed, thinking of a head full of blonde hair and green eyes. And differentiating the two in different ways.

“Then, your arrival is convenient.” Ah, she was back to that smirk. Shirou understood now, she viewed this as a victory. In her mind, she saw him as acquiescing, and playing into her hopes that he would be useful to her.

And he would be, he felt. Perhaps in a way she might not immediately cotton to, but if there was one thing Emiya, Shirou had in spades--

It was willingness to sacrifice for others.
The Witch and the Tournament, pt.1

Chapter 1
The Witch and the Tournament, pt. 1

She stared at him while he dressed. In some way, he's sure it's both to assert her dominance of him and ensure he won't escape (without using some brand of magic). Frankly, he has nothing to be ashamed of. The middle-aged body he had, had been great, but his youthful one was much easier to impress with.

Shirou did not think himself vain, merely proud of countless years of hard work and exercise to have a body that could do Kyudo, Kendo, and various other athletics. He'd learned a little bit late that it made him "easy on the eyes", according to Rin, though.

He really needed to stop thinking about her. That way lay only regrets and pointless brooding. Shirou preferred to think he was rather upbeat for someone whom had lived such a . . . Messy life.

"My Lady, I'm sure you could have waited outside for me to dress." He notes, for the third time within the last ten minutes. The way her lips draw back into that smirk from the almost lazy contemplative look tells him that she had been looking at something intently. Though, what he did not know.

"I've seen men nude. You are not that impressive." For a moment, he paused. Shrugging off the momentary sting of THAT face saying those words, he reminded himself of whom he was dealing with.

"All the more reason." He noted, finally finishing with the heavy pants and the light tunic. Thankfully, they fit well and were in familiar colors to him, blue and white. For a moment, he felt startlingly like he had simply traded jeans and a tee for something less mass produced.

Cotton was more comfortable, though.

"My patience isn't infinite." Morgan warned, and Shirou quietly bowed his head in deference. For all her mannerisms reminded him of two different women who had habits of irritating or enraging him, he couldn't deny that she still was surprisingly demure for a woman described as a Witch amongst Witches. Perhaps he had caught her at a much more opportune time.
“Of course, My Lady.” There was no need to risk being personal with her. Shirou was a bit hard-headed, but he wasn’t an idiot. Besides, he had more pertinent things on his mind. “You said my timing was appropriate. What did you mean?”

Morgan’s eyes narrow again, but she seems to view his question merely as the query it is. Shirou can only imagine that, in her head, she is wondering if he is a fool or a very inopportune tool. He cannot grasp her, even with comparisons to be had. She is not the malevolent and traitorous Caster, nor the once honorable and upstanding Rin who steadily became like a vindictive wind who blew in only long enough to disrupt him.

She is a person of significance, even if Morgan did not know that he considered her such already.

“There is a tournament to be held on the morrow,” She speaks, adjusting the trail of her skirts as she stands from her seat nearby. She begins to leave the room, and he obeys the unspoken command to follow- or at least he presumes that is the case. When she does not turn back, nor does she curse at him, he presumes he has learned well. “To gather more support for the King and those Knights.”

Saber. He thinks, a smile lofting his lips even while he is desperately glad the sister sees it not. “And you would have me participate.” He guesses. “In your honor, or without it?” The preamble is established, and now he finds out just what she considers of him. Or, he hopes to, at least.

“Do not be foolish.” It could not have been more amusing if she’d called him “Baka”. But he will keep that amusement inside. “It will be your chance to prove yourself, so you will assign yourself without my involvement.” She has not turned back towards him, but for some reason, Shirou does not trust that she says those words. In fact, part of him feels like . . . he knows she will involve herself. All he can do is simply nod, even as she does not look to him as they walk a hall that is decorated with countless portraits and reminders of this woman’s vanity and lust.

So many are wrought of past glories, or of her family’s glories. He even, despite some level of surprise, sees some that depict her sister. She continues to walk, so he must set aside time later to study these.

They make him believe that there is more to all of this than he had ever read. Morgan had been jealous, and spiteful. It had been written in countless records, even if people in the modern age held no belief in “King Arthur”, he knows that the truth exists- and is even more wild than the legends say.

“Very well.” She does not look at him, but he feels her smug satisfaction as he agrees. “I will . . .
need some things.” He explains, softly, as she walks into an adjacent room and he finds himself in what can only be described as a lounging room. It is filled with books and furniture purely for a sole occupant. He does not think such a bare-bones place could be her Workshop- or perhaps her Temple?- but he also imagines such a place is far beyond the scope of her trust in him in that moment.

She is surprisingly, for him, quiet until she finally settles into a chaise-style seat and leaves him standing before her. Instinctive power play, something he has also learned from the Alchemists at Atlas. It is, however, also an appealing display. Shirou cannot deny that his new . . . collaborator? Yes, that is safely neutral enough- reminds him constantly of Saber, and so his feelings supplant themselves occasionally. Saber would never take such comfort in so feminine and outwardly confident in themselves an act, but he still sees her face and finds himself allured.

“To make requests of me already is quite brazen.” She notes, and he simply nodded in turn.

“And some equipment, My Lady.” His amber eyes moved away from her for a moment, to gaze at the room around them. “While I can supply my own, it will be . . . obvious.” Shirou was aware of the flaws in his abilities- so Morgan was a suitable answer to that particular issue.

Fighting? Fighting wasn’t a problem. He had learned to fight from someone whom he considered the best.

“Armor. A sword?” Morgan clarified, an amused look on her face that he recognized for what it was. His request was being taken as a very high demand rather than what he’d meant.

Shirou was beginning to realize just how dangerous it was to even say one word around Morgan Le Faye. She was like the Christian’s Devil.

“Just the basics.” The redhead tried to soothe the blonde. “If I walk out there empty handed, they will laugh.” I will win. But it will require answering a lot of questions. The thought-train trailed off as he realized that most of those questions would be coming from HER, most of all. He glossed over that moment of supreme confidence- or perhaps even ego- in favor of keeping his head on a swivel around the Witch. Shirou was not remotely the match for a Knight of the Round, he wasn’t foolish, but other warriors? He knew the game to play with them. Perhaps he could even stand against one of the Knights or Artoria herself if he had to, but he had very low expectations of winning since they were not Heroic Spirits and thus, only restricted by their own bodies rather than the rules of the Grail.

Shirou was confident, not suicidal.
“Would you have your man laughed at?” He’d meant it in a more subservient sense, but for a moment, he knew it had not come across that way. Morgan’s eyes glimmered and lights ran across her skin, before she seemed to gain hold of her temper. I’m . . . going to have to be careful about her. He’d already known that, but that was the first time since they’d “met” that he’d become aware that the woman before him was a “Mage” beyond his wildest dreams. The very match for Artoria’s own Merlin, whom “modern magi” could not even hope to conceive of his tricks and powers.

“No.” She agrees, but he knows that this agreement is going to cost him later. Even if he does not know when. “No, I would not.”

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He knew immediately how Morgan had gotten her revenge, when he ventured unto the field set out for the competition outside of what he understood to be modern day Warwick. Part of the former lands that had been held by the Saxons- Mercia, he believed? Shirou was not sure. The large field filled with a wooden and stone structure hastily cobbled together within months that should have taken years. An arena of sorts, but only in that it would be torn down and reused again and again for all he could tell it’s stability and hardiness.

The travel had been relatively quiet, or by Morgan’s own utterance, “some hours in a carriage let alone with such brusque company.” He’d taken it as a compliment, personally.

She’d been unbearably quiet since their first discussion, barely looking at him let alone giving him the time of day. She’d even had the equipment he’d requested left in his room as if by magic, for all that it had simply appeared out of thin air when he’d stepped out of his room only long enough to wander the Castle’s corridors.

He’d found the place queer enough in that it seemed mostly unlived in, save for the Witch herself, his own self . . . and a child he’d seen skulking about once.

Mordred. That put an even more disturbing taste in his mouth when he’d seen the Son of Arthur. But, bright green eyes and blonde hair had, once again, assuaged him- and it did not help that the child had vanished right around a bend in the hall before he could do anything more than look at them.

Between that, and the look the tournament regulators had given him, he knew Morgan was well
and truly “vexed with him”. He was not just “a wandering warrior-” as he’d presumed he’d be enlisted.

He was Shirou the Black, an armsman brought in the name of Morgan Pendragon, seeking to become a Knight of the Round Table. And it had only been the face-covering helmet that he’d received that kept people from seeing the permanent wince his face had twisted into in response to that.

This . . . had led to a headache that could only be described in words as flowery and prose-like as all of his research into Saber’s life and culture had been filled with. It was titanic- and worst of all, it did not make the fact that the woman he loved and some of her Knights were there to see the ongoing a good thing.

In one fell swoop, Morgan had marked him and made him an enemy of the one person he least in the world wanted to be on the bad side of. And it hadn’t taken magic, or anything more than a soft word in the right ear.

He hated her. But in the same breath, he could only admire her vindictiveness being used in such a productive way. It was truly thinking that was beyond him until it had happened. Shirou realized that he still had a lot to learn about the woman he’d very unwisely chosen to play games with. Part of him wondered if she even -knew- how thoroughly she’d stuck him in hot water.

She probably did. For the first time he could remember, he very dearly wanted to call someone a bitch to their face.

But, there was nothing for it now. He’d simply have to do what he did best- despite internal complaints- and push ahead with all the bullheadedness he could muster.

A general assembly was the first part of the day as the Tournament’s festivities, which made him feel a little bit better. Nearly as easy and sensible as the routine at school- stand, bow, sit- it had given him something to distract his brain from fuming on his continuing failure to actually -not- stick his foot in his mouth. For once.

It was not made better, however, by how his gaze was freely able to wander while the herald for the event went out at length about rules, glories, and elsewise that he only half-listened to. The
And, as if it was fate itself, she sat atop the tallest part of the arena’s construction, in a display-box that spoke to whom was supposed to sit there. Obvious, in retrospect, but Shirou was not an expert—just very enthusiastic. Behind the visor of his helmet—wrought in steel and blued by whatever manner of ability Morgan had seen fit to color him so, shaped into the visage of a wyrm—his amber eyes sat quietly upon Saber while she sat with Excalibur in her lap, flanked by a man with long hair and seated beside another woman with long black hair.

Ah. So that was Guinevere. And, with no presence of it, Shirou understood implicitly why Morgan had been so interested in him.

She had already taken Avalon. Had already tossed it away in a place where it would not be found again for centuries—until Kiritsugu had found it somehow and put it into him. The tightening of his fists in his gloves was obnoxiously loud to his ears, even though it should have been drowned out by the herald and his own loud pounding heart.

It was not better when, for the briefest moment, he could swear that she looked back at him, either. He knew it was not the Saber he’d fought so hard with, or whom had come to trust him so implicitly—whom had made love with him— but to see the . . . depth and glare of those eyes made him understand just how she had needed someone like him all those years ago.

For a moment, he felt like he was the worst scum in the world, but he managed to force it down like bile in his throat as the herald finished and called for a salute of swords to the King.

While many around him wore a shield and a sword, or even other weapons, the “heaviness” of the two blades at his hips was nothing as he drew his dominant-hand’s sword and settled down to a knee with it’s blade planted as dozens more men did the same.

Though the cry of “Long Live the King!” was joyous and loud, his own felt drowned out in comparison. Like it was private and meaningful, rather than an empty scream.

He would win.
The way she smirked at him as he walked into her own viewing stand made him feel a very real desire to shout at her, but even with the preliminary battles going on below, it would draw far too much attention-

And attention was not what he wanted from Artoria, Guinevere, and her men while he was within even miles of Morgan le Faye.

“Are you pleased, to be my man?” She taunted him, and he saw it for what it was. And, even recognizing it as such, he could not help the knee-jerk stiffening of his spine and shoulders. Morgan’s eyes did not miss it either, from the way she reclined more into her chair as down below, men wagered their lives in combat to show that they were worthy to go to war for Christendom. Shirou, for the first time, realized just how serious what he was about to do was.

It was not every day you ruined the careers of potential Knights and warriors. But, darkly, he realized that was going to be the likely result of his position at Morgan’s side.

He’d already heard the whispers, as well. That he had been brought in purely to vindictively punish and disrupt the proceedings. He could not fault their logic, only feel embarrassed that it was- in fact- very true.

Morgan wanted him to tear a bloody swathe through the competition. And while he’d fully intended to excel and not manage to maim any of his opponents, there were more than enough people with mistrust of the Witch and who had seen the “finery” he’d been lauded with and presumed him to be something approaching invincible by nature of her charms and spells.

He hated that he was likely going to prove them right by proxy. He knew that Morgan had done nothing more than give him a very ostentatious suit of armor, and a pair of broadswords that were simply of fine quality- none of which possessed any power or any Code-like properties---

But no one else did. And worse, everyone else would willingly believe it even if proved wrong. Morgan’s fame was a tool she had used very carefully to entrap him in this situation, and for the second time, he got an immense headache related to the blonde woman.

As the bout down in the field died down, a man yielding to another in the face of having his armor dented in against his chest- likely to cause him breathing trouble for weeks if not months- Shirou took a deep breath of his own and let his eyes close, imagining the gun and its cocked hammer. He would try not to resort to Magecraft, but he knew that plans did not survive contact with the enemy.
So let Morgan plan around him, and he would simply have to surprise her and wait for the right moment.

“Next bout in the Duels, Shirou the Black, facing Pwynlan of the Noble House of-”

He shuts out the information, and pictures the colors and the feeling of Od ready to push through the Circuits in his body if the need arises. For a moment, he appreciates the sound of his booted feet as he descends back down unto the dirt field and hopes upon all things Good in the world that this will not end in a tragedy.

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The opponent is a beast of a man by Japanese standards. Shirou is back in the prime of his youth, but he is still Japanese- and this man must easily be Six Western feet. The height difference does not bother him- this man is not Berserker- but it makes him aware of how he will be seen in comparison.

“What a sorry lot,” Shirou hears the words from his opponent while the attendant finishes clearing the area in preparation for the start of the bout, “Put up against some no name who doesn’t even bring a shield to a duel?”

Rather than answer him and offer the man the comfort of a successful taunt, Shirou simply draws his swords, feeling their familiar and comfortable weight, their existence as Swords making them feel . . . like just another extension of himself, even if they are just plain steel rather than like the image of Caliburn that had been held in his hands so long ago.

It seems even without words, he manages to upset others, since his opponent pushes down his visor and stands at the ready. While the beast of a man draws his foot and shield forward, Shirou relaxes. The tension draining out of his muscles as one blade glimmers against the sun, and the other remains by his side.

It is a trap, a technique he had developed many years after the War, when he was able to test himself properly against opponents who did not have the benefit of speed and strength beyond his own abilities.

It is an invitation to attack, one that he will punish, and if Shirou is right, this man will only be stuck crying foul after his wound heals rather than in the dirt as a corpse.
With the sounding of a horn, the match begins.

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Artoria Pendragon- or rather, King Arthur- is disturbed that she has been dragged into this contest. With so much still to do, the fact that she has been pushed away from the table of War in order to be seen by the people and encourage the recruiting of worthy soldiers, she finds herself hating the barbarism that is on display.

But she understands it’s necessity, or at least, she understands that Bedivere and many others think it is one of the few things that will help make her people believe she cares about the common folk whom she strives to protect, but does not seem to understand.

She has grown quiet as of late, though many do not know why. They can only guess, and when she looks across into another one of the tier boxes to stare in disquiet at her sister, her men and Guinevere can only make assumptions.

But she also cannot help but watch the knight whom descended from Morgan’s box, feeling strangely drawn to him as he stands upon the field and, without any words, only seems to widen his stance and wait for the call of the contest’s judge.

What are you up to now? She wonders, scared of the roiling feeling of unease that has settled in her gut as the horn sounds.

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Amber eyes quietly assess Pwynlan as a big overhand swing threatens to bisect him. Shirou admires the veracity of the movement, of someone who is aware of his benefit of reach and height.

He is disappointed that the strike is not coming so fast that he can only struggle to block it. It is easy, it is . . . frightening- to feel that cold and collected in the face of a fight for once.

He takes in a breath. His left hand raises as his right foot swivels, a motion of his wrist knocks the larger man’s strike askew.
Before he can even finish the exhale, his right hand has come across and brought his other sword upwards at an angle.

The slash, a thing of simplistic beauty, connects and he does not bother to pay attention to the red that blossoms into the air in a thin gout.

He steps in, and breathes-

And Pwynlan tries to force him back with the shield, but it is only an impediment if the man’s footing is stable, and Shirou already knows it is not.

This man is not a mountain, he is a pole. One that can be knocked over if enough force is applied at the right angle. He exhales.

He is not thinking, merely reacting, as he uses his shoulder to heave the shield and force the man’s stance open to try and receive him rather than commit to an attack.

And that is when Shirou’s left hand comes around and the blade in it crashes into chainmail at his opponent’s knee and makes him gurgle in pain as he falls unto his good limb. A good swordsman would respond, and he sees the handle of the blade coming around to make space for himself. He breathes.

Shirou does not let that happen. His right hand comes around from the momentum of his left, and redirects the pommel-strike away, before his left comes in and settles comfortably the blade of his off-hand against torn mail and the already wounded neck of his opponent.

It takes three breaths, and the match is over.

And Shirou knows he has garnered victory without killing, which he can only thank his fortunes for. The warrior- fine by many means, Shirou did not mean to insult him- is before him and all can see that he is defeated. Shirou’s eyes are impassive beyond his visor, but the visage of that scowling wyrm must be more frightening than he can see himself, because with a trembling voice, the beast of a man--
-- quietly utters, “I yield.” While a crowd of people so eager to see combat they had been shouting and jesting loudly less than a minute ago are struck dumb by what they see as impossible.

“The winner of this duel is Shirou the Black . . . “ The gobsmacked words leave the herald’s voice, and the redheaded man simply turns, and walks away.

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“That was . . .” Guinevere utters, staring in blatant disbelief. She has seen extraordinary feats of combat in her time, but from the Knights of the Round it is only to be expected. And never from a man wielding two swords at once. Her gaze turns to Artoria- to Arthur- and then to Lancelot, before going back to the blonde King.

“It was impressive,” Lancelot agrees, a deadpan to his tone that does not match with the furrow of his brow. If Artoria would have looked at him, she would have understood.

But she is not. She watches the back of the armor-clad man disappear back up into the stand that leads up to her sister’s box--

And sees him turn, and the glimmering visage of his helm stare right at her.

And in the time it takes her to blink, he has gone up the stairs and out of her sight.
Her eyes settled on him as he entered. He had thought her smirk could not grow even more, but she looked maddeningly pleased with him, regardless of how he himself felt oblivious towards the response of shellshock from the frighteningly short match. They’d been here for hours already, with some of the “better matches” (In his opinion) having taken upwards of minutes.

It was not that these men were to be found wanting, it was that he had been tempered in fires greater than them. The element of confusion with his fighting style, his single-minded determination, they were just obstacles to be removed. In the least violent form he could fathom at the time, hopefully.

“So you were a swordsman.” Morgan’s voice flitted into his consciousness, and her amused green eyes gave him pause in dismissing her without words.

“No.” He settles for, but doesn’t elaborate. She seems to accept this, and turn her gaze back towards the box where she sees her Sister’s gaze firmly rapt upon her new tool.

Do you like him, sister dearest? If so, I will make him mine. With pleasure, truly- he is just as much a match for any of the lovely men you hold court with. But such thoughts were best kept for later. This was business, what she would do later would be pleasure.

The witch was not turned on by barbarism, but she recognized someone with such single-minded devotion to a cause-

And the kind of disgustingly vicious attitude they approached obstacles with. They were kindred spirits, even if “Shirou” did not yet know it. And, for Morgan, her body was just another weapon. One that she got more pleasure out of using than knives.

Men were simple creatures. And Morgan had not missed the looks he’d cast towards her sister. The question that entered her mind, however--
Is that gaze because she is like me, or because I am like her?

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“My King-” Lancelot murmured, as the contest resumed down below, two men taking the field and risking life and limb to showcase themselves before King and Country. “That warrior-”

“I know, Lancelot.” Her voice was soft and sure. Even as her eyes did not leave the stoic form that stood in the shadow behind her lounging sister. Her fingers tightened on the grip of Excalibur while the other wore into the wood of her seat. Politics were ugly, and it said a lot that Morgan—whom had only recommended Agravain to her seats—would put her name behind such a warrior and—rather than use her sinuous and controlling words—have him participate in a contest like this in order to make others respect and extol his talent.

And he was talented. Worse than that, there was something deftly familiar about the way he’d come at his opponent. It reminded her of summers in her youth, spent learning to fight and efficiently protect herself and others with the sword.

It was a very bastardized version of her own sword style, in a way. But in the same breath, it was different. The focus on redirection and the minimum of movement, the hard accelerations that was normally only viable because of her ability to focus her magical energy into a burst--

But there had been none. In the span of a few seconds, he had dismantled his foe without exposing anything more than that he was a fair swordsman. That two-sword fighting style was not recognizable in the least, the only thing that seemed similar was the Saxons of old who would be like monsters in human flesh--

But, again, there was none. Only cold, calculating indifference as he’d first wounded the opponent’s neck—only the nobleman’s chainmail to keep him from a fatal blow, then he’d predicted the bash with the shield as if he’d seen into the very future with how he’d reacted, stepping into it against his foe when most would have stepped to the side or away and given the man the time to breath he had been searching for. He’d capitalized on an unaware and unsteady foe to take out his knee and shunt out the last desperate defense.

And, with a flourish that reminded her of other strong warriors, he had simply planted his blade against his foe’s neck and stolen a yield.
For common people to see swordsmanship like that was galling- and even she was unnerved by the sheer . . . wrongness of seeing a man taken apart like a chair by a carpenter.

She could tell Lancelot was enthused, too. Which only made it all the more worse. Lancelot had been taking on greater and greater challenges lately, wanting nothing more than to absolve himself of the guilt he felt for sleeping with the Queen- which Artoria forgave him without even words. Not that it seemed to work.

Her eyes finally tore away, settling on Guinevere for a moment before returning to the melee below. She did not miss how her sister’s eyes had turned towards her, and narrowed in amusement.

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It had taken half the day for the preliminary duels to end, and the number of contestants had, likely as the nobles who proposed the tournament had hoped, dwindled down within a mere few dozen. Shirou felt a deep relief from knowing he wouldn’t have to fight again as they changed venues and moved onto archery.

For a moment, he felt like fate was playing with him. Though, he couldn’t deny that a more indirect competition was one he favored rather than the risk of fighting someone he would have to kill.

He never even contemplated his own wounds or death. Shirou had never learned to value himself that much.

His worries had increased, however, with his proximity to Morgan. “Stay near me, until you are called.” She had instructed, and he had obeyed out of deference to the pleased look the woman had on her face. A happy Morgan was one whom didn’t think things would go wrong.

She was right, but Shirou was playing the long game.

In blocks of ten, the contestants were to shoot their farthest target, and their scores would be tallied by accuracy and range. It was a western style contest, but Shirou couldn’t help but feel- as an Eastern practitioner- that it was a bit disgraceful to focus on such a thing.

“You look perturbed.” Even through his helmet? His gaze moved unto Morgan through his visor.
“It’s nothing.” He responded, not wanting to fill the Witch’s ears with such a childish complaint. Her smirk levelled out a bit into a thin line.

“This is beneath you?” She queried, and he couldn’t help but feel his shoulders shake with a chuckle.

Rather than answer her honestly, he simply said, “Watch.”

And, despite his expectation that she would grow furious with him, she simply nodded and turned her gaze back unto the current bowmen. There were a few worthy ones in the lot, but a good portion of them had only the talent to hit within thirty yards. And bullseyes were in short supply there. His eyes narrowed at one or two whom put bullseyes into their targets handily at fifty yards. It seemed there were strong contenders here after all.

For a moment, he forgot himself and let his blood boil. Competition was healthy, he had to remember. And letting that strong feeling wash through him before he was called would make it easier to push it all out of him.

His line was called.

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“Tristan would have been depressed by this.” Artoria murmured, feeling lost. Behind her, Lancelot simply shook his head.

“Next up to the line—–”

“My King.” The Knight alerted, his eyes settled on an armor clad figure as he took to the field.

The blonde woman’s eyes followed Lancelot’s trail, and her brow furrowed.

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The English longbow was not his tool of choice, so for the first time he’d actually had to sneakily produce a suitable tool. Thankfully, it was as simple as Projecting his mental image of a bow. He took little mind of the fact that it felt so much easier or less stressful than it did once- merely attributing it to the presence of more mana in the air than when he’d initially learned.

A step away from prying eyes, and to the line he went. The only difference now was that one gauntlet had been pried away and his visor had been lifted in favor of his eyesight and ability to draw the bow. The glove for holding the bow would be fine- the bow was made of pure magical power so it would not require repair after it’s use anyway.

The targets were set up at a minimum of thirty yards, a fair and agreeable distance for anyone worth their salt with a bow, even with the English bow that could shoot up to one-hundred-and-eighty meters in the hands of a veteran.

He was not a veteran. He was Emiya Shirou, whom had missed only one time since he’d finished his training- and that had been in an effort to see what it was -like- to miss.

As he stood at the firing line, he gestured forward the handlers for his target, “Take my target to the edge of the field.” For a moment, the two men had looked at him incredulously, but he had simply waved them off. Unaware of the sudden quiet- including the stopping of arrows hitting targets- he watched as the two men carried it to the very edge of the tournament ground.

A little over the length of an American football field, around one-hundred-twenty yards. He could have hit from further, but then it would have been as if he was striking the horizon itself.

There were very few men capable of such feats, and many would question such an ability on his behalf. Shirou was going to win, not make himself seem invincible.

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“That man is insane,” Guinevere muttered, and Artoria could only agree, “Only Sir Tristan could hit a shot like that- or someone he’d trained, at least!”

Lancelot, though, had narrowed his eyes. The more he watched this man in blackened armor, the more he worried about his King.
Breathe. He steadied his stance and planted his feet. His bow-hand set the target, and his eyes did not see the world- only the bullseye.

The breath stayed in his chest, comforting and testing him as he raised the bow up high as if to salute the heavens with it. His fingers wrapped the fletching of the arrow and he began to draw back with strength honed through countless years of training and the Holy Grail War.

He was the bow. He was the arrow. The target his destination, the bullseye his very being. For a moment, Emiya, Shirou was the Void. He was emptiness. There was no thought, no movement, just him as the arrow.

And then it let loose along with his breath. And with finality, the arrow spun and cleared the air like a bullet before it split the target’s painted middle and declared victory without any doubt.

Shirou let himself flood back into his body. The sensation of tension, of pride, and purpose returning as he let his eyes close, and finally lowered the bow now that destiny had been met.

Morgan, whom had expected the trouncing in the duel considering she’d expected some kind of fae magic to protect the boy, could not say the same when she saw what had just been done. Her breathing hitched, and in the space of that arrow leaving the bow and striking the target, her heart skipped a beat.

He was a monster in human flesh, he had to be. She knew the capabilities of men like Sir Tristan, whom had left her sister’s employ, and even great heroes of legend. But she also recognized that they could have put that target further away still, even had it be moving . . . and he likely still would have hit it perfectly.

Rather than fill her with admiration, it made her recognize the extent of the man whom she had helped to pull through into a time he did not belong to. Morgan was not foolish- only vengeful and a true Witch. She did not know why he had gone to such lengths to come here, but she knew, right then, that she was going to need him by her side.
And so she began to scheme anew, where she had been lounging in the view-box now sat up straight with her mind in a whirl.

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Nearby, another pair of eyes narrowed further, while the King and Queen stared and were dumbstruck in such an order. Contestants were demoralized, and the crowds began to whisper and worry. Lancelot’s ears were not the finest, but even he could catch smatterings of conversation.

This would not be able to stand.

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When Shirou returned to the side of Morgan, having dismissed his projected bow, he expected another smirk and more words, either of a taunting fashion or elsewise. Instead, she had been wholly silent and simply studied him for a moment before returning her gaze to the field— or rather, beyond her spot to where the Royal Family sat.

I had put so much into Mordred. She thought, realizing immediately how she’d already started brooding, I thought I’d have to let this little display go on without my interference, but now it seems as if I have been kindly handed a hammer for the glass. Brushing her blonde hair with a set of fingers while the other stroked across the arm of her chair, the Witch contemplated his words to her.

Let him prove himself, indeed. Now I have no choice. He is . . . irreplaceable in this moment. As loathe as she was to think that she could only admit that his display of dominance over the competition was . . .

Disturbingly alluring. So much so that she realized she had begun to play with her hair, and promptly stopped.

Shirou, not privy to her musings, simply got comfortable in the shade of her box and lamented how damn -hot- it was in all this armor under the heat of the sun.
After the archery competition, the tournament had held for the coming of the night. Camps and tents had been readied, though Morgan had scoffed at him when he’d asked her as to their provisions for the night. She’d tucked up the black dress with its blue lines and, with a flourish of her hand, stepped into the carriage they’d arrived in. Raising a brow beyond his visor, he’d simply stepped back up into the wooden vehicle with no word.

And into a space larger than he remembered the bumpy ride in. Ah, so this was the kind of magic that a Mage from a time before could bring to bear. In the sense of the grand scheme of things, it wasn’t so impressive, but Shirou could at least appreciate the complexity of a bounded field like this. It was akin to a Workshop, though he could tell it was a hasty construct rather than something akin to a Reality Marble.

His “mistress” was an interesting one. Vain, to be sure— not that he could blame her. If Rin could have done such a thing—

And there he was, thinking about Rin again. Clenching his teeth, he let it fade away as he reached up and unbuckled his helmet to set it aside along with his swords as he soothed himself into a chair in the small “lounge room”, his eyes on the blonde Witch as she drew a pewter pair of cups and a pitcher from a table and began to fill both with a liquid more purple than red. The harsh, too-sweet stench of wine filling the air for a moment.

“So you are a warrior.” She noted, as she turned with her blonde hair swirling in the air from the suddenness of her movement. Where Artoria’s was so often in that high-set bun, Shirou was perplexed by Morgan’s lengthy train. It reminded him of a western fable, Rapunzel. Her hair wasn’t quite to the floor, but it was still worn loosely ignoring a single braid at her crown. The more he was given to study the Witch, the more he saw differences between the two sisters.

Not the least of which were those red tattoos that decorated the flesh she chose to expose.

Of course, that meant his eyes wandered to places they shouldn’t have in that moment. So, despite himself, he ended up blushing as he tried to look at anything else. Studying the more brief bed and
chairs that filled this space, alongside the bookshelves.

“Drink.” She told him, offering the pewter cup under his nose as he turned his attention back up unto her. His instincts told him that she was going to poison him, but he also knew such a thing would be . . . senseless now. Taking the cup, he nodded his head in thanks as she moved to sit across from him. Rather than lounging like he’d seen her do almost every time she’d taken a seat since he’d met her, she reclined back in the chair as if it were a throne.

He hid his grin behind the bowl of his cup as he took a small sip. The sudden onrush of harsh, bitter alcohol made his brows furrow before he took a moment to take a deep breath of the wine’s scent and then went back in for a more proper drink. The second taste was more akin to his tastes. The bitter broken out with sweet grapes and fruits to mitigate the harshness of the burn.

Shirou was not a drinker, it was true.

“How have I proven myself to you, My Lady?” He asked, setting the cup, still mostly full, to the side. His amber eyes fixated on the blonde woman as she nursed her own cup with a more steady, practised rhythm. They trailed the sight of her throat as it contracted and flexed with each swallow of that harsh, overly sweet concoction. She lowered her cup, green eyes staring at him for what seemed like minutes, making Shirou feel . . .

Nervous? Anxious? No. The roiling in his stomach made him aware of how he liked that look. If it’d only been Saber instead. He lamented the situation he found himself in. Memories of a blonde’s sweet smile made his stomach do a flip for a moment before he came back to the present he lived in.

The silence stretched on, longer than he would have ever cared to deal with. Being . . . stared at like that was- discomforting, really. It reminded him of Rider.

Ugh. His life really had been filled with notable women, hadn’t it?

“How am I making you uncomfortable?” She asked, lips splitting up into a smirk once again. He realized the tension in his face, and let out a sigh of relief. Morgan’s smirk he could deal with- that serious, studious expression did . . . things, to him. Things he didn’t like when it wasn’t someone else.

“I’m unsure if you are waiting for me to die from poison, about to blast me with some magic, or
thinking how best to kill me when you stare at me like that.” He admitted, honestly.

Her eyes narrowed, though her smirk only seemed to widen somewhat. “You’re not as naive as you look.” She noted pleasantly, setting aside her own cup- empty, he noted- as she raised a leg over the other and crossed them, causing the skirts of her gown to rise up enough to where he could see the blue heeled shoes that kept her feet from the earth.

“I am, My Lady,” He corrected, “I think that I can actually do what is necessary for you, and your sister.” Even before it had come out of his mouth, he knew he was about to play with fire. Perhaps even on the level of the fire that had shaped him so long ago.

Her eyes narrowed further, and the smirk melted away. That stare was back, though there was a little less warmth in it now. Before, she was almost fond of him- at least in comparison with the way she looked like she would stand and strike him down as he sat.

Shirou wasn’t quite sure why he always had to test his luck. He just liked the taste of his feet, he supposed.

“And what, pray, is it you think you can do?” She barely got those words out, so- for once in his life- Shirou was fully aware of just how close he was to pushing the wrong button.

“I-” A knock, bringing his gaze away from her’s. From his peripheral vision, he saw the way her lips split further into a frown as he gathered his helmet and swords. Putting the wyrm-helm on, he went to step out from the enchanted space and back out into the field.

Morgan watched him go with a grimace, a growl in her throat that would have done her namesake proud. That did not go as I hoped.

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He stepped down from the carriage’s rungs, his visored gaze settling upon a knight resplendent in armor that a normal man would have never been able to wear. It was so heavy and so ornate that Shirou was sure whatever was beneath it’s helm only vaguely resembled a man.

“I come bringing an invitation for Sir Shirou the Black,” The voice was muffled by his helmet, but Shirou could recognize the inflection of a man who was used to shouting war cries more than
speaking courtly dialects. “If you will permit, I will escort you to My Liege.”

Shirou’s eyes, for a moment, looked to the man’s massive shield and the sword sheathed at his hip. For a moment, he contemplated the likelihood of him being able to take on the mountain his opponent during the dueling preliminaries was most certainly not.

Without resorting to Magecraft? It would be a struggle. Besides, this was . . . part of what he wanted, at least. Getting to look upon Artoria again would make him feel more comfortable—especially after his heart had been racing in the adrenaline rush of staring down his “benefactor”.

