

Camelot Revisited

“Artie, sweetie, burn me at the stake without further ado or let me go. Stop this charade,” Guinevere raged to her husband, the king, who, in response to her requested audience, was visiting her in the castle where she was confined, confined in splendor without doubt, but still a prisoner. For his visit, she had dismissed all her maids who attended her in her prison quarters.

Guinevere, or Ginny as she thought of herself, didn't want to die by fire, but, perhaps, even more she didn't want Camelot going up in flames less than five years after its flowering, and that would happen if she couldn't get this madness straightened out. Of all the top knights of the Round Table, only Mordred had the intelligence needed to handle the knights and run the kingdom, and Mordred was totally devoted to evil. Art, Lance, Gawain, and several others were absolute dears, but they couldn't run a kingdom without help, and, since her confinement, all the help was to further the kingdom's destruction.

“You know I can't do that, milady, until the trial,” Arthur responded. Mordred is the prosecutor, and he has the court on his side.

She stormed, “First, stop this milady stuff. I'm Ginny just as I've always been. Get Lancelot back here with you, and the two of you together again will have the court back on your side immediately. You know you and Lance are like brothers; so stop this foolishness before you tear Camelot apart. You can both be hard-headed idiots at times.”

“Your affair with Sir Lancelot is the cause of this. How can I have him back?” Arthur demanded.

“By asking him. He'll come to save Camelot. Kick me out of Camelot if you must, but you and he need to stand together.” She was fully aware that kicking her out would be the worst thing he could do for the kingdom, but, once Art and Lance had reunited, she knew she could bypass that possibility and get things back to normal. Actually, she knew that once they stood together before the Round Table, Mordred's opposition was meaningless. “And Lance's and my affair never seemed to be an issue before. Don't tell me you didn't know, all those nights at Camelot, that he was sleeping on the left side of the bed with you on the right and me in the middle. You and he jostled and tilted away too many nights as friendly foes for you not to be aware he was there. And are you going to join me at the stake for what you do with your sister, Morgain? Or, if not Morgain, the barbarous Demon Knight's lady, whose bed you and Lance shared for a week after he slew the knight? Oh, I forgot. Without the justice of our new order, whatever a knight does is right unless there is another knight to call him to task for it. Is that what Camelot has come to? You and Lance kept each other honest, but who's keeping you honest now? For that matter, he needs you as much as you need him.”

“Ginny, Camelot could not endure if everyone knew the queen was being shared by the king and one of the knights. The knights of the Round Table demand strict fidelity from the queen. We didn't recognize how our illegal acts harmed Camelot until Mordred explained to the court that there must be rigorous adherence to all laws and that adherence must begin at the top ”

“Artie, Mordred gives not a whit for laws and uses or abuses them for his advantage. He wants to bed me himself, and, if I thought it would save Camelot, I’d let him, but it wouldn’t stop his evil work. As to laws, if breaking one hurts nobody, is the breach important? When I walked between you and Lance among the knights and we were cheered just last summer, everyone knew about you, him, and me. It was no secret, and they didn’t care because they saw proud happy people who had the best interests of the kingdom at heart, and they didn’t care if we strayed a bit as they sometimes did themselves. Mordred and Morgain have poisoned your mind, Mordred because he is evil and Morgain because she wants you for herself. At least she is honest about it.”

“Heaven knows I miss Lance to guard my rear when my foe is at my back, but no one even knows how to reach him. And how can I forgive him for what he has done with you?” Arthur wondered.

“Please understand that there’s nothing to forgive, Artie. Some might deny it, but your, my, and Lance’s love was pure.” She was aware that the priests didn’t approve, but she really believed what she said because Art and Lance were too innocent for their love not to be pure, and, although she knew innocent was never the word that should be used to describe her, all her schemes had been for the good of Camelot.

