Out of the Shadows

by jillc

Summary

This is a reveal story. It is the Battle of Camlann and the future of Camelot and the Five Kingdoms is at stake. After a tremendous battle Arthur is forced to meet his deadliest enemy, his sister. By the end of the encounter bonds and friendships are left in tatters. As the smoke clears can Merlin overcome his decision to reveal himself, and rebuild his shattered bond with Arthur? Plenty of angst in this story. Thanks to Wil1969 reading over the chapters.

Notes

In this reveal story there are some differences from the show’s. In this version Merlin is present at Camlann and has not lost his magic. That means that Gwen and Gaius are back in Camelot. Lancelot and Elyan are also still alive and are Knights. Mordred is not included in this. Morgana is only briefly there, as I wanted this to be about the fallout between Arthur and Merlin, but felt I needed something about the background first.

I didn’t feel that in the show Arthur had the proper chance of accepting the truth in his own terms. For that I felt he needed time and the chance to come to term with things in a natural way. This is the heart of the story. There is plenty of angst for Merlin after the reveal but I do feel in order to make it realistic that is the way it has to be for both of them.

It is true to say that Gwen and Hunith will play a crucial role as well, but in the main this will be between Merlin and Arthur. I hope you feel I have done this story justice by the end.
Chapter 1

As the sun set an eerie atmosphere had spread around the camp; the Knights of Camelot had been in Camlann for two days, preparing for the battle which lay ahead. A sense of nervousness prevailed in the air, as men passed each other preparing their weapons and themselves for the challenge that lay ahead. The battle had been coming for a while, as reports about Morgana massing an army of Saxons had reached Camelot. With towns outside being ransacked and raised to the ground, they knew a flashpoint was coming very shortly.

Arthur left his tent keeping a wary eye on everything around him. He was totally alert for anything unexpected. He had been in this situation so many times before, soon the battle would begin and once more he would lead his Knights to war. The responsibility rested awkwardly on his shoulders. For all his life he had been prepared for moments like these, but he doubted he would ever get used to the feeling of dread, which accompanied such situations.

He had fought in many battles and been on many quests, but he knew this challenge was very different. This would be Camelot’s most important battle, and Arthur was not afraid to admit that he was very nervous.

If they allowed Morgana to win then the life they knew would be destroyed forever. For endless weeks they had all watched thousands of people heading for Camelot. These people had seen their villages and loved ones murdered by a ruthless and determined army, led by a woman who was both feared and hated in equal measures. The fact that Morgana was his own sister only added to the sense of despondency which hung around him.

He sighed to himself as he thought about her. There was a time when Morgana had been a brave and principled young woman, who would help anyone. He despaired when he thought about how desperate and ruthless she now was. What had happened to the beautiful sister he had once known? What had turned her so much into the dark, that she could do such sinister things?

This was a woman in her earlier days who had gone out of her way to help people; a person who was courageous enough to question their father Uther Pendragon; while no one else, had dared. But here she was leading an army that was terrorising Camelot and it’s outlying villages, and leaving people dead and whole communities destroyed. What had turned this person from a caring individual to someone who thought nothing about leaving children fatherless, and old people slumped on the side of roads.

Arthur shook his head sadly as he contemplated the madness of the world around him. In the next couple of days they would meet Morgana in a huge battle, who knew what would happen after that? Would it be a world born of light, or would they all be thrown into utter darkness and chaos? A cold dread ran down his sudden cold body. He suddenly realised there was something he needed to do.

Taking a scroll, Arthur sat at his table and attempted to write a letter to his wife Guinevere. For a moment he thought about her holding the fort back in Camelot. If this battle was to be his last he wanted to make sure the woman he loved, understood just how proud he was of her. He knew should he not return to Camelot her job would be extremely challenging. But he also knew she was an exceptional woman who would rise to the task at hand. The way she had swung into action the moment refugees had started arriving in Camelot, was testament to that. Even as he left he had seen her helping Gaius in the makeshift hospital, as well as attending meetings with the Lords of the court; all the while making sure she kept an optimistic face to everyone around her.

Arthur knew if things went badly she would need every ounce of her courage and determination, to
overcome the odds she would face. The thought of never seeing her again, had made him feel suddenly restless. He threw his chair back and paced around his mind in turmoil. He knew this battle would be his biggest test yet of his leadership; the forces of evil were growing bigger by the day. Even now he could hear their dreaded drums playing in the distance. A constant beat which entered his head, getting ever louder, the more he wished the noise away.

He took a deep breath and steadied himself. As he breathed out a sudden calmness prevailed and he relaxed. He always got nervous before battles, a man who was not afraid before a battle, was a man who had no respect for living. Life was a constant stream of challenges and uncertainties especially for the young King of Camelot. A life time of preparation for becoming the leader could only get you so far. In the end it was how you dealt with the endless crises and problems which occurred. While he knew he had made some mistakes he also knew he was getting better at accepting the responsibility. It was still daunting and at times lonely, despite the support of his wife and friends, but here on the battlefield lay an altogether different challenge. Yet despite it all he suddenly felt ready for it.

It was as if the moment of doubt he’d had, was somehow a necessary occurrence; a step that allowed him to see the world for what it was, and his place in it. As the pressure around him disappeared he walked back over to the table, with a determination to complete his task; if he could lead an army he could certainly write a letter. As he pulled his chair back it was then the pot fell onto the floor, almost crashing onto his foot. By some miracle it had avoided contact, and Arthur breathed a sigh of relief. How embarrassing would a broken foot be, when he was suppose to be leading his army into battle.

He sighed in frustration; it was typical that Merlin had left the pot in such an awkward place. His servant could be so forgetful and stupid at times. He could feel himself getting annoyed just thinking about him, how long did it take to wash some pots anyway? He had been gone ages. It was typical of his friend that even when he wasn’t with him, Arthur could still find something that annoyed him.

It was typical of his friend that even when he wasn’t with him, Arthur could still find something that annoyed him.

He had never known a person who had so much talent for frustrating him, yet despite it all the world would not be the same without him. He briefly thought back to the boy that arrived in Camelot, and had stupidly challenged the King’s son. All of a sudden Arthur’s annoyance had all but evaporated. His friend was unique, of that there was no doubt. If only he could teach him to be tidier.

He settled down and prepared to write, suddenly finding a flow of words from somewere. Once he had finished it he would check the latest reports of the scouts in the area. The battle was looming nearer Arthur could feel it in every bone in his body. As the feelings of tension increased his face crunched in concentration. Just as he was starting to get into it, the quiet was interrupted with a load of clanging and chatter, as Merlin re-entered the tent.

“I swear that stream gets further and further away each time.” He moaned, nosily putting the pots down on the table, water squirting onto the scroll.

“Merlin!” Arthur said, looking up irritation, trying to dry the scroll.

“Sorry.” Merlin replied, a grin on his face. “What are you doing anyway? I thought you would be getting some rest.”

“Rest?” Arthur said sarcastically, “Fat chance with you around. If you must know I am writing to Guinevere.”

“Hasn’t she got enough on her plate?” Merlin said, “I would have said looking after Camelot was enough to contend with, without trying to work out one of your ponderous letters.”

Arthur rolled his eyes, as his friend grinned at his comment. No one else found his jokes more
amusing, then Merlin himself; Arthur had no intention of encouraging him. He continued writing, but naturally Merlin continued to babble on.

“There is real chill in the air. Even Percival was jumping about tonight. Gwaine of course is just driving everyone mad with his endless chatter.”

“Merlin will you be quiet please, I am trying to concentrate.” Arthur snapped.

“You are being serious.” Merlin replied, as if the thought had only just occurred.

“Yes I am being serious. I may never see Guinevere again; this battle is the biggest we have faced. Probably the biggest challenge of my life, so if you don’t mind I need some moments to myself.” Arthur said, surprising himself with his words.

There was a pause before Merlin replied. “Arthur you will overcome this challenge, I have total faith in you. I have never doubted you and when we return to Camelot your name will be revered, and spoken by everyone.”

Arthur looked up in surprise. It wasn’t the first time that Merlin had come out with such words, and for a moment it was like looking at a different person. No longer was he the bumbling, clumsy servant, who accompanied Arthur everywhere. No longer was he the rude and annoying person who always had the last word. But as he looked at him, not for the first time Arthur recognised the look of confidence in Merlin’s eyes. It was almost as if he had depths of knowledge and wisdom, but beyond that it was the belief in Arthur that those eyes possessed. He suddenly felt humble as if he had been blessed. In that moment, Arthur realized that Merlin was not just an annoying servant, but an important friend, his most important friend.

Arthur watched Merlin quietly leave the tent.

“Thank you.” Arthur said, though he wasn’t sure what he was most thankful for. Was it Merlin’s confidence in him, or just the fact that the young King felt so lucky to have such a friend? As Merlin’s shadow disappeared the quietness of the tent overwhelmed Arthur suddenly. Merlin was an enigma, if he didn’t know it before, he certainly knew it now.

As Merlin left the tent his mind wandered for a second. The moon was full tonight, giving the land a beautiful bright glow, to hide out the ugliness that existed within it. Soon two armies would collide and the future of the land would be decided, and everything Merlin hoped and dreamed for put to the test. Who knew what the result would be, but either way life would be changed forever.

The thoughts that played within Merlin’s mind were hazy and that troubled him. It was as if a mist had descended stopping him from seeing properly. But deep within him was a profound feeling that by the end of this battle, his life would be completely different. He had no idea whether that was a good or a bad thing, and suddenly the uncertainty seemed suffocating to him. Wanting to dismiss the troubling sensation, he decided to go in search of his friends.

He heard them before he saw them, and for a moment he stopped and watched them. Percival and Gwaine were sitting shoulder touching shoulder. Gwaine commanding the stage while Leon rolled his eyes, and Elyan just laughed. He smiled making the most of seeing them all together, who knew if this would be the case after Camlann. His depressing thoughts were interrupted with a warm shout.

“Merlin we’ve been wondering where you are where. Come and have a sit.” Gwaine’s warm eyes, greeted Merlin, and suddenly he forgot his worries. Gwaine had such a zest for life, and genuine love
for his friends, that before long Merlin was laughing away.

“Gwaine. How are you all?” Merlin asked, suddenly wanting to get away from his own thoughts and fears.

“We are trying to stop Gwaine from re-writing history here.” Percival laughed, slapping his friend on the shoulder.

“Oh?” Merlin laughed. “Well good luck with that one.” He sat down and drank from a water skin, enjoying the feeling of it trickling into his parched throat.

“Yes according to Gwaine nothing happened before the day he came into the world.” Elyian explained.

“Now come on Elyan you are a man of few words, so when you do speak you should at least tell the full story.” Gwaine countered. “All I meant was the world we know today began to take shape, once I came into the world.”

Merlin joined in the hoots of laughter, as the Knights continued their bantering. He sat back and just enjoyed the spirit of a bunch of men held together by a strong bond of commitment and loyalty.

These were Arthur’s senior Knights the men who would lead the fight alongside their young King. Merlin felt immense pride at being a part of them, and yet as ever he was apart from them as well. Could he dare to dream that after this battle his life would change for the better? That acceptance for his kind would be one step nearer with the removal of the biggest obstacle to it, Morgana?

A shout and light slap on the wrist pulled him back to the present.

“Merlin you were miles away.” Leon smiled.

“Sorry my thoughts were elsewhere.” Merlin admitted, ruefully. He picked up a spare apple and crunched on it, only then realising just how hungry he was.

“We wondered how the King was when you left him” Percival asked.

Merlin smiled, “He is doing okay in fact he was writing to Gwen when I left him.”

“Last time he wrote to her we had an outstanding victory at Badon Hill. Let’s hope that is a good omen.” Leon smiled.

“I am sure it will be.” Merlin agreed, a determination in his tone which pleased his friends and started them all talking amongst themselves. Merlin suddenly noticed Lancelot heading over to Arthur’s tent, so stood up. “I will see you all later.”

“Merlin everything will be all right.” Gwaine shouted.

Merlin nodded, as he moved away. For a second he paused not sure whether to join Arthur and Lancelot or not. He knew Lancelot had been doing some reconnaissance on the latest movements of Morgana’s army. He suspected Lancelot and Arthur were looking at the latest reports. Sensing it could be a tense meeting he headed for a patch of rocks and sat down and waited for his friend to leave the tent.

As Merlin stared at the moon he could swear it had increased in size and vibrancy. It shone down directly on Arthur’s tent bating it in a beautiful bright light. Merlin smiled for a second, an omen his friend was the big hope for Albion after all. Was this the god’s giving their blessing on the once and
future King?

Merlin liked to think so, the prophecies were clear after all. Arthur was the King who would unite
the land of Albion, with Merlin by his side. The Golden Age they all dreamed about could hopefully
begin after Morgana had been defeated. Then the huge barrier to Arthur accepting magic would have
been removed.

Merlin closed his eyes and allowed himself to think about a world where he and his kind could be
respected and accepted for who they were. A land where he could move freely; no more having to
deny himself, a man who could be open and honest with his friends. For a second he allowed himself
to revel in the thoughts of such a world. To be part of a Kingdom which was truly united between all
people; and where everyone worked together for the common good, rather than live in fear and
danger.

A soft breeze blew across him, interrupting his thoughts, and for a moment he shivered. The light
around Arthur’s tent was dimmer now; he could sense the moon was beginning to fade. Soon the
cycle would be complete; the first rays of sunlight would begin. A sudden movement from the tent
made him stand up as he beckoned Lancelot over. Soon his friend was walking towards him, a
relaxed look on his face.

“Merlin you okay?” Lancelot asked, touching his shoulder.

“I am good. What are latest reports?” Merlin asked, wanting to get know what the situation was. This
way he knew he could be of most use to Arthur.

“Well as we suspected the Saxons have been moving into that hidden path that Percival told us
about. I have been told I will lead a patrol from there to head off her army. She has greater numbers
than we first thought, so we need to hit her hard and fast I think. Take her by surprise.” Lancelot
said, sitting down next to Merlin.

“How was Arthur?” Merlin asked, watching Lancelot intently.

“I think he was resolute in his manner, I feel he is ready for whatever lies ahead.” Lancelot smiled,
“What about you?”

“Me?”

“Yes you Merlin.” Lancelot replied, his eyes not leaving Merlin’s face. “Don’t pretend you don’t
have your own worries, I know you better than that.”

Merlin smiled, he knew he couldn’t fool Lancelot. Lancelot was a rock his one friend who knew
about Merlin’s magic. Though Merlin regretted that Lancelot too had to hide his secret, he knew his
friend would keep his word, as he was a man of honour. It at least gave Merlin someone else to talk
to, when he felt he couldn’t confide to Gaius.

Their relationship had become really close as a result of it. His friend always seemed to know when
Merlin was troubled. Lancelot came from a similar background to him, facing the same barriers and
similar challenges before becoming a faithful Knight of Camelot. Merlin knew how much more of a
burden it would be without having Lancelot to share his troubles with. But he doubted even Lancelot
could help him through this.

“I don’t know how to explain if I am honest.” Merlin began hesitantly.

“Well try.” Lancelot urged.
Merlin paused before speaking. “Whenever we have gone on battles and quests, I have always felt somehow that I knew what the outcome would be. It is not something I can explain. Just I always felt I knew the path that we were treading, the likely outcome. But now everything just seems to be in a haze, which I just can’t see through. It worries me. I just know that after this battle everything could change.”

“It is natural to worry before a battle Merlin, I am always tense I am now.” Lancelot said, ”But whatever happens one way or another Camelot will survive. I believe we have right on our side; Morgana cannot win with her hatred. It will destroy her in the end. Then you and Arthur can unite the Kingdoms of Albion, and you can reveal your secret at last.”

Merlin smiled, “It would be good to think that can happen, but Arthur will still need persuading about magic, being a force for good.”

“When he knows the truth about you, he will understand.” Lancelot replied, putting his hand on Merlin’s shoulder. “You should never give up on that dream Merlin, otherwise what would be the point of any of this?”

Merlin stared off into the distance, Lancelot’s words ringing in his ears; it was no different to what he had once believed himself. Yet now the words seemed hollow to his ears. Morgana had brought so much hatred and fear to Camelot and the surrounding villages. Could magic really be accepted by Arthur never mind the people of Camelot. The fear was deeply rooted now and it would take a lifetime of work to undo the damage.

“You mustn’t give up hope Merlin.” Lancelot said, The Knight eased himself onto his feet. “I need to do some preparation, I think tomorrow could be the day. Will you be okay?”

“Yes I need to get back to Arthur anyway.” Merlin replied. “Thank you.”

Lancelot smiled, and gently patted his shoulder. “Any time my friend. You know where I am.”

Merlin watched him walked away, praying that he would stay safe, in the battle that lay ahead. He had lost too many friends already, and he couldn’t bear to lose someone else. Why did life have to be such a struggle? From the moment he had arrived in Camelot there was always something brewing. As he watched the Knights preparing for battle he was beginning to wonder if they would ever win the peace that was so sorely needed.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

It is the eve of the battle of Camlann and both Arthur and Merlin ponder what may happen next. Each of them have their private thoughts but as ever their friendship shines through. But as the battle rages Merlin wonders if this is the moment for him to reveal his true self to his friends.

Note: This is to be this week’s last posting. I will probably post once a week, most likely it will be every Friday. Thanks to everyone who has so far viewed this, and I hope you continue to enjoy it.

Feeling a bit more upbeat though still perplexed, Merlin walked over to where Arthur was now looking through the night’s reports, sensing the King’s concentration.

“Ah Merlin, there you are.” Arthur said, briefly looking up.

“You okay?” Merlin asked, picking up Arthur’s sword and preparing to clean it. He felt he needed something to occupy him to keep his mind from wandering.

“Yes. I have looked through the reports, Morgana’s army are starting to move. I think tomorrow will be the day. We will have one group of men attacking her from the secret path, and I will lead the main group, on the plain. That way we can attack her on two fronts. I cannot allow Morgana to get any stronger.”

“A good plan sire.” Merlin said, happy that Arthur appeared decisive and sure of his tactics.

Arthur raised his eyebrow. “Would you actually know a good battle plan Merlin considering you spend your time hiding behind some tree!”

Merlin smiled to himself, if only he knew. “I have you know I have played an important part in a lot of battles.”

Arthur laughed, “Yes of course Merlin, your fighting skills are well known throughout the Kingdom.”

“There is more to battles than just fighting skills.” Merlin replied, warming to his task.

“Such as?” Arthur said, eyebrows rising.

“Well pandering after you making sure you remember to take your sword with you. Getting you to the right place, after all your navigation skills are not the best.” Merlin grinned.

“Neither are yours.” Arthur answered. “You cannot even find your way back from the tavern after two drinks.”

“That is Gwaine exaggerating. It is usually me that guides the Knights back to the citadel.” Merlin
replied, suddenly enjoying the bantering.

“Not what I have heard Merlin.” Arthur replied, looking sceptical.

Merlin grinned, just happy to see Arthur enjoying himself and he realized just how far their relationship had come. When Merlin had first arrived in Camelot they were so different, now they could share moments such as these, even on the eve of an important battle. For a second he did not even care that he was unable to reveal his true self, nothing could beat a moment like this for him. Just by looking at Arthur, Merlin could sense each change of mood he had, he knew they had a real connection with each other. Arthur seemed incredibly self-assured this particular night, and Merlin truly felt he had turned the corner with his confidence and self-belief. But Merlin also knew the frailties were always below the surface with Arthur. So the moment Merlin sensed a change in mood he was ready to prop his friend up.

Arthur was still sitting down, but he appeared to be in a trance. Merlin tensed recognising the signs of nervous tension on his friend’s features. He put the sword down, and walked over; making sure that Arthur looked up at him before he started speaking.

“It will be a stunning victory tomorrow. The start of a new era, one where all the Kingdoms can come together as one; and you will be the figurehead. You will be the person they all look too.”

“How can you be so sure Merlin?” Arthur asked, “I have been in enough battles to know, that you can never be sure of anything.”

“I have confidence in you. I know you are fated to be the King that Albion will look too. Come the next day, you will have seen off the hordes of evil that plague this land. Then you can begin to rebuild the new Kingdom that will be born out of this battle.”

“Well by tomorrow we will know Merlin, because we will either be forming a new Kingdom, or there will be little left of it or us.”

“Whatever happens I will be here for you.” Merlin smiled, picking up the sword and beginning to sharpen it.

“I have never doubted that my friend.” Arthur said, lightly touching Merlin’s shoulder as he left the tent.

As Merlin watched Arthur moving towards where the Knights were still sitting, he lightly breathed in, feeling shattered and disorientated. Up to now he had made sure he kept his nerves away from Arthur, sensing his friend needed a bit of reassurance. But the feeling that bothered him before continued to worry him now.

To make matters worse he still could not work out what it was; just a feeling of dread, that something big was coming. But for now he knew he must put it to the back of his mind, for Arthur needed his support. There was no chance that he would not do everything he could for the young King, in his biggest challenge yet. Everything else would wait, whatever the cost would be for Merlin himself.

It was just after late afternoon that the two armies faced each other across the plain they called Camlann. The drums of the Saxons were loud and aggressive, the rhythm running through the heads of the Knights, and enticing them into combat. But Arthur took his time, making sure his army stood straight and strong behind him. He looked ahead, focusing on a Saxon, his first target. He waited a couple more seconds, before raising his sword in his hand and shouting, “On me!” Then he ran, his
army thundering along behind him.

The earth seemed to shake, as thousands of men descended onto one another. As Arthur ran to meet the Saxons, what remained of the daylight seemed to disappear into darkness. The only light now came from the torches but even they seemed to disappear, as the two lines of men became one, and steel met steel in a ferocious battle of survival.

Any doubts that Arthur had before now disappeared as his fighting instinct took over. This is what he had been taught to do, as soon as he could stand. He was a warrior a man who never felt more at home, then when he had his sword in hand, fighting for what he believed in. He leapt into action his foot kicking at a Saxon, and kicking him to the floor. As someone came at him from behind, he twisted his body, meeting the man face to face, before ruthlessly finishing him off with his sword in the man’s heart.

By now he could smell the blood, and hear the crying of men as they fell to the ground. He closed his ears to their cries, knowing that one moment’s hesitation could mean his own death. The noise of the swords clanging became ever louder as he entered the middle of the pack, and his opponents suddenly seemed sharper, and more challenging.

Suddenly a big sturdy man with a glaring face came running at him, shouting loudly, and thrusting his sword at him aggressively. Arthur being slimmer and more agile had the advantage and managed to move quicker, than him. Twice the man threw his sword into the space that Arthur had just been in, only to find he was no longer there. Arthur caught him with a kick to the lower hip, stunning his opponent whose moves became very jerky. Sensing his desperation to keep up on his feet, Arthur went in for the kill, kicking at him again, before thrusting his sword into the man’s chest as he fell on the ground.

By now men were throwing themselves into battle, an animal like instinct taking over everywhere. Arthur was no different it was kill or be killed, as men appeared from the crowd to challenge him. He had no time to wonder where his friends were, or to feel tired, the adrenaline kept him going. He received one scratch to the arm as someone took him unawares he felt almost insulted and finished the warrior off in no time at all. He could feel the trickle of blood running down his arm. But that would not stop him now.

His sword swept another Saxon away, Arthur barely looking at the man, as he went looking for another victim. He was faced with two together, but did not flinch for a second; it was just another challenge to take on. He had soon kicked one in the stomach causing him to stutter; as Arthur bent his head he managed to throw the man over his shoulder. Then he turned his attention to the other one and after a brief private battle, where they traded blows, his sword found its way into the Saxon’s chest. The man went down quick, crying out as he did so.

Arthur looked up briefly to size the situation, there were still plenty of Saxons making their way down the plain. He briefly felt a touch of tiredness, but another man hurling himself at the young King, soon cured that. He met the challenge head on and as they traded blows he gritted his teeth, as he went on the attack. After a brief battle, the man was on the back foot, Arthur sensing it went after him. The man threw his sword out towards Arthur’s face but he easily avoided contact. With one counter attack, he thrust his sword towards the man, kicking out at him at the same time. Feeling the man fall to the ground, Arthur finished him off.

When he looked up he realized he had come away from the main line of men, and was by some caves. He could hear the cries of dying men, as they lay around, some doubtless his own, which for a second made him pause with sadness. But for now he had no time to mourn, that would come later, when the battle was won. He went running back to the main line of Saxons, feeling ready for the
Merlin had found a place to watch the fighting behind some rocks. He had briefly lost Arthur, but after using his magic, he had managed to trace Arthur once again; and so duly made his way near, to where Arthur was fighting away. By now he could sense how ruthless and desperate the fighting had become. By now men lay crying to the gods to have mercy as they gasped their last minutes of life. Merlin wished he could close his ears to the sound. There was nothing more pitiful than the last sound of a warrior, fighting for his last breath.

As Merlin surveyed the scene before him he grew restless. The lines of Saxons seemed to be growing ever more by the minute. There was no doubt that Arthur and his men were outnumbered, and somewhere among them was Morgana. He could sense her round about, and knew he may well have to protect Arthur from her.

But first he had to find her. He closed his eyes trying to use his senses to track her down. For a second he felt he was near her, but some screaming nearby interrupted his concentration. He walked over to the man who was lying a few feet away. He was in an extremely bad way, Merlin crouched by him. He had a huge hole in his side; Merlin doubted he would last too much longer.

The man sensed Merlin and held his hand out to him, talking in a language Merlin did not understand. Merlin put his hand on the man’s shoulder, staying with him until he passed away. When he was still Merlin waited a couple of minutes, watching his still body. The fact that he was a Saxon made little difference a dead man was a dead man.

For a second Merlin cursed the battle that raged around him. By the end so many would be dead, and for what he thought to himself angrily. There was no guarantee that even if Arthur won, that peace would reign. He knew Morgana would continue her mad crusade against Camelot, he doubted anything would stop her now. Only her death or Arthur’s would bring the cycle to an end.

He wondered if she even knew what she was fighting for now. She had abused so many of her own kind, as well as the ordinary people of Camelot. What price or chance would magic have, even if Arthur was victorious? He got up and moved away from the dead man. As he walked over other dead bodies, he sighed and wished he could turn back the clock.

He wondered had he shared his secret with Morgana could all of this have been avoided. Was this the punishment for his refusal to reveal his secret, all those years ago? He closed his eyes feeling suddenly tired, and weary of the burden on his shoulders. For years he had lied to Arthur, to all his friends, terrified that they would discover his secret. The longer it had gone on, the more distant he felt from his ultimate goal. As he stood and watched the fighting up ahead it felt as if the world was laughing at him and everything he had ever hoped for. He felt utter dejection and a terrible sense of despondency.

A shout from the throng brought him too; he had to find Arthur he realized. He had no connection to him all of a sudden. Feeling panic rise in him, he bolted along jumping over some more rocks. He did his best to hide behind the straggly bushes, not wanting to draw attention to himself. But he knew he would have to creep a bit nearer to the action. After a quick look around to check no one was by him, he climbed up on one of the rocks, straining his neck. “Where are you Arthur” he muttered desperately to himself. “Show yourself.”

All he could see were hundreds of men fighting hand to hand, no quarter being given. He looked around again, this time using his magical senses. At first there was nothing once more, forcing him to consider the unthinkable. Then just as he was giving into the ghastly thought, something pulled on
his magic. He looked ahead and caught a brief sight of his friend, finishing off another Saxon. As he followed him with his eyes, he could tell Arthur was beginning to feel jaded, and still there was no end in sight of the battle.

On and on the battle continued. Arthur had no sooner finished one Saxon off and two others seemed to appear from nowhere. Whereas before he fought without even thinking about his condition, now it was beginning to plague his mind. He felt somehow more lethargic in his movement. It was as if his body had physically begun to wind down, whereas before he met each target instantly, now he missed as many as he connected with. The individual battles were becoming longer in length, and more tiring in effort.

Having killed another warrior, he managed to find a brief respite to allow him to take quick look around. The fighting was taking place in pockets now, the battle had become stretched. He could see plenty of victims from both sides lying around on the ground, a pitiful sight. At the back of his mind was a constant fear; that Morgana could appear at any second. He had been so involved in his various battles that he had hardly stopped to think about it. But he could not believe that she would not show up at some stage. Where was she, and when she came what could they do about her anyway? He shuddered at the thought.

Taking a deep breath he prepared to re-enter the battle once again, just as he was going to move he heard a sword move from behind him. A hideous feeling of death washed over him, as if he had stared into the abyss. But before he could do anything a roar came from the side of him, a voice he recognised. He turned around to face the battle just as Leon finished the Saxon off, and he fell almost onto Arthur’s foot.

“Thank you Leon.” Arthur said, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“No problem sire.” Leon smiled, “You’d do the same for me.”

“Yes. Let’s get back to it. I will see you on the other side.” Arthur said, pushing his helmet down.

“Yes indeed.” Leon scuppered away, throwing himself into another Saxon only feet away.

Arthur saw a group of Saxons away by some rocks and made his way over to them motioning another Knight to join him. Before long they were swinging swords as if finding extra adrenaline from somewhere. The young Knight fought well, and Arthur recognised him as Gareth an up and coming young fighter who had caught Arthur’s attention, shortly before leaving for Camlann. By the time they had finished the Saxon’s off he had already rushed away to confront the next group. Arthur followed, relieved that the spirit in his men seemed to be spiralling on.

Merlin continued to watch the battle from his new hiding place. He was now near a cave which had a huge rock he could slot into. He had watched with bated breath as Leon had come to Arthur’s rescue. He had been ready to spring in to action himself, and had only seen Leon at the last minute. He could now sense Arthur was fighting with a renewed vigour. Maybe his slice with death had reawakened the fire in the young King. Merlin had no idea how the mind of a warrior worked despite his endless experiences of accompanying the Knights to various battles.

He was still concerned by the fact that they appeared to be outnumbered; although it was true the Saxons too had lost a lot of men. He found it hard to understand how this battle was going; The Saxons still seemed to be full of battle hardened men. Arthur was now fighting alongside another Knight, Merlin felt grateful for that at least. But he felt on edge and worried that there had been no
Hi senses told him that she was around somewhere, but they had failed to track her down. He did not doubt she would make an entrance at some stage, and when she did he must be ready for what lay ahead. If that meant revealing himself then he was ready for doing that, and he would face the consequences later.

Never before was he more determined to do whatever was expected of him. For all the years he had hidden himself away, he knew that one day something would happen that would force him to confront the cloak of secrecy he had surrounded himself with. There came a time when every man had to conquer his biggest fear, and he would be no different.

He looked up at the sky noticing the daylight was beginning to fade, how much longer could this battle carry on he wondered. The darkness would suit Morgana even more he realized nervously. He suspected at some stage she would throw Aithusa into the mix as well.

The fighting below had reached a crescendo by now, men were throwing themselves into battle like never before. Merlin followed blow for blow feeling restless and helpless. As a few more Saxons appeared a cold feeling of dread entered the depths of his mind. Would this be the moment he would be forced to reveal himself?

He closed his eyes trying to calm himself, knowing that he would need every bit of strength and confidence to step out into the light, after years in the darkness. Whatever happened after that he would face, and know that he had at least enabled Albion to survive; and for Arthur to go on and become the King, the prophecies had spoken about. He prepared himself inwardly connecting with his magic. But suddenly a yell entered the air almost throwing Merlin back in fright; looking below him he saw the unmistakable figure of Percival with Lancelot at his heel, leading a large number of men into the battle.

Merlin just stood in wonder for a second, not quite knowing how he felt. Was it relief or disappointment? In the end it did not matter, as for once it was the Knight’s of Camelot that had the numerical advantage in the battle. Merlin realized the other battle had obviously been won by Lancelot and Percival’s men and now they could hopefully turn the main battle Arthur’s way. As the battle slowed down the action petering out, Merlin disappeared like a ghost into the night.

To be Continued.

Note: This is to be this week’s last posting. I will probably post once a week, most likely it will be every Friday. Thanks to everyone who has so far viewed this, and I hope you continue to enjoy it.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The battle is over, and now Arthur must count the cost of it. As he mulls over the future for his Kingdom he knows the war is not over as long as Morgana walks the earth.

Merlin while relieved the battle is won, is still uneasy and nervous. The bad feeling he has will not leave him, and he struggles to work out what's at the heart of it.

There is also a touch of Merlin-Gwaine's friendship, as I wanted to broaden the story a bit.

I hope you all enjoy it.

The darkness had descended and at long last the sounds of battle had ceased. As Arthur looked around him death and destruction lay everywhere. Arthur watched Lancelot finish off a Saxon, which was as much about putting the man out of his misery. The battle had been won but at what cost he wondered.

How many men lay butchered around where they stood? How many children would be fatherless? Mothers forced into hardships? They never told you these facts when you learnt to become a Knight. But such thoughts troubled him greatly whenever he was forced into the aftermath of a battle.

He wondered if his father ever had these thoughts. He doubted that Uther would think about it, as he would see it as a sign of weakness. But Arthur was a very different animal; he constantly worried about doing the right thing, about showing compassion when it was needed; and being resolute when the situation warranted it.

But it was never easy to find the right balance and he fought a private battle inside his head; forever questioning and wondering, if he had done the right thing. He had brought his beloved Kingdom to a war against a ruthless foe, and he would have to face the reckoning.

“The Saxons have disappeared sire.” Lancelot’s voice broke into Arthur’s thoughts

“Did you lose any other men Lancelot?” Arthur asked, rubbing his sword on the side of a rock.

“The mood for battle seemed to desert the Saxons. They disappeared very promptly. There is no sign of Morgana either.” Lancelot reported.

“No that is what I am afraid of Lancelot. We must keep our eyes open for her. My sister is never more dangerous than when she has taken a set-back. Let’s get back to camp.” Arthur ordered.

“I will get the rest of my men.” Lancelot said, running back towards a cave.

Arthur waited for Lancelot to join him he sat on a rock, keeping his ears open for any strange sounds. He felt anxious to get back to the cover of their base. At least they would have more men and provisions should his sister attack. He wondered yet again why Morgana had not shown her face, it wasn’t like her not to be the centre of attention. From her early days as a Princess to her moronic days as a High Priestess, Morgana had always known how to make an entrance. He knew
they would have to keep watch over the next few days.

Arthur got back on his feet, as Lancelot arrived back with his men, and they began their trek back to their camp. He had sent Percival and Leon back ahead of them, anxious that an immediate watch could be arranged. They were joined by Gwaine and his men who had been on a search around the battleground, for any remaining Saxons.

“You led the men with distinction Lancelot.” Gwaine said, patting his shoulder.

“Everyone played their part today Gwaine.” Lancelot acknowledged, with a weary smile.

“That is true Lancelot this was a huge battle we won today for the future of Albion, and for peace in the Five Kingdoms.” Arthur agreed, keeping his voice low and his eyes observant. “We must make sure we keep the peace, and that could be even trickier than the battle.”

Lancelot and Gwaine exchanged looks, as they took in Arthur’s words. Arthur knew his words had made an impact on the Knights. But he was determined that they would not underestimate the task which lay ahead of them. The journey had only just begun and he knew everyone must be ready for what could happen in the future.

As they made their way into camp Arthur could see Elyan and Leon keeping watch. Leon came over to greet the King, and reported his findings over their losses. As Arthur took in the grim news of the number of dead, he knew he was heading a depleted army. Arthur knew they would need to be diligent in how they managed their situation.

“We must arrange looks out on all sides of the camp Leon. My sister could be here at any time. She will not take this defeat lying down.” Arthur commanded.

“Yes sire I have already organised look outs on the far side of the camp, I will make sure everywhere else is covered also.” Leon said, “How are you feeling?”

“Tired but pleased we have won but obviously there will a cost to all this. I also doubt it is the end of the war.” Arthur replied. “Where’s Merlin?”

“Last time I saw him he was washing down the horses, that was some hours ago though.” Leon reported.

“He is probably sleeping against some tree.” Arthur remarked, a light smile on his face.

He had missed his friend even if he would not admit it, to anyone. He headed into his tent, pausing for a second before sitting down behind his table. It had only been hours since he had been writing to Guinevere; and worrying about what would happen to her, should they lose. All of a sudden he just longed to leave Camlann and be back in Camelot, where he could lose himself in her embrace; and put this battle into the back of his mind.

He began to undo his armour, but exhaustion took him over. He felt his head sliding back and his eyes beginning to close. A sudden noise alerted him and he stood up grabbing his sword from the table. But instead of his sister, the lob sided grin of Merlin greeted him. Merlin had a bucket full of water in his hand.

“What were you doing?” Arthur asked, amazed not the first time at his servant’s sense of timing.

He noticed Merlin looking at the bucket sarcastically his servant’s eyes connecting to Arthur’s.

“Merlin I warn you I have just finished fighting off a horde of Saxons I could just as easily finish off
you, should you give me an insolent reply.”

“Oh well in that case I will give you the boring answer I was washing down the horses.” Merlin replied, putting the bucket down and moving over to Arthur. He started to take off Arthur’s armour.

“You were washing down the horses at this time of night? Why didn’t you do it during the day?” Arthur asked, rolling his eyes. Only Merlin could possibly do something as daft as this. His sister was out there somewhere and there was Merlin making himself a sitting target for her, would he ever learn?

“I had a lot of other things to do during the day. “Merlin replied.

“Merlin, Morgana is out there somewhere, have you any idea how dangerous she can be?” Arthur said, appalled once more at the almost recklessness with which his friend displayed with his safety.

“Oh I will be fine.” Merlin scoffed, helping Arthur off with the last bit of armour.

“She is a High Priestess Merlin, what could you possibly do against her?” Arthur asked raising his eyebrow in irritation.

“You sound almost worried for me.” Merlin said, suddenly.

Arthur was about to answer sarcastically but then watching his friend, he couldn’t help but notice how Merlin’s eyes shined, as if longing for Arthur to admit the thought.

“Yes I suppose I was.” Arthur admitted

“Really?” Merlin asked.

Arthur stared at Merlin, and saw how his face had transformed itself into a huge delightful grin, as if it meant the world to him. Arthur paused and not for the first time was in two minds how to respond.

On the one hand Merlin was still his servant; and yet Arthur knew he was much more than that. He was someone whom he had come to depend on, someone who was always there when he needed a shoulder. Would it really hurt to give Merlin the one thing he so craved in this moment, an acknowledgment of what they had become? On the other hand it would probably go to his head, and he was already quite cheeky enough, so he decided to compromise instead. So he made a joke of it.

“Don’t be ridiculous, I just don’t want to have to find another servant.” Arthur replied.

But Arthur had smiled, letting his look speak for him far more than any words could. He was always useless at expressing his emotions, even though at times he was paralysed by them. At least he was starting to get better with Guinevere, thanks to her quiet influence. He could tell by the look Merlin returned that he had been told just what he needed to hear. Arthur felt pleased inside to see his friend so happy. He knew though he must get them back into reality.

“I will tell you what I have told the Knights Merlin.” Arthur said, “My sister is a real danger still, and she will not take this defeat lying down. We must all be responsible in our actions.”

“Yes and I am sorry for taking the risk.” Merlin replied. “It was a great victory, and one that will go down in the realms of history.”

“It was one battle Merlin we still have to win the war. I suggest you get some rest now, we need to prepare to get back to Camelot tomorrow.” Arthur said.

“Good night Merlin.” Arthur watched him go, aware suddenly of the silence of the night, after the constant noise of the battle. It was an eerie silence which somehow had Arthur on edge. But he was grateful that his men had showed their courage today. He had to prove himself as someone who was capable of keeping the peace. He watched the moon for a few seconds, before a yawn persuaded him to try and get some sleep.

*********

Merlin moved over to where Gwaine was keeping watch. The night was quiet with the moon shining down on the battered plain. Merlin wished he could revel in the quietness, but it was a tense silence and one that kept him feeling restless. This type of situation would be too Morgana’s advantage, a battered army recovering from its physical efforts. He lightly touched his friend on the shoulder.

“All quiet?” Merlin asked, shivering at the breeze which blew around them.

“Merlin!” Gwaine said, smiling. “Yes so far. It is a very still night, no tree moving; even the wolves are suddenly quiet.”

Merlin looked around, as if to prove Gwaine wrong, a sudden breeze blew across them, making them smile nervously at one another. The trees on the horizon blew around as if in a hypnotic dance, making ghostly shapes, and making Merlin’s heart beat faster.

“Ah nights like these remind me of my home.” Gwaine said, looking into the distance.

“It is not like you to be nostalgic about your home Gwaine.” Merlin replied, curious. “I have hardly ever heard you mention it.”

“Once my mother died I couldn’t wait to leave. As you know, my sister and I did not see eye to eye.”

“One day you will have to tell me why.” Merlin smiled.

“Well only if you tell me some of your secrets Merlin.” Gwaine said, hitting Merlin’s shoulder.

“My secrets?” Merlin asked innocently, “I don’t have any secrets.”

“For a second I almost believed you my friend.” Gwaine said, a twinkle in his eye. “There are times when I think I know just about everything about you, and then you behave in a way that totally surprises me.”

“I am not sure what you are getting at Gwaine.” Merlin replied, as he looked off in the distance.

“I just mean you have unexpected qualities, you are not an open book.” Gwaine smiled, poking Merlin’s elbow. “Unlike me!”

“I don’t think you are an open book either Gwaine. I know there are things you still haven’t told me even now.” Merlin said, rolling a stone in his hand.

“With good reason believe me, some things you don’t want to know.” Gwaine laughed.

“Well I want to know even more now!” Merlin laughed back.

“I think this conversation is for another night.” Gwaine grinned.
Their conversation was interrupted by a young Knight who breathlessly arrived with a message.

“Sorry sir, one of the patrols has arrived back with some news.” He panted.

“Thanks I will be with you. Ah well duty calls Merlin.” Gwaine laughed.

“Saved by the bell.” Merlin smiled, “take care Gwaine.”

“We will finish this conversation another night.” The Knight remarked before disappearing into the darkness, leaving Merlin alone.

The darkness had definitely set in and the blackness made Merlin wary. He stood up as another breeze blew around him, stamping his feet and staring at the moon which was at its fullest. Despite that the moon’s glow did not seem to be especially strong. Merlin felt like something was wrong, but he still had no clue what it was. The feeling that had plagued him for three nights, and he still could not understand what was at the heart of it. He remembered similar nights like these back in Ealdor; and something always seemed to happen after one of these feelings, and it was rarely good.

He stared off into the horizon searching for any clue that could stop his suspicious frame of mind. A sign he thought, something to reassure him, but there was nothing, just darkness blanketed everywhere around him. Like he where trapped in the middle of a dark hole isolated from the world. On nights like these his magical senses could trip him up, make him imagine things that went actually there. He tried to talk his way out of the feeling, three nights and nothing had actually happened so why should it happen tonight either? But still the feeling persisted; he kicked at a stone in frustration.

“Merlin I thought I had told you to go and get some rest.”

Merlin smiled as Arthur joined him, hearing his voice gave Merlin some security, against the suffocating state of his own mind.

“What are you doing out here, I thought you would be resting after all the fighting.” Merlin said, wearily.

“I must still do my duty Merlin. I promised I would do a couple of hours watch tonight. I can’t sleep anyway.” Arthur replied, clearing a piece of grass off his sword.

“You mean because of the battle?” Merlin asked, curiously watching him.

“Yes and other things.” Arthur said, his eyes trained into the distance ahead.

“What other things? Anything you want to talk about?” Merlin asked, fighting his tiredness.

“Merlin you can barely stand up, why are you reluctant to get some rest.” Arthur asked staring at him, before looking about them.

“Like you I am restless, though I think for different reasons.” Merlin mused sitting down.

“That’s a bit profound for you Merlin.” Arthur said, slightly grinning.

“Yes it was, wasn’t it?” laughed Merlin, “I wonder what came over me?”

“This could be an awful long conversation that I have no intention of starting tonight.” Arthur said, his eyebrows rising.

“Maybe there is more to me than you think.” Merlin grinned, his eyes meeting Arthur and connecting, before Arthur’s broke away.
“I don’t doubt that for a second Merlin.” Arthur laughed. “I only have to think back to the first day we met to know that.”

“When you were acting like a prat you mean?”

Arthur laughed, “Get some rest Merlin, it will be an early start tomorrow, I need you to be able to walk in a straight line.”

Merlin stared at Arthur for a second before realising he was losing the fight with his tiredness, and regretfully accepted the inevitable. “Okay I will try and get some rest. Nothing I can get you before I go?”

“No.” Arthur replied, “thank you. Go on before I have to roll you back to your tent.”

“Don’t get scared out here on your own.” Merlin replied, with a mischievous grin on his face.

Arthur looked sternly at Merlin’s retreating figure, before laughing to himself. The howl of a distant wolf brought Arthur back to the present. He knew he must set the example, to both his men and his Kingdom. As the trees blew from side to side, Arthur once more became the warrior and leader, ready for whatever may lay ahead.

To be Continued.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

In this chapter an encounter with Morgana, changes everything between Merlin and Arthur. As Arthur struggles to comprehend what he has just seen, Merlin's life is suddenly is thrown into the open. Things will never be the same for either of them.

As Arthur continued his watch, and due to their being no incidents to worry about, his mind reflected back to his recent conversation with Merlin. At times it felt as if he was talking to a different person. Merlin could say the most surprising thing, but then suddenly change in the drop of a hat. From that first day that he had challenged Arthur, he knew that there was something about him. But a few years later he still couldn't say what it was. Merlin continued to both confuse and surprise Arthur in equal measures.

He tensed as a noise in the horizon brought him to attention. He pushed his neck forward trying to see further. But silence soon took over once again. He had been brought news that a Knight had briefly seen Morgana, not too far away. The news made him more conscious of just how dangerous their situation was. Here they were out in the open, a position that would play straight into Morgana's hands. He held his sword in his hand tightly, not for the first time the sword gave him extra security. He had won so many battles with this sword; it was without doubt the best sword he had ever used.

He remembered the time he had first pulled the sword from out of the stone it had laid in. He relived the memory of how he had felt so confident, with Merlin's words ringing in his ears. He had believed that day, and he knew he must be able to do that again.

As he stood still looking down the valley, his emotions began to develop. He wondered where his brave and kind-hearted sister had gone. At one time they had been so close, both of them made closer still by his father's tough rigid personality. In those days they had often backed each other up, when they had needed to. In those times he felt he could tell her anything. But then it suddenly it all changed and Arthur still struggled to understand, how it had occurred so quickly.

He could understand Morgana's feelings towards their father in some ways. The fact that she had not known about Uther being her real father, was an obvious shock. She had sometimes spoken to Arthur about Gorlois the man whom she had believed to be her father. Arthur had understood the strong love she had for him, and sometimes Arthur had spoken about his mother as well. It had been gratifying for Arthur to have been able to mention his mother to someone, as his father never spoke about Ygraine. Arthur had never felt it right to ask Uther sensing his father's pain. With Morgana he could at least talk self-consciously about how much he regretted not having known her.

Even now he missed the days when they could talk but once Morgana had met Morgause, a gap between them had begun to develop. Arthur would often wonder what would have happened had he found out about Morgana's magic earlier. He had told himself that maybe he could have persuaded her to have told Uther and Gaius; then they could have faced it all together. At times he would get annoyed at himself for his inaction towards her. Could he have done more to help her?

He had sometimes tried to imagine what it must have been like for her to discover she had magic. But as soon as he tried to put himself in her shoes, he would feel uncomfortable knowing his father's total mistrust of it. Yet despite all the dreadful things that she had done with her magic, a part of him
could not accept that she was wholly evil. He knew inside her somewhere, a bit of good remained, they had loved each other once; he could not accept she was completely estranged from him. He doubted he ever could think that.

But against that she had hurt people and had caused this dreadful war, with her craving for power. He knew when the time came he had to act deceivably no matter what his past feelings towards her were. He just hoped his courage would not fail him when the time came.

He looked ahead noticing how light the landscape in front of him had become. The moon seemed dimmer, yet he could make out all the mountains and the beginning of the forest. Before he had the chance to try and work out how it was possible, a breathless Leon arrived.

"Sire there has been more reports of your sister hereabout."

"Who saw her Leon?" Arthur asked, straightening up determinedly.

"A couple of soldiers patrolling the outer ridge, they said she had the dragon with her." Leon explained.

"Get more people on lookout we must be ready, she could attack at any time." Arthur said, beckoning a young Knight over to him.

Leon nodded and ran over to another group of Knights.

"I need you to take a couple of men and go on the other side, tell them to report anything unusual." Arthur said, to the Knight.

"Yes sire."

The young Knight saluted and ran off leaving Arthur alone and nervously watching the situation up ahead again. The more he looked at it the stranger the sensation became, he could swear the landscape was becoming lighter and lighter. So much so that he had to shield his eyes, from the sudden brightness. He looked behind him and noticed Percival and Lancelot milling around amongst a group of Knights.

"What is that?" Percival asked, stopping next to Arthur.

"That is what I am wondering myself." Arthur admitted.

"Do you want us to go and investigate?" Lancelot asked, carefully unfurling his sword.

"No I think we should stay here. But we need to keep constant watch."

Lancelot nodded, but before he could move away the camp was suddenly cast in complete darkness. Arthur jumped and to his embarrassment bumped into Lancelot. Arthur could see nothing in front of him, only the breathing of Percival and Lancelot told him they were still near to him.

"This is magic." Percival said.

Arthur flinched as he took in Percival's words. He wasn't doubting his friend, and his senses heightened.

"I remember something similar like this happening before. We were in the courtyard and then suddenly everywhere was cast in total darkness, just like now. I will never forget the feeling of fear." Percival murmured.
"It is so dark, unnaturally dark." Lancelot mused, looking around nervously.

"I think we should take you somewhere safer." Percival suggested.

Arthur wasn't listening as his eyes saw a figure walking towards him, a woman all in black. Beside her was a white creature who walked alongside. As Arthur stared his mind began warning him that he had to move, but he felt as if he was in no control of his body. His eyes kept on staring at the woman and creature coming nearer and nearer towards him.

"Arthur you okay?"

Arthur could hear his Knights but was unable to answer for some reason. It then occurred to him his Knights could not see the woman, only he could. Suddenly Arthur was staring into her eyes, and for a moment it felt as if they were on fire. He tried to move away but once more felt restricted in his movement. He was being toyed with and the thought made him angry, he now knew for sure it was magic. He also knew the person was, Morgana. But before he could react, he heard Percival shout.

"Don't come any closer!"

Suddenly there was a sound of moronic laughter which seemed to take hold of Arthur's mind. But once again he was unable to react.

"Really Percival and what are you going to do if I do move closer?" Morgana laughed, once more.

"You will find out." Lancelot replied, standing next to Percival their sword pointing towards her.

"If it isn't Lancelot as loyal and dull as ever." Morgana purred. She moved towards Arthur keeping her eyes on her brother.

"We are warning you Morgana." Percival repeated.

"Yes I am sure you are, but quite frankly I have lost interest in you Percival. I have somebody else in mind." Morgana clicked her finger, and suddenly Arthur was lying at her feet. "Welcome back brother, it has been so long hasn't it?"

Arthur got up quickly feeling dazed but determined to meet his sister without fear. He pointed the sword at her.

"You need to give up Morgana. The war is over it has already cost enough lives, on both sides. You must surrender."

Morgana smiled at Arthur. "You know brother I don't feel you understand just how powerful I am." Morgana pointed at the swords. "These weapons are nothing, I am a High Priestess and I have more power in my fingers than all your swords combined.

"You cannot stop me."

"I know all about your so called power Morgana." Arthur said, looking straight in her eyes. "But you can never win with it. You don't win anything with violence; it only imprisons you making you bitter and unable to accept the reality around you."

"Brave words but they don't mean anything to me. Why do I have to fear your words when I can change everything with the click of my fingers." Morgana clicked again, and this time Percival and Lancelot stood stock still.

Arthur swallowed back his anger at her treatment of his friends. "Morgana I am warning you if you
harm my friends I-"

Morgana clicked her fingers again and the Knights came back too. She laughed looking at each of
them, in turn a superior smile on her face.

"Face it Camelot is doomed, by the time I have finished with you all, I will be free to take my rightful
place on the throne, and magic will thrive once again. Just like the old days"

"I swear for as long as blood remains in my veins, you will not inflict your will on my people
Morgana. I loved you once as my sister, a part of me still cares for you despite all the pain you have
caused. But you will not succeed. I will do whatever I have too, to stop you." Arthur promised, his
face never leaving hers.

"Such bravado from you Arthur, and they will be your last words, say goodbye to your friends for
your days are about to end."

Morgana raised her hands, and began to whisper a spell. As Arthur faced her he knew he was about
to face a terrifying ordeal.

He refused you yield though, and faced her proud his sword out in front of him. Suddenly Percival
and Lancelot ran at Morgana from behind her but before Arthur could say anything the two Knights
were thrown back in the air, by Morgana's powerful magic. Feeling angry he prepared to lunge at her
as she continued her spell. All of a sudden Arthur didn't care if these were his last minutes on earth;
he would not bow to her dark arts.

Arthur noticed Leon and Gwaine and more Knights had joined them, preparing to defend their King.
He motioned for them to stay back, but the tension increased as more men approached the scene.
Arthur had only his sister in his sights, as her voice seemed to reach a crescendo of noise he aimed
his sword towards her, ready to try and cut her down. But next second he was on the floor the sword
flying out of his hand. Morgana began to walk towards him her eyes never leaving his face. Arthur
prepared himself for the end closing his eyes. But suddenly a noise caught his attention, as his eyes
opened, he saw his sister flying backwards through the air.

For a few seconds Arthur was dumfounded what on earth had happened? He looked around him
then and suddenly he saw the looks on everyone around. There was total shock and suddenly a cold
fear warped around Arthur's being. For the likes of Leon to be so perturbed it must mean something
serious. Arthur slowly turned around, but all he could see was Merlin. His totally useless servant,
friend and -

It was then that he noticed Merlin's eyes were glowing organge, his face set in a cold, calculated
stance as he regarded Morgana. Arthur had totally forgotten his sister and he turned to face her, his
feeling of numbness increasing as he noticed Merlin moving over to where she lay. He was about to
shout out to him, but he no longer knew who the hell he was. So instead he just stood there as if in a
trance once again and watched like everyone else, lost and bewildered.

All of a sudden nothing made any sense. Everything that Arthur had taken as given had changed in a
moment of total madness. He felt as if he didn't know what the hell was going on, who was this man
who was approaching his sister so purposely and menacingly? Should he intervene, and then he
relived the moment his sister had been blown off the floor. The power had been mind-blowing he
had never seen anyone move so quickly as she flew backwards and landed in a heap on the hard
ground.

As he looked he could see she was coming round and Arthur didn't know what would happen next,
in this totally crazy night. But he knew whatever did occur, the world he had known had changed
forever.
To be Continued.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Merlin is forced to reveal himself to protect his friends. As he confront's Morgana he faces his stiffest challenge.

By the end of the encounter life has changed forever and Merlin is forced to consider what the future may have in store for him.

As Merlin walked over to Morgana he could feel everyone's eyes on him, and it felt so strange. For as long as he could remember he had been hiding his true self away, but suddenly he had been revealed, and there was nowhere for him to hide. He knew the minute he had been forced to confront the situation that his life had changed in one powerful moment. A part of him felt terrified, but he knew for now he must concentrate on the task at hand. He must protect his friends from Morgana, whatever came afterwards would have to wait. Making sure Arthur was safe he picked the King's sword off the ground.

Merlin's eyes stayed on Morgana as she slowly came round. Feeling suddenly vulnerable he kept his hand on the sword. The magical sword gave him extra confidence, and he knew Morgana would have no idea of its power. As she eventually stood up, staggering to begin with, he read the emotions on her face with a feeling of melancholy. On the one hand she would never have expected this, that Merlin of all people was a sorcerer.

Morgana had always underestimated him. He knew she would be in severe shock. In all their past encounters when Merlin had come up against her, she had always felt she was above him, but in this moment she would realise just how wrong she had been. While Merlin had been forced to hide, he had been a victim many times of her cruel tapping nature.

Yet there was always the other side. He remembered the times when she had been so unsure of herself, so afraid of her magic and what it was doing to her. He remembered even now despite the cruelty in her eyes, the young woman who had begged him for help all those years ago. Could he have done more, possibly yes although maybe the result would still have been the same regardless. The dragon had once said he was the light to her darkness, the love to her hate, and as he stood there facing her< those words came back and haunted him all over again. But he knew he would have to stay strong and resolute.

"You!" Morgana cried, her finger stabbing his way aggressively.

Merlin said nothing to start off with merely staring straight at her trying to challenge the angry eyes that glared into his. Just as he was going to speak, he noticed the look change from sheer anger to sudden comprehension.

"It is you. You are Emrys." Morgana shouted, into the darkness.

"It is the name the Druids know me by." Merlin replied, his voice sounding suddenly different to himself.

"All this time you had magic, yet you served Uther, and now my brother. You have betrayed your
kind." Morgana snarled.

"No that was you, Morgana. You abused magic with your hatred and your lust for power, using it to entrap people and control them. That was not what magic was about; it is not to be used for our vanity, for our personal ambitions. It is a gift, and you abused yours, and turned people against it."

Morgana laughed, "Turned people against it? I don't think so. I have followers who will pledge themselves to my banner, as you will all see in the days to come."

"No Morgana, this stops now." Merlin commanded, his eyes hardening. "The war is over, there are more important battles ahead. If I have to make you see this, then I will. The choice is yours though. I think in the circumstances that is more than you deserve"

"How dare you! I went to you all those years ago begging you to help me, you turned away from me like the coward you are."

"I did help you. " Merlin bit back. "I sent you to the Druids circumstances forced you to come back, but that does not change the fact that I tried to help you. I wish I had been honest with you. But it was you who chose your path. It was you who decided to go to the dark side. That is not something you can put at my door. We all have to admit we have made mistakes Morgana. You are no different."

"I chose the path to free our kind, you picked the side who tries to destroy magic. Was that one of your mistakes?"

"I have no regret about that. This is what I was born to do." Merlin replied, his eyes glowering at her.

"Betray your kind!" Morgana screamed.

Merlin watched Morgana carefully her moves were getting more irrational and erratic. Her arms were waving around in the air as if a wind was blowing around her. He could sense a change in the air, as if something was being summoned. His eyes scanned the horizon suddenly feeling a danger being unleashed. A shout from behind him warned him.

"Look out a dragon is coming."

Merlin noticed the look of conceit on Morgana's face as she chanted and suddenly Merlin caught the silhouette of Aithusa who was about to attack. Without warning Merlin threw a spell Morgana's way knocking her off her feet, her voice halting in mid-command. Sensing she would stay quiet for a while he turned his attention to Aithusa who was still in the sky. His eyes focused in on the young dragon as he let out his command. "Nun de ge dei s'eikein kai emois epe'essin hepesthai" He watched as Aithusa flew off, aware suddenly of the mumbles behind him.

Merlin realized that Arthur, Gwaine and Lancelot had gone up to Morgana who was still slumped on the ground. Nervously he looked around him and noticed people speaking in quiet whispers, but their looks his way, told him who they were talking about. He forced himself to join Arthur and the other Knights.

"Merlin is she dead?" Lancelot asked, his eyes intently on Merlin's.

"No she is merely knocked out." Merlin replied, "You need to be careful she can come round at any time."

"We need to guard her." Arthur commanded. "I will speak to her when she regains consciousness. In the meantime we need to keep the searches up all around the camp."
Merlin watched as Arthur left the area not even acknowledging him. Should he go after him or keep out of his way? All of a sudden he appeared to lose the confidence to make even a simple decision. But as he relived everything that had just happened he understood nothing was normal anymore.

"You okay?" the voice took Merlin by surprise he turned around to find Lancelot looking at him concerned on his face.

"Yes." Merlin replied, though in truth he just wanted to disappear back into the shadows again. But this was something he knew he could no longer do. He felt trapped in an unreal world where he no longer understood what to do or how to feel; but worse than that was the moment he remembered Arthur's face. His friend had looked at him in almost contempt, and that had cut Merlin to shreds. Suddenly he felt his emotion on the edge, but a murmur from Morgana brought him to his senses.

"You had better tell Arthur." Merlin suggested. He watched Lancelot run off to Arthur's tent.

Merlin kept his hand on Excalibur his mind not sure how Morgana would respond, to finding him there. He gripped the sword as her eyes opened and met him with a familiar glare.

"You." Was all she merely said.

"Yes I am still here Morgana. Here I will stay, until you accept this war is over."

"I will never accept this war is over until I have won!" she spat at him.

"Your refusal to accept the inevitable will be your achilles heel, and it will be this that defeats you." Merlin replied, looking at her sadly.

He knew though that Morgana had already lost interest in him, as Arthur had arrived back on the scene. Suddenly Morgana had a new toy to play with, and Merlin had no doubt she would make both of them suffer.

"Well hello brother once again. How does it feel to learn that your friend is actually a sorcerer?" she laughed.

"We are not here to talk about this. I am here to tell you to surrender Morgana. This has to stop and one way or another it will."

"Why? Are you going to allow magic once again?" Morgana asked, her lip curling in a smile.

"No." Arthur replied.

"How do you feel Merlin to know that all of your years serving my brother has got you absolutely nowhere? Thanks to you magic will never be accepted in Camelot. Does that make you feel proud?"

Merlin longed to shout back at her but he was desperate for it to not be about him, and to allow Arthur the centre stage. He wanted to see his friend be the one to get through to his sister, as he knew Merlin would never be able too. He remained silent, refusing to be drawn in.

"Stop changing the subject Morgana." Arthur said, "I have appealed to you to lay down your arms and stop this senseless war. There can be no winners of this and deep down you must know that."

"Why would I do that? Merlin here maybe a loser and be prepared to sacrifice himself for your rotten Kingdom Arthur, but I am made of sterner stuff."
"Morgana you cannot force your will on me or Camelot. I will not be held to ransom by your craving for power. Now I am telling you one more time to stop this war or you will face the consequences." Arthur said.

"Let me make myself clear as I don’t think of you seem to understand me. I will not stop this war, until Camelot accepts magic. They are my terms, and either you accept them Arthur or you and Camelot will perish."

"Very well Morgana, you force my hand. You will be put on trial when we return to Camelot. You will be tried for your crimes against the Kingdom. You being my sister will not grant you any favours whatsoever. If you see fit to take this course you leave me no choice. Maybe you should sleep on it and reconsider."

"Reconsider what? What have you actually offered me Arthur? Nothing, with your draconian view on magic, you give people like me no choices. You speak of uniting the land, and yet you force magical people out onto the edges of society. What about our rights? What about our futures? You have given us no choice. We fight, therefore we exist. That is entirely due to you, no one else."

"No Morgana you're wrong. It is you that has caused this to happen." Merlin said. "It is thanks to your insanity and cruelty forcing people to fear magic, to see it as a negative thing."

"What would you know Merlin you are a traitor to magic." Morgana chided, "You know nothing of our suffering."

"No Morgana that is where you are wrong. I know about suffering thanks to my gift. I know what it was like to be forced out of my home village, as my mother feared others finding out about my magic. I can remember the day when I saw my eyes in a stream orange and glowing and thinking of myself as a monster, because my eyes glowed, because I was not like other people. I can remember coming to Camelot and watching a man die in the courtyard, knowing that one day that could have been me.

We all have our sufferings, whether we are magical or not. I have seen the look of fear on other people's eyes when they speak about magic. The magic they see is not the beauty that flows through my veins and my being, but the magic that destroys and brings destruction to their lives and their communities. Thanks to people like you that is all they see when they think about magic. We both know there is more to it than that. We both know how magic can be beautiful how it can do things for good, and be for the good of all. Yet all the time the only answer you give is one of darkness. There is more to magic than that Morgana, try to see the light, for all our sakes. Then maybe one day magic can be given a chance once again." Merlin pleaded.

There was a pause but suddenly Merlin wasn't any longer wishing to disappear into the shadows. He felt uplifted somehow, as if this was something he had longed to say for years. He had already sensed it was too late for Morgana, as he knew she would reject everything as always. But he knew if anything would get through to Arthur it was proving that magic could be something else, and not just the dark force that had dominated the young King's life for so many years. The short term between them was already shrouded in doubt, Merlin knew that, but if the gods were truly merciful as he hoped, then this would be what would stay with his friend in the dark days to come for both of them.

"You know the terms Morgana, I urge you think about it over the rest of the night." Arthur said, "Watch her Lancelot."

"Yes sire."
Arthur started to move away, but Merlin stayed for he could suddenly sense a magical force bubbling up in the atmosphere. In one second he looked back to see a spear rising from near where Morgana sat. Merlin quickly unleashed his magic onto it forcing the spear down, and in her frustration Morgana flew at him. He pushed her back onto the ground but even then she kicked out at him with her feet forcing him onto the ground. Her hands were slapping his face and grabbing at him, her shouts filling the air. Merlin eventually scrambled away as Lancelot and Gwaine pulled Morgana away from him.

Even though the Knights held her back Merlin could feel her rage and anger bubbling around them.

Merlin took a couple of minutes to compose himself, and stepped away but stayed near enough should he need to intervene once more.

"Arthur." Morgana called.

Arthur turned around and went back over to her signalling for his Knights to release her from their grasp. Merlin watched closely not for one minute trusting Morgana as she smiled sweetly at Arthur who was regarding her carefully.

"You are right brother, I promise you I will think things over." Morgana replied.

