

ARTHUR'S LEGACY

THE CHILDREN OF ARTHUR, BOOK ONE

TYLER R. TICELAAR

Arthur's Legacy: The Children of Arthur, Book One

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PROLOGUE

“For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.”

— William Shakespeare, *Richard II*

MELEON HAD NEVER thought it would come to this. He knew he and his brother, Prince Morgant, were far from the great knights that their grandfather, King Arthur, or even their father, Prince Mordred, had been, so if those two great men had not succeeded in defeating the usurper Constantine, how could he and Morgant? Yet, Meleon had hoped the good Lord above would aid them in their battle.

But it had been a slaughter, a hopeless slaughter. The brave and loyal men of Britain, those left who had not been slain at Camlann and many more—farmers, millers, merchants, all able bodied men who remained loyal to Arthur’s blood—had done their best. But what could they do against a tyrant who was aided by a witch?

The men had fought valiantly all that afternoon, but when the ravens began to flock above the battlefield with the decline of day and Meleon looked about him, having just run his blade through one of Constantine’s men, he saw that few of his own army remained on the field, and if they did not retreat now, those few would also fall by the sword.

“Meleon!” cried Morgant. “It’s hopeless! Hurry! We must get away!”

Meleon hated to turn and run, but he knew his brother was right. His father and grandfather would not have thought it cowardly if he sought to save his own life. Then perhaps he could make it safely to Lesser Britain, to

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their distant cousins there, to raise a new army, to seek out Merlin, the great wizard who had disappeared from Britain years before, but who might be the only one alive now who could fight against the witch. Meleon, however, had never even met Merlin, only heard tales of him, so how could he know whether the wizard were still alive? But sightings of him had been rumored over the years, and what other hope was there?

No time to think of Merlin now. Meleon turned and rushed after his brother, joined by a couple of dozen fellow soldiers as the enemy's army tried to pursue them. They ran over the nearby hill and into the forest, the enemy cutting down half of them along the way, the blood of his comrades spraying onto Meleon's face as he fought to try to save them. But once his men reached the forest, the enemy failed to pursue them farther, and Meleon and Morgant led their loyal handful of followers into the woods.

They were hardly worth pursuing now. Doubtless, Constantine and his men would find them if he wanted their lives, and they were bleeding so profusely from their many wounds that they could not run far.

Still, they managed to make their way through the forest as the sky darkened, and after a couple of miles, as night finally fell, they emerged into a clearing where stood a small monastery, one Meleon knew well—it was where the great Sir Bedwyr had retreated after the fatal Battle of Camlann where Arthur and Mordred had been slain.

Just that morning, Meleon's men had camped at the monastery before going to face Constantine, and Meleon had then begged Sir Bedwyr to join them in battle, even declaring that as Arthur's heir, he, Meleon, was now Bedwyr's king, so it was his duty to obey him.

But Bedwyr had calmly said, "No. All the trouble that has come upon Britain is my fault. It is God's punishment for my and Queen Guinevere's sins. I am not wise, nor good, but I can hold off causing more pain and bloodshed."

Meleon could not believe the knight's words. Never had there ever been a braver man in all the history of Britain than Sir Bedwyr, so how could he desert them now?

"It is desertion, you know," Meleon had said, trying to incite the knight to anger so he would join them. "You are being disloyal to Arthur. If you wish to make penance for your sins, the best way is to take up arms against he who has usurped Arthur's throne."

But Bedwyr would have none of it. "My king is in heaven now," he said.

Meleon did not know whether by “my king” Bedwyr meant his deceased grandfather or God himself, but either way, it would not help Britain.

“God does not want an evil witch to sit on the throne of Britain,” Meleon had argued.

“God takes no interest in the wars of humans,” Bedwyr had replied. “He cares only for their salvation, and war, in any form and for any reason, works against that salvation.”

Now as Meleon struggled across the meadow to the monastery’s door, he wondered whether Bedwyr would even give him and his men sanctuary.

He need not have wondered, however, for the monks had been watching for their return, and without surprise at their greatly reduced numbers, the holy brothers quickly rushed outdoors to help them inside to treat their wounds.

Bedwyr greeted the princes, separating them from their men and telling them to come with him into the chapel.

