The Chainmail Incident

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Summary

The Knights knew they should have stopped Gwaine from opening his big mouth, but they didn't. So, here they were with a defensive king and an idiotic manservant, both stubborn in their own right, acting like the other was in the wrong. Everyone blamed Gwaine wholeheartedly, but if Merlin would just take off the damn chainmail, they could all move on with their lives.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

They thought it would be hilarious. They really didn't think it would result in all of them having to go to five extra training sessions this week, and it really was Gwaine's fault, honestly.

It had started perfectly innocent. Merlin had been polishing Arthur's weapons in the armory, while the king was in a meeting with some statesmen. Joking and laughing amongst themselves, the knights were readying themselves for their daily training, putting on their chainmail and grabbing their weapons.

Gwaine, already fully dressed in his armor, plopped himself down next to Merlin, clapping his
shoulder. "Merlin, my friend." He began, kindly, but was interrupted.

"I don't have any food, Gwaine." The boy remarked with a grin, teasingly, not looking up from the sword and rag in his hands as he continued scrubbing.

Leon laughed from across the room, pulling on his glove. "I told you, Merlin. If you feed him once, he'll keep coming around."

Faking a laugh, mockingly, Gwaine turned back to his friend. "What I was going to say was you work too hard, Merlin. Does the princess ever give you a day off?"

Lifting his head to gaze across the room, several of the knights pausing to listen to Merlin's response, the boy tilted his head, sucking on his bottom lip. "Mmm, no. I'm pretty sure he thinks I have nothing better to do than to clean up after him."

The knights chuckled as Merlin returned to his scrubbing. Gwaine nudged his shoulder, playfully. They all had come to enjoy the serving boy's presence, though many of them still thought it was strange to see him without Arthur. Many were the times that they had been on patrol and seen him wondering the town on a mission for Gaius. Such instances had them biting their tongues to keep from playfully asking him if he were shirking his duties. They knew he was not to be bothered during those times. One distraction, Arthur had told all of them at one of the Round Table meetings, which Merlin was banished from for the next month, would lead his manservant to forget all of his duties before remembering them the moment the king returned. Though, Arthur commented pointedly, if the boy was seen even remotely near the tavern, he was to be hauled back to the cast immediately.

The sword debacle, as the Knights of the Round Table called it, which lead to the ban, resulted in Merlin getting a large welt on his head from the butt of the king's sword as Arthur shouted in surprise, startling him, as the servant called the sword from his belt with a spell. The servant misguided the speed of the sword and grabbed the edge as it knocked into his head, slicing his hand. "Ow." He had groaned then, cradling both his head and his hand, the wrist of his cut hand pressing against the blooming bump. The knights had shot up rushing toward him, but no one was faster than Arthur. "Idiot, what as that for?" The king shouted, angry, kicking the sword out of Merlin's reach.

Gripping the servant's forearm, he wrenched it away from his face. "I thought it would be funny." Merlin was, officially, banned from the room during knight meetings for the month, but the servant paid little attention to it, unless Arthur brought it up.

As they piled into the armory, Merlin sat by himself on a bench, working as he did now, to clean the king's weapons. Upon being questioned on why he was in the room, and not with Gaius, running errands, he shrugged, saying that Arthur was being more prattish than usual, causing the knights to melt into peels of laughter at the boy's annoyed expression.

"Really, Merlin. You do work too hard." Lancelot announced in response to Gwaine's comment, smiling at the boy as he buckled his sword belt.

"Yeah, I can't imagine washing Arthur's sweaty laundry." Elyan teased as he selected a sword, squeezing between some of the knights who were blocking the rack he wanted to peruse.

Percival laughed, tossing a gauntlet to a fellow knight. "You should be knighted for that alone." He almost wished hadn't said that upon seeing the glint in Gwaine's eyes.

"I wonder what you'd look like as a knight." Gwaine turned to Merlin, who, in response, had stood up, leaving behind his cloth, to replace the sword on Arthur's personal weapons rack. The long-
haired knight stood and followed him closely.

"No." Merlin turned around abruptly, mace in hand, the spiked ball dangling from the handle as he poked Gwaine's chest with it. "I'm not doing it."

