Curveball

by bluevalentine69

Summary

Arthur Pendragon is recovering from a nasty divorce; his wife Gwen, ran off with his best friend Lance, and left him heartbroken. Getting very drunk at his sister Morgana’s engagement party a year later, Arthur finds himself flirting outrageously with a tall, dark and handsome stranger … and then waking up next to him, and not remembering a thing. Except for the fact that he’s straight, so … what? Merlin re-introduces himself, with pancakes, and Arthur wants to take him on a date.

A frantic ‘Gay’ google marathon ensues:

How do you know if you’re gay?
Can you have a gay mid-life crisis?
Is it normal to want to experiment with your sexual identity after a bad break-up?
Can divorce make you less straight?
How do I have gay sex?
How do I find a prostate?
How do you give a blowjob?
Are guys nipples sensitive?
Do gay men like to be taken on romantic dates?
Do gay men like flowers?
Curveball, noun.
In Baseball, a delivery in which the pitcher causes the ball to deviate from a straight path by imparting spin.
Chapter 1

Arthur blinked cautiously, slowly letting his eyes adjust to the early morning light. He grimaced as his consciousness registered all the ways in which his body felt wrong. Scratchy throat, sore eyes, achey limbs, throbbing temples, an odd sense that the room was rotating slowly, and the sickening waves of nausea that tended, in his experience, to accompany alcohol-related room-spinning. He was royally hungover, apparently, and that in itself was cause for his muted groan, because he was 32 now, for fuck’s sake, and hadn’t actually been hungover for a decade. Muzzy, tired, after a long week at work and a couple of pints too many in the pub on a Friday night, yes, certainly, but not this soul-crushing level of wretchedness to which only death could reliably offer suitable relief.

Once he’d taken a mental inventory of all the ways in which his body was paying for his bad choices last night, he began to take in his surroundings, and then felt even worse. He was naked, on a futon, in a high-ceilinged room with floor-to-ceiling bookcases crammed with texts, magazine journals, papers. There was a rickety canvas wardrobe in one corner with clothes tumbling out of it and into a puddle on the floor, a rickety desk scattered with novelty pens, notably featuring a laptop covered in Star Wars stickers balanced precariously on the top of a chipped coffee mug, an overflowing wastepaper basket, with a number of used condoms stuck to post-it notes and Mars bar wrappers, and a feathery dream catcher studded with crystals hanging from the purple curtains. Where on earth was he, and why?

Last night had been Leon and Morgana’s engagement party, he remembered that. Leon was his oldest friend, and a highly respected cardiothoracic surgeon, now engaged to his much-younger 22-year old sister, who’d just graduated with a degree in Graphic Communication Design from Central Saint Martins, London University of the Arts. Given his bizarre, very messy, and somewhat studenty surroundings, he could only imagine that he’d somehow gone home with one of her ‘arty’ friends. How he’d gotten so pissed he couldn’t remember meeting any beautiful young women, let alone sleeping with them enough times to fill up a wastepaper basket with condoms, was anybody’s guess. He also hadn’t had sex with anyone since he divorced Gwen, eighteen months ago now, so it was quite the surprise that he’d moved on with such dedicated enthusiasm, without being able to remember this milestone moment in his life. A snuffling to his right brought his attention back to his present, not entirely welcome, situation and he winced as he turned his head to look at his bed partner. He was met with acres of pale skin, bright blue eyes, messy dark hair and an inquisitive smile, all wrapped up in the package of a very young, very good looking man. That was … unexpected.

“How dreadful do you feel on a scale of one to death?” the stranger asked him with a wry grin. Arthur rubbed his eyes.

“Very much closer to the death end,” he admitted with a grimace, very aware of his nakedness. He quickly raked his gaze down the body of his companion and saw that he was wearing pyjama bottoms, suddenly feeling very exposed.

“Probably all those tequila shots,” the man diagnosed wisely, turning onto his back and stretching like a cat. “I put water and paracetamol by the bed for you. I can find you a toothbrush, if you like? Let you freshen up whilst I make breakfast?” He turned to grin at Arthur, and Arthur felt something funny swoop in his stomach. “Pancakes with bacon?” Arthur wanted to disapparate home ASAP, but didn’t want to appear rude to someone he’d been very recently and intimately connected with, and especially couldn’t afford to offend one of Morgana’s friends, or he’d never hear the end of it. “That would be great, thanks,” he smiled, looking around for his boxers.
“On the chair,” the man helpfully supplied, and Arthur looked over to where his clothes had been neatly folded into a pile, easily the most organised thing in this chaotic room. “You were very adamant about taking your clothes off last night, sorry.” He sat up and climbed to his feet gracefully, rummaging in a basket on a nearby shelf to produce a new, packaged toothbrush with a proud flourish. “Knew I had a couple spare!” What that said about frequency of overnight visitors to his room was something Arthur didn’t want to examine too closely.

“Very kind, thank you,” he said, rolling sideways and lurching heavily upwards to stand. The stranger unabashedly ran his eyes down Arthur’s naked frame, pupils dilating infinitesimally. “I’ll just -” Arthur gestured towards his clothes.

“Oh! Right, yes sure,” the man said, tearing his eyes away and picking a hoodie off the floor. “Bathroom’s second door on the right,” he grinned, exiting the room with a cheerful little wave.

Arthur got dressed, swallowed a few headache pills, and then took his time in the bathroom, washing his face, brushing his teeth, waiting for his confusion and clamouring head to calm down. He’d never once questioned his sexuality, so why he was about to have breakfast with a young man he’d apparently ravaged the night before was an alarming turn of events. God. He rested his head on the mirror, silently praying for help.

When he got into the kitchen, there was a mug of coffee and a glass of orange juice sitting on the table, and the man was humming as he plated up pancakes.

“They’re for you,” he nodded, setting down two plates of food. Arthur slid into a chair and took a long, grateful drink of juice. His new acquaintance slipped into the chair across from him and then picked up his knife and fork. “Bon appetit,” he smiled, tucking in. Arthur picked up a rasher of bacon and nibbled at it tentatively. It was good. He groaned in appreciation.

“Perfect host,” he said, closing his eyes to enjoy the salty goodness, relishing the return of some semblance of normalcy. The man shrugged, eyeing Arthur with amusement.

“You don’t remember my name, do you?” he smirked. Arthur shook his head apologetically.

“If it helps, I feel really, really bad about that,” he offered. The man snorted.

“I’m Merlin,” he said, offering Arthur his hand. “Nice to meet you. Again.” Arthur shook his hand, feeling another swoop in his stomach at the feel of Merlin’s firm grip.

“Were you at university with Morgana?” Merlin shook his head, cheeks bulging around pancake, maple syrup making his lips glisten.

“I work at Guy’s and St Thomas’ Hospitals, with Leon?” Arthur raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“You work in thoracic surgery?” he said disbelievingly. Merlin shook his head again.