“Give me but a moment to alert My Lady, and I will go with you.” He said, softly, turning to open the carriage door--

Only to find inside it, the normal interior of the carriage. “. . . Nevermind.” He noted that he had successfully made the Witch mad at him.

He was good at that. Closing the door, he’d turned to the massive knight and fell into step with him.

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Flushed with irritation, and the knowledge she would be going to bed alone, Morgan undressed and slipped into the bed. He can sleep out on the grass for all I care. She muttered mentally, and tried to drift into dreams.

And then promptly groaned when the itch that had been building all day denied her any hopes of bed before she scratched it. Damn me for getting my damned hopes up---!

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The walk had been lengthier than he’d expected, long enough to burn off even the light little buzz he’d gotten from that little amount of wine. Not unexpected, especially considering they were half cloaked in darkness as they passed camps and fires where men caroused and jested. Shirou’s eyes were drawn to some, watching mugs be shared and men sing songs even though they’d fought or competed against one another merely hours ago. For a moment, he felt his chest fill, and then his gaze turned towards the back of that immense knight once again.
The king’s pavilion was situated a little further from the contestant’s camps, mostly as a result of it being a larger area. Finally, Shirou’s eyes settled on an array of men—adorned just the same as his escort—standing outside the entry to a particularly large tent. His escort stepped to the side and joined the conjugation of guardsmen, directing him inside with a huge gauntleted hand.

Shirou felt very comfortable in the knowledge that he was being taken seriously—though he could have done with just being greeted by the blonde alone. He wasn’t that lucky, it seemed. Instant karma for pissing off the Witch? Maybe.

As his boots stopped hitting soft grass and instead hit leather mat, he rounded into the pavilion and came from the dark into the gaze of fire and light illuminating those gathered.

Which was a startlingly small number, he discovered. Himself, the man with long hair from earlier . . .

And Artoria.

He hated how his breath hitched for a moment, and he could only hope that it was not noticeable.

“You should kneel.” The long-haired man noted, an irritated note in his voice as Shirou could admit he was standing about a bit—gawking behind his visor. It had been so long since he’d been able to see her—up close at least, ignoring earlier in the day—and, well . . .

Some memories never died. Even less so when they’d shaped him and made him do something as crazy as throw himself back into history.

But, as he paused and went to go down a knee, her voice called out. “That is unnecessary. You may stand, Sir Shirou.”

It was disheartening that her voice was so even, so “dead inside” that he could hardly tell it’d come from her. He’d been so used to her warmth and her protection that . . . it hurt him.

Kind of funny, that ache in his chest.
Swallowing past a throat filled with spittle, he was at least glad the wyrm visor was doing it’s job of masking his face. “How can I aid you, My King?” He nearly stumbled, wanting nothing more than to run to her. But . . .

She would not know him. She wouldn’t understand. Worse than that, he wouldn’t be able to stand being rejected even that much. In fact, just- just this much was . . .

It was making him feel like he was being stabbed. No- being stabbed didn’t even hurt in comparison. Shirou could describe physical pain just fine- but emotional pain was . . .

Worse. His attention turned back outwards, trying to push away those dark thoughts back elsewhere. “Purely to business, then.” Artoria said, standing from her seat and taking a step down towards the blackened knight. Shirou’s lips settled in a thin line. “Would you take your helm off, before we speak?”

For a moment, he fretted with the idea. Then, however, he realized that his earlier thoughts meant that his features did not matter at all. Finding a surprising amount of comfort in that thought, his hands reached up and he lightly unbuckled the brace at the back of his head, raising the wyrm-helm from his head and, since leaving Morgan’s magical carriage, seeing with unobstructed eyes once again.

+++x+x+x+x+x

As the knight raised his helmet from his head, the blonde King paused in her next step. A ruff of red hair decorated his head, glimmering amber eyes stared at her in turn while a set of tanned- no, foreign?- features regarded her with a look that spoke of . . . relief. Sadness, even.

Why did he look at her like that?
“I have a demand to make of you, Sir Shirou.” His eyes stopped gazing into another time, seeing that grim, lifeless face that stared at him so. For a moment, he hoped to see a sparkle of life in her eyes, but he painfully found none.

She was as a doll, playing in the hands of strings she could not see. And, for Shirou, that made his heart ache beyond control.

“I would do anything for you, S-- My King.” He had to correct himself. His eyes closing tightly for a moment as he let the mistake roll off of him. When his eyes opened, it did not seem as if any had noticed his slip up. Though, beyond Artoria’s impassive face, he caught a quirk of the long-haired knight’s lips downwards.

“Indulge me in a duel.”

His world stopped. And, for a moment, he was certain so had his heart. “I’m- I’m sorry, what did you say?” His limbs felt heavy, and- worse than that- his chest felt tight to the point of bursting.

For her part, Artoria simply settled Excalibur against the floor, the blade’s pommel being used as a rest for her hands. The regal bearing of her figure in her mantle and armor did not match with the expression on her face. She was so hard on the outside, that he swore her face must have been stuck that way for years.

Perhaps it had been.

“I would have you show me your strength. Your true strength, if you would think to serve me among the Knights, as your Lady recommends.”
Morgan. He’d forgotten completely about her since he’d stepped into the tent, but being reminded of her so brusquely- and by her of all people- made him aware of that tightening in his chest becoming suffocating.

This had not been his hope at all. In fact, this was fast approaching an unmitigated disaster- and that was coming from him. Shirou was well aware he viewed “life or death” circumstances as being normal on some level . . .

But this was- He set his feet, and took a deep breath. There was nothing to be comforted by in this situation, but he also knew, without a doubt--- “No matter what I say, you will not accept anything but an acceptance?” He dared, and when she nodded her head stoically, he closed his eyes and heard the gritting of his teeth reverberating through his skull.

Only bad things could come of this, but he saw no way out. Even behind her, her long-haired Knight simply seemed stoic as well. In fact, Shirou could swear he seemed . . . hopeful.

Shirou gave up hope of an alternative. This was not his Saber- the one whom had taken it easy on him in order to teach him. This was “King Arthur”, who saw a man being played by one of her greatest enemies, Morgan, and making a stand against her.

If she wanted to, and Shirou darkly felt that she did, she would destroy him before he could muster a defense.

In so many words, this was going to suck.

“Very well.” Adorning himself in his helmet again, he waited for her response.

“In the morn, before the tournament continues, we will meet in the fields to the west. Just two warriors. Rest well and come with all of your strength, Sir Shirou.”

Despite her words, when he left the pavilion, Shirou did not sleep well at all that night. Least of all because he’d done so hunched against the side of Morgan’s carriage. Physical discomfort held no sway in comparison with ache of the heart.

And so he would arrive at the destined place, having not even spoken a word between himself and others- let alone Morgan- to hold the gaze of a face he would have rather seen in a smile.
Just the two of them, a situation that would have otherwise made him gleeful. Except she held Excalibur—without even Invisible Air to mask it’s presence—and not her demure, gentle nature that made him so enthralled with her.

And he did not hold kindness and affection for her in his hands, but swords he knew did not stand a chance against that, the Most Holy of Holy Swords. And she wanted his full strength, which he could not give without bringing forth some very difficult to answer questions.

Oh well. He murmured to himself as he watched her settle into that ready stance that he knew meant she planned on letting him take the initiative. If I’m going to get my ass kicked, at least I can say I’ll do my best.

[GATE OF AVALON, EXCALIBUR/ZERO]

He took in a breath, stepping in to close the distance. His stance, the secrets in another world he would have learned from Archer, would do no good against her. Preparing weak points only worked against someone you could actively prepare against.

Saber was too fast as a Spirit weakened by his own poor magical talents. Now that she was alive, and had no such limits? The best he could do was rely on training and—likely—magic-boosted abilities.

He probed with a slice from the left sword, which she dodged deftly and brought her hips into a swivel—a diagonal slice. His right sword careened off of Excalibur as it was all he could do to stop the attack that made metal creak beneath the glowing light of the Holy Blade.

He hadn’t even started and already he was being pushed back. This was the difference between him, he had known it before, but it was only being punctuated. He pirouetted on one leg and brought both blades around to force distance. She met both in a lock, the guards of all three weapons meeting for a moment. His ears would have been rattled by the creaking of his swords against her’s, but just as fast, she’d pushed him with the Sword of Promised Victory, forcing him back. It was a familiar effort, getting his feet and bringing the crossed swords up to hold Excalibur’s blade from splitting his helm. His foot came up to kick her away and she gave the attack up.

She was playing with him. No, measuring him, perhaps. He knew she could have taken that opportunity, but—
His right arm came around as he swung with all the force from his hips and legs. The sword in his hand gleaming from the light of the rising sun. The gleam failing against the brilliant glow of Excalibur as it swatted away his swing and- in the span of another breath- crushed the blade of his left hand coming around to slice at her.

Steel shattered, he simply dropped the broken handle and let it lay forgotten as he circled to the side and adjusted his grip into a two-handed hold on his remaining sword. He hadn’t yet activated Reinforcement, but he knew that he was going to have to. If he had time.

She was on him again, a stab with both arms that formed into the wind---

Ah, Strike Air----?!

The hammer cocked and fired, energy surging into his legs and arms as he ducked to the side as a furrow was worn into the earth from the force of the assault. He did not bother to study more, knowing how serious she was.

If he was a threat to her, she would kill him. But she wasn’t making it easy for him to survive, either.

His arms came up, bringing his sword in an arc to fend off the next helm-splitter swing, the groaning of the sword in his hands told him that another direct clash would see him without a weapon.

It was a good thing that he had a back up in that case.

Parrying would only save him for so long, his feet advanced into her space and he brought the pommel forward towards her gut-

She guarded with the steel of her gauntlet, bringing his strike to the side away from his body- an opening he knew she would capitalize on. She followed through-

And was met with his right sword as he gave up the ground in favor of keeping from a grievous injury. Reinforced legs aiding him in a flip while his blade was used to orient himself, until it’s
blade was passed through cleanly by Excalibur and broken. He dropped the rent blade and- aware of the weight of his armor- darted back several steps.

Her footsteps were quiet in the grass, but they sounded like thunder crashing nearby as his heart was beating so loudly in his ears that he knew he’d entered the stage of pure instinct that she- and so much battle and death- and inured in him.

The light passed into his hands and formed into shapes, the unbreakable Durandal projecting into his left hand while into his right came the hilt of Ascalon, the sword of St. George. The unbreakable defense of the left hand, and the Dragon-seeking weapon for attack with the right.

They were the best he could muster without drawing forth Caliburn. Excalibur was completely out of the question. Both would turn this fight into a nightmare, even before the strain they would put on his magical circuits. Even with his reserves not being drained as bad as they usually would be, this much was already putting half of himself into this battle.

She followed through with the swipe, right to left in a bisecting manner. His left hand came up, powered by Reinforcement and the nature of Durandal’s existence, and guided the strike wide while his right hand came around in a stab of the blade’s formed tip.

For the first time since the battle had started, he got breathing room as she leapt back into charging distance and he had a chance to rest his stance and catch his breath.

And he was winded already, he knew it. It was everything he could do not to let his shoulders shake and keep a stoic facade. He silently thanked Morgan for the armor’s visage, since it meant he could hide the sweat brimming his brow. This much? This much had worn him out?

He’d thought she was strong as a Servant, but this was ridiculous. He knew that she wasn’t going all out on him yet, either. Whereas he was heaving and fighting to his hardest- without pulling out his metaphorical trump cards- she seemed as ephemeral and lovely as ever.

In a most appropriate fashion, he let out a very direct mental, Fuck.

The standoff lasted for what seemed like minutes, but he was sure was only bare seconds, before her voice carried across the wind to him. “Are you her apprentice?”
He paused, caught off guard by the question. His left hand, holding Durandal, lowering slightly from his guard. “Morgan’s?” He clarified, the muffle of his helmet making him aware of how worn his voice was. It was almost like a growl, which made him feel more than a little amused. Best to enjoy what he could out of this mess.

“My sister’s, yes.” She noted, beginning to circle with light steps. In agreement, he padded in opposing circle to her own steps. “You use magic, and gaze at me in a way that reminds me of her.”

That comment brought him pause, making him drop the guard of Durandal even more. He stood up tall, out of stance, and let the blades rest at his side- and then dissipate into the ether. Strangely, while he had been winded, he didn’t feel as . . . taxed, as Projections usually made him feel.

Seeing him relax, the blonde woman lowered her weapon from ready into a cautious side-stance. “No.” He remarked, realizing for a moment that he . . . found the idea amusing. He was rather sure, if nothing else, Morgan would have trained someone better than him.

“Then why do you serve her?” Her caution, the mistrust in those doll-like eyes, stung him to the core. Even as he finally gathered most of his breath back- having to fight the urge to hunch over even though he knew it wouldn’t help with his breathing- he was fighting even more not to bring his hand up to his chest as if struck. Standing opposite her so, and feeling . . . like he was the enemy she was staring at, ready to defeat.

It was disheartening.

“Because there’s someone I want to save.” He finally remarked, after having to mull the thought over. His answer brought a confused look across her face, so much so that he was not surprised when she relaxed into an idle stand. Excalibur was still in her hand, glowing and radiant, but he knew that the time for this “little duel” had passed.

He had lost- handily. She’d been playing with him.

He didn’t mind that. It meant not having to try and figure out how to use Avalon’s remnants to keep him alive.

“Whom?” He smiled at her through his helmet. They really were too alike. One walking in the blinding light until she would burn out, and the other slinking in the shadows and fading away without the light to bolster her existence. Both were doomed to tragic fates- perhaps as he was, too, to try and save them all.
“You.” His word gave her much more pause, those deathly eyes- for the first time- glimmering with something he saw as life. Her brow furrowed, and for a moment, he saw her as pouting rather than outright confused.

The smile that stretched his lips grew so much bigger, and the tightness in his chest from earlier was loosened. Somewhere in there, the woman he loved still lived. “What? What do you mean me? What are you even talking about, that doesn’t make sense--”

He couldn’t help it. He laughed-

“Stop laughing! This instant!” Her pout only made him laugh harder.

Contrary to the proper ideals of someone who dreamed of taking over Britain, Morgan was not a morning person. Especially after how fitfully she’d slept. She did not ever sleep well- always plagued by visions and dreams of a sort that she blamed Merlin for teaching to her, blamed the Fae for engendering in her---

But the morning came unreasonably soon and the blonde woman brushed sleep from her eyes with a hand, she felt the covers cling to her and looked around at the Study she’d erected within the space of the Carriage in order to put up with the timespan of the tournament.

She knew there was no reason to expect him there, but she was disappointed all the same when she did not see the red-headed man inside. Her mind recalling the night’s events just as the rap against the door brought her attention forth. Pushing her senses outside the door, she could only hold up a snort. ‘Come in.’ She pushed her voice beyond, not bothering to move from her seat on the bed, only gather the covers up above her breast.

The door opened, and in walked her “Knight”, the wyrm-visor turning this way and that before---

He quickly stepped back out and closed the door. Her green eyes blinked for a moment. “What are you doing?! Get back in here!” She yelled at him, more incensed than anything she could ever think of at such a reaction.

“BUT MY LADY-” The panic in his voice was practically adorable. If she weren’t -so upset at
“COME IN HERE RIGHT NOW!”

The sight of the door opening and the armored man rapidly stepping in and closing it tightly, leaning back against the door as if afraid someone else would come in and see her was darling, but she’d only be able to think so when she wasn’t -livid-.

How dare he see such a worthy sight and then retreat?!

“Take off that helmet!” She shouted, waiting for him to obey while she restored the structure of the Study. The yelling would attract too much attention to their carriage. As he unbuckled the helm and threw it off like it’d scalded him- the loud CLANG it made as it bounced off a nearby table a comical noise- his red hair came out into the light and she got a look at his sweat-covered features.

And the stench of him, as well. A man’s musk was one thing, but it was obvious that Shirou had been up to something extremely physically demanding-

And magically, from the faint traces of magical energy that radiated out from him. Her eyes narrowed, getting side-tracked as she stood from the bed and- in au naturale- stalked her way over to him.

She wasn’t sure if she found it more adorable that he was obvious in how desperately he tried to look at her anywhere but where most men would dream of looking, or annoying in that he wasn’t falling prey to her obvious allure.

A finger jammed into his chestplate, just hard enough to thunk against it rather than jam the digit and hurt her. Thunk! Thunk! Dragging his attention down to her- their height differences were just enough, after all- she leaned up towards his face by standing on her tip-toes. “Did you learn your lesson?” She asked, hostility evident in her tone- as it seemed he nodded quickly and raised his arms in a placating gesture.

“I- I did, My Lady!” It was refreshing to see him react in a somewhat normal fashion. He’d been cool and collected before, but it seemed that he was appropriately weak to the wiles of women- or at least wary of one he’d scorned.
It said a lot about what his history with women must be to have leapt to appeasement. She would have been more than amused to know just how deep that history went.

“Then, you will repay me for my generosity and kindness in forgiving you.”

-Lemon and Lime, Cherries and Berries-

“How?” He asked, simplistically- and hoping against hope that it had less to do with her being nude and right up against him.

Such a hope was not to be, however, as she brought her hands up and grasped his cheeks, inclining his head and making him look down at her body, svelte and curvy in the ways only a properly grown woman could be. She offered no words, only demanded from him physically by crushing her lips to his. Kisses with Saber had been chaste, gentle, but Morgan was neither. Experience showed through in how her lips tickled across his, and her tongue swathed the flesh of his bottom lip before he could even realize that he was stuck in the liplock with the Witch.

Swept away by her viciousness, his hands went to her back, winding up in her long golden hair and raking through locks still messy with bedhead. The lack of texture from his gloves being on irritated him more than he could admit, and the fact that she was so close made him aware of the fact she was teasing him. Her hands, guiding his cheeks, raked nails down his jaw and across his throat before she pulled at the neck of his shirt.

“Undress.” She commanded, and rather than have her fly into a rage by refusal, he acquiesced. With room to breathe away from the amorous woman, he undid the buckles and belts holding his armor in place, each new bit of exposed skin admired by the blonde with her hands- and when it came to his naked chest- lips. He had had clumsy, unfortunate control of the first time with Saber, and their lovemaking had never gotten much better- and he had taken no lovers since, so it was all a new experience all over again.

But Morgan seemed content to guide him- or at least take what she wanted. A naked hand was dragged to the crux of her legs, a soft thatch of blonde pubic hair tickling against his fingers before his calloused digits were brought up against her warmth and left there insistently.

He obeyed, curling a pair of fingers inside and dipping them in her wetness. The way her breath hitched tickled across his jaw, and for a moment he forgot whom he was sharing such ardor with. Staring into her glimmering green eyes as her hands finished what he had started. Soft, sure hands unfastening his belt and shucking his pants in short measure. Nails tickling across his abdominal muscles and the V-line of his pelvis before shifting through his own dense red and finding-
“Hmnn!” Him. That pulsing length that was betraying him so -very- thoroughly right then. Reflexively, his fingers curled and the palm of his hand went against the hood of her cleft, rubbing the pearl within while she gripped him more tightly than necessary and stroked that oozing length.

“Quite fine . . .” She whispered breathlessly, a very different brand of smirk on her lips as she used her free hand to hold unto his hip and guide him back over to the bed.

If she had her way, they would not leave it till noon. Shirou was just lost in the wave of a woman who was far beyond him in scope. A mother’s heat grasping him as she guided him in, laying on her side with him behind her. A leg in one hand, the other taking a firm hold of a full breast.

She took his weakness from him there, and- flushed with his virility- had simply rolled him unto his back and then taken him into her mouth. Savoring the taste of their mingling prana, she’d coaxed him back to life and then gotten astride him.

His hands had grasped her hips, and she had planted her hands on his shoulders as her legs bent and the sound of flesh meeting flesh filled the Study. Her first orgasm had been dragged out of her with a scream as his hand slipped from her hip and went to the easy target, tickling a rough fingertip against her clit as she hilted him inside.

Flush with another orgasm, he had finally taken some amount of charge of her and rolled her over unto her back. Pinning her legs around his hips, she’d held unto him tightly as he’d begun to hammer himself into her with a bestial, urgent need.

The disgusting, earthly squelch of her pussy being ravaged by him filled the air for what seemed like minutes, until his growls and grunts of pleasure could not longer be silenced.

And then she’d leaned her head up, and whispered a breathless, needy little word.

“Cum.”

And he had. The hardest he could ever remember doing so. Even though it had been his second, it had seemed even more intense and- dare he say it- satisfying than the first.

Laying there, winded and covered with sweat, his eyes had turned onto her to see the glimmering green eyes and the smirk on the Witch’s face, leaving him stuck between disturbed at what he’d done . . .

And wondering how many people had seen her look that satisfied.
Since the morning, Shirou had been a little more off his game. Though, the remainder of the tournament was the joust and a final set of duels- both of which he had gently bowed out of in favor of having no experience at all in the former and no desire to ruin the rest of the day with a duel he would compare to the morning’s death-defying.

People could call him a coward if they wanted. Shirou knew without a doubt that he’d not be able to participate properly. Knowing one’s limits was an important lesson that had been beaten into him by their own King.

With the wrapping up of festivities, Shirou hoped the return to Morgan’s castle would give him time to prepare for the future.

If only he’d known that a completely different struggle was about to ensue, over a small gear in the machine of Destiny that he’d forgotten about in the face of Artoria’s mistrust and Morgan’s scheming.

A little gear, called Mordred.
Parenthood, PT1

Fate/Black Dawn

Author’s Note: Thanks to everyone who has left favorites, follows, and etc. I’m glad all of you are enjoying it so far. I apologize also for those of you who don’t like my writing style.

Chapter Two
Parenthood

The carriage ride back was more pleasant than the trip there. Whereas before it had been a stilted, uncomfortable silence, the passing of the hours was at least mitigated somewhat by an ability to drift into and out of reverie. The trip to the Tournament’s grounds had been stuck with far too much staring at him to feel safe doing so while Morgan was . . . so vexed, in a word.

At least, until Morgan had settled her seemingly bored eyes on him and finally- after what he’d sure would have been the first words out of her lips after he’d come back that morning- asked, “Where did you go in the morn to have come back wreathed in sweat?”

The redhead- without his helmet to defend his facial expressions, nor the blonde her veil to hide her’s- decided that being bald-faced with her was as fair as he could be. “The King called for me.”

Morgan rolled her eyes, scoffing. “Of course she did. I’m not an imbecile.” Grinning a bit wryly in response, Shirou let his eyes drift to the window as the countryside passed by.

“She wished to duel.” That seemed to get Morgan’s attention, making her move from a lazy recline in the carriage’s bench to a more proper seat as she regarded him more closely. He had a feeling she’d grow interested as soon as the prospect of violence against her sister came up.

“And?”

“I lost.” Shirou noted, emphatically. Not wanting to disillusion the Witch- nor go giving her wry ideas. Shirou was stronger than the average human thanks to a myriad of reasons, but Saber and the Knights of the Round were -anything- but average. Class containers were restrictions in the case of most Heroic Spirits, ignoring a Master being able to supply them with mana over their own. He had a feeling Artoria would still only be able to “fire” Excalibur once before being wearied, but he also had no illusions that putting her in that state would be impossible without damn near killing himself in the process. Or succeeding- and then he’d just earn himself a metaphorical sword laser
in the face.

Shirou had better things to do.

“Not too surprising.” Though, Morgan’s lips curled downwards somewhat in a display of discontent. Crossing one leg over the other, she let her cheek rest against a cocked fist. “Though, it’s a good sign that you have her interest.”

Sadly, Shirou wasn’t sure if he agreed with that or not. Even after the discussion they’d had, things had seemed stiff and cautious. But, on the bright side, at least it hadn’t ended in outright bloodshed. He would take the small victory.

Frankly, he wasn’t sure what he was doing. He hadn’t had a plan coming through, which was part of the issue with the fact he’d come into the most egregious of wild happenstances. He had been unconscious when he’d arrived in the days of King Arthur, and he’d awoken in the palm of Morgan Le Faye. Any plans he might have had were promptly thrown completely in the trash after that.

Shirou preferred flying by the seat of his pants most of the time anyway. He’d never claim to be a tactical genius. That had been Rin’s job, back during the War- and even her plans tended to go wildly awry.

Settling in a bit more comfortably himself, deciding that indulging her in this was worthwhile. Casual talk with Morgan was, at the very least, enlightening as to what she was truly like when she wasn’t- well- on the other end of a rampage. He still hadn’t understood her sudden come on to him, either.

A part of his heart did feel very guilty over it, though. He understood that on an emotional level, it felt like a betrayal to Saber, whom he loved with a single-minded passion- but he also knew that he’d had very little control of the situation.

He could ask forgiveness later. And probably get beaten to hell for it, which was fine in his book.

“Might I ask why?” His fingers, clad in his gauntlets, tapped against the arm-rest of the seat. Better to engage in conversation rather than loiter on past misdeeds.

“It means she values you.” He didn’t expect Morgan to be forthright, so he knew there was more to
it than that, but- well- at least he knew just how far Morgan trusted him.

Quite a lot more than most, considering.

“Don’t you as well?” He asked, feeling a strange sense of vindictiveness in him. Shirou would have been appalled at himself, if he hadn’t grown up a little since his teenage days. Despite having regained the physical traits of his younger, “stronger” self, he was still the middle-aged Atlas Alchemist, rather than the boy who had fought by Saber’s side.

His eyes trained on her once again when she didn’t answer immediately, and the . . . complex . . . look that was on the Witch’s face lasted for the entire rest of the carriage ride.

++x+x+x+xx+x+

The return to the castle had been a welcome change of pace for Shirou. The carriage and its contents put away as if it was nothing more than another thing Morgan could simply summon from thin air- he was sure her magic wasn’t that advanced, but Shirou also didn’t know the specifics, so it might as well have been True Magic to him.

The real issue arose when he and the Witch walked quietly back into the greeting hall of the castle, and found waiting in it, a child with blonde hair and wreathed in red clothing. Grinning with a full set of teeth that would have looked like a lion’s maw if she weren’t so . . . cute.

Shirou found it hard to believe that thought filled his head. Mordred. Cute. This was going to be weird, and that was -before- Morgan had quickly gone from a look of side-lined reverie and into what he could only describe as outright fury.

The redhead saw an ugly discussion when it was coming.

“Mama!” Was the only word the little blonde got out before he felt the air shift.

“What. Are you doing. Out of your room.” Contrary to her evasive playing and casual threats before, Morgan’s fury was on full display. Shirou even felt the emanations of magical energy from her, and the way her glare settled on Mordred, Shirou knew before he did he it was about to do something equally stupid.
That didn’t stop him from taking a small, miniscule step to place himself between the homunculus and its- her. Her. He had to fight down the instinctive desire to treat Mordred the way he wanted to- maker.

The fact that Mordred saw comfort in hiding behind his boot-clad leg said that, even if he was about to ruin all the good will he’d built up with the Witch, he was doing the right thing.

He wanted to think he had something to say, some great speech- something more than just his silent presence- but that was what happened.

He stood before Morgan Le Faye, a Witch in full grasp of her emotions, and shielded the little homunculus who, by all rights, he should have allowed to be crushed beneath the oppression of her mother.

Maybe he hadn’t grown up that much.

His heart hurt before he even heard the sniffles, the little blonde’s fists held tight in his pant-leg. That little body shaking, and- for a minute- Shirou forgot those feelings. Mordred needed a hero- and no one else was going to step up right that moment.

Even if redirecting those irate green eyes to himself seemed the most unwise thing in the world at that moment. Shirou could only smile somewhat sadly.

That stare bore into him, and he was sure that if Morgan had the ability to kill him with a stare- or at least remembered the ability to do so- he would have flopped over in that moment. But, just like with Berserker before-

He stood stalwart. Right then, if he wasn’t going to be a Hero of Justice, he’d at least be the Hero these two needed. Even if Morgan didn’t know she needed it, and Mordred would only eventually repay him with pain for the effort.

“Move.” Finally, she spoke words again, and Shirou- knowing it was foolhardy- shook his head. Those eyes narrowed again, and he knew that he was treading a set of waters that would likely end in his death if he wasn’t careful.

“Not when you’re angry.” His lips formed the words, and he barely had the chance to bring up an
arm as she brought up an arm and he was sure she was about to blast him. His ears shut out the child quivering behind him for the moment. They were in close quarters, he could take Morgan without something to guard her-

But that wouldn’t change anything. In fact, it’d probably just urge an even uglier path. Shirou hated the fact that he also knew that he didn’t want to raise his arm against a woman he was . . .

Growing oddly fond of. Ugh, feelings were difficult.

“Morgan.” He softly uttered, hoping against hope, and finding himself disappointed when- rather than calming, the Witch simply stormed past the two and into the bowels of the castle.

He’d call it a victory- if a short-lived one. His amber eyes finished watching her go, and then looked down at the little homunculus, watching her mother stalk off as if the world had wronged her.

Shirou didn’t know much about parents, but he knew that this explained an awful lot of what he’d read.

Rather than put up with the silence, he simply ducked on a knee and picked Mordred up, cradling the grade-schooler-sized homunculus in his arms as he made for the one place in the castle he knew was a domain he could best Morgan in.

And, as hard as he could, he tried to ignore the way the future Knight clung to his shoulder and sniffled. As well as the dark feeling of disgust he developed towards a pair of parents- of sisters- who had done this.

Saber had no choice, he knew, but . . .

That didn’t make it feel any less fucked up.

+××++××++××++××++××+

Medieval kitchens were not quite his realm of expertise, but Shirou was a self-sufficient person
first and foremost. An iron pot and some hunting later, he’d found tack bread and a collection of vegetables and jerked meat that he was sure wouldn’t count for a fair meal in the modern age, but it would do.

A few remnants of bones to create something resembling a stock, and he’d been working his way towards what would have otherwise been a meager stew. Morgan would likely chew him out later- if she didn’t come back to him furious and intending to kill him in the first place- but he’d even taken a few of the herbs he knew were used both for cooking and for magical applications.

Frankly, Shirou felt that Morgan’s decision to be as far away from him as possible would last for a few days. If not longer- she was well known to hold grudges well.

As he looked down at his little helper, young Mordred staring fixedly into the large pot while holding a large mixing spoon, Shirou felt that was fine. He’d have the fight with Morgan later. Right now, he was . . .

Ergh- being a parental figure. To Mordred Pendragon, the Knight of Treachery. Saber would kill him- if Morgan didn’t beat her to it. Curse his knee-jerk reactions to try and save people. He knew he hadn’t grown up at all when he simply viewed the inconvenience as a minuscule comparison to doing the right thing.

“Mix it.” He said, softly, watching the bubbling stew begin to look more like something resembling cuisine as he fished the bones out and tossed them aside into a bucket he’d designated as the garbage. His amber eyes turned down to the little homunculus, and- when he noticed that she seemed to be salivating beyond control- he put a finger in front of her face and spun it to gather her attention. When she obeyed with a reproached look, he shook his head and gently raked his nails through her fussed mane.

“How about you stay with me for a little bit?” He said, softly. “Until your mother isn’t mad anymore?” The quiet way she looked up at him, and looked stuck between fast acceptance and fright only made his heart feel heavier.

He wasn’t sure at all what he could do to alleviate this entire mess, but Shirou knew- in that moment-

He wasn’t going to let Morgan get away with this any more. She’d been his enemy in his mind, and still kind of was-
But this was bigger than any of them. Or, rather, Shirou couldn’t just stand to the side anymore.

Quietly, he scooped the girl up into his arms and, for the first time since he’d arrived, let the emotions crash over him. He’d burned everything away in the Fire, he’d sworn, but right then---

Mordred, for her part, could only blink in confusion as the red-haired Knight she’d seen following her mother around held her tightly and began to cry. Perplexed, she nervously patted his back and murmured--

“It’ll be okay, Papa.”
Parenthood, Ch. 2

Chapter Notes

Blaaaah- so many of you were so vocal, and I was super angry with myself for putting up with the negativity. So have more.

Fate/Black Dawn

AN: No one asked, but Shirou's armor- from Morgan- takes inspiration from Lancer Alter Artoria's. If you were looking for a mental image of that, there you go.

Parenthood PT2

There was what some would call a pregnant pause as Morgan held her hand up against the door into the kitchens. She couldn't remember how she'd planned to reconvene the situation, frankly.

Papa. Mordred thought -Shirou- was her father.

It would have been precious if Morgan had any fondness for the man. Instead, it nearly stopped her heart. She wasn't sure what was making it worse- Mordred's little voice-

Or the fact she could hear Shirou's sobs.

Morgan Le Faye was well known to have one trait, if even the rest of her history was muddled. She was a woman who fell in and out of love easily, which had been part of what had led to the dark relationship she had with Merlin, her teacher and on-off paramour.

She'd meant to use sex to entice Shirou, to have a weapon against him-

But perhaps all she had ended up doing was remembering how lonely she was. And if Shirou's response to that word said anything, perhaps he was too. She had been cast aside into the shadows- or a nunnery, more literally- by her father in favor of a child that hadn't even been raised publicly. Conflicted feelings didn't begin to cover the Witch's life situation -before- she'd taken advantage of her sister's mishap with the senseless half-breed.

Mordred was both a tool to her, and a disgusting sign that she had given in to a feeling for her sister beyond hatred and resentment.
And now there she was, being protected by that man. A man she held no illusions that he did not love her sister- a man's eyes only ever glimmered like that when he stared at someone he loved. The way he looked at her when he first woke up . . .

Quietly, Morgan lowered her hand, and walked away from the door to the kitchen. Her senses clouded with a feeling that was beyond her at the moment to describe.

+x+x+

It took a few moments for Shirou to gather himself, though thankfully it helped that the stench of the stew was going strong and Mordred- in her innocence- got distracted by food. It was good to know that part of Saber was a family trait-

A good cook loves a happy eater, as it goes.

He could address Mordred calling him . . . Papa . . . Later. Cowardice was the better side of valor on that battlefield. Shirou held no illusions that he would be a good father- emulating Kiritsugu was a practice in historical repetition at it's finest. Mordred might be genetically disposed towards being like her mother or ACTUAL father, but she was still a homunculus. The only thing she'd known in her short life was her mother's intermittent scheming and something resembling house arrest-

No, imprisonment was a better term. Punishing her daughter for Morgan's schemes- or whatever reason she might give- was going to stop.

As the little blonde wolfed down a bowl of stew and then grinned like a maniac, squealing "More!" Shirou decided that it was going to stop today.

"Say please."

"Please!"

+x+x+
By the time he'd managed to settle Mordred down in the bed in his own guest room, Shirou had spent more than two hours just running around the castle's halls and engaging the homunculus in tussling. It reminded him, a bit sadly, of time spent in the care of Taiga before she'd left him mostly to his own devices.