"You're only saying that because it's me that wants you to do it. If it was Percival, you'd have no problem."

The quiet, yet unsurprised question of "Why does he always pick on me?" came from across the room near one of the columns.

"No, Arthur will have my head if he catches me messing around. He thinks I was ignoring my chores yesterday." Merlin grumbled, as he sat back down in his previous place, Gwaine following him and clasping his shoulders as he bent down to watch his fingers, his stomach pressing into his back.

"Why does he think that?" Leon asked kindly.

"Because I was ignoring my chores."

Refusing to be snubbed, Gwaine leaned over the boy, forcing his head to lower and gaining his attention once more. "Please, Merls. I'll get the chocolate from that tavern in Cenred's kingdom that you like."

Jumping off of him, the knight smiled, knowing he was about to get what he wanted. The other knights stared at the odd exchange, but then again, Gwaine and Merlin had a strange relationship that easily got both of them into trouble, especially with the king, who had developed a jealousy streak the first moment the Irishman had flirted with his servant.

Eyes glancing at the floor for a moment, he placed the mace and rag aside, extending his hand.

"Deal."

Well, it was good to know that if they ever needed to buy off Merlin, chocolate was an appropriate bartering tool.

"Deal." Gwaine smiled, taking the hand. They shook. The other knights could barely blink before Gwaine was undressing himself, pulling his chainmail off and unbuckling his belt as Merin stood.

Gently as he could, the long-haired knight pulled the chainmail down the boy's body. From within the mess of metal, Merlin's muffled voice could barely be heard, his arms suddenly popping through the sleeves. "-Is heavy."

Head through the appropriate hole, hair sticking up in every way possible, Merlin grinned, seemingly laughing at an inside joke, the metal clicking as it settled around his waist.

"Here, let me put on the belt." Gwaine took his belt, which he had set on the bench, lifted it above the boy's head and strung it around his waist. Evidently, he tugged it with too much force because Merlin stumbled forward a few steps.

"Don't kill him." Leon commanded, everyone realizing out silent the room had gone, except for the two people who should have noticed. Every occupant of the room had gone silent, stopping their chatter and play fighting as they watched Gwaine transform Merlin.

"Wait." Gwaine put up a hand after he buckled the belt, seemingly having forgotten that there were
others in the room besides him and the serving boy. He dashed into the side room. Upon his return, he carried one of the knights' capes. With care, he clasped it around Merlin's neck, smoothing out the shoulders. "Perfect." He breathed, looking over his work as he took a step back.

He glanced at the room. "Well, what do you guys think?"

The knights stared at Merlin. His skin seemed paler against the bright red. In the large amount of fabric and metal, he looked so much younger than he was. He was regal and noble, perhaps more than any of them were.

"You look just like a knight." Percival was the first to speak, his chest tightening, not allowing any trace of fear to marre his face.

Merlin laughed, his head tilted up. "I hope so. Hey," A mischievous expression crossed his face, relieving the knights. "Want to play a trick on Arthur?"

They still insisted the five extra training sessions were Gwaine's fault, but this, this, was all Merlin's doing and he had to suffer the consequences.

Arthur entered the training grounds, tightening his gauntlet, glancing about the field, watching his knights run their drills. His eyes jumping back to a knight that he had almost overlooked, he blinked, leaning over to Leon, Elyan, and Lancelot. "Who is that? And why is he wearing his cloak?"

The man in question, who seemed to be organizing the spare swords, had his back to the group that Arthur had walked up to. Gwaine and Percival were standing in front of the man, watching and giving commentary as he worked, smiling affectionately.

"I don't know, Sire." Leon answered, nervously.

Arthur turned to look at him. "To which question?"

"I don't know, Sire." He repeated, pointedly, enunciating his words.

Shaking his head, Arthur strode over the caped man, who dropped the three swords he was cradling in his arms on the grass with a clang as the king clapped him on the shoulder and turned him. By this time, every knight on the training field, no matter what they were doing, turned to watch the exchange, stopping their training.

They had to admit, Arthur's beyond surprised expression was worth all of the trouble Merlin and Gwaine had caused. His mouth hung open, and his eyes were wide as feasting plates. "Merlin!"

"Hi!" The boy chirped, happily. "What do you think?" He asked, spreading his arms, making the cape widen.

