

Chapter One

Three years had passed since Merlin's departure from Avalon, and scarce a day went by when Jonathan did not mourn the loss of his friend and mentor. He missed their comradeship, their friendly banter, and keenly felt the absence of Merlin's wisdom and genial humour; yet, above all, there was a stabbing regret that he had not taken full advantage of all that Merlin had seemed to offer him. Many times, he had tried to put this regret into words, to make sense of his confused thoughts, but, frustratingly, he couldn't explain what was really wrong. There was just a nagging sense that Merlin had left before something could be completed or maybe passed on to him, his young protégé.

He looked around his room: his eyes passing over a sheaf of scribbled notes, his hasty attempts at trying to recall Merlin's words, to document and preserve in some way that fount of wisdom. However, trying to remember events long after they had happened had proved to be an impossible task. Merlin had said so many things but, equally, Jonathan thought, there had been much that he had left unsaid.

Ah! His next thought came like a physical jolt. What if he stopped trying to recapture those precious words of wisdom? What if he did

what Merlin was always trying to get him to do which was to work things out for himself? Now that would make life so much easier.

Merlin's wisdom was not a family heirloom to be handed over to the next generation. And yet it was that wisdom which had drawn him to study with Merlin in the first place. No, he corrected himself, it was the manner of the man that had captivated him – and every moment in his company had been blissful. If there was a heaven, then Merlin, surely, would be its guiding light.

Maybe Merlin's legacy lay in self-discovery – of finding things out for one's self and not being told how and what to think. Now that was a more promising place to start from.

He sat down at the table and pulled a fresh sheet of paper towards him. What if he wrote down his own thoughts and created his own fount of wisdom? The problem, though, he quickly found, was that there was nothing he wanted to write about. Absolutely nothing to say about his ability to see into other realms, and certainly there was no way that he could explain how teleportation worked. It seemed that either you could do it – or you couldn't.

Teleportation was so ... undefinable. It wasn't as if he could talk about it as Merlin might have done – Merlin, with his beaming smile and unquestionable assuredness, who knew about these

things and accepted them as commonplace and had encouraged him to see his abilities as gifts that could be shared with others. Merlin, who coaxed and persuaded others to think that they also could do the miraculous and achieve the unthinkable. And who sometimes, smiling and grinning, would say nothing, but through his presence alone would steer the course of a conversation.

When Merlin was with you then you didn't need to question anything. It was as if insights came automatically, popping into their conversations, leaving him with little time to think about what had just been spoken. Listening to the wizard's words was to fall under a spell of tranquillity and agreement. At least that's how he remembered it.

Now that he thought about it, he realised that his mentor had given him a lot of support and guidance without asking for anything in return. He had always been there for him, for all of them really, but it had never been anything other than a friendship between equals.

Perhaps, he reflected, his regret was not that of lost opportunities after all. Perhaps it was just that he did not have the breadth of vision that Merlin had always displayed.

The wizard had been an enigma: he had exuded an aura of grandeur and mystique: he had displayed an unfathomable ability

to know things with amazing accuracy, and everything he did was precise and carefully considered. Moreover, he had suggested, in a subtle and cunning way, that his trainees might do well to exhibit the same level of awareness and consciousness and take nothing for granted.

Jonathan put down his pen, frustrated that he hadn't been able to write anything meaningful. The sad fact was that there was no manual for what he could do. *A gift*, Merlin had said, *teleportation was a gift* ... ah yes, but it was a very personal gift that he couldn't share with others. For even when Jonathan held people's hands and willed both himself and them to move to another place – he could move ... but they didn't.

'I can, but they can't,' he muttered softly to himself. 'He can, but I can't.' Jonathan paused and wondered at what he had just said. 'No, that's not true. It's not that I can't do Merlin's magic, it's simply... well, it's *his* magic and not mine. But *my* magic – I know I can do *my* magic!'

He shot out of his chair and wandered feverishly around the room. Perhaps there wasn't a problem after all.

He looked at himself in a mirror. 'I'm almost there. After all this time. Oh, Merlin, how I miss you! You understood me, you helped me so much, but I'm struggling to understand what to do next.'

He closed his eyes and put his face in his hands. 'Remind me,' he said to the figure that he conjured in his imagination, 'show me again what you wanted me to see but which my eyes refused to recognise as possible. Perhaps, now...'

Was there a rustle in the room? He opened his eyes cautiously. Nobody had come in through the door but there was ... something. In the fading light it was possible that his eyes were playing tricks, seeing shadows move. There was a deepening of darkness in the room or at least a sense of a greater scale of blackness there than he had noticed before. It seemed to come towards him and enter his eyes, affecting his ability to see. And then it found a way into his mouth and down his throat, tunnelling into his lungs. He could feel its movement but did nothing to stop it, for somehow it felt right.

Despite the strangeness that he felt, he still knew himself as Jonathan, and the knowledge comforted him: he was still a budding wizard; his memories were still intact. But something was changing inside. He could feel that the longing, the regret, was no longer haunting him. It was no longer there. The darkness was

spreading rapidly through him, consuming all fears and concerns, and, in their place, left a desire for him to be somewhere else.

Jonathan's feet itched – they wanted to follow Merlin wherever he might be, and they would not rest until he met his friend, once again, face to face. It wouldn't be long now.

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