Shirou silently swore, if he ever became a real parent, he'd never let his children go ignored and feeling unwanted. This situation was already too beyond him as it was.

Of course, the first problem was that the woman he would have chosen for such a thing was . . . Well- alive now, but King of England. In hiding. Pretending to be a man. Married to a woman. Who was having an affair. With one of the King's knights.

Wow, I took a lot longer to realize how complicated this all is than I should have. Shirou thought to himself, flummoxed for once by his own headstrong attitude. Rin may have been onto something.

Thankfully, he had something else to expend energy on other than self-recrimination. Standing before the closed door of Morgan's "Workshop", Shirou tried to think of what he would have to say- and at worst, do- to get through to the Witch.

Or at least let him win this particular battle. One he shouldn't even be fighting, but there he was, raising his arm and simply knocking on a door that felt more imposing than Berserker did in that moment.

Caster had been a wiry, annoying enemy, but she'd still been someone who could be beaten with Saber's help.

Today it was just him, in a contest of wills against the student of Merlin.

He'd have preferred one with swords. At least then it was clear cut. This arena was not one he could win in beyond impassioned pleas.

Silence answered him despite his trepidation, but he knew her to be in here. He and Mordred had been through the halls, and since then he'd hunted out every other one of the blonde woman's haunts.
There was only one place a Magus went when they felt threatened, but Shirou had enough optimism in him to hope she had maybe just went to pout in her sitting room.

What he was about to do would have pissed Rin- or Saber- off without question, but he settled his hand on the door cinch and pushed.

Either Gaia was kind, or Morgan was ready for him, since the door opened without resistance.

Shirou got the feeling that it was neither. His luck wasn’t that good. Nonetheless, as he pushed into the room and found himself viewing a space he knew could not exist inside the room she’d set it within, he contemplated for a moment if Morgan herself possessed some kind of Reality Marble.

He knew it was just some kind of great Bounded Field, but he had to admit it was a very . . . expressive use of it. Turning a murky castle room into a garden rife with life. He wasn’t sure what part of him registered it first, the sight of Morgan sat upon a black throne, the sound of her singing words he couldn’t understand, or the sudden rush of scents. For a moment, he felt the breeze lift within her space and his eyes flitted from the blonde upon her throne, towards the trees that hung overhead.

Lifeless and dead, as if winter had come for them even though the ground all around them was splendid with flowers and beyond the horizon he saw a setting sun. For a moment, his eyes overrode the landscape with a vision of a world filled with swords- of death and despair- and in the same instant it was gone.

Just a trick of his own mind.

Her voice stopped, and for a moment, Shirou missed it. A peaceful, sad existence like this was something he had started to fall into the dreary repetition of. Pursuing endlessly, it was the words Saber had used with him.

And so he had-

“You said something that vexes me still.” She spoke, and Shirou put away his reverie in favor of putting his attention upon the woman on her throne. She wore that same blue gown that he remembered her wearing when he had first awoken, similar to Artoria’s own battle-dress, but more akin to a proper English Lady’s dress- and with a more brief chest. Or, rather, that was likely
because of Morgan’s admitted “advantage” over Artoria.

Not that he wanted to be thinking about that at this moment. He’d meant to confront her about Mordred, but it seemed Morgan wasn’t going to let him have that fight yet.

“I’ve said a lot that seems to upset you, My Lady.” He remarked in turn, merely making a statement of facts rather than goading her. The continuing use of her honorific rather than her name was reflexive, as well.

“You are good at it.” Morgan’s lips curled in a measure of distaste, but her eyes were fixed firmly on him now. Lovely green focused on his features, and he could only return with an amber-eyed stare. “But, you are also easy to read.”

Shirou simply shrugged. He’d been told that before- mostly by Rin and Saber. Only they took the time to understand the Distortion that afflicted Emiya, Shirou. He was not a proper Magus in the least- even now as someone having trained at Atlas, he considered himself more of a Spellcaster. Many would have been offended if they called him Alchemist, even if he had “graduated” from the Academy.

“The person you long for is my very own sister, isn’t it?” Morgan surmised, though the grin on her face said an awful lot. Shirou felt his eyes narrow, rather than did it intentionally. It was . . . not something he’d hidden, per se, but he’d been careful not to draw attention to any of it. It was a trick Rin had taught him, before he’d gone and made an enemy of her- or at least a very angry “ex”. The heir Tohsaka had saw it fit as a way he could keep his honesty and devotion without indulging in a practice he saw as untoward. Shirou was, after all, blunt and honest to a fault. He still hadn’t, in his opinion, ever told a lie- though he was sure plenty would say that he had.

“I will admit that this is not a discussion I want to have with you right now, Morgan.” Her name being used, a gesture of his own seriousness. He had little hope that she would abide by it, but it was worth the attempt.

“Oh?” Her lips curled downwards in distaste. Shirou knew a battle he couldn’t win when he saw it. Either he talked about it, and upset her- or refused to talk about it, and upset her. Women were volatile- as were men, but he always seemed more surrounded by the fairer sex. “And what would you rather talk about, Shirou?” The emphasis she put on his name said enough, even still. She was still angry.

Frankly, that was fine by Shirou. He’d rather have an out and out brawl between the two of them right then. His own emotions were still stirring hot, and he could- even with some detachment-
admit that he was purposefully letting them steer him more than he ever had before.

It was weird to have that “Magus-like” awareness, and yet care very little for it. “Your child.” He remarked, simply, crossing his arms in front of his chest.

The way her eyes narrowed was all too obvious to him, and then the slump backwards in her own personally made throne. Any other person might have seen it as threatening and a show of fury, but for the life of him, Shirou couldn’t see it as anything other than a pout like a scolded child. Or, perhaps that was just his imagination putting whimsy before sense.

“What about it?” She muttered, pressing a fist to her jaw and looking away from his face for the first time since he’d broken her reverie.

“Her.” Shirou corrected, at this point long past caring about the fact his “opponent” was a magician who could likely bend reality beyond his own imaginings. Right then, she was a woman- and a mother- who needed to be given an Ėmiya-brand Clue-By-Four. Literally, if need be. Damned if he would be able to handle being Mordred’s “papa”, though.

Shirou had no illusions that Saber- no, Artoria- would deign to raise the child. There were some betrayals that wouldn’t heal, but he was fine shouldering that burden-- even if it made him extremely uncomfortable. Besides, perhaps that way lay a key to victory- though Shirou couldn’t honestly say that he was having that thought first. Indignant Hero was first, scheming Shirou was last. “How.” He finally uttered out through clenched teeth, realizing that the more he became detached from his own senses, the angrier he realized he got. The fact that he’d been -trying to calm himself down- only seemed to be inverting in on itself.

Morgan’s green eyes settled on him again, her imperious- bored looking- gaze on him igniting a further burn in his chest. In the same, dizzying moment, he realized that any more than this and they would come to blows. He didn’t know her that well, but he also realized that he was pushing her temper well past it’s breaking point.

But, sadly, he’d already surpassed his. Mordred’s treatment, her actions towards Artoria---

All of it was eating him up inside. He’d been silent, accepting of it because it was both in his nature and he’d seen no other alternative--

But Shirou couldn’t help himself remembering all the times he’d “had no other option” and he’d
done it anyway.

Imagine something greater than you, greater than her. A familiar “spell” that took his breath away and gave him confidence again. He wasn’t sure why, but it did.

[SACRED SWORD]

“How can you treat her like that?” His arms rested at his side again, and he stood up tall. He didn’t realize when he’d started to slump or when his muscles had all begun to tense- but the tension drained out of him and for a moment he felt a perfect, terrifying clarity. He saw it as it came, the burst of icicle shards as they impaled him from his neck to down near his groin-

And, stricken with that moment of clarity, he gently took a step to the side as they thrust through the air like bullets. No, perhaps even faster than bullets- but his senses were pushed beyond their limits already. His conscious brain melting away in favor of a blade forming in his right hand-

They came forward again, a banshee’s cry following as Morgan cried out her rage and anguish. The blade came up, tearing away the attack with an ease he would never have attributed to himself before. The glinting light of it’s form alerting him to the truth of what he’d done, even though he knew he shouldn’t have.

Caliburn gleamed in his hand. Ominous, but loyal. A weapon that should be broken and cast aside, having found the fault of its owner. But to him, it was a memory of triumph- of victory- over a foe he and Saber had no right to defeat.

As he brought the longsword through and twisted, evading the striking lightning, he hoped it would see him to victory again. His amber eyes trained themselves upon her as she finally stood, the rage worthy of that class on her features, and- against what he saw as logical- began to advance towards him while her lips uttered curses, hexes, spells that he could not even comprehend-

Caliburn led him, inundating his senses even as his own body, the clarity of a battle he could read only because Morgan wasn’t in her right mind--

And so his body flowed. He would not hurt her, but he would let her vent- and he would eat away at his own feelings of inadequacy and fear. It was not healthy, but Shirou fully understood it was not his place to say what was.

They were not healthy people. Not Morgan, not Artoria, nor even himself. Sometimes, all one could do was poison oneself with that unhealthiness until the body fought it off.
The gleaming gold sliced through the air and he repeated the move he’d done against Artoria not even a few days ago, cartwheeling with the blade of Caliburn pointed towards the earth to orient himself while gouts of flame and blades of wind caressed at his sides. A lover that would destroy him utterly—though whether he was talking about Morgan or the magic she spat at him escaped him in the moment.

It was something Artoria had said to him before—abandoning the ground was normally seen as unwise, but there were warriors who had turned it into an advantage. He could not Mana Burst like Saber could, but he didn’t need to—

The jittering lightning that struck at him where he was going to land never touched. The blade of Caliburn sank into the dirt and he jostled himself free from the blade in a follow-through. Using a sword like a pole-vault would have been insane—

But it was not a normal sword, and he was not a normal human. Even as it dissipated from where he left it, Shirou brought himself around into a tumble. Caliburn had brought him closer, as had Morgan’s own advance, so now the two were barely out of arm’s reach of one another—

And, with a breath, he noticed that her own circuits were aflame upon her skin, and he was sure his were too. Projecting Caliburn was taxing, but he continued to be surprised how... easy it felt. As if he wasn’t even accessing his own minimalist reserves. Or maybe it was just that his own power went further?

She raised a hand, fire spewed forth from it—

He raised his own and batted her arm aside. The fury in her face—great and terrible—was simultaneously beautiful and alluring. This was her true face, he was sure. Not the lie she told him to his face. She hated him—

Perhaps even deeply. She spit another curse at him, and his arms entrapped her own for a moment as he stepped towards her, almost knocking her off balance. She hissed at him and he nonetheless spun them, an impromptu mockery of a ball dance as he tried to keep her off her footing and from finishing the battle with his death.

If he had been more poetic, he might have called it that. The dance of death— but he didn’t even think of it. Shirou’s mind focused on her face so close to his, how she looked so much like Artoria that it hurt to see her angry with him—
And for a moment, he almost forgot what it was they were fighting over. But, then, his instincts soothed and his lips descended upon her neck, pressing in tight over her jugular--

She squeaked, he bit. A beast would have torn out her throat--

He took it as victory, letting her free of his grapple and she stumbled back with a look of bemusement on her face- as if this interplay was something she hadn’t foreseen. The foreplay of two people so angry with one another that passionate hatred is taken over for a moment by a different breed.

But, as much as his body became fully aware of her, he knew that he couldn’t let it die.

“Let her out.” It wasn’t the same as when he’d seen it in that vision- when he’d been stuck beyond this world and another- but it was still the words he knew he had to speak. The memory of his anger, of staring her down in that study- of her mistrust. That vision rang out to him in the deepest, most frightening clarity.

What was happening to him?

“Why?” Her answer was the same. Though her cheeks were tinted in pink, she still screamed of wariness. Her hands brought up near her shoulders as if unsure whether to continue their fight or get swept up in his argument.

“Because, she’s your child. Not a tool.” He uttered, softly, for a moment feeling fear grasp at him. First, there was the ease with which he used his Projections- normally so much more tiring to him- and now there was this . . . new sense. These strange visions that had haunted him since he’d done the ritual upon the shores of Glaslynn that spring morning in Britain.

For the first time since he’d arrived, he was realizing with horrifying prospects that he may have done something stupid- rather, more stupid than trying to subvert history. Which he’d known to begin with had been -moronic-. Shirou didn’t do things by half measures, though. If Artoria said he’d have to pursue her endlessly, the first- and most sensible- thing to Shirou had simply been “Why not just go to where he knew she was?”
Someone should have told Shirou that meant he should go to Avalon, not to Arthurian Britain. He didn’t take directions very well.

His introspection was broken again, his gaze turning forward unto Morgan as she looked stuck between slumping back into her throne and walking out on him. For once, he wasn’t comparing her to someone else. To Rin, or Artoria- to Sakura, or anyone else.

In that moment, she was Morgan le Faye. A woman he’d slept with, and someone he needed- desperately- to help so he could help his beloved one. She was a mother, a girl who’d been denied things she did, in some ways, deserve--

She was an evil Witch, but also a benign Goddess who would one day reconcile with her sister on her deathbed, taking her on the boat to Avalon. He’d always wondered at that, even knowing as much as he’d researched and studied about Camelot and it’s “mythical figures”. How could she, in one breath, hate and love her sister so much that she would kill her by proxy--

But in that same breath lament it? It was beyond Shirou’s ability to comprehend. The most challenging feeling he’d ever encountered was the uncertainty of his mission- of what he was doing. But feeling the certainty that, if he kept putting one foot in front of the other . . .

He would see her, and she would smile at him again.

“Morgan.” He said, softly, her shoulders shaking at his address. No longer feeling fury in his veins. Only cold, hard, unfeeling determination weighing his breathing. “I don’t know what you’re planning-” He didn’t, not technically, “- but . . . she doesn’t deserve that. She deserves to have you as a mother. And you deserve to be a great one.” It was a low-aimed attack, but it was also the truth as he saw it.

She turned to face him, and the flush was gone from her cheeks. The moment dragged on, his own impassiveness faced with her own insecurity. Her own anger, self-hatred- all of it played across her features and made him aware of just how deep the mud he was stepping into was.

This was not just about Mordred and Artoria, it seemed. But about the Witch herself.

She said nothing. After a few moments of both breathing heavily, she quietly pointed towards the door.

He understood, and he would allow it for now. They were both too wound up- even after he’d
managed to work most of his feelings out in their short-lived tussle- to discuss this properly. And Mordred was safe in his bed, hopefully still asleep. His throat felt too tight as he uttered, “Please think about it.”

And walked out of her Workshop, back into the Castle. Finally aware of himself again, he slowly leaned back against the door and slid down unto his hind end, noting the singed bits of cloth and the tears across his shirt and pants- as well as marks of blood here and there where he had completely ignored some of her spells having landed.

The adrenaline drained from him and he felt---

Empty. A feeling he normally attributed to practicing Kyudo so long ago, but without that comfortable sensation of the bow and arrow in his hands. His hands settled up against his knees and he let out a long, deep sigh.

His head craned to the side, and saw a shock of blonde hair. The sleepy looking little homunculus cradling a feather pillow and blearily rubbing her eyes at him. She was so open, it hurt his heart to see her with such naked concern on a face he knew would eventually not understand empathy-

Not unless he did something about it, anyway.

Silently, he pulled an arm open wide and cocked his head. Mordred climbed into his lap and curled up against his arm, nestling her face against his armpit. For a moment, he felt a nostalgia he knew he couldn’t possibly have- and a memory of a white-haired girl whom he couldn’t understand being there- before he pushed it away in favor of the present.

“Papa,” She uttered out with a dry throat, and he let his amber eyes sit on her- hiding her face away under his arm still, “Did you and Mother fight?”

Feeling a headache coming on, he slowly stood up- cradling the homunculus with his arms- and began to walk towards the Castle’s water supply. They were both thirsty, he didn’t need to ask.

“We did.” He decided to hold off on the “Papa” discussion until later. Just the soft sounds of his booted feet hitting shaped stone filled the air other than their own breathing.

“Why.” She was so sleepy that she was struggling to stay awake because she wanted to know- he
could tell. But he also knew that he couldn’t lie to her about this- he had so much work to do with the little Knight that he wasn’t sure where to start---

Only that he had to start now. But what to tell Mordred-- he wasn’t stupid enough to say they’d fought over her, that would only damage her more. But he couldn’t exactly lie about it, either.

“She-” He swallowed thickly, aware that some water really was a good idea, “- She needs to treat you better, Mordred.”

That finally brought the little girl’s head out from under his arm, a look of utter confusion on her features. He understood on some level that the girl was a homunculus- that Morgan had purposefully designed her to grow quickly- but he wasn’t quite sure what the literal difference was between her and any other child. Well, besides that Mordred looked more like she was seven or eight even though- from what he estimated- she was maybe a year old at most.

This was a branch of magic that had always been jealously guarded against others, and Mordred was made by Morgan- a Witch likely at least as proficient as some of the most accomplished Magi in the field in his original time.

“What?” The squirrelly look she gave to him was adorable in many ways, like a lion cub who had been handed a bitter candy and fallen for the trick perfectly. Grinning despite himself, he moved one arm out from around her body to rustle her hair, earning a despondent and tired little “Bweeeehhh-”

“It’ll be okay. Just let Papa take care of it, alright?”

She nestled her head against his side again, and Shirou felt her breathing steady once again as he used a wooden cup to get suitable drinking water from a storage basin. He had the little blonde nurse down most of a cup and then found his way through one before they made their way back to his room, where he settled the little Lion back under the covers and then slid unto the bed himself. Raking fingers through her blonde locks until her breathing steadied completely and the little rebel gave up on the battle against wakefulness and nodded off.

By the time that happened, Shirou was dozing himself. Sleep came easy that night--

Even if he dreamed of a hill covered in swords.
Parenthood, Choices

For Morgan, the night did not go quietly. She sat for hours, stewing in the roiling emotions that had surfaced since her impromptu "lover's spat." She was not a stranger to little sleep, and- as much as she hated to admit it- the most she had slept lately had been shortly after her . . . Tryst- with her sister's wannabe paramour.

He was not the most experienced, nor the most endowed, but the way he had stared at her almost the whole time . . .

It still brought shivers to her flesh. She hated it, deeply. The knowledge that the man whom she had gotten nothing but seeming loyalty out of could do so only in the name of her sister.

And now there was Mordred, who viewed him as her father- Morgan's own error in trying to keep the girl unattached and unaware in order to use the knowledge later.

She hated how that made her feel. Simultaneously disgusted with him and herself--

And she deserves to have you as a mother. And you deserve to be a great one.

Despite how insipid it sounded, she felt her gut twist at the thought of those words. She was just a homunculus, not even human--

But Shirou didn't care. And she could tell he was disgusted with her for it. People had derided her for her interests and ambitions all of her life--

She had never felt what it was to have someone disappointed in you because they thought you were better. It was . . .
A startlingly painful sensation. Feeling that guilt - something she'd tried to push out of her life long ago - manifest in the deepest way.

He had accepted the moniker with only tears, making her wonder what had caused them. Whether it was a past unrevealed to her, or his empathy for the little homunculus.

It was not rare for her to know she had little grasp of other's feelings. Morgan was aware her own self-absorption had grown out of control and led to the life of solitude she'd been experiencing.

Even two years ago she had been - if nothing else - tread warily about at Camelot. The quiet connection between herself and "King Arthur" was unspoken of, and she enjoyed her fair share of involvement with the knights and courtiers -

Lancelot having been one of her foremost interests until he'd proven himself wholly devoted to the guilt of sleeping with the Queen and repaying it by quietly giving his all in something resembling a spiral of despair.

The vindictive part of her felt a great pleasure at him being brought so low, but the picture perfect lady she'd once been lamented his heart. Against sense, she had denied the idea of using that secret knowledge - or Artoria's true gender - as a means to her ends.

She was a Witch, not an imbecile. She could not rule a country in ruins, it just wouldn't work. Granted, she could see herself steadily deciding that if she could not rule, no one else would.

She was not blind to her own faults, just a woman of great emotion. And as the night turned into dawn, she dozed off.

And dreamed of a war fought by her sister's side, clinging desperately to life.

x+x+x+x

Against her better judgement, she shut herself away from Shurou and Mordred for the better part of a week. Going between her Workshop, and Bedroom without much effort to see either.
She hated when she would find a covered plate with her meal sat quietly in front of her destination. She was even more furious with herself when she found herself loving his food.

If Shirou was a strong warrior, he was a cook much better. Even with the minuscule offerings she kept around the castle, he seemed to be able to put together a meal that made her stomach ache by the time she’d finished.

She’d been hesitant the first time he’d offered her food, even testing it for poisons, but by now she had . . .

Developed trust in him. She knew, even now, that he was caring for her. She should have been distrustful of him, but the more . . .

The more she tried to find fault in him, the more she seemed to see how easy it was to accept that he had good intentions. Perhaps that, along with his devotion to her sister, should have set her off but---

Strangely that only made her more sure of what she could expect of him. Control of the situation was something she always desperately sought--

But rarely found. It was strange to find it in him, who refused to fall for her most common of tricks. Who stared and encouraged her to get angry with him, in fact. She’d never been challenged like that. She was sure a great many people would have called him a fool for his stunt just the other night.

With a resigned sigh, she slumped back in her chair, her bedroom seeming terribly dark and lonely all of a sudden as she flung her quill-pen hard enough at the letter she was writing to spear the tip into the top of the hardwood desk.

It would never see the light of day, but Morgan had hoped that writing it at all would soothe her. Frankly, it did not--

But she knew what would, and with the announcement of her chair against the floor, she swept from her room and off into the castle proper.
As her feet carried her through stone hewn pathways, a black cat settled into step at her side, long-haired and with mismatched eyes- one blue and one eerily green. A familiar, one she had not named but was the closest to caring about.

Mistress. It spoke through it's mental link, A man in armor stands before the gate.

Irritated beyond measure at destiny's timing, she turned her gaze unto the cat familiar and shooed it towards the gate. Get his message and bring it to me. I have something more important.

Watching as the feline scrambled off, she reached out through the fields she had imbued throughout her home in order to find the errant "Sir Shirou" and Mordred.

Oddly, she sensed their presence in the castle garden. The soft rustle of her gown dragging along smooth stone the only noise until she got closer and the air began to be filled with childish giggles. For a breath, anger filled her but she quashed it down tightly.

It only made it worse that the only thing that helped was hearing his voice again. Those words that had haunted her since their "fight."

She rounded the entry into the garden and saw them immediately. Mordred's bright red tunic and his equally red hair standing out starkly from the greenery and the flowers that were tended with sun, rain, and her own magical energy.

They had a pair of sticks, thicker than need be, and both were clacking them together occasionally only for Shirou to reach in and then ruffle the little blonde's wild mane- always earning a pout followed by another girlish giggle.

Shirou tapped his "sword" against Mordred's- brought up in a two-handed guard that would have been the pride of any other teacher- and then he wiggled it from the side. Play fighting, like a cub being taught to hunt.

She leaned against the entryway, trying to swallow down feelings that made her aware of how much she had to work through with this situation. Anger at seeing Mordred, even more so that she was gleeful, annoyance with him for protecting her and- worst of all-
Jealousy that he was giving her love that Morgan wanted for her own right then. She was doing it again—falling in love with another valorous man who set her heart ablaze but likely would never love her back.

She bit her lip so hard it bled.

Mistress, it is about the Sir. He has been summoned to Camelot.

Destiny, Morgan thought, could eat a dick.

x+x+x

Shirou finally paused in his “bonding” with the little cub, noting that they had an audience in the form of Morgan herself. He’d honestly gotten awash in daily life over the course of the week since their fight. Thankfully, for all he worried about being “a figure of authority” for Mordred, she was surprisingly easy to please. In the deepest sense, she longed mostly for his attention, and was content to behave well and listen when she got it. She had a strong, fiery personality that made him fully aware of who her parents were, but that only made it more---

Pleasant. Yes, Pleasant— to deal with. He’d even started to get over her sudden insistence on calling him “Papa”—though he still felt an odd twinge in his chest even now. As if it was, in some way, wrong— as if Emiya, Shirou did not exist to fulfill such a role.

In his peripheral view, he noted Mordred’s attention dragged to where his own eyes laid. Settling on her mother and going from lively and full of splendid things that made Shirou feel so very . . . new— the girl froze. As if expecting the blonde woman to start shouting at her, something he was sure would have happened before, she hid behind his leg. It would have been heartbreaking, if he weren’t already sure that he’d gotten through to Morgan in some small way.

After all, she’d allowed him to hold onto her, to traipse around the castle with her and spend time with the little homunculus. Shirou didn’t want to be presumptuous, but he felt that was a victory. While he’d otherwise have cooked and tried to bridge the sudden divide between them regardless simply because of his own innate nature, he’d also been half-heartedly bribing the Witch with food and his respect for her personal space.

Shirou was a dunce, he could admit it, but he wasn’t a fool.
Turning his gaze from the woman clad in her lengthy white shift, he softly led Mordred back around in front of him with a hand on her shoulder which did not leave when she was “face to face” with Morgan once again. Shirou was behind her, supporting her— that’s what he wanted her to know. Even if it was perhaps scary for the little Knight to be.

And sometimes, that was what people needed, he realized. Even if Mordred was a very special kind of person.

Glancing up at him, she squared her shoulders and he almost laughed as that proud, strong little voice murmured out in a squeak, “Mother.” He really did have to try. He’d only spent a few days with her, but he could already tell that he was going to have a hard time disassociating himself from the little rebel.

His amber gaze settled upon Morgan again, as the Witch crossed the pathway towards where they’d taken up space for their little “sparring session”. He had to tell himself to relax, that this wasn’t going to turn into a screaming match— or another battle. Shirou had such reflexes ingrained into him from so long ago that even during his days at Atlas it had taken a lot of self-control not to treat his fellow students like fine, brittle china.

Which had only added to their attempts to stay away from him. Magi did not like being assessed, let alone nakedly being assessed for whether he would have to fight them.

Finally, Morgan stood only a few feet in front of the pair. Those green eyes drifting from his face, naked and unashamed in how she gazed at him as if she wanted— no, needed him. It was discomforting to him to see how she stared at him like something she—must possess.— It was not an expression he could compare to anyone else. As much as he’d found himself comparing her to all the other women he’d known, he was steadily starting to rid himself of that bias—of that personal need to disassociate.

She was Morgan. He was Shirou. It was odd to realize how he’d done everything in his power to deny her up until recently.

Her eyes sat upon Mordred’s face, the girl’s shaking being felt against the palm of his hand. A small squeeze was reflexive on his part, but no less meant. Slowly, the Witch stooped down, and tucked her arms against her knees.

“Mordred. Would you like Shirou to be your father?” She asked, softly, and Shirou’s breathing stopped for a moment. Of the things he expected, that was---
Not it. Not by a long shot.

“H-Huh!” Mordred belted out, even while he was stupefied. What game was Morgan playing now?

He couldn’t for the life of him imagine what could be going through that blonde head as she turned her gaze from the homunculus’ face up towards his own, and his utter confusion must have shown on his face from the way the Witch’s lips curled up into an expression of amusement. “Would you like to keep calling Shirou Papa?”

He could no longer see Mordred’s face, since his own gaze was fixed upon Morgan’s pleased smirk. For the life of him, he could only try to figure out how this played into her hands, but he just couldn’t find the answer in himself. They were two different people, after all, so he felt very little loss in not understanding—only annoyance that he felt that it would lead to a very dark situation for him in the future.

“Y-yeah?” Mordred’s stuttering only made him more worried. If he was unprepared, he was sure the little rebel was trying to align her image of her indomitable, distant, spiteful mother with the woman who was asking her—what she wanted—. Shirou didn’t blame her one bit.

“Then, we’re going to be leaving. You, your Papa, and I.” Ah, there was the kicker. But at least she was saying it openly—he had room to work with that.

“Where are we going?” He asked, through a sudden case of dry mouth. As the Witch stood and dusted down her skirts, that smirk left her face and fell into a look of deadly seriousness that he had not even yet seen on her face.

“Camelot. You’ve been summoned to the King’s side, and neither I—” She gestured down at Mordred with a hand, “—nor Your Child will be left behind. But, you will defend my honor, won’t you, “My Knight”?”

Shirou was beginning to understand that he really did not know a thing about this woman—least of all how she managed to make such a bold decision in the face of something that would have otherwise spelt doom for them both. He’d have understood if she’d frothed with rage, or insisted on keeping him from Camelot— from Artoria’s side—but . . .
Here she was, making the decision for the three of them. He’d made a mess of a whole lot of what he’d read about. After all, Morgan had vanished from Camelot’s halls by this point, and had stayed gone ignoring her few interferences in the lives of Lancelot, Mordred, and others, but here she was.

Intent on making a return, using him as a gateway pass and bringing along the little Knight of Treachery that would happily follow those who gave her existence meaning.

The Holy City was going to be the site of his greatest battle to date, it seemed. And he wasn’t sure if he was arriving with his greatest foes-

Or his only allies for the foreseeable future. Shirou let his eyes close, and he took a breath to steady himself from the spinning going on in his head.

Getting his senses, he realized the gravity of this situation. Or, at least, what he thought to be the situation. Assessing it, he turned it all over in his head while he turned his gaze down to Mordred—who was looking at him in turn.

Morgan would say that the child was his, not Artoria’s. Perhaps later she would explain the truth, and things would play out just like he had seen, and nothing would change. She’d probably even use this to her advantage, thinking it a wedge between him and Artoria— and he could certainly see that becoming a reasonable idea. Right then, however, it was also what seemed to be the option he could lean on the strongest.

She had him where she wanted him. Shirou, however, knew that he had the ability to come out of this dangerous situation just as much as the many others he’d dealt with in his life. He was, after all, a sword forged in fires hotter than this.

“What are we bringing?” He asked, a hard, stoic determination on his face once again.
And now we enter the meat of the story, since Camelot was where I was wanting to go with this. Chapters from now on will be longer (or at least in more parts, since I tend to cut off where my muse dies and then pick up, since that allows me to "update faster").

Made of Blades, PT1

Chapter 3: Made of Blades

It turned out that Morgan wanted to basically pack the whole castle for the trip. He’d been more than a little frightened by the idea, but she’d done it within the night and- when the morning had come- they’d set off towards Camelot in the north. Unlike before, where they’d arrived at the Tournament in a simple carriage that had obviously just been for personal travel, they rode in a wagon carriage that was stocked with crates and barrels full of Morgan’s effects. Morgan had ridden in the closed in part of the carriage, while Shirou and Mordred had ridden up front with him in control of the four horses that drew the thing. He couldn’t say he had much knowledge of how to direct carriage travel, but he’d been assured by the Witch that the horses were just familiars that would do it all for him, mostly. That made sense, considering he didn’t remember them having a driver for the trip to the tournament, either.

But it did make him aware that she either wasn’t wanting him inside the wagon with her, or was doing something she didn’t want him to be aware of inside of it. Regardless, Mordred had insisted on sitting up with him, and he’d simply helped her up into the bench at the front before they’d taken off. While it seemed that they’d made some progress in the mother-daughter relationship, he wasn’t going to push the issue more than he needed to.

Besides, he needed some space to himself for now as well. Mordred’s glee at being in the outside world was enrapturing her as they travelled the roads meant he didn’t have to keep her very entertained, just offer her a smile or a word or two when she would inevitably point something out. Most of the time it was the stray stag when they passed through a forest, or a flock of birds.

Eventually, though, her gaze turned back unto him and he knew he wasn’t going to be able to continue his attempts to think through how to deal with the change in scenery- and likely the uprise in danger. The little Homunculus asking, softly, “What is Camelot like, Papa?”
“To be honest, I don’t know.” He admitted, relaxing his hands somewhat on the reins as the horses led the carriage around a bend and over a hill. “I’ve read a lot about it, but I’ve never been there myself until now.”

“Aww.” There was that pout again. He couldn’t help but reach out and ruffle her hair again, earning him an even bigger pout.

“It won’t be boring. I can tell you that much.” He decided that he could at least tell that much with a straight face. “After all, it’s a place filled with some of the strongest, and smartest, people in all of Britain. Especially since your mother and I will be there.”

The grin he earned made him smile. “Uh-huh!”

X+x+x+x++xx+

The sun was beginning to set when they arrived. From what he’d understood, it should have taken longer to travel the distance between Morgan’s little hideaway castle to Camelot itself, but he presumed the fact they hadn’t stopped to rest or feed the horses had helped with that. Shirou had to ponder if it was animal cruelty to feed them via the master’s mana rather than letting them rest, but he figured that- as far as any Magus was concerned- ethics were already a nonsequiter. Morgan, he thought, was likely on the further end of that- especially if she was willing to consider her own child, homunculus or not, as anything less than a tool to meet her own needs.

Even he was aware his moral compass was a bit strong, but it just surprised him how inhuman some people could be.

Camelot was not what he expected, to be honest. After all, the rest of Britain had held true to his thoughts- being medieval and filled mostly with more common stoneworking, but Camelot castle was . . .

It was massive, if he was being honest. Morgan’s castle had been a suitably large residence, but Camelot was easily the size of a small city on it’s own. He’d mentally called it “The Holy City” as a result of translation, but he could see now why that appellation could be considered true in some way. It wasn’t a city on it’s own, but it would have qualified due to sheer size. The white-washed ramparts and blue and gold flags that hung all over the walls all spoke to a great glory that had been told in stories for a long time, but that did not yet become the legend it would be later.
Reaching the castle proper took a little more time, passing by companies of Knights and more as they wound their way into the walls. Occasionally they would be stopped and he would have to identify himself, though most of the time he hardly got his own name out before he was sent on his way towards the castle proper.

He could only assume that those questioning him knew he was expected. That, or they already knew what kind of cargo he would be bringing with him, so to speak. Either Artoria knew already that Morgan would not leave him alone-

Or whomever had actually sent for him had no interest. Shirou was optimistic, not naive. While it was true Artoria could have sent for him, it was just as true that it could be a trap of some kind. Granted, he saw it that way more BECAUSE of Morgan, rather than his own impressions. Turning his gaze down towards Mordred, he noted that she seemed particularly enamored in all of the men traipsing about in armor- some of whom looked to be as massive as could be, like the ones whom had been standing guard at the Tournament what seemed so long ago.

Settling his gaze back upon the horses and the reins in his hands, he hoped that this wasn’t going to be as ugly as his first time meeting the King. He wasn’t sure if he meant when she’d requested a duel, or when Lancer had tried (and succeeded, once) to kill him.

The arrivals for the castle was emptier than he’d expected, which made him more paranoid than he would have liked to admit. Though, he did see someone new as they pulled in and finally paused. Mordred clamoured unto his shoulders as he climbed down, and he turned to face the “greeting party” as he decided to coin the group of knights with a silver-haired man at it’s head.

