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C O R A D D I

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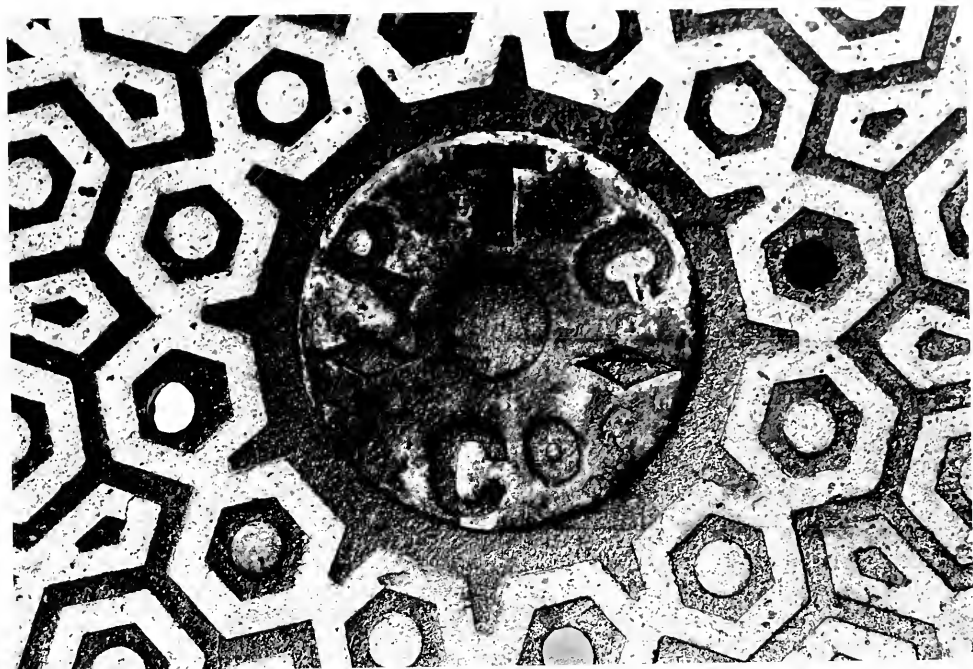
Grateful acknowledgment is made to Stuart Dischell, visiting professor of Boston University for his contribution "The Message," previously printed in *Good Hope Road*, Viking/Penguin, 1993. Reprinted with permission.

Not all art work in the Spring '93 issue of Coroddi was subject to jury.

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Cover: **Robert Mapplethorpe**: American, 1946-1989
Rubberman, 1977, Silver gelatin print, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Weatherspoon Gallery Association purchase, 1987.

Opposite Page: **Tom Saitta**: *Untitled*, 1992, photograph

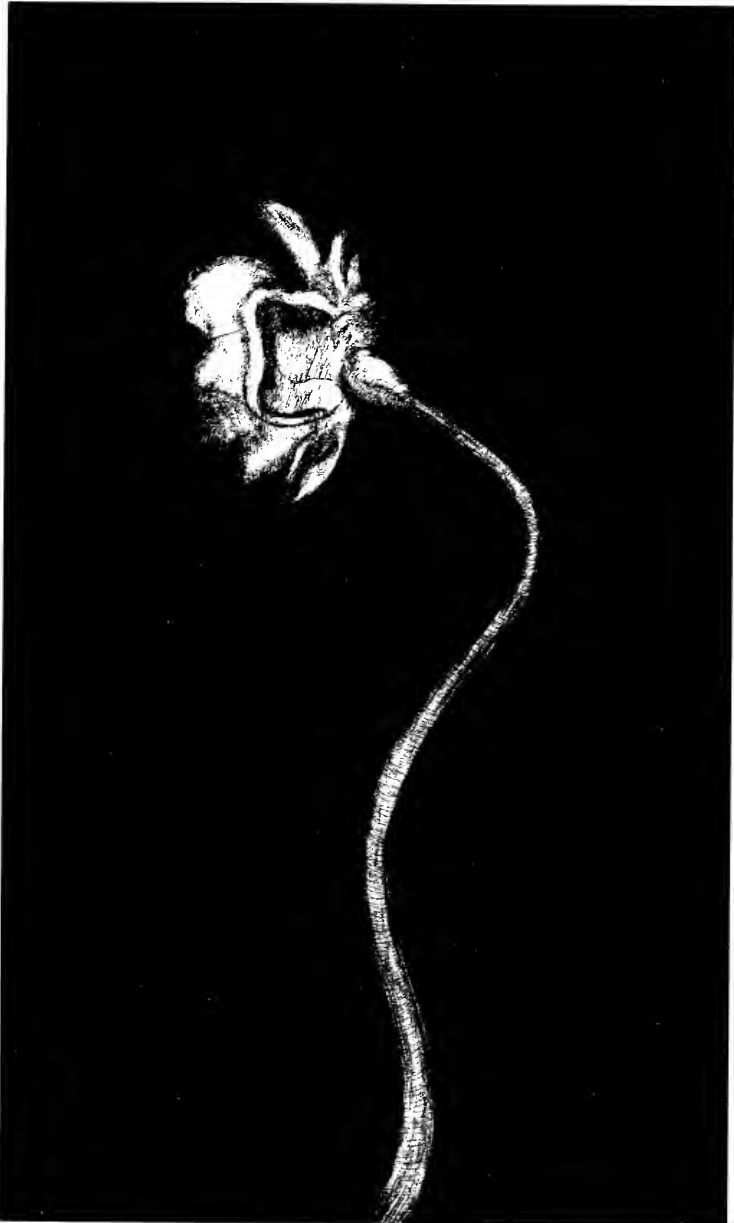


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J. J. Rudisill: *Nude Studies*, 1993, pencil on paper
7 by 13 inches



Kevin Fitzgerald: *Obligato*, 1992, etching
9 by 6 inches

Jimmy's Bait and Tackle

Dana Pipkin Riley

I never held my father's hand,
after I slid, toes first,
from the seat of his truck.
I walked one or two steps behind,
watching drips of paint shift
in the fine herringbone fabric
of his work pants.
He marked timber today.
Going fishing tomorrow,
and already I felt that
bizarre mixture of dread
and anticipation clinging
to my insides like a spiderweb.
There was the hope of catching
something deserving mounting,
like the enameled bass that hung
green and bowed over our mantle,
gills filtering dust.
But I caught little,
except sharp words that clung
to me like tendrils
of algae that my lure brought in.
I was full of clumsy noise.
I ducked, behind my father,
into the cinderblock cave that was the shop.
Recognized and well-liked, he fell
into easy talk with the others,
his hands in his front pockets,
rocking toe to heel.
Treated with deference,
since I was his only child,
I moved about the store freely,
listening to his meanderings.
I would not have to be called
when it was time to go.

Grainy, yellow photographs
spotted the walls.
Men in vests and CAT caps,
cheeks full of Red Man, holding their prizes.
I passed by the cricket cage hurriedly.
Their incessant scooting frightened me,
as did the sour smell of potato hunks
rotting among husks left by cricket
dining upon cricket.
I preferred the murkiness
of the minnow tank, where,
standing with the light
behind me, I could catch flickers
of fragile bodies
in the darker water of my shadow.