“I’m a junior doctor, shadowing Leon at the moment. I haven’t decided on a specialism yet. I’m thinking oncology, perhaps? My dad died of a brain tumour, so I guess it feels personal.” He shrugged, with a small smile.

“I’m sorry,” Arthur murmured, looking at Merlin with new eyes. Merlin shrugged again. “How old are you?” It slipped out without Arthur’s permission, and he winced. “That’s rude of me, sorry.”

“Gosh, full of apologies this morning, aren’t you?” Merlin’s eyes twinkled. “I’m twenty-eight.” He laughed at the disbelieving expression on Arthur’s face. “How old are you, Arthur?”
“Thirty-two,” Arthur replied, taking a mouthful of food. “Although I feel like I’m twenty-two again. I haven’t done -” he gestured between himself and Merlin with a knife, “this, for a very long time.”

“Passing out in the bed of a total stranger?” Merlin prompted, clearly enjoying Arthur’s discomfort. Arthur glared at him.


“I’d hardly call myself a one-night stand,” Merlin admitted, tracing the grain of wood on the table with a finger. Arthur raised both eyebrows in query. Merlin laughed again.

“Firstly, because I’m hopeful that I’ll see you again,” he said candidly, totally unabashed. “Secondly, because we didn’t actually sleep together, and I gather that’s kind of the point -” he waggled his fingers, “of a one-night hook up type thing.” Oh. Well. That was … good?

“But the bin …” Arthur spoke aloud, remembering all the used condoms. He flushed, embarrassed. Right. Not his. He didn’t know why the thought bothered him. Merlin watched him curiously, a small smile on his lips. He felt like he was being examined.

“I work a lot of night shifts,” Merlin explained. “My flatmate Gwaine has a lot of house parties in my absence, and he’s a fairly shameless bastard about letting his friends use my room for adult sleepovers, shall we say.” Arthur felt relieved, without knowing why. Somehow he didn’t like the idea of lots of people sleeping with Merlin. Merlin smirked; the relief on his face must have been obvious. “I’m not very good at casual,” he added lightly. Arthur nodded, and carried on eating, unsure of what to say to that.

“So last night, we …?” he left the question hanging. Merlin put his feet up on the chair next to him and pulled his sleeves over his hands.

“We met at your sister’s and Leon’s engagement party. You were already quite drunk by the time we were introduced. Morgana said that someone had stupidly mentioned someone called Lance?” Merlin looked at Arthur curiously, hoping for an answer, perhaps. When no response was forthcoming, he shrugged. “Well, apparently you’d done quite a lot of shots. I thought you were the most hilarious, handsome, infuriatingly arrogant person I’d ever met, and we spent most of the night arguing about who was the best Doctor Who before you kissed me, in a very non-PG way, and I dragged you back here. At which point you stripped and promptly passed out.” The tips of Merlin’s ears had gone red, his lips quirked at Arthur a little ruefully. Arthur felt all kinds of confused. The Lance part made sense. Lance and Leon were his oldest friends, before Lance had had an affair with his wife, and instigated one of the most painful episodes of his life. Their social group had largely cut them both out, for what they’d done to Arthur. He could imagine needing to get drunk if Lance’s name was mentioned. Why he’d felt compelled to kiss Merlin he didn’t know, although he was starting to understand why - even in his sober state - he might have been attracted to this oddly compelling man. He looked up at Merlin thoughtfully.

“I suppose I should thank you for being gallant, and not taking advantage of me,” he said gruffly, smiling at Merlin’s laugh. Merlin bowed magnanimously.

“I’m a chivalrous kind of guy,” he agreed, tapping his fingers lightly on the table. He was observing Arthur again, in that clinical manner that seemed to provoke such a strong reaction in Arthur. “So,” he said, pushing his plate away and leaning forwards to cross his arms on the table. “Bad break up?”

divorced a year and a half ago.” Merlin’s face furrowed sympathetically.

“Sounds like you really needed those tequila shots,” he said quietly. Arthur shook his head.

“I’m over it, honestly. I don’t want either of them back in my life.” He looked at the table, analysing the truthfulness of that. He decided it was largely true. “I just don’t want to be reminded of everything every time I go out, I guess.” Merlin nodded. “We had the same group of friends. Last night was the first time I’ve gone to one of the group events since the divorce, specifically because I didn’t want reminding. They’re not invited anymore, but I guess some of the gang still see them one-to-one. It feels a bit like another betrayal. Stupid, I know. I don’t want them to be part of my life at all.” Merlin reached out automatically and put his hand over Arthur’s, and why was Arthur spilling his innermost thoughts to this complete stranger? He scratched his neck awkwardly. “Sorry,” he said again, looking at Merlin ruefully. “This really isn’t any of your concern.”

“I understand Arthur,” Merlin said, eyes warm. “I’m glad you told me. Not that our Doctor Who discussion wasn’t a lot of fun, but,” Merlin looked down at the table again, smiling. “It’s nice for me to know something real about you.”

“I’m glad,” Arthur said, and he was, strangely. Merlin’s hand was a reassuring weight on his. He shifted under the small point of contact, feeling aroused and more lost than he’d ever felt before in his life.

“Are you ready?” Merlin said quietly, gesturing to their touching hands. “For this?” Arthur looked down consideringly. To move on? Yes. To move on with a man? To explore a brand new, hitherto unknown aspect of his sexuality? He wasn’t sure, but he did know that something inside him was intrigued by Merlin. By his own response to Merlin. He tried to be as truthful as possible.

“I’m ready to fall in love again. And I’d certainly like to see you again. Non-drunk.” Merlin bit his lip, pleased, ears reddening again.

“Good,” he murmured, removing his hand.

“Out of interest,” Arthur said wryly, reaching for his coffee cup, “which Doctor Who is your favourite?” Merlin covered his face with his hand, laughing helplessly.
Chapter 2

The thing was, it was so easy to spend time with Merlin. After they’d finished their breakfast that first morning, Arthur had spent most of the day arguing with Merlin on his (frankly disgusting and disturbingly stained) sofa, from favourite books to films to food to politics. Merlin was articulate, passionate, clever, kind, interesting, interested. When they’d stopped to draw breath, Merlin’s flatmate Gwaine glaring at them from the floor with a bag of peas on his (also throbbing) head, they’d ordered pizza and eaten it playing scrabble. And then watched Lord of the Rings. Arthur hadn’t wanted to leave, and when he had, it was with the promise that when Merlin next had a night off - six days later - Arthur would take him out for the evening. Arthur had spent the intervening time typing useless things into Google. How do you know if you’re gay? Can you have a gay mid-life crisis? Is it normal to want to experiment with your sexual identity after a bad break-up? Can divorce make you less straight?

