Secret Admirer?

by digthewriter

Summary

The one where Arthur is trying to get over a broken heart and meets Merlin, who immediately runs away.

Notes

Don't hold your breath for updates. It's gonna be a short one. Prob. wicked fluffy. ALL LIES. DIG IS A LYING LIAR THAT LIES.
Arthur wasn't a patient man and "waiting it out" as he'd been told to get over a lying, cheating ex was not his idea of fun.

He had no idea why he had decided to come to this club tonight, maybe he'd thought he'd find a bloke to snog, but he was having no luck.

Every time he started chatting up with someone, some comment about Owen would slip up and Arthur would totally kill the mood by discussing his ex-boyfriend. Again. And again.

Maybe he shouldn't have listened to Gwaine. He was getting nowhere with any of the blokes, and Owen was not becoming a distant memory.

With a heavy sigh, Arthur made his way outside to smoke a cigarette in the alley behind the club, and perhaps he could rethink his whole strategy about finding a man for the night. He could simply just keep drinking and then find someone to dance with. Dancing didn't require talking and that also eventually led to kissing.

"Yeah…” Arthur said to no one in particular and as soon as he had finished his smoke, decided to head back into the club.

"Trying your luck again?" Percy said to Arthur as he stood by door guarding it. He was certainly big enough to look like a guard.

"I… Just gonna get another drink," Arthur said, feeling embarrassed. Was he that obvious? Did he look extremely desperate.

"Here, take Merlin with you," Percy said.

"Percival!"

At first, Arthur hadn't noticed the skinny man standing next to Percy, most likely because Percy was so large he was probably hiding him. But when Arthur's eyes finally fell on Percy's little friend, Arthur had nearly lost his breath. Wide, blue eyes peered at Arthur, and Arthur hadn't seen anything so fucking blue. The man half Percy's size, slimmer than Arthur as well, but he was the same height as Arthur. Arthur suspected the man to be taller, but with the way he was leaning against the door next to Percy, Arthur wasn't certain.

"Hi, I'm Arthur." Arthur offered his hand to skinny bloke who was looking cross.

"Yeah, I know," the man said. "I'm Merlin."

"How'd you know?"

"You're Morgana's brother, Gwaine's old flatmate, and Gwen's ex-boyfriend. We've been at the same social gatherings."

"Oh. I'm sorry, I didn't—"

"You were always with your boyfriend. I mean, or I think he was—is—right. Whatever." Merlin look flustered.

"Smooth, Mer. Smooth."
"Oh, shut up. I'm leaving." Merlin rolled his eyes at Percy, didn't even look at Arthur, and walked away.

Arthur simply stood there staring for a long minute until Percy cleared his throat. There was a line formed behind Arthur, no doubt, people trying to get into the club, so Arthur got out of the way.

"What in the bloody hell was that?" Arthur asked, feeling like the wind had just been kicked out of him.

"That, was Merlin," Percy said, as if that was supposed to mean anything.

"And have I really never met him before?"

Percy shrugged. "You were always so busy with Owen. Kissing, or fighting, or dancing, or fighting, fighting—"

"Right. I get your meaning. Had we been introduced before, you reckon?"

Percy shook his head. "No, he's only admired you from afar—shit, I wasn't supposed to say that."

"Admired. What do you mean?"

Percy sighed and continued doing his job for a few minutes before he turned to look at Arthur. "You were with Owen for a year, Arthur, and in that year, you missed a lot. Owen did you a favour by cheating on you because you were never gonna leave that fucking bastard…" He raised his hand to stop Arthur from speaking. "And Merlin's my friend. He's got a bit of a crush on you so don't try anything with him. He's a sensitive soul."

"And what am I?" Arthur felt offended.

"You're on the rebound. If you're looking for a quick fuck, don't look for Merlin. I can't have that."

"But—"

"Just go inside, Arthur. Don't think about Merlin. Just go find someone for the night."

Arthur didn't answer Percy, and did as he was told. He went into the club and walked straight to the bar to get a drink. He watched the crowds, and saw a few people from the crowd watching him back, but he didn't make a move.

For some reason, Arthur couldn't get the blue eyes out of his thoughts. Who exactly was this… Merlin?
Disappointment

The night was a total bust. When Arthur had returned to the bar after his chat with Percy by the door, he'd not managed to shake Merlin out of his head. There was just something about the man that intrigued him. No, he wasn't exactly attracted to Merlin, Arthur wasn't sure he could find it in his heart to be attracted to anyone at this time, but he knew he definitely wanted to get to know him more.

Without a glance at any of the other blokes at the club, Arthur left in haste, feeling as though he could no longer stand anyone there. He needed to get out, and fast.

The next day, Arthur sent a text message to Percy to get more information about Merlin. Percy wasn't forthcoming at first, but eventually, he told Arthur where Merlin worked. That was all.

Arthur was disappointed Percy simply didn't give him Merlin's mobile number, and what did he expect Arthur to do? Show up at the man's place of work? Arthur wasn't going to stalk him.

Eventually, his saving grace was Gwen, who told Arthur that she was having a few friends over for tea next Thursday, and she was inviting Merlin.

"But, I don't want you flirting with him at my tea party, Arthur," she said.

"I don't want that. I think…I think I just want to be his friend."

"Be gentle with him, okay?" she said, sounding sincere, and worried.

"Am I the only person the world who didn't know this bloke fancied me? How could you all let this be? Why didn't anyone tell me?"

"You were with Owen."

"Owen, that everyone apparently hated."

"Well, he was your boyfriend. If I were dating—"

"Yes, Gwen. If you were dating someone I thought was an arse, I would tell you."

"It's easier said than done, Arthur. When things were good between the two of you, they were really good. And you smiled in a way I'd never seen…”

Arthur sighed. He agreed with Gwen. Things with Owen weren't always bad. They had their moments, though few and far between that might have been. Perhaps it was his mistake to push their relationship to be so close and so fast. Things done in such a haste were always a terrible idea.

"Very well," he said finally. "Can I still come to the tea party and get to know this Merlin? I won't pursue anything, I promise."

"Fine," she said, agreeing but not really sounding totally on-board with the idea.

Arthur didn't know why his friends were all worried. He wasn't going to do anything rash. He was still getting over his bad break-up.
When Arthur arrived at Gwen's flat for tea, he realised he was the last one there. He saw a few familiar faces in the sitting room as he glanced around, and as soon as he locked eyes with Merlin, he gave a quick nod.

Merlin's eyes had widened slightly before he smiled at Arthur and looked away. He seemed as though he were searching for something.

"Arthur! You're here!" Gwen said with delight and pulled him in for a hug. By the time they separated, Arthur saw Merlin had found what he was looking for. Or who, rather.

A man with long black hair and grey eyes had his hand resting on Merlin's shoulder. He was speaking with one of the guests but kept his hand on Merlin the entire time. Merlin, Arthur thought, seemed distracted as he wasn't in the conversation the man was having with the other guest, but was still leaning into the man's touch.

A date. Arthur reckoned.

Merlin had brought a date.

Arthur shouldn't have been upset by this because he didn't really know Merlin, and Merlin didn't owe him anything, but still, he felt foolish for coming to the tea party now. What was he expecting? To be Merlin's friend? He sounded like a fourteen year old.

As Arthur thought about whether or not he should make an excuse to leave Gwen's flat, or not, Gwen asked everyone to take their seats at the table. They served sandwiches and three different types of teas to all the guests, and Arthur distracted himself by initiating a conversation with Mithian who was sitting next to him.

Mithian had just returned from her trip to the States and was telling Arthur her plans of starting a family, and Arthur was starting to relax. He could do this. He could have a nice chat with his friend, and forget all about why he felt so funny to see Merlin there with another man.
To take a break from everyone at tea, Arthur snuck out to the balcony in Gwen's flat to smoke. He wasn't much of a smoker, but once in a while he indulged in the bad habit—especially if he was stressed.

He didn't really know why he was stressing. He had enough on his plate already than to think about some random stranger and his date.

"Hi…" Merlin's voice gave Arthur a start; he quickly got rid of his cigarette. He felt he'd been caught doing something he wasn't supposed to be doing. Technically, it was exactly that. He hated getting lectured on his smoking habit.

"Sorry…I didn't realise anyone was out here. I thought you'd left."

Arthur raised an eyebrow. "You were looking for me?"

Merlin gave shy smile, looking away from Arthur. "No. Just didn't see you around for ten minutes is all; figured you were bored. I mean, it is kinda boring…" Merlin gave a short laugh as if he was embarrassed.

Arthur simply smiled.

"I shouldn't be so mean, and I keep coming to Gwen's little get-togethers thinking I'll find someone new or interesting."

"What about your date?"

"Oh, Stanley? He's not my date…" Merlin's ears turned red but this time, he didn't look away from Arthur. "He's just a friend. He's a bit too friendly, if I'm honest, but I…" He shrugged casually, "I figured he could meet new people. He just moved back to Camelot."

"Oh…" Arthur said. "So you're not dating anyone?"

Merlin gave Arthur a confused look. "No. I'm not. This isn't about… Percy didn't put you up to this, right?"

"No," Arthur said; he wasn't entirely sure why but he took a step closer to Merlin. His body was starting to relax, the tension in his shoulders was easily leaving him. "Gwen told me she'd invited you. I accepted her invitation also so I could…" Arthur gave a heavy sigh. "Meet you, I guess?"

"Are you asking me or telling me?"

Arthur laughed at Merlin's expressionless face. Now it was him thoroughly embarrassed.

"I'm just looking for new friends… I think. I mean, I went through a bad break-up. Maybe I just need a different scenery. Not hang out with people who remind me of Owen. I don't want to dwell on him anymore. I thought maybe you and I could be friends or…"

Merlin seemed to regard him for a long moment. A very long moment before he said anything. Arthur was sure he was just going to turn around and leave.

"I never liked Owen."
Of all the things Arthur was readying himself for, he was not expecting that.

"That seems to be a common consensus," replied Arthur.

"I used to think that maybe I was just jealous of him. But turns out he's a wanker, and I'd been right all along."

Arthur nodded.

"Sorry. I'm honest. I can't—"

"No, Please," Arthur said immediately. "Listening to people talk shit about my ex is kind of my favourite past-time."
At the end of the evening, Arthur found Merlin's friend Stanley flirting with one of Gwen's friends. "Hey, you off?" Gwen asked Arthur, directing his attention towards her.

"Yeah. I'll phone a taxi..."

"I can give you a lift," Merlin said, joining their conversation. "I mean, if you're comfortable. I think Stanley's going to stay behind to...you know..." He smiled and they all looked over towards Merlin's friend again. "He drove himself here."

