You Say Tomato and I Say Tomahto

by aeroport_art

Summary

Arthur and Merlin have their own interpretations of what the hell happened That Night. They're both wrong and kind of deluded. But they still get lucky, so who's counting?

Notes

I hit up holiday parties last night and drank too much and ate too many hors d'oeuvres, none of which looked better coming up than they did going down. That is the inspiration for this story.

This story begins when Arthur wakes up in bed with his manservant. Neither of them are wearing any clothes.

“Um,” Merlin says, looking embarrassed.

Arthur says nothing at all, just gapes in a way he wouldn’t if he could see himself doing it.

His mouth snaps shut when Merlin blearily sits up and their shared blanket rolls down to his waist, revealing a great shock of bare chest and arms and belly all wrapped up in translucent skin and all at once so that Arthur hasn’t the time to adjust to the sight. It’s just BANG here’s your manservant, naked as the day he was born and here, sir, you may have him in your bed.

The silk blanket pools in Merlin’s lap, gracefully draping over his thighs to spill onto the mattress, upon which Merlin’s rear end is pillowed in downy luxury. The swell of his arse is surprisingly
sweet—milky white and flawless.

Arthur doesn’t realize he’s staring until Merlin coughs politely.

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The cough is unnaturally loud and Arthur winces, realizes he has a wicked hangover. He puts his head in his hands and rubs his eyes, then his temples, and Merlin quickly takes the opportunity to duck out from under the covers and fetch his clothing, which is strewn over a chair on his side of the bed. By the time Arthur looks up again, Merlin’s got his trousers on and is clumsily doing up the laces. His hair is sticking up in the front and it makes him look like a little boy.

“I—I’ll have a draught made up for your headache. You had a lot of wine last night.”

“Must have,” Arthur croaks. He swallows and tries again: “I mean, I don’t, er. Do you know…?” He makes a vague gesture that swoops over himself and Merlin’s vacated spot, still warm. It’s meant to say: I DON’T REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED. PLEASE INFORM.

Merlin throws his shirt on and runs out the door.

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This is what Arthur thinks happened: after Lord Lucan’s party last night at which Arthur—along with some other nobles and knights—drank himself silly, he grew lustful. Thus, he assaulted the first warm body he could find back at the castle.

That warm body was Merlin, his ever-present servant with his too-big eyes and palpable innocence that practically screamed “RAVISH ME”.

Which, Arthur supposes, he finally did.

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What actually happened was this: Arthur would not stop vomiting after getting back from the party. Merlin had the great misfortune of being in Arthur’s chambers, filching some oranges off the table to go with his midnight snack, when Arthur woozily blew into the room and promptly threw up on his dresser—the first victim of what would be several that night, including said oranges, Merlin’s right pant leg, and the chandelier (don’t ask).

Merlin nurses Arthur until he can keep down the contents of his stomach, then puts the man to bed and hastily cleans up the room with magic (because, gross). Merlin stays by Arthur’s side in case of a relapse. His job is, above all, to protect Arthur, and apparently this includes protecting him from drowning in a puddle of his own vomit.

Merlin falls asleep in a chair with his head on the far side of Arthur’s mattress. It’s freezing cold and in his sleep, Merlin dreams of taking all his clothes off and burying himself under those warm, freshly laundered sheets.

When he wakes up, it is so. And somehow Arthur winds up naked too.

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They both pretend it never happened.

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Unfortunately, pretending it didn’t happen doesn’t mean you forget all about it. Quite the opposite, in fact, as Arthur finds out.

For instance:

The next day Merlin leans over to pour his juice at breakfast. His stupid kerchief slips down to reveal inches of bare neck, the view creeping all the way down to bird-thin collarbones, and Arthur inexplicably wonders what Merlin’s skin tastes like, wishes he could remember.

For another instance:

Merlin laughs so hard at something Arthur says that water squirts out of his nose. As Merlin wipes it off with the back of his sleeve, Arthur wonders, was the sex fun like this? Giggles and elbows in stomachs and things like that, or had it been straightforward and hot? Did Merlin laugh at all? Because, if Arthur had to name a positive trait in the useless idiot, it would be Merlin’s laugh. It’s a nice laugh.

One more instance:

Arthur knocks over his cup of water, making it look accidental. Sometimes he does this out of boredom, because watching Merlin slave over him is always mildly entertaining if not a total gas.

When Merlin gets down on his hands and knees to soak up the spill, body rocking back and forth from the swabbing, Arthur is suddenly hit with the all-consuming question: Did he top, or did Merlin?

The possibility that Arthur was the one to bend over and present his arse for plundering strikes him with cold horror. He surreptitiously flexes in his seat. He doesn’t feel sore.

With not a little bit of relief flooding him, Arthur rationalizes that even if he’s so drunk as to black out an entire sexual encounter, he’s still him. He still doesn’t want foreign objects penetrating his arse, much preferring it the other way around.

Merlin finishes cleaning and stands up, the wet rag dripping from his hand. His gaze levels to meet Arthur’s and he immediately pinks, then goes off to dispose of the rag.

Indeed, Arthur thinks, trying to look for a limp in Merlin’s gait as he walks out the room. I must have topped. It doesn’t make sense otherwise.

The thought makes him smile.

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Unfortunately, pretending something didn’t happen doesn’t mean you forget all about it. Quite the opposite, in fact, as Merlin finds out.

For instance:

The next morning, Arthur knocks his cup over at breakfast. (And he calls Merlin clumsy.)

The cup hits the ground with a brilliant splash, bounces one-two-three times and rolls backwards into the bed frame, where a giant elk bust gaudily hangs from above. As he’s wiping up the spill, Merlin notices the bust slip forward an inch or so, hanging ominously on what must be a loose nail.