Darryl Joyce: *Number 9*, 1992, photograph
6 by 8 inches



Anna Bonevac: Interior, 1993, pen and ink
13 by 10 inches

A. E. BONEVAC 93

Fat Cat

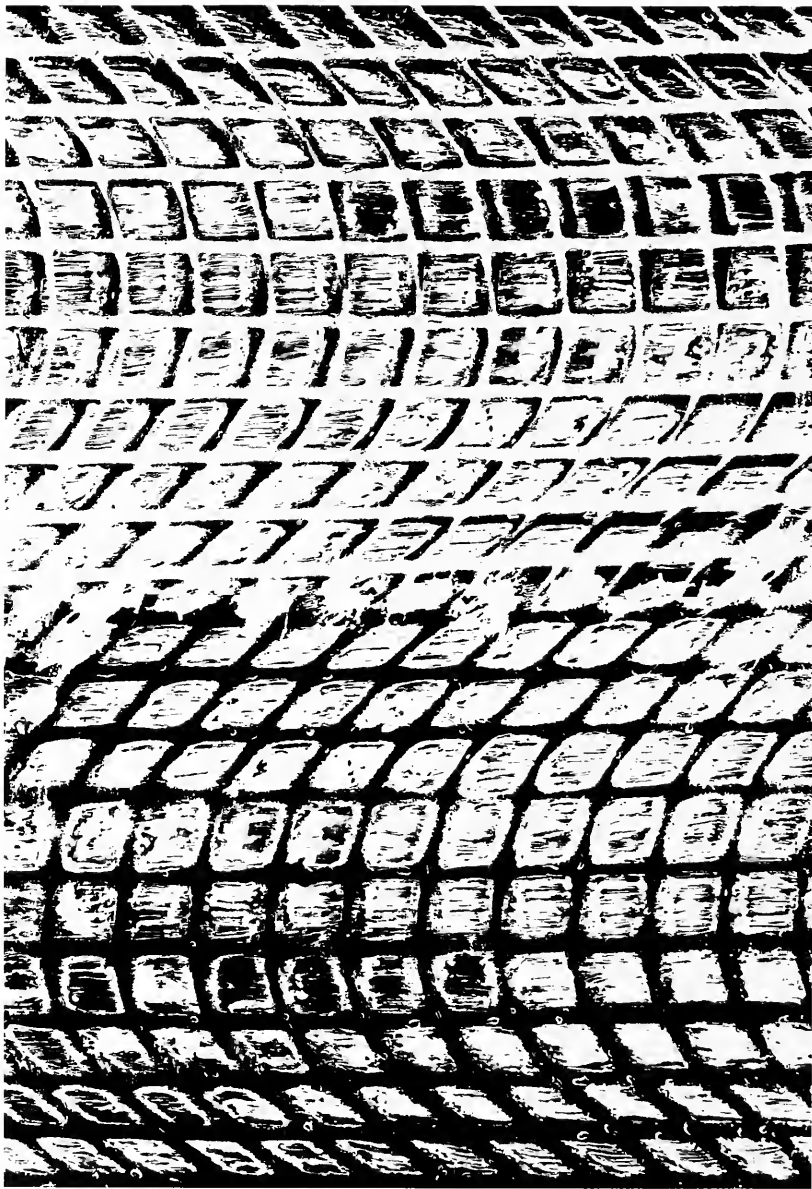
Warren K. Humphrey

She prospers.
Plump;
Like a roasting hen
Fit for a feast,
She sleeps on the sofa,
Her spread apparent
By the dent that's there when she's not.

She sprawls.
Lazy;
Like a low lying shrub
Hugging the ground.
She stretches on the lawn,
Her limbs in the air
Belly up, inviting my caress.

She speaks.
Loud;
Like wax paper vibrating
In a bicolored kazoo,
She smiles with her tail,
Curled in a crook
When she scurries to greet me.

Rita Louise.
Love of my life;
The dent in the sofa is your mark on the world.



Grant Newton: *Untitled No. 7*, 1993, photograph
18 by 12 inches



Greg Podgorny; *Untitled*, 1993, cut & welded steel
30 by 36 inches

Let Go of Indian Music

Pamela M. Elam

East: They stand, sit, walk
talking as if they own him

South: Across the room—she with curly, long blonde
across the street—he with receding line

West: In several minutes, everyone will leave,
the ritual is ending

C The deity
E will watch
N alone
T in
E a
R perfect circle

North: Sign says “Manual for Living”
Consider them automatic angels
of an Indian deity



Matthew Curtis: Staircase 1, 1992, photograph
8 by 2 inches



Rick Weaver: *Greensboro*, 1991, lithograph
13 by 15 inches



J.J. Rudisill: Seuss Navy. 1992, conte crayon
20 by 14 inches

The Quickening

Elizabeth A. Schools

The blood warm quiet ebb and flow
of the beating heart pressed in around my ears
in consistent Timex rhythm.
Weightless in my untimed capsule
I have seen my transformation
from globate to piscine, now with thumbs to suck;
heard soft soothing vibrations of her voice.
Stretching out my foot,
I felt the leather shell then pressure,
and pulled it back again.

I have felt the violent tightening,
crushed and swallowed like the boa's prey.
My paper skull brain forced out of shape
and known my death for sure, seeing the light.



Bernard Hall: *Marilyn*, 1992, oil on canvas
14 by 12 inches

Natasha Pollard: *Self Portrait*, 1992, oil on canvas
31 by 24 inches



Requiem

Gary Alan McCracken

Bukowski on the last night
of his earth sang
about hummingbirds and baptized,
emptied the channels of all silt
sat on a window sill
a particularly old man
made for the streets of L.A.
sirens wailed outside
boardinghouse Epiphany in these walls
drunks in every corner bar of earth
practicing his same religion
Wartime life remembered its old hero: Charles Bukowski
Mozart cursed, saluted turned over in his grave
This great hulking sexist aficionado of his music dead
Sailors returned to the sea
on that midnight heard the shrill lift
of his dusty, free, struggling soul
going
drunk
back to heaven
with reams of paper in his hands.



William Gau: *Prague '92*, 1992, photograph
8 by 10 inches



Greg Monroy: *J.J.*, 1992, magic marker & prismo color on paper
11 by 9 inches



Anne Bonevac: *Untitled*, 1993, colored pencil on illustration board
10 by 15 inches



Lori Lorian: *In the Kitchen*, 1992, oil on paper
20 by 36 inches



L.T. Hoisington: *Goat*, 1993, oil on canvas
18 by 24 inches

The Message

Stuart Dischell

“I lie in my bed with my fears as you might lie
With a husband or wife, or lie that you fear at all
And march eagerly into the world. I know
This is just another one of your deceptions.
The functional lie of your existence. Once
I was like you. I held another’s hand.
I pressed for strength. I let myself be touched.
Now no one can touch me. I have made it clear
I do not wish to be touched. Mornings I read,
Evenings I watch television. It’s the afternoons
That trouble me. They obligate me.
They make me want to be like you again.
But it’s not far to the take-out corner,
The dry cleaner where I leave my bedclothes
And outfits, the pharmacy where I get my medication.
I used to try to sleep through the afternoons,
But that was worse—I could not sleep at night.
I imagined you sleeping and it seemed to me obscene,
The short snores and eyelid flutters, the words
You might utter, recognizable only in your dreams.
And you might tell them to me. I never dream.
If I were near you, I would shake you. I might
Cover your head with a pillow or stuff a sock
Inside your mouth. This is one of the reasons
I cannot let you near me. Here are the others:
1.) I cannot stand the way you smell. The odors
Of the foods digesting in your stomach, coming up
Through your breath and the pores of your skin,
Or the scents you might wear to hide them,
The sweet hills of the South of France or
The sandalwood of the East, sicken me, they
Remind me of places I would not want to go.
I like things devoid of fragrance or smelling
Like nothing in nature. I like the way things are
When they come back from the dry cleaners. If
You were near me, you would have to be dry cleaned.