"I..." Arthur hesitated for a brief second and then nodded. "Of course, it'll be faster this way. I won't have to worry about waiting and giving directions."

"Brilliant." Merlin nodded and made his round of goodbyes as Arthur looked at Gwen who gave him a knowing look.

"What?"

"You already know he fancies you. I just... maybe you should be single for a while, Arthur."

Arthur didn't get a chance to reply and then they were off.
They drove in silence for a while. Arthur couldn't get Gwen's words out of his head, and he wondered if he was being too rude to Merlin by staying so quiet.

"Are you comfortable?" Merlin asked eventually, his eyes fixed on the road. He reached over to the dials in the car and fiddled with them. His car was very small, the smallest Arthur'd ever been in, but the distance between them seemed quite large. Perhaps Merlin had overheard what Gwen had said and was feeling strange about it.

What would he think? Would he think Arthur was flirting with him and stringing him along? Is that why Gwen told Arthur he should remain single for a while. Or would he think Arthur was considering Merlin to be his rebound.

Arthur wasn't doing any of those things. From what he'd been able to tell so far, he enjoyed Merlin's company quite a lot, and wanted to keep seeing him. Even if it was as friends.

"Sorry…” Merlin said when his fingers brushed against Arthur's knee. His car was bloody small.

"I…it's all right," Arthur said, smiling. "I don't mind."

"You don't mind what?" Merlin asked, his eyes quickly diverting towards Arthur before he looked towards the road again.

Arthur chuckled. "That you accidentally touched my knee."

"Oh, right." Merlin bit his lower lip and continued to stare out towards the road.

Arthur had to wonder if Merlin knew what he was doing. If Merlin knew he was so bloody sexy. As he bit his lower lip, Arthur found himself wanted to taste Merlin. No, that was probably not a good idea. It isn't what friends did. It wasn't the kind of impression he wanted to leave on Merlin.

He wanted to take his time and get to know him.
Arthur shifted in the car, trying to settle in. "So how do you know where I live? I haven't given you any directions."

Merlin drove with ease and clearly knew where he was going. Sure, Arthur had told Gwen that it'd be easier to go in the car with Merlin than take a taxi because he didn't want to bother with directions, but he was surprised he'd not even given Merlin his address.

Merlin shrugged. "I went over to Morgana's flat quite a lot before you shifted in. When you were still in Graduate School. I actually helped move her furniture out, as well. Not that it helped much. I can't carry things like Percy or Gwaine."

That gave Arthur pause. How intimate was Merlin with all of Arthur's friends, and how much effort had he put in to stay out of Arthur's radar? "Oh, I didn't realise you were so close to my sister."

Merlin chuckled lightly, and Arthur couldn't take his eyes off Merlin's neck, the way his Adam's apple bobbed, and the way he gulped, as if he were nervous. Was he doing that to Merlin?

"Well, close, I'm not sure. No one can actually get close to Morgana. That's why I was surprised she was leaving her flat behind to go and live with her boyfriend. I mean…that's a bold move."

"Right…" Arthur said, turning his head to look out the window. He'd almost shifted in with Owen. If he'd find the right buyer for his flat, he might have already been living with him before finding out what an arse Owen really was. He'd really dodged that bullet.

"God, this heating dial is really shit…” Merlin said again, and again, his fingers brushed against Arthur's knee. "Sorry again. I hate this small car—"

"It's okay, Merlin. Why are you so tense?" Arthur asked turning towards Merlin and placing his hand on Merlin's knee. Merlin immediately stiffened up.

Arthur heard the amusement in his own voice when he said, "Ah, I suppose I should be the one apologising this time. Didn't mean to make you—"


Feeling bad for how he was treating Merlin, Arthur said, "Sorry if I freaked you out."

"You didn't freak me out," replied Merlin. "Please, by all means, put your hand on my thig—knee. If it makes you feel better."

Arthur heard the delight in Merlin's voice and laughed. His hand returned on Merlin's knee, and Merlin didn't move. He didn't react at all. He continued driving as if nothing had just happened, and made a turn. Part of Arthur wanted to push on.

Merlin's fingers brushed against Arthur's arm when he reached down to change the gear, and Arthur pulled his hand away. When they were driving steadily again, Arthur placed his hand back on Merlin's knee. He liked the feel of the fabric of Merlin's jeans, or, at least that's what he was telling himself.

Could he continue this further? Could I really do this? Would this be considered flirting? A moment later, Arthur's hand slid up Merlin's leg. Now, he was definitely flirting.
"What are you doing?" Merlin asked in an amused voice. He gave a shy little smile but didn't look at Arthur.


"I can see that. Or well, feel it. Can you…stop?"

"You want me to stop?"

Merlin took in a deep breath and shook his head. "We're almost to your flat," he said in a dry tone. Arthur couldn't help but think that Merlin's words were betraying his actions.

"Do you want to come in?" Arthur asked with genuine interest, hoping Merlin would say yes.

Okay, so it was obvious to him now that the red flags were going up everywhere. Arthur was ignoring everyone's advice. Percy told Arthur to stay away unless he was serious about Merlin, because he didn't want Arthur to toy with Merlin's feelings. Gwen had told him to consider remaining single—for whatever reason. And here he was: his hand on Merlin's thigh, two centimetres away from Merlin's cock. He wanted to brush the back of his fingers against the front of Merlin's jeans. He wanted to pull the zipper down and—

"I shouldn't. I can't," Merlin said. His response yanked Arthur out of his thoughts. Merlin pulled into a parking spot right in front of the building and finally turned to look at Arthur. His expressive eyes betraying him again.

Arthur pushed on. "Can't? Or shouldn't?"

"Both."

"What if I ask really nicely?" Arthur bit his lower lip. What was it about Merlin bringing out the fun side of him again? Arthur hadn't flirted so shamelessly with someone in a very long time. He'd been monogamous when he was with Owen so he didn't need to do any such thing and even before Owen, there wasn't anyone that challenged Arthur. There was just something about this man. Merlin. And Arthur wanted to find out.

"What… are you fucking with me?" Merlin asked, looking very serious all of a sudden. Arthur almost panicked. The last thing he wanted was to push Merlin away. "What about how you wanted to be friends?"

Arthur shrugged, and spoke with a light tone. "It's just harmless flirting. Friends do that."

"Ah. Right. Get out."

"No, wait…" Arthur reached over and placed his hand on Merlin's shoulder. For someone who claimed to not want Arthur's attention in so many words, certainly didn't have a problem with Arthur continuing to touch him.

"I'm sorry, I'm not trying to fuck this up, I swear." Even though Arthur totally felt like he was fucking this up. "I like you and I want to get to know you." Merlin looked like he didn't believe him. "I mean, you can come in, and we won't do anything more than just talk if that's what you want. I can make us a drink—"

"I'm driving."
"It's Friday night and unless you have a really hot date you didn't tell me about, you can come over and have a bloody drink, Merlin. And stay a while."

"Damn, you're bossy," Merlin said.

Arthur threw his head back and laughed. "I'm usually not."

"Is that so?" Merlin raised an eyebrow, looking like he was ready to challenge Arthur.

"Do you want me to be?" Arthur asked, his voice low, unsure of why he was beginning to flirt again. He hated how his mind was on repeat. There was just something about Merlin. All Arthur wanted was for Merlin to come over. Heck, he wanted to pull on Merlin's arm and drag him out of his driver's seat and sit in Arthur's lap. His car was small enough that the task would be easy to execute. His fingers twitched again, and he brushed his fingers against the back of Merlin's neck. He turned his body and rested his other hand on Merlin's knee. He was starting to like how small Merlin's car was, and how they could be so close, so easily. "I could be bossy."

"Shit, Arthur. You can't say things like that…"

"What if I simply said that I'd like to kiss you?"
Merlin stared at Arthur long and hard, so much so, it was making Arthur squirm in his seat. Maybe he shouldn't have said that. Maybe when he said he was going to take it slow, he really should have been taking it slow. But, he wanted to kiss Merlin, and Arthur never not acted on his feelings.

It was a stupid thing, but he wasn't simply going to change overnight.

"Can I?" Arthur asked. "Can I kiss you?"

"Is it because I told you I hated Owen, and that gives you some sort of joy?"

Arthur scrunched his eyebrows. "No. I mean, it does give me joy. It also makes me feel stupid everyone in the world knew Owen was an arse before me. Maybe it'll take me a while to really let someone in. Maybe it'll force me to have trust issues for a very long time, but none of that has anything to do with the fact I want to kiss you."

"Damn, you're good with your words," Merlin said; his eyes flickered towards Arthur's mouth before he looked away.

"I'm better with my tongue," replied Arthur. Because, why the fuck not? He was already flirting with Merlin, and why shouldn't he have just amped up the charm as well. "I can show you."

"You're trouble."

"Yeah, but you fancied me once. Don't you want to kiss me too?"

Arthur leaned closer; since Merlin's car was already so small, he was quite close to Merlin already. He diminished the distance between them, and placed his hand on the back of Merlin's neck.

"What are you doing?" Merlin asked.

"Waiting for you to give me the green light. Since you won't come inside, I might as well try to kiss you here."

"So you think the kissing is definitely happening?"

"I don't know, Merlin. Is it?" Arthur asked, smiling, and then he licked his lower lip.

"Oh, you're definitely trouble…" Merlin said before he sealed his lips on Arthur and kissed him. It started out slow; excruciatingly tentative, as if Merlin were taking his time analysing Arthur. But then, much to Arthur's surprise, Merlin cranked up the heat.

His hands were everywhere. They started in Arthur's hair but then he was touching Arthur's shoulders, his back, pulling him closer, all the while, tongue, teeth, and moaning had Arthur's mind racing a mile per minute. Merlin had been so hot and cold with him, Arthur didn't know what to do. Still, for the moment, he spent his time enjoying Merlin's desire for him. It felt good to want someone, and feel wanted. He wasn't lying before when he'd told Merlin he'd have trust issues with people for the next year, but at the same time, he felt it in his heart he could trust Merlin. Merlin'd be gentle with him.

Merlin moved and then he cursed. "Damn this steering wheel…" He looked wedged between the seat and the wheel.
"Come here," Arthur said, pulling him; Merlin came willingly. Arthur's wish had nearly come true. Merlin was sitting in his lap. They continued snogging like a couple of teenagers after a date at the cinema.

Arthur's hands roamed down to cup Merlin's arse and Merlin groaned again as he pressed his body against Arthur's, and rubbed their groins together. He managed to surprise Arthur again. How long had he been holding onto the want to do this with Arthur? Or was this just how Merlin was? Did he rub up against any man he kissed in the confines of his car?

"Sh...fu... God, we should stop," Merlin said, finally.