It only hangs for a second, however, before pitching forward with huge antlers first. Arthur is sitting
Álynian, Merlin whispers, and the elk head freezes, then slides back to it’s original position.

When Merlin stands back up, Arthur’s looking at him. He’s got a strange expression on his face, like he’s thinking hard—definitely strange for Arthur—and Merlin just hopes to God he doesn’t suspect anything. As if his huge feat of magic yesterday wasn’t enough, Merlin might as well just wear a sign that says “SORCERER”.

For another instance:

Arthur decides that day would be the perfect day to slap him around a bit. Or, as the prince calls it, “do some training.”

An insidious voice inside him says: Merlin, he’s onto your magic. How could he have missed it? He’s angry at you. He’s going to kill you this afternoon and make it look like an accident.

Arthur doesn’t actually kill him, but neither does Merlin feel any safer.

One more instance:

The insidious voice sticks around long enough to get Merlin into trouble. It hisses nastily:

_Hey, Merlin. I’m hungry. Get me some thing to eat._

“No, I’m busy,” he grumps.

“I beg your pardon?”

Merlin looks up, feeling like a trapped animal. “Um,” he says.

Arthur cocks an eyebrow, then goes back to chewing.

Then he stops chewing. “Merlin,” Arthur starts, sounding uncharacteristically unsure. “About the other day…”

Heart racing, Merlin squeaks, “Yes?”

Arthur spears his fork into the lamb on his plate and lets it stay there. Finally, “Did you remember to take my boots to the cobbler? I’ll need them for this weekend’s trip.”

_You’re going crazy_, the voice tells him. Merlin pointedly ignores it

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Arthur always gets what he wants.

This simple fact explains why he’s going bat-shit insane, because what Arthur wants is to know what the hell happened between him and Merlin. Other than the obvious.

He wants to remember it. How did it happen? Did he coerce Merlin, or was it—God, was it mutual? Was the idiot any good in the sack?

The questions are killing him, and it takes all of two days for Arthur to give up.

He cuts short a meeting with the agricultural advisor—couldn’t pay a whit of attention to things like
corn and soil when consumed with thoughts of drunken sex—and seeks Merlin out.

Merlin is at the stables, eating sugar cubes nicked from the treat bags while magicked brushes scrub the horses to a gleaming shine.

The door bangs open and Merlin gasps, letting the brushes drop onto the floor. A sugar chunk goes down the wrong pipe and he starts hacking up a lung as Arthur looks around the room with haughty confusion.

"Merlin, don’t die just yet. I’ve got a question for you that you will answer immediately."

A few meager wheezes continue to leak out, but the worst of it has passed. Merlin replies wetly, “Look, if you’ve come to ask about that night…it’s true. It was my fault.”

Arthur looks positively scandalized, so Merlin rushes on before he’s too dead to defend himself: “I’m sorry. I wanted to tell you! But you know how things are, I could die if anybody knew, and it wasn’t that I didn’t trust you with my secret, I do. I just didn’t want to put you in that position where you had to choose between me or, or propriety or something—"

“Shut up for a bit,” Arthur commands, holding a hand out as he walks forward. “Are you saying what I think you’re saying? That night…that was you who instigated it?”

"'Fraid so,” Merlin says, his voice tight, face white as snow. He looks like he’s about to faint.

“So you’re saying you like me.”

Merlin goggles at him. Arthur’s standing before him now, looming tall like he’s getting paid by the inch. “What? I mean yeah, sure. If that means you won’t have me killed.”

“Sometimes I think I ought to—“ Arthur pauses to smirk at the look of terror on Merlin’s face, “—but other times…I don’t know.”

Arthur leans in close and peers into Merlin’s eyes, which are blue—bluer than the sky, bluer than the sea. Bluer than the bruises on Merlin’s arms from their training session yesterday afternoon. Arthur says quietly, “There’s something about you, Merlin.”

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Then, Arthur kisses him. Their kiss tastes like beets and sugar.

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That’s because Arthur had beets for lunch and Merlin was snacking on horse treats.

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Merlin petrifies under the warmth of Arthur’s soft mouth, holding still like he’s made of stone.

What nobody knows is that Merlin has a little crush on Arthur.

(Well, Gaius might have a clue, but that’s only because Gaius is a stinking know-it-all.)

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Arthur breaks the kiss and backs up. “Well?” he says impatiently.

“I…” Merlin touches his lips with his fingers. “You’re not afraid of me?”

Arthur scoffs in response. It’s a rather rude noise, actually, but Arthur’s got it perfected so that it sounds like poetry. “If people want to talk, let them talk. What could they possibly do?”

“Um, execute me?” Merlin suggests, inwardly wondering if Arthur’s gone daft at the news. He supposes it’s a bit shocking, realizing your manservant is actually an all-powerful warlock who could wipe you off the face of the planet with less than it takes to wipe his arse, but he thought Arthur commanded a stronger constitution than this.

“Merlin, you’re with me.” Arthur puts the emphasis on the word “me”, which is a habit of his. “Nothing’s going to change unless I say so. Which means—” he adds waringly, “You’re still my manservant. No handouts.”

Merlin glows. When Arthur kisses him a second time, he doesn’t even stop to think about it and kisses back.

After all, his secret is out. Arthur knows about the magic and he’s okay with it!

Arthur’s tongue licks over Merlin’s mouth, then slips inside. More than okay, Merlin thinks wonderingly.

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As you know, Arthur doesn’t actually know Merlin is a warlock. He just thinks they get to have sex now.

Which isn’t exactly untrue, so. Everybody wins.

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