

Laying together in a small bed somewhere in rural Spain with a now mostly clothed Arty, you roused your small girlfriend from her post orgasm bliss; it was spur of the moment... but you need to talk with her. It had begun to weigh on you too much in the months since Avalon. What you had seen there. What Arty needed to know. It didn't help when she looked up and kissed you on the neck softly; it didn't help that you could feel her playing with the small diamond ring on her left hand beneath the covers.

This... it was going to break your heart all over, hurt her. But she had to hear it; not telling her wouldn't be right. And so you breathed in then out.

"Arty... is it okay if we talk a little. About one of the things in Avalon. Something I faced, when I got separated from the rest of you for a while... something I didn't mention to you and the others once you found me?", you ask, aching on the inside as you while the small girl with messy bed hair curled into you.

"What? Of course it is, Elliot! You talked with me about a lot. Apollo too. Were there when he and I spoke, revealed our secrets, the ones that we had held in so long it was almost painful. You helped me come to terms with... him trying to kill me. Our mom k-killing herself, because she...she couldn't deal with it; having us, twins born 9 months apart who looked so different. Told me and him she didn't hate us, couldn't hate us and made me and him believe. Get she just didn't think she had options. When I was scared to tell Apollo he was the reason I am like this, would die so soon, never have more magical power than I do right now... you held my hand, hugged my brother with me when he broke down and begged me for the forgiveness I already gave him years ago. Spoke with us when we both stopped crying. About us using *crucio* together, committing murder and enjoying it as kids then burning that house to ground. What we did to survive till we got found, helped us come to terms with what we both had done to each other... to others.", she says, soft blue eyes locked with yours and full of concern.

"You can tell me anything, Elliot. I will try and understand, help you. And always forgive you, no matter what; you helped me and 'Pollo forgive ourselves after all."

"You are too good for me, Arty. It hurts... I am sorry if I cry. And thank you so much... I shouldn't have to burden you like this... I would face a dementor before going through that experience again. But you need to know, dearest."

"I like it when you call me that, my love. You are brave, but it sounds like you need this. Go ahead. I will listen, even if I can't help, can't make it better.", Arty says, with a small smile on her face. One that is just slightly sad. You know she can see some of your pain.

“There was this object I stumbled on. The best I can say, it was like an opposite of the Mirror of Impossibility, it’s inverse. Not as grand... he couldn’t do the same as the people of Atlantis even if he was greater than even than the founders. Jet black glass that I could see myself in still; The Mirror of Ytniatrec. And when I looked in, I felt like I had been taken into a memory once more, except it was mine and what would be, not what had been or what might be.”, you say with a shiver.

“A few years from now, after this is all over. The world was safe. Merlin defeated, finally put to rest after so long. I... with one of the things we found at the end, one of his tools in his last refuge, I managed to split my lifespan, give half of it to you. Neither of us would live as long as normal but 100 years, if it was with you Arty? It was more than worth it. It couldn’t give you all the magical power you should have had but it helped some; you even had a little growth spurt, gained a couple of inches. You hated me for a while because I did it and didn’t tell you until after the fact.”, you tell her while stroking her hair, the back of her neck

“Elliot... you I would hate you a bit but... I would love you more. You would really do that for me? Give up so much time?”

“Would and will Arty. A short life with you... It is worth far more to me than a long one with out you in it. Together till the end, remember? And... we could have kids then, without them having to bury their mom before they even graduated. We... we were so happy then Arty.”, you say, barely containing the pain in your voice.

“I didn’t even have to think about it. I love you so, so much Arty. Adore you. And that’s why I have to tell you what that damn Mirror showed me.”

