

Chapter 1



Lovers' Quarrel

It is winter on the Island of Albion, and although there is no snow, the ground is frozen and stark and the trees are bare. A heavy, bloated moon lights the barren branches and casts its pale light upon the frozen, matted ground.

A young girl rushes through the dead, frozen brush, her breath smoking before her in panicky gasps. She clutches her long heavy skirts desperately as she runs. Every few moments she casts her eyes back in terror. At last, she comes to a clearing beneath the shadow of a rocky face. The clearing is empty except for a carpet of dead moss and one hoary stump. The girl throws herself to the ground and begins pawing, searching through the dead, brittle undergrowth.

“You will not find it,” comes a voice.

Looking up, the girl sees a figure sitting upon the stump which had been empty a moment before.

“You! You said you would help me,” cries the girl, tearfully.

“That is why I am here,” answers the sorceress, crossing her legs which are bare beneath a short, purple gown. “I gave you that amulet to protect you. It was very careless of you to lose it.”

“I was here meeting a friend...”

“You were meeting a lover.”

The girl’s face colors.

“I... it must have fallen loose...”

“Perhaps,” smiles the sorceress, knowing it hadn’t. “But you will not find it on the ground. It is in there.”

“Where?”

“There.” And the sorceress points to the maw of a black cave within the rocky face that had not been visible a moment before. “But now, it is too late.”

From the same side of the clearing from which the young girl had come, steps a figure in grey cloaks holding a staff. He has dark, sparkling eyes and black hair with a neatly trimmed beard that highlights his young, handsome features.

“Oh, please,” snorts the sorceress. “Do you think that *glamour* really suits you, *old man*?”

“I have not come to bandy words with you, witch!” snarls the one who sees the future. Turning back to the girl, his voice grows tender as he holds out his hand to her. “Come, Niviane. Come with me now.”

The girl shrinks back, sobbing.

“It is all right, dear one. I know about the boy you came here with, and I forgive you.”

“I do not want your ‘forgiveness.’” I do not want anything to do with you!”

The eyes of the one who sees the future darken for only a moment, then waver and look pained, even pathetic.

“Niviane, you know I love you.” Stepping forward, he takes her by the shoulders tenderly. The girl cries out in horror and revulsion and strikes out at him, wounding his cheek. Instead of anger, the one who sees the future seems only to look more sad and forlorn, although he does not release his grip upon her.

“Let me go!” screams the girl, struggling violently. “You are a demon! A wizard! You belong to the devil!”

“That is not true. And if you would only let me prove it to you...”

“I do not think she is interested,” comments the sorceress casually.

“You have no business here, Morgana!” snarls the one who sees the future.

“Please help me!” cries the girl.

“I tried,” shrugs the sorceress. “I gave you the charmed amulet that would keep that lecherous old man’s hands off of you, but you went and lost it.” She cuts her eyes in the direction of the cave.

“Enough, Morgana! King Arthur and his court have established the age of chivalry.”

“Really? Because you are hardly acting chivalrous at the moment.”

The one who sees the future’s eyes grow miserable again as he turns his attention back to the struggling young girl in his arms. “Come, Niviane. Come with me now.”

“No... No!” screams the girl, struggling more fiercely.

“Are you going to force her to love you?” asks the sorceress, who seems quite amused by the young girl’s plight as well as the desperation of the one who sees the future.

“Your day is done now, witch!”

“Another day will come.”

“Until that time we have no further business. Now you,” and the one who sees the future turns his full attention back upon the young girl struggling to free herself from his embrace. His miserable expression hardens into one of determination. “I have had quite enough of this squalling. The stars have proclaimed my love for you and that my love is true. And you will learn to accept it.”

“Then prove it,” challenges the sorceress rising from the stump.

The one who sees the future shoots her a look.

“Prove you love her. Within that cave is something that belongs to your sweet lady, something she wants very dearly. Go retrieve it for her and prove your love.”

The one who sees the future drops his hands from the girl who falls back upon the ground, crawling desperately away from him.

“I have watched the stars, for they are mine to watch, and I see the future.”

“But you cannot change it, can you, Merlin?”

“I know what will happen when I enter that cave.”

“And yet, still you must. Look at her, old man. She is terrified of you; she loathes you; she is *repulsed* by you. But if you go in that cave, you will at least prove to her that your love is true, pathetic and misplaced perhaps, but still true.”

“I have seen within the stars –”

“Yes, and you must bow to the will of the stars.”

The one who sees the future, but cannot change it, turns to face the cave, then turns to look one last time upon his love, Niviane.

“I do this to prove my love for you. My final act upon this world.”

And with that, Merlin of the Court of Camelot walks into the Cave of Secrets.

And then Morgan le Fay raises her hand and seals it forever.

Niviane gets up shakily to her feet.

“How... how long will that hold him?”

“Why, forever, my dear,” smiles Morgan le Fay.

Niviane places her hand modestly upon her breast and sighs a maiden's sigh of relief. "Oh thank you; you have saved me from being undone."

"Oh, spare me your platitudes and go back to your lover... or should I say lovers? Your *virtue* was never an issue here. Still, I could not have imprisoned him without you. I think I shall let the scribes give *you* credit for it.

"Right now, I wish to prepare for the Battle of Camlann, after which I will help to bury my *dear brother*, Arthur on Avalon. There I shall take my rest for, oh, several centuries I would guess."

"Centuries?"

"Yes, Merlin was right about one thing. My time is done here, but there will come another day."

Walking up to a dead tree on the edge of the clearing, Morgan le Fay breaks off a brittle dry branch and tosses it aside.

"I do look forward to the future. I am sure it will be far more interesting than this grey place."