The truth is, the answers didn’t really matter, because fundamentally, he really liked Merlin. He wanted to spend more time with him. So then he freaked out about how to be gay, and googled other things like: How do I have gay sex? How do I find a prostate? How do you give a blowjob? Are guys nipples sensitive? Do gay men like to be taken on romantic dates? Do gay men like flowers? Eventually, he was all diagrammed out, and gave up on the research. He figured dating a guy was probably the same as dating a woman. And the sex part was pretty similar too. Insert tab A into tab B etc. The thought of being near another man’s penis was pretty off-putting, but Merlin’s penis? Well. Arthur wasn’t totally averse to finding out. Then there was the question of whether or not to tell Merlin that he wasn’t actually gay, or bi, and didn’t as yet have any rainbow credentials to speak of. He didn’t want Merlin to feel like he was an experiment, or to be guarded around Arthur, or the added pressure of feeling like a virginal schoolgirl. So he decided not to mention that teeny tiny insignificant little factor until the time was right.

The following Friday he’d agreed to meet Merlin at the Chinatown arch. He saw him as he was approaching, leaning casually against its side reading something on his phone, striking in dark skinny jeans, a dark cashmere jumper, black leather jacket, dark hair artfully gelled into a style that could only be described as sex-on-legs. Arthur paused to take him in, surprised by the level of his physical attraction. Merlin suddenly looked up, as if conscious of being watched, and slowly grinned at Arthur.

“Like what you see?” he asked innocently, walking towards him. Arthur gulped a little, what the fuck do I say to compliment a male date? Merlin was suddenly in front of him, very close, smelling of a musky, heady aftershave, and he leant in slowly to kiss Arthur’s cheek, one hand at his waist. “You look incredibly hot in that suit,” he murmured, before drawing back and smiling softly. Arthur shook himself.

“I had to come straight from work, sorry,” Arthur flushed. “You look incredible. Definitely not like someone who essentially sleeps in a giant bin.” Merlin threw his head back and laughed, and Arthur felt disproportionately pleased that he’d managed to draw that sound from him. Merlin shook his head.

“An apology, compliment and insult all in one breath. What stunning verbal ambidextrousness. What was it you do for a living again?”

“Lawyer,” Arthur offered.

“Ah yes. Well if the shoe fits,” Merlin shrugged, bouncing slightly on the balls of his feet. “So. Where are you taking me then, Mr Pendragon?”
“One of my favourite restaurants, I hope you’ll like it.” Arthur offered Merlin his arm, which Merlin took with a giggle.

“How gentlemanly of you, kind Sir,” he said in a posh voice, adopting a leisurely swagger as he walked next to Arthur, who blushed self-consciously, and made to withdraw his arm. Merlin gripped it tighter, stopping to turn Arthur’s face to his. “Arthur I’m just teasing you,” he said gently, as if he’d read his mind. “I like this very much,” he smiled, squeezing Arthur’s arm.


“Stop apologising,” Merlin chided lightly, bumping his shoulder. “Don’t ever be sorry with me.”

“Thank you,” Arthur said softly, smiling at the darker haired man. “Tell me about your week.”

Merlin was delighted by Arthur’s restaurant choice, Yauatcha, a trendy all-day dim sum teahouse in Soho. He giggled over their fashionable cocktails, Fig Sours and Popcorn Old Fashioneds, oohed and aahed over their seafood black truffle dumplings, venison puffs and mushroom spring rolls, closed his eyes in delight at the peanut butter jelly macarons and chocolate pebbles. He and Arthur fed each other with chopsticks, chattered at speed about anything and everything, argued about who was paying the bill (Arthur won), and through it all, Arthur was conscious of Merlin’s legs, slowly trapping his foot between them, knees pressed together warmly, of the way the candlelight danced over Merlin’s sharp features, making him look like an ethereal necromancer, of the way he edged closer during the meal, touching Arthur at every opportunity, of the way he smiled from underneath his lashes, undoubtedly aware of the impact he was having. He was gorgeous, plain and simple, and Arthur wanted him. After their meal he asked Merlin back to his house for coffee.


“Are you four? I have Kenyan and Jamaican. I recommend the Kenyan with whisky and the Jamaican with brandy.”

“God you’re posh,” was Merlin’s only reply as he efficiently hailed a cab and pushed Arthur in first. When they got into Arthur’s flat he paused for moment, taking in his surroundings. “I repeat my earlier statement,” he said decidedly. “Posh with a capital ‘P’.” Arthur looked around his South Ken flat and shrugged. It was cosy.

“What can I get you?” he asked, closing the front door. Merlin crowded him against it, both hands at Arthur’s hips, pressing a light, tentative kiss to Arthur’s throat. Arthur stopped thinking and let himself respond naturally, immediately, urgently, pulling Merlin against him with one hand, using his other to pull his head to Arthur’s, fingers twining through his hair as Arthur pressed his lips to Merlin’s, kissing him with fervour, excitement, wonder, biting his full, fleshy lower lip, his tongue, kissing along his jaw, his ears, pulling his hair as Merlin groaned against his shoulder, cock pressing hard against his thigh.

“God, Arthur,” Merlin whispered, clever fingers finding their way under Arthur’s shirt and stroking across the muscled plain of his stomach. “How are you real? You’ve no idea how much I want you.” Arthur slid his own hands underneath Merlin’s jumper and stroked up his spine, curving around his sides so his thumbs stroked his nipples. Merlin gasped in surprise.

“I think I have some idea,” Arthur responded breathlessly, finding Merlin’s mouth again. The
kissed lazily, languidly, testing and pushing and licking and biting, and all the while exploring each other’s skin, learning each other’s sounds. Arthur felt like his skin had been electrified, buzzing with energy, and it was almost too-much, he was too close, too violently ready to release himself and he forced himself to pull back, resting his forehead against Merlin’s and stroking the curls at the nape of his neck. “If you always kiss like that, I can’t believe I can’t remember the first time,” Arthur choked, smiling as Merlin huffed a laugh into his neck.

“I better make this time more memorable,” he mouthed wetly at Arthur’s neck, moving his hand to brush lightly over Arthur’s aching groin. “Can we go to bed?” he asked, drawing away to look at Arthur seriously. “I promise I’m not usually this easy, but I really really want to fuck you, possibly for the rest of forever.” His brow furrowed. “God, I don’t even know what you like! Do you do that? Or would you prefer to fuck me? I don’t mind either way, really?” The reality of the situation suddenly came crashing back to Arthur and he pulled away suddenly, excruciatingly aware that he had no idea what he was doing, and having a minor panic attack that he might be about to have gay sex for the first time, and it might hurt, or go horribly wrong, or be really embarrassing, or he might hate it. God, what if he cried? “Arthur?” Merlin asked warily, hand on his arm, breaking through his mental breakdown. Arthur took a deep breath and clasped Merlin’s hand.

“Can we just … take a moment? Over a drink maybe? I think I’m panicking slightly.” Merlin dropped his hand and stood back immediately, face confused but endlessly, endearingly patient and understanding.

“Of course,” he said, clearly baffled, smiling encouragingly.

“Sorry,” Arthur said for the millionth time, feeling like a complete tit. Merlin moved closer to him, putting both hands on his face, thumbs stroking his cheekbones.