There was a pause before Merlin saw Arthur's face stiffen slightly though he noticed the King kept a distance between them. She eased herself towards him more, and it was only at the last second that Merlin saw the trace of the knife that she had in her hand. Merlin threw his hand out quickly as Morgana lunged at a shocked Arthur. Merlin's magic, made her stagger and gave him enough time, to run over to her. Merlin could see she still had the knife ready to stab Arthur, and realising reluctantly it was either her or Arthur he plunged the sword into Morgana.

There was a pause before she reacted shock in her voice."You cannot kill me." Morgana accused. "I am a High Priestess."

"But this is no ordinary sword Morgana." Merlin said, his eyes never leaving her face.

Morgana attempted to fight him for a few seconds, but before long her body started to go limp, and she slipped to the ground, Merlin catching her before she finally landed.

"I am sorry Morgana, but I could not let you do this. I hope you will find some peace in the otherworld." He said, quietly.

Merlin felt her spirit finally leave her body, her eyes closing the moment death claimed her. For a moment he stared at her face, which looked curiously free from any madness or distress. It was as if she had found a sense of peace in her final moment. Merlin wished with all his heart that was the case. He slowly eased himself up onto his feet meeting Arthur's stare. Merlin wished he could read the emotions on the King's face. But he could feel his strength ebbing away.

"You saved my life." Arthur said, looking straight at Merlin.

"I would do so again." Merlin replied. "Just like I have always done."

He noticed Arthur staring at the sword. "How did you kill her with that sword Merlin? She's a High Priestess. You can't kill her with a normal sword."

"It." Merlin began, but he had to lick his lips as he felt his mouth go dry. This was not the place to be explaining such things, he thought his mind lost in panic.

"Well? The sword how is it able to kill her?" Arthur demanded, once again.
Merlin sighed knowing he had no choice other than to be honest.

"Arthur maybe this isn't the time." Lancelot cut in.

"It is all right Lancelot." Merlin assured his friend. "The sword was made in a dragon's breath Arthur. It means it has the power to kill things or people who have magic."

"Dragon's Breath? You mean the one that attacked us?" Arthur continued, his eyes hardening.

"No Arthur, this was another one."

Merlin watched as realisation dawned onto Arthur's face. "You mean the one that escaped from Camelot and killed hundreds of my people?"

There was a pause and Merlin wanted the ground to open up and swallow him, it was a horrible way for it to come out, but he realized he had no choice other than to be honest now "Yes. But Arthur let me explain more." Merlin pleaded, but he could sense Arthur's mood hardening even more now.

"Tomorrow I am sending a group of men back to Camelot, I wish that you accompany them Merlin. I do not want to see you or speak to you until we are all back in Camelot." Arthur commanded.

Merlin paused but another look at Arthur's set face told him he could do nothing about it. He nodded. "Of course I will do whatever you want."

He watched Arthur walk away, his heart in his mouth and suddenly he just wanted to crumble to the ground. His slumping shoulders tensed as he felt someone's hand on them.

"He will come around Merlin. You must not give up." Lancelot said softly.

"What if he doesn't Lancelot? There is so much he doesn't know, that none of you know. I am afraid that the truth will be a test of our friendship but it could also be too much for him to accept."

"You are doubting him?" Lancelot asked, looking intently into Merlin's face.

"No I am doubting myself." Merlin replied, wanting to be truthful.

"Well don't doubt yourself Merlin. You have proved to everyone today just what you are. Don't let the shock that people are going through frighten you. Today we all saw the real you and I am even more impressed than I thought I would be."

"Thanks Lancelot." Merlin replied, feeling tears close by.

"I mean it. It will be difficult and you may well have to fight for it, but you will get through to him. Just give it time and understanding. One thing I know is if Camelot and the Five Kingdoms are to thrive they will need both of you at the helm." Lancelot replied.

"Let's hope I have it in me then." Merlin smiled.

"You will. I have seen the true fighter today Merlin, and you are one impressive man." Lancelot said, patting his shoulder.

"So are you my friend." Merlin smiled, gripping Lancelot's arm.

"What are we going to do about her?" Lancelot asked, looking at Morgana's body.

"I will find a place to bury her." Merlin replied, his eyes clouding over as he looked at her.
"Are you sure you don't need some help?" Lancelot asked.

"No this is for me to do." Merlin replied.

"I had better get on watch then, take care." Lancelot said.

"Yes I will see you later."

Merlin watched his friend pick up his sword and walk off over towards a group of Knights. Lancelot's words had momentarily lifted his spirits but now he was on his own, and suddenly the world seemed a wild and unfriendly place. If he had thought hiding his secret was lonely he now felt even more cut off and isolated. Every little look from someone made him self-conscious he wondered what they were thinking about him? Would their feelings towards him change? Would he been seen as a danger to Camelot?

He had so many questions floating about inside his mind, he hardly knew where to start. He dropped Excalibur onto the ground, suddenly aware of Morgana's blood still on the blade. He wondered briefly what to do with it. By right's the sword belonged to Arthur, but how would he react to it, knowing it had magical powers? Merlin sighed realising just how complicated life had now become for them. For a moment he dithered, noticing Gwaine's eyes on him. Feeling self-conscious, he decided he needed to get away.

But first he had a job to do. Staring down at Morgana, he knew he needed to find a nice place for her to rest in, it was the least she deserved. He picked her up carefully making for a peaceful corner by some trees, away from the camp. Once he had buried her, he collected some stones and put them on top of the grave, touching the top one, and saying a quiet prayer. He hoped she would now find some peace at last. His emotions were shot as he remembered the moment when he'd been forced to end her life.

He knew he'd had no choice she would never give in, and it was Arthur or her, and there was no way that he would have let his friend die. This way Camelot still had a chance even if it meant that his own may have vanished in that moment of tragedy. He suddenly felt tired. Looking up at the sky he reckoned he would have three hours to maybe find some sleep from somewhere. He walked off towards some rocks, he had noticed an cave and thought a few hours away would enable him to clear his mind. Or to at least take control of himself once again, and stop the endless questions that were whizzing inside his head. The moon was beginning to fade, an odd crack of light showing through the dark clouds.

He tried to shut his mind down, but he was suddenly aware of some magical force calling to him. He looked around him puzzled, then realized it was coming from where he walking towards, over the rocks. As he got nearer the connection felt stronger and he could also hear a whimpering. Suddenly it occurred to him who it was, Aithusa. He ran over the rocks carefully not wanting to alarm her. As he approached the entrance of the cave, he could hear her more clearly. To his ears it sounded like she was in pain. He closed his eyes understanding only too well the feeling of it, the depth of emotion.

He had let her down, by losing connection with her. He had been so busy with everything at Camelot that he had forgotten about the little dragon he had called into the world. That moment had been such a feeling of pride for him, the connection with her as she had come out of the egg, but somehow they had lost the special bond between them. In that time she had befriended Morgana and a relationship between them had been cemented.

He made his way round a corner and suddenly he could see her, and for a second she had froze as if unsure of what to do. He took advantage crouching onto his knees trying to look at her, from her level.
"It is okay Aithusa. I am sorry. I know you are suffering the loss of your friend. Believe me I share your pain, but from now on things will be different. I will be here for you I just need you to trust me and to understand my wish to make amends." As he spoke Aithusa slowly made her way over to him stopping just short. Merlin reached out his hand slowly touching her head. "I remember the day you came out of the egg Aithusa. I was so proud that day it was as if I was bringing life into the world. I was because that was you. I need to make things up to you, and in time I will. Come on." Merlin sat against a rock encouraging the dragon to join him. She did lying by his side, as Merlin put his head back and closed his eyes. The world shut down, and all was peace around them.

To Be Continued.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of Merlin's enforced reveal, the repercussions are being felt by all. As Merlin gloomily considers what may happen next, he knows there are other amends that he needs to make.

Arthur meanwhile struggles to come to terms with what he has seen, and more to the point what happens next. He knows there will be implications in Camelot as well.

Back in Camelot Guinevere overhears a couple of Knights talking. The truth shocks her, and she know there is only one man in Camelot that can shed more light to what she has heard.

Merlin had no idea how long he had slept, but by the time his eyes had opened, the day had begun. Outside he could hear the rain lashing down, and every now and then could feel a trickle of water, falling from the roof. He gave a start, as he felt something on his lap, but then relaxed as he realised, it was only Aithusa still asleep. He stroked her softly, knowing that soon, he would have to leave her, once again. But before he could get distressed about it, an idea came to him. He softly whispered to her, watching carefully, as she slowly came too.

“Aithusa I have to leave now. But I want you to trust me, with what I am going to do.”

The dragon bent her head towards him, as if taking in his words. He got hold of her face gently, looking into her eyes, and softly said a spell. After he had finished, she had got up, and with one last look at him, she made for the rocks, eventually taking off. “Remember Aithusa, we will meet again. Until then, stay out of sight.” Before long she was high in the sky, and by the time Merlin had left the cave, was well out of sight.

The rain continued to come down, as Merlin brushed himself down, and made for the camp. A feeling of uncertainty, haunted his every move. As he pulled his jacket up, to cover his wet head, he could sense the difference, in mood as he walked towards the tents. At least before, he had the dark to retreat into, but now the daylight, seemed to reveal him to everyone around.

Here he comes the sorcerer, the man who had lied to his King. As he noticed people’s eyes, following his every move, he just wished he could disappear, into a puff of smoke. But he knew, he had to carry on, best he could. At least back at Camelot, he could go to Gaius, and hide in his room; away from all the prying eyes. Until then, he had to bite the bullet, and carry on as normally, as he could.

He made his way past Arthur’s tent, stopping only for a moment wondering how, his friend’s night had been. But he knew no good, would come of it, trying to speak to him now. It was best, he got away from him, and allow him some space.

He headed for his tent, pushing back the entrance, to find himself face to face, with Gwaine.

“Merlin we were about, to search for you.” Gwaine said, looking at him curiously.
“Sorry. I thought it was best for me, to keep out of everyone’s way.” Merlin replied. He tensed as he felt Gwaine’s eyes looking at him. He knew he would have to get used to these moments, but as ever the fear of rejection stabbed him like a knife. If Gwaine had no understanding what chance would he have with anyone else? “Gwaine.” He began.

“I was right then.” Gwaine interrupted him, his eyes bright and intrigued.

“About what?” Merlin asked, genuinely puzzled.

“You did have a secret.” Gwaine grinned.

Merlin suddenly laughed. “I am sorry Gwaine, I wish I could have told you.”

“I wish you had too. It wouldn’t have changed my opinion on you, you know Merlin.” Gwaine said.

For a moment Merlin was lost for words. “Thank you Gwaine that means a lot to me.” Merlin smiled.

“I have put that crazy sword over by your bed, you had left it outside. “You take care, I will see you back in Camelot.” Gwaine replied, pushing him gently forward.

Merlin nodded, watching Gwaine disappear. He sighed collecting his stuff and packing away his various possessions. When he had finished, he took one last look around the tent, as if he was memorising it for life. Who knew if he would ever return to Camelot, he suddenly thought to himself and shuddered at the idea. As he had considered various outcomes not for one moment had he imagined this. He had spent half of his life wondering what his gift was for, and now it had ended before he had even had the chance to stand at Arthur’s side.

There was still so much work to do, before the Five Kingdoms became united, and now Merlin’s place in guiding Arthur on this long and complicated task, was at serious risk. For a moment he wanted to break down and cry. He had already learnt that life had a habit of biting you, when you least expected it. But this was something he had hardly contemplated, and it felt like he was being torn apart.

He was about to go, but he couldn’t resist holding Excalibur one more time. He picked it up and carefully ran his fingers up the blade. So many times the sword had saved them, Arthur and himself. He had used it on so many adventures that they had faced together. As he took in the beautiful and magical weapon, he could not help but wonder if he would ever get to use it again. He knew he was facing days of uncertainty when his life could be altered forever.

But he also knew he would never regret his days with the Once and Future King. No matter what life now had in store for him. The more he thought about it, Merlin felt certain that Arthur would at the very least banish him. In his worst nightmare the image of a pyre came into his mind, but his heart told him that Arthur would not do that. But that was not to say that others wouldn’t try and persuade Arthur to kill him. He was about to put the sword down, when he thought there was something he must do first.

He left the tent, pulling his jacket over his head once again, cursing the weather. He went in search for Sir Leon, making sure that Excalibur was hidden away. If he and Arthur were to be parted Merlin was determined that his friend would have the protection of Excalibur, even if Arthur still didn’t know the full extent of the sword’s power. Excalibur belonged to Arthur now, whether Merlin was by his side or not. At least he would rest easy knowing, that the magical sword would protect his friend, while he was not there.
Rain was beating down hard on top of the tent, making Arthur shudder under the thin cover. He had not managed to get much sleep over-night, with too much going on inside his mind. He had hoped he would have managed some rest, if only to forget the sight of Merlin and his glowing eyes, which continued to haunt him. If Merlin was not plaguing his mind, there was the sight of Morgana, lying on the ground, causing him much confusion and upset.

He tried to rationalize his feelings towards his sister. After all this meant peace would at least have a chance in Camelot. But even that could not stop the thought that she was still his sister. For all that she had done, for all that she had been, she was his last living relative, and now she was gone.

He slowly pushed back the cover, being careful not to put too much strain on his arm. The knife had marked part of his lower wrist making him wince. He had stupidly taken off his armour, forgetting that Morgana could have turned up at any time. When she did, he had misjudged the situation, allowing her to get too close to him. But even now he could still see the look on her face as she had called him over to her. Why had he ignored every rule about making it too easy for your opponent he wondered? The answer of course was obvious, because even in that moment he had wanted to believe that she was being genuine. He was so eager for her to see sense, that in that moment he had forgotten just how desperate and dangerous she was.

He glowered at his arm, he knew he needed to get it bandaged. In normal times Merlin would have been there to do it for him. It hurt Arthur even now to realise just how much he had come to rely on him. But the events of the night had changed their relationship forever. Arthur slumped from his chair, letting his despair go; hoping it would rid his feelings of uselessness and anger that was pumping inside him. It hurt because he had been taken for a fool once again. He had allowed people to become close to him, only for them to have betrayed him. How many times was this going to happen, he wondered?

He tried to work out why he was such an easy target? This was Merlin, the person he thought who would always be by his side. He had been so devoted to Arthur, made him believe in himself when Arthur could not. In their endless adventures and quests Merlin had been the one who had kept his spirits up, the cheerful face and the endless chatter. More than any other he had been the constant in his life, when he had struggled to become the King that he was now.

In all those moments of doubt when Arthur had grown up in the shadow of his father, it was Merlin that had made him believe, and have the confidence to become his own man. Now he knew it had all been nothing but a lie. The thought made him want to cry out in bitter frustration.

In that unforgettable night, Arthur had discovered the truth. Merlin was a sorcerer. When his eyes had glowed orange, to Arthur it was like living through his ultimate nightmare. As he stared at the man who he had thought was his friend, he had no longer seen Merlin, but a stranger someone whom he did not know. It had felt as if his life was crashing in around him.

He had struggled to take control of the situation. But somehow from somewhere he found the courage to take the decisions he had to make. It had been one of the biggest challenges of his life. He had sensed the shock of everyone around, as they watched the encounter between Merlin and Morgana unfold. He had shared in it, and yet he knew that he still had to lead.

When Merlin had initially thrown Morgana across the ground, a feeling of coldness and numbness had taken a hold of his inner senses. Even now he could remember how his mouth had flown open, his eyes had grown wider in disbelief. How his legs had felt like lead as if they had been pinned to the floor. But most of all it was the palpable shock in his mind that raged out of control; as he tried to believe what his eyes had just been a witness too.
Merlin, his clumsy and useless servant had just thrown Morgana through the air, like she was nothing but a ragdoll. The power of that moment had been what had shocked Arthur the most. The suddenness and the violence was in stark contrast to how he had seen his former friend. Merlin was someone who Arthur would tease for his utter uselessness on the battlefield.

He was no good with weapons, even in Arthur’s training sessions, he had considered Merlin little more than a “girl”. But now his mind ceased to comprehend the situation. Having seen what he had that night, he realized that Merlin was more powerful than anyone else he had ever seen. With magic like that Arthur reckoned his friend could destroy virtually anything.

The thought of it had left him overcome and confused. He found his mind overrunning with crazy thoughts, and irrational with fear of what Merlin might do. Yet hadn’t Merlin just saved his life? It was that one thing that puzzled Arthur, and left any chance of him understanding everything that much harder.

Arthur yawned suddenly realising he should get dressed and show his face. No matter what he was feeling, he had a job to do, to get his men safely back to Camelot. He himself needed to get to Camelot. There he could talk to Guinevere. She would know what to do, he told himself. Then he could maybe start to make plans of how to take his Kingdom forward.

A call from outside alerted him, and Arthur quickly began to get dressed. He beckoned Leon into the tent and listened as the Knight, spoke about the latest reports.

“There have been no more sightings of any Saxons sire. It seems they have all disappeared.” Leon said.

“That is good news indeed Leon.” Arthur replied, noticing that Leon was looking awkward. “What is it Leon?”

“The first section of our men including Merlin have departed for Camelot, erm Merlin asked for you to have this.” Leon said, handing Arthur a sword.

Arthur flinched as he recognised the sword that had killed his sister, the sword that had been made in a dragon’s breath, according to his former friend. Arthur reluctantly took it from Leon, looking at the markings and the writing on its blade.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what will you do with it?” Leon asked. “I have to say Merlin was most insistent that you have it. He said it naturally belonged to you, and you alone.”

“I see. He said it was forged in a dragon’s breath Leon. There is so much I don’t know about it. But once we get back to Camelot, I will endeavour to find out.” Arthur replied. ”We must not delay much longer, order the remaining men to pack up, we must make haste for home.”

“Yes sire. What, will you do about Merlin?” Leon asked, suddenly.

Arthur had not been expecting the question, and turned away not wanting Leon to see the pain in his eyes. “Like I said once I am back in Camelot I will talk to him, what happens after that, I just don’t know.”

“I will get the men ready right away.” Leon bowed, and left the tent.

Arthur put the sword down, suddenly wishing to do something. He found his bag and began packing away his possessions. Soon they would be heading for Camelot, and home. Maybe there he could get a moment to think about what he had to do. He already knew that certain people would expect him to put Merlin on trial, at the very least. He could just imagine some of the old Lords from his
father's day, giving their opinions insisting that Arthur do his duty. It was then he realized just what a predicament he was in. What was he going to do?

Suddenly the mere thought of it, demoralized Arthur, and he knew he had to put it, to the back of his mind, before it ate him up. He had a long journey back to Camelot, and then he could begin the prospect of, deciding the fate of Merlin.

Camelot

Queen Guinevere sat staring out of the window. Ever since she had got the message that Camlann had been won, she made a habit of spending a few minutes keep an eye out for the returning victorious army. The rest of her time consisted of meetings, and compiling reports over the current situation in Camelot itself. So many refugees had come to the town, and she made it her business to be kept up to date, with any problem that occurred.

It had been an exhausting task, which meant she had little opportunity for herself. That didn’t bother her too much, as it meant there was no chance for her to fret about Arthur and Merlin’s safety.

But ever since the raven had arrived saying the battle had been won, Guinevere felt a sudden rush of longing to see her husband once again. The one concerning thing had been that Morgana had not been found. She hoped that would not be a bad omen. She decided to allow herself a little while longer, and grabbed some unfinished needlework, listening out for any voices outside. Before she had time to even begin, there was a knock on the door.

“Come in.” She called, putting down her needlework.

“My lady, there is news of some Knights arriving back.” Sian said, excitedly.

Guinevere smiled at her maid’s excited face. Sian’s boyfriend was a Knight, and the Queen could understand the young girl’s sudden happiness at the prospect of seeing her love once again.

“Then you had better go down and see.” Guinevere said.

“Thank you my lady.” Sian curtsied and left.

Guinevere attempted to sit down and begin sewing, but curiosity sudden caught the better of her. She had to drop in on Gaius anyway, she thought to herself so maybe she could have a little look. By the time she had got downstairs she could see a line of Knights getting off their horses, and chatting excitedly among themselves.

She went outside, seeing if she recognised anyone. To begin with she did not, but she decided to remain outside anyway. As she kept to the background she suddenly caught part of a conversation that drifted over to her.

“So what do you think is going to happen then?” a voice asked, “Will that sorcerer get back into Arthur’s good books.”

“Who knows, but the King looked so shocked, even the next morning. I still don’t know what to think myself.” Another voice replied.

“Well I suppose he did save the King’s life.”

“Yes but he lied to him for years, that is going to hurt isn’t it?”

The voices drifted away as the men led their horses to the stables. Guinevere was left frowning, a
sorcerer who could they mean she wondered. All of a sudden she was restless for more information. She looked around her seeing if she could recognise anyone who she knew. Presently the figure of Sir Ivan came into view. He was a young Knight, one that Arthur had many hopes for. She smiled at him and beckoned him over. She noticed he seemed a bit hesitant, which made her fear, that something was amiss.

“Sir Ivan. I am happy to see you have made it safely home.” Guinevere smiled.

“Thank you my lady, it is good to be home. I am pretty sure the King will be on his way shortly.”

“How is he, Arthur I mean.” Guinevere asked, watching him closely. She noticed his wariness straight away.

“Yes he is well, last time I saw him. I mean in the circumstances.” The young Knight reddened.

“What circumstances are those?” Guinevere asked, determined to get to the bottom of it.

“Well it maybe better coming from him I think.” Sir Ivan replied, looking very embarrassed.

Guinevere took pity on him. “Ivan I know something has happened please let me know. I overheard someone say a sorcerer saved Arthur, is that true?”

The Knight looked down at his feet, when he lifted his head up he looked even more perturbed. “Yes he did.”

“Ivan what is it, you are making me worried.” Guinevere said, her heart racing

“Well you’re going to find out sooner or later. It was Merlin. The sorcerer was Merlin.” He whispered.

Guinevere stood there, her mouth open and staring at Ivan in shock. Merlin was a sorcerer, surely he was mistaken. “Are you sure?”

“Oh yes my lady he killed Morgana, saved the King’s life in truth. Not that it made any difference in the end.” The young Knight said, suddenly words flowing more. “They haven’t spoken since.”

A shout from across the yard brought Guinevere too, and she suddenly felt the urge to be alone, so that she could come to her senses.

“Thank you Ivan for telling me. I will leave you to your business.” She said, nodding at him and quickly leaving.

“I hope it wasn’t too much of a shock.” The young Knight replied, but Guinevere had already left him, and gone back into the castle.

Once she was inside Guinevere found a quiet corner and tried to make sense of what she’d just been told. She still couldn’t quite believe it. Merlin was a sorcerer, her friend who she had known for so many years. But suddenly she wondered if she had known him at all. As the shock slowly began to leave her, she realized there was only one man who would know more.

Heaving her skirt up, she began to climb the steps that led to Gaius’s chambers. She knew that Gaius would not tell her anything easily, but she also knew that there were certain things she needed to know. She could only imagine how much of a shock it would have been for Arthur. If she was to be of any good to either her husband or friend, she knew she needed answers.
To be Continued.
Chapter Summary

Guinevere is determined to get Gaius to explain the story behind Merlin's life and also what it could mean for Arthur, and Camelot. As Gaius explains she begins to appreciate just how much of the relationship between Merlin and Arthur was foretold.

Arthur continues to struggle with the news, and a further encounter with Lancelot makes him question, whether he has acted as straightforward as a man as he could have done.

As Merlin approaches Camelot he longs for the comfort of his mentor and the safety of his chambers. He also questions just what direction his life will now take.

Camelot

As Guinevere prepared to knock on Gaius's door she paused. Just how could she broach the subject with Gaius? She knew that he was quite rightly protective of his ward. But at the same time Guinevere realized that if, she was to be any help to anyone she needed to understand as much as she could. But she knew how stubborn Gaius could be, and it would not be easy. Somehow she had to persuade him to trust her. She took a deep breath as she knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

Guinevere opened the door and as ever, the first thing that greeted her was chaos. Gaius was making up a potion, with various bottles and herbs lying on top of the work bench. She smiled, as she watched Gaius working away. It always took her breath away whenever she was in Gaius’s chambers. She guessed there was a method to how he stored everything. But to her ordered and tidy mind, she found it hard to understand how he found anything. But she knew this had always been his way, even when he was younger and she doubted he would change now.

“My Lady.” Gaius said, and bowed before putting down the bottle and coming towards her.

“I wasn’t sure if you had heard, but some of the men have begun to return from Camlann.” Guinevere said, more stiffly then she had intended.

Yes I had heard, that’s good news hopefully Arthur and Merlin will be back soon.” Gaius said, “Do you mind if I return to my work?”

“No of course not Gaius.” Guinevere replied, watching him pouring some liquid into a bottle.

“Sit down.” Gaius urged, “I have almost finished making my potions for today, I may even be able to offer you some soup.”

“Oh no I have already eaten thanks.” Guinevere smiled, wondering how she was going to begin the
conversation with him.

Gaius looked up, and Guinevere could feel him watching her for a moment. “If you don’t mind me saying you look a bit preoccupied.”

Guinevere suddenly realised the best thing to do was to come straight out with it. “Yes I have something to tell you.”

“Oh?”

“I spoke to a couple of Knight’s earlier. There seems to have been an incident at Camlann.” Guinevere began hesitantly.

“Merlin?”

Guinevere could sense the way Gaius’s concerns came to the surface straight away, and knew she had to be careful how she spoke about the situation.

“Merlin is not hurt Gaius, so please don’t worry. It seems though he was forced to save Arthur’s life, and in doing so he revealed himself.” Guinevere let the sentence hang in the air, and she watched Gaius carefully.

“Revealed?” Gaius asked, briefly looking her way and then turning away from her.

Not for the first time Guinevere revelled at how calmly he seemed to take the news. If she hadn’t found out about Merlin before, she guessed Gaius would have fooled her with his reaction. But she did know the truth. She knew then that she would have to be more forceful.

“Yes he revealed himself.” Guinevere repeated. “He did it right in front of everybody.”

There was a pause and Guinevere, waited for a reaction. She hadn’t doubted that, Gaius would remain protective of Merlin. But was he really going to force her to confront him with the truth? Was that going to be the only way, he would admit anything. She sighed already knowing the answer.

“Gaius you have to understand how things stand now. I have just heard that Merlin is being sent back to Camelot, his situation is precarious. As you can imagine Arthur did not react well to it. Now I want to help. But I can only do so when you are prepared, to be honest with me. So please talk to me.” She pleaded. She watched as the old man’s colour slowly began draining from his face.

“Gaius please sit down.” Guinevere went over to him helping him into a chair.

“I am okay.” Gaius said, his eyes shocked and worry lined on his face. After a pause he continued. “I always knew there would come a day when you and Arthur would find out. But I had hoped it would have been in a controlled environment.”

Guinevere sat next to him, her hand touching his. “I am not going to pretend this will be easy. I am sure we will find a way through this. But I need you to trust me Gaius.”

“Yes I know.” Gaius said. “Before I say anything you need to know that all I have tried to do, is to protect everyone. Merlin most of all.”

“I know Gaius, but the secret is out now. People know he is a sorcerer, and that news will spread quickly. It has already started too amongst the men here. I have tried to stop it getting any further for now. I am concerned about how some of the older Lords from Uther’s day will react to this. That means we need to be able to act quickly, if we are stop things deteriorating. You know as well as I do, that they will put Arthur under pressure.” Guinevere said, avoiding Gaius’s eyes for a second.
“God, why did it have to come out like this?” Gaius sighed. After a pause he murmured. “What do you want to know?”

Guinevere relaxed, knowing the first hurdle had been overcome successfully. “Everything Gaius, I want to know everything.”

“Everything?” Gaius repeated.

“Yes. If we are to help Merlin and Arthur then I need to know the whole story.” Guinevere insisted.

Camlann

Arthur had finished packing up his things, and was looking forward to returning to Camelot and seeing Guinevere. The only way he could presently get through the “incident” as he now described it in his mind, was by thinking about getting home. The longer he stayed away, the more his mind wanted to return to that desperate night. He was almost hesitant to close his eyes at all, for all he could see were Merlin’s orange eyes. All he could feel was the power that Merlin unleashed into his sister, as she had flown backwards.

He jumped as Lancelot suddenly entered the tent.

“I am sorry sire.” Lancelot murmured.

“It’s all right Lancelot I was in a world of my own.” Arthur replied, making light of it. “What do you want?”

“I am just letting you know that everything is nearly packed and we are almost ready to leave.” Lancelot answered.

“Good, let’s not delay the weather will change soon. We need to make Camelot as quickly as possible.” Arthur turned away, expecting Lancelot to leave. But he suddenly sensed the Knight was still with him. “Lancelot?” he grumbled.

“I was just wondering sire, about Merlin. What will you do?” Lancelot asked.

“I don’t know, and I really don’t want to discuss it at this moment.” Arthur said, turning his back on the Knight.

“Sire, I just want to say everything he did, he did it for you.” Lancelot said.

“He did it for me? “ Arthur asked, curtly. “So he lied for me did he? All these years when I thought I knew him, when I thought I knew who he was.”

“I know he regretted not being able to tell you the truth about his magic. He told me a number of times.” Lancelot stammered.

There was a pause before Arthur turned around and looked at Lancelot directly. “You knew that he had magic? And you didn’t tell me anything?”

“I had promised Merlin that I would keep his secret sire. I am sorry that I did not tell you. But I made an oath to Merlin. I could not break that. But I know how much he wanted to tell you the truth. I knew how desperate he was to reveal himself. But his first duty was to you, no one else but you. I urge you to try and understand that, in the days and months ahead”

“That’s enough Lancelot.” Arthur said. “We need to get out of here.”
For a second the two men regarded each other, Arthur’s hard eyes, against Lancelot’s soft ones. Only at the very last minutes did Lancelot leave, for a moment it seemed he wanted to say something else. But after a pause he left leaving Arthur alone.

How much more Arthur thought to himself, how many other things remained hidden from him. How many more people knew? He suddenly felt incredibly angry; yet again he was the last to find out the truth. Was he such a hard man to speak too he wondered to himself. Did people find him hard to approach? He had set out to make himself easier going then his father ever was. But now he was beginning to wonder, if he had made a good job of it all. He snatched his bag and walked away to his waiting horse.

As Arthur mounted his horse he looked at the other Knights. They all seemed to be avoiding his eyes as if a barrier was up, between them all. Arthur sunk despondently into his saddle, damn Merlin he thought to himself. Just now he wished he had never met him at all. He geed his horse forward not even looking back, to see if they were all following him. He had not seen Merlin for a couple of days now, and he briefly wondered if his former friend had made it back to Camelot. He knew it would be a long journey back for him and the Knights. After that who knew what would happen, the more Arthur thought about it the more lost he felt.

Camelot

As Guinevere listened to Gaius explaining timidly at first all about Merlin’s background, she thought back to a conversation she’d had with Merlin. She remembered sauntering over to him in the stocks, and introducing herself. They had fallen into such an easy conversation, and had ended up speaking about Arthur. He had teased her mercilessly, but then she had remembered something that he had said. He had laughed and told her that he was in “disguise.” Guinevere remembered how the word had intrigued her at the time. There was something about him right from the start that had set him apart from everyone else that she knew.

As Gaius explained how Merlin had come to find himself in Camelot under his care, she realized even before the physician had said it, that there was something inevitable about Merlin ending up here with Arthur. It was a thought that strangely moved her for some reason. Guinevere had always understood that certain things in life followed a set pattern. But this was more than that she realized it straight away. This was something that had been foretold, that Merlin and Arthur would meet, and together they would unite the Five Kingdoms.

“So this prophecy Gaius.” Guinevere said, wanting to understand the detail. “When did you first learn about it?” Guinevere by now was getting used to Gaius’s pauses whenever there was something he did not want to admit too. But she sensed something else now. It was almost as if he was trying to fight his way out of something. In the end she decided to help him. “Remember what I said Gaius, only when I know the truth can I be of any use to anyone.”

“I know but there are some thing’s Guinevere that are not easy to admit too, no matter how much you want too.”

Guinevere thought for a second. Up until now Gaius had been pretty honest she reasoned. She’d already guessed that there would be some things which would be harder to talk about. Also she considered that maybe she didn’t need to know everything all at once. She made a decision. “I suppose I don’t have to know everything now. But one day it may need to be explained more.”

“Yes one day I promise I will tell you, even though I fear it.” Gaius said, sadly. “Some things I think are best left in the past.”

“My father used to say that, when I asked him certain things too. He would say it with the same
haunted expression that you have as well. But I sometimes wonder if doing that causes more problems. One thing though Gaius. You said Merlin was born with this power?” Guinevere asked, feeling anxious to understand just what that meant.

“Yes, his magic was with him from the moment he was born.” Gaius announced. “He had to learn how to use it properly. We had some near disasters I can tell you.”

“And he has spent all this time in Camelot of all places.” Guinevere asked, awe in her voice.

“Yes indeed. Not only that. He has been forced to deny himself as well, in fact too many times to mention. He is such a selfless young man, always was from the moment I met him.” Gaius admitted, sadly.

“Poor Merlin.” Guinevere whispered. As she allowed Gaius’s words to penetrate into her mind properly, not for the first time, an emotion overcame her. For all these years Merlin had been by Arthur’s side, Guinevere instinctively knew, he had kept her husband safe on many occasions. After all there must have been a reason, as to why she had always trusted Merlin, to bring Arthur home. She knew that fighting was not one of Merlin’s best talents. In fact she suspected Merlin’s magic had kept them all safe over the years.

“I fear that Arthur will struggle to understand.” Gaius said, fearfully.

“You must have faith in Arthur, Gaius. At the moment he will feel confused angry even, but at heart he is a good man. He will feel hurt to begin with. But you and Merlin need to find a way to trust in him, no more avoiding the truth.”

“I have lived a life time hiding from the truth. When you do that it is hard to step away from the lies. I fear I have spread that to Merlin as well.” He admitted.

“For the sake of their relationship together Gaius, we must make sure that does not happen.” Guinevere said, with determination.

“I have to say you have been very calm about all of this. It must be a lot to take in.”

“True, but from that first day I met Merlin all those years ago, I knew there was something special about him. I suppose I am just starting to find that out. Try not to worry Gaius, when Merlin arrives just make sure you are there for him. I will do my best to speak to Arthur. I am sure together we can find a way to get through this.”

As Guinevere left Gaius’s chambers, she suddenly felt as if she needed to go somewhere to think. There was so much to take in, but she knew she needed to be there for her husband. She just hoped she had it in her to enable Arthur and Merlin to come to terms with their new relationship.

Merlin breathed a sigh of relief as the turrets of Camelot came into view on the horizon. The journey had gone without incident, leaving Merlin much time for reflection upon recent events. Having considered what had happened, he knew little could have been done to prevent the version of events. Morgana’s incisive attack on his friends had left him with no alternative other than to reveal himself. It gave him little consolation though. The relationship between him and the King was now in peril, and he knew stressing times would lie ahead, for both of them.

The question was how to proceed now? The journey back had highlighted many of the problems, which he knew he would now have to overcome. Although no one had said anything unsavoury to him, he could sense the unease with which some of the Knights now regarded him. There was
almost a forced politeness surrounding him. He sensed that they were struggling to come to terms, with everything that had happened. At one stage Merlin had found the feeling so uncomfortable, that he had been forced to reassure everyone. He had explained to them, that underneath he was still the same person. But he knew in the midst, of what had occurred that it was not really the case. In that moment everything had changed, and there was no going back. From now on his whole situation had altered irretrievably.

As he considered this in the dying light of the day, the realisation made him feel incredibly glum. How he wished he could turn back the clock, but fate had as it often did, had forced him onto a different path. But what would that mean for his destiny now? As he contemplated the future he wished he could somehow disappear into the shadows once again. But he knew that was something he could no longer do. Suddenly the world seemed a fearful place for him, and he wondered what would happen next.

As Camelot came closer, he longed for his room where he could at last shut the door, on the world at large. He needed sleep he thought to himself, but most of all he need the reassurance of Gaius. Surely his mentor would know what to do. All of a sudden Merlin felt lost, in the haze of the new world that had been born, out of the battle at Camlann. As they arrived in the grounds Merlin quickly jumped off his horse. The new stable boy approached Merlin in a careful and slow movement, as if afraid of what he would do. Not for the first time Merlin felt fearful. There was a real negative feeling for magic in Camelot. Who knew how long it would take for people to get over their fear of it. After everything Morgana and others had done, in the name of it. Merlin suspected if he been an ordinary person than he too would be hostile.

As he threw his bag over his shoulder he didn’t waste any more time. He just wanted to get away from the eyes that stared at him, and voices that mumbled about him. He ran up the steps and made for his chambers, almost falling through the door. There waiting for him was Gaius. For a moment they looked at each other. Then Merlin could feel the tears slipping down his face, and all at once he was in the warm embrace of his mentor.

“It’s all right my boy, everything will be fine.” Gaius whispered.

Merlin closed his eyes, just grateful to be home. Tomorrow he would worry about the future, but for now all he wanted was some sleep. Then maybe he could begin to work out how he could rebuild his relationship with his King and friend. Somehow he would convince Arthur, that they were made to be together. He had too or otherwise his destiny would prove to be nothing but a sham. After everything he had been forced to endure he could not bear for that to happen.

He would fight like never before to prove to Arthur that he would do anything, to make up for the lies he had been forced into. He knew Arthur was a good and honest man, surely he would understand and they could rebuild their shattered relationship, and start anew.

To be Continued
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Merlin is now back in Merlin and has a heart to heart with Gaius.

Arthur still feels confused and isolated from everyone. Sensing his unease Lancelot decides to try and get through to Arthur and to also explain why he kept the secret from his King as well.

Guinevere comes out of a meeting suddenly realising just how delicate everything will be between the two men she loves dearly.

Chapter 8

For a second Merlin stayed in his mentor’s embrace. He took his time before he began to explain what had happened.

“Arthur knows...” Merlin said, emotion in his voice making him stop all of a sudden.

“I know, Guinevere had a word with me.” Gaius answered. “How are you?”

Merlin swallowed, he hadn’t even thought about Guinevere knowing as well. “How did she take it?” he asked, quietly.

“She was actually very supportive, spoke about wanting to help you both.” Gaius answered.

There was a pause as Merlin thought about what Gaius had just said. But it was as if everything had caught up with him. Before he could stop them, tears flowed down his face, his head dropped and once again Gaius hugged him.

“It all right Merlin, it’s the shock, just let it out.” Gaius murmured

As Merlin remained there, listening to his mentor’s voice soothing him, he let the tears go. It was only now that he realised just how hard he had held everything back. He hated his weakness, yet he knew he had to let out his emotion. As he closed his eyes a memory came to mind.

He had been a young boy when his mother had one day found him crying in the forest. The day had started happily as he played in the sunshine, trying to catch falling leaves. Then suddenly becoming thirsty he had gone over to a stream to drink some water. He had bent over, and it was then that his eyes had glowed.

The image had terrified him. Who was the thing that had stared back at him that moment? He could remember even now how he had wondered whether he was a monster. He had tried so hard to explain the experience to Morgana only a couple of nights ago at the camp, but she was too vengeful to even listen to him. But for Merlin it had been something that had left him worried and scared.

In the forest that day his mother had held him, as Gaius did now, and tried to soothe away his hurt. She had told him that he was special, and yet as she had said the words, Merlin could hear something else in her voice. It was only now he identified what it was. It was fear. The very same feeling that
he had now, as he thought about his possible future. He relived the journey he’d had with the
Knights just now, and he knew it would be ten times worse with Arthur. Could he really expect
Arthur to understand why he had kept his secret for so long, he wondered?

The more he thought about it, he realized just how wrong he had been in not trusting his friend.
There was always a reason as to why he couldn’t tell him, he had told himself. But in the cold light
of day, as he considered it now, he knew the real reason for it. He had been scared of rejection,
afraid that Arthur would only see a sorcerer and not the devoted friend who would follow him to the
ends of the earth. He closed his eyes, trying to shut out the negative thoughts which were now
clouding his mind. There was also the situation, regarding the Lords of the court, Merlin knew some
of the older ones would pressure Arthur into executing him. For those men, Uther was still relevant
in their thoughts, a Kingdom that needed to be free from the curse of magic.

Gaius’s voice forced Merlin from his distressing thoughts.

“Merlin, you must be prepared for whatever may happen. I know Guinevere will do her best to get
Arthur and you to talk, but there will also be outside pressures as well.”

“I know Gaius. Believe me, I have thought about every situation there could be and none of them
seem good right now.” Merlin admitted, sitting down.

“Have you eaten?” Gaius asked, going over to a pan. “I have made some soup, I suggest you eat
something and have an early night. We can talk about it more tomorrow.”

“I might be locked up tomorrow, Gaius.” Merlin replied, a glum look on his face.

“Merlin, don’t think like that for now. You must try and be positive.” Gaius suggested.

“Positive?” Merlin questioned, “Arthur didn’t even want to talk to me before. I have lied to him for
years Gaius. Whatever way you look at it, this is going to be such a test for us.”

“Then you must be honest with him Merlin, and tell him everything. You must make him understand
about your shared destinies. This is the chance you have to make a clean breast of it. I fear I have
held you back my boy.”

“Don’t blame yourself Gaius, it was my decision to keep up the lie. I have only myself to blame for
that.” Merlin admitted, yawning. “What is it?”

“Oh, I was thinking of what I had said to Guinevere when we were talking before.”

“Oh?” Merlin asked, enjoying the soup warming him inside.

“She was trying to make me be more open, and I said some things are better left in the past. She
didn’t agree, and to be honest I can see she’s right. Honesty is the best course of action for you
Merlin. If Arthur really is the man we both believe he is, we have to trust that in time he will
understand and accept things as they are.”

Merlin let Gaius’s words wash over him, and he knew his mentor was right. He would have to find
courage from somewhere, and tell his friend everything. He just hoped by doing it, Arthur would
eventually come to understand his reasons for staying quiet for so long. He still believed they had so
much more to achieve together. The Five Kingdoms were still not fully united, and the newly made
truce could break at any time. While Morgana was now dead, Merlin knew that other sorcerers
opposed to Arthur’s rule, could try and cause trouble. How would this situation help an already
complicated one?
Having eaten, Merlin made his excuses and went to bed. Once lying there, his mind was still jumping from one event to another. Tired of tossing and turning, he lit his candle and took his magic book from its hiding place. Lying back, he looked through it. He remembered the day when Gaius had given it to him. He had been so thrilled, vowing to learn every spell faithfully. He looked at a page and suddenly remembered the winged griffin that he and Lancelot had killed together. That day Lancelot had learnt about his magic, and being the true friend he was, had remained silent to this day.

But Merlin now regretted how Lancelot had also been forced to keep such a secret from Arthur. It seemed that even when his destiny allowed him something positive, there were always negative implications attached.

He turned another page and came face to face with another creature, but this one brought his tears back to the surface. He outlined the “creature’s” form, but instead of seeing the ferocious bastet, he saw the face of his lost young love.

“Freya. How I wish you were here.” He sighed. But thinking about her at least released his tension, and before he knew it his eyes began to close. He fell asleep, dreaming about the young Druid girl and for the first time in days he found some real sleep.

^^^^^^^^^^

Forest

They had stopped off in the forest overnight. The atmosphere had been strained, and it felt as if everyone was walking on egg-shells. A tension hung in the air that dominated the thoughts of everyone. Arthur was extremely pensive. He had spent most of the evening, lost in his own thoughts. As Lancelot studied him, the sun was beginning to rise and the Knight hoped it would entice Arthur out of his insular frame of mind.

He understood naturally why Arthur felt so confused. The way Merlin had been forced to reveal himself had left a feeling of shock on everyone, even Merlin’s friends. He sensed that of all the Knights, Gwaine was the most relaxed one. Gwaine would sometimes be the butt of the Knight’s jokes, but Lancelot knew he was a lot smarter than he would sometimes let on. He felt confident that Merlin would retain Gwaine’s support. Of the others, he felt Leon would also come around. The older Knight had been brought back from the brink of death by the Druids. Lancelot knew the experience had made Leon realize that not all magic was bad.

Percival and Elyan were the ones he wasn’t sure about. Lancelot had got to know Percival before they had become Knights. Percival’s experience with magic had left him confused and unsure as to what he really felt about it. But Lancelot felt sure that he could talk his friend around, eventually.

Elyan though had lost his father through an incident with a sorcerer. He knew Elyan was no fan of magic, and he felt he would probably take the longest of any of them to come to terms with things. Then there was Arthur, and Lancelot knew the young King would struggle to accept things, for now at least.

Lancelot recalled the conversation he’d had with Merlin, about whether he would ever tell Arthur. That night Merlin had said the time wasn’t right. It left Lancelot feeling immensely sad for his friend. At the time, Lancelot had felt that Merlin doubted that Arthur would ever get to know the truth. Now Arthur did know, and for Merlin in the worst way possible. But as he considered things, Lancelot wondered... Was there a good way of finding out? The Knight knew how important Merlin was to Arthur.

He had realized the first time he had seen them together that there was a developing bond. One that
continued to become stronger, the longer they had spent together. The relationship had always fascinated Lancelot. It seemed that Merlin always knew the right things to do, to encourage Arthur to become the King he wanted to be. Arthur had grown up in his father’s shadow, and at times that had been hard.

As the young King attempted to become his own man, it was inevitable that Arthur would suffer from doubts from time to time. But Merlin always seemed to find a way of increasing his confidence. Arthur in his own way, would acknowledge it as well. Lancelot worried what a separation might do to the King.

He also felt bad about Arthur finding out that Lancelot had known Merlin had magic. He did not regret that he had kept the secret, but realized he could have phrased it in a less obvious way. The more Lancelot considered it, he realized that maybe he should try and explain it once again. Noting that the others were talking among themselves, he casually walked over to where Arthur was still sitting.

“Do you mind if I sit down sire?” Lancelot asked.

“No please do.” Arthur said, looking as if he was relieved to have company.

“I was thinking about what I said before, and I realize now, I should have been more circumspect.” Lancelot admitted.

“You don’t have to apologise Lancelot. Like you said, you had made a vow. I would have done the same.”

“Thank you. If there’s anything that I can do, you only have to ask.” Lancelot assured him.

“There are so many things going through my mind right now Lancelot.” Arthur admitted, “I just don’t know how this is going to work out.”

“Sire?” Lancelot enquired, not sure exactly what he meant.

“I have done my best to change Camelot the best way I can. But certain old ways still prevail there. A number of Lords from my father’s day, they will want certain assurances from me. The fact is, magic is still banished from Camelot and more than that, it is against the law. I will be put under certain pressures to respect those laws.”

“What are you saying sire?” Lancelot asked, a cold dread beginning to form inside his mind at where the conversation was heading.

“Do I really have to spell it out, Lancelot?” Arthur asked.

“You couldn’t do anything to Merlin sire, he saved your life.”

“I know that Lancelot, but it will still have implications. There is a side of me that wants to defend Merlin, despite everything. But at this moment I wonder how much I really know him.”

“I can assure you sire, he is totally devoted to you.” Lancelot assured him; making sure he looked Arthur in the eye, as he said it.

He waited for Arthur to say something, but nothing came.

“So, what will you do?” Lancelot sighed, half-dreading the answer.
“I need to talk to Guinevere and Gaius, as well as Merlin. Why could he not have trusted me?” Arthur asked. “Am I so hard to speak too?”

“Please sire, you must talk with him,” Lancelot urged, watching Arthur stand up. “He will explain everything.”

“There will be a lot of talking once we get back to Camelot. What happens next I really could not say.”

Lancelot watched Arthur striding away, suddenly wishing they were already in Camelot. As he considered what the King had just said, Lancelot realized the real journey between Merlin and Arthur had only just begun. Somehow he would have to find the courage to support both his friends, in what he knew would be a fraught and tricky situation.

Camelot

By the time Merlin awoke, Gaius was not in their chambers. He had left a note to say that he had been forced to visit a patient in the lower town. After helping himself to some left over porridge, Merlin pondered about what to do.

When he had got back to Camelot, he had felt relieved to be able to hide himself away. But with the sun shining outside, all of a sudden he felt like a caged animal, longing for some freedom. He sat down and decided to try and mix some herbs for Gaius. But his mind would not focus on the task. He was pretty soon fighting the urge to leave his chambers, and make a break from what was beginning, to feel like a prison. But where could he go? He had already had enough of being the centre of attention. He craved some isolation, away from Camelot.

He sat down and had a think, and then an idea came into his mind. He scribbled a note to Gaius, telling him not to worry. He then grabbed his bag, pinching an apple from the bowl of fruit. He opened the door, and after checking that no one was around made his way down the corridor. He sneaked his head around the corner and, hearing no voices, descended down the steps.

Listening out for any footsteps and hearing none, he ran through a door and into the passage leading past the dungeons. He knew around this time the guards were changing, so took advantage of no one being around. He made for the secret exit, using his magic to undo the lock. Closing his eyes he re-locked the door and breathed in the fresh air that was ruffling his neck.

Taking one last look around, he made a bolt for freedom. Ahead of him was a small forest, and for a few hours he would hide and get away from the suffocating feeling of being caged and on show to everyone around. He headed for a clearing up ahead, taking the apple out of his bag.

Presently he came to the old ancient oak tree, its huge branches seeping outwards, its leaves already beginning to fall in the autumn winds. He sat down underneath, resting his head against the tree. He tried to blank out his current situation. He would not think about Arthur, presently on his way back to Camelot. He would not think about their relationship, he would block out the fears that were gathering at the back of his mind.