2.) I cannot tolerate movement. One night when I was
Small, I stayed on my uncle's boat. The seiche
Of the lake, which others found so hospitable,
Made me vomit inside the case of my pillow.
I threw it overboard and denied I'd been given one.
I know that you will never be able to keep still.

3.) I hate the way hair feels. It has taken me
All my life to get used to the way my own
Hair feels. It is horrible to think it is alive,
Poking out through the skin, hurting like wires.
If you left one on the sheet I would scream. As if
These things were not enough, you would want to talk.
This I could not allow. Discourse is possible
For only the briefest of exchanges, the handling
Of money across a counter or simple comments
On the outlook of the weather. But no more.
I avoid the news, live TV, and talk radio.
I like voices best when they have been pre-recorded.
Someone has already listened and decided,
As I have decided in composing this message.
I am sorry if you believe I have deceived you,
But I will not respond to further correspondence.
That smile you say you saw me give when passing
Was, I assure you, accidental and should not be
Confused with anything but a speck in my eye
Or an angle of light. I must be more careful."



Emory Culclasure: *Woman Emerged in Religious Dogma*, 1993, acrylic & woodstain on canvas, 15 by 13 inches



Emory Culclasure: *Jill Ingres 2*, 1992, latex & enamel on canvas 36 by 48 inches



Rick Weaver: *The Studio*, 1993, oil on canvas
28 by 28 inches



Rick Weaver: *Untitled*, 1993, oil on canvas
48 by 60 inches

An excerpt from

**Mordred,
or the Bastard's Tale**

a novel by Ian McDowell

I remember the very things I do not wish;
I cannot forget the things I wish to forget.
Cicero, *De Finibus*

Author's Note

"Historically accurate" novels about King Arthur are a dime a dozen these days. The authors of such works often go on at great length about how, if it didn't happen exactly this way, it at least could have. Despite certain similarities, *Mordred, or the Bastard's Tale* doesn't belong to the "this is the way it really happened" genre.

Fantastic elements abound, and the fact that I chose to set this story in a barbaric post-Roman Britain does not mean I'm after any underlying "truth." I'm no historian. My Arthurian Britain is ultimately no more real than that of Sir Thomas Malory or Geoffery of Monmouth, for all its greater plausibility. Verisimilitude is not veracity.

I've always been drawn to the fierce simplicity of the older versions of the story, versions closer to its origins, not in British history, but in purely British myth, without the trappings of the French romancers. There is no Grail here, no Lancelot, just the raw basics of incest and betrayal. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* and its source, Geoffery of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, I read traces of an earlier tradition, one in which Guinevere betrays Arthur with Mordred rather than Lancelot or some other more heroic knight. Indeed, the anonymous, late fourteenth-century poet of the *Alliterative Morte* was my original inspiration, not so much for his incident, as for his detailed realism and the surprisingly sympathetic treatment of his villain, whom I chose to make my protagonist.

That choice in turn seemed to demand a certain narrative style. God help me, but I'm sure some pundit is going to call me the first Swordpunk. This book may shock people who don't expect words like "fuck" in fantasy, who prefer the noble language of high chivalry. To anyone who finds the modern and colloquial tone of Mordred's testament anachronistic, I recommend a good translation of Catullus, particularly the Oxford University Press edition by Guy Lee. Yes, there were indeed people who expressed themselves this way, even in the ancient past.

Other portions of this novel have appeared in the magazines *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* and *Amazing Stories* and been reprinted in the anthologies *Asimov Presents: Fantasy!* (Dial hardcover, Ace paperback), *The Pendragon Chronicles*

(Robinson UK and Edward Pedrick USA) and *The Camelot Chronicles* (Robinson UK and Carroll & Graff USA). My agent is currently attempting to place it with a publisher.

In this section, the young Mordred meets for the first time the man he thinks is just his uncle, Arthur, the newly crowned High King of the Britains. Other characters include Mordred's brother Gawain, his mother Morgawse, and her husband King Lot of Orkney. The royal household of Orkney has just arrived in Britain to witness the youthful Arthur's coronation.

•

"Our wars are Done!"

That's what Gawain said as he bounded along the dock to sweep into his arms the cheering eight-year-old that was me. My brother spun me around, his broad face buried in my chest, while I laughed up at the churning, cloud-streaked sky. Then he put me down, and gestured at the man beside him. Reeling with dizzy joy, I got my first look at Arthur in the flesh.

Not big, though he seemed it at the time. Broad shoulders, barrel chest, eyes the color of the sky above our heads. He had worry-lines at twenty-four, but laugh lines, too, and his brown hair was cut short in the Roman fashion, exposing ears like jug handles. His leather jerkin and doeskin boots were rather the worse for wear, and he smelled like a horse.

"Hello, Mordred," he said in a voice that was all rough campaign music. "Your brother's the best man I have. Will you be my man, too?"

"Always, My Lord." Impeccable manners, even then.

"Don't 'Lord' me, laddybuck," he said as he lifted me into the air. "It's 'Uncle Arthur' from now on!"

If the young *Artorious Imperator*, Hero of Battles and the Chief Dragon of the Island, wanted to forgo formalities, that was fine with me. Before I could say so, I was hoisted to his shoulders and borne breathlessly along the dock, a dozen armored warriors tramping at our heels. I looked back at them, their spear points glittering to prick heaven, their chainmail gambesons and conical helmets a shining contrast to their master's much abused leather, and found myself suddenly, inexpressibly happy. It seemed a new emotion.

I remember it clear as glass, all so particular and bloody perfect—the particular salty-brightness of the air, the particular sweeping blueness of the sky, the particular cries of the particular gulls coasting on a particular breeze. Moments of ineffable happiness are like that, so sharply defined you stab yourself on them, and laugh with joy at the way they hurt. It was a trivial thing, maybe, but for me it was like a second birth, the moment at which I first became aware, not just of the world beyond myself, but of myself as myself, someone with a newfound capacity for transcendent joy. There was a high, shining place beyond the cliffs that surrounded Lot's dank Orkney palace, and suddenly, for just an instant, I was part of it.

Arthur set me down on the dock and turned back to Gawain. "You best go see to your father," he said quietly.

Several of Lot's warriors were helping him across the crude gangplank that connected

(continued on page 30)



Mara Krill: *Untitled*, 1992, wood, coconut & bronze



LeAnna Chadwell: *Seated Nude*, 1992, clay
15 by 6 inches



David Hervey: *Boredom*, 1992, mixed media
20 by 10 inches

our ship to the barnacled dock. As usual, the King of Orkney had been drinking, insisting that inebriation was the only true cure for seasickness. Now, as he stumbled onto the battered wharf, he reeled and vomited all over the red beard and brown tunic of Beortric, the big wall-eyed Jute who commanded the royal guard, leaving his own fine purple robe relatively unspotted. That seemed to sober him, and he straightened up and came lurching towards us, looking not a whit ashamed.