“I told you that you never need to be sorry with me,” he reminded him quietly, soothing him. Arthur pressed another grateful kiss to his lips, and led him from the hallway to the sitting room.

“Coffee?” Arthur asked when he’d switched the lights on and drawn the curtains. “Something stronger?” Merlin was shrugging off his jacket and toeing off his shoes, making his way to Arthur’s sound system. He grinned over his shoulder.

“I’ll have whatever you’re having,” he said amenably, kneeling down to explore Arthur’s collection of music; he had a carefully accumulated array of vintage vinyls, and was pleased to see that Merlin was interested. Gwen had never been that bothered. Arthur cursed himself for thinking about Gwen and wandered into the kitchen to calm himself down. He came out with a tray of fresh coffee, cocoa dusted truffles and whisky, placing it carefully on the coffee table. Merlin was curled comfortably into the sofa, Fleetwood Mac playing softly in the background, head resting back, staring at the ceiling, looking thoughtful; Arthur sat beside him, leaning forwards to pick up both tumblers of amber liquid. Merlin raised his head with a smile, extending one foot to rest on Arthur’s lap.

“Thanks,” he said, accepting the glass, and wafting it under his nose. “What’s this?”


“It’s the Japanese one, isn’t it? I’ve heard good things.” Arthur nodded and clinked his glass against Merlin’s.

“Cheers,” he said, taking a long, and much-needed drought. Merlin took a more cautious sip, letting the flavour roll over his tongue.

“Very nice,” he decided, stroking his foot along Arthur’s thigh. “Want to tell me what’s going on in
there?” Arthur finished his whisky and leant down to pour another, taking another long drink when he sat back, stroking the socked arch of Merlin’s foot, running his thumb along the long toes. “Must be bad if my feet are that fascinating,” Merlin said lightly, watching him with that avid attention that had struck Arthur so powerfully when he met him. “Or do you have a fetish I should be aware of?”

“No fetishes,” Arthur said quietly, still studying the pattern of Merlin’s socks. Is now the time to tell him? No, probably not, definitely going to make things more awkward. Do I actually want to have penetrative sex? Am I ready for that?

“Arthur,” Merlin said more firmly, pushing his foot against Arthur’s hand. “Talk to me.” Arthur looked up to say sorry and Merlin shook his head warningly. “And don’t you dare apologise again.” Arthur huffed out a laugh and put his tumbler down, running a hand over his face. Lesser of two evils, he decided. Some mortification was probably inevitable.

“I haven’t,” he began, before going red, reflecting on just when he had become so inept at emotional conversations, so unpracticed at romance. Merlin started to stroke his thigh with his foot again, a subtle, but tactile gesture of encouragement. “I haven’t,” he coughed, wondering how this could be so hard, and groaning aloud, letting his head thump backwards. “This is pathetic.” He said aloud. Merlin laughed.

“Blimey, you’re really having a mare, aren’t you? Here - ” he put down his whisky and moved closer to Arthur, basically positioning himself in his lap, arms wrapped around his neck, guiding Arthur to look at him. “Unless we’re about to have an AIDS conversation, whatever’s eating you cannot be that serious.” Arthur shook his head, aghast. “Well then,” Merlin prompted, settling against his chest.

“I haven’t been intimate with anyone since my divorce,” Arthur said in a rush, face heating. “I haven’t wanted anyone like this, since … before then.” Merlin kissed his cheek, nuzzling his nose against Arthur’s, lips softly pressing, unmoving, against his skin. “I want it to be good for you, and I’m freaking out, as I’m sure you can see. It might not be. Good.” Merlin continued to kiss him, all over his face, his neck, stroking Arthur’s chest, his arms. It took a while before he peeled back to look at Arthur, and when he did, all Arthur could see was fierce fondness, affection, lust, care.

“Firstly,” Merlin began slowly, running a thumb along Arthur’s jaw, across his lips, and pressing a kiss in the same place, “I’m told that it’s kind of like riding a bicycle,” he stroked Arthur’s neck, placing a kiss there too. “Once you’ve mastered the art, you never forget.” That would be really reassuring, but Arthur’s never actually ridden this kind of bicycle before. “Secondly,” Merlin continued, “I am so deeply, overwhelmingly attracted to you, there is literally nothing you could do that wouldn’t make it good for me.” Arthur snorted a bit at that, feeling marginally better. “Thirdly,” Merlin smiled, “I’m glad that you’ve waited to feel something before moving on, and I’m incredibly flattered and glad that it’s me. It says a lot about your character that you didn’t have as much rebound fucking as possible. Lots of men would. I’d really, really like to fuck you, yes, but I’m also more than prepared to wait for as long as it takes for you to be 100% on board with that. When I fuck you,” Merlin says calmly, pinning Arthur with his gaze, “I don’t want you to be thinking about anything or anyone except me.” Arthur nearly choked on his sudden surge of absolute want for this man, shaken by the quiet authority and control he seemed so effortlessly able to assert.

“I’m only thinking about you,” Arthur whispered, and Merlin leaned in to kiss him without question, sliding his tongue against Arthur’s invitingly, breathing him in, before standing up and pulling Arthur with him.

“Bed?” he asks again, and Arthur nods, leading Merlin back into the hall and down a short corridor leading to his room. As soon as the door closes, shrouded in darkness, Arthur feels released from his
inhibitions, his concerns, pushing Merlin against the door needily, undressing him hurriedly, scrambling at his jean button and zip as Merlin’s fingers quickly divest him of his clothing too. Soon they are pressed together in shuddering, shivering nakedness, wet trails of pre-come clinging to their bellies, gasping into each other’s mouths, scratching nails along each other’s backs, both fighting for domination, giving and taking in equal measure. Eventually Merlin gives in and lets Arthur push him down onto the bed, lick his way down Merlin’s body, neck, collarbone, nipples, ribs, bellybutton, happy trail, down and down until he reaches Merlin’s hard, glistening cock, his thick patch of black pubic hair, and he closes his eyes and kisses the insides of Merlin’s thighs, before taking a deep breath and sweeping his tongue over the head of Merlin’s cock. Merlin moans loudly, body thrumming beneath Arthur’s ministrations, arching sinuously from the bed. Arthur thinks the saltiness is not so unpleasant, nor the musky aroma, but what is absolutely addictive is watching someone as strong and magnetic and lovely as Merlin hand over control so readily, flying apart beneath him. He remembers what he used to like Gwen doing and begins to suck and lave at Merlin’s cock, massaging the base with one of his hands, occasionally grazing his teeth over the foreskin, and in no time at all Merlin is bucking and spurting hot come into Arthur’s mouth, heels pressing into his calves, muttered obscenities and adulations flowing freely, and Arthur grimaces and swallows, resting his head against Merlin’s stomach and feeling his heartbeat stuttering rabbit-fast, completely shocked at what he’s just done. Merlin’s needy hands grab him and pull him up the bed so that Merlin can kiss him hungrily, gratefully, licking his own taste out of Arthur’s mouth.