Gaping, Arthur took in his appearance. He looked pale, despite the warm sun on his face. So pale, ethereal, really. His hair and eyes seemed darker. It stuck up oddly, but endearingly, while his eyes flickered with laughter. His lips somehow looked more pouty, like he had been denied something he wanted, even though he smiled innocently.

He looked adorable, really, not at all intimidating, but there was something in the way he stood. His body straight and proud. Regal. Worthy of fighting, of being harmed for the sake of Camelot, for the sake of his king. Arthur swallowed, thickly.

He looked like a knight, and that's what scared him.
Oh, God, someone even put a sword on his hip.

Although, he had to admit that he did like that shade of red on Merlin.

Wait, go back. Not someone, it had to be - "Gwaine!" He shouted through clenched teeth, charging at the other man, balling his fists.

"How do you know it was me?" The long-haired knight asked, as he attempted to dodge the king's fists, but ended up falling backward as Arthur tackled him.

"You're the only one who's not wearing your chainmail!" He said, landing a punch to the other man's chest, sitting on top of him.

"Maybe I didn't feel like wearing it today!" Gwaine shouted back, blocking the next punch.

"It was him." Supplied Percival, who watched them wrestle with a blank expression on his face.

"Percival, you've betrayed me - ow!"

Arthur stood after socking Gwaine in the shoulder as hard as he could. The long-haired knight sat up and gave a blind smile to Merlin, who watched in worry. With the king's back to him, he took a hand full of grass and tossed it in his direction, Arthur either didn't see the action or had ignored it. Either way, it drew a laugh from the many onlookers.

Staring at Merlin once more, Arthur swallowed and took his servant's wrist in a tight grip. "Right." Without looking back, he tightened his grip, forcing Merlin to follow. Over his shoulder, he called to the whole of the training ground. "Thanks to our friend Gwaine, I'll be adding five extra training sessions for this week."

"But it's Wednesday." Elyan commented as the pair passed him, Arthur looking determined and Merlin looking confused, tugging on the king's hand as he dragged him.

"Exactly."

As Merlin and Arthur left the training ground, several groans were heard as well as heavy footsteps as Gwaine ran from several of the knights who charged at him. The long-haired knight only laughed as they chased him. "Worth it!" He screamed, clearly enjoying the chaos.

Arthur didn't say a word until they reached his chambers, the door shut and locked, no matter how hard Merlin tried to get him to talk. After locking the door, Arthur rested his head against it, organizing his thoughts.

"Arthur, I know I should have been doing my-"

"Take it off!"

Obviously, the organization method hadn't worked.

"Excuse me?" Merlin asked, surprised. His head jutting forward with the question.

Arthur gestured vaguely to Merlin's whole person, stuttering, anxious and eager. "Take - take it off! You can't wear that. You're not a knight." He placed his hands on his hips and raised his eyebrows, feigning confidence.

Tilting his head to the side, Merlin blinked slowly, mirroring his posture. "Is that it?"
"Yes...."

"You're such a bad liar."

"And you're a good one?"

"We're getting off topic, Arthur."

"No, we're right on topic!" The veins in his neck sticking out, he huffed, stomping over to his desk and throwing himself into the chair, arms crossed and foot pushing against the table to rock himself, only serving to make him look all the more disturbed.

"Arthur. Arthur." Merlin glided over to the desk, leaning over it with his hands flat on it. The king only looked in the opposite direction.

"I'm not speaking to you until you take it off."

"Arthur Pendragon, you're acting like a child."

"Well, Merlin of Ealdor, you better take off the knight's garb so I can stop." Blinking, Merlin stared at Arthur incredulously. He straightened, his head held high, an idea striking him. "Huh, putting on knight's clothes was all it took to make you stop talking to me?"

Merlin turned on his heel, practically skipping out of the room. He left the door open as he left, leaving it for the king to close.

Arthur set the chair on its four legs. Wait, what just happened?

"Merlin!"

The next round table meeting was awkward, to say the least.

While they resolved and covered many issues, most of the time was spent watching Arthur glare at Gwaine, who wore a wonderfully nasty grin and no chainmail, unlike the rest of the men seated at the table. His hands were laced together behind his head. "What are you looking at, princess?" He goaded, beaming with happiness because of the king's irritability.