Gaius had told him only yesterday that he needed to be positive. He knew Gwen would do her best to reason with Arthur. But most of all, he knew Arthur was a good man, and surely in the end he would understand Merlin’s reasons. As he began to relax, his mind became less stressed and agitated. The noises from the lower town became less noticeable, and before long his eyes began to close and soon he had fallen into a fitful sleep.

~~~~~~~~~~~
Guinevere had just finished the morning meeting, and was in need of a break. As she made for her quarters, her mind began to wander. What had started off an orderly assembly between the various Lords, had descended into chaos. She arrived in her room, relieved that she could have some time for reflection. It wasn’t long before she was reliving the distasteful encounter. She sighed, knowing it was the sign of things to come. Her annoyance rose again, as she remembered Lord Oake’s scathing tone.

He was a member of the Council, and had been since Uther’s day. He also shared the old King’s opinion on magic. Needless to say, he was adamant that Merlin should be executed straight away. The man had a big booming voice which echoed around the room. The more agitated and annoyed he became, the louder the noise he had made. In the end Guinevere had been forced to intervene and warn him of his conduct.

At the time, Guinevere had looked at the other Lord’s faces. She could see that some certainly had their concerns, but she also knew that a few were not impressed by how Lord Oakes made his views felt. She sensed in the short term, she could use this to her advantage by bringing the meeting to a swift conclusion.

Lord Oakes naturally had not been pleased by the Queen’s actions. Guinevere had found her face reddening as he furiously interrupted her effort at bringing the meeting to an end. But she was determined she would not be bullied by the old man.

As she recalled the words he had thrown Merlin’s way, her hackles began to rise. But she was beginning to appreciate how this delicate situation would cause Arthur problems. Lord Oakes was not someone who would be quietened down. He would make a fuss about things, and make sure that everyone was aware of what was going on.

Guinevere already knew how difficult it would be for both Arthur and Merlin to sort their relationship out. Frankly, Lord Oakes was one piece of strife that neither men needed at this moment in time. But at the same time she knew it would not go away either. The more she thought about it, the more horrifying it all became.

As she considered the difficulties her husband and friend would have to repair their friendship, her worries began to increase. She realised this would be a real test of their friendship. What if she couldn’t help them, she thought desperately?

Just as she considered it, a voice inside her mind raged. Pull yourself together Guinevere, it is up to you to make sure that they do sort out their problems. Camelot could not afford to be without either of them. More than ever she realized that Arthur and Merlin were meant to work together. It was up to her to make sure they had the opportunity to sort out their differences. Looking grimly in the mirror, she knew she could not afford to let either man down.

To be Continued.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

As Arthur returns to Camelot for a reunion with Guinevere he knows he now has to face the situation with Merlin head on. As the meeting between them comes closer Merlin relives his earlier days, and ponders whether he could have done things differently.

It was late afternoon as King Arthur and his returning Knights reached Camelot. Crowds of happy people stood around applauding their young King, as he carefully turned his horse through the lower town, and towards the castle. Arthur attempted to make it look as though he was enjoying the greeting, but in truth he was hating it. How he longed to tip toe quietly and get away from the noise, that descended around him. A feeling of sheer depression had begun to take over his mind, on the last part of the journey. His thoughts were dark and empty as he entered the very new reality of what his life, was about to become. From the moment, his sister had been slain, he knew nothing would be the same again.

While it was true defeating Morgana had opened an opportunity for the Five Kingdoms, Arthur knew it would be full of challenges ahead. Not least, what was to become of his former friend. He had not allowed himself to think about Merlin before now, but as he did he relived the shocking event, when the truth had been revealed. He knew that would be uppermost in the minds of certain Lords of the Court, especially the older ones, from his father’s time.

He urged his horse onwards through the crowds, acknowledging the odd person, with a wave. He knew for certain, that for some Lords this would be the chance, to make trouble for him. He also knew it was something that could develop very quickly, into a serious disagreement of the Kingdom’s immediate future.

He sighed inwardly, looking across at Sir Leon who had just moved alongside him. He marvelled at how happy his second in command looked. No negative thoughts for him, or worries for the future. He was too busy waving and smiling at the crowd. For a second Arthur relaxed, he and Leon had come through a lot together. He was delighted his friend seemed so carefree in this moment. He looked behind him, and noticed the rest of his Knights also looking happy. It was only Lancelot whom Arthur could sense, looked a bit preoccupied.

When he had first realized that Lancelot had known about Merlin, it had shocked Arthur. But after their last conversation when the Knight had explained his position, Arthur could appreciate the situation a lot more. He knew Lancelot was a man of honour, he couldn’t really blame him for keeping Merlin’s secret.

Suddenly the welcoming white towers of Camelot loomed in front of him, and for the first time Arthur’s mood began to lift. Any minute he would see his beloved wife Guinevere, and right at this moment, it was the only thing he wanted to think about. No more dark thoughts, at the very least she deserved his full attention. He urged his horse under the arch and into the court yard. He could see her waiting for the party impatiently. He could hear clapping to the side of him, but for now the only thing in his mind, was the figure in red on top of the steps.

He urged the horse into a trot, and as he did so he watched Guinevere come running down the steps,
to greet him. He could see the emotion in her eyes even now, and it matched his own, he didn’t care anymore. He heaved himself off the horse, and before he could say a word, she threw her arms around him, and for a brief second his worries flew away.

“Arthur it’s so good to see you again.” She whispered into his ear.

“You too Guinevere, you too.” He replied, holding her hands in his. “I’ve been waiting too long for this moment.”

Arthur was suddenly aware of the crowd watching them, and realized now was the time to be professional. His men had won an important battle, and now he had to acknowledge it, and then he could at last spend some precious time with her.

Leading Guinevere back up the steps, Arthur turned and faced his Knights. He felt huge admiration for those who had made it back. He knew that awful sacrifices had been made by others, so that they could have this moment. He cleared his voice before beginning to speak.

“I would like to say a few words before you go back to your families. When we took off for Camlann, I knew this would be the toughest of challenges for us all. Sadly, it proved to be true, and many fine men have been forced to pay the ultimate price. I do not take any loss lightly and as I stand here, I truly grieve for those we lost. But we must be proud of the way, we fought and overcame the odds that faced us. I thank everyone of you for your commitment, and your bravery. This will be remembered as one of the most vital victories, in Camelot’s and Albion’s history. Before I let you go home, we need to be aware, this is just the start. We have won the war, but now must win the peace. Thank you everyone.”

The Knight’s began to clap their young King, and Arthur nodded. Suddenly Leon’s voice was heard.

“Three cheers for King Arthur.”

As the Knights began to cheer, Arthur acknowledged it. But as he did so it troubled him. Had he truly won the war he wondered to himself. It hadn’t been him who had killed Morgana, it had been Merlin’s magic. Suddenly the feeling of confusion returned, it was a reminder of how nothing was straight forward anymore.

There would be huge decisions up ahead, and they needed to be faced, as quickly as possible. As the cheering ended, and the assembled Knights began to disperse, Arthur led Guinevere into the corridor towards their chambers. As they turned the corner though, a face Arthur dreaded seeing, loomed ahead of them, Lord Oakes.

“It is a good to see you arrive back safely sire.” The Lord bowed, stiffly.

“I am grateful for your greeting Lord Oakes, it is indeed a pleasure to be back here.” Arthur responded, trying to keep his temper intact, knowing all too well what would follow.

“Yes indeed, it has been a very trying time for us all.” Lord Oakes replied. “Especially considering what happened.”

The words hung in the air, and Arthur sighed to himself, cursing. But before he had the chance to answer, his wife had already intervened.

“Lord Oakes my husband has just arrived back and is exhausted. I promised you at the meeting I would speak to him. Now please give him a chance to rest.” Guinevere urged.
“I understand that my lady, but it is important that this matter is dealt with, as soon as possible. We have just overcome one magical problem, and now we find a bigger one living amongst us, all this time. I would urge you to deal with it quickly, your father would not have hesitated to-”

Arthur had suddenly had enough, this was typical of Lord Oakes to bring his father into things. He had been one of Uther’s most loyal allies, and would constantly bring his father up, anytime he felt Arthur had not handled something well. “Lord Oakes I would remind you that I am your King. I am fully aware of the situation with Merlin.” Arthur emphasized his former friend’s name. He only had to take a brief look at his wife, to know she was as disgusted as him, to hear the way the Lord had referred to him. “I have already said this matter will be dealt with. But first I will talk to Merlin, and only then, will you be invited to give your opinion. Now I am tired and have been riding for days, and would appreciate a chance to have some time to myself. Good day.”

There was a defiant pause, before the old man took a step back. “Yes sire. I will let you get some rest. My Lady.” Lord Oakes nodded, before walking down the corridor, a sneer on his face.

“I was going to warn you about Lord Oakes.” Guinevere sighed. “We had words in a meeting.”

“I can imagine you would. But please, let us get back to our chambers, we need to have some time together, before we face everything else.” Arthur replied, taking her hand.

“Come on then.” Guinevere smiled softly.

They walked in unison unaware of a shadow lurking behind them. As their footsteps became quieter and finally stopped, Merlin let his breath out and ran for his chambers.

Merlin’s Chambers

Having been initially unsettled about what he had witnessed, Merlin had decided to lie low in his room for a bit. Once his heart had begun to beat at a more normal rate, he decided to try and look at things in a rational light. For one thing Arthur had stood up to Lord Oakley and implied, he would not be rushed about acting. Another thing that encouraged him, was the idea that Arthur would speak with him. Wasn’t this something he had always dreamed about after all? The chance to be able to explain who he truly was?

Merlin let the sentence sink into his mind, determined to make the most of any positive vibe he could muster. He knew in time it would all become a haze again of course. Having been forced to stay quiet for so long, and basically lie to his friends; could he really expect them to ultimately accept his explanations, and reasons for staying quiet? He knew in his own mind, there had been opportunities for him, to be honest sooner. But he had always convinced himself, the time was never right. It had always seemed more straight forward for him to go on hiding away, playing the part, of the devoted manservant.

He had often had the conversation with Lancelot, about when he would reveal the truth. Merlin could never give his friend an exact answer. He had hidden behind the excuse, of doing it “when the time was right.” But that day had never arrived, until he had been forced to act against Morgana that dark, and life changing night. He sensed now in the cold light of day, explaining his reasons for staying quiet, would now become extremely difficult. As he thought about it, he doubted he even knew where to start.

He reached for his magic book, and started to turn the pages, skimming through the text. He had been so excited, on receiving the book from Gaius. This had been the moment, when he had come to understand his abilities more. He had begun to appreciate, just what he could attempt to achieve, with his life. In Ealdor he had been a prisoner in his own home, frightened and marginalised, by the limits of tolerance to his own kind. All his life his mother had stressed he was special, yet only when he
began to learn from Gaius, had he realized the reality of the situation. It was then he began to be at one, with whom he really was.

He thought back to his early life in Ealdor with his mother. She had constantly fretted about his future, knowing only too well, how people felt about magic there. Even Merlin himself had struggled with the idea that, he was so different. He asked himself why were these gifts given to him? Why not someone else? What was the use of magic anyway, if he couldn’t use it freely? He had often felt like a caged animal in Ealdor. He was always on his guard in case he gave something away, dreading the idea of someone finding out his secret.

He remembered only too well the moment, when his friend Will, had found out about his secret. It had been an ordinary day, with the two boys messing about, in the forest. Will had always been full of life, and always liked to push Merlin. This particular day he’d been teasing Merlin about how much time he spent in the forest, on his own. What started off as a joke began to develop, into something more profound. On and on Will went totally unaware at how it was affecting Merlin’s mind. Merlin felt so lonely in his magical isolation, would it really hurt sharing the secret with his friend?

Merlin took a sudden decision, he told him there and then, without further prompting. Merlin would always remember, the utter refusal of Will to believe him at first. A few minutes later, his friend was still reluctant, to be convinced. In the end Merlin was forced to prove it. Under Will’s gaze, he had moved a pile of leaves into the sky, the two boys watching, as they scattered about them.

Merlin had never forgotten Will’s shocked reaction, his friend had stared and then bolted away, in panic. Never in Merlin’s life had he felt more alone, then in that moment. Merlin had eventually found him, and the two boys had the chance to make peace. He also had the chance to tell someone, all about his gift, and what it meant. Will had made Merlin a promise, never to reveal what he knew, and he had kept it to his early death.

From that moment Merlin learnt to live his life in secret, not revealing anything to his friends. What had started off a relatively easy decision, rapidly became more challenging as he moved to Camelot. While it was true he had Gaius to help and advise him, there were so many moments when the secret weighed him down. He had lied to everyone, with the exception of Lancelot and Freya. Could he really expect Arthur, Gwen and the rest of the Knights, to accept him?

He had always envisaged that the right moment would arrive, but when it didn’t, his elusive behaviour became his constant companion. He knew now the situation was not ideal. That the path would not be easy, but surely everything being out in the open, could only be a blessing for everyone concerned? He closed the book and slowly pulled the covers up, and drifted off to a restless sleep.

Arthur and Gwen’s Chambers

It was coming up to the hours of dawn as Arthur suddenly stirred. The first rays of light shone through the window. He moved trying not to disturb, the sleeping Guinevere beside him. It had been a tender reunion for the two of them, as they endeavoured to put everything to one side. His wife had briefly mentioned Merlin, but Arthur was in no mood to even talk about it.

All he had wanted was a chance to hold his wife, and eventually they had come together. It had lasted a few hours, but Arthur knew he was wilting, with the battle and everything else that had occurred. In the end Guinevere had diplomatically suggested they get some sleep. He had tried, but in truth sleep was difficult, as he pondered what lay ahead.

He slumped in a chair and watched Guinevere sleeping away wanting nothing more than to wake her, and begin their reunion again. But his mind was still churning over, the recent events at
Camlann, and he could not fully concentrate on anything. Even now his thoughts were no clearer, hurt and bewilderment still abounded. The one question that would not disappear from his mind. Why had Merlin never told him?

He realised of course, it would have been no simple thing to do. He had always tried to be as supportive as possible to his friend. To the world outside Camelot, Merlin was no more than a servant. But to those inside the King’s council the bond between them had always been clear for all to see. Arthur had tried to keep their relationship as natural as possible, they both understood that outside, certain formalities existed.

All the time it had been a balancing act, between what Arthur knew had to be respected, and what new boundaries he could bring to court. He had always included Merlin in the discussions, being happy to hear another opinion he trusted. He had always known there was more to Merlin, than the daft behaviour, the boy had sometimes shown. Yet it was true, he could never put his finger on what it was. Now of course it was all too clear, and suddenly the future was seriously hazy and precarious.

Why hadn’t Merlin confided in him he wondered, searching for answers which remained hidden. More to the case why hadn’t Gaius. Ever since he was a boy Gaius had been a trusted servant, to both his father and himself. Yet there had always been questions about his past, that intrigued Arthur.

He could still recall the time when the Witchfinder had been in Camelot, and had revealed that Gaius had dabbled in sorcery. At the time it had shocked Arthur to the core, never for one minute had he suspected it. When his father had admitted the truth, Arthur began to see Gaius in a new light. As he thought about it now, he wondered how he had not made the connection that much sooner. But he hadn’t and now he felt a fool. He knew he would need to speak to Gaius too, and how awkward could that prove to be?

He sighed as he softly touched the ring on his finger, and smiled as he remembered the day he and Guinevere had exchanged vows. He had been the happiest man alive on that day, and he knew his wife, would play a vital role in the days to come. For a moment he felt tired but then heard Guinevere coming too.

“Arthur could you not sleep?” she asked, looking at him as she slipped out of bed.

“Only on and off, too many things on my mind, not least you.” Arthur smiled, trying to sound upbeat. “I’m sorry about last night.”

“Arthur you’ve just won an important battle, its natural you were tired.” Guinevere replied, “We have plenty of time for all of that.”

Arthur smiled, as she took his hand.

“There is so much to think about, this is going to have ramifications for the whole Kingdom, not just Merlin.” Arthur mused, gloomily.

“You and Merlin need to talk.” Guinevere said. “I know it’s a shock for you, but in a way, it explains an awful lot.”

“How do you mean?” Arthur asked, curious.

“I just mean, we both know there has always been more to Merlin, than meets the eye. I knew it the moment I met him.” Guinevere replied, rubbing Arthur’s hand.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right. I just wish he had confided in me Guinevere.”

“Sometimes the right moment never comes along Arthur.” Guinevere sighed. “I suggest we have
breakfast, we will have a full day ahead.”

“Yes, you’re right, the hard work now begins.” Arthur nodded, leaning over and kissing Guinevere.

As he contemplated his own words, Arthur knew that the next few days would be vital, in how the Kingdom’s future would develop. He realised this was now the biggest challenge of his reign. Who knew what lay ahead for any of them?
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

As the first meeting between Arthur and Merlin approaches, both of them prepare in very different ways, for what lies ahead. As tension and fear intensifies their friends and loved ones come into play. All of a sudden everyone realises it is a pivotal time for Camelot and those at the centre of power.

For a couple of days nothing had happened. Arthur knew the situation with Merlin would need to be dealt with, but first of all other tasks took priority. With the war now over, certain formalities had to be completed first. He decided to have a meeting with Guinevere and his leading Knight Sir Leon, and discuss with them, what tasks he could hand to other people. That way he could think over how he would deal with Merlin, and everything else that came from that. He knew though, he couldn’t avoid the matter entirely, and decided he’d get it over with relatively early.

Guinevere was already sitting at the table waiting for Sir Leon’s arrival. Sunlight shone brightly through the window of the room. Arthur had avoided using the throne room, he felt it would be more obvious to people. He wanted as much secrecy as possible, as he knew it wouldn’t take much for rumours to start.

The room itself had been an old guest room, which had been changed back to its original function. There was a big brown desk at the centre, with just three chairs around it. There was a cabinet in the corner of the room, where Arthur had thrown some scrolls onto. He was reading one, as the door knocked.

“Come in.” Arthur replied, putting it down and pouring Guinevere a glass of water. “Thank you for coming at such short notice Sir Leon. Is everything okay with the other Knights?”

Sir Leon took his seat and smiled, “Gwaine still complaining about the ride back, and also the bruise on his arm. But besides that, everything seems in order.”

“Good, good.” Arthur answered, passing his Knight a glass. “I decided to call this meeting as I wanted to discuss, how we proceed from now on.”

“Yes, indeed sire, I was wondering the same myself.” Sir Leon admitted, pouring a drink and watching the King intently.

“I think we need to discuss the situation with Merlin first.” Arthur began, hesitantly. “I have no idea how this will end up. I will obviously need to have a talk with him, and Gaius too. I was going to suggest you having a word with Lancelot and maybe suggesting he makes himself, available for Merlin. I know the two of them are pretty close.”

Sir Leon nodded, “Of course sire I will mention it to him, I’m sure he will want to do everything he can to help. Have you seen Merlin recently may I ask?”

“No. I think its true to say he has kept himself scarce, the last few days, not surprisingly. I am going to ask Guinevere to have a word, with Gaius later today. That way we can get things started. But there are other things which also need to be arranged, and that’s where you come in Leon.”
“Sire?” the Knight replied.

“I wish to award some payments to the wives of some of our dead comrades. I will not see their families suffer. I have asked Lord Bartley to arrange for the money to be bagged up, and I ask that you see to this task first of all.”

“Of course, I’m sure they will appreciate the gesture.”

“There is also the matter of the food supplies. I gather we are quite low, and so we need to establish what we require for the Kingdom. I suggest you give one of the Knights that task, as I have one for you personally.” Arthur said.

“Which is?” Sir Leon enquired.

“I need you to assess any requirements we need for our defences. Once this business with Merlin had been sorted, we will need to arrange a meeting for all the leaders in the Five Kingdoms. But first of all, I want to know that our own defences, are as good as they can be. I don’t want to take any chances obviously. But I require your discretion while undertaking this sensitive task.”

“Naturally sire.” Sir Leon agreed, “Can I ask the time frame for this?”

“We have pencilled in the meeting for the end of the month.” Guinevere replied, “Arthur has asked me to start making arrangements for the various leaders.”

“Of course, my lady.” Sire Leon nodded, “If I maybe, of assistance there. You only need to ask.”

“Thank you, Sir Leon.” Guinevere smiled. “I will let you know.”

“It is critical in the days ahead, that we keep everything between ourselves.” Arthur advised. “It goes without saying certain Lords will be putting pressure on us. I don’t want anything getting out, before the situation, has been dealt with properly. It could cause all sorts of upsets.”

“Yes, I can imagine that. I will have a word with the Knights and make sure they report anything.” Sir Leon suggested.

“Thank you, Sir Leon.” Arthur replied. “I know I can rely on your support for what lies ahead.”

“You can sire, I will get on with the tasks in hand straight away. If there is anything else you only need to ask.” Sir Leon, pushed his chair back and made for the door, he paused by it.

“I have known you for a long time. I know you can deal with this difficult situation fairly, and find the right answers for everyone concerned, sire.”

Arthur nodded his thanks, and watched the door close wishing he shared Leon’s opinion. He sighed and turned to Guinevere.

“If only he knew how lost I feel Guinevere.” Arthur said, holding her hand.

“He is right though Arthur. I know it feels difficult now, but it will become clearer in the days ahead. Please give Merlin the chance to explain things.”

“He is like a stranger to me now.” Arthur lamented.

“Then you need to start getting to know him all over again.” Guinevere replied, kissing his head. “I will go and see Gaius.”
“Yes, thank you. I take it you know what to say?”

“Of course.”

As the door shut Arthur reached for another glass of water, and tried to plan the days ahead. With the meeting for the leaders pencilled in, he knew everything needed to have a strict timescale attached. That was easier said then done though. How on earth could everything, between himself and Merlin be sorted, in such a short space of time.? A lot of talking lay ahead, and he knew it would be emotional for the two of them. He also knew how he struggled, with his own feelings, at the best of times. Guinevere had helped a bit in that respect, but he still found it difficult to open himself up entirely.

There were also the Lords to be considered, he really hoped Leon and the Knights, would keep their ears open, for anything that was said. It was not only Lord Oakes who could make trouble, but other Lords, who were also against any sort of magic. By now he suspected that most of Camelot was aware of Merlin. The gossip from the townspeople was one thing, but anything coming from the Lords, was entirely different.

Arthur picked up a scroll and began writing determined to press on and get the whole procedure started. Time was of the essence now and he knew it would be a hard road up ahead. The sooner he got it started, the quicker they would all know where they stood.

*******

Gaius was making up his morning potions, but watched Merlin uneasily, as the sorcerer paced about. The last couple of days Merlin had been like a caged animal, moving around aimlessly, put his own nerves, as well Gaius’s on edge. Gaius himself was worried, wondering what the delay was about. He hoped it was merely Arthur putting off the inevitable talk, but feared it could be something else entirely. Not that he shared that thought with Merlin, he feared it would send him over the edge. Growing weary of Merlin's endless moving about, he decided to give him something to do.

“Merlin could you go and collect some more herbs for me? Being outside maybe of benefit to you, it is such a nice day.” Gaius said, picking up a basket.

“What’s the delay Gaius? Why haven’t they been in touch. Doesn’t it strike you as strange that he’s been back two days, and no one’s said a word? Merlin asked, as if unaware that his guardian had even spoken.

“Merlin, we have been through this before. When Arthur is ready, you will be summoned. I am sure there is nothing to be worried about.” Gaius tried to assure him. “Here go and get some sunshine and bring me back some comfey.”

“But what happens if Arthur ask’s for me?” Merlin asked, staring at the basket, his eyes wandering.

“Then I will come and find you. Don’t worry, please Merlin you are starting to worry me.” Gaius exclaimed. “Being cooped up in this room can’t be doing you any good.”

“A few weeks from now I will probably be in the dungeons anyway.” Merlin answered, a look of despair on his face. “Or worse, hanging by a noose.”

“Merlin, that will not happen you need to stop thinking such things.” Gaius stressed, putting his hands on his charge’s shoulders. “Arthur is your friend, there is nothing you cannot sort out together. But you must clear your mind of these dark thoughts.”

Merlin looked at Gaius dejectedly. “You really think that Gaius?”
“Yes, I know you can. Everything just seems murky at the moment, but in the end things will become clearer. It’s bound to take Arthur a couple of days to arrange things. Especially after that long ride, saying nothing of the fact, that he hasn’t seen Guinevere for a while.”

Merlin regarded his guardian for a couple of minutes, and then took the basket from him.

“Just make sure you find me if he calls then.”

“Yes Merlin. I will, now go and get some fresh air, and remember those herbs.” Gaius said, holding the door open. He watched as Merlin went down the corridor, and sighed as he shut the door.

He went back to the bench and began to mix some herbs, trying to keep his mind from wandering. Ever since Merlin had arrived from Ealdor he had looked at him, as the son he never had. The young man was everything to Gaius, as was Arthur. The whole situation between them, was breaking Gaius’s heart. He feared too that he had contributed to it as well.

Ever since Merlin had been with him, Gaius had advised caution with regards to his magic. Of course, with Uther that was a given. But he wondered if had chosen the wrong approach with Arthur. While it was true Arthur was suspicious of magic, he believed that the young King was more open to change. Arthur had always had a more considered attitude than Uther, Gaius didn’t doubt that came from Ygraine’s influence.

He wondered if he’d encouraged Merlin to be a bit more open, could this state of affairs have been avoided. He sighed. There was little point in thinking too much, as this was the place they were at. It was too late to have regrets he ruefully decided. He was about to sit down, when there was a knock on the door.

“Come in.” Gaius called, wondering who it was.

The door opened and Guinevere came in. “Hello Gaius. I am sorry it has been a while since I called on you.”

“My Lady.” Gaius nodded, about to get up, “I am sure you and Arthur have had things to talk about.”

“Yes indeed, don’t get up.” Guinevere conceded. “Is Merlin here?” she asked looking up at his room.

“I sent him out for some herbs.” Gaius explained, “he was a bit fretful.”

“It must be very difficult for him. Arthur has asked me to call, so that I can fill you in, on what is going to happen.” Guinevere explained, sitting down on a bench.

“We feel it is important that as few people as possible, know about any meeting. That way, we will prevent any unnecessary rumours circulating. Sir Leon and the Knights will take care of that. Arthur has asked for Lancelot to make himself free to support Merlin, along with you of course.”

“I see.” Gaius nodded, “Merlin and Lancelot have always been close, so I am sure that will be of benefit.”

“Of course. Arthur would like to speak to you as well, there are matters he feels need discussing. It is nothing to worry about at all. I just think Arthur needs to have a clear understanding of everything surrounding Merlin. Sometimes that conversation is not an easy thing to have.” Guinevere said, looking regretful.
“How is Arthur in himself?” Gaius enquired, feeling it was important to know the King’s current state.

“A bit lost, confused about what their relationship is now. He said to me before, that he feels he doesn’t know Merlin anymore.” Guinevere explained, sadly.

“He is still the same person underneath you know.” Gaius explained, suddenly feeling his years.

“I know that.” Guinevere replied, reaching for Gaius’s hand. “But from Arthur’s situation seeing Merlin with new eyes, may not be such a bad thing. For the sake of the Kingdom we need Arthur and Merlin together.”

“True, let’s hope the will is there for them to come to an understanding.” Gaius mused.

There is another thing Gaius. We are due to have a meeting with the leaders from the Five Kingdoms. We have pencilled it in for the end of the month. Time is important now. With that in mind, Arthur would like to see Merlin tomorrow for a meeting. There is a room we have made ready where they can meet in secret.”

“Right, I will tell him then when he comes back.” Gaius nodded, a new feeling of tension awakening.

“If you could, I will send Lancelot to accompany him there tomorrow.” Guinevere said, getting up and moving over to the door.

“Thank you. Guinevere, I feel this is my fault in some way. If I had encouraged them to talk maybe this would never have happened.” He said, sadness etched on every word.

“Gaius, there was always going to be this moment. The most important thing is what happens next now. We all need to be ready for both of them. If you need to talk you know where I am.”

“Yes thank you.” Gaius replied, and watched as the door closed. Suddenly it felt as if the world was getting smaller, and Gaius felt extremely helpless.

********

Merlin had decided to take a quick break having found the herbs Gaius had asked for. He felt a bit more rested, now he was out in the open. His mind was still in a dark place though, as he wondered what lay ahead for him. He also couldn’t help but worry, about what was going through Arthur’s mind. Was it as confused as his own right now, or did he have a much clearer view.

Knowing Arthur as he did, he suspected it would be the former. The King had always been insular about his feelings as such. Being Uther’s son, had meant it was necessary for Arthur to hide his true fears. Yet Merlin knew him, as much as he knew himself. They were two of a kind in every way, and the idea of them being parted, was making causing Merlin to despair. If only he could reassure him, but he doubted Arthur would even care as this stage.

He picked up a branch and waved and fingered the leaves on it. The sun by now was shining brightly on the forest, but Merlin felt little warmth. He wondered about having a quick nap, but a voice interrupted his thoughts.

“So this is where you’re hiding yourself.” Lancelot said, striding over to where Merlin sat.

Merlin looked at Lancelot, unable to say even hello. The Knight dropped down by his side.

“If you want me to go say, but I guessed you may want some company at the moment.” He said, a
hand on Merlin’s shoulder.

“As long as you don’t expect much chatter.” Merlin said, trying to smile.

“I have spent all morning with Gwaine, with his endless talking.” Lancelot smiled, “I dare say I could do with some quiet as well. He asked me to say hello, as do the other Knights.”

“That’s nice of them.” Merlin sniffed. “Thank them for me.”

For a couple of minutes, they both contemplated their own thoughts in silence. A soft breeze blew around them, moving leaves around their feet. A distant cry of a fox could be heard, further down among the trees. In these moments Camelot seemed a long, long way away. Presently Lancelot, spoke.

“I remember you telling me one day, about how you felt so alive in this environment. I always wanted to ask you why?”

Merlin said nothing for a couple of minutes, but then picked up a leaf. “I feel my magic in the forest, more than in any other place. It connects with everything around here. It’s hard to explain to be honest.”

“When you say connect what do you mean?” Lancelot asked, curious.

“Like I am just a part of the actual place. I feel less a person as such, but almost a creature that feels its way around. I sense every change of light, or mood. I can feel things before they even happen out here. Everything feels natural and familiar.” Merlin smiled at Lancelot’s face. “I’m guessing you still don’t quite understand.

“I want too though.” Lancelot said, throwing a twig in front of them.

“That’s what I fear more than anything Lancelot. That even after explaining, Arthur will not understand me truly. How do I make him understand, that he has nothing to fear from me?” Merlin asked, as sense of despair in his voice.

“You will make him understand Merlin. Arthur and you belong together, I know you will get through to him. Just don’t give up hope, if it takes time. You have to keep faith with him, I know he will come around in the end.” Lancelot assured him.

“Thank you, old friend.” Merlin said, lightly touching his shoulder as he jumped up. “It is no good hiding here for ever. I think it’s time to get back to Camelot.”

“Only if you feel ready.” Lancelot said, his eyes never leaving Merlin’s face. “I feel ready. It is going to turn in a while and we don’t want to get drenched.” Merlin smiled.

“You can feel that?” Lancelot asked, intrigued.

“No but that big rain cloud over there is telling me.” Merlin grinned, and started to run.

Lancelot looked up at the sky, shook his head and laughed, and caught up with his friend, as the rain started to beat down.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

This is the day that Arthur and Merlin meet for the first time since the incident at Camlann. As Arthur ponders meeting Merlin once again, he realises he has missed him more than he expected.

For Merlin the day of judgement has come, and as he begins to open up to Arthur he realises this could be a chance for him to be honest and tell his story.

The morning of Arthur and Merlin's first meeting was delayed. A problem with an eloper entering the castle was reported to Arthur, first thing in the morning. Having read the report, written hastily by Leon and having had a quick meeting with him, the morning had almost disappeared. Feeling hungry he ate a few grapes, while he waited for Merlin to join him.

He wondered what his emotions would be, seeing his friend again. It crossed his mind that they had been apart, now for two weeks. In the last five years Merlin had been his constant companion, in various quests and adventures. While he sat there in silence he realised, just how much he'd missed him.

Despite everything that had happened between them, that was his first emotion. It caused him to be surprised. He had been thinking about his own confused feelings for so long, that he had failed to acknowledge until now, the undeniable truth. It was because Merlin had become a friend to the King, something so much more than just a servant. He was never very good at that anyway he realised critically. He was always late, usually rude, and rarely did anything in the order, that Arthur asked for.

But he had missed the banter they had once had between them, and the mere presence of him in his life. It was that more than anything, that left him saddened. There was also something else, which had occurred to Arthur. The undisputable fact was, Merlin had the ability to make him believe in himself. Guinevere too, was important in that respect, but with Merlin it somehow went to another level. How many times had Merlin picked him up, from the latest betrayal, or loss of confidence that he had suffered? Through everything he'd been through, Merlin was the constant, the person that Arthur had turned to, when he could go to no one else.

As he sat there contemplating he was unaware, that Merlin was even in the room. It was only when a shadow crossed him, he looked up and there he was. He stood in at the door, looking very uncertain. It crossed Arthur's mind, that Merlin could easily blow him off his feet. Yet he looked so devoid of confidence, it made Arthur almost want to laugh out loud. For a second, he felt unsure about what to do, but realised he had to make the first move.

"For god sake Merlin, close the door." Arthur said. It would appear that some things would never change, he thought to himself.

"Sorry." Merlin replied, before shuffling over towards the table.

For a couple of seconds there was silence, as they each regarded the other one. Arthur for his part noticed, how awkward Merlin seemed. He avoided eye contact, his face had little colour in it. His
"Merlin I'm not going to kill you. Please sit down." Arthur said, trying to make some eye contact.

"Sorry." Merlin mumbled, and pulled out the chair and sat down, though still reluctant to meet Arthur's gaze.

"And stop apologising. There are obviously things we need to discuss but before I get down to that, I feel I need to say something to you. That night at Camlann you saved my life, and I never thanked you for that. It was very wrong of me, no matter how shocked I was, I should have acknowledged that. So, I am sorry."

"I would still save your life even now." Merlin replied emotionally.

It was now Arthur's time to feel awkward, and avoid eye contact. This was more the Merlin he knew, the one who would always look him in the eye, the one who worked on his confidence, when Arthur was down. The person who believed in him, when Arthur doubted himself. They had only spoken a couple of sentences to one another, but even now Arthur saw the paradox of the situation. Who was the real Merlin he wondered? Not for the first time, he wished Guinevere was with him, she would know the right things to say. He decided he needed to set the tone, so continued.

"I feel it only fair that I explain the procedure of what now happens." Arthur began.

"Procedure?" Merlin questioned.

For the first time Arthur noticed a flicker in Merlin's eyes, he found it interesting. He decided to carry on, in the hope of flushing the real Merlin out, a bit more."Naturally. Merlin the whole Kingdom is talking about the sorcerer who killed Morgana, that night in Camlann. I have a couple of Lord's chewing my ears off, about that same man living amongst us even now."

"You mean Lord Oakes?" Merlin replied, this time looking straight at Arthur.

"How did you know?" Arthur asked surprised.

"Ah that time you and the Queen met him, I was further down the corridor." Merlin explained, his face suddenly red.

"I see. So, you heard what was said? In that case I don't need to tell you, that other people will be following this closely. I will be under certain pressures, so it's important that we set procedures down, so that we can deal with it, in a fair and transparent way." Arthur explained.

"They will expect you to kill me." Merlin said, unemotionally.

Arthur looked at Merlin closely, after a couple of more spirited answers, this was back to the morose Merlin that had entered the room. Arthur was amazed already at the difference in Merlin's attitude. He was suddenly the brow beaten individual, too ashamed to look the King in the face once more. The man stripped of confidence almost as if, he was accepting his fate already."That maybe the case, but I will be the one with the final say. I won't kill you Merlin, and if you really knew me, you would know that already." Arthur said, glumly.

There was no answer from Merlin this time, merely a refusal to look at him. Not for the first time Arthur acknowledged the difference. He realised this was going to be even more of a challenge, then even he had anticipated."To continue, we will have a series of meetings and I hope that out of those we can find a way forward." Arthur began.
"Will I be put on trial?" Merlin asked.

Arthur looked in Merlin's eyes, and hated what he saw there. It was an unmistakable fear, how on earth had it come to this, he wondered. Surely there was an easier way, and yet when he looked back on his own upbringing, he realised it was for that exact reason, that they were here in the first place. Namely Camelot was a closed society for those who had magic like Merlin. So, with that being the case, Arthur decided to give him a chance.

"Merlin what I want from you, through all of this is your honesty. I can't promise what will happen, I can guarantee though, you will not be harmed."

There was a slight pause before Merlin replied. "Okay."

"But I want to know everything Merlin, no more secrets. Nothing left in the closet. Everything."

"Everything?" Merlin murmured.

"Is that a problem?" Arthur asked, noticing the haunted look was back. What on earth is Merlin holding back, he wondered, suddenly feeling anxious.

Merlin regarded the question, as he did so, he could feel Arthur's agitation, that was attached, and what looked like concern. In a way he couldn't blame him, and yet for a second, Merlin felt caught in a trap. In one way this was always what he'd wanted. The chance to tell the truth, the opportunity to explain who he was. But the everything complicated it completely.

It was bad enough that he had the burden of some of his experiences. But now not only did he have to relive them all, he also had to tell Arthur. All the while watching any respect his friend still had for him, disappear down a dark hole. At times it felt as if destiny was trying to destroy him. He decided to try for some time.

"But it would take forever to explain everything." Merlin said.

"We have time." Arthur replied. "I will make sure of that."

"What about the meeting you have planned?" Merlin argued, remembering what Gaius had told him.

"Why do I get the impression you're trying to avoid giving me an answer?" Arthur asked.

Merlin grimaced realising the plan had not worked. He sat back a sigh of frustration escaping from his lips. He closed his eyes for a moment, trying to block out the mounting pressure.

"It can't be as bad as all that surely?" Arthur prompted.

Merlin reached a decision, he recognised that this was as good a chance he would get, to tell his side of the story. Was it really in his own interest to turn it down, even at the risk of falling out with Arthur? He turned his head up slowly and faced him. "I will tell you everything. You have my word. But please just remember, that everything I did, I did for you, and Camelot. I have never used my magic in a bad way, and I never would." Merlin met Arthur's stare, and for a second it was like going back in time. Merlin felt a softening in Arthur's eyes. It gave him a little bit more hope, that maybe this could be the best way after all. He watched Arthur writing on the scroll for a minute or two, and then came the question, he just wasn't ready for.

"I have to ask this Merlin, why did you never tell me?"

"I wanted too, believe me there were so many moments, but it never seemed to be the right time."
Merlin answered. It was the truth, but he knew it sounded pathetic. It was the question he never stopped asking himself; and he’d never found a satisfactory excuse, to come up with. As he sat there searching for the right words, a wave of exasperation hit him, cursing the choice he’d had made. He realised just how tough this whole trial would be, and for a second, he wanted to bolt for the door.

"Was it because you didn't trust me?" Arthur asked.

"No of course not, I would have hated to have put you in an awkward position. Ever since I was a young boy I was encouraged to keep my magic a secret. Apart from my mother, I only ever told Will."

"Will? Of course, it was you who did that spell, when I was fighting Kanen. He took the blame for it, I seem to remember." Arthur pointed out.

Merlin looked down, unable to face Arthur's stare and the terrible memory of Will's ultimate sacrifice for him. One of so many people he had lost through his journey to his destiny. How on earth could he explain his emotions to Arthur, when he couldn't even accept it himself. "I never asked him to believe me. Even now I would give anything to stop him from doing it, if it meant he'd survive."

Merlin said, "I miss him even now."

"You said you only told Will. What about Lancelot?" Arthur asked.

Merlin stared for a moment surprised. "Lancelot?"

"You remember when I asked you before to be honest?" Arthur pointed out.

"I never told Lancelot about my magic. But he saw me using it." Merlin admitted, hating having to mention it. "When?" Arthur asked.

"You remember when we had the trouble with the Griffin?" Merlin asked.

"That big eagle like creature?" Arthur answered.

"Yes, that's the one, I used a spell on it, and it enabled Lancelot to kill the creature. He overheard me using my magic. Afterwards he refused to take credit for the act, when he went back to see your father. He promised me he would keep my secret. Merlin closed his eyes, "I hated the fact that he was forced to keep my secret. I really don't want you thinking badly of him. Lancelot is a man of honour."

"I don't think badly of him." Arthur said, "He was a true friend to you, and he always protected you after that night."

Merlin nodded. "So, what happens now?"

"I think we need to have a break. I need to think about what you've told me so far. I think we need to continue tomorrow. Go back to Gaius, and I will send for you."

"Of course, I promise I will tell you everything."

"Go on Merlin." Arthur said.

As Merlin walked away he suddenly felt exhausted, it had only been an afternoon; but he felt as if, they’d been going on all day. He was dreading the next day as he knew it would be longer, and there
were worst revelations to come out. But he knew this was only the beginning, and who knew where they would be, by the end of it. All of a sudden, he was desperate for some sleep, so he could close his mind to everything, he was going through  

________________________________________

Arthur had been sitting there for a few minutes, before he heard a knock on the door. "Come in."

He forced himself to be ready for whatever problem revealed itself, but it was only Guinevere.

"Arthur, how did it go?" she asked, sitting next to him.

"It's all so strange Guinevere. I saw two different Merlin's tonight, and I have no idea which is the real one now." Arthur said, putting his hand over hers.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"He was so scared when he first walked in, wouldn't even look me in the face. There was also something like a resignation that I'd have him killed. It was really. Arthur struggled for the right word. "it, was depressing."

"Poor Merlin." Guinevere remarked. "Although I suppose in a way he is in very unnatural territory."

"What do mean by that?" asked Arthur, intrigued.

"Well think about it from his viewpoint. He has always been in the background, keeping his magic a secret. It must feel as if he is on view to everyone now, that must be quite scary." Arthur considered her words for a moment. He accepted she could well have a point, but then the question he'd asked Merlin not long before, came back to him.

"So why didn't he tell me Guinevere?" Arthur asked, staring at her his eyes emotional. "I always thought we had a good relationship, that he could approach me. But he didn't."

"Did you ask him that question?" Guinevere asked.

"Yes." Arthur admitted, taking a drink of water.

"What did he say?" Guinevere asked.

"That he could never find the right moment, but he also said he didn't want me to have to make a decision about him. It's like he expected that I would kill him." Arthur said, "Can you believe that?"

"You have to remember that in your father's time, it would have meant death. How many sorcerers did he kill?"

"A number. I know what it was like in my father's time. But I have been King for a number of years now, yet still he didn't feel he could tell me." Arthur said.

"How do you think you would have reacted if he had told you?" Guinevere asked.

Arthur thought for a second. "I don't know." He said, grimacing.

"I think Arthur you need to listen a bit more to him, it was never going to be an easy thing for him to do." Guinevere mused.

"There is another thing." Arthur hesitated.

"What? Arthur?" she asked.
He could sense a bit of panic in her voice, and he remembered how close she'd been to Merlin. Even before they'd married, Merlin and Guinevere had been servants and friends together. He decided to tread carefully about what he said, "When I said to him that I wanted him to tell me everything, he looked terrified. It makes me wonder just what he could have done." Arthur said, staring straight at his wife.

"Arthur, I can't believe for one minute he would do anything evil. It's just not Merlin." Guinevere said.

"You didn't see how much power he had Guinevere when he killed Morgana. I had never seen anything like it before." Arthur said, "Even I was scared, he could have killed anyone in an instant."

"I know it must have been a shock for you, for everyone. But has he ever threatened anyone here? I don't see him as someone who would harm his friends, but rather protect them. In a way it makes some sense to me now." Guinevere smiled. "I often used to wonder, how it was that when you went away, as long as Merlin was there too, I always thought you'd come back to me."

Arthur let her words sink in for a second. His first reaction was to object to the idea, that Merlin could possibly protect him at all. He was after all, a useless fighter. But then it dawned on him that what she actually meant, was that there was a reason as to why she felt that. It might be she didn't know exactly what it was, but it was enough to give her the reassurance, even if she didn't know the exact reason for it. He admitted to himself it was quite logical.

"I can see your point." Arthur conceded. "I still feel nervous as to what might still come out though."

"Remember Arthur, he has always been devoted to you, so don't be hasty whatever happens," Guinevere said. "Now let's go and have some supper, you need an early night."

Merlin was coming back from the lower town with some herbs for Gaius, when he was stopped by a shout. As he turned around a hard slap on his shoulder made him wince.

"There you are, I was wondering when I would next see you." Gwaine laughed, "You're like a sorcerer, the way you keep disappearing."

"Gwaine!" Merlin exclaimed, looking around him in horror.

"What?" Gwaine grunted. "You're a hero Merlin. You killed Morgana and brought peace to Camelot. I think there should be a song written about it. Maybe I'll write it."

"I'm not sure Arthur will see it that way." Merlin mumbled.

"He will come around Merlin, and if he doesn't I will tell him he's an idiot." Gwaine grinned.

"Thanks, Gwaine I appreciate the support." Merlin said.

"How did it go today anyway? The boys were asking about you."

"Not too bad I suppose, I'm still here." Merlin tried to smile optimistically.

"Everything will work out for the best. When everything is normal, I will take you down to the tavern, and find you a nice girl." Gwaine winked.

"I don't think you and I have the same taste in girls Gwaine." Merlin laughed, relieved for a bit of genuine merriment. "I need to get these to Gaius, thank you for everything."
"You know where to find me if you need a talk." Gwaine shouted.

Merlin smiled, and ran off towards the castle suddenly desperate for a bit of cover. The way people had stared at him, had made him nervous. So many people in Camelot had suffered under Morgana's reign of terror. He feared what some would think about him, especially now he was out in the open. He decided he needed to stay out of the limelight as much as possible, while the meetings were ongoing. He hated to think what someone like Lord Oakes would think, about people celebrating a sorcerer. He also didn't want to make any trouble for Arthur, at such a sensitive time.

As he ran up the steps and into the safety of his chambers, his only wish was to find some peace and solitude. Then he could face whatever the new day brought him.
Chapter Summary

At the second meeting, Arthur is determined to find out more about Merlin's life before he arrived in Camelot. As Merlin opens up he realises just how little he knew about his background and life. But the day ends with revelations, that Arthur struggles to come to terms with.

By the time Arthur and Merlin met the next day, the weather had turned and a storm was howling outside. As Arthur walked through the door, a bolt of lightning hit the window, making him jump. He was grateful that Merlin had not been around to see it, and was embarrassed by his reaction. But it summed up his troubled mind as he approached the second meeting. The words of Guinevere were still in his head, and once more he was happy, he at least had her to talk things through with.

By the time Merlin had arrived and took his seat, Arthur had decided to follow his wife’s advice. He felt he needed to get to know Merlin and to do that, he took the decision to ask about his childhood.

“When you were growing up in Ealdor what did your mother tell you about your background?” Arthur asked. He watched Merlin for a second as he dithered in the chair opposite. He noticed that Merlin seemed a little hesitant as if the whole situation, had hit him for the first time. He even felt a touch of pity, as he never found it easy to open up either.

“I didn’t know my father at all when I was growing up.” Merlin began. “I didn’t really know anything about him, my mother didn’t like talking about him. All she would say was, he had to leave suddenly. She was always really worried about my magic being discovered, so would always tell me, to stay quiet about it.”

“Will knew about your magic I mean.” Arthur said, “How did that go down with your mother?”

“She was furious when she realised that Will knew. It was terrible I had never seen her so angry and hurt. I felt I had let her down. But I don’t regret telling Will. When you are forced to keep secrets, it becomes almost second nature to you. You feel as if you cannot be open to anyone. I always felt I had to be so careful with people I didn’t know.

At times, it felt as if I had sorcerer stamped on my forehead. I used to fear when I was walking down the road, everyone would know what I was. So, I would get in the habit of giving nothing away. The trouble with that is it creates a certain isolation, which is not easy to deal with.”

Arthur studied Merlin. He had come to a stop, and as Arthur let his words sink in, he tried to put himself in Merlin’s place. He attempted to understand the world, that Merlin had been forced to grow up in. To have to be secretive from such a young age. He realised it was similar to his own experience. Growing up as the King’s son, Arthur too was always careful and felt somehow apart from the other boys. He had people he would describe as friends, but really, they were never on the same level as himself. He could never be that open with them either. Indeed, he probably had more of a relationship with Morgana, which gave him a sudden stab of pain. He frowned thinking about her, but then Merlin began again.

“So, in a way, I got used to keeping the secret, when I was growing up. But it was never an easy
thing to do. I would have given anything to be allowed to be normal.”

Arthur lifted his head at that, and suddenly sensed Merlin’s pain. There was another awkward pause and he watched Merlin fight his composure. Taking pity on him he reached out to him.

“Take your time Merlin, I know it isn’t easy.” Arthur accepted.

“Thank you,” Merlin whispered. “I loved spending time in the forest, it was the place I felt most at home in. I had an affinity with all the nature around, it was something I could never explain to anyone. I will always remember the first time I discovered I had magic. This particular day I was collecting firewood.”

There was another slight pause, and Arthur sensed that something big was coming from Merlin. He realised he was stealing to say something quite important, and he suddenly felt quite tense. It took him back to the day before when Merlin had seemed reluctant, to be entirely honest with Arthur. But he sat still and waited for Merlin to begin again.

“As usual, I had forgotten what I’d been sent out to do. I was enjoying myself being in my own little paradise. I remember it was autumn and the leaves were falling all around me. There was a little stream, I will always remember it. I picked up a leaf and a breeze had blown it out of my hands. I ran after it and picked it up again, but once again the leaf blew away. I threw myself down, and the leaf just came back to me. As I looked I noticed my reflection, in the water. It was the first time I had noticed, my eyes glow. In that moment I felt like I was a monster, I didn’t recognise myself. I kept looking and thinking what is this thing? I had never been so terrified in my life.”

Arthur sat back horrified at the story, but not quite knowing what to say to Merlin. Somehow, he had not expected this at all. Yet as he digested the words, it did resonate with him. He remembered the times when Merlin had seemed aloof, and distant. All of a sudden, he started to appreciate just what Merlin meant, when he described his life as isolated.

“What did you do?” Arthur asked, leaning forward. To his surprise, Merlin met his eyes, and he saw a glint of humour enter them.

“I ran home, which was a mile or so. I just never stopped running, I wanted to leave the image behind. When I arrived home, I locked myself in my room. I wouldn’t come out until my mother begged me to let her in. When she came in I told her what I’d seen, and in her eyes, I could see fear written within them. That made me even more scared. I realise now that it was the day she’d been waiting for.”

“What do you mean?” Arthur asked.

“My father had magic, and she didn’t know to start off with whether I would have it too. It was only when I told her about the incident, her worst fears had come true.”

“You never met your father, did you?” Arthur asked, remembering how they had both once spoken about the parent, neither had known.

“Yes,” Merlin replied, after a pause. “So, did you.”

“I did?” Arthur repeated, racking his brain and trying to work out who it was. He realised it could only have been since Merlin had arrived in Camelot. He watched as Merlin wriggled in his seat, and waited for the answer.

“It was the time when we were searching for the Dragonlord.” Merlin began.
“It wasn’t one of those people in that tavern we came across?” Arthur interrupted a horrified look on his face. There had been some pretty strange characters in that place, he remembered.

“No,” Merlin said softly.

“Who then?” Arthur asked, getting impatient for a second. Then a thought came to him. “The Dragon Lord, Balinor?”

For a second there was a silence and then Arthur watched as Merlin nodded. He didn’t know what to say next, there were so many questions forming on his mind, but he tried, to be as compassionate as he could. The pain was etched on Merlin’s face, and Arthur felt uncomfortable having to ask anything else for now. He thought of a way out of it, but to his surprise, Merlin continued, so he sat and listened.

“When we began the quest, I had only just learnt that Balinor was my father. Gaius had told me before we left. Gaius had helped him escape from your father when the purge was on. He asked me if I knew my father’s name, but I didn’t. My mother had never really told me much about him.”

“My father never spoke much about the purge, except for warning me of the dangers of magic. Did you know much about his history before from Gaius?” Arthur asked, wanting to learn as much as he could.

“Only a little bit. I spoke to my father briefly, when we met him. He explained that he had the ability to speak to the dragons. He also told me your father had asked him to bring the last dragon to Camelot so he could make peace with him. My father did as Uther asked, but he broke his word. Instead of making peace, he chained the Dragon up and locked him in the cave, underneath the dungeons. My father escaped, after getting help from Gaius.”

In the pause that followed Arthur closed his eyes for a second. The story did not exactly surprise him. He had loved his father dearly, but he knew that Uther had done things, which were wrong. Was this one such thing? But he then remembered the Dragon who had brought pain and terror to Camelot, when he had escaped.

The creature has been vengeful and cruel, killing many citizens of his Kingdom. Even now he could relive the sheer brutality of that event, how the fires had burned in the citadel. He could remember the smell of the smoke, as they battled endlessly, against the fires that raged in the courtyard. That day, he had almost lost Guinevere. The horror in his heart, as he watched the dragon making its way towards her, would always live with him. Now he had found out about Merlin’s connection with Balinor.

“Which explains his initial reluctance to help us,” Arthur said. “Was it you who changed his mind?”

“He didn’t want to help at all to begin with. I appealed to him, but his mind was set. I mentioned Gaius to him, I think that more than anything persuaded him. When he joined us, I talked a little bit with him, and then told him that he was my father.”

“I never guessed,” Arthur admitted. “I would notice you two talking quietly together, and sometimes I would wonder what you were talking about.”

“I am sorry I couldn’t tell you. It would have complicated things, but I wish I could have been truthful. I would have liked to have shared it with you.” Merlin said.

“I am sorry for your loss Merlin, it must have been really hard. To have found your father and then lost him again so quickly. I just wish we could have got him safely back to Camelot.”
Arthur allowed Merlin to take a brief rest and began writing. But questions were still forming in his mind, and he knew he had to ask them. Arthur remembered them being back in Camelot, looking back he could now begin to understand why Merlin was so withdrawn. He had been so used to Merlin’s banter, but there had been something different about him. But Merlin had gone with Arthur and the Knights to face the dragon.

It was one of those events that Arthur had little memory off. Merlin had told him at the time, that he dealt the dragon a mortal blow, yet he had no memory of the incident. Everything surrounding it was so hazy, he’d been knocked out and when he had come around the dragon was nowhere to be seen. Only he and Merlin had been there. Something in the depth of his mind told him, Merlin had not been entirely truthful. He knew he had to find out the truth.

“Merlin that night, when we confronted the dragon; you told me I had killed it. Yet I have no memory of it at all. I remember being knocked out, and when I had come around there was only you there.”

“Yes,” Merlin said, quietly.

“What happened that night?” Arthur asked, “You told me I had dealt the dragon a mortal blow, was that really the case?”

There was a pause and Arthur could sense the turmoil in Merlin’s features. He smiled to himself knowing already the answer. But his need to know was at desperation point for him, just where was he in all of this, he wondered.

“It was you that killed the dragon wasn’t it?” Arthur said, raising his voice more than he intended.

“No, I didn’t kill it. When my father died he passed his dragon skills onto me. I became a Dragon-Lord, which meant I could control the Dragon.”

“You can control a Dragon?” Arthur laughed, then suddenly a thought occurred to him. “What do you mean, are you saying this thing is still alive?”

“Yes, Kilgharrah,”

“Kilgharrah? You even have a name for it?” Arthur asked, his voice incredulous and his mind suddenly feeling stretched to the seams. “It killed hundreds of people Merlin, how can you allow it to live?”

“Arthur, when I first arrived in Camelot it was from Kilgharrah, that I learnt about why my gifts had been given to me. Not even Gaius, knew why I had been born with magic. But after you had me thrown in the dungeons, I could hear a voice calling my name. Eventually, I realised it was underneath the castle.”

“A voice? Are you telling me this Dragon can actually speak to you?” Arthur asked, suddenly feeling as if he was living in a state of madness.

“Yes, he can. He has helped me save you on occasions as well. The sword you pulled out of the stone that time, was burnished by Kilgharrah. It was when the wraith, came back from the dead for your father. Gaius, told me the wraith couldn’t be killed by an ordinary sword. I was told about a fable, where a sword which had been breathed on by a dragon, had killed a wraith many years before. So, I took a sword from Gwen, which her father had made and asked Kilgharrah, to burnish it. He told me it could only be used by you, but it was your father that used the sword. He was very angry with me and blamed me. Although there was nothing I could do to stop your father
obviously.”

“I seem to remember I was drugged by Gaius,” Arthur said, by now feeling numb with what he was hearing, and near the end of his tether.

“I believe so.” Merlin murmured. “But the sword killed the wraith, and it has saved you and Camelot, on more than one occasion.”

Arthur sat back in his chair, feeling suddenly exhausted. So many things no longer made any sense to him. Not least the exhausted looking Merlin. “I think that’s quite enough for today. I need time to take everything in Merlin, and you look like you could do with a rest.”

“Thank you, sire.”

“Off you go, back to Gaius, we will meet again tomorrow.” Arthur yawned as he watched him walk over to the door. As it shut softly he put his head on the table.

There was so many questions running through his mind now, he could barely think straight. He hardly knew where to start. He tried to clear his mind, and as he sat there he noticed the sword across the room.

He walked over to it slowly, picking it up and looking at it closely. He realised the sword had always felt somehow different, from his other ones. He almost felt a deep connection with it, but then Merlin had explained it was a magical sword. So how could it? He did not have magic, so why did it feel such a part of him. He sighed no longer knowing if he understood anything at this moment in time. He knew he just needed to find Guinevere, right now she was the only person whom he really understood.

Merlin tossed and turned as he willed his tired eyes to close and remain so. But he couldn’t find any peace at all. In the end, he lit his candle and got out of bed, fetching his magic book out, from under the floorboards. As he slowly turned each page, his eyes too exhausted to take in any of the words, he relived the momentous day once more.

Today he had told Arthur about his father Balinor, introduced Kilgharrah, into Arthur’s life. He had shared some early memories of his childhood, both good and bad. Yet at this moment he felt completely empty of any emotion.

It was because he knew, there was no way of knowing how Arthur would react, to everything he had told him. He was amazed at how easily the words had tumbled out of him today. For some time, he had feared that he would be unable to face the consequences of the deceit, he’d been forced into for so long. Yet in being so open, it proved to be a blessed release for him.

He wasn’t at all sure that Arthur would feel the same right now. But all he could do was hope with time, he would come to understand. Whatever happened Merlin knew his whole life had changed in an instant. He would have to live with whatever fate and destiny, threw his way regardless. There was still so much more to discuss. He hadn’t even spoken about Morgana, or Freya, Arthur’s birth, the whole prophecy that held himself and Arthur together. But he knew he would have to be ultimately honest about everything if there was to be any chance of a reconciliation between them.

As he went through the book, he came across the spell that had started it. The first time his magic had been used, to turn the tide. It had exposed Knight Valiant at the Tournament, for using a magical shield. As he silently read the words, he was once more transferred back in time. It had ended up being the moment when the journey towards his destiny, had truly begun. Throughout the time since,
there had been endless ups and downs. But he knew none of those days could compare, with where he was now.

As sleep slowly began to claim him, he dreamed of a time when he could truly be himself. When he and Arthur could take the Kingdom forward, and magic could become a force, which spread goodness rather than fear.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Troubles arise before Arthur and Merlin meet. Yet again Arthur is reminded of how everything could go seriously wrong, and demands answers as to how the information of the meetings have got out.

As Arthur meets Merlin once again, it is not long before more revelations are made, which leave his mind both disturbed and in confusion. How can he make sense of how the world around him is changing?

When the meeting suddenly ends, Merlin realises just how acute and risky the truth coming out could be both for Arthur and himself. How will they manage to find common ground once again?

As Arthur woke up early next morning, a crisis had taken over. Leon had interrupted him early to report, that Lord Oakes had found out about the daily meetings. He was now attempting to cause an uproar with other people, and rumours had begun to circulate. Arthur was furious and decided to convene an early meeting. After telling Lancelot to delay Merlin, he asked for Leon and Guinevere to join him. He was still in confusion over what Merlin had said at the last meeting. But knew he would have to stop, the situation causing further trouble.

“Have we any idea how Lord Oakes found about this?” Arthur asked, annoyance in his voice. “I strictly told as few people as I could.”

“Not sure sire. It could be that he is just guessing, and trying to spread unease around.” Leon said, with more hope than expectation.

“It all came out of nowhere.” Guinevere pointed out, “Doesn’t Lord Oakes have a nephew working here?”

“Yes, he does,” admitted Leon. “Or perhaps someone has just noticed the two of you meeting, and the information has leaked out.”

“And Lord Oakes has picked it up,” Arthur grunted, “A little too convenient I would suggest.”

“What do you want us to do about it?” Leon asked.

“It needs to be stopped before anything else gets out.” Arthur said, “I would like you to deny the rumour, and just say matters are in hand. We cannot afford for gossiping, we need to contain the situation. Once you have done that, I suggest you look into how the news got out. It might be prudent to check for any new arrivals recently. Check with Audrey.”

“Yes, sire,” Leon said, “I will get on to this immediately.”

“Thank you, Leon,” Arthur replied. Once the door closed, Arthur turned to his wife. “I have a particular task for you.”

“Oh?”
“I need you to speak with one of the other Lords. I feel I need as much information as I can get, on what Camelot was like before magic was banned. Lord Blake might be a good person to start with. I hear he had some experience dealing with it. I just want a general conversation with him for now. Also try and get him to find out what the feeling is from the other Lord’s. Let’s just try and see where the problems are before we are hit with anymore. Please do it discreetly though.” Arthur said, knowing it was risky.

“Naturally.” Guinevere replied, “It could be an idea to involve Gaius as well, he will know a lot about Camelot before the purge.”

“I will talk with Gaius at some stage. For now, I’d rather keep him out of it.” Arthur said, “He is Merlin’s main supporter at this moment in time. If you are happy with doing that, I will get on with things.” Arthur stood up, “Let’s hope this is just a setback.”

“We will do what’s necessary.” Guinevere promised, “Go and meet Merlin. I will let Lancelot know you are ready.”

Arthur nodded and headed down the corridor. He was still fuming about the disturbance, aware that there was still plenty to discuss between Merlin and himself. He suspected this would not be easy, for Merlin to put up with either. Damn Lord Oakes he muttered under his breath. He threw the door open, and marched into the room, throwing his sword down. As he waited for Merlin to join him, he tried to calm himself down. The last thing he needed was to appear too angry. He suspected that today would be quite hard enough, without the added tension. As he heard a knock on the door, he cleared his throat, before calling, “Come in.”

“You haven’t been waiting too long?” Merlin asked, looking concerned.

“No. I need to tell you though, that news of our meetings has become known. Lord Oakes is currently trying to make waves.” Arthur explained, watching Merlin’s reaction closely.

“Oh, that is a pain.” Merlin sighed, “I’m sorry it’s caused trouble for you.”

“It’s not your fault Merlin.” Arthur replied, “It’s certainly something we could do without.”

“Any idea how it happened?” Merlin asked.

“We are not sure, I have asked Leon to find out.” Arthur said, “Hopefully we will be able to stop it from spreading, now we know about it.”

“Yes hopefully.”

Arthur looked at Merlin, he couldn’t help but notice the young man’s nervousness. “It will be fine Merlin, try not to worry. We need to get on, we’ve wasted enough time.”

“Oh course.”

“There was something I wanted to ask you, carrying on from what you told me the other day,” Arthur said.

“Oh anything,” Merlin said.

“You mentioned about you controlling the dragon, where is this creature? Is it a danger to us?” Arthur asked, leaning forward.

“No, not at all.” Merlin replied, “The dragon lives away from Camelot, but I can command him to
come when I need to.”

“So, if I asked you tomorrow to bring me the dragon, you could do it just like that?” Arthur asked, feeling a little uncomfortable.

“Yes, but the dragon is not dangerous Arthur. Please believe that. I banished him from Camelot after he attacked the citadel.”

There was a pause before Arthur took a deep breath. “Of course, it was you who released the dragon.”

“I had to keep my word after I made a promise to Kilgharrah. He had helped me on a number of occasions.”

“He killed hundreds of people Merlin,” Arthur said, horrified suddenly.

“I know and believe me if I could have done anything to stop him, I would have done,” Merlin said. “But I had no choice.”

“No choice, you could have said no,” Arthur said, quietly feeling demoralised, and totally lost.

********************************************************************************

For a moment Merlin came to a stop. If anything highlighted the difficulty, that lay ahead between them, then this subject alone proved it. How could he truly explain to Arthur everything that the dragon was and had done? He could feel the tension rising in the room, and knew he must at least attempt to explain it. “The dragon has lived for a thousand years, Arthur. He has seen Camelot long before the purge happened, or before your father arrived on the scene. He was alive at a time when there were many dragons when magic was everywhere. When Camelot and magic went hand in hand. Throughout my time here, he has many times helped me, and by that, I mean he has also helped you. He has always supported the idea of you. It was from him, that I first learnt about the prophecy.”


“The prophecy that was foretold and linked us, long before I even knew such a thing existed. It was said that I would meet you, and together we would unite the land of Albion.” Merlin said, hardly daring to meet Arthur’s stare. As he said it, he wondered if there was any hope at all, that Arthur could believe such a thing.

“But who wrote this prophecy, where does it even come from?” Arthur asked, suddenly.

Merlin could sense the bewilderment in Arthur’s voice as he asked the question. He couldn’t really blame him, as he knew how unlikely it sounded to his own ears, never mind Arthur’s. But he took a deep breath and tried to explain it, the best he could.

“Only a few people or magical beings know about the future. The dragon told me when I first met him, that it was my destiny to protect you, to enable you to unite the land of Albion. According to Kilgharrah, other cultures have known about our meeting as well. I once met a seer called Talisman, this man had been dead, for thousands of years. In his time, he was a seer to the Great Kings. He told me certain things, which he learnt from the crystal cave.”

“What is the crystal cave?” Arthur asked, “You are talking in riddles Merlin.”

“The crystal cave was the place where Talisman saw his prophecies. He saw things in the crystals which would tell him, what could happen in the future. Talisman saved your life when you had been
hit by a spear. I had tried to heal you, but I couldn’t, and he had come out of nowhere and healed you with a spell. Then he took me into the crystal cave, and I saw the crystals for myself.”

“Are you telling me you can also read crystals?” Arthur asked, in a voice clouded with doubt.

“Yes, I can. But sometimes the crystals can deceive you, so it is not an exact science.” Merlin explained, remembering the incident with Morgana, which had almost ended with Uther losing his life. He guessed now was not the time to bring that up.

“You don’t say!” Arthur half mumbled.

“As well as Talisman, the Druids too knew about me. They have known me as Emrys.”

“And what do they say about us Merlin?” Arthur asked,

Merlin sensed a cynical tone in Arthur’s voice and met his stare dead on. “That I will become the most powerful sorcerer to walk the earth, and that I will live forever. Emrys means immortal”

Arthur laughed. “Now I know you’re not being serious Merlin. No one lives forever.”

Merlin shrugged, “Believe me, that is not something I would want to happen to me.”

“Just when I think this cannot get any stranger, as ever you exceed expectations,” Arthur replied.

“Is that a compliment?” Merlin asked, daring to try a bit of humour if only to lighten the gloom he was beginning to feel.

“Don’t push it, Merlin,” Arthur replied, quietly. “So, to be clear, you are telling me our meeting was always going to happen. That your job is to protect me so that I can unite Albion, and finally, you will never die. What about me, will I die?”

“Oh,” Merlin replied, suddenly realising he’d left the most important line out.


“You will die eventually, but you are known as the Once and Future King.” Merlin watched, as Arthur closed his eyes for a second.

“The Once and Future King?” Arthur asked, incredulously. “You mean that I will -

“You will come again when Albion’s need is at it’s greatest,” Merlin explained. There was a pause. As Merlin looked at the young King all he could manage to say was, “I know there is a lot to take in.”

“At times Merlin, you are amazing,” Arthur said, shaking his head. “I need a break. We will continue in a couple of hours.”

Merlin watched in stunned silence, as Arthur walked out of the room. For a few minutes, he stayed where he was, not really knowing what to do. But when he realised Arthur was indeed not coming back, decided to go and see Gaius. As he arrived back in Gaius’s room, he matched the gloomy look of his mentor.

“Merlin! I didn’t expect to see you so soon. What happened?” Gaius asked.

“I’m not sure, to be honest,” Merlin said, throwing himself on a chair.
“What do you mean?” Gaius asked, looking very concerned.