She remembered back to before she had been Art’s queen, when he had come courting her at her father’s palace. Of her suitors, Art was not the handsomest, though comely enough, not the best lover, though quite adequate for the task, not the best warrior, though certainly an excellent one, and, sad to say, certainly not the brightest of the lot; however, he had this idea of a kingdom founded on right and justice as the law of the land, where knights helped bring fairness to the law instead of trying to evade justice themselves, and where the king served the people instead of forcing the people into servitude. Except for his dream, Art was the type of nobleman Ginny usually dallied with briefly and moved on; however she was drawn to the young king, who, she knew, had no chance of achieving his dream without the help of someone of her ilk; thus, she became his queen and had never regretted it for a moment until this foolishness.

As one of the first acts of their reign, she had accompanied Art to the kingdom ruled by Lancelot’s father to court the noble son as a knight of the Round Table because, even in his youth, Lancelot was already known as a warrior without peer in battle and one absolutely devoted to the ideals of knighthood. It’s true that Art was innocent, but he was not so innocent that he wouldn’t use his wife’s allure to draw Lancelot into their circle, and she had never been sure whether she made the offer because Art wanted her to, because the kingdom needed her to, or because she desired Lance. She suspected all played their parts in her offering to welcome Lance to her bed to gain the young prince’s devotion, but she was surprised that he would join her only if Art was there also. Since that day, Lance and Art had both been her lovers, and, though she would never express such to them, she sometimes suspected they were using her to pass kisses from one to the other. That made no difference to her because, although Lance was her lover, more importantly for Camelot, he was Art’s friend, or had been until Mordred’s evil scheming had split them apart.

”Ginny, of course, I wish we could go back to the more-innocent days, and I wish I had Lance by my side again because I never felt vulnerable to a foe, seen or unseen, when he stood at my side to face other kings or churchmen or stood back to back with me when we were surrounded by enemies. But, as I said, I don’t even know where he is.”

“Artie, you remember the games you, Lance, and I played. Every time Lance gave me a kiss, you could demand that kiss from me in tribute. Of course, sometimes when we played knight at the crossroads, he, not you, would get to be the bad boy to whom tribute had to be paid, but we all liked the game however we played it. You and Lance were both my men, and neither of you ever had to doubt I was totally your woman. And, dear one, I can get in contact with Lance; in fact, if I don’t send word every day, his forces will attack and destroy Mordred, but, along with that destruction, many good men on either side will die, and, possibly even worse, Camelot will probably perish.”

It was meant only as a statement of fact, but the mention of Camelot perishing caused Arthur to show resolve that had been missing for weeks. “We can’t let the dream die. Get word to Lance, and I’ll meet with him whenever and wherever he wishes. Tell him I need no bond from him because I trust his honor.”

Ginny thought a moment before saying, “One day from tomorrow is the date for a meeting of all the Round Table, isn’t it? Be here in my prison a bit before the court meets, and Lance will be here too, if he will agree to enter the castle in disguise instead of being too stubbornly proud to be a simple servant. You, he, and I will walk in to the meeting of the Round Table together as we used to do.”

After a few kisses and exchange of terms of endearment, Arthur departed, and Ginny began planning. When the three of them showed up arm in arm, most of the Round Table knights would pledge to them immediately, while smaller factions would support Mordred and would have no opinion, but Ginny knew the group supporting Mordred would not act unless they were in the majority. She also knew that some of those knights supporting Mordred would be doing so because they thought it the right course for Camelot, while others would be doing so because they were adherents of Mordred, and it would be up to her to sort out those knights for the good of Camelot, even though she had, at one time, probably been close to some of those she must dismiss or even eliminate. She suspected Mordred’s real support came only from those knights he had recruited, but even some of those were worthy men.