“I became the assistance potions master since Slughorn was getting on in his years and taught battle classes with you privately to other adult wizards during the summer and winter breaks at a small area we had built by our home; with your strength closer to normal... you were a fucking terror Arty. We had more than a few “skilled” wizards drop out of our “boot camp” after a few days because they couldn’t handle you putting them on the ground again and again despite still not being quite as powerful as a normal 20-year-old witch should be; still so small. More came just because of you though, because you took down people you had no right to with cleverness, skill, tenacity, and resourcefulness; quite a few of your old soldiers did just to see you again and relive what it was like to battle with you. It was amazing. The exact details are hazy but I distinctly recall you beating some hot-shot rookie Auror with a shoe to the face, a hex 1st years learn, and a few knees to the crotch; he had insulted you before saying that this would be a joke. It really was given he couldn’t manage a single hit and you dislocated a wrist when he grabbed you. Learned to not underestimate you after that you kept his wand until he could take it back.

He dropped out after the third day and when he demanded it back you hit him right across the eyes with it. Told him to take it, that a wand was only as strong as the hand which held it, the will behind it, and he was harmless with or without it.”, you say with a grin. Something that would become rare as the story of what you say would continue... you wanted to try enjoy the parts of the vision that didn't give you nightmares even Helga couldn't help with.

“That idiot, he lost it... he tried to hit you with a spell when you were walking back to the rest of the students. I *may* have over reacted a *bit*. He forgot there were two people teaching that class and ended up with both arms and legs broken and me having to Apparate him to the hospital. It's hazy but I think he dropped out of the Aurors after they heard what he tried to do and how hard he got his shit pushed in by a tiny girl and someone who just loved potions and Ancient history. Got a lot more people from the ministry after that first summer, surprisingly.”

“Elliot... that sounds like so much fun... being able to fight like that, with you. Knowing you had my back, even if I didn't need it. Teaching people to defend themselves. Crouch's lessons paying off... I don't *like* hurting people even if I can, tried to put that part of me away, but helping them, like we helped all my housemates? I love it. The fact you are willing to cripple a magic cop for me... I love you so fucking much.”, she says with a giggle.

“I-I love you Arty. You could have done it yourself, you were already rolling away when he fired. After all we had been through... you were so damn skilled, love. Fucking terrifying, really, given you won about as often as you lost when we practiced and I am apparently good enough at this to take down Potter with a bit of help... But I couldn't let that stand, trying to shoot my wife in the back. So I showed him and all our students what facing a *real* Dark Lord would be like. Probably gave him PTSD, but taught the other students a very important lesson. Had a couple of old Hufflepuffs show exactly why it is the House of the Loyal when they tried to come help me.”

“*Do not try and shoot Artemis Hallaster-Pertinger in the back when I am around.* You managed to calm me down enough I didn't kill him, thankfully.”

“Since your magical power had grown some... you could be scary when you wanted to, which was incredibly hot. Very, very fucking scary actually; lotta small very dangerous magical creatures on the grounds you could call in an instant. And Cordelia, she was still hanging around to, heh. Our attack bee. Guess you were right that she liked me, silly fat girl. I felt it, remember from a memory of the future how amazing it was to see you like so strong, even stronger than you always are... I ended up playing good cop to your bad cop a lot, when I didn't have to bring out Dark Lord Hallaster. I think we learned to respect Potter for being a bastard, teaching those people. Giving more than a few shit heels a lesson or two in humility.”

"It was-we had a nice little house outside of Hogsmead with a couple of spare bedrooms, right by a part of the Forest you liked, with the animals you adore living right there. We had all mostly made it out okay, in the end. A few scars here and there, a couple of weeks in St. Mungos for us. You had been doing some freelance writing for Luna's dad about magical creatures in-between being the best wife in the world and teaching our battle classes. Considering taking over Care of Magical Creatures in a few years. Linda had a small shop selling muggle games and curios off of Diagon Alley named after her old identity. Apollo *had* decided to go to the department of Mysteries after all. Even Brighton made it out okay and was living with Summer and Winter while he recovered from the dark magic he had been afflicted with. Supplied me with potion ingredients from his fields on the side. The Founders, even Salazar, had been able to truly pass on into a place of light and not endless dark. I-I remember how Helga said how proud she was of you before she departed, that she loved you like a daughter at the very end... she never got one, after all."