“We were just talking. He was asking me about the Dragon so I told him about how he explained about my destiny. How our meeting was foretold, and about it being a prophecy. Then I told him that he was known as the Once and Future King.” Merlin explained. “I think he found it hard to take it all in.”

“Aww right.” Gaius said, “Well to be honest Merlin it is a lot for him to learn in one day.”

“You think I have said too much?” Merlin asked, suddenly feeling in despair.

“Well, he did ask you to tell him everything.” Gaius said, “But maybe you should keep a little back for another day. Sometimes you can load people with too much information, better to pace it a bit.”

“I see that now. But the moment I started telling him things, one thing led to another, and before I knew it, everything was pouring out.” Merlin explained, feeling suddenly down.

“I will get you something to eat, you look exhausted,” Gaius replied, putting his hand on his shoulder.

“Thanks, Gaius, Arthur said he needed a couple of hours.” Merlin grimaced.

“Why don’t you go for a lie down while I am heating the stew up,” Gaius suggested.

“What if.” Merlin began

“I won’t let you sleep Merlin, go on.”

All of a sudden Merlin decided to give in, he felt tired, and it was obvious he would not be able to think anything through, at the moment. He made for his room and lay on his bed, trying to close his eyes for a few minutes. But all he could see was Arthur’s face, as he relived the conversation. The look of utter shock and disbelief. As he remembered his words, he suddenly realised how mad it all sounded. It was little wonder that Arthur had needed a break. He just hoped he would still be prepared to listen to him, but he knew it wouldn’t be easy. This day had just reinforced all of the fears which were growing in his turbulent mind.

***************************

It had taken Guinevere a while to calm Arthur down when he had suddenly ended up unannounced in their quarters. One look at her husband told her, that something had happened. He looked as white as anything, and for a moment she wondered what he’d been told. Eventually, she managed to persuade him to sit down, instead of pacing around the room, talking loudly and making little sense.

“Let me get you a drink.” Guinevere suggested, “Then you can tell me what happened.” Once she poured him a glass of water, she sat down herself and then encouraged him to tell her, what Merlin had said. By the time Arthur had poured the story out, she took a few seconds to think about what he’d told Arthur.

“Well, a certain amount makes sense.” Guinevere began.

“What makes sense, Merlin living forever, me rising again once I’ve died. How can you even suggest anything makes any sense Guinevere? Even now I can’t believe any of it.”

“What I mean, is when I spoke to Gaius he mentioned to me about the prophecy. So, I did know that it existed,” she admitted.
“What exactly did he tell you?” Arthur asked.

“That this prophecy said that you two would meet, and unite the land. He didn’t tell much about the detail. I didn’t know about you living again, or Merlin being immortal. Poor Merlin.” She sighed.

“Poor Merlin?” Arthur asked, gazing at her.

“Think about it Arthur, having to live forever. I don’t know about you, but I am not sure I would want that.”

“He said much the same thing,” Arthur admitted.

“What is it that bothers you the most Arthur?” Guinevere asked, taking his hand and squeezing it.

“Almost everything Guinevere. I started off not knowing Merlin, now I’m wondering if I even know myself anymore.”

“Arthur, of course, you do. You are still the same man, despite everything Merlin has said. You are a great King, and in time everything will become clearer still. Maybe by hearing everything Merlin has to say your whole future will become more obvious. You will know what you need to do, to take the Kingdom forward. I am due to meet Lord Blake tomorrow, I will ask him if he has also heard about this prophecy.”

“Good idea. You need to find out as much as you can.” Arthur said.

“So, do you. You must go on talking to Merlin and don’t be afraid or unsure of what he tells you. It is not that you are different in yourselves. Deep down you are still the same, but now you have found out things you didn’t know before. The only thing that has changed for either of you is your perception of one another.”

“I suppose so. The way it all came flying out though Guinevere. I got to the stage I couldn’t think things through anymore.”

“I understand. But one day at a time. It must be just as scary for him, as it is for you.” Guinevere pointed out.

“I don’t know what I’d do without you right now,” Arthur said.

Guinevere kissed him keeping her arms around him. She could sense how confused he suddenly was, and knew Merlin would be feeling the same. She knew though that Gaius would be there for him, and realised she would have to do the same for Arthur. Somehow the two of them would have to keep the two men together, whatever came up next. Too much was at stake for the Kingdom, and now part of the truth had come out. Guinevere knew things could go, badly wrong if they parted on bad terms. She was determined that nothing would wreck their relationship, for Albion’s sake she had to be strong.
This chapter looks more at Guinevere and the task she has been given by Arthur of finding out about magic and its place inside the old Camelot, of his father's time. By the time Guinevere has come out of the meeting with Lord Blake, she realises there is yet more astonishing questions to be answered. One in particular about Arthur's actual birth causes her a real anxiety about what to tell her husband.

There is also a brief bit on Gaius and how Lancelot calms his nervousness.

Guinevere finished writing down the questions she had decided to ask Lord Blake. She realised she had a few minutes, so walked over to the window. It was a lovely day. She could see all the way down the valley, to where the Darkling Woods began to spread out. With the sun shining from the sky, it reminded her of brighter days to come. This was the time of year she had loved as a child. It was just before the spring arrived, with the snowdrops and daffodils suddenly appearing, combining with the colours of the landscape. It was as though everything around was waking up, after a long hibernation. She found a brief comfort in the thoughts before her mind returned to the matters in hand.

She knew this meeting could prove vital in the future of her husband and Merlin’s relationship. Lord Blake was a man whom Arthur trusted implicitly. He was one of Uther’s oldest friends, his son Edgar was currently one of her husband’s Knights. It reminded her once more that happily, they were not all like Lord Oakes, who was ready to explode, at a moment’s notice. Lord Blake was a man who always considered any answer or opinion he gave. He was a man of breeding and possessed a sincere heart. Since the beginning of Arthur’s reign, he had already sorted his advice on more than one occasion.

She felt confident that he would be able to supply the answers, which she hoped, would make everything a bit clearer. Magic had long been a subject of confusion for her. She had been both the victim and had also been cured by it as well. She tried to think back to her own childhood. The nearest experience she’d had with magic then was when the healers arrived in Camelot. Her father would sometimes use their natural remedies to help with his allergies. Even now she could recall the distrust that some felt towards even those people. But she had seen with her own eyes, how the potions had helped her father and others, as well. Surely it couldn’t all be wrong?

Her father would assure her using these potions, was not against any of Camelot’s laws. He had a broad-minded view on natural medicine, but to some, it was a step back in time, when magic was alive on the streets of Camelot.

It was here she saw the start of where the problems could begin. As some people had a deep-rooted suspicion, towards magic of any kind. Therefore she knew it was important, to find out as much as she could, of life in the pre-days of the purge. She poured herself a glass of water and heard a knock on the door.

“Come in,” she said, smiling as she saw Lord Blake peering through the door.
“I’m not too early my lady?” he enquired, as he slowly hobbled over towards the table.

“No Lord Blake, you are right on time.” Guinevere replied, “would you like a glass of water?”

“Yes please.” He replied, “I fear my voice is becoming a little strained.”

“I think there are a few things going around at the moment. You need to take care of yourself.” Guinevere said, handing him the glass.

She had to admit he did look his 80 years now. He was quite slow in his movements, and his face was cleared from his usual rosy colour. His long cloak seemed to hinder him, as he shuffled along. He had a head of grey hair now, going white in places. But he retained his usual welcoming smile on his face.

“I have an old potion that one of the Druid’s gave me, the last time I saw them.” Lord Blake remarked. “It is remarkably good at stopping the winter ailments from taking a hold.”

“Yes, I remember my father using those as well,” Guinevere admitted. “Do you see a lot of the Druids now?”

“Your husband asked me some time ago, to keep some a line of communication open with them. They don’t come this way as much as they used too. Their camp is on the far side of the Darkling Woods now.”

Guinevere waited until Lord Blake had settled down. “I expect you are wondering why I called you in today?”

“I was a little bit curious I must admit my lady. I gather there was a bit of trouble with Lord Oakes.”

“Yes, there was, a situation we could do without to be honest. I don’t suppose you have heard how the news about the meeting’s got out?” she asked.

“I have naturally made some discreet enquiries after Sir Leon spoke to me. I know Lord Oakes nephew Peter has just started working in the stables. But he seems a nice boy. I don’t think it is from him. It could just be with everything going quiet Lord Oakes, has used it as an opportunity to make some trouble.”

“I am grateful that you have tried to find out, Arthur has asked me to pass on his thanks, for all the hard work you are doing on his behalf.”

“Tell your husband I have my ear to the ground all the time. If I hear anything you will be the first to know. How is Merlin?” Lord Blake asked, suddenly.

“I haven’t actually seen him since he came back from Camlann. I will say that matters are in hand, to sort the situation out. Arthur and Merlin are having regular meetings, Arthur wants to understand everything. I know I can count on your discretion on this matter?” Guinevere replied with a smile.

“I can assure you my lady,” Lord Blake smiled, “They will hear nothing from me.”

“Thank you, Lord Blake, I was hoping to ask you some questions though if I can.”

“Any help I can give.” He nodded.

“I am sure you have spoken with the other Lords at times. I was wondering what their feelings are
about magic overall. I know Lord Oakes opinions, but there are others who are a lot quieter and
more circumspect on the subject.”

“Most of the Lords on the Council lived in the pre-purge days. Those were very different times.
When Uther came to power he used magic quite freely when his relationship with the sorceress
Nimueh began.”

“He did?” Guinevere asked, amazed at the news.

“How much do you know about Uther’s early days in Camelot?” Lord Blake asked.

“Only what we were told in our school, that he beat King Ragnard for the crown after a long and
sustained battle.” Guinevere couldn’t help but notice a smile on Lord Ward’s lips as she had
explained.

“I had known Uther for many years my lady before he became King. He was a battle-hardened
warrior by the time he was sixteen. He led an army and battled with Ragnard for a good six months
before the tide was turned his way. It wasn’t all down to his leadership though.”

“Oh,” Guinevere replied, suddenly curious.

“About a month before the final battle for Camelot he met Nimueh. She was introduced to him by a
seer named Jonerth. He had been attached to Uther’s group of soldiers and had made many
predictions, that Uther had used to his advantage. One of those was that a meeting would take place
between Uther and Nimueh, and this would turn the tide his way.”

“So he used magic?” Guinevere asked, finding it hard to believe.

“Not Uther himself. In the last month, the situation was getting desperate. He had beaten most of
Ragnard’s men, save for a group of mercenaries who were causing huge problems, for Camelot and
the immediate area. They could never track these people down. Whenever they got there, the men
had all but disappeared. In the end, he felt as if he was being made a fool out of.”

“I can imagine that was not fun for anyone,” Guinevere remarked, with slight amusement.

“N, indeed not. Gorlois who was Uther’s best friend and his general had already clashed over how to
deal with this final group of men. It was Gorlois that raised the question of Uther using Nimueh. At
first, Uther wouldn’t hear of it. His ego would never have allowed anyone else, to have the glory.”
Lord Blake laughed.

“I would imagine you’d be correct there.” Guinevere smiled. “So what happened?”

“When another unsuccessful raid failed to flush out the group, Nimueh claimed that she could track
down the group, using magic. At first, Uther had laughed it off, but Nimueh stuck to her view, and
Gorlois persuaded Uther to give it a go.”

“Did it work?” Guinevere asked, feeling like a child being told a story at Christmas.

“Indeed it did, within two days Uther was riding into Camelot and being appointed King. He would
never have found the group, had magic not been used on that occasion. From that moment on he and
Nimueh became a partnership. She was part of his wise counsel, and was an important early ally to
him.”

“Was that when magic became part of Camelot?” Guinevere asked.
“Yes, it was. In those early days magic was Camelot. On every corner, magic was flowing from one end of the street to another. There were magical entertainers who put on shows for the children. People plied their trade in the marketplaces. Alongside the physician’s, healers visited the area handing out potions and healing people of the most serious ailments. It was a world of experimentation at the time. Also, the Druid’s would visit, and work in the marketplace.”

“So what went wrong?” Guinevere asked.

“It all began to go wrong around the time it was realised that Ygraine, Uther’s wife could not conceive a child.” Lord Blake explained sadly.

“How was Arthur born then?” Guinevere asked, shocked.

For the first time, Guinevere sensed a shift in Lord Blake’s general attitude. It reminded her of Merlin, and the way he would sometimes withdraw inside himself. She realised she would need to be tactful.

“Please Lord Blake, we need all the information we can get hold off.”

“I feel there are people better placed then me to explain what went wrong, and the timescale of it. Someone who you are very close too I would suggest.”

“Gaius?” Guinevere asked, looking at him.

“Indeed my lady.” Lord Blake said. “My dear wife was ill at the time, so I spent more time away from the Council. I feel sure Gaius can tell you everything else you need to know.”

Guinevere smiled, knowing better than to pressure him anymore. “I would like to thank you, for being so open Lord Blake. I get the impression you have quite a favourable relationship with magic?”

“Magic is not evil in itself. It depends entirely on the person concerned. There was a reason as to why magic was controlled in Camelot, we had a good relationship, with the Druids. They worked with Nimueh, to control the less trust-worthy people, who used magic for their own gain. If ever magic would return, I feel you need to involve those people once again.”

“I will fully inform my husband of your comments today Lord Blake. May I take it that you would not be against, more involvement should we need it?” she asked.

“I would be happy to help in any way I could.” Lord Blake bowed. “You know where I am. I wish you a good day.”

“Good day Lord Blake,” Guinevere said, watching him leave the room.

When the door closed, Guinevere tried to take in the information she had been told. She only knew vague things about Camelot, when magic was had been part of normal life. She knew of the healers that Lord Blake had mentioned, because of her father’s use of them too. But the idea of magic flowing from street to street left a feeling of amazement for her. She had not expected it to have been that open.

When Lord Blake had spoken about Nimueh and Uther’s relationship with her, it made her realise, just how different life in Camelot must have been, at that time. She wondered if it could ever be that way again. But then she remembered the information that had caused her such shock. If Ygraine’s mother could not conceive naturally, then how was Arthur born? More to the point knowing this put her in an awkward situation. Could she really mention this to Arthur, who was already confused
enough with everything, that he had learnt? But how could she possibly not tell him either? Suddenly she realised how this was nugget of information could blow open, a whole new problem. If only she could make her mind up she thought despondently to herself. But one way or another, she would have to make up her mind in how to deal with it. She realised the best thing for now, was to sleep on it and think about it more the next day. Why was life always so complicated she wondered?

******************************************************************************

In his room, Gaius pottered around mixing herbs for his round for the next day. In normal circumstances it would be Merlin, doing the task. But with his ward still occupied with Arthur, Gaius would get into the habit of doing it the day before. Besides which it helped to keep his mind occupied. The truth of the matter was, Gaius never stopped worrying about Merlin. His ward by now was a man of considerable maturity, but he remained the son he’d never had. Gaius constantly fretted about his role, in the current situation.

When Merlin had just arrived in Camelot, he seemed so naive to Gaius about his magic. From the moment he’d taken him in, Gaius had insisted that Merlin kept his magic a secret. With Uther being King it was unavoidable, his war against magic meant Gaius had no choice in the matter, at that time. Added to which, Merlin had an almost reckless side towards his safety, where his magic was concerned. Gaius felt constantly under pressure, to keep him safe. But once Arthur had taken over from his father, Gaius had begun to wonder, if he had advised Merlin right.

Maybe if he had been willing to encourage Merlin to be more honest with Arthur, they wouldn’t be in the mess they were in now. Gaius feared that all the years of life spent under Uther had made him too fearful. There had been opportunities for Merlin to have told Arthur the truth, but something always seemed to hold Gaius back. He had sensed the negative impact it had on his ward. But more than that, he felt Merlin had lost his belief. He had no longer spoken about his dream, of standing by Arthur’s side, and magic being restored to the land. Gaius could appreciate how the enforced time of having to hide his magic, had finally beaten out all of the hope from Merlin’s heart.

That was until the day Merlin had been forced to reveal himself at Camlann. But in doing so, it could not have shocked Arthur more, and now everyone had been forced to live with the consequences of it. He sighed and wondered how different it could all have been, had he been more courageous with Merlin. But it was too late for regrets now; this was where they were at. As he brooded, a knock on the door broke into his thoughts.

“Come in,” he shouted, wondering who it could be.

“I hope I am not disturbing you Gaius,”

“Lancelot, this is a nice surprise.” Gaius smiled, happy to be brought out of his weary worries.

“I just thought I would pop in to see how you are getting on?” Lancelot enquired.

“Me? I am fine Lancelot, it’s Merlin I’m thinking about more.” Gaius answered, truthfully. Despite his reply, he had to acknowledge the look on Lancelot’s face to his predictable reply. “Yes, I know but’s not easy admitting your worries, even to friends.”

“That is why I wanted to assure you that I am here if you need to talk.” Lancelot insisted.

“You have always been such a considerate young man Lancelot.” Gaius smiled, “The only thing I am worried about is my decision, to persuade Merlin to keep his magic, from Arthur for so long. I just wonder if I could have done something different.”
“You always did what you thought was best, especially for Merlin. I have my own regrets on that score. Being a friend to both of them, I too wonder if I could have done more.” Lancelot admitted, “Yet I also feel if Arthur is to accept Merlin as he truly is, then maybe he needed to see Merlin being, well Merlin.”

Gaius took a couple of minutes to absorb Lancelot’s opinion. He had to admit there was some truth to it. A huge amount of risk as well, but hadn’t it always been that way? He had always feared one way or another, Merlin may have to reveal himself in a dramatic way to Arthur. Maybe this was the way fate had always intended.

Gaius smiled at the Knight. “You could be right Lancelot. Fate has a funny way of forcing events, and we have always been at the mercy of fate and destiny.”

Lancelot nodded, “Especially Merlin and Arthur. All the rest of us can do is be there, for both of them.”

“Indeed Lancelot,” Gaius said, feeling a little calmer. “Thank you for dropping by.”

“I will always remember the support you have given me down the years Gaius. Without you and Merlin I would never have become a Knight.”

“You are a very fine one at that,” Gaius remarked.

“Thank you. Is there nothing more I can do for you Gaius?”

“I am fine thanks. I will wait for Merlin to return, I have a stew cooking you are welcome to join us Lancelot.”

“I would love too, but I’ve already promised Gwaine a night at the Tavern,” Lancelot explained, making for the door. “Have a good night Gaius and let Merlin know I am always available for him.”

“I will do and thanks once again for your concern,” Gaius said, very touched by Lancelot’s gesture.

As he was once more alone the one thing Gaius knew was, Merlin would not lack friends who would support him right till the end. He realised things could be a lot worse than what they currently were.

He thought back to the night when Arthur had entered the world, all those years ago. How incredible it had seemed how life had changed in such a dramatic way, on the arrival of one small child. As Uther had mourned the loss of his wife, magic had suddenly become the new pariah of everything that existed in the world. Surely there would come a time when Arthur realised, it was never that simple. Gaius hoped with all his heart that the young King would soon understand, that magic itself was never the real problem.

They had been so close to building a multi-layered community, where magic had played its natural part before the purge had destroyed everything in its path. Was it so outrageous to hope for a time when Arthur himself, could bring those days back with Merlin and finally unite the whole of Albion? Surely you were never too old to dream?
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The next day Guinevere meets Arthur and wonders how she is going to break the news that she heard from Lord Blake. But their conversation goes into another direction, and by the end, a new direction in the journey is reached.

Such was the timetables of both Arthur and Guinevere that it was morning before they got the chance to speak. With the sun shining through the window, Guinevere felt slightly more refreshed. She decided to check on Arthur’s meeting with Merlin first, before raising anything from her own.

“How did yesterday go?” she asked, pouring him a glass of water. She had already realised that he seemed lost, in his own thoughts. She hoped nothing more dramatic had happened.

“Nothing out of the ordinary, I know more about the other dragon now.”

“There are two?” Guinevere questioned, She had heard about the big dragon and even now could remember the nights Camelot had almost burned to the ground, through his numerous attacks. But she didn’t know anything about another one.

“Merlin hatched this baby dragon out of an egg,” Arthur said, his eyebrow rising as he took a drink.

“It’s a young one? I hadn’t realised that dragons came out of eggs.” Guinevere replied, and then felt a bit foolish, where else would they come from? “When was this?”

“It was a couple of years ago. There was a magical key in the vaults which opened the Tomb of Ashkanar. Merlin helped a man steal the key, in his infinite wisdom. Only it would appear the man concerned wasn’t as trustworthy as he first thought. The tomb itself was destroyed and Merlin assured me at the time, the egg had been lost too. Only it hadn’t, and the dragon attached itself to Morgana.”

“Morgana?” Guinevere replied, “Morgana had a dragon?”

“It attacked us that night in Camlann, just before she herself approached us. She’d put me in some sort of trance, I just remember seeing this white thing walking towards me. It was only when I came too I realised what it was.”

“Arthur. You’ve never really told me what happened that night.” Guinevere prompted, hoping he would enlarge on the incident more.

“No, I haven’t.” Arthur admitted, “I promise when this is all over I will tell you everything.”

“I would like to know. So what has happened to these dragons now? Where do they live?” she asked, suddenly restless for information.

“Well, the younger dragon, what did he call it?” Arthur said, “Oh yes, Aithusa. I mean have you ever heard of such a name?”

“Arthur.” Guinevere smiled, “Every living thing has to have a name I suppose.”
“According to Merlin, he has left that dragon in a forest. I think he feels bad about it. He said something about neglecting it. At times he talks about it like it’s a pet or something.”

“Well I suppose if he brought it out of this egg, he must feel responsible for it,” Guinevere replied,

“As for the other one, he hasn’t seen that one for a while. So I am not sure, and not sure I want to know either. Apparently, as a Dragonlord, he speaks to them.” Arthur explained,

“You mean like a command?” Guinevere asked, trying desperately to understand.

“Yes, he has a special language that only they understand. He said that he gained the power, once his father died.” Arthur replied,

“The man you and he tried to track down when the other dragon was attacking Camelot?” Guinevere replied,

“Kilgarrah, Guinevere.” Arthur interrupted, “Such strange names they all have.”

“Kilgharrah.” Guinevere repeated, “Who’d had thought that Merlin could control such creatures.”

“Yes hard to believe isn’t it?” Arthur replied, taking a quick drink. “Anyway, how did you get on with Lord Blake?”

“It was a very interesting meeting. He is very knowledgeable about so many things. Whatever happens, we need to keep him involved in some way. He pointed out that most of the Lord’s had lived with magic. Most of them go back to your father’s time.”

“I know Lord Blake was one of my father’s eldest friends. But he seems to be more open to magic. I asked him to keep in touch with Druids.” Arthur remarked, “Did he mention that?”

“Yes, he said that he thinks they have camped the far side of the Darkling Woods now,” Guinevere replied,

Arthur nodded, “Merlin also hinted that as well.”

“Arthur, how much do you know about your father’s past, before the purge began?” Guinevere asked, deciding to go carefully.

“My father never told me much about magic at all. In fact, pretty much nothing, other than it was evil and needed to be destroyed at all costs. I have always gone to Gaius for any magical information I have needed.” Arthur said, frowning, “why?”

“Lord Blake told me something about what happened before your father became King of Camelot.” Guinevere began,

“I know there was a battle between him and Ragnar before my father chased him out,” Arthur explained,

“Right,” Guinevere said, biting her lip for a moment.

“What is it, Guinevere?” Arthur asked, “You are making me nervous.”

“Lord Blake gave me some background information about the battle. There was indeed, a battle between your father and Ragnar. It lasted for many weeks. Among his men, he had a seer named Jonerth working for him. He had a vision that Uther would meet a sorceress, and she would help him turn the battle.”
“Lord Blake suggested my father worked with a sorceress? That can’t be true.” Arthur objected, getting up for a second.

“Arthur sits down with me, and I will explain the rest of what he said.” Guinevere watched, as he went over to the window. It was a couple of minutes before he came back and settled down.

“Sorry Guinevere. Continue please.” Arthur said, taking another drink.

“Well as I said Jonerth made a prediction that your father would meet a sorceress, I think Lord Blake called her Nimueh.” Guinevere began,

“Hang on that name is familiar I’ve heard it before.” Arthur interrupted,

“Can you remember where you heard it?” Guinevere asked,

There was a slight pause, then Arthur got up excitedly, “That’s it. It was the time Morgause arrived at Camelot. When I was on the floor after our fight, she had said she would let me live, but I had to agree to meet her a few days later and take part in a challenge of her making. When I saw her the next day, she had said she knew my mother. But, before I could ask anything she had ridden off.”

“She knew your mother Ygraine?” Guinevere asked every day a new revelation seemed to arrive.

“Yes. So, Merlin and I rode out and met her in this castle. It was a really dark, and spooky place. At first, we thought no one was there. But out of nowhere she suddenly appeared. I had to keep my word and do the challenge, which was to put my head on a block of wood.”

“Arthur!” Guinevere cried out, “She could have done anything.”

“That’s what Merlin had said. But I was determined to keep my word at the time. I have to admit I could feel my life pass in front of me when she picked up the axe. But after a few seconds, she just put it down again. She then granted me a wish. I asked her about my mother, she then said do I want to meet her?”

“Meet her, but how?” Guinevere said,

“To this day I don’t know how she did it. I just remember her lighting some candles and all the time, I could sense the change in the wind. A really strange feeling occurred inside me, but I can’t really describe it in words. Then I had to close my eyes. I could hear her say this spell, and then I heard this voice call out my name and there she was.”

Guinevere could see even now the memory of it affected her husband. She went over to him, holding his hand.

“I wish you’d told me this.” She whispered,

“Even now despite what my father and Merlin said later, she felt familiar. It was like staring into myself. All my life I had an idea of what she was like, and that moment when she held me, she was everything that I had expected her to be.”

“Arthur. I don’t know what to say.” Guinevere said, caressing his face gently. “So, what happened?”

“I apologised as it was my fault she had died. She denied it, and then mentioned how it was my father’s fault.”

“Why?” Guinevere asked, hardly daring to wonder what she would learn next.
“She told me she couldn’t have any children.” Guinevere almost breathed out in shock, remembering the conversation with Lord Blake. But she decided to let her husband continue uninterrupted. But she hardly dared to imagine what he would say.

“She said my father had betrayed her. She said he had gone to the sorceress and asked for help in conceiving a child, without my mother’s knowledge. At first, I refused to believe it, but she said he had deceived her, as he had made.”

Guinevere gasped out loud.

“I had felt such rage for my father at that moment, even though she kept telling me not to do anything. Part of me didn’t want to believe it, but then I thought of all the times when I’d asked him about her, and he would never talk about her. It seemed to somehow make sense. I knew he was sad about her death, but sometimes I felt like there was something else there too. But I could never put my finger on what it was.” Arthur said, softly.

“So, what happened after that?” Guinevere asked,

“One minute she was there and then she’d disappeared, Morgause had said she couldn’t bring her back. So, Merlin and I returned to Camelot, I was determined to ask my father about it.”

“And, did you?”

“Yes. I said straight away that I knew what he’d done to my mother. That he had used magic to have an heir. He kept saying Morgause had lied, that she wanted me to think that. I was so angry Guinevere, that we ended up fighting. I accused him of having blood on his hands. I threw my sword down at him, but he refused to pick it up. So, I thrust my sword out to him and he was forced to defend himself. In the end, he had fallen onto the chair and my sword was inches from his face, and at that moment, I was willing to put him to his death.”

“But you didn’t,” Guinevere replied, watching him carefully.

“No, Merlin arrived then. He stopped me from killing him. He said that it was what Morgause had wanted for me to kill my father. He had claimed that she had put those words in my mother’s mouth, to create the tension between us.”

“Well, he could be right. It is the sort of thing Morgause would do.” Guinevere said, softly.

“Maybe,” Arthur said,

“Arthur, what is?” Guinevere asked, There was a faraway look in her husband’s eyes.

“It might well be true that Morgause made my mother speak those words somehow. But I tell you, Guinevere, I know it was her. I know that woman was my mother, and even now I wonder about so much of my background. I feel I don’t know myself anymore. Merlin said those words to stop me from killing my father, but I have to know the full truth. Was I born of magic? If that is true, then everything has been a lie. I have to find out, and there is one man who can tell me for sure.”

“Gaius,” Guinevere said, softly.

“Yes, indeed. I need to speak to him. I have a feeling my father would have made him promise not to tell me the truth. Will you come with me?”

“Of course, I will,” Guinevere said,
“I just feel I need your tact, as I don’t trust myself with it.”

“You are much calmer than you used to be.” Guinevere smiled, “In fact even more so since you came back from Camlann. With everything that you have learnt recently, I think you have handled it better than you think.”

“But this question is so big Guinevere. If it’s true it changes everything. Also, what about Merlin if it proves to be the truth?” Arthur asked,

“Let’s have the conversation before we think of the ramifications of it.” Guinevere replied, “This needs to happen as soon as possible. I suggest we should go to Gaius’s chambers. He needs to be somewhere he can be relaxed in.”

“Good idea. I will suggest that Merlin spends a couple of days away.” Arthur said,

“I am sure a visit home to Hunith will be good for both of them,” Guinevere suggested,

“Good idea. I will put that idea to him.”

“You go and have another word with him, and I’ll go and arrange the meeting with Gaius.”

Arthur nodded, kissing her before walking out of the room. Guinevere realised this was a crucial time. What they would learn from Gaius could be the most important thing yet. She just hoped she could help Arthur keep it all together.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

After Guinevere's information from the meeting with Lord Blake, Arthur realises he needs to understand more about the circumstances of his birth. He decides he needs to first see what Merlin knows about it, before asking Gaius.

Merlin is nervous when he finds out what Arthur is asking, as he realise there could be ramifications for Gaius in it as well, so he seeks to appeal to Arthur, on Gaius's behalf.

Guinevere, decides to see Merlin to check up on him, but she then asks a question that has been on her mind for sometime. Yet again Merlin feels his life trapping him once more....

Merlin had been sitting in the room waiting for Arthur’s arrival. By now the sun was high in the sky and shining brightly through the window. For the first time he could feel the first warmth of spring in its rays. This time of the year always cheered him, making him think of Ealdor back in his youth. The winters were hard there with a lot of snow. But once it began to thaw properly, he always seemed especially connected with his magical senses. It was as if they were slowly coming alive, as the days grew warmer, and sunnier. For a moment he smiled to himself, at least this felt like a positive start to the day.

He always hated these moments just before the meetings began. The room was so quiet he couldn’t help but be aware, of the slightest sound. It could be shouts from outside in the court yard; or footsteps outside the room itself. As he and Arthur continued their daily talks, life around them was going on as normal. Yet Merlin himself felt separated from life in Camelot, as if suspended between two worlds.

On the whole it had gone well he felt. The edge in Arthur’s manner very visible at the beginning seemed to be more, under control now. There had obviously been moments between them, which had been difficult, especially the dragons. But even that Merlin felt, was less of an issue then it had been. The more Arthur asked, the less hesitant Merlin felt, in being honest. Of course, the really difficult moments had not been reached yet. Merlin dreaded some of what was to come. For now, he’d put it to the back of his mind, as he tried to explain his everyday feelings and trials.

But he knew the more contentious issues lay ahead of them. Certain facts would have to be admitted to, not least Morgana. He’d been thinking of her a lot lately. Even now he could recall the first time she’d tried to speak to him about magic. He could picture the frightened pale face, as she begged him to reassure her, she wasn’t going crazy.

He still couldn’t help but wonder if he had been more open, would it have made a difference? Maybe he’d have been able to dissuade her from developing, into the demonic High Priestess, that had plagued Camelot. He knew it was a pretty pointless exercise, but just couldn’t help himself. It seemed such a long time ago now, as if he’d been a different person to what he was now. But he knew this would continue to trouble him for as long as he was around. Like so many other things, he lamented to himself.

His most pressing concern was how Arthur would react, to Merlin’s part in Morgana’s journey. He
knew Arthur himself, had his own regrets, of his sister’s sad decline into madness. Would Arthur’s own feelings increase knowing how she’d appealed to Merlin, he wondered frantically to himself. It was in moments such as these that he realised just what a negative impact, his secret had become to himself. If he’d been honest maybe he and Arthur together could have solved Morgana’s issues together. He realised he had to be completely honest, and get everything out into the open, for all their sakes. No more keeping secrets, having doubts, the future he realised was too big for those things now. For there to be any chance of a united Albion, honesty and integrity were paramount. It would take courage he knew, but right now he’d do anything to save his and Arthur’s chance of making a brave, new world. He jumped, as the door opened and Arthur came in, walking quickly and business like.

“Sorry if I kept you waiting. I was talking with Guinevere.” Arthur explained.

“It’s fine I knew something must be up. No problems I hope.” Merlin enquired.

There was a pause before Merlin received an answer. He looked closely at Arthur trying to work out, if it was something he could guess. Arthur seemed very unsure, as if it was something he didn’t know how to deal with. He then realised his friend was obviously struggling with how to begin, so decided to help.

“Arthur is there anything I can help you with.”

Merlin watched as the young King finally looked straight at him, as if he had come to a decision. Merlin tensed, wondering what was coming next.

“Do you remember that journey we went on, after I had fought Morgause. We arrived at that strange castle, and I had to put my head on the block.”

Merlin shuddered, “As if I could forget.” He murmured, “I still can’t believe that you did it.”

“I had made a promise Merlin, it was imperative that I had kept my word. That day Morgause summoned my mother, and she spoke to me about my birth.”

Merlin suddenly felt chilled to his bones, he instinctively knew where the conversation was now going, but he knew he had no choice, other than to follow Arthur’s path of questioning.

“I remember.” Merlin admitted.

“We both know what was said that day. That my father had sacrificed my mother’s life. Do you remember what you said?”

Merlin looked up, “Of course I do. I said that Morgause had put those words in your mother’s mouth. That she wanted you and your father to fall out.”

“Tell me Merlin, do you still believe that Morgause used my mother that day. Do you still think that she was merely trying to cause a falling out with my father? Or do you think there could have been some truth to it?”

Merlin let the question hang in the air, as he considered the implications of it. He could tell by the way Arthur stared at him intently, that this had now become a pressing matter. But he suddenly felt unsure about how to proceed. He briefly thought back to the day in question, as he’d arrived back in Camelot and Gaius had confirmed, that Arthur had been born of magic. He had remembered the stunning reaction he’d had to the news. The realisation that Uther’s Camelot had been built on a lie. Even now the thought of it shocked and disgusted him, as he thought about those that had died so needlessly, in Uther’s quest for vengeance.
As he continued to struggle to gather his thoughts, he knew he would have to be honest here. Even if it meant that Arthur would have to face uncomfortable information. He also thought about Gaius, as he knew what he told Arthur would come back to his mentor. If he had to be honest, he was determined to watch Gaius’s back as well. Sensing Arthur’s impatience he looked up and faced the King eye to eye.

“I think there are people who could tell you more details than me. But after we came back and you had rushed off to see your father, information came my way.”

“What information?” Arthur asked.

“It was confirmed to me that magic was used in your birth.” Merlin watched as Arthur stood up and walked abruptly away from the table. “But Arthur I don’t know the whole story, but there is someone who could tell you more I am sure.”

“Gaius.” Arthur replied.

Merlin nodded. “I just ask that you be understanding towards him when you speak to him. I believe your father asked him to take an oath, but he felt in the circumstances that he had to tell me, so that I could stop you…”

“Killing my father.” Arthur completed the sentence for him.

“Yes, obviously. I knew I couldn’t let you do it although I could understand your anger at the time. But I felt killing your father would destroy you, and I couldn’t let you go through that.”

“How did you feel though, when you found out?” Arthur asked. “About my father using magic, after everything he had done. You could have allowed me to kill him considering what he had done to people such as yourself. Where you not tempted?”

“Maybe for a minute.” Merlin replied, “I can’t deny I felt angry and frustrated. But my only concern was for how you’d react with him. Everything else was secondary, including me. It is the way it’s always been for me Arthur.”

“Everyone is important Merlin, even you.” Arthur said.

Merlin stared at his friend and for a brief second the King had smiled, only fleetingly but unmistakably. Merlin let his heart hope, maybe this could be the start of a break-through. He sensed this conversation had been an especially important one for Arthur.

“So, what are you going to do now?” Merlin asked.

“I am going to have a meeting with Gaius and see what he knows.”

“Arthur…” Merlin began,

“Merlin, Gaius will be fine. I just need to know the truth now. I can only be a good King if I know everything. There has been too much secrecy in this Kingdom, how can we function if there is nothing but lies and deceit at the heart of this place. When I founded the Round Table, I wanted to base it on truth and honesty. Now I find my own birth is shrouded in mystery. It is time for the whole story to be known and understood. Only then can I really decide what is best for the future of this land.”

“I understand, if there is anything more I can do for you.” Merlin said, “you only have to ask.”
“I want to thank you for your honesty so far Merlin. I know it can’t have been easy for you. I have spoken with Guinevere and she will be at the meeting with Gaius. I just feel she has more tact and can take things in that I may miss.”

“That seems like a good idea, and I think that will help Gaius too.” Merlin agreed.

“Yes. As for yourself I suggest you take a couple of weeks away.” Arthur suggested.

“Away?” Merlin enquired, “how will that go down at court?”

“I don’t care, besides which no one else will know except us. I think its about time you visited Hunith don’t you?”

“It would be nice to see her, it has been a long time.” Merlin admitted. “If you are sure.”

“Yes I am.” Arthur replied. “Come back after that, I can’t promise what you’ll find, but at least I will know more.”

“Arthur, you will be fine, whatever happens just remember you were always meant to be the King of this Kingdom. Nothing else matters. I will be here for you no matter what occurs. I give you my word.” Merlin said, looking the King straight in the eye. As he got up, he paused and allowed a brief smile before he headed for the door.


Merlin turned around, “And you.”

Merlin let the door ease shut and leaned on it for a moment. He knew there would difficult days ahead for Arthur and Gaius too, but at least Guinevere would be there to keep them together. He felt confident that she would be able to control any emotions, that either of them might have to contend with.

____________________________________________________________________________

He made his way to his room, suddenly looking forward to a couple of weeks away. He could catch up with Aithusa as well as his mother. He decided he may as well pack this evening and make an early get away before his absence was noticed by anyone.

“Gaius?” he shouted as he entered their room, but there was no answer. Realising his mentor had probably gone on his rounds, he jumped up the steps to his own room and snatched his bag off the cupboard. He started throwing things into it, with some relish as he imagined his brief bit of freedom away from his worries. He was so immersed into his packing it was only when Guinevere coughed that he even realised she was with him. He jumped up quickly.

“Guinevere, I mean my lady.” He said, stepping back from her.

“You were right the first time Merlin.” Guinevere replied.

He watched and suddenly realised she seemed a bit anxious, and for a second, he was reminded of the shy girl he had met, the first day he’d arrived in Camelot. He watched as she dithered with her hands, her body swaying slightly.

“There is nothing wrong?” Merlin enquired, suddenly worried.

“Wrong? No nothing. I just feel a bit awkward to be honest. I feel I should have checked up on you,
especially with everything that’s gone on lately.”

“I completely understand, please don’t worry about that.” Merlin assured her. “Arthur has suggested I leave for a couple of weeks.”

“Yes, he mentioned it to me yesterday, do give my love to Hunith when you see her. Did the meeting go all right today?” she asked.

“Yes, I think so, he is going to speak to Gaius as you know. In fact, I wonder…”

“Merlin, what is it?” Guinevere asked.

“I know how important this is to Arthur but I am worried about Gaius as well, I probably shouldn’t ask this of you, you have enough to do.”

“You don’t have to worry about anything Merlin. I will make sure that Gaius is okay, I know it will be troubling for everyone. I don’t want you worrying while you are away either. I promise that I will do everything in my power to get you and Arthur back together. The Kingdom needs you both, that much I do know.”

“I suppose it depends how Arthur reacts to everything. There will be a lot to take in, for both of you.” Merlin said, his eyes clouding.

“There is nothing we can learn, that will make us feel different about you Merlin. We can get over whatever has happened in the past. The most important thing is what we do for the future. You should be by Arthur’s side, like you always where.”

Merlin smiled, “Thank you. I just wish everything hadn’t got so complicated.”

“Things will turn Merlin, they always do in the end.” Guinevere said.

Merlin could tell by the way she stayed that there was something else in her mind, she had never been good at hiding her true state of mind, he thought to himself.

“There is something else.” Merlin said, deciding to prompt her.

“Yes, there is.” She admitted, “something I have longed to know for a long time to be honest.”

Merlin tensed fearing it was something he may have done. “Oh?”

“Merlin that time when my father was ill with that plague and he suddenly recovered, it was you wasn’t it?”

Merlin coloured feeling awkward suddenly, ” Yes.”

Guinevere stopped for a moment and then slowly walked over to him and kissed him on the cheek. “Thank you, Merlin.”

“Why are you thanking me? You could have been killed, with that stupid mistake I made. I was such a fool.”

“No, you weren’t. I could never understand how he recovered when so many others had died. I thought in the end it was just a miracle. But all the time I should have known it was you. With that one act you proved to me, the good that magic can bring to the world. You were taking care of all of us, weren’t you?” she asked, smiling.
“I will always look after my friends.” Merlin replied, smiling in return.

“Yes, I know you will. Take care Merlin and keep safe.” Guinevere said.

As she walked out of the room, Merlin slithered onto his bed, and for the first time since the day he’d been outed, he gave in to his emotions and cried.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

This is a long chapter which involves the meeting between Gaius, Arthur and Guinevere. It is mainly from Arthur’s pov, but there is also a bit from Gaius’s as well.

With rain beating down hard against the window, Gaius decided to get up earlier than usual. It wasn’t as if he could sleep that well anyway. At least it meant he could get his rounds ready in plenty of time. He busied himself, collecting his herb jars taking care not to drop anything. He had already waved Merlin away glad that he would at least, get to see his mother. He sat down gingerly feeling every bit his age. On days like this, it felt as if every limb in his body was aching. He sighed, thinking of what was to come.

He understood entirely why Arthur felt the need for the meeting. He felt for the young man who was being forced to come to terms, with the deceit which had left his life in such uncertainty. He also wasn’t proud of the part that he himself had played in it. He regretted some of his own decisions in Merlin’s early days at Camelot as well. There was even Morgana too, who in his darker moments he felt he’d completely let down. If he bothered to cast his mind back further, he even wondered about his dealings with Alice. The woman he’d loved and then watched, as she’d left Camelot without him. All of these people’s lives he had touched and it felt as if his best intentions had failed them all dismally.

For a second he felt completely lost and came to standstill. His mind blurred and his heart raced in his chest. From nowhere a feeling of helplessness threatened to take him over, leaving him paralysed. He put his hand on the table to steady himself and breathed in. Suddenly he regained his composure and a resolve took hold of him, and he pushed the dark thoughts away.

For Arthur’s sake, he needed to be strong and honest. The boy needed to know the truth, despite what he had promised Uther. Gaius allowed his mind to go back to those desperate days in the immediate hours after Ygraine’s death. One incident remained alive in his mind, and he relived it as he slowly sat down for a few moments.

After the tragic event, a strange calmness had descended upon the court. Gaius had persuaded Uther to take a tonic, so he could get a few hours rest. Uther’s shock at his wife’s demise had been so violent that Gaius was afraid of what he might do. It took all of his determination to get through to the King, but eventually, Uther had relented.

In the remainder of that night, many things had been said and whispered in the corridors of Camelot. Gaius had taken Nimueh aside and spoken to her, asking what had happened. She had claimed that she had warned him that this way would lead to disaster, but the King had not listened. Gaius knew how defiant Uther could be at his worst, and also how desperate he was to get an heir. Gaius was also struck at how terrified, Nimueh seemed to be.

At times it seemed as if Uther and Nimueh, would play a game of dare, with one another. The King hated having anyone who was seen as superior in any way. Nimueh wore her power like an extra skin and knew which buttons to press to pressure him.

From the moment, she’d been made Court Sorceress, her confidence, never slight, had increased
with each passing day. She was also not one to step down if she sensed she held the upper hand. But from the moment Uther had asked her to use her magic to help create an heir, a sense of unease had started to materialize.

She had told Gaius what the King had said, and Gaius had impressed upon her, that she must refuse. The whole idea had horrified Gaius, and as he discussed the implications with Alice that same night, she had shared his worries. Alice had already begun to learn about mixing certain aspects of magic and medical practices, in her occupation as a healer. But there were certain lines she was not prepared to cross, and this was one of them.

But none of them had taken into account the mindset of Uther, and his utter determination to get an heir. As he continued to pile the pressure on Nimueh, it began to get harder to refuse him. Gaius at the time had sensed a certain change, in the sorceress’s manner, as if she was softening. All the signs were suddenly that this last desperate act was the one chance, to save Uther Pendragon’s house. Gaius knew without an heir, it would only be a matter of time before the King was challenged.

He had still tried to persuade the King to try other means. But it was clear Uther’s impatience was running out. Nimueh had disappeared for a few days, from the moment she’d arrived back Gaius could sense, a change in her. Nothing Gaius said to either of them, made any difference. All he could do was watch on helplessly, trying to ignore the feelings of doom he felt.

A veil of secrecy had been flung over the inner workings of Camelot. As few people as possible would know about what was to be performed, Gaius being one of them. He spoke of it to no one, not even Alice though he feared she had guessed. As the spell had been performed on the unaware Ygraine, they had all waited to see what would happen.

Sure enough, the Queen had become pregnant and Uther had become a different man. His worries had lifted from his lined face, and he had the air of a man twenty years younger. Ygraine had blossomed throughout her pregnancy, and a sense of triumph and expectation had erupted inside the Kingdom at the news, of an heir. But all of that had disappeared, within minutes of Arthur being born. Ygraine had enjoyed but minutes of holding her son, before screaming out in pain. It was a scream that would haunt Gaius to his dying day. He had tried everything to stop the pain, but the only thing that silenced her was her death minutes later. Even now Gaius could remember how Uther had shouted out, “No!” He had never heard such a scream of agony, and sadness. It had touched the bottom of his soul, as had a feeling of dread, of what it would mean for them all.

A sudden knock on the door brought Gaius too. He went over to the door and took the letter from one of the guards. He instantly recognised the handwriting, Hunith. He wondered for a second where Merlin was by now and hoped he’d enjoy a trouble-free journey back home to his mother. Deciding to read the letter later, he continued getting his rounds ready. He suddenly realised that Arthur and Guinevere would soon be with him. It would be a day of revelations he suspected for everyone to take in, and the sooner it began the better for all of them.

Arthur prepared to leave the room with Guinevere, knowing that the day ahead could prove to be far-reaching. As he turned his mind back to the day when Merlin had come out of the shadows, he realised that everything that had happened since was a further step along the journey he needed to take, to discover his own destiny. He smiled as Guinevere had squeezed his hand, he waited as she spoke to Sian the maid who was clearing away the dishes on the table. When she had left, he turned around and faced his wife.

“Are you ready Arthur?” Guinevere had asked him, a soft smile lighting up her face.
Arthur took his time to think, “Yes, I think I am.” He replied. “I’m not sure if I know what to expect though.”

“Well, whatever it is, we’ll face it together,” Guinevere promised, stepping up on her toes, and kissing her husband.

“Yes, I feel I can face anything with you by my side.” Arthur smiled and held out his hand.

“Come on then, it is best to get on with it. Arthur, we must reassure Gaius, we are expecting him to break possible vows, he may have made to your father.” Guinevere pointed out.

Arthur looked at his wife. There was a time when anything said about his father’s behaviour would turn him defensive. But if there was one thing he’d learnt by now, it was the realisation that under Uther’s rule, not everything had run smoothly. He understood well the point Guinevere was making and decided to confront the point straight away with Gaius.

“Don’t worry I will speak with him about it. I am sure he will be nervous, as I am. I’ve come to realise that this Kingdom wasn’t always healthy under my father’s reign.” He said. “But then, we all make mistakes.”

By now they had arrived outside Gaius’s room, Arthur looked briefly at his wife before knocking on the door.

“Come in.”

He nodded at his wife then opened the door, and the first thing that hit him was how nervous Gaius seemed. The old man was stood up one hand holding onto the table, a look of unease, and almost terror on his face. Arthur sighed inwardly knowing today would not be easy. But he knew it was important for him to take control early on.

“Please, Gaius sit down.” Arthur did the same, as Guinevere poured them all a glass of water, from a jug on the table. He waited until she was sitting down too, and after a slight pause, spoke earnestly hoping it would relax Gaius.

“I’d like to thank you for agreeing to this meeting. I know it won’t be easy on any of us, but I want you to know, I will not think any differently of you whatever you say. I realise being your position, my father expected you to keep certain vows after he was gone. I know it is hard to ask, but please be as open as you can, that is all I ask.” As Arthur’s eyes met Gaius, across the table he was relieved to see slightly more colour on Gaius’s face.

“Thank you, sire.” Gaius began.

“This will be hard for all of us, as this is unofficial meeting I would suggest us being less formal.” Arthur smiled.

“Thank you, Arthur.” Gaius said, “I appreciate what you have said, and I want you to know I am willing to be truthful and tell you, what you need to know. It is true your father asked me to respect certain vows and I agreed to them. But I always expected there to be a time, when I would maybe have to be more open, then what he’d have liked.”

“I think its true to say you were one of my father’s oldest and most treasured friends and servants. I want to go on record and thank you for your time in service of the Pendragon house. You were always supportive of me throughout my time growing up, of Morgana as well.”

As he said that Arthur thought he’d seen a shadow cross the old man’s face, and once more was reminded just what a huge day this could turn out to be. He wondered where they would all be by
the evening’s end. Realising he’d relaxed the old man as much as he could, he leaned forward and began.

“As you may know Gaius, I asked Guinevere to have a meeting with Lord Blake.”

“Yes, I had heard there had been a meeting. Is Lord Blake well?” Gaius asked.

“Yes, he is well Gaius and he asked me to send his best wishes to you when I saw you,” Guinevere assured him.

Arthur smiled at her, noticing how quick she was to relax Gaius further, wanting to use her influence at this time, he turned to her.

“I wonder Guinevere if you could tell Gaius what you learnt from the meeting?”

“Of course.” She smiled.

Arthur decided to sit back and watch the reactions of Gaius to what they had so far learnt.

“Lord Blake gave me a detailed picture of what Camelot was like before the purge took hold. I remember him mentioning how the streets were full of magic, from performers to healers and the Druids who would come to the market on regular occasions selling their wares. He also told me about the way the Druids worked with Nimueh, to contain any bad element that risked the Kingdom’s safety.”

Arthur couldn’t help but notice that the moment Guinevere had mentioned Nimueh’s name, the old man’s manner had become restrained. He sensed an inner withdrawal from him and knew what he could learn about her, and the role she played with Uther could be vital. But for now, he was content to take his time, and give Gaius the chance to give his own interpretation.

“I wondered Gaius if you could share your own experiences about Camelot before it all went wrong,” Guinevere asked.

“Of course,” Gaius began after a slight pause. “It was a vastly different world obviously. Before Uther had hold of the throne magic had always been a part of the landscape. The old religion had always been around, and many followed it, not just sorcerers and sorceresses either. But ordinary people too, whether it be for health or other reasons.”

“Other reasons?” Arthur asked his first question, intrigued by what Gaius could mean.

“All sorts of reasons Arthur. While health was obviously the most common one, other people who possessed magic would use it, to make a difference in other people’s lives. I recall a missing child who had disappeared from one of the outer villages, and they called in a sorcerer to help with the search. He not only managed to track down the missing child, but also the group of people who had snatched him. So, you see magic could be used for all manner of good things. It could also be abused and used for bad, as we’ve seen recently. But in my experience magic is neither good nor bad, it’s what you do with it that counts.”

“Thank you for sharing that observation, Gaius. I know from experience that not all magic users have been evil. You said before that ordinary people have used magic, what about those in power? If it can be used in practical terms as you’ve proved, then I imagine it can also be used to take Kingdoms, like Camelot?” Arthur suggested, thoughtfully. He noticed when he said it, how carefully Gaius was considering his answer.

“Arthur your father had mainly won the battle to win Camelot before he turned to magic, Ragnard
had mostly been overrun. Uther was a mighty warrior from a very young age, a man destined I would say to sit on Camelot’s throne. He had problems at the end it was true, with a particular group of mercenaries. People I might add, who brought a lot of hardship to the immediate Kingdom. By whatever means they needed to be brought to heel’

“Did you meet the seer called Jonerth?” Guinevere asked.

“Yes, I did. He was a very talented young man. I imagine Lord Blake told you about Jonerth telling Uther about Nimueh?” Gaius asked.

“Yes, he did mention it. What was Uther’s immediate reaction?” Guinevere asked.

“He was horrified at the idea, to begin with. He was a very driven young man was Uther. He believed in getting things done himself. He was of the opinion that if he was to be a respected King, he needed to have won the Kingdom himself. But the battle with the mercenaries went on a good long while. The casualties were mounting up. In the end Gorlois, a man your father respected persuaded him to meet with Nimueh.”

“I see.” Arthur mused, understanding all too well how hard it would be for his father, to admit to needing help. “So, what happened then.”

“Jonerth arranged a meeting between Uther and Nimueh. I didn’t actually attend the first meeting. But I was later told it was not good. Nimueh was not short on confidence, and neither was Uther. But another meeting occurred which I was at, and eventually, we managed to persuade them to work together.”

“What help did Nimueh actually give to my father?” Arthur asked.

“She used her powers to lead Uther to where the mercenaries hid away, in a very dark cave in the middle of the woods. She refused to take part in any fighting, claiming that was Uther’s forte. But she insisted on some return for her favour.”

“What was a position in court I take it.” Arthur finished for Gaius.

“Indeed Arthur, although that was of Uther’s own mind. No one could have persuaded your father to do that if he wasn’t in agreement. He was probably always sceptical about what magic could actually achieve. But after taking the throne he then realised there was a lot you could do with it. I recall him having endless conversations with Nimueh, about what magic could do. But she was always careful with what she told him, and what she let him learn about it.”

“In the immediate days after his coronation magic ruled supreme in Camelot then?” Arthur said, doing his best to visualise it.

“Arthur, magic as I said before had always been part of the landscape in the world. It has been here long before men arrived and will be there long after they’ve departed the earth. Magic is the essence of the world you see, it exists around us. At the heart of the old religion is a belief that everything in the world is about balance. If you take something, then something else must be given back.”

“I see,” Arthur said, thinking hard about what Gaius had just said.

In a cold, calculated way it made a certain sense to him. As in the rule of law, if someone did something wrong, then they must be punished in some form. Yet there was still something that didn’t sit well with him. But as he struggled with the meaning of the words, he couldn’t quite put his finger on what it was. For a fleeting second, he longed to talk to Merlin, but the realisation that he sent him away hit him in a moment of utter rejection. For all the process he had gone through so far, he still
couldn’t work out where his former friend belonged, in this sudden new world.

The Merlin he knew had always been so full of compassion and care for his friends, was it true that he followed this code in the Old Religion, he wondered. If he did then Arthur realised he still had a fair way to go, to understand it all. But for the sake of the Kingdom, he knew it was his moral duty to find out.

“You said before Gaius that magic was neither good nor bad, but it was what you did with it. Can you explain more please?” Arthur asked, suddenly restless for more information.

“Of course. In my early days I studied magic, I was not what you would call naturally gifted. The little I could do I had to practice each and every day, and certain things I could never perform. Some people you see are born with a big gift, while others have but a passing talent for it, but all have a moral responsibility of using magic in the right way. There were many who have used magic for their own ambitions, they became obsessed by the power it granted them. While others, have only used it for the good. As in all things, and like how you yourself have to rule, it is doing it for the right reason which is always the most important thing.”

There was a pause for everyone to take a brief respite.

“Where does Merlin sit in this Gaius? This is where I have the biggest questions, I don’t get where he sits in this magical setting. Is he ruled by it, by the old religion? Does he follow his own will?” Arthur asked, feeling suddenly quite lost with it all.

“Arthur, he follows you. Merlin has always followed you.” Gaius said. “There has been many a time where Merlin has put his own aspirations aside to make sure that you prevail. From the moment he found out about his destiny with you, that is all he has followed. He has many a time had to deny himself and his own dreams and hopes, but he has always done it willingly and without reward.”

Arthur let the words sink in that Gaius had said. It was no different from when his wife had said the same thing. For a second time, he wondered why he was so special, to get this utter devotion. He recalled back when Guinevere had explained to him about the destiny that held himself and Merlin together. He had found it all hard to accept, and yet when he looked back on certain events, it actually explained things perfectly.

The number of times Merlin had been at his side, his friend had never been the greatest of fighters after all. But, of course, now he realised his magic gave him a certain protection.

It didn’t explain the full story though, the years of faithful companionship. The times he had swept Arthur back to his feet when he felt like everything overwhelmed him. The steadfast support and advice he had always offered Arthur, whatever the situation, and now he realised in magical matters his friend had indeed put his own kind’s needs aside, for what Arthur had always thought was the greater good, the Kingdom.

Yet he realised now that had been an illusion to a degree. His father had been happy to use magic when it suited him, he also knew that had not always been the case. He was also aware that he himself, had abused magic users too. As he let this information trickle into his mind slowly, he realised he needed to get to the most vital part of the journey. His birth, the essence that had brought him into this world. Maybe by understanding what had happened in those days up to his birth, he would have a better idea of how everything in Camelot should be. He paused before he spoke.

“Thank you, Gaius, for your honesty. But now we come to what I feel is the most important part of this journey. I want you to tell me about my birth, everything you know whatever it is. I know there will be some difficult things coming out of this, but if I am to truly understand what the new order in
Camelot has to be, I need to know everything about what happened, the night my mother died.”

There was a tense silence for a while, and Arthur could read the fear on Gaius’s face, and his heart went out to him. Yet despite this, he was determined it had to be worked through whatever the consequences. He was about to intervene, but Gaius beat him to it.

“I will endeavour to do that Arthur, it will be difficult for all of us though.”

“We will get through this together Gaius, the way we always have done,” Guinevere said, softly.

Guinevere’s voice made Arthur jump, he had almost forgotten she was still there. Not for the first time he was grateful, that she was. He knew too she was right, they would get through this, they had to. The whole future of Camelot depended on that and having come this far, Arthur was not about to turn back.

“So, let us began then.” The young King replied.
Chapter 18

The forest by now was getting dense, the branches thicker which made Merlin’s movement slower as a result. He decided to take a quick break and rested on a little patch of grass, by an old oak tree. He reached into his bag and pulled out the water skin, taking a mighty gulp of water. He closed his eyes for a second and let the warm rays of the sunshine penetrate his mind as he suddenly felt sleepy.

After a few seconds, he reluctantly opened his eyes, sensing the danger of falling asleep, and delaying his journey further. His magic told him he wasn’t too far from where he needed to be, and even as he sat, he could sense the magic around calling out to him. He had been travelling for two days now, following his magical senses. By now, he was feeling confident in using all aspects of his craft, especially out in the open and away from Camelot.

Camelot, not for the first time clouded his mind, as he wondered how his friends were dealing with his absence. Did they suffer from the same anxieties as he did? Or were they so busy with all the meetings, that they had barely registered him not being there? Even now in the midst of the forest, he marvelled at how hard it was for him, to function as just himself. For so long he’d been part of the team, part of Arthur’s inside circle. But now being so undeniably out of bounds, it was as if it had happened to somebody else.

He had not fought the Griffin, not gone to the Isle of the Blessed, some other person than him had fought Morgana, and saved King Arthur’s life countless times. He had not tended to the sick, nor rescued his friends, or killed the endless number of Camelot’s enemies. He had not killed Morgana, as Arthur had watched on horrified by what he’d seen. He had not stood over her body and wondered for the thousandth time, if he could have done more to help her, and saved her from herself.

He banged his water skin on the ground in frustration. He remembered the day he had looked in the crystals in the Crystal Cave and had seen Morgana killing Uther. Except, of course, it had deceived him and he’d acted in haste, and then made it happen. How magic liked to play with his mind, he thought to himself. At times the beauty of the gift he'd been born with, grew into a restless, dangerous and downright immoral dilemma. It left him at times feeling dead in mind and feeling, uneasy and searching for more answers to more questions than he ever had in the first place. Yet as he contemplated where he was now at, he began to wonder if at last, he could gain some of those answers. He jumped up suddenly restless to reach his destination.

Whatever was happening in Camelot would have to wait, for he had things to see too, and people to see. For a second he thought about his father, and a trickle of a tear had brushed down his cheek. He had only known him for a very brief time, but for some reason today he seemed with him, in every step he took. Maybe it was because he was starting his own journey, and in an essence, it brought him back to where his own life had begun. Whatever the reason, he knew he had a path he needed to take, and for now, it was the only thing that he allowed himself to think about.

************************************************

Camelot

There was suddenly a slight tension in the room. It was as if someone had tightened a rope around their necks, and in his almost panicked state of mind, Arthur quickly took a sip of water. He needed a few more stolen moments to begin this difficult conversation in the right way. From the moment he had returned to Camelot, this was the moment he knew he’d been waiting for. For this was the story which held the biggest questions for him, the story of his beginning.
For as long as he could remember, the castle he had grown up in had been a place of contrasts. There were locations, in which he’d been at his happiest, where he’d played with his friends, chased Morgana around. There were rooms of safety, and contentment, scary creepy corridors, where he’d had endless fun. Where he pounced on his sister, making her chase him down the steps into the courtyard, where Uther’s booming voice would tell them to take care.

Then there were the other places, which people avoided speaking about, rooms which were never gone into. From an early age, Arthur had realised Camelot was a building with secrets, which he was not a part of. Whenever he asked his nanny, she would shoo him away, encourage him to look at a book, do anything other than, ask about the room that no one ever entered. As he matured he had learnt more about the room on the second floor. In a moment of enormous amazement, someone had confirmed, that this was the room Arthur had come into the world in. But now, the room was out of bounds. Closed up, locked and forgotten about. He would have given anything to have gone in and seen it for himself.

When he had become King, he had gone up one night and decided he would take a look. Yet at the moment he had begun to put the key in the door, something had happened. He had been thwarted once again. Since then, he’d forgotten about the room as the days were filled with doing his duty as King and Protector of Camelot. As he sat facing Gaius and Guinevere, he thought once more about the room, he’d never seen.

“That room Gaius, facing due east on the second floor. Someone once told me I had been delivered into the world in there.”

“Yes, Arthur. It was your mother Ygraine’s quarters. She had decided from the first moment, that was where you would enter the world.” Gaius admitted. “She planned everything, from the moment her pregnancy had been confirmed.”

There was a pause as Arthur considered his next move. Once decided, he forged ahead determined that nothing or no one would stop him.

“That time when Morgause made her entrance into our lives, did you recognise her?” Arthur asked.

"Not immediately," Gaius said, quietly. "It was only when she had given Morgana a bracelet that I realised which house she belonged too."

“Gorlois’s house.” Arthur prompted.

“Yes indeed.”

“After the fight with Morgause, I had met her the next day. She had told me she knew my mother, did they meet?” Arthur asked.

“Your father and Gorlois spent much of their early time together. It is true that Ygraine and Vivienne did indeed meet. Morgause was caught up in the early days of the purge.”

“Oh?” Arthur said, looking surprised.

“At the time, your father was compiling lists of known sorcerers, that he wanted to arrest. Vivienne had magic, she feared for her child. I agreed to take Morgause to safety. When your father heard about Morgause from an acquaintance I assured him, she’d been dealt with. I had in fact taken her to the High Priestesses. I thought at the time it would never be known what had happened to her. But when she arrived back in Camelot it opened a new can of worms.” Gaius admitted, colouring.

“How did my father take the news?” Arthur enquired.
“Not very well, as you can appreciate. He thought that Morgause had trapped you and Merlin about going on the quest, by mentioning your mother.”

"I can understand how he thought that," Arthur admitted. "I would say my meeting Morgause was my father's ultimate nightmare, as the pieces fitted together."

"Very much so," Gaius said,

“You say an acquaintance gave Morgause away?”

“Arthur, at the time Camelot was in panic. The purge ripped through the heart of the fabric of the Kingdom. People were being arrested, neighbours were turning their own neighbours in, everyone was terrified. I myself had lost Alice, whom I had just got engaged to. I had barely managed to smuggle her out of Camelot, by taking her off one of your father’s list.”

"Gaius," Guinevere uttered. "That was risky."

“It was the way of the mad times we lived through Guinevere. Uther’s sorrow had turned him into someone who was lost to reason. If I hadn’t have done that, then Alice too would have been lost.”

“Alice, I remember her. She came back to Camelot and poisoned my father that time.” Arthur said, making the connection.

"She was possessed by the creature Arthur, it was never her. Before the purge, she'd been a healer one of the best in Camelot. She had healed many people rich and poor. Overnight her world and others had been turned upside down, by the purge.”

“Didn’t Alice escape?” Arthur asked, looking Gaius straight in the face.


“You helped her escape.” Guinevere said softly, “Didn’t you?”

Arthur watched as Gaius looked from one to another, his cheeks turning red in the process.

“Yes, I did, I’m afraid.” He admitted,

Arthur laughed despite himself, “It is okay Gaius, I doubt this will be the worst thing to come out of this.”

“Thank you, sire.”

"I need to ask you a question, and I would really like an honest answer from you, Gaius," Arthur said.

"I will do my best to answer the question, Arthur," Gaius replied.

“Was it true that my mother knew nothing about magic being used in my birth?” Arthur asked, his eyes never leaving Gaius’s face.

“Arthur, it was a torrid time,” Gaius began,

“Please Gaius, just answer the question.” Arthur pleaded, aware of how his heart was suddenly beating quickly.

After a pause, Gaius sighed, “Yes, Arthur it was true.”
"So, my mother was right, to all intents and purposes he deceived her," Arthur said, a rage building up inside him. Not even the feel of Guinevere's hand on his arm calmed him. For a second he wanted to wreck the entire room. He had convinced himself in the aftermath of that wretched quest, that his father had been unfairly targeted, but now he knew that was a lie. How many more lies were attached to this sorry story, he asked himself. Was there anything about the Kingdom which was true?

"Arthur please let me explain something. When Ygraine had been unable to conceive, there was a huge pressure on your father. With no heir, it would only have been a matter of time before someone challenged him. We had pretty much tried everything, to allow your mother to become pregnant naturally.

"It wasn't just your father either who was under strain, but your mother too. She was afraid she'd be replaced if she was unable to give an heir to Uther. When the idea had been made to use magic in your birth, it had pretty much seemed the last thing which could be tried."

"But why did nobody tell my mother? Why? I cannot understand how my father could have taken such a decision, and not told the woman he perceived to love. Earlier on you spoke about magic being about a matter of balance. For one thing, to be given, another thing had to be taken. That is why no one told her, wasn't it?" Arthur said, feeling suddenly beyond angry, as the injustice of the answer left him feeling winded and lost. "To be frank I killed my own mother, my birth took her life away."

"No Arthur, "Guinevere rushed over to him, putting her hands on his face. "You must not think like this. It is not your fault."

"That was what my mother said, that night. But I didn't believe here then, and I can't now. All this destiny is nothing more than a fudge, for my father getting the heir he needed to survive. There is nothing special about me, there never was." Arthur pushed his chair back, "Sorry I need some air."

Gaius and Guinevere watched helplessly as the door slammed behind him.

"Guinevere I'm sorry, I fear I have not helped here," Gaius said, bowing his head in sadness and despair.

"It is all right Gaius, there is nothing to blame you for," Guinevere assured him. "Arthur just needs time, he will be back."

"I fear I should have done more that night to stop the birth going ahead." He mused, taking a sip of water.

"Then Arthur would never have been born, Albion would not have come together, Arthur and Merlin would never have met." Guinevere pointed out. "None of us would be where we are now."

There was a pause before Gaius nodded his head. "You are right, of course. But it will take Arthur a while to accept this, and the Kingdom cannot wait too long."

"I know. Arthur will be back, he is much stronger than he realises. I have watched him become a much stronger man since he became King. All of us have our crosses to bear, but we always find a way through them, don't we?" Guinevere pointed out.

"I can only hope you are right about that. I have always thought that you were the strongest of us all Guinevere. Though I do agree, Arthur has made a fine King so far. We cannot let him forget this."

"We won't" Guinevere promised.
In truth she felt less confident then she sounded, but she knew they had to get Arthur over this bit of traumatic news, and soon. Making sure Gaius was feeling alright, she decided she would go and find Arthur.