Green eyes, a slim and youthful face, and that silver hair that spoke of wisdom. The somewhat androgynous features made him wonder which Knight this was, though he had a fairly good guess, considering he was known as-

“Hello. You must be Sir Shirou, correct? I am Sir Bedivere.” - The Steward of Camelot. Well, that wasn’t necessarily true, but it was presumed quite often. Nonetheless, it seemed to be the case.

“A pleasure.” He offered a hand, and Bedivere took him at the wrist and shook, Shirou returning the gesture a bit clumsily. He’d worn his armor for the trip, having only put his helmet back on when they’d entered distance of the castle in order to keep from overheating himself. It seemed to help that Mordred was clinging onto the “horns” of the helmet now, as well. “The little one is Mordred, and of course, Lady Morgan is in the carriage-”
Speaking of which, it seemed his introduction was timely, as the door opened and Morgan herself stood at the entrance to the carriage, wearing her black and blue gown with that veil covering her face, glancing to him meaningfully after a moment. He knew that he shouldn’t- it would only associate him with her more- but he nonetheless stepped aside from Bedivere to offer her a hand down.

With the grace of a noble lady, she stepped down using his aid. Of course, he got the feeling she was giving Mordred- still clinging onto his shoulders and looking gleeful, since he could hear her soft giggles with every step he took- quite the unamused look. His attention returned unto Bedivere, noting the silver-haired man’s face tensing up somewhat. It was only just noticeable, but he didn’t blame the Knight. After all, Shirou had known since before they’d left that this was going to be an uphill battle both ways, metaphorically.

“My Liege has been expecting you, if you are prepared to meet with him?” Bedivere noted, his attention once again on Shirou. Knowing this was inevitable, he couldn’t help but feel this was about to go south again. Reaching up with an arm, Mordred swapped over to it and giggled as she was sat down upon her own two feet again.

“I am. Mordred, be good for your mother, won’t you? You keep her safe while I’m with the King.”

He saw the little salute she snapped off as cheeky, but allowed it. It made him feel better about what he saw as a disaster waiting to happen. His gaze turned to Morgan, whom he could not see the expression of through that black veil, but he knew she had to be mistrustful of this. He wasn’t an expert on the Witch, but it was the most sensible reaction she’d have. Mordred offered her mother a hand, and- with a small flinch, Morgan took it.

It was progress, even if small progress. His gaze turned back unto Bedivere and his escort- three knights with actual exposed faces rather than the mountain-like creatures he’d sworn couldn’t be human- and he gestured with a gauntlet-clad hand to lead on. When the silver-haired man did, he fell into step with the other men. With no swords being worn, he knew he’d look a little less dangerous on the outside- but Artoria already knew his secret. Whether she’d shared it with her Knights was unknown to him.

He’d take a bet that she had, though. Otherwise it might have been Bedivere alone who’d met him. It was hard to decide if that was a show of trust, or mistrust itself. He personally hoped it was the former. Leaving Morgan and Mordred alone was a risk in itself, but it was one he couldn’t mitigate at all. Better to approach the dangers he could do something about first.

As they walked the stone-hewn walls, he caught how Bedivere’s eyes occasionally came back to
check him- or perhaps study him. Behind his visor, an eyebrow raised before he relaxed a bit more. He was getting jumpy himself- treating this place like a nest full of enemies rather than the home of his beloved Saber. Even if she didn’t remember him, even if she didn’t trust him, everything he was doing was in pursuit of her. He had to live with that knowledge for the moment.

It made him feel stronger than he thought it would.

“That child . . .” Bedivere began, trying to make conversation, but showcasing how honest he was. Rather than needling the information out of him, he was going right for it. Shirou decided, then and there, that he liked Bedivere. “That is Lady Morgan’s child?”

He nodded his head, though he realized it mattered little when Bedivere’s eyes were fully set on the hall before them. “Yes.” He wasn’t sure if Morgan would still try to pull the wool over people’s eyes and proclaim Mordred a male like her “father” hid away, so he’d stay away from the topic as best he could.

“I see. The father?” Ah, there it was. Upstanding and forthright, indeed. Shirou would have applauded him if it weren’t a question he dreaded being asked.

“Not around.” It was, and was not, the truth. Shirou would still rather never lie, and he knew that anyone else would have seen that answer as a lie. He didn’t see it that way, however.

“Ah, so she isn’t yours?” Bedivere mused, making him choke up and stop for a moment. “E-eh?! Are you alright?”


“Ahaha- I’m sorry.” The apology was sincere, he knew it, but Shirou couldn’t help but pout a little himself at the laugh. “I guess anyone else would have taken offense to the idea of being in bed with their benefactor, as well. That was terribly rude and crass of me, I really am sorry about that.”

Despite himself, the redhead let a somewhat vivid memory of that exact act play through his head. Letting out a sigh in order to comfort himself, he responded as evenly as he could manage, “It’s fine, Sir Bedivere. You meant nothing untoward by it, you were just curious, correct?”
“Of course.” The somewhat sly smirk that tilted the man’s lips wasn’t missed though. Courteous he may be, but Shirou got the feeling that he and Bedivere would get along alright— if the older man could keep himself from making such comments too often. Especially not in earshot of Morgan, whom he was sure would have been -very- upset by that idea. Or she’d use it to her advantage. It was a miracle she or Mordred hadn’t said something to that effect already.

So it was just a manner of time, even if he’d tried to stave it off with that answer. That was all he could do, so he returned his anxieties to the forefront issue.

What was he going to do now that he was in Camelot? He’d been headstrong in getting here, but he’d never really thought of what he was going to do beyond half-baked plans that had fallen apart the moment he’d arrived to discover himself in Morgan’s hands.

Yet strangely things had worked out so far, so he’d just play his part as best he could, and hope his luck would hold. He got the sour feeling that someone, somewhere, out beyond that place and time was laughing at him, though.
Made of Blades, PT2

Fate/Black Dawn

Morgan watched quietly as Shirou was led away. Glancing down at Mordred, realizing her hand was still in the homunculus', she let loose a sigh. "Come, Mordred. Let's go get our room set up." With the direction of some of her homunculus knights- it was a miracle Artoria had kept them around, she admitted- the wagon was unloaded and she began to walk the halls back towards the one room in the castle that had been her's at some point in time.

"Is Papa gonna be staying with us?" The little cub asked, and Morgan would have paused if she hadn't prepared herself for this throughout their trip to the castle.

"He is." She agreed, deciding it was fine to put up with . . . Her daughter's . . . inquisitiveness for the moment.

"That's good." It was the most she'd heard Mordred speak since she'd begun taking her own feelings out on the child. She'd meant to see her as a tool, but Morgan could freely admit she'd been letting her feelings get in the way of that scheme. "I like Papa."

Letting out a sigh, the veiled woman mused, "He likes you too, Mordred." Internally, she wondered if such things would matter in the end.

"You . . . must like him too, Mother?" This time, Morgan did pause. The Witch looking down at her side to the little red-wearing child. Part of her brewed a new anger, but against her whims she snuffed it out. Mordred wasn't to blame for the complex feeling, and it wouldn't even make her feel better this time.

"Don't tell him that." She chided as she resumed walking along. "He'll get a big head."

Despite herself, she felt how Mordred began to skip along after her words. The magus simply rolled her eyes.

It was obvious Mordred's starvation for attention was allowing Shirou into her heart- and perhaps even a little bit of her parents' desire to be saved. Neither Morgan nor Artoria would admit to it, but Morgan was at least AWARE of that deep seated desire within herself.
The question now was, would Shirou make good on his word? And, after that, would either allow him to save them? Morgan didn't know. She could only prepare and hope that the doom she saw in her dreams was a warning, not a certain future.

+x+x+

Shirou's paranoia grew the more they walked the halls of Camelot. He got the feeling that Bedivere, at the very least, was not the type to place an ambush in what would otherwise be a display of chivalry and fealty, but . . .

He'd figured out by this point that only a certain amount of Artoria's followers had remained. Tristan, the Bowman, had left in refusal of Artoria's seemingly stone heart. Agravain, and Gawain were both around, one of whom he would have to be more cautious of over the other. Gawain was noted as being valorous and proud of his martial accomplishments.

Agravain was his enemy. Regardless of if he served Morgan or Artoria. Everything he'd read about the man painted him as someone without the knowledge of how to be truly loyal.

The exposure of Guinevere's affair was easily the most noticeable catalyst for the fall that would take place. If he'd come back further he could have done more, but at least he had a clue towards what to do now.

 Somehow, he would have to either preserve the sacred image of the Royal Marriage- or he would have to split it in a much less dramatic way. Ironically, Morgan would be the most fit to help him with that.

One would think she would prefer the most explosive means, but he had been puzzling through her awareness of it all for days now. She had to know Artoria's secret, especially to have fathered Mordred, but then why not use that knowledge itself?

The only answer he could come up with was that she saw it for the doom it would bring. She was, after all, Merlin's disciple. A wizard able to predict and control the future as if he had precognition. Some of his research insisted it to be the case, in fact.

Morgan was many things, but she was by no means stupid. The thing that reminded him of Rin the most was just how cunning she was.
His attention snapped back up to Bedivere, noticing that in his musing they'd finally reached a carven door in red with gold embossing upon it. The beginning of night falling upon the world through the castle's windows.

"Please be on your best behavior in front of the King."

The escort opened the twin doors, and ushered Bedivere and Shirou into the chamber beyond. Shirou could not say that he'd ever expected to end up gazing upon another artifact of Artoria's great age.

The round table, adorned in a design like a crucifix and with a size that belied its own majesty. Despite his admitted focus on swords over other noble phantasms, he was aware that it was also a suitable target. Not one he could personally use, but he could at least comprehend it's structure.

Of course the next target of attention was easier to find. Flanked by another knight- this time not that long and dark-haired man he'd yet to learn the name of- was Artoria, with Excalibur for once not within view. He had an innate feeling that it was just a look away, though.

His eyes softened behind his visor, while his entire posture relaxed in the face of her again. Even with her seeming so far away, there was much to be said of how her physical presence alone seemed to put him at ease.

"My King." He noted past dry lips, having to forcibly make himself address her that way. It was harder than he cared to admit. There was a great big part of him that still longed to see her smile, and to hold her.

"Sir Shirou." Her voice was official, without inflection of emotion. It was another pang in his heart, but one he'd prefer over the alternative. "Welcome to Camelot. Of course you've met Sir Bedivere-"

Bedivere, who had moved to take his stand at one of the seats of the table, nodded in turn.
"- and beside me is Sir Gawain." Her right hand gestured to the blonde man with a mop of frizzy hair. He was tall and gallant in stature, Shirou could easily see how he'd earned such recognition in the tales of Camelot. Adorned in a cloak and with his sword at his hip, the man offered a nod in return.

"It is . . . truly a pleasure, King Arthur." It felt so weird to call her that. It felt -wrong.-

Despite his intent to say more, that fact made his throat tighten up. If it was this hard just to be around her like this, how could he do more? Ugh. This was a trial on it's own.

"I've not heard much of you," Gawain noted, "Save that you are an exceedingly strong warrior, and that you personally dueled with the King."

Well, that was a fair amount, as far as he could understand. After all, Shirou couldn't outright tell anyone how he'd come to this place.

“I would hardly call it a duel myself.” Shirou admitted, his gaze turning from the dirty blonde male towards the King herself. Still adorned in his helmet, he let out a sigh as he reached up and began to unbble the wyrm-faced thing upon the table before him, he noted Bedivere’s slight narrowing of his eyes while Gawain simply nodded his head in turn. “After all, I was struggling just to match the King while he was testing me.”

He’d almost called her a she. He didn’t know what power to invoke just then, but he was growing all too aware of just how quick a minor slip up would turn this situation from mildly uncomfortable to downright horrifying. How did Tohsaka ever deal with all this politics? I’m not even in the thick of it yet, and I’m already scared I’ll put my foot in my mouth!

For the first time since he’d entered, Artoria spoke again, Shirou mentally had to stop himself from calling her Saber, “You are much too modest.” Her voice was a pleasant thing to hear again, especially when he was feeling more than a little too studied by the two Knights with her. He wasn’t sure which one he was more nervous about, though. Bedivere, or Gawain. “Especially since I know you were holding back, as well.”

His eyes narrowed, despite himself. It was true, there was no way she would have accepted his performance as it was. He’d not pushed himself to the limit against her, it was true, but there was no way he ever would unless he absolutely had to. Even if it got that far, he would take any other option before it, as well. “I . . . apologize.” He bowed his head in turn, not wanting to be seen as impertinent. Plus, it gave him time to figure out where this conversation was being led.
Nowhere, in his opinion, but he knew that there was no way he’d been summoned here without cause—especially after they’d just arrived—

“You’ve nothing to apologize for.” His head rose as Artoria spoke once again, his gauntleted hands settled for the moment on the table beside where his helmet rested. “Though, I admit I had hoped you would come on your own to Camelot.” For a moment, her dull and glassy eyes seemed to hold a flicker of something again. Though, it wasn’t the liveliness he hoped to see—instead a basic, sincere annoyance that he knew was more akin to when he’d insisted against her fighting Rin and Archer that first night, rather than anything he’d have preferred.

He missed her so much it hurt. Right then, right in front of her, he thought for a moment he was going to cry. He’d put in so much effort, and even though he knew in his head that she couldn’t even know him, it felt like she was betraying all the effort he’d put into coming back for her.

Emotions were a dangerous thing. But, he couldn’t stay quiet, either. “It would be unseemly of me to—” He paused, trying to figure out what to say. Gawain raised a brow in his peripheral vision, and he tried to ignore it, “- abandon Lady Morgan after what she’s done for me.” And with Morgan came Mordred. Shirou didn’t particularly want to imagine bringing just Mordred, either. Morgan might be his enemy in some fashion, but she was still Mordred’s mother—

“Morgan, my own aunt?” Gawain mused, turning his gaze unto Bedivere while Shirou kept his gaze fixed on Artoria, whom stared at him stolidly in return.

“Yes. Lady Morgan is back in Camelot, along with—” Bedivere started, and Shirou decided to subvert it before it got further. It wasn’t polite, but—

“Her child, Mordred.” Shirou continued, his amber gaze still fixed on Artoria. Anyone else would have missed it, but Shirou noticed the slight tensing of the King’s shoulders. His lips smoothed back out into a thin line as a result. There was no way she could put those facts together, but Shirou would be . . . careful . . . about watching over Mordred. Morgan would be a slow going project, but he wasn’t going to allow anyone else to interfere in that, either.

If it all ended the same, he could at least say that he’d done his best. Done his best to help save Artoria, Morgan, and Mordred. Perhaps that was his fate, to die here having failed—

But Shirou would not go quietly.
“I will have to pay my aunt her respects, and greet my new cousin, then.” Gawain noted, clapping his hands together with an easy smile. Shirou’s gaze was finally broken from Artoria’s stoic face unto the more muscular man. He hadn’t meant to, but it must have been more akin to a glare, since the blonde man seemed to flinch a bit.

“I can’t say that will be wise,” He decided to try and soften himself a bit. He took a deep breath and forcibly relaxed himself. The tension in him was building at an all-too-quick rate with every moment where he was trying to figure out what it was they expected. “But, you are welcome to do as you please, Sir Gawain. My Lady is . . . moody.” His lips curled up into a grin, feeling suitably amused at describing her so- knowing that if she had heard him she’d have had certain words for him.

Probably more fire, ice, and curses, really.

“I thank you for your advice, then.” The man smoothly replied, and Shirou couldn’t help but feel a strange kinship with Gawain just then. He was walking into hell and knew it, but put one foot in front of the other in the name of virtue regardless. Shirou felt that the fact even he recognized that inherent danger, though, said a lot about how he’d matured since the Grail War.

“I apologize,” Shirou decided that pleasantries had been exchanged, “I’m sure that I was called for a reason, and I’ve made it digress. May I ask why I was summoned both to Camelot, and then to the vaunted Round Table?”

Bedivere’s face slouched a bit, while Gawain resumed a more idle- if somewhat stoic himself- stance. Ah, so it wasn’t something they were all eager to discuss, either. His eyes settled on Artoria once again as she settled into her chair at the table.

“You said you wanted to save me,” She began, “So now I must ask you: What is it you wish to save me from, Sir Shirou?”

His lips pulled back into a frown. This was going to be an uncomfortable discussion, even without having to hide his knowledge of events. In fact, it was wholly possible that he’d already shredded his understanding of events to hell just via his own existence.

“May I sit?” He gestured at the chair next to his helmet, settling into it when Artoria nodded. He had to luxuriate in the feeling for a moment, getting to take a seat at the legendary Round Table. It would have made someone else feel proud, but for Shirou, it just felt like he was too far away from her in that moment. He understood the concept- everyone equidistant, everyone on the same level, it was idealistic and romantic in a way that he could only applaud- but he hated how it didn’t allow
him to sit at her side or right across from her to the point that he could reach out and touch her.

And he wanted to touch her. Badly. To the point he winced when he felt that urge run through him. Morgan had been the first time since she’d left him during the War since he’d felt the touch of another human, in a platonic fashion, let alone a romantic one. He’d denied himself, hungering only to find her, to be with her forever, and that kind of denial--

Even he knew it was unhealthy. It was eating him alive right then, after all.

“You have lost Sir Tristan,” He began, noting again how his words made all three of those facing him react in ways he could pay enough attention to. The reaction alone was enough for him, he had their interest. “And he will not be the last. You are the great King Arthur, the unifier of Britain. The wielder of Excalibur-” For a moment, he had to invest in himself the memories of his time at Atlas- of dealing with people he couldn’t just defeat or talk down. This was both. Perhaps he could best them one on one at the risk of his own life, but it would accomplish nothing. “- And ever since you pulled the Sword from the Stone, you have held a great destiny-”

Bedivere’s hands resounded against the table, and his eyes flitted towards the silver-haired man, even while his face remained towards Artoria. “How much has your Lady told you?”

“Nothing.” Shirou responded, barely a beat between the man’s question and his answer. “If you want proof of my loyalty to the King, then I can show you proof without a shadow of a doubt, but I know for a fact that if I show you, you will never trust me again.”

It was contradictory, but all things in life tended to be. He was the agent of Chaos in a world being built towards Order, and that was the truth as he knew it right then.

“What . . . do you mean?” Artoria’s voice was the one that came free in response.

Shirou took a deep breath. He was tired of playing games, and- in that same breath- he wanted to see Her again. Not “King Arthur”, but Saber. The woman he’d fought alongside and bled for. Whom he’d fell in love with, had laid with, and had struggled without for two lonely, unbearable decades.

The question was, what was it that he should show her? The sheath was still somewhere out there in the wild- likely somewhere Morgan knew, since he doubted the Witch would cast it wide and simply let it drift off even if it was in a display of anger. It was obvious after that thought.
There was only ever one thing that connected and bound them the most, after Avalon which had been put inside of him so long ago.

His hand reached out, and it came to him without even a breath. Morgan had stayed quiet after their little tussle, but he knew there was no way she hadn’t noticed that he had brought forth Caliburn.

But there it was in his hand once again. The Sword of Selection, that proved one’s worth of becoming King of Britain. That, in its most simplistic form, turned magical energy into a compression of heat that would cleave the wicked, even if it was not the same splendorous and powerful weapon that Excalibur, which he could mentally imagine as easily as breathing- but could never bring forth without utterly destroying himself in the process.

The blade was just as much a part of him as Avalon was- and it was his one remaining connection to Artoria.

So his gaze turned up unto her again as he let the blade rest upon the tabletop, his fingers light around the blue hilt that filled him with a warmth that he hoped was a sign that he’d chosen correctly.

“That’s- that’s impossible.” He wasn’t sure which man said it, but he didn’t care in that moment.

Because, dull and glassy green eyes were holding open wide, and a face that had been impassive and just a step away from death----

Was filling with tears.
If the air had been awkward before, it was stifling now. Artoria's tears had moved him to stand, and even with Caliburn dissipating as he lost focus on it, both Knights moved in tight to the King and prevented him from getting closer like he wanted.

It was an ugly thing to deal with, the sight of someone you love crying and being unable to get closer. Worse, he couldn't even say the words he wanted to.

"Saber--" He paused, wincing. He'd thought purposefully about not saying it and he did anyway. "Arthur… nothing I say will make sense to you, so please believe me when I say there is one thing that will always be the truth, now and forever-"

Bedivere and Gawain's attention turned unto him. He could see that they were ready to interject, but he refused to let them.

"Always and forever, I'll love you! You are my sword, and I your sheath!"

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This was not to Morgan's hopes. Of all the things to happen, running into HIM of all people right when she'd come back--

She hated herself for doing it now, for indulging in the folly of Shirou's existence. But, there was nothing for it as she quietly moved Mordred behind her legs.

There, standing in front of what would always be Morgan Le Faye's room, was a man drenched in white. Fluffy silver hair raining down his shoulders standing out against a robe wreathed in the color of fallen snow, and in one hand was a gnarled rod that wound around a more pristine and elaborate length.

"Merlin." She would have liked to think it sounded as meaningless as possible, but even she would
admit that was a lie. She'd all but hissed his name like it was a curse even she would not cast on another.

And Morgan was a spiteful woman.

"Morgana." He noted in turn, a lazy smile coming unto his features that infuriated her without end. She was not vulnerable, but she would have gladly put Shirou between her and him in that moment.

All the better if her "Knight" saw fit to try and kill the half-breed. She'd reward him handsomely for the attempt, let alone success.

Morgan had become his lover to learn magic, it was true, but Merlin was famously unfaithful--And startlingly cruel to women besides. At least, the ones dumb enough to think they meant more to him than a meal for his Incubus half.

If Morgan had been wary of other people before, Merlin had taught her to hate them all on his own.

"You're in my way." She finally gritted out, even further annoyed that now SHE was protecting Mordred. But Merlin would see through the scheme immediately, and the witch still had a great many uses for her daughter.

"I am." Merlin intoned in kind, "You want me to go?" He asked as if it was his own charity that he'd remove himself. Morgan hated this man so much that she longed to make him suffer.

If the world was righteous, in her opinion, he would.

"And never return. If Gods be good." Neither of them cared for divinity, but that was just her own way of showing her enmity. One that was rapidly making her reassess her next few steps.

His face settled back into a mask of neutrality, and he bowed his head. To her, it was a mockery, though she was sure he saw it as an earnest expression towards her. "Then I will. But, let me warn you, I won't stand for your interference with the King."
By now, Morgan was struggling to keep herself in check. And she felt Mordred, Fae bless her little heart, readying to come forward as well.

For that moment, she loved her child.

"Go." She uttered, biting down a curse- or a spell- anything that would send him away faster than his own two feet.

As he turned, she relaxed, the man's back fading into the hall as she finally relinquished her grip of the little rebel's shoulder.

"Mother . . . Who was that?" Mordred asked softly, green eyes following the man in a narrowed leer. Morgan's attention went away from Merlin's back down to the little blonde.

"If the world is kind, someone we won't have to deal with, Mordred. Come inside, I have to make a gift for your Papa, it seems."

"Oh-! What is it, Mother!?" The homunculus' glee was amusing for the moment, and in the wake of dealing with Merlin, Mordred was so preferable as to have her in a good mood.

Morgan had mixed feelings about Artoria, but Merlin was an existence she would hate until the end of time. "Something he will need. If you are well-behaved, I will let you watch."

The child's celebration was a fine thing. Morgan had hoped she would have to do little to account for Shirou, but it seemed she was going to have to arm him against the foes that now surrounded them.

One of them being fate itself, it seemed. She stepped into the room and, with a touch of a sigil and an extrusion of her magical energy, brought it all into her own control once again. Taking note of the space warping to fill with tools and equipment beyond a layman's comprehension, she let her gaze fall upon the large glass housing that glowed eerily with a light beyond ken.

Mordred beside her was dumbfounded and amazed, though she stayed at her mother's side as the blonde woman moved to the container and pressed a hand against it.
Within, the glowing liquid began to turn an ominous and pure black. The only signs of color remaining being streaks of red that crossed through it all like lightning.

"Sit and watch, Mordred. It's not every day you will see what you are about to witness. And after I am done, I will need some . . . Time with your Papa. Do you understand?"

The lion cub grinned, climbing up onto a workbench and settled her hands in her lap. It was sad to say that this was the most bonding she'd ever done with her mother-

But that was the best part, in her opinion. Mordred was going to see something cool!

As Morgan held her hand to the glass and began to glow across her skin with lines of blue steadily turning red, the liquid within began to fill with a maelstrom of crimson as it steadily warped and coalesced.

Mordred's eyes widened as she forgot to keep kicking her feet from her sitting place.

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A deep confusion had settled onto Artoria's face, while Bedivere and Gawain both had looks of utter shock that it would have been comical in how outrageously exaggerated they were.

His attention turned back unto her face. The knights were unimportant right then- unless they intended to interfere anyway.

He'd take them both on at the same time if they got between him and Artoria.

The tears that had streaked her face were now just trails on her face, visible confusion warring with a face that was indescribable purely due to all the emotions that were washing over it.

With him standing again, he tucked his helmet back under his arm as a means to fill the silence. He'd already said enough- too much by many degrees- so it was up to her. If she'd respond at all. Even just dismissing him as crazy- or ironically, a homosexual since she was appearing to be a man- was one thing. But he couldn't play the card of her secret in front of Bedivere and Gawain.

Only certain people had known that truth- and he could not dare presume to know where Kay or
Ector were at this time.

He'd succeeded where it mattered though. He'd gotten her off footing and kept her responding to him rather than falling back on her carefully trained habit of sacrificing herself and her emotions like an automaton.

Even now, she was staring at him incredulously, with her eyes open wide and a slight sheen of pink on her cheeks. It was, he admitted, adorable.

"S-" She stammered, as he couldn't describe that near stutter as anything less, "Sir Shirou! This is not a time for jesting!"

Despite himself, he grinned. Saber had always kept him on guard due to her diligence and strange sense of duty, but it was refreshing to be the one teasing her for once. "I would never joke about that." He was in a better mood now, which was somewhat sad really. Even just the two knights looking between them with a worried set of looks threatened to make him break into laughter again.

"Behind King Arthur, whom I respect, is a person I have known and cared for for a long time." He noted, settling his helmet back on his head. He was going to return to Morgan after this- he'd been away from her and Mordred for too long.

"And, if I have to continue to pursue you endlessly until you will accept that- then I've already done it for twenty years. What is another decade more?"

Was he subtle enough? He hoped so. But for now, it was better to retreat while he had the upper hand. And before Morgan went back to deriding Mordred. Thankfully, as he stepped from the room, he didn't have to worry about a backlash in the form of being halted. He let the sounds of his greaves announce each step as he made his way towards the signature of little Mordred's core.

Let it never be said Shirou had learned nothing from Atlas. It was a basic magecraft in a way, but it was his own bastardized version of a tracking spell. He hadn't figured out yet how to sneak one unto Morgan in some fashion, but he'd had plenty of time alone with Mordred to affix the formula into the collar he'd fitted as a necklace for her.

In the hall as he passed, a man wreathed in a white robe hurried past going the direction he’d come from. If Shirou had been paying attention, he would have seen the man double-take as the armor-
clad man rounded the corner going towards the room Mordred seemed to be in.

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Morgan’s eyes opened, the brief amount of respite after she’d completed her ritual was coming to an end. Glancing down at the slumbering Mordred in her lap, she shook her head after a moment of anger welled in her and was gently quashed down.

More than ever, Mordred was important. As a tool, and as a leash for Shirou. She was aware she was being warped towards the idea of actually properly being the homunculus’ mother, but she would persist in the lie for a little longer, at least.

Morgan was a stubborn woman, when she wanted to be.

Green eyes trailed over to the door as she stood and carried the little red-wearing cub up a stairway into the expanded Workshop. Unlike her teacher, Morgan had a much more grounded grasp of creating Workshops and Mystic Items. She’d had to cheat a bit, but it was admittedly necessary for her to reach the same level as . . .

She could think about it later. Right now, she was drained from such a display- and she intended to make good on Shirou’s absence- and Mordred’s own sleepiness. Settling the blonde child into a prepared cot, the Witch took the time to pull a set of covers from the nearby bed in turn and dragged them back down the stairs with a smirk on her face. Which one of you will bring me the victory I deserve, I wonder? The child made equal, or--

The thought wasn’t allowed to be finished. As her foot hit the bottom of the stairs, the door opened and the man stepped through. Adorned in his armor- the armor she’d given to him- he held himself as if a man who had done what needed to be done. He’d normally held such a reserved aura, but he was . . .

Alive. That was the only word to describe him in that moment. She could feel it radiating from him. She didn’t know what he’d done, but his satisfaction amused her, at least. “Does being in my sister’s presence give you that much strength, Shirou?” She queried, letting the bedding she was holding lankly in one arm gather at her feet while her other hand came up to brush back the crown with it’s veil from her face. Setting it’s blue and black points upon a nearby table, she gazed at him quietly for a moment.
Rather than answer her immediately, he reached up to unbuckle his helmet and let it rest against another desktop. Her workshop was filled with furniture—far more than even a full family could use—though she found that thought somewhat ironic now. She had built her best Workshop in Camelot proper—one not even Merlin could probe—in preparation for hiding Avalon away within it and using the tool herself.

But, of course, her temper had gotten the better of her. Not that she would tell anyone that, of course. Besides, she could make a tool nearly as useful—and had.

“You’ve had the dreams, haven’t you?” Shirou mused, his face once again in view and with her now able to see the way his brow warped into a crease. It was such a serious look, she couldn’t help but smile at it.

“I have.” The truth was a powerful weapon of its own. “They were quite... interesting.” She flung the covers into the center of the floor and let them bundle as they lay. His amber eyes followed them, while her own green stayed firm on him in turn.

“Where’s Mordred?” He asked, a nervous twitch developing in one shoulder as her smile slowly widened.

“Asleep, upstairs.” Morgan noted, reaching up along her body. The gleam in those green eyes warned him of trouble, but he also knew there was very little escaping her at the moment.

Worse than that, he already knew she was going to have her way. Profess love to one sister—technically for the third or fourth time—and the other would immediately demand his affections in a more... carnal way.

Why did this feel familiar?

“There’s no way I’m getting out of this, am I?” He asked, rhetorically.

“If you want what I’m going to give you, then no.” She noted, shedding her gown without another word as his eyes widened in return.

“Oh.”
While he’d been with Morgan before, it’d admittedly been completely at her own behest and he’d been wound up in her pace. This time, however, she simply stood in her nudity as if waiting for him to pounce like a beast. He had to swallow thickly as amber eyes drank in her body, mentally comparing the two sisters in a way that no sane man would ever do so out loud.

Artoria was svelte, petite, and brought to life a fatal desire to protect her in him- despite him being aware that she had always been a more frightening and powerful creature than he himself. Morgan had her sister’s face, and not much else. Her immensely long blonde hair was not shorn or put up in that tight bun, always worn free and with a feminine grace. Her curves were generous, and made him wonder if- had Artoria not been affected by the nature of Caliburn or Avalon- if she would have grown so voluptuous and womanly.

Part of him cursed the Noble Phantasms for that idea. Artoria was still beautiful and desirable to him, but he could admit that he had a fair taste for the motherly figure that the Witch put on offer for him.

She craned a finger towards him, beckoning him to come to her as she slowly sank down unto the covers and murmured, even though he would have sworn it sounded like a shout in that moment where only his pounding heart could be heard, “Come. I spent a lot of energy preparing your gift, don’t I deserve a reward?”

She was playing on his guilt, on his desire, on his loneliness- but he knew that even if she hadn’t, he would be tempted. Shirou was naive, even now, but he wasn’t so blind as to take a naked woman putting herself on display as anything but what it was. Taking a deep, steadying breath, he shed himself of his armor with practiced movements. He would have been amused to hear Morgan’s thoughts on how she would have to enchant the armor and make it able to come away faster- or maybe not. The impromptu strip-tease was quite nice for the Witch, even if she’d never dare admit it out loud.

Shirou was a damn fine specimen, she couldn’t imagine any woman with a taste for men to deny that. Her eyes devoured every inch of tanned skin and taut muscles that glistened with a light sheen of sweat from travel, and then he was topless before her. She’d had her fair share of lovers, it was true, but it was rare that she’d taken so fully in admiration of them. Many were rough and demanding of her, but it was a singular pleasure of Shirou- and Artoria, if one wanted to be technical- that they allowed her to be a woman and indulge herself.

Finally, though, he was naked in turn. The sight of him eager for her adding further intensity to a feeling that had been burning since the last time she’d had him. He was wise to remain quiet on the matter- though she was sure he wasn’t the type to play wry when he was being allowed near her as it was.
He settled unto the covers above her, and she raked her nails up his chest and then grasped his chin, dragging him hungrily into a kiss. Saliva was fine in the fashion of extremely small amounts of magical energy, but she’d spent far more than that purely to prepare, let alone the amount she’d used to actually complete her ritual.

Morgan had spent so much on behalf of this man- it was only right that she took some of it back, wasn’t it?

His kiss was inexperienced, but she found that endearing in its own way. A soft nip to his lips brought forth a groan from him, and he balanced with one hand at her side while the other cupped up her thigh and hunted for her-

And did she gasp when he trailed his fingers across her sex? She’d never admit it. Never. Being made to feel good by him- unbearable. But Gods, did she. She wasn’t sure what the bigger aphrodisiac was, that he’d laid with her sister before, or that he was laying with her now- when she was firmly aware that she shouldn’t.

Shame and hunger were strong motivators, especially in her. She knew it, but there was no use fighting it right then. One of her legs craned around his hip and dragged him in against her. A needy little growl coming from her throat, breaking the kiss only long enough to utter, “Inside.”

He obeyed, enthusiasm a replacement for expertise. He felt wonderful, filling her, and when her other leg joined the first, and she clung to him like he was the only thing that mattered, she knew she was acting weak.

But in that moment, she didn’t give a damn. He felt so -good-. And when he found his pace- and the spot that made her eyes close tight and assaulted it relentlessly- she dragged a corner of the cover into her mouth and fitfully bit down on it to keep her screams quiet.

She would drain him dry, and only then would she allow herself to wonder why she’d insist on doing this. Resting against his chest and wondering, privately, if she made him hungry and weak the same way her sister ever had.

Or if he liked her better. She trailed a nail around his chest as both began to doze, and let her fantasies run away with her for a little while. She could take him away, it was true. She could make him immortal in a fashion, and make him her husband- it would be simple.
But it wouldn’t make either of them happy, she knew it. He did not love her, and even if he grew to love her, he would never love her as he loved Artoria.

Letting her eyes narrow as sleep started to claim her, she quietly murmured, “Well, then, if I have to make a miracle . . . let us make one for the family, shall we.”
Morgan knew, long after she’d awoken from her spot in Shirou’s arms, that several people had tried to come through to make good on an attempt to speak to one of them. She couldn’t discern intentions, but she knew very well whom they were.

