



The White Knight

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Category: Romance, Paranormal, Fantasy

Description: In the aftermath of tragedy, Guin faces a difficult choice: to follow her heart or her duty.

Having lost her husband, Lancelot, Guin feels stuck and alone in a time so far from her own, with no family or friends to rely upon. Grief is no stranger to the White Enchantress. But when King Arthur offers her his hand in marriage, Guin must decide to put her grief aside or wallow in it for the rest of her life.

After the birth of her son, Galahad, Guin takes refuge in the home she once shared with Lancelot, hoping against all odds that he will return. She struggles to decide whether to fulfill her destiny as the legendary Queen Guinevere or follow her heart and remain loyal to Lancelot, even in his death.

As the years go by and doubt creeps in, King Arthur slowly works his way into Guin's heart. But as fate would have it, their paths are not meant to be easy, and the futures they have built for themselves are not as legend has written them to be. With the threat of danger in every move she makes, Guin must navigate the treacherous waters of love, loyalty, and duty.

Will she choose to follow her heart and risk it all, or will she embrace her new life with King Arthur and the hope of a brighter future? Only time will tell in this epic tale of love, loss, and destiny.

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Prologue - Part I

Lancelot

I am startled awake from a deep sleep. The sound that stirred me awake was something between a roar and a screech. The dragon. In an instant, I am on my feet, reaching for the sword on my hip. But it is not there. As I look around, searching for my weapon, I do not recognize my surroundings.

Tall, ancient-looking trees surround me. Long sticks of wood topped with greenery. A sprinkling of snow decorates the forest floor. I walk a few paces to my right, where the trees stand aside to offer a breathtaking view of an endless forest. I know in this moment that I am no longer on the island of Britain.

I am lost. Far from home. From Guin. How far? When will I see my love again?

A pain in my chest brings me to my knees. I should have never left her. She was mine to protect, and now she is alone again. An agonizing wail escapes from the deepest depths of my soul. I do not care if the dragon hears my screams. It knew I meant to kill it, so it dropped me in the middle of nowhere with no means of returning home. A fate worse than death.

I will make it back. I must. For Guin, my life, my beautiful wife. I will make it back to you. I close my eyes and envision her before me. Her dark copper strands of hair entwined in my fingers. She is stroking her swollen belly, a joyous smile plastered on her face. This vision is one I have had many times. Even before we wed. I have dreamed of Guin as my wife, the mother of my children, my life partner.

And I swear on all that am, I will return to her.

First, I need to find my damn sword. I take inventory of what has survived the flight. Two daggers are still secure in the sheaths against my thigh and ankle. Most of my armor is still intact. The clothes I am wearing underneath will not keep me warm enough though. I will need to find a large enough animal with a thick hide I can skin.

Despite being late March, this place is considerably colder than even the highlands of Britain. I am unsure how long winter will last here, as I do not know how much farther north I am.

Trudging along, I comb through the area of the woods where I had awoken, searching for my sword. After scanning behind a cluster of trees quite a distance away, I find it stuck in the ground.

I am now surrounded by trees with no view of the outside world. Since I need to get a better bearing on my location, I walk back out to the small clearing. The sun seems to sit lower in the sky, but it still feels like it could be late morning or perhaps the afternoon.

It had been nearing evening when my men and I began our pursuit. The dragon must have flown all night with me stuck to one of its spikes. I do not remember dismounting or falling. Why did the beast not kill me? I only remember the look in the dragon's eyes before it took flight. And where was the dragon now?

I had heard it just as I woke up from a dreamless sleep. But I do not see any signs of the beast anywhere in this part of the forest. I will have to stay hidden. Learn the terrain. Survive.

"Guin. I promise. I will find my way back to you," I speak aloud, hoping some god hears the desperation in my voice and sends a message to Guin. I need her to know I

have not abandoned her.

Prologue - Part II

Guinevere

The light of the moon shines brilliantly against the temple, casting it in a luminous luster. It looks younger than I remember. Almost as if I had stepped back further in time. Or perhaps the priestesses have only renovated the once dilapidated roof. But even the rough and worn edges are as smooth as freshly carved stone.

As I walk up the west-facing steps, I notice a soft white light pulsing from within. The temple is still open on all sides, but I cannot see what is causing this unnatural light. Even though the moon is full and bright in the sky, it is not the source.

Suddenly, I feel strange. Something is off. My stomach swells with anxiety. A cramp causes me to keel over, making me fall sideways. Before I hit the ground, a soft, feminine hand reaches out from the light, pulling me back up.

I follow the pale skin of this hand up to a face I recognize but cannot place. Her eyes are the brightest blue. Her hair, platinum, shining from the white light pulsating from her body. And even stranger are her ears. They are pointed.

She is smiling at me with sparkling tears pooling in her eyes. "Hello, Guin."

A gasp falls from my lips as I recognize her voice, finally meeting her face-to-face. "Excalibur?"

She nods assuringly before pulling me into a warm hug. "My name is Elnaril," she says, stepping out of our embrace.

“But how is this happening? How am I able to see you?”

“It is nearly time for me to leave you, Guin. But I did not wish to do so without saying goodbye.”

“Leave?” My heart cannot take another loss. But it’s not my heart that pulses in this moment. My flat stomach, which should be rounded in my late stage of pregnancy, throbs as another contraction shakes from within, and I almost fall over again. “What do you mean, leave?”

“Your son, Galahad, will leave the safety of your womb soon. I must depart with him. I must protect him and prepare him for his future.”

“My son?”

Elnaril pauses in thought, looking up to the moon hanging so close to us in the sky I could reach out and touch it. “I never intended to hurt you. I need you to know that. I did not know everything that would come to pass. Only that you and Sir Lancelot would conceive a son. And this boy would one day become the bravest knight Britain has ever known. A man of patience, piety, loyalty, and purity.”

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I don't know how to respond. I have a son. Of course I had known all along. I can feel his soul inside me, growing stronger and stronger every day. He would grow up under the teachings of Arthur, so of course he would become all that Elnaril says. I am suddenly terrified at the idea of bringing him out into the world. I don't want my son to live a life that has been written for him. He will try to rewrite it like I did. I don't know if my heart will survive witnessing my son suffer the same fate.

“Guin, I know this is much to take in. But I promise, your son will be fine. I will protect him. When you give birth to Galahad, you will awaken an immense power within Excalibur. That power will only grow stronger each day of your son's life. I will help him learn how to use that power. So will Merlin. With our help, your son will summon Excalibur on command and wield its power.”

“He'll be so little. A newborn baby cannot possibly survive this power. It would be too much.”

“Galahad is strong enough.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I have been waiting for this moment for an eternity, it feels like. I sacrificed myself for Excalibur, for Galahad, for the future of Britain. When I found you, I awoke inside the sword I forged. And though I do not know what the future has in store for you, I can promise you that Galahad will live an incredible life. He will change the world.”

The pain in my stomach grows stronger. It will soon be time to say goodbye to

Elnaril. “Why can nobody see my future?”

“Because you are still writing it, Guin,” Elnaril says, her voice just above a whisper.

I laugh, thinking of all the stories I’ve read of Guinevere. Perhaps those are all lies. After all, I am Guinevere and my story is not over. And though the story I had attempted to write didn’t work out the way I wanted, I still have an entire life to live. A son to birth, to raise, to love.

Another contraction hits. I stifle a grunt, taking a deep breath to steady myself. Elnaril still has a grip on me, helping me to stay upright. I look into her deep blue eyes. They are glowing from a light within. I place my hands in hers as I say my farewell. “I will miss you. My constant companion. My friend. Take care of my son.”

She embraces me tightly, weeping against my neck. I close my eyes, feeling her warmth for the last time as she says, “Goodbye, Guin.”

Chapter 1

Lancelot

I cannot say how many years have passed, but I have lived through several winters without the warmth of my Guinevere. The wilderness where that blasted dragon dropped me was impossible to navigate through. Untouched by man. Swarming with creatures I had only heard tales of.

I was barely holding on, surviving on small forest creatures and unusual vegetation. With every bite, I prayed to any god who would listen that I was not unknowingly poisoning myself. Every morning, I woke up not knowing if I would see the light of tomorrow’s sun. And now I am certain I will not.

The first village I came across was nestled in a valley, far enough away to keep safe from the beasts within the forest. Forgetting caution, I was eager to finally meet another human. I strolled into the center of the village with confidence, sword hanging at my side and the hide of a black furry beast wrapped around my shoulders. Otso is the name the villagers called the beast. A creature of divinity. And I had killed one.

If I had known the death of this hideous black beast would be the death of me, I would have let it kill me in my sleep. Claws as long as my hand. Teeth sharpened to rip into flesh. And black, beady eyes that flashed with pure hatred. Its hide had kept me warm during the winters and offered me a soft bed at night. Now, I am marked as a killer of gods. At least that is how I have interpreted the situation I am in.

I could have swiftly overpowered the people of the village when I arrived, even though they gave me no warning before attacking me and removing the hide from my back. They are small people, even the men, with pointed ears and eyes larger than any man I know, sitting close together on a round face.

They threw me into a hole in the ground and placed a latticed roof made of sticks on top to keep me from escaping. I sit in this hole, listening to them mill about their day, speaking in their strange guttural language. I wonder if Guin could understand them with the gift of tongues given to her by Excalibur—one of its many mysteries.

Guin. It has been an eternity since I have seen her, felt her, been inside her. So long that my memory of her feels like a fading dream. I must hold on to her image in my mind, or I will lose her forever.

Every morning, I wake up missing her wild copper locks strewn across my chest. Every afternoon, I crave a glance from her dark emerald eyes. Every evening, I listen for her laugh. Every night, I fall asleep wishing she was in my arms.

With every breath I take, I am more determined to return to her. My love, my life. I left her confident that I would return. Hopeful that I had given her enough of my seed to sire a child. Before Guin, I had never thought about settling down and starting a family. I gave my life to Arthur, for his kingdom, and for his dream.

I never imagined my life could be domestic and serene. The few months Guin and I had together were the greatest of my life. My heart was whole. Our love was raw. Our life together was bliss. I need to go back to that life. I need to hold my wife in my arms again. And when I do, I will never leave her again.

Tears fall freely down my face. How will I get back to her? How the hell will I escape this open grave? I scream in agony. Raw from the emotions coursing through my body. I am tired. Exhausted from lack of food and lack of sleep. I am weak. My body, overworked from years of fighting my way out of an endless dark forest. I am doomed, captured by halflings who want me dead for killing a divine creature.

I let myself go, yelling to the sky, tearing at the walls of my prison. As I punch the dirt wall, a loud crack of thunder sounds overhead. An instant later, it rains. A downpour so strong it could be the death of me in this tiny hole of a prison.

Though I am not religious, I pray to God, the gods, my mother's goddess, anyone who will hear me, asking for them to grant me one more chance with Guinevere. To save me from this place.

The trench fills with water, rising above my ankles and is at my knees in what feels like only a few minutes. I look up at the sticks loosely held together with rope. I could break my way out of here with enough force. If I jump, my fingers just brush the doorway to my freedom. I could use the water to my advantage. The rain is making the ground softer, which means I could slide the roof out of the way.

I just need to reach it. The rain can help get me there. Perhaps one of the gods did hear

my prayers. I steadily wait until the water is at my chest, then submerge myself. With all the strength I have in me, I launch myself up and out of the water. The makeshift roof slides out of the way as I knock it with my fists. One more jump and my hands reach the top of my prison.

The mud makes it difficult to pull myself out. My fingers slide around the slimy earth, searching for something to grab hold of. I lose my grip when my hand finds a loose stick from the roof. As I tear it off, I fall back into the water, which is now at my shoulders. An hour or more has passed since the deluge of rain began, but I have only just attempted my escape plan. I know this will work. It has to.

Submerging myself one last time, I jump, gliding through the cold water. When I breach the surface, I am high enough to grab onto firmer soil. I take the stick I had pulled from the roof on my last attempt, stab it into the soft earth, and roll myself out of my prison.

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The surrounding area is unguarded. No one to stop me from running. I can see the village in the distance. The huts are being swept away by the currents of rain and wind. The people are struggling to save their homes and little ones. This rain, it is unforgiving. I should want to walk away and leave them to their destruction. But something inside me cannot turn away.

These folk are so small. Small in stature and mind. I would not wish this kind of death on my greatest enemy. Instead of fleeing, instead of continuing my journey home, I stay.

Chapter 2

Guinevere

Joyous Gard is not the same without Lancelot's warm embrace. I can recall the first time I laid eyes on my castle by the sea, as if reliving the memory all over. Lance and I were riding on horseback from Avalon, accompanied by chaperones because Gawain didn't trust us to be alone together. We had to appear as a properly engaged couple. And in the sixth century, properly engaged couples of honor didn't touch until they were married under the eyes of God. I didn't want to be honorable. I wanted to put my hands all over Lance.

How I wished I could just take him to my time, away from the prying eyes and threat of legend. But I behaved. And I let Gaheris and Mairren shadow my every move while in the presence of Sir Lancelot.

Returning to Joyous Gard after Lance's death should have destroyed me. But I've

made it a home for me and my son, Galahad. He is a crazy little three-year-old with hair that doesn't quite know if it's ginger, brown, or blond. His bright green eyes are a constant reminder of who this little boy is. Every time Galahad looks at me, I'm filled with love and sorrow all at once. His gaze always surprises me. It's overwhelming how much I love this little boy. I don't know where all this love came from.

Every time my heart shatters, it's rebuilt to carry more love than it did before. This sweet little boy of mine is a treasure. Not only to me, but to Arthur and his kingdom. Arthur comes to visit us here when we are not at Camelot. I know he still wants to marry me, but I cannot. I'm not ready yet. I'm still hoping that somehow Lance survived. That he is out there somewhere, fighting his way back home. To us.

My heart refuses to believe he is gone. Perhaps this is only my grief keeping me from healing. Latching on to the memory of him, the reminder of his touch, the feel of his soul melding to mine. Or perhaps it's fear. Fear that if Lance is still alive, and I am married to Arthur, destiny wins.

Even though I rejected Arthur's proposal, I still couldn't abandon him again. So I agreed I would marry him if Lancelot doesn't return in five years. I don't know where my heart will be then. I don't know if I will ever be ready to say goodbye to Lance. And I don't know if the story of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot is over yet.

Elnaril said that I'm still writing my story. I will try to keep true to my word. I know Arthur will give me all the time I need. Still, Arthur needs a queen. And not just a queen, an heir. A son who will inherit his throne and keep his legacy alive, which is why I have given him Galahad.

For years, we have allowed a rumor to spread. A rumor that Galahad is Arthur's son. It breaks my heart that the realm believes Lancelot's son to be Arthur's. But this lie, this rumor, has helped Arthur regain the loyalty of those who were upset by my

sudden “departure” and marriage to Sir Lancelot.

Arthur’s visits to Joyous Gard keep that rumor alive. I’m sure the court at Camelot turns into a hive of gossip while he is here, all of them wondering when he will return with me as his wife and queen. At the same time, Arthur enjoys the reprieve from court life. He loves being here with us. He loves Galahad. That much is not a rumor. Though this rumor has been accepted by most in the realm, Arthur’s nephew, Mordred, doesn’t believe the lie.

I had warned Arthur about Mordred years ago. Told him that Mordred would be the one to turn his sword against Arthur and deal the fatal blow. That future has likely changed with Lancelot’s death. Still, I can’t help but believe that Mordred will find another excuse to murder his uncle. I have spent little time in Camelot in the past four years, mainly because I despise Mordred.

After our brief visit to Avalon, I returned to Camelot with Arthur. At the time, I was halfway through my first trimester; at least that is what I had guessed. Though I wasn’t showing yet, my nausea made it obvious I was with child.

Elaine, of all people, had befriended me during this time. She was always kind to me. I had no reason to hate Elaine except for the fact that she was in love with Lance. It was jealousy and nothing more. But at my lowest, Elaine of Astolat showed me kindness while everyone else kept their distance, believing I had run off and abandoned Arthur to be with Lancelot. She knew the actual story. She was there at our wedding. As much as she hated it.

“I am so sorry for your loss, Lady Guinevere,” Elaine said as she approached me slowly from the entrance of Arthur’s private apartments. I had been hiding away in there for weeks, unable to face anyone at Camelot without bursting into tears. She hesitated at the arm of the bench I was curled up in, uncertain of my state of mind.

Elaine was the first face I had seen in weeks, besides Arthur and the servants who kept his apartments clean and brought me food. She was the first person to approach me and offer sympathy. I was still so weak from my grief, still raw from the loss of my husband. When I looked eyes with Elaine, I cried. She rushed to my side, scooping me up in a surprisingly comforting embrace.

I sobbed into her shoulder until I could breathe again. She was patient. Kind. Motherly, even. “Thank you, Elaine. I really needed a hug like that.”

She pushed out of our embrace to wipe the tears from my face. “You are most welcome, my lady. I needed a hug myself.”

I smiled, my lips shaking with the foreign movement. “I know we have not gotten along in the past. So it means a lot that you have come here and given me some comfort. I know you love him too.”

“Yes. I was not very good at hiding my obvious feelings for Sir Lancelot. He was an exceptional man. Easy to fall for.”

“Tell me about it,” I sighed, closing my eyes to see his face, an image I imprinted on my eyelids. When I opened them, I caressed my belly. A motion that did not go unnoticed by Elaine.

“There is a rumor going around the castle that you are with child,” Elaine whispered, as if she was afraid someone would overhear. “Is it Sir Lancelot’s or King Arthur’s?”

“What? How could it be Arthur’s?”

“Some say that you came back to Camelot because King Arthur and you, um,” Elaine’s skin turned a deep blush. “They say that you and the king...” She looked helplessly into my eyes, unable to finish the thought on her tongue.

“Oh,” I said plainly, relieving Elaine of the need to say what she couldn’t.

“Sir Lancelot would want you to marry King Arthur, to birth him children. He lived for King Arthur and would do anything for him. If Lancelot knew what would have happened after marrying you, he wouldn’t have done it.”

I scowled at her last comment. “You know nothing about it. Lance and I married to save Arthur.”

“Save him?”

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“Arthur knows the truth of it, and he alone will know. It is none of your business.”

“Lancelot didn’t marry you because he loved you?”

“Elaine. Lance and I loved each other with a passion that battles that of Achilles and Patroclus. If I had his remains, I would cremate them and store them in an urn where they would one day be mixed with my own ashes. Lance is my heart, my soul, the love I was destined to never have. You know nothing of what we had. You know nothing.”

I stood up, rushing to the bedpan I kept in this room because of my constant bouts of morning sickness. I vomited all my insides out within a minute, but felt like I still had more to expel. A hand took hold of my hair, helping me keep it out of the filthy pan.

“Why are you here, Elaine?” I didn’t understand what she wanted. I thought she was here to befriend me, to grieve with me. But her last comments pissed me the fuck off.

“I apologize, my lady. I am aware I do not know everything that has passed between you, Lancelot, and King Arthur. I also do not have the gift of premonition as you do—”

“I don’t have...” I stopped myself. Maybe I should let her believe I can predict the future. I sort of can. I took a deep breath, pushing myself against the stone wall.
“Why are you here?”

“King Arthur is worried about you. He wants you to have a companion, someone to talk to.”

I laughed. “How considerate of him.” And I meant what I said. I knew Arthur cared for me. He cared for my unborn child. He loved Lancelot. He put me in his royal apartments to keep a close eye on me, but also to show the kingdom that I was his family. Perhaps he also wanted to show them that we are something more than kin, but I don’t believe he would ever manipulate me.

“Does Arthur know about the rumor?”

Elaine joined me against the wall. There was something so intimate in the way we sat next to one another as if we were old pals. “He is king. If he has not heard it himself, one of his advisors has told him.”

I nodded. In that moment, I understood what I needed to do. I needed to let that rumor become the truth.

Later that night, while Arthur and I dined in private, something we had done together every night since our return to Camelot, I told him my plan. “So Elaine informed me of a rumor spreading through the halls of Camelot.”

“Hmm. And which rumor is this?” Arthur asked. “There are too many to keep track of.”

“The one that we slept together. In our raw grief at the loss of a man we both loved, we fell into bed together. From that grief, I became pregnant.”

“I have heard this one and have been discussing with my advisors on how to handle it.” Arthur meant to continue, but I stopped him from speaking, putting a finger to his lips.

“Let them talk.”

Arthur looked up into my eyes, confusion folded along the lines of his forehead. I could tell he was still grieving the loss of our White Knight. The redness behind the dark blue of his eyes told me he hadn't been sleeping well. His usually clean-cut blonde hair had grown out past his ears.

"Let this child be yours. I cannot marry you. At least not yet. But I can give you something that will appease the people. And give you a potential heir. You told me you cannot father your own children. Who else knows this?"

"No one. Only rumors." Arthur smirked shyly.

"If Lancelot is still alive...I know I'm crazy to think he could be, but I can't shake this feeling that has been coursing through me since seeing Vivienne. If Lancelot is alive, I can't marry you, but I think he would want you to have this. To have our son. With an heir, you have a stronger claim to the legacy you seek."

"What if you have a daughter? I will still be without an heir."

"Why can a woman not inherit? It's been done before and will happen again in the future. I was heiress to an earldom." I grabbed Arthur's hand as he thought of his response, but I kept going. "I know I have a son growing inside me."

Arthur squeezes my hands with his. "You are certain?"

"Yes."

At the time, I needed to give something to Arthur that would act as a peace offering to show him I was on his side. Maybe he thought I was lying to him. How could I know I was having a son? They don't have any ultrasounds in the sixth century.

Giving Arthur my son was one of the toughest decisions of my life. But I have not

regretted it for a second. Arthur has shown us nothing but kindness and love. He treats Galahad as if he truly is his own son. I am so grateful to him for being a father to my boy. That was my biggest fear. I didn't want Galahad to grow up as I did, without a dad. Now he is growing up between two homes, seeing his father as often as we can. We will eventually make the permanent move to Camelot, but not yet.

Chapter 3

Lancelot

I stay in the village until the last of the huts are rebuilt, hoping my kindness will pay for a way home. After rescuing them from the ruthless rain that threatened to destroy their entire village, the folk no longer fear me. I am their savior. When I first walked into their lives, I was a god killer. Now I am a god. They worship the ground I walk on, offering me the best food that survived the storm, their strongest ale, and their prettiest women. I take the food and drink with thanks but decline their offering of women. For only one woman possesses the comfort I seek.

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After weeks of celebration and months of trying to explain to the chief that I need to get back home, I feel hopeless. We understand each other's basic needs and wants, speaking mainly through hand gestures. Still, I am unable to convey my most desperate need. Or perhaps the chief chooses to ignore it. I have proven to be a godsend to these people. Why would they want to give me up? First, they believed me to be an omen. They may even believe I had brought down the rains to release me from my prison. I cannot be certain.

How I wish to have the linguistic power Excalibur gave to Guin. I need them to understand me. I need them to help me. I could simply turn and leave, head south and hope that I have chosen the right direction. Hope that I reach a land I recognize. Hope that I will not encounter a more violent folk who would not give me a chance to breathe an introduction. I cannot decide which is worse. Dying on an endless journey to find my way back to my home to my Guin. Or living a long life alone among these dwarf-like folk surrounded by a dark forest.

I need to try. I cannot live here waiting for a chance. I need to take it. Gathering my belongings—my sword, daggers, and furs—I leave my hut for the last time. No one stops me as they see me walk through the village, my intent clear. I am leaving. Before I make it past the boundary of the village, the chief appears in front of me out of thin air. I had not noticed his approach.

“Ukko,” I say his name, or at least what I believe is his name. “I need to go home now. I miss my wife. Please step aside.”

He sighs deeply, a sadness overtaking his strong bearded face. Holding out his hands, he motions me to look behind me. The entire village is there. Among them, a group

of males equipped for an expedition. Ukko addresses the folk, pointing first to me and then to the forest to the south. I laugh inwardly, knowing that he had understood me all this time. He had even prepared for when I would be ready to leave on my own. The group of four men steps forward, surrounding Ukko. They are dressed in furs and adorned with packs and all sorts of weapons and tools. Ready for whatever awaits us in the woods.

“Thank you, Ukko.” I stoop to embrace my friend. He holds onto my shoulder when I release him, saying something in his harsh, guttural tone. I know not what words he speaks, but I understand them. He wants me to get home safely and has offered his best men to escort me as far as they dare travel. “I am grateful.”

I stand and say my farewells to the villagers. Hope swells in my chest for the first time since I landed in this mystical place. I know I will see my Guin again. I do not care how long it takes. I will keep going until she is in my arms once more.

Two months into our adventure, I have gotten to know my fellowship of halflings rather well. Antti is a natural leader like his father, Ukko. It is obvious that his men admire him. Veli and Aku are brothers, I think. Both of them have the same golden hair, the color of hay in the afternoon’s light. Their noses are pointed at the tip, and their chins are covered in the same hay-colored hair. They love to make each other laugh. And their laughter is contagious, keeping us in high spirits.

Then there is Helgi. The shortest of the group and among the shorter folk from the village. That is saying something, considering the tallest of them only comes up to my chest. Even though Helgi is small in stature, his bravery outshines them all.

We make camp along the treeline near a lake. As the moon rises in the black night sky, it shimmers against the placid water. I cannot help but think back on the moments I shared with Guin after meeting her in Avalon.

Even when we were strangers to each other, I felt as if Guin was mine. Her pull. I could not resist it. If I did not have the restraint of a knight trained by Sir Gawain, I would have begged her to be mine then. But I kept my distance. Kept away from her, hoping that my insides would fuse back together after being ripped apart by her dark green gaze.

That moment by the lake, when Guin fell into my arms, that is the moment my heart claimed her. I could have lived my whole life in that single moment, consumed by her warmth.

Closing my eyes, I picture her head against my chest. Her breath gently tickling the hairs on my chest, making my skin come alive. Even in thought, Guin takes my breath away. She consumed so much of my soul, I am not sure I have any left for myself.

A small, brawny hand pulls me back from my thoughts. Keeping his hand on my arm, Antti guides me away from the tranquil lake. He points toward the lake, then bares his teeth and growls. For emphasis, he points to the lake again, shaking his head. I nod in understanding. Do not go near the lake. Something dangerous lies within.

I walk back to the campsite with Antti, the both of us making ourselves busy setting up our camp and collecting wood for the fire. Though still unable to speak with each other, we can communicate with dramatic hand gestures. As we eat our supper, Veli and Aku tell a story about Helgi. It must be embarrassing because the little man's skin turns as red as an apple. Helgi seems to be the primary subject of most of their jesting. Being among the shortest of their people, he is an easy target.

After we eat, the five of us prepare our sleeping pallets. Aku is the first one on watch. As I throw a thin blanket over my body, I see him walking the perimeter of our camp, eyes alert. Though this side of the forest is less dense, it does not mean there are no dangerous creatures lurking in the shadows.

Later that night, I wake up to a fit of screams and splashing of water. Antti, Veli, and Helgi are already up on their feet, running toward the lake. I follow, catching up with them as they reach the shore where the screams had come from. At first, I do not see a thing. Even with the full moon glimmering down on the lake, I cannot make out where the scream came from. Then Aku rises out of the water, flailing his hands around and wailing with all his might.

Something is trying to pull him under, but he is fighting, a short sword in his hand. Instinctively, I reach for the weapon at my hip. It is not there. I had tucked my sword in my blankets before falling asleep. I sprint to grab it and hurry back to the lake, where Aku is still putting up a fight. Though I do not know what creature has hold of Aku, I cannot leave him to die such a dreadful death.

I yell to Antti, telling him and his men to get their bows and cover me. Then, without hesitating, without waiting for them to acknowledge that they understood me, I run into the water. By the time I am waist-deep, the men are back at the water's edge, ready to fire. I dive under, keeping my eyes toward the direction of where Aku is flailing about. Thankfully, the moon is full tonight. Its bright luminous light penetrates the surface of the water, casting down on the horrific scene below.

A creature like none I have ever seen has hold of Aku by his ankles. But he is still fighting, making it difficult for the creature to drag him further into the lake. This breed of men is strong for their size. Any predator would think them easy prey. In the dark woods, I fought many fantastical and unusual beasts. Beasts much bigger than me. Beasts with talons and fangs. For Aku and his fellow villagers to survive such a land filled with horrors, they must be strong, quick, and unwilling to accept defeat.

I swim back to the surface for a breath before diving to meet this demon. Its body is that of a long, spinless fish, decorated with black scales. Though its face looks feminine, the sharp fangs in its mouth are enough to terrify any brave man. It does not know I have entered the battlefield, or at least it has not turned its attention toward

me. Good. I will have the element of surprise.

With all my strength, I swim forward and push my sword toward the belly of the creature, where the scales look thinner. But it moves aside at the last minute. Still, I grazed the scales, leaving a trail of black blood. In its shock, the creature lets go of Aku but casts its gaze on me. Its scale-covered arms reach out for me, claws growing bigger as I try to swim toward the surface, needing a breath of air. Sensing my weakness, it launches at me before I make it to the surface. The water slows my parry, giving the beast the opportunity to graze my shoulder with its long claws. But I do not flinch; I follow through and slice the beast's arm off.

At the same time I attack, Aku launches at the beast's back, sinking his small sword into its neck. Black bubbles escape from its mouth. If sound could reach my ears, I am certain I would hear a savage screech. With the beast in distress, Aku and I swim back to the shore as fast as we can. My lungs burn, needing air, but I have no time to breathe.

As we reach the lakeshore, I help Aku out of the water. He is bleeding badly, but otherwise can hold himself up on his own feet. We will examine his wounds once we are far from the lake. Antti and the others are busy shooting arrows at the creature. It howls in pain and frustration as two arrows pierce between its thick scales. The three little men shoot again, all reaching their target on the softer fleshy scales where the heart would be in any other creature. With that last assault, the creature disappears into the blackness of the lake.

"We must go. Now," I say to Antii, who replies with a sharp nod. We make haste to our camp and gather our supplies as quickly as possible. Veli helps Aku bundle up his pack, and we set off into the woods at a rapid pace, not stopping to catch our breaths until the sun rises in the east.

The five of us collapse under a group of trees, shading us from the rising sun. As I

close my eyes to rest, Veli hands me a skin full of ale, gesturing me to drink. I take a long sip to appease him. Afterward, Veli places his left hand on my uninjured shoulder and his right across his chest. I nod, telling him that he has nothing to thank me for. I would never leave someone to die.

But it is not enough. Veli hands me his rations of cheese, bread, and a handful of berries. “There is no need for this. I have my own food—”

Veli interrupts me by shoving the parcel of food in my hands. He points to Aku, who is dressing his own wounds, then places his right hand over his chest again. I nod again, this time placing my hands on his shoulders, giving them a squeeze. “Let us get some rest now.”

Eight months later, my escort leads me to the very edge of the dark forest, even though they had been afraid to journey too close to civilization. These four half-sized men are some of the bravest I have ever met. They would have walked me right onto a ship and ensured my safe passage home if I had not stopped them from continuing further. Though I do not know what they are, I know they are not human. They would not be welcome in the human world.

Upon my departure, I am gifted with furs, skins of ale and wine, and parcels of cheese. “But these are for your journey back to your village,” I say, pushing the items back into their hands. Their stubbornness is stronger than mine though. I thank them again for bringing me this far and tell them that I hope to never see them again, in jest.

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I will miss this bunch. I will miss the companionship. But I am closer to home than I have been in years. I breathe a sigh of relief as I take another step closer to Guin.

Chapter 4

Guinevere

“What has Merlin taught you today, my love?” I ask Galahad as I get him ready for bed. Merlin is staying at Joyous Gard now that Galahad is five. For the past six months, Galahad spends his mornings training with Merlin, learning to feel the power growing inside him and how to control it. He’s still so young but has the mind of a young man, not a little boy.

“He’s still teaching me the histories of the realm. We’ve been reading some interesting scrolls. Really old ones. Merlin won’t let me hold them on my own, probably because they fall to pieces if you hold them too tightly. But I’m learning so much.”

“That’s good. It’s important to understand the land you will one day rule.” I tousle the caramel-colored hair on his head and usher him into his bed. “What was on the scrolls?”

“Magic.” Galahad’s eyes light up with wonder. I rarely get a detailed briefing of his training with Merlin. How I wish I could be with him, learning all of this by his side. I want to shelter him. I want to help him. On the other hand, I don’t want to be a smothering mother. He is in safe hands with Merlin. We’ve had many conversations about what Galahad’s training would be like. I was relieved to hear that Merlin’s

expectations were to educate first.

“That’s a scroll I’d love to read. Where I’m from, magic is only pretend. Though you could easily confuse some technologies for magic.”

“Tell me about the future again.”

I pull the covers up to his chin and tuck him in tight. “What do you want to know?”

“I want you to tell me about the sky chariots.”

“Airplanes, you mean?” I chuckle as he nods enthusiastically. “Airplanes are these big metal...chariots...that fly in the sky. So I guess sky chariot is an accurate term for them. People use airplanes to travel long distances within hours. If we had an airplane here, it would take us maybe less than an hour to fly to Camelot.”

“How long is an hour, mama?”

“About the time it takes us to finish supper.”

“How is that not magic?” Galahad asks with wide eyes.

My laughter echoes against the stone walls of the bedroom. “Like I said, some technologies from my time sound like magic, but it’s science.”

“I want to fly.”

I give Galahad a kiss on the head. “It’s pretty cool. But also pretty scary. It was never my favorite way to get around. Sometimes it can be a bumpy ride if the plane has to fly through a storm. Turbulence, it’s called. It makes your tummy jump.”

“That’s silly, mama.”

“Sweet dreams, my love.”

“Night,” Galahad whispers, closing his eyes to dream about flying sky chariots, no doubt.

As a baby, Galahad was always calm. Never too fussy. Slept like a baby. I mean that in the figurative sense of the saying. There were barely any nights I would wake up to a howling baby. When hungry, he’d simply coo at me and nuzzle my chest. He’s so attentive too. Always listening and understanding things he shouldn’t. I wish I could speak with Elnaril. I am desperate to know what she is doing inside my son’s head and what powers Excalibur is giving to him.

I trust Elnaril. She was part of me for so long. She is a force of good. I believe what she told me. But no longer hearing her voice or feeling her essence inside me makes me feel vulnerable. And cold. At the same time, it comforts me that Galahad has her to guide him. She is the reason Galahad has become this incredibly calm, rational, mature little guy.

With Elnaril calming his soul, Merlin training him to harness Excalibur, his tutors enriching his mind, and my own teachings, Galahad will become the man he is destined to be. My fears will always consume me. I don’t want Galahad to live a scripted life, nor do I want him to suffer if he fails to change his story as I did. He’s so tiny. And so like his father.

Before making my way to my bedroom, I find myself walking toward the guest apartments. Arthur had journeyed here with Merlin. This has been one of his longest stays at Joyous Gard so far as Galahad and I have not returned to Camelot for some time. Though Arthur hasn’t said it out loud, he hopes I’ll be ready to become his queen now. Lance has been gone for six years. If he was alive, he’d be back by now.

Any daft idiot can see how much Arthur cares for me. It took a while to see that he also loves me. I haven't been able to give my love back though. Losing Lance nearly destroyed me. My heart is still mending. It's still empty, even with Galahad's love.

When I returned to Camelot all those years ago, Arthur could see I was struggling emotionally. He comforted me when I needed to cry and gave me space when I needed to think. When I was a swollen pregnant mess, he massaged my feet and brought me extra snacks from the kitchens. When Galahad was born, he worshiped me as if I had given him the power of flight.

Unconditional love poured out of him, gushing into my son. Seeing how much Arthur loved Galahad as I held the little bundle of flesh in my arms for the first time freed my aching heart and allowed me to love back, just a little. Though I felt a weight lift off my heart, there are still plenty of holes that will never be filled again. Holes for all those I loved and lost. My mom and dad, Josh, and my White Knight, Lancelot.

It was easy to care for Arthur. Though I haven't fallen for him, he's slowly become an important part of my life. He treats me with respect, as his equal. I am the woman who gave him an heir. The woman he is promised to marry. The woman who will be his queen.

He is patient with me. Knowing the deep wound of losing Lancelot would take time to heal, he never asks me for anything I can't give. He will wait for me. Six years he has waited. Six years I have been grieving the loss of my husband.

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Maybe it was foolish of me to allow myself to hope that Lancelot was still alive. Six years. Lancelot is truly gone. I can only recall his face by looking at the photos and videos I took of him on my phone. What would I do without this hunk of plastic and metal? I'm so lucky that I was carrying my solar-powered portable charger when I unwillingly time-traveled here. The privacy I'm granted at Joyous Gard allows me to keep it fully charged so I can look at Lance's image every day.

I know I need to move on. I am so lonely. Arthur is too. Six years is a long time. An eternity. Arthur and I deserve happiness. Even if we don't love each other with the fierce passion Lance and I had, we both have physical and emotional needs. And for a thirty-eight-year-old man in the sixth century, Arthur is in perfect shape. Doesn't hurt that he is quite good-looking. Nothing will ever compare to Lance's god-like beauty. But Arthur is from the same stalk.

Blonde hair cut neatly like a Roman and eyes the deepest of blue. He and Lancelot are both tall for men of this time, standing more than a foot over my five feet two inches. Though Arthur and Lancelot share many similar physical attributes, I have learned that where Lancelot was rough and rigid, Arthur is soft and rounded. His muscles are less defined but still athletic.

As king, Arthur has little time for adventures and quests. He is an accomplished swordsman and keeps up with the craft, but only for sport. Most of his days are spent listening to his people, reading letters, writing letters, strategizing, and praying.

I am sure he is still working even at the late hour as I knock on the door to his chambers. "Arthur, it's me."

A shuffling of papers tells me I was right; he's working. A few seconds later, the bolt on his door slides open and I'm staring into eyes the color of a tropical storm.

Tonight, six years after my heart died, five years after it was reborn in the light of Galahad, I am ready to move on. I grab Arthur's hand and pull him along with me. With his hands in mine, I walk to the edge of his bed and pull him to me for a kiss.

"What are you doing, Guinevere?" Arthur asks in a shocked whisper, stopping me before my lips touch his.

"Healing," I reply.

"But, you did not wa—"

"We've been courting for years. You are the father to my fatherless child. I am ready to be your queen. I am ready to love again."

A single tear slides down Arthur's cheek. "I was uncertain if you could love me after everything that happened."

"I didn't think I had anything left inside me to love either. But I do. You and Galahad are my life now. I think I can love you with what remains of my heart. I don't know if it's enough, but it's yours if you'll have it."

Arthur wraps his arms around me, locking me in place. "I will," he says. "May I kiss you?"

"You can do more than kiss me, Arthur."

Chapter 5

Lancelot

The salty air awakens my soul, making me think of home. Joyous Gard. It has taken me years to reach the sea. A sea that might connect to my homeland. A sea that will bring me to Guin. The coast seems to end in the west. To the east, I can make out a little village nestled into a large cove. But I do not see any ships. At least ships large enough for the open ocean.

West, that is my destination. I am certain that is where home lies. That way shows me an opening to an even bigger sea. And something is pulling me in that direction. I know somehow it is Guin. She has been pulling me toward her for what feels like an eternity.

Spring is arriving again, which means another year has passed since I last tasted my wife's pale, freckled skin. Another year with barely any human—or inhuman—contact. I have become feral. If I had a polished glass, I am certain I would not recognize the mangy beast it would reflect. Would Guin recognize me in this state? Would she see past the dirt, grime, blood, and hair?

During my solo journey out of this densely forested land, I crossed paths with that of a few people. I did not frighten them with my wild appearance, as they, too, were mangy beasts. I might look terrifying, but my Guin would know me. She would welcome me into her arms and into her bed. After a proper bath, of course. I chuckle as I remember being covered in sheep shit. Guin only pretended to be disgusted. If it were not for the pizza Faina had been cooking, Guin would have gladly rolled around in the muck with me.

My cock tingles at the thought of her rolling on top of me. I place my hand against the stirring, only to feel it harden. Dusk is coming in quickly, so I make quick work of setting up a small camp for myself. No fire, as I do not wish to attract any unwanted company. I force down a ration of dried meat, something I had traded for

recently. More people who only spoke a language I did not understand.

As the wind drifts against the water, it sends an icy breeze into my bones. I wrap my furs tighter around my body and lie down on the soft earth. Guin. She is the last thought in my mind before I drift off to sleep. My hand moves on its own, dipping inside my pants. I take hold of my cock, imagining it is Guin's delicate hands. She always knew how to awaken my passion, even with the slightest touch or gaze.

I had the same effect on her. When I would place my fingertips along the outline of her jaw, down to the silky skin of her breast, her skin would come alive with goose flesh. Her shallow breaths, full of want, full of need for me to fill her. I could never refuse.

My lips would always find hers, even in the dark of our bedroom when the fires had died down to embers. Our bodies molded as one. We had no need of nightclothes. They would only get in our way. How I relished the feel of her warm skin on mine. She was always so unnaturally warm. Her touch, her kisses, consumed me in flames.

Making love to Guin was my religion. Every thrust was a prayer. Every kiss, a testament of my faith and loyalty to her. At the sound of her moans, I became immortal, her immortal being, consumed in her fire.

The wind hurls around me, mimicking the sounds in my mind. Tormenting me as I roughly stroke my cock from root to tip, seeking release.

After days of walking along the coast, I finally stumble upon a village. It is not the large port city I had hoped to find, but there are boats. I barter for one, trading a bottle of the halfling's wine along with one of my furs. A steep price for a small fishing boat that does not look like it will make it very far. Still, it is a chance I am willing to take if it gets me closer to Guinevere.

I row all day, making camp along the shores. Rowing, eating, rowing, sleeping, rowing. The sea is endless. Yet I know that at the other end, my home awaits. I only hope that Guin is still waiting. It has been so long. Would she have really waited all these years for me? What if my mother has found a way to bring Guin back to her time? I had not thought of this before. Guin was desperate to get back home. As desperate as I am now to get back to her.

Surely, with the magic of Excalibur and my mother's power, they would have found a way to bring Guin back to where she belongs. But her home is with me. At Joyous Gard. In this time. My chest clenches at the thought of never seeing her again. Traveling all this way, what if she is gone? The pain in my chest grows until I can no longer breathe. I pull the oars back into the boat and fall to my knees. I have never prayed more than when Guin came into my life. Or rather, since she was ripped from my life.

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The gods must know how much Guinevere means to me, how much I need her. They made her for me as they made me for her. We cannot possibly live without the other. So why would the gods separate us for so long? My mind torments me with these thoughts. In my solitude, thoughts and memories are all I have. I have no one to talk to. No one to put some sense into my mind.

Tears run freely down my face, burning against the cool breeze. The agonizing pain of losing Guin is too much. I fall down onto the roughly carved wood of the boat. Perhaps I should lie here and let destiny do what it wants with me. Kill me or bring me back to my love. I close my eyes, blocking out the bright sun, and fall into a deep sleep.

When I awake, I hear male voices shouting all around me. A large sail looms above me and long oars threaten to decimate my frail little boat. I grab the oars I had tossed inside the boat earlier and row a safe distance away. A man toward the rear of the ship spots me. Is this man my savior? Or will he enslave me, rob me, kill me? What chance do I have?

I put my arms up and wave, yelling, "Hello! I seek safe passage to Britain."

The man runs away, bringing my hope with him. I slump back down on my little boat, defeated. "Oy! You are a long way from home, brother!"

Another man appears at the rear. A man whose words I can understand. I cannot help but laugh. "Yes. A very long way from home. May I come aboard? I have goods I can trade for passage."

“We are not headed to Britain. I have not been out that way in years. But if you have something of value you can offer me, I might be swayed to change course.” The man holds out his hand to me. I grab my sack and furs, accepting the hand he offers.

Chapter 6

Guinevere

When Arthur and I arrived back at Camelot two years ago, he announced me as his wife. Two short weeks later, I became his queen. And now we are celebrating Galahad's seventh birthday. Camelot is bursting with festivities. There will be feasts, drinking, and entertainment for two weeks straight. Earlier today, Arthur presented Galahad with his very first sword and offered to provide a demonstration with Gawain. Afterward, Galahad begged to learn how to fight with his new sword.

Though I had explained he was too young, Arthur had already planned on giving him a lesson, the first of many, starting on his actual birthday. “A boy can never be too young to learn the art of the sword, my dear,” Arthur had said to me a few days before Galahad's seventh birthday when he mentioned this gift. “In fact, I believe he is starting late for a prince and heir to a mighty kingdom such as ours.”

There was nothing I could do to stop Arthur from teaching my son how to fight. I was terrified at the thought of my little guy sword fighting, worried he'd gouge an eye out or lose a finger. But Arthur and Gawain are being gentle, and all of them are using wooden swords. I trust these men. Arthur and his knights are the most honorable men in the realm, probably even the millennium. Though I might have disagreed with Gawain and his lack of faith in the love that Lance and I shared, there isn't another man I trust more than Gawain. Besides Arthur, of course.

I've lost count how many times I've nearly blurted out the truth of where I'm from to Gawain. He has become such a constant in my life; it feels wrong to hide this secret

from him. I have no doubt he would believe me. Perhaps he would look at me differently. Arthur and Lance never did, but Gawain doesn't share their "pagan" beliefs. Sure, Arthur is a Christian king. But he also has a Druid advisor. Merlin might not appear at court often, but he still has a forceful presence in Camelot.