“That was fucking incredible,” he breathes, shaking his head. “INCREDIBLE. Fuck. Is there a light in here? I miss your face.” Arthur likes the darkness, he feels safe and anonymous under its cloak, but he rolls over to switch on a bedside lamp, which floods the room in warm golden glow. “Hi,” Merlin smiles, glowing, the picture of sated happiness. “Can I please, please fuck you now?” Arthur nods, relieved, in some ways, that he’s not expected to ‘perform’ before seeing what the show’s supposed to look like, and he reaches for the lube in the bedside drawer, which he’d ordered earlier this week, just in case. “Condoms?” Merlin asks, taking the bottle.

“You are too tense,” Merlin observes, putting the lube to one side and crawling over Arthur’s body. “How about we start with doing something about that?” Within minutes Arthur is a molten pool of burning bliss, limbs relaxed, muscles relaxed, soothed by Merlin’s tongue and patient fingers, Merlin sucking his cock is the best thing he can remember happening to it, and he’s relaxed and pliant right up until the moment Merlin presses one lubed up finger against his hole. “Sshh,” he mouths at Arthur’s groin, sliding his fingers in, “we’re just opening you up, nice and steady. Relax for me Arthur,” and Arthur does his best to accept the intrusion into his body, to adjust to the feeling of something inside him, and it’s odd, and there’s a burn and an ache, but it’s also weirdly nice, soothing, it’s making him feel aroused and confused and he tries again to stop thinking and just feel. Merlin keeps adding fingers and more lube, and Arthur concentrates on not grimacing, squeezing his eyes closed and trying to remember how to breathe. “You’re so tight,” Merlin murmurs in awe, carefully preparing him, and when he presses some secret place inside Arthur, Arthur shouts and comes down Merlin’s throat. Merlin keeps him in his mouth until the aftershocks have subsided and then pulls off with a pop, grinning like the cat who got the cream. “Well you are delicious,” he observes, removing his fingers and working his way up Arthur’s body. “You ready for me, d’you think?” Arthur nods, because, he has no idea if he’s ready, and Merlin’s big. “How do you want to do it?” Merlin asks, kissing Arthur gently, and running a reassuring hand down his flank. Arthur grips his wrist.

“However you want me,” he says gruffly, and Merlin’s eyes glint as he kisses Arthur again in a soft thank you, sitting back on his feet as he rolls a condom over his hard length. He raises one of Arthur’s knees up, foot on the bed, and slides over him, until their bodies are pressed together, and
his cockhead is nudging at the entrance to Arthur’s hole.

“Face to face, okay?” he checks quietly, waiting for Arthur’s affirmation before pushing in slowly. Arthur feels like he’s being split apart, torn open, physically and emotionally; he’s never experienced anything so raw, or intimate, or painful in all his life. He barely knows this man, he suddenly realises, and almost-freaks-out before Merlin’s voice calls him back, checking he’s okay, tangling their tongues together, manoeuvring Arthur so that his legs are wrapped around Merlin’s back, Merlin burying his face in Arthur’s neck before he begins to thrust, hard, deeply, and suddenly something in Arthur is ablaze with light and he’s groaning in pleasure on every in-stroke, feeling empty every time Merlin withdraws and thrusts back in. He feels like crying, like he’s falling apart, totally exposed and profoundly connected to this man he’s only known for a week, and he closes his eyes and loses himself to the sensation of Merlin surrounding him, inside him, above him, until all he feels is Merlin, Merlin, Merlin, and then Merlin is stroking his cock and he’s flying apart, arms circling Merlin’s strong, narrow body as he too, collapses forwards onto Arthur’s chest. Arthur strokes his hair absently, down his spine, rubbing his neck, his shoulders, wincing as Merlin slips out.

“Sore?” Merlin whispers, and Arthur shrugs, mind at sea. Merlin tries to read his face, before peeling himself away to dispose of his condom and find a warm flannel to wipe Arthur’s belly. Arthur watches him, utterly perplexed by the intensity of his feelings, of this physical awakening. Merlin drops the flannel to the floor and flops down next to Arthur, propping himself on one arm. He leans down to kiss him. “You’re very quiet,” he murmurs, tracing the shell of Arthur’s ear with his forefinger, brushing his hair out of his eyes. “Everything okay?” Arthur rolls over him, pressing Merlin into the bed, body screaming in protest, not used to being used like that, and kisses him deeply. Merlin’s flushed when they stop for air. “Thank you for trusting me,” Merlin mumbles, face open and sweet. “I hope it was as good for you as it was for me.” He looks uncertain, now, and Arthur hates uncertainty on this man’s face.

“The best,” he says simply, kissing underneath Merlin’s chin. Merlin wriggles against him comfortably. “I want you to fuck me too, in case I wasn’t clear about that earlier. I like it equally both ways.” Arthur grins, rolling onto his back, and pulling Merlin against his chest.

“Good to know,” he replies.

“I’m off again in four nights,” Merlin offers pointedly. Arthur looks down at him.

“We’re not done with tonight yet,” he teases, curling his arm around Merlin’s waist. “And we have all day tomorrow, I hope. I owe you a cooked breakfast and lunch.”

“Do you have a maid hiding in a cupboard somewhere, ready to jump out and do all your cooking for you?”

“Your lack of faith in my domestic skills is wounding, Merlin, truly. My English breakfasts are legendary. Or if Sir would like Posh, then I can also provide a champagne smoked salmon and scrambled eggs brunch, complete with weekend newspaper?” Merlin sighs comfortably against him.

“You are literally my dream man. Fry-up at six, once we’ve stopped shagging, and then continental elevenses, once we’ve slept off our sex haze and woken up ravenous.”

“Are you some kind of nymphomaniac?” Arthur asks, stroking Merlin’s hair, and grinning at the purring sound he’s making. He’s very cat-like, Arthur decides. Merlin nods sleepy and yawns.

“Yes, I’ll be wanting you at least three times a night, at least twice a week until we move in together, and then it’s full penetration once daily, with at least one quickie extra.”
“Has anyone ever told you that you’re very demanding?” Arthur asks, amused. Merlin pats his chest sleepily.

“You’ll get used to me,” he yawns, drifting off to sleep, clearly sated for the time being. Arthur smiles. He likes Merlin in his bed, and he likes the idea of him being around enough to get used to. Something warm unfurls inside him, and he can feel Big Things starting to blossom inside him for only the second time in his life.
Chapter 3

As Merlin predicted, they see each other twice weekly, whenever Merlin’s not on shift. Arthur learns that the life of a junior doctor is ridiculous, and quite frequently when he picks Merlin up from the hospital for one of their date nights he won’t have slept for thirty-six hours, so the time they spend together is largely shaped by frantic, urgent, desperate sex, sofa snuggling, sleep, whispered pillow talks, and it works out well that way, because in their haze of intimacy they learn how to fit together, they’re drawn closer, mouthing secrets into each other’s skin, mapping love across each other’s bodies. They talk about everything that honeymooning lovers are wont to do; past relationships, life stories, important friendships, family dynamics, hopes, fears, plans. Arthur learns that Merlin’s fallen in love twice; first, at eighteen, with his best friend and first boyfriend Will, now like a brother to him, and happily married to a girl called Freya, and the second time at 24, with his consultant mentor at his first placement hospital, Edwin, who was in his late forties, and a bit of a philandering bastard, by all accounts. Arthur learns that he’s been single for two and a half years, and that he only ever has drunken hook-ups when Gwaine drags him out to their favourite gay bar Psyched and plies him with dangerous cocktails called Blue Nipples every few months. Arthur bans Blue Nipples from the menu and Merlin laughs, rubbing his sticky, sweaty, salty post-sex body against Arthur’s reassuringly, sucking another bruise into his shoulder.