"Oh... oh wow!", Arty quietly says.

"Salazar, the real one, not the monster pretending to be him, he said I was a worthy heir. Thanked me for finishing his work, stopping Merlin for good. Said just that this once, he would approve of one of his decedents marrying a Hufflepuff. Said good bye and looked at peace for the first time in eternity as he and the others left for the next great adventure, friends again at last. He had even grabbed Helga's hand before they faded.", you say eyes misty.

"Hypocrite, ha. He had loved Helga from the minute they met. But he could never say it, and when she was so kind to him, kind to others? He had started hurting because he didn't understand and shared that hurt with others but not *with* them... Foolish, foolish love-struck man... if he had said it, told Helga how he felt, she could have helped him. Would have loved him. He could have shown her what Merlin was doing. But... Slytherins, we aren't great at things like that. Like this."

"He... he was in love with her?!"

"Yep. From the very start. I asked Helga... to not look at that memory. Or what I am saying now. I had my suspicions about who was truly in Lily, what was in her. And the more we learned, the more I doubted the founder of my house could be like that, do that to a child. And now I know. What I saw and will see there and what we had and will find... Salazar was an asshole. A bastard. But as much as he is reviled, he was not Evil.", you say and take a breath.

“He... Helga taught him to use a patronus. Not the incantation, the wand movements. But the intent. Gave him the other thing needed. From the day she helped him stand up, put her hand in his when they were scouting out a place for the school and he tripped. After he looked up and met her eyes, ones just like yours, Salazar could use it. And it came forth as not a snake, a serpent, a basilisk... It was a damn badger.

“Oh! That is... surprisingly sweet for a racist bastard.”

“Salazar, from what the Mirror showed me... he was not a perfect man. Not even close. He was a dick, paranoid, covetous... shy and scared. But he also began to see through Merlin and his plans. Had to seem even worse to keep that fucker in the dark. Become a villain so Merlin wouldn't suspect him, leave the others to find a way to try and stop him. He was egotistical... but was trying to be a better man, knew he would not get the chance to do so. Sacrificed himself. Endured who knows how long in the dark just to stop Merlin.

“Ancient magic was coming back into the world Arty, slowly; it would be centuries before we could do anything close to what the Founders could but it was returning to people. We could start learning from tomes and grimoires again, to a degree, with the Interdict fading. We were going to make inroads with the muggles, gradually; their science and our magic together.”

“That... that sounds amazing Elliot. We can have that. I want that to be real I-”

“**NO!** No, don't say that Arty.”, you tell her loudly. Too violently, enough she flinches.

“No... I am sorry! I didn't mean to shout. All this... this happy ending? It was just to make the pain worse. Things were so good... we got to have our wedding, everyone there. Even Potter though he looked salty I had beaten him in the last fight and took the Elder wand. Grateful and sad because I could finally tell him about Lily, the amazing person she truly was and tried to be. Gave some closure to him and Ginny because there was nothing to bring her or Taylor back in the end. It was so good for a while...” , you say, stroking her hair lightly. Hating yourself for making her scared, if even for a moment. Hating yourself even more for having to tell her what else would happen but needing to get it off your chest so badly you couldn't stop. Needed her to know. Held her tight while you continued the story.

“It started when Apollo got injured. Something he was working on, I don't know what, the Ministry wouldn't tell us and even Potter couldn't find out. Maybe Ancient Magic related. It was bad. He was comatose and nothing they tried helped. We went to visit at the end of the semester one Saturday morning... and you got sick couldn't stop throwing up, felt weak. And so we had them check, just on a

hunch. You were pregnant. Twins. Even though we were told it might not be possible for you to get pregnant at all. We told Apollo as he was laying there in the hospital robes and I can still see it. A small smile on his unmoving body when you caressed his cheek and told him he would be an uncle when he woke up. We still though he would, with what people were relearning of our ancient legacy of magic.”, you say, a bit of pain creeping into your voice.