I breathe a sigh of relief as Galahad ducks under a swing aimed at his head. His reflexes are fast. I know he'll be a skilled swordsman like his father. Galahad holds so many of Lancelot's traits. His bright green eyes and lopsided smile. He is patient and understanding, even as a toddler. Now, witnessing him in the heat of a mock sword fight, it is as if I am looking at Lancelot reborn.

My worry that people will see what I see has died down after years of peace. During the first year of Galahad's life, the entire castle was drowning in rumors. The rumor about Arthur and me was the one people favored. There were also whispers around the castle that Galahad's father was actually Lancelot. Though this is the truth, the people dismissed it quickly, even with Mordred's attempts to discredit me and my son.

It was as if Lance and I had never been married. So few were at our wedding in Joyous Gard. But Lancelot couldn't be forgotten even though our marital union might have been. The entire castle mourned the loss of their White Knight.

Their love for Lancelot didn't die with him. He is still praised as Camelot's bravest knight. Thanks to Gawain and the other knights, tales of his bravery and heroism will live on through generations. Though only a few of us truly felt the depth of that loss. Those are the people I can trust.

Gawain was distraught at the news of Lancelot's death. He never took the chance to make things right with Lance after the harsh words they had thrown at each other. Gawain might have been upset with us for not returning to Camelot all those years ago, but he couldn't deny what existed between Lance and me. Now he is a fierce ally

of mine.

Both Elaine and Gawain have been my constant friends while at court and during the months I stayed hidden away at Joyous Gard. They are the only ones who know the truth about the paternity of their prince. Instead of feeding the fires of rumors that are now whispered embers, they were the ones to speak against them, against Mordred.

Mordred isn't always at Camelot, but when he is, I steer clear of him. Or I travel back to Joyous Gard with my son for a couple of months. That's how much I hate him. I only hate him because he hates me for some unknown reason. Perhaps destiny has told him to hate me.

We avoid each other like the plague, barely interacting for the past eight years. It is only on occasions such as today when we need to make a show of liking each other. Or at least standing beside each other. I am worried about how he will treat Galahad. Even on his best behavior, Mordred is cruel to my son.

While standing along the edge of the training yard, I give Mordred a warning look. He has begun talking about the need to expand the royal family to ensure Arthur's legacy. The look of warning I give doesn't go unnoticed either, but Arthur is busy discussing the proper way to swing a sword with Galahad, so I bite my tongue.

As if sensing what I am thinking, Mordred turns to me and asks, "Why have you not given our king more children? Imagine if our little prince were to fall ill and not recover. Arthur needs an heir."

"He has an heir."

"An heiranda spare," he says with a mouth full of spite.

"What the fuck is your problem, Mordred?" I lose my composure, falling into his

trap. He knows how unladylike I can sound when provoked, but thankfully there aren't many people around to hear as they have fled when they noticed my venomous look.

"I only want to secure Arthur's throne," Mordred explains.

"As do we all."

"You cannot deny it is rather curious that you came back to Camelot after a brief marriage to the mighty Lancelot and gave birth to your son just short of eight months. Not to mention who he is named after."

"Arthur blessed the named Galahad, as you well remember."

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“You still have not answered my question. Are you incapable of giving Arthur more children? The kingdom deserves to know.”

“That is no way to talk to your queen, Mordred.” Gawain had snuck up from behind, placing a hand on Mordred’s shoulder and giving it a tight squeeze.

“Hmph. I think it is a fair question, Sir Gawain,” Mordred retorts, throwing Gawain’s hand off him.

“You know it is not a fair question. If King Arthur had heard you speak in this way to the queen, he would have you thrown out of the castle.”

“My uncle would do no such thing.” Mordred is so sure of himself. I want to whip his smugness off with a punch to the nose. I’m rather gifted at breaking noses.

“Is that so?” Gawain asks with his own brand of smug.

“Yes,” Mordred says with complete confidence.

Gawain spins on his heels and heads directly toward Arthur. Though I can feel some nervous tension spewing from Mordred’s direction, he remains confident, head held high. I can see the look on Arthur’s face drastically change when Gawain reaches his ears. Handing his wooden sword to Gawain’s brother and fellow knight, Gaheris, Arthur promises Galahad he will return shortly, then walks in our direction.

“Nephew, what is this I hear of you insulting my wife and queen? Of all days to direct such harsh words. Can you not, for one day, silence yourself? It is your

cousin's birthday.”

“Hmph. My cousin?”

“If you wish to make a scene, I will gladly oblige. Otherwise, I ask you to leave at once. Do not return until you have come to your senses.”

“But uncle, I was—”

“I asked you to leave. Do you wish to make a scene, Mordred?”

“This is outrageous. Uncle, can you not see that Galahad is not your son? You need a legitimate heir.”

“I have a legitimate heir. My son. Whom I adore with all my heart. If you cannot accept him as my son, how can I trust you to follow Galahad when it is time for him to become king?”

“But—”

“Gawain, will you escort my dear nephew back to his quarters?” Turning back to Mordred, Arthur continues, “If you continue to spread these hateful lies against my son and wife, I will have you removed permanently. I love you, Mordred. Do not doubt my love. But you are playing a dangerous game. One I cannot afford to play, and you very well know this.”

At that, Arthur grabs my hand and pulls me to the middle of the training yard where Galahad is swinging around his new wooden sword, attempting to decapitate Gaheris.

“I apologize for my nephew. He does not mean what he says.”

“Yes, he does. He absolutely means it. And he knows Galahad isn't your son. Most of

the kingdom has accepted Galahad as their prince, but with Mordred spreading more and more doubt each year, he is weakening your power. He threatens my son every time he speaks. How can you allow him so close to you? Especially after I told you what he will do?"

"It is better to keep your enemies close than to let them plot from afar. Here, I have eyes and ears everywhere. Mordred will not be able to harm you or Galahad."

"So, you believe Mordred means violence?"

"No. I...he is still my nephew. I cannot believe he would harm my family or me. And Guinevere, you and Galahad are my family."

"I know, Arthur." I pull him closer, planting a soft kiss on his cheek.

"The future could have changed. After all, the circumstances leading to my death will not happen." Arthur's body shakes in terror. He knows my story. Where I came from, everything. Like Lancelot, he took the truth well, in all its craziness. There are still moments like this when the truth makes fear crawl just under his skin and down his whole body. I can feel Arthur trying to push those thoughts of his death out of his mind.

"That doesn't mean we break down our defenses," I say, staring straight into his dark blue eyes.

"I will never let anything bad happen to either of you." Arthur's gaze is piercing as he pulls me to his side. He means what he says, and he needs me to feel it. "We keep no secrets from each other. There will never come a day when you will betray me and I will order your death. There will never be a war over your betrayal. I will never battle Mordred. I might argue with him in an endless battle of words. It is only words thrown at each other, not daggers."

“And I will never trust Mordred.”

“Nor will I, but he is my nephew. He has not harmed us. I promise, he will never hurt you.”

“I know you will do anything to protect us, Arthur, but you cannot make a promise like that. Never promise me something you cannot control.” I think of Lance. He was full of promises that he would return to me. Promises he couldn’t keep.

Arthur grabs my hand again, giving it a squeeze. “I love you, both of you.”

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I smile back at him. I love him back. I do. Not in the same way he loves me though. When he offered me a life as his queen, I could see then that he cared for me, even though we had talked little when I first arrived at Camelot all those years ago. I know now this was because he realized Lancelot was in love with me and didn't wish to interfere.

The love Arthur had—still has—for Lancelot was the reason I had said yes to him. Though it took me years to move on. I knew Arthur would place that love on Lancelot's child, and I wanted that love for my son. I didn't grow up with a father, but I felt the love of a dad. And my child would have that love too.

Chapter 7

Guinevere

Mordred keeps his distance after being dismissed by Arthur during Galahad's sword training. His absence is celebrated by a small group of us who have grown to detest the bastard. With him away, it's much easier for me to relax. I sing with delight and ease in the great hall, entertaining our guests and Galahad.

Even Arthur seems to enjoy himself more without Mordred's constant hovering, questioning, and moodiness. As I sing "Till There Was You" to my little guy, I sneak a glance at Arthur. He smiles from ear to ear, his happiness radiating, spreading around the great hall like a contagion.

Galahad sits at Arthur's side. The pair of them truly look like father and son. Galahad, with his caramel brown hair, a color that turns blonde in the blazing

sunlight. Those bright green eyes always catch me off guard.

Lancelot's eyes looking back at me with adoration. I have to keep myself together until I finish the song. A song that was meant for Galahad now turns into a love song for the man who stole my heart, captured my soul, and claimed my body. I had moved on, but I still feel the pain of Lancelot's loss deep in my heart, brought to the surface during vulnerable moments like this.

Applause fills the great hall as I end my song. I stand up and bow to the crowd before walking with purpose to Galahad. With no concern for his embarrassment, I scoop him up in my arms. "Happy birthday, my love." I kiss his head, placing him back down next to Arthur.

"Mama, I'm not a baby anymore."

"I know, sweet love. You are growing up too fast."

"When do I get to go on my first quest, father?" Galahad uses that moment, thinking he is now old enough for anything.

Arthur turns to me, a question in his eyes. The fright must have shown on my face, because Arthur turns back to Galahad, explaining that he first must prove himself worthy.

"How do I do that?"

"You will know when it is time. Do not fret if it takes a few more years, my son."

"How old were you?"

"Oh, well...my childhood years differed greatly from yours. I hope you never have to

endure war at such a young age as I had to.”

“What if there is another war? There are still kingdoms that oppose you. They could attack at any moment. I want to be able to fight now. To protect Camelot.”

“Who told you this?” Arthur asks in a hushed tone.

“Cousin Mordred.”

“That fucking bastard!” I say perhaps a smidge too loud.

“Guinevere, hush.” Arthur turns to me with fear in his eyes, as well as disappointment. I quickly shake the anger from my face and take my son’s hand into mine.

“Sorry. Galahad, your cousin is right. There is unrest in the realm. But Mordred likes to dramatize the truth,” I calmly explain.

“What does that mean?” Galahad looks up at both Arthur and me, his little brow furrowed.

“It means we are safe but must be prepared for anything,” Arthur responds, giving me a sideways glance. He dislikes it when I speak harshly, something I have worked on for years. A queen should keep a calm and regal demeanor. Not raise panic and anger. I pledged myself to Arthur and promised to be the queen he needed. It was difficult to become that queen. I guess I was always meant for these shoes though.

Back in the twenty-first century, I was the heir apparent of an earldom, being groomed to become a proper English lady even though I had grown up in New Jersey. I had been unsure of my future, if I had wanted that path, but destiny had thrown me into much bigger shoes. Queen Guinevere. That is who I have become. Fucking

Queen Guinevere.

“I’m feeling quite exhausted. I think I’ll head to bed,” I say with a yawn.

“I, too, feel sleep crawling behind my eyes. Let me thank our guests first, then the three of us shall retire together.” Arthur stands up, raising his hands as if conducting an orchestra. The crowd decrescendos immediately. A few seconds later, silence. “My friends, let me give thanks to you all for your kindness toward my son as he enters his seventh year of life. Our little prince will be a grown man soon enough. Your loyalty and faith in our kingdom give us hope for a peaceful future. Please continue to celebrate, drink more ale, and relish the peace we have built together. To Galahad!”

Arthur raises his tankard of ale as the hall repeats his words in drunken unison. Drinking deeply, Arthur finishes a full tankard in just a few gulps. He looks to his people once more, then picks up Galahad and grabs my hand, leading us to the keep.

Galahad continues yelling that he isn’t tired, that he could stay up all night. But he can’t fight his own tiredness for long. Before we reach our apartments, Galahad is asleep over Arthur’s shoulders. Arthur and I tuck him into bed together, taking turns kissing his forehead.

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As I turn toward my bedroom, Arthur takes my hand in his again. “Are you too tired to stay up a bit longer?”

The sparkle in his eye tells me what he wants. Though I am completely knackered, I still feel emotionally frazzled and in need of relief. “My bed or yours?” I respond with a kiss.

Before I can pull away, Arthur pulls me to his chest, lifting my head to his lips again for a kiss filled with urgency. I hold on to him, pushing him toward his bedroom. Tonight, I need to indulge in his body. My thoughts for the past two weeks have fallen into the depths of my sorrow, missing Lancelot, needing his touch, his love, his smile.

We tear each other’s clothes off as we reach the foot of Arthur’s bed. Before I can make my move, Arthur throws me face down on the bed. I feel his hardness as he straddles me from behind, entering me fully in one quick lunge.

I yell into the covers from the intrusion. Though I am willing and ready, I’m caught off guard by Arthur’s demanding body. He knows I was thinking of Lance, which is why he takes me from behind. Arthur surprises me often with his ability to see into my soul. Knowing I crave the touch of my first husband, he gives me the illusion.

Using each other’s bodies has become a normal part of our relationship. We both lost a beloved spouse. Lovers our hearts still miss. Our pain strengthens us. I can talk to Arthur about everything and he returns his own sentiments.

Moments like this, when we get lost in our heated passions, threaten to tear my soul

to bits. And I let it. I need to let myself go. Breaking down my walls brings me closer to Arthur. Healing my heart more and more every time I pull myself back together.

Arthur shifts his weight off me, moving his hands to my hips, guiding me onto all fours. This position allows him to thrust even deeper, and I take him, all of him. Showing me what he wants with his hands, he pushes me away from him, then at the same steady pace, pulls me back until my entrance reaches the root of his cock. I moan with delight, begging for more as he releases his hands from my hips.

I follow his lead, slowly pulling him out and pushing him back in. It is blissful torture. A hand caresses the peaks of my breasts, causing a loud moan to escape from my throat. I sit up, quickly wrapping my arms around his neck behind me, grinding into him for release.

His hand massages my breasts erratically in delightful pain. Just as I reach my climax, I feel his own release beginning to stir, sending vibrations through my body. He bites down on my neck, hard. It's painful but makes the orgasm stronger, sending me into eternal bliss.

We fall down onto the bed together, still attached from behind. As Arthur curls his arms around me, I feel his cock slowly slide out, a soft moan tickling my ear.

“Do you think of him when we—”

“Not all the time.” I interrupt Arthur before he can finish his statement.

“Were you thinking of him now?”

“Yes.”

“Do you like what I do to you in bed?”

“Yes. Except maybe the bite.”

“I am sorry if I hurt you. That was for me.”

“I know. It didn’t hurt too bad. The bite.”

“Sometimes I want to be the one you think of. I want to remind you it is me inside of you.”

I turn around to face Arthur, needing to look him in the eyes. “I know it’s you. I’m sorry I so often think of him. I don’t think I will ever forget him, Arthur. It’s been eight years, and he still consumes me. And when I look into Galahad’s eyes...”

“I know. I am not asking you to forget Lancelot. I will never ask that of you. And you very well know that I often think of my late wife. How different our lives would be if we had not lost them.”

“I was just thinking the same thing.” My lips brush his cheek with a quick peck. “I do love you, Arthur. I had my doubts at first, if we could make this work. You’ve been wonderful to me, to Galahad. You’ve fulfilled all your promises and more. And yes, I wish with all my heart that Lancelot was still alive and we could live happily ever after at Joyous Gard. That doesn’t mean I’m not happy here, with you. And I know you feel the same.”

“Good. That is just what I wanted to hear.” Arthur kisses me on the forehead. “Now get some sleep. We both need to be well rested for tomorrow’s festivities.”

“Are you going to let Galahad battle tomorrow?”

“Yes, but only in a mock battle. Gaheris will feign injury to Galahad’s training sword.”

“As long as no one gets hurt,” I say, anxiety pouring out of my mouth.

“Gaheris may hurt himself by falling dramatically to the ground. He will be fine though. Do not worry yourself.”

“Easier said than done.”

Chapter 8

Lancelot

The castle is quiet. As if it had all the wind knocked out of it and is now struggling to take its next breath. It feels different, changed over the years. I do not recognize a soul. And no one turns their head toward me as I pass by.

Camelot. A place I once called home feels so foreign to me now. The stone walls have become weathered. Even the dirt on the ground looks different, grayer than I remember. Still, I hope that I have a home here. That Guin is here. For wherever she is, I will be home, finally back home. I am unsure how long I have been away. The journey from the distant land the dragon had flown me to was endless. I thought I would never make it back.

As I walk past the armory and stables, I peek inside, hoping to see a familiar face. There is only a young squire I do not recognize. When I ask where everyone is, he explains the castle had hosted a fortnight-long festival in honor of the prince's seventh birthday. Everyone has either left Camelot for the winter to return to their own castles or is sleeping off the two-week binge.

Arthur has a son. I do not think to ask the lad if Arthur is still king. I am sure that news would have traveled far and wide if King Arthur was dead or dethroned. Not to mention his golden dragon banner still flies along the walls of Camelot.

A clashing of swords leads me over to the small training yard where a young boy with golden hair is practicing his fighting stance. On the far side, I see a pair of young squires testing their newly learned sword skills. Then my face lands on a familiar face. I turn before Mordred can see mine. He will not be the first person I speak to

after my years in exile.

I trudge on, approaching the great hall, which only contains a handful of people. Still, there is no one I recognize and the head table is empty. Either Arthur is dining in his private apartments with his family or he is away from Camelot. Hunger carries me through the doors, pulling me to the nearest table with food.

Filling my plate with bread, cheese, and bacon, I eat in silence, trying not to shovel the rations down my throat. Barely anyone takes notice of me still. Why would they? I am a stranger here among strange faces. With my long tangled hair and grizzly beard, I most likely would not be recognizable to my greatest friends here at Camelot. I need to find them. I need to see a friendly face. One face in particular.

Sitting in the great hall fills me with memories. I smile, thinking of the night when Guin joined me and the knights for supper. She had gotten a little drunk, and I selfishly did not stop her. How she glowed with happiness. Her hand brushing mine. Our fingers interlocking. Her eyes set upon my gaze. My Guinevere. How I miss her. I would have gone to our castle in the north first, but I landed much closer to Camelot. If she is not here, I know where to look next.

I finish my meal quickly, needing to continue my search. The chapel stands out among the old, rough walls of the castle. Its once wooden facade replaced with a more solid stone structure, small sculptures of Christian saints lining the entrance. I doubt Guin would be in the chapel, but I take a glance inside. Then I turn toward the keep. Perhaps I should go directly to the royal apartment. Arthur will be glad to see me and surely he could tell me where my wife is. As I approach the keep, I look up, remembering the first time my lips pressed against Guin's. A lifetime ago, yet it feels like yesterday.

The sound of music interrupts my memory. A heart-achingly beautiful voice sings along with a string instrument I know to be a lute. My heart jumps out of my throat.

As it settles back into place, it beats rapidly, drowning out Guin's song. For I know that voice is my wife's. I turn toward the gardens on the far side of the keep as my mind reels with greetings to say to Guin.

All these years in solitude, I did not think about what I would say to her. Now she is only a few steps away and I cannot make myself move toward her. I am a goddamn knight. I have killed demons, dragons, and gods. But I am terrified of what I will face through the trees standing in front of me.

I close my eyes, imagining her face, her contagious smile. She will be happy to see me, of course she will. I am her husband. But I am also the man who left and never came back. It is difficult to believe otherwise when I could have stayed. Arthur has many knights who are just as courageous as me. Maybe another could have slain the beast as I could not.

Taking a deep breath, I walk through the trees. There she is, my beautiful wife. Her red hair falls to her hips in long waves as she bends over her lute. The sun has tinted her usually porcelain skin red. I want to reach out and touch her, but I do not want to frighten her. She looks so peaceful, playing a melody I have often heard from her and her magical "phone" object.

As if suddenly sensing my presence, she looks up slowly. Then quickly stands up, taking a step backward in fright. "May I help you, sir?"

"Guin," my voice trembles. Our eyes lock onto each other and I know then that she sees me. Her breath catches and her eyes glisten with tears as she looks past the dirt, grime, and hair. I can see her peeling back all the layers that hide the face she knew from so many years ago.

"Lance?" Her voice is delicate, a whisper. "Lance. How are you—"

I run to her, falling to my knees in her presence, and bury my face in her abdomen. I feel her arms pull me in closer. Then she is kneeling before me, her face in front of mine, her hands combing through my mess of hair.

“How is this possible? We all thought you were dead.” Her lips tremble as she holds back her tears.

“I thought I was dead too.” I try to smile, but her enchanting face in front of mine brings me to tears. For a moment, I think I am dreaming. That I am still living in a cave, surviving off mice and insects.

As if sensing my thoughts, Guin asks, “Are you really here? At Camelot? This feels like a dream, one I have dreamt so many times.”

“I have fought so hard to get back to you, my love. Yet, holding you in my arms, breathing in the same air as you...if this is a dream, I wish to never wake. But I need to know, are you real? Have I finally made it back to you?”

Tears pour down our faces. Tears of joy, anger, elation, loneliness, fear. At least those are the tears pouring from my eyes. A sharp pain in my right arm takes me out of my stupor. “Ow. Did you pinch me?”

“Yes, you asked if this was real. I pinched you to show you it is. You’re really here.” Guin pulls me in tightly against her body. She smells exactly as I remember, but her body is different. I no longer feel a warm glow pulsing from her. Perhaps I only dreamt about that during my many lonely, cold nights thinking of Guin. We had known each other for not quite a year. But her body is something I know well.

“You feel different.”

“And you look different.” She smiles through her tears, trying not to let her emotions

destroy her. I know her well enough to know that she is struggling to keep herself together. Before I can suggest we head inside, a small boy runs through the trees, yelling for his mother.

“What is it?” Guin asks the boy, turning to face him.

“Who is this?” The boy asks, disregarding Guin’s question and pointing to me.

“Oh. Well. This is Sir Lancelot,” Guin responds.

A look of shock explodes on the boy’s face. “No way! My father talks about you all the time. But he said you’re dead. That a dragon ate you.”

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“That dragon nearly died at me.”

“He also said he would not have a son if it weren’t for you.”

The way this boy talks reminds me of Guin. I am unsure of some words he uses, but I understand him well enough. Though I am completely lost with his last statement.

“Galahad, I need you to do me two favors. Give Sir Lancelot the biggest hug you can. Then I want you to find your father and tell him who our guest of honor is. It is of utmost importance that you tell this only to your father. Do you understand?”

“Yes, mother.”

My eyes shoot to Guin. Hers, avoiding mine with fierce determination. Galahad leaps into my arms, melting my heart with his warmth. A warmth I have missed. A warmth that once belonged to his mother.

“Before I go, I just wanted to say that Cousin Mordred is being a piece of shit again. Though I didn’t say that to his face like last time because you said it was not nice to say to someone, even if they really are being a piece of shit.”

Guin and I chuckle together. This child of hers is so much like her. Even though Galahad steals my soul with every second he remains in my presence, I cannot shake the coldness consuming my heart. Who is his father?

“What was Mordred doing?” Guin asks.

“Just talking bullshit while I was practicing with my new sword.”

“We will talk about this later, my love. Now give me a kiss. Remember to only speak to your father.”

The boy gently pecks Guin on the lips, then hurries off in search of his father. With my eyes, I follow his boyish gait as he disappears through the trees. Once he is gone, I turn back to Guin. The both of us are still kneeling on the ground. Before I can organize my thoughts into words, Guin stands up, offering me her hand. “We have a lot to talk about, and you desperately need a hot bath.”

“A hot bath can wait. Guin, that boy...your son—“

“Our son.” Guin’s eyes bear into mine, begging me to see the truth in hers. “Let’s talk inside, please, Lance.”

Pulling at my hand, I let her guide me through the garden to a secret doorway at the back of the keep. Questions swarm in my mind once inside the damp and narrow passage. It is nearly pitch black, as there are no windows, though Guin seems to know exactly where to step. I wonder how she knows of this passage. The biggest question I need an answer to is who does Galahad believe is his father? My mind is reeling with possible answers.

We finally approach a set of small stone doors. Choosing the one on the right, Guin lays her hands on the cold stone, searching for something. A moment later, the door opens to a sunny bedroom.

“Stay here. I will be right back.” As I am about to argue against staying in what feels like a dungeon, a pair of soft lips meets mine. “I will tell you everything. Just stay here, please.”

Though I had not yet entered the room, what I glance is none other than one of the royal bedrooms in Arthur's private apartments. Guin and I have not spoken about it yet, but I am putting the pieces together in my mind. Galahad is my son, yet he is also the prince of Camelot. The prince who recently celebrated his seventh birthday. That can only mean that Guinevere married Arthur. The legend has come true, just as Guin predicted.

What does this mean for us? For Guin was my wife. She is my wife. If she told me the truth about Galahad, we have a son together. I want to shout my anger up into the heavens and punch the walls down with my fists. Guin is no longer mine. The son I did not know I had will never be mine.

As tears fall down my cheeks, a sharp, violent pain explodes in my chest. I should have never left Guin. I should have stayed with her at Joyous Gard. We would be a happy family of three. Perhaps we would have filled our castle with more children. Arthur would have been upset, but he would have understood my request to stay with my new wife.

The stone door opens, flooding my teary eyes with light. Guin looks like an angel on fire, her red hair glowing. "Oh, Lance. Come here."

I melt into her chest and cry. Wrapping my arms around her waist, I want to take her here and now. I want to stake my claim on what is mine. For Guin is mine. Forever and always.

"Let's get you cleaned up, Lance," Guin whispers in my ear. But she does not attempt to peel me from her body. "I'm so sorry, Lance. I should have waited for you. I gave up hope you were still—"

"I am the one who left you, Guin. This is all my fault."

“I had just realized I was pregnant when Arthur arrived at Joyous Gard with the news of your death. All the knights who had traveled with you were dead, injured, or swore they saw your body get torn to pieces. Arthur wouldn’t tell me the details until years later.”

Loosening my grip, I push Guin away from me so that I can look into her eyes. “I gave up hope so many times. There was a moment I wanted to throw myself off a cliff. I was hungry, alone, cold, everything hurt.”

“Lance, I really don’t know what’s going to happen, but I’m so happy you found your way back. I love you so much, Lance. That I never gave up on.”

Slowly, Guin unties the strings on my shirt and pants. There is nothing sensual about it. Guin needs to take care of me. She needs to inspect me and make sure I am intact. I let her.

“You have so many scars, Lance. What happened to you?”

“A great many things, Guin. I will tell you about them all if you wish.”

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“I do. But first, let me tell you about my scar.” Guin guides my naked body into a steaming tub. “Arthur proposed to me only after learning I was pregnant. The guilt he had, and still has, about leading you to your death was unbearable. He needed to make it right. So he offered me his hand and offered to care for Galahad as his own son. He did not want me to suffer. I didn’t want to be his wife, but I didn’t want my child to grow up without a father. I was so conflicted. I even went to your mother and begged her to find a way for me to return home to my time. It was impossible. So I stayed and became Arthur’s queen.”

Guin goes on, filling me in on everything that has happened since I left eight years ago. As she speaks, she rinses my hair and scrubs my skin, massaging the tougher scars on my body. Her touch is soothing, relaxing, divine. I cannot recall the last moment of peace I had. For the past eight years, every day was a battle I fought to get back home.

“Can I trim your beard and hair?”

I nod in silence, letting Guin return to her story. How Mordred has become her nemesis, doing all he can to soil her name as well as my son’s. How Galahad is growing up to be an incredible person. That he inherited so many traits from me. I close my eyes as Guin shaves down my beard, pushing back my prideful tears. I have a son. A beautiful boy.

“Who gave him his name?” I ask.

“Me. Or really, Elnaril gave me the idea.” I look up at Guin in confusion. “Elnaril is the soul living in Excalibur. When I told Arthur that I wanted to name my son

Galahad, he was overjoyed at the idea. He wanted to honor your memory by naming your son, his heir, after you.”

“Does Mordred have evidence to back up his claim?” I think back to the vicious stare I saw Mordred giving Galahad as I passed them in the training yard earlier before finding Guin. Of course, the bastard would want to spark trouble.

“No. He’s only telling the truth, describing the timing of your death compared to when Arthur returned with me and when I gave birth. He did not buy our story that Galahad was a premature baby. Galahad was a big, strong, healthy boy. And...Excalibur now lives inside him. I was terrified when it happened, worried every day of his life that it would consume him. But it’s been dormant. Elnaril talks to him though. He tells me he can speak to her as I could.”

“I could feel it. When I held you in my arms, the warmth I remember was gone. Do you miss her, uh, Elnaril?”

“Sometimes. But I have Galahad now. He is the chosen one. I was just a temporary vessel. I’ve thought a lot about why she chose me. Why she chose us. I still don’t know what he is chosen for. It absolutely terrifies me.”

Guin leans forward, placing her forehead against mine as her hand presses against my chest. My heart beats at a chaotic pace from our closeness. I want to pull her into the lukewarm water with me and kiss her lips raw. I want desperately to be inside her, to feel her heart beat with mine, to consume her body and soul. I have craved her touch for eight years. I need her touch.

My wet hands reach out to her, cradling her head. I guide her gaze to my eyes so she can see the torture brewing inside me. Guin’s breath mixes with mine as we share an agonizing sigh. The look in her eyes sends me over the edge. Just as I am about to kiss her, the door opens, and Arthur barges in. Guin does not make an attempt to back

away from me. She is not afraid nor ashamed of our closeness.

“Lancelot, is it truly you?” Arthur stops and stares at my face, still covered in a mangy beard.

“Arthur, I am sorry—“

“It is a miracle.”

“I do not know about miracle. The life I thought I was returning to no longer exists,” I say, with a heaviness in my voice, trying desperately not to scream in agony.

Arthur defuses the tension inside me by offering a change of clothes. “Dry and get dressed. We have much to discuss.” It is hard to read Arthur’s face, but I know he is happy to see me. He is right though. We have much to discuss.

Chapter 9

Guinevere

I follow Arthur downstairs into our private living area while Lance finishes his bath in my bedroom. Even though we can speak freely here, Arthur still looks around and checks the adjoining rooms to make sure there are no eavesdroppers.

When he is satisfied that we are alone, he asks me, “Did you tell him we are married?”

“Yes. And that he has a son. I wonder if it is now time to come clean to the kingdom about Galahad. We have to do something quickly to avoid the future I spoke to you of. But if the people find out you lied to them, it would be disastrous.”

“Would we have to admit our lie?” Arthur asks, his voice is soft and shy, unsure of what to do in this impossible situation.

“What do you mean?”

“Lancelot is your husband. Even though we are married too, he is still your husband in the eyes of God. I am unsure if that makes our marriage invalid. We only need to tell the people that Lancelot is alive, your first husband, returned from the dead, to spark questions about our marriage.”

“What would that mean for us, for Galahad?” Part of me doesn’t want my marriage to Arthur to be dissolved as if it was nothing. I love Arthur. I’ve built a life with him. And even though he’s not Galahad’s biological father, Arthur is my son’s father in every other way.

“I will tell the kingdom that I knew you were pregnant with Lancelot’s child and that I adopted the boy as my own, knowing I could not father my own heir.” Arthur looks confident, but his voice betrays his doubt.

Instead of remarking that the people would not accept this truth, I turn my attention to the villain in our lives. “Mordred will love that.”

“I will speak with him privately.”

“He doesn’t like me, Arthur, and he loathes Galahad. He will do everything he can to unseat Galahad as your heir and take it for himself. He is greedy and power-hungry.”

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“The people will not accept him. What they will accept is that I had adopted your child without knowing the gender, without knowing that Excalibur would choose Galahad. Merlin believes Excalibur has shown her loyalty to me in this action. That in choosing to accept your child as my own, she revealed herself in my child. For Galahad is my son. Not as he is Lancelot’s, but in every way that matters. I love him.”

“And he loves you.” I reach out for Arthur’s hand and he quickly takes it, giving it a squeeze. Arthur is an admirable ruler. A kind man. A loving husband. But he is a fool if he believes the people would be so accepting. Too kind to be a king. “We cannot tell the kingdom that Galahad is Lancelot’s child. It was never a lie we said out loud. But we let everyone believe Galahad was yours. They have accepted him as your heir. He is protected as your heir. As the son of Lancelot, Galahad will not have the allies you think are loyal to you. Mordred will ensure he loses favor with the kingdom, with the realm.”

Arthur sighs, knowing I am right. The kingdom cannot know Arthur had led them on for eight years. “What about us?”

I hesitate, looking toward the door to my bedroom where Lance is bathing, then turn back to Arthur. His pleading eyes break my heart. He doesn’t want to lose me either. “I don’t know. Lance is alive. This whole time he was alive, Arthur.”

Arthur pulls me to him, seeing the pain behind my eyes that threatens to tear through me like a plague. I let Arthur hold me. His attempt to soothe me is sweet, but I cannot stop crying.

“Guinevere. If you choose Lancelot, it is the same outcome as confessing our lie. There will be more than doubt about Galahad’s paternity. His claim to my throne could be weakened, if not accepted at all. I would be left without a queen, without an heir, my kingdom, and everything I have worked so hard for...I am not saying this to convince you to stay, only I...I am frightened of this future you spoke to me of.”

His last comment only makes the pain strengthen. I am gasping for breath as I attempt to calm myself down enough to speak. “I know,” is all I get out between breaths.

Behind me, a door opens. When I turn out of Arthur’s embrace, I nearly faint at the sight of him. Sir Lancelot, roughly shaven and worn down, but still my husband. The man who stole my heart, shattered it to pieces, and gave me my beautiful son. A boy who brings sunshine and laughter everywhere he goes.

In my weakness, I run to Lance as he takes the last step down the stairs. He accepts me into his warm embrace, pulling me tightly to his body. With my cheek pressed against his chest, I continue to cry. Tears stream down my face as I violently tremble in Lance’s arms. My husband. My love. My heart has returned to me.

I honestly am not sure what will happen. Will the kingdom accept Lance as my husband and allow Arthur to keep Galahad as his heir? I know the answer, but my heart and mind are at war with each other. I crave Lance’s touch. Now that I have him back, I know I can never have his touch again.

Arthur’s plan could work. But Mordred holds too much power in his words. I know he would turn the kingdom against us all and not because I read it in a story, but because I know the kind of scum Mordred is. In this moment, I don’t care. All I care about are the arms wrapped around me and the heart beating rapidly into my ear.

“Guin, my love, I am so sorry.” Lance’s arms tightened their grip around me as if he means to absorb my body into his. I wouldn’t mind either. But there is much we need

to discuss, and I know Arthur is desperate for a Lancelot hug too.

I feel cold as soon as I release my grip from around Lance's waist. Looking up into his eyes, I see he has been crying as well. I reach up and brush his tears away. He does the same for me. Before turning back to Arthur, I slip my hand into Lance's, but he attempts to pull his hand from mine when he looks up at Arthur. I don't give up so easily, keeping his hand in mine as I walk toward my other husband.

Lancelot throws himself down, kneeling before Arthur, more tears spilling down his face. "My king, forgive me."

"What are you asking to be forgiven for?"

"I failed in defeating the dragon. I failed to return home to my wife. I have failed to raise my son. You have taken on the burden of caring for my family for...eight years. I...I...and I am sorry. I do not know if I can stop loving Guin...Queen Guinevere."

"Why would you have to stop loving your wife, Lancelot?" Arthur pulls Lance back up to his feet.

"Well, because she is yours now."

"Lance, Arthur and I may be married now, but aren't we also still wed? You are alive," I nearly scream, my irrational mind taking over, forgetting the fear swirling in the pit of my stomach as I look upon the face I never thought I'd see again.

"But you are his queen. And Galahad his heir." Lancelot's eyes are full of despair at the truth of our situation.

Arthur answers for me. "Yes. Guinevere is my queen. The kingdom accepted her the moment she returned to Camelot. Guinevere is beloved in Camelot and throughout

the realm. And Galahad, the kingdom will continue to accept him as my heir. The question is, will they allow a king's heir to be another's son? Will they allow a king's queen to be another man's wife? I want nothing more than to give you your family, Lancelot. To let you take them back to Joyous Gard and live the life you should have been living."

Lance dries his face with his hands. Then he pulls Arthur into a death-grip hug. Slowly, I see Arthur's arms reach around Lance, squeezing gently. And when the two finally release each other, fresh tears slide down their faces.

"Would I have received such an embrace if I told you that Guinevere was mine and mine alone?" Arthur asks, holding Lance an arms-length away.

"Under different circumstances, no," Lance replies. The pair chuckle softly before turning serious again. "What happens now? What state is the kingdom in?"

I take a step closer to my men. "This is the part we are unsure of. If we tell the kingdom the truth, how can the people trust Arthur again? Though we've said nothing for or against the rumors. But Mordred has made it difficult for me and Galahad. He has already planted the seeds of distrust in the people. Knowing who he is in the story of King Arthur, I'm worried about what he could do."

"And who is he? Besides a horse's ass," Lance scoffs.

I laugh loudly at that comment. "Horse's ass is accurate. Sorry, Arthur."

"Mordred can be difficult at times, but he is still my nephew. I cannot believe he would wish ill of me. Even so, let Guinevere tell the tale, Lancelot."

The three of us sit together on the benches in front of the fireplace as if there haven't been eight years of distance between us. My heart races every time I steal a glance at

Lance's bright green eyes swimming with unshed tears. His lips curl into a grin at my glances. Fuck, how I want to tear his clothes off and kiss every inch of his delicious body and ride that grin all night long. I blush at my own thoughts and turn to Arthur, a man I have grown to love.

As much as I want Lance back, could I give up Arthur? I don't know. With Lance here, my mind and body are at war with each other. I can't have him. At least for now. I will have to wait until it is safe. Until we have a solid enough plan that will allow us to be together. I can't let myself be free with Lance, even though he is my husband. If we are caught, if Mordred finds out, it will be the end of us. The end of King Arthur.

Chapter 10

Lancelot

Later that evening, Galahad joins us for a private supper in the royal apartments. My son. I cannot keep my eyes off of him. He looks like Arthur in how he holds himself. But those bright green eyes are mine. I cannot quite tell what color his hair is. It seems to change from gold to sandy brown to auburn. Galahad may resemble me and carry himself like Arthur, but he is Guin's son.

From the few hours I have known him, I know he will be a remarkable ruler one day. The way he looks into my eyes when I speak to him, like he is listening to every syllable I say. Breathing in every word. He does this with everyone. He listens. He examines. He studies. Everything around him is sacred and worthy of his attention. How is it that this boy is only seven years old?

"I was told you have the makings of a fine swordsman, Galahad. If you would like, I could train you myself. It would be an honor," I say to my son after finishing our supper. We walk through the small private dining area with Guin and Arthur, each of us taking a seat on the benches by the fireplace.

"Really? Sir Lancelot, do you mean it?" Those bright green eyes flash even brighter with excitement.

"Yes, of course I mean it. The prince of Camelot must have the very best training. And if I may humbly say, I am the best."

Chuckling, Arthur chimes in with his agreement. “Sir Lancelot’s skill with the sword is well known, and he has proven himself in battle. You may have heard the stories, but to see him in the heat of a fight is quite the treat. You must take care and pay attention to everything he teaches you, Galahad.”

“Yes, father.” Galahad nods firmly in Arthur’s direction.

I look away, catching Guin’s eyes. A pain in my chest clenches my heart. I am not angry with Guin, but knowing we have a son and she did not tell him about me hurts more than I can admit to her. But I know she too feels this pain.

Guin attempts to smile, but it only makes the tears pooling in her eyes come gushing down. Quickly, she wipes them away, not wanting Galahad to see her sadness. I try to comfort her by sending her a message through my eyes, telling her I am all right, even though I am a complete mess inside. It is all I can offer at the moment.

“Sir Lancelot, will you tell us what happened with the dragon? How did you survive?” Galahad asks in his childish giddiness, shifting from a princely young man to a little boy in an instant. Guin has the same ability. One I find rather endearing.

Arthur clears his throat. “Son, that is for another time. I am sure Sir Lancelot is weary from his travels. Now, off to bed with you. Kiss your mother goodnight.”

“Okay,” Galahad says unenthusiastically, hopping off his seat to plant a soft kiss on Guin’s cheek.

“Goodnight, my little love,” Guin says as she tousles his hair.

“Night, mama.”

As Galahad makes his way down the hall to his bedchamber, Arthur stands up and

walks over to the fireplace, staring into the flames. Guin and I remain sitting opposite each other on a pair of cushioned benches.

Not knowing where to begin, I offer my thanks for their hospitality, but Arthur interrupts. “Nonsense. Camelot is your home, Lancelot. It will always be. I am so happy to see you again. To see you alive. It...well, I know this is a complicated situation we are all in, but we will find a way through it and avoid a catastrophe.”

“How?” Guin asks, shaking with tears. By instinct, I find myself at her side, warming her cold body, holding her as close to mine as I dare.

“We need to tell the truth,” Arthur proclaims.

“What truth?” Guin and I ask in unison.

“A few days from now, we shall enter the great hall together. The people will be in disbelief that you are alive, that is to be certain. They will have questions. I want to answer them before they are asked. Let us come up with the truth now so we can do so together.”

“You mean, let us come up with lies to tell so we don’t get caught in the wrong one?” Guin sits up straight, facing Arthur.

“No. Well, not complete lies. I mean to tell the kingdom the truth, as much of the truth as we can. I think you are right that confessing the truth about Galahad’s paternity is dangerous. Is it more dangerous than lying? Perhaps. There will be questions about our marriage, regardless of what I say about Galahad. We will need to speak to the archbishop. He will be angry that I have married a woman already taken, but how could I have known that your first husband still lived? How could any of us have known? There must be a way we can carefully navigate these waters, find a way for the two of you to be together without the kingdom losing their queen.”

“This is very dangerous, Arthur.” Guin looks away from the two of us, gazing into the embers of the hearth. “Whatever choice we make tonight, it will bring us closer to the peril I told you of.”

I carefully wrap my hands around Guin’s icy fingers, then look at Arthur. “If we give them the truth of Galahad’s paternity, how will the kingdom trust you? And Guin, you said that Mordred had already damaged the people’s trust in Arthur. Even a small amount of distrust can lead to ruin. This most certainly will enrage those who already follow Mordred.”

“There are assumptions, and there are hidden truths.” Arthur thinks for a moment, placing his hand on the carved stone of the fireplace. “I have always claimed Guinevere’s child as mine, yes. And there is truth in that. I told Guinevere her child would be mine, no matter what she decided. I would adopt her child, no matter the sex. We only need witnesses. I know two volunteers who will say such a thing if we need them to. The people will accept this truth.”

“You have too much faith in humanity, Arthur.” Guin shivers next to me.

“Or maybe you have too little faith in people, Guinevere.” Arthur looks at Guin with longing and sadness.

“I can’t help but think of what I know is to come.” Guin matches his sadness. “Whatever we do, the three of us are doomed. All we can do is make sure that Galahad is protected.”

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“I agree with Guinevere. Announcing the truth of Galahad’s paternity will do more harm than good.” I squeeze Guin’s hand before I continue. “My only concern is that if we allow the people to think Galahad is Arthur’s child, he would be considered a bastard. Perhaps the archbishop will deem your marriage to Arthur invalid, given the circumstances, which may worsen the situation. Acknowledging Galahad as King Arthur’s bastard child is a better option than considering him as the son of your estranged husband. Arthur has no heir of his own and has everyright to claim an heir of his choosing. A bastard, and a well-loved one, would be a welcome choice.”

I pause to take a breath, pain ripping through my chest as I decide to give Arthur the son I did not know I had. “The kingdom believes Galahad is your son, Arthur. To say otherwise will break their trust. I know that me being alive complicates the validity of your marriage, but I do not believe it will affect Galahad’s claim to your throne. As long as he is seen as your true son.”

Guin squeezes my hand tightly. I can feel her internal struggle. She knows I am right. She knows this is best for Galahad. “Lance...I—”

“I know, Guin.” I am desperate to kiss my wife, to let her comfort me in the way she needs. Before I act, I glance over to where Arthur is standing. He looks over at me. His face is blank, unreadable. “Arthur, may I...uhhh—”

Arthur nods at me, looking away to give Guin and me a moment. I wrap my arms around her waist and she pulls my head to her chest, resting her head on top of mine. She cradles me like a child as I absorb all of her love into my soul. Hot tears fall down my face and splash into her cleavage. I close my eyes, remembering a time when life was simpler. Walking hand in hand along the shore at Joyous Gard, waking

up to a mane of wild red hair entangled on my chest, falling asleep in exhaustion after a night of lovemaking.

Guin pulls away from me, forcing me to look at her face. “I am sorry, Lance. I cannot say I regret allowing rumors to turn into the truth about who Galahad is, but fuck, I wish there was a way to shout to the world that he is yours.”

My hand wipes the tears from Guin’s cold cheeks, tracing the line of her jaw to her throat. I slowly guide my fingers through her hair, feeling the silky strands I so missed. “I never knew I could love so fiercely in an instant. The moment I saw Galahad, I knew he belonged to me. But I accept the truth that must be, so should you.”

“I love you.” Guin’s lips tremble as she attempts to abide by what I have said. “Arthur,” Guin says with more confidence, turning to her other husband as he brings his attention back to us. “What about the marriage issue here? Should I step down as queen? Can I?”

Arthur clears his throat. “This is what troubles me. I have crowned you as my queen. Your coronation is as binding to me as your marriage nuptials are to Lancelot. Even if our own vows do not hold up against previous marital vows...I promise, Guin, I will set this right.”