The path was narrowing and up ahead the trees became more spaced out. Merlin could sense something beyond. He concentrated more forcefully, tensing with the anticipation that trouble may lay up ahead. As he felt his magical senses release themselves into the environment, he suddenly realised he’d been mistaken. It was not danger he’d been sensing, but something else entirely. He looked at the figure coming towards him and recognised he was among friends.

“Emrys, we are delighted to see you.” The young man offered his hand, and Merlin took it with a smile.

“I was very sad to hear about the death of Iseldir," Merlin said, sadly. "The last time we spoke he mentioned you a lot.”

“I can assure you, my father is still my main motivation in everything I do. Our camp is only a short walk away. I am sure you will enjoy your time with us.”

"I am sure I will Mervyn," Merlin said, taking a quick drink from the water skin.

“I was sorry to hear about your and Arthur’s situation. I am sure though, that in time you will sort out your difficulties.”

"I hope that you are right. Otherwise, I don't know what I will do.” Merlin said, realising how frightening the thought was.

“I will go so far to say that I am sure you will. Sometimes we have to go through the bare fields, to find the fruit.” Mervyn smiled, softly.

“Yes, indeed.” Merlin smiled back. “Can I ask if you have seen her?”

“We have heard her, especially when the wind blows from the west. Her call is one of the saddest sounds I have ever heard. Do you think you can cure her?” Mervyn asked.

"I will do everything I can. I have found some papers from my old magic book, which may be of some assistance to me. As ever only time will tell.”

“It has caused much excitement in these parts I can tell you.”

"Not too much I hope, we don't need the attention. I will visit her tomorrow early on. After all the travelling I would be grateful for an early night.” Merlin admitted, seeing the camp up ahead.

“We will endeavour to make sure our welcoming doesn’t last too long Emrys.” Mervyn smiled.

Merlin laughed, and followed Mervyn into the Druid's camp, noticing as ever the intense excitement that occurred whenever he arrived in a camp. He waved at the various people who called out greetings to him. In truth, he longed for a bit of anonymity but knew tonight that would not be possible. The great Emrys had arrived and the Druids didn't need a second invitation to begin the celebrations.

Within an hour Merlin was sitting down with a necklace of flowers around his neck, a drink in his hand, and enjoying the singing of a young woman, sat the other side of the fire that blazed into the
evening sky. Already the stars were beginning to cast their appearance through the fast departing clouds. He began counting them, as he sat listening to the enchanting singing, that echoed around him.

“Please, Emrys, let me refill your cup.”

Merlin lifted his head and saw the face of a pretty young woman, who had a face brimming with intelligence, and fun.

He smiled, passing his cup over to her. She had long, slim fingers, which caressed everything she touched. “I have heard many great things about you, Emrys. It is my honour to serve you, and I will do anything you command.”

“Please, don’t put yourself through too much trouble on my account. I am afraid I am but passing through.”

“It matters not. If our meeting is only fleeting I can still say I filled the cup of the great Emrys.”

Merlin smiled, hoping his embarrassment didn’t show too much. “Sit by me, what is your name?”

“My name is Sikia.”

“Well, I ask Sikia that you pour some for yourself and drink with me.”

She laughed softly, her voice tittering on the breeze that blew around them. “Thank you, it will be an honour.”

“How long have you been here?” Merlin asked, suddenly wanting some attention.

“I have been here for three years now. I have come from the west a little village called Turely.”

“I have heard of that place. It has a sacred spring running through it.” Merlin said.

“That is right. They say that once a year the spirits dance on the fields and leave their gold dust on the pavestones. It is a place of legend and myths, a place that the great Emrys would feel at home in, I think.” she smiled, looking at him from under her lashes.

Merlin smiled, “If ever I am in the area, I will remember to visit.”

“Then be sure to visit Madame Micanty. She is my grandmother and she brought me up and drew this on me.” Sikia said and drew up her sleeve on her arm.

Merlin smiled as he looked at the dragon on her arm.

“They say a white dragon is lucky, is that so?” she asked him.

Merlin thought about Aithusa for a moment, “Sometimes the legends and myths do not get everything right.”

“We hear her some nights crying on the wind, it is such a sad sound. They say you can talk to the dragons. I would love to be there when you go to her.”

After a pause, Merlin looked across the fire and into the black on the other side, he turned back to the pretty face full of wonder, and lightly touched it.

“One day you will see her, but for now I must keep her safe. If all goes well she will keep us all safe
and the Kingdom will thrive, in a way it’s never done before. For all of us”

“Well, until then Emrys let’s drink to the spirits of the night.”

Merlin picked up his drink and touched her cup and for a second felt a simple contentment he’d not felt in years. If only the world could be this straight-forward all the time he thought, but for this one night, it was enough to satisfy him.

After Sikia left Mervyn came and sat by his side. “I hope she wasn’t too inquisitive.” He smiled.

“Not at all. Truth be told she cleared my mind of a lot of troublesome thoughts.”

“Then that is a positive thing. You will leave and go to the cave early?” Mervyn asked.

“At first light.” Merlin answered. “I should get some sleep now if you don’t mind.”

“No, of course not. You are sure we can be of no assistance tomorrow?” Mervyn asked.

"Thank you, but I would rather keep her away from strangers, for now, I don't know the effect the spell will have on her."

“You know where we are if you change your mind.”

I do. I’m sorry its been such a brief stay, I would have liked to stay longer, but I need to visit my mother as well.”

“I understand, perhaps when you and Arthur are back together you can bring him here.”

“We will need the assistance of the Druids, I take it I can rely on your support.”

"As ever Emrys, we are in your debt,” Mervyn said, giving Merlin his hand.

Merlin shook it, “Thank you Mervyn. Please thank Sikia again for her assistance tonight.”

“I will.”

Merlin watched him walk away and suddenly tired he entered the tent he’d been given and settled down for the night. He closed his eyes to the singing of the woman and the memory of Sikia’s laughing eyes. The next morning, he left the camp early, following the directions that the old Druid had given him. The terrain changed under his feet, from muddy to dry and back again. As he went through deeper into the forest, he could hear her breathless cries. He thought about the description that both Mervyn and Sikia had used, and he knew they were right. Her cries were filled with sadness and a loss of hope. Not for the first time, he cursed himself for leaving her for so long. He could hardly blame her if she refused to acknowledge him, even though he knew she wouldn't.

Suddenly the cave came into view, and he saw her outline against the walls. He took his bag off his shoulder and went softly into the cave. At first, all he could hear was her constant murmuring, but then she caught his scent on the breeze, and gave a huge cry of such sadness, that Merlin was almost reduced to tears. "It's alright Aithusa, I am here. I'm so sorry it has taken me so long to return to you. But I hope that I can help you, to retain your senses once again.” He approached her, and she came ambling over to him nuzzling his hand as he greeted her.

“I will never let anyone harm you again Aithusa. I give you this vow.” He sat down on a pile of rocks and the young dragon moved over with him. She rested her face on his knee, as he softly stroked her skin, and calmed her. As he thought about the spell he was about to use, he once again
thanked Gaius for giving him the task of cleaning out the spare storeroom. Even now he couldn't quite believe how he had found the old magic book, under some discarded mattresses. He remembered the night he had spent under lamplight discovering magic all over again. Then the wonder of coming across some spells which could be used in connection with dragons.

Not for one minute had he thought he would have any chance of returning to Aithusa what she had lost when she had spent her time being chained up with Morgana. But with this spell he had memorised, he felt sure he could at least return some of her lost senses to her. He knew he would at least have to try.

Sensing her calmness, he straightened his frame and his hands left the dragon's back. He closed his eyes took a deep breath and whispered the spell softly becoming aware of the power that he was unleashing through his being. He felt his magic flow through him, and into Aithusa who by now had her eyes closed and was breathing slowly. He watched his magic build a protective circle around the sleeping dragon. As the magical rays disappeared into the air around her, Aithusa briefly stirred. He attempted to contain his excitement and let her have a few hours of interrupted sleep. He would discover soon enough, whether the spell had worked. Feeling suddenly tired himself he closed his own eyes and gave in to his own emotionally exhausted state.
The Darkling Woods

The first rays of sunshine were beginning to creep into the entrance of the cave when Merlin woke up. He yawned quickly, then gave a start as he realised Aithusa was not with him. He jumped up and called to her, alarmed by the sound of silence which greeted his call. He went to the opening of the cave and looked out. Already he could tell it was going to be a warm day, he moved quickly towards the sound of running water, scanning the horizon around him.

He dropped to his feet and splashed some water onto his face as a nervous feeling of anxiety began to increase. He tried to come up with a logical reason as to why would she disappear, after he'd just arrived back. As his fear began to intensify and his mood darken, he was suddenly aware of a movement behind him. He turned around slowly, to be greeted by Aithusa; who on seeing him began to make some excitable noises. Relieved just to see her, he reached out and stroked her encouraging her to follow him. He sat down by the cave, the young dragon sitting at his feet.

“You had me worried there Aithusa.” He gently chided her. She responded by making some excitable squeaks. He smiled at her contentment and continued speaking to her, keeping his voice low. He had suspected that the spell would not necessarily work instantly, yet he felt there was something extra curious, about the white dragon today. She seemed more intent in eye to eye contact, as if some sort of strange feeling, had a hold of her.

He decided to take it slow and put it to the test. He held his hands out to her, and she came close pressing her face against them. He had a definite inkling that there was something different in the way she was reacting to him. The noises she was making took on the form of some structure, rather than just her usual squeaks.

He remembered the book mentioning how in the early stages the animal may require, some encouragement. So, he started talking to her more, making sure the eye contact continued. As he did so he could see how her eyes seemed to change, almost as if a light had come inside them. The noises coming from her seemed to change slightly in tone as if she was trying to attempt something new to her.

Merlin could sense his excitement growing. But he was determined not to rush her and let it all happen, quite naturally. He reached for some plants and offered them to her. She graciously accepted them and began to eat ravenously. As he looked above them, he could see a light shining and his mood grew more excited. This was a sign he had decided, now all he had to do was wait.

Camelot

On waking up, Arthur had strangely felt worse, than the day before. After the meeting with Gaius had ended, they had decided to leave it until the next day to continue. But even the break in time had done little to decrease the anger, he still felt. It wasn’t just his father’s betrayal of his mother that stung him. But also, the realisation that his father had been unable to admit the truth to him.

For years on end, he had given his father the benefit of the doubt, when he’d been unable to talk about his mother. Arthur had been respectful of how much the loss of her had hurt his father, and when growing up had made allowances for that. Yet it had never stopped him wondering and wanting to know more about the woman who had been his mother. He now realised it had been as much about Uther’s determination to cover up what happened, as his grief for her loss. Now he didn’t even have the chance to ask his father the questions, he’d been longing to know.
He quietly got dressed as Guinevere lay sleeping. He knew she was worried about how he had reacted. For once, not even she had managed to cut through his annoyance and anger. He decided to take an early walk and try and get some sanity inside his head.

He moved down the corridor quickly, nodding at the servants and the odd Lord who passed him, but not really seeing any of them. By the time he was outside in the sunshine he longed to find somewhere to go, to get away from the suffocating feeling of court life. He suddenly came up with an idea and headed off to where the stables were and looking around quickly, sauntered down the path into the forest.

The moment he sensed Camelot behind him, he began to feel strangely calmer. While he was there, he was the vocal figure, but here he could at least enjoy some anonymity away from the crowds, and people who wanted his answers on everything. He sat down and rested his head on the old oak tree. He remembered another day when Merlin had recited the history of the tree. How he had thought his friend crazy as he babbled on about what the tree had seen in years gone by. But right now, he’d have done anything to have his friend’s constant talking disturb his angry mood. He realised he desperately needed some distraction, to break through his frame of mind. But Merlin was no longer here.

He thought too back to the day when Merlin had stopped Arthur from killing his father. What was it he’d said? He then remembered with clarity how Merlin had claimed that Morgause had lied and had put those words into his mother’s mouth. At that moment Merlin had swept away any chance of magic being accepted into Camelot’s daily life. He then remembered what Gaius had said about Merlin many times denying himself, in order to do what was best for Arthur. It would have been so easy for Merlin to have allowed his own hopes and dreams to succeed at that moment. But instead, he had put that aside. He had realised the implication of what that act would mean for both Arthur and Camelot. He wondered what had gone through his friend’s mind in that minute.

He was sure there had been other times when he’d done something similar. But that would have to wait for another day. For now, he had to put it all to one side and get himself prepared for what next was to happen. There were still things he had to ask Gaius, and he knew it was essential that he found some calmness, before asking the questions. If only he’d been able to see his mother again if only to say to her that he now knew. He realised with regret he knew little about her at all. But he also realised now was the perfect time to ask the only person, who still knew. Suddenly, he felt his determination return to him, and he jumped up ready to face the day ahead.

Inside Camelot

“Any news Leon?” Guinevere asked as the Knight returned to the empty throne room.

“No one has seen him. A couple of servants said they had seen him go in the direction of the courtyard but after that, nothing.” Leon reported. “I have asked the Knights to prepare a discreet search in the meantime.”

“Thank you, Leon,” Guinevere replied, biting on her fingernails, but then remembering to remain strong. “I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“Yes”, Leon agreed, “I’m sure he will turn up. May I ask did he have something on his mind?”

Guinevere thought for a second, she didn’t want to reveal any information to anyone regarding the meeting. But she realised she had to at least say something.

“It was a difficult meeting yesterday, and he learnt something that surprised him.” Guinevere explained, “having said that he said he was ready for today’s meeting, so I didn’t think anything else
about it.”

“Like you said before, I am sure he will return when he is ready. But we will search for him just in case.” Leon assured her.

“Yes, carry on and report back to me if you find anything out,” Guinevere said.

Leon nodded and prepared to walk away, but as he did so the door opened and Arthur came in.

“Arthur,” Guinevere said, “We were worried when no one could find you.”

“I’m sorry.” Arthur apologised, “I just needed some air that was all. I should have said something first though.”

“No problem sire, you are here now.” Leon smiled, “I will ask the Knights to stop the search.”

“Thank you, Leon,” Arthur said, looking embarrassed. “I’m sorry Guinevere I shouldn’t have acted like that.”

Guinevere wrapped her arms around him. “Don’t worry; it was as much me worrying. When I couldn’t find you and no one else could I think I just panicked. How are you anyway now, it was a big shock yesterday.”

“Like you say, it was a shock, yet not a shock. When I look back on the quest with Merlin it all makes perfect sense. As does Merlin’s act in stopping me killing my father.” Arthur said.

“It certainly shows how Merlin stopped you from doing something you’d regret.” Guinevere mused.

“More than that Guinevere. My father being dead would have made his dream of magic returning seem more of a possibility. I remember Gaius saying how Merlin had denied himself on occasions; well that was one of them.” Arthur replied. “I wonder how many other times he’s done it.”

Guinevere took his hand, “I suggest that might be a question to ask Gaius.”

“Indeed, I will, but first I have some other questions for him. We’d better get on with it. I have a feeling this will be a long day”

Darkling Woods

The wind had changed direction and it appeared to Merlin that something else seemed different about Aithusa. She seemed to be on a mission, her nose on the ground as she followed a path behind the cave. He followed her curiously wondering what she had on her mind. So far, she had not spoken, but that hadn’t altogether surprised him.

The book had spoken of dragons needing time to adjust to a change in their situation. They were creatures of logic, who eventually worked out how to behave quite naturally. He decided to put her under no kind of pressure or make her worried about how he was acting around her. If the spell had worked, he knew that in the end, she would speak whenever she was ready too.

So, for now, he contented himself with some close observing. The path made a sharp turn left, Merlin looked ahead and saw the trees were much closer together and thicker in form. He was still puzzled at what she had in mind. But he continued to take his time and let her lead him to where she wanted to go. As they continued down the path he suddenly heard, some running water. Feeling thirsty he allowed her to lead him over to the little stream.
As Merlin bent down and took a drink, Aithusa walked on towards a big pink bush. Merlin watched her from where he was, she bent her neck forward and began eating, pulling the leaves away and taking her time to devour them. Not for the first time, Merlin marvelled at how little dragons could feast on. He presently walked over to her and pulled some fresh vegetation from another bush, leaving it for her.

As he turned to walk back towards the water, it was then he heard.

“Thank you, Merlin.”

At first, he thought he had imagined it, he turned back towards her watching her munching away. She was pretty much in the same position neck bent towards the bush. Yet as he continued to observe her, he could already feel the emotion coming through him, from what had just occurred.

It seemed the spell had worked, and all of a sudden, he was restless to get her to speak some more. But despite the mounting excitement, he knew it best to take it step by step.

Camelot

The meeting between Arthur and Gaius continued, with Guinevere observing. The mood of depression had lifted briefly from Arthur. He had a fresh momentum to press ahead with more things he needed to learn. Not least about his mother, and what had happened after her death.

“Gaius, I want to ask you about my mother. My father would never talk about her, so at times I felt I seldom knew her. Tell me about her please.” He requested, noting the sad look in the old man’s eyes.

“She was a very fine woman Arthur. She came from a rich family who had past dealings with the Pendragons. As soon as your father won the crown, plans were put into operation to arrange their marriage. When she arrived in Camelot she transformed the castle, before she arrived it was quite a dour place.”

“Yes,” Arthur admitted, “I remember my tutor telling me that. How did people take to her?”

“The people loved your mother from the start, she had a true regal way about her, and yet she was also very approachable to the ordinary people. She would often take a walk along the market and keep in touch with the people there. She would also make sure that any problems were addressed. She never had any fear about your father. She had a confidence about her that enabled her to be assertive when she had to be.”

“She doesn’t sound much like me.” Arthur smiled, thinking about the woman who had hugged him so tightly that night.

“Oh, but you remind me of her. Look at how you have led this Kingdom, performed what needs to be done. Say nothing of the compassion you have shown when you need to. Those were all qualities you gained from Ygraine.”


“Camelot lost the voice of reason, the voice that was not afraid to question your father’s actions. Ygraine had never lacked the moral courage to speak with Uther if she felt the need to. But from that tragic night, all reason evaporated, leaving a vacuum of fear in its place.”

“My father once told me, that the night after the purge started, he could smell the smoke for weeks afterwards,” Guinevere spoke, softly.
Arthur looked up, then watched Gaius’s reaction. His eyes looked hollow and empty.

“From the moment Ygraine had been buried the purge began at once. Your father commanded that the name of every person who performed magic, be given up or people would face serious sanctions. There was fear and suspicion everywhere. It affected families, friends, virtually every part of the Kingdom was embroiled in this incessant search for any kind of magical being.”

“Were there, trials? Where people given the right to defend themselves?” Arthur asked, wanting to know every gruesome detail.

After a pause, which merely added to the tense feeling around the table, Gaius continued.

“In a lot of cases no, I regret to say. The castle’s prisons were overflowing with people, they were dealt with quickly and in some case, without much fairness. Children, as well as adults, were put to death. There were some dreadful scenes that I really don’t want to recall.”

“I’m sorry to put you through this, but I need to go through everything, every detail you remember,” Arthur said, hardly feeling like it himself either.

“Would you like some more water, Gaius?” Guinevere asked.

“Yes, please.” Gaius composed himself. “Thank you”,

“That time when your father appeared to be losing his mind, after you found Morgana, that illness was actually caused by a mandrake root. The root caused him to remember the scenes of the past.”

“Yes, I remember that he claimed he’d seen my mother in the well,” Arthur said.

“Yes indeed, the enchantment gave him flashbacks from the purge. In that time children had been drowned, others had been burned at the stake. The whole episode of that time had been played back into your father’s mind. There had been many terrible events of suffering, and it set his mind completely against magic of any kind. Nimueh had been thrown out of court and accused of causing your mother’s death. All sorts of accusations had been thrown in court, from all sorts of people. It was a time of little reason, and unending pain for many individuals.”

“I see. This doesn’t show Camelot in the most positive light, Gaius.” Arthur pondered.

“In some instances no. But there were some people who didn’t help the situation, and made it worse than it needed to be.” Gaius said, “When life changes so quickly it doesn’t always bring about the best in humans, on either side.”

“No,” Arthur agreed. “What about the Druids? When Guinevere met Lord Oakes he said they had worked alongside the Kingdom with regards the magical community.”

“Yes, they did indeed. At the time Lord Oakes and I wanted the Druids to have someone on the King’s Council. To all intents and purposes, they were helping us run the Kingdom, keeping an eye on anyone who used their magic for evil purposes. But your father would only have the Council for—”

“His allies,” Arthur finished the sentence for Gaius. It was a familiar situation to Arthur and one that he desperately disagreed with. Now, in his time, he invited commoners to sit on the Council and also become Knights. But his father had always been rigid about such things.

“Yes, he recognised it as a matter of trust and he never allowed those outsiders the same implicit rights, as those who gave an oath to the Pendragon name. But you Arthur, are a very different man.”
Gaius remarked.

“So what happened with the Druids when the Purge took hold?” Arthur asked, realising they had side-tracked from the original question.

“To begin with we still met with a man called Agnorlos. But he died shortly afterwards. We met with his successor Iseldir for a time. But inevitably Camelot and the Druids ended up on different sides. Although, once in a while they still sent messages. But when your father intensified the arrests, there was little common ground between us anymore.” Gaius explained, taking a sip of water.

“I see. We have some channels open now though with the Druids.” Arthur said, brightening slightly.

“Yes indeed. The man who now leads the Druids is called Mervyn who is Iseldir’s son. He would be a good man, to begin working with again.”

“I will think about it,” Arthur promised. “Thank you for being so open once again Gaius, I know it can’t be easy, after all these years of secrecy.”

“Maybe some of these things have been kept hidden for too long.” Gaius admitted.

“I suggest we take a break and come back in an hour,” Arthur suggested, pushing back his chair.

“Of course Arthur,” Gaius said

Arthur held out his hand and guided Guinevere outside. It was when they went down the corridor that his wife spoke to him.

“I thought you wanted to push on today.” She said, with a surprised tone in her voice.

Arthur smiled, she didn’t miss anything. “True, but I feel I need to think about how to speak about the next part.”

“Oh?” Guinevere asked, intrigued.

“My sister, Morgana. I can’t go through all of this without asking what he and Merlin knew about her. I feel like I lost her somehow, without realising it before it was too late.”

“I see.” Guinevere nodded, her face pale suddenly.

Arthur looked at her closely, wondering what was wrong. He decided to ask discreetly. “You must be curious too, considering how close you were to her once.”

“Arthur, I think we need to talk,” Guinevere said, looking wary.

“As you wish, what about in the gardens?” Arthur suggested, worried about what he would next be hearing.

The sun was high in the sky by the time Arthur and Guinevere had found a nice quiet secluded spot to sit in, away from any prying eyes. Arthur allowed Guinevere to get comfortable before getting himself ready, to hear the next bit of the unending story. He didn’t allow himself to think it would be that bad, not on top of what he already knew. But the idea that Guinevere too had a secret, had shocked Arthur more than he wanted to admit to.

“Tell me Guinevere, whatever is on your mind,” Arthur said, sounding more down than he intended.

“To be honest, as everyone else is telling you things, there is something I feel I need to get out, so it’s
Arthur nodded, waiting for her to continue there was a pause before she began.

“I knew about Morgana’s magic when I was still working as her maid,” Guinevere said, looking straight ahead.

“I see how did you found out?” Arthur asked, feeling a little numb.

“I always knew there was something going on around her. She suffered from really bad dreams I would come in and find her completely out of herself. Some nights she was unable to sleep at all and sometimes I would offer to stay with her, but she would try and cope with it herself.”

“Yes, that sounds like the Morgana I knew.” Arthur sighed. “She never told me anything.”

“As we continued, her nightmares seemed to be getting worse. This happened after Morgause made her appearance. I remember the first time she arrived in Camelot, Morgana had said she felt like she knew her. When I asked her from where she just laughed and dismissed it.”

“I never knew any of this.” Arthur mused, “How did you find out about her magic?”

“As the time went on we grew apart. Nothing I could put my finger on, to begin with. I think I really started to notice the difference after she disappeared with Morgause. She never seemed the same after that.”

“Yes,” Arthur replied, “I remember that we went and searched for her all over the place. She seemed so scared when she came back. In fact, wasn’t it the same time my father lost his mind? Gaius mentioned it yesterday, some sort of root that Morgause used on him.”

“Didn’t he call it the mandrake root?” she said, suddenly remembering the name.

“That’s it.” Arthur said, “I need to ask him more about this.”

“Arthur, I’m sorry I kept this from you. I wished I had mentioned it earlier now.” Guinevere said.

Arthur took hold of her hand. “It is okay. I can understand why you were hesitant. But in future, let’s have no more secrets, from any of us.”

“I promise Arthur. It needs to be the same for all of us.” Guinevere smiled. “You have to as well.”

“Yes, especially me,” Arthur admitted. “We’d better get back to it. There is still a lot to talk about”

He gave his arm to her, and they set off towards Gaius’s apartment. As Arthur thought about what Guinevere had just told him, once again he was aware of how much secrecy surrounded Camelot. He vowed in his own mind to bring the walls of silence down, for Camelot to move forward, there could be no secrets between those who ran the Kingdom. It was one thing he was determined to stop.

Darkling Woods

The clouds were starting to darken as Merlin and Aithusa walked back into the cave. All day, Merlin had watched every little movement and listened to every noise. While she still hadn’t said anything else, Merlin felt sure it would soon happen. He had decided to stay with her overnight, and then make for Ealdor early the next morning. He knew the Mervyn would keep an eye on things, while Merlin was gone.
As the dragon put her head down on his lap and settled down for the night, Merlin’s mind had turned already to Ealdor. It had been some years since he’d seen his home village, and he could hardly wait to see his mother once again. He had thought about her such a lot, after the fallout with Arthur. He felt sure that she would know what to say, to encourage him out of his worried frame of mind. He wondered how Hunith was, she always seemed very positive in her letters to him, but he knew she was now getting older. It was about time he had visited her and spent some quality time with her. He also had some questions for her, though he knew she may find them hard to answer, there was no time like the present. Like Arthur, he had his own path to walk on.

Not for the first time, he wondered how the King was bearing up. Did he feel as lost as Merlin did? Even now, it felt so wrong to be away from Camelot and protecting Arthur and his other friends. He hoped too that Gaius was coping well with having to visit a past, Merlin knew gave him a lot of sadness and regret. If only they had been able to be open with one another, then they wouldn’t be in this big mess. Yet Merlin deep down knew, the seeds of doubt had been planted in the dark, distant past. It would need a huge difference in attitude and determination to change the errors of a past tragic age.

Once more, he thought about his father and the journey Balinor had to go on when Uther chased him away from his mother. Could he really hope that Arthur would see past Uther’s entrenched view’s, and into a world where magic could be recognised for the beauty he knew it possessed? There had been so much pain for those with magic, but also those without. Merlin wondered if there could ever be a time when everyone could see past the crimes of the past on both sides and come together, as one people. In the coldness of the night, it seemed a tall order to him, and he sighed sadly at the thought. In the end, only the exhaustion in his mind granted him the peace he craved, and he finally fell asleep.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Gaius reads a letter from an old friend and is reminded of something he has hidden away. Merlin returns to see his mother in Ealdor and they reminisce about his father Balinor, at the end of the day Merlin receives an unexpected boost.

Camelot

It was early the next morning when Gaius suddenly remembered the letter from Hunith. Such was his forgetfulness he had to look in a few draws before he remembered where he'd put it. Feeling intrigued as to what was inside, he tore it open. He eased himself onto his chair as he read it.

Dear Gaius,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. I am sorry I haven't written for a while. There has been such a lot to do and I find I'm taking longer, to do even the most mundane of tasks. It would appear old age is rapidly taking over me. Although I would rather you didn't tell Merlin that, I know how he worries about me.

I have heard rumours that all is not well between him and Arthur. I am, of course, looking forward to seeing him again, but I would like to ask you something before I see him.

There were a number of items that dear Balinor left in my possession. Obviously, something I have needed to hide, but now that Merlin is coming home, it seems a good time to give them to him. I know his father would have wanted him to have them. I regret through the years, I have not been more truthful with Merlin over Balinor. I know you mentioned that he briefly met him, but I feel he needs to know the full story now.

I feel it only right, as the story involves you too, that you should also know what I intend to do. I hope you support my decision and will answer any other questions, he may have about his father. I feel sad, that he knows so little about his own background. It seems that everything has been shrouded in secrecy. Maybe now is the time to be more open.

My last request is that you give him the magical staeff that Balinor gave me, all those years ago. I trust you have kept it safely in Camelot and I can't thank you enough for keeping it, at great risk to yourself. I hope that before long, I will have the chance to see you once again. Take care and thank you for everything, you have done for my son. I know I couldn't have asked for a kinder and more loving person than you.

Yours with love and respect,

Hunith.

For a second Gaius just sat there, as the words whirled around his mind. It seemed to be a time where truthfulness was pouring out of everywhere. He found himself having to take a deep breath, to accept how fast things appeared to be changing.

He thought back to the troubled night, he had smuggled Balinor away from Camelot. The man had
been angry and so upset, at what had occurred. Kilgharrah was chained up and imprisoned underground, as Uther driven with vengeance, ruled his Kingdom with a cold heart.

It was all Gaius could do to persuade Balinor to escape, the man's loyalty to the dragon was so strong and steadfast. He felt he had betrayed Kilgharrah and nothing Gaius said, seemed to improve his broken spirit. In the end, he had smuggled him out in an old cart. Balinor had then gone on to Ealdor and Hunith.

Gaius had felt saddened too, by Merlin's lack of knowledge of his father. He thought about the magical artefact he had stored away. What would it teach Merlin? He hoped he would use it wisely, as he knew the power it could unleash on the world.

He realised things were at a sensitive stage between King and Sorcerer now, and Gaius knew one wrong move, could yet ruin everything. He decided to leave it where it was for now. It was best he dealt with it when Merlin had returned. He hoped everything would go well between the boy and Hunith. Merlin needed some time with his mother. He knew now more than ever, Merlin would need her to make sense of all he was about to learn. The young boy, who had come bursting into Camelot all those years ago, had come far, his mentor thought proudly.

Merlin by now had made good progress and knew he was on the outskirts of his home village. He guessed looking at the sun high in the sky that he would be in Ealdor, by about mid-day.

The journey had been pretty uneventful after he had watched Aithusa fly away. She hadn't spoken any more words and the elation he had briefly felt, had already passed. He felt so sure that the spell had worked. But now he wondered if he had imagined the whole thing. Despite that, Aithusa seemed quite happy to fly off and leave him. He knew with her growing maturity, she was now yearning for her own bit of space. So, he had allowed her the freedom, knowing she would come back if he called her.

He had felt sad when she had eventually become a dot on the horizon, feeling that there was still a bit of distance. Had he managed to return her speech fully, a new bond would have begun. Now, he felt he'd let her down all over again. Here he was the most powerful sorcerer in the world, and he still couldn't help those he loved the most.

At times his magic was so frustrating, he wondered if he would ever learn all he needed to know. One blind avenue turned into another one. He would leave searching for yet more answers, to new problems. At least he would soon be with his mother again. It had briefly brought a smile to his face. How long had it been since he'd last seen her?

Hunith kept in touch with her letters and Merlin would read each one with affection and but also a regret, that he couldn't see more of her. His time with Arthur had taken him far away from his mother and home village. As he approached the long road, that he'd walked along so many times before, memories stirred in his mind.

He passed the orchard where he and Will had spent endless hours, climbing the trees, eating the apples and dreaming of where their lives would lead. Even now, he would often think of his old friend. He and Will had been so close, that to Merlin his death felt like he had lost a member of his family. It was also a bleak reminder of how despite his magic, he couldn't save everyone.

It had at least saved Arthur, yet here he was now still feeling bereft and stripped of his usefulness. But he knew, for now, he must put on a brave face, his mother deserved it after all her sacrifices. He stopped as he looked down the row of little huts.
Ealdor had changed little since the last time he'd been here. It was quiet now, save for a couple of children playing outside. He walked on, his eyes only on the door of his old home, watching for any movement from within it.

He was about to knock on the door when suddenly it opened, then he was pulled into an emotional embrace, as he heard his mother's voice whisper his name.

"Merlin, let me look at you. How grown up you are now." Hunith laughed.

"That's because I am grown up mother." He laughed, "How are you? I am so sorry it's been so long since I've seen you." Merlin kissed her cheek, noticing how slower she seemed to move now.

"Come in my boy," Hunith replied pulling Merlin inside. "You must be exhausted after your journey."

"A drink of water would be welcome." Merlin admitted, "You must be hungry, I could do us a stew if you like."

"It's already cooking my dear, it will be ready shortly. Sit down"

Merlin sat on a chair by the window, vacantly looking outside as his mother brought him a drink. He watched as she sat down across from him. He noticed at once she had more wrinkles on her face and once again, felt saddened that he wasn't able to keep an eye on her more.

"I have missed you. You look tired." He said, knowing she would deny it.

"I'm just getting older, my boy. What is it, Merlin?" Hunith asked.

Merlin felt suddenly annoyed that he couldn't stop some stray tears, running on to his hand.

"I have made a mess of everything, mother. I don't know what to do anymore." He mumbled, shocked at how quickly everything deteriorated.

Before he could get any other words out, he was pulled into his mother's arms and he surrendered to her tender motherly love. He felt like the frightened, little boy who had just seen his eyes glow for the first time. He stayed like this for a few minutes, until he felt more composed. He slowly sat up again having regained some strength. His mother reached for his hand, her eyes watching him closely.

"Tell me what happened Merlin." Hunith urged him.

So, he did, the whole wretched tale. At first, the words tumbled out as he struggled to convey every detail. But after stopping for a few moments he told her about the whole awful night.

"Right from the start I knew something would happen, I could feel it deep inside me. At times it felt like I was being suffocated, as the feeling just grew and grew. I remember talking to Lancelot. The moon that night was so strange, so high in the sky and really bright. I almost sensed a kind of power from it, but I couldn't work out whether it was good or bad." He stopped briefly, taking a sip of water.

"Go on." His mother encouraged, still holding his other hand.

"As the night went on, the feeling just became more intense. I knew something would happen and I had a sense that it would change everything. But not in the way it did, in no way was I prepared for that. When Morgana did arrive she began mocking Arthur, I just got so angry. I reasoned with her,
but she was too far gone to listen to me. She was so angry and bitter, I just wish I could have got through to her."

"The Morgana I met was so different. I just find it hard to imagine her as you described her, she was so charming that time she came to Ealdor."

"She was a changed person from then, I wish I could have been more honest with her, maybe then she wouldn't have gone to the dark side."

"Merlin, you cannot go blaming yourself for everything. What happened next?"

"Morgana continued to mock Arthur and then began to threaten him. I warned her but she wouldn't stop. She tried to kill him, so I was forced out into the open. Right in front of everyone I killed her stone dead. I wish I could say in the aftermath I was sorry, but the only thing that mattered to me was saving Arthur. When he realised what had happened, he couldn't even look me in the face."

"Oh Merlin, that must have been so hard for you." Hunith sighed.

"He sent me back to Camelot and told me to wait for him there. That journey back with some of the Knights was so strange. They kept looking at me and I could tell what they were thinking. They were wondering who I was and whether they could trust me. In the end, I said to them that they could. But they were all too stunned to take it in." Merlin said, looking down at the table and avoiding his mother's eyes.

"You had Gaius though at least." Hunith reminded him.

"Lancelot too." Merlin smiled softly.

"Lancelot knew about your magic?" Hunith asked, "Merlin that was risky."

"He has known for years and has always kept silent about it. He has been a true friend, I don't think I'd have got through this without him. I didn't tell him about my magic, he just found out and swore to me he would stay quiet, which he has done. But I hated the idea, that he had to keep the secret from Arthur as well."

"I'm glad you have had someone to confide in, though I am glad I didn't know about it. What happened when you got back to Camelot?"

"It was some days before Arthur arrived back. Within a couple of days, we were having meetings, and I was trying to tell him why I had to lie to him. When I told him about the prophecy it was so hard for him to understand. I felt so annoyed that I couldn't explain it better. But it must have sounded so weird to him."

"It was the same with your father too, when he told me about his skills as a Dragonlord," Hunith said.

"You knew he was a Dragonlord?" Merlin asked, his eyes lighting up.

"The night before he was forced to flee he told me everything. All about his magic, his skills but most of all about the fact that he could talk to dragons. He was so angry about Kilgharrah being trapped by Uther."

"I can understand that." Merlin admitted, "Uther broke his word, it must have been a terrible burden for him. I met him briefly. It was at the time Kilgharrah was attacking Camelot. Gaius had confessed to Uther than he had helped him escape. Arthur and I were sent out to find him and bring him back
"I am so glad you at least got the chance to meet him. He would be so proud of you Merlin." Hunith said, stroking his hair.

"He still loved you, I could tell by the way he spoke about you," Merlin whispered.

Hunith smiled, tears shining in her eyes. "There wasn't a day when I didn't think about him and wonder what life we'd all have had together, had the purge not happened."

"If the purge had not happened you probably wouldn't have met him." Merlin pointed out. "The way fate and destiny affect us all becomes clearer the more I think about everything that's happened in my life. Sometimes I wonder how my life would have turned out without either of them."

"It's best not to think about that Merlin, it is what it is," Hunith said. "I will get us dinner and then you need an early bed. Tomorrow I will tell you all about Balinor if that's what you'd like."

Merlin looked up at his mother. "Only if you want too, I don't want to cause any stress."

"I think if you are to get through all of this, you need to know where you are from. I've always regretted not speaking about your father, it is time you knew all about him."

Merlin stood up and hugged Hunith. "I would like that very much."

"I love you so much, my son," Hunith replied and kissed his cheek.

A warm glow entered Merlin's being for the first time since he began the journey. At long last, he would get to hear about his father. Suddenly he wished tomorrow was here already. After he had eaten, he washed the dishes expecting his mother to go to bed.

He was momentarily taken by surprise as he realised his mother wasn't in the hut. But when a breeze blew onto his face, he realised with relief she was standing outside looking up at the stars. One star, in particular, dominated the night sky.

"That's a bright star," Merlin said, with a shiver remembering the night he revealed himself at Camlann.

Hunith put her arms around his shoulder and pulled him towards her. "The night your father left, I remember him pointing at the very star we're seeing now. He said as long as this star is shining, you know I'm never that far away. I have never forgotten that even now, after all these years."

"You still miss him." Merlin murmured sadly, wishing he could ease her pain.

"I always will. But I have you back now, and tomorrow I will tell all about him. Now come on, let's get some sleep." Hunith said, stepping back indoors.

Merlin spent a couple more minutes staring at the star and remembering the meeting with his father. He relived the beginning of the journey to Ealdor and how he felt his father's spirit was walking beside him. Perhaps that feeling had been a sign for this very moment when at last he would know more about his father's life. Smiling to himself, he closed the door, threw himself onto his blanket and then fell into a deep, deep sleep.

The next day Merlin took his mother to the place, where he had his most terrifying experience as a young boy. In his own mind, it was the moment when everything in his life had instantly changed. Even now, the babble of the stream gave him goosebumps as he relived the moment once more, in
his head. At least this time, he had his mother at his side. He stopped in front of the stream, watching the water run gracefully down through the forest path.

"It was this very place I learnt I had magic. This particular day I was really emotional. I think Will and I had argued over something or other, I can't even remember what it was now. I had run and run down this path until I arrived at this stream. I felt so thirsty, after all the crying. As I bent over the water and took a drink, my eyes glowed back at me. I will never forget that moment. It changed everything."

"I remember how you came home crying, not understanding anything. I felt so helpless at that moment, as nothing I said consoled you." Hunith said, sadly. "It was in those moments when I missed your father the most. Balinor would have known what to say. He would have been able to explain so much better than I ever could."

"It doesn't matter now. I actually think it made me stronger in the long run. I realised nothing I would go through, would ever seem more life-changing than that moment. This place became my little hideaway, the place where I would come to practice my skills." Merlin explained, sitting down on a log.

His mother joined him, holding onto his arm.

"How did you meet my father?" Merlin asked feeling suddenly excited.

"It was Gaius who knew him first. Gaius was an old family friend of my father's. Your Grandfather was an admirer of magic. He spent much of his time in the company of sorcerers, the Druids and healers. He spoke of Balinor, I think he'd met him, through Gaius when he had travelled to Camelot." Hunith began.

"Balinor was living in the Darkling Woods then, passing through various places, healing when he was asked by the village elders. It was the way of life back then, but then one day the purge began and everything we knew changed with it. He came from a family of Dragonlords, who could trace their ancestry back generations."

"When did he come to Ealdor?" Merlin asked.

"Very shortly after the purge began, once the dragon had been captured, Gaius was trying to persuade him to leave. But at first, he wouldn't go at all. Gaius sent a message to my father and asked if we'd put him up, my father agreed straight away. But he was such a sad man when he first arrived in Ealdor. I spent endless time just trying to get a simple smile from him. When he smiled it never showed in his eyes. But I continued to try and eventually I received one. It was worth waiting for it lit up his entire face." Hunith smiled. "After that moment he began to talk to me before we knew it we were in love."

Merlin smiled. "What did he say about his magic?"

"It was hard for me to understand, not having magic. He always spoke with such certainty. It was as if he had knowledge far beyond anyone else. Whenever I asked a question he could always give me an answer. No matter what subject, he was such a wise man. He would show me his skills, turn leaves different colours, bring me a rose out of thin air." Hunith laughed, "But most of all it was his heart that enthralled me. He was such an honest and decent man. But, the incident with Uther had left him really deeply upset."

"He was still angry when I first met him. To begin with he refused to help us at all." Merlin said, quietly.
"Your father could be a stubborn man," Hunith admitted, with a smile. "But in his heart, he was a fair and just one. I knew there were many things he didn't tell me. I probably learnt more about him on his last night, than our entire time together. That was when he said he could speak to Dragons. That was such a strange moment for me. I never knew that Dragonlords even existed. I had heard about sorcerers, Druids, the healers from my father, but nothing about Dragonlords. He had told me they were a very ancient race, and there were not many of them left."

"It was Gaius who told me about my father, he told me he was a Dragonlord but I knew nothing about it, until then. I would go to Kilgharrah for advice. But to me he was a unique thing, I couldn't for one minute believe that any person could actually control him. When my father died he told me with his last breath that I must control Kilgharrah. I was just so numb by his loss, but most of all with the fear that I couldn't live up to my father's last wish."

"But you did my sweet son. I am so proud of you. I know he is still looking down on us now. My biggest regret was not being able to tell him about you, on that happy day you came into the world. But I am so thankful that you at least were able to meet him."

"I feel so at peace when I am here." Merlin smiled looking around him, "I always think that this is the place I am most at home in."

"You sound like your father now. He always talked about the forest, nature, everything which made the world what it was. He used to say he only truly came alive when he could feel the wind on his face and the rain on his skin. Being kept indoors was like a prison to him. He would pace up and down endlessly. In the end I would beg him to tell me, something else about magic."

"I remember the old book we had, which you would read to me from when I was younger. Was that from him?" Merlin asked, remembering the little-bound book with a unicorn on the cover.

"Yes, it was. He left me other things as well. I think you should have them now." Hunith said, with a sad smile.

"No, I don't want to take anything from you that is from him. You sacrificed quite enough already." Merlin said, "He'd want you to have them."

"Some of those things would be of better use to you than me. I have all the mementoes of Balinor than I could ever need, most of all you."

Merlin smiled sadly at her. He then remembered something she had just said. "What did you mean that some of those things would be more useful for me?"

"Let's go home, it is getting chilly then I can show you what I mean." Hunith smiled, grabbing hold of his hand.

Merlin enjoyed himself on the walk back to Ealdor as his mother chatted away about old times. They laughed at memories of their time together, and of Will but mostly of the man who now, seemed a living person to both of them. Never before had Merlin felt closer to his father. For so long he had been an invisible force, that Merlin had barely been able to mention.

But now he was something real to him, he just wished he could have one more moment with him, having got to know more about him. There were still so many questions he wanted to ask but knew his mother couldn't tell him much more.

"Mother, do you think Gaius will be able to tell me more about him?" he asked.

"I know he will, he has promised me he will answer any question you ask," Hunith assured him.
By now they had reached the hut, and Merlin could sense his mother seemed to be on a mission. He sat down and waited to see what she came back with. He was amazed to think, that these treasures had remained with them, throughout his childhood, yet Merlin had known nothing about them. His curiosity increased, when Hunith came back with a brown box.

"Here we are." She smiled, caressing the top of the lid. "I was always aware that one day I would give these items to you. But I knew the timing had to be right."

Merlin nodded and watched impatiently as his mother opened the box. What he saw took his breath away.

"That is a Grimoire. Gaius gave me one when I first arrived in Camelot. I learnt so much from it." Merlin said, picking it up in excitement.

"It is not an ordinary one Merlin, this is one which is unique to Dragonlords. It was passed down to your father, from his own. He said to me this is the only one of its kind, so you must take great care of it."

"Dragonlords?" Merlin breathed in wonder. He had never seen such a book before, it fascinated him, it seemed to be a different language to the one in the magic book, Gaius had given him. He flicked through the book quickly trying to read every page. But then realised his mother had picked up something else. He stared at the stone intently. He had seen Gaius use one before.

"Is that a healing stone?" Merlin asked, taking it from his mother. The stone was small but Merlin could feel some power from it. It changed colour as he touched it, the softness calming him somehow.

"Your father used it many a time, Gaius often writes about how he wishes you'd take an interest in healing, I thought this may persuade you." Hunith smiled.

Merlin laughed, "I can feel its power, it's very interesting. Maybe once I have stopped reading the Dragonlord Grimoire I may try it."

There was one other object in the box that caught Merlin's attention. A little ring with the sign of the old religion on it. It reminded him of the ring that Gili had used in the tournament against Uther.

"This was your father's dearest possession, it was given to him by his father. It was said to be in their family for generations. It can give extra powers if you learn to control it. I think there is something in the Grimoire about it, I remember reading about it one day."

"I've seen something similar before," Merlin admitted, picking it up and looking at it closely. "These things are amazing, thank you so much for giving them to me. I promise I will look after them."

"I know you will. There is one other thing, but that lies in Camelot. I have asked Gaius to give it to you when you return." Hunith said, looking very serious.

"What is it?" Merlin asked, trying to imagine what it could be but one look at his mother told him he'd have to wait, to find out.

"I think Gaius is better telling you about that, but I know your father would want you to have it. Think about me, when you receive it." Hunith said, tears glistening in her eyes.

Merlin hugged his mother. The rest of the evening he was impatient to get to bed so that he could read the Grimoire. A thought had suddenly occurred to him. In receiving the Dragonlord book, could there be a way of returning Aithusa's lost voice in its ancient pages? It would certainly be appropriate.
he realised if a book owned by his father would enable the dragon to talk once more. A direct possession that connected father to son and allowed the last remaining dragon to become her true self once again.

This was one piece of fate that made Merlin uncontrollably happy. Suddenly he couldn't wait to investigate. He remembered the words Kilgharrah had once spoken, about a white dragon being lucky for Albion and its future. Maybe now he could put that to the test. If at least Aithusa was returned to normality then not everything would have ended in vain. He gave a quiet thank you to his lost father, hoping that in this one act he could repay his father's memory.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

More revelations between Gaius and Arthur. As Arthur discovers more truths about Camelot's past it conflicts with his own feelings over his Kingdom, in its present state. For the first time, he considers he must face a new reality if Albion is to become a reality.

It was early next morning when Arthur, Guinevere and Gaius met again. There had briefly been a delay while Arthur was forced to sort out an argument with Lord Oakes; who was demanding to know what was going on with the “situation”. It annoyed Arthur that the old man couldn’t even mention, Merlin by name. Arthur dealt with the matter with ruthless efficiency, determined that nothing would get in the way, and further delay the process.

By the time the three of them was settled around the table and Guinevere had poured each of them a drink, Arthur forged ahead knowing there was still a lot to get through.

“I have a difficult matter to come onto now Gaius, but I don’t feel I can ignore it.” Arthur said, quietly.

“What is it Arthur?” Gaius asked, a slight tremor in his voice.

“I mean Morgana. I know towards the end she was lost to us all, but she was still my sister. I feel I still need to know and understand what turned her into the person she became. We all know she wasn’t always the enemy of Camelot.”

“No, indeed not Arthur.” Gaius agreed.

Arthur could read the unease on Gaius’s face, he suddenly remembered something Merlin had said to him. “When I was on a quest I mentioned to Merlin how I wished I could have done more to help her. He said to me that others were better placed too. Do you know what he meant by that? I realise you cannot answer for Merlin, but any information would be appreciated.”

“I suspected Morgana had magic, when she was quite young. At the time she was suffering from nightmares. I would give her nightly potions to try and calm her, but sometimes they sadly didn’t help her.”

“You said you suspected she had magic. What made you think that?” Arthur asked, intrigued.

“Have you heard of a seer?” Gaius asked,

“Is that someone who can see the future?” Guinevere cut in.

“Yes, that’s exactly what it is. When Morgana had some of her nightmares, she would tell me about them. Some of those nightmares actually came true. You remember when you met the girl called Sophia the one you eloped with?” Gaius asked,

“Eloped with?” Guinevere gasped, “I never knew that.”
Arthur blushed, “Something I’ve forgotten about to be honest.” He stammered,

“Well, two nights before Sophia arrived in Camelot, Morgana had a nightmare about a girl trying to drown you. The girl she saw was none other than Sophia. It was that incident which convinced me that my suspicions were correct. Obviously couldn’t tell your father about what I thought. So, I elected to try and look after her as best I could. Things became worse for her over time, the nightmares becoming worse and more extreme. If you remember one day she went to the Druids.”

“I thought the Druids kidnapped her.” Arthur argued.

“In actual fact they did not. Merlin wanted to help Morgana, but I worried that Merlin becoming involved would expose him. So, I told him to let me handle it. But then Morgana came into these very quarters extremely upset one night. Merlin used his initiative and told her about the Druids and how they might be able to help her.”

“I see.” Arthur said, feeling suddenly deflated as he remembered the scene of carnage around the Druids camp, as he and his men rescued his sister. Uther had told Arthur to take no prisoners, which is exactly what he did. Even now, he could recall the terrified faces of the people they’d mowed down and killed. It was not an episode that he was proud of even back then, now he felt ten times worse. Would the lying ever have an end he wondered sadly?

“The Druids confirmed to her that she did have magic. When she came back she seemed a lot more settled, as if she had just accepted it. We just continued to keep an eye on her at that time.” Gaius continued.

“Then what?” Arthur asked, “What made her go so fanatical?”

“It started to go away from us when Morgause came on the scene. I think it’s true to say they had an immediate connection to one another.” Gaius admitted.

“I remember the day Morgause arrived to fight the duel,” Guinevere interrupted, “Morgana said that she felt she knew Morgause. But when I asked her how she just closed up again.”

“Morgause would have known that Morgana was her sister.” Arthur said, his finger drumming the table.

“Yes indeed. Not only that but Morgause gave her a healing bracelet, which was how I found out about Morgause coming from the House of Gorlois. The bracelet stopped Morgana’s nightmares overnight. She never needed any potion again.”

“It must have been a scary moment for my father as well.” Arthur said, as he once again remembered the meeting with his mother and how Morgause engineered Arthur’s meeting with his dead mother.

“Yes, it was indeed, he suspected then that Morgause knew about the circumstances of your birth. I suppose to an extent, Morgana was always going to go away from us. She became more actively against Uther’s way of handling magical problems. Morgause naturally, was only too happy of course, to persuade her to step away from Camelot. She used her influence to drive a wedge between Morgana and your father.”

“I remember she would always try and stand up for anyone who was being hunted down by my father. I used to wonder what had caused the change of heart. I suppose as you say, once she met Morgause, everything that followed was inevitable. I still wish I could have done something more though.” Arthur admitted, “she must have felt quite alone at times.”

“Yes, she did. It was the same for Merlin too, his main motivation in trying to help Morgana was to
understand how isolated it could be when you had magic.”

“I never really gave that much thought, I can understand it now.” Arthur admitted, “I suppose you did the right thing in not telling my father. I doubt he would have understood.”

“It would have complicated things certainly. Uther found it hard to think with any compassion over any magical issue. People do not become sorcerers by choice, they are born with the gifts, they have little choice in the matter.” Gaius explained.

“It was such a shock to me when she took over Camelot that first time. It came out of the blue, I didn’t even suspect her. Nothing could have prepared me for that moment. When did you know she was my father’s child?” Arthur asked, suddenly curious to fit that piece of the puzzle together.

There was a pause before Gaius began his explanation. Arthur sensed he was trying to find the best way to explain it, and he immediately tensed thinking there was a sinister reason for it.

“If you remember your sister fell down the stairs and was knocked out, her cranium broken. At the time I was treating her, your father would pop in and sit by her bedside. When she was showing no sign of coming around he begged me to find a way to cure her. I assured him I was doing everything I could, but he was very insistent about me doing something, anything. Eventually he pointed at my books and said there must be something in one of those that would her bring her around.”

“Wait a minute, are you saying my father asked you to use magic to cure Morgana?” Arthur asked, disbelief in his face, he saw Guinevere too shared his shock.

“Yes, he did. He mentioned the old religion there was no doubt about that. I tried to reason with him about doing it, but he was determined. It was then that he told me about Morgana being his and Vivien’s daughter. Suddenly I understood why all those years he had such a special relationship with her.”

“I can’t believe that he would actually do that.” Arthur said, looking down at his hands. Was there no end to his father’s treachery he wondered?

“Arthur, before you become too upset,” Guinevere said quietly, “you remember when your father had been stabbed? You, yourself wanted to use magic to cure him, I remember you telling me about it. At first, I was horrified, but then you pointed out that not all people who had magic were bad. In such situations I can understand why both your father and you were prepared to go to those extreme lengths. When it’s someone you love it changes everything.”

“I’m as big a hypocrite as he is then.” Arthur said, feeling very confused but having to admit that his wife had valid point. It was no good just condemning his own father, when he’d done the same. They were both guilty of using magic when it suited them.

He closed his eyes for a few seconds if only to see off the doubt which clouded his mind once more. Whichever way he turned there was hypocrisy and deceit hidden everywhere. It sometimes felt as if the Kingdom was made from it. Was there actually any truth at all within the walls of the place he called home? All of a sudden, he wondered which way to go next. It seemed every way was blighted with some sort of conflicting emotions.

“Did you know the old sorcerer that tried to heal my father?” Arthur asked, waiting for Gaius to answer. When no immediate reply came Arthur looked up and could see the conflict on the old man’s face.

“Gaius?” Arthur asked once again,
“Well, Arthur,” Gaius began differing on his chair.

Arthur stole another look at him, when suddenly a thought came to him. “Hang on a second, it was Merlin wasn’t it?”

There was another pause, Arthur looked over at Gaius and raised an eyebrow knowing the answer was written all over the old man’s face.

“I knew it.” Arthur admitted, “especially the way it turned out it had to be Merlin.”

“When it became known that you wanted to use magic on Uther, he was so excited. He was sure if he managed to heal your father, then he felt that you would see magic in a different light. I knew though it was fraught with complications and tried to talk him out of it. But he was so keen to at least try.”

“I couldn’t believe it when my father came around that night, it was like getting a second chance with him. Why didn’t it work Gaius?”

“He had a cursed necklace around his neck, Morgana had put a reverse spell on it. I believe Agravaine put it on Uther.”

“Agravaine, of course.” Arthur muttered, angrily. “When I look back on that night I remember how Merlin seemed so emotional somehow. I thought he was just being respectful to me.”

“He was devastated Arthur and he thought with Uther’s death any chance of you viewing magic differently would disappear. Though of course there were some successes.”

“Like what?” Arthur asked,

“When your now wife was framed for enchanting you and Uther imprisoned her.” Gaius explained, “It was the first time Merlin had tried the ageing spell, I thought he was mad as that spell could easily have been exposed. But he was determined to save Guinevere from execution. So, he came up with the idea of planting another magical poultice and doing it in front of you.”

Arthur suddenly smiled, “I thought there was something strangely familiar in the eyes when I first saw the old man. I couldn’t put my finger on who it reminded me off though.”

“He could have been killed,” Guinevere gasped,

“Well there was potion he was supposed to be able to drink and he would turn back into his normal self. Only the potion didn’t work and instead Arthur caught him.”

“He saved my life.” Guinevere replied, looking stunned. “I suspect he has done that quite a bit.”

“Yes,” Gaius replied, “he has saved my life too in fact everyone’s. We all owe him a lot.”

“I have been so wrong about everything.” Arthur said, stretching his hands out on the table. “I always thought the Camelot I ruled was a decent and fair Kingdom. But now, I realise I have been deceiving myself.”

“You have done your best Arthur. You are a good ruler, a decent man and a lot nobler than a lot of other Kings.” Gaius assured, him.

“But we’re living a lie here. How can I be the man to lead Albion if I can’t take all my people with me? To unite the land, I have to unify my own people and I haven’t done that.”
“No Kingdom is beyond fault Arthur. Time and situations change, which means that things can alter very quickly. What one day appears right, can suddenly in another time be very wrong. But no change can happen overnight. I advise you to think very carefully how you go from this day forward. It has far reaching consequences for all sorts of reasons.”

“You are right of course Gaius.” Arthur admitted. “I want to thank you for everything you have said, I know it’s been painful for you. But I bear no malice on any of it. This has made me realise we have all done things wrong, in one way or another. It is what we do to put it right which matters now.”

“Indeed. Although it has been difficult I stand a little less conflicted today for admitting certain things. It has always been an honour to serve your family I want to make that clear. I hope that you and Merlin are able to sort everything out.”

“That will be the next step, I at least feel ready to take it now. We need to bring him back here. One last thing Gaius, what is your true opinion on magic? I mean can it be controlled?”

“Well, it wasn’t too bad before the purge Arthur. I’m not saying there were not problems from time to time. People can allow their magic to corrupt them, it was something I was always warning Merlin about. But with the right control in place and with the right people involved, it can be put into practice. But it won’t be without challenges, especially with some of your father older allies.”

Thank you, Gaius, for your honesty and guidance, throughout my life. I have a lot of things to consider now. I think we have kept you long enough.”

Arthur stood up giving his hand to Guinevere. Guinevere bent over towards Gaius and kissed him on the cheek. “Sleep well Gaius, I will see you tomorrow.” She said.

“Thank you, Guinevere. If there is anything else I can do Arthur, you only have to ask.” Gaius assured him.

“I think for now you’ve done all you can. It is up to Merlin and I to have a conversation. Just try to persuade him to be open with me.” Arthur said, with a slight ironic smile.

“I will do, don’t worry. Have a good night both of you.” Gaius said.

As Arthur accompanied his wife back to their quarters he was suddenly confused as to how to approach things next. Getting Merlin back to Camelot would be the easy part, but how should he proceed from there. He already knew getting Merlin to open up was not easy, at times it felt as if he had the weight of the world, on his shoulders. Somehow, he had to make him realise that now was an opportunity for him, to be open in a way that he’d never been able to before. He suddenly had an idea.

“Is it okay if you I see back in our room later. I would like to speak to Lancelot.” Arthur said.

“Of course, I will see you later, don’t be too late.” Guinevere said, squeezing his hand.

“I won’t be, thank you for facing this with me.” He said, kissing her hand.

“I was really proud of how you handled everything. I know you will get there Arthur.” She smiled.

“At least I know more about the truth, now I have to convince Merlin to be as open.” Arthur started walking towards the court yard when he saw Lancelot coming towards him.
“Lancelot, I was just searching for you. Can I have a word with you please?” Arthur asked.

“Of course, sire.” Lancelot followed Arthur down another corridor into a secluded room. “No problem is there?”

“No, no new problem just the old one. I have learnt a great deal about all manner of things. Not least how Camelot was before my father came onto the throne. But I want to ask you a pacific question if I may?” Arthur said, looking at the Knight intently.

“Merlin?” Lancelot remarked.

“Yes Merlin, indeed. When I first learnt about you keeping his secret, I admit I was a bit disappointed. But the more I go into things, the more I understand why it happened. The way life changed for those who had magic was so sudden, brutal even, that it’s little wonder that secrecy became a way of life for so many.”

“You know I have a conversation with Merlin once. I asked him if he would ever tell you about his magic.” Lancelot explained.

“What did he say?” Arthur asked, intrigued.

“That he would like to, but he didn’t think it would happen. But despite that he was prepared to deny his own self, to continue to serve you.”

“Why, Lancelot?” Arthur replied, flummoxed. “Why does he give me so much loyalty with everything that has happened to his kind?”

“Because he believes in you sire, surely you see that. He’d always say to me, that you will build a different world, a better one.” Lancelot replied. “I can’t give you every answer that is a conversation you both need to have together.”

There was a brief silence between them, as Arthur attempted to take in what Lancelot had just said. It was nothing he hadn’t heard others tell him, so in that case it was nothing new. But still the answer of Merlin’s almost blind loyalty to him hindered Arthur’s understanding of the situation.

He was still no nearer to finding the answer he craved. But at least he knew the path now that he had to take. When Lancelot coughed, Arthur remembered the Knight was still with him.

“Sorry Lancelot. Thank you for being open about everything. I appreciate that, from now on I want honesty between everyone in Camelot. The secrets need to become a thing of the past.” Arthur said, shuffling some papers on the desk.

“I’m glad I’ve been of assistance.” Lancelot said, walking to the door.

Suddenly realising he hadn’t left the room, Arthur looked up. He sensed that something was on the Knight’s mind.

“Is there something else Lancelot?” Arthur asked.

“It’s probably not my place to say this, sire.” Lancelot hesitated.

“What have I just said about not keeping secrets? Speak your mind Lancelot.” Arthur encouraged.

“Thank you, sire.” Lancelot replied, “It is just I fear Merlin is always content to be in the background and let everyone else take the credit. When you speak to him, you need to convince him that he too is important, he has made so many sacrifices and saved us all on many occasions. It’s almost become a
matter of habit for him, to dismiss his own needs. In fact, do you remember the Griffin that attacked Camelot?"

Arthur shuddered inwardly, as he recalled the huge winged magical creature with its powerful talons and beak.

Lancelot continued, “It was Merlin’s magic that ultimately killed the creature that night. Yet he was prepared to allow me to take the credit for bringing him down. I couldn’t do that that, my conscience wouldn’t allow it. But I obviously couldn’t tell you at the time about Merlin’s magic. I can say now though. So, you see another example of Merlin’s service to Camelot.”

Arthur nodded, “Thank you once again Lancelot. You are a true friend and an honest man. I need you to do me a favour.”

“Anything sire.” Lancelot replied.

“I think Merlin and I need to talk properly this time, I would like you to take a couple of Knights and bring him back to Camelot. As discreetly as possible, I don’t want Lord Oakes getting wind of it for now.”

“Of course, it will be my pleasure.” Lancelot nodded, “I am sure you will both sort this out sire.”

“Thank you, Lancelot, get an early night.”

When the door closed, Arthur pondered everything he had learnt over the last few weeks. Many had spoken about Merlin’s service and personality, except the man himself. As Lancelot noted, Merlin always seemed to downplay his own part in things. Arthur knew his next job was to connect with the real Merlin, not the one that bolstered the self-confidence of the King. To get a real understanding of Merlin, he knew he must have the conversation he should have had from the beginning. He now realised the grave disservice he had done to his former friend. In his own mind, he knew he must right that wrong.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Merlin is summoned back to Camelot, a happy reunion and Arthur comes to understand more about Morgana's journey into her isolation.

Ealdor

Merlin had spent a few happy days in Ealdor reliving his past. He revisited old haunts from his childhood, paid a call on some people he remembered with fondness. For the most part, he had been welcomed back to his old home. Inevitably rumours of his and Arthur’s problems had rippled back to his home village, but he put a brave face on it when asked. In truth he found not thinking about it helped him keep a positive outlook.

But naturally his thoughts would meander back to Camelot taking him unawares. He knew a day would come when he was summoned back there, who knew when or what the outcome would be. Being away from there at least allowed him perspective of everything he had been through.

As he made his way through some pretty bushes on his way to one of his favourite places, he thought back to what his mother had said about his father. He wondered if they had ever walked this very path together, before Uther’s vengeance forced his father into a very different life. The forest had always retained the spirit of sanctuary that Merlin had remembered from his earlier years. This wood had always been a place of comfort for him.

He had always felt his magic best when in a natural surrounding, where he could feel the life buzzing in and out of his senses. As he crouched on the ground he pulled at a wildflower, which had lost some of its petals. The flower was a robust pink, daisy like in appearance but with a faint scent. He closed his hands over the delicate flower and whispered, “Haelan blostma,” He then watched with wonder, as the flower reformed in his hand. It always seemed amazing to him how doing something as simple as that, always moved him. He stared at it intensely, until a voice broke the silence of the wood.

“That is very good Merlin, but will it help us get back to Camelot?”

Merlin whirled around and smiled as Lancelot came walking towards him a grin on his face.

“Lancelot, it’s good to see you,” Merlin smiled back. “What are you doing here?”

“I have my orders to escort you back to Camelot. Arthur thought sending me may persuade you to stop running in the other direction,” Lancelot said, sitting down next to him.

“I have been waiting for this moment, in fact I was thinking about it moments ago. Funny how you should have arrived at this very time,” Merlin said, “Not too bad a journey I hope?”

“One of the horses got lame so we had to stop and pick up another one, besides that it was pretty trouble-free. Are you ready to come back?” Lancelot asked,

“As much as I’m ever going to be,” Merlin replied, feeling more tense than he realised. Suddenly he was aware of a knot in his stomach. He quickly looked away.
Lancelot caught hold of his arm, “It will be all right Merlin. You will find changes back in Camelot,”

“Changes? What do you mean?” Merlin asked, intrigued.

“Let’s get on the road, your mother is packing your things we need to set off as soon as possible. I will fill you in with the details then,” Lancelot jumped on to his feet.

Merlin allowed the Knight to pull him up. He took a last brief look at his old haunt, before following the Knight down the path and back to the village.

“How did my mother take the news?” Merlin asked, as he ran to catch up with his friend.

“Like someone who knew the moment would come, but didn’t want to believe it. She is going to put some stew on for us, so you’ll get the chance to say goodbye properly I promise,” Lancelot said, a sad smile on his face. “I know it will be hard to say goodbye, but hopefully there will be happier times ahead for all of us,”

“I hope so, it only seems like yesterday that I left Camelot,” Merlin mused, “I think I must have lost some time along the way,”

“You have been missed my friend, I can tell you,” Lancelot said, “Gwaine sends his regards,”

“How is he? I hope he’s stayed out of mischief,” Merlin grinned, pushing a branch back.

“You know Gwaine, when is he not in mischief of some sort?”

Merlin laughed, running down the path as a familiar whiff of his mother’s stew flew into his nostrils. He knew despite everything he would miss her, more than that he worried about how much slower she appeared. In his dreams he had hoped he’d be able to bring her to Camelot, so he could keep an eye on her more. But now he wondered whether even he’d be in Camelot, never mind his mother. He sighed with unease, at what lay ahead. Lancelot’s earlier words about change had for some reason made him slightly concerned. But he knew for now he needed to give his mother his undivided attention.

Camelot

Gaius had just left the old meeting room, where he’d had a few words with Lord Blake, when he suddenly came face to face with Lord Oakes. One look at his face told Gaius, everything he needed to know. There was about to be a scene.

“Lord Oakes, you are well?” Gaius asked, trying to stay calm and polite.

“Let’s dispense with the pleasantries and get to the point, Gaius. There are rumours that Lord Blake, has been appointed into looking at the possibility of magic returning to the Kingdom. Am I to presume that you too are part of it?” Lord Oakes barked.

