

LEGENDARY

The woman's smile turned friendly for the first time. "Then all you must do is make your way to the king. Your final test is a test of your faith. You must believe in yourself and the decision you've made. Once you cross that bridge, you will claim your destiny."

"Faith... right." Aliana rolled her still wet eyes. "Have faith that I'm not going to fall to my death and let down the world at the same time. No pressure there."

Sighing, she took one step onto the bridge. It was barely wide enough for her to stand with her feet side by side. When nothing happened, she took another step, then another, until she stood just a few feet from the gap. It seemed like maybe four yards to the other side. If she got a running start, she might be able to make the jump.

Backing up, Aliana took a breath. "Have faith," she reminded herself. Rocking back and forth, she steeled her nerves. "One... two... three!" she took off, focusing only on Arthur and reaching the other side. Her foot hit the crumbled ledge, and she pushed herself forward, soaring over the gap. A faint trail of glittering pink light guided her path across the abyss. As the other side got closer and closer, she felt herself start to fall. For a brief second she thought she wouldn't make it, but the pink lights gave her faith. She hit the ground hard, her own momentum sending her rolling as her arms twisted and scraped against the hard earth. She finally stopped, hitting a rock and knocking what little breath she had left from her lungs. Her heart exploding in her chest, she glanced up, trying to get her heartbeat under control.

The old woman glided across the now re-formed bridge. "You have done well, child."

Aliana blinked, forcing her vision to clear, and the room to stop spinning, but she couldn't stop the ringing in her head.

"You have passed the third and final test to prove your worth of the title Destined One." The smoky voice was filled with joy.

The buzzing in Aliana's head grew louder, and words ran through her mind so quickly that she couldn't understand most of them. "What's happening to me?" she gasped. Her chest grew tighter. Something inside of her was rising to the surface, trying to escape. She tried to keep from panicking, but she didn't know what was happening or if she could control it.

"Only the Destined One has the strength to harness a spell strong enough to free King Arthur. The power has been growing inside of you since you first entered the forest surrounding Avalon's gate."

Sweat trickled down Aliana's cheeks as she fought to hold the power within her. Struggling, she made it to her feet. Her grip on the stone rock in front of her was the only thing keeping her from falling back down. She studied the man lying on the ivy-covered altar. The magic bounded as words started to string together in her mind. Gritting her teeth, she pushed away from the stone and made her way to the king, ignoring the strange woman only a few feet from her.

The legendary king didn't look anything like she thought he would. He was young, maybe in his mid-twenties. His thick, chocolate-colored hair swept across his forehead. Even lying there asleep he radiated a power and strength that had probably made men tremble before him. His skin was pale and smooth over his square jaw, and his nose looked like it may have been broken once or twice. He was as tall as Galahad, easily over six feet, and in great shape for a guy who'd been asleep for hundreds of years. His armor and clothes were untouched by either time or the dampness of the cave. There was nothing to show that he'd been mortally wounded when he'd arrived here.

Aliana sat next to Arthur on the altar and leaned over him. Gently, she brushed the dark locks from his brow, lowering her lips to inches above his. She focused on the power flowing within her, gathering together the forming words and whirls of magic. Somehow, she knew exactly what to do.

"Arthur Pendragon, our once and future king, your time has come. Your people need you once again to rise up and fight for them." The power drew her closer to him so that her lips nearly touched his. "Hear my voice; come to me." Her lips met his as she breathed out the final words.

The power burst forth. Aliana closed her eyes, surrendering to the magic flowing from her lips to Arthur's, breathing life back into his hard body. When the last wisps of power flowed from her lips, she pulled back,

breaking away from his full, firm mouth. Slowly, she opened her eyes, watching the color return to his face. She ran her fingers over her lips in awe, still feeling his mouth on hers, the power flowing between them weaving a tangled web. And somehow, a small piece of her heart healed itself. Arthur drew in the first breath he'd taken in almost fifteen hundred years.

It was then she realized what she had just done; she had just kissed King Arthur! Before the shock of her actions could set in, the king's eyes opened. In that moment, all she saw was the rich gold bursting in eyes. They were such a clear brown, they seemed to glow. Nothing could have torn her eyes from him, and for an endless moment, King Arthur looked at her with pure exhilaration and joy, his beautiful lips turned up in a smile.

He raised his hand, brushing his fingertips gently across her lips before his large hand cupped her cheek. The gentle warmth flowing from his hand had Aliana sighing, leaning into his touch and smiling back softly.

"It is you," he whispered, his voice weak.