Gawain intercepted him and tried to take his arm, but Lot shook him off. "I'm fine. dammit," he said, wiping his mouth on his brocaded sleeve. Steadying himself, he gave Arthur what might have passed for a token bow. "Hail, O Dragon of Britain. Congratulations on your good fortune." His tone was mild, but something about his bloodshot eyes suggested a man speaking through clenched teeth.

Arthur nodded back. "I'm glad you arrived safely, Lord of Orkney. Is my sister with you?"

"Of course," said Mother as she appeared atop the gangplank, raven's wings of black hair framing her olive moon of a face. Gathering her black wool robe up about her legs, she clambered nimbly to the dock, ignoring Beortric's proffered arm. "I wouldn't have missed this occasion for the world."

Arthur gave her a diplomatic smile. "You honor me, My Lady." Despite the polite facade, they did not embrace. Gawain, however, stepped forward and received a hug. "Ach, but it's good to see you, Mum," he said, in a tone that suggested he really meant it.

Arthur bowed again. "I'm sorry if I appear a bad host, but there's much to do before this evening, and I need Gawain's help. My steward Amphoras will see you to your quarters. Perhaps we'll have the opportunity to speak further after tonight's ceremony." With that he waved his hand and turned back towards the palace, Gawain and his other soldiers falling in behind him. I watched them tramp up the pebbled beach, still as giddy as if Jupiter had just welcomed me to Olympus.

"Bastard," said Lot, kicking a trunk so hard it nearly went off the side the of the dock. "Bloody, shit-eating bastard. And he's got my own son to lick his arse for him, damn them both to hell." His eyes were redder than before, and a vein stood out like a purple worm on the pale dome of his forehead.

"Such a tantrum is unseemly," said Mother mildly. "Especially since none of this was a surprise. If it bothers you so much, why did we come?"

Lot sat on the chest, hiked up his robe, and scratched a skinny red-and-white ankle. "I don't have to explain myself to you, Morgawse. And if I want to have a tantrum, as you call it, I bloody well will, so you can just piss off."

"As always, your manners are as refined as your intellect," she retorted, a jibe which pleased me with its cutting tone, even though I didn't understand the irony. Depending on one's definition of intellectual refinement, Mother's quip may have been unfair. Despite his boorishness, Lot was not a fool.

He must have noticed my smile, for he lurched to his feet. "What the hell are you smirking at, you insolent brat? Is there another Arthur-worshipper in the family?"

He started to reach for me, but Mother's strong hand shot out and closed on his thin wrist. "There'll be none of that," she said so quietly I almost couldn't hear her. "Let's see to the baggage."

Cursing under his breath, he turned away. "You can see to the bloody baggage. I'll

not wait on the dock like some lackey." He motioned to Beortric, who got the royal guard into rough formation. "Come on, you dogs; let's see how things fare in the palace. I want to find out if the other Lords of Britain are really as content with Arthur's coronation as is claimed."

Alone with the servants, Mother and I waited until an unctuous household steward appeared, to escort us up the beach and through the broken maze of fortifications that were the grounds of Uther's old summer palace. I was amazed by how big everything was, and how much of it was made of stone, although today I'd find it shabby enough. We passed weed-choked courtyards and dead orchards, crumbling limestone walls and cracked plaster facades, skirting the main hall and threading our way through half-collapsed colonnades and dilapidated outbuildings. Mother dryly commented on just how far our lodgings were from the restored inner palace, but she did not seem offended. Thinking on it now, I imagine she considered it more of a reflection on her husband than herself.

As for Lot, he eventually rejoined us, apparently having met little success at stirring up discord among his fellow petty kings. In the bare chamber where we lodged, he snarled and cursed, and would probably have kicked the furniture, if there had been any, and even muttered about not attending the ceremony that evening. In the end, of course, he did. More to the point, he allowed me and Mother to attend with him.



I felt joy again that evening, when I stood between my brother and my mother, the former in burnished mail and the latter in fine red linen, and watched Arthur pull the old sword of Maximus from its brass scabbard that had been in set in a block of polished black stone. "*Ave Imperator!*" yelled the throng with enough force to gutter the torches in that smoky, high-timbered hall, and if the assembled Kings of Britain were not cheering as loudly as the warband that had protected them for two decades, they nonetheless did cheer. Except the man I thought my father, who stood slightly apart from us and muttered in his beard.

"*Ave my arse,*" said King Lot. "He's come from nowhere and taken everything. Bloody peasant soldier bastard."

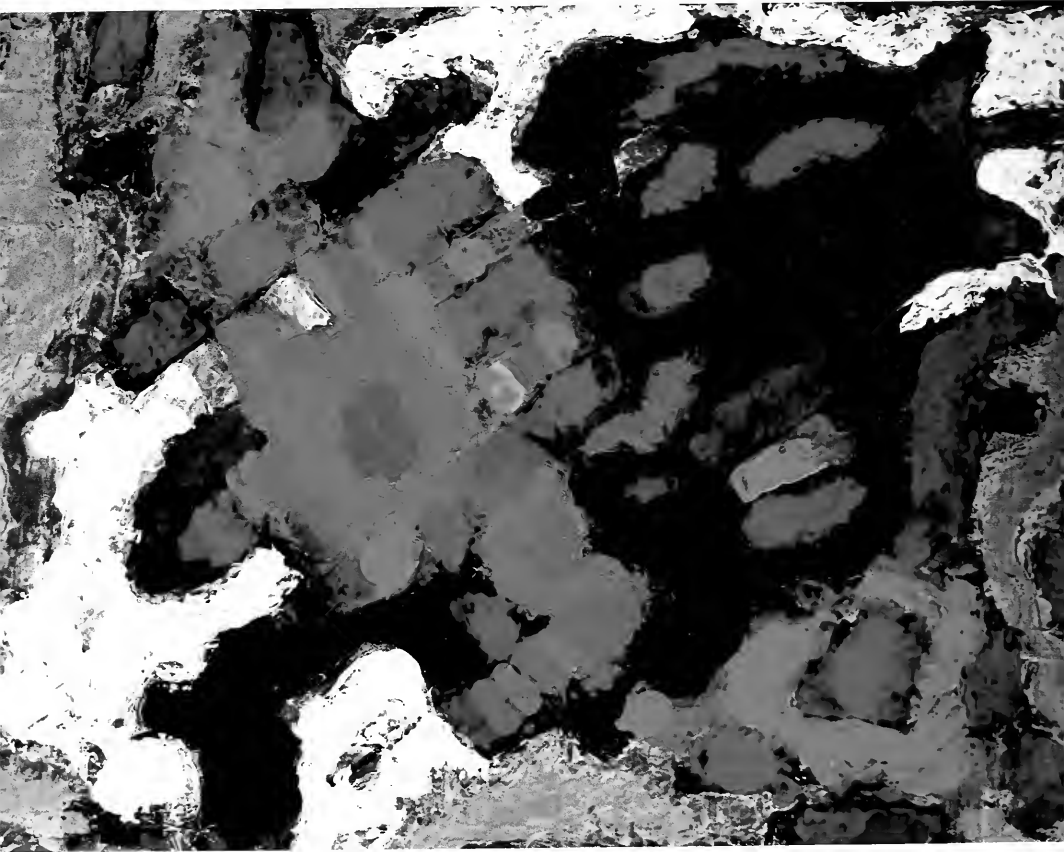
"I'd not say that too loudly if I were you, husband," said Mother. "I doubt many of those present would care to hear it." She gestured at Arthur's soldiers, hard-eyed battle-worn men who looked at their chief with an expression close to awe. Lot snarled something inaudible and kept his peace.