Gawain had come, the aura of the Knight of the Midday Sun was as notable as those of his comrades. Artoria had happened by as well, though she had only stepped barely within the Field that she’d set up around her room’s section of the hall.

Morgan did not need to read minds to know that her sister had been troubled. She’d come within a few steps of the door and then turned away—likely after much mental anguish. Whatever Shirou had done, it had worked. As she mindfully scraped a nail along his chest again, she couldn’t help but let out a soft little laugh before she extricated herself from the covers and went to pull on a lady’s shift and prepare for the day ahead.

The other was a bit more galling, though. The Queen did not have the same register as the Knights or Artoria—whom could be like beacons in comparison with Guinevere’s miniscule amount of presence.

Guinevere was an annoyance to the Witch, but she couldn’t help but wonder what would have brought her wandering up to outright knocking on the door. It’d been pointless since both had slept through dawn and into the noon, but Morgan wasn’t sure she would have appreciated the woman’s interference regardless.

Nonetheless, as she began to brush her hair, she turned her gaze in her vanity and saw the fluff of blonde hair that was the homunculus—

No, Mordred. She was going to have to get over that. Even if she wasn’t going to become the world’s best mother, she was going to have to affect that appearance.

“Why is Papa asleep on the floor?” Mordred murmured sleepily, rubbing her eyes as she moved over to stand next to her mother at her vanity. The Witch rolled her eyes, feeling a twinge of amusement, before she turned on her bench and began to carefully brush Mordred’s hair in turn, earning a whine from the child.
“He gave me a reward.” Morgan answered simplistically, “Don’t fret your little head about it, he’ll wake up shortly.” She’d kept her eyes on him enough to know his routine, and to have a good guess how long he would sleep in after the night she’d put him through.

A pleasurable one, if she was honest. She’d have to train him a little, and he would make a very excellent lover.

Morgan found herself delighting in that idea, but she pushed it to the back of her mind for now.

“Okay, Mother.” Mordred blearily rubbed an eye again as her hair was carefully fixed up into a wild ponytail. The Witch mused idly on how cathartic it was to tend to her child’s appearance. Granted, perhaps that was just the numbness from a night spent indulging in a darker, more base desire.

“What are we going to do today?” Mordred asked, beginning to steadily perk back up to her normal level of energy. Morgan’s eyes narrowed for a moment while she considered the question. It was true, they would need to do something more than just hide away in the Workshop all day.

“First, we’re going to raid the larder and force Papa to make breakfast for us.”

Mordred’s (almost literally) glowing eyes said that Morgan had stepped unto the right track. Unable to help it, the Witch began to laugh. Over atop the pile of covers, the redheaded man stirred and blearily covered his face with a hand as he sat up.

“What’s so funny?” He grumbled out, looking around dumbly for a moment before he finally saw the blonde pair sitting not so far away from him. He noted the two promptly beginning to stare at him, with intent on their faces. “. . . What?”

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“She really is her daughter.” Shirou grumbled, having dressed and rushed through a wash down in favor of facing down the familial Pendragon hunger. He’d always had a naked assumption that Saber had eaten that way because of her need for mana, but it seemed that it was simply a trait shared by the entire blonde family.

He’d made an error in spoiling the two.
Nonetheless, his moaning settled back down as he stopped one of the patrolling knights— a brunette youth whom had given him a confused look when he’d asked about the castle’s kitchens—and made his way to attend to the hunger of two very hungry women. On a small level, he’d known it was an excuse to get him out of the room as well, but even his own grumbling stomach made itself known as he ducked into Camelot’s kitchens in order to scrounge up breakfast for the three.

Unfortunately, by the time he’d finished that little errand, he’d single-handedly made himself known to the castle at large due to what the staff would later insist was “magic of some kind.” The response from Merlin would have forced a laugh from anyone who knew the Wizard.

Shirou, though, would have just been offended that anyone would have compared his cooking to magic. He was Emiya, Shirou. Kitchens were the battleground he refused to lose within. And lunch that day was served to the approval of the countless people who ate in the grand hall not even an hour later, long after Shirou had vacated in favor of returning to Morgan’s workshop.

+x++x+x+x

“Smnfufsguf-”

“Mordred, don’t talk with your mouth full.”

“Yes, Papa!” The little blonde then proceeded right back into devouring a plate filled with oatmeal and with egg-in-a-basket decorating the top. He’d had to substitute a grill cake rather than bread, but Shirou hadn’t really wanted to go and bake bread when it had been made obvious to him that any delay would be met with a displeased Witch and Mordred.

While the child’s table manners were to be expected, he was somewhat amused to see that Morgan was eating like a devil possessed herself. Granted, he also knew that unless she willed it, absolutely no one would be able to interfere with their meal. I bet she eats like a proper lady when she’s in front of other people. He thought to himself with a smirk he couldn’t push off his lips.

Her narrowed eyes at him made it melt away in favor of his own breakfast. With food in their stomachs, Shirou took the dishes and settled them aside in an empty bucket for cleaning later. Not having the common amenities of the modern world was hard to get used to for him, but he could at least admit that there was a benefit to Camelot’s slightly larger facilities than Morgan’s unstaffed castle. He’d ignored the few men in armor wondering under their breaths if he was her servant rather than her Knight.
After all, in some ways, he was. Though there’d have been a slight difference in terminology. He was here in a form akin to a Servant, after all. While he’d effectively transposed himself into this point in history, he was still only able to be here due to Morgan’s interference and her “finishing” the ritual, so to speak.

It was better than the alternative of him having been flung into the metaphorical chaos of human history, though. There were many ways his attempts to reach Artoria could have gone wildly wrong.

“Ahem.” His gaze turned onto Morgan as she finally came back into his vision, holding a veiled object. While she was adorned in her shift still, he was once again struck with an awareness of a familiar sight he hadn’t lived yet.

The French had coined a term for something similar, though not quite right. Jamais vu, he believed. He felt a headache coming on, but this one was thankfully one he could push down rather than have to deal with. Instead of letting himself linger on it, he stood and turned towards the blonde woman as she gently settled the cloth-wrapped bundle in her hands and stared at him in turn. Mordred in the background kicking her feet atop her chair at the dining table- a workbench repurposed.

“If you are to do as I want you to do,” She began, a smile working unto his lips despite himself, “You will need this.”

“And you are very gracious to offer it to me, My Lady.” He responded, softly, as she offered it to him and he took it with all the reverence he owed her. He knew what he would find within, but he also knew that she would be displeased if he reacted outside of her expectations.

“I am, you are right.” She huffed as he carefully unwound the silky black cloth that hid it away---

And paused. His eyes slowly widening as, rather than just a sword, a sword within it’s sheath appeared. The eerie, natural glow of the thing filling the air around it as it’s hilt and length rested in his hands heavily---

It was a weight he wasn’t aware he’d have to hold in his hands. It was a weapon he recognized on some level, but he could not say how. And even if he knew he could understand it’s make, it was also not a tool he could recreate on his own.
Quietly, he turned his hand over and grasped the blackened handle and began to pull it’s length from the scabbard decorated in sweeping red lines and Fae script.

Winding, coiling, battling dragons stood out prominently from the shadowy thing’s length as he pulled the blade free. In his hands, it hummed with an intensity that he knew could destroy him- or anyone else- who wielded it improperly.

It was still a weapon that ruled in the shadows that Morgan lived in, but the blade was not the surprising part. It was the sight of Avalon that he knew was not something Morgan could have simply hidden away and retrieved without him becoming aware of it.

The scabbard was held limply in his left hand, the aching of that arm as the thing connected to the remnants of it’s true self within him and brought his very being back into perfect balance.

“How.” He uttered, complete and utter disbelief on his face as his amber eyes turned onto the Witch, a grave look on her face.

“But it is not.” She insisted, and for a moment he thought to call her lie to her face- but he knew she would not lie to him about it. To offer him Avalon would be damn near suicide at it’s finest level of foolishness. “This is yours, and only yours alone. If Gawain wields Excalibur Galatine, then this---”

She raised a hand, pointing a finger at the blade as it hummed in his hands, aching to be swung, “---is Excalibur Morgan. And what binds it is not Avalon, but a conduit to the Avalon that exists within you.”

His gaze turned from her, unto the sword once again. He brought it down level with his face, and stared at the depiction of the winding and battling dragons, noting how they intersected and finally came together into a line of blistering and angry red. It was a weapon that shouldn’t exist, but it did. A weapon constructed from the secrets of the Fae and made as a challenger to the Most Holy of Holy Swords.

Shirou knew it would not stand against Excalibur, empowered by the battle for the fate of mankind, but it did not need to. Adjusting his grip on the black blade’s handle, he let his magical energy flow into it.

As the Workshop drained of light, an eerie blackness emanating from the blade, a dark and
foreboding feeling filled him. In his hands was not the savior of the world that Excalibur could be called, but the hand of Evil that ruled justly with an iron fist. It was neither a Holy Sword nor a Demonic Sword, but a weapon beyond the bounds- something that belonged on the Far Side.

Morgan had given him the tool to destroy Utopia, and expected him to use it to deny the fate of her family.

To destroy in the name of love, huh. Shirou mused, stopping the flow of his energy to the blade and quietly sheathing it. His gaze turning unto Morgan once again. I guess that’s one way to do it.

Nearby, Mordred blinked in confusion as her Papa and Mother seemed to have a staredown of epic proportions.

The day had been colored by that gift, but that sudden awareness of the future Morgan had seen was the icing on the cake. He could not say for sure what she’d seen, but he understood now. Morgan had always known the fate she had wandered towards-

Perhaps it had even been what drove her to fall so deeply. Or maybe it had simply been the balance of the world in that she would be the “Evil counterpart” to the Lady of the Lake, Vivian. The Pendragon family was beholden to fate- they had no alternative to the destiny that had been prescribed for them from the beginning.

Shirou had made an assumption as to what he would have to do, but he’d never have dreamed it would have been even more complex than he’d already presumed it to be. The already insensible seeming idea of preventing the fall of Camelot seemed miniscule in comparison.

He could never have saved Artoria that way. No, in fact, it seemed as if he would have only been dooming himself to despair to have tried. As he glanced at the sheathed blade at his hip, his armor protecting his visage once again as he made his way towards the Round Table’s chamber, he began to understand.

He had been blindly stepping towards the exact opposite of what he’d wanted. He’d been naive, thinking that his trespass on time itself would change the very fact that Camelot had fallen and he would be able to live happily at Artoria’s side, the way he’d wanted to desperately enough to try something as insane as conscripting the Second Magic.
An image of a man wearing red, and with a head full of silver hair flashed through him in that moment. He did not know why, or whom it was, but he knew instinctively it was the fate that awaited him had he “succeeded.”

Had Morgan saved him? Or was she only saving herself? So much was thrown into doubt, that the only thing he could do was answer the call. For a moment, he thought that his actions the day before were being answered by Karma now. It wasn’t a foreign concept, but Shirou had never really believed in the idea. It wasn’t so far fetched right then as he stepped through the red and gold doors into the room beyond.

And saw within the gathered knights. Artoria, Bedivere, Gawain, and that tall black-haired man whom he had not been introduced to yet— but he had come to understand by now.

Lancelot. A man he knew he would face him someday soon. In fact, now more than ever he understood his place in Camelot. There was only one ally he could rely on—at least, with face value being envisioned.

So, my place is first to save Mordred, huh . . . He thought, quietly, as he stood at the side of the great table and watched as all of the eyes in the room turned to him, and then unto the sword and sheath worn at his hip.

Then, if I have to be the messenger of Fate, let me bring the victory cry. His amber gaze, behind his wyrm-helmet now infused with Morgan’s magics and no longer simple blued metal to defend him, swept unto Artoria’s face.

Despite the doll-like face she’d worn, he saw the light of a living being behind those green eyes as they widened.

And let me bring it for love. For you, for your sister, for your child.

I will be that selfish. Heroes are men that make miracles happen, after all.

“My King.” He intoned, bowing at the waist with one hand against his breastplate.
Morgan walked the halls of Camelot, once again adorned in her usual attire with it’s black and blue crown of thorn-like growths and the black veil that covered her face. As much as she would have preferred to leave Mordred behind, she’d stepped beyond the boundary of keeping the little homunculus safe.

Now, the child’s fate was in Shirou’s hands. She could only act as a mother would, readying her to be what she needed to be. Now that her Excalibur was wholly comfortable and attuned to its proper master, she could only do what she needed to in order to support Shirou. Certainly, she was not defenseless herself, but there was a foe that only she could deal with.

And after Morgan had dealt with Merlin, the only thing that would be allowed to her as the Black Lady of the Fae would be to usher out the age of Arthur’s England. Then, she would fade from history, from legend. Irrelevant, weakened, trapped in Avalon with both her sister and Merlin.

Hell, in so many words.

“Mother.” Her gaze turned down unto Mordred as they walked past the gardens of Camelot and came through into the Royal quarters, “What are we doing?”

“Something I never thought I’d do.” Morgan admitted, for once feeling so out of her depth that she was sure the only reason her heart wasn’t racing was the fact that she . . .

Trusted Shirou. Yes. It was strange to say, but the Witch had faith in her Black Knight.

“Huh? What’s that?” The bemused look on Mordred’s face made her smile softly.

“Making a friend of an enemy.” Morgan mused, gently rapping her fingers upon a singular
lonesome door that stood at the end of a hallway. A portal into a realm that existed outside of the understanding of the Knights of Camelot.

She would forever hate Merlin. But the half-breed’s prophecies were a tool useful against a world in disorder, and a weapon Morgan was happy to hold firmly in her hands as she stepped into the door as it opened to admit her and her child.

Within, Guinevere turned nervously at the sight of the Witch and the homunculus.

“Your Majesty.” Morgan’s lips curled up into a smirk all too well known, while Mordred blinked.

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“That- that weapon. T-that’s-” Bedivere was the first to speak, dumbfounded but also the most able to grasp his sense of self. Shirou still found himself quite fond of the silver-haired man. If the world was righteous, he would have seen him as a worthy friend to have.

It was sad that he knew, at the end of this, Bedivere would have to shoulder the burden of ignorance. He would have to tell the tale, and believe that what he spoke was the truth.

Shirou pitied him in that moment, and he understood deeply that the world was a flawed and cruel place. Something he hoped he would correct, at least a little bit, with a selfish desire that would make him both a Hero and a Villain.

His amber eyes moved from the silver-haired night, to Gawain, to Lancelot, and then onto Artoria. His gaze stayed on her, searching her face. Emotions he was sure she thought she had suppressed launched across her features like bullets from a gun. If he had shaken her yesterday, now he had stolen every ability to remain stoic. He’d expected it, but even still it surprised him.

They were sisters, he was sure of it. Both prone to playing the parts that had been made for them, and failing miserably in upholding themselves as a matter of course. “It is Excalibur Morgan.” He intoned, the reverberation of his voice through his helmet’s glimmering face making him aware of how much more menacing he must appear. Especially now that he was visibly armed. Of course, so were the other knights, but perhaps they’d presumed him to always rely on that magic that Artoria had witnessed.
He could not blame them. It was a thought he’d held unto in turn as well. But he knew when she’d handed him the blade and it’s sheath that this was now the weapon he was to hold at The End of the World, so to speak.

“E-”

“You-”

The chorus of their voices rang through his ears, while his gaze stayed firm on Artoria’s face. His words to her before had led to this, just the same as his position now. If they would be alone, he could tell her so much- but there was no way anyone would allow it.

His closeness with Morgan was a blade no one would allow to slip through to their King. So, now, he bore it loudly and held it nakedly to draw her into his pace.

No. Their pace. Morgan was doing her part, so now it was necessary that he do his. Without words, he had understood her. There was no need for a plan. Within three years, Artoria would go to Rome, and leave the whole of Britain to fall into the hands of Mordred, rousing the people against a King whom they all saw as abandoning them, as inhuman and intent on ruling over them with a fist that saw no mercy nor honor in their own sacrifices- only shouldering the world because she saw it as the true worth of a King.

A selfless act that would do more damage than even the most fatal of blows. It would destroy everyone she held dear, and show her the futility of reaching for Utopia- a paradise that could not be allowed to exist by the very nature of Gaia and Alaya themselves.

Within three years, he would have to drag the Pendragon family kicking, screaming, biting, gnashing from the grip of fate. Reaching across, he began to draw the blade in underhand-

The Knights went towards their own swords-

“King Arthur Pendragon, chosen child of Uther, King of All Britain-” He noted, placing the tip of the blade caked in the deepest light-swallowing black upon the chair he’d sat in only a day before, “- You longed for a duel with me before. I ask that you allow me a rematch, this time at our true and honest best. If I win, you will hear my reason and answer me.”
Artoria’s eyes widened, a glimmering in her eyes that spoke of the fact that she could stay quiet no longer. Standing, the distorted air that hid Excalibur forming in her hand. The Most Holy of swords responding to a weapon that wore it’s soul and yet was its own dark side.

“And if I lose, I am neither fit nor able to join at your side as I have hoped to do since we first met- I will leave with your sister and we will trouble you no more.”

It was unreasonable, it was a punishment all his own, even if she- as the King- would never understand it. And that was why, for once, Shirou would not lose to her. The burning of his gaze behind his visor rang out with his own pounding heart.

He would do as he’d done so many times before. Put his whole being, all that was Emiya, Shirou, into a battle that he had no right to win.

“Do you accept?”

“Why?” It was the first words he’d heard from her in awhile. She’d sat vexed and unable to respond to his declaration of devotion and love the day before, but he refused to let her stay quiet this time.

“Because, you hold a heart locked away to mankind, your very own people.” He intoned, “And your own radiance will see you burn out. I have lost you once, and will not, ever again. No matter how I must do it. That is this sword, the sign of devotion given to me by a sister who holds love for you in her heart, despite her anger that you took what she believes to have been rightfully hers. This,” He tapped the blade against the seat, sending a thud out through the small room and it’s shocked inhabitants---

“-- is the key that will set you free.”

He knew those words would sting her. He also knew that was the pain she needed to feel. A burden of guilt he would have to ease. Tristan had been one of the first, a Knight who said to her face that she did not understand the pain and loss of men. She who bore sacrifice like it was her debt to pay, like a shield that could protect her from her pain and resentment that would build up inside and lead her to try to change history itself through the corrupted Grail.

It had led her to him, it had made their love possible. But it was a mistake that he had to fix now, to save her. To save all of them, his own self included.
“My King, you mustn’t consider him at all- he’s-” Gawain began, and Shirou’s eyes turned onto the blonde man. He longed to see Artoria succeed, to be the Perfect King— to usher in Utopia.

“This will not make you happy, there’s no reason to-” Bedivere counseled in turn, Shirou’s gaze settled on the pitiable man.

Lancelot was the only quiet one. But he did not need to speak, Shirou saw the look on the man’s face.

Lancelot was his enemy. He’d known it from the start, but now he had extradited the process. If he was going to fight the man, he’d do it on his own terms. No other thing but that same guilt and pain that Tristan had accused Saber of could roil in his gut and leave him glaring like that. Shirou did not need to read minds, nor know the man to understand.

The simple fact was, Shirou knew what he had to do now. The World itself was his enemy, and it would only allow him to play by Its rules. So, he would.

Camelot was fated to fall. Artoria fated to fail. She was fated to meet with him, and he was fated to pursue her forever. So he would take Mordred’s place, and join her in Avalon-

Or he would save her, let Fate have it’s way, and carry the Pendragon family into obscurity where they would technically abide the same fate. It was a different kind of death, but it was a death far kinder.

He sheathed Excalibur Morgan as his eyes returned unto Artoria’s face.

Despite himself, he was pleased this time when her face set in determination. Let her see him as the enemy he could be. Before, he’d wanted anything but—

But now, she needed him. And he needed to be the “Dark” to her “Light”.

“Very well, Sir Shirou.”
“My King-!” “King Arthur-!”

“Enough!” She waved a gauntlet clad hand, the one not holding Invisible Air and Excalibur hidden within it. “I am King. I have been issued an honorable challenge, and I must answer it. That is the burden of the King, and it is one I accept willingly.”

“Good. I disappointed you before, but this time I promise- from the depths of my heart- that I will defeat you. And, when I do-”

He raised a hand, pointing with a clawed gauntlet to her face, set in grim determination and a readiness that made memories flash through his head. Facing down Berserker, even Gilgamesh himself-

This was his Artoria. His Sword. The woman he would love and long for forever. Not King Arthur. If words had not done it--

Actions did.

“-- I will show you that your dream was not a lie. That what you helped to make is worthy, and that you can unshoulder that burden without sacrifice.” Shirou did love to get passionate, though.

“Was?”

Shirou simply smiled. The adrenaline rushing through his veins was a heady drug.

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Morgan sat quietly across from Guinevere, Mordred balancing herself precariously upon one of the other chairs in the room. The Queen’s nervousness was an amusement the Witch couldn’t help but drink deep in.

“What- what do you want, Lady Morgan?” Guinevere questioned, eyes moving from the blonde woman to the child seemingly ignorant of the uncomfortable air that pervaded the royal sleeping quarters. A place only Guinevere used, since Artoria turned a purposefully blind eye to the goings on within. Morgan had seen it’s insides once, when she had conceived Mordred with Artoria, but that was unimportant in the moment.
“My sister will finish with her meeting soon, and- for the first time since you went to the marital bed together to please the people- she will come here.” Morgan noted, tapping a finger against the arm of the chair she sat in. Her legs were crossed, and she was aware she was putting out the aura of a spider perusing it’s latest meal.

Guinevere minded, but Morgan certainly did not.

“How can you know?” The Queen asked, wary of her “sister in law’s” reputation as an enchantress and magician.

“Because, after Lancelot, you are her most firm friend.”

Guinevere winced, her own guilt creeping across her features for a moment. Morgan knew she could have phrased it differently- not indirectly accused her---

But Morgan wanted it to hurt. She’d been much too nice lately, and it was only reasonable that she enjoyed what she could before a talk that she dreaded.

A talk that she needed to have. Both for her own future, and so she could secure the alternative.

If Artoria would fail to see the gift in Shirou, Morgan would take him, that was the simple fact. Honestly, she hoped she would. Shirou was a man few women could deserve, so it did not hurt Morgan’s feelings one bit if she would be the one who picked up the pieces and forged him into someone to share the loneliness for eternity with.

If her sister was truly so willing to sacrifice of herself, Morgan would take her greatest sacrifice- that one true love- and make it her own. From where she sat, the Witch saw only victory.

Either Shirou would save them all, or she would kindly bring him into eternity with her. He would hurt, he would lament- but he would heal.

She would make sure of it.
“And, because my man-” She put careful emphasis on those words, “-- has made sure that she will seek your counsel, and I intend to make good on his sincerity.”

“If she is hurt---” Guinevere started to stand, Morgan’s veiled face contorting in amusement even further, “--- you won’t leave here unscathed---”

“Oh, she is already hurt.” Morgan mused, resting a cheek against her fist, “After all, how can she not hurt when the man she loves and whom loves her most stands in her way and tries to save her from that which she thinks is right?”

“What?” The Queen’s bafflement was a delight to Morgan’s senses as well. There was a certain glee to playing with the mysteries of time so warped.

Mordred’s attention had finally gone back unto the two women. The homunculus not able to understand what it was they were talking in circles around, but aware that her Mother was treating the Queen to an amount of bullying that even Mordred was in awe at.

And she thought Mother had been mean to -her-!

“I’m going to have to have this discussion with her anyway, so I suppose I can indulge you, Guinevere. But, I’d sit back down. This is going to be a very . . . interesting story.”
The remainder of the meeting had ended in complete disarray. Artoria had been bent on discussing the coming plans to turn to Rome and save Christendom from the barbarians that held sway over the seat of the Papacy, but that train of thought had been derailed twice now.

Both times by the same man. Shirou, the Knight of Morgan, a man who professed his love and devotion to her and yet-

He made no sense, least of all because she- despite strange inklings that she should- did not know him. He’d pursued her for twenty years? Surely she would have noted such a memorable individual, but his odd forthrightness said that he believed deeply that he had been. And, against the better judgment she was sure Merlin or even Sir Ector would have cautioned against him, she believed the Black Knight.

Shirou was planning something- or perhaps it was Morgan herself doing the planning- but he had staked his everything on a rematch against her. One where he’d made it clear he would not be losing to her.

That thought boiled her blood- in a depressingly pleasant way. She was King, supposed to be above the feelings and emotions that would boil down people who had not been brought up and made to be the way she was. As she walked the halls towards the Royal Quarters, she paused when her peripheral view caught the sight of herself in a mirror adorning Camelot’s hall.

Why. Why am I smiling?

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As Morgan’s fingernail tapped against the arm of the chair, the Witch mused on the shellshocked guise of the Queen. It had been a barebones explanation- she hadn’t wanted to repeat the whole story twice, after all- but it was definitely something easily beyond Guinevere, a smart and wry
woman by most standards, but one completely unversed in the knowledge of magic.

Morgan would have liked Guinevere in many other circumstances, but the fact of the matter was that the Queen was complicit in a fate that saw them all streaking towards doom like a star falling from the heavens above. She’d complied with Merlin’s scheme, and pretended that there was something to be made of a royal marriage between two people whom did not love one another.

Oh, Artoria cared for Guinevere, it was true. But she was a friend- one of the few true ones Artoria had, since Guinevere knew the secret of Artoria’s birth- not a wife, nor a proper lover.

Morgan held more proper love for her sister than Guinevere did. The Witch did not hide behind innocence and virtue while frolicking in the royal bed with her lover, both betraying the King in a way that they longed to be redeemed of---

--- even while they continued to do it.

Morgan hated many things, but hypocrites were above all a distaste she’d learned young. Thrust from her father’s home and into a nunnery because of her special birth, because she was a girl who could not rule by tradition---

--- and then Artoria had been chosen. At first, she’d been vengeful, inconsolable with rage that she-or even her sister, Anna- the mother of Gawain and Agravain, both of whom had become knights at Artoria’s side. She’d even kindly given her nephew her word and backing, even if she’d ostensibly done so to see him help bring ruin to her.

She was still unsure if she was proud of him for staying loyal, or furious with him for failing her.

“That- it all sounds crazy.” Guinevere said, her face hidden by her black hair and her head in her hands. Morgan could agree with that, it was all beyond sense. But, of course, so was the idea of a child made from the seed of a Dragon and the womb of Queen Igraine.

They lived in interesting times, Shirou was simply a new piece to an even greater tapestry. One only she and Merlin had once been able to see.

And now he was the one tearing holes in it and repurposing it for their own ends. He was a good man, and in a way, it was a tragedy all its own that he, in so doing, was becoming the thing that
would deny Artoria the purpose she’d been assigned since birth.

Her own visions of the future had ceased, and she was sure Merlin’s had as well. The only fate she knew that still was shared was that she would go to Merlin, and be the one to confine him in a space beyond the world he loved when the daughter he’d help make and raise failed.

Vengeance, sweet and cruel in all it’s mercy. The Witch slept better at night thinking about it. It was a heady poison she drank deep in, and luxuriated in the ache of.

“It gets worse.” Morgan noted, pleasantly. Mordred had moved into her lap by this point, the little blonde resting her head against the Witch’s bosom. The blonde woman knew her child had not followed even an ounce of the story that she’d unfolded, of a war in a far off land where Artoria had met a young Shirou and fallen in love with him- and saved the world, at the cost of their own happiness.

At the cost of what little had made Shirou human. A vestige of the man he used to be, throwing himself into the mercy of beings beyond his ken in return for that which he desired most. Blaspheming against the rules of Magic and his own paradoxical existence.

“I don’t know how it can.” The Queen raised her head, slumping back in her own chair for the moment as Morgan contented herself. Nearby, she felt the slowly nearing pulse of Artoria’s own magical core, the connection of siblings that would always register one another. Even little Mordred perked and looked at the door as destiny wound its way tighter and tighter around the room.

A hand settled into the homunculus’ hair, brushing long nails through it and drawing a soft little grunt nearing a purr from the child. Her own little Knight. The one fated to betray Artoria and bring down Utopia so that the world could progress, rather than die.

Destiny was unkind, especially to those of her family. Uther had died pointlessly against Vortigern, a creature beyond a man, before he could even become amazing enough himself to be more than a footnote in the story of King Arthur.

Her mother, her own Fae beauty failing her as Artoria- the one thing she had left to remember a husband she was cursed to love- was taken from her. Never to be seen again, only to languish under her own miserable heart.
Her own self, innocent and steadily warped by her own connection to Magic and the Far Side, becoming a Witch and realizing the futility of her own hunger for power. Slowly being consumed by her own madness and all the feelings that came with being the repository of all that Vivian, Lady of the Lake, was not.

The simmering, burning hatred she’d developed for Merlin and his schemes that had bled and turned into a twisted, wanton desire that made her believe that he could love her- could make her happy and whole. Before he’d tossed her aside too---

Just like the man he’d help to make King. Just like the child he’d taken and fostered in order to sacrifice like a lamb.

Merlin might have felt guilty, but Morgan would never forgive him. She was not her sister, all but saintly in virtue. She was a Witch.

The depths of her hatred could not be touched upon with words. They were not eloquent, not all-encompassing enough. No language ever conceived of could touch the depths of the Shadows that Morgan lived in.

Only a young, handsome man whom had dared her to be better.

Her lips split in a frown as the door creaked open. She didn’t bother to look, but Guinevere and Mordred both did.

The stage was set, and it was time to discover whether he had been right, or if he had only been naïve. Morgan reached up and removed her veil and the crown of black and blue thorns.

“Hello, sister.” Finally, green met green. And two dragons, one caked in the black that now powered the tyrant’s blade, and one brimming with the light destined to fade away, bore their teeth and made ready to decide which would win.

The “Evil” seeking to destroy- and save- for love. Or the “Good” that would sacrifice everything and become a legend.

“Ar- Artoria-” Guinevere murmured, even while the King of Knight’s horror grew across her face, the sight of Morgan sitting so placidly- with that blonde child in her lap- right across from the
Queen. Excalibur appeared in the mantled woman’s hand---

--- And was promptly ignored as the Witch continued to pet her child’s head. The child she’d made in a moment of weakness, and had planned a dark and unwholesome scheme for. “Mordred,” Morgan mused, even as Artoria readied herself, “Say hello to your father.”

The Witch wasn’t sure whose face held the most amusement for her in the moment. Guinevere’s look like a lemon had been thrust into her mouth and squeezed till it burst, Artoria’s slack-jawed disbelief---

Or the benign little squint she got from her lovely little child. She adored it. “Eeehh?” Morgan couldn’t help but giggle at Mordred’s very nature. Not equal with her physical age, but Mordred was special even besides that. After all, a child could just as freely choose who their real parents were, the same way Artoria had never known Uther and had taken to being in the care of Ector and Kay. The Witch didn’t need to read her mind to know that Mordred had no interest in her birth.

Shirou was her Papa. Nothing would change that now. Morgan didn’t mind---

--- Now, anyway.

“Morgan, you- You didn’t-” Artoria uttered, Excalibur drifting down at her side as the horror of a night she’d thought had been a dream came to her head. Gone was the King, killed by her own doubts, her own fears, all of the emotions she’d bottled away and stored like a bomb waiting to explode.

Shirou had put in the wick and lit it, Morgan simply made sure it was fit to burst. “I did.” The Witch noted, an undeniable ounce of pleasure in her voice.

“How many times had that question come from her lips today, Morgan wondered. She was sure not as many as it had drifted across her thoughts.

“Because, as much as I hate you, you are my sister, and I love you even more. I loved you so much, I thought that the only right thing was that I be your Queen instead.” Morgan explained, her gaze now firmly on Artoria’s in turn.

“But that would never have-” Guinevere began, and Morgan raised a hand in turn. The woman was
fit to remain, but not to intrude. This was between family now- and the only piece of the family that was missing now-

Was the man holding onto what would destroy him, the woman he loved, and in the same breath, free them all. Excalibur Morgan, a declaration he would call out tomorrow, when they battled.

Then, the only deciding factor would be Artoria. Hence why Morgan was here now, laying bare the truth as it would be. “It wouldn’t.” Morgan agreed, her fingers trailing along Mordred’s pouting cheeks. The red-garbed child looking between her mother and her birth father with a face that spoke of refusal. She had no concept of what was going on, but Morgan knew already that no words were necessary from the homunculus.

Shirou had already taken that burden upon himself. Even if Mordred would never let her beloved Papa fight that battle alone.

“Why are you here, Morgan?” Artoria’s voice had become as level as she could bring herself to be, a voice that grated on the Witch’s nerves just as it did on Shirou’s, she was sure.

No, it was probably more. Shirou would torture himself endlessly in the name of her sister, she knew, but Morgan was not so kind or patient. Without the truth being revealed to him, he would have stood at her side and failed and saw it as his own fault.

It was disturbing to her core, but Morgan had saved him, as well. And now it was his turn to pay her in kind---

Or for Artoria to reject him, and give him away into the Witch’s arms.

“Because, unlike you, I know what that man is fighting for. And, it’s only fair that I arm you with that knowledge before you face him tomorrow.” Morgan mused, taking a moment to dote on Mordred and pinching the child’s cheeks, earning a belligerent little whine. “And, even if it is a cruel mercy, you deserve to know how much he has sacrificed and given up in the name of being by your side. Because, if you don’t, then it will never be even between us. I will take the man who belongs with you as part of your soul, and make him my husband forever. He is, after all, a man who only appears once in the span of a world.”

Her gaze softened, fingers rubbing across the now red cheeks of the squirming child. It was a queer thing, to lament ruining Shirou’s intentions on the battle, but Morgan knew that Shirou would win
if Artoria did not fight at her absolute utmost. And, in her heart, Morgan hoped Artoria would deny him.

Morgan deserved that happiness, more than her sister. But she also could not deny her the opportunity to seize it.

“Sit, sister. I’ve already told the basics to your Queen, but it’s time you understood why.” Her hands came away from Mordred’s face, the little cub rubbing her cheeks with a pout on her face.

The quiet little murmur of, “I’m gonna tell Papa you were bullying me again”, went ignored.

x+x+x+x+x

In a country far away, a young boy died. Burning in the flames of a curse so great it transcended time and space. From him, it stripped everything, turning him into an empty vessel without memories, or senses. It took everything from him, making him simply a shell in the shape of a human.

In that Hell, a man sought salvation, and found the boy. Possessing a tool that could not save himself, he used it instead to save the boy. That tool was Avalon, the sacred object that can mend almost any wound.