“It feels impossible.” Guin rests her head on my shoulder. I feel her tears through the thin fabric on my shirt and want nothing more than to scoop her onto my lap and hold her close to my heart as she did to me just minutes before. Arthur looks at us with kindness, or perhaps it is sadness in his eyes. He nods to me as if reading my mind.

I trust Arthur will find a way for us to be together again. But I know this is the closest we can get to each other before that happens. I need to be patient. I waited eight years. I can surely endure a few more weeks. Though I am not sure I can wait for

much longer.

Being around Guin again is intoxicating, suffocating, and exhilarating. I should feel happy as well, but it is difficult to find happiness when my life is uncertain. Will I ever get to hold Guin against my naked body again? Feel her breath mix with mine. The biggest uncertainty for me is whether Guin wants me as her husband.

Guin has a life at Camelot. Guin is queen. Though she married Arthur for security and to give our son a loving father, I know it has been a genuine marriage. Guin kept no secrets from me. She told me everything. Even that the two of them were intimate with each other.

How can I fault her for falling into another man's bed when she thought I was gone forever? Still, Guin is mine. I want to claim her as mine. I want the entire kingdom to acknowledge her as my wife, mother of my son. This cannot be, I know, yet my heart is in agony at the truth of it all.

I was naive to think that my life would continue as if I had not been gone for years. My only blessing is that Guin has not returned to her time. At least she is still in my life and there is a chance we could be together again.

Chapter 11

Lancelot

Before the big reveal in a few days, Arthur brings his most trusted knights together in his receiving room to explain the situation and prepare them for the announcement he will give to his kingdom. The announcement that I am alive. He feels it is best not to shock the knights in front of everyone. A wise decision on his part.

When Gawain enters the room, he looks at me as if seeing a ghost. After several

attempts to speak, he finally says, “Either Sir Lancelot has finally decided to haunt me, I am going insane, or...”

I stand up and embrace my dear friend. “If I was dead, I would most certainly haunt you, my friend.”

“Lancelot, how is this possible?” Gawain grabs my shoulders, holding me an arm’s length away to examine my face. I pat him back on the shoulders before giving him another embrace.

“A story for another day, Sir Gawain. Please take a seat as the others will be here shortly,” Arthur speaks with calm authority, motioning us to sit down. As we take our seats on one of the benches in the room, Guin enters with Elaine.

Guin had told me she and Elaine have become friends since my untimely death. I offer a friendly smile to the lady and a deeper one as I turn to face Guin. Every time I look upon her face, my heart stops for an instant before racing at a speed that should frighten me. This woman. She is the reason I fought my way through wild lands, mystical beasts, and countless obstacles for the last eight years. This woman is why I am alive.

“Lancelot, the others have arrived. Try to calm yourself.” Gawain places a hand on my shoulder, returning me to the present situation and why we are all gathered together. Kei, Bedivere, and Gaheris have arrived and are staring at me with the same shock and confusion Gawain had on his face moments ago. Before I can properly greet them all, Arthur begins his speech.

“As you all can see, Sir Lancelot has miraculously returned to us.”

“So that vision of Sir Lancelot is not a ghost. He is real?” Kei has not removed his gaze since entering Arthur’s study.

“Yes, Sir Kei. I assure you, I am real,” I say with a smile.

“Sir Lancelot returned to us a few days ago and has been staying with the queen and me. I apologize for keeping such a secret from all of you, but there was much we needed to discuss. And Lancelot needed rest. He has been through much to get back to us.” Arthur pauses to let the shock of my presence settle among the men.

“I invited you here today to discuss those same matters with you before gathering the whole of Camelot together. You all have shown yourselves to be loyal, trusting servants to both Guinevere and me. Even when you believed Galahad was fathered by Lancelot, you fought the rumors and ensured that Guinevere’s position as queen was recognized throughout the kingdom. I am grateful for that.” Arthur pauses again to look at me, for he needs one last consent to take my son from me. I nod so that only Arthur can see the gesture. “A few nights from now, in the throne room, I will acknowledge the paternity of my son. Galahad is my son and heir. He might not have been born in wedlock, but I have made that right. I have married his mother and made her my queen. I need this to be the truth.”

“Is the queen still married to Sir Lancelot?” This brazen question comes from none other than Elaine. Though a friend to Guinevere, I can tell she has not fallen out of love with me. She has fixed her gaze on me since she walked into the room and saw me beside Gawain.

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“Yes, the vows of marriage are binding and only broken when a spouse has passed,” Arthur explains.

“Does that make your marriage to the queen invalid, my king?” Bedivere’s face holds a look of concern as he asks this question.

“That is the one question I do not know the answer to. I will need to speak to the archbishop about the matter.” Arthur quickly glances at Guin, uncomfortable with the tension surrounding us all.

“Is Queen Guinevere still queen, then?” Gawain asks.

“It is a sticky situation we are in, no doubt. The archbishop and Merlin will help us find an answer to this. Until then, I want you all to continue treating Guinevere as queen.”

As the knights confirm their agreement loudly, Elaine’s delicate voice speaks up from the masculine cheers. “Will Sir Lancelot and...Queen Guinevere resume their marital...relationship?”

“That is a very personal question, Elaine. One you are not entitled to know.” Arthur’s voice is commanding.

“Do the people not have a right to know which man their queen spends her nights with?”

“Elaine! That is none of your concern,” Gawain shouts, enraged at her rudeness. I

look to Guin, wanting to hold her and rid her of the pain I know she is feeling inside. She turns to me, tears shimmering in her eyes as she holds them back.

“Though he is my husband,” Guin says, holding herself with grace and confidence. “I will not be sharing a bed with Lancelot until we have consulted the matter with the archbishop. Until we have reached a decision on how to proceed. I will also not share a bed with the king if you are wondering, Elaine.” As her eyes land on Elaine’s, I see fire and fury.

I stand up to offer my own thoughts on the matter and make it known that I will support Arthur in every way possible, as I did before. “Guinevere and I are married. You all witnessed that glorious day of our union. I will cherish the time I had with my wife and can only hope that we can come to a resolution. Most importantly, we need to continue to show our support for Arthur. He is our king, our leader, our champion. If the people lose faith in him, he will be in danger. The kingdom will be in danger. Galahad will be in danger.”

The knights of the round table, as Guin likes to refer to my friends, whole-heartedly agree with my statement. It is as if I have never left. They all welcome me with joy in their hearts. We are brothers once again. Happiness creeps back into my soul. All I need now is for Guin to be mine and I will be whole again.

Chapter 12

Guinevere

When Galahad and I came to live permanently at Camelot and I became queen, Elaine’s friendship was everything I needed. I was so nervous on the day of my coronation. Arthur and I had a small, intimate wedding at Joyous Gard a couple of weeks prior to the coronation, so we needed to provide an epic celebration. As Elaine helped me into my coronation gown, I was shaking. The bright white dress was

gorgeous, embroidered with intricate designs of crowns and flowers. Flashbacks of the first time I walked through the throne room towards Arthur, while wearing a white gown, threatened to consume me with anxiety.

Elaine's soft, soothing voice brought me back out of my head. "You have nothing to be nervous about, my lady. You look stunning. As you are every time I see you."

"Are you charming me, Elaine?" I didn't take her for an ass kisser, but her sweet compliments lifted my spirit. "It's just...it feels like that day when I wore my white gown and presented Arthur with Excalibur. Only everything went to shit."

Elaine's laughter filled the air, shaking the nervous tension from my core. It was a sound I never thought I'd hear from such a gentle, soft-spoken woman. "In comparison, today will be nothing. When you reach King Arthur this time, all you need to do is stand there with a crown on your head and listen to the archbishop drawl on in Latin. It will be rather boring."

"You are teasing me now. But go on, almost all the butterflies are out of my stomach."

She smiled at me. "You know, I used to be so frightened of you. The White Enchantress. You spoke of the future, bewitched every man who looked upon you, and took Excalibur's power into your body."

"Yeah, well, I was terrified of that last part. Bewitching every man...I don't know about that."

"Well, you certainly bewitched Sir Lancelot. I have never seen him like that, so obviously in love." She looked away from me then, ashamed of her jealousy, but no longer afraid of me.

Years later, with our friendship to soften the early blows of our acquaintance, we can now speak freely about Lance. She would tell me stories of his youth, his ambition to become a knight. I would even tell her stories of our time together as man and wife. Not the juicy details of our sex life, but just him. She would listen to me talk about him on the days I missed him most, like some goddamn therapist. Those talks saved my sanity and helped me keep my memories alive.

We talk about him so openly, but since Lance came back from the dead, we've strictly avoided that topic. I miss our time together. And I want to make sure our friendship is still intact. As Elaine brushes my waist-length hair, I open my mouth to begin some frivolous conversation about Gaheris' obvious crush on one of my lady's, Lynette, but she speaks first.

"Was Sir Lancelot ever...violent with you?"

"Violent? No." A wave of nausea hits me. Elaine is my friend, I remind myself. Though I can't help but dread the next words that will come out of her mouth. She's been in love with Lance since before I first arrived at Camelot. Though I believe she would never betray me, it wouldn't surprise me if her feelings for Lance compelled her to.

"Oh," Elaine whispers shyly. It's as if something inside of her deflated.

"Why did you ask me this?" I command. My queenly voice taking over, camouflaging my anger.

"Well, it is only that he was perhaps overenthusiastic when I offered myself to him."

"You what?" I stand up so quickly that the chair I was sitting on falls to the ground.

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“He is lonely. Had been alone for eight years. Since you cannot perform your wifely duties, I offered myself to him.”

“You better be fucking joking, Elaine.” Now unable to contain my anger, I turn away from her, disgusted by her presence.

“I apologize if I have offended you, Guinevere. I only wanted to help him.”

“Help him? Or help yourself? You’ve been in love with my husband for years. Since before I first arrived at Camelot. Now you take advantage of our situation and throw yourself at him at your first chance?”

“I do not think he is the same man you believe him to be. He was harsh, cruel. I think he enjoyed hurting me.”

“What did he do to—fuck, I don’t want to know! Get out. I don’t want to look at you anymore.”

“Guin—”

“Get out!” I thrash my arms out, knocking the brush from Elaine’s hand.

“Please—”

“I said get out!” I shout, feeling my throat go hoarse.

Elaine has the audacity to look hurt by my anger. Her little nose scrunches up as if

she is about to cry. Before any tears fall from her face, she flies out of my bedroom.

The archbishop arrived at Camelot two months ago, and there is still no answer. Lance and I are living in limbo. Arthur and I are living in limbo. Married to both, but unable to be a couple with either. It is agony. To have the love of my life back after believing him dead for eight years and all I can give him is a hopeful smile and sometimes a kiss on the cheek as I bid him goodnight.

I haven't slept with Arthur since Lance's return. How can I? It wouldn't be fair to Lance, Arthur, or me. I thought Lance would keep himself for me as I have been doing for him. He knows how much I love him, how much I want to be with him. Lance is all I ever think about. Something Elaine is fully aware of. Perhaps my open heart was too much for her to bear.

Alone in my room, I pace back and forth until my feet ache. I can't breathe. The air is thick around me. I feel like the walls of this fantasy are caving in and I'm being sucked back to reality. A reality where a happy ending is impossible. Barging out of my room, I run down the quickest path to the gardens.

As I turn a corner, I run full-force into what feels like a brick wall. What little air I have inside my lungs is knocked out of me as the brick wall engulfs me. When I come to, bright green eyes are searching mine with concern. I push myself away from Lance, not wanting to be near him.

"Guin, are you—"

I turn away from him, needing more distance, desperate for air. Galahad comes up from behind Lancelot, calling to me. Turning back around, I flash a smile at my son. "Mama, will you come watch me practice with Sir Lancelot?"

"I...um I need to..." I can never deny my son what he wants. He is my pride and joy.

Those pleading eyes are impossible to say no to. I push down my seething anger and take Galahad's hand in mind. "Lead the way, my love."

With all my strength, I keep myself calm, breathing in and out as I burrow everything Elaine told me deep inside my gut. Lance is not an idiot. He knows that I know, and he knows I am angry with him, which is why he remains silent.

As I sit on the bench watching my son and Sir Lancelot dance around each other with practice swords, I feel extremely nauseous. The anger I have buried is rolling around in my stomach, fighting its way back to the surface. Every second I look upon Lance makes it harder to contain. After a while, I can't take any more of this agonizing anxiety and vomit my emotions onto the ground.

The servants around me rush to my side, offering me handkerchiefs, bread, and ale. I give them my thanks, telling them all I need is air and perhaps to stretch my legs. Making my way out of the huddle of worried faces, I come face-to-face with Lance again. This time I don't give him a chance to touch me. I walk over to Galahad and apologize for interrupting his sword practice.

"That's okay, mama. Are you sick?"

"No, I just need to stretch my legs and breathe some fresh air. You can continue practicing. I will see you tonight at dinner."

After kissing Galahad's forehead, I spin around, making haste for the stables. I need to get as far away from Lance as I can. He torments my mind just by loving him. Now all I feel is hate. The love that was taken from me and brought back to life has betrayed my heart.

Chapter 13

Guinevere

My horse is readied quickly, in no time, I am galloping out of the castle walls and into the fresh country air. I slow my horse's pace once I'm a safe distance away, seeking my favorite hiding spot in a small grove of trees. From here, I can see all of Camelot. A castle I can claim as queen.

"It is not safe for you to be outside the castle walls on your own, Guin." Of course the White Knight of Camelot followed me.

"I wish to be alone." The anger in my voice comes out unfiltered and filled with hate.

"Will you tell me what is the matter?" Lance's sweet voice infuriates me even more. I cannot look at him or I will cave. I can't hate him for long. I know that, and so does he. But dammit, I need this rage.

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“Please, Lance. I need to be alone right now.”

“Are you pregnant?”

“What the actual fuck! Lance, leave me alone or I will say hurtful things I don’t wish to say to you.”

“I only ask because of what happened back—”

“No, I am not pregnant, Lance. I haven’t had sex in months. Unlike you.”

“Guin, I do not—”

“Are you going to lie to me, Lance? After everything we have been through. Do you really expect me to stand here and let you lie to me? You either stay and tell me the truth. Or leave.”

“What do you want me to say?” The look of helplessness on his face is like a knife through my heart. Fuck. His love hurts so much.

“You would never reveal the women you’ve bedded before me. Is that because one of them is Elaine? Have you secretly been in love with her all this time? What am I to you?”

“God dammit, Guin. I do not love Elaine. She threw herself at me a few nights ago and in my weakness, I let her suck my cock. Is that what you want to hear?” His anger pounds against my ears as he speaks a truth I wish was a lie.

“No, I did not want to hear that.” Tears pour out of my eyes unwillingly showing my weakness. I fall against the trunk of a tree and slide down to the cold ground. At least Lance doesn’t love Elaine. Still, he let her close to him, let her touch him in places only I should have access to.

The flicker of anger disappears on his face, replaced by concern and disappointment. “I am sorry, Guin. I am your husband, and I have betrayed your trust. I betrayed our marriage vows and let another woman claim me. All because I was angry that another man had claimed you. Because I cannot claim you back. Because I do not know if you will ever be mine again. But I am yours, Guin, no one else’s. Please forgive me.” Lance kneels down beside me, pleading with his eyes, just as Galahad has learned to do. “You are the only woman I love. Have loved. Will ever love.”

At those words, I let Lance back into my heart, a place that had gone miserably cold without him. He reaches for me, bringing his forehead to mine. Our noses brush against each other intimately. His breath tickles my mouth. I know I need to say something before we end up doing something we shouldn’t. But I let the thick silence swirl around us for a moment.

“You were angry at Arthur?” I whisper against his mouth.

Lance flops himself down beside the tree I am sitting against. “Not at Arthur. I could never be angry with him. Though, thinking about the two of you in bed together makes my blood seethe. I was mostly angry that I was not there for you when you needed me most. That another man stepped in to take care of you and our son.”

“I can understand that. But Elaine?”

“Please forgive me, Guin. I was weak. She snuck into my room. I could not stop myself.” He brushes his fingers through his long locks of caramel hair in frustration. “I do not think she will ever return for such affections if that helps.”

“She said you hurt her.” I turn to face Lance, needing to see his reaction.

“I am sorry for that as well. I hated what I was doing. So I let my anger out on her. It was wrong of me, in so many ways.” Pain, anger, guilt, and a deep sadness I know all too well crease Lance’s usually strong visage. I slide my hand in his, giving him some of my strength.

“When she told me this morning, I nearly tore her head off.”

Lance chuckles, making me smile. “I hope you can forgive her in time. She was wrong and betrayed your friendship. She betrayed our friendship even. I know it will be hard for you to forgive. But she has been a good friend to you and she is loyal to Arthur. Not to mention how much she cares for our son. I hate even suggesting this to you, but it is safer that she remain our ally rather than our enemy.”

I huff. “You are probably right. But it will not be easy for me to forget.”

“Forget, never. But forgive.”

“I will try.”

Leaning back against the tree, Lance sighs deeply. “Guin. I think it would be best if I return home to Joyous Gard.”

“What?” I jump to my knees and stare at Lance in shock. I only just got him back, and he wants to leave me. Again. My heart can’t take this.

“Being here, around you all the time but unable to show you how much I love you in public and private, it is tearing me apart. I have already given into weakness once. And here with you now, alone outside the castle, it is taking everything I have not to undress you and take you right here.”

My heart races and I'm panting at his words, wanting desperately to have my way with him too. As if sensing my rising passion, Lance stands up too quickly, nearly toppling over. He reaches out to the tree, regaining his balance.

"That was graceful," I laugh, lifting my hands up to him. "Help me up." Lance pulls me up and I can't help but take him in my arms. I just want one more moment with my love. Just a small, private moment with his arms wrapped around me.

"We should head back to the castle. Everyone will wonder where we have gone," Lance says into my hair, unwilling to let me go.

“Will they?” I smile into his chest.

“Especially the archbishop.”

“Ugh, okay, let’s go.”

We ride side by side at a slow pace, reaching the castle well before sunset. I am still upset with Lance, but I have already forgiven him. I know he is sorry and I know he will never do it again. With Lance back in my life, I will admit that I still sometimes crave the touch of my second, possibly illegitimate, husband. Not to Lance, though. I’m ashamed of myself, but it is hard to forget my intimate nights with Arthur. We might not have a deep love for each other, but the passion is there. The want, the need. We had something. Without Lance or Arthur to warm my bed, my mind has been wandering.

Still, I will never sleep with Arthur now, knowing Lance is alive. All I want is for the life I was supposed to have with him. The life that was taken from me eight years ago. It will be complicated, but I know there is a way past this mess. There has to be.

Then there’s the Archbishop of Canterbury. He’s made it seem impossible. Every suggestion Merlin and Arthur throw on the table, he denies it, without reason. I’m not sure what his motives are, if he has any. My mind keeps going back to when I returned to Camelot with Arthur. When the archbishop discovered the rumors surrounding my pregnancy, he rode at once to Camelot, missing the letter of invitation sent by Arthur to baptize Galahad. The archbishop would never make a scene, especially in front of Arthur, but it was obvious he had disagreed with how Arthur had taken my son without question. I wonder if he had spoken to Mordred

before arriving at Camelot then and even now. Is he Arthur's man?

Arthur does all he can to sway the archbishop. Though after two months of discussing the messy situation Arthur, Lance, and I are in, I am losing hope that he will let me return to my first husband. I want to shake this man to sense, tell him exactly how I feel about him and his damn Christian rules.

But he could easily take away my crown. If I am no longer queen, what will that mean for Arthur, Galahad, and Camelot? Even if I were to remain queen as the acknowledged wife of Sir Lancelot, how can I truly be queen if I'm living with and loving another man? I feel so lost with the uncertainty lying before me.

As Lance and I enter the royal apartments, Merlin and the archbishop walk out from Arthur's study after what looks like a rather intense session. I bid them good evening as they exit the chambers and rush to Arthur's side. He looks exhausted.

"I told them I wanted you and Lancelot to live as husband and wife."

"Oh." My heart shatters at the pain creasing Arthur's brow. "How did the archbishop take it?"

"He was most angry. Believes I would be forsaking my vows as your husband as well as king. That denying you as my wife would deny you as my queen and deny Galahad as my heir."

"Fuck."

"The archbishop also has concerns about naming Galahad my heir if his mother is no longer my wife. Our marriage gives him protection and a claim to my throne. If we were to dissolve our marriage, then he would be a bastard born from adultery and the archbishop will not allow him to inherit my throne."

“Fuck,” I repeat. “Can he do that?”

“Arthur,” Lancelot interrupts before we can continue with the depressing topic of my son’s legitimacy and claim to a throne I thought Arthur had full power over. “I do not wish to make matters worse, so I plan to return home to Joyous Gard. If you would grant me permission, I can begin preparing for the journey this week.”

“Guinevere, did you know of this?” Arthur lightly squeezes my arm in comfort.

“Lance only just mentioned it to me today.”

“And are you fine with Lance leaving?”

I sigh, turning toward Lance. Before tears pool in my eyes, I turn back to Arthur and say, “I will miss him, of course, but I think it’s a good idea.”

Bowing his head in thought, Arthur quickly looks back up to Lance. “Perhaps it is best. Galahad will join you.”

“What? Wait. Arthur.” I shout.

“I know it will be hard for you, Guinevere, but it is time that Galahad had proper training. I lived away from my home at a much younger age. It will be good for him. And Joyous Gard is a second home to the boy. He will feel welcome there. Not to mention, it will give Lancelot a chance to bond with his son.”

“I thank you for that chance, Arthur. But if Guinevere does not wish for Galahad to leave her side, I will not take him from her.”

I sigh, not with relief at what Lance had said, but with sadness. “No. You are right, Arthur. Plus, he shouldn’t be around all this drama. If shit hits the fan, I want him far

from Camelot.”

“Are you sure?” Lance grabs my hands, his eyes searching mine for truth. Those beautiful green eyes. Like the calm before a storm.

“Yes. You deserve to get to know Galahad as I have. He is the best of us, all three of us.”

Chapter 14

Lancelot

The journey to JoyousGard is long and exhausting. With the royal guard and Merlin accompanying us and the luxurious camp we need to set up every evening, means less riding during the day. But every day is a blessing. I ride side-by-side with my son. This boy, he is everything to me. Though Arthur has embraced Galahad as his own and the realm believes this to be true, I know Galahad is mine.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

I have maintained a proper distance from both Galahad and Guin since arriving back in Britain, not wanting to sway the minds and hearts of the people. The last thing I want is for them to see me as a usurper. I never meant to cause such a struggle for Arthur. Though in marrying Guin in the first place, knowing she was meant to be Arthur's queen one day, maybe this is all my fault.

In marrying Guin, I had hoped—we both hoped—our actions would protect us all, save the kingdom. My love for her was blinding. It still is. I could not see past the present. I did not want to see a life where she was someone else's wife. Yet, here we are. Guin is married to Arthur, though still married to me. The three of us living in this strange limbo, unsure of what this all means for us.

All I know for certain is that I still love Guin. I am mad for her. Riding away from her, leaving her again, it was agonizing. I was not sure I could go through with it. I know it is the right thing to do. And with Galahad by my side, it is much easier to keep going. Every mile closer to Joyous Gard is a weight off my heart.

“Are we going to Avalon?” Galahad quietly asks, bringing me out of my thoughts as we steer our horses down a well-worn path through the woods.

“Why would we go there?”

“To see your mother and, I guess, my grandmother.” I briefly glance at the lad, thinking I heard him wrong, then look around to make sure the rest of our party is not within earshot. “You haven't seen her since you arrived back at Camelot. Does she even know you are alive?” Galahad looks away from me, checking his surroundings, then moves his horse closer to mine, speaking in a lower voice. “Does she know I am

your son?" Galahad is sharp for his age, but I am surprised by his observation.

"How long have you known?" I interrupt before Galahad can keep going.

"A while," he says, with a long sigh.

"I wrote a letter to Vivianne shortly after my return. She has not had the chance to come to Camelot, but she will visit us at Joyous Gard."

"You call your mother by her name? Mom always glares at me when I call her Guinevere."

I laugh, imagining that harmless yet threatening look of hers. "Vivianne is not my actual mother. Though she is the woman who raised me and the woman I have thought of as my mother all my life. I do not always call her by name, especially when speaking with her."

"Did you ever find your real mother?"

"I know who she was, but she had already died when I learned of her." I glance down at my son riding beside me. We have never properly discussed who we are to each other. Guin, Arthur, and I debated telling him. In the end, we thought it would be too confusing for the boy. But Galahad seems to have accepted the truth that I am his father already, yet I do not want him to think less of Arthur or Guin for keeping this from him.

"Are you saddened by the truth that King Arthur isn't your real father?" I ask my son.

"No. I think I always knew. Mom would tell me things about my father that made little sense. It was like she was talking about someone else. Even Excalibur...or Elnaril. Well, she doesn't really speak to me. She just kind of gives me a vibe. Or

that's how mom describes it."

"A vibe?"

"Like a feeling. Whenever I am near my father—King Arthur—he doesn't feel like my father. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, I think it does." Excalibur is a strange being. A sword with a soul. It seems to know things we mortal beings do not. How I wish I could speak with her, know the things she does. Perhaps together, we can empower Arthur's reign and build his dream of a united kingdom.

"Cool," Galahad nods.

"You speak just as your mother does. I cannot understand some of the words you say, but I know your meaning. It is strange."

"Oh, sorry, I usually speak Cumbric or Brythonic when I am around anyone other than mother and father. I feel comfortable around you though." Galahad tenses up for a moment, straightening his body and his speech. "So I guess my language falls in and out. I know mom's native language, English. She didnot have to teach me either. Excalibur helped me learn. I know a few languages, actually."

"Perhaps you can help teach me your mother's language. I would like to understand every word that falls from her mouth."

"I'm not sure you would," Galahad chuckles, falling back into his comfortable, informal self. "She doesn't always say the nicest things."

"That sounds like my Guinevere."

Galahad stares at me for a beat as if he is about to ask a question, but is unsure how to ask it. I give him a reassuring nod, letting him know he can ask me anything. “Can I call you ‘dad’?”

“What is dad?” I ask, squinting my eyes at Galahad, whose smile is so like Guin’s I nearly fall from my horse.

“It’s a word for father. Mom uses that word when she talks about her dad. I thought, since it’s a word the people around here are unfamiliar with, perhaps I could call you dad.”

I answer with a smile as bright as my son’s and nod my consent. “Yes, I would like that.”

“Dad?” I had a feeling more questions were coming my way. “Do you love my mom?”

“You are a very perceptive lad. I think you already know the answer to that question. But we can talk more about it when we are behind closed doors at home.”

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Galahad bobs his head vigorously in agreement. We ride in silence until making camp for the night. My heart feels full, knowing Galahad is comfortable around me and has accepted me as his father, as his dad. Though he still addresses me as Sir Lancelot in front of the others, it is a comfort to know I mean more to him. I am eager to get to know my son better and help him grow into the exceptional young man I know he will be.

“Galahad, it is time for your morning lesson,” Merlin announces as he approaches the head table in the great hall where we have been breaking our fast.

“We have only just arrived home last night. Let the boy rest for a day,” I say to Merlin. In the years I have been away, Merlin’s hair has turned completely white, but he looks exactly the same. Gray eyes that look like they have witnessed centuries. A tattoo hides beneath the shoulder-length beard that has also turned a grayish white. He is wearing a well-worn moss-green robe. I do not believe I have ever seen him wear anything else. The weathered skin of his hands tightly grasps his staff, a long gnarled piece of wood encasing a yellow orb on the top.

“I do not wish to delay our lessons any further. During our journey to Joyous Gard, Galahad has made exceptional progress in reading through the books I have assigned him. However, we must resume with more physical lessons.”

I had hoped to have the entire day with my son. Though we shared moments together on the journey to my home, we did not have many chances to speak openly. But we will have the rest of our lives for that. I turn to Galahad to ask him if he wishes to go with Merlin. Galahad takes a bite of crusty bread and nods. “Yeah, I am feeling a bit antsy, like something inside me needs to be released.”

“Go then. I will fetch you from the beach by mid-day.”

“Bye, dad.”

I smirk at my son as he sprints to catch up with Merlin, who has somehow already made it to the other side of the hall. They will go down to the beach, most likely, where Merlin has set up camp. Even during the winter months, he chooses to live innature. Outside the walls of Camelot, Merlin has a small hut he resides in. His main dwelling is a cave off the southwestern coast of Britain.

After nearly a decade of living off the land, I am glad to be under a roof again. Knowing if it rains, I can take shelter somewhere dry and warm. When the sun goes down, I have a comfortable bed to lay my head upon. A table full of food to fill my belly when I am hungry.

Finished with my morning meal, I am unsure what to occupy myself with. I have been gone from home for too long and do not recognize most of the faces in my own hall. Even so, I received a warm and loud welcome yesterday evening when I walked through the castle gates. Augwys, my steward, finishes his meal as I push my chair back and stand up. He is at my side before I can exit the hall. “My lord, if I may say so again, I am filled with joy at your return. I hope you are happy with the state of your castle.”

I walk us out into the courtyard, examining the refurbished stable and armory. “Queen Guinevere told me she has charged you with running my castle while she is away at Camelot. I am eternally grateful to have someone like you put so much care and attention into maintaining my home. Guin is an exceptional woman, but I can imagine taking on an entire castle was difficult for her when she has duties elsewhere. I thank you.”

“I am honored, my lord.” Augwys bows his head.

“Would you be so kind as to grant me a tour of my castle? Show me all you have done while I have been...away?”

“Of course, my lord. Where would you like to start?”

“I leave that up to you, Augie.” I call him by the nickname Guin adopted when she was my wife here. He would always grimace at the name, but he seems to have grown accustomed to it, presenting me with a smirk. Augwys shows me the expanded armory, which is now attached to the stables. Similar to the layout in Camelot.

The training grounds are exactly as I remember, only filled with unfamiliar faces. Young men and boys, some who were learning to walk and feed themselves when I was here last. I walk among the new faces, offering them a warm, encouraging smile while stopping to talk to the men I remember from before. It is a tremendous relief to have such loyal men who have stayed here to protect the people of Joyous Gard in my absence.

Next is the small chapel. The outside has not changed much, but I can tell that they have replaced the roof. It was collapsing the last time I was home. I had plans to fix it but never got to it.

Then we make our way to my private apartments. Augwys opens the room meant for the Lady of the castle. Guin never used it since we shared my bedchambers. There was no need to have separate spaces when all we wanted to do was invade each other's souls. I am curious why Augwys would bring me in here; the room looks unchanged. “Was this room used at all during Queen Guinevere's stays?” I ask, keeping my voice steady.

“Our lady takes residence in your chambers, my lord. She never uses this room. Though I had the masons fix the hidden door on this wall.” Augie points to the wall

between this room and mine. I walk over, looking for a door, but I do not see one. “Forgive me, my lord, but I had this done without the lady’s approval. I did not want her to know of its existence.”

I glare at Augwys, confusion burying the concern on my face. “Please explain, Augwys.”

Clearing his throat, Augwys explains the day Guin learned of my...death. “Arthur had come to Joyous Gard to break the news. My lady was so distraught that she locked herself in her room and refused comfort or food. I knew of this secret door, but it had not been used in decades. The door would not budge. Everyone was beside themselves with worry, unable to find a way to my lady. It was Arthur who finally knocked down the wooden door to the bedchamber. Afterward, I wanted to ensure a way inside my lady’s rooms if she ever tried to lock herself in again. Hence the secret. I do hope you can forgive me.”

I turn from Augwys, placing my forehead against the cold stone of the wall. Normally, I would never show such weakness in front of anyone, but I cannot stop the tears from sliding out of my eyes and down my cheeks. I watch as my tears splash against the wooden floors. “Show me,” I whisper. Then, with more courage in my throat, I speak again. “Show me how to open this door.”

“Of course, my lord.”

Chapter 15

Guinevere

These past six months have felt like a million years. Camelot feels strange without my son’s laughter. It feels cold without his warmth. I feel vulnerable with him so far away, knowing he has so much riding on his shoulders. The vessel of Excalibur. He

carries so much power inside him. Wielding so many expectations. I know Lance will protect him with his life. Merlin and Gaheris are with Galahad too. And of course, Elnaril. Galahad is safe. He will be okay. More than okay. But fuck do I miss that little guy.

I find myself wandering aimlessly around the castle grounds much more often. Today I've taken my lute with me as I make my way to the gardens where I usually play. Elaine is there, as if waiting for me to appear. I haven't been ignoring her, but I also haven't spoken to her that much since...well since she sucked my husband's cock. It's difficult to look at her without getting angry. I don't want her to become my enemy. It's just hard to forget what she did.

Elaine looks up at me with hope in her eyes, desperate to talk to me. I don't want to hear any of it. So I speak before she opens her mouth. "There's nothing more you need to say to me, Elaine. I already forgive you." I have. It's only fair since I've forgiven Lance. "But I cannot forget. You broke my trust, and that is something you need to earn back."

"I understand, your Highness." Elaine bows her head in defeat. "Have you received word from Galahad?"

"Yes. He is doing well."

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

Elaine nods, then stands from the bench to curtsy before walking back to the keep. “Wait.” Fuck. I need to be the one that makes this right. But I don’t know how. “Do you want to stay? I don’t want to be alone.”

“Of course, your Highness. Only if you want me to keep you company.”

“Yes. But don’t you ever try to fuck my husband again. I will not be so forgiving next time.”

The color drains from Elaine’s face, but I hear her breathe a sigh of relief as she sits back down on the bench next to me. “Are you practicing for another banquet?”

“No, I came here to just play. It’s been some time since I played for myself. Any song requests?”

Elaine smiles, shaking her head. “No. Sing what your heart wants.”

So I do. I sing a song that, as soon as I heard it, became one of my heart songs. A song that made me miss my mother’s love. It brought back so much pain. I had thought that I already healed from losing my mom, but it all came back when this song played on my Spotify for the first time. I loved it. I loved the pain I felt. I needed that pain. That pain filled me with memories of my mom.

Memories of her picking me up after my first attempt on roller skates. Memories of us playing the piano together. Memories of us sobbing together while watching a movie about tragic love. Memories of having tea in our sitting room. Memories of her and Ed stealing glances at each other when they thought no one was looking.

“Because you were there...” I sing, letting these memories fill me. My mom, always there, even after she died. It took me a while to find her again. Josh helped me find her in music. And this song. This song made my heart explode with sadness and joy. It still does. As I reach the last verse of the song, I know I have a tear-soaked face, but my soul is drowning in my mother’s love. Because every time I sing this song, I know she is somehow with me. And I need her right now.

What I wouldn’t give to curl up on the couch next to her, eating a pint of ice cream from Bent Spoon as I tell her everything that has happened to me since I stumbled into the past.

She would likely steal the ice cream from me, devouring it as she eats up everything I tell her. Fuck, I miss that woman. I haven’t heard her voice in nearly twenty years. Twenty fucking years. It’s also been nearly ten years since I’ve seen my dad, Josh, Leo, Uncle Al, and ice cream. Oh my god, ice cream. And chocolate.

But seriously, I miss my family so fucking much. With Galahad now gone, I feel so lost. I know this is good for him. To get to know Lance. Merlin can teach him much more up north than he could ever do here. Despite being one of Arthur’s advisors, many fear Merlin and his magic. The people up north are more accepting and less frightened when it comes to the unknown.

As I finish singing to my mom, I send her to Galahad. He needs her more than I do. I wipe the tears from my face, placing the lute on my lap.

“Why do you always sing songs that make you sad, Guin?” Elaine asks, tears brimming her eyes.

I smile at her. “Because they make me feel. And I need to feel these emotions. These emotions remind me that I am alive. After a healthy cry, I always feel better.”

I pick my lute back up again and sing “Touch the Sky” from Brave. It’s a song I’ve sung many times at Camelot, and I know it’s one of Elaine’s favorites. She hums along and taps her thigh, delighted at my current song choice. Yes, we’ll be okay. I’ll be okay.

As I head back to the keep, I take a detour around the castle grounds, walking through the cloisters that surround the main courtyard. I wrap a shawl around my shoulders, warming myself against the cool evening air. Elaine had gone to the chapel to say a prayer for Galahad. And probably to beg God to give her Lancelot. I know she will always love him. It doesn’t make me angry anymore though. I pity her. Knowing that she will never have Lance. He’s mine. Even though we must be a part now.

I have no idea how long we will endure this torment. The archbishop left Camelot shortly after Lance and Galahad left for Joyous Gard. I doubt he will be the one to help us resolve this messy trio of a marriage anyway. He will not support Arthur if he denounces himself as my husband. Galahad could disinherit everything. I just don’t understand. The archbishop had his reservations about Galahad since day one. Why does he have a say in the first place?

I’ve asked Arthur this many times, but I hate the answer I am given. The archbishop speaks for God, we must listen. I have this nagging feeling that the archbishop’s pockets are filled with gold and it isn’t God who’s filling them. I wrap my shawl tighter around my shoulders as a chill runs down my spine.

“Have you developed a chill now that you do not have Sir Lancelot to warm your bed?” I spin around to find Mordred an inch from my face. My reflexes react. Using my lute, I push him away from me. He is faster than I thought he’d be, grabbing the lute out of my hands and dropping it to the ground. A scream escapes my lips as he kicks it hard, smashing it against a wall. He then grabs my wrists, twisting them hard.

I struggle to release my arms from his grasp. “Arthur gave me that lute, you mother

fucker.”

“All you need to do is wrap that tight cunt around him and he will buy you anything you wish, whore.”

This guy. He is such a fucking twat. I don’t know what he expects to happen. As I attempt to escape again, he squeezes my wrists tighter, pinning me against the stone wall. “You have a simple choice ahead of you. Give up Arthur, and you can have Lancelot. No one would fault you for leaving your second husband now that your first is alive and well.”

“You would love that, wouldn’t you? You think you have won. That Arthur will give you the throne you so desperately want. That throne belongs to Arthur, and after him, my son will inherit the crown and all the power that comes with it.”

“That is where you are mistaken, Guinevere.” Mordred releases one of my wrists, placing a cold, clammy hand to my jaw. Someone is bound to see this attack. I can’t let this go that far. With all my strength, I pull my knee up quickly and slam my heel down on Mordred’s foot. Then, wasting no time, I bring my knee back up to his groin as hard as I can.

Mordred falls to the ground, grabbing his crotch. “You bitch!”

A hand grabs my shoulder, stopping me from reacting further. “You should watch your mouth when you speak to the queen, Mordred.”

“Gawain. I should have known your prick was up the queen’s ass too. One day, there will be no one to save you,” Mordred spits at my feet. I feel Gawain react beside me, but I’m quicker, landing a punch on Mordred’s nose. It cracks under my knuckles, creating a river of red streaks down his face.

“I don’t need anyone to save me, fucker.”

“You broke my nose!”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“Yeah...wasn’t my first either.” I am so full of rage. I feel like I could literally tear his head off. Gawain pulls me away, keeping me from making another punch, and places me against the opposite wall.

“Guinevere, calm down. Do not let this jealous, angry man drag you down to his level.”

I walk around Gawain, pacing up and down the quiet hallway, breathing deeply as Josh had taught me ages ago. I can hear his calming voice in the back of my head:one, two, three, breathe. When I turn back around, Gawain has my broken lute in his hands. His face tells me he is beyond angry.

If Gawain didn’t have the heart of a lion, he would have smashed the remains of my lute against Mordred’s head. Instead, he whispers, “You are lucky our queen loves her king so dearly. She does not want to see Arthur kill his own kin. For he would surely do just that if he learns of what happened tonight. Stand yourself up and go back to your rooms. Do not leave there until your nose has healed. I will have food sent up to you.”

“You cannot expect me to lock myself away.” Mordred wipes the blood from his upper lip as he stands up. “I am King Arthur’s nephew! And in the eyes of God, his heir.”

Gawain lunges at Mordred, pinning him against the stone wall. “Do not test my patience. If you care for your uncle, you will listen to what I say. You will go to your chambers. You will tell no one of what happened tonight. If anyone sees the state of your face, you will tell them you drank too much ale and tripped up the stairs.

Understand?”

A grunt of acknowledgment escapes from Mordred’s blood-coated mouth. The moment Gawain releases his hold, Mordred sprints away toward the keep. A second later, Gawain is back to his calm and collected self.

“That was intense, Gawain. Are you okay?” I ask, hesitant to approach him. Did I look that scary after punching Mordred?

“Me? Mordred attacked you, and you ask if I am okay? You really are quite a strange woman.”

I shrug. “I’ve had a lot of experience with bullies.”

Gawain sighs. “Let me escort you to the great hall. I am sure King Arthur is wondering where you are.”

“I think I want to dine in my private chambers tonight.”

“Then let me escort you there.”

“Gawain, I can walk there by myself. I’m fine. Really.”

“I know, my queen. But I am not. And I promised Lancelot I would keep you safe while he is away. So I will escort you back to your room. Then I will tell King Arthur where his wife is.” Gawain looks down at the broken lute in his hand. “What shall I tell him about the lute?”

“I do not want to lie. Maybe we can bend the truth and say that Mordred took the lute in jest and accidentally broke it?”

Gawain rubs his forehead. "I, too, do not wish to lie to my king. But I think that version is close enough to the truth. King Arthur will be angry, but not as much as he would be if he knew what Mordred did to you. I understand you do not want to cause him pain, but our king deserves to know the kind of man his nephew is."

"He does, Gawain. Trust me. I know things about that man that are not yet to come. I have confided in Arthur."

"You have had a vision? I thought your foresight left you after you gave birth to Galahad."

I hesitate. Arthur, Lance, and Galahad are the only ones who know my truth. Know that I am from the future. Though I trust Gawain with my life, I cannot tell him this. I don't think he would be as accepting of my truth.

"These are things I knew of from before."

Gawain squints his eyes at me with suspicion, but accepts my answer. We walk in silence to the royal apartments. Our nervous, angry energy slowly disappears the closer we get to my sanctuary. Gawain opens the door to let me in, but swiftly enters before me when he notices Mordred sitting on the upholstered bench.

"My nephew came to me as I was heading to my evening meal, complaining that my wife attacked him unprovoked, breaking his nose." Arthur says, hunched over on the bench opposite Mordred, resting his chin on folded hands.

I can't help but cackle. If Mordred thinks he has a one-up on me, he is a fucking idiot. Gawain answers for me as I attempt to calm myself. "Your Highness, I was there when Queen Guinevere attacked Mordred. She was angry because Mordred broke her beloved lute. The lute you had gifted her crowned her queen."

“Mordred, is this true?” Arthur asks.

An exaggerated sigh falls from Mordred’s scowling mouth. “It was an accident, uncle.”

“Hmmm. Guinevere, was it an accident?”

Why is Mordred playing this game? He knows he cannot win. Gawain is a witness. Even if it was just me, Mordred still doesn’t stand a chance.

“If you call grabbing the lute from my hands and kicking it against a wall an accident, then sure. But it’s okay. I’ve already forgiven him by breaking his nose.” I can’t help but smirk.

“Mordred,” Arthur’s voice sounds calm, but I know he is angry, fiercely angry. “Go get your nose looked at. On your way, tell a maid to bring up two plates of supper for me and my queen.”

“But Arthur—”

“You may call me ‘Your Highness.’ And until you can learn your proper place in my court, I will demote you to the stables. Gawain will leave orders for the stable boys to give you instructions the day after tomorrow. I will allow you a day to rest and heal from the wound my dear wife has inflicted. Your rooms will also be moved to guest housing on the other side of the castle. I will organize to have your things sent there. Now go.”

With a quick glare in my direction, Mordred disappears into the hallway with Gawain on his heels. When I turn back to Arthur, he looks so tired. “I’m sorry, Arthur. I was so mad, I couldn’t control myself.”

“No, my love. I am the one who should apologize. I have always put up with my nephew’s antics because of who he is. I promised my sister I would look after him, give him a place at my court. A promise I have fulfilled now that he is in adulthood. Yet he still acts like a child.”

Arthur opens his arms to me. Accepting his embrace, I silently cry against his chest, wishing I could tell him what really happened. Maybe with Mordred gone, our future will be safe from death, chaos, and destruction. But what kind of man would Arthur become if he had to kill his nephew? He’s a little shit, but he’s still Arthur’s family.

I think about Cecily. My twat of a half-sister. She’s done some horrible things to me. I broke her nose too. And even though she tried to ruin my life in every which way, I would never wish death on her. She’s my sister. A fucking demonically spoiled, entitled brat. But my sister nonetheless. The only daughter in my father’s life now

that I've disappeared through time. Fuck, how I miss my dad. What I would give to feel his arms around me, call me his dear girl, tell me how much I remind him of my mom.

Galahad had filled all these holes inside me. But now that he's away from me, these holes are empty once more. Yearning for the love of those I will never see again. I hold on to Arthur, feeling his love, letting it soothe me. But it's not enough. There is too much emptiness inside me.

Chapter 16

Lancelot

Home. I have been home with my son for eight months now. Vivienne came to visit for a full week shortly after we arrived, something she has never done before. I know her heart grieved for me. She raised me as her son, after all. But she was never the maternal loving type the way Guin is with Galahad. Still, I felt her love growing up and I know I am the man I am today because of her.