I'd say disappointment soured him, but Lot was always sour. His face was a pale, indignant mask in the fire-thrown shadows of the hall, his pursed mouth, long ascetic nose and perpetually startled eyes all giving him his usual look of sanctimonious hauteur mingled with righteous indignation, like a prelate who's just been bugged by a Jute. This coronation had been inevitable for many weeks now, and he should have had time to come to terms with his disappointment, but Lot rarely came to terms with anything.

It had all been set in motion over a year before, when Uther sat up on his deathbed and declared a young squadron commander named Arthur both son and heir. Ordinarily,

(continued on page 33)

Robert Gerhart



Breakfast Special, 1993, oil on paper, 24 by 30 inches

such a proclamation would have gotten nowhere without the support of the more powerful local kingdoms. However, the Warband of Britain, the mobile cavalry force established by Uther's brother Ambrosius, did not wait on any petty king's approval before declaring Arthur the de facto High King, calling him the heroic Defender of the Britons so long rhapsodized in Merlin's prophetic song. Some challenged the claim, but the Battle of Celidon, where Arthur's troops smashed the forces of Hueill and the other Northern Brits and united the rebellious frontier tribes with the South, put an end to any real dissension. Lot once considered siding with Hueill, which would have made things very difficult for Gawain, who was even then serving Arthur as a Master of Horse, but the King of Orkney had ultimately known better than to join a lost cause, and our islands remained neutral in the conflict between the mainland North and South. Arthur would most likely have been crowned that year, but the Saxons hadn't proved so obliging, and only the desperate action waged by the British forces at Agned had kept them from making further incursions towards the West. (Lot's warband sat out that campaign, too, which accounted for the cool reception our party got from Cadur of Cornwall and the other southern kings, although Arthur's indulgence and Gawain's heroic reputation prevented any active discourtesy.) Now, after a season of uneasy peace, things had settled down enough for the Lords of Britain to gather and officially submit to the man whose forces and tactics had kept them from becoming Saxon thralls.

•

Arthur still wore his scuffed campaign harness, but he looked magnificent as he held the short, broad old Roman sword high above his head, the jewels in its hilt glinting in the torchlight. "One Britain," he said, seemingly softly, but his voice carrying above the crowd. "One Britain under God and law. I take up this sword for us, for all of us, for all of the kingdoms of the Island of the Mighty, all the kingdoms that are one kingdom now. In your names I hold it, my Lords, and in your children's names, the children who are our future and our hope." He looked at me then, or I thought he did, his eyes blazing like the jewels in his sword. He kept speaking, but I don't remember what he said, just what I felt swelling inside me.

His men felt something too, for they shouted as one, drowning out whatever else he'd meant to say, and then they surged forward. Forgetting all ceremony, they bore him on their shoulders, him laughing as much as I had earlier, his pomp and fine words forgotten, and carried him out into the courtyard, where a huge bonfire was burning.

I was almost caught in the rush for the doorway, but then Mother grabbed me and hugged me into the shelter of a column, while men in iron and leather surged around us like the sea. Then they were all outside, even the assembled Kings of Britain, and dancing around the fire. Other than our own men-at-arms, Mother, Lot and I were alone in the hall.

Picking up a flagon of ale that had been left behind on a table, Lot came forward and took Mother by the arm. "We're not part of this, and will need to rise early. We should go to bed." He snapped his fingers for our soldiers, who still seemed nonplused by what they'd seen, as if they couldn't imagine hoisting their king that way, and they were slow in

coming to attention. "Dammit, Beortric," snapped Lot. "Don't tell me he's bewitched you apes as well!"

Before Beortric could answer, a broad figure stood in the open doorway, silhouetted by the bonfire. "Father, Mother come outside!" Gawain reeled closer, his brown hair tousled and spilled wine gleaming like blood upon his harness.

"To hell with that," said Lot. "Our ship leaves with the dawn tide."

Gawain swayed, and leaned on a table for support. "Leaves! You mean you're not staying?"

"For what?" snapped Lot. "I've had my fill of this."

"But there's more ceremony tomorrow. The High King will be anointed in chapel by Bishop Dubricius. After that, there's new postings. Arthur's making it official. I'm to be commander of a hundred horse."

"A hundred horse!" I said in astonished wonder. "Oh, Gawain, can it be true?" I imagined him riding before a forest of mounted spear points, hoofbeats drumming like thunder, the red dragon unfurled as a wedge of horse and iron swept down on the hapless foe, a vision with all the pomp of Rome and the heroic splendor of ancient Britain. I towards him, but Lot took me by the shoulder and shoved me back into Mother's arms.

"I don't care if you're made commander of a hundred whores. It's equal shame."

Gawain's confusion looked so out of place on his usually confident face. "Shame! What shame? You yourself sent me to serve here. Arthur thinks I've done so with great honor . . ."

Lot nearly choked in his fury. "I don't give a fart what Arthur thinks. I sent you here to serve Uther, to speak well of me, and be my eyes and ears in Britain. But no, you stupid git, you were always off somewhere, fighting one of Arthur's battles, and now Uther's dead, and Arthur sits upon the throne. There's nothing for me here, or for any son of mine that truly loved me. You'll come back with us, if you're worth your salt."

No one bullied Gawain, not even his own king and father. Though his eyes were downcast, he stood straight and tall in the flickering light. "I gave the Pendragon my oath," he said in a low, even voice. "I won't break it."

"To hell with you then!" Lot clapped his hands, and his men surged forward, escorting us outside. Mother didn't say anything, but paused to hug Gawain, then followed her husband, pulling me gently with her. Looking back at my brother, standing there like a dejected bear, I remembered my earlier joy, and wondered, in my childish way, where it had gone.

Skirting the revelers in court yard, we made our way to the outbuilding where we housed. Here and now, as I sit writing this memoir in a high room with a fine window that looks out on the sighing Usk, I find it hard to remember the days when there were relatively few multi-story edifices in Britain. Uther's "palace" actually consisted of many squat, thatched or slate-roofed buildings linked by enclosed walkways and courtyards, a stone and timber labyrinth that sprawled over several acres, incorporating the remains of a villa and an ancient hill fort. We were lodged near the northwestern corner of the palisade, in a low timber-and-plaster structure with two rooms, a small inner one floored in cracked flagstones and a larger outer one floored in earth and straw, which is where our soldiers and attendants bunked.

That night, I lay wrapped in a blanket on the stones of the inner chamber, while

Mother and King Lot rustled in the straw of their crude bed and murmured to each other, sometimes angrily, until the talk gave way to Mother's shallow breathing and Lot's loud, gurgling snores. Trying to sleep despite those sounds, I found my thoughts returning constantly to Arthur. Not even the troubling discord between Lot and Gawain could blot out the wonder of my new-met uncle. Shutting my eyes, I could still see his face. Maybe that's how Christians see Jesus, when they close their eyes to pray; not the scrawny carcass on the cross, but a man proud and alive, with something good burning bright inside of him. When I think back to the boy I was, I can almost understand such worship.