Another distasteful action Ginny knew she must take was to make peace with and, if possible, become friends with Morgain, although they had disliked each other even before she had married Art, chiefly because they were rivals for him. For the good of the kingdom, she could become like a sister to Morgain, and she would even share Art with her if necessary because she needed Morgain on her side, not merely a non-adversary. Ginny was aware that many claimed Morgain was the mother of Mordred, but Ginny knew this was untrue. Morgain was only four years older than Ginny’s twenty-seven, too young to be mother to a twenty-two-year-old Mordred. The situation was strange because Morgain was Art’s older half-sister through the same mother, and

Mordred's mother was Art's half-sister through the same father, but neither Art nor Morgain had any love for Mordred. Certainly, Ginny felt nothing but revulsion for him, and, although she had never been able to prove it, she suspected that Mordred had killed his own mother.

After Arthur left, Ginny set in motion with her attendants the steps to get in contact with Lancelot to postpone his attack for another day and to try to prevail on him to enter her place of confinement as a humble servant. Then, she began the important task of repairing bridges between herself and Morgain, who agreed to meet with her the next afternoon.

Morgain greeted the queen as she entered her prison room, "Good day, Your Majesty. Of what service may I be to you?"

"Good day, Lady Morgain. You and I were never friends, mostly because you didn't want me to have Art and I didn't want you to have him or, later, Lancelot, but, if Camelot is to survive, we must put our dislike for each other aside, even if we have to share."

"You want me to intercede with Art on your behalf to save you from the stake?" Morgain inquired. "I would certainly do that if it would ensure Camelot's future."

Ginny responded, "I can actually take care of that, but your support will help. You know that you and I are the only ones at court, other than Mordred, who have the intelligence, resolve, and intellect to guide Camelot on the course of Art's dream, and your desire to share that dream is one of the reasons you have wanted Art for yourself."

Morgain interrupted, "And you suggest you and I share power, including men, to save Camelot."

"I suggest you and I share responsibility, not just power, to save Camelot. My mishandling of you when you showed up at Camelot last year was the worst mistake I ever made. I should either have invited you into our household as a full member or have put you to death immediately, but I wavered, being neither queenly nor wifely."

"And which do you wish you had done?" Morgain wanted to know.

Ginny admitted, "I've been of both minds over time, but does it matter at this point? You know that, if I give you my word, I will keep it. Do we have a bargain?" She paused briefly for the other woman to nod. "I suspect you have Art in your bed now, and getting Lance will be no major task for you, if I don't oppose it. More importantly, you and I will discuss issues and make decisions jointly or, rather, we will direct Art and Lance as his advisor to those decisions."

Morgain put in, "You speak as if the accusations against you were resolved and as if Lance and Art were reconciled. You even dismiss Mordred as if he were not a problem. Granted, you and I can assure your charges are dropped and you are restored, but getting Lance and Art back together may be more difficult and getting past Mordred is even tougher."

Ginny replied, “You probably know already that I met here with Art yesterday to start the process of getting him back together with Lance, and they will meet tomorrow, and, if you will support us, the two of them and I will appear together before the meeting of the Round Table, and every knight and, just as importantly, every man and woman in the kingdom will be aware that their friendship is restored. Their standing together before the court with your voiced approval will effectively take away Mordred’s power, although I haven’t yet convinced Art of that.”

Morgain offered, “Just one thing you may have forgotten. Mordred is as smart as you and I and as devious as either of us in his wicked way. As you and I do, he will see that the four of us united against him will doom his plans, and he will do something tomorrow while he still has support from some of the knights. I wouldn’t be surprised if he does it as soon as he sees Art and Lance together. Let me talk in confidence with a few selected knights and have them ready. That’s something you can’t do from your position.”

Ginny said to her, “I take it we’re in agreement that we will do whatever is necessary to save Camelot and Art’s dream of a better kingdom. You will become a member of the royal household, and you and I will treat each other like beloved sisters and put aside all thoughts of destroying each other. From now on, I am Ginny to you. Do what you need do with the knights you trust most, and we need to identify the knights who we believe are adherents of Mordred.”

The two women discussed strategy and could identify only five knights as likely strong allies of Mordred, and all had been brought to the court by him. Ginny left handling the Mordred affair to Morgain and concentrated on reuniting Art and Lance.