It gave the boy the strength to survive, though it did not heal his soul, marred and destroyed by the curse that he’d seen kill countless others around him. As the man cried and rejoiced that he could save one measly person from that horrible fate, the boy thought how wonderful it must have felt, to be able to save others.

He felt guilty, it ate parts of him with every new memory he made. Why was he allowed to survive? Why was it him who had been fortunate?

The man took the boy in, and raised him, in penance for what he’d done. Though the boy would never know it, the man saw it as the one chance he had to make good on an ideal that had died in him long ago. It was an ideal the boy inherited, years later, when the man died from that curse.

The boy became a young man, and- as fate would have it- he was drawn into the very thing that had ruined his life not so long ago. The young man died a second time, and a miracle occurred. A
woman came before him, clad in resplendent armor and wielding a sword that would glow with the light of the moon and the hope of mankind.

He became a soldier in a War. At his side, a blonde woman whom he came to love and adore. Though he had allies, he had many more enemies. None of which were as unkind as that of his own nature. At his side, the woman gave him strength, and from the very moment that his eyes laid on her, he loved her with all of his soul. They were destined for one another, the sword and the sheath. They faced many challenges, and through their strength and their bond, they rose to the top. The very thing that had saved him, he returned to her, despite knowing without it he would inevitably fall apart.

[Sorrow]

But his love for her could not be. Even as they took in the glory of victory, he could only taste the bitterness of defeat as she smiled at him and faded away. Two miracles needed to bring them together once again, one to wait endlessly for him, and one to pursue her endlessly.

There were others who loved him, but he could no longer feel the touch of others. Only the memory of her spurred him on. His every waking moment consumed with her, blinding him to those who wanted to ease his suffering- his sacrifices.

For decades, alone purely by his own hand, he hunted for her. In the deepest pit of his despair, he decided to make a miracle. Knowing the place he could reach her, he did something unthinkable. He threw himself at the mercy of a Magic beyond those of his time, and tried to make a miracle built with human hands- the very existence of a Hero.

For the third time, the man died. But, a miracle occured---

+x+x+x+x+x+

Mordred was enraptured with the story, Morgan amused by how she had her child’s complete and undivided attention as she went into much more length than she originally had. Her gaze turned from the homunculus unto Guinvere and Artoria, the King’s facade gone in place of a look of complete and utter horror.

“The remnants of Avalon found where it belonged, and brought him here. From the lake I’d cast Avalon into came forth the body of a young man,”
“Shirou . . . ?!” Artoria murmured, earning a nod from Morgan before she continued.

“Only the remnants of Avalon, and his closeness to it, allowed him to survive. In my curiosity, I brought him away with me and nursed him until he became conscious again. At first, it had been—” Morgan paused, realizing she was stepping beyond the boundaries of what she’d initially meant to do, but decided that it was only reasonable that Artoria understood what it was that occurred.

“— curiosity, but it soon became more. He annoyed me, but he was worthy and proved himself to me. Even though I knew that the one he looked at was not me, I began to long for him to be mine.”

Morgan’s gaze turned onto Artoria once again, and she was aware her emotions were beginning to run high. The Witch could feel her pulse pounding, and anger flooding her veins. She would have indulged in it before, but right then she simply let it roll off of her shoulders like water from a fall. When she’d gained command of herself again, she murmured---

“He took your child as his own, and challenged me to be her mother. He faced me with the intent only to do right, knowing that he was not my equal—”

“Papa’s so cool—”

“--- and blindly came here, knowing he would be at a disadvantage in order to save you from the fate he knew would befall you. The same one that will ruin all of us.”

Morgan took note of Artoria and Guinevere’s pensive looks, the dark-haired Queen more concernedly looking at Artoria while the blonde King was biting her lip hard enough for it to bleed. It was the most emotion she’d ever seen drawn out of her sister.

“And now,” The Witch finished, reclining back in her own seat, “I have given him the sword that consumes the light, and the sheath that draws forth the Avalon that exists within himself. The weapon he knows he must use to end your dream in order to save us all from a destiny that we have been running towards- aware of it or not.”

Silence reigned- ignoring Mordred, whom even now was muttering gleeful praises of her “Papa”- as the Witch let her stare bore into her sister and the Queen. This would not be the last of it, but it was the last fork before the End as it would be seen by the Pendragon family---

--- and Shirou.
Where Shirou could only stare at Artoria and see Saber, Morgan did not have any such blindness. She saw the King warring within against the woman beneath. Trying to understand the man who had sacrificed to be with her, and recompense it with the fact he was the one shouldering the burden of doing what would have otherwise been done by Mordred.

A knitting of her brow, the clenching of her teeth. The tightening of her fists, the limping of her shoulders. None of it escaped Morgan’s “all-seeing eyes”.

In that moment, Morgan fought her own internal battle. That of desire for the King to win the battle and hand victory to her without a fight, and that of the woman whom had only ever wanted to be good enough- to be worthy. The Morgan le Fay who longed to love her sister, rather than hate her.

Morgan knew it was not a fight she had to invest herself in, however. There was only ever one outcome that would happen.

“He will refuse to lose.” Guinevere remarked, making bald the truth the Witch already knew.

“He will not lose, when he has worked so hard for it.” The Witch agreed. “The only question that remains---” Morgan’s eyes once again drove into Artoria’s face as the King stared at her sister in turn.

“--- Will you reject him, and let it all happen? Or, will you fight him with your all, and let his love reach you, beyond the boundaries of the world?---”

Morgan crossed her legs again, Mordred fussing on her lap. “Either way, I don’t mind. Give him to me, or show that you are selfish and human for once- that you are my sister. I no longer need to bring you low, he will be mine regardless. Whether he is mine alone forever, or if I must share a space in his heart, I have already won.”
Chapter Summary

Just a fun omake for that one reviewer who thought it'd be amusing.

MAYBE IT IS.

Fate/Black Dawn

Omake

[Normal End: Chaldean Antics]

Fujimaru, Ritsuka blinked her eyes as the magical circle began to sparkle and glow brightly gold. From the explosive light came contortions of black shadows and red lightning until finally her gaze settled on a woman with lengthy blonde hair, adorned in a black and blue dress and with her face covered by a veil falling from a crown of black and blue thorns.

"Servant, Caster. Forth from the shadows of Avalon, I come." Her voice, gently ringing like a soft bell, tickled across the Japanese magus' ears. "If you know what is best for you, Master, you will hurry and bring to me my husband."

Ritsuka blinked again.

x+x+x

The sparkling rainbow of mana blossomed into a rich crimson red, a blonde woman hefting an ornate silver blade with red decorations, while in her left hand she held firm an English longbow and a quiver of spear-like arrows hung from her knuckles. Half of her body was adorned in shifting silver armor while the other half was cloaked in red garb.

"Servant, Archer. As a Knight, I will show you the hand that shot down paradise." She grinned, showcasing a mouth full of fang-like teeth. "By the way, if Papa is around, you better tell me, okay? I don't want him catching onto me."
"I'll make sure he finds out." Morgan noted dryly, forming into existence out of the shadows near the redhead Master.

"MOM, PLEASE, NO."

+x+x+

The sparkling rainbow was becoming an oddly common sight, though the amber-eyed magus felt her brow twitching as stood beside her were Morgan and Mordred, both holding placard signs that said, for some odd reason, Daddy come home.

Strangely, both had heart caricature on them, but in different places. Mordred's right after Home, while Morgan's was right after Daddy.

Forth from the light came a well of blackness and streaking red lights, followed by a figure guised in blued armor that looked like the effigy of a dragon. Held tightly in one hand was a mass of shadows that held a form without true shape.

"Servant, Ruler. The Tyrant who destroys Utopia---"

"NOOKIE!" Morgan launched herself at the armor wearing Knight, Mordred meaningfully covering the redhead Master's eyes from the sight of her parents getting it on.

"Is that normal?" Ritsuka asked, confused while she couldn't see.

"I'm pretty sure the only reason our bloodline is so thin is because Mother hates being pregnant." Mordred remarked, leading their Master away in order to let the sexual tension work itself out.

And sneak some candy from the kitchen.
Shirou had returned to the Workshop and found himself confused by Morgan and Mordred’s absence. He’d presumed the two had simply stepped away to do something else, though what he didn’t know. Glancing down at Excalibur Morgan on his hip, he let out a deep sigh as he realized just what it was he had to do tomorrow.

He’d have to reach above and beyond, and defeat the very woman whom had both taught him, and that he loved. It was a daunting idea, but one he felt great confidence in. Reaching up, he idly pressed at the neck of his armor and felt his wyrm-shaped helm shift and slide into the shoulders of his breastplate. It was a feature Morgan had added, alongside the ability to outright “dismiss and summon” the armor wholly. She’d explained it in more vivid detail, but frankly most of it had gone over Shirou’s head.

Morgan’s breed of magic was wholly separate from his own, after all.

Unhooking the blade and it’s scabbard, he settled the tyrant blade against the arm of the chair while he reclined and let the tension drain out of his body.

He needed to rest. And worse than that, he needed to at least have something resembling a plan to go up against King Arthur. He didn’t need to kill her, it was true, but fighting her to the point of discernable victory wasn’t any less crazy a prospect. Excalibur Morgan, and this Avalon Alternative were a huge set of gap-closers for him, but even if he wholly overpowered Artoria, he knew she could wrest victory from the jaws of defeat.

She’d done it for him countless times, after all.

Morgan trailed into the Workshop later, Mordred gleefully hopping up unto his lap and grinning like a loon at him as the Witch moved to him and---

Kissed him softly on the lips, drawing forth a belligerent little “Eww-” from the red-wearing child.
Blinking, confused, he watched as the Witch moved up into the upper level of the Workshop and—
from the sound of disrobing and shifting covers—presumably went to bed. His amber gaze turned onto Mordred.

“Papa, teach me to fight. After your duel with the King.”

Knitting his brows closed, he simply shook his head. Whatever they’d done, it had worn on Morgan. And Mordred was looking at him as if he was— even more than her beloved Papa—someone she wanted to be just like.

Raking his gloved fingers through her hair, Shirou murmured, “Sure, Mordred. All that you want.”

He could not yet know that Mordred would not let him fight alone—and Morgan had already planned against the few defenses he would utter. She was, after all, still destined to be a Knight capable of surpassing her true father.

Who better to teach her, than the man who took her place? How better to protect her, than teach her to fight and to be the one she fight alongside? And if all else failed, she’d simply sic Mordred’s little lion cub eyes on him.

She loved him, but Shirou was very easily played like an instrument.

x+x+x+xx+x+x

[Fate/Zero, Point Zero]

The night passed. Despite his worries that he would once again fail to sleep, he had nestled into the covers beside Morgan, and faded from awareness within the space of a few breaths. Mordred had insisted on tussling, “You’ll have too much energy to sleep, Papa!” And apparently she’d been right. He’d felt better as he laid down next to the Witch in the bed.

Their bed, if only for tonight, it seemed.

After a quick breakfast for the three, Shirou had donned his armor and settled Excalibur Morgan at
his hip after pulling the blade out just enough to gaze at the motif of the warring dragons upon it. For now, the helmet could stay attached to his armor. He wanted to see face to face with Artoria this time.

He was aware. He was ready. As ready as he could be, anyway.

Morgan, ever NOT the morning woman, had stayed in bed as his footfalls carried him from the Workshop. He was sure that, between them, only Mordred would want to watch.

He would be sad to disappoint her, but he already knew that no one but he and Artoria would know what was about to happen. No matter how many witnesses she brought.

As he rounded the corner, he saw a blonde man leaning against the brickwork wall. Sir Gawain leaned off of the wall and settled his crossed arms unto his hips instead. For a moment, Shirou had the false thought that the Knight would try and stop him.

But he understood that Gawain was not the one who would try such a thing. They’d gotten off on the wrong foot, and he’d yet to actual get to speak to the man personally, but he knew Gawain’s legend- his greatness and his weakness.

“You don’t have to do this.” Gawain murmured as he stopped within speaking distance. “There has to be another way.”

Shirou couldn’t help the smile that lifted his lips. Privately, he wondered how many of the Knights were men he would have respected and adored- if they weren’t his enemies in this.

“Trust me when I say this, Sir Gawain,” Shirou mused, his own stance relaxed as he prepared to move on. “If there were another way, I would take it. But, the hard path is the only one that ever is worth treading.”

“Did my Aunt put you up to this?” Gawain asked, crossing his arms again.

For a moment, Shirou considered the question. In a way, she had, but that would have been slander on the Witch’s name if he blamed her solely. “She just gave me the tools. Morgan is a good woman at heart, just like . . .” He paused, realizing he’d almost said something unnecessary. “. . . the King.” It was a misstep, but it was one he felt wouldn’t translate the same.
“The King does have a virtuous heart.” Gawain agreed, and Shirou privately amused himself with being the one doing the deceiving for once— even if only in a tiny way. “You said you loved him—

“--- Do you mean that with all your being? Is that truly why you insist?”

Amber eyes closed, and then opened after a few moments of contemplation.

“You would not know it, but I’ve seen the King’s truth. Their tears, their smiles. Though they do not know it, I loved them from the very moment my eyes laid upon them.” It was awkward to use such impersonal descriptors, but— well— a secret was still a secret that needed to be kept until he could shatter the illusion. “I know their dream’s pain and desperation, and shared it with them. They made me who I am. In return, I can only do what they did for me.”

“Which is?” Gawain mused, a brow raised in curiosity.

Shirou smiled, an honest expression of pleasure at the memory— at the sadness— of seeing her fade away with a soft and sincere smile. “Save them.”

Despite it being impolite, he stepped past Gawain and continued towards the courtyard where the duel would be held. The sound of his greaves sounding against the floor as he went the only noise that fell on his ears. Behind him, Gawain raked a hand through his hair, letting out a sigh.

“That man makes no sense, but by God, does he speak with a conviction that makes me respect him.”

+++x+x+x+xx+

It was as he expected when he arrived. Arthurs was not alone, though it was obvious from the way she stood that it had not been for lack of trying. At the sidelines of the courtyard stood Bedivere, Lancelot—

--- and that man in the white robe, Merlin. Well, that would make this more interesting, at least. At
least, in the fact that he’d get more of a reaction than the two Knights would offer. His attention was firmly on Artoria as he stepped onto the field, however.

Her face was set in a line. Rather than the doll-like appearance she’d affected before, it was a face that spoke of misery and indecisiveness. He’d made some estimations of Morgan’s actions the day before, but he’d been unable to figure out what had been done other than that it had involved Mordred.

It was easy to figure what at least part of it had been, now that he saw Artoria’s face and had a few of the dots to connect. So Mordred knows who her father is, but she runs right to me and calls me Papa…

For a moment, he wants to laugh, but it passes quickly. He’d spoiled the little blonde too much, it seemed.

His eyes turned back upon her, moving from her expressive face to her hands settled on Excalibur—glowing in the light of the rising sun—out in front of her. Her armor resplendent and the mantle and crown of kingship both absent.

She was taking him seriously. That was good. It made him feel comfortable with what he was about to do.

“My King.” He noted, earning a startle from the blonde woman’s shoulders. Her green eyes rose from the hilt of Excalibur towards him, and he realized he’d caught her in reverie. Face to face with her, his features softened into a smile.

“Sir Shirou.” She noted back, strength in her voice. No longer plastic and fake, only the rumbling of a dragon he could almost feel once again.

This would not be the last time they fought, regardless of win or lose, but he knew right then that this was the first and only chance he had to properly show her that he’d learned from her.

That he was worthy.

“Are you ready?” He asked, unable to force down the smile on his face. Rather than continue to try, he simply let the ache from his jaw remind him of who he was.
“I am.” She said, hefting her blade and setting it in a ready stance.

It was not the stance of preparedness, it was the one she always did before she charged. To garner the most momentum on her first swing and flow into combat as easily as breathing.

This wasn’t a test.

This was the real deal.

Shirou’s blood boiled. He drew Excalibur Morgan and let it rest at his side.

[EMIYA]

“I have come from across the sea of time-”

She came, Excalibur sweeping in an arc from low to high. Her speed was great, and the attack would have killed any normal man in tenths of a second. She was even using Mana Burst---

“Pursuing endlessly, hunting endlessly-”

Excalibur Morgan sounded the war cry against her sister sword, his lips uttering the Aria even as he stepped into her follow-up and crushed his blackened blade against her’s. Strike Air began to gather-

“I have created over a thousand blades-”

The Hammer of the Wind King crashed through the dirt as his Reinforced legs pushed him to the side in a leap, he closed back in with a second leap as she raised her blade and his eyes saw the point of Excalibur come forth towards his chest faster than lightning in his perception-

“Knowing Loss-”
CLANG-

Her stab was thrown to the side, his gauntlet-clad fist knocking it wide. He felt the magical energy welling up inside of him, threatening to explode outwards—waiting for the cry.

“Knowing Victory—”

CRASH, KER-SHUNK---

He draws Excalibur Morgan up and grips the handle with both hands, cleaving the sky and earth in equal measure as the blackened blade floods over with the shadows it was born in.

“Making a miracle of human hands—”

Her guard meets his strike, the Holy Sword beginning to fill the world around them with a shining luminance--

“I have no regrets. This is the path I’ve chosen.”

“What—” He isn’t sure who cries out, he doesn’t care. He hammers the blade of the tyrant blade into Excalibur again, using the enhanced strength it grants him to force Artoria to defend or retreat--

She steps back---

“My whole life was Unlimited Blade Works.”

And the world around them turned into an inky black.
It drew one's eye immediately. The only thing resembling space in the endless shadows illuminated only by lines of red crossing endlessly against the horizon in forks like lightning.

A single ray of light descending down upon a clearing, flowers littering the ground. Standing upright and proud in the dirt in the center of the clearing were things Artoria was only able to believe because of what she’d seen him do already.

Excalibur and Caliburn, both swords leaning on one another while they were surrounded by blades in various shapes and sizes further out, most fading out into the shadows of the world she was surrounded by, though a few were closer to her weapons than others.

Reflexively, she looked down at her own hand, making sure Excalibur was still clutched tightly in her fists. It was, of course, but for a moment she absolutely wasn’t sure that it had been.

Then her eyes moved around in search of the others that had come to attend as witnesses, then towards the man who had conjured this space outside of reality.

The Black Knight stood, Excalibur Morgan held loosely in his right hand while the left was lowering from an outstretched position. Across his face, streaks of red branching lines had begun to light up against his skin, bleeding down into the body hidden by that blackened armor.

“This is magic.” She noted, not surprised but awed at such a thing being available to him after the duel they’d had nary weeks ago. Raising Excalibur up into ready stance again, she watched as her opponent’s face relaxed.

“It is.” He agreed, “The only Magecraft allowed to Emiya, Shirou. The result of a life being forged into a sword and seeing only one ray of light.” He gestured with his free hand towards Caliburn and Excalibur, “My own Avalon.”

“Morgan helped you to do this?” She uttered, still at the ready as they spoke.
“Not quite.” Shirou’s features smoothed into a comfortable smile, his free hand coming to rest atop
the sheath of Excalibur Morgan, “All she did was make it easier. The same way Avalon helped you
shrug off wounds, and age, Avalon Alternative acts in a similar way for me. Though, of course, it
isn’t near the amazing thing Avalon was for you.”

He raised Excalibur Morgan, finally grasping the weapon’s hilt with both hands. “This, however--

The blade drew in the shadows of the world around them, flooding the world around Artoria with
light as it powered itself on Shirou’s own inner being. Fields of flowers expanded further and
further, blades thrust into the ground and calling out to be held in the hands of warriors beyond
time and space,

“--- is the real thing. I’m used to using imitations, so I have to say that it’s strange for me to face
you with a weapon that I never should have held in my hands.”

Her eyes widened as Shirou’s grip shifted, “I wanted to tell you so much. I wanted to run to you
and hold you in my arms again. For twenty years, I ran after you, desperately trying to think of a
way I could go to you.”

Magical energy began to gather, and Artoria summoned her own energy-

“I’m sorry, it’s stupid of me to be trying to talk to you right now. I wanted to tell you everything,
since we’re alone here, but that’s pointless, right?”

“My sister told me a lot.” Artoria agreed, more comfortable with continuing than hearing that story
again- the one that made her heart ache and made her wish she could remember him.

[Excalibur- Sword of Promised Victory, ZIZZ Ver.]

“Then, Artoria, I want to hear your answer. Let’s have no more words---”

They came at one another. The man in black armor and the King who wanted nothing more than to
understand.
Why her heart ached, why his words that should not get through to her did.

CRASH--!

The great blade made of shadows careened off of Excalibur-

The sound alerted her, her own instincts saving her skin as she used Mana Burst to throw herself to the side as two swords flung themselves from the dirt and then impaled the spot she’d stood only seconds ago--

The Tyrant’s weapon separated the space where she stood, only her own magically enhanced strength allowing her to stand firm against the roiling blade. She brought her arms up and around, refocusing the attack’s direction to bleed off some of the redhead’s momentum---

More swords came, thrusting past her shoulders as she twisted and twirled into the air, kicking off the air using her own magical power to fall like a comet towards him-

Rather than block, he side-stepped and brought a gauntlet-clad fist around to crash against the guard of Excalibur as she blocked it at the last moment.

She had tested him before, she knew he was talented and well-trained- and now understood why- but he was a completely different beast now.

He was powerful, and she didn't know if it was just Morgan’s sword or if it was the fact he had lured her into a world where only his own rules could apply that made him stronger.

Her blood was boiling--

No, it was singing. It was sounding the war cry against a foe who was challenging her.

It was a disturbingly pleasant feeling. One she thought she’d thrown away when she’d become King.
She brought forth Invisible Air, readying to use the Hammer of the Wind King to make up for the difference between her own blade and the enlarged shadow of Morgan’s sword.

His shoulder rose against her, the full force of his larger armor-clad body tearing into her sternum and launching her end-over-end until she caught her feet and brought Excalibur up into the air above her.

He was right in front of her, blade being brought up in a charging slash just like the one she’d started the fight with---

Both of them swung.

KRR-AAAANG-

Both Excaliburs, the Holy and the Blackened, clashed and they locked in a stalemate as Mana Burst-enhanced strength tore against a World’s worth of shadows.

All of the darkness and loneliness he’d felt without her brought to bear, illuminating them both in a pure and pristine light as she broke the stalemate when more swords tore through the air towards her. Copies of Excalibur Morgan shredding through parts of her gown and bloodying her arms and legs as she fended them off.

Protracted combat was against her right then. He held the advantage of attacks that could come from anywhere and anytime. Even her instincts built from birth could only mitigate so many attacks at once. And, as long as he held the initiative, he was sure to win.

She thrust her blade forth as he came in to assault her again, a tornado spiraling forth from her blade---

He dodged, and she used the opening--

“Sheathed in the breath of stars---!”

His eyes widened, and his stance mirrored her in turn-
“Iron Hammer of the Hollow King---!”

What? He can’t-

“A torrent of shining life--!” Golden light began to radiate, filling the shining world of flowers and blades as a pillar of great magical power and heat formed the blade of Excalibur.

“Overturn the aurora, swallow the light---!” His own blade, held aloft in reverence and crying out for victory, opposed the golden light of Excalibur with a great pillar of black, purple, and red.

“EX-

-CALIBUR--”

“-- MORGAN!”

The world exploded.

+x+x+x+

A great confusion had crashed upon Lancelot, Bedivere, and Merlin as a void of black shadows had come into existence, forming an orb that swallowed what had once been the grounds for the duel. The dark-haired Knight had grasped the handle of Arondight, and-

“No! You absolutely must not!” Merlin’s voice, panic registering through every timber his throat could produce.

Lancelot’s glare did nothing to cow the wizard as the half-breed raised a hand and pointed at the shadowy existence in front of them. “That isn’t a spell you can beat with a sword.”

“It’s a spell made out of them.” Morgan’s voice caused his blood to run cold, the attention of the
three men drawn to the green-eyed Witch as she stepped forth from the shade of the halls of Camelot, adorned in a blue gown resplendent with a white furred ruff.

“What did you teach him?! This isn’t something even I could have come up with—” Merlin was stuck between horror at what had been done, and pure delight at seeing something so -new-. The feeling of fear won out, since it had to do with Artoria, however.

“I taught him nothing.” Morgan mused, staring intently at the Bounded Field. “Even I couldn’t live a life that would create a magic like this. Just wait, it won’t be much longer now—”

And true to Morgan’s words, the sphere of Unlimited Blade Works suddenly exploded, cracking open with a fury of lights. All of those present unable to watch as twin pillars of golden holy light and wretched shadows entwined and spun into the air, exploding with the force of magical power being unleashed without restraint.

Morgan finally lowers her arms, shielding herself both from the blinding display and the flying debris and wind that had been generated by the clash of the two sister swords.

And sees, tossed about on both sides of the field, Shirou and her sister. Both are covered in injuries, but--

Shirou stands, aiding himself with the blade of tyrants, while Artoria has buckled to her knees, panting and worn.

Shirou . . !

Her heart lifts, the Witch’s lips opening into a smile that hurts her jaw. Both of the warriors stare at one another, blood streaking their temples and cheeks and with armor worn away from the sheer force of the warring attacks.

Her heart pounds, a laugh wanting to come free of her chest as his eyes turn to her and- exhausted-smiles---

Twang
It is a sound that makes her heart stop. She sees it before it registers, the shaft of an arrow splitting the air like a bullet-

The color drains from her face-

Artoria’s hand raises-

The projectile strings through his neck as his head turns and her magic fails her, more blood spilling forth from his mouth as the force knocks him from standing to down upon one knee-

“SHIIIIIRRRROOOOUUUUUUUU---!!!”

The world envelops in flames and shades of red as she wraps him in her arms and, with eyes filled with hatred turned onto those gathered-

A man with long red hair has joined at the side of Artoria, the blonde woman stumbling up unto her feet-

Morgan shunts them both through the shadows. Mordred is tucked in against her mother’s breast and pressed in against the blood-stained breastplate of her Papa-

And the family leave Camelot, for the last time.

“What have you done?!?”

“I-”

“Sir Tristan, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE--?!”

“My King-”
A year passes, Sir Tristan’s return is lauded by the Knights as a sign of God’s favor, but the King on the Throne bears him an ill will that festers and all are able to see. Britain deals with invasions from the remnants of the Picts, as well as excursions of mythical creatures, King Arthur’s new and merciless zeal frightens the people of her Kingdom and makes them long for the days they simply thought her a creature beyond human suffering. She leaves Excalibur to be beheld in the halls of Camelot, and refuses to draw it again as the Most Holy of Holy Swords has been disgraced. She rides at the forefront of her army going north from Camelot, holding aloft a spear gleaming with the light of mankind’s rule. She has discarded the secret of her gender, and the restraints of kindness in favor of Divine Law, and the results have shown in the fact she has blossomed into a woman beyond compare.

On an isle miles off the coast of Wales, a young blonde woman clad in red and silvered armor nocks an arrow, and grins as it splits her target- a falling fruit that cuts cleanly in two as an arrow more like a javelin pierces through it and lands in the healthy wood of the tree.

A man adorned in black and red, with an ominous blade at his hip, smiles softly as the woman hoots and hollers. “Papa, did you see that? It was a perfect shot!”

Shirou grins indulgently at the homunculus who has grown from a child who ought to be in school to a warrior woman as beautiful and strong as both her mother and her birth father.

“It was.”

Under the shade of the enchanted castle Corbenic, the Enchantress Morgan watches as her husband and child train- or more properly, play, by Mordred’s accounts. Her green eyes spying Mordred sneakily trying to carve a slice of the apple she split with a knife hidden away in the breast of her coat.

“Mordred, you’ll ruin your appetite for dinner.” Shirou notes, not even bothering to move his eyes actually onto the errant girl.

“Awww---! But Papa, I want a snack.”

The Witch rolls her eyes, then turns her gaze to the East, murmuring softly, “Dragons and their appetites.” From up above, she spies the ramparts adorned with red standards, fluttering in the wind
and making the sight of the black dragon with its claws outstretched hard to discern. Morgan’s
gloved hand comes up, the gleam of silver glinting off of her ring finger as her knuckles press into
her cheek and she flicks the piece of parchment paper out of her right hand and out into the wind as
it bursts into flames.

[Night of Fate]

“Come then, dear sister. We’ve never fought over a man before, but let’s make this war a good
one.” She laughs, the sound like bells on the breeze as the sound of wingbeats fill the air. Her gaze
turns skyward as she watches flocks of wyverns take their riders out to the north and east.

“It’ll be the last one we ever fight.”
Fate/Black Dawn
Omake

[Good End: The Family Pendragon]

[Turning Seasons]

Shirou smiled at her, exhausted. Rushing to him, Morgan held him upright as he threatened to fall over from his exertions with any more stress.

"You're... You really are that boy, aren't you?" Artoria asked, her eyes drifting up from her bloodied hands and their grip on Excalibur to Shirou supported by Morgan.

"Yeah. It- ah- kind of defeats the purpose of the duel if Morgan went and told you all about that."
Shirou glowered somewhat at the Witch, who simply rolled her shoulders in a shrug with a smile on her lips. "But, I’m glad she did. I know you were taking me seriously- seriously enough to use Excalibur, even."

Bedivere and Lancelot both rushed to Artoria’s side, the blonde woman accepting their help back unto her feet as she tried to get her own breathing back under control. The two worn out opponents locked eyes for a moment, and then--

Artoria began to giggle. Shirou couldn’t help but laugh in turn.

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Though there wasn’t much point in it anymore, Shirou stayed at Artoria’s side as he told her about their time in the war when she’d become a Servant, how he’d decided to take up the burden of Mordred’s birth, and the downfall of Camelot that couldn’t be avoided. He didn’t think it’d mean much, but it would at least help him to show Artoria what it was he was so desperate to save her from.

At first, she’d looked confused at him, as if there was no reason they couldn’t simply deny that fact, until he explained how the fall of Camelot had shaped the very nature of human history---

It was a fixed point, something that couldn’t be avoided. The only thing that could be changed, was
how and in what way. Rather than with her death at the hands of her own child, why not let the world forget that there was need of a body to confirm one’s death? Or, well, some other reason.

Shirou simply grinned when both Morgan and Artoria had looked at him like he was an idiot. He was used to it.

The hard part in the end was convincing Artoria to be selfish for once and allow the fall of “King Arthur’s Britain” in favor of the brighter future. It took two years, but---

+x+x+x+x+

The French countryside was beautiful. Even by horseback, it was breathtaking. Drawing back the hood of his cloak, Shirou turned his head to admire the way the midday sun shone down on the three blondes as they stopped. “I think here’s going to be the best place we’ll be able to stop for lunch. It’s been nothing but hills and forests for days.”

“Food! Papa’s cooking, hell yeah!” Mordred remarked from atop her russet horse, having long since grown to a woman of startling beauty and power. More time spent with her had led to him getting defensive of her, especially since- of the three- she was the most commonly accosted by men on their travels.

Ironically, though, it was often the girl herself who tended to punch out her more amorous suitors rather than him. She’d muttered “Nothing like Papa,” too many times for him to dismiss it anymore.

He wasn’t sure he liked the idea of Mordred finding a man like him, either.

“I have to agree,” Morgan mused from astride her own black stallion, her own cloak only offset by the extensively high ringed ponytail she wore as a result of her lengthy hair on horseback. “I am starving.”

On a familiar white horse, Artoria held a stoic face that was utterly destroyed by the “subtle” wiggling of her ahoge. “If my sister and Mordred are in agreement, I won’t dare argue. Let’s make camp for now and we can continue south after our stomachs are full.”

“Plus, carrying around this meat is gonna slow us down anyway.” Mordred mused, glancing at the
sack filled with salted jerky, then settling her gleaming green eyes on the redhead. “Papa~ You think we’ll hit a town soon? I’m dyin’ for some fruit.”

Shirou dismounted, unable to help the grin on his cheeks as he pulled the “Kitchen utensils” pack from his own mottled horse and began to get ready for making lunch while Artoria set up a leather mat for them to sit upon. “Well, if I understand our map right, we’re nearing what in my time was Italy. So, we’ll either meet civilized people soon, or raiders.”

“So, why -are- we going towards Rome, Shirou?” Morgan asked, raising a brow at her paramour.

“Well- if we have long lives ahead of us- we might as well enjoy it. I hear Venice was quite the place to be a few hundred years from now. Until then? We’ll figure it all out later.”

Zelretch let out a sigh, tapping his cheek with a finger. It had been an interesting little diversion, but it was sad that it was so short-lived. The timeline pruned some hundred years later when it was decided to have entered stagnancy as a result. Really, the boy Emiya Shirou was always an entertaining one, even when he was fighting against a fate he couldn’t possibly win against.

His gaze turned back unto another viewpoint, leaning forward in his chair and letting his fingers knit together as he watched a dark-haired youth punch out an ages-old demon.
Merlin had meddled. He knew the moment he'd interfered that it had been unwise, but it had been the only thing he felt he could do when he'd discovered that Morgan—against the fate prescribed to her—had returned to Camelot.

Bringing with her a knight clad in black who shouldn't exist. His visions and prophecies had begun eluding him, the only one that remained the sight of his eternal punishment—locked away in his tower in Avalon both by Morgan's whims and his own pain and guilt.

Tucked away in Avalon, settled in a space that could hardly be described save for as "office cubicle size", the Mage of Flowers let his mind wander, once again, to his greatest failing.

He had thought bringing Sir Tristan back would have meant the difference—even just a little extra time until the fall came, but instead he had only managed to exacerbate the issue.

Get rid of the Witch and her Knight, it had seemed simple. In fact, it had seemed altogether too easy.

Raking a hand through his hair, he remembered how he had been frozen solid by that moment. What if Tristan had killed that redheaded knight instead? They were lucky Morgan had simply retreated-

Well, Artoria and the Knights had been, anyway. He'd been free for all of a few days when Morgan came, and he had been shunted away into the tower where he would know his penance for the rest of time according to humanity's will.

He honestly couldn't blame her this time. Certainly he'd been contrite before, but . . .
This time, he really had screwed up. Becoming the very hand of Gaia to strike down the errant strings threatening her laws. It had never been his job, and he'd had the foolish pride to think that he was beyond it.

And now, gazing outwards, he watched. Watched as the miracle he'd once helped to make fell from grace in a wholly different way.

+x+x+

Camelot had descended into chaos unfettered for days after the duel. Tristan had been put under house arrest by Lancelot- at least until such time as the King could perform her duty- which was by far the kindest thing he could do for his friend.

Rage was not something any of them had ever experienced from the King. But, it existed.

In fact, it seemed as if a switch had been flipped entirely in the King after the duel's result. Rather than a stoic woman above the suffering and pleasures of human life, she had become overly inconsolable. She'd sent entire legions of men hunting for the missing Morgan, Mordred, and Shirou---

---and led just as many forays into the wilds of Britain in order to try and hunt down her sister. Lancelot could only feel a growing despair in the fact that Merlin had gone completely missing after the resolution.