"You, and your stupid face." The king replied, grudgingly, effectively halting the discussion on irrigation methods for the lower town.

Before Gwaine could respond, which the knights were thankful for, the doors opened and closed quickly as Merlin, still in chainmail, minus the cape and sword, which was a small victory, truly, entered the room. He gave a large smile.

"Sorry to interrupt, but, Arthur, I -"

"Lancelot, tell my manservant that I'm not talking to him."

The addressed knight blinked. "Um, alright." He turned his gaze to Merlin. "Arthur isn't talking to you."

Merlin, the little troublemaker, had the audacity to laugh. "I'm well aware. I just needed to know if he still wanted me to shine his boots today. I have to deliver some things for Gaius tonight, so I was
going to polish one pair and do the rest tomorrow."

Lancelot turned back to Arthur. "That's fine, but he can't wear the chainmail."

"He said that's fine, but you can't wear the chainmail."

This was ridiculous.

Merlin smirked, causing many of the knights to suddenly fear for his life. "Mmm, no, clotpole." He singsonged the last word. Arthur slapped his hand against the table. Although his words were directed at his manservant, he spoke to Lancelot.

"He doesn't respect me. That's what's wrong. I'm not going to even hear him until he calls me Sire."

The knights stared at him in disbelief. Lancelot shook his head slightly. "You can't be serious."

"Tell him." Arthur commanded, gesturing to the servant, who much like Gwaine, seemed to be suppressing boisterous laughter.

Sinking into his chair, his fingertips on his forehead and elbow on the table, Lancelot glanced at Merlin's amused face. "Arthur said you have to call him sire or he won't hear you."

Hands behind his back, innocent as a kitten, Merlin pointedly made eye contact with Arthur, leaning forward on the balls of his feet, bending at the waist slightly, articulating his words. "I'm not doing that, dollop-head."

Puffing up, as if he were going to reply himself, Arthur put his left elbow on the table, his forefinger pointing at his servant and his mouth forming a word as Lancelot, who sat to his imitated right, spoke.

"He said you're an idiot."

Momentarily distracted, his finger curling down, Arthur turned to his friend, his eyebrows scrunched together.

"No, he didn't."

Lancelot sat up straighter, gathering and straighten the papers in front of him. "Really? That's what I heard."

"Wha-"

"Oh, so you can hear me now?" Merlin taunted, standing at his full height, his heels coming together with a dull click. "Great, now you can hear me insult you: cabbage head, ass, turnip head, clotpole." With each insult, Merlin took one step back. He leaned forward, his expression morphing into one of anger, startling everyone in the room, especially the king, who masked his worry with tense posture. "Spoiled arrogant brat! " Those words struck Arthur as familiar, but he shoved that feeling aside when he couldn't quite place them. He pushed back from the table, roughly, standing at his full kingly height. Glaring daggers at his manservant, Arthur seethed, the deadly silence of the room, making his breathing seem louder. "That's it." He stormed around the table, knocking his chair back in haste. "Merlin, come here!"

Turning on his heel, Merlin skidded out of the room, almost falling on his arm as he turned into the corridor. He caught himself, pushing off the floor with his hand. Before he made it to the hallway, Arthur caught him around the waist and lifted him off his feet, crushing him to his chest and pinning
Eyes flashing gold and body squirming as Arthur carried him to one of the large windows, Merlin shouted, snapping his head to stare at the table. The knights assumed, so Arthur did this could throw the servant out of it, rather than corner him as the king intended. "Inbringe cume mec!"

The papers on the table flew up and burst into different directions in the air, scattering about the room. Arthur released his servant, who skittered away quickly, as a stack smacked him in the face. "Ow - Merlin!" He growled as he watched the other man run in the opposite direction of the hallway, toward the window. With a spell, it burst open.

Merlin inhaled a large breath, his eyes turning gold again. "Aithusa!" He yelled, picking up speed as he dashed toward the window, the knights gaping at him.

"Merlin, don't you dare-"

Before the king could finish his sentence, Merlin flung himself out the window.

Silence filled the room…until Gwaine whooped, clapping slowly.