"Why?" Arthur asked, his hands finding their way under Merlin's shirt; he squeezed one of Merlin's nipple for good measure. He wanted Merlin naked under him, writhing, while Arthur sucked on Merlin's nipple. Before making his way down to—

"This is more than just a kiss, Arthur."

"You're more than just any man, Merlin."

"Funny how a week ago, you didn't even know my name."

"Yeah. It's true. But now I do. I know more than your name, Merlin. I know if I suck on the side of your neck, you make the most delicious sounds. I know you love getting your arse grabbed and—"

"Stop it, Arthur. Please."

"Okay..." Arthur said, removing his hands from Merlin's body—raising them up as in surrender. "You want me to go?"

"Yes."

"And I can't convince you to come in?"

Merlin shook his head. "No."

Arthur doubted that, but he let it go.
Letting Go

Reluctantly, Arthur got out of Merlin's car, and walked away. He didn't regret his decisions because he had loved kissing Merlin, but he regretted he might have scared Merlin off.

"Oh well," he said to himself as he let himself into his flat, and closed the door behind him. If Merlin couldn't handle it with Arthur, maybe they shouldn't be getting together. Instead of walking into his living room, Arthur leaned against the door and took in the view.

His flat. It was still full of Owen's stuff.

Arthur shook his head at himself. Maybe this is what Gwen meant. Maybe he needed to be single because he needed to get rid of Owen. Owen's things. Owen was already out of Arthur's heart, and now, he needed to be out of Arthur's living space.

It was a good thing he had insomnia, he thought, as he grabbed his shirt and threw it on his bed and emptied a box. He'd recently ordered books so he was glad he had something to collect Owen's items in. He placed the box in the middle of the living room and got to it. He picked up framed photos of him and Owen with friends, at various outings, and books and posters that were either presents from Owen or would only remind Arthur of him.

As he walked around the room collecting things, Arthur started to get hot. "Why am I still wearing jeans?" he asked himself as if there was someone there to answer. He really should have changed completely before taking on this task.

As he unbuttoned the jeans, there was a knock at his door. "What?" he wondered, again out loud and to no one in particular. He was too used to being around someone. Around Owen.

Who could be calling unannounced?

Arthur walked up to the door and opened it, not realising he was half-naked. What if it was the old lady from down the hall and she needed Arthur's help fetching her cat again? However, it wasn't the old lady from down the hall. It was Merlin.

"Merlin?"

"I… uh… hi." Merlin said, his eyes wide, giving Arthur the once-over. "You always answer the door like that?"

"What are you doing here?" Arthur asked at the same time. "You have the code to the building?"

"Yeah. I knew Morgana, remember?"

"Right, of course. I… Come in." Arthur got out of the way and started to button up his jeans again. "I was cleaning up," he said, hesitantly. "I'll just go and get a shir—"

"No. I mean, don't get dressed on my account."

Arthur chuckled and closed the door to his flat. "So you're here, because…"

"You invited me, remember?"

"Yes. And you turned me down. What did you do? Drive home and then drive all the way back just to tell me you don't want me. Again."
Merlin looked slightly embarrassed. His cheeks pinked and his gaze fell away from Arthur and towards the box sitting in the middle of the living room. "What's this?"

"Mer...lin."

"I didn't drive home," Merlin said, snapping his head back to look at Arthur, still defiant as ever. "I sat in my car and thought..."

"You thought."

"Yes. It's known to happen. You should try it sometime, you know. Before simply jumping to conclusions, and taking actions without really thinking."

Arthur rolled his eyes. "What did you think about?"

Merlin shrugged. "About how if I didn't take you up on your offer, of coming in and having a drink, by the way and nothing else... That I'd be making the biggest mistake of my life."

Arthur's stomach twisted up in knots and he took in a deep breath. "Shit..." he said, exhaling. He took a step towards Merlin, and for a brief second, he saw the hesitation on Merlin's face but then it vanished. "The things you say, Merlin." Merlin allowed him to close the distance between them until they were chest-to-chest, and then Arthur kissed him again.

Arthur kept pushing Merlin, and Merlin kept walking back until his back hit the kitchen island, and then Arthur was all hands. He couldn't bother breathing while his mouth of was on Merlin's and while he pressed his chest against Merlin's.

Finally when Arthur let Merlin go for a brief second, only to start kissing his favourite spot on Merlin's neck again, Merlin spoke. "You know, I'm really only here for that drink you promised me."

Still, he didn't do anything to stop Arthur from continuing his actions.

"I just seem to need you like air," Arthur murmured against Merlin's skin, before his hands reached the button on Merlin's jeans. He wanted to push more. God, he wanted to push all the way, but he stopped and looked at Merlin.

"Can I?"

"What..." Merlin gulped. "What did you have in mind?"

Arthur smiled. That smile of his he knew people found endearing: all teeth and sparkly eyes. He used to practice it as a kid. "Let me taste you, and I'll offer you that drink."

"Uh... yeah? Do you want to?" Merlin asked, his voice nothing but hot breaths on Arthur's jaw. He kissed Arthur's chin lightly as he gently thrust forward.

"You know I do. I knew I wanted this before I saw you tonight at Gwen's. I just was in denial about it. The question is, do you want to?"

"Maybe I should have that drink first," Merlin said.

Arthur nodded. He pulled away from Merlin and turned around but he'd only walked away one step when Merlin snaked his arms around Arthur's waist and pulled him back in. "Shit. I think I might
need you like air, too."

Arthur smiled again, and before Merlin could stop him, or say anything else, he dropped to his knees.

In record time, he had Merlin's jeans around his ankles. He might have had insomnia, but he was going to make sure Merlin would sleep well tonight. Maybe even in his bed.
"What do you want, Arthur?"

"How do you want me?" Merlin whispered, his hot breath coaxing Arthur's lips, as Arthur pressed himself against Merlin; his erection straining against his trousers. He'd just finished sucking Merlin, who had come so beautifully on Arthur's tongue.

"You don't have to—" Arthur had begun to say when Merlin kissed him.

"Shut up. You just made me... shit, that was so good. Better than I'd imagined it'd be with you... I have to..." Merlin sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. "I've to return the favour. Feel you. Maybe even taste you."

Arthur loved the anxious tone in Merlin's voice. Loved that Merlin wanted him so badly. It'd been such a long time since he'd felt this desire, the feeling of being desired that... Shit, I can't be falling for him. Not like this. Not now.

"What's the matter?" Merlin asked, looking worried. "Where did you just go?"

"No. Sorry. I just... sorry."

"Do you regret it?" Merlin asked, his hand resting against Arthur's erection; he wasn't pushing against it, but as though he was just making certain Arthur was still hard for him.

"Of course, not. I pursued you. Without any shame..." Arthur laughed. "I don't regret it."

"But..."

"How do you know there's a but?"

"It's written all over your face," Merlin said.

"It's my fault. I rushed into this."

"You rushed into it," Merlin repeated dryly.

"I told you I wanted to be friends, but then I wanted to have you. I guess I see now... Shit, not the right thing to say, Arthur."

"I should go," Merlin said, trying to push past Arthur when Arthur stopped him. Still, Merlin bent down and pulled his jeans up. He looked ready to flee.

"No. Please don't. Don't run away every time I doubt myself. I—" Something inside Arthur shook then. How could he have not seen this? How could he allow himself to be vulnerable again.

Merlin was staring at him. Arthur wasn't sure if he was cross or he was trying to read Arthur's expressions. "What?" he asked, softly.

"Maybe it isn't I won't trust other people. Maybe I shouldn't trust myself," Arthur said.

"What do you mean?"

"One sign of trouble, and everyone just starts to abandon me," Arthur said. "Never mind, you won't..."
"I wasn't trying to abandon you, Arthur. You all but made it clear you sucked me off and now you're done with me."

"That's not—" *Shit.*

"What do you see?" Merlin asked. "You just said you see now… What is it?"

"Tonight, Gwen told me I should try staying single for a while. I think I understand why now. I've got issues. It's not I don't want you… you have to know that I do. I don't just bring men over to my flat and have a one-off. I *want* to see you. Be friends…and more."

"And more," Merlin said, sounding unimpressed.

"I'm doing this all wrong."

"I'll say," replied Merlin.

"Let me get you that drink," Arthur said, pulling away. He took three steps toward the kitchen. "We'll talk. Maybe I can redeem myself—"

"You don't want…" Merlin said, sounding uncertain. He glanced down at Arthur's groin before meeting his eyes again. His ears immediately turned red.

"I would say I don't think I deserve your touch," Arthur replied. "Not the way I've been acting. Not by how confused I'm being, and I don't want to end up hurting you…"

"It's all kinds of fucked up that I still want to," Merlin said, but he didn't make a move. He continued to stare at Arthur from a distance, and Arthur shuddered under Merlin's heated gaze.

*It would be so easy to give into you, Arthur thought. It'd be so easy to let you make me feel good.*

"But you're right," Merlin said, when Arthur hadn't replied. "You don't deserve it."

And if that didn't sting Arthur to his core.

"Right. Gin? Vodka?"

Merlin laughed. "Whatever's easy for you."

Arthur nodded and turned to the bar setup in the kitchen. He quickly concocted two whiskey sours and returned to the sitting room to find Merlin staring down at the box of Owen's stuff Arthur had packed up.

*Great, just what I needed right now.*

They stood awkwardly in silence for a few long minutes while Merlin sipped his drink and Arthur looked everywhere else but at Merlin. God, this anxiety was going to kill him, he thought.

"I am so sorry," he said, finally. "I didn't think…I thought I was getting well past my issues…"

"Yeah…" Merlin said quietly. "I obviously jumped the gun. I shouldn't have come after you; should've just gone home."

"No."

"No.″ Arthur took a step towards Merlin, and much to Arthur's surprise, Merlin took a step back. "I can't get anything right." *And with you, I desperately want to try.*
"Well, you make a mean drink," Merlin said, finishing the last of his whiskey. Arthur hoped he wouldn’t leave now. Not right away after having a strong drink. "If your plan was to keep me here for a while, I reckon, you managed to do that right."

"Do you want to relax? Maybe I can put in a film…or we can talk."

Merlin kept quiet for a few long moments, in which Arthur had forgot to breathe, and eventually nodded. "Fine," he all but whispered.

They sat on the sofa, Merlin obvious to keep his distance from Arthur as Arthur turned on Netflix, and handed the remote control to Merlin. "You can pick," he said. He watched as Merlin went through the list of comedies and put on an old black and white film.

"Are you really going to sit that far away?" Arthur asked, hoping Merlin would edge closer, or that he would have the courage to get closer to Merlin.

Merlin only glared at him.

