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I, Mordred

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I, Mordred

How splendid of you to take interest in the affairs of your young, thin-blooded son. I received your letter early yesterday and was literally quite thrilled by the energy and feeling you expressed, in fact, one might go so far as to call your tone desperate. I shall write soon enough of the goings-on at Camelot, but first I should like to inquire after your own health. Are you aging well? Have the wrinkles now conquered every corner of the gorgeous realm of your skin? Do your monstrous boobs yet drag across the marble floor and are your liver-spots as dark and vile as ever?

Yes, Mother, very kind of you to inquire of me the reason that your son is not yet King, to scribble madly on the page your hatred and your thirst for blood. You wonder if I waver in my dark resolve? Frightened that I might have been won over by my father's wholesome tenderness and all of the flowering beauty and love which blooms daily here at Camelot? You may breathe easy my dear wind-bag, there is no love for me at Camelot, and I will tear this place apart with nothing else but a wink and a nod, if my mouth, my hands and feet be gagged. Camelot will fall like a murdered child when I am through with her, and I myself will drag her down to hell.

I saw a father once carrying his young dead son in his sobbing arms. The little corpse was wrapped loosely in a piece of gorgeous soft red velvet, and I remember wondering from whom the man had stolen the cloth to wrap up his dead child. Tears were spurting from the knave's red face and snot was running down into his open, howling mouth. He was a commoner, a baker probably or more likely a blacksmith of some sort. The street was busy with carts and commerce, and not a soul but me was turned to watch the big fool's weaving, wet procession through the traffic. He wailed and moaned as if he'd lost an arm, or an entire kingdom full of gold and cloth and horses, but he'd only lost a son. The stupid brute. He must have had more, all these insipid dopes breed like the plague and fill the gutters with the rotting flesh of their unwanted children. Infant beggars are daily set to street by women who hadn't the sense to cross their bloody thighs (no offense to you, dear mother). And still, the father cried and moaned, and honored his crusty little snot with a snatch of royal velvet, lifted from a nobleman's coach.

He wrapped him in velvet, Mother! Do you understand what I'm telling you? The poorest wretch in all the kingdom breaks his scrawny neck while loosening his bowels, and his father picks him up into his strong, red arms, and wraps him in a piece of heavenly velvet, because he knows that he has lost his son. His son. Angrily I stormed up to the man and ripped the velvet off of his dead child. The impudence! I, the King's own son, will be wrapped in a heap of dung when I am wormsmeat, and yet his snot-faced brat would go to dirt in a luscious pile of England's finest cloth! I ripped the velvet off of his young corpse and burned it in the nearest blacksmith's forge.

I won't be wrapped in velvet when I die, my father will not weep and carry

me. Whether I die on the pot or in the field, my father, the King, will have me tightly wrapped in maggot-skins and toss my cracked bones fast into the horses' piles. My father, dear, sweet father, almost spoke to me today. I sat near him this morning at the joust. He looked at me and then he looked away. Oh, yes, he loves me dearly I daresay. He cannot even bear to see my face. Oh, Mother, not because I look like you (although that might have similar effect) but because I am a bastard, just like him, and I am far too honest for this court. He really is a bastard, is he not? When hoary old Uther bedded down my only grandmere from behind, tangled in a web of matted magic, was not the illegitimate product our bright King? Who shines so golden from the turrets of this sinking pile of stones? Oh yes, and grandpere Gorlois was yet warm, and breathing when the dragon pierced his wife. And thus our fair King Arthur was conceived. And thus is he a bastard like myself. Although Igera and Uther had not blood so thick and close as you and he, yet still, a bastard he, I think, like me.

Wasn't that lovely? Oh, by the way, "Her Highness the Queen" sends her royal regards, or would, if she condescended to speak to me or thought you more than a vicious slut. She's looking marvelous, all that physical activity keeps both her and Sir Lancelot looking quite young. Really, you must hand it to Guenevere, here she is, fast approaching forty, and yet still she bangs her bed each night into the floor with Lancelot. Each night the country howls with their obscenities, as my father, the bastard, lies silent in bed with his eyes frozen open, his toothy mouth a thin blue line set hard between his cheek and chin.