“It’s only been you since Morgana’s engagement Arthur,” he states matter-of-factly as though it’s nothing, just giving himself body and soul to Arthur without asking for anything back, and that’s how they become official, monogamous, exclusive, no drama, no existential angst on Arthur’s part; it’s as easy as breathing. Somehow Arthur never tells him about Gwen; never tells him that he’s straight, and only gay for Merlin. First it was because he didn’t want Merlin to feel doubtful, uncertain about his role in Arthur’s life, until Arthur had a clearer idea about that himself; then, he’d become everything to Arthur, and it felt too late to bring up, and now it’s a shadow hanging over Arthur’s head; a lie that seems irrelevant but constantly present.

It begins to matter when Merlin starts asking questions. He’s introduced Arthur to his mother, his uncle; Arthur’s been to stay with him in his childhood home, in fact, meeting all his family and relatives and family-friends and best friends, awkwardly sharing a few pints with Will, until they’d discovered a shared love of Game of Thrones and craft beer and become inseparable for the following week, much to both Freya and Merlin’s annoyance. He’s introduced Arthur to all his medical friends, his colleagues. He’s sewn Arthur into the fabric of his life, and he’s started to question why Arthur hasn’t done the same for him. He wants to move in together, but Arthur can’t commit like that until he’s figured out how to tell all his friends and family that he’s gay now. He’s totally in the closet, and Merlin has no bloody idea. Leon even mentioned to Arthur over a football match that Merlin had asked him in surgery one day about how Arthur was dealing with everything since the divorce, and didn’t Arthur think that his interest was odd? Arthur cringed and asked what he’d said, but Leon had miraculously replied that Lance’s betrayal had hurt both of them, and would probably always hurt, and left it at that. It’s beginning to put a strain on their relationship, and Arthur doesn’t know how to make it better.

Everything comes to a head about a year in. Arthur’s walking hand-in-hand with Merlin through London, peering in at cake shops as they peruse for something sweet to take to Merlin’s uncle Gaius, who has invited them for supper this evening, when they walk straight into Lance and Gwen coming out of one of the little West End patisseries giggling into each other and balancing boxes between
them. Arthur pulls his hand out of Merlin’s immediately and springs away guiltily. Merlin looks at him in confusion, and then at the two people standing in front of them, both with horrified looks on their faces, and suddenly a silent oh look of understanding crosses his face, and his gaze switches between concern for Arthur and scrutinisation of Lance.

“Arthur!” Lance says, snapping out of his shock first, smiling with genuine affection, and reaching out a hand to shake Arthur’s. “It’s been such a long time. You’re well, I hope?” Merlin snorts.

“Very well, thank you,” Arthur says stiffly, ignoring him, eyes drifting to Gwen. Her eyes are sparkling with unshed tears.

“We’ve missed you Arthur,” she says hurriedly. “Everyone. How’s Morgana? She’s getting married this Christmas isn’t she?” Arthur nods, and tries to unglue his tongue from the roof of his mouth.

“Yes, she’s organising it with the precision of Hitler’s army. Like her eighteenth birthday, but with more strategy.” Both Lance and Gwen laugh fondly. Arthur’s surprised to discover that he doesn’t feel angry any more. No pain. No bitterness. He just misses his two friends, and feels nothing but a fleeting sadness for what they’ve lost. A hopeless wish that it hadn’t all ended with betrayal.

“I heard that you got married recently?” he offers, keen to kill all the elephants. “I’m glad that you’re both happy.” He means it. Gwen looks like she might cry again, and Lance rubs her back soothingly.

“We really are sorry about the way everything happened, Arthur,” he says. “I hope you’ll forgive us one day.” Arthur smiles pleasantly. Merlin doesn’t.

“Well I won’t keep you both.” Arthur says. “Have a good day.” They bid him goodbye with sad smiles and walk off together, and it’s only then that Arthur remembers Merlin, unacknowledged, standing unobtrusively to the side. Merlin’s face is impassive, unreadable, and he’s very, very still, which is what alerts Arthur to the fact that All Is Not Well. Merlin is animation and expression at all times; happy, tired, cross, excited, horny … never still. The absence of emotion is disconcerting. Arthur moves towards him and takes his hand. “Merlin?” he asks cautiously. Merlin looks at their hands.

“The ex, I presume?” he asks in a flat, monotone voice that sends shivers up Arthur’s spine. Arthur nods, helplessly.

“He’s hot,” Merlin says in the same strange, unemotional tone. “You didn’t mention that your best friend was a woman.”

“That’s not … you don’t understand,” Arthur says quietly. Merlin raises an eyebrow, pure disbelief etched across his face. That small flicker of emotion disappears quickly.


“Merlin, stop! I’m sorry I didn’t introduce you. They’re just … I don’t want them knowing anything about my life. They’ve lost that privilege.”

“And yet these two people that you want to know nothing about your life, still know a lot more about it than I do, apparently. In-jokes about your sister, for instance, who I still haven’t met in the context of being your boyfriend.”

“I’m sorry,” Arthur says.

“Back to apologising? I thought you’d grown out of that.” Arthur bites his tongue and looks at the pavement. “Tell me, Arthur, do you see your future with me or not?” Arthur can’t believe they’re
having this conversation outside a cake shop.

“Yes,” he says honestly.

“Does that future involve you sharing your life with me in any meaningful way?” Arthur feels a jolt of panic at committing to someone in that way again, but then he looks at Merlin and thinks yes.

“Yes,” he answers with conviction.

“Then what the fuck are you playing at?” Merlin demands, angry and on the verge of tears, before pulling his arm away from Arthur and striding away from him, leaving Arthur standing alone in the middle of London.