"Okay, fine. We'll watch a film," Arthur said.

"What the fuck do you actually want from me?" Merlin said after ten minute of silence.

Arthur had had his eyes glued to the telly but had no idea what was even on.

"I told you…"

"Right," Merlin said sharply. "You want to be my friend. But you try to pull me. In the car, and then in your flat — you and me — fuck we had sex— fuck—"

"I'm sorry," said Arthur.

"Yeah, that's sort of getting old, Arthur."
"I'm not entirely sure how I should react to this…" Merlin said after they had been quiet for too long, and Arthur was feeling sorrow for treating Merlin in such a manner. He liked Merlin, there was no doubt about that, but the moment they'd been together, Arthur had started planning his future with Merlin.

This was not how things should have ended up being. He was supposed to take things slow. He was supposed to only tease Merlin… Play the flirting game. Get them both comfortable.

But the fact that he was cleaning up the remnants of his old relationship all the while planning a new one with Merlin was a clear indication Arthur shouldn't be in a relationship. This was what Gwen had mean. Probably.

"I don't regret what we did," Arthur said to Merlin who gave him a look he didn't believe Arthur. "I loved being with you. I'd want to do it again. But, I think… I confused myself. I'm not ready for something so meaningful."

"Hm," Merlin said, sounding thoughtful. "In that case, I should go."

"But…" Arthur said and immediately got up from his seat when Merlin reached the door. "Can I see you again?"

Merlin laughed, as if he were in disbelief, and then looked at Arthur embarrassed. "Sorry, I didn't mean to have that reaction, but…you're joking, right?"

"I want to see you. I mean, we can go to the cinema. A public place where I won't try to suck you off and be all confusing or whatever. I mean to say… Shit, I'm doing this all wrong. I'm asking you out on a date. Like, a real date. With just a film, and dinner, and then you go home and I go home. Maybe we talk on the phone or text. The type of date where I'm not a wanker."

"You don't have to make this more than it's—"


"I want to see you." Arthur didn't loosen his hold on Merlin. "My issues are just that. They're my issues, and they don't mean there's something wrong with you. I want to get to know you. I want you to know me, too. I want to know why you like me. Or did, because I'm quite sure I fucked all that up…" Arthur laughed, feeling embarrassed.

"Okay…" Merlin said, sounding as though he still wasn't convinced. "You want to be friends. That kiss?"

Arthur smiled at him and pulled him closer. He rubbed his nose against Merlin's cheek and felt the man shudder. "Friends that kiss who don't kiss anyone else."

"But you don't want to have sex?" asked Merlin.

Arthur sighed. "Of course, I want to have sex with you."

"Of course," Merlin said, sounding annoyed. "How I could I be mistaken?"

Communication
"I just…" Arthur sighed, running a hand through his hair, and all the while Merlin watched his movements. "I just want to take it slow. I did this all wrong. I want you, but I don't want to fuck this up. I want to…"

"Be friends, that kiss, but don't kiss anyone else," Merlin said with a smile.

"I…" Arthur gave a short laugh. "I know what you're thinking."

"I doubt that," said Merlin.

"I'm not worth it."

"That was not what I was thinking."

"So, can I see you again? We can go see a new action film about a superhero, or something. I'm sure there's some superhero film that's in the cinema—"

"There is, actually," Merlin said with a smile.

"Brilliant. So next Friday? Seven o'clock."

"And you won't forget to show up?" Merlin asked, looking unconvinced.

"Give me your number," Arthur said, rushing to the coffee table and grabbing his mobile. "Put your number in and send me a text message. I will text you to remind you. Or you should text me, to confirm. But, I'll be there."

"Fine," Merlin said, taking Arthur's mobile and punching his number in. A second later, his own mobile buzzed and he reached into his pocket to check it. "It's there."

"Brilliant," Arthur said, and he pulled Merlin in for a quick kiss again. "I'll see you on Friday."

When Merlin left, Arthur decided to pick up the box he'd been collecting Owen's things in and placed it next to the rubbish bin in the kitchen. The next day, when he'd take the garbage out, he'd put the box in his car. He planned on throwing the pictures out, of course, and donate all the other things to one of those charity shops. He was certain they could use the books, clothes, and picture frames he had to donate.

As he settled into bed that night, Arthur strolled through his missed calls and messages, and came upon Merlin's message. When Merlin had sent himself a text message from Arthur's phone, he'd written: Clotpole, and Arthur immediately snorted.

Unable to stop himself, Arthur sent another message to Merlin.

Arthur: HI

Merlin replied ten minutes later.

Merlin: Changed your mind already?

Arthur: Of course, not.

Merlin: Then what do you want?
You. Obviously.

Arthur: What were you thinking?

Merlin: Isn’t that a loaded question? When?

Arthur: When I said “I wasn’t worth it.” You said that’s not what you were thinking.

Merlin: Oh.

Arthur: So…

Merlin: I was thinking if I needed to get the oil changed in my car.

Arthur: Were you really?

Merlin: No.

Arthur: Are you going to tell me?

Merlin: No.

Arthur: Merlin… Please.

Merlin: I’ve gotta go. I’ll see you Friday.

Arthur smiled to himself. Merlin confirmed the plans for Friday. It was childish, he knew, because he was the one that’d asked Merlin out but it was somewhat comforting to know Merlin was confirming it.

Arthur: Can’t wait.

[[]]

Over the course of the week, Arthur sent text messages to Merlin almost every night. Merlin's replies, though consistent, were not always immediate. Arthur had to wonder if there was something about Merlin he didn't know. Something he didn't share with anyone.

Did he have a night shift? Did he play video games and Arthur was nothing but a distraction to him? He always seemed interested. Yet, distant.

And Arthur couldn't help but worry if it was him.
A Trip To The Cinema

Realising that going to see a film with Merlin on Friday night was probably not a good idea, Arthur, fidgeted in his seat the entire time.

"Will you relax?" Merlin said in Arthur's ear, and his hot breath sent shivers down Arthur's spine.

"Sorry… I forgot I kind of hate the cinema…"

"Then why did you—"

"Shh!" Someone from behind them scolded.

"Sorry…” Arthur said and tried to sit straight.

"Come on," Merlin said, grabbing Arthur's hand, and got up. He led Arthur out of the hall and into the lobby. "If you don't like—"

"I know, I'm sorry. I sort of panicked. I wanted to see you and— God, Owen used to hate this about me…"

At that, Merlin furrowed his brows. "Fuck that bloke," he said. "He was a cheating arsehole so we're not discussing him."

Arthur smiled. "Okay, we're not discussing any sorts of topics that might bring us anguish," he joked.

Merlin shook his head. "So, do you want to get out of here and go to a pub or something? Or do you want to try and finish the film—"

"How much time is left for the film to be over?"

Merlin looked at his watch, "about thirty—thirty five minutes." He was still holding Arthur's hand with the watch-free arm.

"Okay, let's go to a pub," Arthur said.

They walked out to where Arthur had parked his car, still hand in hand, and Arthur tried not to grin like a complete idiot. Merlin seemed more distant in his text messages than he was in person. Maybe he was just not a mobile communication sort of bloke.

Right after Arthur had thought that, Merlin let go of Arthur's hand and checked his mobile. He contemplated over whatever was on the screen, and then sent a lengthy reply.

So maybe it was just Arthur.

[]

At the pub, they sat closer together; knees bumping, and Arthur's hand casually brushing over Merlin's. There were a few people giving them strange stares, but Arthur didn't care. If someone was going to start a fight with him, he had the strength to take them on. Maybe three of them together.

Besides, he was used to stares. Owen loved going to gay only pubs but Arthur hated putting himself
in a box. He liked going to a place where no one was trying to pull his date, and he could actually enjoy the company. There might have been also the reason he didn't know which gay put Owen would be at tonight, and Arthur didn't want to risk it.

"So what is it that you do for work?" Arthur asked Merlin. He remembered vaguely asking Percy about it, but he couldn't remember at the moment.

"I work in the library at Camelot University," Merlin said and Arthur recalled Percy had told him that. It was when Arthur wanted to know Merlin better but didn't want to show up at the man's job and embarrass him.

"Right, of course."

"Wait, you knew that?"

"Percy told me."

"You talked to Percy about me?"

Arthur nodded. "After we'd met. I asked him…"

"Asked him what?"

"I don't know…you intrigued me."

"Yeah?" Merlin said with a sly smile before he took a sip of his pint. "You didn't notice me for ages and then I intrigued you?"

"I was wearing relationship goggles," Arthur admitted. "When I was around Owen—you know this. I'm not the one that cheated. I was the one that wanted to work it out."

"And do you? Still?"

Arthur shook his head. "No. You also know this. That ship's sailed. I don't even want to be in the same room as him. Besides, I don't want to talk about him, Merlin. I want to talk about you."

"So, what do you want to know?" Merlin asked, almost as a challenge, and bit down on one of the pieces of the chips placed between them.

"What makes you come apart?"

"Why are you so short with me when we're texting, but tonight, you've checked your messages fifteen times since we've sat down?" Arthur asked instead.

"Oh, that," Merlin said. "Sorry, didn't realise it was a problem."

"It's not. I just…wonder. If you're interested."

Merlin raised an eyebrow. "That's rich coming from you."

"I mean in our friendship, you idiot." Or maybe more. Are you interested in me? Do you want to go back to my place and finish what we started last week? Will you take the lead this time? Because I sure as hell am done making a fool of myself.

"Of course," Merlin said, looking slightly annoyed. Arthur couldn't tell if he was annoyed with Arthur or with something else. "I just…I have a family emergency, I mean, I might get a text, I
mean… I'd rather not talk about it, okay?"

Arthur nodded. "Of course. Sorry, I didn't mean to pry in your personal—"

"It's fine," Merlin said, placing a hand on Arthur's shoulder. "I'm flattered you want my undivided attention."

Arthur's hand rested on Merlin's knee and someone brushed past them, bumping his shoulder with Arthur. Arthur didn't know if the man was doing it on purpose, or if it was because they were at a crowded bar.

"Do you want to go someplace else?" Arthur asked, looking around, and realising he wanted to be in a less crowded place with Merlin.

"Actually…" Merlin said reluctantly, "I need to head home. I'm sorry, but I…" He hesitated, and Arthur decided he didn't want to push.

"No worries, mate. Can I offer you a lift?"

Merlin seemed to hesitate again, but eventually, he nodded. "That'd be great."

[[[]]]

They drove in relative silence. Merlin gave Arthur directions, and Arthur knew the neighbourhood. It was far far away from his own. This was the kind of place his father had warned him about, told him to stay away from, and Merlin lived here?