Sleep never came. I lay in my scratchy blanket, wide awake, my mind racing. If we were truly sailing in the morning, then I'd not be seeing Arthur again, at least for a long time, and that prospect was suddenly unbearable, like seeing sunlight after living in a cave, only to be told you won't see it again. If Gawain could stay on his service, why couldn't I? The fact that Gawain was an adult and I was not did not seem a fair objection. Surely, if Arthur were to request that I remain behind, Lot could not gainsay it. I wasn't sure he'd want to. Even then, he was not the most affectionate of fathers.

No, I told myself, I must find Arthur.

Sitting up in the chilly dark, I tugged on my boots, then groped my way to the door. Finding the bolt, I pulled it slowly, slowly back, trying to be as silent as possible. Despite my efforts, there was a metallic creak, and behind me I heard Lot stir and grunt, but he did not wake up. Neither, apparently, did Mother. Holding my breath, I eased the door gently open and slipped out.

There was no door to the outside, just an opening in the wall. Our warriors were huddled together in their cloaks for warmth. None stirred as I picked my way between them, even at that age as light-footed as a cat. Outside, I saw shadows folded upon shadows, dark walls, the glow of a distant fire, the bright points of torches on the outer earthworks, and above all, the fainter torchlights of the stars. I skulked across the courtyard, scaled a low wall and slipped through a large hole in another one, where rotted timbers poked out through patches of ruined plaster and broken dry stone. Uther had restored the outer defenses well enough, but much of the inner complex remained in disrepair, leaving plenty of gaps through which a boy my size could slip.

Eventually, I found myself in another courtyard, one enclosed on three sides by the central hall. It was darker here, and even my sharp young eyes could spy no egress in the gloom. I walked to the nearest wall and touched it, but felt nothing but cold, rough, crudely-dressed limestone. Arthur's chamber was somewhere inside, but I had no idea how to reach it.

"What do we have here?" said a soft, high voice very near my left ear.

I jumped back with a wordless cry and spun around, to find myself facing a dim figure scarcely taller than myself, muffled and shapeless in a hooded cloak. "Who's there?"

"I might ask the same thing of you," answered the fluting, insinuating voice, that of a child with a naughty secret.

"Mordred Mac Lot, Prince of Orkney!" I said, trying to sound older than I was. My

heart was pounding, but I quieted it by telling myself that Gawain would not have been afraid.

"Ah, the younger son of King Lot and the beautiful Morgawse. Brother to the much-vaunted Gawain," the accent was very strange, almost affected-sounding. "Come inside with me, boy, for I should like a better look at you." A hand no larger than mine closed over my own, and I found myself being pulled forward. "Wait, I'm looking for the King!"

The voice laughed, a high, childish giggle. "Which king is that? We've plenty here. Tonight the palace is well stocked in kings."

"Artorious Imperator, King of All the Britons." I said, impatient that someone wouldn't know who the king was.

"Ah, Arthur. Yes. The new Pendragon. It's funny, he doesn't much care for his sister, does Arthur, but he dotes on her son Gawain as though he were his own. Does he dote on you, as well? I suppose we could find out. Would you like me to take you to him, little Mordred?"

"Yes, please."

"Well, follow me then. Keep hold of my hand, and soon we'll be there."

I was silent after that, as I was led to the opposite corner of the courtyard, where now I could see a short flight of stairs leading down into the darkness.

"Where are we going?" I motioned over my shoulder. "Arthur's back there, somewhere."

The covered head turned back towards me, though I could see no face beneath the shadowed hood. "We go to my quarters, first. Like a badger, I lair underground. Come into my hole, little Mordred."

I followed him gingerly down into the darkness, where I could hear our breathing, and the echoes of our feet on stone. "But how will going down here get me to Arthur's chamber?"

A soft chuckle. "Silly boy, there are more tunnels beyond my lodgings, connecting almost every building on the grounds."

The stairs leveled out into a narrow corridor. I could see nothing, but when I stretched out my free hand, I felt rough, damp walls. There was nothing for it but to be led through the confining darkness, with no sound but our breathing.

Finally, there was a glimmer of light ahead, reflecting off the wet tunnel. Those walls became higher and further apart and more regular as we approached the source of light, the stones drier and better fitted. Suddenly rounding a corner, we stepped through an open wooden doorway and into a large, well-lit room. It came as quite a shock. Remember, royal though I may be, I'd been born in the decidedly rude splendors of Lot's Orkney palace. During the day we'd been in Britain, we'd been treated to precious little luxury. For me, the contents of this new chamber were as strange and wonderful as the interior of a fairy hill.

Fat red and yellow candles were everywhere, in little brass holders that hung on hooks from the plaster walls, on row after row of scroll-covered shelves, on two low tables, one of variegated marble and the other of some dark, ornately carved wood, and on several large, iron-bound trunks. There was a luxurious Roman-style couch with stuffed scarlet cushions and a gilded arm rest, as well as a more homespun but equally comfortable-looking wicker chair. The furnishings were impressive enough to someone accustomed to

more spartan accouterments, but the decorations were even more dazzling. The entire floor was an intricate tile mosaic depicting a naked woman borne on the back of a rampant bull, partially obscured by several sheepskin rugs and the pelt of what must have been a truly enormous bear. Two of the walls were also decorated. On the left-hand one was painted a naked youth, bent over in front of a bigger, bearded man with a large erect penis, while on the opposite one, a blood red dragon emerged writhing from between a supine woman's splayed legs. Having seen precious little art of any kind, let alone the pornographic variety, I would have been intrigued if the figure in front of me hadn't been so extraordinary as to command my full attention.

Stepping out of his heavy, hooded robe, which I now saw was dyed scarlet and lined with otter fur, he tossed it on the wicker chair and turned to face me. At first I thought he was a boy, only a few inches taller and no more than a couple of years older than myself, with very ruddy skin and fair hair, a boy wearing nothing but a green tunic that left his slender pink arms and legs bare. But no, the short, soft-looking hair that covered his head like downy fuzz was not blond but white as snow, and there was a delicate tracery of wrinkles around his small, mischievous mouth and large wet eyes, eyes that on closer inspection appeared yellow and rheumy and flecked with spots of red. He wasn't a dwarf, for I've seen dwarves since then, in the courts of the Summer Country. He was not stubby or foreshortened, but slim and graceful and delicately boned, with small hands and narrow hips, and a high-domed, narrow-jawed head.

"Hello, Mordred," he said in that strange accent, which I did not then recognize as being that of someone who spoke pure continental Latin. "Will you give Merlin a kiss?"

"I want to see Arthur!"

"Of course you do. I can take you to him. I'm his magician."

I knew that. Everyone knew who Merlin was, the prophetic boy who'd been Uther's pet seer, and who now apparently played the same role for Uther's son.

"You said you'd take me to Arthur."

He bowed, a movement as graceful as a dancer's. "And so I shall. But I thought you might want to rest first, here in my chamber. Would you like some wine?" he motioned towards the marble table, where dark red liquid filled a wide-mouthed enamel bowl.

I shook my head. "Mother doesn't let me have any."