I don't imagine the poor old toad can sleep a wink, no matter what his silence says. And yet, I find myself wondering, who gives a damn? Who cares if the best and brightest of Camelot rip off their vows to Arthur on royal sheets? Come to think of it, I like their constant fucking very well, for who better to care and feed for the long, thick horns on Arthur's head than the King's own wetnurse, Lancelot. Yes, I think a set of horns should always be on Arthur's head, it's really a family tradition, you know. Very like the horns that my grandpere wore, and ones that were given King Lot of Orkney by his dear wife.

"Yes, yes Mordred, this is all lovely and well," you are thinking in your numb and calculating way, "But when, darling, will you leave off your boyish whining and conquer Camelot?" When will the country be mine? When will I finally clutch this rotting hulk of land you bought me with your flesh? The horns which rode Lot's frosty brow were no more noble than the rest. Happily, I hate him too, or did, until he bit the sword. How did you purchase that kingdom mother? Now that your flesh is old and grim? A magic spell, perhaps? I hear a fine enchantment can work wonders on an unsuspecting victim. Oh, all the lovely people in our family simply can't seem to keep their claws off one another. Thank you, mother, for the other night, I'd send flowers to you now, but my allowance here simply won't allow. A bit of humor, just for you, my sweet, sweet mother, who (luckily for me and all my kin) is ages past the point of fertility.

Do you want to know why I'm not yet King? Yes, of course you do you grubbing hag. You have waited twenty years to slide me into Arthur's golden throne, preparing me to set my scepter in your hands so you can yank and bend it as you please. Well, let me tell you, I will not be King. I, Mordred, do not care

for this green hole. "Not all that glitters is golden" someone once said, and it might have been in Camelot. All of the ninnies in this bloody castle are perfect examples of fabulously ornate, and glaringly empty jewelry boxes. When father asked me if I hoped to join The Round Table, I almost giggled right in his hairy face. They're all a pack of clanking, clinging church bells, who ring themselves too loudly through the day, and change their tune to darker songs come evening.

The lovely Guenevere walks splayed all day in glowing silver gowns and wears a shining golden cross upon her perfect breast to show the world her saintliness, as Lancelot rides next to her, brandishing his sword and swearing that he will carve up any man who dares to look upon the Queen and say that she is not a breathing angel. Oh, Lancelot. He is a man to be reckoned with, a full-blown knight with a light French twist. Hobbling about in his fine, bejeweled armour, swearing off women and wine "for God and Arthur" one would think him seated in the dais 'tween heaven and Earth. Must drive him buggy though, swearing abstinence and chastity during the day, then swearing it off during the night. Galahad, his pious young son, shrinks away from him as though Sir Lancelot were a demon and makes his hands into a cross each time the lovely pair rides by. Of course, the Brave Sir Galahad hasn't the sense to dress himself in the morning and sobs if his unspeckled helmet is fixed too tight upon his precious skull. My loving brothers, Gawain and Aggravaine, have decided that my presence here is less than welcome, and Gawain has all but challenged me to single combat on the field. He is old, mother, and he is angry, angry with me, with the King, and with himself.

Do you remember when Gawain was seventeen and I was four? I used to follow him about the castle, polishing his sword and fetching him whatever tools he needed handy. He hated me even then of course, although at the time I was too young and dull to understand his thick contempt. I only knew that you loved me best, and I suppose that in my innocence I wished Gawain could come and share in your love. I will not trifle with the silly details, but I do remember a particular instance when you had tucked me into bed and touched me goodnight and I crept quickly out of bed to see my brothers "being men."

"Well the little worm will have to go to court someday I suppose." Aggravaine was sitting on a sofa across the room from Gawain's bed. He was already pale and out of shape, I suppose he was about fifteen then and he liked me even less than did Gawain. The poor sod must have missed his childhood journeys through your sheets.

"I hope he never does," Gawain replied, and suddenly I became very interested in the conversation. In my diseased young mind the words of Gawain were as gospel and by the harsh, hushed tone the two were using I gathered that the subject was important.

"What do you mean you hope he doesn't? With Mordred out of the castle we could once again be men of honor, men who need not cringe at every commoner's dark glance. We have a name and heritage, Gawain, yet all of England figures us for swine."