Vivienne raised me to see the worth of women, to treat them as my equal. She gave me the courage to become Camelot's White Knight, and she taught me how to stay true to myself. Though I was not always the pious and respectable knight Vivienne had raised, when I finally discovered myself, everything fell into place.

That is what I mean to do for Galahad. Though I do not have a difficult task ahead of me. Galahad has a good head on solid shoulders. He knows very well who he is, even after learning that the truth he'd been told all his life was a lie. For one so young, Galahad is extraordinarily wise.

Faina is quite smitten with him, as are the rest of my household. They know him well now, not just from being here these last few months. Joyous Gard has been home to

Galahad his whole life. While I was lost, making my way back home, Guin would bring my son here when Camelot became too overwhelming for either of them. Knowing that makes this cold, lonely castle feel warm and inviting. I never want to leave my home again.

It is missing one very significant person though. Guin. My heart. I wish it did not have to come to this—me leaving her side again. I keep needing to convince myself that it was the right thing to do. Arthur needs me out of the picture while he and his council come up with a plan. I wish I could have taken Guin with me. She is suffering inside. Though she puts on a brilliant smile, I know she is in agony. Every time we were near, I could feel it. I recognized the pain as I too feel my soul being torn to pieces.

“Is everything okay, dad?” Galahad asks while we sit together in the dining hall for our evening meal. He started calling me “dad” in front of others a few months ago. It is a strange word, but one I have gotten used to. And though we openly call each other “dad” and “son,” we keep our relationship formal. I do not want word to reach the enemies of Camelot that I have taken Galahad away from Arthur. Our time together is meant to mold Galahad into a better leader, living away from his mother and learning how to behave with honor and respect far from the throne he will one day sit upon.

I smile back to my son, sitting at my right. “Yes. I was only thinking.”

“You are always thinking.” Galahad slides into English, testing me on my newly learned skills.

“There is a lot to think on.”

“About. You should say, ‘There is a lot to think about.’”

“Hmph. Yes. That seems right.”

“How shocked do you think mom will be when you see her again and you start speaking English?”

“I do not think my English is good enough for that yet. I also do not know when we will see your mother. She has not responded to the letter we sent last month.”

“No. That could be because the weather has been extra dreary lately.”

“Winter is coming. It will get more and more drear-ee,” I test the new word on my mouth. It does not feel quite right. “Drear-ee. I assume that means not good.”

Galahad giggles. He has been an exceptional teacher. Patient and knowledgeable. Though he cannot tell me the meaning behind some of the words I hear Guin use frequently, he knows they are not nice.

“It means gloomy, cold, miserable. Yeah, so not good.” Turning back to his food, Galahad falls into a pensive state. I leave him to his thoughts and return to mine, but am instantly interrupted by a sigh from my right.

“Do you want to see mom again?” Galahad asks, even though he knows my answer.

“Yes. Of course I want to see Guin again. I miss her every day. Every hour. Every minute. Down to the second. When I am not talking with you, I think of her.”

“Why don’t you say that in one of the letters?”

“I could not do that. If the letter were to be intercepted, it would not look good for me, your mother, or the king. We must hide our feelings for each other until a decision is made.”

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“It doesn’t seem fair,” Galahad pokes at a bone on his dish.

“What is not fair?”

“You and my mom are married. According to the archbishop, marriage is a binding vow that cannot be broken. Even though mom married father, doesn’t that second marriage become illegitimate?”

“You are right about marriage being an unbreakable vow. Unfortunately, because I was believed dead and had been gone for a long time, the vow we made could be invalid now. It is a dreary situation.”

A smile curls up on Galahad’s face as I attempt to try out my newly learned word. I reach over to him, scooping his shoulders into my side, not caring that I am outwardly displaying my paternal love for my son. “But know this. You are meant to be king. I can feel it in my bones. Everything your mother and I have endured, it was meant to happen so that you could be born the way you were. Excalibur has chosen you. It was always you. No one can deny you what is rightfully yours.”

“But Mordred—”

“Mordred is no one,” I interrupt. “He is nothing. Only a jealous man who has lived his whole life thinking that Arthur would one day name him his heir. I can tell you for certain that Arthur never intended to do so.”

Galahad mumbles an agreement.

“What was that?”

“Okay!”

“Good. It is important you know who you are. I know it is a lot to place on your shoulders. You are so young, but I can already see the man you will become, the leader you were made to be.”

A small hand quickly wipes away the glistening tears threatening to fall from Galahad's eyes. “Okay, dad. I will write to mom tomorrow. Ask her to visit us because I miss her too.”

I wake in a pool of sweat after dreaming of fighting that dragon again. My breath heaving as if I was back on the dragon's spine. Falling back to my bed, I wipe the drops of sweat from my brow and turn over, looking to the side of the bed Guin used to lie on. How I miss her.

Guin promptly replied to Galahad's letter, informing him that she and Arthur will arrive in the spring to avoid the dangerous winter weather, which will soon begin. My heart sank when Galahad told me they would not be here for months. But I understand. Winters up here can be harsher than the south, where Camelot is located. So we waited. Galahad's birthday passed with a modest celebration in the great hall. My birthday passed in a quiet, lonely bed.

Now it is a new year. Another year of waiting for my Guinevere. She will arrive in just a few weeks with Arthur at her side. Arthur has not visited my home since bringing Guin back to Camelot as his wife and queen.

Joyous Gard was Guin's hideaway, and I think Arthur understood this. He is a good man. He truly is. As much as I want to hate him for taking my wife, claiming my son, ruining my beautiful life. I cannot. I know he is doing all he can now to make it right.

What he is trying to accomplish is impossible, but if anyone can make the impossible happen, it is Arthur.

I wish with all my heart that they will arrive with good news. That Guin will be mine again. But doubt is much stronger than hope.

Galahad is the one thing that brings me joy now. We fill our days with sword training, swimming, castle duties, and chess. He seems to have the same love for pizza that Guin did. I only had it the once, right before I left to fight the dragon. Now, once a week, we have what Galahad calls “pizza night,” something he and Guin would arrange on their visits to our home.

Faina most likely kept the tradition going, even when the lady of the castle was not in residence. Pizza has become a favorite of all who reside at Joyous Gard.

As Galahad and I prepare for the King and Queen’s visit, we sit in the kitchens discussing the feast days and what dishes to serve. Pizza was never a dish served at Camelot, or so Galahad says. “I don’t think my father has ever had it. But I know he’ll love it.”

“I had my hesitations at first, but have grown to love it. I am certain Arthur will too. Let us put this on the menu for one of the informal dining nights.” I turn to Faina, seeing her nodding in approval.

“What toppings would you like on this pizza?” She asks, turning to Galahad.

“Can we do a pizza buffet? Have a variety of pies. All the pies you’ve come up with have been delicious, Faina.”

“Thank you, master Galahad. You honor me with such a compliment.”

“Mom will be so excited to eat pizza again. Maybe we should serve it every night! It’s been over a year since she’s been home...uh, here.” Galahad corrects himself, but I heard him refer to Joyous Gard as home. I cannot help but smile.

I place my hand on Galahad’s shoulder, ushering him out of the kitchens. “Now let us check on the fields and see if we can offer some assistance.”

Chapter 17

Guinevere

The embers of the fireplace flicker to life as a servant builds a fire to warm the chill of the late afternoon air. Spring is upon us, and in two weeks, Arthur and I will leave Camelot for a six-month trip to my former home to visit Galahad and Lance. To say I’m excited would be an understatement. To say I’m terrified would also be an understatement.

Lance had left so quickly after I had found out he cheated on me. Cheated seems too harsh a word, but it’s the only word I can think to use. We aren’t together, but we are still married, and he let another woman touch him. My heart had forgiven him quickly, but my mind still wanders to unwanted thoughts of Elaine and Lance together.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

Though I have also forgiven Elaine, I can feel myself more guarded around her. I want my friend back and I desperately want my husband back. Either of them. Both of them. For months, I have felt like I've retreated to that hollow shell of a person I was when Lance was taken from me, before Galahad was born.

Arthur has been busy with the archbishop now that he is back at Camelot. That is when his excellency has seen fit to grant Arthur the time of day. When not speaking with his councilors, Arthur is in the throne room meeting with his subjects, training with his knights, or meeting with allies to persuade them to join his cause. Even Mordred keeps his distance from me so much that I am missing our quarrels. That is how alone I feel at this very moment. How alone I have felt since my son has left Camelot. Since the return of my love over a year ago.

But I cannot let anyone see my weakness. Especially Mordred. In public, I am the queen Arthur needs me to be. Regal. Polite. Kind-hearted. Charitable. Even god-damned pious. I attend mass and go through the motions of the silly ceremonies that are all for show. I do it for Arthur. I do it because the archbishop is here, and he needs to see what a good little queen I am.

Everything I do is for Arthur and his kingdom. This is what I signed up for when I became his queen. I knew my life would not be mine. When Lance came back into my life, I knew I could not be his wife again. It feels impossible, yet I still wish to have his arms around me, to kiss him, to feel him inside me. Such selfish thoughts when I think of Arthur. He has been nothing but a wonderful husband to me. Though I miss his touch, I do not crave it as I do Lance's.

I made a vow to myself that I would not touch either of my husbands until a solution

to our predicament is made. Or until one of them gives up. Gives me up. But neither of them will let me go, and I don't want them to. I want to be a wife to both. I love them both. Selfish. That's what I am. I should be happy enough to have Arthur as my husband. To be his queen. I'm not though. On the other hand, I can't imagine ever leaving him. I also can't imagine keeping my hands off of Lance for the rest of our lives. I'm drawn to him. He is the other part of my soul.

The servant leaves after tending to the fire. Its flames dance to a melody, a sad ballad tormenting my heart. Tears break from the weak barrier of my eyes, and now I am crying, sobbing as my grief awakens inside me again. I have been able to reign in my sadness most days, but when I am alone, it is impossible to control.

The door to the royal apartments open, but I ignore the person who opened it thinking it is just another servant. I hide my face inside the book I borrowed from Arthur's study, pretending to read the words. "Why are you not in the great hall for supper?" Arthur—not a servant—asks. He drops down beside me on the bench when he sees my wet face. "My dear wife, what has happened? Was it Mordred again?"

"No. That bastard doesn't bring tears of sadness to my eyes. Just the urge to break his nose." Arthur laughs with me, drying my tears with his thumbs. The touch is oddly satisfying. I don't want him to stop. When he releases my now dry face, I drop my head to his shoulder.

"Why were you crying?"

"I'm tired."

"No. Tell me, Guinevere. Why were you crying?"

"I am tired, Arthur," I repeat. "Tired of waiting. Tired of wanting. Tired of putting on this heavy mask every day. Tired of missing my son. Tired of being scared. Tired."

Arthur wraps his arms around my waist, pulling me tighter against his body. His lips push against my hair before he speaks. "I am tired too, Guinevere. I promised you I would set things right. And I will."

"I can't stay in this limbo for much longer, Arthur. It is drowning me."

"I see that now. I am sorry for letting this drag on."

"This is not your fault, Arthur. You know that, right?" I push myself up to look into his eyes. "Right?"

"But it is. I was selfish. I wanted you to be my wife and queen. I needed it for Camelot. For the realm to see my strength. Though I had my doubts, especially after you confided in me about where you came from and the legend of my reign, I still wanted you. I should have known that your love would come at a price."

"What price is that?" My voice trembles, afraid to hear his answer.

"A price I am not willing to pay." Arthur gently caresses my cheek and I nearly cave to his touch. Sensing my thoughts, he pulls his hand away. "I am working on a solution. One I have not discussed with any of my councilors. Give me time to work it through in my mind. I would like to discuss my idea with both you and Lancelot. Can you wait that long?"

I take his hand in mine, giving it a gentle squeeze. "I can wait as long as you need me to. I can't say I'll be sane at the end of it all."

Arthur's smile reaches his eyes, showing me a rare moment of unfiltered emotion. After nearly a decade of being in each other's lives, Arthur has only given me this smile two other times. When he held Galahad for the first time and when he reached for my hand on our wedding day. This smile breaks my heart into a thousand pieces.

How could I ever leave him? How could I deny Lance? They will tear me apart no matter what I choose or what Arthur chooses for us. Once again, I have no idea how my story will play out. But as long as Arthur gives me that smile of his, I will keep playing my part. And I will do so by his side.

“Are you hungry?” he asks.

“Yes, but I really don’t want to be around people right now.”

“I will have a plate sent up for you then.” Arthur stands up to leave. I stop him, pulling him back down beside me.

“Make it two plates. Let’s dine together in private. It’s been ages since we’ve had an evening, just the two of us.”

“I thought you did not want to be around people.”

“You aren’t people, Arthur. You are my husband. This whole thing might be complicated as fuck, but you are still my husband.”

Arthur places a gentle kiss on my forehead before standing up again. “As you wish. I will have two plates sent up.”

Chapter 18

Lancelot

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

Tonight. My Guinevere arrivestonight. There will be no feast this night, as I am sure Arthur and Guin will need to rest after the long journey. I have asked Faina to prepare a small pizza supper for Guin's arrival. I have also arranged the room closest to mine for Guin to stay in. It was originally meant for the lady of the castle, but when she was my wife, and only mine, she stayed with me in my chambers.

Though I hope to reunite with Guin as her husband, my intentions are pure. Joyous Gard has been her home for longer than it has been mine. I want to offer Guin a room that will make her feel at home in what has become hers. Though I will offer the room to both Guin and Arthur, I hope Arthur will choose the second option I have prepared for him—one of the guest suites on the opposite side of the keep.

Perhaps my intentions are not so pure.

"They're here, dad!" Galahad yells from the entrance hall, Augwys standing beside him with a faux grimace.

"I was to announce the arrival of the king and queen, young master." A smile struggles to keep hidden on Augwys' face.

"Sorry. I'm just so excited!" Galahad runs up to the mezzanine where I have been standing for the past hour, monitoring all the preparations being made for our honored guests. "Come on, dad. Let's go so we are the first people they see."

"I am coming." I can barely make the words out as Galahad pulls me along, sprinting down the stairs and out into the courtyard.

I feel jittery, nervous. My palms are sweating. My heart is racing. Guin is here. The thought of seeing her again, her copper hair shimmering even in the dimmest light, her pale skin speckled with freckles, those green eyes. How I love every inch of her.

“Mom!” Galahad sprints toward the carriage as it comes to a halt. I stay put, not wanting to show my desperation.

“Is that my son?” Guin jumps out of the carriage, not waiting for assistance as she always does. She pulls Galahad into a hug that would choke an Otso. “How the hell did you grow this much in a year?”

“I ate a lot of pizza?” Galahad shrugs as Guin takes inventory of her son.

“That’ll do it.”

I realize they are speaking English. A smile forms on my face as I approach, sharing in their secret language. “Hello, my love.” I hold out my hand and she fills it with hers, no hesitation. Giving her hand a small kiss, I say, “I have missed you.”

A small breath escapes her mouth and I know she wants nothing more than for me to kiss her again, and not just on her hand.

“Wait, did you just speak English?” She asks, her eyes bright with joy.

“Yes. Our son has been teaching me.”

“Well done, Galahad.”

“Thanks, mom.” Guin hugs Galahad again, but her eyes remain on mine.

I look around and only see Kei, Bedivere, and one of Guin’s maids. No sign of the

king. “Where is Arthur?”

“Oh, he wanted to make a quick detour to visit Avalon. He told me to travel on without him, so it’s just us tonight. He will likely be here tomorrow.”

My stomach churns with excitement at having my family to myself tonight. “Why is he going to Avalon?”

“He wishes to apologize to Vivienne in person. And to ask her for advice. Though I don’t know what she can do to help us. We’ve gone over every scenario.”

“Arthur has nothing to apologize for. As I am sure my mother will tell him.” I step closer to Guin, offering her my arm. “Shall we make our way inside? Galahad has prepared a surprise for you.”

Galahad takes Guin’s other arm. “I think you can guess what it is, mom.”

“HMMMMM...pizza?” The three of us laugh heartily together. We must look like a small family, and for the first time in years, I finally feel like I have one. These two are my family. They are my life. They are my home.

I step in front as we enter the great hall on the ground level of the keep, guiding my son and wife upstairs. We enter the wing where our private apartments are located. “Guin, I have prepared the Lady’s quarters for you. I hope it is to your liking.” I open the door for her. “When you have freshened up, we will be waiting for you in my solar.”

“Thank you, Lance.” Guin’s evergreen eyes dive deep into mine before she enters her room, closing the door behind her.

“I’m going to make sure the pizza is ready, and that Faina didn’t eat it all,” Galahad

says, oblivious to the friction pulsing between Guin and me.

I follow him down the hall and into my private rooms. Since arriving back at Joyous Gard, I spend more time in here. Before Guin, I rarely tucked myself away in my apartments. Now? I come here to feel her around me. This is where we would dine most nights, only showing our faces a few times a week in the great hall for meal times.

In this room, I had envisioned our children learning to crawl, to walk, to talk, playing with little baubles. I imagined a whole life I would live with Guin and our family. That life is now a distant dream. Our son will soon turn nine. Though I have cherished our time together this past year, I wish I could have been there for his birth, to watch him grow.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“What should we do with the fourth pie, dad?” Galahad asks as we enter the solar.

“If Guin is properly hungry, she will eat the extra pie.”

“You are probably right. Mom turns into a black hole when she eats pizza.”

“Hmmm. Does that have another meaning? Black hole?”

“It’s something mom has said. A black hole is this thing that just keeps eating. Supposedly they exist up in the sky, in space, as she explained. It even eats light.”

“Your mother says the strangest things sometimes.”

“That she does. Has she told you a lot about the...future?”

“A bit, yes. I assume you know where your mother is from?”

“Yeah, I know she is from the year 2019. And she has this shiny, thin brick from her time that has images of her family and you in it. She would sometimes show me these pictures and tell me stories of the people she has loved and lost.”

I nod, remembering the object Guin calls a phone. She had only ever captured our likenesses with the phone and played me music. I wonder now if she has images of her Josh. It seems likely. Does she look at his face, dream of being with him again? I want to ask Galahad if he knows about Josh, and if Guin had told him any stories of her old...friend. As I open my mouth to ask my questions, Guin walks into the room.

“You better have left some pizza for me.” Guin glides over to the table where Galahad and I are sitting.

“We haven’t even started, mom. We were waiting for you.”

“Let’s dig in then. I’m starving.”

Chapter 19

Guinevere

For the first time in years, I feel like I am home. Sitting with Lance and Galahad, eating pizza, I nearly forget that I’m centuries away from the place I called home for most of my life. The only one missing is Arthur.

Arthur has become a constant in my life. He is always there. When I would come up here to Joyous Gard when I needed to get away from court and, in particular, Mordred, I missed him. Not in the same agonizing way I missed Lance. It’s just that Arthur is my husband, friend, lover, and right-hand man.

For eight years, he and Galahad were the only family I had. Now that I have Lancelot back in my life, I feel complete. The missing piece I thought was forever lost. The universe, destiny, or just chance has delivered him back to me, to us. I should ask myself why, but I don’t care. As long as he is here.

Seeing Galahad and Lance together gives me the greatest joy I’ve ever felt. They are so alike. Yet, Galahad has a certain kingly poise he learned from Arthur. He is the best of both his dads. Pride bursts in my chest at the thought, but there is a pocket of fear that always lingers. What does fate have in store for my Galahad?

Even with Mordred’s threats, I believed Arthur would keep us safe. I trusted that the

people of our kingdom would protect us, no matter what. With Lance back, everything has changed. Our lives are filled with uncertainty. The court at Camelot has always been divided, but people couldn't see the division. Now there is chaos and confusion.

Trying to keep everything together has torn my mind, body, and soul apart. Proving to the kingdom that I am loyal to my king, my husband. Keeping away from Lance this past year, knowing he was but a week's ride north from me, was more agonizing than believing him dead.

And here he is, sitting before my eyes, eating pizza with our son. Tears fall silently against my cheeks, burning my cold flesh.

"Mama, are you okay?" Galahad reaches out to wipe away my tears as I would for him. "Why are you crying?"

Lance moves closer, engulfing my hands in his. His touch is pure love. I break down completely, sobbing like a baby, not able to communicate why I am so suddenly miserable. Or am I happy? It's hard to tell which emotions I feel when they are so heightened. Zero to a hundred. I've always been this way. Josh would blame it on my red hair. It fuels the fires of my emotions.

Galahad and Lance jump out of their chairs, surrounding me in their warmth, in their love. While Lance lays my head into the crook of his neck, Galahad places his head on my chest, taking slow, calming breaths. It takes me a few more minutes to compose myself and breathe as calmly as Galahad.

When I find my calm, they keep their arms around me, patiently waiting for me to speak. "I'm okay," I whisper into Lance's chest. "I am, truly. I'm so happy to have both of you here with me. It feels a bit surreal, like a dream I've had over and over, taunting me. But you are really here, Lance. And we are sitting together like a little

family. My heart is overwhelmed.”

My two guys squeeze me tightly, reaffirming their presence. Galahad pops up and gives me a soft kiss on the forehead. “We are here, mama. I know you are frightened of losing us. But we aren’t going anywhere. Even if we are not here by your side, we will always be in your heart. You can speak to us from there and we will hear you.”

“Are you sure you are an eight-year-old boy?” I ask accusingly. “Because you sound like a wise old man.”

Lancelot laughs as Galahad explains that he’ll be turning nine soon. “Your mother is right, Galahad. You have wisdom beyond your years and so much love inside your heart.”

I wrap my arms around my two guys, smothering them with my love. Love I thought I had lost. Love I thought I would never have again. That emptiness I had felt weeks ago is shrinking. Soon enough, it will be filled to the brim.

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“Okay, let’s eat this pizza before it gets cold.”

I yawn quietly, looking down at my son’s sleeping face resting peacefully on Lance’s lap. We have been talking for hours, the three of us. Telling stories of our pasts. Lance had given us a heroic account of how he had saved a woman and her little daughter from being enslaved by barbarians. Galahad listened with eyes and mouth wide open in awe.

My stories are nothing like these epic tales of Lance’s life and journey back home. Stories of me camping and hiking in the woods with my modern technology in the twenty-first century had put Galahad to sleep. Lance encourages me to finish my story of the time my mom and I crossed paths with a bear after a long hike. As he gently strokes the gingery brown hair on Galahad’s brow, I continue.

“As we entered the parking lot—a field to park cars which are like coaches—my mom looked down into her backpack for the keys to our car. I was walking behind her when she stopped suddenly, a hair’s breadth away from a big black bear. In the dimming light of the setting sun, the bear looked like a massive shadow. I was paralyzed. Then, all of a sudden, a car alarm went off. Mom squeezed the keys in her hand, which set off the panic button. Lucky move because the sound spooked the bear, and it ran off into the woods. If mom didn’t accidentally set off the alarm, the bear would have killed us.”

“What did the bear look like?” Lance asks, his face just like Galahad’s look of awe. Eyes and mouth wide open.

“Umm, so this one was at least six feet tall. Dark fur. A big black nose. Round ears

on top of its round head. Its paws were rather small, and maybe the fear in my eyes made the claws look larger than they actually were. Bears aren't actually that scary, but in that moment, with a black bear towering over us, it looked like a demon."

"I think perhaps I had come across the same demon during my travels. The folk called it an Otso. And what is this alarm? Is it some sort of bell or a horn? How does it work?"

"Horn is an appropriate description of a car alarm. It's a very loud horn. Car keys usually have buttons, uhhh something you push, that automatically unlock the doors and turn on these alarms."

Lance stares at me with a blank face, unable to conjure these images in his mind. I can imagine he is struggling the same way I do when I read a sci-fi novel. Well, when I used to read them. There are none here in the sixth century.

A second later, Lance's face melts into concern. "I hate the thought of you being attacked by such a beast. If your mother had not pushed that button, I cannot even think of a world without you in it. I will not. Eight years not knowing if I would ever see you again nearly made me lose my mind."

A hand reaches out, lightly caressing my cheek as another tear slides out of my eyes. We lean in instinctively, our lips brushing ever so lightly. Below our heads, Galahad sighs, still deep asleep. The sound brings us back to reality, where we are not allowed to touch in such a way.

"I will put him to bed," Lance whispers. "Will you stay?"

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"Just to talk, only talk."

I nod and sit back on the couch I've been lounging on as Lance hoists Galahad up. We nearly kissed. My insides are churning, yearning for more than a brush of his lips on mine. I shouldn't stay. Being alone with Lance in our home, in a place where we made love, where we were free to be in love, is too much. I don't trust myself to keep my hands off Lance.

My body doesn't move even though my brain is shouting to leave. My heart pounds loudly in my ears, drowning out the logic my mind is screaming. I am at war with myself. No matter what I do, I will lose.

Somehow, I find the strength to stand up and walk to the door. Before I can make my escape, Lance waltzes back into the room, nearly throwing me to the floor. His reflexes are sharp and in an instant, he holds me tight against his chest. The first time he caught me like this, I melted into him, helpless. I am just as powerless now as I was then.

"I am sorry, Guin," Lance tickles my ear with his whisper. Pulling us upright, he keeps hold of me, steadying my core. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Well, no. I don't know, Lance. What are we doing? Nearly kissing. Now you are holding me against you. I feel helpless."

Lance lets go of me abruptly, turns and walks to the chair by the fire. Releasing his weight, he falls down loudly, head in his hands. "I apologize, Guin. This is all so...every piece of me yearns to hold you, kiss you, love you. You are mine in every way, yet I cannot have you. It is tearing my soul apart."

"I know that feeling well, my love." It takes all my strength to remain at the door when all I want to do is run to him. "I will go. Goodnight, Lance."

"How long will this last?" Lance looks up, locking his eyes with mine, pleading.

“I don’t know. Until one of us dies, perhaps.”

“I cannot accept this fate.”

“If you would like me to leave your castle, I will make arrangements first—”

“That is not what I want. I want my wife. I want to take her in my arms and paint her with kisses. I want to lick every sensitive part of her body. I want to reclaim her soul. I want to burrow inside her. I want—”

In three quick strides, I am kneeling in front of Lance, cradling his heavy head in my hands. “I am yours, Lance. All of me. Every cell of my body, every thought inside my head. My skin craves your touch. All I want is to give in.”

“What will happen if we do?”

“Nothing, right away. But if the kingdom finds out, if Mordred finds out, it will get ugly. The kingdom might have accepted Galahad as their prince, even with the doubt spreading around thanks to Mordred. Still, they will not accept that their queen has been unfaithful.”

“But I am your husband. What does that mean?”

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“To me? It means everything. To the people of our kingdom? You have been away for so long. I married Arthur. I became their queen. If you need someone to blame, blame me.”

“No. I would never. This is not your fault. I should never have left you.”

I place a finger on Lance’s lips, shushing his irrational mind. We both blame ourselves, but it is destiny that put us here. It’s destiny that has played with our hearts. Fuck destiny. I replace my finger with my lips, pressing hard in my passion, needing him to know how much I need him.

Two strong arms wrap around my waist, lifting me as Lance stands up. I wrap my legs around him, my body claiming its home again. He walks us to the bedroom, pushing me against the wall by the bed. His kisses are urgent, violent in a way. I welcome the violence. I need to feel him everywhere.

Squeezing him closer, I open my mouth, letting his tongue enter the once-familiar place. Our tongues come together, reuniting, tasting each other. Garlic, cheese, and a bitter taste of ale. I want more. I want to consume all of it.

Lance freezes, placing me back down on the ground. His arms still wrapped around me, a hand caressing the base of my skull, lightly grasping my hair. He steps away, pushes open a hidden door to my chambers on the other side, and says, “Goodnight, Guin.”

I look away from him, seeing the pain of his desire for me take hold. He has strength enough for both of us, but I want him to be weak like me. “Please, Guin. Leave now

before I do something we will both regret.”

The struggle in his voice pierces me. I turn and walk through the stone wall.

Chapter 20

Guinevere

“What did I miss?” Arthur asks as he takes a seat at the head table for dinner after arriving from Avalon.

“Pizza!” Galahad shouted.

“Oh, yes. I have heard of this pizza. We have not had this dish at Camelot yet. I would love to try some while I am here this time.”

“Of course, your Highness,” Lance says with a forced smile. He avoided me all day, anxiously awaiting Arthur’s arrival. I shouldn’t have thrown myself at him. It’s only made the awkwardness between us more palpable. I hate it. Lance won’t even look at me.

I stand up, feeling sick suddenly, unable to play this part anymore. “Please excuse me. I am not feeling well. I’m going up to my room.”

“Do you want me to ask Faina to bring up your supper?” Lance asks in a monotone voice, staring down at his plate.

“No, I’m not hungry. Had too much for lunch, I think.”

“If you are feeling better later, I would like the three of us to meet, perhaps in Lance’s private rooms.” Arthur looks at me with concern. “There is something I wish

to discuss.”

“Sure. Just let me know when you are done with supper.”

I feel exhausted, defeated, empty, hollow. Hanging my head, I ignore all the other looks of concern and float up to my room—the room Lance had given me in his private apartments. We slept so close to each other last night but I felt so far away from him. I fucked up. I know I fucked up. I shouldn’t have kissed him; now we are suffering more than before. I should have just stayed away in Camelot.

Storming through my bedroom door, I throw myself down on the bed. Was this how my mom felt? Every summer, we would stay at Eden Manor. Mom and Ed were polite to each other, friendly even. But I noticed the side glances, the love in their eyes. Though Ed had married someone else, he still had eyes only for my mother. And she for him. There was never anyone else in her life. If there was, mom kept that well hidden from me.

It must have been painful to be so near Ed but unable to touch him. Then again, they were having an affair. At least that’s what Leo alluded to while we were driving to my mom’s cottage by the sea. A place I never arrived. I never got the chance to ask my dad about their relationship. Perhaps their affair made things too complicated, and that’s why my mom didn’t want to return to Eden Manor that summer.

If that was the truth, she was right to want to stay away. I should have stayed far from Joyous Gard. It is not my home anymore. Camelot is my home. I need to accept my fate, the path I chose for myself.

A loud knock on my door wakes me from a dreamless sleep. “Guinevere, are you all right?”

Arthur. His concern for me slices through my heart. He really cares for me. Galahad

and I mean everything to him. It's not fair of me to mope around like a wounded animal when I have such a wonderful, sweet husband. I need to release Lance from my love. That's the right thing to do. It's what I should have done months ago.

"Yes. I'm fine. I just needed some sleep. I'll be right out."

Taking a deep breath, I gather my courage and pull myself out of bed. As I walk toward the door, I try to think of what I am going to say. How to form these words out loud when I can't even conjure them in my mind. I open the door to Lance and Arthur in a drunken embrace.

"Ah, there you are, my dear wife. We have missed you." Arthur's concern slurs on his tongue.

"You are drunk. The both of you," I accuse, hands on my hips.

"Yes. Yes, we are. Would you like to join us?" Arthur asks.

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I look to Lance, who gives me a shy, crooked smile that melts my heart. How the hell am I supposed to turn him away? I feel giddy in his drunken gaze. His defenses are down and his love for me shines a spotlight onto my shattered heart.

“Yeah, why not.” I can’t say no to either of them.

“Lead the way, Lancelot.” Arthur takes my hand, pulling me along toward Lance’s room, and spins me through the door. “The lady needs to catch up, Lancelot. Give her a drink!”

Lancelot concentrates on pouring a generous amount of golden liquid into a large mug. He stumbles toward me, offering the drink to my hands. Taking a sniff, I guess it’s some kind of cider, a strong one. I take a large sip, letting it burn the insides of my mouth before swallowing.

“Keep drinking, Guinevere!” Arthur shouts.

“This is pure alcohol. What did you give me?” The men burst into laughter and I can’t help but join in. Their joy is contagious. “Well, are we celebrating something or just getting drunk together?”

“A little of both.” Arthur slumps down on the chair by the fireplace. The same chair where I had jumped Lancelot the night before. “Sit down, both of you.”

My nerves are swirling out of control like loose hoses in a cartoon, so I take a deep drink and sit on the bench closest to Arthur. Lance takes position next to me, sitting so close that our thighs touch.

“What is it you waawant to sppeeak to us abouuuut?” Lance slurs. He is so wasted.

Arthur clears his throat, sobering himself up enough to speak without a slur. “I want to propose something. As our situation is unlikely to be resolved, I want us to devise a solution of our own.”

“What is, uh arre you tuttalking about, Arthuurr?” Lance struggles to get his words out, but I can tell he, too, is attempting to sober up, wanting a clear head for this conversation.

“Guinevere is your wife, Lancelot. I want you to resume your marital vows. When she is here, at your castle, she will be your wife. The people here are loyal to you. They will not judge your union as they have witnessed your blessed wedding day and blooming marriage. When she is at Camelot, she will take her place as my queen.”

Lance and I stare at Arthur, unable to form a response. I take another drink.

“What do you think?” Arthur asks. “All three of us get what we want. What we need.”

I turn to Lance, his gaze already fixed on me. Flames of desire and tears of longing mix together in his eyes. He turns back to Arthur. “What are the terrrms? What...does it mmmean to haveGuin as my...as my wife when we are home and yo...your queen when she is at Camelot?”

“We are both married to Guinevere. Our marriages can be what we want them to be. We choose the terms. All I ask is that I have my queen and my son. For the kingdom, not necessarily for my own needs. Though if I am honest, I would like to enjoy intimacy from my wife as well.”

“Would I...be allowed to indulge in the flesh of my wife?” Lance asks darkly, the

waves of drunkenness crashing softly against his eyes. Both of them turn to me, making my heart beat at a pace that will surely kill me.

“I don’t like the idea of my body as a timeshare. But I am open to the idea of a joint partnership. I think we need to lay out the details. All the details. The three of us need to be honest with each other and understand what we want from this.”

Arthur sets down his mug of ale on the floor next to his seat. “What I want right now is to lift your skirts and wet your sweet cunt for Lance to enjoy.”

A gasp escapes my mouth at Arthur’s bluntness. I feel Lance’s body stiffen beside me, the both of us breathless, at a loss for words. Did Arthur just ask us to have a threesome? More than that, to share me as a wife. I’m not opposed to the idea, especially if it means I can have Lance.

My rational mind tells me this is a bad idea, that agreeing will ensure ruin. But I want oblivion. I want to throw myself into the fire.

Arthur stands up from his seat, moving toward me in slow motion. “Do I have your permission?” He looks to Lance and then to me. I nod, taking Lance’s hand in mine. Arthur kneels before me, pushing the skirts of my dress up over my knees. My entire body vibrates in anticipation as Arthur’s hand glides up my thighs. “Kiss her on the mouth while I kiss her down here. I will get her nice and wet for you, Lance.”

Chapter 21

Lancelot

I hesitate for a moment, watching Arthur kiss Guin’s intimate lips below. Jealousy, anger, desire flood my body. I am free to touch my wife, but do I accept the terms? I do not wish to share her. I am selfish, for I want Guin to myself.

Her moans of pleasure draw me closer to her, my tongue salivating with need. I cover her mouth with mine, capturing her next moan, and turn her attention to me. My lips trace a pathway down her jaw and over that sensitive dimple of her throat. I brush my tongue lightly over her skin while dipping my hand into the bodice of her dress.

As I free a breast, my mouth finds its target, licking her already-hardened nipple. Screams of passion and delight echo in my ears. Guin places a hand on my head, grasping my hair and pulling me in deeper.

Then I hear Arthur's voice from under Guin's dress. "Take her, Lance, take her now. She is yours."

I guide Guin over my lap, pulling out my hardened cock and securing her to the root of me. Our breath mingles, sighing in relief as our flesh finally becomes one again. In the distance, I hear the closing of a door. A quick look behind me confirms Arthur has left us. Arthur has given me back my Guin. Though it might only be temporary, I will not take a single second for granted.

Guin must have read my mind. She becomes wild in her movements, bouncing up and down with such vigor I know I will finish too quickly if she does not slow down. I am past the point of no return, so I let her ride me. The night is young. I will have her in a hundred different ways before sunrise.

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Guin's head falls heavily on my neck and I close her in with my arms, unwilling to let her go. Tears fall down my cheeks, dropping in droves on Guin's coppery strands.

Holding her tightly against my chest, I feel Guin's body shake. She, too, is crying. But I know what she feels is pure bliss. I feel it with her in our union of flesh. We have always been able to sense each other, which has made our connection unbearable until now. Our bodies sing with ecstasy. Our souls harmonize. Our hearts beat as one.

With one last thrust, we climax together. I spill myself inside Guin as her walls shudder around me. Still crying, I lift her head to face mine and cover her mouth with urgency. She answers back with her own need, our tongues slide against each other in hunger.

After an eternity of tasting her delicious lips, I pull her back just enough to speak. "I need to see you. All of you."

Guin swiftly dismounts, pulling the strings that hold her gown in place. "You too. I need to feel all of you."

I rise to meet her, shedding all of my clothing in two movements. The both of us now stand naked, taking each other in, studying every new scar, crease, blemish on our skin. In unison, we collide into each other's arms, our naked flesh burning with a euphoria I haven't felt in nearly a decade.

This woman is mine. She will always be mine. Being in her presence is exhilarating. With our skin bonded, I feel complete. I feel everything.

We cry together until our eyes have dried up, unable to produce any more tears. I position my left arm under Guin's legs, scoop her up, and walk us to our bed. I place her down gently on the bed and slide in next to her so that there is not even a sliver of space between our naked bodies. My mind is much clearer from the drinks I had earlier with Arthur. I should feel shame and regret from what we just did. I do not. I have never been so sure of my actions in all my life.

Guin is mine. I can finally hold her in my arms again. Kiss her sweet, delicate lips. Run my fingers through her wild red hair. I look into her emerald eyes and can see a decade's worth of love and despair. My fingers trace her cheeks, wiping away tears. "What are you thinking about, my love?" I ask against her lips.

"I was about to give up on us. I was going to let you go. But then Arthur gave me back to you."

Guin's fingers run through my shoulder-length hair. The sensation releases a moan from the back of my throat. "What do you mean?"

"You ignored me all day. I thought you were angry that I threw myself at you and nearly made you do something you would regret. I felt I had tarnished your honor. So I thought it would be best to break myself from you instead of keeping us in agony. The look on your face last night. I just couldn't let you live with all that pain."

I roll on top of Guin, securing her underneath the length of my body. "I live with the pain of loving you every day," I say, placing a gentle kiss on her lips. "I would live a lifetime of pain being tortured in your presence if it meant that you would be part of my life. Before I brought you to Camelot, I loved you. Even though I knew you were meant to be Arthur's wife, I loved you. It was torture then. It was torture yesterday. And it is still torture now. Loving you."

"Oh, Lance." Guin's breath tickles my chin, making my body come alive. Her hands

slip behind my head, pulling my lips to hers. I can feel her chest heaving under mine, her erratic heartbeat matching the loud thumping of my own.

My hardened cock slides into her entrance as I push my hips against Guin's inner thighs and she opens up for me to take her deeply. Once I am sheathed to the hilt, I pull back out, thrusting slowly as to feel every delicious inch of my Guin. I pull my lips away from hers ever so slightly, taking in her beauty. "I thought I came home when I arrived back at Joyous Gard. But you are my home, Guin. I am finally home."

"I love you, Lance. You are the missing piece my soul has been yearning for. I will never even think of letting you go again." Guin grabs my bottom and pulls me deep inside her. Home. And this time, I am not leaving.

"You and Arthur were quite drunk last night," Guin drowsily whispers, her face lying on my naked chest. Her hair ignites in the rays of the rising sun. "Do you think he meant what he said last night?"

"About us sharing you?" I look down at Guin's face; her eyes are barely open.

"Mmm, yes. It was very un-Arthur-like. I still don't know what to think of it. Even with Arthur's consent, this is dangerous."

"What is dangerous?"

"Us." Guin opens her eyes fully, lifting herself up to look into my eyes.

"What is so dangerous about us?" I ask, even though I know where Guin's mind lingers. She still believes we will be the reason that Arthur falls, that we will destroy everything he has worked so hard to build. "We would never betray Arthur."

"No. But others would. If those people find out about what happened last night, it will

be devastating.”

“How could something so pure as our love be a catalyst to disaster? I refuse to believe in it any longer. Do you not feel how our bodies sing as one? We were made for each other, Guin.” I hold her against me, surrounding myself with her love.

“I know. I feel it too. Every time you touch me, I feel at home, at peace. I need you as you need me. Denying this truth has nearly destroyed me. Lance, I love you with every beat of my heart and every breath I take. Being with you again has awoken me. I don’t think I can go back to ignoring our love. I will kill me.”

I roll Guin over so that my body engulfs her, claiming her. Though I know I do not need to claim her, she has given herself to me. She was always mine. “What do we do then?”

“We accept Arthur’s proposal.”

“I do not want to share you, Guin.” My hands grasp around Guin’s wrists a little too tight, but she does not flinch.

“You will not have to. Arthur said we can draw our own lines of what to expect in our respective relationships. Though I would feel bad denying Arthur access to my body. He has sacrificed so much for his kingdom. We all have. It’s time we all got what we deserve. Happiness.”

“Would it make you happy to be with Arthur?”

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“It would make me happy to make you both happy.”

“I do not want to share you.” My hands release their grip on Guin’s wrists to explore every inch of her soft curves.

“So you didn’t enjoy watching Arthur ravish me with his mouth last night?”

Her lewd comment throws me off guard. Coughing on the sharp breath I inhaled, I lie down next to Guin. I cannot deny what I had felt watching Arthur between Guin’s thighs. Jealousy and anger. But also desire. It aroused me. “Did you enjoy it?”

Guin’s skin turns a deep shade of red. “Yes. I did. But I will not let him touch me again if you don’t want him to. I am yours, Lance.”

I roll out of bed and pull on a pair of pants. Guin reaches out for me, worry in her voice. “Where are you going?”

“We will break our fast with Arthur. Tell him what we have decided. I am going to fetch Augwys.”

“Have we decided?”

“You are my wife and Arthur’s queen. Galahad is my ward but the prince of Camelot—son and heir to Arthur. We can decide the rest once Arthur is with us.” Before I take my leave, I pull Guin to my lips. “I will be right back.”

Lancelot

The three of us stare at each other after an hour-long debate about our boundaries in this trio of a marriage. We have gone over our expectations repeatedly, memorizing our declarations. We won't keep a written record of our discussion, and there won't be any proof that it took place.

As agreed, Guin is my wife. While residing at our home, we may indulge in each other's company whenever, wherever. At Camelot, we must keep our relationship hidden from the court, from everyone. Guin will appear at Arthur's side for all public events. She is his queen. And I am to be named godfather to Galahad.

Along with my vow of celibacy and pledge of loyalty to Arthur and Galahad, I will be given the position of chancellor. Chancellor of Logris, Arthur's kingdom. My new position will grant me the privilege of residing in the royal apartments. Close to Guin. No one, not even our closest allies, must know that my vow of celibacy will be a lie.

"But what if I get pregnant?" Guin asks.

"Your children will be princes and princesses. I will not deny them that right." Arthur surrounds Guin's hands in his. A purely innocent move, but my stomach churns with jealousy.

"But we deny Lancelot heirs—a family of his own." The desperate look of sadness on Guin's face erases the jealousy I felt as my heart sinks into the bowels of my despair.

"I will not be alone if that is what you are worried about, Guin. I will have you. Galahad. Arthur. We are family."

"Yes, but I don't think I can agree to all of this. Ripping your own children from your arms, calling them Arthur's? Keeping our love a secret. This seems dangerous. Won't

people wonder why you don't just get remarried?"

Arthur still has Guin's hands firmly in his. She accepts a kiss on each hand. "This might seem cruel on the outside, but between the three of us, we will be one happy family, united in love, fighting for the same cause. The kingdom will believe we have finally come to an agreement. One that will see Lancelot rewarded for his heroism and honored for his loyalty. Lance cannot re-marry as he is still bound to you by your marital vows. You are bound to me as well from your coronation vows." Arthur pauses, dragging his fingers through his short blond hair. "The people will believe that in taking a vow of celibacy, Lance has chosen his loyalty to me above all else, and accepted you as my queen."

Guin's brow continues to furrow in worry. I reach out to her, lightly brushing the wrinkles away. She turns to me, tears pooling in her eyes, her hands still engulfed in Arthur's. "What of the people here? Are you afraid they will talk? Rumors spread quickly and could turn on us."

"I trust all those who reside in my castle. But perhaps we might need to act our parts on the outside when company calls."

The worry recedes from her brow so that only a thin line creases her skin. But Guin is not finished with her questions. "Lance, are you sure you are fine with denying your children if we should have more?"

"Guin, I will love our children, as I love Galahad. We will have privacy and protection from Arthur. This is a gift. I might not get to shout to the world that you are mine and cannot yell with fatherly pride when you birth more of our children. As long as your hearts are mine, that is all that truly matters to me."

I stare deeply into Guin's evergreen eyes, showing her the truth in my words. This arrangement is the best chance we have of a happy life together. It is not perfect, but I

will take any opportunity that gives me my Guin. That gives me a family.

“Will Lance and I be able to...share a bed occasionally when we are both living at Camelot?” Guin turns to Arthur.

“That is why I have arranged for him to live in our apartments permanently. You will not need to sneak around and risk someone discovering you two.”