Making the Knight begin to question the timing of Tristan's intervention, and the nature of it. Tristan was a courtly man who understood that duelling was, while an outlawed practice, also one that was considered noble. Royal law often held such contradictions at it's base level.

The coincidence was too much. He'd even settled the matter with Guinevere, whom had agreed with him.

If he could just get Tristan to speak on the matter . . . Perhaps at least he could protect his friend from the King's wrath.
At least, the worst of it. As the days passed and Tristan refused to defend himself, Lancelot worried for the future, rather than dwell on his guilt.

And when Artoria renounced mankind in favor of the spear Rhongomyniad, Lancelot let his head sag.

Even the benefit of Guinevere being freed from a joyless marriage did not comfort him. As Bedivere left, a frown marring the silver-haired man's features, Lancelot realized that they were abandoning the ideal.

The King was no longer someone who swore to protect the people, she'd become an absolute that would lead people into a Utopia that, to human hearts, was a prison.

But his guilt held him in sway. And so he stayed.

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Tristan had taken to something resembling meditation since his arrest at Lancelot's hands. He'd known what he was to do was against the code of Chivalry--

-- but it was also the only thing he could do to save the King from straying from the path of peace for Britain. At least, that had been the words of Merlin, whom had never steered the king wrong in all of his life.

Eventually, the King would see reason. Tristan would atone as need be when the time came. He could only put his faith in a King he had wrongly abandoned.

For Tristan, only servitude for the rest of his life on pain of death awaited him.

+×××+

It had never been a fatal wound, she knew it. Nonetheless, she had expended a great deal of magical power to bring Shirou and Mordred to the isle where Corbenic castle remained, the home of the Holy Grail. An Enchanter's castle that now belonged to her.
And it was a fine place, even as she'd spent several days watching and caring for the redheaded man's wound, trying desperately not to snap at Mordred when she would inevitably come into the room to worry over her Papa.

Morgan understood. Even though she knew thanks to Avalon Alternative he would not die, she couldn't help but enter that fury.

It was only after Shirou's eyes had opened and the only reminder of the assassination attempt- as she saw it- was a starburst-like wound to match the one on his chest that she'd seen him receive in one of the dreams she'd had from his past, that she'd gone to do what she should have done years ago.

Perhaps another time she would have gloated, or postured. But Merlin didn't even deserve her wrath at that point.

He was a bug. Only disgust remained. With the help of the Fae and the World's punishment for his abuses, it had not even taken a span of minutes before Artoria's essential father no longer could return to the physical world.

Then, she'd returned to Corbenic, finding Shirou up and about, marveling at the strange sights to be found within the Grail Castle.

She'd been furious. No- that was putting it lightly.

He stayed in bed for a week after that, all but forced to be attended by either herself or Mordred.

"I think you made Mama mad." She'd heard Mordred whisper one time while the blonde child had been feeding the redhead, and the look he'd given Mordred with those amber eyes put pleasure to the fact that he wouldn't disobey her like that again.

He had been strong enough on his own by the time he'd woken up, but Morgan hadn't cared. He was too precious to her, and now they had all the more reason to be cautious.

Morgan had had enough. It was one thing to do it without reason-
But now she'd been given all the reason in the world.

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Mordred grew, faster than a human child. Within the span of a year, she'd gone from resembling a grade schooler to a full blown adult woman. While she was a bit more scrawny and tomboyish than her mother, she was . . .

Powerful. That was the one way to describe it in Shirou's opinion. The young blonde had made him make good on his word to teach her, and he'd put up a token resistance at best when Mordred had stared at him with tears in her eyes.

He wasn't quite sure why Morgan had glowered at him over it, though.

Nonetheless, since he couldn't teach her his own brand of magecraft and the little amount of general knowledge he had was completely eclipsed by Morgan's own magical understanding, he'd settled for teaching her the two things she didn't innately know.

The first had been his own bastardized form of Artoria's swordplay technique and the dual-wielding technique he'd adapted over the years of training and contests against Magi and Alchemists. While it hadn't been much, Mordred's own bred-in instincts would help make her a more formidable foe on her own.

Then, it'd been Archery. Mordred's energy and willfulness made it hard to teach her the method behind Kyudo, but she'd picked up on the technique just fine. He'd eventually given up on making a Kyudoka out of her, and had settled for being content with her perfectly good practical skills.

Not everyone could just achieve complete and utter nothingness. Some just didn't even bother, like the blonde.

She made up for it by being able to use a larger bow and more deadly projectiles thanks to her own Mana Burst, though.
Shirou had simply shrugged when Morgan had perked a brow at Mordred's slinging of javelins through a bow as large as she was.

"I blame you regardless." The Witch had noted.

+x+x+

The circumstances of their marriage were eccentric at the least. The arrival of an unexpected guest had put fire to the metaphorical tinder pile.

Sir Bedivere, who comes within sailing distance of the isle and beckons.

"I've come not as an enemy, but to trade Evil for Good."

Morgan alone meets him, despite the Knight's insistence that Shirou would want to hear his words in turn.

He gets an inkling of what was discussed regardless, when Morgan finds him later in the kitchens, and quietly wraps her arms around his middle.

"Morgan?" He asks softly.

"Marry me." She utters, and he nearly sends the pot full of their supper clamoring to the floor before he can right it using a gloved hand.

"What?! What's brought this on?"

Her hands force him to spin, clasping her fingers against his shoulders and staring up into his bewildered face with her glimmering green eyes.

"I want you to be my husband. What more reason should I have?"
"Morgan, I- I'm flattered, and-

Her lips perk into an amused smirk, hands moving from his shoulders up unto his cheeks.

"A Queen needs a King, Shirou. And it will be very lonely for me if I can't have you by my side."

She paused, and added, "Besides. If you do this for me, I'll make it so Mordred can stay with us as well. You know her circumstances, how long she will have. I love you, and we can be together-forever- if you will be with me."

Shirou's eyes narrowed, "Morgan. She's not a tool." The irritation was leaning on the wall just before becoming outright anger.

"I know." Morgan remarked, placidly, as her lips came up to press against Shirou's. "But I don't know how else to show you how serious I am about the offer. Please--"

"-- be my King. My Knight and Lord. If you must go to Avalon, then go with me. If you will continue to go after her, then at least let me have you as my own until then."

She cradled in against his chest, his arms reflexively coming around her. They'd been together for quite awhile now, and he'd come to understand her moods better. Including when she was trying to manipulate him.

She was, but he also knew that it was what she wanted in the first place.

"Tell me what this is about, first."

"Artoria has forsaken Excalibur and taken up Rhongomyniad."

Shirou paused, eyes opening wide. His hands took in Morgan's shoulders and moved her at the length of his arms.
"What." His amber eyes bore into her features, thoroughly terrified of the greater meaning behind that simple message.

Rather than correcting history, they'd spiralled it off course entirely.

Nothing was going to go the way it should from then on.

Morgan's lips split into a somewhat shy smile, the Witch looking startlingly uncomfortable for the first time since he'd met her.

"Congratulations, Shirou. I think we've just rewrote history."

"This isn't the time for jokes, Morgan."

"It's not really a joke. But, please, Shirou. At least think about it."

"Alright. I will. We have to talk to Mordred about it, too."

The witch raised a brow, looking at the Black Knight like he was an idiot.

Of course Mordred would prefer her parents married. It'd give more credence to calling him father, anyway.
Rebellion, PT1

Fate/Black Dawn

AN: Welcome to the longest set of fucking chapters this story is going to have. Time for the meat and potatoes, folks. I’m glad for those of you who have stuck with my meagre writing this far, so I hope you enjoy this way more than the rest, since I’m going to put so much more effort into this that my update schedule will probably slow down.

I’ll also be trying to put out an update to Grand Ball within the next month, if I can power through Fuyuki (Which is going to be the most boring part of that fic, since I’m super psyched to write Orleans forward.)

Chapter Six
Rebellion

They did not have heroes of great renown, or even many great artifacts of power, but Morgan felt that what they did have was more than enough to function as the building blocks of the war coming.

From the moment Bedivere had appeared, long enough to inform her of Artoria raising up the spear Rhongomyniad in favor of Excalibur before vanishing into the horizon, she’d begun preparing for the clash she knew would one day come. Corbenic was beyond the reach of most due to the nature of it’s enchantments, but it would still inevitably give way to the World’s extinguishing of magic.

The first priority had been preparing further protection for both Shirou and Mordred. Mordred she had gifted with silvered armor and a bow made with the blessing of the Fae, while Shirou . . .

She had simply pushed Avalon Alternative into his flesh, making him whole once again. The shadows that would entrap the Tyrant Blade would serve as a suitable replacement, she thought. All of that on it’s own had been draining, but it had been the most sensible and vital right off the bat.

The creation of soldiers had been next. A thing she thankfully already had a strong basis in, since she’d made Artoria’s own homunculus knights back when she’d been a more agreeable woman. The new designs were sturdier, more mana-efficient, and even a little bit deadlier.

The fact that they did not need to consume food and did not grow tired was a true benefit over both
the originals and normal human knights. The only true issue with them was their requirement of magical energy- and being relatively unadvanced in intellect.

They could only obey so complex a command, after all. That was less important when they only needed to be told to attack or defend. They’d have to supplement the automatons with actual commanders at some point, but that was a hurdle Morgan had yet to vault.

She, Shirou, and Mordred could only be in so many places at once, after all.

Birthing Wyverns from the castle’s Dragon had been much simpler in comparison. After all, it took a lot less effort to modify and improve something that already existed rather than build it from scratch. They were bestial at best, but could be trained to take riders, and so she’d settled for the age-old tactic of cavalry.

Flying cavalry, but cavalry nonetheless.

She’d been working herself to death. It had been the thing that led to Shirou’s acquiescence of her request to marry. If she’d been more goodly of heart, she might have felt bad.

But frankly, they’d spent their honeymoon nights indulging too much. She’d been riding a high of not being alone anymore, and she’d refused to be away from him for more than minutes at a time as a result. Mordred had insisted on having a room further away from the two as a result.

Against her expectations that Artoria and the entirety of the British Isles would arrive at their doorstep before she could finish preparations, she had gotten to enjoy almost two whole months of downtime since their marriage. Shirou had gone from her Knight, to her husband.

Her King. And even the villages on the isle around Corbenic had taken well to him, since his forthright and honest nature had led to a slowly developing natural charisma.

It helped that he and Mordred had quelled the uprisals of the invading Picts and the mystical Beasts that had flooded the island as a result of England’s destabilization. Most of the fear regarding the castle had begun to be associated with her, rather than him.

Not that there weren’t a great many who saw him and knew- rightly- to worry about his presence. The red lines that had begun to creep along his skin and the way his tanned flesh had started to
pale had worried her, but he had never shown anything more involved than those symptoms themselves.

She supposed it was only reasonable that he wouldn’t simply stay the same after she’d begun to make him immortal in the same way she was. He was, after all, originally human. Mordred’s own enhancements were more cut and dry.

The sad truth was that she’d never cared enough to give her child the gifts she could have given her until Shirou had fought for her.

She’d become known as the Witch Queen of Corbenic, and he her King Dwelling in the Shadows. Only a handful of stories of his backlash against those who had threatened her or Mordred were necessary before such attempts had stopped. He had become known as a creature beyond belief that defended that which belonged to him with a fury beyond human comprehension.

A Black Dragon. Morgan had simply fanned the flames of belief, knowing that such faith would only make it more true. Unlike Vortigern before him, Shirou’s self-made land of shadows was one for humans to flourish in, rather than die within.

A world for them. The one they would usher in and then be able to safely abscond from if Morgan played her cards right.

Of course, as their fame had spread, that meant their attempt to stay hidden had fallen apart. Which had led to the letter.

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It had come as the winter chill was falling away, when the island’s apple trees had finally begun to bear fruit. A spring of rejuvenation and life being interrupted by the arrival of a declaration.

Bend back into the fold of Britain, and offer up the Cup of Christ, or Artoria would take both. Morgan had recognized Agrain’s handwriting, and knew without a doubt that the blonde had very little to do with the message.

Artoria would never have dared to say such words to her sister, or likely even to Shirou, no matter how the Spear- for as much as she’d learned from Merlin- might have changed her.
Agravain, however, had never ceased to hate her. Shirou and Mordred would suffer by association purely because that was the kind of person her nephew was.

A child she would have otherwise proudly, yet disgustingly, bore for her own. More like her than her admittedly gentle sister Anna.

It helped that she also already knew Artoria was seated upon her horse with the lance firmly in her hand to their east, engaged against the rising Picts.

They could come and take the Grail if they thought themselves worthy. Morgan had long since stopped caring about the thing since her one true wish had been granted already, and Shirou had always viewed it—even if it was not the Grail he knew at all—as an evil thing that only brought destruction, something to protect others from rather than a holy object to be praised.

Mordred had come within steps of using the thing for fruit juice. That thought still inspired a laugh in the Witch.

“Ugh, I hate when Mom laughs like that. I always want to look over my shoulder, like you’ll be there, Papa.”

“Then you should probably stop trying to sneak candied fruits from the kitchen when you know we’ll catch you.”
Rebellion, PT2

Chapter Notes

A lot of people have questioned if I have all of this pre-written, I’ll break your immersion and inform you that I write all of this shortly before posting, so the reason for the fast updates has more to do with how enthused I am for the story rather than anything else.

That said, the update today will be a bit short, due to having lots to do (and then a lot of screwing off.) Enjoy.

Fate/Black Dawn

[This Illusion]

“So, why can’t I have a wyvern mount, Mother?” Mordred questioned, trying (and failing miserably) to hide her pout. The ponytailed blonde settled with her hands on her hips as she stood in the throne room of Corbenic. Adorned in her half-plate and with her bow strung against her back alongside her quiver as well as an arming sword at her hip, the homunculus was only missing her helmet.

The Enchanted Castle’s great throne had been modified into something resembling a loveseat, a great symbol of lacquered dark wood and red and black accents that spiraled upwards into an effigy of a black dragon. Morgan had insisted on it’s design, but she’d promptly used the thing more for excuses to spoon with Shirou than act in any official capacity.

Like just then actually. Mordred was glad her parents were getting along well, but it was still disturbing to see her once powerful and austere mother become something akin to a playful kitten when her Papa was involved.

Actually, no, make that scary. It was only made better by how obviously uncomfortable Shirou still was with Morgan’s preference for being near him to the point it was catastrophe-questioningly rare to see her -away- from him.

It was still damn funny, though, seeing the man in all of his great armor and without his helmet looking ready to blush or run away at the first sign of Morgan doing more than just leaning up against him with her head resting against his jaw.
Mordred had long come to associate her beloved Papa with fearlessness, after all. More than that, she also had come to acknowledge that her Mother had been made a better person by his presence.

Oh, she was still the Witch Morgan le Faye, it was true, but Mordred was able to have something resembling an ordinary conversation with her most of the time. In fact, there’d even been points where she’d swear Morgan smiled at her.

It was chilling, as if it was totally wrong, but it was also one of the single greatest things to fill her life. And for that, Mordred would follow her King forever— the one who had taught her to fight, who had taught her what it meant to stand up for someone else---

--- to be strong. Shirou had insisted time and again that she was far stronger than he was, but Mordred never in her life had accepted that idea. Mordred could best him in combat without him relying on Excalibur Morgan or Unlimited Blade Works, it was true, but Shirou had a strength that had absolutely nothing to do with the density of one’s muscles or how quickly they could wield a sword.

He had the strength to be King.

“You’ll not find it as enthusing as you think, Mordred.” The Witch mused, trailing a nail along Shirou’s jawline--

-- making Mordred laugh when his eyes, glimmering golden amber, darted anywhere else in that moment. He was trying to look regal in that seat, since Morgan’s purpose for him to even sit in the thing was to make him accustomed to the role of a tyrant, but . . .

Well- Mordred’s Papa just tended to look uncomfortable. Especially when Morgan was draped all over him. And her Mother was -very- affectionate with her new husband.

I thought the newlywed period only lasted a month or so? Mordred mused. Glad she’d taken up a room further down the hall from her parents. She was a smart child, but there was still some things you didn’t need to know about your mother and (step-)father.

“You’ll have to just let me try!” She grinned, trying to focus back on the conversation. Raising a gauntlet-clad fist, she waggled it back and forth. Family time like this was nice, especially with the threat of war on the horizon.
“We’ll see, SIR Mordred.” Morgan noted with an amused smirk, finally sitting back up straight in the mutual throne and giving Shirou much-needed reprieve since the red-headed man relaxed back against the seat’s back. The red lightning marking his cheeks began to stand back out against his ashen skin. Mordred saw the topic change on his lips before he even spoke---

“What about all the new recruits, and the refugees?” Shirou mused, bringing Excalibur Morgan forward to settle it’s blade against the floor and use it as a rest for his hands. At his side, Morgan trailed her gaze to him in her peripheral view.

Mordred could almost read her mother’s thoughts, too. After all, it took a few months of persuasion to encourage Shirou into actually -using- the people whom had come to their banner for protection from the Picts, monsters---

--- and the King who had become more like a Goddess than a saint without human traits. At first, Shirou had insisted on offering them succor without need for repayment, but Morgan had insisted that not only was it damaging to their own position, it would only end in the same negative feelings that had made them originally flee from Artoria in the first place.

Humans needed meaning, after all. Even she, being born of the Fae, knew that. Most were allowed to keep to simple lives, but many had chosen to swear fealty and become soldiers under the Black Dragon’s banner. Ostensibly, it was Morgan’s faction, but . . .

The Witch knew most had sworn themselves in Shirou’s service. That was fine, since they were married anyway. He was her King, and she his Queen. Mordred’s cheeky little “Does that make me a Princess?” had earned a snort from both, though Morgan knew Shirou had been repressing a laugh at the mental image of the tomboyish girl wearing a gown.

Mordred had pouted for a week after that.

“They’re doing pretty well. Those who can’t handle riding the Wyverns have settled into the barracks. We’ve had a few bad eggs, but a good wallop puts them right.” Mordred’s fang-like teeth were on full display as she crossed her arms. “Our numbers are pretty good at this point. A thousand armsmen, with about five-hundred infantry and the other half split into other roles.”

The blonde bow-woman reached up to nervously rake her fist through her ponytail. “Eh-heh. Though, most of the new laymen have had a hard time acclimating with the guard and the wyverns. We do have half a dozen new magus candidates, though!” That hand extended forward, a thumb upraised while Mordred tried to push past the nervousness of people’s fear of the homunculus guard and the wyverns.
“Six?” Shirou’s eyes turned unto Morgan. The Witch simply rolled her shoulders in a shrug. “Well if you aren’t teaching them, who is?” His gaze turned upon Mordred, who let out a whistle aimed at the door behind her a few yards.

[Fate/Empire of Dirt, Shadowbound]

Within walked a woman clothed in black robes, overlaid with a cloak made of the pelt of some great gray-furred beast. Lengthy wine-purple hair marked her features and was pulled up into a ponytail, and though her eyes were closed as she entered, moved to stand slightly behind Mordred, and then knelt down, he had a strange inkling about her.

For some reason, her entire bearing gave him goosebumps. His chest hurt, but then vanished as if in a breath.

“My King, my Queen.” She noted. Finally, she opened her eyes and he startled in his seat, Morgan giving him a confused look.

They were vivid, unearthly red.

“I thank you for welcoming my countrymen unto your isle. For this, I owe you my gratitude. I greet you under the humble name of Aethach.”

Those eyes . . . I’d recognize them anywhere. Shirou’s mind was racing. In fact, the only thing that wasn’t racing was his body. Almost hauntedly, his gaze turned unto Morgan.

“She comes from Eire, along with the remaining five magi. It seems recently--”

-- “My Queen, if I may?” Morgan’s annoyed face said her feelings on being interrupted, but she settled back quietly in her half of the throne with her chin on her fist. Mordred, just ahead of Aethach, turned her head to the side and covered her laugh with a cough.

The woman stood, and Shirou had to stop himself from rising in turn. Both ingrained politeness and a gut-instinct that this woman reminded him terribly of Lancer was a hard habit to fight. Raising a hand, she continued--

“Recently, the Old Ways have been contemted in our homeland, and so I and my compatriots fled
the island. Most resolved to go to Brittany to the south, but the spirits bade us come here. Of myself and the five who followed me, we obeyed. Knowing that the great Fae Witch Morgan has settled herself here with the Black Dragon, I now know for what reason we were called here.”

She settled her hand against her breast, fingers closed tight in a fist. “We serve the Dragon, and will continue the rule of mankind. This I, descendant of the Queen Scathach, swear by the Primordial Runes.”

Shirou had no clue who Scathach was, besides the teacher of Cu Chulainn, but it certainly explained her bearing. So this Aethach was a descendant? Well, that just spoke to how strong and--

--- he felt sweat roll down his skin at Morgan staring at him with her lips quirked inwards with a pout. “Don’t you dare.” She uttered, and his hands came away from Excalibur Morgan and up to defend himself with a placating motion. More amusingly, he missed how Excalibur Morgan stayed stood upright.

“I wasn’t even doing anything--!?”

Mordred couldn’t hold back her giggles anymore, wrapping her arms around her stomach as she began to laugh herself sick. Aethach, however, could only blink in confusion.
“So you’re all remnants from Ulster.” Shirou had stood, deciding that the only way he was going to keep Morgan from acting -extremely possessive- was to pace and take in the newest arrival. The flowing of his own armor’s skirt against his greave-clad legs mingling with the way Excalibur Morgan was wreathed in shadows at his hip.

Aethach, for all of her stoic bearing, blinked once again. “You are well-learned, though somewhat aged in thought. After all, Ulster collapsed centuries ago. But yes, I am the descendant of Cu Chulainn and Uathach, the student and daughter of Queen Scathach.”

It probably wasn’t helping that in the background, behind Aethach, Mordred was making abnormally goofy faces and waiting until Aethach happened to look back at her to present a more “Knightly” appearance. Morgan, at her spot on the throne, simply seemed to be developing a tic of her brow.

The Knight was truly too much.

Shirou, for all that he was aware of it, was trying desperately to focus on the topic at hand. “Why would you join with us, rather than escape to Brittany where you’ll be safe? I’m sure you know that Britain is about to be drenched in a war. Standing at the side of Morgan now is likely to shorten your lifespan rather than lengthen it.”

“I’m certain that’s why only the few of us came here, despite the rest of our brothers and sisters hearing the call as well.” Aethach remarked, “But, you’ll come to understand that most of us want nothing more than to know the glory of being a warrior- of standing atop the foe in victory.”

The runeshaper raised her hands, settling her hands together in front of her abdomen. “If we die in the service of the Black Dragon, then the only matter is if we were worthy to die there, you know?” The slight tilt of her head was completely against the nature of her austerity. Shirou couldn’t help but find it strangely “against character.”

“Even as a Runecaster, our people have been warriors for ages.”
Shirou paused in his pacing, settling his gauntlet-clad hands at his hips. Trying desperately to ignore the way behind Aethatch was Mordred using the same pose but with her hips cocked much further forward. He was privately thankful that only certain people had ever seen Corbenic’s “true throne room”, otherwise it would be hard to live down the playful mockery.

Besides, he was only getting what he’d earned. Mordred’s gleeful nature was a huge preference from the idea of her being tormented with the weight of that which was heavy on his own shoulders now. Better she be happy and healthy, rather than the alternative.

Even if he knew Morgan was going to yell at her after Aethach wasn’t here to watch the squabble. He wasn’t even going to look at the Witch right now, sure that she was rapidly losing her patience.

Frankly, he was going to have to praise her for being so stately later.

“Then, I hope that you’ll find your worth here, Aethach. In the name of the Pendragon family, I welcome you.” It was so strange to be acting as a formal person, but it was- well- it wasn’t against his senses.

Just strange for him to have to affect the nature of a King. If he’d known this kind of thing would have happened, he’d have done more research about it.

The things you don’t prepare for, are the things you inevitably have to deal with, huh.

“I thank you, My King. If I may impose, I understand that we will be going to war against the spear-wielding King of Britain soon. May I request that I be allowed to prove my worth alongside my brothers and sisters in the first skirmish?”

Ah. That was a wholly new expression, though he was sure no one else would be able to tell the difference. That grin may have seemed miniscule on her face, but Shirou would recognize that glee for combat anywhere. This was definitely Lancer’s descendant.

He also knew it was pointless to try and deny her. “As you wish.” He moved back to the Throne, settling unto it and letting Excalibur Morgan rest in front of his body as a hand rest once again. Morgan glanced meaningfully at him, ignoring how Mordred had begun to look away, mimicking whistling innocently as Aethach turned her gaze back towards the blonde before putting her attention back on the wielder of the Tyrant’s Blade. “Aethach, I charge you as King. On the eve of battle, you and your compatriots will lead the skirmish against the Knights of Arthur.”
The way the Celtic woman’s lips curled up into a full blown smile made him wonder if he was making a mistake. “On one condition.” Her lips narrowed back into a thin line, and he tapped the black blade against the floor.

“If Artoria Pendragon should take the field against you, none of you are to combat her. You are not to send troops to fight her. Only I will fight with the King of Britain.”

It was obvious she was displeased with that, but Shirou didn’t care. He had no interest in sacrificing anyone to Artoria’s strength, and in that same breath, he had no interest in anyone managing to best her that was not him.

Even Morgan and Mordred he would ask to let him handle it, even though he knew neither would obey.

“If that is your will, then we will obey. Does that mean you will be on the frontlines as well, my liege?” Her stance had loosened, her stiff and placating posture had become one of curiosity.

Ah, he was being gauged again. That was more to his own comfort level. His lips curled up into a grin.

“A proper King should lead from the front, don’t you think? We’ve always thought that same way.” He didn’t bother to explain whom “We” entailed. Morgan’s eyes narrowed, while Mordred grinned and threw another thumbs up from behind the runecaster.

“Then, when will we go to war, my King?”

His gaze turned onto Morgan, whom rolled her eyes with a sigh. “With my sister being on the front lines against the Picts, it will be prudent to announce ourselves before she has time to recuperate and return south to Camelot. The riders and vanguard have already left, so Shirou and Mordred will be leaving to take Wales by tomorrow morning with the bulk of the forces. I will remain with Corbenic and the guard.”

And the expression on the Witch’s face said she hated that idea with all of her soul, but Shirou had only gotten her to agree to it on the precaution that both of them would return immediately should things turn sour. She knew they wouldn’t, but . . .
No longer could she know the future. The benefit was that Artoria did not have Merlin to guide her, and he likely would have been in just as much disarray, but it was a fact Morgan was not used to.

Everything was new. There was no shadow war to be waged, unlike with her plan with Mordred. Now, it was open warfare between Artoria and the Knights of the Round, and the Black Dragon faction, composed of those who had fallen out of favor with the strict rule of the King- and those else whom had come forth to support them from the shadows over the “Lion King”.

As Morgan’s green eyes opened, she smirked. “If I know my sister, you’ll get your wish quickly, Shirou.” Her gaze turned onto the redhead seated beside her. His gaze turned half unto her, before he rolled his shoulders and stood again. Aethach and Mordred both knelt down, both showing joy and glee as he raised the blade cloaked in shadows and held it aloft, pointed towards the horizon beyond the castle’s walls.

“Let’s make this the last great war of Britain!” He yelled, putting all of that effort into learning to be a King in his words, “For the future!”
Chapter Summary

You're welcome.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Fate/Black Dawn

AN: You’re welcome.

[Normal End: Chaldean Antics 2]

“WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS?” It was amazing to see, Mordred standing staring at Mordred. One wearing full armor and hefting Clarent onto a shoulder while the other wore less armor and had a bow to go along with her sword. “When the fuck did this happen??”

The Last Master of Humanity slowly covered her face, already feeling a headache coming on.

“Wow, you’re even more ornery than I am! You really need to spend more time with Papa.”

“OH THAT’S FUCKING IT--” The resulting fight completely demolished that section of hallways.

Strangely, though, both Mordreds were seen being scolded by Ruler not even an hour later.

x+x+x+x+x+x+x+x+x

Within Chaldea’s lunchroom, a similar stand-off was occuring. At one end, a tanned man with white hair draped in red, his weapons at the ready.

At the other, a red-haired man with pale, red-streaked skin and wearing a crisp suit sans the blazer
in burgundy and black, his own implements of war at hand.

Sitting at a table, countless women bearing the same faces all held up empty plates. “More-!”

The war began again. Steaks, fish, chicken- all of it was served with precision and decorated like a King’s very life was on the line.

Because it was.

“So this is the power of a husband . . !” Saber Lily remarked, amazed as she jumped between dishes prepared by Ruler and those indulgently plated by Archer.

“How about a Tyrant who Cooks Utopia!” Morgan laughed, pausing just long enough to raise her own plate. “Husband! More!”

“I do not know who you are.” The Blackened Shirou remarked, carefully plating the Witch’s next meal and then promptly going right back on the assault with fried chicken for Saber Alter, who mauled her meals mercilessly. “But I will not lose to you.”

What the fuck. Archer thought, even as his own self-hating drive made his body tap into reserves beyond his normal skills.

Morgan sat comfortably in her chair in Chaldea’s library, ignoring the noise of Shikibu dropping another massive stack of books.

“Awawawawawa---!”

Yes. Even with the clutzy, but otherwise enjoyable, woman about, this was the quietest place in all of Chaldea that wasn’t the Pendragon Family’s own room. . .

. . . When she wasn’t surrounded on all sides by Knights staring intensely at her. Gawain, Lancelot
(in his Saber guise), Artoria in her Saber form, and Bedivere all doing a very bad job of lurking near her. Finally, with an annoyed huff, she closed her book (a particularly risque erotic novel that had given her ideas) and started to get up.

The fact that everyone surrounding her started to shift in turn only further enraged the Witch.

“WOULD YOU ALL FUCK OFF?!?!?”

She promptly blinked when all of them, save Artoria, vanished in the blink of an eye.

Artoria simply blinked and looked around, noting the retreat of the other knights. “Oh, you bloody cowards--”

“Please be quiet in the Library!” Both sisters glanced over at Shikibu, the goth-attired woman glowering with a prodigious amount of mana distorting the air around her.

Both Pendragon sisters promptly retreated from the library.

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“Mash, have you seen Merlin? I was going to go farm Embers today and bring him along to help, but I haven’t seen him at all.”

Mash blinked, trying to remember if she had seen the white-haired man--

“PLEASE DON’T PUT ME BACK IN THE BOX---!”

“Was that him, senpai?”

“You know what, I’ll just go ask Penthesilea.”
“So, let me get this straight.” Saber Mordred— as he’d come to refer to the one that wasn’t his actual step-child— held up her hands clasped together with her fingers pointing towards him. “Instead of having me commit the rebellion against my Father, you and my Mother fell in love, you basically adopted me, and you staged a war against Father so you could try to convince her to abandon Camelot in favor of living an extremely long life— because you love her.”

Arms crossed, he blinked his glimmering golden eyes. “That’s the basics, yes.”

“And you taught Your Me how to use a bow, and basically gorged her on sweets, good food, and paternal affection.”

“You could say that, yes.”

He promptly blinked in confusion as the armor-adorned Mordred walked off, yelling, “THIS IS BULLSHIT.”

“Oh! Sherou, you became a Demi-Servant too?” He blinked, utterly confused at the sight of the blonde haired and blue-garbed woman who approached him.

And then promptly blushed sixteen different shades of red (not including the corruptive marks that decorated his bod) at the sight of her . . . liberal outfit.

“Aghguh—” He noted, completely losing his austere presence as a result.

“Oh! And you’re a Ruler too! This surely means we’re destined to be together!”

Before Shirou could even muster a proper response, he was dragged violently into the shadows while Morgan popped free just long enough to flip Astraea the double-birds. “Stay away from my husband, you slut!”
Chapter End Notes

For fun, and so you people can mock me for actually putting time into this:

Fate/Black Dawn
Goofy Stuff
Servant Sheets

True Name: Pendragon, Shirou (nee-Emiya)
AKA: The Black Dragon, Tyrant who Destroys Utopia
Class: Ruler
Type: Anti-Heroic Spirit
Gender: Male
Source: Arthurian Legend
Region: Britain, England / Japan
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Attribute: Earth
Traits: Brynhildr’s Beloved, Humanoid, Male, Servant, Weak to Enuma Elish

Stats:
STR C AGI D Luck EX END A Mana D NP EX

Active Skills:
Protection from the End of the World B
Projection Magecraft B (-> Blessings of the Witch EX)
Charisma D (-> Alluring Nightingale EX)

Passive Skills:
Magic Resistance C
Item Creation (False) EX

Noble Phantasms:
Excalibur Morgan: Black Sword that Kills Utopia (Anti-Fortress) A
Unlimited Blade Works: Infinite Creation of Avalon (?Anti-Unit?) E-EX
Avalon Alternative: The Distance To Utopia (Anti-Self) A++

True Name: Mordred Pendragon
AKA: Knight of Rebellion, Archer-dred
Class: Archer
Type: Anti-Heroic Spirit
Gender: Female
Source: Arthurian Legend
Region: Britain, England
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Attribute: Earth
Traits: Saberface, Dragon, Female, Humanoid, Riding, Servant, Weak to Enuma Elish
Stats:
STR B+ AGI A Luck C END A Mana B NP A+

Active Skills:
Mana Burst A
Instinct B
Knightslayer A++ (Ignores own class card disadvantage 3 times)

Passive Skills:
Magic Resistance B
Riding A
Independent Action C

Noble Phantasms:
The Witchwood Bow: Destroyer of Paradise (Anti-Fortress) B
Clarent: Withheld Promise of the Future King (Anti-Army) B

True Name: Morgan Pendragon
AKA: Witch of the Black Lake, Witch Queen of Corbenic
Class: Caster
Type: Anti-Heroic Spirit
Gender: Female
Source: Arthurian Legend
Region: Britain, England
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Attribute: Earth
Traits: Saberface, Dragon, Female, Humanoid, Servant, Weak to Enuma Elish

Stats:
STR E AGI C Luck C END D Mana A++ NP A+

Active Skills:
Hero Creation A
High Speed Incantation B
Witchcraft A (→ Witch of the Lake EX)

Passive Skills:
Territory Creation A
Item Creation EX
Independent Action C

Noble Phantasms:
Corbenic: Enchanted Castle of Witches (Anti-Army) C
Chapter Summary

Yeah, I'm doing it out of order. But I had the interest in writing this first. We'll pick up the story with the war within the next day.

Fate/Black Dawn

[True Ending]

Coffee

London, England; 2005

She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Sitting by herself in a small cafe in the city's lower east side.

"Can I join you?" His hand drifted across the back of the chair opposite her. She looked up from her iced drink and smirked around the straw.