“You started getting sick Arty, after a few months. Really, really sick... Arty. I tried every potion I knew of, every charm and nothing worked. Because our babies were killing you. I took you to every healer, every doctor I could find. They all said the same things. If you tried to carry both of them to term... It would kill you. I had to see you cry so much... They told us that you could handle one though. It would be hard with how small and frail your body still was but you could manage that...If you tried to keep both though, all three of you would die.”

“Elliot! What... I would never-“

“No. No you wouldn’t. You couldn’t so you left the choice to me. I-I couldn’t deal with my wife and both of our children dying. I chose the boy Arty. To die. Because the girl would be smaller, easier for you to bear. I... wanted to stop myself but it was like the vision was a movie. I couldn’t make it end, I was trapped in my own body yet couldn’t stop what I was doing; was going to do in the future. I screamed tried to fight, called out every spell I could think of. And had to feel as you and I sobbed after it was done.”

“Oh god, Elliot... I-I don’t know how horrible... I know you would never-“, she says clutched on like her life depended on it.

“I would Arty. That’s why that monstrosity was showing me these things. To save you and one of the kids... we had figured out that Merlin’s tools were useless. There wouldn’t be time to look for some other way. Augusta had paid to send the best healers she had found in her travels to look at you and they all said the same as the others; except for one who secretly offered a Dark means...very fucking Dark but even that was at best a 10% chance. Spoke of other spells and rituals he uncovered. And I knew you would never accept it, living and them living if it cost another pair of children their lives.”

“What! He wanted to use... human sacrifice? To power his ritual?”

“Yes. An old thing rediscovered after the Interdict was undone, not used in 2000 years. The dark potential of what we had done by destroying it coming to bear.”

“He had a means that might have worked but that was the cost. When he left the hospital after I refused, I ambushed him outside of New St. Mungo’s and made sure he could never offer another husband and wife that option again. Forced him to tell me where his grimoires, his research was so I could destroy it when I finished with him. By the time I was done, he made Frank and Alice look sane ... I’m sorry. Sorry for what I di- would do. Will do. I know you would never want another person to hurt in the way you and Apollo caused your caretaker to. And *he* wasn’t already dying; that young man lasted a long time before his mind broke and he could never use those Dark rituals, magic, again. The future me never told you there might have been a way to save them. You love more than hate but... I was tempted for a moment and didn’t want you to feel what I had, when I realized I *could* kill a couple of innocent babies to save ours. I-I am sorry.”

“No... you couldn’t do that, not in a 1000 years, Elliot.”

“I felt everything the future me did. I still feel it. And I don’t know how you are so strong. When I came back when I was done with him... I told the healers to show me the spell needed to end one of our babies before they were even born; I *had* to do it myself. If one had to die to save you and the other. I couldn’t make another person do it. When...when I convinced you it was the only way for at least one to live, that even with all the potions and spells in the world, you wouldn’t be able to bring both to term... magical twins can feed on each other... they can feed on the mother as well... I did it myself while you were under. I didn’t tell you I was the one to kill one of them, that I was a monster. A child killer.”

“Stop, stop it Elliot this is just a vision, something meant to hurt you... you are a good person.”

“No, I really am not, Arty.”

“We talked a lot, cried even more, before they released you. Things looked better for a while. We came to terms with what happened, had to happen so even one of them could be born and you could live. We talked more back at home and you began looking less ill. It was still a hard pregnancy but you were better. Not dying. Smiling again some. We picked a name for her. *Taylor Atalanta Hallaster-Pertinger*. I brewed everything I could think of, had the other professors strengthen your body with what spells they knew, made you go to see Pomfrey every week for a checkup even though you said it was fine. You were healthy if weak. You looked unbelievable even with dark bags under your eyes.” You said, with Arty smiling. Sadly returning her grin of happiness. Knew what was coming while she didn’t. Not yet.

“See? Elliot, things happen but they get better. If you can overcome it... there is still hope after all the despair, it’s just at the bottom of the box. Just have to look for it. What happened, what you did... it was what had to happen.”