The all of knights, except for Gwaine, were done. Officially. They needed this fight to be over now. So they did the only reasonable thing and cornered Merlin, who was still wearing Gwaine's damned armor, when he was mucking out the stables, which were completely clean by the way. They assumed Arthur had given him an overabundance of pointless chores just to annoy him into doing as he was told.

"Please, Merlin," Leon begged for all of them, standing at the front of the group. "Give Gwaine his armor back. Arthur will stop the extra training sessions."

"He added ten to next week." Elyan butted in from Leon's left.

"No, he can keep it." Gwaine grinned from his spot on the floor, leaning against the wall. "I don't need it." He stuck a piece of hay in his mouth.

"Shut up, Gwaine!" The knights glared at the long-haired knight, who tugged on the laces of his shirt, loosening it, and ignored them.

Rolling his eyes, Merlin sighed heavily. "I can't. He's being a prat. Plus, he hid my books so now I'm actually kind of angry." He shifted his shoulders, cracking his neck. "Don't tell Arthur, but the armor kind of hurts."

They had only one option: tell Arthur.

Well, they told him, and it made everything worse. Merlin had exploded several stacks of paper over the last few days. Arthur ignored his servant, which typically ended in a shouting match with said servant. One occurrence resulted in Merlin casting a spell that enlarged Arthur's tongue so he couldn't speak for the whole day.

Upon them telling Arthur, directly in front of Merlin, who wore an expression of betrayal, the king
lunged at his servant, taking hold of the metal shirt and yanking upward.

"Take it off!"

Merlin sent him reeling backward with a short spell.

"Never!"

He shouted over his shoulder, running straight into Gaius, who looked less than impressed. Reaching his hand up and smacking the back of Merlin's head, Gaius raised his eyebrow, making the boy grimace.

"Merlin, take off the damn armor. I've had enough of this."

Seemingly frozen in place, Merlin blinked. "Um...no?" He stated cautiously.

Gaius raised his other eyebrow, menacingly. "Excuse me, young man?"

Out of reasonable fear, Merlin ran away, not bothering to cast a spell, tripping over his feet as he went. "I'm sorry!"

Shaking his head, Gaius turned toward the king, who looked just as frustrated as the knights felt, except for Gwaine, of course, who happily munched on an apple while lying on his back in the middle of the hallway, seemingly recovering from some trip he hadn't disclosed until he came back with two wooden crates of chocolate that Merlin, despite the situation with the king, happily took into his room in Gaius' chambers.

"Here's what you do: take this," Gaius extracted a jar from the folds of his robe and placed it in Arthur's hands. "Smear it on every lock in your room, once he's in your room and lock every lock, even the windows, especially the windows. He won't be able to unlock them with magic. Don't come out until you resolve this." With a knowing smile, Gaius turned and left, acting like he hadn't just set a trap for the young man he thought of as his son.

Merlin had only come to pick up his king's laundry, not intending to speak to him or even look in his general direction, but Arthur took the chance and struck, shoving him aside and locking the doors. He had locked the windows in preparation, just in case his servant might come by, perchance.

Retaliating, Merlin muttered a spell as Arthur stepped back, smugly, arms crossed. He restated the spell with more force, extending his hand. He turned to the king. "What did you do?"

"I'll tell you when you take off the chainmail."

Sighing, Merlin deflated, rubbing a hand over his face before locking eyes with his friend. "Why are you acting like this?"

Arthur stuck out his chin defensively, placing his hands on his hips. "Because you're acting this." He gestured at Merlin's chest with one hand.

"Well, I'm acting like this because you're acting like that." Merlin announced, the metal sleeves clinking as he moved. He took a breath, calming himself. "Really, Arthur, tell me."

The king stared at Merlin, images, dark and gory, of Merlin, his sweet, gentle, opinionated, annoying, adorable servant, filling his head, memories of fallen men on the battlefield, replaced by
the man in front of him, bleeding and dying, pleading for him to help, to just hold him. For all his military prowess, royal blood, and love for his magician, all Arthur could do was hold him as he died. The worst part was there were no tears, no moans, no death grips, just a content smile as he faded, his eyes losing their luster, a final gasp rolling past his lips like a small wave on a soft shore. Such love from his eyes faded along with his spirit. Other times, he couldn't find him in such dreams. He'd shout Merlin's name, but would never receive an answer. He'd stumbled upon the body after the life had gone out of him, his eyes dull and glossy. He'd sit there, rocking Merlin until he awoke from his nightmare to an empty room, struggling against the need go crawl into Merlin's too-small-for-one-person bed. He'd fought with those images, both in his waking hours and in his dreams, for several days. "It's just - you - I - ugh."