“I really don’t know what you are talking about. I have been asked to take on more patients, I can assure you magic was not even mentioned in that conversation,” Gaius assured him, trying to move away.

“So, the King has even you lying to the Council now then?” Lord Oakes replied, his voice rising in anger.
“King Arthur has not been asking anything of me which can be construed of misleading the Council, now good day Lord Oakes I have things to do,” Gaius insisted.

“Now you are running away.” Lord Oakes called after him, “I will be having words with the other Lords,” Lord Oakes walked around the corner and straight into an angry looking Arthur.

“What is the meaning of this Lord Oakes?” Arthur asked, “You will not harass other Council members in the corridor. If you have a problem you come to me,”

“I have heard that – “Lord Oakes began, raising his voice once small.

“Lord Oakes, I don’t believe you are listening to my words. I will not discuss any Council matter in the corridors. If you have a problem follow me and we will talk in private,” Arthur by now was seething, and walked down into the room where he and Merlin had shared their earlier meetings. “Sit down please,”

Once Lord Oakes had sat down, Arthur leaned forward making sure he was looking into the Lord’s face, hoping that way there would be no room for misunderstandings.

“I suggest you say what’s on your mind,” Arthur prompted, sitting back but keeping his eyes on Lord Oakes face.

“There are rumours of secret meetings going on, one of the other Lords suggested that magic had been discussed at one. I am anxious to find out whether this is true,”

“To answer your question, no it’s not true. We have had a smaller meeting involving other Lords, where the subject of magic was mentioned in a general sense, but there have been no talks about bringing it back to Camelot. I suggest you stop worrying about rumours and start concerning yourself with the duties you have been given. I will not have gossip spread about any of the other Lords, otherwise there will be serious consequences,”

“If you want everyone to pull in the same direction sire, I suggest you stop keeping secrets. Such things never bring any good your father knew that, and if he could hear what’s being said, he would be very disappointed in your behaviour,”

“That is enough Lord Oakes. I warned you before about bringing my father into this. I am King now, I will rule this land the way I see fit and not be threatened by people such as yourself. Do this again and I will immediately free you from your duties. Now good day, Lord Oakley,” Arthur stood up, making it clear the conversation was at an end.

Lord Oakley pushed his chair back, and didn’t look back, slamming the door on his exit. Arthur hit the desk in annoyance throwing himself back onto his chair in frustration. He noticed the door open, as Guinevere came through it.

“So, it was true then,” She said, looking as frustrated as her husband.

“Yes, somehow the news has got out, not what we need at this moment in time,” Arthur said, yawning.

“But how could it have happened?” Guinevere wondered, “we’ve been so careful at who we’ve told,”

“True, I have made a decision I am going to meet Merlin outside of Camelot. Doesn’t one of Gaius’s friends have a place out in the woods?” Arthur asked,
“Yes, I believe he does. It is not the most luxurious place, from what I remember though.” Guinevere admitted.

“That doesn’t matter, I just feel this meeting needs to be done out of the way, away from the gossiping of certain Lords. Can you cope with the Lords if we go away for a few days? We can come up with some story to cover our disappearance,”

“It won’t stop the gossip’s,” His wife pointed out, “But yes, I think I can handle it okay. I will have Lord Blake for support,”

“Good, I think its for the best. It will be hard enough to get Merlin to be open without having all this surrounding us as well,” Arthur admitted, “I will get Leon to meet Lancelot and Merlin, and take them to the place concerned,”

“I will go and have a word with Lord Blake then and get our cover stories straight,” Guinevere smiled.

“Before you go.” Arthur walked over to his wife, pulling her into a hug. “Why does everything have to go so wrong?”

“People can’t help themselves, we always knew Lord Oakes would be a problem. He may have to be dealt with, I can’t ever see him coming around,” Guinevere replied, kissing Arthur’s cheek.

“I already have an idea for that Guinevere,” Arthur assured her,

“Oh?” she asked, raising her eyebrow.

“Let’s get this talk with Merlin out of the way, then I will tell everyone,” Arthur promised her.

“When will you leave?” Guinevere asked,

“Later this afternoon, that way we can get settled,” Arthur held the door open for his wife.

She grabbed his hand, “Everything will be fine, you take care of your side and leave us to take care of things here,”

“Thank you, Guinevere. Let’s hope the next time we’re together this whole situation is resolved,”

After sending Leon out to divert Lancelot and Merlin, Arthur went back to his quarters and threw some clothes in his bag. In moments like these, it amused him how now he could deal with his own packing. In the old days, it would be Merlin doing the chore, chattering endlessly as he did so. He realised now how things could change between them. If they did manage to reconcile then there was no way Merlin could go back to his serving days.

It appeared suddenly as if life was coming full circle to the young King. When Lord Oakes had accused him of keeping secrets, Arthur had to admit he was right, but then did he have any choice at this moment in time? For a new Kingdom do come out of the old one, Arthur knew the most vital ingredient would be honesty and truthfulness. To come out into the light, you had to go through the dark, Arthur thought to himself. Now all he had to convince was his old friend, then they could all look forward to better days.

Darkling Woods
The party had stopped off for a break, they had been going for some hours already. Merlin could feel the chill of the late afternoon wind and pulled his jacket tightly around him. He watched Lancelot collecting some firewood in the distance. Merlin relived his goodbye with his mother. She had been saddened to see him go naturally, but had assured him she’d be fine. She may have said the words, but in her eyes, Merlin could see the truth. She had looked heartbroken and unsure, and it unsettled him seriously. They both knew nothing was guaranteed in the future, but Merlin couldn’t stop a feeling of real unease affecting his mind.

Before Merlin had the chance to become too down, Lancelot came back with some firewood. He threw it near Merlin, a little smile on his face.

“I have a feeling you can do something with that?” Lancelot said,

Merlin checked around as to where the other Knights were. He was still nervous about showing his magic to others.

“Merlin, they know about your magic, and we’re all getting cold including you,” Lancelot pointed out.

Shrugging, Merlin put his hand towards the firewood, “Forbaerne,” He was relieved to see no one around seemed to mind, as the fire spread its warmth around the camp. Merlin went and sat down by Lancelot, feeling suddenly exhausted.

“How does it feel, to do magic I mean in public,” Lancelot asked.

“It still seems strange and even now I feel wary over what people think about me. I can’t expect instant acceptance as a sorcerer, after what some of my own kind have done to Camelot,” Merlin explained, “I mean, Arthur,”

“You will find Arthur a different man,” Lancelot interrupted.

“What do you mean?” Merlin asked, tensely.

“I mean in a good way, not a bad one,” Lancelot insisted. “I think the talk with Gaius has opened his mind somewhat,”

Merlin allowed himself a brief smile. “How is he in himself?”

“He seems to be on a mission to learn from the past. Merlin, don’t take this the wrong way,” Lancelot began, “This could be an opportunity for you and you need to grasp it. You need to stop thinking about others and put yourself first for a change. You will never get a better chance than this one,”

“What are you saying?” Merlin breathed, a sudden rush of wonder entering his mind. Was Lancelot suggesting what Merlin suspected he was he wondered. Was Arthur actually talking openly about magic? All at once a huge feeling of elation was waiting to come rushing out, but Merlin checked it in time, wanting to be sure.

“I mean there have been meetings set up where he has talked to some of the older Lords, about Camelot before the purge began. He is anxious that you are honest with him in this moment. He wants to know the full truth and as much information as possible. You could play a huge part in this, if you choose to do so,”

“I see,” Merlin said, the rush gone, but he still felt warm inside.
He had been so worried while he’d been so far away from Camelot, about the situation getting more and more complicated without him being able to explain things. But now it would appear the thing he had most wished for, was all of a sudden beginning to occur. He realised things would still be difficult, that hard conversations still lay ahead of them. But if Arthur really did want to know everything, then he knew he owed it to both himself and the good in his own kind, to tell the full truth.

“So, are you going to be truthful, old friend?” Lancelot asked,

“I think there have been enough lies to last a lifetime,” Merlin admitted, “That being the case, it would appear I have no choice,”

“You are making it sound as if its terrible, Merlin,” Lancelot said, warming his hands.

“There are still some hard conversations to be had Lancelot. So much more to say, sometimes I’m afraid it will all be too much for us,” Merlin said, allowing his fears to be realised.

“I think the two of you are a lot stronger than you both realise. You two are the rock that keeps Camelot upright. Without you, we would all struggle,” Lancelot said, getting up suddenly.

“Thanks, but – “ Merlin stopped, as his friend put his finger to his mouth. Merlin followed Lancelot, suddenly on alert as the other Knights all jumped up, swords at the ready. “What’s wrong?” Merlin whispered,

“I heard horses, we’ve had rumours of bandits hereabouts, stay here while the rest of us go and investigate,” Lancelot bounded off, beckoning to the other Knights to follow him. He was just about to throw his sword up, when Merlin heard a familiar voice up ahead.

“It’s okay Lancelot it’s me,” Leon said, jumping off his horse and going over to his fellow Knight.

“Leon, what are you doing here? There are no problems are there?” Lancelot asked, with alarm.

“Arthur has decided he would like to meet with Merlin away from Camelot. Hello there, Merlin,” Leon smiled, holding out his hand.

“Leon, it’s good to see you. Are you well?” Merlin asked taking his hand, “Is Arthur following on?”

“Yes, he will meet us at this new place.” Leon replied, “In fact, I think we should leave now,”

“What’s this place called?” Lancelot asked,

“Summer Hall, I think Merlin here knows where it is,” Leon suggested.

“Yes, indeed a couple of hours ride away from here,” He said, mounting his horse. “Very basic though,”

“Leon, are you sure there are no problems?” Lancelot asked,

Merlin couldn’t help but notice, the alarm in Lancelot’s voice, and it worried him. He too, had the feeling they hadn’t been told everything. It seemed strange to Merlin to have the conversation away from Camelot, although he felt quite happy to be away from prying eyes. His only regret though, was not being able to see Gaius, as he had so much to ask him about. That though would have to wait, from now on Merlin decided everything would be about speaking frankly with Arthur. Then he could face everything else afterwards.
The ride to Summer Hall was uneventful, the first pangs of darkness had begun, to appear, as they reached the grounds, the old residence of Sir Edgar. Merlin had brief memories of Gaius telling him, that Sir Edgar had been on a magical committee, before the Purge began.

The Knights having escorted Merlin to the Hall, made ready to move away, explaining they had to immediately return to Camelot, leaving Merlin suddenly bemused and alone. What should he do he wondered? He pushed his way through the big iron door, at once shivering at the lack of warmth. For a second he was tempted to warm himself with some magic, but decided to at least go into the main hall first, then he could light the fire.

The Hall had seen better days certainly, but at once Merlin felt it had enjoyed a grand illustrious past. Although bits of the interior hung off in places, pictures of old Lords and Ladies adorned the inside walls. An old picture drew Merlin towards it, as he looked at it closer, he could see a picture of a sorceress in the centre, surrounded by the Lords and Ladies of the day.

At the head of the picture was a young man sitting with his sword by his side, surrounded by Knights and warriors. He appeared to be beckoning to the sorceress, as everyone else looked on. Something about the scene made Merlin wonder if this was actually history being captured. The two important figures seemed relevant in his mind, then it dawned on him.

Did this represent Camelot in the pre-purge days, reliving the moment that magic became an accepted practice in the Kingdom? The two figures had to be a young Uther and Nimueh, the more he stared the more fascinated he became. Never did he think for one moment he would see anything that would have portrayed such a thing. But here it was, in this very old Hall a placed which bellowed out history in every corner of it.

For a minute he wanted nothing more than to explore the rest of the building and see what he could find. But coldness and tiredness prevented him from doing so. Walking into the main hall, he saw a fire and lit it quickly using his magic. He put his rug down in front of it deciding to rest his eyes, but before long he drifted off into a long, restful sleep. When he eventually woke up, he realised he was no longer alone.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

As Merlin and Arthur meet in Summer Hall, the past rapidly becomes a footway to the future. As both men listen to the other, they realise an opportunity for the future of the Five Kingdoms, has begun to be born.

Arthur watched, as Merlin did a double take. For a moment he felt a bit sorry, as Merlin looked stunned and surprised, as if seeing Arthur was the last thing he had expected to see. But eventually Merlin had regained his composure. Arthur decided to lessen the shock by just taking charge.

“Hello Merlin, I apologise if I startled you. Though I’m not sure who else you were expecting?”

“Sorry, it was just a shock to hear your voice after these last weeks apart,” Merlin said, his face Arthur noted, had slightly increased in colour.

“I can understand that,” Arthur conceded, “I hope you had a relaxed time away and Hunith is well,”

“Yes, thank you for asking, she is very well,” Merlin responded, “Though she seems a lot older,”

“A time that comes to us all sadly,” Arthur sympathized.

“You look well,” Merlin said, for the first time a real smile on his face.

“It has been an interesting few weeks,” Arthur admitted, “One in which I have learnt much.” Arthur was suddenly aware of how much they were speaking in polite term and was about to push on, when Merlin intervened.

“Can I ask, there are no problems back in Camelot are there?” Merlin enquired,

Arthur saw once more a frown reappearing on Merlin’s face, as if he was inwardly fretting, Arthur thought it was only fair to reassure him quickly on this point.

“No, there are not any problems as such I just thought it might be an idea to use somewhere away from the pressures of Camelot, for both our sakes,” Arthur implied.

“I have some food in my bag from my mother, would you like something,” Merlin asked.

“No, thank you. I had something on the way here,” Arthur assured him, “But don’t let me stop you, you must be hungry after that sleep,”

Arthur sat down watching Merlin closely. He noticed he seemed very jumpy, as if he wasn’t quite sure how to behave. Arthur hoped that once he had eaten something his nerves too would become less apparent. Suddenly there was a quietness in the room between them, but not an unfriendly one and Arthur began to take interest in his surroundings more closely.

As he looked around the room, Arthur was intrigued by its whole setting. When he had been told about Summer Hall, he realised he’d been expecting an entirely different place to what it actually
was. It was certainly true, it had seen better days. Parts of the decorations on the walls were hanging off, but he could see already, it was a tough impressive castle, one that had been built to withstand war and the passing of time. He had known little about Sir Edgar, but he could well imagine his father being impressed with such a place. A sudden choke from Merlin, reminded Arthur that it was the present, rather than the past which was now the challenge.

On his way over to Summer Hall he had rehearsed over and over, what he had intended to say. He felt setting the right tone was especially important, but other things had to be said first. If he was to reassure his friend, he knew he must relax him so that Merlin felt, he could tell Arthur anything. He could already sense Merlin’s surprise, at Arthur choosing this particular place to meet. Arthur was so glad he had met with Lord Blake, who had suggested Summer Hall as a good place to break the ice. Noticing Merlin was busy closing up his bag he decided to drift back into conversation, once more.

“I imagine you are wondering why I chose this place to meet you,” Arthur asked.

“Yes, I had wondered,” Merlin replied. “Gaius told me it belonged to one of your father’s friends Sir Edgar, he didn’t tell me much else,”

“This is a place of history Merlin. A building which saw an accord brokered. An accord which changed the whole perception of life in Camelot. By the time my father had wrestled control of the Kingdom, he was working in tandem with the sorceress Nimueh. A person, whom we have both had experiences with. Lord Blake claims that within this old house there lies an agreement involving the original accord,”

“But surely it would have been destroyed once the purge happened,” Merlin broke in.

“It seemed there were secrets kept even in my father’s time as King. Sir Edgar had magic in his family, according to Lord Blake. It was something which remained hidden from my father, so they never even thought to come looking here. My father, as you know had a touching faith in the word of his own allies,” Arthur explained, “It wouldn’t even have occurred to him that Sir Edgar, would be hiding anything from him. There is also a picture I believe somewhere in the house,” Arthur said, looking around the wall of the huge room.

“I found it last night when I arrived,” Merlin said, “Do you want to see it?”

“Lead the way,” Arthur replied.

Merlin led Arthur out of the room and into the hallway, as the two men approached it, each was lost in their own thoughts.

“So, it really is the truth,” Arthur said, quietly.

“I was trying to work out what it was about. I think the artist caught your father well on this, I recognised him almost instantly.” Merlin said.

Arthur could hear Merlin talking, but found he couldn’t react to him. Even as he had sat there talking with both Gaius and Lord Blake, a part of him had wondered if everything they’d been saying was true. But as he stood there, looking at his father but yards away from Nimueh, he knew everything they had told him had indeed been the truth. As he stood and contemplated the scene, he understood more than ever, what needed to be done. In that instant he knew some of the wrongs had to be righted, starting from this very moment.

“Let’s go and sit down it is still cold, I will relight the fire again,” Merlin suggested.

Arthur watched Merlin struggling to persuade the fire to light, once more struck by how long his
friend had been forced to hide his skills. “Just use magic, Merlin,” Arthur said, “Why stay colder any
longer than we have too?”

“Okay, thanks,” Merlin murmured.

Instantly the warmth comforted Arthur, though he noticed Merlin seemed reluctant to look straight at
him. He was desperate suddenly to ask why, but in the end asked an entirely different question.

“How does it feel to use magic in front of me?” Arthur asked,

“Very strange,” Merlin admitted.

“Yes, the same for me even now. I always thought of you as rather,” Arthur paused, searching for
the right word to use. Merlin found it for him instead.

“Awkward,”

Arthur suddenly wanted to dismiss the word Merlin had casually tossed his way, as he understood
not the first time, how he had taken him for granted, saying nothing of not seeing just what he was.

“I suppose so, that was my fault for not seeing who you really were,” Arthur allowed, “We need to
get on, but first I feel there are things I need to say to you,”

“I see,” Merlin said,

Arthur looked up worried at his friend’s tone, realising that once more Merlin was expecting the
worst. Not for the first time, he felt crushed by his friend’s demeanour.

“Merlin, you are not in trouble, let me assure you of that.” Arthur began, “I want to thank you for
coming back and agreeing to meet me here. I want you to know, this last month has been a real
journey for me. I used to think that I knew most things about Camelot, but having spoken to Gaius
and Lord Blake, I realised the real Camelot was completely different to this present one.

I want to thank you first of all, for your commitment to both me and to Camelot. I realise now just
what you have done for everyone, especially me. I will always feel sad, that the night you saved my
life, all I could do was turn away from you. You did not deserve that, which brings me on the other
thing, I need to say.”

“Arthur, you don’t have to say anything,” Merlin began, “I know what a shock it must have been for
you, the night I revealed myself. I just wish I had been able to tell you, so it wasn’t so traumatic for
you,”

“Yes, it was a shock for me, but it was no reason to push you away. I can’t pretend that I was
justified to do that, judge you in a way that was both unfair and unjust. I have always thought I was a
man of honour,” Arthur said, feeling the same shame that he felt, the night everything had changed
between them.

“You are a man of honour,” Merlin cut in, “You are one of the fairest men I’ve ever known. You
always treated me with respect which is why I have such belief in you, now more than ever,”

For a moment all Arthur could do was stare at Merlin. The look on Merlin’s face was soft, yet his
words were determined. This was the Merlin that Arthur recognised, the one that appeared whenever
Arthur was having a crisis with his confidence. The man who would always convince Arthur in
those testy moments, that he was on the
right track. He knew now just how much he needed his friend, how without him he would not be the
same person in belief or spirit,

“Thank you, Merlin.” Arthur said, but knew the next bit was the most important for him, to get right. “The more I have learnt off people such as Gaius and Lord Blake, the more I’ve realised that as a Kingdom we have not always acted honourably. No matter how much grief my mother’s death caused my father, he had no right to come down on everyone in the same way. Treating everyone with indiscriminate savagery. That is not what justice is about.

My father was wrong, and by implication I have been wrong also. We have both used magic when it suited us. Yet the greatest crime, was to force people such as yourself into the shadows of our society. I could admit to you that I was hurt, when you couldn’t tell me about your magic. Yet having been on my own journey, I have realised that this Kingdom has made people like you live in fear and isolation. Therefore, I have no right to be upset with you, as I have contributed to your situation and for that I am very sorry. I hope you will accept this apology from both myself and Camelot,”

There was a silence between them for a brief second, Arthur realised there was real emotion in Merlin’s face, much like his own. Saying the words had an immediate positive affect for Arthur, as he felt happier in his own skin. They were words that had been long overdue. He could even feel his own anger and disappointment in his father, feel easier to bear, at least for now. As he gave Merlin a few more minutes, he pressed on.

“I hope that you will still be able to answer some questions that I have. I can assure you that nothing you tell me, will make me think any less of you. I know you have always been a friend to this Kingdom and myself. I really want to know you, Merlin. Not the one that does everything for me, but what it’s been like, to be you. I know this place would not be where it is, if you had not been around. I am pretty sure you hide in some heavy shadows. Now, it’s time to let me share that burden, if you can manage that,” Arthur finished. Now he knew he had done everything he could, he had to support Merlin in what he knew would be his friend’s ultimate nightmare. To step away from the shadows and embrace the light.

As the words had washed over Merlin’s being, he had begun to fight an enormous feeling of emotion. It had started off making his heart beat quicker, he had felt as if the air in the room was being sucked out from around him. There was a moment when he had wanted to gasp out, only his most determined effort to keep it in, had stopped it from happening. He did not want to embarrass himself in such an obvious way.

Yet as the two apologies had come from Arthur, the words of so many others filled his mind. Gaius, Lancelot, his mother, even Guinevere when he had been forced to leave Camelot quickly, they had all spoken of the need for honesty, now he knew that time was essential. He knew the journey Arthur had been on, had been as profound as his own. The only thing that would do now was truth, honesty and the hope that the days could get better for all. But it could only happen if he made himself step out from the shadows, he had always hidden in. There was now no hiding place left, for Arthur, his sake and Camelot’s as well.

“I would like to thank you for those apologies. You know yourself, I would have never have expected them from you, that I would still serve you without them. But now that you have uttered the words, it just confirms what I have always known about you. You are a man of honour, I have always served you with pride and that will never change. I will do everything I can to be honest and help you with anything you want to know. Even if I know, it won’t be easy. You get into a habit of living a certain way. While it always hurt me to deny myself, I don’t regret ever doing it. As I know
in my heart that it was the right thing to do, at the time. That’s not to say I haven’t made mistakes,”

“We’ve all made mistakes Merlin,” Arthur replied, “I certainly have, but I had a friend who I could always talk to. I know you had Gaius, but it can’t have been the same,”

“I would never have made it through without Gaius. I had Lancelot too, but sometimes I know they struggled to comprehend. You cannot get over how lonely it can sometimes be, or how you feel isolated from those around you,”

“Then tell me now,” Arthur prompted,

“I remember when I was trying to help Morgana, when I look back and remember her own isolation, it was like looking back in time,” Merlin admitted, surprised at how easy it was to suddenly let go.

“I know you tried to help her,” Arthur said.

“She kept trying to get me to admit she had magic. Gaius had told me not to get involved. Yet I could see her fear of when magic awakens inside of you. The way it creeps up on you unknowing until something so powerful occurs, that your life no longer makes any sense,”

“What happened the first time you realised you had magic?” Arthur asked.

“I’d been arguing with Will, he had said something I can’t even remember what now. It was trivial but the reaction to it was not. I ran to this stream fell onto my knees, looking into the water and my eyes glowed back at me. I think I had sent a rock flying backwards, it was so shocking. In that moment I didn’t even feel human. When my mother comforted me, she just said I was special. She called it a gift, but to me it felt like a burden,”

“That must have been hard to come to terms with?” Arthur questioned, taking a drink.

“It was initially, but when you are young you can react to things quite naturally. The moment my mother explained what it was, suddenly all I wanted was to explore what I could do with it. I could go to the forest and turn a leaf a different colour. I could make items move across a room, do all sorts of things,” Merlin laughed, “Gaius would have been shocked. The first time I came to Camelot he was forever telling me, magic wasn’t a toy. He was right of course. I learnt that the longer I stayed in Camelot,”

“Can I ask about Morgana, what made her go so crazy? She was so different when I was growing up with her, even now I can’t appreciate just how much she changed,” Arthur frowned.

“It is partly the isolation that does it. I had Gaius to talk out any troubles I had. With Morgana she never had that, Gaius was worried about your father finding out about her magic,” Merlin explained,

“Of course, he would never have understood how it could happen to his child,” Arthur admitted, “Gaius said her mother Vivien had magic,”

“Yes, I think too meeting Morgause also, was a deciding factor. When I first arrived in Camelot and Gaius had told me about Morgana and her abilities I had dreamed, that I would have someone to talk things over with. But of course, it could never be. So, once Morgause arrived on the scene, she gained that kindred spirit, but she also gained her lust for revenge against Camelot. It would be wrong to blame her entirely though, there is something that I need to confess,” Merlin murmured suddenly reluctant to look Arthur in the face.

“Oh?”
“If you remember the Knights of Midhir attacked Camelot that time, leaving everyone asleep. Well, everyone except Morgana. From the moment I realised she was awake, I knew there had to be a reason for it. Morgause had used your sister as a vessel to make the spell last. Not knowing what to do I visited Kilgarrah. He explained to me that I would have to kill Morgana, in order for the spell to be broken. It was devastating to hear those words, I insisted there had to be another way. But he was adamant. For the spell to be broken the vessel had to be destroyed, that could only happen if I killed your sister,” Merlin hardly dared, to look at Arthur, but in the end knew he had too. He could see shock there, but also could see the King trying to be calm.

“So, what happened?” Arthur suggested.

“In the end I took some poison and put it in the water skin, which she drank from. I can’t even begin to explain how I felt as she trustingly took the water from me. I held her in my arms as it started to affect her, but then she began to struggle as she realised what had happened,”

“But, she survived somehow?” Arthur prompted.

“In the end I made a bargain with Morgause. If she stopped the Knights, I would give her the bottle, so she could cure Morgana. That’s when she took Morgana away with her,”

“That must have been difficult, god Merlin how did you cope with it afterwards?”

“It was one of the hardest things I’d ever experienced. I knew after that Morgana would be a risk to us all. I felt totally responsible for it all. Also, I knew how everyone missed her too. I wished with all my heart I could have said something. I felt as if my spirit was being crushed out of me at that stage. Only Gaius knew, I couldn’t even tell Lancelot,” Merlin said. “I just wish I could have been there for her, in the beginning,”

Arthur said, “You are not alone in feeling you could have done more. I feel bad, I know Gaius does, even Guinevere feels she could have done more. You need to stop blaming it just on yourself. But even saying all of that, the choices Morgana made were her own in the end. You never turned out the way she did, even though you could have,”

“I had a destiny and a good teacher in Gaius, with a good friend to lead me through all the rocky times. Somehow, we have to come to terms with how Morgana turned out, for all our sakes,” Merlin said, feeling glum and somewhat deflated.

“We need to come to terms with a few more things,” Arthur suggested, “But first I need to show you something,”

Merlin looked up surprised, then followed Arthur through into the Hallway and they began climbing the old creaky stairs. Merlin wondered where they were going, the stairs seemed to go on forever, making him gasp for breath. Eventually having arrived at the top, Arthur paused. Merlin was relieved to take a breath. He waited until Arthur had come to a decision then followed him down a corridor and up yet more steps.

Arthur walked passed two more rooms, before stopping and taking a key out of his pocket. He unlocked the door and opened it and they both stepped inside the room. As Merlin looked around it, amazement came over him. He sucked on his breath as looked at the magical crystals, the various books and artefacts that littered a big table, in the centre of the room.

“It seems Lord Blake was right. He told me about this room, feel free to have a look around. You can see if there is anything of interest,” Arthur suggested.
Merlin felt like a kid at Christmas, so much to look at and explore. He felt intrigued about many of the old books which lay scattered around. He picked one up, mesmerised by the secrets within it. He looked up and noticed Arthur apparently searching for something. He went over to him.

“Are you looking for something in particular?” Merlin asked,

Arthur pointed ahead, “I think this is it, now let’s see if the key I have fits it,”

Merlin moved over to see Arthur was unlocking a little box which had been half hidden underneath an old cupboard. The box was plain and brown with smudges over the top of it. But eventually Arthur prised it open and then began taking out the items inside it.

First off was an old quill, which almost disintegrated underneath his touch. There were various other items all of which seemed to be of little interest to him. Merlin felt more than ever, that he was looking for something in particular. He waited with bated breath, until he saw the King smiling.

“I believe I have found what I’ve been looking for,” Arthur said,

Merlin watched as the young King, unfurled a piece of parchment as Merlin read it, he almost fell to the floor.

“Lord Blake told me this old accord existed, that it had been hidden away in Sir Edgar’s castle. I think we both need to look at this together,"

“Arthur, what are you saying?” Merlin asked, he could feel butterflies fluttering inside him.

“You always talk about me being the man to unite the Five Kingdom Merlin. But how do I become this man when even my own Kingdom is not united. For years we have discriminated against your kind, without any reason, for the most part. I can only become this man when I face the prospect of accepting that magic users, should have the same rights as our other citizens. I would suggest we start by looking over this accord. If our forebearers once managed to work together, there should be no reason why we cannot also find a similar way,”

“How is this going to go down in Camelot?” Merlin asked, his excitement growing by the minute.

“I know it won’t be without its challenges, which is why we need to look at this and use it as a marker for the future. The more I looked into Camelot’s past the more I realised I was blinded by so much mindless conceit. Now, I feel like I can see clearly. Do you feel the same? Are you up to the same mammoth task, or do we allow the past to continue to blight us?” Arthur asked, holding out his hand.

Merlin waited until the feeling of happiness had taken over his mind completely, then he leaned forward and grasped Arthur’s hand.

“I am up to the challenge if you are,” Merlin smiled.

The two men laughed, the heady moment of hope intoxicating the air around them. Merlin knew in his heart of hearts, there could be set backs, but he had never expected to find this place at all. He allowed himself a smile as he followed Arthur out of the room. All he could think about where the people he’d lost, who were not here to share this moment. But as he remembered Freya, Will, his father and other lost magical allies, he knew for their sakes, they had to do everything to make the new world work. The Five Kingdoms futures depended on it.
Over the next couple of days, Merlin and Arthur worked through the original Accord. They wanted to get the feel of just how integrated magic had once been in Camelot. As they battled their way through the old-fashioned style of wording on the document, they realised it had been far more out-reaching, than either of them could have anticipated.

To Merlin, the whole idea of the Accord was still like a dream to him. Even now, he couldn’t quite accept that he was in this position. He had been so afraid of what would lie ahead, that his whole mind just swirled on the emotion of each passing moment. He just wished he could convey to Arthur just what it all meant to him. But he sensed the young King was in a frenzy to make a start, as soon as possible. So, he forced himself to put his dreamy side to sleep and concentrate on the task ahead.

“Can I make a suggestion?” Merlin asked, an idea suddenly coming to him.

“Of course, you can,” Arthur replied, “What is it?”

“I have been thinking of the attitude that magical users may have towards this. For some, they will be reluctant to believe it’s genuine. Therefore, we need a way to involve all of these people. The more we give them a stake in the new world we are building, the more likely they will be to embrace it.” Merlin suggested. “But it has to come from us at least to start off with,”

He watched Arthur thinking about what he’d just said. He recognised already how much more Arthur considered and listened to what he now had to say. He could sense a change in their relationship, less joking, more about building a proper relationship. The idea thrilled him and made him even more motivated for what lay ahead.

“I think you are absolutely right. I think starting a Magical Working Group might be an idea. It could work in a similar way to the Round Table. I would suggest that you run this yourself, feel free to bring in anyone that you think would be beneficial,” Arthur said.

“That’s a great idea. I think Lord Blake and Gaius should be involved, I’m sure the Druids would be interested as well. I know the leader of the local group very well as it happens. I think he would be a really interesting man to involve in this. I also think it might be an idea to meet with people with magical skills. Due to the purge happening and people becoming more afraid to makes themselves obvious, we need to re-engage with them. Not just for their sakes, but also for the non-magical people as well. We have to be ready for the idea that some will be afraid of this plan. By showing them, they have nothing to fear, the integration will hopefully be more straight-forward,” Merlin said, though he realised that challenges would still lie ahead.

“I think that is a very good point. We both know this will not go without set-backs, which is why we need to carry the people with us,” Arthur said.

“Yes. It will be a good idea to make this as open a process as we can. Once we get the magical community on our side, we can begin to mix them in with the ordinary people. It might be a good idea to involve them in the market place. Especially if we use the entertainers it would mean people would get used to mixing with them in a natural way,”

“I am thinking of giving you use of Lancelot in the initial stages. While I know you will be able to take care of yourself, it could spread fear to those who are not favourable to magic. We have to accept the return of magic will not go down well with some in Camelot,” Arthur said, gravely.
“I agree, it’s a very brave step you are taking here,” Merlin replied. He decided to ask Arthur something that had been making him curious. “Can I ask you something?”

“Go on,” Arthur prompted, writing away.

“I just thought you would question me a lot further than you did.” Merlin explained, “I was expecting more of a hard time, you seemed to make your mind up quickly.”

“If I hadn’t have spoken to Gaius, Lord Blake maybe I would have done it differently. But having learnt from Gaius in particular what you had done, I already knew I could trust you. It was also about learning the truth about Camelot before the purge. I realised that for a lot of people an injustice was done. You don’t often have the chance to make amends, so this is an opportunity we must take,”

“There will still be those who will try to take advantage,” Merlin pointed out, determined that the reality of the situation needed to be faced. He knew more than most the truth in Gaius’s words of how magic could corrupt individuals.

“All the more reason that we set up a group that will look into things in a just and fair manner,” Arthur replied. “We cannot afford to get this wrong, we may only get one chance to do it,”

“How are you going to approach this with people like Lord Oakes, he will fight it every step of the way,” Merlin said, already understanding the battle that may lay ahead.

“I will deal with Lord Oakes don’t worry about that. There was another reason I decided to go down this path. If this prophecy that everyone talks about is true, how can I possibly unite the five Kingdoms, when Camelot itself is not united? As long as there is division here, then I cannot be the leader that I need to be in the Five Kingdoms. It’s not only the right thing to do, it is vital for the future of the world we live in Merlin,”

“Spoken like a true leader, in all our time together I have never doubted you. This moment proves just how right I was to do so,” Merlin smiled.

“Not even when I turned my back on you, that night in Camlann?” Arthur replied.

“No, not even then,” Merlin said, his tone defiant.

“I’m not doubting you for a moment Merlin, I know now that you have always been my most loyal supporter, for that I am truly thankful. I think you have earned what I am offering you,”

“But it will all be for nothing if its not done properly,” Merlin said a new steely determination breaking through. “Something else, I think we need to target certain groups of magic users,”

“I am all ears,” Arthur urged,

“In the case of the healers they were an important part of the different communities around Camelot, many people used their expertise before the purge struck. I think its important to have a representative on the group,” Merlin explained, his mind suddenly nervous as he wasn’t sure how Arthur would react to the person he wished to appoint.

“Anyone in mind?” Arthur asked,

“I have actually, but I’m not sure how you will react to it,” Merlin admitted, slightly tensely.

“Tell me who and I will let you know,” Arthur replied, candidly. “Although I did say the choices should be yours,”
“I am thinking about Alice,” Merlin said, promptly before his courage failed him.

“Alice?” Arthur questioned, “Oh you mean the woman who tried to poison my father?”

“I’m not trying to excuse her for that act, but she was under the influence of a magical creature. She is not an enemy of Camelot. She was just someone who overnight had her life turned upside down, by the purge. She was a well-known figure in Camelot before then, a leader in her field. She is exactly the kind of person we need on this group. She more than anyone will understand how important this whole idea is and we could do with using her influence. I believe she will be a valued associate, if you give her a chance,”

“Do you know where she is?” Arthur asked.

“I believe Gaius does, she wrote to him the other month, I am sure we can find her,” Merlin assured him. He watched Arthur carefully, the King was staring into the distance, not for the first time he longed to know what was going through his mind.

Arthur’s mind was suddenly restless, with being cooped up in the same room with Merlin working away, he suddenly longed for some space and fresh air. Although he also knew, his friend’s latest suggestion troubled him somehow. He tried to work out why. Isn’t this the very moment when he should be open to suggestions such as these? It appealed to him to give people second chances, yet his own feelings towards his own father confused him greatly.

It was easy for him at a time like this, to build a protective wall around his memories of his father. Reliving the moment when his father lay dying with Alice being unable to help, still held painful emotions for him. Yet what Merlin said in his reasons for suggesting her made sense. Arthur knew having as many respected people on the group would be crucial to its success. Could he work with people like Alice, put the past back into the past, for the sake of the future and everything it would bring? Suddenly he knew if he was serious about everything, there was only one answer despite his misgivings.

“Okay we will go with this Merlin. I have already said I trust you to make the right decisions. I don’t deny it will be challenging for me from time to time, but it’s something I am going to have to accept,” Arthur admitted.

“I know it is going to be hard at times, but all we can do is work together through all of this. If I am going to be busy with the group I would feel a lot happier with Alice being around, especially as she could help Gaius with his duties. I am always saying he needs to retire, but he shows no ambition towards doing it. Having Alice around may make him reconsider to a degree,” Merlin smiled.

“He has certainly earned his day in the sun, I am not sure how easy retiring him will be though. Maybe you should get in an apprentice to work with him,” Arthur suggested.

“I already have an idea for that,” Merlin said, throwing down his pen.

“Oh who?” Arthur asked, amazed at just how much Merlin had already put his ideas into possible solutions. In fact, Merlin had surprised him greatly over the last couple of days. He already knew that this would be the making of him and he felt extremely proud of his friend.

“Do you remember when your father took part in the tournament with you?” Merlin asked,

Arthur thought back to the moment when his father defied his wishes, to suddenly arrive in the arena. He had felt so crestfallen in that moment, but sometimes his father just could not help himself. He
also remembered how Morgana had needled him, he didn’t doubt that had been another idea from her, to divide them.

“What about it?” Arthur asked, coming back to reality.

“He fought a young lad in the final,” Merlin began.

“Yes, I remember him. He was very small but plucky I have to admit,” Arthur said.

“His name was Gilli,” Merlin explained, “He actually saved me from a beating. I got to know him. To cut a long story short, he had a magical ring.”

“He had magic?” Arthur said, “Tell me about him,”

“He received the ring from his father who had magic. His father though was so afraid of using magic, that he never used it. He was attacked one day by a group of men but even then he didn’t use magic,” Merlin said, sadly.

“That is terrible,” Arthur admitted, “That must have affected his family;”

“It did Gilli. He was determined to be different to his father, but in doing that he allowed his magic to corrupt himself. He was using it for vanity rather than for good. I tried to talk him round, I knew he was no fighter and I understood he had other qualities. But sometimes you need people to show you that,” Merlin said.

“You saved my father that day, didn’t you?” Arthur asked, emotion in his eyes.

“I stopped Gilli from winning the fight yes. At first, he thought I had betrayed magic users. It was a familiar argument put to me by some. But I always knew Gaius was right, magic is only noble when it’s used for good. Vanity is not good, valour on the other hand is,” Merlin said, “I talked him round, he reminded me of myself to be truthful. I couldn’t give up on him. I always said to him that one day when magic was returned then maybe our paths would cross again;”

“It looks as if your destiny is calling,” Arthur smiled, “I hope you track him down, I would like to meet him. Thank him for saving my friend’s life,”

Their eyes met and the emotion broke out in both of them. They both laughed as much to mask their true feelings in that moment. As usual Arthur noticed, that Merlin quickly sort to take advantage when both of them were calm again.

“I swore I saw emotion in your eyes there,” Merlin said,

“Nonsense Merlin, I’m a warrior, warriors are not emotional,” Arthur said, his face set and serious.

“Oh, I see.” Merlin said, quietly.

Arthur couldn’t help but laugh inwardly at his friend’s ability to sound so utterly nonchalant. “I know exactly what you are doing Merlin,” Arthur said without looking at him.

“So now you are a mind reader too, I’m impressed with how much you’ve evolved in these last few days!” Merlin admitted,

Arthur grunted “This is what it’s going to be like isn’t it? You will be so full of yourself;”

“You know me, I was never one to give you an easy time,” Merlin laughed.
There was a pause before Arthur admitted “I wouldn’t want it any other way, despite everything,” He got up stretching and looking out of the window, noticing the Knights coming through the gate. “The Knights are here, why don’t you take a last look around and see if there is anything we need to take back,”

“So, it’s really going to happen then?” Merlin asked, disbelief in his tone.

“Don’t doubt it for a second our destiny is calling Merlin, now we have to deliver for the Kingdom’s sake,”

“Thank you, Arthur,” He replied.

“I think it’s Camelot that should be thanking you. Now go and get ready we need to leave for home. We still have a lot of work to get through. I will send Lancelot to help you.”

*****

It took a couple of hours of rigorous searching before Merlin was content with everything. As Lancelot upturned various cupboards the Knight was amazed by his friend’s determination and rapid influence. The moment he had come through the door he could see the change in Merlin and he revelled in it. This was the moment Lancelot had always wanted for Merlin and Arthur too. He knew a rocky road would lie ahead, but he was determined to be there for both of them.

“How do you feel,” Lancelot asked, as he opened another draw while Merlin searched through the contents.

“I haven’t really let myself think about it. It is all too profound for the moment, but I feel pretty good,” Merlin admitted.

“Pretty good?” Lancelot asked, “Merlin you are about to become one of the most powerful men in Camelot, that’s all you can come up with,”

“If I allowed myself to think about it too much, I’m not sure what it would do to me,” Merlin smiled. “It’s enough for now to know that Arthur has accepted me for what I am, which is all I have truly wanted.”

“I’m pleased for you, no one deserves this moment more than you,” Lancelot said.

“Thank you, for all your support. I could not have come through this without you,” Merlin said, “Now we have to make sure that we bring the Kingdom together. There is so much work to do, I don’t even know where to start,”

“I would suggest a good night’s sleep back in Camelot, Gaius has missed you greatly. Why don’t we bring that picture, you can use it for your motivation to bring forward this new world?”

“That’s a great idea, the proof that Camelot and magic can once more unite and bring the land together. How is Gaius?”

“He is getting slower and creaky but shows little sign of slowing down. But he cannot wait to see you,”

“It feels like forever since we spoke, I think we are done here.” Merlin said,

Lancelot watched as Merlin took one last look around the room. “We can always return here and bring back other things later,” he suggested,
“This was such an important monument for Camelot before the purge. I really feel we need to find a way to bring this place back to life,”

“What about as a meeting place outside of Camelot for the group?” Lancelot suggested.

“Or a place of study, look at all those old books. We could encourage lessons in magic for children. To make sure they use it in the right way, all the most important lessons in life start in the beginning Lancelot,” Merlin said,

Lancelot stared at his friend, all of a sudden, he saw a completely different person there. Here was the man who had developed into what he was always meant to be, he was incredibly moved by the transformation and the journey he had been on. It was through Merlin that Lancelot had lived his own ambition, now at long last he would be there to see his friend earns his too. He followed Merlin out of the room with as big a smile on his face as Merlin had on his.

*****

It was nightfall by the time they had arrived back in Camelot. To Merlin’s relief no one had noticed their entrance. It was not that he was afraid but merely the fact that tiredness was dripping out of every vein in his body. As he jumped off his horse, he covered up the picture and followed Arthur into the castle. He smiled as he saw Arthur and Guinevere embracing. He waited politely emotion beating in every part of him.

The next moment he was enveloped into a big hug as Guinevere noticed him.

“Welcome home, Merlin,” Guinevere said, “You look exhausted,”

“I am. Your husband takes up a lot of my time,” Merlin grinned,

“You’ve been overworking him Arthur,” Guinevere replied, looking at her husband sternly.

“I am just whipping him into shape,” Arthur smiled. “For what lies ahead,”

“He thinks he is,” Merlin grinned, “Thank you for all your support,”

“You deserve everything that is coming to you. I have no doubt without you Camelot would not be the place it is today,” Guinevere said, “Now I suggest you go and see Gaius it will make him so happy,”

“You don’t need me for anything?” Merlin asked,

“No, you go and get some sleep. I suggest you spend the day with Gaius, I’m sure he has things to discuss with you,”

“You are giving me a day off?” Merlin asked, disbelief in his voice.

“Don’t get used to it and don’t tell anyone they will think I’m being soft,” Arthur said.

Merlin laughed, “Not much chance of that!”

Merlin picked up his bag and the picture and ran down the corridor suddenly anxious to see his mentor once again. He took the steps two at a time and decided he would surprise Gaius by knocking on the door. He smiled as heard his footsteps and as the door opened his face beamed at the old man.

“Merlin, my boy!” Gaius cried out, hugging him as he came through the door. “You look tired,”
“It has been a busy few days,” Merlin admitted, putting his bag down. “I have a lot to tell you,”

“As do I,” Gaius admitted, “But I suggest we suspend any talk until tomorrow, I think an early night will be good for both of us,”

“Yes, I think that is a great idea,”

“Do you want anything to eat?” Gaius asked, “I have some stew already made up,”

“No thank you,” Merlin said, “I think only a sleep will do right now,”

“It is so good to see you again,” Gaius said, hugging him once more.

Merlin could feel the old man’s love and affection and he drank it all in. Suddenly it had all sunk in that he was now back home, where he most wanted to be. Here he was surrounded by his friends who had stuck by him and now they could all work together to bring their destiny into a reality.

As he lay in his bed later that night, he remembered the boy who had arrived in Camelot all those years ago. How young and naive he had been as he stumbled into this very room. He had no idea of his destiny then, of the part he would play in the legend of the Once and Future King. But in this night, anything now seemed possible to his over active mind. He would use every part of himself to bring the world to fruition that he and Arthur dreamed about.

He vowed nothing or no one would be allowed to derail their dreams for Camelot and for Albion. He finally closed his eyes and before he knew it, sleep had claimed him.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

This should actually be the last chapter of this story. But I have decided to add a couple more chapters. There will also be a development at the end of the story that I will enlarge on when I get there. To make my next idea work I feel I need to go into more details first, I hope that will be a good thing. It will not alter the ending I had planned. But I hope it will make it more worthwhile for everyone. I hope you enjoy the next couple of instalments. As ever I thank everyone for staying with this story.

Merlin took his time to wake up next morning, having had a fitful sleep. Once he'd allowed himself a couple of minutes to open his eyes, he considered his options. His mood was incredibly upbeat and even now a huge smile appeared on his face which he just couldn't remove. When he properly came too he realised he still hadn't told Gaius the most important news. He was about to burst down the steps in excitement when he hesitated, wondering how best to go about things.

There was so much to go through with Gaius that he wondered, how he'd get through it all. But he could already smell the aroma of porridge next door making him feel hungry. He picked up the picture from Summer Hall which was still covered up and took it with him. He decided to reveal the news in a controlled manner, wanting to gage his mentor's mind set first of all.

"You've must have been tired," Gaius said,
"One of the best sleeps I have had for a while," admitted Merlin contentedly,

Merlin had noticed Gaius had aged in the weeks since he'd been away. His movement seemed slower and for a minute he wondered if the extra responsibility would be too much for him. But then he decided he would talk to him about it first and see how he felt about it.

"What's that you've got there?" Gaius asked, noticing the picture for the first time.
"Arthur and I found this in Summer Hall, up on the wall," Merlin explained, "I thought you might like to see it," He uncovered it putting the picture on the table.

"Oh my," Gaius breathed, "That takes me back in time,"
"I was wondering about this figure over here," Merlin said, pointing at a man standing to the right of Uther. "He seems to have a certain familiarity about him,"

Gaius laughed, "Yes that is me in my younger days. I had just been appointed as Chief Physician then. My goodness I forgot this existed,"

"Who are all the others?" Merlin asked, restless to know more.
"The man on the other side of Uther is Lord Blake. It was he who arranged for the painting to be done. I seem to recall he had to persuade Uther. Even then the King wasn't too keen, for the news to leak out about the Accord. Did you actually find it?" Gaius asked,
"After a bit of hunting around we did, we then spent a couple of days looking through it. I was
surprised at how far reaching the Accord went," Merlin mused.

"Nimueh, drove a hard bargain over it. She was at her most influential at this time. I think that was why Uther wanted secrecy about it, as he thought it would make him look weak to his enemies," Gaius explained.

"We all know how Uther hated that," Merlin agreed, a grim look on his face.

"It is very much part of being a King though Merlin," Gaius pointed out. "I know it seems almost daft, but other people will see something like that as a weakness. The problem was both Uther and Nimueh would play games with the other. I warned both a number of times,"

"But neither listened," Merlin said, continuing to look at the picture. "Who are the other people in this?"

"The man on the extreme right was a Druid called Meitia, who was a great help with the running of the Accord. The Druids played a crucial part of keeping the magic users on side," Gaius explained. "Also, being in the forest they got to hear things and could keep us up to date with any trouble brewing,"

"What about the two men over here?" asked Merlin, pointing to two figures at the side of the main group.

The man next to Meitia is Roland, he was an important person in Alice's life," Gaius explained, "She learnt an awful lot from him. He saw the talent she had as a healer and took her under his wing. I'm not sure about the other one though,"

"I was amazed when I came across it," smiled Merlin, "Anyway I would guess you are wanting to know what happened,"

"So tell me, what went on?" Gaius said, a curious look on his face.

"Arthur is determined to bring back magic. After all the conversations he has had with you and Lord Blake, he has had a change of heart on everything," Merlin said, leaning forward. "Isn't it incredible?"

"He said that?" Gaius asked, amazed.

Merlin almost laughed at the disbelief on his mentor's face. "Yes, it's really going to happen, Gaius. He has asked me to form a Magical Group so are you interested in helping me?"

"Oh my boy, that is wonderful," Gaius cried, "Of course I will,"

Merlin laughed as Gaius embraced him and after squeezing the life out of him, Merlin hugged him back.

"Even now, I can't believe it Gaius. When we were looking at the Accord I was dying to celebrate but Arthur was so driven, he is determined to do it as quickly as possible,"

"So how are you thinking of conducting this group?" Gaius asked,

"I was hoping you and Lord Blake would help me. I will also bring in the Druids as well, which was why I was asking you about that picture before. How did you deal with any magical problems that came up?" Merlin asked.
"On a number of different levels," Gaius explained, "The Druids as I've said would be our eye in the magical community. They had contacts all around the Kingdom and had their own group who meet with Lord Blake and reported anything that needed looking at. We had other contacts inside Camelot itself, at the time magic was everywhere."

"Did you have a group that just dealt with magical issues?" Merlin asked,

"Uther would not tolerate that, he insisted on knowing everything himself. His whole court was about control, he didn't like outside influences interfering on his Kingdom's business. Everything was reported to him personally and he would deal with any problem which came up. That in truth, was how it started to come apart even before the death of Arthur's mother,"

"Oh?"

"He would deal with any disobedience ruthlessly, often in front of other magic users. That not unnaturally would often encourage problems. Suddenly there was, disharmony around all the different people involved. Uther was never one for listening if he felt he was doing the right thing,"

"I can imagine that," Merlin murmured,

"Another thing he didn't like was the fact that Nimueh was such a free spirit with no one to report to other than herself. He felt she was following an agenda that she was setting for her own benefit,"

"Was that true, in your opinion?" Merlin asked,

"Not in the way that Uther imagined. He was obsessed that she had her eyes on his throne. But that was never Nimueh's ambition, she wasn't interested in ruling as such, just making magic more powerful inside Camelot itself,"

"The Accord doesn't actually make any mention of contact with non-magical people and that surprised me," Merlin said,

"It was part of the reason the Accord failed in the end. My advice to you would be to involve everyone, whether they have magic or not. There was too much suspicion hanging around, that more than anything spread the poison about. It could all have been avoided if those in power had worked together more and involved everybody in the community,"

"I think you are right there Gaius. That's what I intend to do include somebody from every area of life. I think Arthur himself, recognises we need to get the support of the people on this," Merlin replied,

"That won't be easy there will be some vested interests in some for not accepting magic back inside Camelot,"

"Lord Oakes?" Merlin asked, "Was he always against magic?"

"No, not that I remember. He like most others benefited from magic in some areas. I remember Alice healing members of his family when all the normal potions failed. The healers in particular played an important part in keeping the channels open between those with and without magic," Gaius explained.

Merlin noticed an almost like melancholy look on his mentor's face for a second. For a moment Merlin wanted to tell Gaius there and then how he had already arranged for Alice's arrival in Camelot. But he decided it may be even better to for her to arrive unexpectedly. He hoped by tomorrow that Gaius and Alice would be back together once more.
"I see this as a new beginning for people. A chance for everyone to come together and find ways we can all contribute to make this Kingdom better," Merlin said.

"Very good sentiments my boy, let's hope we can persuade people to connect with this ideal. I will get us some fresh water, then we can go through some new ideas," Gaius suggested.

"Thank you, Gaius."

As Merlin waited for Gaius to return he realised just what a major task this would be. He was so glad that Gaius would be by his side once more, helping and supporting him. He knew tough times would lie ahead, but with luck and good planning they could avoid major pitfalls at least. If the old Accord had taught him one thing it was such realities only worked with openness and trust. There would have to be a new spirit of co-operation between everyone. This was something which had to be planned meticulously. He was determined nothing would be left to chance and every problem would be dealt with.

******

Arthur had spent the morning on matters which he'd been forced to put off, when the challenges with Merlin had blown up. But even now the old problems still plagued him. He was perturbed over how to solve the problem with Lord Oakes. The idea he had originally thought about now seemed to be an unwise move. He realised going into this new spirit with any sort of confrontational attitude would do none of them any good. This was more the moment for tact, but how was he to do that with a man like Lord Oakes?

He sighed as his mind went blank and he was relieved when a knock on the door interrupted his troubled thoughts. "Come in," he shouted.

"It's only me," Guinevere smiled, "I wondered how you were getting on? Have you made any progress?"

"On the matter with Lord Oakes?" Arthur grimaced, "Not really I still don't know how to approach this. My idea from before doesn't seem so appropriate now,"

"Why don't we go for a ride?" Guinevere asked, "Maybe a change in scenery would help,"

Arthur thought for a moment. There was still a lot to do, but then he admitted to himself after all the work with Merlin, he had come to a halt. Maybe doing something else would grant him some inspiration.

"Why not? I suppose we need to make the most of the weather before it turns," he smiled.

"I will go and ask Jude to get a couple of horse ready," Guinevere said,

Arthur put away his papers and made his way over to his apartment to change. By the time he had left the citadel Guinevere was already waiting with the horses. Arthur couldn't resist placing a kiss on her cheek, as she looked so happy. He suspected that she may have an ulterior motive with the idea of the ride and he was suddenly curious to find out about it.

They galloped away from the castle and out into the fields beyond and already Arthur was feeling more alive. His mount was a sturdy and fast horse with a personality to match, who pulled hard as he ran. It made Arthur feel more alert suddenly and already he could feel the benefit of being outside and away from the suffocation of Camelot.

He looked over his shoulder and checked Guinevere's mare was keeping up. He slowed slightly to
allow them to be more together. When she caught up finally, she smiled.

"I thought you would disappear away into the horizon, he is a bit of a handful," she suggested looking at his horse.

He laughed, "Yes, but maybe just what I need at this moment in time. It is good to get out of Camelot and clear my mind out."

"That is why I thought this would be a good idea. I know you and Merlin have done a lot of talking but I wanted to tell you, if there is anything I can do I'm here," Guinevere said.

"I know that and believe me everything would be much more difficult without you being around. You can maybe help me with Lord Oakes, we have to find a way of involving him in the process, but how I just don't know,"

"This group that Merlin is going to put together," Guinevere said, "I'm guessing it will mainly involve those who have magic,"

"I would think so. It will be a group that works with the magical community so it makes sense that most in the group will have magic of some kind," Arthur replied,

"Perhaps," Guinevere said, "But maybe there is another group of people he can work with,"

"Such as?" Arthur enquired, suddenly keen to know what Guinevere had in mind.

"If magic is to be introduced then you have to engage with those who do not have it and especially those who fear it. We both know that some will oppose this move. So why not invite somebody into this group who represents those very people. That way they can get to know Merlin and more important understand magic, in all its basic forms."

"Merlin did mention this, but are you suggesting that someone like Lord Oakes should do this?" Arthur asked, wanting to check he was understanding her suggestion.

"Just think about it for a moment. As long as he is on the outside he will harbour suspicions and probably spread them around. But the moment you actually involve him in both the idea and the process it becomes something that he can invest into as well. He will expect that you and Merlin will exclude him from the start. If you do the opposite, then maybe you can actually begin to change his mind. He will see this in a different light,"

Arthur thought for a moment, the idea had its good points he admitted to himself. He was also amused at the idea of being able to wrong foot Lord Oakes from the start. He knew the Lord's first thought would be to accuse Arthur and Merlin of keeping him out of the group. He realised being open with him could actually safe a lot of time and effort. He was also quite interested to see how he would react to the suggestion.

"I would need to put this idea to Merlin first," Arthur said,

"Of course, but I am sure between you, you could persuade him to take up the challenge,"

"By doing this it will hopefully stop a lot of aggravation at a later date," Arthur admitted.

"Exactly, he cannot accuse you of keeping him in the dark and forcing magic onto the Kingdom then."

"That's a very good point Guinevere," Arthur smiled, "I will give this serious thought,"
"There is something else I've been thinking about. You know Hunith and I have been writing?"

"Yes, I had heard that. Is she okay?" Arthur asked,

"I'm not sure. She appears to be really missing Merlin now. I think he does as well. I was thinking we have a number of old rooms not in use. So why not invite her to stay at Camelot? Merlin will be so busy now, but it will be one less thing for him to worry about. With Hunith nearby he can keep an eye on her and I know she will benefit from it."

"Do you think she would accept a life at Camelot?" Arthur asked,

"She would love to be with Merlin, she has done everything for him and it just seems a natural step. She would involve herself in Camelot life it will be the making of her," Guinevere pointed out,

"Yes, I can actually see her fitting in. I suggest you write to her and put the question," Arthur replied.

"That is two solutions resolved then," Guinevere said, "It has been good this ride, maybe we should do it more often,"

Arthur laughed, "Why not? It is going to be very busy in the weeks ahead with all the planning and arranging to do. So, any time we can escape we should do,"

"That's agreed then," Guinevere said, "This will be such an exciting venture and it will be the making of the Kingdom,"

"I certainly hope so. A new beginning for all the peoples of Camelot, a Kingdom that unites, can only be a positive advancement for Albion as a whole. I just hope we can bring everyone together the way we need too," Arthur said, suddenly weighed down with the whole idea of it.

"You will, you two are a partnership you've always been one. It's been obvious to me all along," Guinevere admitted.

"I never saw this coming, but now it just somehow feels right. I know this will change Merlin's life in particular but I have seen enough of him these past few days, to know he won't disappoint. We must make sure we support him when we can,"

"We will. I am proud of you Arthur for how you've come through this. It has been a hard experience for you I know. But come through it you have and it has made you an even better man. I for one cannot wait to stand beside you and Merlin and see this new world be born,"

Arthur stopped his horse by now they had come full circle and were facing Camelot in all its glory. As the sweeping white towers greeted him, he began to see the new dawn that his wife had just spoken about. A feeling of excitement took over his senses. As he and Guinevere urged their horses towards the citadel he was suddenly restless to start planning for the brave new world ahead.

Merlin and Gaius had come to the end of a good afternoon's work. Merlin felt clear with what he needed to do next. He could sense though that now Gaius's mind wasn't fully on it and so decided to pack it in for now. He noticed he was rummaging in a cupboard he hadn't especially noticed before. He was by now curious to see what Gaius was looking for.

****

"Can I help?" Merlin asked, "Have you lost something?"

"No, I know where it is. Your mother wrote to me before you left." Gaius said,
"She didn't mention it when I was with her," Merlin said, "There wasn't a problem was there?"

"No not at all. But there was something she wanted me to give you," Gaius said,

Merlin noticed he had something in his hand, an object which was long and a bit awkward for Gaius to manage.

"My boy, when your father was being hidden by your mother in Ealdor, he left me something that he wanted me to keep,"

"Oh?" Merlin said, intrigued.

"But considering the way everything is going I feel its about time this was returned to its rightful owner," Gaius said, handing him the object. "You need to be careful with it though,"

Merlin accepted it and slowly took off the cover. When it finally slid off, all he could do was look at it with awe. He'd had a magical staff before, but nothing like the one he held now. It was plain in colour and had an intricate patterned design on it. What looked like small crystals shone from its base. It was the most beautiful object he had ever seen. Not only that but he could sense the power coming from within it. As he inspected it closer he could see a line of words on it, in the language of the Old Religion.

"What does it say?" he asked Gaius, inspecting the words.

"To the bearer of this staff, lies the power of the ages," Gaius explained. "I don't need to tell you this is one of the most powerful magical artefacts in the world. You need to look after it and only use it when absolutely necessary,"

"Of course, how did my father come to have this?" Merlin asked, his eyes still shining as he checked over every detail on the staff.

"He told me it was in his family for years," Gaius explained, "It was handed down from father to son. It was always the way that families kept magic alive from one generation to another. Maybe one day you will get to hand it to your own son,"

"I have to settle down for that to happen Gaius, I'm not sure I will have time to meet anyone especially at the moment," Merlin remarked, downbeat for a second.

"Don't say that," Gaius said, "love comes to everyone eventually even you,"

A sudden knock on the door brought Merlin back to the present and to his surprise Arthur stood there. He was about to jump up when he realised he still had the staff in his hand, he put it down carefully. As Arthur came over to them Merlin realised he seemed genuinely intrigued by it.

"It was from my father come over and have a look," Merlin encouraged him.

He watched as Arthur came carefully over, Merlin picked the staff up so he could see the beautiful detail on the bottom. He felt strangely serene as he watched the King hold it and then take a good look.

"Where did you get this from?" Arthur asked,

"It belonged to Merlin's father. When he was forced to escape from Camelot he asked me to take care of it. I thought it only right for Merlin to have it now,"
"You need to keep that safe Merlin, it looks as though it could do some damage," Arthur said, handing it back to Merlin.

"That goes without saying," Merlin smiled,

"I am taking it you have told Gaius about our plans?" Arthur asked.

"He has indeed, it's a very brave step Arthur. But one I feel could be beneficial for all of us," Gaius smiled,

"I hope you will play your part Gaius. We will need your experience,"

"It goes without saying I will do everything I can to support this," Gaius promised,

"Thank you", Arthur replied,

"Do you need something doing?" Merlin asked,

"No, but after speaking with Guinevere she has come up with a suggestion and I wanted both your opinions," Arthur explained.

"Sit down Arthur," Gaius said, "What is it you want to know,"

"When Merlin and I were speaking before he suggested that a non-magical person should be selected into the group. Speaking about it with Guinevere this afternoon, she suggested Lord Oakes," Arthur said, "What do you think?"

"Lord Oakes?" Gaius said, "I'm really not sure how he'd take to it,"

"I know it has its risks. But as Guinevere said to me it will be the last thing he expects, also once he begins to work with the group he will gain more understanding about what it is, we are trying to do," Arthur said,

"I suppose so," Gaius said dubiously.

"What do you think Merlin, you've been very quiet," Arthur said,

Merlin could feel both their eyes on him as he went on thinking about what Arthur had just said. It certainly had not been what he'd been expecting, on the other hand the more he thought about it, the more he actually quite liked the idea. He knew it could backfire on them, but if they did manage to persuade him to work with them, Merlin knew it would be a huge step forward. Sensing Arthur's impatience he smiled.

"I think it's a good idea, when do you want to talk to him about it?" Merlin asked,

"You are sure. We don't know how he'll react to you," Arthur pointed out.

"Like you say it's not without risks but surely it's worth taking if we could get him on our side?" Merlin said "I think its something we have to try,"

"That's decided then, I will send a message tonight for him to meet us tomorrow, I would like both of you in attendance please," Arthur suggested. "I'm also inviting Lord Blake as their friendship goes back a long way,"

"A very prudent idea Arthur," Gaius said, "Of course, I'll will be happy to attend,"
"Thank you, both of you. I'm sorry I disturbed you I will see you tomorrow,"

"That's okay," Merlin assured him, "Good night."

"Good night, get a good sleep it could be a long day tomorrow," Arthur smiled.

As the door closed, Merlin looked at Gaius a look of disbelief on his face,

"Well, I wasn't expecting that," he admitted.

"You took it very well," Gaius said, "You can't have liked the idea,"

"I was surprised," Merlin admitted, "But then, the more I thought about it, it seemed to make sense. Whatever we do there are risks attached, we have to take every chance that comes our way,"

"You are right of course," Gaius said, "Lord Blake can certainly help us he has a very constructive manner about him. As Arthur said he and Lord Oakes go back a long way. I'm sure he can appeal to his better nature,"

Merlin's eyebrow shot up at the last sentence.

"Even Lord Oakes has his better side Merlin, I hope you can get to know him one day. He is actually a man of knowledge and learning,"

"Let's hope we manage to get through to him then," Merlin yawned, "It's been a full day I think I will go to bed if you don't mind,"

"You go," Gaius replied, "You will need all your wits about you tomorrow,"

"Don't stay up late, don't let me sleep in either I'll help with the potions tomorrow,"

"Thank you, Merlin,"

As Merlin climbed the steps to his own room and shut the door, his mind was already on tomorrow. He knew this would be one tough challenge for them all, but Gaius's words had given him some renewed hope, that they could get through to Lord Oakes. It would be one more hurdle overcome and then they could properly work on the future of Camelot and Albion.

As he lay down and closed his eyes he thought once more of the staff left to him by his father. He wondered how Balinor would handle it, he wasn't sure if his father would have the patience. But Merlin knew that it was vital to be diplomatic and understanding at least in the beginning. If Lord Oakes was indeed the man Gaius said he was surely he could be persuaded to come on side. A Kingdom truly united once more could only bring renewed hope to every citizen, whether they had magic or not. Merlin finally closed his eyes and allowed himself to dream.
Chapter 26

It was early in the morning when Sir Leon had escorted Alice into the court yard at Camelot. They had been riding for some hours and by now she was exhausted. But the Knight had kept her well entertained as he told her all that had been happening.

She couldn’t believe that once again she was back in the place where it had all started. She had never dared to dream that one day she could return here to be with her old love. She had been thinking about him for most of the journey, her heart fluttering around as if she was young all over again. She was relieved in the end that Sir Leon had been able to distract her; otherwise her excitement would have become overwhelming.

He helped her off her horse, taking her bags from her. She looked around; even in the early morning the castle was busy. She sensed a new exciting buzz about the place. When Uther had been alive everything had seemed so controlled and rigid. But she felt completely different in this new Camelot. It didn’t stop her being nervous about meeting the new young King. She still felt shame over the incident which had led her to be incarcerated inside a Camelot prison cell. She knew she had to apologise at the very least. She had felt so excited when she received the letter from Merlin inviting her to return. All of a sudden, she was determined to do everything she could to make it a success.

As she looked around her, she noticed a tall and dark-haired Knight walking towards her. She thought he looked very striking, which was confirmed even more when a smile broke out on his face.

“I believe that you are Alice,” he said, “My name is Lancelot and it is my job to escort you to Gaius,”

“Thank you and its lovely to meet you Lancelot,” Alice beamed back. She turned to Sir Leon who had finally brought her bags over to her. “Thank you once again Leon for your company, if that injury to your hand still troubles you I have a potion which may help,”

“Thank you, Alice,” Leon replied, “I may very well take you up on the offer. I hope you will be very happy at Camelot,”

“Thank you, I know I will,” she smiled,

“I will leave you in Lancelot’s capable hands then,” Leon replied, walking away.

Lancelot picked up her bags, “If you follow me I will take you up0 to Gaius. He doesn’t know you are coming today, so it will be a surprise for him,”

Alice laughed, “Let’s hope a good one,”

“It will be he speaks highly of you,” Lancelot assured her.

“He always was a charmer,” Alice laughed, “I never thought I’d get the chance to return here to him,”

“So much is changing now, everyone is needed,” Lancelot said, trotting up the stairs.

Alice was tempted to ask him more, but then thought now wasn’t the time. Besides which any
moment she would see Gaius once again, right now it was the only thing she wanted to think about.

Lancelot knocked on the door, Alice smiled as she heard Gaius’s voice. Lancelot was about to pick up the bags again, but Alice intervened.

“Thank you so much Lancelot, do you mind if I surprise him?” she asked, her eyes twinkling.

“Of course not, don’t tell anyone that I left your bags outside the room though,” Lancelot grinned.