The first thing Arthur does, of course, is call Morgana. Who invites him around for lunch. Where he tells both her and Leon the entire truth of what’s happened in his life over the past year. Morgana squeals and shouts and calls him an idiot and throws things at him, and Leon attempts to restrain Morgana whilst offering sympathetic and supportive words of advice to Arthur. Next he goes home calls his father, who is silent on the phone for a number of minutes, before inviting Arthur and his ‘young man’ around to dinner the following week. Arthur then calls Merlin, ten times, and leaves ten desperate voicemails. Eventually he texts him. Merlin, I’m not going to say I’m sorry (even though I have lots to be sorry about), but we really, really need to talk, as I have lots I need to explain, and which I should have explained sooner. I’m an idiot. Please come over. I’ve cocked up, I love you, I’ll make it better, I promise. Before supper with Gaius tonight. I bought Lemon Meringue Pie, I know that’s his favourite. I love you so much, please come home to me xxxx

Merlin knocks on his door an hour later, hands shoved in his pockets, and he pushes past Arthur and into the sitting room, where he plonks himself in an armchair, arms crossed.

“Go on then,” he says to Arthur, nodding at the sofa for Arthur to sit down. Arthur sits, and puts a hand on Merlin’s knee. He looks at it, but doesn’t move. Arthur meets his gaze, and something in Merlin’s eyes soften. “I’m listening,” he says quietly, uncrossing his arms.

“I’m straight,” Arthur says, deciding it’s best to get the worst bit out of the way first. Merlin looks at him as though he’s gone mad.

“Bloke,” he says slowly, pointing at himself. Arthur shakes his head.

“I was straight my whole life until the morning I woke up in your bed. Not bi, not curious, not questioning. Completely, 100%, ladies man straight. Gwen is my ex-wife.” Merlin suddenly deflates and bends forwards to rest his head and arms on his knees, as if suddenly struck with seasickness, and Arthur carries on speaking quickly, worried that Merlin might get angry and start shouting, or leave, before he’s had time to explain. “I never meant to lie to you. At first I didn’t tell you because you assumed I was gay, and it didn’t seem to matter that I wasn’t previously, and then I really liked you, and didn’t want you to think you were an experiment or something, and then I fell in love with you, and didn’t want you to think you were an experiment or something, and then I fell in love with you, and suddenly the deception felt too big, and now we’re here. It’s the only reason I haven’t asked you to move in, or introduced you to my family and friends. Not because I’m not over my ex, not because I don’t want to commit to you, not because I’m ashamed or uncertain of you; it’s simply because I’ve been in the closet. As of about two hours ago, that is no longer the case. I told Morgana, who shouted at me for about an hour about what a selfish, fucked-up prick I am, because now she’ll have to redo the table plans, because she firmly expects you as my guest at her wedding, and Leon’s invited you to the stag, and my father’s invited you round for dinner next week, to meet my ‘young man’, and he’s even posher than me, I warn you. I’ll tell everyone else, I promise.” Arthur gets off
the sofa onto his knees, and crawls between Merlin’s legs, nudging his head against Merlin’s bowed one. “You’re not an experiment Merls. You’re the love of my life, and our relationship is the one I’m proudest of. No-one has meant more to me than you do, or is more beautiful to me than you are. I’m sorry that you’ve doubted that.” Merlin keeps his head bowed, shoulders shaking, but he covers Arthur’s hands on his knees with his own. “Please look at me,” Arthur begs. Merlin raises his head, and Arthur is broken to see that his eyes are red and watery, his face covered in tears. Arthur pulls a small tissue-paper package out of his pocket and hands it to Merlin. “Open it,” he whispers. Merlin wipes his face with his hands, then peels back the tissue with shaking fingers, more tears appearing when he sees the contents. A key to Arthur’s flat, and his mother’s wedding ring. “Move in with me, and marry me?” Arthur asks sincerely. “We can figure out what comes after that together. Cats. Dogs. Kids. Whatever. I’m happy with whatever, as long as I’ve got you.”

“You lied to me for a year,” Merlin says accusingly.

“I didn’t lie,” Arthur hedged, “more … withheld important information. Does it matter to you that I’m only gay for you? Do your partners have to be rainbow-flag wearing Pride marchers to be acceptable?”

“You’re a fucking arsehole,” Merlin says tightly, sliding to the floor to sit next to Arthur. He takes Arthur wrist, stroking his thumb over its warm pulse-point whilst he gathers his thoughts. “It’s unbelievable, and romantic, and precious, and brave, and so, so special that you chose to be with me, Arthur,” he says eventually, his tone reverent, looking at Arthur seriously. He slides his fingers into Arthur’s, and presses wet, angry kisses against his lips. “I’m so cross with you for not telling me, so I could have been more patient. More gentle. More supportive. I feel like a brute now, the way I took you … it was your first time. Jesus fucking christ.” The tears are still streaming silently from his eyes.

“I wouldn’t change a single thing about anything that’s happened between us,” Arthur says, squeezing his hand. “You’re perfect for me, and I want you always. Please forgive me, and say yes?” Merlin sniffs, wiping a sleeve across his eyes. He takes a deep breath, opening his hand to look at the key and the ring lying in his palm. He turns and kisses Arthur sweetly, lingering, exploring, like he’s something precious, and cherished and worshipped.

“I’ve nothing to forgive,” Merlin whispers against his lips. “Of course my answer is yes. You’re the greatest part of my life. Nothing and no-one compares. Everything that I am is yours, Arthur, you know that.” Arthur smiles and slips the ring onto Merlin’s engagement finger.

“Shall we get all the other big-life questions out of the way?” he asks lightly, pushing Merlin down onto the carpet, and peeling his clothes off. “How many kids do you want?” He licks Merlin’s nipples, biting lightly, knowing how sensitive Merlin is there. Merlin arches, holding Arthur’s head in place and-half-wraps Arthur’s, and presses wet, angry kisses against his lips. “I’m so cross with you for not telling me, so I could have been more patient. More gentle. More supportive. I feel like a brute now, the way I took you … it was your first time. Jesus fucking christ.” The tears are still streaming silently from his eyes.

After a pleasant meal at Gaius’s, celebrating their news with champagne, Merlin is quiet, lying in Arthur’s bed on his back, examining the ceiling.

“Penny for them,” Arthur says, budging him over, propping himself up on a pillow, one hand on Merlin’s belly. Merlin shrugs.

“Just thinking how weird it must have been for you.”

“ Weird?”

“Suddenly being gay after a lifetime of being straight. I can’t imagine what that must be like. Like, waking up and suddenly fancying a woman.” Merlin visibly shudders. “Weren’t you confused?”

Arthur caresses Merlin’s stomach absently, musing.

“It felt weird only in that it felt normal,” Arthur tries to explain. “I’d never noticed a man sexually before, but for you … it was just there, if that makes sense?” Merlin contemplates him.

“The sex must be different?” he pushes. “I mean, I have nothing to compare it to,” he looks away, a little hesitant. “But you obviously liked hetsex?”


“You give me everything I want,” Merlin begins slowly, as if trying to work his own thoughts out. “There must be things I don’t - can’t,” he corrects himself, “give you?”

“Specifically breasts and a vagina?” Arthur asks, deadpan. Merlin makes a face and then nods.

“Different,” he says again. Arthur leans over to kiss his nose.