Guin squeezes Arthur’s hands, a sigh of relief escaping her delectable lips. “Thank you, Arthur. You are truly a kind, loving, selfless man. I will be the queen you need me to be, a wife to Lance in secret, and our children will help us make a new world together. A new ending to the tragic tale of King Arthur.”

Reaching over the table we are congregating around, Arthur grabs my hand, the three of us joined together. “Let us repeat all of this once more. We need to be of one mind. Understand each other’s needs, as Guin suggested. We are a family.”

“One really fucking weird family, but I love you all,” Guin says, a smile replacing the last bit of worry on her beautiful, freckled face.

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Later on, the three of us take Galahad for a walk along the beach. Guin urged us to be honest with Galahad, convincing us that keeping this secret from him would do us more harm than good. Since Galahad had taken the discovery of his true paternity well, I knew our new arrangement would not shock him.

“I dislike lying to our people, but I agree that this is the most acceptable arrangement for all of us. I get to spend time with both of my dads. My mom gets to be with her true love, happy endings all around.”

“You really are your mother’s son, Galahad,” Arthur says with a laugh, but I can see the pride in his heart.

The four of us burst into laughter. The tension I had felt all day dissolves into nothing. All I feel is joy. It radiates between us. The epicenter of it all is Galahad. I can see him glowing as Guin would when Excalibur lived inside her body.

“Okay, my guys, let’s sit and have a nice family picnic.” Guin grabs the basket from my hands, pulling out a blanket to lie on the sandy shore. As we sit down together for a seaside feast, I am immediately drunk with happiness. My family. Fucking weird family, as Guin called us. Yes. There is likely no other family like ours.

Perhaps I would have been happier had I not left to fight that dragon. Perhaps Guin and I would have a hoard of children running around, causing chaos, pushing each other into the waves of the sea as my lady and I picnic quietly together. Perhaps we could have visited Camelot, unafraid of being seen in each other’s embrace.

I will never know what my life could have been, but I know I am blessed. Even with

this curse, this prophecy looming above our heads, we have conquered it. For now, at least. My mother believes we forge our own paths in life. I left Guin to fight that dragon. In doing so, my path has led me here, to this moment.

I have a devoted wife who loves me unconditionally. An intelligent son who will one day be king. And a... “Arthur? What should I call you now? Our relationship has shifted into something entirely different. You are more than my king and cousin.”

“I would be honored if you called me brother,” Arthur says with a smile. “But in public, your Highness will do.”

A brother. I have a brother. Smiling ear-to-ear, I look at Guin and Galahad. I ruffle my son’s golden hair and kiss my wife on the cheek, breathing in this perfect moment.

Chapter 23

Guinevere

So last night was crazy. Today was crazy. I kind of sort of had a threesome with Sir Lancelot and King Arthur, and then we decided on a joint marriage. This is insanity. But I would do it again. No shame. Honestly, I would do anything to touch Lance again. To feel him inside me. As terrified as I am of the future, I feel like we have finally figured out a way to defeat our destiny.

I can breathe a genuine sigh of relief. Galahad is safe. We are safe. But the true test will be how the court at Camelot take the news, most of all, Mordred. He will not like this. Well, he won’t be happy until he gets Arthur’s throne. He most assuredly will try to destroy our family to get it. We are stronger together, though, the four of us. Nothing will get in our way.

After all, we have Excalibur on our side. That has to mean something. She brought me here, 1500 years in the past, for a reason. I know now that the reason is Galahad. Arthur might not be the chosen king to rule over a united Britain. Still, he has lain a path for the kingdoms to unite.

Perhaps it will take a few generations to create the England I know. I am now certain that Galahad was chosen to be part of this. If Excalibur hadn't taken me away from my life in the twenty-first century, Galahad wouldn't exist.

This thought has replayed in my mind since Elnaril transferred her essence into Galahad when he was born. I was meant for Lancelot. We were meant to create Galahad. Maybe we aren't meant to have a happy ending, but I'm going to fight for one. My heart yearns for it.

"Galahad, give your mother a kiss. It is time for bed," Lance says after noticing our son nodding off on the armchair in our sitting room, or the solar as Lance calls it. Galahad jumps down, planting a big kiss on my cheek.

"Goodnight, mama."

"Goodnight, my love." I ruffle his hair, admiring the rose gold strands shimmering in the firelight.

Arthur stands up from his spot by the fireplace, closing the book he had been reading. "I will see him to bed, Lance." He places a hand on Lance's shoulder and claims my hand for a kiss.

As the door closes behind Arthur and Galahad, I run to Lance's bedroom and through the secret door to mine. When I re-enter, Lance is lounging on the bed. "I was worried you were leaving me too."

His smile is contagious. I can't help but kiss him. He pulls me in closer, but I step out of his embrace. "I want to show you something."

"Can this something wait? I have been craving you for nearly a decade."

"You had me to yourself all last night. We barely slept."

"That was not enough. I can never have enough of you." Lance attempts to snatch me back down to the bed, but I jump out of reach.

"I promise what I am about to show you will be satisfying."

"Hmph." Lance throws himself back down on the bed, his hands tucked underneath his head. "What is it you want to show me?"

I carefully sit down next to him. "Hands to yourself."

"I will behave." Lance sits himself up as I bring out my phone.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve watched this video of you. It’s the one I took of you the night before you left to hunt the dragon.” As I press play, I snuggle close to Lance, listening to our conversation from nearly ten years ago. Lance promising that he will return to me. My protests that his promises won’t mean anything until he returns to me. But he doesn’t accept defeat. Instead, video Lance paints an erotic picture of what will occur when we reunite.

“You will likely not be happy with the stench and filth I will bring home with me. When you catch sight of me in the distance, you prepare a scolding bath for my arrival. Dismounting Gringolet, I make haste to our bed chambers where you then grant me a chaste kiss on the cheek.”

“Just a kiss?” Video me asks.

“You will want to scrub my hair and skin before you do anything more than kiss me.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. And so you peel the damp, dirty clothing from my body until I stand before you naked. I chance a kiss, but you will not let me get close enough. Rather, you guide me into the hot bath where you proceed to scrub every inch of my filthy body.”

“Hmmm, and then what?”

“Then you drop your dress to the ground, revealing your delicious naked body to me. I pull you toward the bath, but you slip from my grasp. ‘I am not getting into that filthy water’ is what you say.”

“Just because I wouldn’t bathe in the sea with you that one time when you were covered in shit doesn’t mean I am afraid of dirty bath water. It was cold outside, and I wanted pizza.”

“Even so. I get out of the bath. You have a warm cloth ready to dry me off.”

“What a thoughtful wife I am.” Video me smiles, leaning in to give Lancelot a kiss. The camera view shifts to the wall for a couple of seconds. As video Lance lets out a moan, the camera moves back to our faces.

“As I was saying. You start at my feet, drying me slowly, torturously slow. By the time you reach my knees, I am so hard, one more touch would finish me. I step away from you, taking in your beauty. Your nipples, hard and covered in gooseflesh, pointing toward your desire as my desire points to you.”

Video Lance moves toward video me. The camera points up to the ceiling and all we can hear are suggestive noises and groans. After a few more seconds, video me repositions the camera so it shows both our faces.

“I would like to know what will happen next,” video me whispers, gazing up into Lance’s eyes.

“You, my beautiful wife, take my cock into your hands and—“

Video me interrupts Lance with a giggle. “You really love using that word for your dick. What did you call it before I taught you the word ‘cock’?”

“I cannot recall. Do you wish to know what you will do with my cock?”

“Hmm, I suppose I wrap my lips around it and roll my tongue down until I reach the root of your cock. Sucking and licking until you reach ecstasy. But I will stop and

release you from my possession before you finish.”

“Sounds like blissful torture. I will not be happy if you deny me though. So I take you in my arms, throw you down onto the bed, and give you some of your own blissful torture. I think I will start at the sweet flesh between your legs. Just a kiss. Then I need to give attention to the silky smooth skin of your thighs. And your breasts. I need to taste those delicate peaks.”

Video Lance pinches my nipples, making me squeal and roll off his chest. The camera angles up to the ceiling again. “I can’t take any more of this. I need you to—“

The video cuts off. I turn my phone back off and look at Lance. “I have watched this video countless times. My emotions were always so unpredictable after each time. Sometimes I would pleasure myself. Other times I would cry myself to sleep or scream into my pillow.”

“What do you feel now?” Lance asks, lightly caressing my cheek with his fingers.

“Desire. Passion. My blood is boiling. Lance, I need you inside me. Now.”

His light caress turns to urgency, pulling me against his body. “I am intrigued to see how you pleasure yourself. But tonight, I will be the one performing such pleasures on every curve of your flesh.”

With our newly formed pact, Arthur suggests we tour the entire country, visiting all the kingdoms in the realm. Those who are loyal to Arthur, those who are still uncertain of his ambitions, and even those opposed to his dream of one unified country. I am hesitant about the tour, mainly visiting the kings who do not believe in Arthur.

Flashbacks of Melwas still haunt me. The smell of his sweaty body pressed against

mine, his lips seeking entry into my unwilling mouth, the deep slash of a knife on my thigh. He meant to take me by force and make me his wife and queen. But Elnaril saved me, and barbecued Melwas for taking what was not his. Those memories are faint now, though I still remember the pain and fear. Melwas hated Arthur. There would have been nothing Arthur could do to convince Melwas to join him. I'm certain others feel the same. They don't want to give away their power, their kingdoms. They fear what Arthur could do if he had control of the entire realm.

I don't blame them. The Romans terrorized these lands. Their search for power to expand their empire and take over the world ultimately destroyed them. World domination caused them to neglect the protection of their homelands.

Arthur doesn't want that kind of power. He only wants the kingdoms to be of one mind. To sign a treaty of peace. Assist each other when they have need of an army. To fight off the Vikings, the Saxons, and anyone who attempts to invade this beautiful, fragile land. Arthur hopes to convince the opposing kings of the realm during this tour, but I fear if we travel to those kingdoms, we will never see Camelot again.

"I think the tour is a marvelous idea, Arthur. Truly. It will be a wonderful experience for Galahad and introduce him to all the kings of the realm. But Arthur," I plead, "we shouldn't visit those who see you as an enemy."

"If I do not include everyone in this tour, what will that say of me? Won't people taunt me for being afraid?"

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“No matter what you do, Arthur, someone will have something negative to say about you.”

Arthur looks at Lance, hoping to get his approval. But Lance is on my side. “Guin is right. Your enemies would likely refuse to invite you to their castles or kill you within. Would it not be best to tour the castles of those you consider friends and allies? Those you know will not attempt to assassinate you and your entire family?”

“Perhaps you are both right. I only wish for the entire realm to see the four of us together. To show them we have united our houses. Show them we can all live as one.”

Arthur looks tired. For nearly thirty years, Arthur has fought to keep his throne. Fought to bring the realm together. And he is still fighting.

“What about a gathering?” Arthur looks hopeful at Lance’s suggestion. He twirls his finger to let Lance know he would like to hear more of this idea. “We bring the realm together at Camelot. There we will host a month-long gathering of games, entertainment, and unity.”

“Like a tournament?” I ask. “I haven’t seen a joust since traveling here. Is that a thing you do in this time?”

The blank faces from my husbands tell me that the idea of a medieval tournament hasn’t yet been invented. Oops. It could be the very thing to create the comradery Arthur seeks. So I explain my modern idea of what a tournament could be.

“It is like a gathering, I suppose. It’s a competition that shows off one’s skills in mock combat. Jousting, swords, archery. For our tournament, we should allow anyone to enter. Knight, squire, farmer, king. No exclusions. In doing so, we are showing the people of this country that King Arthur only wishes to unite the whole of Britain. Maybe we can even allow women to enter the tournament?” I ask playfully.

My husbands continue to stare back at me with blank looks on their faces. Perhaps gender equality is a bit too much to ask for, but I had to try. I thought they were progressive six-century men. “I’m pretty good with my bow, just saying.”

“I do not think the people would be happy to see women entering a tournament, but perhaps we could have a segment for the womenfolk to join in. A weaving competition?” Arthur suggests, with a smirk hiding behind his stern look.

I roll my eyes at that. Arthur knows I’m terrible at weaving or any of the other “womanly” tasks of this century. They are boring and tedious, and I just don’t enjoy doing them. Gardening, cooking, and archery are the only things I’ve had any experience with in my past life. I’ve excelled at all three since hobbies are very limited in this time, even for a queen.

“What about a cooking contest?” I laugh. “Or a baking contest. I’m sure everyone has their own spin on a type of pastry or bread. Could be fun.”

“I think a weaving contest would be more appropriate. That way, the ladies of each castle can contribute. You can oversee the judging, Guinevere. You will not have to take part.”

“Okay, that’s fine then.” I shrug. “Would we really be inviting every kingdom in the realm?”

“As Lance said, we want to promote unity. Perhaps not all will show. But word will

spread of our hospitality and honor. That will be enough. For now.”

I look down at my lap. The scar on my thigh pinches slightly as a brutal memory washes over me. “We will need to ensure the safety of all who attend. No woman, no matter her station, should ever be unattended. Camelot might be one of the safest castles in the realm, but someone took me from there once. I will not let it happen to another. Not under my watch.”

Lance and Arthur reach out to me as one. I offer them each a hand, letting them give me their comfort and sympathy. Arthur releases me as Lance draws me closer to him. “No one will ever touch you that way again. I will ensure that the knights are on guard at all times. Our tournament will be safe. Camelot will continue to be safe. No one will get hurt. Unless Mordred enters against me in swords. I cannot promise I will not hurt him.”

Lance’s joke loosens me a bit, shaking a laugh out from deep under my fear. I hug him close, pulling myself onto his lap. It feels freeing to be around Lance now, to touch and hold him as I need to. It will be difficult when we return to Camelot to push these urges aside. We can’t let anyone see the truth.

“Mordred will likely enter all the events. Let us hope the other knights will eliminate him before facing you, Lance.” Arthur raises his mug of ale. “To unity.”

Lance grabs his from the table, our own small round table that has become our meeting grounds. The place where we make all our plans, strategies, and decisions. “To unity,” Lance shouts as he clinks his mug against Arthur’s.

“I will write to Gawain, have him prepare Camelot. Then I shall write to all the kings of the realm, inviting them to Camelot next summer. That should give us enough time to make all the arrangements. We will need to have an exceptional harvester this year.”

“Will we be heading back to Camelot soon?” I ask. Hoping he will allow me to stay in my home for longer.

“We have only just arrived here. It would be ungracious of us if we depart so soon.” Arthur looks at Lance. “Let us continue with our plan to remain at Joyous Gard for six months. Then we will journey back to Camelot, the four of us. In the meantime, I will send word to Gawain to begin preparations. He should send back a report soon enough on how Camelot is faring during my absence.”

“Galahad will be thrilled when he hears of the tournament,” I sigh excitedly. “Please promise me you will not let him enter any of the events. He is too young.”

“He is eight years of age, Guin. And by the time of the tournament, he will be close to ten.” I know Arthur’s mind on the matter. He’s already given Galahad a sword. It’s small, but I still lose my mind whenever he practices with Lance. “We should allow him the chance to compete in the non-combative games. Perhaps archery?” Arthur looks at both Lance and me for approval.

“You can train him, Guin,” Lance suggests. “I have seen you with a bow. You are rather talented.”

I blush at his compliment. “Thank you.”

Chapter 24

Guinevere

“Come here, let me see how much Galahad has grown,” Vivienne pushes through the welcome party of priestesses as we step off the barge into Avalon. Galahad has grown so much in the last year and a half. Standing up straight, he nearly reaches my shoulders. I might be on the shorter side, but I’m not that short. Galahad will be as

tall as his father, no doubt.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“You are a young man. How old are you now?” Morgana asks, ruffling Galahad’s hair as Vivienne releases him from a delicate hug. Vivienne is rarely affectionate, even with Lance. Though a kind, lovely soul, I have only seen this maternal side of her when Galahad is near. Something about this kid brings out the gushiness in all of us.

“I’ll be nine years old next month, Auntie Morgana,” Galahad says, his back as straight as a pencil, showing his full height and proud demeanor.

Lance clears his throat. “Why have I never received such a welcome whenever I would return to Avalon?”

“My dear son, you have never returned home with such a party before. My grandson, King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Merlin.” There was a lack of excitement about the last name, almost as if it was on purpose. “In fact, I cannot recall a time when Avalon has had so many honored guests. We only had a few days to prepare your rooms as you did not think to write to me in advance of your arrival.” Vivienne offers Lance a half smile, attempting to keep her severe facade up.

We had only decided to make a quick detour to Avalon a week before our departure from Joyous Gard. Not knowing when we could make the trip back up here, we all thought it would be a nice little family trip. To be honest, it has been too long since I stepped foot on this island. I miss being here. The quiet, peacefulness. It’s odd, but I feel close to my family here. My family in the twenty-first century. This is the place where I came through when I unwillingly time traveled. Though I may never see my family again—not because it would not be possible, but because I would never willingly leave the family I have here—I still find peace in Avalon.

“I never need to give you notice of my arrival,” Lance says to Vivienne. “You always know when I am coming home, mother. Though I do apologize for bringing such company. I hope it was not much trouble.”

Lance moves quickly and pulls Vivienne into a playful hug. Though he had seen her since returning to Joyous Gard, I know he misses Vivienne. It warms my heart to see such a masculine man act so lovingly toward his mother. He’s so adorably affectionate. Something I hope Galahad pays attention to because I will demand hugs from him until I can no longer lift my own arms up.

“Yes, my lady, I apologize for the late notice,” Arthur adds with kingly kindness.

“No trouble at all, your Highness,” Vivienne says as she releases herself from Lance’s embrace. “Morgana will show you all to your accommodations. Merlin, you will want to stay at the Druid temple?” Merlin nods graciously, a man of few words. “I trust you know the way.” Vivienne adds.

Another nod, and Merlin heads off in the opposite direction. I have never seen Vivienne and Merlin together. There seems to be history there. Something between them. My eyes follow Merlin as he heads into the trees. Before he disappears, he turns back to our group, setting his eyes upon Vivienne. Definitely something there.

I grab a hold of Morgana’s arm as she leads us to our rooms, whispering in her ear. “Was that sexual tension or something else?”

“What?” Morgana asks, turning to me with cocked eyebrows. “You really do say the strangest things sometimes.”

“Vivienne and Merlin. Were they a thing? A couple? Love each other?”

“Oh. We do not speak of that.”

“Mmm hmm. Noted.” I smirk at Morgana’s amused face.

“What are you two whispering about?” Lance asks, curiosity riddling the crease of his brows.

“Nothing.” Morgana and I say in unison, chuckling like a couple of teenagers.

I turn back to Morgana, asking, “There’s a Druid temple here?”

“Yes, well, there is another island, much smaller than ours. There are so few Druids left, we offer them sanctuary here. Merlin is the only one who leaves Avalon.”

“He just gets more mysterious as I learn more about him.” As we pass through the main complex, I am unsure where Morgana is taking us. “Wait, are we not staying in the dormitory?”

“Vivienne thought it best to have a cottage built. We had the old temple transformed into a guest cottage so that whenever you and your family visited, you would have a place to stay and some privacy away from the priestesses.”

“The old temple,” I whisper, remembering my dream with Elnaril. We had been standing in the middle of that temple. It looked brand new. The last time I had seen the place in real life, it was one poke away from collapsing.

“Auntie Morgana, is this the temple where Excalibur was forged?” Galahad asks. Though he most likely knows the answer as I do.

“Oh. I do not know for sure, but there are stories about remarkable magic being cast in this temple. It could be the place.”

I turn to Galahad and nod. “It is the same place.”

“What?” Both Arthur and Morgana ask.

“I never thought to mention it before. Elnaril, the soul who lives within Excalibur, she told me. As I’m sure she told you, Galahad.”

“We will be staying in that very same temple, Lady Morgana?” Arthur is always so formal with the priestesses, it cracks me up. I push my laughter aside, only allowing a smile to show on my face.

“Yes, your Highness. Although, it has been completely rebuilt. It is just around this bend here.” Morgana takes a few steps ahead of me and the rest of my group as we approach the area where the old temple stood. The mid-day light shimmers cheerfully overhead, shining a spotlight onto what is now a quaint stone cottage.

Being familiar with the old structure, I can make out the original stones from the temple. The old structure has undergone a complete transformation. Where there were once stairs leading up to an altar is now a doorway leading into a modest dwelling. A fireplace sits in the middle of a living area, simply furnished with two bare wooden benches.

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“It is not the grand accommodations I am certain you are used to, your Highness, but there are two bedrooms through these doors.” Morgana points to the doors on either side of the fireplace.

“Thank you, Lady Morgana. This is most generous of your mistress,” Arthur says.

“It’s very cozy,” I say as I walk around the small living area and stop next to Galahad, who sits in front of the roaring fireplace. Autumn has begun to make way for winter, and the chill on the ride to Avalon pierced our bones. Galahad usually never feels the cold. Excalibur keeps him warm, as it did with me. I remember that constant warmth, a blanket that would never leave my skin. Galahad stares into the fire, mesmerized. He is meditating. Something Merlin has taught him to do as a way to communicate openly with Elnaril and strengthen his connection with the powers inside him.

Normally, I would leave Galahad alone, but curiosity draws me in. I sit beside my son and whisper, “What does Elnaril think of the remodeling?”

His skin glows brighter at my question, and a smile forms on his windswept face. “She is happy to see her temple looming with life, even if it’s being used for a different purpose.” Pointing to the fireplace, he explains, “This is where the altar stood. A fire always dancing. A fire that forged Excalibur.” Galahad smiles, at peace in this little stone house. Lance and Arthur join us on the floor, warming themselves by the fire but also wanting to feel the serenity flowing from Galahad.

Morgana whispers a farewell, not wanting to break our peaceful silence. “I shall let you all settle in.”

I turn and wave as she closes the door behind her, then place my head on Lance's shoulder. We've only been traveling for a few days, but I feel wretched. This cold weather will make for a miserable ride back to Camelot. But I don't want to think of that just yet. I want to sit in this moment. I want to breathe in the peace. I want to remember the four of us here, sitting in front of the fire. One fucking weird, but happy, family.

Chapter 25

Guinevere

After nearly a week in Avalon, I have barely seen Galahad. He's been spending his mornings and afternoons with Vivienne and Merlin, training. By the evenings, he is so exhausted he just climbs into bed to sleep. Lance, Arthur, and I have taken advantage of these peaceful days by planning the unity tournament. It is rather a lot to plan, more than I had imagined. I just keep picturing scenes from *A Knight's Tale*. All the different tourney events and then the banquets. It looked so simple in a movie, but in real life, every detail needs to be planned.

The invitations are the easiest. We only need to write them all out. Something Arthur has taken upon himself. He wants the other kings to hear his voice in the words that they read. Knowing the invitation is coming from his hand will have a more significant meaning, Arthur explains as I rub his sore and tired hand after a modest supper in our little cottage.

Lance looks up from the paper displaying the list of events we compiled. A scowl disappears from his face as quickly as it formed, turning his head to look into the roaring fire of the hearth. He doesn't like that I am touching Arthur. Even though he agreed to share me, Lance still doesn't want to share my body with my other husband. I love Lance. I will always be his. But Arthur is still my husband and a dear friend. He has sacrificed so much for Lance and me. He is putting everything on the

line to give us all a chance at happiness. The least I can do is give the man a hand massage.

Even with the slight tension I feel from Lance, I am happy with the life I have forged. I have this incredible son who I know will do remarkable things for the world. Two loving husbands. I am queen to one and everything to the other. The love we all share is fulfilling. I didn't know my heart could be this full of love. I'm overflowing with it.

So I ignore Lance's scowl. I know he holds no hate for Arthur and the relationship we have. Well, maybe just a little jealousy, but it is harmless. Still, he has these possessive reflexes. I'd be lying if I said I didn't like it.

"What about RSVPs?" I ask as I place Arthur's hand on the bare wooden bench we are sitting on.

Arthur clears his throat. "What are those?"

"Responses to the invitations. So that we know who is coming and how many are in their party."

"Ah, yes. We should prepare the castle for a full headcount. However, I would assume that most will send someone ahead to announce their uh aresveepee."

"It's just R S V P," I enunciate each letter. "It's an acronym for...uh, actually, I can't remember. Something French though."

Lance lets out a soft chuckle. "What?" I ask sharply, squinting at him as he leans back on the bench across from Arthur and me.

"You. Just you. How I had missed you when I was...gone. I love you." Lance's eyes shoot to Arthur, who is smiling back at him.

“We have missed you too, Lance.” Arthur gets up to place a hand on Lance’s shoulder. “It truly is an incredible thing to have you returned to us. I hope you know that.”

Lance’s only response is a slow nod. He pats Arthur’s hand, squeezing it slightly. “Thank you, Arthur. For giving her back to me. I—”

“Guinevere was always yours.” Arthur removes his hand from Lance’s and takes a seat beside him. “I knew this the moment you two first arrived at Camelot. It feels like an eternity ago, yet I can still see it in my mind’s eyes, as clearly as I see you both now. It is why I did not offer marriage to you when we first met, Guinevere.” Arthur turns to look at me but is unable to keep eye contact. He slouches down, placing his elbows onto his thighs and his face in his hands. “I will make this right. Or I will die trying.”

I gasp at Arthur’s choice of words. “No. Don’t you dare talk like that. We will be okay. We have to be okay.”

Both of my husbands rush to comfort me, something they do often because I’m an emotional fucking wreck. Arthur takes my hands as Lance wraps his arms around me, lying my head on his chest. I feel his lips on the back of my skull as he whispers, “Guin, we may still have to face fate. But right now, we have each other. We will always have each other, no matter what.”

“I know.” I choke on a sob. “I’m just terrified of losing you all. I can’t lose my family again.”

Spiraling is something I’ve always been good at. This endless cycle of grief. It hits hard when it arrives in my heart. I can’t help but think of my mom. Losing her was the worst thing to happen to me until I lost my life. My dad and Josh were taken away from me as quickly as my mother was. Then Lance. Losing him should have

obliterated me. But it didn't. I'm terrified of what awaits me. Perhaps I can take losing Lance and Arthur, but I will not survive if I lose my son.

I cannot shake the feeling that this is where my life leads. That one day, I will wake up, and Galahad will be gone. I know I shouldn't think of these things, but my thoughts work against me even in my happiest moments. Because in these moments, I am most vulnerable. These are the moments I will never have if my heart shatters once again from another loss. I will not survive it.

I feel refreshed after waking up in the arms of a husband I love with every cell in my body. Lance is already awake, holding me against him. "How do you feel, my love?"

Source Creation Date: July 11, 2025, 6:43 am

“I’m sure I look worse than how I feel.” I wrap my legs around him and let him inside me. He’s gentle this time. Last night, both of us could not be gentle with each other. We were both a bit singed from my emotional breakdown. Now, our bodies comfort each other, taking away the last traces of agony our souls have bared out in the open.

A sigh of release escapes our mouths in unison as we lie next to each other after making love. Opening my eyes a second time, I give Lance a quick peck on the nose, then roll out of bed. “Where are you off to in a hurry?”

“I want to see what Galahad is up to with Merlin and Vivienne.”

“But my mother said not to bother them. They need Galahad to be clear of mind. No distractions.”

“I will not be a distraction. Galahad has a sound head on his shoulders. I will not be a bother to him. I need to see him. I miss him.”

“If you are going, so am I.” Lance hops out of bed to help me tie up my dress, then pulls on his own clothes. “For a year, Merlin lived on my land, teaching, testing, training my son. Galahad said they were meditating, reading, and researching. But here, in Avalon, something feels different. It reminds me of what I felt when I came here to meet you. You had awoken something. Perhaps it was the magic of the lake. I think, perhaps, Galahad has done the same. Has Galahad been here before?”

A chill races down my spine at Lance’s words. I had felt that same something when we arrived here a week ago. The same feeling I had when I brought Galahad here as a

wee baby. “Yes. Only once before. After Galahad was born, I wanted to return to Joyous Gard. We came here on the way.”

Lance pulls me into his warm body as I shiver. “Let’s go.”

He turns away from me, taking his warmth with him. A hand pulls me through the door and into the small living area. Arthur sits at a table, perusing through all the documents we’ve been writing for the past few days. As we rush through, Arthur asks with a slanted eyebrow, “Where are you going in such a rush?”

“To see what Galahad gets up to with his training,” I state.

I fear Arthur will stop us. He always respected the privacy that Merlin had requested and extended his word to me. I was never to interrupt. “May I come with you?”

“Oh.” I squeeze Lance’s hand, and he nods his consent. “Yes, of course.”

“They have been working him too hard these past few days. Do you know where they will be?”

“The lake,” Lance and I say in unison. Another shiver runs down my spine.

The three of us make haste to the shores I have come to know intimately. Where I first opened my eyes as Guinevere, a queen to be, and where I met the love of my life. There is a strange, unknown magic that lives in the waters surrounding Avalon. Vivienne and Morgana have said this to me many times. I hope they aren’t using Galahad to unlock this magic. Perhaps it is unknown for a reason.

As we approach the shore through the concealed path in the trees, a flash of white light blinds us, making us fall back into each other. When I catch my bearings, I don’t hesitate. I sprint for the lake—Arthur and Lancelot yelling my name. Nothing will

stop me, even if they catch up with me.

Vivienne and Merlin are at the lake's edge, careful not to touch the glowing water. And Galahad, he is standing waist-deep in the water, looking out into the lake, Excalibur in his hands. The vision stuns me. A moment later, Lance and Arthur flank me, reaching out for my hands, but I run. I push against the shallow waves of water with each step, shouting my son's name. He cannot hear me. "Galahad, don't let it take you away. Listen to my voice. Galahad!"

When I reach out to touch him, a brighter burst of light blasts into the air, but I keep my aim on his shoulder. He turns toward me at my touch; his green eyes have turned a bright blue. The shock nearly knocks me off my feet. Instead, I launch myself into him, surrounding myself in the orb of white light that pulses from his body.

Chapter 26

Lancelot

"Guin!" I shout. She disappeared in the white light with our son. "Galahad!" Running into the water, I continue shouting into the still, muted air, calling for my wife and son. I dive into the water, hoping they may be underneath. All I see are murky waves of sunlight and a scattering of fish. As I reach the surface, I scream once more. My voice melts into the emptiness around me as a panic I have never known threatens to consume me.

Merlin catches my eyes as I make my way out of the water. I am furious. I have lost the two things in my life that make me whole. And Merlin is standing there with the shadow of a smirk on his face. He glances at Arthur who is motionless. I do not think he has even drawn a breath since Guin and Galahad disappeared into the orb of light.

"What did you do, Merlin?" I stalk toward the wizard; his confidence never wavers as

I reach for my dagger.

“Lancelot, no!” Vivienne shouts.

Merlin is faster than he looks. He draws his hands from behind his robe, throwing me back into the water with an invisible force. I yell in frustration, stabbing the ground with the blade in my hand. “What the fuck did you do?” I use a word I hear Guinevere speak when she is angry. It feels fitting. I quite like how the word molds the anger in my voice.

Finally, Arthur moves, the shock of our loss unfreezing his mind. “Yes, Merlin, what did you do?” Anger sparks behind his eyes, blazing a fire I have never seen before in him.

Merlin must have seen it too. His smirk and confidence wither away into the old man. “Your Highness, I did nothing. Our queen and prince are quite safe. They should be making their way here any minute now. I told them to stay far away from the scene.”

“Do not speak in riddles, Merlin. Tell me what just happened.” Arthur sounds calm, but his eyes are wild. If he feels what I am, I know I must look just as terrifyingly frightful.

I look toward my mother. She is in shock, holding back her tears. She is innocent of whatever scheme Merlin has organized. But I must know that she did not play a part in this. “Vivienne, mother, do you know what happened?”

She comes to me at the lake’s edge, helping me out of the muck. “No, my son. Whatever just happened, I did not know...” Vivienne turns to Merlin. She is just as angry at his deceit. But there is something in her eyes that shows me she might know more than she is letting on.

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Merlin clears his throat, looking into the trees as if waiting for someone to appear. “If you would only be patient a little while longer, you can ask Galahad yourself.”

I sheath my dagger, clenching my hands into fists before taking a step toward Merlin. “What the hell do you mean? And what of Guin?”

“She, too, is fine.”

My heart cannot hear his words. It is still clenched with fear, anger, and anguish. “That is not good enough. I will not wait any longer for an answer.”

“I agree with Sir Lancelot.” Arthur takes a step toward Merlin. The king of kindness looks like he could murder his most trusted advisor with just one glance.

I walk to Arthur, placing a hand on his shoulder to offer him as much comfort as I can spare. “Answer the king. And answer him plainly. We all deserve some answers after witnessing...I do not even know what we witnessed.”

Merlin sighs. “Queen Guinevere knew you two would be frightened, but we could not say anything for fear that it would alter what had happened, what would happen.”

Vivienne steps toward Arthur and me, putting her hand out to stop me from another attempt at slitting the Druid’s throat. “Merlin, did they...travel?” Vivienne’s voice is soft, but I hear the tremor of fear. A slight nod from Merlin seems to answer her question. “How far back?”

“Two weeks. They went straight to the Druid temple to wait for my arrival when it

happened, and they have been hiding there ever since. I told them they could not go near themselves.”

My mind is racing, trying to make sense of what Vivienne and Merlin are saying. “What does that mean?” I speak louder than I intended, the panic inside becoming more difficult to tame.

“Lance,” a voice I recognize intimately speaks behind me. Guin’s voice. My heart jumps in my throat, freezing me where I stand, but I force myself to turn around.

Guin and Galahad walk past the boulder on the lake’s edge. I sprint to them, not thinking, not caring who might see. I pull them both to my body, letting my grief spill out onto Guin’s delicate neck.

“Dad, you’re squeezing too tight. I can’t breathe!”

“Sorry, my boy,” I say, before bringing Guin’s lips to mine. She melts into me. It takes everything I have to release her. Turning back to Galahad, I give him a gentler hug. “Never do that again. Whatever it was you just did.”

“Sorry, dad. I didn’t mean to.”

Arthur appears in front of Galahad, kneeling before him as I step out of our embrace. I grab Guin’s hand, not wanting our skin to be apart ever again. “What exactly did you mean to do?” I ask my son.

Galahad looks up at Guin, who nods back down at him. “I was trying to connect with the magic in the lake. Excalibur resonates with it, but the magic is difficult to tame. If I can somehow tap into it, just a small part of it, I could...potentially travel. That is what I did.”

“Travel?” Arthur and I ask in unison.

Vivienne steps in next to Galahad, placing a hand on his cheek, and wiping away a smudge of dirt. “Travel in time.” Galahad nods vigorously in response to Vivienne’s statement. Then she turns back to Merlin, anger etched on her face. “Why did you keep this from me? Why did you not tell me what you were training the boy to do?” The anger in her voice shakes.

“Vivienne, I—”

“You better not be making up an excuse. This is my island, my lake, my grandson.”

“I did not want to risk—”

“Risk what?” Vivienne interrupts again. She is seething. Her dark eyes kindling with a fire I rarely see in her. “I have been trying to understand the magic of this lake my whole life. Others before me, their whole lives. You put Galahad and Guinevere at risk. Who knows where or when they could have traveled.”

“Vivienne, I had to let it happen because it had already happened. If I stopped it, well, I honestly do not know what would have occurred.”

“Probably a paradox. The universe exploding, you know, normal time travel stuff,” Guin says with a shrug.

I stare at her in wonder, my eyebrows pinched together. She reaches up to smooth the wrinkles. “Don’t think too much about it. Time travel will give you a migraine.”

“I do not understand.” I reel Guin in closer to me. I am so afraid she will disappear again.

“Let me try to explain it to you, dad.” Galahad plops down on the boulder behind him. “What happened to us two weeks ago only just happened to you. Mom and I, well, we’ve been hiding on the island since before we arrived at Avalon. Wait, let me back this up a bit. Mom and I were in the lake a few minutes ago. You saw us disappear. But for us, we didn’t disappear. When the light around us faded, you disappeared. No one was at the lake. When we got to the Druid temple, we were told that Merlin had not yet arrived. That our entire party had yet to leave Joyous Gard. Mom and I haven’t seen you, father, or Grannie Vivienne for two weeks.”

After Galahad’s attempt to explain the unexplainable, I look at Guin, searching her tear-filled eyes. “But last night, this morning...” I was thinking about how Guin had fallen into a fit of sadness and how I had attempted to soothe her. She smirked back, as if reading my mind.

“That was two weeks ago for me, my love.”

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I pull her tightly against my body, terrified of losing her, of her losing me. Then I reach out for Galahad, who happily joins in with Arthur on his other side. Our family reunited again. We are stronger together. I can feel the love we all have for each other. I can also feel the fear. The fear of losing each other.

Chapter 27

Lancelot

It seems like just yesterday that we began discussing the Tournament of Unity. Now we are back at Camelot to assist in the preparations for our tournament. Guests will arrive in June, half a year from now. But the castle is already alive with the excitement of the coming festivities. Chaos has replaced the tranquil life we have grown accustomed to at Joyous Gard and Avalon. The intimacy Guin and I have shared will need to be hidden.

I think back to the days when I first brought Guin to Camelot. Everyone suspected I had fallen for the White Enchantress while I thought I hid my feelings well. I must restrain myself from the need to touch her every minute of the day. To offer her a peck on the cheek when she passes me by. To keep my fingertips from brushing against hers as we dine together.

Arthur has given me a room in the royal apartments, making it easy for Guin and me to be together secretly without the fear of being caught. I know he also enjoyed our family evenings together while away, the four of us. Galahad, Arthur, Guin, and me. Arthur has spent most of his life alone. I remember his first wife vaguely. She died quickly, within the first year of their marriage. For years, Arthur only had his knights.

Family was never something he had, not even with his cousins or sister, Morgause.

Guin means everything to Arthur. I can see the love he feels for her. Sometimes I also see the hunger in his eyes. He misses his wife. But he will never take her from me, even though she is his to claim. He also knows that Guin is not a woman to claim. I want to tell both of them it is okay for them to love each other. To express their love. I cannot say it aloud though. I do not want to share her.

I know that makes me selfish. I do not care. Guin is mine. My soul, my heart. I was a hollow lump of flesh without her. Now that she is back in my life, I feel whole again. Still, I will play my part. The White Knight will have a new meaning at the court of Camelot. I will show my virtues to the crowd and nestle my vices deep inside, where only my Guin can see.

I chance a glance at my wife, sitting on the other side of our king at the head table in the great hall. Our eyes meet for a split second before our attention diverts to Galahad, telling a story about how Merlin had tripped over a log in the woods on our journey back from Avalon.

“I had joked, asking how he could claim to see everything when he can’t see a log that lies right in front of him. Merlin squinted his eyes at me, saying, ‘My prince, I had seen that coming, but since it was to be, I let it be. Let me tell you this. Beware your surroundings, for there are many...creatures that leave droppings where one might think a cozy spot for a nap.’ And sure enough, the next night, I fell asleep on a giant mound of shit!”

Those of the court who are close enough to hear the story release hearty laughter right on cue. Galahad is well-loved by the people here. He is so young, and yet, he has already captured such loyalty and love from the kingdom. He will be a remarkable ruler one day.

Arthur pushes his seat back and stands up tall, ready to make his speech. The hall falls silent in an instant. Everyone keeps even their breaths still, awaiting what their king will say. “There have been rumors at court. Many rumors, new and old. I mean to snuff out those rumors with the truth tonight. In doing so, bring unity to our hearts and minds. A unity that we will extend to the far reaches of the realm with our tournament next year. Tonight, let me tell you of a decision I have made. A decision my queen and I have made together with the new chancellor, Lancelot of the Lake.”

The silence in the room is suffocating. Every eye in the hall is upon us. Every ear, fixed on what Arthur will say next. Arthur holds out his hands to Guin and me, pulling us up to stand by his side. “Lancelot and Guinevere were once married. A marriage I had blessed. They shared a strong bond, which is why I had allowed Lancelot to court Guinevere when others advised me to take her for my wife then. Yet, I could not take to wife a woman whose heart belonged to another. Now Guinevere is my wife. Your queen. Mother of your prince. To say that we have been in a complicated situation would be an immense understatement. We have spent the better part of two years trying to come up with a solution. For a woman cannot be married to two men. Still, the vows we have spoken to each other through the words of God are binding until death. Lancelot was dead and now returned to us. Though he still loves his wife, he has stepped aside as her husband.”

I drain all emotion from my face, hoping my expressionless face tells the same story.

“Lancelot of the Lake will take on the role of my chancellor. He has also made a vow of celibacy. One in which he will repeat two nights hence in our chapel once the archbishop has returned to our castle. Queen Guinevere and I are overjoyed to welcome Lancelot back to our castle. Let us all give him the warm welcome he deserves.”

My heart swells at his words, and as the crowd before us bursts into applause, I cannot help but smile. As Arthur put it, our situation might be complicated. The truth

of it all is known only by our little family. But I am happy. I get to have Guin. I have a son. I have a king who is like a brother to me. I have friends who will defend me and my family. In all its complications, this is happiness.

Chapter 28

Guinevere

“Elaine didn’t look pleased with your vow of celibacy,” I smirk at Lancelot as he changes for bed. By change, I mean gets naked. I can’t take my eyes off his chiseled and scarred chest. He is breathtaking. He is mine.

“Mordred looked amused. We still need to be wary of him. He will most likely try to make a scene at the tournament. Let us be extra cautious. I do not wish to give him motive.” Lance removes his pants, a serious look plastered on his face.

“Should we stop fucking then? Because I honestly will not be able to stop daydreaming of your cock ravishing my pussy no matter how serious you take this ‘vow of celibacy.’”

My eyes meet his, which have gone a wicked shade of green. Lance grabs me by the waist, his warm hands searing through the thin fabric of my nightgown, and throws me down on my bed.

His face comes within an inch of mine and his ale-scented breath tickles my jaw as he whispers, “Do you wish me to stop fucking you, Guin?”

I angle myself upward, pushing my groin into Lance’s leg. His muscular thighs pin me down, keeping me close to him without touching the one spot I need touched. It’s fucking torture. “I would like to see how you pleasure yourself. Will you show me?”

“What?” My face grows warm at the shock of what Lance just asked me to do. “No. I...well, I’ve never done that before.”

“But you told me once that you would pleasure yourself—”

“No. I mean, I’ve never pleased myself in front of anyone before. I’m not sure I could do it.”

“Hmph.” Lance rolls to the side. “Do not get shy on me all of a sudden.”

I roll my eyes at him. He knows I cannot say no to a challenge. Especially when that challenge comes from him. So I roll my nightgown up and Lance helps me pull it over my head. Then I lie down beside him, spread my legs and touch myself. Lance sucks in a breath as he watches me massage my clit. Turning back to my face, he asks, “What are you thinking about, my beautiful wife?”

A smile cracks my face wide. “You.”

“Mmmm. And what am I doing?”

“The same thing I am, except your hands are much warmer than mine. So I imagine them on me, filling me with warmth.” I dip a finger inside, touching the sensitive part that makes my body lift off the bed instinctively.

“How does it feel? My imaginary finger inside you.”

“Oh,” I moan. “Does that answer your question?”

Lance leans down to kiss me, slipping his tongue in my mouth. He doesn’t touch me with his hands though. Those hands I so desperately need on me. “Do you ever pleasure yourself?” I ask against his lips.

His mouth quickly leaves mine. Ocean eyes swimming with the flames of embers in the dying fire from my hearth look down at me. There is so much love in those eyes. But also pain, loneliness, desperation. “I spent many nights in the wilderness lying awake thinking of you.”

“Let us not waste a moment touching ourselves, then. Touch me, Lance. Let me touch you.”

A month before guests are due to arrive, it is utter chaos at Camelot. Everyone is running around making preparations for the games, banquets, and accommodations. I’ve been tasked with organizing the entertainment, something I begged Arthur to let me have. I’m still putting together the silly weaving contest, but I needed something more. Something I actually want to do. This will be the biggest event Camelot has

ever hosted. There needs to be good music.

Galahad sits by my side with his guitar, helping me teach a group of musicians a few songs. Like with swords, language, and apparently magic, Galahad picked up the art of music quickly and effortlessly. He's not yet shared his musical talents with the court though. During the opening banquet, he will debut this hidden skill with me and the rest of the musicians who've traveled here from all over the world.

It's been ages since I've performed for the court. I'm a little nervous at the thought of so many strangers watching me sing and play. But I'll have my son by my side and a group of merry musicians around me. They've already proved to be exceptional. Some of them brought instruments I've never seen before. The tricky part is teaching them how to sing songs they've never heard. It's not like I can just whip out my phone and let them listen to my Spotify playlist.

I hum the melody of "A Million Dreams" for Adair, who plays a large fiddle-like string instrument. He's a tall man with delicate fingers and matches the tune perfectly. When he is confident enough with playing the melody, I jump in with my lute, and Galahad sings. It takes me a while to find my bearing with the proper cords, but we get there halfway through our first run-through of the song and it's just fucking beautiful.

"Promise me you will compose some cheery songs, your Highness." Gawain approaches us with a big smile on his face. "These melancholy songs of yours are lovely. However, they are dreadfully depressing."

I smack Gawain playfully on the arm. "Oh, shut it. I know you enjoy a good cry. But I promise that most of the songs are joyful and fitting for the celebration."