"Oh, honestly Aggravaine, you've conjured all this on your own. Besides, even if the birth of Mordred is a womanly blemish on our household, sending him

to the King would only make matters worse, and you're not a man yet, Aggravaine, much less a "man of honor." Mother's infidelity need not destroy your name and value. I myself intend to go to Arthur's court and join my sword with his on the Round Table."

"Well, I for one would feel much safer if the little turd were to have a fatal accident. He's always playing with your weapons, don't you think you could arrange . . ."

Suddenly Gawain was on his feet. In one swift burst he'd crossed the room and cut off all of Aggravaine's last words. The younger boy let out a muffled moan that sounded like a drugged and dying cat.

"Hush now Aggravaine, unless you crave our mother's claws more tightly round your neck. You think our younger brother is a problem, and yet you've made it very clear just how little you really comprehend. Do not you know that if Mordred were to die your neck and mine would prove no thicker than a crisp spring air? That brat is Mother's key to all the kingdom and if you think, if thinking's what one calls your dim and feeble reasoning, that she would care a fig for any flesh but his, your final breath is soon and will be painful."

That lovely moment's frozen in my mind, just as a rock or chip of bone becomes frozen in in a bed of ice and hangs malignantly, stacked in crystal, so that image hangs inside my skull: my two brothers, one choking the other, frightened both of me and of my mother. I went back to my room that night and gave myself to you completely. I suppose that in the case of a four-year-old stupidity and simple awe erase completely fear and loathing. We had them, Mummy, right in our tiny fists, these two big, silvery men were frightened to the teeth of you and me.

Well dear, they are not frightened anymore. Else Gawain cares no further for his neck than he does for the fiddler's ass. He all but shits on me at Arthur's court, and he'd do that as well were I not fast enough to dodge his rheumatic squats. Aggravaine, however, loves you still, in some way deep and perverse as my own, and though he loves me no more than before, we've hatched a plot to topple the divinity, the Queen, her French Knight and the Holy Goat. We've only got to catch them in the act, then Arthur will be forced to burn them both. Hell, Mother, if they are not naked, joined and sweating this very night I am a mug of ale. It's far too simple to be any fun, and I am losing interest in this game. The reverend trio's old and I am young, and Arthur's horse could hatch a plot this quick. I barely have the heart to even finish.

And probably I would just leave this. Leave you and your snagged nets, leave Arthur and his holy horns, leave all this heap of rotten dung and sail to the edge, to the end of everything and everywhere, over the edge. In fact, I'd like that better than having Arthur's steaming innards on a golden platter, served to me with a silver spoon. And I would sail tomorrow, wave my little hanky at the cast of Camelot who would all stand cheering on the dock together, crowding around to make sure that little Orkney bastard was really leaving. And all the while they'd hurl boulders and toss lances at my boat, tossing me gifts to remember them by. Still, I would forget them all, I could forget them all, if not for that dead beggar boy I once saw wrapped with love in velvet.

For that piece of velvet this kingdom will burn. For that father's tears this country will be smeared with blood and shit. I, Mordred, son of Arthur and Margause, will hold the burning, stinking nation in my own arms, wrapped in hatred and in velvet, and I will not weep, no, I will laugh, and my voice will carry to their sinner God and rouse out all the devils who snap bones and feathers in the hollowed bowels of Hell. And I will toss this rotten corpse, this blackening child down to those devils in a fit of father's love, as I dive after, forging hell-ward with screams and laughter, waving my hanky at nothing but air. And you will come with us, Mother, won't you? Hell just wouldn't be the same without you there to rub the salt into all of the wounds. Yes Mother, you too can go to Hell. And we will take brandings and lashings together. Together we'll laugh as they rip out our minds and feed them to Cerebus. Oh, Mother, we'll lie in Hell together, you and I, and Gawain and Aggravaine can finally join us, in scorched sheets together, unfolding in screams.

And so now you know why I am not yet King. The time is not right yet to drag down the angels, and you are not ready to join me in Hell. You will be, my darling, and I will grind your sick bones in my fingers. Do not be frightened, and don't bother with your magic. You may not hold my scepter.

Your loving, devoted son,
Mordred

– Carey Christie '95