

Thanksgiving
A King Arthurs Short
By K. M. Shea

Britt shivered and fluffed her fur cloak so it covered her throat. Her breath turned into silvery puffs of mist in the crisp night air as she peered from the inner walls of Camelot, looking out at the dark countryside. She could hear the rustle of dry leaves—during the day the forest surrounding Camelot was a beautiful explosion of colors—and the wind tugged on her hair.

She sniffed. “Not much longer and I’ll have to start pacing indoors.”

“Aye, Milord,” one of Britt’s guards said. He was already swaddled in furs, and his nose was red with the cold.

Britt leaned against a wall and rubbed her hands together. “Right, might as well try to warm up.” She slid Excalibur out of its magical scabbard and twirled it once.

“Couldn’t you practice inside, Milord?” a guard asked. The cold temperatures had brought frost—which made the walkways slick.

“No, I need to be prepared to fight on any terrain,” Britt said. She lunge forward, whirling Excalibur in a step pattern she had drilled so thoroughly she could do it blindfolded. Her right boot slid only once—not bad for such a slippery surface.

The guards shifted and looked disgruntled, but they didn’t try to stop her.

Britt got through three patterns before she heard feet stomping up the stairs and a familiar voice grumble. “That churlish coxcomb!” There was more stomping. “Wayward lout!”

Britt leaned over the side of the wall. “Merlin?”

The wizard’s pale blonde hair and brilliant blue eyes—that were narrowed due to his bad temper—appeared over the wall first. “You!” he glowered.

Britt raised both of her eyebrows. “Yes?”

“What are you doing?” He climbed the last few stairs and adjusted his blue tunic while glaring at Britt like a moody chicken.

Confused, Britt tilted her head. “What I always do?”

“No, no. Not the insomnia, Excalibur! Why must you run, swinging that pig-stickler around on an icy castle wall? Excalibur’s scabbard will keep you from bleeding out, but it won’t stop you from cracking your silly head should you take a spill!”

Britt rolled her eyes and slipped Excalibur back in its scabbard. “Fine. Starting tomorrow I will pace indoors. Will that pacify you?”

“I suppose,” Merlin said.

“Then I’ll do that. Now go be crabby elsewhere.” She turned to look back out over Camelot, her eyes watering from the stinging wind.

Behind her, Merlin shifted. “It’s still bad, isn’t it?” His voice had lost its edge, and was soft with a little hint of sadness.

The change in his voice made Britt twist around to look at him. The flickering torches made his blue eyes look almost sorrowful, as did the upward slant of his eyebrows. Britt pushed off the wall and smiled. “It’s better. I have made many friends and gained a family that I love.”

Merlin looked away from her. “But you still miss your old life.”

“Yes,” Britt acknowledged. She had lived in ancient Britain for a short time compared to her life in modern America. It would be stupid not to admit that she missed her mother, her sister, and her friends.

She rubbed her hands together again. “But I can think of them with less pain, now.”

Merlin looked at her with a furrowed brow.

“It’s true,” she continued. “Homesickness keeps me up late into the night still, but I don’t feel so alone now. In fact, I think I can actually be thankful.”

“Thankful?”

“Yes. There’s a holiday in Ameri—er, where I come from,” Britt said, casting a glance at her guards who were carefully not paying attention. They idly shifted backwards, shuffling out of hearing-range. “It’s in the fall—right around now, actually. Families get together and feast for an entire day until you are so stuffed, you make yourself sick.”

“Gluttony is a sin,” Merlin tisked.

Britt laughed. “Maybe, but it’s still fun. My mom always made my sister and I list the things we were thankful for.” She hesitated. “I’m thankful for my life here. I never would have chosen it, but having Sir Ector as a foster-father has changed me, and I’m so lucky to have Kay as my foster-brother. But even outside of my foster-family, there are so many people I’m grateful for.”

“Young Gawain, I imagine, is near the top of the list?” Merlin asked.

“Yep! As are his brothers: Agravain, Gareth, and Gaheris. There’s also Sir Ywain, Sir Bedivere, Sir Griflet, and Sir Bodwain and Sir Ulfius. King Pellinore and his family make the list, of course. Oh, and Morgan and Nymue—I would have gone crazy ages ago if not for them.”

“I am surprised you have included none of your animal menagerie,” Merlin said.

“Of *course* I’m thankful for them too! Cavall, Roen, Llamrei, Rudolph—the whole bunch!” Britt said, warming up to the topic. “I’m also super thankful the cook has stopped trying to get me to drink soup for breakfast, and I’m *really* glad Guinevere has made some female friends.”

“I notice a certain handsome knight is missing from your list.”

“Sir Tor?” Britt asked, deliberately being obtuse.

“No. Lancelot.”

“I can assure you there will *never* be a day I am thankful for that idiot.”

“To *never* be thankful for him seems a bit much. After all, because of him clean-shaven faces are now the fashion,” Merlin said, rubbing his chin.

“I’m also thankful for you!” Britt blurted out, anxious to derail Merlin’s thoughts. She cringed. *That was a dumb thing to say. He’s going to have a cow.* Britt cautiously looked to the young wizard, who was thoughtfully staring at the sky.

“I am also thankful for you,” he said.

Britt relaxed and gave him a half-grin. “Of course you have to be thankful for King Arthurs. How else would you—”

“No, not Arthur, but *you*, Britt,” Merlin said.

Britt would have thought it was a joke, but Merlin’s blue eyes were serious and his expression was solemn.

“I’m thankful it was you who pulled the sword from the stone, and I’m thankful you are here—though I am sorry for your loss.”

Britt looked down at her feet. “I miss them horribly. Sometimes I wake up and reach for my phone to call my sister or mom, but...”

“But?” Merlin prodded.

She hesitated. “But...I’m thankful I’m here.”

A smile bloomed on Merlin's face. "Good," he said. "Remember that next time I make you preside over your subjects."

"Merlin," Britt groaned.

"Now, let us climb down from this wretched wall. Why must you stand out here like a fop when you can call for a fire in a study or the feasting hall? Are you a bird that you must get as close to the sky as possible?"

"It's soothing to look at the stars," Britt said.

"I see."

"Though I am half frozen, and I suspect my guards would support the change in locations," Britt admitted.

"Wonderful. Then let us move—if you get yourself killed while practicing I won't let you hear the end of it."

"It's great to see where your priorities are," Britt said.

"Of course," Merlin said as he shuffled towards the stairs.

"Merlin?"

"Hm?" he turned around to suspiciously eye her.

Britt smiled. "Thank you."

He quickly looked away and stormed down the stairs, but not before Britt heard him say, "Of course."

The End