"I helped mother pick the songs, Sir Gawain. I can vouch that there will not just be sad ballads for the festivities." Galahad is all smiles. "Would you like to hear one?"

“Of course, my little prince.” Gawain rustles the rose gold hair on Galahad’s head, then takes a seat on the bench closest to our trio.

“Mom, shall we sing ‘Touch the Sky’?”

I turn to Adair and another fiddle player. “Do you think you can play that one with us to give Sir Gawain a preview?”

“Is it the one that goes like this?” Adair begins to play ‘Touch the Sky’ exactly as I remember it.

“Yup! That’s the one. Galahad, do you want to play the guitar on this one?”

“Yes, mother. You should sing it.”

I smile at my son as he plays, cueing in the fiddles and a drummer. Galahad radiates a soft white light when he plays, something I know I had done when Excalibur lived inside me. Pure happiness causes the glow. My heart swells knowing that music brings my son joy just as it does to me. As it did for my mother.

His energy flows into me as I sing, my eyes never leaving his face. Galahad remains focused on his fingers. This is quite a fast-paced song and though he’s talented with guitar, he is being extra cautious with his cords and strums. I’m so fucking proud of him. Not just because he’s a skilled musician. But that he gives everything he has to what he is doing in every moment. When he plays music, that is his life. When he is practicing swords, that is his life.

Though I rarely get to witness his lessons with Merlin, I know magic is his life too. After the incident at the lake, Merlin has been more open with us about what Galahad is capable of. It’s terrifying, but I know Galahad can handle it. I draw the line at time travel though. He might have successfully transported us two weeks to the past, but

time travel is not something so easily achieved. The magic is unknown and unpredictable. I cannot lose him.

Gawain breaks out in applause as we finish our preview. “More of that, please and thank you. It has been ages since Camelot has felt pure joy, my queen. I am looking forward to hearing more of your songs. We all are.” He takes my hand in his and places a soft kiss on my knuckles.

I swat at him. “Now off with you. We must get back to rehearsal.”

“I came with a purpose. Sword practice.” Gawain turns to Galahad. “Sir Lancelot is waiting for you.”

“Is it time already?” Galahad looks out the tall windows on the side of the hall, showing that the sun is beginning its descent into the late afternoon. “Sorry, mom.”

“That’s okay, love. I didn’t realize it was that late either. The kitchen staff will want to prepare the hall for supper anyway. We’ll resume rehearsal tomorrow afternoon and have archery in the morning after your lessons with Merlin.”

Galahad kisses my cheek after placing his guitar on the table we had set up shop on, then walks away with purpose. Gawain stays behind. He must have an update from our spies. I dismiss the musicians, who bow in farewell, taking their instruments with them as they depart.

“What news do you have?” I ask Gawain as we fall in step with each other toward the back entrance of the great hall, where we are less likely to run into others.

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“Nothing out of the ordinary. Mordred is still spreading rumors and attempting to dethrone you and dismiss Galahad. I do not think there is anything to worry about though. No one seems to bite. The forthcoming tournament has brought much excitement. That is what the people are speaking of. Not of you, Galahad, or Lancelot.”

“Wonderful. And Arthur, he is safe?”

“Yes, my queen.”

I breathe a sigh of relief. “This tournament is exciting, but I still worry. So many people will be here. How will we keep track of everyone?”

“Do not worry yourself. The knights of Camelot will be everywhere, watching everything. Where one knight is visible, there will be more in the shadows. Camelot will remain the safest place in the realm. I will have my finest men watching Mordred’s every move.”

“Thank you, Gawain.” My mind relaxes knowing that the safety of my family and kingdom is in the hands of such a brave knight as Gawain. Still, my heart cannot help but clench at the thought of Mordred.

Gawain guides me into the gardens. A place I’ve considered my sanctuary. A little garden nestled on the far side of the keep. The place where Lancelot and I were reunited for the first time in eight years. The memory brings pain to my heart. Seeing him alive, not believing my eyes. His body, wasted. His face covered in matted hair. He was wild. But mine. Always mine.

“Has Mordred...bothered you since you have been back?” Gawain asks, no doubt seeing the sadness on my face.

I shake my head. “No. Besides the glares and stares, he has not said a word directly to me.”

“Good. Does Lancelot know about what he—”

“No! And he will not. If Arthur or Lancelot find out, they will act. Such an action will bring chaos. The people may not be listening to Mordred right now, but they have done so in the past, and he still has allies.”

“Yes,” Gawain scowls. “Allies who will be closely watched at the tournament.”

“You had mentioned one name to me, Maleagant. Will he be coming?”

Gawain scratches his chin, combing through his mind for the long list of guests who have responded to our invitations. “Hmmm. The son of King Bagdemagus. Yes. He will be here.”

A chill runs down my spine. Maleagant is another name I am familiar with from the Arthurian legends of my time. So much of the story is different already, so perhaps his story is different as well. We all need to be extra careful for the next couple of months.

“Ahhhh, just the two people I had been looking for.” I spin around to find Arthur waltzing into the garden, a wide smile painted on his face. It makes him look like a little boy on Christmas morning.

“Oh? I hope you have pleasant news to share with us. Your joy is contagious already,” I giggle.

“It is wonderful news, my dear wife.”

I smile at the endearment, keeping up with the charade even in front of Gawain. He doesn't know the arrangement we've made. I trust him with my life, but no one must know. We've already let it slip at Avalon, but that is a safe place for us. No one at Camelot must know our secret.

“Gawain.” Arthur places a hand on the knight's shoulder, forcing him to walk along the walls surrounding the garden. “Do you remember that order I placed for a round table?”

Gawain laughs. “Yes, the extraordinarily large table to replace the head table in the great hall? The one our queen said we needed?”

I hide a smile, turning my head away from the men. All this time in Camelot and there isn't a round table in sight. I needed to say something.

“It has arrived!” Arthur is giddy, making my heart swell with happiness.

“Where is it?” I can't help but share his excitement.

“It is being assembled in the great hall as we speak.”

“We must have just missed it. I am escorting Queen Guinevere from her rehearsal there,” Gawain explains.

“Well, you must turn back around and follow me to see this glorious table my beautiful wife envisioned.”

My heart flutters at Arthur's words. He was always an affectionate husband. So it makes perfect sense he wouldn't change his attitude toward me, even though I am

secretly Lancelot's wife. Yet I am still Arthur's queen. As his queen, yes, I am his wife as well. For the public. Not in private, I remind myself as I smile back into Arthur's charming face.

As we approach the great hall, Arthur grabs my hand, pulling me through the entrance. The table is massive. A team of ten burly men hoists all the pieces together. As they work, Arthur's arm snakes around my waist. I melt into him, lying my head on his shoulder. It feels comforting to be so close to Arthur. I miss this closeness. I miss...him.

I look up into Arthur's face and his eyes immediately lock on to my gaze. Eyes that show me a longing I haven't seen in him for years. Without reserve, I mirror his longing. My lips reach out to kiss him and are met with a chaste peck. I shouldn't want more. But I do. Arthur and I turn our attention back to the massive round table slowly being built right before our eyes. It is a wondrous vision to behold.

Chapter 29

Lancelot

“The round table of Camelot,” I say between kisses as I walk Guin backward toward her bed. “Whatever gave you such an idea?”

“It is in the legend, so it wasn’t my idea. Or perhaps it was, for if I said nothing, then perhaps there never would have been a round table.”

“Arthur certainly loves it.”

“What do you think of it?” Guin asks as she kisses my neck, making me release a moan.

“I love it too. It is fitting for Camelot. The perfect symbol of unity.”

I wrap my arms around Guin, pinning her to my body. Just as I am about to undress her, Arthur walks into the room unannounced, making us jump away from each other. My heart, racing from the passionate kiss we shared just a moment ago.

“Is everything all right, Arthur?” Guin asks, her voice trembling.

Arthur looks crazed. I have never seen him in such a state. Vulnerable, agitated, timid, and anxious. These are feelings Arthur never lets anyone see.

“I need my queen, my wife. I miss her. Lance, please. I know I gave her back to you,

but I need her. If you will let me. If she will have me.”

My chest clenches at his words, at his pain. How can I deny my king—my friend, my brother—what he so desperately needs? I knew this day would come. The day when I would unwillingly let him have my Guin. I do not wish to share her with anyone, not even Arthur. But the agony on his face is tearing me apart. For months, I have been taking many comforts from my wife. Comforts Arthur has been denied. My hand releases Guin’s, and I walk away from her.

As I pass by Arthur, he places a hand on my shoulder, stopping me from going further. I turn back to Guin. She is still trembling. Her face is hard to read. I cannot tell if she is upset that I am walking away from her.

“Where are you going, Lance?” Arthur asks.

“It is selfish of me to keep her for myself. She has been your wife for years. I cannot deny that.” I attempt to walk past him again and through the door, but Arthur squeezes my shoulder tighter.

“I do not wish you to leave.”

“What?” I whip my head around at him.

“I want you to stay.”

“Arthur, I do not want to see you with—“

“No, no. You misunderstand me. I need my wife. But I want her to have both of us tonight. I will never deny her your touch, never. I only ask to have a taste. If she would grant me such pleasures.”

Guin's gasp brings my attention back to her. The pale skin of her face has turned an even paler shade, if that is possible. "Arthur, what exactly are you asking for here?" she asks.

"It would not be the first time the three of us have...been intimate together. Let me hold you while Lance plows into you. Kiss you while he ravishes you with his tongue. And if you will allow it, let me inside you."

Rage and lust swim through my skin, tempting me, drowning me. I do not want to share Guin. Yet, I cannot deny the sinful pleasure that consumed me when I held Guin in my arms as Arthur kissed her intimate lips.

I look back at Guin. She is looking at me with a question flickering in her green eyes. She wants this.

I know Guin has missed Arthur, her husband. They have lived together as husband and wife longer than I had with her. I am being selfish. Perhaps this is the solution we need to bring balance to our relationships, to keep us stable. Hell, if I am honest, I want this. I give a slight nod, releasing a breath I did not realize I had been holding.

"Ok. We need to set ground rules before we do this." Guin's voice is still shaking along with her body. She has not stopped trembling since Arthur walked into the room and now I am wondering if her passion was my doing or the anticipation of having Arthur again. "We should have a safe word too."

"What is a safe word?" Arthur asks.

"It's a word we all can use if we feel too uncomfortable with something. Let's keep it simple. Yellow for slow down and red for stop." Guin pauses, waiting for our nods. "My only rule is simple. Nothing goes near my butt. That's a one-way street for me."

As serious as this scenario is, I cannot help but laugh at Guin's last statement. It takes Arthur a minute to understand what she means. Utter shock transforms his face when he finally understands her meaning, making my laughter shake to my very core.

"You really do say the strangest things, Guinevere." Arthur looks out the small window cut into the far wall of Guin's bedroom as I pull myself together. "I do not think I have any 'ground rules,' but I accept yours. Lance?"

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My head answers for me, nodding my consent as I clear my throat to speak, but nothing comes out of my mouth. I make eye contact with Guin as she walks to where Arthur and I stand. She is beautiful. Magnificent. Mine. No matter what happens tonight, Guin is mine. She always will be.

A light touch from Guin soothes my scorching skin and clenching chest. She moves her hand up from my chest, caressing my cheek, and pulls me to her lips. She tastes of stale ale and honey. Heaven. I focus on her tongue as Arthur joins us. My eyes cannot help but open, seeing Arthur's lips on Guin's shoulder. He tugs her dress down, letting it fall to the ground with his clothes. Those delicate lips release mine and travel to Arthur's as if she has hungered for his touch.

I pull my shirt over my head and kneel behind Guin, kissing every curve, dimple, and perfect imperfection. As I devour her skin, I slip my right hand up her thigh and a finger into her tight cunt. A feeling of pride consumes me as I picture Guin's moan spilling into Arthur's mouth. That moan is mine. Her moan turns into a delightful melody of panting as I slide two fingers in and out of her. She might be kissing Arthur, touching him even, but I have her at my mercy and I do not intend to let her go yet.

In one swift motion, I have Guin flat on her back in the middle of the bed, my face between her legs. My desire for her explodes as I taste hers. As I look over Guin's delicate mound of flesh, I see Arthur has taken his place beside Guin on the bed. His mouth devours hers, muting the moans from the pleasure I am giving her with my tongue. I slide three fingers inside Guin while firmly pushing my tongue onto her button of flesh. I am instantly rewarded with a cry of pleasure. Her pleasure is mine.

I am on my knees and deep inside Guin before she can take a breath. It is rare that I would take her so suddenly, but I am crazed. When I see Arthur's hands and tongue on Guin's breasts, I thrust harder into her, making her scream. But she has not yet uttered the 'safe words,' so I keep my pace. Every thrust is a brand, letting her body know that she is mine and I am hers. Arthur will never take this away from us. Only our two bodies together can create the ecstasy I feel. I know she feels it too.

After her body clenches around my cock a second time, I release her. A smile spreads across my face at the sad sigh that escapes Guin. She does not want me to stop. I climb up the bed, avoiding Arthur, whose cock is in Guin's delicate hand, and plant kisses along her neck, making my way up her jaw before dipping my tongue inside her mouth, giving her a taste of herself.

I steal a glance at Arthur, who is lost in ecstasy at the touch of Guin's hand on his cock. He is larger than me. Yet I know he cannot do what I do with mine. I help Guin off her back and guide her onto Arthur's eager cock. She instinctively wraps her legs around his hips. As she makes to move her arms around Arthur's neck, I grab her hands and bring them backward around my neck so that she is leaning into my chest as she grinds Arthur's cock deeper inside her.

"Lance," she whispers, her head leans back so that her breath falls against my lips. My name, not his. Such a simple thing makes my heart swell with love, pride, and lust. I slide my right hand between their bodies, massaging the slick folds of Guin's intimate skin while my other hand pinches her nipple. I am rewarded with a sound between a whimper and a sigh.

"Lance, what are you doing to Guinevere? Her cunt is going wild."

All I can do is smile wickedly at Arthur. Deep inside my core, I breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that Arthur could not give Guin the same pleasures I give her body. Guin might be riding Arthur's enormous cock, but it is me who makes her skin

shiver, her body quake, and her insides explode.

“We need to be inside her together, Lance. I need to feel her when you are inside her.”

Guin chokes on her moans. “What? There is only one hole you may enter.”

I cannot help but chuckle against Guin’s neck, slick with sweat. “We only need one hole, Guin.”

Her body quivers between Arthur and me. I look into Arthur’s eyes for the first time since he entered Guin’s bed chambers. Understanding, love, devotion, and desire pass through our eyes.

“Lie down on the bed, Lance.” Arthur orders. I do as he commands. A moment later, Arthur places Guin onto my hardened cock. Her mouth instantly captures the groan that escapes mine at our sudden connection.

Arthur kneels behind Guin, placing his cock at her entrance. “Guinevere, is this all right?” Arthur asks softly.

“Mmm hmmm,” she groans against my mouth.

“That is not good enough. I need to know this is what you want.”

“Yes. Arthur. Fuck me with Lance’s dick inside my pussy.”

Without hesitating, Arthur guides his cock into Guin, sliding along my cock. The sensation sends a powerful shock through every inch of my skin. Being inside Guin is enough to finish me. Feeling her all around me, consuming me, is the closest I will ever get to divinity. Now, with Arthur’s cock rubbing up against mine, pushing me

deeper into Guin, my senses are heightened. I can hear every breath, feel every drop of sweat falling from Guin and Arthur's bodies, and taste the desire in the air.

I move with Arthur. Both of us thrust into our wife with urgency. As Guin's moans turn to screams, our thrusts become almost violent. We cannot stop. The three of us are fighting to reach the peak of an unseen mountain. We cannot see where we are going, but we race to get there anyway. Faster and faster we climb. Three bodies moving as one.

There are no empty seats in the great hall tonight as we celebrate the first day of our unity tournament. Nearly all the kingdoms have answered our invitation. Even some kings who oppose Arthur's claim. They all have been arriving in droves for the past few weeks, but tonight is the first banquet with all the kings under one roof sitting around Arthur's round table. He had it placed in the middle of the great hall, replacing the head table. An idea Guin came up with. Though she said the round table was meant for the knights of Camelot, it fits all of Arthur's honored guests, kings, and their queens.

Sitting in my usual seat on Arthur's right, I scan the tables surrounding us. Folk from all around the realm are eating, drinking, and laughing with one another. I spot Mordred lurking at the entrance, a scowl sculpted on his face. Following his gaze, my eyes land on Arthur's hand caressing Guin's as she eats supper with her other hand. I no longer feel a pang of jealousy when I catch these moments between my king and queen. Since the night of our coupling a few weeks ago, the three of us have reached a better understanding. Our relationship has grown stronger for it.

When I look back at Mordred, his gaze is now fixed on me. I smile, showing him I am unbothered. Since arriving back in Camelot, Mordred has been a constant shadow. I know he is waiting for me to break. He is especially hard on Guin. We will never let him see our love though. We will never give him what he needs to start a coup. Guin, Arthur, Galahad, and I are a family. Not the family I imagined with Guin,

but I love the family we have become. I will not let Mordred take them away from me.

I lean toward Arthur and whisper in his ear, “Should we make room for Mordred?” Arthur follows my nod to where Mordred leans against the wall.

“No. He can sit with the men if he wishes to join in the festivities.”

“He can sit next to me,” Guin smirks. “I’ve got a lot of ammo if he starts up some drama.”

Arthur gives Guin a warning look. We have both been ordered to keep our distance from Mordred. This has been an easy task. But he has a way of sneaking up on us when we least expect it. Which is why Guin and I are so careful in Camelot. We barely look at each other outside the royal apartments.

“I’m only joking, Arthur.” Guin places a kiss on Arthur’s forehead, then leans over to look at me. “Are you enjoying your pizza, Lance?”

“It is not as good as the pies Faina makes back home, but very good. Still, I require more meat.”

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Guin rolls her eyes when Arthur agrees. “You both are brutes.”

“And you love us this way,” Arthur whispers, making Guin blush deeply.

Shaking her head, she quickly changes the subject, bringing Galahad into the conversation. “Are you ready to blow everyone away with your archery skills?”

Galahad is caught mid-bite but impatiently answers with a mouth full of pizza. “I wish you’d let me enter the other games, or swords at least. You know I’m ready.”

“You are too young.” Guin still has the mindset of her future world, where boys do not have proper combat training. It was shocking to hear that men do not even carry daggers on them.

“I’m nine, mom.” Galahad brings his shoulders back, showing his full height.

“Too young. You will do wonderfully in archery.”

“No one cares about archery.”

“I do. Don’t you remember the stories I’ve told you about badass archers? Robin Hood, Legolas, Katniss, Merida, I could go on.”

“Yeah, but those were made-up stories.” Galahad slumps back into his chair.

Guin switches to English as she says, “We are living in what I thought was a made-up story.”

Galahad glows a little brighter at that last comment. “So, are you saying all those stories could be true?”

I lean over to get a better look at Galahad, who is sitting beside Guin. “Perhaps we can hold an exhibition, show the realm your skills as a swordsman from the safety of the training grounds. Your mother is right. You are too young for most of the tournament games. All the men who have entered are much bigger. You could get hurt. I think it would be beneficial for the people to see you are being trained in combat and will be a fierce warrior one day, like your father.”

“A brilliant idea, Lance.” Arthur claps his hands together. “Guinevere, what do you say? Can we have a sword exhibition with Galahad?”

Guin shoots me a look I know means I am in trouble and will hear all about it later. But she nods her head in agreement.

Chapter 30

Guinevere

The tournament commences on the main field, showcasing Galahad’s talent with the sword. Sir Gaheris gladly volunteered to be his sparring partner. Though not as skillful as his brother or cousin, Gaheris can keep up with Galahad’s quick footwork and jabs. They are fighting with blunted metal swords, which I’ve been told will not cause too much damage if one lands a blow.

I squeeze Arthur’s hand as Galahad does a dive roll to avoid Gaheris’ blunt blade. If you blinked, you would have missed Galahad’s quick pivot as he gracefully stands back up, nearly slicing Gaheris’ neck with the tip of his sword. This is all too much for me. I honestly do not know how I will get through the games.

When I was a kid, I loved going to the Medieval Times castle in Lyndhurst. My mom and I would go crazy, yelling and screaming for our knight, even if he was the bad guy. The fighting was so obviously choreographed. I knew nobody could get hurt for real. So I'd sip on my tomato soup, tear through my roasted chicken, and scream my throat hoarse.

Here, in Camelot, in the Middle Ages, this shit is not entertaining. And watching my son sword fight with a proper knight in front of the entire realm causes my stomach to churn. I feel like I cannot breathe with my heart in my throat. I know Gaheris will not hurt Galahad, but my son is putting all his strength and energy into this exhibit. He is desperate to show everyone his worth.

That is what this tournament is all about, isn't it? Sure, we want to unify all the kingdoms of England, but Galahad is our main event. He is the future. When the people see how well-educated he is, how seriously he takes his combat training, and even his musical skills, they will see the makings of a strong leader. A king of kings. Knowing that Excalibur has chosen Galahad makes it all the more convincing. So many people had been angry at Arthur, distrusting him after I had left Camelot. They thought he had lied. Now the people see Excalibur had chosen Arthur in choosing his son.

As the sword exhibition becomes more intense, Galahad glows. I have seen him do this before in practice. Arthur had asked Galahad to give the people a little glimpse of Excalibur. Anyone who had doubted that Excalibur existed within his son would have the proof they needed. Galahad leaps away from Gaheris as his sword swings low, letting the blunt blade fall to the ground, replaced by the unmistakable legendary sword.

All Galahad has to do is point Excalibur at Gaheris, who then drops his sword and kneels before my son. The crowd goes wild. Louder than any Medieval Times audience I had been part of. It makes my skin shiver. Though I was two seconds away

from losing my breakfast, I can't help but smile as the crowd's excitement fills me with pride.

Arthur and I stand up from our seats in the royal box to get a better look at Galahad in his victory. Lancelot remains seated beside Arthur's throne, beaming with pride. His smile matches the radiant one Galahad gives us as he looks up from the arena floor. The happiness I feel in this moment is squashed instantly as I hear Mordred and Maleagent talk loudly behind us.

"That was not a very fair move on the prince's behalf," Maleagent laughs.

"A coward's way out," Mordred agrees. The two of them have been all buddy-buddy for the past few days.

I spin around quickly to offer a few choice words, but Arthur beats me to it. "Then you misunderstand the purpose of this exhibition. My son has not only shown his exceptional skill with the sword, but now the people have seen with their own eyes that he is the bearer of Excalibur."

As the crowd continues to cheer their prince, Maleagent glares with a malevolence I want to wipe off with my fist. He catches me glaring back at him, shifting his face to that of innocent curiosity. "And how did your prince come to behold the sword of power?"

I answer proudly, pushing my shoulders back. "For a time, I was the vessel that carried Excalibur. It had been waiting for Galahad. Arthur and I were destined to create the one who would be chosen to rule all of Britain. And there he stands, with Excalibur in hand." I can feel Lance's gaze behind me, but I dare not look at him now. I only hope he is not giving too much away and can keep a stern face.

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“Hmmm. Then why did Excalibur hide itself in you and not King Arthur? If his son was to be this...chosen one, why was Arthur not chosen? Why would it hide in a woman? You were obviously not strong enough to wield its power. For all we know, any man could have taken you and forged the chosen one inside your womb,” Maleagent so boldly states.

Mordred’s wicked smile tells me he has been sharing all his thoughts with his pal Maleagent. Arthur will not take a public action against anyone who questions the validity of his son’s status. Such an act will show weakness and guilt, he says. Mordred has spoken in such a way countless times, and yet Arthur only banishes him to his room for a week or so. Maleagent is not Arthur’s nephew nor kin to him. The look on Arthur’s face makes it clear that he will not let such words be spoken about his son and wife.

Arthur grabs my hand and pulls me behind him, shielding me from any other vile words that might be sent my way. “King Bagdemagus, I think it best that you remove your son from my presence. If he has anything more to say regarding my wife and son, he can speak to me in private. I will not have my family dishonored.”

Bagdemagus stands up, placing a hand on Maleagent’s shoulder. “I apologize, King Arthur. My son does not know when to shut his big mouth. He thinks he is smarter than everyone, thinks he knows everything. Yet he is as intelligent as a turkey and as wise as a pile of shit.” His scowl matches the one on his son’s face. “Return to our tent and stay there until you have thought of a decent enough apology.”

“I will escort him.” Mordred is mid-way to standing when Arthur stops him.

“No. You will remain here with me and watch the games.” Arthur looks at Lance. He shakes his head at Arthur, silently telling him not to select him for the job. There is nothing I want more than for Lance to walk this shitbag back to his tent and beat the shit out of him. Something I am sure he would do. And that is why he cannot be the one to go. “Gawain, can you ensure Prince Maleagent safely returns to his tent?”

“Of course, your Highness.” Gawain stands from his seat beside Lance. He pats Lance on the shoulder before making his way over to Maleagent, whose scowl has turned even more—dare I say—malignant.

Elaine brings me back to my seat, offering me a cup of wine to cool my nerves. “Are you all right, Guinevere?”

I nod after taking a sip. Arthur is still standing at the banister, looking out into the arena where his knights are putting on a show of their strength. Lance joins him, chancing a glance at me before placing a hand on Arthur’s shoulder.

“What sort of plotting do you think Arthur and Lancelot are discussing over there?” Elaine whispers the question against my ear.

The thought sends a shiver down my spine at the thought of my husbands. “Could be any number of things,” I say aloud, letting my mind wander to the bed I share with them. The many nights we’ve explored each other. Testing our limits.

Elaine breaks my thoughts with another question. “Why did Arthur just let that man go? That is an action you take with a small child who does not know any better. But a grown man? He should be whipped for saying such a thing.”

I take Elaine’s hand in mine. “Punishing his guests would not look good for the whole unity idea of this tournament. Though I’d like to punch Maleagent in the fucking nose, it is better this way. We want peace, Elaine.”

“But he denounced Arthur as being chosen by Excalibur.”

I nod, looking back to my husbands who are now laughing heartily with each other. It warms my soul to see them so at peace. I feel safer knowing the three of us can live together peacefully and let our love be what it is.

I don't quite understand it, but I'm cool with it. I love Arthur and Lance is my everything. My love for him is second-nature. Arthur knows this. He understands what Lance is to me and me to him. Yet Arthur loves me anyway. He loves Lance. I never thought I'd be in a reverse harem-type situation. Never ever would I have even imagined it. It's fucking crazy. It's my normal now.

Lance and Arthur turn back toward me, offering me two brilliant smiles. Their eyes sparkle with love, devotion, and passion. I allow this moment to soak in for two seconds before turning away. We can't let anyone know how we feel. We can't let anyone know about us.

“Arthur is a kind and just king. He will see that the proper punishment is given. Something he will probably confer with King Bagdemagus.”

“I do not know how you do it,” Elaine sighs.

“Do what?” I ask, pressing my brows together.

“Sit here so elegantly, your emotions in check, your mind clear.” Elaine glances over at Lance and Arthur, then leans closer so only I can hear her whisper. “I know you still love him, and he you. You both hide it much better this time, but you cannot hide it from me.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” I smirk.

Elaine smiles back. “Are you hungry?”

I nod. Elaine gracefully scurries to the buffet table for some snacks. She returns with a plate full of cheese, bread, berries, and dried sausage. I cut a chunk of cheese, but as I bring it to my mouth, a wave of nausea makes me think better of it. I take some bread instead, washing it down with a handful of berries.

“No cheese?” Elaine asks with a mouthful of bread and cheese.

I shake my head.

“You never turn down cheese unless...” Elaine’s eyes bulge from their sockets. She grabs my hands in hers and pulls me close to whisper again. “Are you pregnant?”

“What? Nnnnn.” I was going to say “no,” but the truth is, I could be pregnant. Lance and I had been very careful, not wanting to risk having another child yet. With Arthur warming our bed so frequently now, we’ve not been as careful. Arthur and I have not been able to create a child together. He had said to me once before that he was sterile. So if I am pregnant, it is Lance’s.

“You are!” Elaine whispers loudly. “It is a miracle.”

All I can do is smile back. Elaine might know that I still love Sir Lancelot and that the White Knight’s love for me has not diminished. She cannot know that I am carrying Lance’s child. Not this time. I can trust Elaine now. She is an ally. Still, I will not burden her with this secret.

Chapter 31

Lancelot

I am startled awake as Guin launches herself off the bed, her coppery red locks darting behind her as she sprints behind the folding screen in the corner of her bedchamber. As I swing my legs over the bed, I hear Guin retching.

Arthur rolls over from the other side of the bed, still groggy from the early hour and lack of sleep. “Is Guinevere okay?”

“I do not know. She jumped out of bed and ran straight over to the corner. I was just about to check on her.”

Arthur massages his eyelids, rubbing the sleep from beneath, then searches the blankets for his clothes. I stretch my legs into my pants and let out a yawn. Together, we walk over to the corner where Guin has gone silent.

“Perhaps we were too rough with her last night. I should not have let her—”

“No,” I interrupt Arthur, “Guin can take it, trust me. I think she might be—”

“Pregnant. I’m pregnant,” Guin groans. She is still naked from rushing out of bed too quickly to even think about dressing. I am at her side in two strides, pulling her cold body to my warm chest.

“Arthur, can you grab her robe? The one hanging on the other side of the screen.

Guin is freezing.”

As he drapes the fabric around Guin’s back, he says, “How are you feeling, my dear?”

“Like I’m not done puking.”

On cue, Guin pushes off of me and releases the remaining contents of her stomach into the chamber pot. I hold her hair back as Arthur helps Guin get her arms through the robe. A few moments later, Guin collapses against me. “I don’t think there is anything more inside me. But I still feel so nauseous.”

“I will fetch you something to drink.” Arthur stands up and is out the door before either of us can respond.

I wrap my arms around Guin as gently as possible and place a kiss just below her jaw. “Do you want me to carry you back to bed?”

“No, I might puke again.”

“You need to lie down, rest. What if I bring over a fresh pot?”

“Okay. That would be nice then. I just don’t want to puke all over our bed.”

I chuckle as I lift her up slowly. Arthur walks in, accompanied by Elaine. “I thought you might be feeling worse today,” Elaine appraises.

“What do you mean?” I place Guin on the bed and take a cup of water from Elaine’s hands, slowly pouring the cold liquid down Guin’s throat.

“I was feeling queasy at the games yesterday. Well, all week. I thought maybe it was

just nerves.”

“When you could not stomach the sight of cheese,” Elaine says, “I knew then you were with child. You must be.”

All three of us look at Guin, but she just stares back at us, exhausted. Perhaps Arthur and Iwerea bit too rough with her last night. “Why are you shirtless, Lancelot? And where are your shoes?” Elaine asks.

“Oh, I uh...”

“I called down to him when Guinevere first appeared unwell,” Arthur attempts a lie, but Elaine sees right through it.

“Hmmm...and why, your Highness, are you wearing Lancelot’s shirt and yours is thrown on the ground over there?”

I follow Elaine’s pointed finger to the tunic on the floor, all rumpled up, but so obviously Arthur’s with a golden dragon peeking out from the wrinkles. Arthur and I can only stare at each other, at a loss for words. How are we going to get out of this one?

“Who is the father?” Elaine asks bluntly. She has grown braver in her womanhood. Bravery is something I do not have at this moment. The three of us have been so careful in public. Guin and Arthur remain a happy couple. I am their loyal chancellor. No one has suspected our secret. Now it is out in the open for Elaine to peer into. I am terrified at how she will react. Elaine raises her eyebrows. “Both of you, perhaps?”

I look away from her, into the eyes of my beloved wife. “Any child Guinevere bears is Arthur’s of course. She is his wife and queen.”

“Mm hmmm.” Elaine makes a sound I so often hear come from Guin. It startles me.
“And you two just happen to be in my queen’s bedchambers so early in the morning.
It is okay. Your secret is safe with me.”

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Elaine brushes by me to sit on the edge of the bed where Guin is lying. She presses her hand against Guin's forehead, then takes the cup of water from my hand. "You may go now. I will see that Guinevere is rested and well enough to attend the games later today."

Arthur and I remain motionless. Guin is pregnant. I do not wish to leave her side for a single moment now. I had missed so much with her. I want to be the one to take care of her now. Elaine might have suggested knowing our secret, but I do not want to give her visual evidence of it. Still, I am desperate to take Guin in my arms and never let her go. Guin is pregnant.

A smile perks the edge of Guin's mouth as our eyes meet. I relax, not realizing I have pulled my shoulders back so tightly. Arthur sighs, "Guinevere, will you be all right?"

"Of course. I'm in a much better emotional state than my last pregnancy. I will be fine. You guys go. There is much to do today. And you have to prepare for swords today, Lance."

I kneel next to the bed, not caring what Elaine sees. We can trust her. She is an ally. I place a gentle kiss on Guin's forehead. "Will you be there?"

"Even if I have to bring my puke bucket, I will be there. I wouldn't miss it. You are going to kick ass."

I laugh. The breath from my mouth tickles Guin's skin, causing it to pucker. "I love you," I say in English. "I know you were not ready for another child yet. I know you are scared. I am too. Still, I cannot help but feel overjoyed. I have dreamed of holding

our baby in my arms.”

Guin gently touches her fingertips to my face. I grab her hand with mine and press her palm to my lips as she says, “I love you, Lance.”

When I look at Elaine, she is studying Arthur’s face. He is smiling at Guin, a smile so full of love, pride, joy. Not the look of a man watching another fawn over his wife. Arthur truly loves Guin, me, us. I place my hand on Guin’s belly, still in shock that our child exists inside her. All I want to do is hop back in bed with my wife for the rest of the day. Instead, I stand up and walk over to Arthur on the other side of the bed. He places an arm around my shoulder as we exit Guin’s room. I hear Elaine tell Guin to explain herself before closing the door.

I part ways with Arthur as he makes his way to his bedchambers, and I head for my room downstairs. I pause mid-way. “Arthur,” I call up to him. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For giving me a family. Letting us be a family.”

“You will never have to thank me for such a thing, Lance. You have given me a family too.” Arthur walks down to where I stand on the stairs. “What we have is special. Though part of me struggles with the idea that we are all living in sin. Lies and deceit are not the worst of it. But how could something so good be bad? I know what we are doing could destroy us all. It could be the end of Camelot. Still, I cannot deny my happiness and that of my family. We deserve that much, do we not?”

I nod, my words stuck in my throat. “Can we trust Elaine?” Guin seems to trust her. But I need to know her motive. Why she has become so close to Guin.

“Yes.” Arthur chuckles. “Elaine is one of our spies.”

“A spy? Who would trust her when she is loyal to you?”

“Mordred. He is in love with her. Well, perhaps not in love. But he wants her.”
Arthur glances back at Guin’s room. “She pretends to be interested.”

“Interested? How?” I do not understand why I am suddenly angry. The idea of Elaine using her body to get secrets from Mordred makes my blood boil. Not because I am jealous. I have known Elaine since my youth. We are childhood friends. She deserves more than Mordred.

“I never ask for the details. Elaine is a lady, after all.”

I think about how she threw herself at me, coming at me in a moment of weakness. My cock slamming into her mouth. I am just as ashamed as I was then. To think of her doing that to Mordred fills me with more shame. Elaine deserves more than being used like I had used her, like Arthur is using her.

Sensing my concern, Arthur grabs me by the shoulders. “Elaine put herself in this position. She wanted to be useful, and when she saw an opportunity to gain Mordred’s trust, she took it.”

“How long has she been spying?”

“Since before you came back from the dead.”

“Mordred does not suspect a thing?”

Arthur shakes his head. “Guinevere gives her some things to say to Mordred. Little things that pique his curiosity.”

“Like what?”

“About still being in love with you. Pretending that I am you when we are in bed together. Only things Mordred can speculate, not accuse.”

I am still unconvinced by this situation. “And why was I not informed that she was a spy?”

“There are some secrets I need to keep from you, Lance. I am king.”

Chapter 32

Guinevere

I can't find Galahad anywhere. He could have gotten distracted with the castle so full of people and tournament events happening every hour. But it is not like him to miss our jam sessions. We've been playing music together more and more since the tournament began. The audience loved our concert and requested many encores. I am constantly amazed at how brilliant my son is and how quickly he picks up everything he tries. He even taught me a few things on the lute.

Granted, I taught myself how to play this thing. I stare down at the lute in my hands. A new one Arthur gifted to me after Mordred smashed my other one. The body is a light-colored wood, delicately inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Expensive but beautiful. It might look like a guitar, but the extra strings took some getting used to.

A wave of nausea hits me as I swing my lute behind my back, the soft leather strap gliding over my shoulder. I'm perhaps two months into my pregnancy. Thankfully, I am not getting as nauseous as I did with Galahad. Like clockwork, I'd vomit first thing each morning and then again before dinner, and about twenty times in between. This time, I only get a little queasy with occasional barf sessions.

Lance is having a tough time containing his affection and devotion for me. He didn't get to play his part as the terrified and eager dad when I was pregnant with Galahad. Now Lance has to hide his joy. Since he participates in nearly all the games, we rarely see each other. Which is a good thing. One of us is bound to slip. I know all he wants to do is hold me in his arms and place a hand over my belly. In the evenings, he will not take his hands off me. Not that I'm complaining.

Having his love back in my life is something I only thought possible in my dreams. It's a love I have wanted all my life. A love I was terrified to feel in my youth. A love that makes you feel alive. To have someone who will always be there, to hold you, to need you, to love you unconditionally. I've lived without Lance for most of my life. I've grieved losing him. I've spent too long yearning for him. He is mine. I am never giving him up.

After weaving through the crowds of people coursing through Camelot, I lean against a tree at the entrance to my garden. Well, it's not really my garden, but it might as well be with how often I come here. Galahad was meant to meet me here two hours ago. Where is he? Another wave of nausea hits me, causing me to close my eyes and bow my head.

"Are you praying, your Highness? I did not think you were the godly type." Ugh. I don't need to open my eyes to know whose voice that is, but I open them anyway, landing a vicious stare at Mordred. He's accompanied by his best bud, Maleagent. Great.

I promised Arthur I would behave. I will be the queen he needs me to be. "I am just catching my breath, waiting for my son to arrive."

"Your son, the chosen one?"

I turn my attention to Maleagent to answer his question. "Yes."

"Arthur had Galahad sent to his rooms. I think he is realizing just how much Galahad looks like his father." Mordred's smile needs to be removed. I am a queen full of grace. And there are witnesses.

"He's always looked like Arthur. Why would that be a reason to send him to his rooms during the tournament? Did something happen?"

Maleagent takes a step toward me. “Theprincelooked a bit...different. Something has happened, but we are unsure what. Would you like us to escort you to the keep? I would hate to see you rush and exhaust yourself when you are carrying a child within.”

I gasp. “How did you know I’m—“

“I did not know. But now I do.”

Fuck. I should have known he was playing me. That smirk of his needs to be removed. With all my strength, I press my nails into my palms and calm down. “Thank you for the offer of escorting me, but that will not be necessary. Good day to you both.”

“Good day indeed,” Mordred hums.

FUCK!

I am out of breath when I make it to the royal apartments. Loud voices within make my skin crawl with fear. I cannot hear the words they are saying though. Taking a deep breath, I reach for the door and open it. Lance is pacing back and forth in front of the barren fireplace, and Arthur is shouting at...

“Galahad?” I whisper. No, that can’t be my little nine-year-old boy. This boy is much taller than my son.

“Mom,” the boy says as he turns around. His eyes light up as if he hasn’t seen me in ages. My knees buckle. Lance has me in his arms before I hit the ground. He carries me over to a bench, placing me gently beside him. Galahad approaches my stunned glare timidly. As he stands next to Lance, it’s unmistakable. Galahad is Lance’s son. “Mom, I’m so sorry.”

“What did you do?” My jaw trembles as I look into the face of my son. He looks older. Not just a day older. Years older.

“I know you didn’t want me to travel again. But I had to. I need to learn how to control it in case I ever need to use it.”

“What did you do!” I shout.

“This morning, during my lessons with Merlin, I...” Galahad looks at Arthur, who nods back at him with a stern yet fearful look. “I traveled.”

“How far back did you go this time?” I hold on to Lance’s hand, terrified of what my son will tell me.

“Well...I had been traveling for a while now. Merlin told me not to travel too often or I could wear myself out. So once a month we would practice this magic. When successful, I would travel back a day. Then a week. A month. This last time, three years.”

I close my eyes to hold back the tears that threaten to break free. What Galahad said is fucking terrifying. “Where did you go? All that time, where have you been staying?”

“With Merlin for a bit. Then I went to his caves when he traveled to Joyous Gard with dad and me. I couldn’t come back here and risk running into myself or anyone else who would recognize me when I wasn’t supposed to be at Camelot.”

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“No. That would have been difficult to explain, wouldn’t it?” I’m beyond angry with Galahad. He disobeyed me. He put himself in danger. He could have traveled so far back that I would have never seen him again. “Does Merlin know what would happen if youwereto bump into yourself?”

“He has a theory, but there is no record of anyone ever possessing this power. It is a gift from Excalibur and Avalon.”

“What is his theory?” I think of all the time travel TV shows and movies I’ve watched in my past life in the future. There are loopholes, but in most cases, meeting yourself would cause a paradox. Is that even real? How is any of this real?

“He thinks that nothing bad would happen unless I try to change something. If I change my actions enough and I don’t end up traveling when I had done so, it could cause some...ripples.”

“Ripples...” I repeat. Then I turn to my husbands. “I assume neither of you knew about this until today?”

Lance squeezes the hand he’d been holding this whole time. “No,” he whispers as Arthur shakes his head. “This was reckless of you, Galahad.” I’d never heard Lance’s big dad voice. It’s kind of really sexy. I shake my head, telling my hormones to chill so I can stay focused.

“I know, dad. But it felt like the right thing to do.”

Arthur steps up. “Why did you not...uhh...travel back?”

“What do you mean?” Galahad asks.

“You said you traveled back three years. Why did you not travel back from then? Why did you stay there and live out those years away from us?”

Galahad rubs his brow. “The Merlin from back then said it would be dangerous. If I didn’t travel back on the exact day I had left, I could end up too far in the future, and everyone would think I’d gone missing.”

“But now? How do we explain that you have aged three years overnight? You are no longer our little prince, but a young man. The attention this will bring is the last thing we need with Guinevere now pregnant.” Arthur’s voice raises in anger again.

“Mom’s pregnant? I’m going to have a brother or sister?” The wide smile on Galahad’s face makes him look like the little boy I remember. I can’t help but cry. And crying leads to sobbing. Galahad falls to his knees. “I’m so sorry, mom. It felt like the right thing to do. I missed you so much. There were days I would sneak into Camelot and listen to you and I play our lutes together in the garden. I know that was reckless, even more reckless than time travel. But mom, don’t you see how important it is for me to hone this magic inside me? If things ever turn for the worst here, if you are ever in trouble, I can bring you back to your home.”

“This is my home, Galahad. I no longer have a life in the future. The three of you are my life, my home.” Though I believe this to my core, I wonder if I would actually still have a life with my dad if I ever returned.

Lance clears his throat. “Perhaps Galahad is right.”

“What?” Arthur and Galahad say in unison.

“Guin has told us all what will happen here in Camelot. Maybe we have found a way

around the destruction she has spoken of. What if we have not? What if we walk that path to destruction even now? There will be no safe place for you, Guin. Now that you are with child...”

“Okay, okay, I get it. I just can’t think about this right now. I don’t want to think of it.”

“Guinevere,” Arthur sits down next to me so that I am now surrounded by my guys. “They are right. You need a safe haven. This is it. As much as it tears my heart to think about you gone—all three of you—it would ease the pain knowing you are all safe.”

My mind is racing, my heart aching, my body shaking. We are safe now. Mordred and his new bestie are all talk. The people will not listen to them. We will be safe. I quietly push myself off the bench and pull Galahad into a suffocating embrace. But I’m too shaken to keep a tight grip on him.

“I need to lie down,” I say as I loosen my grip around Galahad’s shoulders. Lance walks me up to my bedroom where he lies down beside me, cradling me against his body. I fall asleep with his hand on my belly and his breath against my neck.

Chapter 33

Lancelot

As chancellor to King Arthur, I am charged with maintaining peace in Camelot, spreading the message of unity, and keeping everyone’s minds at ease. The latter is difficult to do with Maleagent and Mordred spreading the news that Guin is with child. Their intent is no doubt to discredit the king and queen. Brewing questions about why they are keeping such a secret. Why Guin and I are never seen together anymore. Why I am allowed a room in the royal apartments. How Galahad has

seemed to age overnight and looks more like me than Arthur.

Arthur is ignoring the rumors and questions for now, as he plans to make an official announcement soon. Guin thinks it is still too early to announce since she is likely only a couple of months into her pregnancy. Still, we must do something to stop the whispers and the side glances.

At the same time, I want nothing more than to scream the truth to everyone. It is suffocating me.

Ever since Elaine found out about this arrangement Guin, Arthur, and I have made with each other, I've wanted to tell more people. If Elaine can accept the truth, shouldn't everyone else? My irrational brain wants to believe they can. I know they would never allow such a sin from their Christian king. I sometimes forget how closed-minded folk can be because their god deems every carnal thought a sin. So we keep quiet, keep the questions unanswered, hoping the crowd will calm down.