“We will pray,” said Bedwyr, “for those whose lives were lost this day, both those of your own men and those of Constantine’s.”

“Pray for the souls of traitors!” spat out Morgant.

“Before your grandfather Arthur went to Avalon to be healed, he told me to pray for him and the souls of all men,” said Bedwyr calmly. And then he turned and walked to the chapel, and the princes, too exhausted to argue, decided it was best to follow and get the praying over with so Bedwyr might find them a meal and aid them in further escape.

“We cannot stay long,” said Meleon. “My wife Rachel will be grief-stricken with worry. We must find a boat and sail to Rheged so I can warn her of what has happened.”

“There is no need,” said Bedwyr, “this morning after your army left, a messenger arrived to bring news of your wife. He journeyed all night and was exhausted; he is resting inside the monastery, waiting to give you the news, but for now, it is enough to tell you that Princess Rachel gave birth two days ago to your son, whom she named Arthur after your grandfather, and this morning, she embarked with the child and several knights of her father, King Accolon, for Lesser Britain to find safety there, for Constantine has sent another army against Rheged. The messenger barely escaped them as they marched toward the castle just an hour after Princess Rachel and the child made their escape.”

“Thank God for her safety,” said Meleon as they entered the chapel. “I

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will pray then that God be with her, as well as with my father-in-law, King Accolon, and his people.”

Bedwyr bid the princes follow him to the altar in the small chapel, and there the three knelt and spoke silently to God of what troubled their hearts.

But their prayers were not to be finished. Not three minutes after they knelt, the chapel door was flung open and in strode Constantine with half-a-dozen of his armed men and the Witch Queen following him.

Bedwyr jumped up, instinctively reaching for his sword, but there was none by his side.

Morgant only had time to half-draw his sword before Constantine's own sword swung through the air, severing the prince's head.

“No!” cried Meleon, his sword drawn to engage his enemy in combat.

Constantine's men, however, quickly surrounded the prince. One of them, having not a shred of honor, struck Meleon a blow in the back, which did not pierce his armor but sent the prince to the floor. A second later, Constantine's sword rested against Meleon's throat.

“Sacrilege!” shouted Bedwyr, who had been grabbed by three burly knights, now struggling to hold him, his old fighting spirit having been raised by the attack. “Would you shed blood in the House of God?”

“Silence!” screamed the Witch Queen, she who was named Gwenhwyvach and who claimed to be sister to Guinevere and the true Queen of Britain. Stepping up to Bedwyr, she laughed in his face. “Fool knight, you who thought yourself invincible—look at you now, a beggar monk. To such humility I have driven the strongest man in Britain. You are just like every other man since the time of Adam himself. Weak, foolish, a coward, afraid of women, afraid of my power, afraid of your very self.”

“My lady,” said Constantine, drawing her attention, “with this sword blow, I now do claim all Britain as wholly ours.”

And with those words and before Gwenhwyvach even could speak, he plunged his sword through Meleon's throat.

Meleon could not believe the agonizing sting of the metal as it severed his flesh. He struggled for breath, his body going into panic mode.

“Fool!” screeched Gwenhwyvach at her consort. “Did I tell you to slay him? First I must know where the rings are!”

“What rings?” asked Constantine.

“Where are the rings?” Gwenhwyvach demanded, staring down at Meleon with piercing eyes.

But Meleon closed his eyes, for he had heard that the Witch Queen could read the very secrets of a man's soul in his eyes. He knew which rings she meant—the royal rings of Avalon, the rings his grandfather and grandmother had always worn. Once, when he had been a small boy, he had sat on his grandfather's lap and played with his ring and his grandfather had said, "This ring holds incredible power such that even I don't know how fully to use it or all its secrets. But one day it shall be yours, and you shall pass it to all the Kings of Britain who shall come after you." Meleon had always wondered what power it held, but he had never dared to ask his grandfather more. Neither his grandfather nor grandmother ever would have taken those rings from their fingers, so if...as Sir Bedwyr had told him...Morgana had...had taken.... Meleon could barely think...hated that he was dying... would never again...see Rachel or his son.... But if Morgana had taken...King Arthur to Avalon...the rings were there...and safe until his son....