Merlin the wizard was a wise man nearly all his life, but when he was old he fell into foolishness. Perhaps he trusted too much in his own power and so forgot that humility is the root of wisdom. He fell in love with one of the beautiful young ladies of the court, called Vivien, a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. He became quite crazy about her, followed her about everywhere, and told her any magic secret she wanted to know. He knew he was making a fool of himself, and sometimes he would think he should use his power to destroy Vivien. One day she found him in this mood and made him swear a magician’s oath that he could never break, that he would never use any enchantment against her.
Vivien had been brought up by the Lady of the Lake, who was also a sorceress. One magician seldom likes another, and Vivien had grown up to have no love for Merlin. But because he was a famous figure at court,
she was flattered and excited by his attention, and she also hoped to get some magic power for herself. But after a while, Vivien became very tired of Merlin’s devotions. Then she grew frightened of him and said he was a devil’s son, but nothing discouraged Merlin.

Indeed, he could not be hurt from attacks by other people. He knew this, but in his visions he could also see that he was going to come to disaster. He warned King Arthur, whose faithful friend he had been throughout his reign, and shook his head when he foretold how the King would need him after he was gone.

“Since you know what is going to happen, do something about it,” urged the King. “Prevent the disaster by one of your spells.”

Merlin’s pride in himself is what betrayed him into Vivien’s hands. When the King urged him to use a spell, his eye clouded and his voice dwindled away to muttering. He became very angry and vanished in the form of a cloud.

Vivien’s moment finally came. She had been storing up magic words and spells of a simple kind that Merlin had taught her, words that had power over elementary things like rock or earth. One day she was roaming in the forest of Broceliande with Merlin when
he told her that there was a cave nearby with a small entrance that no one would find under a shelf of rock. He offered to show her the marvelous treasures hidden in the cave, and she pretended to be very eager. Merlin
led her through the wood, and on the way a cloud of foreboding came over his spirit.

He was warned, but his confidence in himself was too complete. He went on and led Vivien to the entrance in the rock. The moment he had stepped inside the mouth of the cave, she pronounced the magic word that had power over rock, and the two sides of the opening sealed together behind Merlin.

Only the person who said the word could say the other word that would undo it. All Merlin's magic was useless to him in his imprisonment underground. Vivien ran from the rock in panic, and as she ran the thickets closed behind her and the way back was lost forever. Merlin is sealed up in the earth by his own folly and pride. In the shakings of the earthquakes, in the blasts of fire and water that burst to this day from the earth, the master of magicians groans and tries to soothe his unhappy heart.