“Don’t worry, I won’t say anything I promise,” Alice smiled, watching him leave.

She opened the door slowly and stepped inside the room her eyes searching for Gaius. She found him straight away, working on some potion his back turned to her. She picked her bags up putting them down quietly and walked over towards him.

“Hello Gaius,” she said, her voice happy and light.

“Alice!” Gaius replied, “What a lovely surprise, I wasn’t expecting you today,”

Suddenly they were sharing an embrace and Alice felt all the years apart suddenly disappearing as they came together. They stayed like this for a few minutes, until the emotion in Alice’s eyes forced them apart. She saw much the same reaction in Gaius as well.

“Once I received word from Merlin, there was no reason to stay where I was. He kindly sent Sir Leon to escort me to Camelot. I will have to thank him when I see him. Who’d have thought I’d have another chance after last time,” Alice said, wiping her eyes.

“Don’t even think about the last time Alice,” Gaius reassured her, “It’s a very different Camelot to the one before. One I never thought I’d see again,”

“Is it really true then?” Alice asked, “That the King is returning magic to the realm,”

“Oh yes, it is very much so,” Gaius smiled, “In fact, I will have to go to a meeting shortly with one of the Lord’s. I can’t quite believe you are here, I was speaking to Merlin only yesterday and he made no mention of it,” Gaius laughed,

“I think he wanted to make it a surprise for you. I hope its not too much of a shock,”

“The nicest shock I have ever had,” Gaius assured her, “I feel really bad to be leaving you so soon, but at least it will give you a chance to settle in,”

“Don’t worry about me Gaius. I will have a little rest that ride has exhausted me. It is just so good to be with you,” They hugged again making the most of every moment. As they eased apart Alice kissed him on the cheek. Then there was a knock on the door and another wide smile on his face. “Go on, you will be getting me a bad reputation on my first day
back,”

“I will see you later,” Gaius replied, before finally closing the door.

As a sudden silence took over the room, Alice looked around Gaius’s chaotic workplace with affection. It really hadn’t changed from when she’d been there before. She walked over and looked at some of his potions, hardly being able to contain her excitement, at the thought of working with him once again. She had brought some new ingredients with her, which she knew would intrigue him. She decided to make a potion for Sir Leon, as she felt he would need some shortly. Before long, it was as if she had always been here.

****

Merlin was already sitting with Arthur as the door opened and Lord Oakes came in. Lord Blake and Gaius were also there. Merlin had shared Gaius’s joy at him being reunited with Alice, even now he could see the happiness in his mentor’s eyes. But he knew now he needed all his attention on the matter in hand. He watched as Lord Oakes walked over and Merlin could sense he already looked disgruntled. He had already decided to let Arthur lead proceedings and he waited for the King to begin.

“I would like to thank you for agreeing to this meeting with us Lord Oakes,” Arthur began, “I am sure you are wanting to ask questions and I will certainly allow you to do so, but I will first explain why you have been called to this meeting,”

To Merlin’s surprise the Lord gave a curt nod at Arthur, though not before looking sternly in Merlin’s direction. Merlin hoped that Arthur would say the right things otherwise he had a feeling that things could move away from them very quickly.

“This last month has been a real journey for me personally. When I first discovered that Merlin was a sorcerer, I am not going to deny that it was a huge shock for me. But then having spoken with Merlin and indeed with Gaius and Lord Blake here, I have to admit that my whole perception of this Kingdom has changed beyond everything. No matter how much I loved my father and I did, I can no longer accept that the purge was anything other than an abomination of this Kingdom’s great name,” Arthur continued. “To make war on a whole people was both wrong and unjust,”

Merlin who by now was watching Lord Blake closely could already sense his growing fury and knew before long, it would explode. He was surprised already at how forthright Arthur had been and while grateful, was also hoping it wouldn’t prove the undoing of them now.

“Furthermore,” Arthur went on, “I feel for us to make peace with the past we have to change in a way that is real and meaningful. That will mean certain changes,”

“So, it’s true then what I have always suspected,” Lord Oakes cut in, “I knew from the start that magic would be back on the agenda. The moment he was spared I could see it. Does he have you under his power?”

“Lord Oakes, I assure you that I am my own man, I am under no one’s power real or imagined. I have on the other hand had my eyes opened. I was brought up to fear magic, yet those around this table, Gaius, Lord Blake and even your good self, know there is more to magic than just plain fear. Before my father committed war with those magic users, Camelot was a very different place. It was a time when everyone worked together for the good of the Kingdom. There were healers who helped keep people alive in the harsh winters. There were people who would entertain children on the streets, while others who sold their wears in the market and traded with non-magic users,”

“There were those that killed without pity,” Lord Oakes argued, “People like your sister who left people dying on roads. Old people, children lying around in the mud. I had to bury them along with
others. I lost my own brother to a man who practiced dark magic, even now he is alive to follow his
dark arts. Yet here you sit preaching to me with that sorcerer sitting by your side,”

For a moment Merlin felt they had lost the fight. It was one undeniable truth that magic in the hands
of some had indeed cost lives and created untold fear and destruction. Thanks to those who had sold
themselves to the dark side, it was an argument that people such as Lord Oakes would throw in their
faces time after time. Just as Merlin was beginning to fear the worst, a quiet and dignified voice
broke in silencing the room.

“Yes, it’s true Lord Oakes, that magic has cost people’s lives,” Lord Blake interrupted, “I too helped
bury the dead when Morgana went on her rampage of appalling destruction. I lost relatives as well
just like many others in Camelot. Yet if we are honest, we have also benefited from magic as well. I
like you had family members healed by magic, in those years before the purge occurred. I believe it
was your mother who had caught the winter sweating sickness that year. You like me, tried
everything. Then Gaius here introduced us to an amazing woman called Alice.”

Merlin watched in silence as all of a sudden everyone became transfixed by Lord Blake’s
reminiscing. He briefly saw the emotion in Gaius’s face as the old man relived one of Alice’s great
successes. Not for the first time Merlin realised that having people like Alice on side would be so
important.

“I believe she fought that illness with your mother for four nights, never leaving her side. Each time
you refused to believe she could cure her,” Lord Blake continued, “But eventually on that
miraculous fifth night the miracle happened. Do you noy remember how we wept together, when
your mother finally opened her eyes once more?”

“It was a new potion that Alice had learnt that very month. She was passionate about helping
people,” Gaius added, “Your mother was far from the only one who had her to thank for saving her
life. I lost count at how many little ones, she managed to keep alive that hard winter. All thanks to
magic, as for whatever reason, the conventional cures had no effect,”

Merlin noticed how quiet Lord Oakes had gone, his eyes were looking down at the table it seemed as
if he was somehow somewhere else. But Merlin could feel the emotion enough to know that the old
man was reliving something that was very personal to him alone. In that moment he felt nothing but
compassion for another man.

“Can I speak?” Merlin asked, wanting to contribute and knowing now was the time to do so.

“Go ahead,” Arthur replied.

Merlin could see the trust in Arthur’s eyes and affection too which gave him even more belief and a
determination to make a point.

“Lord Oakes I understand that there are things you fear about magic. If I did not have magic then I
too would probably suffer from the same emotion. Camelot as a place suffered greatly after the
purge, as too did people who had magic. My own father was forced away from my mother and had
to live in a cave on his own for years, away from the woman he loved. In your experience and also
in my mother’s too, there is nothing but a harsh cruelty. When he died I had only known him for two
days. It is only when you lose somebody that you can begin to understand the depth of someone
else’s loss.”

“You were Balinor’s son,” Lord Oakes replied, looking up at Merlin for the first time. “He actually
helped me once when I was out in the woods and was injured. I had been left for dead, he had stayed
with me until the Knights arrived. He kept me alive, I would never have survived if I hadn’t come
upon him.”

“He was a good man, who always helped people. He cured Arthur too when a wound had become infected,” Merlin replied,

“I still don’t know what he gave me that day, but I had never felt better in all my life,” Arthur admitted, “Lord Oakes I understand it is difficult for some people to see the good in magic. But as Gaius said to me it is not magic itself which is evil, but what the person does with it. I know what my sister did, but I also know what Merlin has done for all these years. I know that without him by my side I would probably not be here. It’s not just me he has protected either but all of us. I think it’s true to say without him by Camelot’s side, we would have struggled to overcome some of those dark forces, you speak off.”

“All this may be true sire, but if magic comes back how can we control those who will look to use it as a weapon?” Lord Oakes asked, “No matter what the intention is there will be those who will do that,”

“They will be dealt with Lord Oakes, I give you my word on that. Over the years I have had to kill other magic users, I’ve done it without hesitation. Those who have used magic as a tool to force their beliefs on others will receive no backing from me. Arthur has asked me to form a group which will look at all magical matters. Arthur and I both feel it shouldn’t just be those with magic on the group, but we should also have a non-magical person as well. We thought about you which is why we have called this meeting,” Merlin explained, holding his breath.

“Me?” Lord Oakes asked, “What could I possibly give to this group?”

“We all know the reasons the old Accord died away Lord Oakes,” Gaius said, “It was because the biggest group in the Kingdom the non-magical peoples were not invited to contribute. It was a huge error and one we never managed to put right. Therefore, there has to be someone to work with those who return magic. By doing that they will understand magic better and know the guidelines will protect those that need it,”

“I feel with your experience you are the ideal man to take this on, along with Lord Blake and Gaius. I also believe Alice and the Druids too will be a part of it as well. It is essential that we all have our say and make sure that every group in Camelot is represented on this new Accord. I believe you knew the words of the old Accord,”

“Yes, indeed sire. I helped compose them,” Lord Oakes muttered quietly,

“Yes, you did,” Arthur replied, “You also put in some useful guidelines that I would like to see you do with any new Agreement we reach. It is essential we use everyone’s intelligence and diligence so that there is a fair and just framework to hold too,”

“Have you thought about how this will effect other Kingdoms nearby sire?” Lord Oakes asked,

“Well I know in certain Kingdoms such as Nemeth magic is already allowed. I know one or two other Kingdoms are less well-disposed towards it. But I will invite everyone over to Camelot and can reassure everyone about our future plans,” Arthur explained,

“Which is why we need to work on it as soon as possible. I am asking you to be a part of this Lord Oakes,”

“I need some reassurances first sire,” Lord Oakes replied,

“Which are?” Arthur asked,
“I need proof that Morgana is really gone,”

“I can already assure you of that, I saw Merlin kill her along with a most of Camelot’s army,”

“We both know from before that people can be returned to life through magic,” Lord Oakes said, staring at Merlin,

“Maybe I can answer this,” Merlin said, looking at Arthur who nodded,

“I killed Morgana with a sword that was forged in a dragon’s breath. That allows me to kill those with extreme magical skills, such as a High Priestess. I can personally assure you Morgana will not return to this world,”

“A Dragon’s breath?” Lord Oakes asked, “Is this the dragon that was under the castle?”

Merlin gulped, “Yes Kilgharrawas indeed under the castle until I set him free. He helped me to protect the Kingdom by advising me on magical matters,”

“What has happened to this creature now,” Lord Oakes asked,

“I believe Kilgharrah is no more. I have called him but he has not returned. There is another dragon a very young one called Aithusa who I am presently assisting as it’s my sacred duty due to being a Dragon lord,”

“Is she a danger to Camelot?” Lord Oakes let the question hang in the air.

“No, I control her,” Merlin said,

“But what happens if you die, get killed or something,”

“I won’t be dying any time soon Lord Oakes, I can assure you of that,” Merlin said,

“How could you possibly know such a thing? You could be killed tomorrow for all you know then we are left with a dragon we cannot control,” Lord Oakes, pointed out.

Merlin looked at Gaius and felt relieved as his mentor cut into the conversation.

“I feel there are things we should all know around this table. Arthur here is the Once and Future King,”

“What does that mean?” Lord Oakes asked,

“There is a prophecy which has come about long before any of us were born. It speaks of Arthur the Once and Future King, who one day will die and then come back to life to save Albion in her moment of greatest need. Merlin here will remain alive and wait for Arthur’s return,” Gaius explained, looking at Arthur.

“I realise this is a lot to take in it was for me as well. But I have seen the prophecy that was written down, I see no reason to disbelief it. It has been Merlin’s destiny to protect me and he has from the first day he arrived in Camelot,”

“Is this really true Lord Blake?” Lord Oakes asked,

“I believe the Druids first mentioned this to me many years ago,” Lord Blake confirmed.

“I have a connection to the Druids they know me as Emrys which means immortal. They have also played their part in assisting me in my protection of Arthur and Camelot,”
“So, you see Lord Oakes, even as Camelot persecuted those with magic, those same magical people were still helping protect this Kingdom. It is this more than anything, that makes me realise that this situation has to change. I owe those who have helped this Kingdom survive a debt, we all do. No longer can we hide behind this fear of magic and use it as a weapon to attack those who possess it,”

“I don’t know what to say,” Lord Oakes said,

“I would be grateful for your loyalty and assistance in righting this wrong Lord Oakes. We need every able person to work on a new Accord. One which will bind all the peoples of this great Kingdom together, enabling us to grow as one. We have been divided enough through these past years, now is the time to come together in peace and unity. Then we can unite with the other Kingdoms and Albion can become a reality,”

“You didn’t have to ask me of all people,” Lord Oakes admitted, “I have indeed been a menace to you on occasion and to Merlin,”

“I can assure you Lord Oakes I bear no ill feelings,” Merlin assured him, “All I would like is to move forward and work with the non-magical community as well as my own kind. This Kingdom will face many challenges up ahead, we need to speak with one voice now,”

Lord Oakes nodded, “I will do what I can. Can I ask for a couple of requests?”

“Go ahead,” Arthur encouraged.

“I would like my nephew Franik to attend the meetings with me and attend in my place when I cannot,” Lord Oakes said,

“I have no objection to that,” Arthur conceded.

“I would also like to re-read the old Accord, as I fear I have forgotten much that we put on it,”

“That can certainly be arranged, we can look at it together,” Lord Blake assured him. “What about tomorrow?”

“Yes, if that is okay with everyone,” Lord Oakes replied.

Merlin nodded catching Gaius’s shining eyes across the table. He felt the same emotion in his own as he realised just what a breakthrough it had been.

“Thank you, Lord Oakes.” Arthur smiled. “In fact, my thanks go to all of you. You have all served this fine Kingdom with honour and loyalty and I am grateful to every one of you. I suggest we call this to a halt now that we have reached agreement. Tomorrow will be the day we all work to bring forward the changes we need to implement. This has been an historic day, I suggest we all go and get some rest before the real work begins,”

Merlin waited behind with Gaius and Arthur, once the two Lord’s had left, he sighed with relief.

“I want to thank you Merlin for being so honest today. You didn’t have to mention some of what you did, though maybe that changed the tide,” Arthur smiled, “I also need to thank Gaius for stepping in when you did. I don’t think I could have explained that Prophecy again,” Arthur admitted,

“I think it may have made an impression,” Gaius admitted,

“I thought Lord Oakes was going to faint when he heard. I wasn’t sure if I had done the right thing,”
Merlin said with a smile.

“I have asked you for honesty,” Arthur said, “So, I suppose you couldn’t really do anything else,”

“If you don’t mind I would like to go and see Alice.” Gaius said, “I wanted to thank you for letting her come back Arthur,”

“The more I hear about her the more I know it was the right thing to do,” Arthur replied, “You go ahead Gaius,”

Merlin started to follow Gaius out of the room feeling suddenly tired, but Arthur’s stopped him.

“Merlin, Guinevere wanted to speak to you,” he said,

“Now?” Merlin asked, surprised by the timing. He then saw a cryptic look on Arthur’s face and then it all became clear. “Of course, you want Gaius to have a bit of time with Alice,”

“Partly, though Guinevere does want to speak to you,” Arthur said, “It won’t do any harm to let Gaius and Alice have a bit of privacy though,”

Merlin followed Arthur down the corridor wondering where he was going to sleep now. He assumed that Gaius would want Alice with him. But he realised he needed to make his own plans now. With Alice back, he knew she could help Gaius with the potions as well as work on the new Accord with him. He realised that everything was about to change for them all.

“Merlin, it feels like a while since I’ve seen you,” Guinevere smiled,

“Likewise. I think now would be a good time to thank you for all your help,” Merlin said, “I know you have done a lot behind the scenes,”

“I need to thank you for keeping Arthur safe, say nothing of the Kingdom.” She replied,

“It is my destiny to protect Camelot and everyone. I assure you both I will continue to do that night and day,” Merlin said, a sudden emotion in his voice.

“Oh Merlin,” Guinevere replied, going over to him and giving him a hug. “Why don’t you sit down I want to talk to you about something,”

“Oh yes,” Merlin said, feeling self-conscious, “Arthur said something about that,”

“I need to tell you, over the last few months I have been writing to your mother,” Guinevere began,

“Right, she is okay?” Merlin said, feeling a little bit apprehensive

“She is fine you don’t need to worry. But I was a little bit concerned that she was hiding her true feelings on one or two things,”

“Yes, now you mention it that was the impression I had as well. I think she was putting a brave face on things when I was there,” Merlin agreed,

“Well, to cut a long story short. I found out that she was struggling to cope on her own somewhat especially in the winter. You how cold it gets in Ealdor. So, I have invited her to stay in Camelot for as long as wants,”

“Really?” Merlin asked, feeling happy and relieved. “Thank you for this, it will be a load off my mind. I did wonder as to when I would next see her. I’ll be busy with the Accord obviously,”
“Everything went well?” Guinevere asked,

“Yes, Lord Oakes has agreed to help us,” Merlin smiled,

“That is good news then,” Guinevere said, “I have asked the Knights to accompany your mother back to Camelot. Hopefully she will arrive tomorrow,”

“That’s wonderful,” Merlin said, “I was wondering, now Alice is with Gaius as to where I should stay,”

“In the circumstances,” Arthur said, “I suggest with your new title that you should get a room all of your own now,”

“Right,” Merlin said, “Sorry, did you say title?”

“Yes,” Arthur said, “I forget to say before so I had better confirm it now. I intend to make you the Court Sorcerer of Camelot,”

“What?” Merlin replied, looking in shock at both Arthur and Guinevere.

“I hope this isn’t going to become a habit Merlin,” Arthur said,

“What do you mean?” Merlin asked, confused,

“Acting all stupid, when you can’t answer me,” Arthur replied,

“Well, maybe if you had told me first I wouldn’t be so shocked now,” Merlin prompted, in exasperation.

“Anyone with half a brain would already have worked it out anyway,” Arthur murmured,

“Half a brain you say?” Merlin replied, “If you think I’m so brainless why are appointing me anyway you prat!”

Guinevere sighed, “It would appear your relationship is getting back to normal with all this bantering. I will leave you too it,”

Arthur laughed, “It appears it is,”

“I suppose so,” Merlin agreed with a smile, “Are you sure about all of this?”

“I have never been more certain of anything Merlin. I think you have earned this title with your loyalty and service. I will announce it tomorrow officially at a meeting of the Round Table. You will naturally attend,” Arthur said,

“Of course. Thank you, Arthur for this, I promise I won’t let you down,” Merlin said, “I’d better get my stuff from Gaius,”

“I know you won’t let me down Merlin. You have proved that over all this process. I couldn’t hope for a truer friend. Go on, I suggest you take The Pendragon Suite for now, until we officially sort out a proper room for you,”

“Thanks, I will see you in the morning then. Good night,” Merlin said, feeling surreal.

As he walked over to Gaius’s room Merlin felt as if he was in a dream world. Here he was a boy from a little country town now Camelot’s official Court Sorcerer. He wanted to scream it from the
roof tops, but decided he had best keep it quiet for now. He knocked on Gaius’s door, walking through it carefully. Alice and Gaius were working away on a potion.

“I might have known I would catch you two working,” Merlin smiled, “I am so pleased to meet you again Alice,”

“Thank you so much for inviting me back to Camelot, after everything that happened you didn’t have too,” Alice said,

“That is in the past. The only thing that matters is the future. I am starting this magic group I hope you will sit on it and play your part in creating a new Accord,” Merlin said,

“Of course, Merlin, it will be an honour,” Alice beamed, “Did everything go all right with Arthur?”

“It did thank you. In fact, I am going to let you two into a secret. I have been made the new Court Sorcerer of Camelot,” Merlin grinned,

“Oh, my boy, that is splendid news,” Gaius said, hugging him.

“Congratulations Merlin,” Alice smiled, “You deserve it, I will do everything I can to help you,”

“Thank you both of you. It will be announced officially tomorrow, so I suggest until then we all stay quiet. Otherwise he will probably kill me before my first day,”

“He won’t hear from us,” Gaius assured him.

“Arthur has given me the Pendragon Suite tonight until I get some official quarters of my own. So, I will pack a few things and leave you.” Merlin said, running up to his room. Once he put a few things in his bag he came back down.

“I feel a little bad that you are being forced to leave here,” Alice admitted, “I take it thought the Pendragon Suite is rather grand?”

“Oh yes, I have had endless days of cleaning it in the past. In fact, I seem to remember it has a draft coming from one of the windows. Trust him to give me that room,” Merlin made a face,

“Merlin,” Gaius laughed, “I don’t think you are in a position to be too critical of Arthur,”

Merlin laughed, “I suppose not. Oh yes, my mother is coming to stay. She should arrive tomorrow. It is all change,”

“Hunith, that is wonderful news. I will look forward to seeing her. You had better go and get some rest before you fall down,” Gaius suggested,

“Yes, I am a bit tired,” Merlin smiled, “I will see you in the morning,”

“Good night, Court Sorcerer,” Gaius beamed.

Merlin couldn’t help but smile as he walked over to his new room. As he opened the door he took a few moments to take in the scene. It still seemed completely surreal to him, yet somehow a natural step as well. Tomorrow would be the start of a new era for him, suddenly he was restless for the morning to arrive, so he could get started. From the moment he lay down, sleep engulfed him.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Arthur calls a meeting in which he changes the course of the Kingdom's direction and in doing so comes to a decision that alters everything for Merlin.

It was early when Merlin woke up and he decided to get up and go for a walk, to gather his thoughts. He knew he would have a busy day ahead with the meeting and his mother arriving. He had slept well in the large, plush bed in the Pendragon Suite, he made sure he left the room looking respectable. He had only just come out of the door when he bumped into Lancelot.

“Merlin,” Lancelot cried out, “Did I really just see you coming out of the Pendragon Suite!”

Merlin inwardly cringed, not sure what to do. He was conscious of the fact he had already told Gaius and Alice about his promotion against Arthur’s instructions. Yet he knew he had to tell Lancelot, since the Knight had kept his magic a secret for years.

“Arthur decided I needed a new room as Alice is staying with Gaius,” Merlin explained, walking quickly to keep up with his friend.

“I understand that,” Lancelot smiled, “But Merlin, you must have arrived to have one of the best rooms in the castle,”

“There is more, though I shouldn’t be telling you really,” Merlin cautioned.

“Not more secrets Merlin,” Lancelot laughed,

Merlin joined him seeing the funny side. “As you kept my secret for so long, I think you deserve to know,”

“Now that does sound interesting,” Lancelot mused, stopping in the corridor.

Merlin backed him into a corner and checked that no one was around before giving him the news.

“Arthur is going to make me Court Sorcerer,” Merlin explained, a smile on his face.

“Merlin, that is wonderful news,” Lancelot cried, giving Merlin shoulder a pat. “You must be so happy,“

“Yes, but obviously I wasn’t supposed to have told anyone. So you need to act surprised at the Round Table meeting that Arthur has called,” Merlin said,

“So, who else knows?” the Knight asked,

“Oh, only Gaius, Alice and you,” Merlin answered,

“You have only told three people then,” Lancelot laughed, “You are getting better at being more open now,”

Merlin laughed, “Yes, I suppose I am, it still feels slightly surreal,”
“You will get used to it, trust me. I am very happy for you, you deserve this,” Lancelot smiled,

“Thank you, Lancelot,” Merlin said,

“I’ve heard rumours that your mother is coming to stay.”

Merlin nodded, “Gwen said one of the Knights would accompany her to Camelot

“I think they have just left now. Hopefully after the meeting you will see her,” Lancelot said, “I had better go and finish off before the meeting begins,”

“I will see you later,” Merlin said, watching as Lancelot went down the steps and into the Knight’s quarters.

Merlin suddenly felt lost and unsure of what to do. He walked down the corridor and eventually came to the main steps and flew down them. He could feel a sudden breeze as the first temperature of autumn made its presence felt. He decided to go for a little saunter around the court yard and pick up the mood outside. There were already a few people milling about. He watched as a few individuals were putting up some market stalls.

Suddenly Merlin caught the whiff of roasting nuts and decided to go and treat himself. He knew exactly where Mary’s stall was and he lost himself in the crowd, taking in the scene around him. No one gave him a second look which made him feel happier still. Before long he arrived and was greeted by Mary’s friendly smile.

“Merlin!” she cried out, “I haven’t seen you for a while,”

“I have been a bit busy, something came up,” he said, he still felt anxious about how people would react to the recent rumours

“I heard what you did at Camlann. They say it was down to you that the young King survived. I think for that you deserve something special. Here,” she said, presenting him with a big packet of cooked nuts. The box had been smartly wrapped up with a red bow, as if waiting for Merlin’s arrival.

“Thank you, Mary. I have certainly missed these,” Merlin said, reaching into his pocket,

“No you don’t. That is free. It’s a return for everything you have done,” Mary winked,

“Thank you, for the thought Mary,” Merlin smiled,

“We’ve heard rumours that things will change, not before time I think,” she said,

“How do people feel about it?” Merlin asked, intrigued to get some early feedback.

“I think most people are accepting that it should happen. Especially when they know how their King was saved from Morgana. Don’t worry I will reassure anyone who is not. We need some new faces around maybe the Druids will return,”

“Thank you, Mary,” Merlin smiled, “I’d better go,”

“Mind how you go,” she laughed.

Merlin waved, and he relaxed more as he blended into the crowd. He took his time enjoying the nuts, as he walked. By now the crowd was increasing in size and vibrancy. Mary’s message had given him pause for thought. He wondered if having someone like Mary working with them would be a
good thing, on the outside. She seemed to have an intricate knowledge about the old ways. He suspected she had some magic in the family somewhere. She had always spoilt him from the earliest days.

Merlin walked slowly through the market, all of a sudden, a buzz seemed to take over the crowd. Her turned to where various people were pointing at a tall figure making his way through the curious groups of people. Merlin smiled as his eyes settled on Mervyn and his two companions. The Druid was bowing to various people as they watched him move towards where Merlin was waiting for him. When he drew up alongside Merlin, the sorcerer smiled,

“You seem to be making an impression,” Merlin said, “Welcome to Camelot,”

“This was something I could not miss. When I received the message, I knew I had to be here Emrys,” Mervyn replied, shaking his hand.

“I know Arthur is anxious to meet you as soon as possible,” Merlin said, “I suggest we make for the citadel and away from all the prying eyes,”

Mervyn laughed, “I am well used to being centre of attention thanks to my father. Especially as I am now performing his role. I am more interested in how you are taking to it,”

“Thankfully, this has been the first real experience of it so far. I suspect that will change pretty quickly though,” Merlin conceded,

“I take it you remember Cedric and Johnin,” Mervyn said, introducing the young and old Druids who both bowed at Merlin.

“Of course, I do, welcome all of you. Let’s go and get in from the cold,” Merlin suggested, leading the way. He became aware of a certain amount of curiosity in some of the Knights, who were training in the court yard. He decided to take them straight to the meeting room. As he went up the steps Lancelot passed by. The Knight smiled as he watched.

“Lancelot, this is Mervyn who is leader of the Druids in this area. May I also introduce Cedric and Johnin,” Merlin said, anxious for his friends to become acquainted with them.

“I am pleased to meet you all. I trust the journey wasn’t too bad and you didn’t have too many people gaping at you,” Lancelot said,

“Thank you, for your greeting Lancelot. I believe we caused a bit of a stir but hopefully people will get used to seeing us around,” Mervyn smiled,

“I am sure they will,” Lancelot agreed, “I will let the King know you are here,”

“Thanks, Lancelot,” Merlin replied, “Please make yourselves comfortable,”

Merlin suddenly felt a bit nervous as he became aware that now the hard work was really beginning. He was intrigued to see how Mervyn and Arthur would take to one another. He suspected they would get on, but he knew there were formalities to attend to first.

Arthur arrived shortly afterwards, coming straight over to where the Druids were sitting.

“Welcome to Camelot,” Arthur announced, “I have ordered some refreshments for you,”

“Thank you, your highness,” Mervyn replied, courteously
“Please, call me Arthur,” he replied,

“As you wish Arthur,” Mervyn said, “These are my two colleagues Cedric and Johnin. I am hoping they will be able to attend meetings if I am otherwise detained,”

“I certainly see no objections to that,” Arthur replied, “Merlin?”

“I’m fine with it,” Merlin said, he stood up as the drinks arrived and he poured some drinks out for everyone. “This seems like a good moment for a toast. To new beginnings,”

“New beginnings,” they all answered.

“I really wanted to meet you as soon as possible as I thought I needed to say a few words. I realise our relationship has not always been what it should have been. I myself have done things, of which I am not proud. For that I can only apologise,” Arthur said,

“Thank you, for that,” Mervyn replied, “Though I may add that nobody is perfect, we too have made mistakes, for which we regret. The most important thing is what we do in the future,”

“Absolutely and with no further ado I will let Merlin tell you about our future plans,”

“Thank you, Arthur. After we spoke and Arthur decided to lift the ban on magic, he asked me to appoint a group who will control any matters involving magic. I wanted naturally to involve you, especially as in the days before the purge, the Druids played a key role in magical matters in this Kingdom. The group will also involve non-magical people. Lord Oakes will represent their views. As well as him, Gaius, Lord Blake and Alice will also be involved in the meetings initially. I would like in time, to invite other groups too, but I think for now it is best to keep it a tightly knit group at least in the beginning,” Merlin explained,

“Of course, it sounds very intriguing and I agree that it is important to involve people who have no magic. When do you envisage the first meeting will happen, also will a new Accord be written?” Mervyn enquired,

“A new Accord will indeed be written. I know Lord Blake and Lord Oakes are looking at the old one. The first meeting will happen shortly and will include ideas for a new Accord. So, if you have any ideas please let me us know. I am anxious that every group should be represented on this Accord. The sooner we get started the earlier the work can be completed.” Merlin explained,

“I am wondering Arthur, if following this path will make uniting Albion that much harder?” Mervyn asked,

“There are obviously some Kingdoms which will doubtless not be impressed. But there are also others who have already embraced magic, as you know. I intend once we re-write the Accord, to invite all the leaders over and introduce the Accord to them, then we can reassure anyone who is nervous about this state of affairs,” Arthur explained, “I also have a meeting planned this afternoon, which I will be delighted if you would stay for.”

Mervyn looked at Arthur intently, “That sounds very interesting. We would be only too happy to stay,”

“That’s decided then,” Arthur said, “Speaking of which I still have a bit of work to do. I will leave you in Merlin’s capable hands,”

“Of course, it was nice to meet you Arthur,” Mervyn said, bowing.
Arthur smiled, “I’ll look forward to working with you,”

Merlin waited until Arthur had left the room. He felt this would be a good time to see how the Druids felt about what their role should be, in the new working order. He also wanted to know what Mervyn already knew about the old Accord.

“I’m not sure if you knew much about the old Accord. Did your father mention it to you?” Merlin asked,

“Yes, he talked quite a bit about it. He always described it as a contract between different peoples, who had differences in how they viewed certain situations. For the Druids the care of the land and the respect for those creatures who we existed with, was a moral obligation that we took seriously. Now, obviously sometimes that would lead us to conflict with those that saw the land as theirs to do with as they wanted,” Mervyn explained,

“I believe there was an unofficial rule which said the Druids had the right to exclude certain activities in the forest,” Merlin asked, remembering the little ruling that had Arthur grumbling.

“Yes, indeed. There were many disputes over who could hunt in the forest in the vicinity of our base. It was a very hotly contested argument. But once we started to push our weight with regard to keeping forest life sacred, the conflict would spread to other things as well,”

“We cannot let something like this happen again,” Merlin cautioned, “People must understand and accept the guidelines on which the new Accord will be based,”

“I agree,” Mervyn replied, “There was a signing after the original Accord was completed. Everyone who took part in the initial meeting signed their word on the document that they would stick to the letter of the law,”

“That didn’t happen though,” Merlin conceded, “There was a breakaway group which dissented, when they claimed that outside influences were getting too much power,”

“An important part of avoiding that from happening once again, is to invite those who have no magic into the process,” Mervyn agreed, “But we have to understand that some magical people will not be happy about them being involved. There will also be some scepticism as well,”

“That is natural,” Merlin assured him, “Arthur and I have already spoken about this. There will be suspicion on both sides, which is why people have to meet half way over this. After all, there are no clear winners here. Both the magical community and those who fear magic, have both suffered. Trying to bridge the gap between those viewpoints will be our greatest challenge,”

“With the people you have appointed, I am sure we can make a good start,” Mervyn said,

“I hope you are right, time is the essence. The longer we leave the uniting of Albion the bigger the chance, that someone will challenge Arthur overall,” Merlin admitted,

“Yes, there are some powerful personalities that we will have to bring to heel in those other Kingdoms,” Mervyn replied, “I have heard that King Lot will be stepping down and his son Martin will be taking over. They say he is very like his father, so we should be warned,”

“Interesting times ahead then. Having said that, I am reluctant to pre-judge anyone before they’ve had a fair chance,” Merlin cautioned. The one comfort he had, was that most of the other Kingdoms would be straight forward to deal with. King Lot and his son would have to wait.

“Before I forget Emrys, I would like to give you a copy of my father’s original notes. I have had
them copied by Johnin here meticulously. They may be used for a starting point in our first meeting,” Mervyn pulled out a manuscript from his battered bag and gave it to Merlin.

“Thank you, for this Mervyn. I will be very interested to acquaint myself with this,”

The door suddenly opened and Leon walked in, an apologetic look, on his face.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, but Arthur would like to start the meeting shortly,” Leon announced, “There is some food in the room down the corridor if you are hungry before it starts,”

“Oh no,” Merlin groaned, “It’s not going to be one of those long meetings is it?”

Leon laughed, “Time will tell. I will show your guests to the food,”

“Thank you, Leon. I will see you all later,” Merlin smiled, shaking Mervyn’s hand as he left.

Having been left alone in the Great Hall, Merlin started putting some extra chairs around the Round Table. His stomach was already tied up in knots and the meeting hadn’t even begun. He wondered if Arthur was struggling with the speech, especially as it was usually Merlin who wrote them. He just hoped Arthur wouldn’t embarrass him too much. He doubted there was any need to go over the top, but he already knew that the King would.

For a second he wished his mother was with him, if only to stop him wanting to run away. She, at least would speak some sense into his head, right now he needed it from somewhere. He wondered whether to go in search for Gaius, but was reluctant as he wanted Gaius and Alice to have some time together. He knew they had a lot of time to make up for.

In the end, he decided to have a quick flick through the manuscript that Mervyn had given him. He settled down and started going through the pages quickly, without really taking anything in much. It seemed a lot more detailed than Merlin had expected, but he was quite grateful for the distraction it gave him.

Just as he started to get into it the door opened and people started coming in. There were some Lords, then the Knights entered all smiling at Merlin. After them Gaius came in, waving at Merlin to join him. Merlin walked over to the other side of the table.

“How are you doing?” Gaius asked,

“I am so nervous. I hope he doesn’t expect me to speak my mouth is so dry,” Merlin moaned,

“Why don’t you have some water,” Gaius urged, pouring him a drink.

Merlin gratefully took the glass, but it felt as if he had a stone in his throat, the water seemed to be taking forever to trickle down.

“Sit down next to me,” Gaius urged, pulling a seat back.

“I don’t think I should assume to take a seat at the Round Table. I’m not a Knight or a Lord,” Merlin whispered, suddenly worried about the protocol.

“If he’s going to make you Court Sorcerer, my boy I don’t think there is any problem in sitting down,” “Gaius whispered,

“No one else knows, apart from Lancelot,” Merlin pointed out.

Suddenly the door opened and the King and Queen walked in. Merlin noticed how relaxed and
happy Guinevere was looking. She immediately smiled over his way and signalled for him to take a seat at the table. Merlin gave a quick glance at Arthur, but he hadn’t objected, so Merlin finally pulled a chair back and sat down. To his surprise no one looked at him in shock. There was an excitement around the table, Merlin sensed it immediately.

Presently Arthur stood up, smiling at everyone around the table, before his eyes finally settled on Merlin.

“First of all, I would like to thank everyone for attending this meeting. I know things have been confused and unclear after I returned from Camlann. But after what happened on that fateful night, it was important for us to take our time and consider things. A lot changed that night for both this Kingdom and for myself. But having gone through the range of emotions, followed by a carefully considered approach of what should happen next, I have finally reached a decision.

For many years this Kingdom has banned magic, it has led to a certain fear or paranoia about those who possessed these very unique skills. When my sister began her reign of terror on Camelot, it seemed that magic was the root of all evil to many of us. We looked at those magical people with suspicion and distrust. Not for one moment did we judge them individually, it seemed easier to just assume the worst.

I myself, was as guilty of this as anyone else here. We had allowed ourselves to be convinced without really knowing it to be true. I found that out on the night that Morgana attacked me. When Merlin revealed himself in front of everyone and killed my sister, instead of reacting with gratitude, I behaved with cowardice instead. I turned away from the man who for years, had been protecting myself, this Kingdom and every one of you.

I still feel great shame that was my first reaction. Instead of facing him and thanking him, I turned my back on him. I allowed myself to become distracted from being the King that I was born to be. The only good thing which came out of that was the realisation, that I needed to look at the whole question of the purge and everything that followed it.

I loved my father and I always will. I know he had his faults, I also understand that when my mother died it caused him deep distress. But having gone on the journey I have, I can no longer allow myself to accept that the ban on magic was justified. To punish a whole people for a tragic happening was a grave injustice. It was wrong and I feel I officially need to make that clear to everyone. With that in mind I have decided that the ban on magic will be lifted,”

Merlin heard a gasp from one or two of the older Lords and for a minute he wondered what would happen next. But he saw Arthur was ready to fight any disagreement here and now.

“I realise that to some it may come as a shock, but I assure you I have not reached this decision without speaking with those who have lived in this Kingdom, and have a full knowledge of Camelot’s time before the purge occurred. I would like to give my thanks to Gaius, to Lord Blake for all their work and honesty on answering my many questions. Having reached that decision, I will now announce another one.

I have asked Merlin here to become Camelot’s Court Sorcerer. This man has spent his time in Camelot, serving the realm with both honour and a bravery that impresses me the more I think about it. I would often question his courage while we were out on quests, but I know now truly what a brave man he is. A man prepared to give his time and his powers to a Kingdom that treated his kind as inferior yet he never judged for one moment. A man who would always look me in the eye and protect me, when I was in my most vulnerable moments. In bestowing this honour onto Merlin, I do so in the time-honoured notion that his greatest moments, and this Kingdom’s still lie ahead. I urge all of you to join me in welcoming him into the official Court,”
There was a brief pause in the room, until Gwaine and Lancelot jumped onto their feet and
applauded. Suddenly, everyone else followed suite and Merlin could feel his emotion welling up
inside of him. He dared not look at anyone for fear of it pouring out. The silence briefly returned
until Arthur once more stood up.

“Maybe you would like to say a few words Merlin,” he urged.

Merlin stood up and shuffled on his feet, he hadn’t even made a speech but decided today it needed
to come from the heart. It was the only way he could possibly express what was going through his
mind.

“First of all, I would like to thank you all for accepting me as Court Sorcerer. I can assure everyone
here, that I will do my utmost to protect the Kingdom, as I have done from the moment I arrived in
Camelot. When I first came I knew nothing about why my powers had been given to me. But as I
eventually found out I realised that at the heart of the Kingdom, stood a man of honour and integrity.
It has always been an honour to serve this Kingdom and Arthur.

I know we will face challenges in bringing magic back. I understand too that some will harbour
doubts and fears, that is only natural. It is for that reason that Arthur has asked me to form a group
that will write up a new Accord to bind all of our people together. It will also involve those who
have no magic, I would like to thank Lord Oakes for agreeing to represent those people. If we are to
succeed it is essential that we all work together. There can be no secrets or agreements on the side.
This Accord will come to symbolise not only Camelot, but also what Albion itself should be. An
understanding of how all our peoples can come together and work for the good of everyone.

Our friends here from the Druids will play an important part of this initial stage. It is imperative that
the first meeting is held as soon as possible. I will report to Arthur with any progress. Once the
Accord has been agreed, we then have the chance to bring the Five Kingdoms together so that
Albion can be officially born.

Finally, I would like to thank Gaius for all the support he has granted me over the years. Without him
I would not have made it through this whole experience, my thanks also go to Queen Guinevere for
her steadfast understanding and support for both myself and Arthur. But most of all it goes to the
man I have had the honour of serving all these years. I have never regretted a moment of it and I as
long as I am here I will always be at his side,”

Merlin turned and looked at Arthur in the eyes and for a moment they locked together as both of
them nodded at the other. The look spoke of an unsaid vow of service and deep friendship, that both
accepted in that moment and for ever more.

As Merlin sat down, Sir Leon immediately led the salute to the King and new Court Sorcerer.

“Three cheers for King Arthur and for Merlin the new Court Sorcerer of Camelot,”

As everyone rose to their feet once more and the cheers echoed around the room, Merlin this time
allowed a quick look at Gaius. He could see the tears in the old man’s eyes, for a moment he wanted
to hug him. But he knew now he was officially a member of the court, certain behaviour would have
to be abided by.

He contented himself with the thought that there would be time for that later. After a few more minor
announcements the meeting broke up. Merlin walked over to the King and Queen, as they remained
seated.

“Not a bad speech Merlin, all things considered,” Arthur remarked,
Merlin waited for a sarcastic aside from his friend, but realised he actually meant it.

“I was a little bit worried about your speech too,” Merlin smiled, “Having said that it wasn’t too bad, maybe a bit too long though!”

“Well, you can content yourself with the realisation that your speech writing days will begin to double now, both for yourself and for me,” Arthur grinned,

“I hadn’t thought about that,” Merlin replied, rolling his eyes.

“Seriously though, you did well today Merlin. I know there is a lot to take on, but you can be sure of my support throughout this whole venture,”

“Mine too,” Guinevere agreed,

“Thank you, both of you for everything,” Merlin said, then noticing Mervyn waiting at the door excused himself.

“My congratulations Emrys, on your promotion. It goes without saying you can call on me for any support,” Mervyn said, holding out his hand.

Merlin took it, with a smile, “Thank you, for everything you have done. I look forward to working with you all. I expect the first meeting to be very shortly. I will let you know,”

Mervyn nodded, “Please thank your King for his hospitality, sadly we must leave. Something has come up at our camp,”

“Nothing serious I hope,” Merlin replied, concerned.

“No, just a complication we are having to deal with. I am sure it will sort itself out,” Mervyn confirmed, “I will wait to hear from you so that we can begin the hard work,”

“Thank you, Mervyn safe journey back for all of you,” Merlin said, escorting them to the door.

Merlin watched the three Druids walk across the court yard, suddenly caught up in the new world that was unfurling itself around him. He thought back to the day he had arrived at Camelot, the thought that three Druids would have been walking inside the confines of the citadel was unthinkable. It made him realise that progress was already being made. Who knows what else they could achieve with time.

“Merlin?”

Merlin swung around to find his mother a smile on her face as wide as the Kingdom itself.

“Mother, when did you get here?” he cried, hugging her closely oblivious to those walking by them.

“About an hour ago, I’ve just had something to eat. Is it true what they are saying. That my boy is Camelot’s Court Sorcerer?” she asked, emotion in her eyes.

“The one and the same,” Merlin laughed, “Isn’t it amazing? Who’d have thought this would happen. When I think how worried I was in Ealdor only weeks ago, it feels like a lot of time has passed between then and now,”

“I am so proud of you my son,” Hunith replied, “I feel sure your father is looking down now and every bit as happy,”
“Which reminds me, Gaius gave me a staff from my father. We need to sit down, I’d loved to know what he told you about it,” Merlin said,

“All in good time Merlin. Guinevere has said I can stay for as long as I need to or want too. The idea of being able to stay close to you is really tempting. But I would feel better knowing how you feel too,” Hunith said,

Merlin took her hands in his. “You being in Camelot, is perfect. You would be so happy here. You can see Gaius, I’m sure you will get on well with Alice and there is a lovely community in the lower town. I can see you fitting into life here seamlessly. I can think of nothing better,”

“Oh Merlin, that is settled then,” Hunith hugged him.

Guinevere smiled, as she watched the tender reunion between mother and son. She was so happy that Hunith had accepted the invitation and knew having her in Camelot could only be a good thing for all of them.

She felt immensely proud of her husband and her friend who had at long last was now by Arthur’s side officially. She knew much work lay ahead and she was determined that everyone would give them the backing they needed. She was also determined that there would be opportunities for the women too. She had already given Arthur some thoughts. She felt elated that at last all the right people were now in place. Now the real work could begin.

Notes
Just a quick note to say there will be an epilogue posted next week to officially bring this story to a close. I will also explain what happens next. I hope everyone has enjoyed reading this chapter and thanks for all the lovely reviews.
In the months that had followed Arthur’s decision to lift the ban on magic, a succession of meetings had begun in earnest. At first predictably it had proved a slow-moving process, as different viewpoints were sorted and decisions put into order of importance and necessity. In those moments Merlin had felt a certain pressure, but with the people he had at his side, had managed to keep an open and understanding mind. He knew for any agreement to be met, he had to take all sides with him.

To his genuine surprise Lord Oakes had been proving a valued colleague in such moments. A man with a methodical and meticulous nature, he was someone who made sure everything had been thought through fully. It gave Merlin an assurance that everything had been considered in a fair way, which avoided accusations, from any other individual involved in the talks. Merlin had also been truly surprised at how open Lord Oakes had been, when discussing magical matters. Merlin still recognised he had concerns, but it made him more patient towards him when he expressed them, as a result.

He felt as long as Lord Oakes was being open and honest, it was easier for him to be supportive of any fear he held. Merlin had met with the Druids before-hand and explained the importance of working with the elderly Lord. True to their word they had remained patient and supportive, whenever any matter came up. To Merlin’s delight it proved a straight forward way of encouraging people and groups to trust one another. The more progress that was made, the further the relationships developed between the different groups of people. By the time the fourth meeting had ended, they had a straight and fair plan to work too. The Accord was beginning to take shape.

Merlin had breathed a sigh of relief, as it meant he could now go to Arthur at least with a broad agreement, in how it would come together. Arthur was in the middle of arranging a meeting with the leaders of the four other Kingdoms. Merlin knew the King was anxious to move the meeting forward, so that he could officially announce to the Kingdoms outside Camelot, that the magic ban had been lifted.

In the interim, life had changed drastically for Merlin. He had by now been given brand new quarters, as befitting a man of his position. The room was on the far side of the castle, in a quiet secluded corridor away from the hustle and bustle. He had at first dreaded moving from his old quarters, but within a week he had begun to fall in love with the lovely apartment. It was a big room, square in shape with big windows which gave it plenty of light. Arthur had seen to it, that Merlin had the best of everything. On the wall, was a copy of the old Accord, taking pride of place.

As Merlin became more used to his new surroundings, he sensed the room had something about it. It was as if, the place had its own history attached. That was duly confirmed by Gaius one afternoon, as he admitted it had formerly belonged to the last Court Sorceress, Nimueh. Merlin had not been at all unsettled by the fact, he recognised the place had a natural feel of belonging for him. Nimueh had become lost in her use of magic, Merlin though would do things in another way.

The room was also well strategically placed, as it overlooked part of the courtyard, so Merlin could see who was entering the castle at all times. On the very first day he had moved in he began to explore it more, he had made an exciting discovery. At the very back of the room was a small passage way, looking for somewhere to put his magic books he had accidently knocked on one of the side panels. To his surprise it opened up and within it revealed a secret room. He could see it would be ideal as a place he could store all his magical belongings. He had already fixed some shelves around the room and moved in some books. He also had a little cupboard where he had
stored his magical staffs, including his father’s old one. All of a sudden, he had begun to feel as if he truly found a home of his own. He loved the old divan which was placed against the far wall. Here he would often come to get away for an hour or so, when his mind was tired or he needed to think something through. He missed Gaius’s company, but he knew the old man and Alice were once more getting to know each other again. For now, he had his mother along the corridor so he contented himself, with spending time with her.

Hunith’s room was around the corner and was smaller than Merlin’s but overlooked the castle’s gardens. Merlin already knew how well she was settling down at Camelot, even if she had to get used to much more plusher surroundings. But to Merlin’s relief she loved the room and its views. She had met Alice already, so they would often spend time together. Guinevere too, made it her business to visit Hunith and involve herself in making everything perfect. It meant for the most part that Merlin could relax and get on with the job in hand, knowing that his mother was getting plenty of attention elsewhere. He would always drop in on her most mornings. But to his eyes, she was already looking much happier and contented than she had in Ealdor.

Merlin’s relationship with Arthur too was growing. They had their banter in moments between the endless work, but Merlin, sensed he had utter trust from the King, that more than anything gave him the confidence to power on. They would meet every day with Merlin giving him regular updates as to how everything was going. When Merlin needed any advice, Arthur would make himself immediately available. Merlin sensed a real growth in their personal relationship, which had grown out of everything, they had been through. But more than that, he felt their friendship had never been stronger or more respectful than now. When Merlin had needed Arthur to trust him on some important decision the King never hesitated. It gave Merlin a huge sense of worth and made his confidence increase as a result. Such was the feeling spreading through Camelot Merlin would wake each morning, smiling at the world. Suddenly everything seemed so much brighter. Despite the extra responsibility which came with it, he had never felt happier, yet in the odd moment a feeling of melancholy would enter his mind. The first time it had happened, it had taken him by surprise. But it always seemed to happen at the same time, at the end of the day.

His days were usually spent being surrounded by people, but once the meetings had ended and he had left Arthur’s chambers, the feeling would grab him unawares once again. He didn’t think he was worrying about anything, he knew things were going well. But when the feeling began to persist he decided he needed to talk to someone.

Merlin decided to drop in and see Gaius, as it had been a while since he’d seen him, outside of the meetings. He knocked on the door waiting for someone to answer, not hearing anyone he peered into the room. He was just about to go when suddenly Alice came down the steps of his old room.

“Merlin, how are you?” Alice asked, coming over and kissing him on the cheek.

“I am well thanks, I was hoping to catch Gaius,” Merlin smiled, sitting down.

“He will be back any minute, just went to see Lord Horst and to give him his medicine,” Alice explained, “do you want something to eat, there is some porridge left over,”

“No thanks, I had some with my mother,” Merlin replied “How are you settling in? I hardly get the chance to speak to you outside the meetings,”

“I am feeling very much at home. Camelot was my home before the Purge happened. I am surprised at how many people are still around that I used to know,” Alice laughed.” It still feels strange being here,”

“I feel the same where I am now, it’s not that I don’t feel at home it just feels different,” Merlin explained, “If that makes any sense,”
“I know exactly what you mean it’s a new start for you after all. I am sure you must miss Gaius too, you are welcome here anytime. I hope you realise that,” Alice frowned, “I know he has been missing you,”

“That’s why I thought I would drop in today,” Merlin admitted, “I am very thankful for all your help at the meetings,”

“You are doing a very good job, not easy keeping everyone on board after all,” Alice pointed out.

“No,” Merlin agreed, “But it’s useful when you have so many good people surrounding you,”

“Speaking of good people,” Alice exclaimed, as the door opened and a beaming Gaius came in.

“Merlin, what a nice surprise,” Gaius said, “I was hoping you would pop in,”

“I will leave you two boys to it,” Alice smiled, “I have some medicines to deliver,”

“Don’t let me force you out Alice,” Merlin said, frowning.

“I think you both could do with a bit of time together,” Alice suggested, “I will see you both later,”

“Thank you Alice,” Gaius grinned, “She can read my mind,”

Merlin laughed, “I’m not sure I would want anyone reading my mind,”

“How are you my boy, you were looking tired at the last meeting. Nothing on your mind I hope,” Gaius prompted.

“No problems on the Accord,” Merlin admitted.

“But,” Gaius asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I’m not sure I could explain it even if I knew what it was,” Merlin said, making a face.

“What about trying?” Gaius urged,

After a pause Merlin did his best to explain, still not sure he really knew what was behind it. “It is just every now and then, when the work is done I just feel really down sometimes. When I was a servant I didn’t have any time to myself, so I never had the chance to feel this way. It just nags away at me I don’t know how to stop it,”

“Merlin, you just have time to yourself now. So, you need to find something to do when you are not working, to fill the gaps in. Maybe you need to have a think about what you want to do with your quality time,” Gaius suggested,

“Go back to being a servant?” Merlin smiled,

“Oh Merlin, you are worth better things than that now. I think you have earned your place to build a life of your own,” Gaius smiled, “You need to have a think about what’s important to you. No one can just work we all need something in our life, especially you. I think Arthur and Guinevere want that for you as well. Promise me you will think it through,”

Merlin thought about it logically for a second and realised Gaius had a point. For so long he had been at Arthur’s beck and call, but his life had now changed and he suddenly understood that he needed to adjust to it. If he couldn’t go back to being a servant then he needed to do something else, which wouldn’t interfere with his ultimate responsibilities. But what he wondered?
“What are you thinking?” Gaius asked, with genuine warmth in his voice. “You don’t need to decide this very moment, just take your time and take stock of your life,”

“You’re right,” Merlin smiled, “Thank Gaius, as ever you have all the answers,”

“I’m very proud of you, you know that?” Gaius said, putting his hand on Merlin’s shoulder.

“I know and I thank you for all your support. How are you anyway, I wanted to check up on you and here we are talking about me,” Merlin grinned, awkwardly.

“I am fine. Alice is looking after me well. We have so much to catch up with, I doubt we will ever find enough time,” Gaius laughed, “I am so grateful I’ve had this chance again,”

“I am pleased too, for both of you. You already look years younger,” Merlin said, realising how much brighter Gaius now seemed. “Love suits you,”

“It would suit you too my boy, maybe you should try and find some,” Gaius urged,

“I wouldn’t have the time,” Merlin argued, only half joking.

“Merlin, there is always time for love,” Gaius assured him. “I mean it, whatever else you do you need to meet more people away from your responsibilities,” Gaius said, looking at him intently.

In moments like these Merlin realised how much he missed Freya. There were times he felt almost envious of Arthur and Guinevere when they shared a hug or kiss. But then he would get angry with himself, they were his friends after all, he should be happy for them. But sometimes he felt there was a hole in his heart that would never fill. He doubted if he could so much as even talk to a woman in that way now. What of interest would he have to say anyway he wondered despondently.

Merlin shrugged, “I will keep it in mind. I had better go and see Arthur. The meeting will be here before we know it,”

“Do you know what you will say?” Gaius asked, readying some herbs.

“I have done a draft of my speech, it will be nothing elaborate I have erred on the side of caution. There will be two leaders there at least whose attitude we won’t know much about,” Merlin grimaced.

“If you need any help, just ask,” Gaius said, “I am sure everything will be fine,”

“Let’s hope so. If there’s nothing I can do for you I will leave you, I may even have an opportunity to think about how to spend my days now,” Merlin smiled,

“There is a lot of things outside that you could be of interest to you Merlin,” Gaius pointed out.

“I dare say,” Merlin replied opening the door, “Let’s see if I’m able to fit it into my schedule,”

“Go and see Arthur,” Gaius laughed,

As he walked down the corridor Merlin felt slightly more cheerful, the initial gloom had lifted at least. it was also good to see his old mentor so bright and happy. He had already recognised a huge improvement in Gaius’s manner towards life generally, since Alice had arrived back. He knew he could trust her to take care of him, as Merlin concentrated on the task at hand. He hoped that Arthur would have nothing new for Merlin to get his teeth into, as he already felt time was of the essence. He noticed the door of Arthur’s chamber was open and the King was going through some paper
work on his desk. Arthur lifted his head up as Merlin dithered outside.

“Ah Merlin, come in. Is everything okay? How is your speech coming along?” Arthur asked,

“I have done an outline of what I’m going to say. I am trying to keep it as neutral as possible, for obvious reasons,” Merlin explained,

“While that is a good idea, don’t be too worried. It is important to establish the Kingdom’s new position, whatever anyone else thinks,” Arthur pointed out.

“Yes of course. How about your speech, do you need any help?” Merlin asked, his eyebrow rising.

“Anyone would think you are angling for your old job back Merlin,” Arthur grinned, “I ran my speech past Guinevere last night, she seems to think its fine.”

Merlin nodded, “I’m impressed since I have gone out on my own, we have a new pro-active King in place, learning new skills. This rather suits you if you don’t mind me saying,” Merlin laughed,

“Go on, you know I can still always get you back Merlin. Never forget that,” Arthur replied, a mischievous look on his face.

“Oh, I don’t doubt that,” Merlin admitted, “Do you need me for anything?”

“I think most things are covered, the invitations have gone out. King Rodor and his party will arrive later today. Can you make sure you are with Guinevere and I when they arrive? Speaking of which Guinevere would like to see you,” Arthur said,

“Why?” Merlin asked,

Arthur laughed, “You don’t have to sound so suspicious Merlin. I just think she has a little job for you, that’s all,”

“Now?” Merlin replied, suddenly feeling pressured.

“Don’t worry it won’t take that long,” Arthur said, pointing to the door. “You don’t want to keep her waiting, she’s in the rose gardens outside, unless there is anything you want to discuss?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Merlin replied, frowning and perturbed. He left the room questions in his mind.

It seemed strange for Guinevere to suddenly be giving him something to do, but he thought it best to get it out of the way. Then he could concentrate on what else he had to do, before the meeting began. He realised for the first times, the nerves were starting to happen and he was already wishing it was over. All of a sudden, he was relieved at the idea of keeping himself occupied.

***

Guinevere sat on the bench waiting for her and Arthur’s plan to unfurl. She knew her husband and his friend where having their daily meeting. She knew from Arthur’s daily reports to her that everything was going smoothly so far. For that she was relieved. But there was something that was troubling her about Merlin, after speaking to Arthur he agreed they should do something about it.

When Merlin had been made Court Sorcerer, Guinevere noticed how his confidence had soared, at least in the beginning. She had revelled in the way he had begun to shake away the secrecy of his former existence. She had always known there was more to him than met the eye. She had realised at
their very first meeting, when she introduced herself to him. She had always remembered the curious phrase he had used, “I’m in disguise,” when he had shaken her hand from the stocks. It was a sentence that Guinevere had never quite been able to forget or fully understand. But once Merlin had revealed himself at Camlann and the truth had come out, everything became clear to her.

She had always felt that in the beginning Merlin and she had been close. They had both grown up as servants to Arthur and Morgana, both had much in common. In the early days they had often backed each other up, when each had needed the other’s support.

Merlin had always been behind Guinevere and Arthur’s romance, when others such as Uther had disapproved of it. When Guinevere had finally sat on the throne beside Arthur she had always sworn, it would not come between herself and her friend. But inevitably such were the protocols of court life that sometimes things did get in the way, much to her distress. She felt in some moments, as if she had left him out in the cold, leaving him to feel even more isolated. But now she was more relaxed in her role, she swore to herself this would change.

So, it was, she had taken it upon herself to write to Hunith and through that had discovered that Merlin’s mother wasn’t too happy. It occurred to Guinevere that she was missing her son, she also understood that Merlin too was worried about his mother. She realised she had the power to bring them together, so she had invited Hunith to stay. She had got to know Hunith over the years she knew that the older woman, would bring much spirit and ideas to Camelot. Having persuaded Arthur and Hunith, Guinevere had felt sure that it would help Merlin as well.

To begin with it had, he seemed relaxed and happy. But there still appeared to be something which was missing. On the surface all seemed fine, but every now and then he would go quiet she would sense him withdrawing once more. She understood too well how confusing fitting into society could be for someone like Merlin. She had suffered the discomfort herself when she was adjusting to being the Queen. But she felt it went deeper than just that. She had mentioned it to Arthur hoping that he could break into Merlin’s mind. But he too had been unable to get to the bottom of it, in the end he suggested that Guinevere should try instead. She realised that she could maybe talk to him as a friend rather than as the Queen.

She wondered how easy it would be to get him to talk. At times, it still felt as though he was living in an isolated world apart from his friends. She and Arthur were both convinced at the heart was something he had been unable to tell them. Such a thought didn’t trouble her indeed she was pretty sure there was plenty they were still to learn. She had already had a brief conversation with him about Morgana.

The truth was she still thought about her former mistress, or rather the person she had once been. Like Merlin, she was saddened at how her magic had forced Morgana to turn into the person she had become. In the early days she had been such a kind and considerate soul towards Guinevere, especially when she had started off as her maid. They had become firm friends by the end of the year, but Guinevere could sense Morgana’s loneliness.

She had already learnt from Merlin himself, how isolating having magic could be. It was something which could cause distance between people, meaning barriers would go up. Guinevere realised that in her and Morgana’s case there was some truth to it. She wondered how many other people were forced to go through the same thing, sometimes with a lack of support. Merlin had already mentioned that he wanted to do something, to help people who were in that position. But she felt the reason for his sadness was something more personal and today she was determined to get to the bottom of it.

She smiled as she saw him ambling along the path, his manner strangely bumbling as if unsure of himself. She tried to read his face as he came towards her. He certainly looked tired, which
considering his workload was hardly a surprise.

“Arthur said you wanted to see me?” he said,

Guinevere sensed he sounded worried, so set to put his mind to rest. “There is nothing wrong Merlin,” she assured him. “Why don’t you sit down,” She wanted to laugh at his slightly suspicious look. She guessed he had already made the supposition that she was after something.

“It’s a bit strange to be meeting out here,” Merlin said, looking cold and dejected somehow.

“I thought you’d approve being outside with nature all around us,” Guinevere said, with a smile.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Merlin replied, “I love being outside, but it is a bit cold,”

“Point taken,” Guinevere conceded, “Let us walk instead of sitting,” They began walking and she took his arm gently.

“If there is nothing wrong, what’s the reason for this?” He asked, sounding much to Guinevere’s amusement confused.

“Does there have to be a reason for two friends to meet like this?” she pointed out.

“Arthur hinted you had a job for me” Merlin said,

“He got the wrong end of the stick, I only wanted to see you,” Guinevere replied laughing, “I just wanted to catch up with you, that’s all,”

“Oh,” Merlin replied surprised, “I suppose that’s okay then,”

“I know you are really busy at the moment, but I just wanted to see how you feel about everything,” Guinevere said, trying to broaden the conversation. She guessed before he even spoke, that he would just answer generally, but to her surprise he gave her far more than she was expecting.

“Obviously it’s full on for me just now. But everyone is pulling together so that is fine. But I don’t know, there is something that is on my mind, the moment I’m away from the work,” Merlin shrugged,

“Try and be a bit more pacific,” Guinevere prompted, “Do you mean when you are on your own?”

There was a pause before Merlin answered, she could tell he was fighting for the right words and wondered if she should help more. But he suddenly took the initiative.

“It’s just a feeling I get when I’m at the end of the day and everyone has left me,” Merlin mused, “I just feel really strange, almost low. I know it doesn’t make much sense,”

“I think it does, your life has changed so much in such a short space of time. Then there is getting used to being involved in court life officially. I remember it taking me ages adjusting to that. Of course, there is another thing it could be,” Guinevere said,

“What’s that?” Merlin asked, stopping.

“Have you considered you are feeling lonely? I mean think about it, everyone around you now has someone. So, it could make you feel a little bit alone even though a lot of the time you don’t think about too much,”

Guinevere watched Merlin taking a couple of moments to absorb what she had suggested. She could see a deep-seated frown on his face, as if it was something he hadn’t really considered himself.
“What do you think?” she asked him gently,

“It’s funny I was having a conversation with Gaius before. He suggested it was because I needed to have something else in my life, other than work. I suppose this is something similar. But when would I have time for someone else? I mean with all the work,” Merlin began,

“Merlin,” Guinevere cried, “Of course, you would have time for it, you would make time. Gaius is right you can’t just think about work all of the time. Sharing your life with someone is special, it makes every moment feel worth while somehow. It would be so wrong for you to feel you don’t have any time for anything else because of your responsibilities,”

“I just wonder how I would meet anyone now to be honest. I would hardly know what to say,” Merlin sighed,

“If it was the right person you would know, trust me. Look at Arthur and me, so many times I felt we had no chance. But there always seemed to be something which kept us going, you mainly,” Guinevere laughed,

“I did have someone special once,” Merlin smiled, sadly.

“Who?” Guinevere asked, surprised but then worried about the sudden sadness in his eyes.

“I never told Arthur as I didn’t want to upset him,” Merlin grimaced, “In fact only Gaius knows,”

“I’m happy to listen, if you want to tell me,” Guinevere replied, leading him over to the corner of the garden, which was quiet and secluded. They sat on a bench and Guinevere waited until he felt ready to begin.

“She was a Druid called Freya. I met her one evening after I had helped deliver some medicines with Gaius, in the lower town. We were on our way home when we passed this wagon, which had a cage inside it. As I walked passed, she sprang at me I was so shocked, but when I looked in her eyes and saw the fear, I knew I had to help her,”

“That is dreadful, why was she in a cage?” Guinevere asked,

“Do you remember the Bounty Hunter Halig, that Uther would use?” Merlin asked,

“Yes, I remember seeing him when I was with Morgana,” Guinevere admitted, shuddering at the memory of it. Her former mistress had a very forthright views on the man, which she shared when she too came across him.

“A man had attacked Freya and in defending herself she had killed him. The man’s mother was a sorceress and she put a curse on her. That was why the Druid’s had let her go and had given her to Halig,” Merlin explained.

“What was she like?” Guinevere asked, desperate to know more.

“She was so lovely, you would have got on with her so well. I wish you could have met her. I only knew her for a few days, but I fell in love with her. In fact, we were planning to leave Camelot. I realise now she was only saying it. She knew I had a good life in Camelot and she didn’t want me to risk it by going on the run with her,”

“I had no idea about any of this. How did I not know?” Guinevere said, shock and surprise in her voice.
“I kept it from everyone,” Merlin said, with a sigh. “With her background Gaius thought it best not to tell anyone,”

Guinevere didn’t know what to say. “I’m so sorry Merlin, to not be able to tell anyone must have been awful,”

“I had by then begun to get used to keeping secrets, putting on a face,” Merlin admitted, frowning.

Guinevere suddenly remembered something, “Can I ask a question? You said before you didn’t want to upset Arthur. What did you mean by that?”

“He had to kill her, she died in my arms,” Merlin said quietly, “It was so tragic its why I had decided not to say anything, knowing him as I do, he will blame himself. But it wasn’t his fault, any more than it was Freya’s. I buried her in the lake its somewhere I go to when I feel a bit down,”

Guinevere didn’t feel it was her job to question him about the curse. She could already see how sad and lost he looked. She hugged him and after a second, he leaned against her and accepted her support.

“Maybe one day you can tell Arthur,” Guinevere said, “I think he would want to know, but only when you are ready for it,”

“You really think he’d be able to take it?” Merlin sniffed,

“I think both of you have come a long way on this journey. I think you and he have changed and are stronger as a result. There are certain things which I don’t think would affect Arthur as much now, or you for that matter,”

“You could be right,” Merlin admitted, “I am pleased you know and when the time is right I will tell Arthur. You could also be right about the other thing as well,”

“I think out there somewhere, is a person just for you Merlin. Maybe you should give yourself the chance to look for her, once in a while. I know Arthur would be happy to see you with someone as well. In fact, I have an idea,” Guinevere grinned,

“Please, no match making. I promise I will not rule it out but let it happen naturally,” Merlin suggested.

Guinevere laughed at the look of horror on his face. She already had someone in mind, though she suspected it wouldn’t have occurred to Merlin. But with the leaders coming to Camelot she knew she would have the chance to do a bit of encouraging to her friends. She decided to say nothing as she was sure Merlin would have bolted at the idea.

“I hope you feel a bit better now, nothing else bothering you?” she asked him,

“No, and thank you for this. I feel a lot better now, at least I have some ideas from both you and Gaius. I just have to fit it all in,” Merlin smiled, getting up.

“You will fit it in Merlin, because if you don’t I will be asking you why you haven’t!” Guinevere replied, noting his eyes narrowing with terror once again.

“Right. I have to prepare for the meeting, I will see you later,” Merlin grinned, walking down the path.

“Remember what I said,” she called after him. He raised his hand in reply and she laughed to herself.
She felt a lot better now having seen Merlin unburden himself a bit and she also had an idea of how to rectify things. She had an impression that she wouldn’t have to work so hard on the other person concerned, which was probably just as well. All the same discretion she knew was the name of the game. As she walked back to the castle she had a think on what she would tell Arthur. She also realised their first guests would be here soon and she knew she had to lay down some groundwork first.

***

The Darkling Woods