Walking through the campsite filled with lords, ladies, knights, and their servants, I am greeted cordially enough. A smile here, a nod there, the occasional side glance. Sir Kei, one of Arthur's trusted knights, walks alongside me as an extra pair of eyes and ears scanning the crowds for any threat. The Unity Tournament is coming to a close this week after a month of games, banquets, and friendly competition. There have only been the normal incidences of drunken violence. A small flame easily extinguished with a bucket of water.

The knights of Camelot have been working tirelessly over the last two months to ensure the safety of every one of our guests. Their queen has commanded that every woman has a companion at all times. Guin calls it "the buddy system." If we see a woman alone, we must offer to escort her to her destination. Camelot has always been a safe place. The only time an act of violence was taken here was when Melwas and his men kidnapped Guin and murdered the guards at the southern gate. This will not

happen again, even with the castle and nearby grounds swarming with strangers.

Mordred and Maleagent are the only two I am concerned about. I am unsure how far they will go with their campaign against Guin. An informant had told me that the pair make appearances at the alehouse in the village, whispering their gossip into any ears that are drunk enough to listen. I am hoping to stumble upon them and put a stop to their tirade. As Kei and I approach the edge of the camp, I can already hear their voices shouting amidst a drunken crowd. We keep our distance, standing behind a rickety building. Stones had been hastily cemented together to build the walls, and a thatched roof was placed on top. Some of the straw juts out just a little too much, offering us shade from the blazing afternoon sun.

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The two men I am looking for are seated outside at a wooden table, joined by two of King Nentres' men and a lady. Her back is to me, so I cannot make out who she is.

"We have been waiting years for our queen to produce another heir for our king," Mordred spews after taking a deep sip of his drink. "Now that she is with child, they keep it a secret? Why? What else are they keeping from us?"

Mordred's voice becomes louder as he speaks. The people at the table next to him glare in anger. "And how do you know the queen is pregnant?" A woman at the table over asks.

Maleagent answers with a cocky smile. "The queen let it slip to me the other day. Did she tell you, Elaine?"

Elaine? Why is she here? I know Arthur said she was a spy, but this seems a bit of a blatant move to be sitting out in public with Mordred and Maleagent. "She did not have to, I guessed," Elaine says with a laugh. "But it is too soon to be certain. The baby inside might not survive. It is more likely that they are waiting until they are sure that Guinevere and the baby are healthy before making the announcement."

"Hmmm, and how long will that take?" Maleagent tosses the rest of his drink down his throat, slamming the tankard to the table.

"Usually a couple of months. But, you should know this, Maleagent. Do you not have a wife and children?" Elaine sounds innocent and sweet, but I know it is a jab at his ignorance. Perhaps her role as a spy is also to sew in the truth, make sure Mordred and his companion do not overstep too much.

“I do. Four boys.” Maleagent winks at Elaine. “But I do not bother myself with womanly details.”

“I see,” Elaine tuts. “So, why concern yourself with Queen Guinevere’s womanly details?”

“Elaine,” Mordred warns.

“I thought you said this lady of yours was on your side. Seems to me like she is just another pawn stuck up your queen’s cunt,” Maleagent scoffs.

Elaine speaks before Mordred can answer, glaring at him. “I am no one’s lady.”

Mordred grabs Elaine by the jaw. “Is that what you think?”

Thin, feminine fingers reach up and gently flick Mordred’s rough fingers from her face. “Yes,” she says sternly, staring into his eyes, daring him to counter her. But all he does is smile. I am stunned. Mordred must truly be in love with Elaine. If anyone else spoke to him in such a way, they would not have received a smile.

He clears his throat, keeping his eyes fixed on Elaine’s. “What news do you bring to us from the royal apartment? Have you witnessed our beloved White Knight breaking his vows yet?”

My skin tingles. Perhaps I should not have shown Guin such affection in front of Elaine. Arthur trusts her, and he does not easily trust. I must put my faith in Elaine. “The White Knight remains pure,” she says.

One of the other men sitting with them at the table perks up at Elaine’s statement and asks, “Are you speaking of Lancelot?” Elaine nods her head in response before he continues with his next inquiry. “There have been many rumors about him and the

queen. Were they once married?"

"Legally, they are still married, but he has stepped aside since he had been gone for eight years. Guinevere moved on and married Arthur in his absence," Maleagent answers coldly.

"We all thought him dead, Maleagent." Elaine's voice quivers, doing her best to sound neutral.

The second man, an older knight with a head covered in gray hair, chimes in, "It is all quite strange. And now Lancelot lives with them in the royal apartments instead of having his own rooms. That would seem more appropriate. If I were Arthur, I would banish Lancelot, keep him away from my wife."

Maleagent jumps in to add, "There is definitely something unseemly going on behind closed doors. I would not be surprised if Guinevere sneaks into Lancelot's room at night."

That is my cue to make my presence known. I signal to Kei, telling him to come in on the other side of the table. "Would you like to make this accusation known to the king? Or shall I tell him of your...theories?"

"It seems a fair question, does it not, gentlemen...lady?" Maleagent emphasizes the last word, scanning the others at the table, his eyes landing on Elaine.

"What exactly is the question you are asking?" I bring his attention back to me.

"Did you impregnate Queen Guinevere? Is she hiding your brat inside her as she is now hiding your son as Arthur's heir?"

Kei walks up on the other side of the table, placing a hand on Maleagent's shoulder.

“You should watch your tongue. It is known that our prince was conceived out of wedlock. But he is our prince. He is the heir to the throne of Camelot. Our queen is loyal to her king. As is our chancellor. To suggest otherwise would give us reason to arrest you.”

“Are you another pet of the queen’s? She seems to have so many loyal...knights by her side.” Maleagant is relentless, more so than Mordred.

It takes all my strength not to skewer the man right here for speaking about my Guinevere in such a way. I want to wring his neck, snapping every bone within. I want to rip his tongue out. Gut him like a fish. Slam his head against a rock until he is unrecognizable. Cut off his—

“I seem to have struck a nerve with you, Sir Lancelot. Did I offend your lady’s honor?”

“Maleagant, enough,” Elaine whispers harshly, as Mordred chuckles heartily. “You should not say such things. Lancelot is sworn to protect the king and queen, which includes their honor. If you dishonor them, of course Lancelot will act accordingly.”

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My eyes never leave Maleagent, though I am saying a silent thank you to Elaine. Not that her interjection has likely helped the situation before me, but she has given me a moment to calm down.

Before I can respond, Maleagent continues his rant. “So then, if I were to dishonor King Arthur in front of his men, I would get the same response?”

“If you show any dishonor toward my king and queen, you will be punished as I see fit,” Kei explains.

A villainous smile breaks out on Maleagent’s face, ignoring Kei and looking straight into my eyes. “Does the king enjoy watching you plow his wife, or perhaps he joins in, the both of you filling your whore of a queen?”

That last statement sends a panic of ice through my veins, but I melt the panic with my rage. I remove my hands from the hilt of my sword and slam my hands onto the table. “Our king invited you to our Unity Tournament because he seeks peace and a stronger, unified Britain. But all you seem to want to do here is divide and conquer. I will not allow it. You will answer for your slanders on the dueling ground. And King Arthur himself will place judgment on you after I have defeated you.”

Maleagent rolls his eyes and glances at Mordred, who looks slightly frightened. Even he is shocked by the words Maleagent so boldly let fall from his lips. “And what if I defeat you, Sir Lancelot?”

“That will not happen.”

Kei helps boost my claim. “Sir Lancelot, the White Knight and Chancellor of Camelot, has never lost a sword fight. He has defeated twenty foes on his own. Killed a dragon. Fought against demons in unknown lands. When he wields his sword, it is as if God himself is grasping the hilt, landing each blow with purpose. You will be lucky enough to survive to receive your judgment from King Arthur.”

“Then at least give me a week to prepare myself,” Maleagent says with less confidence in his voice. His friends have slowly backed away from him. Even they think he has gone too far. Elaine just shakes her head.

“No.” I pause, staring into his eyes. “We meet first thing in the morning at the main arena.”

I do not give him a chance to respond. Turning on my heels, I head directly for the castle. But before I make it to the other end of the alehouse, I can hear Elaine call Maleagent a “stupid, arrogant man.” I cannot just leave Elaine. Seeing her with Mordred would have been shocking had I not known she was a spy. It still was a shock. Turning quickly back around, I shout to Elaine. “Come with us, now. We have to talk about the company you keep.”

“I am only having a drink with my fellow countrymen. Is this not what our tournament is for? Unity?” She glares at me, but I can tell it is for show. I hide a smirk that tingles in the corner of my mouth.

“Now, Elaine.”

She lets out a dramatic huff, then begrudgingly gets up and steps in time between Kei and me. The role of spy suits her well. Even I am left with a dull feeling of doubt about her loyalty. Arthur trusts her, I remind myself.

Chapter 34

Lancelot

I wake up with Guin in my arms. Her dark copper curls are the only blanket covering my naked body. She was so angry with me for initiating a duel with Maleagent. Supposedly, I kill him in one of the King Arthur stories she has read. Good. I cannot wait. I have been dreaming of ways to torture him since he dishonored Guin at the opening of the tournament.

But I will play fair today. I will defeat Maleagent in an honorable duel. When I am victorious, Arthur will place judgment on him. If Arthur decides the bastard must die, I will gladly thrust my sword into his chest. I clench my fist at the thought of getting to fight him in just a few hours.

I had hoped to fight Mordred in the games. The day we were due to fight, he claimed to be sick. Coward. It is hard to believe this man is Arthur's kin. He is nothing like my king. Nothing. Mordred is cruel, vile, selfish, and power-hungry. With Maleagent by his side, their hate and selfishness are poison. A poison I will cure today.

Guin stirs above me, likely feeling my chest pounding with excitement, fear, anger. Delicate fingers brush up along my torso, gliding against my jawline, turning me toward the forest that is Guin's eyes. How I wish to get lost there, every day, all day, for eternity. "Don't go," she whispers. "Please, Lance. It doesn't feel right."

"Perhaps it does not feel right because it is not supposed to happen. Is that not what we are trying to do? Change what happened?"

Guin lets out a long sigh. Her breath tickles the hair on my chest, making my skin ignite in gooseflesh. I want nothing more than to bury myself deep inside my wife, but I know she is tired. It is early yet, and she had gotten out of bed a few times to empty her bladder throughout the night. And sometimes, her stomach. Even though she says she is all right, that she was worse in the early months carrying Galahad, I

still worry. Our child is growing inside her belly. I will never stop worrying.

I roll into her, placing my palm on her stomach, imagining the child within. “Do you think it is a girl or boy?” I whisper into her forehead, giving her a soft kiss.

“I haven’t really thought much about the gender. I just can’t wait to meet our child. To see you hold such a little thing in your arms.”

I smile against her forehead and pull her against me so that every inch of our flesh touches. Whenever we are this close, I swear I can feel magic of our own pulsing through our bodies. “If we have a girl, I would be terrified.”

“Why?” Guin asks, nuzzling my neck and tracing my collarbone with her soft lips.

“Because I know what thoughts run through a man’s mind, and I do not want such thoughts to be made about my daughter. I am afraid I would kill any boy who looks at her.”

Guin’s laughter shakes the mattress beneath me. She pushes me over on my back and launches herself on top of me in astraddle. “And what thoughts are running through your mind right now, my love?”

“Mmmmm. Do you really want to know?”

“No,” Guin leans down so that our lips barely touch. “I want you to show me.”

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Maleagent tries to throw off my concentration by spewing more vile words about my queen, my wife. I remain silent through them all as he wastes his energy, swinging his broadsword higher than necessary, trying to land a blow to my chest. He likely thinks if he can knock the wind out of me, he will have me at a disadvantage. I am not letting him anywhere near me. As he pulls his sword back, I notice the weak spots in his armor. The pit of his arms, the neckline where the gorget meets his helm, and even in the back, there is a small gap.

His armor is burdensome. With every step he takes, his footsteps are heavy and loud. I never enjoy wearing armor, but I am grateful for our skilled blacksmiths. In my armor, I can move faster, more nimbly on my feet to avoid every potential blow directed my way.

“Stop running away from me, coward, and fight. Your whore is watching you. Do you not wish to impress her, or does she get wet at cowardice? That would explain why she is married to a pansy of a king.”

I let my anger feed my strength. Our swords connect with a long clang, sending Maleagent backward with a menacing blow. The metal of our blades slides away from each other, and I remain silent as Maleagent continues to attack me with his words. The mental game he is playing will not work on me today.

“Why are you not defending your whore and that coward of a king?” He spews, attempting to land a jab at my side, which I deflect with ease. I can tell Maleagent is growing tired, his breath ragged and shallow. It is time to show him just how good I am with a sword.

I leap backward, giving him the idea that I mean to stay away from his reach. He immediately raises his sword. As soon as I land on my feet, I rush forward, my hands firmly gripping the hilt of my sword as I hold it up against Maleagent's blow. He fumbles backward, nearly losing his grip. I spin around using the momentum and Maleagent's vulnerable position to kick him down to the ground.

His sword falls from his hand as he lands on the soft dirt of the arena. The crowd's cheers and yells fall silent for a second. I take my time walking over to Maleagent, not wanting to end this fight so quickly. I mean to make him look weak. I want the crowd to cheer for Arthur's judgment, whatever it might be. Maleagent crawls over to his sword, rolling away from my half-hearted jab. On his feet again, Maleagent remains quiet as our blades clash.

With each swing, I bring my sword down harder and harder until he groans in frustration, unable to keep up his strength. I smile triumphantly through my helm, and I know Maleagent can see my face as I deflect his last blow. The movement of our swords turns him to the side, giving me a small window to slice at the exposed fabric underneath his armor.

A scream pierces the air. I believe I have made Maleagent angry. But his anger does not make him a better swordsman. It makes him sloppier. I swing faster and faster, landing blows to his shoulder, side, thigh, and finally, his helm. The last blow stuns him long enough for me to kick Maleagent back down to the ground. I step on the blade of his sword and aim the point of mine at his exposed neck. With my foot, I kick Maleagent's sword away from him.

I remove my helm, looking up to see Arthur is now standing at the railing of the royal box. Guin still sits, looking paler than usual. I know she was frightened, but I told her I would win, and win I did. For her, for Arthur, for Camelot. I will never lose when I fight for honor. Still, seeing her in such distress makes my chest clench in pain. When we are alone later, I will make her forget all her fears.

Arthur silences the crowd with a simple gesture. “This unscheduled duel brings much sorrow to my heart. It was fought with honor on the part of our White Knight and chancellor, Sir Lancelot. An honor soiled with unsolicited and slanderous words from one of my guests. Prince Maleagent, I hope you will accept my mercy as I accept your defeat as an apology for your vile words against me and my wife. The purpose of this tournament is to demonstrate that we can be a united country. United under one ideal. Peace. And the protection of our land and people. In keeping with this aim, I will place your judgment on the shoulders of your father.” Arthur turns toward the seats within the royal box, motioning behind him. “King Bagdemagus.”

The robust man rises from his seat to stand next to Arthur, his wide shoulders held back in confidence, not the defeat of witnessing his son losing a duel. I quickly glance behind him to check on Guin. There is more color on her face now, but she still looks nervous. I sheath my sword and kick Maleagent’s further away before stepping away from him as he faces his punishment.

“My son, I have never been more disappointed in you than I am on this day. You have disgraced yourself by dishonoring your host, a most gracious king. For your actions, I am taking away your claim to my throne. Knowing you cannot hold yourself with grace and nobility, I see clearly that you are not fit to wear my crown.”

“What?” Maleagent rises from the ground. “You cannot take my crown from me for speaking the truth about King Arthur and his whore of a wife.”

“That is enough,” King Bagdemagus bellows.

But it is not enough for Maleagent. I can feel him move behind me at the same time I hear Guin shriek my name. The knife nearly slices my throat, but I step back and grab the hand holding it. In one swift move, the same knife sinks deep into the opening of Maleagent’s armor. Blood pours from his neck, coating my hand within seconds. I quickly remove the helm on his head, falling to the ground with Maleagent in my

arms and try to stop the bleeding. It is no good. With one last gurgled breath, Maleagent looks up at me, a wicked smile plastered on his face.

Chapter 35

Arthur

Chaos. My castle is in chaos. Bagdemagus punished his son in front of all my court and guests, stripping Maleagent of his royal title. I had thought it a harsh punishment, but he did it for me. Because he had chosen my side. Chosen the truth I carved out of lies. The guilt weighs heavily on my heart to continue to lie to the man, to everyone. But no one would understand. No one would allow Guinevere, Lancelot, and me to be together.

So I try to focus on what is important. Bagdemagus believed in the Britain I have been dreaming of. His son did not. Maleagent only wanted to destroy me. Why? I cannot say. He spent much time with Mordred, who most likely poisoned his mind against Guinevere and Lancelot.

Maleagent's death shocked Bagdemagus, leaving him distraught at the sudden loss of his son. Everyone saw Maleagent meant to kill Lancelot after the duel. He attacked from behind in desperation. I just do not understand why. Perhaps he knew Lance would kill him, that chaos would erupt and threaten to bring down everything I have worked so hard to build here.

Why? I have been asking myself this question over and over. Why? Am I being punished for taking Guinevere as my wife? I thought—no—knew I was doing the right thing. I blamed myself for losing Lance. Yes, I believed having Guinevere as my wife would make my life easier, would bring peace to the realm much faster, and carry me to the seat of power I was destined for. But now? Everything is falling apart. I must have done something wrong. Something to offend God.

Thinking of the nights I spend with Guinevere and Lancelot should fill me with shame. My sinful love for a wife I share with another man does not feel shameful though. It feels pure. For God to punish me for loving my wife, for loving Lance, seems wrong. He would not punish me for trying to bring happiness to the people I love most.

And Galahad. I had promised Guinevere that I would look after her child no matter her decision. I would have kept that promise even if she never wanted to marry me. If the realm believed Galahad was Lance's and not mine. But he is my son. I have raised him as my own since his first breath. I have loved him as my own since before Guinevere let me in her life.

I have sacrificed everything for my kingdom, for Britain. Was it too much to ask for happiness? To have a family? To feel loved? I have been alone most of my life, trusting few, and loving less. So much was taken from me when I was young. I grew up quickly, alone, except for Merlin and a small group of followers loyal to my father, who were then loyal to me.

For decades, I have been fighting a war with the minds of all the kings in Britain. I fought to keep my claim to the throne when I should have been playing with wooden swords. Now, I am fighting to show the realm a better world. A world where we are all one unified country. I do not want this power, this destiny, this throne. But that is the crown I am meant to bear. I will fight for it until the day I die. Still, it has all come at a terrible cost.

When I finally felt like my life was full, that I could have more than just a heavy crown, it all crumbled to dust. Why am I being punished? Have I not lost enough, sacrificed enough, fought enough?

Bagdemagus' men took Lancelot, and I cannot do a thing about it without risking the unity I have fought so hard for. With Mordred whispering into the king's ear, filling

his deranged grief-filled mind, I worry about what they will do with my White Knight.

The arena had been packed with people curious to see Sir Lancelot fight Prince Maleagent. Every one of them witnessed the scene after the duel. Lancelot was defending himself. Though most people were on Lance's side, especially after he was taken away, their memories have faded and rumors are ringing loudly within my castle walls.

Guinevere is beside herself with worry. She wants me to send my strongest knights and demand that Lancelot be released. If Bagdemagus does not hand him over, Guinevere told me to kill him. She is obviously grieving. Anger is her way of defending her heart. She reacted similarly when I told her Lance had died all those years ago. I cannot threaten Bagdemagus though. I need to stay true to my message of unity. The people will see reason. They must.

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With Gawain at my side, I head for the tent where Bagdemagus and his company have set up camp. This is a routine I have repeated for the last five days to plead for Lancelot. As I approach the makeshift prison Bagdemagus' men had built to hold Lancelot, two guards halt me from proceeding further. "I would like to speak to my chancellor."

"You must first speak withourking," the guard snarks, leaving strands of spittle on his rust-colored beard.

"I come here every day and am granted a visit."

The other guard motions me to the extravagant tent sitting across from Lance's prison. "Alright, alright. I am going in." I glance at Lance hunched over on the ground. A beard hides his tired face. He keeps a brave face, hiding the desperation I know he feels. I will get him out. I nod in his direction before stepping into the tent.

Bagdemagus sits at a desk, his head in his hands. The other man in the tent, Alfred I think his name is, stands up abruptly. "My king is indisposed at the moment. Come back later."

"No," I say defiantly to Alfred, but he insists I leave as Bagdemagus is in no mood to speak with me.

"It is fine, Alfred. I will speak with Arthur." He motions me to sit opposite him at his desk. As I sit in the chair Alfred had been occupying, I notice dark circles under Bagdemagus' eyes. He has not been sleeping. I continue examining his face, even though he has not yet looked up at me.

“I know you are grieving, Bagdemagus, and I am truly sorry for your loss.”

Bagdemagus holds up a hand to stop me from speaking further, rising from his chair.

“I have heard this speech from your mouth a dozen times, and I know what is coming next. The answer is ‘no.’ We will not release Lancelot. We will put him on trial.”

“Trial?” I suppress a laugh. “Bagdemagus, it was defense. The entire arena saw what happened. You saw what happened. Maleagent meant to kill Lancelot in cold blood.”

“And yet Lancelot is alive while my son is dead. Someone needs to pay.”

“I know you want justice, but you will not get it with Lancelot. He is my chancellor. He was defending my honor and that of my queen. After winning a respectable duel, your son attempted to slit his throat. How is it justice by imprisoning a man who was defending himself?”

Bagdemagus sighs, collapsing into his chair. “I cannot just let Lancelot go, Arthur. He killed my son.”

“Your son thought he could win a duel against Lancelot. And then, after he was humiliated by the loss and punishment you gave him, he attacked Lancelot. I understand you are upset. You had dismissed your son in public, and then he died. That must not sit well in your heart. I can only imagine how you feel. Just the idea of losing Galahad in such a manner, or at all, guts me. I truly am sorry.”

A laugh escapes from the hands that hide his grief. As Bagdemagus lowers his hands, his sharp laughter fades. “Your Galahad is nothing like my son. If ever you lost him, it would be a loss the entire realm would feel. Every kingdom would place a monument in his memory, even those who oppose your rule. Galahad is everything my son could never be. You are a lucky man to have such a son.”

“Thank you, Bagdemagus.” I pat my eyes before tears fall from them.

“Perhaps there is a way to get the justice my son deserves, for even though he was a cruel and selfish man, he was still my son.” I motion my hand out to Bagdemagus, letting him know to go on. “Mordred.”

A chill runs down my spine as he speaks my nephew’s name. I wait for him to continue, but he seems to be waiting for me to say something. What should I say? I know Mordred and Maleagent were...friends. Is that the right word for what they were? Mordred clung to anyone who would listen to his nonsense. Nonsense that bordered treachery and betrayal, even though it was true. But he has no proof. Elaine made sure of that.

“What of my nephew?” I ask, leaving the anger and disappointment out of my voice.

“He poisoned my weak-minded son into believing certain things about your queen and chancellor and continues to try and sway me. To me, he sounds like a jealous little boy upset at his uncle for giving away the throne he believes should be his. And my son, he ate it up. He loved to stir up drama, pit friends against each other, tear families apart. He was very good at it. Mordred used him to attempt an attack on your family. I do apologize on his behalf. I should have stopped him before he said anything to dishonor you and Guinevere.”

“No apologies are necessary from you,” I say.

Bagdemagus nods, accepting my forgiveness. “Let us put Mordred on trial. He has done enough damage in your court and now has brought down my son.”

My chest clenches at Bagdemagus’ suggestion. It takes everything I have to keep a calm demeanor as I think about what Guinevere has told me. About the last battle I will fight and the mortal wound I will receive by my nephew’s hand. For years, I

have kept Mordred in my line of sight. Watching him glare in my direction. His love and loyalty for me turning into hate and anger. All because I have a son. Still, I give Mordred freedom at Camelot, only shutting him up when he crosses a line. And he has crossed a line here. He got a man killed.

If I agree to this, if I put my nephew on trial, will this be the catalyst that leads to my final battle? I hold back a shiver and look into Bagdemagus' eyes. A simple nod is all he needs to see that I have agreed to his request.

“Thank you, Arthur. I know this is a difficult thing to ask of anyone.”

“It is time that Mordred answers for his actions.”

I open the door to my private apartments, Lancelot following close behind. We walked the entire way here in silence; an understanding passed between us when the door to his makeshift prison opened. He nodded and fell in step with me. Looking straight ahead, I ignored all the curious faces staring at us.

The walk back to our little corner of the castle was an eternity. The entire way, I kept replaying my conversation with King Bagdemagus. There is no other way. But what does it say of me to sacrifice my nephew instead of my chancellor?

Still, I know I have made the right choice. When I see Lancelot holding his wife, our wife, in his arms, there was no other choice I could have made. I could never have punished Mordred before for simply passing on rumors about my son and wife. There was never much harm in his words because they were woven with jealousy. He never attacked my family. Now that he has offended another king, we can safely denounce him.

“Father, how did you get King Bagdemagus to release dad?” I smile at my son, still shocked at how much older he is, not just his face but his voice and courage.

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“Sit. I need to speak with all of you.”

Guinevere pulls herself from Lance’s embrace, keeping a hand tightly threaded with his. “I don’t like the sound of that. Just tell me that my three guys are safe before I have a heart attack.”

I smile at Guinevere and her dramatics. “We are safe, my dear. Though still treading rough waters.”

We sit together around the fireplace. Galahad sprawls out on a bench while I take the large armchair. Lance and Guinevere take the other bench together, sitting so close I could not tell where their bodies touched. How could anyone forbid their love? They were molded as one, their bodies and souls. To keep them apart would be the greatest of sins. I will never let that happen.

“Mordred is to be put on trial.” I pause, letting the statement settle in their minds. “Before you ask questions, I know this could mean my downfall is near. But I refuse to let Lancelot be punished for something Mordred is responsible for.”

“But Arthur,” Lancelot says, “I am the one who killed King Bagdemagus’ son. I challenged him to a duel.”

“A duel you fought for my honor. Honor that was besmirched thanks to my ungrateful and disloyal nephew. It is time that he pays for his actions and his words.”

“When will the trial begin?” Galahad asks, curling his legs into his chest.

“Gawain stayed behind with King Bagdemagus’ men. They will keep Mordred under house arrest. I will make arrangements for the trial to begin in two days.”

Guinevere gasps. “What of the tournament? The last of the games and all the awards. Shouldn’t the trial wait until the tournament is over? We can keep Mordred locked up for a week.”

Lancelot unlaces his hand from Guinevere’s and wraps his arm around her shoulders, pulling her even closer. “This cannot wait, Guin. A man was killed. Someone must be held responsible. Perhaps that someone should be me. I am the one who sunk a knife into his throat. But the alternative was to let him slit mine.”

Guinevere grabs Lancelot’s bearded jaw, pulling his gaze to hers. “Don’t talk like that. Ever. Again.”

“Father,” Galahad whispers, bringing our attention to where he sits curled up on the bench. “What if I use my powers to go back in time to make sure this doesn’t happen?”

“No.” Lancelot answers for Arthur. “Merlin said you cannot change what has passed. If you try to change it, you could make things worse.”

“This could be what causes the collapse of Camelot.” Worry etches the lines of Galahad’s face. This boy. This young man is always so poised, calm, and collected. Rarely ever showing signs of vulnerability. Galahad might have grown up in the blink of an eye, but he is just a scared little boy in this moment.

Guinevere pulls herself out of Lancelot’s embrace and rushes to her son. “We don’t know what it will be. We can only choose our own paths and hope they lead us to an end where we all live happily ever after. I’ve been afraid of how this story will play out for us, but we cannot make a move that will put us at a greater risk. You traveling

in time to change something we have all witnessed would most definitely be an unnecessary danger. What if you run into yourself? What if you arrive on the wrong day? What if you can't get back? The unknown future is terrifying, but we have each other today. We will find the right path together."

I stand up with Lancelot, surrounding Galahad and Guinevere, needing to hold our family. Guinevere sounded so confident we could make it through this together. I do not share this confidence. Fear consumes me. Fear of losing all that I hold in my arms in this moment. I was delusional to believe I could have this, that my life could be full of love, light, and joy. My future was always destined to be one of solitude. Until that future, I will soak up every memory with my family. Every moment of happiness. Every minute I get to hold my wife and son close to my heart.

Chapter 36

Guinevere

The throne room has been transformed into a courtroom. As Arthur and I enter the hall, silence falls on the crowd. A crowd full of unreadable faces. A crowd that should be enjoying tournament games and celebrating unity. Instead, they've come to watch the king's nephew be put on trial by another king whose son had died at the hand of Lancelot, the White Knight of Camelot.

Two solid tables face each other in front of the throne. Mordred sits alone at one table while King Bagdemagus stands at the other, flanked by Alfred and Lance. I steal a glance at my love as Arthur and I pass through the tables with Galahad behind us, making our way to the thrones on the dais. From my seat, I have a view of the entire room. The mass of people makes a perfect semi-circle around the tables now in front of me, keeping a respectful distance thanks to our knights keeping guard.

Looking out at the crowd, I can't help but recall the first time I walked into this room

as the White Enchantress, holding Excalibur at my side. There was an air of excitement filled with expectation then. Now, there is grief, confusion, worry. There is no outcome that will appease everyone here. King Arthur has allowed his own nephew to be tried for the death of a prince. My heart clenches with anxiety. My stomach churns, and not from being pregnant. I didn't want to come, but Arthur said it was expected. I must keep my composure, no matter what Mordred says.

Galahad is the last to sit, taking his place next to Arthur. Once the three of us are seated, Arthur motions to King Bagdemagus to start. Lance and Alfred sit beside him, but Bagdemagus remains standing. "Before we begin, I wanted to make a public apology to King Arthur for imprisoning his man, Lancelot, the chancellor of Camelot. I had acted in grief and was not thinking clearly. Yet our gracious host still gave me the time to grieve and helped me see reason. Not every man would allow his own kin to be put to trial. King Arthur is known for his mercy, his kindness, and his fierceness in battle. I hope to live up to your ideals and show mercy to your kin. Through this trial, I only wish to gain the truth."

Bagdemagus pauses before sitting down, waiting for Arthur's nod of approval. Alfred stands to begin the proceedings, asking Mordred questions about his friendship with Maleagent. "You have known our prince for many years now, correct?"

Mordred rolls his eyes as he falls deeper into the wooden chair he sits upon, crossing his arms in disappointment. "Yes. Shall I remind you that Maleagent was no longer a prince, as his father stripped him of that title just before Sir Lancelot murdered him?"

"King Bagdemagus stripped Maleagent from his right to rule Gorre. As we have all witnessed, Mordred. He was and will be remembered as a prince. We are here to gain insight into the events that lead up to the duel and the unfortunate death of Prince Maleagent."

Alfred pauses for a brief moment before continuing. "Sir Lancelot challenged the

slanders Prince Maleagent spoke regarding King Arthur and Queen Guinevere. We do not wish to repeat these dishonorable lies, only to understand where they came from. Was it you who whispered these lies into Prince Maleagent's ears?"

Mordred slams his hands down on the table. "They are not lies," he yells, then points to me. "This woman is a whore. Her son and the brat inside her belly are obviously not the king's. They are bastards."

Gasps, shouts, and grunts shake the silence in the air. I grab hold of Arthur's hand and look into his eyes. His squeeze doesn't reassure me like it was meant to. We knew Mordred would speak out so bluntly about us. He is angry and mortified at being put on trial. He's out for blood now and will take us down any way he can. Fortunately, the crowd around him doesn't seem to agree, well most of the crowd.

"I told you not to repeat such slanders. We wish to know how you coaxed Prince Maleagent into speaking your own hateful musings out loud to Lancelot."

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“I thought this trial was meant to seek truth. I have spoken the truth as I spoke it with Maleagent. I am sorry he is dead, but his actions were his own. All I did was confide in him thesetruths.”

Bagdemagus stands before Alfred can respond, anger on his face. “Do you have proof? Because to speak out against your king and queen the way you have done is treachery. If I were your king, I would have had your head years ago.”

“If that is true, you would have taken your son’s head years ago as well for the things he would say of you.” A wicked smile stretches across Mordred’s face.

Lancelot places a hand on Bagdemagus’ arm, coaxing him to sit down. “Mordred is only trying to get a rise out of you. Do not let him shake you.”

Bagdemagus nods, grinding his jaw to staunch the anger. Then he waved his hand to Alfred, letting him know to proceed. “Did you knowingly allow Prince Maleagent to believe your lies and spread them to anyone who would have listened?”

“Yes. We wanted everyone to know of Queen Guinevere’s deceit.”

My grip on Arthur’s hand tightens. Instead of letting go, he brings it to his mouth, placing a soft kiss on my knuckles. I reward him with a shaky smile and push my nerves deeper inside my core. Though I don’t know how much longer I can keep it together.

“And did you plan for Prince Maleagent to get challenged by Sir Lancelot or any of King Arthur’s men?”

“No, but it was extremely entertaining to witness Lancelot’s reaction. He all but admitted to it with his face,” Mordred chuckles.

Alfred looks to Arthur, who then nods. “Lady Elaine, would you mind stepping forward?”

Mordred stiffens in his chair. Good, he should be scared. He thought Elaine was his, but she is mine. Once an enemy, now my dearest friend and one of Arthur’s most loyal subjects. Elaine walks forward, her head held high, though I can see a slight shade of green tinting her delicate skin.

“Lady Elaine, can you please tell us about the conversation that occurred between Sir Lancelot and Prince Maleagent?”

“Would you like me to repeat the conversation verbatim?” Elaine asks with a voice full of confidence.

“No, that will not be necessary. Only regale us with the attitudes of the two men.”

Elaine nods. “Prince Maleagent was as cocky as ever. He wanted to get a rise from Sir Lancelot. And he did. But any knight of Camelot, or rather, any man who respects and loves King Arthur, would have lost composure at the way Maleagentdisonored our king. Sir Lancelot was a man defending his king. That is all.”

“And why were you sitting with Mordred and Prince Maleagent that day? Are you not the queen’s lady?” Alfred asks. “To be seen in friendly company with the two people who have done everything in their power to tarnish your queen’s reputation would make it seem like you are passing on information to them.”

“I am the queen’s lady and I am loyal to King Arthur. For years, I have been pretending to be...friends with Mordred in order to spy on him. Make sure he did not

have any plans to harm Queen Guinevere and Prince Galahad.” Elaine stands still, staring at Alfred as she answers his question. I desperately want to give her a hug and a high-five. She is awe-inspiring.

Mordred slams his fists against the table and stands up. His attempts to approach Elaine are cut short thanks to Bedivere and Kei. They hold him back as he yells, “You bitch! Just another whore like your queen.”

The crowd erupts in chaotic gasps and murmurs. Arthur rises from his throne, and I let go of his hand, which has become slightly purple from all my squeezing. Why didn’t he tell me I was squeezing too hard? “Quiet! Let us break for today. Tomorrow we will resume this trial and come to a conclusion.” Before anyone can respond, Arthur reaches for my hand and motions Galahad to follow behind.

“Your Highness, I have a message from, uh, the king, uh, your husband.” A young boy whom I don’t recognize approaches me in my garden, handing me a letter. He stammers about how Arthur had sent him to find me immediately.

“Thank you,” I say, relieving him. He breathes a sigh of relief and sprints away.

The note is scribbled with Arthur’s messy handwriting, not the hand he uses for official documents and letters. In it, he tells me to meet him in the catacombs before the trial resumes after the mid-day meal.

“The catacombs?” I say out loud. Where the hell are the catacombs? I wasn’t even aware there were any here. And why does Arthur want to meet me somewhere I’ve never been to before? Especially in a dark, creepy catacomb. I shrug, taking a quick look up at the sky. It’s nearly mid-day, the trial is due to resume after lunch. A sigh escapes my mouth as I think about yesterday’s proceedings. It was excruciating and terrifying hearing Mordred speak so crassly about me.

I will never understand his unconditional hate toward me. Never. But perhaps we were made to hate each other. That is how the story goes. And I haven't tried to change his feelings for me. He's just a medieval asshole. I will not let him ruin everything.

As I wander the castle grounds looking for a door that looks catacomby, I am greeted with smiles and slight bows. Everyone seems to be on my side, on Camelot's side. It's a relief to have such support from our kingdom and countrymen. Knowing that Mordred's words, though harsh and true, have held no meaning to the people who were listening.

I catch sight of Elaine as she makes her way into the great hall for her noon-time meal. Seeing me wave, she changes course and heads in my direction. "Your Highness, what are you doing about? I thought you were in the garden. I was going to bring you some food."

"That is very kind of you, Elaine." How far our relationship has come. To think I wanted to gouge her eyes out for even looking at Lance, and now she is my best friend at court. "I need to find the catacombs."

Elaine's eyebrows mold into a question. "Why would you need to go there?"

"Arthur has requested my presence there. But I didn't even know we had catacombs."

A smile washes away the lines on her forehead. "That is because no one ever goes there. Only if you were up to no good," she says with a chuckle.

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“Hmmmm, okay, I’m not sure what that means, and now I really don’t know why Arthur has asked me to meet him there. Anyway, can you tell me where it is?”

Elaine nods. “Of course. There’s actually an entrance in your garden. I will show you. It is not very noticeable.”

We walk briskly back to my little hidden garden where I’ve come to seek peace and tranquility from the tournament guests. It would make sense there is a secret door to a hidden catacomb as there is another hidden door which leads up to the royal apartments in the keep. It is how I got Lance inside without anyone seeing us after he returned from the dead.

Elaine brushes a bit of ivy from the stone wall. It looks like an ordinary wall except for a small circular stone that seems out of place. With her left hand holding the ivy back, Elaine pushes the stone button with her right. A door appears almost out of thin air and opens inward to a tunnel as black as night.

“How the hell am I supposed to see in there?”

“Wish you had Excalibur’s light?” Elaine chuckles again. “There should be a torch somewhere.” She walks into the blackness, blindly touching the walls on either side. Before disappearing, she seems to find what she is looking for and returns to the light with a torch and a piece of iron. “Here, hold this. I will light it for you.”

Holding the torch with both hands, I stare at Elaine. “How the hell do you know about this place and I don’t? This is my bloody garden. And if this door is here, why didn’t Arthur just come and tell me himself?”

“There are other entrances. The king likely took a different door inside if he means to speak to you in private.”

“This is so fucking weird and creepy.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” Elaine asks, giggling again.

“Why are you laughing?” I squint at her with my question.

“It is strange that the king would need to ask his queen to go down there. It is known to be a place where couples go to do things without being seen.”

“Again, how do you know of its existence?” My eyes are barely open through my glare.

A blush dances across her face. I wonder if Lance ever brought women down there. Is that where he kissed Elaine? Ugh, no, don’t even go there. Taking her hand in mine, I return my voice to serious mode. “If I’m not back in an hour, will you send Gawain or Gaheris to come find me?”

“I will come find you myself, Guin.”

It is rare that Elaine uses my name, let alone my nickname. I have been begging her to call me Guin for ages, but like Lance, she was hard to break from her formal upbringing. We smile at each other before I turn away into the dark tunnel of doom.

Chapter 37

Lancelot

A small light from a torch appears at the end of the cavernous room. I had begun to

believe that I misread Arthur's message. It was an unusual request that he would ask me to meet him down here. I have not been to the catacombs for some time. Since before Guin came into my life. There were many times I had wanted to bring her here. A million years ago, before she was my wife. Every time her hand brushed mine or her eyes landed on my gaze. God, how much I wanted to ravish her, and I knew she wanted me to.

"Lance?" Guin's soft voice brings me back to the dank, dark catacombs, as if my thoughts pulled her here.

"Guin? What are you doing down here?"

"I should ask you the same thing," she says, one hand on her hip as the other holds a torch.

"Arthur asked to speak with me down here."

"Same." Her arm relaxes. "Is that a strange request? Cause this feels weird."

I laugh and reach to take the torch from her. She relinquishes her grip on the handle, and I place it in a holder on the wall. "It is strange. But Arthur might just need to meet us somewhere private."

"We have our own private apartments."

"Yes, but not as private as down here." I scoop Guin into my arms, feeling the small swell of her stomach against my hip.

"Lance!" She whisper shouts. "What if someone sees?"

"Who? Everyone down here is dead." I plant a soft kiss on her lips, feeling her tongue

escape into my mouth. “You are ravenous.”

Guin’s body stiffens. “Did you hear that?”

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“Hear what?” I brush a soft lock of hair behind her ear and kiss her brow.

“I thought I heard footsteps.”

“I do not hear anything. But perhaps it is Arthur. He should be down here by now.” Something stirs in the dark, making the hairs on my back stand up. “Guin, who was it that told you Arthur wanted to meet you down here?”

“A boy. He handed me a note written by Arthur.”

“Did you recognize him?”

“No.”

“We need to get out of here.”

A sinister laugh pierces the murky air. “It is too late for that, White Knight.”

“Mordred,” I hiss, instinctively grabbing the hilt of my sword and pushing Guin behind me. A shadow looms in the darkness, and I can only hope he did not see Guin and me kissing. I hear him tut in disappointment and more wet footsteps slowly approaching. How many people are down here? Who is down here?

A hulking figure I recognize steps into the dim light, murder in his eyes. “King Bagdemagus.” My heart sinks into my stomach.

“How could you betray your king? I should cut you down where you stand,” he

bellows.

Mordred finally steps from the darkness, placing a hand on King Bagdemagus' shoulder. "My uncle will want him alive. If we kill him, it will only make us look guilty."

Rushed footsteps splash in the puddles of the catacomb floor, heading toward us. I know it is Arthur as I know now that this was all a trap. My king slows his approach as he enters the light of Guin's torch, Elaine at his heels. His face is alight with fright at the vision before him. I turn away from his gaze. I cannot look at him.

King Bagdemagus reaches a hand out, placing it on Arthur's arm. "It seems you have been deceived, my friend."

The anger in Arthur's voice is palpable, but I can also hear his sorrow. "It seems I have."

Guin sits on the floor of the cell across from mine, hugging her knees to her chest. I know she is crying. She has not stopped crying since Mordred tricked us into revealing our truth. Except the full truth has not been revealed. Arthur is still innocent in this. He played his part well, maybe too well. The part of a broken-hearted cuckold whose closest friend betrayed him.

There was a quick trial before we were tossed down here in the dungeon. Arthur did not look at me once. His face was stone, cold, unbreakable. Was he falling apart on the inside as the world crashed down on us? I wish I could speak with him. Tell him I am sorry. Sorry for loving Guin. Sorry for letting my heart believe she could be mine. Sorry for ever leaving her. Sorry for coming back to her. Sorry for ripping apart all of Arthur's hard work. Sorry for falling into a trap. Sorry. I am so sorry. I have failed my king.

To think I believed we were safe. That we could all live happily together. I punch the stone wall of my tomb, for I know I will die here. Arthur will not put us to death. He could not do that. But he can certainly let us live our lives out in tiny cells. Able to look upon my wife but not able to touch her.

Guin has not moved a muscle, not even when my fist connected with the gritty rock. She is unraveling, and I cannot console her. Our son is now on trial for the sin of being our son. Mordred has no way to prove this, but with Guin and I now in this prison for our guilt, his story will be more convincing. I tried talking to Guin earlier, but her mind was somewhere else. I barely notice my bloodied knuckles as I grasp the bars keeping me inside the prison. The cold metal offers a bit of refreshment as I place my brow against its rugged surface. More tears. More anger. More fear. I cannot make it stop. There is nothing I can do to save my wife, son, and friend from the fate Guin has feared since Excalibur pulled her out of time.

If only I had not been so weak. I should have refused Arthur's kindness. I should have refused Guin's love. I do not deserve it. I do not deserve either of them. For I have let my wicked heart conquer reason. When I came back to Guin and Arthur married, my son, the heir to the throne of Logris, I should have left and never returned.

"It isn't your fault." The first words out of Guin's mouth since the catacombs are soft, yet bear no hint of hesitation. "I can feel you arguing with yourself inside your head, blaming yourself for everything that happened. I am as much to blame as you are. Even Arthur is. The three of us did this."

"Guin, I—"

"No. Lance." Guin stands up and makes her way to the bars of her prison cell. She reaches out her arm and I reach for her. Our fingers barely touch, but it is all I need to feel how cold she is.

“Guin, you are frozen. We need to get you something warmer.”

“I’m fine, Lance.” She attempts to reassure me with a sad smile.

“No, you are not. And the baby. What barbarians would throw a pregnant woman down here?” Rage courses through me. I know my anger will do nothing to help Guin. Squeezing the iron bars offers me some relief. The pain slowly takes over my wrath.

“Breathe, my love,” Guin whispers. Her words tickle my ear. She can always see the mess inside me. It is one of the many reasons I love her. Most men would be horrified if a woman ever approached them about their emotions. But I love that about her. I need that from her. She keeps me together. I breathe in and out as she counts me down. Each breath unties the knots in my heart.

When I look into her eyes, it feels as if the world around us is not falling apart. For that one eternal moment, we are happy again. Footsteps jolt me out of our stupor, fear replacing my small moment of happiness. The dungeon is poorly lit, with only a few torches scattered here and there, so I cannot distinguish who has come to visit.