“Apparently, I tell myself that in the future too.”

“Arty, you looked so amazing in your dress and that old jacket mom got you when we walked around the forest as our baby girl was growing in you. I remember it, from the vision. The fall, feeling the fallen leaves under our shoes. Giving you a proper muggle Halloween that year, complete with our home being fixed up like a haunted house. Getting permission to let students come out to trick or treat as long as I had set up the right protections to let them get there safely. Potter came dressed like Freddy Kruger at one point. Linda came by and dressed up like Elvira to help you hand out candy while I spooked kids. You had a Bloody Mary get up. You can look insane and very scary with a bit of make up on, Arty I... dressed like Grindewalt, which might be gauche, but it was a funny Grindewalt. Potter frowned when I went to the castle and taught in the costume Halloween day but my students loved it. Hypocrite.”, you say and laughed. A rueful laugh, but she didn’t pick up on the pain behind it and joined you.

“Oh I bet he loved that. Did you go pee on Dumbledore’s tomb too?”

“No. After they broke whatever spells were still on it-his body, they decided to move his resting place somewhere a bit more private. Having a few students desecrate his previous grave, steal his stuff, then fight a skeleton kinda made the Board of Governor’s reconsider having it in the middle of the Courtyard.”

“As the months went on... it was the greatest feeling in the world when you put my hand on your belly and I could feel our little girl move. You were smiling so much then. In the vision, it went by like a blur but I felt...happy, despite it all. I had to run out to Hogsmead who knows how many times or even London in the middle of the night to grab some weird combination of snacks you were craving as little Taylore grew; you have odd tastes.”

“Hey! Peanut butter sandwiches with pickles are good! But, Elliot why do you look so sad behind that little smile? Things... they were getting better.”

“Linda sent something to us, in the early winter. I was expecting congratulations on the baby coming. Asking when the shower was. There was a letter and a couple pairs of black and green outfits for her, baby clothes. A tiny hat that looked like a sunflower. But.. the letter...” , you say breathing in to prepare. You had more to get to, after all. Still more hell to reveal.

“What was it? She wasn’t sick or hurt, right, with something bad? I... want her as a god mother, I think. Be there, when our kids-kid is born. Be my maid of honor. Did she find someone new? Was she-”

“She was dead. Dead by her own hand. She had sent the owl just before doing it. Told me how she was so sorry, had tried as hard as she could, after we figured out her love couldn’t return. We had split up the Hallows at the end... I kept the Wand. You had the Cloak. But, idiot I was and am, I gave her the Stone to look after because she had kept *me* from using it before. When she had heard about our child-child on the way, it was just too much. Seeing us at Halloween was too much. She wanted to see Taylor again. Wanted what we had; said she knew she would never find it again, though. I wasn’t there to stop *her*, this time. Used it and after... went to join him when his shade spoke to her. Told her things only he would know. Said he was waiting for her, loved her. That it was *better* there. That the stars were so clear... There were so many tear stains on the letter, Arty.”, you say with and sob. This vision had been so real and you had felt everything the other you did. Had it hurt now just like it happening would.

“Please, please stop Elliot! You don’t have to remember this, it was just another trap Merlin made. It’s not real... won’t be real.”, she tells you. Holds tight for a minute until you break away.

“I... wish. I wish I could forget, just oblivate myself, think it was all just a lie. But I can’t. And... please listen to the end, Arty.”, you ask, almost desperately.

“I will. Of course Elliot. This is horrid. But if you had to endure it, I will too. Try and be there to take some of it from you. Will be there till the end, remember?”, the small beautiful girl says with a sad smile.

You weren’t doing this to hurt her. You would never do that but... she had to know what would come.