Came the morrow, and all came to pass as Ginny and Morgain had predicted. When Ginny appeared before the assembled knights walking between Art and Lance and holding an arm of each, Morgain and her contingent led the cheering for them, and, after a moment, it seemed the entire assembly joined in. Those watching Mordred, however, saw him raise his sword against Art as the king, his queen, and his friend passed Mordred’s position at the table, and they saw Lancelot cut him down without even seeming to move. Four knights had followed Mordred’s lead, but they were easily subdued without bloodshed by the knights Morgain had stationed around them. The fifth knight they had identified as a probable participant in the conspiracy stood quietly without showing support for Mordred.

With Mordred dead, the four traitorous knights were imprisoned separately in luxurious quarters to await the justice of Camelot, which would be a meeting of the Round Table to hear their cases; however, Ginny and Morgain knew bringing up all the issues in court could result in divisions among the knights, and, on the same night, not long after their capture, each of the four treasonous knights hanged himself, something against which no safeguards had been taken because taking his own life by hanging was a shameful act for a knight. With all the traitors dying shamefully, everyone at court wished to forget them quickly without asking embarrassing questions about the Mordred affair, the unfaithful knights, or their fates. Ginny and Morgain felt a degree of guilt but would have gladly suffered even more for the sake of Camelot.

The Round Table, Camelot, the kingdom, and the people of the kingdom flourished for many years with Arthur and Guinevere as rulers, watched over, supported, and loved by their good and loyal friends, Lancelot and Morgain, and with the knights of the Round Table ready and eager to fight injustice any time it raised its head anywhere throughout the kingdom; however, as do all kingdoms, eventually, the glory of Camelot ended, not through treachery, warfare, or disagreement from within, but from the demise of its rulers after long, long lives. While it was true that there were royal offspring who were eager to wear the crown and who even accepted the noble goals of Camelot, they had all inherited their intelligence from their fathers instead of their mothers, and none had excelled at the problems with which Ginny and Morgain tested them. The day might still have been saved had one or more of the offspring chosen mates who possessed the necessary wisdom to rule, but looks, athleticism, bravery, and, in one case, submissiveness, won out over intelligence in their choices. Ginny and Morgain loved their children, but, after it was too late for a remedy, each sometimes regretted not having dallied with one of the super-intelligent ambassadors sent to Camelot by foreign courts. Without exceptional candidates to succeed Art on the throne, the two women did their best for the kingdom by ensuring that the most-competent people were installed as judges, clerks, and district administrators, but, over time, not days or even years, but decades, the kingdom slowly decayed and crumbled.

As centuries passed, details of Camelot were forgotten, but legends of the kingdom that was founded on justice survived and were related by poets, wandering minstrels; and other tellers of tall tales; however, the true tale did not ring with the romance and tragedy of tales of kingdoms that failed because of regal infidelity, intrigue at the royal court, or plots and subplots among the knights. The truth being insufficiently glamorous, men were not loath to concoct tales in which Mordred was the illegitimate incestuous offspring of Arthur and Morgain, tales in which Guinevere, Arthur, and Lancelot let others characterize their mutual love and devotion as something ignoble, tales where a more-mature Mordred's perfidy worked according to his plans, even tales in which Arthur and Lancelot crossed swords with each other instead of standing side by side to defend the kingdom. The portrayals of Guinevere and Morgain in these inaccurate tales were always as beautiful but vain women whose moral weaknesses helped to doom the kingdom, not as the heroines whose intelligence and bravery saved not only the high ideals of Camelot but Camelot itself. Being human, Ginny and Morgain liked being appreciated for a job well done as well as anyone; however, they always knew that the king and the knights of Camelot would get the praise, if they succeeded and knew, moreover, that living out their lives and continuing to provide guiding hands — and guiding minds — in a peaceful, just kingdom would be their greatest reward, and they were satisfied with that and with the love and devotion of Arthur and Lancelot.