He clucked disapprovingly and then giggled. "Well that's Northern provincialism for you, isn't it. Here in the South, we let babes drink wine as soon as they're weaned. Try the wine. I'll even give you some bread baked with honey, for dipping in it."

At any other time, such a treat would have been very tempting, but I shook my head again, more adamantly this time. "I don't want any. I just want to see Arthur."

He walked towards me and reached out with one slim pink hand. "And so you will, my sweet," he said softly as he stroked my cheek. I backed away, only to find he'd somehow gotten between me and the door, and further retreat was blocked by the painted wall. Merlin giggled as I sidled along the plaster, only to find myself trapped in the corner of the room.

"Now, now, pet, don't be frightened of old Merlin. You're such a pretty boy. All I want to do is kiss you."

At that moment, Mother stalked through the open doorway behind him. "Get away from my son," she said in a low, dangerous voice.

Merlin turned and gave her a courteous bow. "Certainly, Madam," he piped. "You're to be congratulated on having borne such a lovely child."

She was clad only her linen shift and her long, unbound hair, but none the less regal for all of that. "Don't play with me, Merlin," she snapped in the ominous tone of voice that I'd seen make Lot quail. "Or with him. I know what you wanted to do. Your years may lie lightly upon you now, but I can change you into the wizened ancient you really are."

Merlin smiled boyishly and balanced on one foot, while scrabbling idly at the tiled floor with a dirty pink toe. "Oh, Mistress, I doubt that, I truly do. All right, so you've managed to spoil my fun. Now be wise and leave it at that. Take the brat with you and go, before I set a dragon to hatching from your cunt, like in this lovely fresco here."

I darted around him and ran to Mother. She held me to her, gripping my shoulder so tightly I nearly cried out in pain, and said five or six low guttural words. My scalp tingled, and I felt the hair on my arms and the back of my neck stirring. Looking up, I saw Mother's tresses rise in a tangled halo about her head, making her look like a beautiful Medusa. Our shadows danced on the obscene wall as the candles guttered in an impossible wind, and many of them went out. But Merlin only laughed, and gave one idle and languid wave of his hand, and the wind stopped, the extinguished candles springing to life again. Mother's hair fell back limply about her head, and she stood there, breathing deeply, suddenly drenched in sweat and looking pale and drained.

He bowed again, his pink, infantile face still a mask of courtesy. "Your anger is quite impressive," he said, "but the only woman I fear is the one who'll some day kill me, and though I don't know who she is, I do know you're not her. So why don't you take the boy back to bed? Unless you want me to take you both to Arthur. Mordred was seeking Arthur when I found him."

Mother looked down at me, and for an instant I saw a glimmer of what might have been fear cross her face. "Mordred, why were you doing that?"

I stared down at the polished tiles and did not answer her.

"There are certain facts about Mordred that might interest Arthur," continued Merlin, "facts that might interest your husband, too. Perhaps I should have King Lot awakened, and bring the three of you before my new master. Arthur needs me, of course, but he doesn't like me very much. Do you think he'd like me more, if I told him who your son really is?"

None of this meant anything to me, naturally, but I could tell it was affecting Mother. "No," she said, through clenched teeth. "I don't think he would."

"I expect you're right," sighed Merlin. "Telling the truth hardly made Cassandra loved, did it? Now, are you going to leave, or must I get nasty? Believe me, I can be very, very nasty."

Pulling me behind her, Mother backed towards the door, then hustled me out into the dark corridor. She did not say anything to me, as she led me along, as apparently at home in the darkness as Merlin had been. My heart was still pounding, but the main thing I felt was disappointment, for now there was no chance I'd be seeing Arthur before we left. Of course, I don't suppose I really understood what had almost happened to me, there in Merlin's chamber, but I was disturbed by seeing her faced down. Certainly, I'd never known her to retreat from anything before.

A courtyard away from our lodgings, I hung back and made her stop. "I just wanted to see Arthur again," I said. "Before we leave. Please, Mother, can't I see him?"

She hugged me to her flat stomach, her breasts a comforting shelf above my head. "No, love, I'm afraid not. Even kings need their sleep."

"But it's not fair, for us to be leaving so soon."

She knelt down and kissed me, but when she spoke her voice was steely. "Don't start talk of things not being fair, Mordred. I hear enough of that from Lot. Things are as they are, and you must accept it. My husband is enough of a burden. Don't make me ashamed of you, as well."

I dabbed at my eye with a forefinger. "I'm sorry."

She lifted me in the air, for she was very strong, and held me tight. "That's all right. You've not had a good night, have you? If I'd not followed you, Merlin might have" Her voice trailed off.

"Might have what?" I asked through a mouthful of her hair.

"Never mind. We need to go to bed."

The men-at-arms did not stir as we crept back to our chamber; it was a good thing we weren't assassins. Of course, for all I knew, Mother was seeing to it that they did not awake. Instead of climbing back into bed with Lot, she curled up with me on the floor, with her arms around me and my head upon her breast. Comforted by that pillow, I slipped my hand up her sleeve, and fell asleep feeling the smooth softness of her bare skin underneath my fingertips.



We rose and dressed before dawn, and trudged through rainy fog to the docks, where a ship waited to take us back to Orkney. I stood wrapped in oily sealskin in the creaking darkness, while Lot's men stowed our gear aboard. Nobody broke the silence.

Until, finally, I did. "Where's Gawain?" Oh, I knew he wasn't coming with us, but I thought he'd be seeing us off.

Mother was a cloaked shape looming at my right, a warm hand squeezing mine. "He's staying with Arthur, love. He's Arthur's man, now."

"I wish I could be Arthur's man, too."

The blow came out of the darkness to my left, spinning me around and knocking me onto the wet, salty-smelling planks, where a splinter was driven into my cheek. Then I was grasped by the sealskin where it bunched at my throat and hauled up, to stare into the dim oval that was Lot's ale-stinking face.

"Then stay here, you whelp, and be damned to you!"

He cast me away from him and I reeled, feeling empty space and water behind me, before I regained my balance. Then a gust of wind swept over me, and I heard Lot make a sound like he'd been struck, and a shrill, keening cry that was Mother, chanting in some old Breton tongue.

"No!" cried Lot, "I didn't mean"

But I was already running away, recklessly down the dim pier, leaving him to face Mother's rage. In the pre-dawn glimmer, I could see the pale expanse of beach, dotted

with black lumps of rock. I leapt from the pilings and ran along the shingle and wet sand, finally stumbling to catch my breath in the deeper darkness of the cliff.

The rain had stopped, and light was seeping into the sky. I huddled against a weedy outcrop, my face buried in my knees, sobbing deep, racking sobs. Here was something I wanted to be part of, and I was being taken away, just as soon as I'd found it. As disturbing as Merlin had been, I still wanted desperately to be with Gawain and Arthur, but had no idea how to find my way back to the great hall, which was at least half a mile away. So I just crouched there and continued to cry, hoping, if I was formulating any thoughts at all, that Lot's ship would leave without me.

Then Mother was holding me, though I'd not been aware of her approach. "It's all right, Mordred, it's all right. I've dealt with him. He'll not be doing that again." Beneath the soothing, there was steel in her voice, like a dirk in a silk sheath.

"I don't want to go back. I want to stay," I said at last.

"I know. Me, too."