“I don’t miss anything, M,” Arthur whispers quietly. “Sex with you is amazing. Your body is amazing. I love you, and I love … connecting, with you. I’ve never experienced sex so intensely, or intimately. You’re the only person that’s ever been inside me. You are the proud owner of my arse virginity. You’ve taken me in a way that no woman has. I’m open and … vulnerable with you, in a way that I couldn’t be with women. Gender stereotyping or something. I don’t know. With us, it feels more … equal? Balanced? I feel held.” Merlin turns his head to capture Arthur’s lips with his own, slender fingers firmly carding through Arthur’s hair, sensuously massaging his skull.

“Can I get that on an apron?” he murmurs, kissing Arthur’s jaw.

“What?” Arthur quizzes, distracted by Merlin’s wandering fingers, the light brushes of his tongue, teasingly tasting Arthur.

“Proud Owner of Arthur Pendragon’s Arse Virginity?”


“Fine. Get a mug and coaster to go with it.”

“And a giant helium balloon?” Merlin questions innocently, turning on his side to press his forehead against Arthur’s, sliding a hand up the warm bare skin of his back.

“All the balloons,” Arthur answers, kissing him; properly, deeply kissing him.

“Can I put that on an apron?” he asks, grinning. Merlin pulls back, puzzled.

“What?”

“Arthur Feels Too Big Sometimes.” Merlin laughs loudly, smacking Arthur’s arm and burying his head in Arthur’s chest, entwining his long limbs with Arthur’s until it feels like they’re one single, lumpy thing.

“I’m offended at how funny you found that,” Arthur pouts, making wounded eyes at Merlin. Merlin shakes his head, eyes brimming with adoration.

“You are the biggest and the baddest AP,” he retorts, giggling as Arthur pinches his side.

“You’re mocking me,” Arthur accuses in mock-outrage. Merlin shakes his head.

“Am not,” he counters. “The biggest and the baddest and the bestest and …”

“Merlin,” Arthur interjects.

“The buffest and the bravest and the brilliantist.”

“Merlin,” Arthur interrupts again.

“Hmm?” Merlin hums against his chest.

“Shut up.” Merlin snorts, and Arthur cradles him closely, enjoying this new-found closeness, no more barriers between them.
Epilogue

“He’s an absolute idiot,” Morgana huffs at Merlin, pouring him tea a few days later. “Frankly I have no idea why you’d stay with such a total moron. But you’re a doctor, so you’ve taken some kind of Hippocratic oath to do charity work, right?” Arthur smiles at Merlin across the table, where Leon is wincing behind his mug, and Merlin can’t help but grin back broadly, truly happy to be part of Arthur’s family at last.

“That’s not really how the Hippocratic oath works, actually,” Merlin replies neutrally. “Dating Arthur is simply a poor life choice on my behalf. Although not being able to hurt him for being a bastard is part of my oath, alas; its first order is to do no harm.”

“That’s alright, I can hurt him for you,” Morgana offers blithely, whacking Arthur round the head with the tea cosy. Arthur uses a cushion to defend himself, and Leon and Merlin catch each other’s eye and snort, privately enjoying the antics of their sibling fiancés. Then Morgana goes and ruins it, flopping down on the couch beside her big brother. “You know now you’re engaged, dad’s going to start nagging you about providing an heir again? Even more so now that Gwen’s pregnant. How’s that going to work with you guys?” Arthur flinches a little, still raw from the news that Gwen is expecting Lance’s baby. What should have been their baby. What should have been their baby.

“They don’t need to worry about that yet,” Leon intervenes, alert, as ever, to his future wife’s uncanny ability to accidentally throw grenades into people’s relationships.

“We definitely want them,” Merlin says, looking at Arthur for reassurance, smiling his full, loving smile. The clouds are chased away, and Arthur relaxes, grinning back.

“Merlin’s after three,” he says drily.

“Brave man,” Leon comments, “bringing all those mini Pendragons into the world. I’ve limited Morgana to one. God forbid it’s a girl.”

“Oh hush, we’re having five. How are you going to do it?” she persists. Arthur swats her nose with a coaster.

“We haven’t got a blueprint yet, harpy,” he chides her. “Surrogacy, I guess? Seems to be the route gay guys go down if they’re not adopting. I think I’d like the genetic link. So maybe, we find a surrogate, and then each have a child with that surrogate. Then we’ll both be biological parents, and our kids will be biological siblings.” He shrugs, just thinking aloud really, and looks at Merlin to check he’s onboard; he’s giving Arthur the most shit-eating grin. He flicks his gaze to Morgana.

“What I find most annoying about your brother, is the way in which he somehow manages to constantly surpass my expectations,” he says ruefully, staring at Arthur with intent. “Brilliant, isn’t he? Thoughtful, loyal, brave.” His gaze is hungry, flickering across Arthur’s groin, and he shivers.

“Always been an over-achiever,” Leon nods.

“Runs in the family,” Morgana snarks coolly, reaching for a ginger biscuit. “Well good luck with father dearest. He’ll want to make sure your baby mama is from the right pedigree, of course. Not the kind of thing you used to have to worry about,” she muses thoughtlessly, and Arthur sees Merlin’s face fall a little.

“I’m not worried about it now,” he says, a little sharply. “The only thing about my situation that’s changed is that our children will be made in a lab somewhere, instead of in a bedroom. It won’t be
any the less precious to me because of it. The thought of raising a mini Merlin is the best thing in the world.” Morgana’s eyes widen when she realises how much she’s upset Arthur, and grabs his hand quickly.

“Of course it is,” she says gently. “I didn’t mean that you and Merlin wouldn’t … nothing. I meant nothing.” Arthur lets himself be placated with more tea and biscuits, and when he hazards a glance at Merlin it’s to find him flushed a soft, pleased pink, looking at Arthur like he’s the world.

*

Arthur pushes inside Merlin’s tight heat later, face pressed into his neck, chest to back, spooning, legs entwined and knees pulled up for a better angle. Merlin twists his head back to kiss Arthur, tongues tangling, groaning into Arthur’s mouth as his prostate is brushed again and again, heartbeat fluttering like a caged bird underneath Arthur’s firm fingers, curled around Merlin’s ribcage, his slender, strong, finely muscled body strung like a bow at Arthur’s command, pulled taught, back arched, on the brink of release. He comes silently, spurting long, pearly ropes across the sheets in front of him, and Arthur follows him over with a grunt, biting his ear as he coats his anal passage with seed. He stays inside him as he softens, both breathing deeply, both relishing this closeness. They kiss and stroke and whisper and bite until they’re hard again, and this time Merlin takes Arthur from behind, on his hands and knees, gripping Arthur’s hips firmly as he alternates his rhythm between leisurely pumping and rapid, hard pistoning, eyes closed as he claims the body beneath him, relishing the feeling of ownership, loving Arthur, loving Arthur’s easy submission. When he comes inside Arthur he peppers his back with kisses, and then pulls out, pushes Arthur onto his back, and crawls down his body to suck him to completion. They lie quietly together for hours, absorbing each other, simply being and loving, no words necessary.

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