“After I read the letter, I Apparated to her flat, above the shop immediately, left you behind. Apparition can be hard on pregnant women. When I blew down her door... she was there, hanging by a rope, wrists slit, a small bottle of poison on the ground and her wand snapped in half so she couldn’t change her mind and save herself. It was so horrible I threw up. Her hair...she started doing it up again. She had the same braids on... same as I met her in... And on the table were several letters and a piece of paper asking me to take them and send them when I found her. Telling me she was too much of a coward to tell her mom and little sister what she did. Saying sorry to people. On top of them was the Stone. I-I took them, cut her down and checked her. She was already cold. So all I could do was go down to the street and send up the combination of sparks to call for the Aurors and healers in the alley. Told them what I found, showed them the letter I received. Stayed there till they declared her dead, and began to investigate.”

“Oh God...I am sorry you had to see that, feel that Elliot. But that is how you know this is a lie! Linda would never commit suicide. She-she is too strong for that.”, you are told while having your hair stroked by the best woman in the world.

“BY that point she was a perfect Occulemens. She could be Linda, Raven, whoever she wanted. Lie to herself even. She hid what she was going through, her thoughts completely; but / should have seen it. She has been my best friend since before she even needed a fucking training bra! We... even thought about doing it together, when Taylor died; use the Stone and just jump off the Tower or whatever it was going to make us do. She stopped me... you stopped me. She didn't have anyone to stop her... she just wanted the pain to end.”, you respond. Angry. Not at Arty, not at what Linda was going to do in the future, to herself... just at you. Furious and sick at Elliot Hallaster.

“I left her alone, was too concerned with us to care, to see. Stupid, foolish Elliot.”

“Oh, no, no, no... she-you couldn't have known. Its okay, she is still here now and we are both going to give her a big hug when we get back, okay? Be there now.”

“They had to do an autopsy, due to how she died. Interview me, since I found her. I had to send the letters out for her, put one on the grave they had eventually built for Taylor. Her sister sent me a Howler, screamed at me crying... Then you went into labor from it. Too soon. Far too soon. But it would be fine you told me. Muggle babies were born too early all the time and they turned out fine after all. I had agreed, if they could be okay a month or more early, ours would be too. We had a connection to the floo network set up just in case this happened. We went to the new hospital after your water broke. They took you in and then maybe an hour later, brought me in. So I could be there when she was being born. You didn't scream even once. And then? A couple dozen minutes later, we had a beautiful daughter. She- she was small, too small. Premature, but they gave us a little bit of time with her before needing to take her away to treat her...” , you say to your soon to be wife. Your head on her shoulder, trying to endure the pain.

“I'm so sorry... Linda...but still we-we did it. I know, you told me so much else happened but that sounds so wonderful. I- we got a child.”, Arty says with a sniffle, hugging you tighter.

You... wanted to die, doing this to her. But Arty *had* to know.

“You and Taylore had to stay for a bit; she was fussy... So small. Beautiful eyes that matched yours. During it, Linda's funeral happened. I left for the day. Saw the sad far away look her mom had, the furious glare BauBau gave me. See Taylor's, her Taylor, parents and couldn't even meet their eyes. Felt

worthless as all our old soldiers came and greeted me; Amalia and Elend do get married by the way. I have never felt as useless as then. But at the end, when we all left in silence, after I couldn't even put a flower on her casket... I went back to the hospital and you and her were there, room filled with cards and balloons, and sweets. They gave you an oversized bed for particular fat wizards or short ones who demanded to get to rest with their wife and had literally saved the world. I got to sleep with you and her. It... almost stopped the pain. It still hurt but I had the two of you. My wife and my daughter. Linda's sister still had a few more years at Hogwarts. Enough time to apologize, ask her for forgiveness. It was going to be okay..."

"Why... why the fuck did that damn thing show me this, make me live it!", you say and clench up some in frustration. You knew it was just a vision, a prophesy and even they could be wrong. Did Merlin have to deal with this all the time, with his Sight? You couldn't say and if what it showed was correct, would never have a chance to ask him. All you knew right then was there was a tiny auburn-haired badger hugging close to you, like her dear life depended on it.

More torture since you were getting to the *best* part. The one which almost broke you, down there in the bowels of the Earth. A thing that day by day... you think maybe had.