That took me aback, somehow. Even so young, I didn't know what there could be for her here. What was Arthur to her?

"Please, can't I stay?" I said finally.

"No. Merlin is here. Harm might come to you."

"Arthur would protect me!" Oh yes, I was very sure of that.

"No, Mordred. Your place is in your father's kingdom."

At that, I started to cry again. "I wish he weren't my father."

She didn't speak for a long time, but just sat there, on the damp rock, me in her lap now, holding me, while dawn broke over the cliffs. No one came looking for us. Finally, she nuzzled my cheek and whispered in my ear.

"Mordred, I'm going to tell you a secret."

"Yes?"

"You must swear, though, not to tell anyone. Or to ask me more than I tell you. Not till you're a man."

"I swear, Mother. By Lugh and Jesus." An oath I'd picked up from Gawain, who'd adopted some slight trappings of Christianity.

She seemed to flinch at the Carpenter's name, but accepted the oath. "Mordred, Lot is not your father."

"Who . . . ?"

Her hand was at my mouth. "Shhh. You swore. Now sit here a while, and cry if you must, and then be done with it."

That's what we did. At least, I think she was crying, too, as she held me and rocked me. At length, she dried my eyes with her cloak and we trudged back to the ship, neither of us speaking. Lot was huddled on the deck in his sealskin, also not speaking, nor meeting his wife's eyes, or mine. He was very pale, and bent over, as though he were in pain. Probably he was.



Of course, I couldn't understand then, how it must have irked him. It wasn't just

losing the throne, either; I can't be so uncharitable as that. It must have eaten at him that Gawain was staying behind. It would prove to be another eternal thorn in Lot's side, the fact that his firstborn son had sided with his brother-in-law, had never once suggested that Lot might have a better claim to the throne. From the first, the Heir of Orkney had forsaken his birthright to be the right-hand man of the Dragon of Britain.

I love you, Gawain, and I hated him, but one could say you did him wrong.

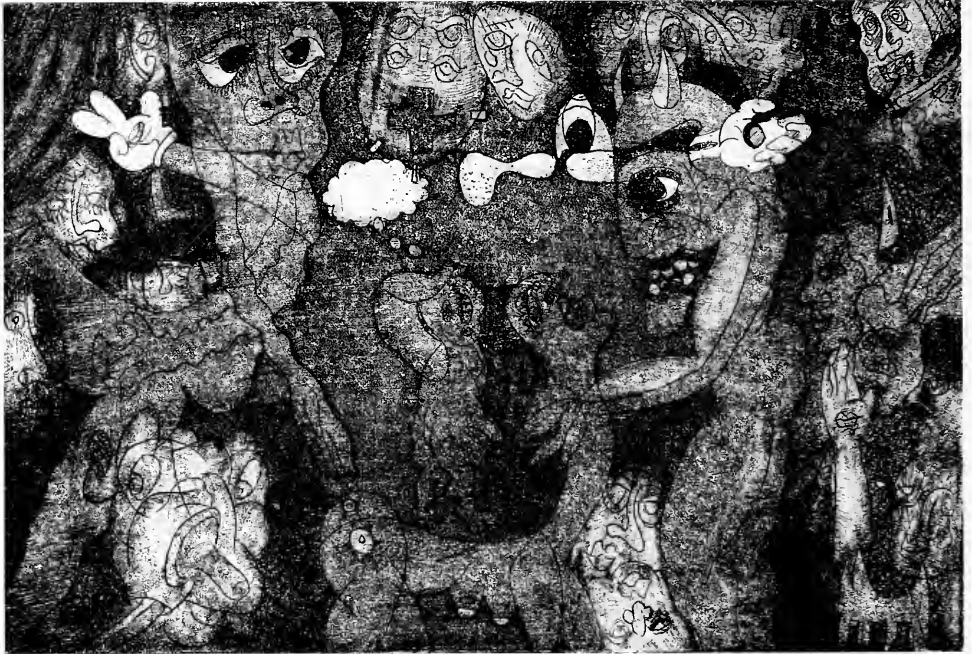
Who could blame you? Our kingdom wasn't much to come home to. Lot's grandfather had been one of the first Scots to leave Ireland and carve out a realm for himself among the Brits and Picts. But he'd never gotten a real foothold on the mainland, and had been forced back to these harsh islands, all peaty windswept hillsides rolling down to the cold and churning sea. His grandson had until recently dreamed of better things.

Now, so long after, I can almost pity Lot Mac Conag, King of the Orkneys and thwarted would-be king of more than that, the father of my brother and lord of the house where I was born. I pity him even though it was me who killed him, with Mother's help after she was dead. As I've already said, it feels strange to be to consider these memories now, after so many years. It's been so long since I last thought about the crafty old turd.

His craft never paid off, nor did his marriage prove to be as lucky as he'd hoped. He'd wanted much more than the bare kingdom he'd been born with, and had come so close, but Fortune proved as fickle as they say she is. Think what it must have been like, to have a common soldier turn out to be your wife's long-lost brother. When Arthur turned up to catch the falling crown, all of Lot's royal ambitions proved worth less than a crofter's fart.

That draught would have been bitter enough, but the very man who'd so thwarted Lot, also turned out to be the incestuous father of Orkney's youngest son. My da, I mean. Our family history does tend to sound like something out of a complicated bawdy joke, doesn't it?

And Gawain thought our wars were done.



Kevin Fitzgerald: *In the Neighborhood*, 1991, aquatint
6 by 9 inches



Heather Hoover: *Untitled*, 1993, aquatint
11 by 8 inches

First place



Jeff Roll: *Untitled*, 1992, photographic series, continued on opposite page
6 by 8 inches



Third place



Tom Saitta: *Burden*, 1992, photograph
5 by 7 inches

Multi-media Visual Arts
Contest Juror
1993
Ruth Beesch

Ruth K. Beesch presently serves as the Director of the Weatherspoon Art Gallery at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has done so since May, 1989. Born in Norwich, England, she received a B.F.A. in painting, and an M. F. A. in art history and museum studies from the University of Florida. She worked as Director of the Grinter Galleries 1982-1986 and as Acting Director of the University Gallery from 1986-1989 at the University of Florida.

She completed photographic conservation studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology and served as a consultant to the Miami-Dade Community Library and Associated Photographers on the Gleason Waite Romer restoration project. She received a Smithsonian Institution Scholarship to attend the American Bar Association "Legal Problems in Museum Administration" course study. Beesch has juried numerous invitational exhibitions, including the Ormond Beach Arts Festival and the Gainesville Regional Library Arts Project. She has received numerous grants and awards for exhibition support and public programs from the NEA, the Florida Arts Council and the North Carolina Arts Council. Beesch is a member of the College Arts Association, the American Association of Museums, and the Southeast Museums Conference.

Beesch has organized and written numerous exhibition brochures and catalogs on African, Japanese, and Latin American art, and has edited and authored major exhibition catalogs on contemporary sculpture and nineteenth and early twentieth century American painting. She most recently presented a paper at the Southeast College Arts Conference entitled "Visionary Artists in Florida," and spoke on the same topic at the Reynolda Museum of American Art. Recent editorial projects include an extensive exhibition catalog based on Weatherspoon Art Gallery collections entitled *Changing Perceptions: The Evolution of Twentieth Century American Art*.

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