A hand over his eyes, Arthur breathed in and out several times, feeling his heart beat faster. Letting his hand fall to his side, the other still on his hip, he swallowed, glancing about the room.

"Is it because it's Gwaine's?"

"What? No."

"Because I can wear yours if you want."

"No," Arthur was surprised that he himself laughed. "I don't want you to wear anyone's armor unless absolutely necessary. Though, with how much trouble you get into, you might as well stay in it, even when you sleep."

Merlin blinked once slowly, slightly confused, ignoring the shot at his ability to attract trouble, which really was Arthur's fault, no matter what the king said.

"What?"

"It's just...when I see you in," He waved his hand as he moved forward, taking Merlin's biceps. "This. I start imagining things. Bad things."

"Like what?"

He cleared his throat, embarrassed, his hands falling to the other man's wrists. "You...Dying on a battlefield in knight's garb." He didn't elaborate because he was telling the truth. He didn't dare speak those thoughts out loud, not yet.

Smiling in a sympathetic way, Merlin laughed kindheartedly, letting Arthur fiddle with his hands, tracing his long fingers with his own. "Arthur, I can't-" He cut himself off.

"Can't what? Die? Don't think you're immoral."

Merlin suddenly looked sad, so very sad, his mouth fading into a line and his eyes losing their brightness. Arthur couldn't quite understand why.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Arthur wanted to question him, but Merlin smiled, his face brightening, erasing the king's concern. "Can you help me?"

"Always, love." Taking the collar of the chainmail, Arthur stepped forward into Merlin's space and planted a soft kiss on his cheek before pulling up, tossing the shirt onto the table with a clatter. Gently, he smoothed his servant's shirt, his hands coming to rest on his waist. Lips quirking upward slightly, Arthur studied his Merlin's face, which watched him in turn. His fingers curling, running his hands up and down Merlin's back, Arthur chuckled. "I missed you."
Slinking his arms around the king’s chest, Merlin rested his cheek on Arthur's shoulder, causing the blonde to stick out his chest. "You've seen me every day." Merlin murmured, the king sensing his closed his eyes as his muffled voice buzzed against his neck.

"Mm," The king concurred, tilting his head to press a kiss to Merlin's nose. "But you wouldn't let me hold you," Arthur tightened his grip flirtatiously. "Or kiss you." He leaned in close, nosing his servant's jaw.

Opening his eyes with an exasperated roll, Merlin pretend to gag, letting his head. "Disgusting. You're too sweet."

"Oh, I'm too sweet?" Arthur smiled playfully. "Sir I-picked-these-flowers-for-you-and-I-have-to-give-them-to-you-right-now-in-front-of-all-of-your-knights."

Unabashed, Merlin grinned. "You like it."

"I love it." Arthur corrected, releasing his friend and launching himself at his bed. "Bedtime." Scooting backward, the king patted the right side of his bed, invitingly.

"I still have some things to do before-"

Voice lowered, Arthur tilted his chin down, his eyes never leaving Merlin's form. "It's bedtime."

"Ah, bedtime." The warlock crawled on the bed, plopping down next to his king. Both Arthur and Merlin didn't bother taking off their shoes for the time being. Nuzzling his friend's hair, Arthur breathed in his scent.

"Remind me to put you in a bath tomorrow."

"For someone who missed me, you're being very rude."

"You smell like Gwaine."

"Oh, you mean like ale?"

Arthur chuckled, pulling Merlin to rest his head on his chest. "Yes." His eyebrows scrunched together as he caught a second, more subtle, scent. "Is that... chocolate?"

Absentmindedly, Merlin nodded, fiddling with his sleeve. "Yeah, Gwaine bought some for me."

"Why?"

"He said he would get it if I put on the chainmail."