Maybe it wasn't as bad as his father had thought. His father did have a reputation to keep in society, but Arthur wasn't anything about that. If it'd been up to Uther, Arthur would have never been friends with a club bouncer, and a kindergarten teacher, or a barista. Arthur found all the kids of his father's friends boring. Hell, he'd found Owen's friends boring.

"I know it looks dangerous…" Merlin said, sounding uncertain.

"It's fine. It's not my place to make any judgements or whatever…" Arthur said, feeling awkward. "I mean, I don't think… Shite. I don't know what I think… I just don't want to say the wrong thing again."

Merlin laughed and placed his hand on Arthur's knee. "It's all right."

Arthur nodded but continued to look at the road.

"And this is okay…?"

Arthur rolled his eyes. "If you're flirting with me, Emrys…"

"Of course, I'm flirting with you. You've been flirting with me all week. Wait, right here, on the left."

Arthur pulled into a parking spot in front of what looked like an abandoned building. "You live here?"

"No," Merlin said, "Two streets over."

"But—"
"This is fine. I don't want…" He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I'm not ready for you to know where I live."

"Why? Afraid I'll stalk you."

Merlin shrugged. "Maybe."

"Wow, you don't trust me," said Arthur.

"No. I don't… Invite people over. And if we park in front of my flat, and if we kiss—"

"There's kissing?"

"I hope so," Merlin said with a shy smile. "Or I had hoped…"
Three Days

It started slow. Merlin's lips were soft as he tentatively pressed them against Arthur's. Arthur had to hold himself back as he tried not to rush into it. All he'd wanted to do was kiss and taste Merlin again. All night he'd been itching to put his hands on the man, pull him close, claim him in anyway he could.

It was slightly chilly in the car, and Merlin's affections felt like a welcoming warmth of a campfire, and Arthur was thankful for it. He never wanted the kiss to end. If it had to end, all Arthur wanted to do was drive home, and take Merlin home with him. Maybe this time, they could continue what they'd started, and this time, Arthur wouldn't have been such an arse about it. Or maybe the could have been in Merlin's car, and Arthur would have pulled him into his lap again. There wasn't a better feeling than having Merlin in his arms. Feeling Merlin's skin under his fingertips.

Merlin's phone buzzed.

"Ah, shit," he said. "I'm sorry…" He scrolled through his text message, quickly to read it, and then put his mobile away. "I have to go."

"Is everything all right? I mean…whatever it is, you can talk to me about it."

"I know…" Merlin said with a smile. "It's my mum. Our neighbour helps me take care of her and she's leaving for the night and I don't like to leave my mum alone in the flat—"

"Oh," Arthur said with a smile. "Sorry, I don't mean to…"

"What is it?" Merlin asked, looking nervous.

"It's a noble reason. I thought maybe you were running away because you had another man waiting for you or—" Then Arthur realised what he'd been doing. "Sorry, you know, once cheated on… always on the…"

"I would never," Merlin said.

"I know, and I know you're a good man. And now you've just proven it more. You're a good son, too. I can drop you—"

"No, that's fine," Merlin said, and he leaned over to press a quick kiss on Arthur's lips. "I have to run. Maybe we can get together again? I think I have a full free evening on Monday."

"Three days," Arthur said, nodding. "Call or text me and we'll set up a time."

"Just like that," Merlin said, his tone light.

"Just like that. I want to see you again. We should get to know each other better." Arthur meant every word. He wanted to be able to trust Merlin. If anything, he wanted to be able to have faith in another man again. He needed to get over what Owen did to him.

"If I'd known I could see you so easily…maybe I'd have tried before," Merlin said.

"But…something was holding you back. It still is," Arthur said; that wasn't his insecurities talking. Arthur knew he was starting to understand Merlin.

"I like slow…"
Arthur smiled. "Slow is good."

"Very well then," Merlin said. "Three days."
Trying to date someone who had an unpredictable schedule was a first for Arthur. Usually, the men he'd dated before Owen had simple office jobs and they were free for dinner on Fridays, and ready to go to the pub on Saturdays.

Merlin, though, seemed busy all the time.

Their Monday night date had been switched to Tuesday lunch. Which was okay, Arthur thought, it gave them more of a chance to get to know one another than find a darken corner to snog in. His hands always itched to pull Merlin closer, but as they sat at the restaurant across from one another, they actually talked.

Percy and Merlin had been friends for a very long time, and it seemed, he was the reason Gwaine had been introduced to their little group. Merlin was apparently quite the matchmaker.

"Then why don't you have a boyfriend?" Arthur asked once they'd paid the bill—Merlin had insisted on paying—and walked back to the library at the University where Merlin worked.

Merlin sounded nervous when he said: "I don't date. I don't want to divide up my time more than it needs to..." When Arthur raised an eyebrow at that, Merlin added, "Well, I used to feel that way. Maybe I just never met the right bloke, and if I did, he was..." Merlin trailed off.

"Dating a wanker named Owen?"

Merlin nodded. "Precisely."

They were out in the open in the garden in front of the library. No matter how much Arthur wanted to pull Merlin in close to him and kiss him, he also was quite aware he was at Merlin's job and he wasn't going to do such a thing.

"So...uh..." He shook his head and then ran his fingers through his hair. "Have a nice day?"

Merlin laughed. Genuinely laughed and Arthur couldn't help but grin right back at him.

"Will you call me later?" Arthur asked softly, realising, he wanted Merlin to say yes.

"It won't be until really late," Merlin said, "if that's okay. I've got some errands to run after work and---"

"Yeah. That's fine," Arthur said, pulling on Merlin's hand for a second and then letting go. "Even if it's very very late. I'll wake up." He hoped he didn't sound totally desperate.

Merlin opened his mouth to say something but a student walked by and said hello to him. It was almost as if they'd forgotten where they were for a second and were jolted back into reality.

"I'll see you," Arthur said and then walked away because he really wanted to fucking kiss Merlin, and it was really tempting to do so in front of everyone.

**

It was quarter to eleven when Arthur's mobile rang.

"Hello?"
"Hey, it's Merlin."

Arthur chuckled. "Yes, I have your number saved, Merlin."

"I know… just…" He trailed off for a second. "Nervous, is all."

"Why? We're talking on the phone? We've done a lot more than that."

"I know," Merlin said, "But—"

"We're starting fresh. Or something," said Arthur.

"So how was your day?"

"Boring. Yours?"

"Fine. Were you sleeping?"

"No."

"Are you in bed?" Merlin asked tentatively.

"Yes…" Arthur drawled. "Naked and everything."

He heard Merlin cough on the other side. "Are you serious?"

"Well, no. I'm wearing trousers."

"But you're shirtless."

"Yes," Arthur said, making sure to sound entertained.

"You're evil."

"Why am I evil?" Arthur laughed. "If I told you I knew you were going to call and I wasn't sure if things were going to get all hot and heavy—and that's why I needed to make sure I wasn't wearing a lot of clothes then—"

"Arthur."

"Merlin."

"I hate you," Merlin said without any conviction.

"No, you don't."

"Phone sex wasn't part of the deal of our friendship."

"Who said anything about phone sex, Merlin? It's not my fault your mind's filthy."

"What if I told you I'm naked, too?"

Arthur cleared his throat and sat up straight. "Fully naked?"

"Maybe." It was incredible how he'd turned the tables again. He always did this to Arthur, whenever Arthur thought he had the upper hand, Merlin would make Arthur get down on his knees.
"You know what I liked?"

"What's that?" Merlin's voice was husky all of a sudden and there was a rustling sound as if he was moving his sheets or blankets or something.

"That mole you have on your right hip. I'd gotten to kiss it once."

"You...you remember that?" Merlin asked, almost whispering, as if now they were sharing secrets.

"Of course. I remember every part of your body I had the pleasure of touching."

Arthur wasn't sure but he thought he heard Merlin groan on the other side.

"Are you okay?"

"You're too much for me, Arthur. Sometimes, too much. So unpredictable."

"I'm sorry," Arthur said genuinely. "This isn't why I wanted you to call me. I wanted to talk to you, tell you I wanted to kiss you outside the library today, and maybe we could go out again sometime."

"I'd like that."

"Just let me know when you're free."

"I will."

They said their goodbyes and Arthur settled into his bed wishing Merlin was there next to him. He didn't get to dwell on it much because his mobile chimed this time with a text message. It was from Merlin.

Merlin: I wanted to hear more about what you remember about my body.

Arthur: Oh yeah?

Merlin: I'm crazy.

Arthur: No, you're not.

Merlin: Is it crazy I was open to the idea of phone sex?

Arthur laughed. He was open to the idea of it also.

Arthur: You're just going to have to wait and next time I can whisper in your ear the things I remember.

Merlin: You want to know what else is crazy?

Arthur: Sure.

Merlin: I'm really glad you know the difference between your and you're and don't text UR.

Arthur nearly jumped off the bed as he laughed so hard.

Arthur: Like a true librarian...

Merlin: Good night.
Arthur: Good night.
The next time Arthur met up with Merlin, it was at a gay club called Defiant. Arthur had all but avoided the club because he knew that it was one of Owen's. But when Merlin invited him, saying that it was one of his coworker's birthday, Arthur couldn't say no.

As soon as he'd entered the club, his eyes had found Merlin. Arthur couldn't believe how unpredictable his life had become these past few weeks. To go from worshipping Owen, who turned out to be quite the wanker, to being absolutely heartbroken—and now to find a man who was sweet and sexy, but also acted like he was Arthur's friend had his heart doing cartwheels.

Still, Merlin didn't let him in. He had a wall around him, and Arthur had to wonder why. He figured taking his time with Merlin was probably the best thing to do. He genuinely cared about Merlin, more than just his attraction towards him, and even if they never became more, Arthur would be there for him. Because Merlin deserved it. He clearly had a fanclub of people--given how many of them had told Arthur to stay away--so Arthur would simply become one of those faces.

"Hey, you made it!" Merlin jumped out of his seat to greet Arthur and pulled him in for a hug. "It's good to see you."

"You too," Arthur said smiling.

Merlin introduced Arthur to his co-worker Cora who gave Arthur an assessing look. "So you're the reason Merlin's been all smiles at work."

Arthur looked at Merlin who was rolling his eyes at Cora. "Don't mind her. She's drunk."

"Yes. But only enough to dance!" Cora said and pulled the girl that was seated next to her onto the dancefloor.

Arthur watched them for a while and then returned his attention to Merlin. "Get you a drink?"

Arthur shook his head. "I'm okay right now. I didn't drive tonight so I have all evening to drink," he said.

Merlin nodded. "Yes, unfortunately I did, so I'll just be having this one," Merlin said pointing at the beer he was holding.