“Mom! Dad! Are you all right?” Galahad rushes to Guin, grabbing the hands reaching for him through the bars. “I’m so sorry I couldn’t come sooner.”

“Oh, my boy. I’m just so glad you’re okay. Mordred didn’t do anything to you, did he?”

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Another voice answers from the darkness. “Mordreddid.” Gawain approaches my cell, keys in hand. Kei, Bedivere, and Gaheris are with him too. Their faces are somber, but I do not see any hint of anger or hatred. They should hate me for what I have done.

Kei continues explaining what had happened as Gawain unlocks my cell. “The trial did not go well, my friend. With you and the queen deemed traitors, it did not take much for Mordred to convince the people of Galahad’s true paternity.” Myskin pinches with gooseflesh. Of course I am a traitor. Have my brothers come to take my head.

Gawain tosses the keys to Galahad, who then opens Guin’s cell. She rushes into his arms as I sprint to embrace my family one last time. They can at least give me this. No one attempts to pry me away or tell me what a treacherous bastard I am. “Why are you all here?”

I notice Galahad is carrying his mother’s bag. The one she had traveled here with. The one that carries all her belongings from another time. He holds the bag out to Guin, who quickly secures it through both arms, then explains what else had happened at the trial. That Galahad is no longer the prince of Camelot.

“Everyone believes we are bringing Galahad down here to lock him up next to you both. But we will not let that happen.” Gaheris is close to tears when he looks at me. “We all knew. Well, we all suspected.”

“And you said nothing?” I turn to Guin, her arm wrapped around Galahad. He has grown so tall that he is nearly the same height as his mother.

“Who would we have spoken to? If our king allowed you two to be together, then who are we to denounce a legally sanctified marriage?” I am shocked at Gawain’s pronouncement. He is the one I was most worried about, being the virtuous one. “Albeit it is a strange situation, Arthur did the right thing. I understand the secrecy because I know this arrangement could never be made in the light. But now...”

“It’s a fucking mess,” Guin completes Gawain’s thought. “Do they know Arthur is part of this?”

“No.” Gawain answers quickly, turning to Guin. “You should have let me tell Arthur about what Mordred did to you that night.”

“Do not stir this up now.”

“What did Mordred do?” My nostrils flare in anger at the thought of Mordred so much as looking at Guin in the wrong way.

Sir Bedivere steps front and center, preventing the conversation from proceeding. I notice he is holding my sword, which he hands to me. “We do not have time for this. They will want to see the traitors behind their bars. We need to leave now to avoid getting caught.”

I grip Bedivere by the shoulder in thanks, receiving a curt nod in reply. Then I reach out to Guin, her cold hand slipping into mine. Galahad takes her other hand, and we follow our escort out. Kei and Gaheris lead our group as Gawain and Bedivere take the rear. We weave our way out of the dungeons, using the door that leads into the armory. It is empty. Still, Gaheris tells us to wait as he quickly scouts for anyone hiding among the armor and weapons.

He gives the all-clear and we make our way to the stables adjoining the armory. Merlin is waiting for us inside with three readied horses.

“Does Arthur know we are escaping?” I ask.

Gawain and Merlin share a glance at one another. Merlin responds. “What the king does not know will not hurt him.”

I nod at Merlin. He is right. We need to keep Arthur innocent from all this. But my stomach churns when I recall the look on his face in the catacombs. “You are all staying with him, right? He needs protection.”

“Do not worry, White Knight. We will not abandon our king. But we must get you out now or Mordred and his men will be on our tails.” Gawain’s voice is calm, but his eyes fill with urgency. “If we are to remain here, we must let no one see us.”

“I understand.” I pull Gawain into a brotherly embrace. When I step back, I see Guin and Galahad mounted on their horses. A weak smile shakes at the tips of Guin’s lips. Her strength fills me with hope, and I feel as if I could do anything. In an instant, the growing smile disappears, her eyes flying to the back door leading into the armory where we had come from.

“What is the meaning of this?” A knight from one of the other kingdoms asks as his eyes fall on me, then Guin and Galahad on their mounts. “Traitors! The lot of you!”

“No, Gaheris, don’t!” Guin screams as Gaheris launches at the knight, sword in hand. But another man enters from the armory, reacting with lightning speed, sinking his dagger deep into Gaheris’ neck.

I turn to Guin, whose skin has turned a greenish gray. “Go,” I yell.

She does not move, only stares at the blood pouring from Gaheris as he struggles to breathe. She shakes her head at the skirmish taking place behind me. “Guin, go now.” I am at her side in three strides.

“No. I am not leaving you. No.”

“I will meet you at Avalon. Please, Guin, go!”

Merlin steps up to Galahad’s mount. “Do not go straight to Avalon. They will expect you to go north. Go south. To my caves. A boat will be waiting to take you to Vivienne. But you both must go now.”

I kiss Guin’s hand as I steer her horse to the entrance of the stables. “I will find you, my love. I will find both of you. In Avalon.”

Not waiting for a response, I slap her steed’s rear, making it gallop away. Galahad follows close behind. And now my hollow heart threatens to consume me. I push my sorrow down and pull out my sword to help my brothers. I will not let another one die for me.

Chapter 38

Arthur

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In the blink of an eye, my life is in ashes. I am not the king everyone admires anymore. The king with a beautiful, loyal wife. The king with the perfect son and heir. The king who was chosen to rule Britain. I am nothing. I am no one. Mordred has taken everything from me. He has betrayed me just as Guinevere had predicted. I should have listened to her. I should have banished him. I should have killed him.

As everyone filters out of the throne room, I think back on the events of the last couple of days. How did Mordred evade his house arrest? How did he convince King Bagdemagus to help him? Elaine had known immediately that something was wrong when she found me walking into the great hall to share the mid-day meal with my men. The look on Elaine's face made my stomach drop. At first, I thought Mordred had found a way out of his apartment to harm her. Elaine had been courageous to speak up against Mordred during the trial. He would certainly want to retaliate. Perhaps he still does.

When Elaine explained she had helped Guinevere into the catacombs to meet with me, I felt my world crash down all around me. I ran without explaining myself. I ran to the entrance of the catacombs, Elaine at my heels. All I could think about was Guinevere and Lancelot. I was not ready for it to end. I was not ready to lose them. I still am not ready to lose them. I know that for the rest of my life I will regret this day above anything else. The day I let them be taken from me.

As I sit in the empty throne room, I want to believe this is all some nightmare. That I will wake up in the morning to find Guinevere and Lancelot sleeping peacefully by my side. Mordred walks over to me, head held high with confidence. He settles himself in the seat that belongs to Galahad, my son. It takes everything I have not to strangle him until his eyes pop from his head. I need to keep on this face though. I

need to let Mordred believe I am defeated. I need to give them time.

Even though I had not said a word to my knights, I know they are helping Guinevere, Lancelot, and Galahad escape. They had a plan. I do not know what, but I noticed Elaine handing over Guinevere's old bag to Gawain as he escorted my son out of the room. Such loyalty is undeserving of a deceitful king like me.

"It grieves my heart that you had to find out this way, uncle." Mordred leans over from the solid oak chair that belongs to my son, placing a hand on my arm. His false sympathy is nauseating, but I let him think he is consoling me. Until I know my family is safe. "I only wanted to bring the truth to light. You were too bewitched by your whore of a wife to see it."

I stand up quickly, hiding my face from Mordred. The anger coursing through my body needs to be sated with Mordred's blood. In this moment, I know I will kill him. I could kill him now. Perhaps with Mordred gone, I could have my family back. I would no longer fear losing them. My hand snakes around the hilt of my dagger. I can feel the blade sink into his chest, snagging on his breastbone, his blood rushing down my hands. It feels good. I need to kill him.

As I turn to make my attack, a man runs into the throne room, out of breath. I can barely make out what he is saying, so I allow him a few minutes to compose himself. "They have escaped."

I hide the smile spreading across my face by running my hand along my jaw. The hand that was ready to take Mordred's life just a moment ago.

"They who?" Mordred rasps.

"The queen, her son, and her lover." The man is still catching his breath from his sprint to inform us of the recent events. "Sir Gaheris is dead."

“What? No.” My heart breaks all over again. I must find Gawain. “Who killed him?”

“Sir Lancelot, your Highness. At least that is what I have been told. I was not there to see it. I only saw him escaping through the north gate. He has a few arrows sticking out of him, so he will not get far.”

My chest shatters to pieces. Lancelot would not kill Gaieris. This must be a lie. “And what of my q—Guinevere? Galahad? Where are they?”

“They were also seen escaping through the north gate, but not with Sir Lancelot.”

“No doubt they are heading to Avalon or Joyous Gard,” Mordred spews. “Arthur, we must send men to both locations. We either catch them on the run or we fight them in battle. They must pay for their actions. I can lead a group of men to Avalon. It should be easy to capture them on an island full of women.”

His ignorance is not surprising. No one knows what it is like in Avalon, except for those who have been there. I am comforted to know he thinks Avalon will be an easy place to conquer. That is where my family is going. They will be safe there.

“Where is Gawain?” I ask the messenger.

“I believe he is still in the stables with his brother.” He bows his head in sadness. Gaieris was well-loved by all whoknew him, even the strangers who came to Camelot for our tournament. I turn toward the doors leading outside, but Mordred stops me.

“Did you hear me, Arthur? Do you wish me to rally some men to go after the traitors?”

“No, Mordred.” I do not look at him for fear that he might see my truth. “Let us

mourn our losses.”

“But we have an advantage. Lancelot is wounded. We must act now.”

“I said no, Mordred. Let them run.” I pull my arm from my nephew’s grasp and stalk toward the stables. Even at the late hour, the castle grounds swarm with men. As I approach the stables, I push aside the somber people peering at the carnage within. Kei and Bedivere spot me upon entering. They stand up at full height before bowing. They are both bloody messes. No doubt they had been part of this skirmish. Eight men lie dead on the ground. Men unknown to me. I sigh in relief that my other knights are safe, but I will need to think of something to say to the other kings. Whoever these men belong to, their king will not be pleased with tonight’s events.

My eyes fall on Gawain’s back. He sits on the ground surrounded by sticky blood, cradling his brother’s head in his lap. I walk to him, placing my hand on his shoulder. Not caring that my garments will be soaked in blood, I kneel beside him, placing my other hand on Gawain’s.

“There are no words to express my sympathies for the loss of a treasured brother. He was a fiercely loyal knight, ready to prove his bravery at every chance. It is not fair that God should take him so early in his life.”

A scratchy, pain-soaked voice replies. “It was not God who took him.”

“I was told that Lance—”

“That is what happened. That is what must be told. He must be seen as the villain here, or we are all doomed.”

I squeeze Gawain’s hand before rising, terror spreading through my chest at what is to come. Turning to the crowd, I announce a funeral will be held to honor all who

have fallen this night. “After we have honored our dead, then we will seek our revenge.”

I just hope I can buy my family enough time to escape. The thought that I will never see them again tears my insides apart. Family was something I never had as a boy. I never thought to seek one out after becoming king. But I found a family in Guinevere, Galahad, and Lancelot. It has only been a few hours and I miss them terribly.

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This was the inevitable end. No matter what we would have done, our lives would always lead to this moment. I know that now.

Chapter 39

Guinevere

Galahad and I have been in Avalon for two days now. There has been no word from the outside and no sign of Lance. If I wasn't already freaking the fuck out, I'd be having a fucking panic attack. But I need to stay calm and keep a clear head. Panicking will do me no good other than make me lose my goddamn mind.

I know Lance is alive. I know it. But where the fuck is he? I need to see his face. I need to hold his hands in mine. I need to tell him I love him. I need him to be okay, not just for me, but for our son. Galahad is the only reason I am keeping my shit together right now. He keeps a tough face for me, so I will do the same for him.

We haven't left our little hovel since we arrived at Avalon. Our journey was exhausting. Riding on horseback for two days until we reached Merlin's caves on the west shores of England. Sure enough, there was a boat there. A small ferry to bring us to safety. At first, I hadn't trusted the sailor. How did Merlin send word so quickly? Or was this sailor always prepared?

Merlin is full of surprises, but at the same time, he is all-knowing. Everything he does should not be a surprise because it was always meant to be. He had to have seen our demise. I hate him for allowing it to happen. But I know it would have made things worse had he said something. This is our fate. We must face it whether it be now or in

five years. I would have much preferred five more years of happiness though.

Lying in bed in the dead of night does nothing but make my fear scream in my head. It forces every terrible thought into the front of my mind. Lance never made it out of Camelot. His head is on a spike somewhere. His beautiful, god-like body is being eaten by maggots. No! Shut the fuck up! Why does my mind do this? Where do these awful visions come from? I know Lance is okay. I can feel it. Stop fucking around in there! I scream internally to myself.

A bang from the living room makes me jolt up from my bed. I grab the knife on the table beside my bed and slowly approach the door. When I open it, I see Galahad on the floor, picking up bits of bread and cheese, placing them back on the brass plate that must have been the cause of the bang I heard.

“Everything okay, my love?” I whisper, not wanting to sneak up on him.

“Everything is awful.” Galahad falls to the ground, weeping. “It is all my fault.”

“What do you mean? You are the last person at fault here, Galahad.” I pull him to my chest, attempting to take away all his pain with a hug full of motherly love.

His sobs shatter my soul. “I could have done something. Why do I have all these powers if I don’t use them? I could have saved you and dad. I could have traveled—”

“Absofuckinglylutely not! I told you not to travel again.”

“I could have warned you, prevented all thi—”

“Galahad,” I interrupt. “I know you understand that doing something like that could be catastrophic. If Merlin has taught me anything, it is that what will be, will be. There is nothing you can do to change it. You can walk your own path, but that path

will always lead to the same end.”

I let go of my son to peer into his face. He keeps his eyes down, avoiding my gaze. “Galahad. Listen. I don’t know why you have these powers. I don’t know why Excalibur chose me to be your mother. All I know is that we are in a legend. One I thought I would make my own.”

I sigh, scooping Galahad into another hug. This time, he wraps his arms around my waist. “Every thought, every step, every decision will lead us to the same ending. Fate chose us. Our lives are intertwined with legend. It doesn’t matter what we have done or what we will do. We already know how the story ends. I was selfish and naive to think I could change it. This isn’t just my story. It’s ours. It’s Britain’s.”

A sniffle from below my chin makes me pull Galahad into a deeper hug until he finally speaks. “I think I understand what you are saying.” He pulls away from my arms and plops down beside me on the dusty floor. “Do you think all of this would have happened if you stayed in your time?”

His question makes me smile, as it’s a question I’ve thought a lot about. “Yes. Maybe not in the same way or as quickly. But I think that Arthur’s idea of a united country is too progressive for this time. Arthur is a great king. He has a way of attracting the most loyal followers. But with loyalty comes those who seek to take power. Mordred would have found a way to destroy Arthur without us in the picture.”

Silence falls between us as Galahad processes what I have said. Of course he would blame himself. His powers could have saved us. But they also could have made things worse. I don’t believe Excalibur chose him to keep Lance, Arthur, and me in a happy love triangle.

Galahad is meant for so much more. I am certain his story is not over. But I know mine is. The only question is, will I get a happy ending? Okay, actually, there is a

second question. Where the hell is Lance?

I wake up groggy from crying most of the night. My hands entwined in my son's. Both of us didn't want to be alone, so I let him sleep in my bed. I can't believe this boy has been in my life for nearly ten years. Sometimes it feels like just yesterday he was born. The first time those big beautiful eyes of his opened, Galahad instantly penetrated my soul. My heart was bursting with love for him; it still is.

Nearly all the empty holes inside my heart had been filled when I first held him in my arms. I kept a small space for my grief to live on though. I needed that grief, a place where my lost loved ones used to live. Without the pain of their loss, I was afraid I would lose my memory of them.

Every day, I felt the residual pain of loss until Lance came back into my life. With Galahad and Lance, I became whole again. Being separated from Lance again, not knowing when I will see him, has ripped that hole open once more. I can't help but feel that something is terribly wrong. I even dreamt that he was lost, wounded, in pain. It felt so real.

As I roll over onto my back, I recall the details of my dream. Lance riding on a horse. Three arrows decorated his body. One through his shoulder, another poking through his side, and the last digging into his thigh. He looked exhausted, as if he'd been riding for days. The blood from his wounds had congealed around the arrows still attached to his body. Trees surrounded him when he fell from his horse, breaking the arrow on his shoulder. The scream that followed his fall still echoes in my mind. Closing my eyes tighter, I remember him trying to pull himself up. Instead, he fell back down to the ground in defeat. "Guin, my love," he whispered.

My eyes fly open, and I shoot out of bed. Holy fuck. That was real. That was fucking real. "Galahad," I scream, shaking him awake. As soon as his eyes flutter awake, I explain the dream I had. How I believed it was a vision and not just a dream. Galahad

looks at me with tired eyes, but I can see the deep fear inside.

“I had the same vision. There was a bit more detail in mine. I think I know how we can find dad.”

“What? When did you have this vision?” I’m crying and screaming and laughing like a crazy woman.

“Perhaps at the same time you did. We need to speak with Vivienne and Morgana. With their powers, we can locate dad. Then I can travel and bring him to Avalon.”

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I shake my head. “No traveling, I told—”

“I’m not talking about time traveling. I can move my body from one place to the other. I just need to know where I’m going.”

I squint my eyes at Galahad with suspicion. “And what else can you do that I don’t know of?”

“During the three years I was...away, Merlin and I tested my abilities.”

“So you can teleport.” My voice shakes, but not in fear. I wonder if I would have been able to do all these things had Excalibur remained inside me. I wouldn’t know what to do with such power.

Galahad nods. “I can also see things. I’ve been able to move things with my mind. Conjuring Excalibur is as easy as snapping my fingers now. I don’t need to feel threatened. And I believe I could travel to the future. I haven’t tried it yet, but I have mastered traveling in both time and space. I’m just not sure I can travel with others, but I have to try.”

“You are incredible. Do you know that?” Galahad turns his face away from me as if he is ashamed by my compliment. Gently, I place my hands on his cheeks and force him to look up at me. “There was nothing you could have done at Camelot. That is how the story has been...or rather will be told.”

“But Gaheris—”

“I know. All we can do now is save your dad and hope that your father will not go to battle against Mordred.”

Galahad pushes his shoulders back, regaining his strength and confidence. “Then let’s go!”

We sprint toward Vivienne’s quarters in the dormitory building as the sun peeks from behind the trees. It’s a strangely warm morning. The short run to the compound has me breaking into a sweat. The priestesses clumsily scatter to make a path for us as we weave through their morning procession.

The door to Vivienne’s room opens as we approach. Of course she knew we were coming. Morgana is inside waiting for us as well. “You have had the vision too?” Vivienne asks. “We need to search for him. I do not know how much longer he has. He did not look well.”

Vivienne’s usual sun-kissed skin fades to a pale gray at the thought of her son dying. She has lived through the grief of his death already; we both have. I do not plan to let that happen again. As if reading my thoughts, Galahad gives my hand a squeeze. “I will not let my dad die. We will find him and I will bring him home.”

Vivienne and Morgana don’t wait for an explanation. They sit down on the floor, crossing their legs and holding their hands out to me and Galahad. We join hands, making a circle on the floor in front of the fireplace. I don’t question myself as to what I can bring to this little seance. I just close my eyes, block out everything around me, and search for the other half of my soul.

Memories of Lance invade my mind. Our meet-cute at the lake, our awkward mealtimes together, the silent ride to Camelot, the slow fall of my love for him, growing deeper and deeper inside my heart. I let all my memories swim around me as I reach out, searching for him. Cold tears stream down my cheeks as I hear his voice.

“Guin, my love. I am sorry.”

“There,” Galahad breaks the silence. Before I can open my eyes, he is gone in a flash of white light.

“Wh-what just happened?” Another flash of light appears. Galahad collapses to his knees with Lance in his arms. “Lance!” I rush to my guys, both of them covered in blood. Bruises decorate Lance’s face, but he is still the most beautiful man I have ever laid eyes on. A smile opens a gash on his cheek as his eyes fall on mine. He pulls me to him, crushing our lips together. Something sticky slips through my fingers as I grip his shoulder.

A wince makes me pull away from him, but he won’t let me go. “Lance, you are very badly injured. Please let us take care of you. Once you heal, I promise you can kiss me as much as you need to.”

Lance answers with something between a sigh and a growl as he falls backward. Galahad and I gently lay him down on the floor as Vivienne and Morgana tend to his many wounds. His skin is so pale and cold to the touch. I know he will be all right though. He’s home, and his mother will not let him die. But fear has a way of weaving itself inside hope, tearing it to shreds, making you doubt everything just from a tiny stupid thought. What if...fuck you brain! Stop thinking.

I need to stop thinking. Breathe. Hold Lance’s hand, comfort him. Breathe. I take a wet cloth from the basin Morgana placed on the floor and use it to wipe away the blood, sweat, and mud from Lance’s face as I keep his hand in my other. Galahad takes the dagger from his belt and cuts Lance’s shirt, carefully pulling the fabric around the arrows sticking out of his stomach and shoulder. Then he slices into Lance’s pants, around the broken arrow dangling from his thigh.

Morgana grabs a basket of tools from the table, pulling out something that looks like

pliers. She snips the arrows, removing the ends with fletching. We work as one, removing each arrow point and soaking up blood from Lance's wounds. Vivienne applies herbs and medicines as Morgana stitches his skin together. I can't tell if Lance has passed out or is just sleeping, but he looks calm, at peace. His rising chest is all I can concentrate on. As long as he keeps breathing, so will I.

Chapter 40

Arthur

A day after the funeral, I am still shaken. So much death and pain has spread through my kingdom in so little time. Just a few weeks ago, we were all happy. Drinking, singing, dancing. It was the most wonderful time I have had in my life. The people banded together under my kingdom for a moment. A beautiful moment when everything was perfect. When I had an intelligent queen, a son full of impossible wonders, and the most loyal chancellor a king could ever hope for.

My kingdom was thriving. The people were captivated. Now they believe me defeated. I am uncertain I have a kingdom any longer. Nearly half of the tournament guests departed, leaving their disappointment and pity behind. Many people showed up for the funeral, most of them to honor Gaheris.

If I am to leave a legacy behind, I would be proud that my legacy would live on through my knights. I might be the mind and body of Camelot, but my knights, they are the heart. They keep us all in line. They protect. They uphold justice. They are the bravest warriors. My knights of the round table, as Guinevere liked to call them.

I laugh to myself at the thought. A laugh that reverberates off the walls in the empty room, reminding me just how alone I am. Tears threaten to break through the barriers I put up inside me. For the past few days, I have mustered every bit of strength to keep my eyes dry and my head up. I did not want to show such defeat in public. They

already believe me to be a king who was easily deceived by those closest to him. I will not let them see me cry.

A knock on my door makes my chest clench. Tears have already started streaming down my face, and I have no strength left to pull them back in. I remain silent, hoping whoever it is will leave me and my grief alone. My hope is crushed when another more insistent knock pounds on the door to my apartment. This time, a voice accompanies the knocking. "Arthur. I know you are in there. Please let me in."

I sigh with relief at hearing Gawain's voice from the other side. I have wanted to talk to him for days, but nothing I could think of to say would be enough. His eyes told me he knew the truth. But he has kept that truth to himself. I wonder if the rest of the knights know, but I dare not ask. Breathing deeply, I wipe the stray tears from my eyes and rise to open the door.

"Gawain, please come in." My eyes are stinging from the unshed tears that beg to be released. As if sensing my internal conflict, Gawain simply closes the door behind him and then pulls me into an embrace. A king should never show his weaknesses, not even to his allies. A king should never be coddled, not even at his worst. But I am not a king in this moment. I am a man who has lost his wife, queen, son, brother, and cousin, standing before a man who has lost his brother.

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We hold each other tight, letting our grief consume us. The pain behind my eyes fades as I drain myself of all the tears I have held inside for the last few days. Keeping Gawain in a tight embrace, I push an apology from my mouth. “I should have told you the truth. I should have told everyone the truth.”

“No, Arthur. You did the right thing.”

“How was this right? They are gone. I will never see them again. And Gaheris...” I pull away from Gawain and stalk over to the fireplace, wanting to throw myself into the flames to end the agony racking through my heart. “It is all my fault.”

“It is Mordred’s fault.” Gawain places a hand on my shoulder, pulling me over to the closest bench. He sits me down and takes a place beside me. “He is greedy, selfish, power-hungry, vile, cruel. He is all the things you are not. It does not matter if Guinevere was married to you or Lancelot. It does not matter if Galahad is your son or Lancelot’s. It does not matter what you did or did not do. You would have never made Mordred your heir, and he would never have been happy with that decision.”

Gawain’s words strike true. Still, the pain of loss consumes me, fogging my mind with doubt. “If I publicly announced my marriage to Guinevere invalid and that Lancelot is not only her true husband but father to my heir, would the kingdom hate me as they hate me now? Perhaps we would have had a better chance if I laid everything out in the open.”

“No one hates you, Arthur. Including Mordred. He is full of hatred, but not for you. If you let it known that your wife was legally another’s and that your son was not your own, all the respect the people still have for you will die. Even though you lied to

them, your lie was safer than the truth.” Gawain chuckles under his breath. “Though it would have been safest to keep Lancelot in Joyous Gard, far away from Guinevere for the rest of their lives.”

“I could not do that to them.” I stare into the fire, knowing that any scenario would have put us right here. It is how the story is to be written, for it is how it will be told.

“I know. The love those two share for each other is impenetrable.”

We sit in silence together, letting our thoughts simmer. A maid enters quietly, telling me she will light the candles for the evening and if I would like my supper brought up. “Yes, bring enough for four. Gawain will be staying. Fetch my nephew and King Bagdemagus as well.”

The maid curtsies with a “Very well, your Highness.”

Gawain eyes me with suspicion as the maid leaves my apartment. “What is the plan, my king?”

“We go to war.”

Our supper is pleasant enough, considering the strange quartet sitting around my dining table. I was not sure King Bagdemagus would accept my invitation. We have spoken little since the catacombs. But he seems jovial enough with my company that I believe he could still be an ally. The two of us make idle conversation, avoiding the topic I know he desperately wants to discuss.

Across from me, I notice Gawain has not taken his eyes off Mordred since he sat down to eat with us. I can see that Gawain’s stare is unnerving Mordred. His mask of arrogance is peeling away with every second that Gawain stares. Even as I call his attention over to my conversation with Bagdemagus, Gawain does not break his gaze

as he responds.

Soon enough, Mordred will break. And when he breaks, I will remove my mask as well. My mask might not have fooled Gawain, but Mordred does not know how I feel inside. He believes he has freed me. That this invitation to a private dinner in my apartments is a sign that I am thankful for what he has done. I smile warmly at Bagdemagus as he compliments the food I have chosen for tonight's menu.

"Pizza. It is a dish my wife brought to Camelot." I allow my voice to falter a bit. It is authentic in sadness, but the anger I add to my eyes is false. "Even though she is...gone, I cannot seem to remove her from my mind."

Bagdemagus pats me on the shoulder. "It must be difficult to cope with the loss you have faced. Such deceit right under your eyes. We all grieve for you, Arthur."

"Coming from another king, your sympathy means more than you can know." I bow my head and push my plate away, signaling Gawain.

"Here is the thing, my king. I am just not convinced by all of this." Gawain's glare is so sharp, Mordred reacts as if someone placed a cold dagger against his throat. "Not too long ago, I witnessed your nephew attack Guinevere. Unprovoked."

"What!" Mordred pushes his chair back, nearly toppling over as he stands. "I did no such thing."

Gawain ignores Mordred's response but finally breaks his gaze, turning his head to me. "Do you remember that night when Mordred broke Guinevere's lute?"

I nod, pushing my brows together in curiosity, even though I know what he is about to tell me. He told me earlier. Now we have all we need to prove that Mordred had set everything up to take the throne from my son.

“Mordred broke the lute, attacking Guinevere, calling her a whore. He also told her that the throne belonged to him, not Galahad.”

“Shut up, you stup—”

“No. Mordred, let Sir Gawain finish.” I motion for Gawain to continue, sparing a glance at Bagdemagus. He is cautiously intrigued.

“I was at the other side of the corridor when Mordred began his assault. When they were in sight, Mordred had Guinevere against the wall. He kicked the lute so hard it smashed against the opposite wall. I ran as fast as possible to save her, but she was faster. As I approached, Mordred was on the ground with a broken nose and a bruised ego. At which point, I had to save Mordred from being attacked. Guinevere did not want me to tell you, my king. She was afraid of how you would react if you knew your nephew had attacked her. She wanted peace, just as you do.”

Bagdemagus speaks up, turning to Mordred to ask, “Why did you attack Queen Guinevere?”

Mordred hesitates. “I...well...because she was...IS a whore! She was taking advantage of my uncle. She was lying to him about Galahad.”

“Hmm, and did you have evidence of this at the time? You told me you only suspected but that you could show me the truth if I helped you.” Bagdemagus’ gaze sear into Mordred’s.

Mordred’s eyes shift to mine, avoiding Bagdemagus’ deathly stare and ignoring Gawain’s victorious smile. Gawain leans his chair back to get a better look at my nephew before saying, “It is curious, Mordred, that you only were about to get this...evidenceafter you had been accused of causing the death of King Bagdemagus’ son.”

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“I knew. I just knew the truth. And I was right.” Mordred looks as if he is about to flee. Gawain scoots his chair closer and closes a hand around Mordred’s arm, pulling him back to his seat.

“Did you actually see Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot kiss?” Gawain asks. “Or were they only standing close to one another? The catacombs are a dark place, even with the light of a single torch.”

“I...uh—”

“No,” Bagdemagus answers for Mordred. “I gave you the use of my pages to send messages to Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere. What was the message you gave them?”

It is my turn to speak. “They were told that I needed to speak with them in the catacombs. They went down there thinking I had sent them. That is why they were alone. Did you see them kiss, Mordred?”

Bagdemagus answers again, “King Arthur, I truly am sorry. I had thought that I saw them embrace. But as Sir Gawain mentioned, it is very dark in the catacombs.”

Mordred shoots a deadly stare in my direction. “How do you know what message I gave to the pages?”

“Elaine told me. She had seen Guinevere just before and helped her get to the catacombs, a place she had never been before. Everything happened so fast. I was so angry at the thought that Guinevere had made it up so Elaine would not know who

she was really meeting down there.” That last part is a lie. For I know I must not let it slip that I knew of any such affair. I still need to play the part of a wounded husband and deceived king in order to save any chance I have at redeeming my honor and that of my family.

As he stands, Bagdemagus’ chair falls to the ground. He rushes over to Mordred. “You deceiving little rat. You are unworthy of your uncle’s love and protection. If I were King Arthur, I would have your head on a spike this very minute.”

“It is a good thing you are not my uncle then,” Mordred spits. “Your son was right about you. You are just a weak, idiotic, cunt of a man undeserving of your throne.”

Before Bagdemagus can react, Gawain slams Mordred’s head into the table, knocking the pizza to the ground. While stunned, Gawain pulls my nephew from his chair, gripping his arms behind his back. “What shall we do with this scum, your Highness?”

Mordred struggles to escape Gawain’s grasp as he pleads for forgiveness. “I was only trying to protect you, uncle.”

“No, Mordred.” I am the last one remaining at the dining table. Slowly, I stand up, keeping my eyes focused on my nephew. In silence, I stalk over to where Gawain has Mordred contained. “You wanted my throne. A throne that was never yours and will never be yours. I would rather see Camelot burn to ashes than see you upon its throne.”

Gawain releases his grip on Mordred, but he does not try to flee. Not yet. “I am your nephew. I am your blood.”

“Blood means nothing to me when that blood runs with hate, anger, and greed. You have caused the death of a prince, a beloved knight, and many others. You have

tarnished the memory of my wife, son, and friend.” I pause dramatically, placing a hand on the table to give me strength. “Though I wish nothing more than to kill you right now, I will instead hand you over to King Bagdemagus to answer for the death of his son.”

Mordred’s pleading stare turns to fire. “You cannot hand me over, uncle. Mother would not allow it.”

“Morgause has no say in the matter. I am king. I will choose your punishment.” I turn toward Gawain and nod. He leaves the room and returns in haste with guards. As the guards shackle my nephew, I ignore Mordred’s pleas of forgiveness. I will never forgive him. Never.

The door slams shut behind him, and I suddenly feel as if I am falling. Somehow, I keep myself standing straight. I do not feel fear. Knowing what is to come, I feel relief. Relief in knowing that my family will survive. Bagdemagus will not send his army to seek vengeance. Mordred will die at the hands of another. But what does this mean for my future?

My family is gone. My chest clenches at the thought of them escaping to the future, a place I cannot follow. Even if I could, would I? No. My place is here. My story is here. And it has not ended yet.

Chapter 41

Lancelot

“I am fine, Guin, I promise.” It has been just over a week since Galahad saved me from certain death and Guin will not leave my side. She is constantly checking my wounds, cleaning, and re-wrapping new bandages. The dark circles under her eyes betray how tired she is. “You need to rest. I have not seen you sleep in days.”

“I am fine, Lance, I promise,” she retorts, a sweet smile curling on her lips. “I just want to make sure everything is healing properly. If you get an infection and we don’t catch it in time—”

I place a finger to her lips to stop her from going on another rant. “We are in Avalon. My mother and Morgana are gifted healers, as you well know.”

A delicate sigh escapes from the wet lips she has been biting in her nervousness. I know precisely how Guin feels. Though it seems like a millennium ago when I brought her here, her blood poisoned from a gash Melwas had given her. The pain I felt just from the thought of losing her was unbearable. Then I lost her. For eight years, I fought my way back to her. I will not lose her again.

I pull her down on the bed, placing her head on my uninjured shoulder. The skin of her brow pushes against my neck, so cold. I attempt to grab the blanket folded at my knees, causing pain to shoot down to the wound in my stomach.

“What are you trying to do, Lance? You are hurting yourself.” Guin sits up, gently fingering the dressings around my shoulder and stomach. I am naked except for the bandages wrapped around my body, making my skin pucker in gooseflesh.

“It is cold. I only wanted to pull the blankets over us.”

Guin bends over my body and pulls the blankets over us both. Before she snuggles back into my undamaged side, she places a kiss on my parched mouth. With her stomach pressed against my side, I can feel the little bump that is beginning to grow. Our child. What a marvelous thing it is to know that the woman I love is carrying my child.

“How is the baby?” I ask into Guin’s hair, kissing her softly.

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“Sometimes I forget that I’m pregnant now that I’m no longer nauseous. She is doing fine, I think. I can’t wait for you to feel her move. That won’t be for a few months. But you will lose your fucking mind.”

I can feel her smile against my collarbone as I press her closer to my body. “She?”

“Just a gut feeling.”

“Did you know Galahad was a boy before birthing him?”

“Yes. I don’t know how. I just knew. And then, well, I told you about the dream or vision I had right before his birth.”

“With Elnaril?”

Guin nods against my shoulder. “She told me of Galahad, who he’d be. Maybe she had been whispering it to me throughout my pregnancy. But she isn’t inside me now. It’s just our wee one. Yet I have that same feeling. I just know.” Guin pushes herself up so that her face is level with mine. “Do you want a daughter?”

I kiss Guin on her freckled nose. “It does not matter to me. As long as we are all together. As long as we are all safe. Now lie back down and go to sleep. We both need to rest.”

The steady breathing from Guin lulls me to sleep, where I wake up around a campfire. Guin plays the lute, one of her melancholy songs, as I place more wood onto the fire. The light of the fire shimmers in her copper hair. She looks younger in

my dream, not that she looks old now, but there is a certain innocence in her eyes that has not been there since before Melwas took her. Looking around me, I notice we are in a shallow part of the woods along the road leading to Camelot.

This is not a dream. It is a memory. The night after Guin stumbled upon a unicorn. We had avoided each other for days, barely talking to one another. It was the loneliest I had ever felt. But it was necessary. I was trying to push her away. I needed to push every thought of her away. Then that damn unicorn. That beautiful, wonderful, miraculous unicorn. Something in me fell into place that day with Guin in my arms. She made me feel whole, like I had never felt before.

Listening to the memory of Guin singing makes my mind feel dizzy. I sit down on the cold, hard ground, as close to Guin as I dare. Now that I know English, I can understand her songs much better. But is this really a memory? How can I remember a song she sang to me so long ago?

“I don’t know you, but I want you,” she sings, her eyes fighting to stay focused on her fingers as they dart in my direction. The flush of her cheeks grows brighter with each gaze I capture with mine. How could I have ever thought she would want anyone else but me? She sang to me, telling me how she felt. Only I did not know what she was saying then. Perhaps she did not know either. “Falling slowly,” her voice wavers as if she might cry.

I want to go to her, wrap her in my arms and kiss her sweet mouth. But I let this memory play out as it is meant to. The moment when Guin and I fell quietly in love.

“Mama, dad, wake up!” Galahad shouts. I feel his hands gently shake my arms before he moves over to Guin. “They are coming. We need to go.”

I bolt up, pulled from a deep sleep and a dream I desperately want to return to. Back to my aching body. “Who is coming? What are you talking about?”

“Grandma Vivienne says that Mordred is coming. He is looking for us.”

“Fuck,” Guin groans. “Does he know we are here?”

Galahad shakes his head. “There are only two obvious places for him to look. Here. And Joyous Gard.”

Guin turns toward me. “Lance, you don’t think he’ll attack Avalon or—”

“He would not. I doubt he has an army large enough that could break through the defenses at our castle. And no army can break through the magic that protects Avalon. Our people will be safe. They will remain safe as long as we are not seen there. We need to leave.”

I look at Galahad, who stares back at me. Rarely do I see fear in my son’s eyes. The night we escaped Camelot, his eyes were riddled with fear. He did not wish to part from me then and does not want to do so now.

“We do this together,” I reassure him.

He nods back and helps me out of bed. “Do what together?” Guin asks, her voice holding back the panic that threatens to break out of her. I offer my hands to her. She takes them but does not put much weight on me as she slides out of bed.

“We are going on a trip,” I say after kissing her temple. “You will want to bring your satchel.”

“Here, mom.” Galahad hands her the old, worn leather bag still filled with mystical items from the future. “I’ve also packed us a bag with some food and a few skins of water and wine. Morgana and Mairrenn helped me pack them. They are waiting by the lake with grandma.”

As I pull on my clothes, Guin remains still. I cannot even tell if she is breathing.
“Guin, we must go now.”

“We can’t just leave them. What if Mordred attacks? What if—”

“What can we do? Galahad could possibly fight him and his small army, but we do not know how many men there are.”

“Twenty-nine. At least that is what grandma said.”

“She is sure?” I ask. Galahad nods back. “Could you take on that number?” His hesitation is all I need. “Then we go, now.”

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I strap on my sword and grab Guin's hand, pulling her from our bedroom and out of our little cottage. The moon is bright tonight, casting its light for us to follow. Galahad leads the way, checking behind him to make sure we can keep up. My muscles ache with every movement I make. I know I must keep going or else I will collapse and not be able to get back up.

Guin lifts my arm around her neck, taking some of my weight as she wraps her arm around my waist. We move swiftly together, hurrying down a sloped path to the lake. The heavy breathing racing from Guin's chest tells me she is exerting herself. I am just about to pull my weight off her when she holds onto me tighter. "Don't you dare let go of me. I got you, my love."

A smile spreads across my face, her love filling me with strength. I grunt when a branch swats at my thigh, right over the wound. Pushing away the pain, I keep my pace alongside Guin. When we reach the lake, I have no idea what will happen. If it will work. It has to work. We will be safe. But what of Arthur? I worry for him. We have had no word, not even an angry letter or an announcement about our betrayal. Nothing.

If Mordred has killed Arthur, I do not know if I can leave without avenging his death. I do not know if I can leave without knowing Arthur's fate. He has sacrificed so much for Guin and me. And how do we repay him? We abandon him? That is what we have done. Abandoned our king. No. He wanted us to do this. He wanted us to be safe. He made me promise to keep Guin and Galahad safe. I will do just that. I will protect them for as long as I live.

My heart races at the sight of the lake. Vivienne is knee-deep in the water, chanting to

the waves while Mairenn and Morgana wait to greet us. They hand Galahad a bag, which he secures across his shoulders. Guin sits me down on the boulder, her boulder. The same boulder she sat upon when I first laid eyes on her. So much has changed since that day.

“Will Mordred be able to cross the waters into Avalon?” Guin looks bewildered. She must know what we are about to attempt. We have spoken of this many times. Though she never wanted to imagine a time when this would be necessary, she must know.

Vivienne turns toward us, walking back to the shore as Morgana answers Guin’s question. “No boat can cross our waters. Only the ferry can bring folk to and from the island.”

“So we are safe here? We don’t have to leave?” Guin’s voice is calm with a hint of panic.

“You are safe here, Guinevere. But you are safer if you return home.” Vivienne pulls Guin into a hug. “I will miss you. All of you.”

“No. We can’t leave. What about Arthur? I didn’t get to say goodbye. I can’t just leave him, knowing I will never see him again. No.”

I push myself off the boulder and hobble over to my wife and mother. “We must. Arthur would want you to escape, to be safe. He has said as much to me and I will keep my promise. I will keep you safe.”

I wrap my arms around Guin, and soon Galahad’s arms embrace us, pulling in Vivienne. Two more pairs of arms join us, turning Guin’s sobs into a giggle. “Can we just stay in this group hug forever?”

Laughter breaks the deep silence of the moonlit night. With the laughter, I can hear

the distant shouts of men on the other side of the lake, but I cannot see anything. They are close. Closer than I thought they would be. Mordred cannot know how to enter Avalon. The ferry is hidden, only known to those who know where it should be.

“Are you sure they will not be able to find you, mother?” I pull from our embrace and stare into her eyes. There is no fear there, only despair.

“Yes, Lancelot. I have seen it in a vision. They will wander around the outskirts of our lake for weeks and then give up and head to your castle. But Arthur will be there with his army. He will protect your people there and declare war on Mordred.”

“No.” Guin lets out a soft sob. “He can’t. That will lead to—”

“He knows. And he has accepted his fate.”

Galahad steps back from Vivienne. “How do you know all of this? From your vision?”

“Merlin wrote to me. King Bagdemagus had taken Mordred prisoner by the command of King Arthur. But Mordred escaped before his planned execution. It turns out he had gathered a small army over the years. King Arthur left Camelot immediately upon hearing of Mordred’s escape, Merlin with him. They should make it to Joyous Gard in a few days. Sir Gawain stayed behind to ensure Camelot remains protected. I would have told you sooner, but I only just received the letter this evening.” Vivienne looks out at the lake. “The lake is willing. I can feel its power. Take what you need from her, but nothing more, Galahad.”

I feel Guin shiver next to me. Wrapping my arms around her, I hold her close to me as we follow Vivienne and Galahad to the lake. Vivienne kisses my brow with all the love of a mother. Our eyes meet for a brief moment before she moves to Guin.

“Vivienne, please tell Arthur not to go into battle against Mordred. It will be the

death of him,” Guin begs.

“That is for Arthur to decide.” With delicate fingers, my mother lifts Guin’s chin up. “Think of home, Guinevere. Your father. Josh. All those you loved and lost. Hold them in your thoughts.”

I stiffen when Vivienne mentions Josh. A name I haven’t heard in ages. A name I never want to hear again. A name I hope Guin does not yearn for. Her face betrays no such yearning, but is shadowed with fear. I pull her toward Galahad, who is waiting for us in the water. When we reach him, I look at my mother one last time, offering her a reassuring smile.

Mairenn holds Morgana to her side, both of them holding back tears. How I will miss my family here, my home, all that I have known. But I have another family I need to protect now.

Guin, Galahad, and I wrap our arms around each other, keeping no distance for fear that we might get lost. Galahad squeezes us as he glows, a bright white light swimming out from his veins, swallowing us whole. I close my eyes and hold on to my family with every bit of strength I have. When I open them, the sun shines brightly in the sky. The lake is gone. The trees surrounding us look different.

I feel cold without the warm white light, even with the sun blazing down on me. Guin’s hair seems to float in the sunlight, shimmering like burnt copper. Galahad’s eyes are wide with shock, a trickle of blood flows from his nose.

I react quickly, catching him before he falls to the ground, ignoring the searing pain from my bruised and damaged body. Guin falls to her knees by his side. “What happened? Is he okay? Oh my god, please tell me he’s okay!”

Her hands rack over Galahad’s body, searching for wounds, punctures, any sign of injury. There is none. “I’m okay, mama. I’m okay.” Galahad’s voice is weak, but

sounds confident.

“Did it work, Galahad?” I ask, wondering how we would even know.

“Mama, check your phone.”

“Right.” Guin pulls her bag from her shoulders, riffling through the interior until she finds what she is looking for. The mystical, shiny object that sings and plays music, holds images of people inside, and God knows what else. Her hands are shaking as she presses down on the button. The top lights up, exposing a crack on the side. She seems to fumble a bit with her hands on the light, then gasps.

“What is it?” Galahad and I ask in unison.

“There are bars. I have service.” Before she can explain what that means, her phone begins to vibrate and chirp, making the three of us jump back in fright. Instead of throwing the beastly object from her hands as I surely would, Guin places the phone to her ears. “Hello?”