Sitting up, his head resting on his hand, Arthur stared. "You know I could get more chocolate for you than he ever could."

Merlin groaned, knowing Arthur wasn't really jealous, only wanting to show that he could give him whatever he wanted or needed, but the servant did want and need chocolate. "I know, Arthur." He patted his shoulder, comfortingly. He quickly changed the topic. "Also, stop abusing your knights. They were really sore today."

Almost making a dirty joke, almost, Arthur barked a laugh. "They can handle it." Reaching out, gently with his knuckles brushing against his friend's cheek so that his arm was across his body, the king watched Merlin with an adoring stare, his lips upturned as he traced his fingers down the servant's smooth neck. Scooting closer, he tucked his finger under the neckerchief he wore, smushed
by the armor he'd been wearing previously. Running his forefinger under the rim of the cloth from side to side, the blond, teasingly, tugged on it, pressing his lips under his jaw.

Merlin tilted his head away, releasing his breath so that his chest fell, his body shifting, relaxing into Arthur's careful hold. Catching sight of Arthur's dresser, he raised his head, face twisting in confusion, making the king pull back with a question forming on his lips. Merlin spoke before the king could.

"What's that on the top drawer?"

Raising his head as well, Arthur rested his chin on Merlin's shoulder. "What?"

"That glob on the lock?"

"Oh," The king settled back into his previous spot, murmuring against the skin there, making Merlin giggle as it tickled him. "It's how I locked the door...and the windows."

"And the drawers?"

Pushing Merlin's dark hair back, Arthur gave a sheepish smile. "I didn't know how you would try to leave, and, in my defense, Gaius told me to put it on every lock. I wasn't going to take a chance."

Shaking his head, Merlin took Arthur's hand, bringing it to his lips. "You're a prat, my king."

"You're an idiot, my love." He responded, their lips coming together in a sweet kiss. Arthur still tasted the chocolate on Merlin's pink lips.

Arthur had, somehow, taken on several cases of chocolate, per month, from the neighboring kingdoms as imports in exchange for wheat and salt. How he initiated that deal, the knights didn't know. When the council members questioned him on why they exchanged sweets in place of necessary food, the king simply responded that it was a matter of aiding the other kingdoms as well as keeping stability and productivity in the royal household of Camelot, the king's main priority. This statement was whispered in a hushed voice, even though Merlin was in the royal chambers, cleaning the room as retribution for being disobedient to his king when not listening to his orders. Merlin glared at the teasing punishment, refusing to give Arthur the satisfaction of irritating him. Besides, Arthur defended himself to his counsel, most of the chocolate would go to his people during feasting times or special occasions, be presented as gifts to visiting nobility, or as a peace offering, while the single case that disappeared without much ado from the stores would somehow find itself in the royal chambers, for the king's manservant to munch on. But, the council didn't need to know about that last part.

The Knights were happy to have their king and their king-protector, a title that Arthur detested, back in their normal habits, routines, and exchanges. They knew now, if they could help it, not to let Gwaine and Merlin do as they pleased. They were handfuls, in different ways and individually, but when together they turned into a complete and total mess of trouble for the Knights of the Round Table and the King of Camelot. Luckily, the king canceled those extra practices in favor of coddling his servant by following Merlin around the lower towns as he delivered potions for Gaius, pride in his kingly eyes and watching for any sign of an attempt to run off into the forest to go who knows where without a knightly escort.

Speaking of....

Stomping into the sunny training grounds, Merlin's angered look turned absolutely sour as he came to a stop next to Arthur. "You told the guards that I'm not allowed out of the castle without an
escort?" He demanded, crossing his arms.

"No," Arthur commented, not looking up from the sword rack, examining the blades. "I told them you were to be accompanied in the castle as well as escorted whenever you wish to go into the towns and forest." He tsked, his hand on one of the gold painted hilts as he pulled one up out of the holder. "I'll have to correct them I suppose." Finally looking up, he grinned confidently, his free hand squeezing Merlin's shoulder. "Thank you for telling me."

"Arthur."

"Oh, also," Arthur grinned maliciously. "I've implemented a curfew, just for you."

"Arthur!"

The knights had to admit that sometimes Arthur was just begging for a fight between his official unofficial consort and himself.

End Notes

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