"Its okay. It's okay, Elliot. It... doesn't sound great. But we would get through all that right? We made it through much more than Avalon, right? Things happen. And if it was a prediction... we can stop it."

"Ha. Sure. Most powerful wizard in history failed to stop his own undoing, but a 16 year old boy and his 15 year old wife shall surely succeed."

"Elliot! Stop it! I don't want to see you like this! Please...", Artemis Pertinger says and wraps on, close.

And your heart broke again.

"I- we sent an owl; to Slughorn, to McGonagall. I wouldn't be there for a while, the baby came early. Get Slughorn off his ass and actually teach."

"It starts getting hazy, muddled towards the end but... she was the most beautiful thing in the world, our child. Seeing you get to nurse for the first time when Taylore was stable enough, being right there helping to hold her? It was the greatest thing ever; her silly button nose, hair the exact color mine is. It was... it was magical. *Real* magic. I can recall that if nothing else... her holding my finger for a moment.

Holding her to my chest. Seeing how happy she looked next to you; using up my stock of Developing Solution on you and her.”

“I don’t know how long we stayed there... a few days, a couple of weeks. But we eventually got to go home. I returned to work; I had actually gotten to take Fitzgerald’s old library as an office and we were renovating the area under the school. I wanted it because I could Apparate from there easily, if you were in trouble. Potter hated the hole in security but respected how many ways we had fucked over the most secure place in Britain; so as long as I kept it safe, it was mine, along with all the books in it. I apparently turn that place into a small fortress with all the enchantments on it, to the point a dark wizard would have an easier time just walking through the front door. Granted someone did just that before so not sure that says too much.”, you say and briefly smile at recalling figuring out the trick Potter used to open doors with a hand wave, having 1st years need to tramp down there to see a scarred Potions master for whom the dungeons were not deep enough and freaking out when you offered them hot chocolate or a muggle soda.

“The spiders, the giant bees, the thestrals were bringing you “presents” every day, Arty. It was annoying to clean up every morning before going to teach. Fuck, even the sadgers... had to get rid of a mauled deer carcass the one time and shoo a couple of them off the porch and the phantom cats kept bringing birds in by phasing through the damn walls...”

“Wait- the sadger’s are real? I was starting to think I was-“

“You are crazy Arty, and that is why I love you. One of many, many reasons. Have to tell you what happens... no... what will happen. No sane woman would have followed me to Avalon, done the Grail challenge just because her boyfriend thought she could, kept following him when things got so bad... They are real but we did apparently need to go a *bit* further to find them and bring back a breeding population to the Forest. Bitey, snappy little fucks...”

“Heh! Don’t talk that way about my snadgers, I love them!”

“I had to use a dozen Wiggewelds, a handful of Bezoars, and all my of general anti-poison shoving them a suit case to bring back. And get a rabies shot. Turns out you have to stun both parts, ha! Snake and badger. Fun.”, you say with a slightly far off look. That horrible Mirror was very good at what it did and you could recall how it felt for a couple of snake-badger hybrids to try and eat your face.

“Okay... they sound a little feisty.”

“Yes. Yes they are. I don’t have the ability to just kind of talk to them in my head; I am just good at cooking and brewing deadly concoctions. Dancing. And kicking the crap out of cops I suppose.”

“The last one is never a bad thing Elliot, given how Voldemort managed to turn a big chunk of the ministry when he came back. The fact Umbridge didn’t get trampled by the centaurs or isn’t serving a life sentence for torturing children pisses me off every time I recall it.”

“Yeah... she dies Arty. Our little girl dies.”

“What!”

“I left, one weekend after she was born. Mom and Dad caught some silly muggle virus; dad was mostly okay but my mom couldn’t get out of bed. Brought some potions. Stayed the night. You said you would be fine. She stopped breathing in the night. I Apparated back in the morning. You weren’t there. Potions cabinet was raided, some spilled. Your wand on the ground. I started running. Found your ring with the charm on it. You tossed it to the ground. Found you and her a bit later. Under the tree we proposed beneath.”