It was late afternoon and King Rodor and his party were making haste for Camelot. He had his two children Mithian and Nael with him, who were having a very lively conversation opposite him. His oldest child Nael was accompanying him to Camelot for the first time. The elderly King felt it was time for his son to take on some responsibilities, as he felt he was reaching the end of his life. Nael was so confident in his behaviour but Rodor knew he still had much to learn. As he watched his son having his animated conversation with Mithian, he wondered as to where Nael had got his almost brash confidence from. Neither he or his now dead wife Edina, had such confidence in their earlier lives. At times Rodor felt as if his son came from a different family entirely. He did though look very much like his younger self, tall, gangly with very expressive eyes. He certainly knew how to get his sister going.

He was very proud of how much poise his daughter Mithian possessed, but Nael could turn that to dust in an instant. She had been looking forward to her next visit to Camelot. She was close to the Queen, Guinevere but also had an extremely good relationship with Arthur as well. But the animated argument was about the other member of Camelot’s hierarchy. It was also Merlin whom Rodor himself had been thinking about for a while. When he had heard about Merlin saving King Arthur’s life at Camlann it hadn’t entirely surprised him. In fact, he had always recognised that the King’s young servant had a certain quality about him. It wasn’t that he knew about his magic, but when the truth came out it hadn’t shocked Rodor at all. There had always been something steadfast about Merlin, despite Arthur’s jokes about his former servant’s fighting qualities. Rodor liked to feel he could sense a man with a special quality, now he knew he had been right all along.

He had also recognised that his daughter had taken a liking to Merlin. She was invariably talking about him when returning from a visit to the Kingdom. It was also something that Nael had caught onto very quickly, he wasn’t slow to tease her either. He knew his daughter well though, he felt as if he had seen her attraction to Merlin, before even she had. He also had a curious feeling that Merlin was not even aware of her attraction to him. This didn’t surprise him as Rodor himself had been exactly the same. He’d been the last one to know about Edina’s true feelings.

“So, what are you going to say to Merlin this time, Mith?” Nael teased,

“I will ask him to turn my annoying brother into a toad,” Mithian replied, with a scowl.

Rodor laughed, “I hope the pair of you will remember you are representing Nemeth in this meeting. I trust there will be no embarrassments of having to search for my son in the local pond,”

His two children laughed with him.

“Father please, you should know me better than that, I will be the model of discretion,” Mithian smiled.

“I don’t doubt it my dear. A big test for you Nael, to see if you can aspire to your sister’s expertise,”
“I know it will be hard, but there is no task, mountain or quest that I will not take on to prove myself to be in such worthy company,” Nael replied, with a sideways grin at his sister.

Rodor laughed, at his sibling’s reactions despite their arguments he knew each was extremely loyal to the other. He was proud of both of them and was determined to give his son every opportunity to be a successful monarch. He realised having a good working relationship with those in Camelot would be an ideal place to start.

“Not so far away now, the sight of those white towers is always a special moment, isn’t it Mithian?” Rodor smiled,

“Yes, it is a spectacular setting, I think even Nael will be impressed for once,” Mithian replied,

Rodor looked out of his window and saw the knights of Camelot riding into view.

“Sir Leon, thank you for greeting us,” he said smiling at the Knight.

“May I accompany you to Camelot sire. Hello Mithian and this must be Nael,” Leon said with a smile.

“Hello Leon, how are you?” Mithian smiled,

“Very well, thank you. I hope your first visit to Camelot will be a memorable,”

“Thank you, Leon. I am sure it will be everyone has told me a lot about this place, I look forward to meeting everyone,” Nael said.

Rodor sat back contented the first meeting had gone well. Within a few minutes they were entering the courtyard and he could already see the King, Queen and Merlin standing outside. As the carriage came to a stop, Leon helped King Rodor down, he turned to Nael and with a smile said, “Now my son, the hard work begins,”

***

Merlin was surprised by how nervous he was as he waited for King Rodor, Mithian and Nael to approach them. He had always felt as if he wouldn’t have a problem from them, as Nemeth had proved a true ally to Camelot in the past. But he recognised that he didn’t truly know their opinion on magic, though he knew the Kingdom tolerated its use. He wondered if he was smiling too much, as he went from one foot to another.

“Calm down Merlin, it’s not as if you don’t know them,” Arthur urged,

“It’s the first time I’ve greeted anyone though. You don’t know how hard it is,” Merlin shot back, making his smile even bigger.

“Merlin, just be yourself,” Guinevere said, giving him a reassuring pat. “You’ll be fine,”

Merlin nodded and gulped as Arthur went forward to greet their royal visitors. Merlin decided to just stay focused and concentrate on getting everything right.

“May I welcome our visitors from Nemeth,” Arthur said, he shook King Rodor’s hand. “As ever it is an honour to have you all here.”

“Thank you, Arthur. I speak for Mithian and Nael when I say I was very intrigued by the invitation,”

“Indeed, I hope and feel sure that this will be a new start for everyone. You know my wife, Queen
Guinevere,”

King Rodor took Guinevere’s hand, “An honour to meet you once again,”

“Thank you King Rodor, I hope your stay in Camelot proves enjoyable,”

“Now, can I present my new Court Sorcerer, Merlin,” Arthur said,

Merlin came forward hoping his nerves were not on show as much as he suspected. He came over to where King Rodor was still standing, relaxing as a smile appeared on the elderly King’s face.

“It’s a pleasure to meet your acquaintance once again Merlin. I would love to speak to you sometime, if it can be arranged?” King Rodor said,

“The pleasure is mine King Rodor, I am sure I can find some time for you,”

“Thank you, may I present my son Nael,”

“I am pleased to meet you Nael, its your first visit to Camelot I’ve heard. I hope you enjoy your stay,” Merlin replied,

“The pleasure is all mine, I can assure you I have been told a lot about Camelot already. I am sure I will enjoy it,” Nael smiled.

Merlin noticed Nael flash a smile in his sister’s direction as he said it, but he had gone in a flash, then Mithian came over. As ever, her simple, natural beauty took his breath away and his smile grew larger as she approached him.

“Merlin, it is nice to see you once again. Can I congratulate you on your promotion? I was so proud when we received the news about you,” Mithian smiled,

Merlin took her hand, “Thank you, my lady for your kind words. It has been a bit of an ordeal for me dealing with all of this. But as ever, you can put anyone at their ease,”

“From where I was standing you dealt with it very well. I know it’s a new experience for you but in the circumstances, I think you can deal with it. Something tells me you’ve faced far worse than this,” she smiled,

Merlin laughed, “I am happy you are so sure. Now please, let’s get you out of the cold and inside,”

As he escorted Mithian up the steps he realised not for the first time how easy a conversation was with her. Their relationship had steadily improved and he now considered her a friend. He knew one day she would be Queen somewhere, he just hoped whoever it was deserved her.

A special dinner had been prepared for their guests from Nemeth and it had been a good way for Merlin to prepare himself for what lay ahead of him. He realised there would be far more difficult people for him to work with, but for now he made the most of it. Tomorrow more challenging guests would be appearing in Camelot. So, for now he revelled in the easy conversation and the warm smiles coming from Mithian opposite him. As far as Merlin was concerned the rest of them could wait.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

The day before the big conference that will change Camelot's future the Kingdom get's ready for the influx of guests. Finding a quiet moment to himself Merlin attempts to find some solace but then someone comes to call, and Merlin realises on meeting them his plan is on track.

It was the day before the meeting arrived and Camelot had transformed overnight into a frenzy of activity. There seemed to be new servants everywhere as they rushed around organising each part of the castle so they could welcome their important guests. Every official room by now had already been cleaned, decorated with every amenity catered for. Guinever had helped in the organisation overall, along with Hunith, who seemed only too happy to help. The Knights too, had played their part, transporting heavy loads into the meeting room. Even Merlin and Arthur, had been seen putting up some decorations in the state rooms, as the big day approached. There were colourful sashes around the windows. Every table had been newly polished, chairs redecorated. The kitchens had been busy preparing banquets of food for the leaders and their entourages. Nothing had been left to chance by Arthur, who was determined there would be no mishaps, or crises on that most important day. He revelled in the idea that soon he could officially announce the change in Camelot's direction. He also loved how everyone, no matter how important or not had pulled together, to get everything ready. It had been a real team effort. He could already sense the excitement of the occasion beginning to take over.

For Merlin it had been a hugely busy time. He had fretted over his official speech, in the end having to run it by Gaius. It had only been the evening before that he was entirely happy with it. Arthur, to his amusement had already “perfected” his. He had noticed an almost competitive edge between his friend and himself now. Merlin suspected though, that Guinevere may have helped with the speech. It appeared to have her calm and considered manner in it. Either way it was one less thing for Merlin to have to do.

He had the spent the evening before in the company of first King Rodor and then his daughter Mithian. Rodor had wanted to go through his ideas for the possibility of involving other Kingdoms into their future magical plans. Merlin realised it was an obvious next step for them to expand into places such as Nemeth. Rodor had vast experiences of dealing with magical matters and seemed happy to put himself at Merlin’s disposal.

After that fruitful meeting, Merlin then enjoyed the company of Mithian. She had already spent a couple of hours helping to decorate the state room. When Merlin had pointed out she was actually a guest, she had laughed it away saying she was enjoying herself. Merlin admired the ability she had just being like everyone else. She had no airs and graces and treated everyone no matter who they were with the same attention and politeness. She also had a genuine sense of style, without being too extravagant. Merlin had enjoyed his time with her and agreed to meet up with her again, if time allowed. He knew though that could be doubtful if any problem came up. As the day grew nearer so his fears begin to increase. Two of the groups had an unknown attitude to magic, Merlin had no real idea how either of them would react to him. He decided in the end just to take it as it came.

The night before the guests were due to arrive in Camelot, Merlin had spent alone in his room. He had taken out the Grimoire that his mother had given to him in Ealdor. By now the ancient language
that was written in the book was becoming easier to understand. He realised it was just an older more old-fashioned style of communication, he was actually amazed at how quickly he had got to grips with it. While the spells were all in the ancient tongue, there were other passages in the native language. He had already found the paragraph about the healing stone his mother had spoken about. The stone according to the grimoire was centuries old and possessed special healing powers of both physical and mental variety. Merlin realised this could be something that Gaius and Alice would find interesting.

He continued to flick through the Grimoire anxious to find something, anything that could enable him to bring Aithusa’s suffering, to an end. He felt within his bones there had to be a spell or message which would lead him to make the connection he needed too. He had spoken to Mervyn upon his arrival and he had assured Merlin the dragon was fine. She was still staying in the area Merlin had left her, but looked to have settled down and she seemed to be reasonably content. But Merlin was desperate for more than that for her. He remembered what Kilgharrah had said, all those years ago. It seemed the tragic that so far, the young dragon had proved to be anything but lucky for Albion, Merlin was determined to change that. He continued to search through the pages impatiently, presently a knock distracted him. He looked around wondering who it could be. He knew the Knights and Arthur would be busy, Gaius and Alice rarely left their room in the evening apart from visits to their patients. Curiosity got the better of him and he moved over to the door, he opened it and stared at the young man who stood there, a smile on his face.

“You don’t remember me,” the young man said, his smile becoming bigger.

He was a bit smaller than Merlin, in brown trousers and a jacket that had seen better days. There was something about the eyes that seemed strangely familiar to Merlin, and the young man’s gawky manner, he thought hard. He then smiled as his guest’s name came to his lips.

“Gilli, welcome back to Camelot,” Merlin laughed back, “Please come in,”

Gilli stepped in the room and had a good look around Merlin’s apartment.

“This is lovely,” he said, “I hope I wasn’t disturbing you, I gather you are very busy at the moment.” he said,

“Never too busy to see you,” Merlin replied, “How are you?”

“I am well. I was curious to come back to Camelot after hearing about the magical ban being lifted. Just like you said it would be all those years ago,” the young man nodded.

“Well, I can’t pretend it happened in the way I was expecting.” Merlin grinned, amazed that even now he could talk about it so openly. It made him realise all over again how far he and Arthur had come.

“Yes, I heard from a villager how you saved the King’s life,” Gilli said, looking impressed.

“One day, maybe I’ll get around to telling you more about that day. But I am more interested in finding out about what you’ve been doing.” Merlin suggested, anxious to get away from the Morgana incident for now. He pointed at a chair and poured Gilli a drink as he listened to his story.

“I was in a village in Nemeth, King Rodor’s Kingdom. They had started a school for children with magical abilities. Some had problems controlling their skills, we worked with a group of Druids to help them overcome their situation,”

Merlin grew excited, realising his initial idea about Gilli had been a good one. “Yes, I was speaking
with King Rodor the other night, he told me about this school.”

“King Rodor is a very impressive man. I was so happy with how he and his family have lived with magic, in their Kingdom. It’s been a really interesting job working with them. I grew friendly with Nael he is a right character, a bit of a hot head maybe sometimes, but he has a good heart. Mithian too would involve herself, she is such a kind-hearted individual. The whole family were supportive of our aims. It makes such a difference,”

“It sounds as if you have done really well for yourself I am really pleased for you,” Merlin nodded, watching him carefully.

“I met one of your Knights and he told me all about what had happened, I knew I had to visit and see Camelot once again. It seems you are already making a difference,”

“Gilli, I feel I owe you an honest explanation. The Knight you met was Lancelot and I asked him to track you down, as I have a proposition for you,” Merlin explained, hoping Gilli would not take offence.

“Ah, I had a feeling it was a bit of a coincidence that I met Lancelot when I did,” the young man laughed. “I’m flattered that you would think about me at all, considering our last meeting,”

“You have nothing to reproach yourself for, I will never forget that day you saved my life. Camelot is facing huge challenges. Tomorrow Arthur will officially announce to the various leaders, that the magic ban will be lifted. I have already begun working with various people, in how we take the Kingdom forward on the back of that. But I have a particular job in mind for you, considering your experience. For now, though, I can’t say exactly what it is, as I haven’t discussed it fully with Arthur yet. I am hoping you will take a temporary position here, until I get that chance,”

“As I said before I am happy that you have even thought about me. As it happens I am looking for a new challenge, so I will be happy to assist you in any way I can,” Gilli smiled.

“That’s wonderful. I have been speaking with Gaius I’m sure you remember him,” Merlin said,

“Of course, I do,” Gilli said, “How is he?”

“He’s very well as it happens, he has his former fiancé Alice back with him. I think its true to say she has given him a new lease of life. But he is getting older and could do with a hand. I know you said you had some healing experience, so I wondered if you would mind helping him, until I can get my idea up and running?” Merlin said,

“It will be an honour to assist Gaius, he is okay about it?” Gilli wondered,

“It was him who suggested it. Where are you staying?” merlin asked,

“I have a room in the lower town, a nice enough place. Although a bit cold at night,” Gilli explained.

“Come to me tomorrow we will have an apartment for you, that’s if you’d like too,” Merlin smiled.

“Really? You mean it?” Gilli asked, his eyes amazed.

Merlin laughed, “The job I have for you will be an important one, so you may as well get used to living within the confines of court life,”

“I can’t believe how much my life has suddenly changed upon that meeting with Lancelot. Thank you for thinking about me, I cannot wait to start now and assist you anyway I can. It is amazing how
one day a new opportunity arrives. I think I had better go and get a good night’s rest, it sounds like I have a busy day ahead,” Gilli said, holding out his hand.

Merlin took it, “It is good to have you with us, we need every bit of help we can,”

“I won’t let you down,” Gilli promised.

Merlin escorted him to the door as he opened it he saw a shadow and jumped as he realised Mithian was standing outside.

“Gilli, what a surprise,” Mithian laughed,

“My Lady, as ever a pleasure to see you,” Gilli smiled, taking her hand.

Merlin watched them closely realising they seemed quite close and completely at ease in each other’s company. Gilli though quickly excused himself and walked away leaving Merlin enjoying the laughter in Mithian’s eyes.

“Oh, come in,” Merlin smiled, “It is best not to invite too much gossip,”

“So, me being outside your room would invite gossip in Camelot would it?” Mithian asked, her eyes playful.

“You of all people know about gossip and Court life,” Merlin grinned, “I dare say, you have been the cause of it yourself once or twice?”

“Intriguing, what gossip about me have you heard?” Mithian asked, sitting down on a chair. Merlin poured her a drink and gave it to her still feeling unreal that Mithian seemed so pleased to see him.

“I have heard you cause a stir wherever you go,” Merlin said,

“If only my life were that interesting,” Mithian smiled,

“Out of curiosity what brings you here?” Merlin asked, “I thought you’d be having an early night being a busy day tomorrow,”

“I thought you might be a bit nervous so thought I would come around and take your mind away from it all,” Mithian said, “I know how you are fretting about things despite your denials,”

Merlin loved the way she was suddenly so honest and open with him. They could alter their behaviour together instantly he found. With Mithian he didn’t feel there was any pretence, which was rare for someone of royalty. Once more her kindness touched him.

“Thank you for the thought. As it happens its been a busy night one way or another,” Merlin admitted, “You seemed to know Gilli really well,”

“I used to visit the magical school where he taught at, I would take some really badly baked cakes around there and meet the children,” Mithian explained, “We always seemed to get on very well, he has a really interesting take on all sorts of things. I used to love talking to him,”

“That school seemed to be a real success in Nemeth” Merlin said, “How did it start?”

“My father was brought up by people who had magic. In his childhood he was surrounded by them so he was always used to having magical people around him. There were even rumours that our family had magic in it going back a few centuries. I’m not entirely sure about that though. Nael and I had a maid who was a Druid called Else. She was such an important person in our young lives. She
was a real character, used to tell me all sorts of magical tales. She used to say in the Darkling Woods there were unicorns,” Mithian laughed,

“There are, or at least there were,” Merlin said smiling,

“Really? I assumed it was just a story. I know they used to exist but no one has seen them for years,” Mithian replied,

“When I first started working with Arthur we came across one. At the time Arthur was in hunting mode and he basically hit it with an arrow, after I tried to get it to leave. It brought a curse down on Camelot.” Merlin explained,

“No!” Mithian cried out, “Wasn’t there a keeper of the unicorns what was he called, no don’t tell me, I will remember. Oh, I know Anhora,”

“That’s correct Arthur and I came across him, Arthur had to prove himself worthy for the curse to be lifted,”

“For a person to atone for killing a pure-hearted unicorn, then that person had to prove themselves with an equally pure-hearted act,” Mithian finished the story for him.

“That’ right, your maid taught you well,” Merlin laughed,

Mithian laughed, “That’s amazing I always thought it was just a fairy-tale,”

“Sometimes magic and life are strange companions,” Merlin pointed out, “I suppose in a way we’re going to rediscover it now,”

“I suppose so. It must be an emotional moment for you, I mean I’m sure you always hoped this would happen. But there was never any guarantee that it would,” Mithian remarked.

As her words sank in Merlin realised in essence that she was correct, but luckily his and Arthur’s destinies had proved to be stubborn entities which had forced the world around them to change with it.

“Arthur and I always had a shared destiny in making this happen. Like you say though, life has a habit of complicating things. There was many a day when I questioned myself as to whether it would in my weaker moments,”

“And Arthur too?” Mithian enquired,

For the first time, Merlin felt troubled under her intense gaze. But as he considered things, he realised he had never lost his true belief in his friend. It was that which made their relationship so strong he now realised.

“No, I always believed in Arthur, even if he had never accepted magic, I would still have chosen to serve him. I would do anything for him,” Merlin met Mithian’s eyes, smiling gently at the surprise in her face.

“Even though you’d have to go on denying yourself?” she asked,

Merlin considered the question once again, though he already knew the answer deep down, he was keen to share the truth with Mithian so she could understand fully.

“Absolutely. You see, I always knew Arthur was at heart a good man. He had been brought up to
fear magic, he had also seen the abusive side of it as well. But he would always be fair in his judgement. No matter what, he always treated me with respect. I saw the decency in him, before he had any reason to need to show me anything at all,”

For the first time there was a brief silence between them. He knew for anyone else understanding his loyalty to Arthur, would be a struggle to comprehend. Perhaps they needed to be inside the circle of Camelot’s majesty to truly appreciate the feeling behind it.

Merlin remembered once more the time Arthur had invited them all to give their vows to him, inside the castle of the ancient Kings. That day the legend of King Arthur had been born, but it was only now that Arthur the man had become a true reality. A man who had chosen to see past the beliefs of his father, to see the truth surrounding magic and how it held together the whole Kingdom to its very core.

He wished he could convey his feelings better to Mithian. But deep down, he suspected she already understood the concept pretty well. Not for the first time he wondered what would happen to her. He knew eventually being a Princess she would marry someone, to unite two Kingdoms. He hoped with all his heart, it would be someone worthy of her. He suspected by then their friendship would be a distant memory, it was something that filled him with despair. He realised he could seldom talk to others, how he spoke to her. But they were two people going in opposite directions, he just passionately hoped whatever her future, it would be a happy one.

He jumped, as her voice interrupted his gloomy thoughts.

“Forgive me, you must be tired by now and you need a good night’s rest before tomorrow begins,” Mithian said, putting the glass down on the table. “I bid you good night,”

“Thank you Mithian once again, for,” Merlin paused, fighting for the right words, “For being so generous in thinking about me,”

“Why wouldn’t I think about you, you are an incredible man,” she replied, “I hope Arthur realises how lucky he is to have you by his side,”

“I assure you he does,” Merlin smiled,

“I know you will be busy over the next couple of days, but I hope our paths cross at some time,” Mithian replied,

“I will endeavour to make sure they do, my lady,” Merlin said, noticing that suddenly it was Mithian finding it hard to look at him.

“Good night Merlin,” Mithian stood on her tip toes planting a kiss on his cheek.

Merlin was in a trance as she walked passed him, by the time he had come out of it he realised to his embarrassment she had left. Only the faint aroma of her perfume lingered around him, all he could do was close his eyes and remember the light kiss on his face. He understood now her reluctance in looking at him, as she found her courage to act, had it been an impulse or something more he wondered?

But just as a slight excitement surfaced he shot it down quickly. Tomorrow would be the most important day of his and Arthur’s life. He could not allow any thought of a fanciful future with Mithian cloud that, he realised he was probably misreading her intentions anyway.

He had so few experiences with women especially since the death of Freya, Arthur and Camelot took up all his time. That wouldn’t change in the foreseeable future. He just needed to accept the
inevitable. Feeling well and truly brassed off he threw himself onto his bed unhappily. Sleep would not choose to be easy that night.

Next Morning

It was early and Arthur was meeting with Guinevere, Merlin and the Knights making sure everything was arranged as planned. The different leaders would all arrive within an hour of each other, Arthur knew he and Guinevere had to greet each one personally. He also had a pressing problem involving King Martin, who had refused to give an answer on whether he was accepting Camelot’s invitation. The son of Lot who had recently taken over from his father was already proving a thorn in the side to the new order. Arthur had in the end sent over Leon to see if he could get an answer. Leon and the Knights had been left standing outside the castle, with the new King refusing to invite them inside. After a couple of frustrating nights Arthur had sent word to Leon to return back to Camelot. He was anxious to hear Leon’s report on the matter.

“So, Sir Leon, what happened?” Arthur asked, feeling apprehensive and not wanting any problems arising before the conference had even begun.

“Not a lot sire to be honest. We made our way into his Kingdom and waited outside his courtyard for two days. On each day he refused to open the gates to let us in,“

“Did you not manage to see anyone?” Arthur asked,

“No one of real importance sire, just a very embarrassed courtier who assured us he wouldn’t allow us in, no matter what,” Leon explained,

Arthur grimaced turning his back. “This is something we don’t need,“

“Whatever happens we cannot allow this to interrupt the conference, even if it has to go on without him,” Guinevere said, determination in her voice.

“He has only just taken over from his father,” Merlin pointed out, “He is probably just trying to prove to his people that he is not someone who will be bossed around by anyone,“

Arthur thought for a second. He knew both Guinevere and Merlin had a point, the conference must carry on regardless. He also kind of understood the game King Martin was playing, in setting the tone of his rule even if it seemed entirely trivial to him.

Arthur turned around having come to a decision. He was determined nothing would stand in the way, of pushing through the new direction for his Kingdom. The other leaders would have his full attention, he would worry about the young King further down the line.

“We all know the timetable. It is important there’s an official greeting for each party. Leon, you and the Knights know the order I take it?”

“We do sire. The party from Gawant will arrive first. I will meet them and bring them into the courtyard. Lancelot, Percival will meet the others,“

“Good, remember when dealing with leaders always treat everyone exactly the same,” Arthur smiled,

“I’ve heard that a bit of exaggerating their importance goes down well too,” Merlin remarked, avoiding looking at Arthur. He could already sense the sarcastic expression on his friend’s face, though to his relief Arthur shared in the laughter.
“A pity you didn’t try that Merlin then,” Arthur pointed out,

“I heard you were the exception to the case,” Merlin lied,

Arthur enjoyed the sudden toning down of the mood, before bringing the conversation to a close. “Thanks everybody, this is a crucial day for our Kingdom’s future, I’m grateful for everyone’s assistance over the last few days. Now let’s work to make this a success,”

The Knight’s excused themselves and made haste to greet their visitors. In the end Arthur was left with Merlin and Guinevere, the two most important people in his life and without whom he would never have made it through.

“Here we are then,” he said, “I am grateful for both of you for your support over the last few months. I think it only right Merlin that you stand with Guinevere and I to greet our visitors. I am sure you would prefer to disappear but may as well get used to this part of Court life, as soon as possible,” Arthur could clearly read his friend’s expression without Merlin saying anything. “I promise you, it’s not that bad,”

“I suppose I am about to find that out,” Merlin said, blowing his cheeks out. “I actually think you will find it easier than you think,” Guinevere pointed out, “It’s not like it’s completely new to you,”

“I am usually in the background,” Merlin said, agitating suddenly,

“You still will be,” Arthur pointed out, “You won’t be standing in front of me,”

“In that case,” Merlin replied, “No will notice if I’m not there,”

“Merlin, you won’t get out of this so you will just have to adapt,” Arthur said sternly, before breaking out into a grin. It wasn’t often he could get the last word, so he decided to make the most of it.

“After that comment, how could I possibly not enjoy it,” Merlin replied, sarcasm leaping out of every word.

“I will leave you boys to come to terms with your new arrangement then,” Guinevere laughed, “Don’t forget our first guest’s will arrive shortly best faces on,”

“Where are you going?” Arthur asked, surprised.

“I just have to pop in and see Alice, I won’t be long.” Guinevere assured him.

Arthur and Merlin exchanged expressions. “What’s that about?” Arthur asked,

“Arthur, I am holding endless meetings and have other responsibilities yet, you still expect me to know what Guinevere’s every thought is!”

“I was only asking, thought you may have picked up some information. She seems to be seeing Alice a lot,”

“Maybe she would like to get away from her husband,” Merlin suggested,

“Merlin!” Arthur barked,

“It was only a joke,” Merlin said, “Albeit a bad one,”
Arthur laughed. “You will be fine Merlin I promise you. It can’t be worse than having to deny your whole existence can it?” There was a pause before his friend answered.

“When you put it like that, I suppose not. It’s just very different,” Merlin replied,

“You don’t need to tell me. It’s just as strange for me,” Arthur admitted,

“A huge moment in Camelot’s future,” Merlin said quietly, “A moment I cannot wait to realise. Although it’s pretty scary too,”

Arthur thought about his words and let them sink in. He realised they were just as relevant to himself. “True, yet according to the prophecy it was our destiny to bring the Kingdom to this moment. So somehow it seems very real now,”

“Destinies are funny things aren’t they,” Merlin smiled,

“Funny and life-changing. We have to make this work somehow Merlin and bring the Kingdoms into one entity. Strength is in numbers and that can make the difference for everything we’re aiming for,”

Merlin nodded, “I will do everything I can to bring this together, you have my vow like always,”

They clenched their arms and their eyes met and each saw the strength in the other.

“Thank you, my friend,” Arthur replied, “Now, let’s go and start making the future,”
chapter 30

Chapter Summary

The Great Meeting between the different Kingdoms begin and Arthur and Merlin prepare to meet their destinies. They realise this is just the beginning of all the hard work.

Chapter Notes

Note:

So, only an epilogue to go now and then this story comes to a close. I will then say where I will go next with it. Thanks for the continued support and enjoy this last proper chapter.

The morning had passed relatively stress-free for Merlin in the end. His hands ached with the incessant shaking they had endured from each party. But he felt it had all gone pretty well. Indeed, it had been a rewarding experience to realise that far from treating him with suspicion or disdain, there was a new found feeling of respect for him. Not only that but many had insisted on speaking to him at some time to sort out his opinions. Merlin realised it was a step forward, considering magic had been outlawed throughout most of the Kingdoms. Now, it appeared people were prepared to speak openly about the future. He realised more than ever that this was a huge opportunity.

There was one person missing, as suspected King Martin had so far not shown up. Merlin still felt deep down, it was the act of a young King proving his own mettle to his people. There would come a time when they would meet him, Merlin was determined to be open-minded when they did. For now, he had plenty to keep him busy. Presently the leaders were settling in. The meeting would open in a couple of hours, Merlin decided to sort out a few people, beginning with Mervyn the Druid’s leader.

The Druids had arrived early on and they appeared to Merlin completely settled in and almost excited to be present. They were sitting in one of the meeting rooms talking quietly amongst themselves. Mervyn stood up a big smile on his face as Merlin approached them.

“It is good to see you all, on this exciting day,” Merlin said, shaking each of their hands.

“It is a pleasure to be here in such distinguished company. It seems you have gone down well with everyone,” Mervyn replied,

“Yes, so far it has proved very straight-forward, which has left me at a loss somehow,” Merlin admitted,

“Perhaps the absence of King Martin might be the main reason for that,” Mervyn suggested with a smile,
“In a way I would have preferred him to be here, to see what we are dealing with,” Merlin said, still not sure about what was going on in that Kingdom.

“He is very much his own man, from what I have heard from the Druids over there. He has for the most part left them alone, but there is still a suspicion about his true motives,” the Druid, confessed.

“Maybe that shouldn’t surprise us too much considering the history,” Merlin replied, “Though I would prefer to give him the benefit of the doubt until he proves otherwise,”

“That is natural, the words of a true diplomat, which is what you will have to be to steer us through all of this,” Mervyn smiled.

“Indeed, speaking of which, the meeting will be starting shortly. I’ve been assured you will be escorted in, when everything is ready.” Merlin smiled.

“In that case, we will not detain you any longer Emyrs, good luck,” Mervyn smiled, offering his hand.

Merlin took it, feeling comforted by the firmness of the touch. He had always known that Mervyn would be an important ally in the agreement and so far, the Druid had proved useful beyond expectation.

Happy that the Druids were content to stay there, Merlin decided to check up on Arthur and Guinevere, knowing it was just as big a day for them. He walked briskly down the corridor smiling as people acknowledged him, as he turned the corner, he heard a familiar voice. Merlin turned around and smiled as he saw Alice and Gaius walking towards him.

“I was just thinking about you, I hope you are both well today,” Merlin said,

“These early starts, can take a toll on the old body,” Gaius replied, “But I wouldn’t miss this day for the world”  

“I’m sure Alice can find a potion to help,” Merlin replied with a smile,

“I am not sure even the genius of dear Alice can reverse my old age Merlin,” Gaius laughed.

Alice laughed too, “I keep telling Gaius healing is moving along at quite a rate so many new things to try. I’m not sure I can altogether defeat the aging process, but I know a few things which can at least help,”

“Just you being here, is comfort enough,” Gaius assured her, patting her hand.

Merlin not for the first time revelled in the closeness that Gaius and Alice shared. Alice coming back had completely reinvigorated Gaius in every way possible. She had also proved an astute ally in steering the Kingdom towards its intended destiny. She had knowledge that Merlin had benefited from in numerous ways already. Her practical advice and experience were something he had come to realise would be vital in the years ahead.

“Merlin, is it true that King Martin has stayed away from the talks?” Alice asked,

“So far, he has unless he decides to make an entrance at the last moment,” Merlin said,

“That wouldn’t surprise me, it was always Lot’s way of behaving too,” Gaius pointed out.

“I have heard concerning rumours about this King Martin. You need to be careful with him Merlin.
Be prepared, he is a young man who seems to be on a mission,” Alice warned,

“I’ve heard those rumours too, not least from the Druids,” Merlin admitted,

“There are a number of Druids who have reached the outer camps who are reporting mass movements of soldiers encircling them from time to time. Nothing has happened, it just seems very worrying,” Alice continued,

“We will do everything to keep an eye on things they have my word on that,” Merlin promised, “Mervyn is in the room over there, if you want to catch up with him, I had better go and see Arthur,”

“Of course,” Gaius smiled, “Oh, Merlin good luck,”

“Thank you, both of you I will hopefully see you soon,”

Merlin sprinted down the corridor wondering if Arthur was as tense as he suddenly felt. Alice’s words also played on his mind. He had already learnt she was not someone who would falsely exaggerate rumours, she also had a number of contacts among the Druids in different areas. As he approached Arthur’s quarters, he could already hear the young King’s voice and King Martin was prevalent in the conversation. He knocked on the door before entering.

Leon was already speaking with a concerned looking Arthur. The Knight, was obviously trying to calm Arthur over the continued absence of the new King.

“She, we have guards on every border, if King Martin did suddenly arrive, we would be forewarned. I suspect he is trying to be a martyr to his people by staying away,”

“Has there been any news?” Merlin asked, trying to get to the bottom of it,

“There have been rumours of a large army on the move, circulating on our border,” Leon stressed, “But at last sight they were moving away from Camelot,”

“I have just spoken to Alice. She has had reports from the Druids about King Martin surrounding their camps. There has been nothing sinister so far though,”

“Maybe scare tactics?” Leon asked, frowning,

“It could be I suppose. Everyone else is here though, we cannot delay it indefinitely. If we have to deal with King Martin at a later date, so be it,” Merlin said, looking at Arthur.

So far, the King had been quiet and thoughtful. Merlin could see he was in a bit of turmoil and he understood this was exactly what they didn’t want. But even if they could reach an accord with three of the Kingdoms, they had made a good start. He was about to make the point, when Arthur spoke.

“Thank you, Leon, for the up to date reports. But Merlin is right, we cannot delay any longer with everyone else here. I think we need to keep vigilant about King Martin’s intentions, so we keep our garrisons alert to any change on the situation,” Arthur commanded, looking at Leon,

“Yes Sire, I will pass on that message,” Leon nodded, and left the room.

As the door closed Merlin and Arthur was alone and not for the first time Merlin was aware of the hugeness of the task up ahead. It seemed Arthur was feeling the same strain.

“Well, how are you feeling on this important day, Merlin?” Arthur asked, picking up his sword from the table.

“I feel we should be careful with King Martin. He could just be playing a game with us, so we watch and see what happens. I won’t tolerate any bullying of the Druids. If this new future is to become a reality then respect must be the order of the day,” Arthur pointed out.

“I agree, Alice has a lot of useful contacts due to her work in the Druid camps,” Merlin said, “She could prove a useful ally here,”

“I was wrong about my feelings towards Alice, she has proved a godsend so far,” Arthur admitted,

“She certainly has,” a voice agreed behind him,

“Ah, Guinevere you’re here,” Arthur smiled,

“Hello Merlin, I hope you are feeling well on this wonderful day. Maybe a quick toast before we depart?” she asked, a smile on her face.

Merlin smiled and nodded, noting that Guinevere was in a new gown for the occasion. He looked at her closely and thought there was something different about her, that he couldn’t put his finger on.

Arthur paused, “Why not, there is a bottle of vintage wine in the cabinet,”

“Only water for me please,” Guinevere said, with a smile.

Merlin and Arthur both looked surprised, but Guinevere was quick with a reason.

“Don’t worry. It is such an important day, I want to have my mind focussed that’s all,” she assured them.

“Why don’t we all use water and save the vintage stuff for another time?” Merlin asked,

“That’s a good idea, I will get the glasses,” Arthur said, coming back with three glasses and pouring some water in each of them. “To the future, a future of tolerance, fairness and unity,”

They clicked glasses, a feeling of shared destiny gripping them all. Today would be the start of the journey toward uniting the Five Kingdoms. All of a sudden it didn’t matter that one King was absent. An important part of the new shared alliance would begin today without King Martin. The only thing that mattered now was heralding a new beginning for the lives of everyone. A knock on the door interrupted them,

Lancelot came, “Everything is ready, sire,” he said,

Arthur looked at Merlin and Guinevere, “Are we ready?”

“Yes, we are,” Merlin smiled, he put the glass down and he was suddenly hit by a feeling of pure emotion. The day he thought would never come had actually arrived after all. He vowed nothing would get in the way of his destiny becoming a reality.

The Hall

By the time Arthur, Merlin and Guinevere, had arrived in the Great Hall it was full of people. Among the leaders there were ordinary people from Camelot in attendance. It had been Guinevere’s idea; she felt it was important that there should be a representative from every corner of life, in Camelot present. There was also a group of children who would later perform before the dignitaries. They smiled in excitement as the royal party passed them, everyone sensing their joy as they did so.
Hunith, had stated to help with the children and took great delight in sitting amongst them, as Merlin followed Arthur and Guinevere to the centre of the table. Mother and son, exchanged nervous smiles.

The Round Table had been put to one side, as Arthur felt it was important that everyone was able to sit at the same table. The large oblong table in the centre of the room, had a history of its own. It had been around this very table, that the original accord had been signed. Arthur liked the idea of linking the past with the present. As Arthur approached the table, he helped Guinevere sit down and waited as Merlin did likewise.

Arthur paused, allowing the buzz of excitement settle down before he raised himself to speak. He made sure he looked around everyone, not wanting to exclude anyone from what he was about to say. Happy that he had everyone’s attention he began his long-rehearsed speech.

“First of all, I would like to welcome our guests to Camelot on this historic day. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the ordinary people of Camelot, who are sitting amongst us. I feel it is especially fitting that we have so many young people attending, as it is their futures which will be mostly affected by what I am about to announce.”

Arthur was aware of a sudden burst of anticipation, he could almost feel the nervous tension that had gripped the audience all around him. He continued meeting every eager face, in the Hall.

“I realise there has been much rumour and gossip about what occurred that fateful night at Camlann. When I rode away with my men to face our foes, little did I know that the life we knew in this Kingdom, would begin to unravel and then change forever.”

Arthur paused, looking at Merlin with an expression of pride on his face.

“In the moment when I faced my sister on the battlefield, I had little idea of what a dramatic confrontation it would prove to be. You could say it was the moment when I began to question everything, I had known in my life. I can assure everyone that without the actions of Merlin here, Camelot would have been without it’s King. Not only did he save my life, but also that of Camelot itself. I have to admit, such was my shock at watching Merlin perform his magic, I did not act in the way I should have done. Instead of thanking him for his courage and being grateful, I treated him with disdain and sent him back to Camelot. That is a reaction I remain ashamed of, at it disrespected him for his actions.

In the months that followed Merlin revealing himself, I went on an enormous personal journey. I had been brought up to believe that magic was something to be feared and distrusted. I had also been told that all Sorcerer’s had evil intentions and cause to bring down this Kingdom that I loved.” Arthur paused, having a quick drink of water.

“I will not disclose what was said between Merlin and myself that will remain between ourselves. But following on from that conversation I spoke with many people. I must give great credit to everyone who conducted themselves with honesty and integrity. I will make a special mention of Gaius, also Lord Blake and Lord Oakes. The more I spoke and learnt about life in Camelot before the purge, I realised that things had been very different from what I expected to hear.”

Arthur took a deep breath knowing the next bit would ruffle some feathers among people, but he was determined to say them anyway.

“I will always love my father and thank him for how he prepared me to be King. He was a resolute man and leader, he enabled Camelot to progress and always fought for what he felt was right. But, having learnt what I have in the past few months, I can no longer agree with the way we as a
Kingdom treated those who had magic.”

Arthur could already hear some murmurs but decided to face them straight away. He knew this would not be easy as many had suffered from magic, not least some of the ordinary citizens who sat among them now.

“Let me explain more please. I know we have all suffered in the past from magical acts. There were some despicable incidents from individuals, my sister among them. But that in itself does not give us the right to decry a whole race of people. Yet, that is what happened. From the moment the purge took a hold of our lands, no reason or fairness was engaged. Anyone who had magic was treated the same way. Their rights were taken from them, they were pushed away into the outer areas of our Kingdom, punished, attacked sometimes, often for little or no reason other than they had magic.”

Arthur paused for a second, as much to take a breath knowing he had caught everyone’s attention. “I have always believed that everyone must receive a fair and just hearing even if they have done wrong. Therefore, how can we possibly say hand on our hearts, that what happened here was right? I do not believe that two wrongs make a right. In a just society we must treat all people the same and with that in mind I have an announcement to make.”

A nervous ripple of excitement broke out making Arthur pause until everything had settled down again. Before speaking he nodded at Merlin and they smiled at one another, then Arthur went back to the audience.

“From this day forward, the ban on magic that has existed in Camelot, will be lifted straight away. Furthermore, I have one more announcement to make. Merlin Emrys here, will be made my Court Sorcerer. This is an honour that Merlin has earned through both service to me and to his adopted Kingdom of Camelot. I urge everyone to grant him the applause that he has truly earned in the last few years, when he has saved many people’s lives.” Arthur and Guinevere began the applause and soon everyone had risen and joined in.

***

Merlin shifted uncomfortably as the applause drifted over him as he stood, feeling self-conscious and not quite sure what to do. He looked around and caught the face of his mother Hunith, wiping tears from her eyes. He wished in that moment he could go over to her and hug her tight. This was as much as own triumph as his own he knew. He also noticed the pride of Gaius’s face and he nodded at him in gratitude. He turned and was encouraged to stand by Arthur and Guinevere, who were both milking in the applause for their newly crowned Court Sorcerer.

Merlin suspected now would be the time for his own speech and decided to take a quick drink, to stop his throat from drying anymore. As he put the glass down, he noticed the look of happiness on Mithian’s face. How he wished he could escape for a few minutes with her, to gather his thoughts, but suddenly Arthur was inviting him to speak and accept the honour he had bestowed on him. Merlin came and stood by Arthur, nodding at him as he passed the King.

“I would like to thank everyone for their kind and generous applause just now. When I first arrived in Camelot all those years ago, I had little idea what would happen. I had been born with a magical gift, yet I had no idea what it was for. I only met my father very briefly before he died, so it fell to my mother to bring me up and to keep me safe in my early years. It was only when I arrived in Camelot and met Gaius that I began to understand, the reason my magic had been given to me.”

Merlin smiled thinking of his and Arthur’s first meeting. “It was true to say that the King and my first introduction was not the best start. In fact, I had ended up being locked in the cell when I intervened between him and a servant. Yet from those early days I knew in essence that he was a decent and honourable man. He proved that time and again when he went over and above what most Princes
would do, for ordinary people like me. By that time, I had learnt that my ultimate destiny was to serve and protect him. I was proud to do so, in that time I had been forced to kill people and some of those like myself had magic. I didn’t for one minute hesitate to do so, as that was my ultimate duty. In accepting with gratitude, the job of Court Sorcerer I can assure everyone here, that I will do my utmost to protect my King and this Kingdom. I have come to consider this place as my home now and I hope I will remain here for many more years.

In lifting the magic ban I want to say to everyone that we will do our utmost to unite everyone in the Kingdom, whether or not they have magic. A Magical Council has already been set up. I have been asked to head it and many fine people are working with me to make it a success. I would like to welcome a party from the Druids who will be part of this new process. I’d like to announce too that Gaius, Alice and Lord Blake will also play an important part of the future. I would also like to mention Lord Oakes, who is the representative for those non-magical citizens. We felt it was important that all members of Camelot’s community were involved with the Council. I invite anyone who ever has any concerns, that we are all at their service.”

“Finally, I would like to thank King Arthur and Queen Guinevere for their support and the friendship that they have given me throughout my time in Camelot. I remain committed to this Kingdom and my King and Queen and I will endeavour to do my best to make this a success for all of us and for the land of Albion. Thank you everyone,”

Merlin made a bolt for his seat and managed to avoid Arthur’s hand stopping him. He could feel how red his face had become and wanted nothing more than a few minutes of freedom and time with those people he loved the most. Once the applause had stopped, Arthur got up once again, Merlin was happy to be in the background once more.

“I thank Merlin for his acceptance and update of what’s been happening. I realise that the change in the direction that Camelot is taking, will be of interest to our distinguished guests. I will be happy to speak with anyone who feels the need to, Merlin as well. I hope that others will consider their position on magic. This land has many challenges ahead, if we as a Kingdom want to successfully meet those, we need everyone pulling in the same direction. It will be up to everyone to make their own decisions and I’m not seeking to put pressure on anyone. But I feel we all would benefit from working with those who have unique and far ranging skills. Just like the rest of our peoples everyone has a role to play in uniting the land of Albion.” Arthur paused, to let his words sink in with the leaders. After a minute or so he decided to lighten the atmosphere,

“Having made our official announcements, I feel the time is right for a little bit of entertainment, I invite the children of Camelot to perform now.”

Arthur and Merlin settled back as the children came to the centre of the room. The speeches had seemed to have gone down well with most people. The challenges would lie ahead both of them realised that, yet both sensed a feeling of optimism engulfing the room. As they enjoyed the dancing and singing, they contented themselves with the idea the worst of it was now over. Now they needed to see how those Kingdoms around them reacted. As the children’s voices reached a crescendo echoing around the old Hall, Merlin’s eyes met Mithian’s once more and he knew he had to make sure he saw her once again.

Once the children had sung and departed the feast began and both Arthur and Merlin relaxed. The dinner went by with no averse, reaction from anyone, indeed everyone appeared to be getting on well. Suddenly a sense of tiredness took over Merlin and it was all he could do, not to yawn endlessly. The dinner having finished he excused himself and made his way over to where Hunith sat, taking it all in.
“Are you all right mother?” he asked, worriedly.

“Come here my boy,” she answered, a look of pride on her face. “I am so proud of you. Your father would feel the same. Court Sorcerer of Camelot, not bad for a young man from a little village in the country,”

“So much of this I owe to you and Gaius. I was thinking about that as I did my speech. You always said I was special, I always doubted that until this moment, then suddenly everything seemed to make sense to me,” Merlin said, with a smile.

“You were always special, even when you struggled with getting used to your gifts. But I always knew there was something out there for you. From the moment you came into my life, I never doubted you from the start,”

Merlin smiled, he turned around and spotted Mithian looking at him. He turned around and realised his mother had noticed too.

“I think Mithian likes you,” Hunith smiled,

“Mother, how would you know that,” Merlin asked, his face reddening.

“We had a little stroll in the gardens the other day. She is very nice and she spoke about you quite a lot,” Hunith smiled,

“It is true,” Merlin replied, “We get along very well, she is very easy to talk too,”

“I see,” Hunith grinned,

“It’s nothing like that mother, “Merlin assured her, “We are just good friends,”

“Either way I suggest you go and talk to her,” his mother laughed.

“Will you be okay?” Merlin asked,

“I’ll be fine, I sense Guinevere needs some female company,” Hunith grinned. “I will see you tomorrow,”

“Good Night mother,” Merlin smiled, walking over towards where Mithian was standing.

“Princess Mithian,” Merlin bowed formerly,

“Court Sorcerer,” Mithian curtsied back, a wicked smile on her face. “What about going out for some fresh air?”

“That would be a good idea,” Merlin agreed escorting her outside into the lit court yard.

“That was a very good speech,” Mithian said, sitting down. “Though I insist you tell me more about that first meeting with Arthur. To think he locked you away, he has some good ideas,”

Merlin laughed, “I fear that story would really bore you, especially for someone who has some dark ideas of wanting to lock people away,”

Mithian laughed back, “Why didn’t you use your powers to escape?”

“Ah, now that’s a question I wonder about myself,” Merlin admitted, “Though maybe the idea of facing Gaius’s wrath had something to do with it!”
“I find that hard to believe. He always seems like such a quiet man,” Mithian remarked.

“Let’s say he has his moment’s.” Merlin cautioned. “Can I ask something?”

“Of course, you can, ask anything,” Mithian smiled,

“How do you think the speeches went?” Merlin asked, nervously,

“I think they went down very well. You and Arthur are taking the lead and I find that really admirable. Maybe it will lead to changes elsewhere,” Mithian suggested,

“I was going to ask. I would like to see that Magic School in Nemeth sometime. I was going to take Gilli with me. Do you think you can suggest that to your father? Maybe you can visit and bring some very burned cakes to us,” Merlin suggested, a smile on his face.

Mithian laughed, “It’s been a while since I almost burnt the castle down. I don’t see that it will be a problem at all,”

“Good,” Merlin said, “I will be sad to see you leave,”

“I’ll be sad to go, this has been a really fascinating time. You have come into your own now,”

Merlin thought about her words and realised once more she had summed it up aptly. For the first time he did truly feel like he had become what he was supposed to be. It felt liberating but also scary. So much was riding on him, he knew so much could still go wrong.

“What are you thinking?” Mithian asked,

“I feel like I have embraced my destiny for the first time, it feels good,” Merlin admitted,

Mithian held his hand, giving it a squeeze, as they sat and contemplated the night in all its splendour.

Next Day

It was the next day, Merlin and Arthur were in the Great Hall going through some papers. The leaders had all departed at intervals throughout the morning. The speeches had gone down seemingly well, with everyone congratulating the King and his Sorcerer. A promise had been made by each leader present to return to Camelot after Christmas for another meeting. By that time, it was hoped the King Martin would join everyone else.

Merlin and Mithian had said their goodbyes properly the night before. As the party from Nemeth prepared to leave Camelot, both had been professional in their behaviour. But one look in Mithian’s eyes told him the parting for her, was as tough as it had been for him. As he watched her figure disappear into the carriage, it felt as if he’d lost a part of himself. The one saving grace, was the fact was her father had given him permission to visit the Magic School. He knew until then, he needed to stay strong.

Merlin pushed the pieces of paper absent-mindedly around the table, wishing he could exude some form of enthusiasm. Considering what they achieved he knew the feeling should be much more upbeat than what he was presently feeling. But he knew sometimes lows always followed highs and put it down to that. Looking up at Arthur, he suspected he felt much the same.

“How are you feeling?” Merlin asked, trying to gauge Arthur’s mood.

Arthur looked up, “I know I should be feeling happier but something feels flat and I don’t know
Merlin smiled, “I know exactly how you feel, that’s my mood exactly. Maybe that was bound to happen after everything we’ve been through lately,”

Arthur nodded, “You could be right Merlin. I have been thinking about Morgana a lot just now,”

“That’s only natural, she was your sister after all,” Merlin said, an idea suddenly coming to him.

“No matter how much I think about what she did at the end, I can’t forget who she was at the beginning,” Arthur admitted, “We have to stop that from happening to others Merlin, she wasn’t all bad. We both know that.”

“You are right and I actually have an idea. I have been thinking about how we could use Summer Hall. Once it’s been built back to its former glory, I wondered what we could with it,”

“I thought you were going to hold meetings of the Magical Council there,” Arthur said,

“It needs to have more of a use than just that. I was thinking generally about what it’s like when you grow up with magic. It is so easy to get marginalised by a community that doesn’t understand something like that. It happened to me in the beginning, as it did to Morgana too.”

“Go on,” Arthur encouraged,

“I’ve been thinking a lot about the Magic School in Nemeth.” Merlin began, “I have been invited to take a look at it. I feel we would benefit to do something similar in Camelot. Summer Hall could be the place where we can help others to give them the support they need. It would be a good example of remembering the decent side of your sister and others like her,”

“I think that’s an excellent idea Merlin, once again you have excelled yourself,” Arthur admitted,

“Gilli has experience working with young people, I will take him with me and suggest he works in the School. I am sure both Alice and Gaius too might show some interest as well,” Merlin continued,

“I am fully behind that, we need to get the work up and running. I will arrange for Leon to find some of the best possible people. We need to have Summer Hall restored and then the hard work can begin properly.”

“Thank you,” Merlin smiled,

The door opened and Guinevere walked in, once again looking at her Merlin felt something was different about her. She had a serene look on her face as if she was supremely happy.

“Guinevere, we were just about to have something to eat,” Arthur suggested,

“That’s nice,” Guinevere smiled, “Now all the official announcements are out of the way I have one of my own to make,”

“Oh?” Arthur replied,

“Don’t look so worried,” she laughed, “I have suspected for a while and now it has been confirmed that I am pregnant,”

“Did you hear that Merlin?” Arthur laughed, then went over and hugged his wife,

“That is wonderful news, there could be no better way to end this journey,” Merlin smiled,
“I think it is time for that vintage wine to be opened,” Arthur agreed,

“I’ll have water, but you two go ahead,” Guinevere encouraged,

“Congratulations,” Merlin said, giving Guinevere a kiss,

“Thank you, Merlin” she replied, taking a glass from Arthur,

With glasses full the three of them toasted the future and suddenly the disappointing feeling evaporated into a very different one. Camelot had reached its ultimate destiny and the future looked rosy in every way.
Life in Camelot had continued in the intervening months. Work had commenced on Summer Hall and Merlin had stayed in touch with the team of builders, whose job it was to restore it to its former glory. By now he had spoken to Gilli who had agreed to teach in the new School for Magic, which was now rapidly being planned. They had already received plenty of requests for help from people all over Camelot.

As Merlin suspected, there were plenty of people whose mistrust of magic remained. This in turn had, led to people being forced into the outer fringes of their communities. The mark of dark magic had left an impression on isolated villages, away from the safety of Camelot. It didn’t truly surprise Merlin, as he knew from his own experiences in Ealdor how fear could spread if unchallenged.

These people tended to be more set in their ways and less inclined to copy what was happening elsewhere. He had already made a plan to visit some remote villages when the spring came, to try and set up groups who could give assistance where needed. If that meant him meeting with Elders to encourage some support, he was more than willing to undertake it. But deep down he knew, some people would continue to oppose any change in their communities involving magic. In that case if all else failed, they would have to try other ideas. Merlin was loathed to force magic on people, for fear it made the situation worse. He knew though there would be many problems for them to overcome.

In Camelot itself excitement was building for any day now Guinevere was due to give birth to the new heir. After the endless days of worries and loss of hope, these were much happier times. Merlin was truly happy for his two friends, as having an heir would undoubtedly lead to more security for Arthur as a King. There was also the added buzz it gave everyone in the Kingdom. Right now, Camelot was living for a constructive and exciting future and Merlin was determined to make the most of it like everyone else.

By now his days had a set routine about them, which helped him through his enormous responsibilities. He would start the day working with Lancelot, who would report any problems which may have happened overnight. It was a situation both of them enjoyed. Lancelot had always been supportive of Merlin’s magic; the Knight also had a thirst for learning more about magic and any problems which could come from it. Merlin felt happy that his friend had one ear actively listening out for any impending problems. That meant he could concentrate on the more practical day to day challenges.

He also spoke daily with Alice and Gaius, often with Lord Blake dropping by. There would then be a weekly meeting with Lord Oakes also attending. Then they would go through any pressing problems which had occurred. By now Merlin felt completely confident with the people surrounding him. Alice represented the Druids when they were not there, but they would usually attend once a month. The rest of the time messages would be sent on to them. The daily meetings would last a few hours, leaving the rest of the time for Merlin to meet with Arthur, Guinevere and the Knights. Merlin
would always let Arthur know what they’d talked about in the meeting, and whether they needed any extra backing or power.

For the most part Merlin had found taking each challenge on its own merits was the best way to go up about it. It had mostly worked and so far there was more to be pleased about, then worried. At times it could feel as if progress was very slow, but he understood in the early days it was bound to be that way. Once they won the support of more people he knew that would give them some forward momentum. Then things would move more quickly.

When he wasn’t working with the group and had some time on his hands, he would often spend it in his apartment, looking over all the magic books he had assembled. Mervyn had given him one which had belonged to his father Iseldir. Merlin was amazed by how many different types of magic actually existed in the world. Whenever he could read he did, his thirst for further knowledge was insatiable.

Whenever he could find a spare hour he would talk things over with Alice and Gaius, finding out what they knew. He would sometimes go for dinner, by the time they had finished talking, it was usually the early hours of the morning. Gilli would often be with them unless he was meeting his girl in the lower town. Merlin enjoyed Gilli’s company as he thought there was a lot more to him, than was first apparent. There was no doubt his father’s death had overshadowed his young life; Merlin understood only too well how hard that was to overcome. But he sensed since Gilli had worked at the School in Nemeth, it had opened up a completely different way of life for the young man. Merlin felt confident the new project would be a blessing for him.

The other subject that occupied his mind was Aithusa. The Druids were still keeping a close eye on her and she appeared quite happy for now. He continued to read the Grimoire given to him by his mother. In it he had read much about different types of ancient magic that could be picked up in different areas. This information intrigued him and suddenly he wondered if he looking for the answer in the wrong place. Maybe it was a special location he was searching for rather than a particular kind of spell. It could be part of the solution was already out there, either way he knew he had to do more research. It made him more determined to find it.

**

It was mid-day and Arthur was studying a report that Leon had brought him. There was nothing too sinister on it, King Martin’s manoeuvres of a few months ago, seemed to be over now. Arthur knew at some time in the future they needed to look more forcefully into the situation. There were still rumours that the Druids there were feeling nervous of the young King’s attentions, but nothing so far had happened. As Arthur read half way down the page, he found his mind wandering off the task, as it often did these days.

For a man who liked to be disciplined in what he had to do, it was starting to become a really annoying occurrence. He seemed to be plagued by awkward feelings, which would catch him unaware. At first, he had laughed it off when other people began to notice. But as they started to become more frequent he began to wonder. To begin with, he’d been at a loss at what it was, which was troubling him.

When Guinevere had first told him she was pregnant, he had been deliriously happy. It wasn’t just about the joy of becoming a father, but to him it almost felt like a lucky sign for the way the Kingdom was heading. A new beginning, with an heir to the throne on the way, it almost felt as if the Gods themselves had sent a glorious message. But as time went on a feeling of intense brooding had begun to occur. When it began to seriously interrupt his day-to-day duties, he decided to seek some guidance.

He had already found Alice to be a big support for his wife, but Alice also went out of her way to
assist Arthur too. He wondered at first, it was a touch of guilt on her part over the incident with his father. He had already assured her, he held no hard feelings. Once that had been said, a new open and honest relationship had begun to develop.

In the end he had confided to her the strange feelings and brooding he was going through. The explanation Alice came up with him had stunned him to begin with. She had suggested that he was inwardly thinking about his own birth, which in turn was making him fear rather than look forward to the event. The fact that magic was coming back into the Kingdom, at the same time his child was being born, was making his mind connect with his own past and tragic start in life.

At first, Arthur had been ready to reject the suggestion, but the more he thought about it, the more he realised there was a touch of truth there. He knew feelings deep down in a person’s mind, can mess with reality and turn something positive into a negative situation. Alice urged him not to worry, to understand that they were learning things all the time. She assured him Guinevere would be in safe hands, he should try and enjoy the experience.

Arthur had done his best to follow Alice’s advice and for a brief time he coped better with his feelings. But as the days before the birth approached, the feelings of anxiety had returned to him. He was once more being disturbed at night, forgetting to do things and had a general feeling of despair surrounding his mood. He hated himself when he was out of control and would sometimes snap at people as a result, then he’d feel really bad about it. He sensed too, that Guinevere was worried which made him even madder with himself.

He had tried to talk it out with Merlin, but his friend could only say so much as he’d never been through the experience. What he did say made perfect sense, such as trusting in Alice but still his over-active mind would not settle. In the end he had a heart to heart with Guinevere, by the end of the conversation they had managed to settle his nerves down to a more manageable level. He realised as well, she had feelings of tension with it being her first birth. But together and with everyone who surrounded them, they both knew they would deal with whatever occurred.

Once that was out of the way, Arthur resumed to his normal duties. Progress was being made in many different areas. It felt like it was all coming together at last, the royal birth would be the event that joined it all together. He felt the day of his and Merlin’s destiny was becoming ever closer.

**

Alice was by now spending more time with Guinevere as she approached the day. Alice had made a calculation that the birth could take place any time over the next few days. She had already made sure the supplies they needed were already in. Everything was being meticulously planned, nothing left to chance. She had helped many a person before, in much less good situations than what Guinevere was facing. She would often tell her when they were together about her experiences, as she went from village to village, after escaping Camelot.

In her time especially in the poorer areas, she’d had to deliver babies in the sparsest of conditions. Some had somehow survived, while others had sadly not. One of her tasks given by Merlin was to see what villages outside Camelot needed and whether healing could be better administered in such places. It was something she had always wanted to undertake, it seemed really appropriate that in this new age of hope and freedom, nothing was off the agenda. She felt proud to be part of the new emerging Kingdom but knew the birth of a royal heir would be the lynch pin and give a sense of security, that was badly needed, for them to push on.

She and Gaius were continuing to discover new things about one another which surprised both of them. They had always made a good team before the Purge had separated them. Yet as a new opportunity had thrown them back together, it enabled each of them to learn something different of
the other. They enjoyed pooling their knowledge gained over the missing years, which enabled them to pass it on to the younger generation beside them.

Gilli was an attentive student always open to learning something new. Sometimes he would show them something different too, any new idea was immediately swooped on by the others and that enabled the learning to continue uninterrupted. Merlin had already described Gaius’s chambers as the “Learning Circle,” a name which duly spread through the rest of Camelot. Already people would speak in hushed whispers about how new discoveries were being learnt about healing, science and magic. A sense of almost reverence presided over the knowledgeable group. Gaius and Alice would laugh about it when they were together, still rather unbelieving of how everything had turned around for them and also magic too.

Elsewhere the Knights of Camelot had remained busy throughout the months approaching winter. Leon was organising regular trips around all the borders, keeping an eye of things. Percival, Gwaine and Elyan would often accompany him. By now they had taken in some new Knights, among them a quiet serious-minded young man called Galahad. The regular Knights had already discovered his quiet and polite nature, but there was no denying either his courage or his fighting skills.

He had already saved Gwaine’s life when they had been caught up in an ambush, on the way back to Camelot. The act had made Gwaine feel it was his duty to lighten up the new Knight’s demeanour. But he had made little progress, much to the other Knight’s amusement. Galahad seemed oblivious to the wonders of the Tavern and Gwaine’s other “occupations.” But if there was one quality Gwaine had it was patience, he vowed to one and all that he would break the young man’s will eventually.

Lancelot remained working with Merlin. He would sometimes ride out with the other Knights to outer regions, if any rumour circulated regarding magical problems, he would be the one who investigated it. He would then report back to Merlin who would decide what could be done. The plan had already had encouraging results. By being active they had managed to find small problems and solve them, before they became much bigger ones. Lancelot had been surprised by how many different kinds of problems there were in magic. He felt as if he was beginning to learn about a new civilisation. Merlin as ever proved open and honest and they would often chat about his own problems, earlier on in his life.

On his travels Lancelot would have regular meetings with the Druids and would sometimes stay overnight at a camp in the forest. By now he was getting to know them as a people and was already beginning to admire some of their beliefs and appreciate a different kind of life. In the old days he knew them just as the Druids, but now he had a sense of how distinctive they were as a people. The Druids were now more open as well, it was less necessary for them to hideaway for their own safety.

Lancelot would often escort them into Camelot where they would open stalls and channels of communication between them and the ordinary people of Camelot. It made the Knight busy and sometimes the days disappeared in a flash, but Lancelot seldom complained enjoying the change of pace and life around him.

So the days continued as the winter began to spread its white coat along the roads and villages surrounding Camelot. The first storms were beginning to be forecasted bringing blizzards in their wake, giving everywhere a crystalized and a wild magical look. A sense of community would come out as people worked together to keep their world functioning. The roads would be cleared so carts, carriages and people could continue to bring their goods into the Kingdom.

So it was on the 4th of December that Prince Lachlan was born, on a wild and windy night. The largest snowfalls had fallen just before the birth. By now Camelot was encased in deep snow,
everyday a fight to keep the Kingdom moving. But when the announcement was made Camelot celebrated, the curse had been broken. An heir had been born and the Kingdom had moved full circle. Magic had been reintroduced and Camelot came together. Amid the celebrations which took hold, questions remained, but for now they were put to one side.

***

It was in the evening when Merlin came to do a blessing on the young Prince. Everyone was in Arthur and Guinevere’s chambers. The King and Queen, the Knights, Gaius, Alice, Gilli, Hunith. All sat around as Merlin prepared the sacred prayer that would protect the newly born. A feeling of hope and happiness dominated the room. Merlin was dressed in a newly designed robe of blue, with big buttons and he had with him one of his staffs, which he blessed. He then approached the babe in the cot carefully. For a brief second Lachlan opened his eyes and they met Merlin’s, blue on blue. Merlin waited until he had settled again, then closed his eyes and recited the ancient prayer. With one movement of the staff he moved it over the cot, as his words came to an end. A brief flurry of light descended over the sleeping baby. Eventually he turned around and smiled at the group of people who were so dear to him.

“It is done,” he told, Arthur and Guinevere

“Thank you, Merlin,” Guinevere smiled, going over to Lachlan and checking on her son.

As people began to talk amongst themselves, Arthur beckoned Merlin over to him. They went out on the balcony. The dark had already descended, a sky of bright stars shone above them, with a full moon glinting on top of a faraway hill in the distance.

“I’m grateful to you Merlin, I wanted to ask the history of that prayer,” Arthur murmured looking ahead, as his Kingdom became bathed in darkness.

“It is an old ancient prayer that magical families always recite to their children. That is not to say every magical child gets a blessing, depends on their circumstances. As we’ve found recently there are many who are not in the best situations,” Merlin replied, watching the moon.

“That will change you have my word on that,” Arthur said, looking at Merlin.

“You have already changed a lot for them Arthur. We must continue to take the people with us on this adventure. Only then will the Kingdom become one,” Merlin pointed out,

“Indeed, there are many challenges that lie ahead. We will face those together. Tomorrow the hard work will truly begin,”

“We will,” Merlin agreed.

Someone called Arthur’s name and the King excused himself and disappeared back into his chambers.

A new flurry of snow fell out of the sky. To Merlin it was almost like a message, he allowed himself a contented smile. He thought of the journey that both of them had been on. At times it had been extremely painful but as he thought of where they were now, he regretted nothing. He knew some dark times could still lie ahead, but nothing would stop Arthur and him from reaching their destiny now….

The End.
Notes

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who has stayed with this story to its conclusion. At times it has been a challenging work to finish. I am extremely grateful for those who offered their comments and support.

When I first started writing this, I thought it would be just a one off. But the more I thought about it as it developed, the more I wondered about what came next. What was the point in writing a story where everything that you longed for has now been reached, only to pull the plug on it? It didn’t make any sense to me, slowly but surely another idea has been planted.

I intend to write another story following on from this one. It will not be a continuous story, but a collection of stories based on what happens next to Arthur and Merlin. It will involve many other characters as well. I will look back at the purge years especially with Alice now back with Gaius. I also have a plan to introduce other leaders from Kingdoms that Arthur and Merlin have to deal with.

Naturally Arthur and Merlin will have a big part of it, but I really want to explore the whole idea of them taking Camelot down, this particular road. How it affects the people there, how Albion becomes united, how it affects and changes Merlin, Arthur, Gwen and everyone else. It will probably not be a weekly posted story. I don’t intend any of the stories to be over long, but just have a continuous theme running through it.

I hope this encourages people to stay curious as I think there is a lot of scope to further develop this. It goes without saying I cannot wait to get started and the new collection will be called, The Albion Years. Thank you.

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