"I'm married, you know." Despite himself, he laughed.

"A woman as beautiful as you? It'd be a shame if you weren't."

"Flattery will get you nowhere, you know." She trilled the straw inside of her drink. Admiring the way his suit and the coat over it emphasized his strong build and the youthful yet mature appearance he displayed.

She liked the colors, too.

[New Dawn]
"Ugh. Are you two flirting again?"

Shirou's eyes, gleaming golden amber, looked up from the table to look amused at his child. Mordred with two drinks held in a hand each, wearing a red leather jacket and an outfit that looked more like something a biker tough would wear than a former "Princess of England."

She offered him one, a coffee rich in vanilla flavoring, and stole a chair from a nearby table to seat herself at the same table. Morgan, for her part, simply worked on finishing her over-sweetened mess of a beverage.

She was truly the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, though. Her hair draped across her shoulders, that peacoat that covered a sweater and slacks, down to the heels she wore.

His lips split in a smile. His gaze turned to Mordred, and the girl stuck her tongue out at him— the pink muscle tainted with marshmallow white.

He felt like he was the only one actually drinking coffee that day.

Raising his cup, he noted, "Welcome home, My Queen—my Princess."

Snorting, Morgan let her gaze go towards the horizon. Their magics had faded long ago, but that didn't mean much in the sway of things. Shirou still chased after Artoria—HIS Artoria— in Avalon, but he loved her and stayed with her.

One day, they'd get tired of this long Fae life. They'd die together and go to Avalon, where she'd likely have to fight with Artoria over his affections—

---But, they'd been going strong fifteen centuries.

What was a few more?

"It's nice to be home, My King."
Nearby, a mousy young silver-haired woman looked amazed. Seeing someone whom she looked just like.

"Teacher?"

"Unh?"

"That woman. . ."

"Don't bother people when they're enjoying their morning coffee, Gray."

"But--" Her gaze turned back towards the three, noting they were gone. Frowning, she turned her gaze back unto her mentor and simply dismissed it as a trick of her own mind.

~FIN~
Rebellion, PT4

Fate/Black Dawn

True to form, the next morning was when the King and the Knight set out for Wales across the channel. With Aethach and her fellow Druids, Shirou wasn't sure what the future held--

-- but he knew that regardless he would have to face down Artoria one last time. And this time it wouldn't be as simple as a duel.

It was war. A King versus a King. The Knights would interfere, for the few that remained anyway. He had his own tricks still, it was true--

-- but it was a scary prospect. Morgan wasn't around to save him. He and Mordred would have to make it on their own this time.

Mordred's presence already meant he'd have to fight that much harder. His golden eyes narrowed.

Let them come, then.

+x+x+

The vanguard had already established a base in Wales via a castle barely defended when they'd arrived. Shirou would have felt sorry for the people there before, sure that most of the militia and knights had marched north with Artoria days before the wyvern-riders had even arrived.

But, he couldn't find it in him. Instead, he hoped they went to their Heaven as worthy.

The next step was to wait for the return of the scouts. The worrisome part had begun.

If they couldn't drag Artoria and her forces to them, or attack them on the return, it would complicate matters.
His gaze turned quietly unto a flock of wyverns being carefully taught to heft powderkeg barrels. Letting out a soft sigh, he mused.

"I suppose we're on the last leg of it."

From beside him, a soft voice rose, "My King?" His attention turned onto Aethach, the Celtic woman raising a brow at his muttering.

"Sorry. This is a big moment. Hopefully the last one, too. I couldn't imagine a situation like this."

His gaze shifted from the Druid, looking around for Mordred. Knowing her, she was probably hid away somewhere stealing a treat before the festivities began.

If only he knew. "This means a lot to you, does it not?" His gaze, glimmering gold, settled on the purple-haired woman once again.

"Enough that I'm fighting one of the women I love. Potentially for the last time." He agreed.

Aethach's lips slipped upwards a bit in a smile. It was more amused that conciliatory, but he found it much more emotional than he'd thought the stoic woman to be. "What will you do if you have to kill her?"

Quietly, Shirou tried to stop the way his heart threatened to burst. It only worked, partially.

"Hope she'll forgive me in the next life, I guess."

"It's a good sign that you've made peace with that idea. Battle is a contest that can always end in death." The robed woman held up a hand, idly drawing a rune in the air. "If I may, why is it that you stay by Morgan le Faye's side? Is it not the Lion King yourself you devoted yourself to?"

Ah. Some kind of ward, was it?
"To tell you the truth," Shirou began, settling his hands upon the hilt of Excalibur Morgan while his gaze settled over the battlements. "It seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

Aethach's confused expression amused him. It was far too adorable for a woman who was likely actually older than him- even including his life span back in the modern age. "For a tyrannous king, you are a strangely altruistic soul."

He couldn't help but grin at her in turn. "You have no idea." Even he was self-aware enough to find amusement in that thought. Him, a man who dedicated himself to the ideal of becoming a Hero of Justice, becoming the evil tyrant who sought to end the prominence of Camelot in a bloody, horrible rebellion.

Perhaps that was why he'd taken so well to Morgan. Or perhaps it was just the result of twenty years without anything but the miserable struggle to find meaning to life without her.

Even now, he just wanted to tell her he loved her. But this wasn't his Artoria. In fact, he'd ruined any chance that this Artoria had a future.

As worried as it made him, Shirou only had one option at this point. Hope that he could smack some sense into her before he had to play the part he'd taken over.

Before his hands would be stained with her blood.

“News, my Liege! The King of Britain’s armies have rerouted and are heading this way! They should be within eyesight by tomorrow afternoon!”

Closing his eyes, he hoped that what he was about to do wouldn’t kill him on the inside. “It looks like we’re going to fight together one last time, Saber.” He murmured, “I don’t know who I should pray to anymore, but please- please just let this go well.”

His attention turned onto Aethach, “Set up the Queen’s fields with your men, then get some rest. You’ll get what you came for here.”

As she bowed her head and went to do as he had said, he turned his gaze back unto the horizon and hefted up Excalibur Morgan until it was level with his eye-line. “I have come from across the sea of time…” He murmured, the beginning of the aria for the Reality Marble that had been awoken in
him by the return of Avalon- or more specifically, Avalon Alternative being put in his hands.

He remembered one of his lessons from Rin, the nature of self-hypnotizing that followed with some spells. Those words he’d spoken had been from the depths of his heart, a display of the one ray of light that still existed inside of a storm inside of him.

A world perfect for feeding the blade in his hands. The one weapon that was rightfully his, by virtue of Morgan giving it to him in a gesture as symbolic as the rings she’d exchanged with him.

The mark that he could no longer be Emiya, Shirou. That he was an Anti-Hero as recognized by the nature of the World. The sword of the tyrant was no longer a tool he could deny.

If anyone else had remained to see him, they would have noticed the intensifying glow of the red lightning-patterns on his skin.

Wherever you are, Saber. I hope you will still love me after what I’ve done.

He lowered the sword again as he turned from the ramparts to go find Mordred. He would need her help when the battle came. As loathe as he was to ask it of her, he’d have to ask her to kill again.

But, at least she would not slay her birth father, or be slain by her in turn. If someone has to die. Let it be me.
Rebellion, PT5

Fate/Black Dawn

Britain

“Hey, Papa. You sure about this?” Mordred’s gaze remained fixed on the army beyond the castle’s walls, but she could feel the slowly rising pressure of her “King’s” presence. She knew explicitly why, but it was still amazing to be beside him now when he had such a serious expression on his face.

There was only one point in the horizon that he could be staring at, after all. Standing out from the rest, ignoring the sight of two or three other Knights just slightly behind her--

-- a point of light, rising up towards the sky and parting the clouds. A woman astride a white horse wearing resplendent armor and a helmet that resembled a lion’s head, she was staring ahead at the gathering darkness that was her Papa’s own rising “fighting spirit”.

It was his magical energy, but Mordred thought it sounded cooler that way. After all, it was a lot less impressive for him to be putting out all of that intensity just because of focusing on drawing out power from Avalon Alternative. She liked flashy things, after all.

The loud clang of Excalibur Morgan crashing against the ramparts gave her a decent answer, but his voice lilted into her ears regardless- even through the muffling of his own wyrm-shaped helmet. “No choice now. I’m not one to take half-measures, you know that, Mordred.”

The blonde grinned, “That’s my Papa.” Her gaze turned unto him.

Standing, once again with both of his hands upon the hilt of Excalibur Morgan while from both the sword and him poured forth tendrils of shadow and magical energy. A year’s worth of stored power and the energy being drawn from Britain itself by Morgan’s conscription of the isle’s ley lines through the circles that had been set up with Aethach and her fellow Druids’ help.

In Mordred’s eyes, Shirou was everything and more of what people believed him to be. And that faith was being rewarded right now, as she turned away from the imposing sight and let her gaze settle unto the army without the walls. Hefting her bow into her left arm, she used her right to
crook over her mouth.

“FOR THE BLACK DRAGON!”

The world ended again- but this time in a flurry of motion and screams rather than exploding magical power.

+x+x+x+

It was chaos. Unfiltered, uncontrolled- beyond the senses of humans. He stepped forth as two knights charged at him--

The sword sang as it crushed through their armor and the Reinforcement of his body made the plate like nothing more than bare flesh as both were struck in the same swing.

His eyes remained firm on the growing horizon, the sight of the Lion King upon her horse and awaiting. Even as some of her cavalry split off and cried out for war as they rode towards him.

The blackened Excalibur came up in his hand--

-- but they were flung from their saddles by red spears that pierced through them and left them in heaps of bloody flesh. Aethach. They were not true replicas of Gae Bolg, but they were still extraordinary constructs of magical energy.

He didn’t look back at the Druids and their Mistress.

Another detachment of infantry tried to impede him. His steps remained sure--

-- one came close to die by his hand rather than the two spear-like arrows that knocked them to the ground. The man unfortunate enough to be batted aside by the shadow-engulfed blade sent flying hard enough to knock another man from his horse as archers and knights alike tried to shoot down men and women riding scaled beasts of war.
He heard the hooting and hollering of the Knight. She’d conscripted one of the Wyverns, he already knew it. That explained her absence the day before.

He’d yell at her later. Right now, he had a much bigger focus---

--- white and blue broke off from the King’s circle, above the mounted man’s head shone a sword of silver and gold up above his head.

Ah. Today is the day for you, is it, Lancelot? Shirou thought to himself, wondering if the slowly building boil of his blood was because he had been anticipating this for so long--

-- or because he hoped the man would offer him a challenge.

Excalibur Morgan raised in return, and his steps finally stopped. His stance shifted and both of his hands grasped unto the handle of the tyrant’s blade.

Before, he would have been scared. But today, he had too much at stake. Shirou no longer needed to hold back.

He would either win, or he would do his duty and die together with her here.

[Fate/Zero, Dogfight]

“Surrender--”

He heard the words, but he drowned them out. Igniting the blade to its absolute zenith, he brought the blackened thing outwards and across, screaming with all of the air in his chest.

His answer seemed to be sufficient, since the great wave of black and red crashed against a wave of blue light and steadily broke through as he began his laborious walk towards her again.

The helmet had been knocked from the man’s head, and it seemed he’d dismounted the Knight of the Lake since the next attack came from a leap.
His sword came up--

Lancelot crushed Arondight against Excalibur Morgan, and brought his full fury into the helm-splitter that would have killed him. Shirou knocked the strike wide--

The Fae sword came forth from the expert man’s hands, and Shirou’s gauntleted fist crashed into the long-haired man’s arm in return.

Another swing, met by another. The roiling magical energy inside of him filling his reserves just as fast as he depleted them.

If he was not cheating like this, Lancelot would be more than a match for him. Shirou was not the invincible knight chosen by the Lady of the Lake-

But he was the tyrant who would kill in the name of Morgan le Faye. Lancelot was, just like Berserker had been at one point, just another obstacle.

So fast he felt his biceps rip and repair just as fast thanks to Avalon Alternative, he brought both hands unto Excalibur Morgan’s hilt--

--- and followed through.

Rather than bisected like anyone else might have been, the Knight of the Lake was flung back tens of yards and barely caught himself in time before he was knocked end over end.

The black blade came up again, pointed at the man as Shirou watched Lancelot gather his breath. “You have a woman to go home to,” His voice felt alien to him in that moment, even though he knew it was necessary, “Take yourself from my sight and live.”

It was the best he could do. He knew it wouldn’t be enough, but Shirou wouldn’t be himself if he didn’t try, even a little bit.

Which was why he didn’t bother waiting for a response, raising Excalibur Morgan again--
-- as Lancelot brought himself back up fully to his feet and prepared to charge--

“EXCALIBUR MORGAN!”

Right into the coming darkness that exploded forth from the blackened blade, allowing Shirou the mercy of a few seconds of feeling human before he felt his body overflow once again. Use of an egregious amount of his power was the only thing keeping him together just then, what wasn’t being used was being poured into Avalon Alternative in order to keep his body from breaking down with each time he pushed himself beyond human limits.

It was a pain he knew well. He’d been killed- or nearly- too many times to not know the feeling. While he was advancing so slowly because he knew it would affect the morale of the surrounding enemy troops-

It was also so that he wouldn’t break down.

“Did that manage to kill you, Lancelot du Lac?” His words ushered forth, beginning his slow and steady advance along the crater that the Tyrant’s blade created in the earth heading towards the great pillar of light that was being emitted from Artoria’s lance.

The scream that answered him was a worthy one. One he felt he could have uttered once in his life. He saw it in his mind’s eye before it arrived, the man spiralling towards him- armor in tatters and with the enchanted blade screaming for his head once again.

Ah, so they understood the nature of Avalon well. Artoria was wise--

Sword rebounded against sword.

The crash of blades sounding like a song to his soul, to his body. To the very essence of who had once been Emiya, Shirou.

The deep, unyielding draw of adrenaline flooding his system as he stood toe to toe with the greatest warrior of his age.
He could only feel bad that this was a fight Lancelot could not win. One he might survive, but win?

Not when his opponent was Emiya, Shirou. And the woman behind him was Artoria Pendragon.

Even if she was not the same Artoria Pendragon.

Obstacles will be removed.

He took more than a step as he pushed first Arondight from clashing blades--

-- and then his shoulder plate crushed against Lancelot’s chestplate.

Roaring with the mingling pain of overstressing his “human” muscles and screaming a cry for victory--

Lancelot brought his blade around---

And silence reigned in Shirou’s ears as that familiar motion passed through him as easily as if he was born to do it.

The mental image of Artoria bringing Excalibur through flooded within him, just the same as in the days of the War.

And the Knight of the Lake was sent flying at the end of the rut that’d been worn into the earth from Excalibur Morgan’s lowered attack.

She may not have been visibly present, but Morgan was here, at his side. Flooding him with magical energy that would have otherwise torn him apart.

The knight staggered up--
Shirou brought his blade up to guard. The blades of wind caressing the black blade and circumventing to crash into his armor as his voice filled the void. The vortex projectiles making the sound more urgent than he meant it to be.

“Mordred!”

x+x+x+x

[Fate/Grand Order Arcade, Fatal Battle]

Only two knights had been allowed to ride out with Artoria to the front lines. While almost all had insisted on going, she had permitted only them. Tristan watched as Lancelot was batted aside, a deep and unrelenting fear settling in his gut as he raised Failnaught.

A sorrowful little pluck joined the aria of combat. The shout after it only amplified by the nature of the weapon-

He began to stir his horse with his spurs---

And was thrown from the saddle as a bolt like lightning pierced the sky and filled the air around him with dirt and debris, knocking into his mount’s head and sending the beast panicking. The shattered earth blossoming upwards again--

An Archer’s duel. His eyes gazed upwards at the blonde woman astride the scaled beast.

“I’m gonna pay you back for hurting Papa before, pretty boy! This one’s from Mom, though!”

-- projectiles began to fill the air.

x+x+x+x

“Send them all to me, Artoria!” Shirou yelled, batting aside another set of swipes from the ragged Lancelot. He’d taken a hit or two himself, but with Tristan being forced out of the picture, he felt more comfortable with the battle.
Lancelot and Gawain he could deal with, but he had no defense against the archer from range.

Excalibur Morgan came forward again, a stab aimed to split open the remnants of Lancelot’s breast---

Knocked askew by a gleaming golden light.

He laughed as the blonde man joined in the attack. Where Lancelot was a warrior without peer, Gawain was a graceful creature. The sun still shone, but it was drowned out by the great gulf of shadows being created from within himself and the fields laid in wait for this moment-

Why should he let them have the fight at their strongest? Saber had taught him that much, as well-even if she loathed the idea of a fight when both opponents were mismatched.

He contented himself with the idea that two on one made it more interesting.

“I will send them back to you in tatters--!” He raised the blade---

“STOP!”

His gaze moved from the two Knights to the voice, the sight of her astride her horse and throwing her helmet away-

She was beautiful. She was not his Saber, but it was still Artoria Pendragon.

x+x+x+x

A certain unenviable quiet filled the air as Tristan nursed a wounded arm. He could still shoot, but Failnaught had a very simple weakness to it.

The redheaded man himself. A man who had sullied himself and marred his own glory. And now
his arm was caked in blood and he worried that the simple strings of his bow would soon become too slippery to grasp.

Even as the King broke off, he could not follow.

It was a bitter, romantic irony.

Next Chapter
Mighty Wind
Her gaze, now glowing with motes of gold, meets his. The year has changed her.

From astride her horse, the Lion King canters closer to the man standing all on his own while Gawain supports Lancelot nearby. Even though she should confirm the health of her men--

--- her eyes see only him. His free hand reaches up and presses two fingers to the neck of his armor, causing that helmet that declares his very existence to hide away in the structure of his breastplate.

What she sees brings her pause, even Gawain stumbles in shock in his effort to keep Lancelot on his own two feet.

His skin has paled, glowing against the ashen skin that had once been strongly tanned are nets of red lightning-like marks that glow with all the intensity of his magical energy. The eyes that had gazed at her in sadness and determination before have become golden pools of conviction.

He has stopped being just a human, just a man. She is staring at the dark shadow of her former self.

The Lion King feels sorrow. She has not yet become a Divine Spirit, but her sense of humanity has muted. Even she, however, is aware of the fact what they are about to say has been destiny since he arrived.

"Shirou."

"Artoria."

She lowered herself from Dun Stallion's back, the lance at her side as her own booted heels tread
upon the dirt and grass.

The chaos of war surrounded them, but in the midst was the serenity of the eye of the storm. The clashing of his own dark aura with the light emitting from Rhongomyniad.

"Please, stop this." She pleaded, lips quirked in a pained grimace.

"You know I cannot." His voice was pleasant to her ears, and worse, made her heart flood with warmth from the way he stared at her as if she was the only thing that mattered in the world.

She knew that was exactly why he would not stop. No matter who stood before him, or who said it would be impossible.

To Shirou, as long as she was on the far end of that path, he would walk it. Morgan had made that abundantly clear to her.

She was not his beloved, even though she could easily see why she would have fallen in love with him otherwise. He was a strong, just man, who would never shirk from the consequences of his actions.

The problem now was that what he wanted was not what she wanted. She had been raised since birth for this.

And even if she knew how it all would end, she could not abandon the people who relied on her. Even as those who left her in the name of her own growing inhumanity, she could only hold her head up high.

"You said you loved me." She murmured, raising Rhongomyniad into her arms.

"More than even your sister." Shirou noted, Excalibur Morgan at the ready.

"Then don't make me do this."
"I have come from across the sea of time."

It was a bluff at best. Using his reality marble now would disconnect him from the circles powering him via Morgan. Nonetheless--

She launched at him, the crystalline spear at the ready. The lance was certainly more threatening than Excalibur was, but it was a weapon without complexity in attack.

She watched as he vanished from her sight, her instincts screaming--

She brought the lance up vertically and swung it like a battering ram rather than the pointed weapon it was. Excalibur Morgan clashed with the immense length of the weapon and wild bursts of mana- his and her own- sparked off into the air.

His gauntlet-clad fist came forward, lashing out with the talon-like growths decorating the knuckles of his gauntlets.

Her free hand braced against Rhongomyniad as she moved it in the course of his attack. His strength matching her own until she positioned the lance and stabbed forth with the point--

-- a wreath of shadows erupted from the blade of the black sword and she grit her teeth as her follow-through was left averted.

"My King--!"

Her gaze was stolen by Gawain's shout--

And then pain blossomed from her gut as she tumbled end-over-end, occasionally able to witness as the Knight flung himself at the red-haired tyrant with a war cry--

"No, you don't--!"
It was a familiar, dark sensation. The sound of a bowstring being plucked. But this time, Artoria got her feet on the ground--

-- splach

That sound chilled her to the bone. Even as she had started to embrace divinity, it was a noise that had haunted her for a week after the failed duel.

But this time, it was not Shirou she was afraid for. As her gaze shifted from the man cloaked in shadows, she saw the arrow- as big as a spear- sticking out of the blonde man's chestplate, the sight of sizzling flesh speaking to the force of which that projectile had been shot.

Gawain was thrown aside, a bat of the black blade all that was offered to the man who dared to stand between the two. Callous, without remorse, Shirou’s eyes remained on her, gleaming and glowing in stark contrast from the dark magic that swirled out of his very being.

She didn’t even know if the knight was alive, part of her wanted to rush to his side and see--

--but the look in the red-haired man’s eyes said he wouldn’t allow it.

Her gaze rose to the sky, spying the red-clad woman upon the back of a wyvern with her bow primed and ready for another shot, her finger pointed downwards at the earth below.

Mordred. She grit her teeth. Bringing the Tower at the End of the World up, she braced it-

And felt a sudden, explosive pain bloom into existence. Her armor-clad body flung from one spot with a force beyond comprehension.

She was pretty sure her jaw would have broken if she weren’t more sturdy. Instead, it just felt like she’d had her face run over by a horse.

Her eyes, gleaming gold and deep with rage, turned onto him. His outstretched fist opening until he
held two fingers out. “Don’t be mad at her. You’re fighting with me right now.”

Against her will, she slammed a fist into the dirt and charged up from her kneeling position towards him.

If he would not let her go to the aid of her Knights, she would indulge him.

“Rhongo-”

Schluurk---

Her leg gave out from under her, the sight of a blade sticking forth from the meat of her thigh--

-- The pain was unbearable. So many parts of her were hurting, and she could feel her blood pumping out onto her skin. She’d been pushing herself, using Mana Burst and her own prodigious strength and speed as much as possible--

-- but he was inhuman in that moment. So like Vortigern that she was scared she couldn’t win. Vortigern had been a lone enemy, one that had taken both she and Gawain at her greatest to defeat.

She did not have Excalibur, having forsaken it when it became obvious that she was no longer worthy of carrying the blade.

All of these things felt like mistakes in that moment, as her eyes went from her new wound, the blade dissipating back into the ether and letting forth a gout of red blood.

Above her, he stood, a hand outstretched as if offering to help her stand. “You taught me better than that.” He remarked, as if the very words themselves ought to encourage her. That he hadn’t been meeting her expectations and surpassing them from the beginning.

He knew her too well. In fact, it felt as if he was being protected FROM her, of all things. Then again, it wasn’t an unreasonable thought.

Emotions flooded her, and she screamed--
-- the lance came thrusting upwards--

-- his eyes stayed on her's--

-- blood filled the air.
Memories of her flooded him. Of eating peacefully with her at morning, of her smile. They stood out so prominently that for a moment, Shirou forgot where he was. The pain was nothing new- in fact, just being pumped full of so much mana he was fit to burst was much worse- but Rhongomyniad piercing into his chest was a discomfort he could easily describe.

It was just like when he’d been pierced with Gae Bolg. Though, of course, the Tower at the End of the World did not have the killing curse the red spear did. He thought of her--

-- even while his arms brought up the black blade.

The look of new, primal fear in her eyes--

-- as the blade split the sky in a roaring tempest of fuming black and careened down to the earth.

They would say that the Black Dragon died that day. Witnessed by the wounded Lancelot, and hundreds of the surviving men. In return, they had lost King Arthur, Sir Tristan, and Sir Gawain. The rebellion had been a success, Britain was thrown into a violent disarray with no true heir to take up the throne after Arthur.

Crushed beneath a great evil brought forth by Morgan le Faye, the land becomes split into many kingdoms once again. It will be a great many years before the British Empire rises, and in the interim, it will be a land ruled by strife.

In the shadows of that chaos, a young woman with blonde hair and wearing rich red sits upon a
castle wall, chewing contentedly on bread baked with raspberries within.

She is the Knightslayer, Mordred. The child of King Arthur and Morgan Pendragon, siblings and an illicit child. From the tower on the wall comes forth a woman with purple hair, the black-robed woman noting the homunculus’ lackadaisy mood.

“Your Highness,” Aethach noted, “Your mother wishes to see you.”

The blonde turned her gaze unto the Druidess, palming the bread and swallowing it with a reverie. “Ffufmgu-”

“Please don’t speak with your mouth full.” The purple-haired woman scolded.

The blonde rolled her green eyes, swallowing the treat, “Fine, fine. I’m coming.” Slipping from her position atop the wall, she announced her steps with the soft clink of her boots against the stone. As the Celtic woman turned and settled her hands in front of her abdomen and started her path back down the tower’s stairs, Mordred wiggled her middle fingers at the woman’s back.

“Just because I am not looking at you, does not mean I don’t know what you are doing, Your Highness.”

“Pgffta-!?”

+x+x+x+

As they walked the grounds of the castle, Mordred swept her cloak in tighter around herself. The coming of winter’s chill had been abrupt, inhospitable even. Compared to the days before, the castle seemed so much more lively than it had when she was so much smaller. It was still empty without compare, it was true, but it was a place full of memories.

Aethach’s booted feet stopped in front of a door resplendent in carved reliefs of dragons preparing to open the door. Mordred grinned at the woman, whom seemed as stoic as ever, as she opened the iron-enforced doors with the wave of a hand. “Show off.” The blonde noted, full of good spirits.
Nonetheless, she stepped into the throne room beyond. A repurposed room that had been once a place where she’d been kept forever away from her mother’s sight.

Within, gleaming in light, her mother sat. The woman adorned in a gown of deep blue fitted with a black fur ruff. At her side, an empty chair kept her company.

“What’s going on, Mom?” Her grin melted a bit.

The older blonde looked up from a sheaf of parchments in her hands, glimmering green eyes noting in her child’s appearance- including the remnants of some crumbs by her lips. “You were sneaking snacks again.” Morgan remarked, furling the pieces of paper back into a roll as she worked up unto her feet.

“God damnit.” The archer muttered, brushing her chin with a red sleeve.

Morgan’s wry look only served to further embarrass the red-wearing woman, especially as Aethach stepped within and bowed at the waist. “Your Majesty.” The blonde waved off the Druid’s pleasantries.

“ANYWAY-” Mordred interrupted, throwing up an arm and pointing at her mother. “- what were you wanting me for? You don’t have to sic the nanny on me every time you want to bust me for stealing the snacks from the kitchens!”

Both blondes purposefully ignored the purple-haired woman’s raised brow at the term.

“It’s about time we departed, don’t you think?” Morgan finally began, glancing back at the empty thrones and then turning her gaze once again unto her child. Mordred crossed her arms in response.

“I guess. Where are we going? Brittany? France?”

Morgan’s idle musing irritated the headstrong young woman, making her foot begin to tap against the floor as it took a minute for the Witch to answer.

“I was thinking East, actually.”
Mordred blinked. “Eh? To Rome?”

Morgan’s smile only grew. “Oh no. Much more East.”

Aethach, behind Mordred, raised a brow. “You’ll traverse the world?”

The witch nodded in return, the blonde woman unfurling the parchments she’d been holding again. “There’s a certain place that we’ll be staying for awhile, I think.”

Mordred squinted at the papers, while Aethach simply shook her head.

With a breath, the purple-haired woman noted, “And what of Britain?” Morgan’s scoff in return answered her enough.

“This place has been boring since my birth. It’s a Witch’s prerogative to choose a new lair, don’t you think?”

The purple-haired woman tapped her fingers together, “Abandoning the world of war is not to my tastes…”

Morgan shook her head, waving a dismissive hand. “That’s fine. You’ve played your part well, so feel free to find your worth elsewhere.”

Mordred panicked, grasping out for the taller woman and holding her—perfectly burying her face in the Celtic woman’s bust. “But, who will protect me from you?”

Aethach’s unamused expression was honestly quite funny. Even to Morgan, who had to hide a slight grin behind a sleeve.

“You’re too much like your father.”
Mordred stuck her tongue out. “That’s a compliment.”

+xxxx+ Many Years Later . . . +xxxxxx+

The turn of the century had passed. Humankind forgot about magic, about beasts beyond the pale. Science and technology advanced. Indeed, as he walked up off of the street, he let his eyes peer around—when they stopped.

She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Sitting by herself in a small cafe in the city's lower east side.

"Can I join you?" His hand drifted across the back of the chair opposite her. She looked up from her iced drink and smirked around the straw.

"I'm married, you know." Despite himself, he laughed.

"A woman as beautiful as you? It'd be a shame if you weren't."

"Flattery will get you nowhere, you know." She trilled the straw inside of her drink. Admiring the way his suit and the coat over it emphasized his strong build and the youthful yet mature appearance he displayed.

She liked the colors, too.

[New Dawn]

--- "Ugh. Are you two flirting again?"

Shirou's eyes, gleaming golden amber, looked up from the table to look amused at his child. Mordred with two drinks held in a hand each, wearing a red leather jacket and an outfit that looked more like something a biker tough would wear than a former "Princess of England."

She offered him one, a coffee rich in vanilla flavoring, and stole a chair from a nearby table to seat
herself at the same table. Morgan, for her part, simply worked on finishing her over-sweetened mess of a beverage.

She was truly the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen, though. Her hair draped across her shoulders, that peacoat that covered a sweater and slacks, down to the heels she wore.

His lips split in a smile. His gaze turned to Mordred, and the girl stuck her tongue out at him- the pink muscle tainted with marshmallow white.

He felt like he was the only one actually drinking coffee that day.

Raising his cup, he noted, "Welcome home, My Queen- my Princess--"

[New Dawn 2]

“Hey . . .” Shirou’s eyes raised, spying a woman in white pouting as she arrived with a tray with three different piles of confections and a tall cup of what he presumed to be tea.

His lips split into a pleased, gentle grin. “Yeah. Welcome home to you too, Artoria.”

Her smile was worth every minute, every scar, every moment of worry.

“Shirou…” Artoria settled her tray down, leaning down--

“Hey-! He’s my husband, so stop trying to hog all of the attention from him-!”

He looked at Mordred, who just looked irritated as her birth father and mother began to squabble in the streets, he couldn’t help but let out a laugh.

Nearby, a mousy young silver-haired woman looked amazed. Seeing someone whom she looked just like.
"Teacher?"

"Unh?"

"Those women. . ."

"Don't bother people when they're enjoying their morning coffee, Gray."

"But--" Her gaze turned back towards the group, blinking quietly. From within her cape, a soft voice murmured--

“Don’t worry about it, kid. You’re you. They’re them. Stick with it, eh?”

The silver-haired girl blinked, but turned her gaze back unto her teacher reading the morning’s news. In a photo on the front page, she saw a pair of women standing shoulder to shoulder, offering smiles while a younger looking blonde stood, grinning and throwing up victory signs, between them.

Family make priceless donation to British Museum of diaries of Knight of the Round Sir Bedivere, pictured: Morgana, her daughter Momo, and her sister Altria. Not pictured, Morgana’s husband Shirou, archeologist who uncovered the artifact in the ruins on an isle off the coast of Wales--

Gray’s attention shifted back over to the group, and found that they were gone. Blinking her own green eyes, she reached out to gently tug on Lord El Melloi’s sleeve.

“Teacher. Can we go to the museum?”

~FIN~

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank all of you who followed along this far. This is the first fanfiction I’ve ever finished, and to be honest, it took all of the positive encouragement and even some of the criticism to make it all happen. I hope you enjoyed the story.

orz
Omake 4 [Chaldean Antics 3]

Slowly, Ruler raised his hand from his book and quirked the rims of his glasses down as he looked over the lenses over the length of the table he’d taken up in the library- Morgan having conscripted a chair at his side and using it more as a footrest since she was, otherwise, almost wholly in his lap.

His gaze, glimmering gold standing out from his ashen features and the red markings that spread from his jaw-line and downwards across his flesh, was settled fast on the three women leaning heavily on the table across from his wife and himself. The black-haired Archer, the purple-haired Lancer, and Artoria- in her Saber guise.

He had a feeling this was about to go very poorly.

“Can I--”

“Awawawawa--!” He paused, letting his eyes close as poor Shikibu once again had an accident as a result of her E-rank strength. A quick glance down at Morgan’s head in his lap confirmed that the Witch was still napping- or at least faking it.

He’d put good money on the latter. He knew his wife relatively well. After all, he’d been with her for nearly two millennia until the whole “incineration of humanity” thing.

“Ahem. Help you ladies?”

Yes, it’s going to be a bad day to read.

+x+xx+x+xx+
“Yo, Tristan!” The red-haired man blinked, turning on a foot as he came to regard a blonde-haired, red-wearing woman. Ah, Mordred. Though, did her armor look different--?

The extremely violent way his face promptly met the floor after her gauntlet slammed into his face made him fairly sure he must have done something to upset the Knight of Rebellion.

For the life of him, he didn’t know why, though.

+x+x+xx+x+x

“Shirou.” Ruler glanced up idly from polishing Excalibur Morgan’s edge, being greeted by a familiar- if disheartening face.

Standing quietly, the Lion King variant of his beloved Artoria. It was true, he’d done as much as he could to avoid any of her forms at large, though . . .

This was the one that hurt the most. Seeing the one whom he’d faced down so personally on that day so long ago. The one whom he’d killed, and cemented his own status as an Anti-Heroic Spirit. Quietly, he banished the blade back into the shadows and began to stand and leave--

-- Only for her hands to softly take hold of his shoulders and pull him in.

Lips touched to lips, and his face could not have appeared more confused. Even while nearby, lurking in the shadows, a blonde-haired and green-eyed woman simply watched quietly, raising her right hand and idly rolling it over a time or two, those eyes fixated pointedly on her ring finger.

AN:
I said it before on AO3 for those of you who read it there, but Black Dawn itself is completely done. I started putting work into Drops of Red, and have stalled a bit on it, though I’ll admit quite a few of the reviews have had interest in either a sequel Grail War with the Pendragons (The True End variants, I imagine) acting out. Plenty have wanted more of the Chaldean/Grand Order silliness, but frankly I’m still working on Grand Ball, so I don’t intend to do a second series about
that.

If I get some support for the Pendragons, though . . . .

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