“No, Elliot...no.”

“You were rocking her back and forth when I got to you. Her in the dumb looking green and yellow self-heating blanket Ellend had got for our baby shower. You were in a little pink bath robe and a set of pajamas. You lost your slippers. Feet were bleeding. She was cold Arty, so cold. Had been for a while. Since you woke up that morning. Since you tried to do CPR, force some of our potions down her throat.”

“We-we had a floo connection why didn’t I-“

“You told me, under that same tree... you knew what they would say. Couldn’t handle it. Had faith I could fix it. And I couldn’t. Can’t. Wont be able to. We have a beautiful little girl Arty and she dies in the early hours of the morning and I find you under the branches of an old tree, rocking her back and forth, trying to feed her. I have to make you set her down...have to watch you beg me to kill you so you could join her, see her happy and gurgling again. She... She is probably the only one we could have together... body still too weak, not able to try again or it would kill you then.”

“She was dead. Dead and cold and in your arms. If the other mirror shows you want the most in life... well this one shows you something far, far different. Shows you the worst day you will ever live, gives fucking context to it so it hurts more. What Merlin had to relive again and again to keep his resolve strong. He already had his worst days, maybe it was easier, if you already went through it once.”

You aren't ashamed. That you cried some. It was a small blessing the vision began to grow fuzzy towards the end, cut off around the time you were holding your wife and daughter under the tree. Did Merlin truly have to go through this every single time? Live with his Sight showing him such things? Perhaps... true death was a good thing for him... 3000 years of agony was too much for anyone; asshole that he was.

And the tiny girl you loved and had learned you should never try and have children with crawled on top of you. Held you close. Then socked you in the face twice, rocked your head back and forth. Even with what she had been through, she wasn't very strong... very precise however.

***“Shut the fuck up Elliot.”***

“I will cut that damn tree down even though I like it enough to want you to propose beneath it; what does that stupid Prophecy do then, huh? I will go to Pomfrey every day and the hospital every weekend it that is what it takes. Eat better. Drink more water. Take a nap more often. Whatever. We are getting twins, I will not beg for death, we... It won't happen. It is a warning, Elliot. Something to avoid. If a Prophecy couldn't be changed, why would it even exist, huh? That dumb mirror you saw? Showed you the worst case, so we could avoid it. Maybe... maybe our first pregnancy doesn't work out, we will try again though. Maybe our friends do hurt themselves and we have to tell them to not be foolish. But I will hang out with Linda more. Tell Apollo to not be silly, be more careful. Do *something* with Brighton, even if he is an ass and horse killer. And you and I will go place a couple of cards on your friend's grave. Meet his parents. Together. I will do a lot of things, ask you for a lot more... But I will not ask you to kill me. Our babies will not die. That is how I know that what you saw in that vision is just a lie. A very bad one at that. Given how easily I can disprove it. Am about to disprove a part.”

“Arty we can't-“

“Can and fucking will.”

And then something breaks in you. In a set of brilliant blue eyes. Pink lips and a slight grin. A few freckles dotting a nose. Hair smelling of strawberry.

Something terrible which you held in for far too long... you were still afraid of what would come... terrified of losing the girl you loved. Seeing her cry. Of her going too soon. Of having kids, given you nearly died from fucking a transformer.

Maybe living a bit far from electrical sub stations *was* a good idea even if you were going to have to figure something out so you could show them some films? If...if your kids were half as adventurous as you, keeping them away from dangerous balls of power *was* probably smart.

So you just pulled Arty back down, bleeding from the nose. Held her close. Told her about some of the good things you saw, suggested a couple of other baby names since she would not settle for just a couple. Asked for a napkin at one point because she could punch very well if not quite as hard as normal.

You weren't a Gryffindor... Taylor would have been a far better one than you could ever hope to become... but in a small inn in some no name town, you found the courage to try. To ignore what had been showed to you.