"Are you the designated driver?" Arthur asked, feeling stupid. He should have asked Merlin about that in advance, then he could have brought his car also. "I wish I'd known…"

"Not officially," Merlin said. "I didn't want to drink and do something stupid…well…"

"What is it?"

Merlin shrugged. "I didn't want to do something stupid in front of you. Drunk, I mean. I've been feeling quite stupid around you, anyway."

"I don't…Did I do something…"

"No," Merlin said, laughing. "It's just, it's all a bit unreal, you know. For me." Arthur stayed quiet but he edged himself closer to Merlin, waiting for him to continue. "I fancied you and all, and now you're here—"
"Arthur?"

Arthur closed his eyes and took in a deep breath. *Fucking hell.*

"Is that you?"

The voice that wouldn't go away, Arthur thought. Arthur opened his eyes to look at Merlin who seemed more annoyed than anything else, and then he slowly turned around to find Owen standing close to him.

"It is you!"

*Yes, this is pretty much why I don't come here.*

"Owen," Arthur said, dryly.

Owen looked past Arthur's shoulder and at Merlin. He gave a knowing smile before looking at Arthur again. "Should've figured that was going to happen," he said.

Arthur didn't reply, he continued to glare at Owen.

"I knew you'd rebound with him. He's been so desperate for—"

"What do you want, Owen?"

"I don't want anything. Saw you here so I supposed I'd say hi."

"Very well," Arthur said standing up straight. "Goodbye."

"You're still cross with me?" Owen shook his head. "You know you should really move on from it, Arthur. It's in the past. There's no reason why we can't be friends."

"I'm not cross with you. I've moved on and made new friends. I don't have any interest in being friends with you so you know, that's that. Have a nice night, Owen."

"It's my club, you know. You know I come here all the time. If you didn't want to see me—"

"You don't own the fucking club, Owen," Arthur said. "And I was invited here for a birthday party. I had hoped I wouldn't see you, but you had to come by and ruin my evening. So, congratulations. Now if you'll excuse me…" Arthur brushed past Owen, pushing him against the crowd, and made his way to the bar.

He probably shouldn't have left Merlin alone back there but Merlin was surrounded by his friends and Arthur was the one that was all alone. He didn't want to start a scene so it was best to walk away.

"Are you okay?" Merlin's voice was soothing, and Arthur wanted to close his eyes and thank God for sending him then. But most of all, Arthur wanted to turn around and pull Merlin into his arms.

Instead, he nodded once, and grabbed the bartender's attention to get him a pint. Then a few seconds later, he turned around and looked at Merlin as if nothing had happened.

"That was unpredictable," Arthur said, almost lying. He'd actually thought that Owen was going to be there, but he'd not thought of Owen speaking to him.

"Unfortunate, really," Merlin said with a smile. "Besides, apparently even Owen knew I fancied
"Yeah, sorry about that. I shouldn't have let him speak about you—"

"Hey, it's okay. I don't care. That man's an arse."

Arthur chuckled lightly and took a sip of his pint before paying the bartender for it. Then, they both walked back towards the table where Merlin's friends were.

"I'd hoped we wouldn't see him," Arthur told Merlin when he sat down next to him in the booth. He'd kept himself close to Merlin, afraid that Merlin would run away otherwise.

"So he does come here a lot?"

Arthur frowned slightly. "It's one of his favourite places. He knows almost everyone that works here, it's kind of pathetic, I think. I don't know, maybe I'm jealous."

"Jealous?"

Arthur shrugged. "He knows everyone here, maybe it's like he belongs here. Not pathetic… maybe I'm the pathetic one…"

"Do you want him back?" Merlin asked. His voice was even as if he really were inquiring as a friend.

Arthur resisted rolling his eyes. "Of course, not. You said it, he's an arse."

"So if he wasn't an arse anymore. What if he apologised, begged for forgiveness, wanted another chance—"

"No. I've moved on. Cleaned out my flat of him."

"Moved on?"

Arthur looked right into Merlin's eyes when he said the next words, "found someone far better."

Merlin smiled and bit his lower lip. "You have?"

Arthur let go of his pint glass and placed it on the table. Then, he wiped his hand on his jeans before running his fingers through Merlin's hair and pulled him close. "You tell me, Merlin." He pressed his lips against Merlin's and used his other hand to pull on Merlin's shirt. It seemed any distance between them was too much, and Arthur wanted nothing between them.

"You know that time when we were in my car outside your flat? After Gwen's dinner party?"

Merlin asked and Arthur smiled. How could he forget. He'd tasted Merlin for the first time that night and he'd been drunk ever since.

"I was right then, you know," said Merlin.

"About what?"

"That you're trouble."

Arthur grinned and placed his hand on Merlin's knee, squeezing it lightly. "Glad you gave me a chance regardless."
"Hmm," Merlin said.

"What?" Arthur asked, nervous all of a sudden. Had he said the wrong thing again?

"Nothing. This isn't the right place to get all serious—"

"No," Arthur said and turned his body so he could be face to face with Merlin. "Don't do this. Don't shut me out. Please."

"But…"

"We can get out of here if you want. I'm sure your friend won't care…" Arthur gestured towards Cora who was on the dancefloor still and kissing the girl she was dancing with. "Let's go somewhere. And let's talk."

Merlin shrugged. "You could come over."

Arthur's eyes widened then. "Come over?"

"I don't mean it like that," Merlin said, rolling his eyes. "I live with my mum."

"Okay," Arthur said immediately.
Arthur was back in Merlin's tiny car, and his heart was beating rapidly. They were heading over to Merlin's place. He knew where Merlin lived, but he'd not known exactly which building, which flat. The fact that Merlin was trusting him with something he'd obviously liked keeping to himself — was exhilarating and frightening.

Would being with Merlin always feel like Arthur's standing on the edge of a bridge on a lake, feeling the warmth of the autumn sun, and yet, scared of what would happen if he jumped and took a chance?

"Arthur, this is Alice." Merlin motioned towards the older woman seated in the armchair in the sitting room. She had kind eyes and she smiled softly at him. She immediately got up from her chair to greet him, and Arthur rushed towards her, he didn't want her to make an effort for him.

"Very nice to meet you," she said and then looked at Merlin. "Do you need me to stay—"

"No, thanks for staying late tonight, Alice," Merlin said and she nodded.

"You know I'm used to odd hours my whole life, boy, it's no effort at all."

"I know, thanks again," he said. "Is she asleep?"

She shook her head. "We had a nice game of cards and she's in the bath. I reckon she'll probably want her late night tea and then call it an evening."

Alice gathered up her things and said goodbye to them and Merlin walked her to the door. Then Merlin turned to look at Arthur and released a sigh.

"So this is where I live," he said.

"I like your place," Arthur said.

It was a small flat, but well kept. Arthur could see Merlin and his mother had been living there for a long time. There were pictures everywhere and mismatched furniture that all seemed to...fit. It was the kind of home Arthur would have liked to grow up in. Nothing fancy about it but the essence of warmth, comfort, and security was exuding everywhere.

"Have you lived here a long time?" Arthur asked.

They were both standing awkwardly in the sitting room, and Merlin hadn't offered for Arthur to sit, so Arthur hadn't moved a muscle.

Merlin shrugged. "A few years. I moved in after my father passed away and my mother was diagnosed..." He trailed off, looking away from Arthur.

"Diagnosed?" Arthur whispered.

"Cancer," he said and Arthur tried not to show his reaction. He figured the last thing Merlin wanted was pity, or empty words, he'd probably heard it all.

"I'm sorry..." Arthur said in a gentle tone. "I can't even imagine..." He wanted to sound genuine.
He wanted Merlin to know that he cared about him. Even if this was why he'd been keeping himself at a distance, that Arthur understood. He'd never demand anything from Merlin. If anything, he'd want to only give and give because Merlin deserved it all.

"It's been a long-winded battle but she's in remission," Merlin said, sounding slightly happier. "Alice and Gaius live next door, and well, Gaius has been our doctor since before I was born… They help me take care of her. Alice has been everything to me. If it weren't for her—"

"Merlin, who are you talking to out there?"

Arthur stiffened up immediately as Merlin crossed the room in two strides and went to his mother. He introduced them and Hunith gave Arthur a knowing look.

She looked fragile, but there was a fire in her eyes that told Arthur that she was solid iron. It was the same kind of fire and determination Arthur had seen in Merlin's eyes, and he smiled at the thought of knowing where it came from.

"How are you, Arthur? It's finally good to meet you."

"Oh?" Arthur asked with intrigue. "You've heard of me?"

"Of course—"

"Mum— You should be resting."

"Oh hush," she said in a teasing tone. "Why are you still standing Arthur, come, sit with me." She pointed to the sofa and sat down, expecting Arthur come and sit next to him. "Merlin, make us some tea, would you?"

Merlin nodded awkwardly and continued to stand in his spot. "Don't…don't ask him any embarrassing questions," he said.

She laughed as if she'd planned on doing just the thing.

When Merlin was gone, Hunith turned to look at Arthur, and her smile sent a chill down Arthur's spine. It's as if she was looking into Arthur's soul and assessing whether or not he as good enough for her son.

"Your home is lovely," Arthur said.

"It is what it is," she said, looking around. "I've lived here for so long that even if Merlin insists that he can afford something bigger and better—it's just too much of a hassle to move. Besides, I'd rather he leave this place after I'm gone—"

"I don't think Merlin appreciates you talking like that," Arthur said immediately. He didn't want her to talk like that, and he didn't want Merlin to walk back into the room and listen to her speaking about her death.

She chuckled lightly. "Think you know my son already, do you, Mr Pendragon?"

And there was that challenge, the fire with which Merlin burned. "So, Merlin talks about me?" Arthur asked, hoping the slight subject change would put them in a better mood.

Her face lit up then. "I remember the first day he'd met you," she said. "I'd never seen him so luminous…if that's the right word. It was like he was on fire from within. He'd casually mention
you in conversation. Mostly talking about his friends Percy, and Morgana, and Gwen, but then… Arthur this… Arthur that…” She laughed again. "I've been waiting to meet you. But, of course, it's Merlin. Duty comes before everything else. He didn't want to get a boyfriend if it meant he'd get distracted from his responsibilities."

"I'm sure it didn't help that he never actually introduced himself to me," Arthur said. He tried to think about the times he could have met Merlin, especially if they'd been at the same parties. But Merlin knowingly kept his distance from Arthur, Arthur was sure of it.

"It was the same with his father and I," she said. "We'd had the same friends but never talked to each other, and one day he walked up to me and said hello, and I was a goner. I could never think of anyone else but him. Found reasons to sneak out of the house with my girlfriends to see if he was at some party and…” She paused to take a breath.

