The One About Merlin's New Coat
by reges_criniti

Summary

Post 4x13; Arthur gives Merlin his new coat.

Notes

Merlin's new coronation coat gives me so many feelings. Insomnia due to drinking coffee too late at night filled my mind with thoughts of the coat's backstory and this braincrack grew from there.

On the eve of Gwen's coronation, Arthur calls Merlin into his chamber.

Merlin knocks but doesn't wait for the booming voice within to grant him permission to enter; he simply does, calling out to Arthur as the door falls closed behind him. "Did you need something, sire?" Merlin asks, hands clasped behind his back, waiting for Arthur to turn and acknowledge his presence.

"Ah, yes." Arthur shuffles some papers to the side before he stands and moves from behind his desk.

Merlin's heart tugs when he sees yet another parcel in Arthur's outstretched arms and he already beings to dread the trek he will have to make across the castle to deliver it to Gwen. He's lost count of the number of gifts he's delivered and bestowed upon the future queen- trinkets and baubles, strings of pearls and gems of every size and color, new shoes and rich furs, acres of fresh bouquets of flowers, and yards and yards of silk and lace, seemingly enough to bedeck every wall in the castle. Gwen is fair and gentle and beautiful and will make the best queen Camelot has ever seen-
it's only fitting that her new possessions gifted by her doting husband reflect that.

But nonetheless, it's late and cold and Merlin simply has no energy left. After attending Arthur, mucking out the stables, standing through a council meeting, taking on Gaius' deliveries and workload while the old man recovers, all Merlin wants to do is lie down and sleep. So when Arthur thrusts the parcel at him, face somber and serious, Merlin takes it apprehensively, fatigue drawing a frown down across his brow.

He weighs it in his hands and gives it a squeeze just to hear the satisfying crinkle of the crisp parchment wrapping. He waits for Arthur to give him instructions to deliver it to his new bride and when none comes, when Arthur only leans towards him with apprehension in his eyes, Merlin clears his throat and addresses his king.

"Sire?" he asks, glancing down at lumpy bundle in his hands. "What am I to do with this?"

"Really Merlin," Arthur mocks, "I would have thought that even an idiot like you would know what to do when someone gives you a gift."

"A gift?" Merlin repeats, and it's then that he notices an M written in the corner in Arthur's familiar tight, tidy scrawl.

"Yes, Merlin. You know, a gift? Surely you've heard of those before?" Arthur huffs and crosses his arms across his chest. "Well, if you don't want it-"

"No!" Merlin holds the parcel- his gift- tighter and draws it away from Arthur, as if the other man might make good on his words to take it away. "I wasn't….it's just that…" Merlin stops and starts until he sets his jaw, eyes fixed on the package whose wrapping, thanks to his vice-like grip, is now deeply creased and wrinkled.

Arthur braces his hand on the hilt of Excalibur, rocking back on his heels as Merlin's long, delicate fingers set to work untying the twine securing the bundle. The gasp Merlin makes as the coat unfurls in his hands is small, yet it seems to fill the room, echoing off the stone walls, making Arthur's heart hammer in his ears.

"Arthur," he breathes, fingers stroking the rich, red velvet. And it's not just red, it's Pendragon red. Arthur's red. The only shade he would ever dream of wearing.

"Do you like it?" Arthur asks, voice small and quiet and edged an apprehension.

"Arthur it's...beautiful," Merlin says at last, cradling it to his chest.

A smile breaks out on Arthur's face then, and Merlin's eyes shine with unbridled joy and tenderness at this man he loves, at this king who would charge in to battle without pause but who is shy and gentle and bashful when giving Merlin the finest livery he's ever owned.

"Well, try it on."

Merlin scrambles to shed the thin, worn brown leather of the coat he's worn day after day for longer than he cares to think, lets it mindlessly fall to a heap on the floor at his feet as he reverently slips his arms through these new lush red sleeves, expertly quilted by a steady hand. Merlin beams in delight, looking down to where it falls just above his knees, the coat cut and tailored so perfectly that it already feels like a second skin. But a better skin; a stronger, sturdier, more exquisite skin.

Arthur steps forward and tugs at the collar until it sits properly against Merlin's neck. He worries the fabric, smooths out the shoulders and tugs at the laces until his fingers tangle in the leather
cord; tugs again until Merlin's just a breath away.

"Yes," Arthur whispers, "beautiful indeed."

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