

Excerpt

*Prelude to Camelot*

Bedwyr arrived at Cameliard unexpectedly, shortly after Lugnasad when the August heat was upon them. He brought Arthur with him, as well as Cai, Gwalchmai, and Gryflet.

Gwenhwyfar flew down the steps to meet her older brother as they rode through the gate. He picked her up and swung her around and set her down. “You’re getting too tall for me to do that much longer,” he said.

“Never!” she laughed. “We didn’t know you were coming! How long can you stay? Wait until you see how I’ve improved my swordplay! Can we go riding? My pony, Prince, has learned some new tricks...”

“Do you always ask so many questions?”

She stopped in mid-sentence and looked up. Arthur. His clear grey eyes were laughing at her. *I don’t like being laughed at.* “Why does it matter to you?” she asked flippantly.

“Another question.” He dismounted. “Your brother told me his baby sister was a whirlwind.”

She lifted her chin. “I’m not a baby! I’m eleven.”

“My apologies. I should have realized you were a lady.” His discerning gaze took in her treads and the stains on her shirt and then her hair, half of which had escaped her braid. He grinned.

She felt herself blush and furiously tried to stop. So this was the Arthur that Bedwyr so admired. She glared at him and someone else laughed.

She glanced at the other man, but he looking at Arthur.

“It seems this is one...lady...that you haven’t impressed!” Gwalchmai swung down from his saddle. He bowed toward her. “I’m happy to meet you, Gwenhwyfar.”

She looked into his eyes, wondering if they were all going to tease her, but she saw nothing in his bland expression to indicate that. *At least one of Bedwyr’s friends is nice.*

“Let’s go in,” Bedwyr said and wrapped his arm around Gwenhwyfar’s shoulders

Once they were seated in the Great Hall, Bedwyr explained the situation to Leodegrance. “We can’t stay but the night. We’re on our way to Rheged. Uriens says there’s trouble with the Saxons and Octa has been spotted across the Wall.”

“So close?” Gwenhwyfar asked before her father could.

Bedwyr nodded. “Octa’s not Hengist’s son for nothing. When he stayed north and held the Picts at bay, all was well. Now Uriens thinks he may have other plans.”

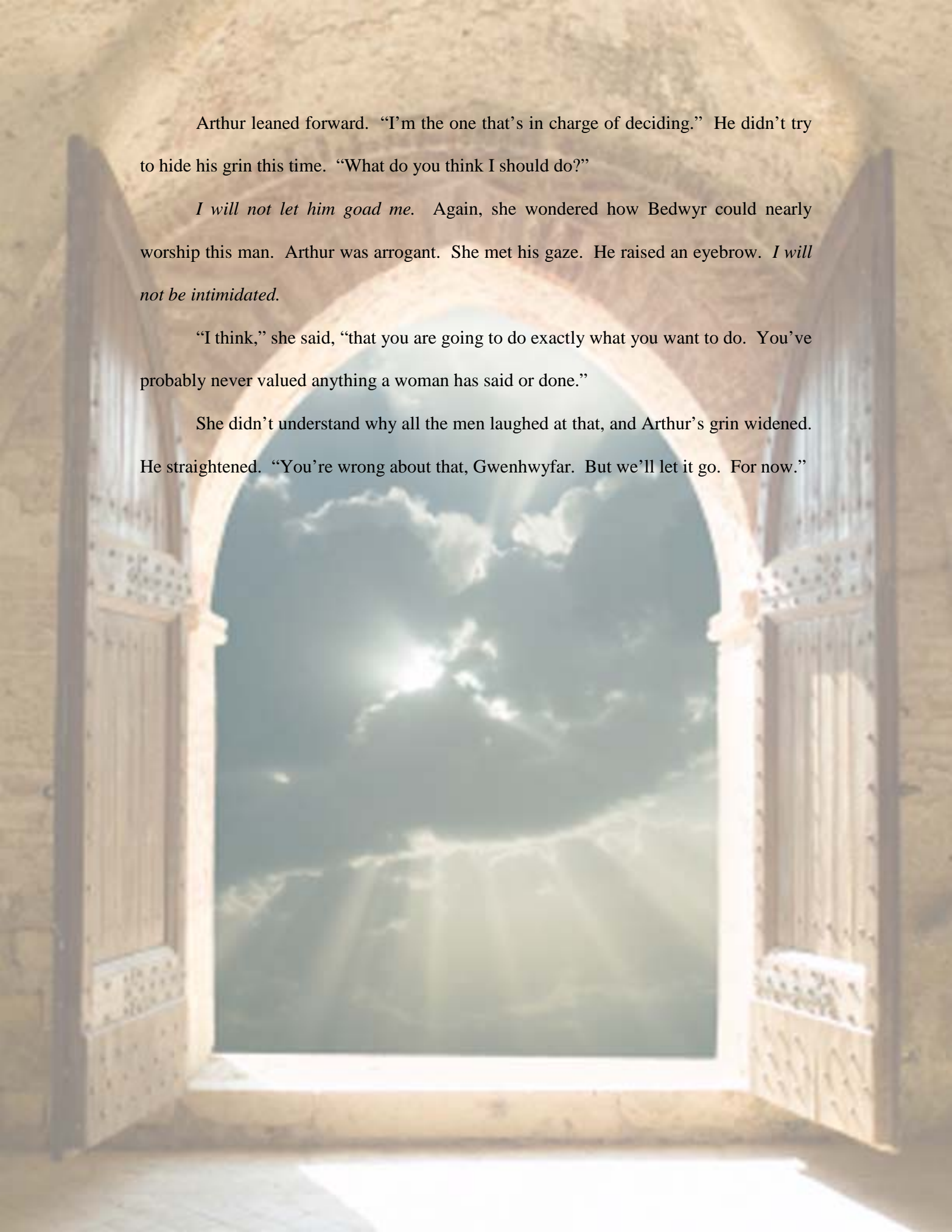
She frowned. “If King Uriens needs help, why doesn’t he come to Cameliard? We’re neighbors. We could muster troops much faster than King Uther could.”

“For a girl, you seem to understand strategy.” Arthur looked amused. “Mayhap Uther would let you into the army.”

Gwenhwyfar glared at him again. He had a way of setting her temper aflame and it didn’t help that his friends all seemed to think him funny. She didn’t.

She deliberately turned to her brother. “Is King Uther going to send troops?”





Arthur leaned forward. “I’m the one that’s in charge of deciding.” He didn’t try to hide his grin this time. “What do you think I should do?”

*I will not let him goad me.* Again, she wondered how Bedwyr could nearly worship this man. Arthur was arrogant. She met his gaze. He raised an eyebrow. *I will not be intimidated.*

“I think,” she said, “that you are going to do exactly what you want to do. You’ve probably never valued anything a woman has said or done.”

She didn’t understand why all the men laughed at that, and Arthur’s grin widened. He straightened. “You’re wrong about that, Gwenhwyfar. But we’ll let it go. For now.”