"Are you all right? Do you need me to get—"

"No, it's fine. I've had a long day…” she said and then sighed. "Not as young as I used to be."

They changed the subject again and Hunith asked Arthur questions about his work.

"Here we are…” Merlin walked into the room holding a tray with three tea mugs and biscuits. "Sorry, I'm not much of an entertainer," he said, placing the tray in front of Arthur and Hunith. He took his seat at the armchair that Alice had been sitting on and picked up a tea mug to hand to his mother.

"Thanks, dear," she said and sipped from it.

"So what were you talking about?" Merlin asked.

"Work," said Arthur.

"Hmm," Merlin said, giving his mother a scrutinising look, "I believe that."

They drank their tea in more or less companionable silence with Merlin and Hunith speaking about some neighbours and Merlin asking after what Hunith had done for the day.

Eventually, Hunith got up to excuse herself and head over to the bedroom.

"I'll help you," said Merlin.

"No, clean this up, boy," she commanded him and he quickly followed her orders.

Then, she leaned over and kissed Arthur on the cheek. "It was very nice to meet you, Arthur."

Arthur nodded. "You too."

"Be careful with my boy," she whispered in his ear and then left the room.
Hunith's words were still ringing in Arthur's ears as Merlin grabbed Arthur's hand and led him to his room. After he closed the door, Merlin rested his head against it. His back was to Arthur, and Arthur watched for a long while as Merlin took in a breath and out, as if he were trying to figure his life out.

Arthur felt bad for him. He didn't know what was going through Merlin's head, if he was regretting his decision, or if he was making a list of things to be thankful for, but Arthur didn't want to wait for him. He didn't like the idea that his life—this thing—he had with Merlin was solely going to be Merlin's decision.

Arthur walked up behind Merlin and wrapped his arms around Merlin's waist. He kissed the back of Merlin's neck, and maybe that was the right thing to do, because Merlin's body relaxed and he leaned into Arthur's embrace.

Merlin made a low moaning sound and without Arthur's permission, Arthur's cock sprang into attention. No, this was not the right time for that, Arthur thought, but he couldn't exactly control his body, either.

Still, he didn't let go of his hold on Merlin. He liked having the man in his arms…maybe he loved it. Because he sure as hell loved Merlin.

"Do you want me to leave?" Arthur asked softly.

Merlin shook his head.

They stood quietly for a long while, Merlin's head against the door, and his body in Arthur's embrace.

"I love feeling you like this," Arthur said, and it was true. He didn't mean it in a sexual way; he simply loved feeling Merlin. Everything about Merlin gave Arthur life and that was something he'd never had before. Not with anyone.

"I love—" Merlin hesitated for a second. "I like being in your arms. More than I thought I would. And I thought about this for a long time."

"I wish you'd told me. Or, I don't know, I wish you'd wanted to be my friend from the start. We could've..." Arthur chuckled. "I could have had you, enjoyed my life with you...Feel this amazing, always."

"God, Arthur," Merlin said, sounding frustrated. His body started to turn and Arthur let go of Merlin and Merlin turned around to look at him.

"What?" Arthur said, almost panicking. Had he said the wrong thing?

"Can you stop being so fucking perfect tonight?" Merlin asked, laughing.

"Oh, that..." Arthur shrugged. "Sort of born like this, so can't help it—"

"Shut up," Merlin said, and pulled Arthur in for a kiss.

They kissed like they had the first time. Arthur enjoyed kissing Merlin because it always felt like
the first time. He pushed Merlin against the door, grabbed him by his hips, and pressed his body against Merlin's. Merlin didn't seem to mind. If anything, it looked as though he liked getting overpowered by Arthur like that. So Arthur brought his leg in-between Merlin's legs and Merlin lowered himself so he could ride Arthur's leg while kissing him.

It was the hottest fucking thing in the planet.

"Why do you always feel so good?" Arthur asked between kisses as he moved up and down Merlin's neck, nipping and sucking. Merlin released a low moan again and Arthur had to wonder if he was trying to stay quiet because they weren't alone in the flat.

"And the way you smell, Merlin…" Arthur growled. "You drive me wild."

"I want you…" Merlin whispered and then his head thudded against the door. "Shit…"

"Will we wake up your—"

Merlin shook his head. "No, she has this noise cancelling whirring machine thing in her room… It helps her sleep soundly. I just like to be quiet because sometimes Alice or Gaius stay over…"

Merlin shrugged. "Just habit."

"Whirring machine thing? Is that the technical term?" Arthur teased.

"Shut up," Merlin said.

"Okay, so…" Arthur said, taking a step back.

"What's the matter?" Merlin asked, looking concerned.

"I…" Arthur hesitated but Merlin's face was getting into deep frown so Arthur tried to hurry his thoughts up into coherent words. "I just don't know what you want from me. Tonight, I mean. I mean, I'd like to stay, but I don't want to invite myself to spend the night, and with your Mum in the next room—"

"I want you to stay," Merlin said. "I think she'll like it we all have breakfast together."

"Okay…" Arthur drawled, glad he was staying, at least, and Merlin thought his Mum liked him enough to want to have breakfast with him. "Do I sleep on the sofa?"

"Don't be daft, Arthur," Merlin said rolling his eyes. "You're sleeping in my bed. Naked."

"But I thought you'd said…at the club…"

"I know what I said," Merlin said, taking a step closer to Arthur, and then pulling Arthur into his arms. "But I can't deny myself this anymore. My mother knows I've stayed out for the night before, and even if she's never seen me bring someone home before it doesn't mean she doesn't understand — And I can't keep lying to myself. I want you. I want you tonight."

He took in a deep breath and looked at Arthur expectantly. Arthur nodded. He didn't dare speak since his heart was beating so fast. So, Merlin continued.

"Even if we don't do anything tonight but lay next to each other. Even if we don't do any more than what we did that first night…"

"I liked what we did that first night," said Arthur. "I like the idea of making you feel good."
Merlin's face softened and he gave a shy smile. He raked his fingers through Arthur's hair and leaned down to kiss Arthur's neck. "You make me feel good every day, Arthur. You make me feel incredible just by being here."

"Now who's perfect with all the right things to say tonight?" Arthur teased again. Damn, he really hated how he relied on humour whenever he became nervous. When Merlin didn't answer but kissed Arthur's neck again, Arthur added, "so should we get ready for bed?"

"Hmm," Merlin said. "I've had a long day. I wouldn't mind taking a shower first."

Arthur nodded. Suddenly, imagining Merlin all naked and wet had made him speechless again.

"Join me?"
The lights are turned way down low

Arthur stood still, mostly still in shock, as Merlin began to undress him. One button at a time, and painfully slowly, he removed Arthur's shirt which fell to the floor. Then his fingers trailed down Arthur's shirt and Merlin sucked in a breath.

"What is it?" Arthur asked.

"You're hot," Merlin said with a shy smile. "It just isn't fair."

"Why?" Arthur whispered, leaning forward and placing a tentative kiss on Merlin's lips.

"I never had a chance," replied Merlin.

"You should talk. I've been hooked on you since the night I saw you at the club speaking to Percival." Arthur's hands reached up and grabbed Merlin's hips. He closed the distance between them as they were chest to chest with Arthur half naked and Merlin fully dressed. "Take off your clothes, I want to see you. All of you."

Merlin bit his lower lip and broke eye-contact.

"Maybe it wasn't a good idea," he said.

"Hey..." Arthur said, his hands going to his belt buckle and Merlin's eyes followed that movement. "You already have my shirt off, don't you want to finish the job? Or is this revenge?"

"Revenge?" Merlin asked, looking confused.

"From that night in my flat. You're set in making me fall for you and then humiliate me." Arthur made sure to keep his tone light so Merlin would know he was joking.

"You can be such a wanker," Merlin said, without any disdain, and Arthur sighed with relief.

"Goes to show you I'm not all that perfect."

Merlin rolled his eyes and swatted Arthur's hand away from his trousers and then took over. He removed the belt slowly and then unbuttoned the jeans, then his hand brushed Arthur's hard cock before he pulled the zipper down.

"Oh, eager are we?" Merlin teased.

"I am spending the night," Arthur said softly. "And we've got no place else to go..."

"Don't tell me you're going to start singing Let it snow..."

Arthur threw his head back and laughed. "Well it hasn't started snowing yet. Christmas is still a bit far."

"Good, because, I don't need more stress in my life by trying to figure out what to get you for Christmas, on top of trying to be..." Merlin paused immediately, as if willing to shut himself up.

He pulled Arthur's trousers and pants down and Arthur kicked his shoes off before stepping out of the rest of his clothes. His erection was so close to Merlin's face and Arthur wanted to rub it against Merlin's cheek. He wanted to tease, play, and get his reward for being so patient but he didn't want
to push, either.

"Tempting," Merlin said, looking up at Arthur while still on his knees.

"You have no idea."

"Touch yourself."

"What?" Arthur asked, surprised.

Merlin leaned back and rested himself on his haunches. He crossed his arms and then gave Arthur's cock one glance before looking up at Arthur again. "Touch yourself. I want to see. I want to see the face you make when you come. I want to watch you."

"Merlin…" Arthur growled before he did exactly what he was told.
Passion

It wasn't very surprising to Arthur he was there for Merlin to command. Whatever Merlin asked of him, Arthur did. Merlin stayed on the floor, eye level with Arthur's erection and watched Arthur wank.

He licked his lips a few times, otherwise, he only tortured Arthur with a heated gaze. He never, ever, touched him. When he could tell Arthur was close, Merlin stood up and closed the distance between them. He kissed Arthur so passionately, Arthur had nearly fainted. Or at least, he felt weak in the knees.

As much as Arthur had wanted Merlin, it was hard to believe Merlin had wanted him back. Especially, with so much enthusiasm.

"Don't come yet," Merlin mumbled against Arthur's lips. "I want you to come in the shower with me. I want to make you come."

Arthur shivered against Merlin's strong hold on him. He had never wanted anyone as badly as he wanted Merlin. And it wasn't just the sexual attraction he'd felt, it was more. He wanted to do everything for Merlin. He wanted to take care of him, pay for his mother's medical bills, and just take him home and keep him there.

He knew it sounded crazy and creepy so he kept the thoughts to him. One thing at a time, he told himself.

00-00

Merlin gave Arthur a long, cotton towel to wrap around himself, and completely undressed—obviously giving Arthur a show before he put on a dressing gown. They slowly walked to the bathroom on the other side of the flat with Merlin holding Arthur's hand.

Once there, Arthur didn't know why his heart was pounding so fast. He was there with Merlin. Merlin wanted him, and he was safe. Not that he'd never been safe before, maybe he hadn't fully trusted his heart before, but this time he did. His heart was in Merlin's hands, and he felt safe.

Merlin smiled at him and gave him a soft kiss before they rid their towel and robe and entered the shower. As the hot water poured on Arthur's body, he finally came to terms with just how exhausted he'd been. It was as if Merlin could read him, he started to massage his shoulders. Arthur let out a guttural moan and immediately regretted it. What if Merlin's mother heard him?

"It's okay." Merlin's voice was comforting and Arthur leaned back, resting his head on Merlin.

"It's so sexy how you've always been so touchy with me," Merlin said.

"You make it easy to trust you."

Merlin kissed Arthur's shoulder and turned him around. "I'm happy to hear that. I'll do—I know it'll sound weird, but I'll do anything for you."

"Yeah. Me too," Arthur said as they started to kiss again.

Arthur used a bit of shampoo to lather Merlin's hair and massage his scalp, and this time, it was Merlin groaning for him. "Sometimes it's hard to believe you're actually here."
Arthur laughed softly, "sometimes it's hard to believe I was never with you."

It didn't take long for their soft, flirty moments to turn into something that left them hot and heavy. Arthur's hand reached around Merlin, caressing his back, and then moving down to his arse before slicked fingers and found their way into Merlin's tight entrance. Merlin gasped as he stroked Arthur's erection and they were both moaning in each other's mouths, on the brink of an orgasm.

"Wait…" Merlin said, almost sound panicking. "I wanted you to come in my—"

"There's time for that," Arthur said. "This is so good for me right now. Is that…is that okay?"

Merlin nodded. "I just want to satisfy you…"

Arthur laughed, "If anything, I should be the one making sure of that for you. I need to make sure you're happy. I want you to be…to stay with me."

"Arthur…" Merlin said, "I find you sexy as hell but that's not why I lo—like you. I would be happy just being your friend. Now…especially now I know you're this amazing, gentle man I always wished you were."

"Keep talking like that, Mer, and we won't be sleeping tonight."

"Sleep is overrated anyway."
Arthur had never slept so peacefully. He had soon forgotten the sounds of the rude world he'd heard in the day as his night was full of love, and passion. For Merlin.

When he woke up in a different bed, in a room he'd not immediately recognised, he'd not panicked. Because next to him was the sweet man he'd come to admire. Merlin was wrapped around his body, with the both of them mostly naked, and Merlin breathing into the crook of Arthur's neck.

As Arthur caressed Merlin's back, Merlin stirred. But he didn't fully wake up. If anything, he edged himself closer to Arthur and mumbled something.

"I have to go soon," Arthur whispered in Merlin's hair. He hated how he had to leave but he'd made plans with his father and sister and he couldn't miss them. If he were going to be late, Morgana would only have his head. She'd want to know all about why Arthur was late, and given how she knew Merlin, the news would only spread fast.

He wasn't keeping it a secret—him and Merlin—but he wanted to know what they were to each other before Morgana went around announcing it to the world.

"What?" Merlin asked, sleepily. He looked up at Arthur, his eyes wide, and he looked so fucking innocent right then, all Arthur wanted to do was pull the covers over them and never let him go.

"I made plans with my sister and my father. I didn't know—" We'd be like this. "Otherwise, I would have changed but I'm afraid it's too late. My father doesn't look kindly down on me cancelling on the day of…I'm sorry. I wish I could…"

"No, it's okay. I don't…" Merlin chuckled nervously. "I don't have any claim on you."

But you do. You have all the claim on me.

"I want to stay," Arthur said, feeling the need to tell Merlin something he wasn't able to actually say. I want to stay with you, always. "Make you breakfast and…"

"My mum's already started on that. Probably," Merlin said and he tore his body away from Arthur. Arthur immediately missed the man next to him.

"Hey. Come back!" Arthur wrapped his arms around Merlin's waist and pulled him close. "Don't go away from me. I need you." Arthur took in a deep breath and buried his face in Merlin's hair. "I need your body."

"For how long?" Arthur heard Merlin say.

"What?"

"Nothing. Sorry!" Merlin said, relaxing into Arthur's embrace. "Forget I said anything. I don't know what I was thinking. Sorry, I—"

"Let's be together, yeah?" Arthur said and didn't offer Merlin any time to respond. "I'll call you all the time, we'll make plans to go out, dinner, cinema, all the parties. Together. We'll be a proper item and all."

"D'you mean like…"
"Boyfriends," confirmed Arthur. "I want to be your boyfriend, okay? If that's alright with you. I don't wanna date anyone else, and I don't want you going around kissing or shagging other blokes —"

"I wouldn't. I haven't done that in a long time."

"Well, you are good as they come, so. I didn't think you were the type to go back and cheat on your boyfriend…I mean, trust me. I'm the expert on spotting those types of blokes," Arthur joked, or at least tried to. Owen's betrayal wasn't a distant memory. Not by the long shot.

"Arthur, I—"

"Merlin. Are you in there? I've just put on a pot of coffee and am making breakfast. If you boys are still here I expect you out in five minutes or it's breakfast for one."

Merlin's eyes widened and his body stiffened in Arthur's arms.

"We better get up then," Arthur whispered in Merlin's ear.

"You mean, you're staying?" Merlin sounded surprised and he wriggled out of Arthur's hold and went to find his clothes.

"I reckon I have to now. I'll have coffee and toast before I head over to my flat to change. I don't wanna be rude to your mum, Merlin. I mean, I want her to like me. I'm her future son-in-law." Arthur winked and turned away. He knew his face was turning red and he didn't want to show Merlin just how nervous he was. He couldn't believe he'd just said that.

"Don't joke about that kind of shite, Arthur." Merlin came around the bed to face Arthur. "It's not funny."

"What's not funny?" Arthur asked. "That I like you. A lot. I wanna—I am your boyfriend. That ever since I've managed to get my head out of my arse, I haven't been able to think about anyone but you. I've fucked up with you royally—a million and a half times—and you've been giving me seconds chances, and third, and so forth... and all I want to do is make it up to you?"

"I…Arthur—"

"Merlin!"

"Fuck, I've gotta go outside. Here take these…” Merlin handed Arthur a pair of joggers and a t-shirt. "Wear this and come soon. Or she'll think you don't like her."

With a quick kiss on Arthur's lips, Merlin was gone. Arthur knew he was a dreamer. But Merlin... he was a dreamer too.

Arthur's beautiful dreamer.
The final chapter in the Merlin/Arthur love story. Written for prompt 02 for ficlet_zone, inspired by title of MASH episode: "There is Nothing Like a Nurse"

Those that have kept up with the chapters, I hope you like this ridiculously fluffy ending.

"It was good to see you again, Arthur," Hunith said as Arthur said his goodbyes to Merlin's mum and left Merlin's flat. Merlin followed him out to the car, and Arthur was glad for it. He wanted a chance to kiss Merlin again, and preferably, without an audience.

As soon as they got to Arthur's car, Arthur pressed Merlin against it and trapped Merlin in-between his car and his body. "I wish you could come with me…"

"Didn't I?" Merlin teased.

Arthur grinned, feeling his face heat up. "To brunch, I mean, you fool. I'm meeting Morgana and —"

"Oh, no. Thank you."

"Why?" Arthur asked, curious.

"She'll have a million questions, and will have sent a text to everyone by the time the mimosas are ordered."

"You do have a point," Arthur said, leaning in for another kiss from Merlin. "But, it would also mean I could take you home after."

"I thought you wanted more than sex?" Merlin asked; he was still smiling but Arthur heard the doubt in his voice. "A date to all the parties, and the cinema and all that… even though you can't sit through a film to save your life."

Arthur bit his lower lip and straightened up to look into Merlin's eyes. "I want that. I hope you can trust me that I do. I want everything. Just because I want to take you home doesn't necessarily mean sex."

"Right…”

"Okay, so it means sex. However, more too. I want to be able to pull you in and kiss you — take in your scent — cuddle up next to you when reading a book or whatever. I probably sound like a wanker because I feel like I have lost so much time not knowing you. I just don't want to waste any more time."

Arthur watched as Merlin's eyes widened and his body relaxed against Arthur's. "I want those things too. And yeah, I want them all everyday, as well. Nevertheless, I don't want to be stupid. I don't want to rush into anything. I don't want to move in together only after actually knowing each
other for a handful of weeks. Sure, I fancied you for ages but that doesn't mean I want to give up everything for you. And my Mum—"

Arthur laughed softly. "I know...I know about your responsibilities. I know how much your mother means to you. And I envy that. I don't have anything in my life that means this much. Never did. Not even Owen."

But you could. You could mean everything to me.

"I just want to see you more. Just think about it okay? I'm not asking for anything you can't give me. All I'm saying is I can't control myself when I'm with you and I'm greedy." He grinned again, and this time, Merlin grinned with him.

Merlin raked his fingers through Arthur's hair and pulled him in for another quick kiss. "Thanks for making me feel so good about myself," he said.

"It's not a difficult job," replied Arthur.

"I'm free for lunch tomorrow, by the way," Merlin said softly after a few seconds. "Maybe you can come over again tomorrow night?"

"That'd be nice."

"And next weekend, I can arrange with Alice and Gaius to be around, or hire a night nurse...If that..." Merlin hesitated. "If that sounds all right?"

"That sounds brilliant," Arthur said, feeling like his heart dancing with excitement.

It was a simple gesture: Merlin making an effort to pull himself away from his responsibilities to be build on a relationship with Arthur, but it was everything for him. As much as Owen had claimed to care for Arthur, he'd never done anything out of his way for him. It'd always been Arthur making adjustments in his life.

It was nice to be treated well for once. He felt like a prince.

"Can I ask for one for thing?" Arthur asked, tentatively, and Merlin nodded. "If you have to pay for more nights for a nurse or someone else to come in and stay with your mum, will you let me pay for it?"

"What? Arthur, No..."

"Please, Merlin. You're going out of your routine to do something for me. The least I can do is help in my own way."

"Breaking my routine for you is something I'm also doing for myself," replied Merlin.

"But promise me," Arthur insisted. "Promise that in the future if we're going away for a weekend or something, you'll let help."

"Okay, fine," Merlin said, sounding exhausted. "Are you always going to argue with me and try to have your way?"

Arthur shrugged. "Not always."

Merlin shook his head and pushed Arthur off him. "I can already see I'm going to have my hands full in this relationship."
"Hey, you must have seen something in me if you fancied me so much," Arthur said with a wink and opened the door to his car. "So, tomorrow?" he asked, still uncertain. It was nice to have butterflies in his stomach again, and it was good to know that maybe Merlin felt the same way.

"Yes. Tomorrow." Merlin bent down and kissed Arthur through the car window.

"Can't wait," replied Arthur and drove away.

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