This Twisted Little Game

by reges_criniti

Summary

Mordred could have it all- could have Arthur's future written in blood and bound by destiny, but he could never have this.

Notes

Post 5x02. Because let's be honest there was a lot of eyefucking going on and tension so thick you could cut it with a knife, spread it on a bagel, and eat it up for breakfast. Mmm, yes.

Merlin's played the bumbling manservant for so long, it's almost easier to keep up the ruse than let slip how much he really knows, how much he really sees. Like how he notices the way Arthur's gaze lingers a little too long upon the young knight, notices the way his pupils dilate when Mordred turns his full attention to the king.

So, no, he can't in all good faith say that he's surprised when he walks in to Arthur's chamber later that night and sees them together, their flushed and bare bodies a stark contrast to the lush red bedspread beneath them.

And curse them if neither has the decency to even look mildly scandalized as the door latched closed with an echoing snick.

Instead, Mordred's lips pull off Arthur's flesh with a lazy, wet pop and Arthur's whole body arches
with frustration. "It would seem we have company, sire," Mordred drawls, eyelashes fluttering under heavy lids.

"Merlin," Arthur growls, barely bothering to spare a glance at his manservant before his fingers are tangling in Mordred's curly locks, guiding him back down until the newly made knight resumes lavishing the kings body with lips and teeth and tongue.

He watches the pair and it's almost like watching night and day come together and create sunset, a blaze of light and dark and heat that draws the eyes and leaves you breathless. Arthur, with golden limbs and bulging muscles, straining to keep control, a thin sheen of sweat dotted across the King's brow making the ends of his fringe damp and curl around his forehead. And then above, Mordred surprisingly small and almost frail, a mix of soft, boyish curves and sharp, birdlike angles that had gone unnoticed under the multitude of layers that protected him in the North, or hidden beneath his shiny new chain-mail that protects him now.

Arousal curls low in Merlin's stomach, making his heartbeat pound in his ears as he watches this man who is so much his equal it's like gazing in to a twisted looking glass, one where reality is distorted and fractured, creating a whole new image that's new and slightly terrifying.

He can't help the little flare of jealousy at that because in this twisted reality, Mordred has what Merlin never will; recognition. Merlin may quip with his king and call him stupid and use sarcasm to hide the truth so that when he hints at how many times he's saved Arthur's life, all he's rewarded with is a put-upon sigh and a "don't be stupid Merlin" and an ever-ready eye roll. Nearly ten years, and that's all it's ever been. Don't be stupid Merlin.

And maybe the Druid's new red cape adorned with the crest of Camelot should stir up some glimmer hope within Merlin's soul because with the simple tap of a sword, Arthur has accepted magic. And yes, maybe that acceptance is shrouded in lies and deceit, but nonetheless, magic has it's place among the Round Table, and Merlin can't help but be envious at how easily the younger man breezed in and claimed what Merlin has been working towards for years now.

Merlin knows he should turn and leave, run as far away from this tableau before it permanently burns itself into the back of his eyelids, imprints in to his memory, but a strange kind of rage swells and mixes with the shocking arousal of it all until his body is thrumming, trapping him where he stands.

"Are you just going to stand there, Merlin?" Arthur asks, haughty as ever, as if this is something normal, quotidian, hands busy along Mordred's slender body.

The look Arthur directs at him just then, as Mordred grunts and spasms is enough to clear the haze from Merlin's mind, set his feet and fingers in motion so that by the time he reaches the downy island that is Arthur's stately bed, all it takes is one more hazy-lidded gaze from his king before his resolve snaps and then-

Then it's familiar and easy, uncomplicated flesh against flesh.

He doesn't say anything, but then again they never do. This thing they have between them has never been acknowledge, at least not verbally. There was a time, all those years ago when it was tender and new, when this push-pull between them sent hearts racing and seemed both thrilling and dangerous. But even then, the bright blushes and nervous coughs spoke more than their halted, bumbling attempt at words ever did. And now, it's too late, the time for words has passed. A pointed look, a lingering touch- it's a language all it's own, secret and known only to them. At the end of the day, falling in to bed together feels as easy, as natural as breathing. And if the unspoken-ness of it all leaves Merlin a little bit heartbroken, leaves him yearning for more, well, he doesn't
say anything. Not when Arthur's happiness is on the line.

So they don't talk and when he tries, the words get caught, jumbled and mashed and all together too big to be able to vocalize. "Mine," he pants into Arthur's sweat-slick skin, over and over like a mantra.

It's both too much and not enough, and with every breath he takes, Merlin wills his king to understand. Mordred could have it all- could have Arthur's future written in blood and bound by destiny, but he could never have this. Because this- the taste of Arthur's skin on his lips, the heat of Arthur's breath panting on his neck, the heft of him warm and velvety in his palm - that all belonged to Merlin.

When it's over, there's no nervous glances or awkward farewells. Arthur falls into the easy pattern of when it's just the two of them. His lips drag across Merlin's shoulders as their limbs untangle, stiff and loose at the same time. Arthur sprawls across the bed, spread eagle, open and unashamed, looking for all the world like a triumphant conqueror returning home from battle.

Merlin watches the younger man dress, and when Mordred finally notices his gaze, he straightens, bringing himself to his full height, every inch the knight that Arthur sees, before elegantly sweeping down in a low bow, head bent, arms open wide in his supplication. He lifts his head after a beat, a smirk on his lips, a fire in his eyes, and Merlin knows in that moment- the realization like a punch in the gut that leaves him struggling for breath- that this genuflection isn't a sign of acceptance or submission, but a challenge, an acknowledgement that Merlin has won.

For now.

Merlin's the first to look away and feels the fool for it, focusing instead on counting the errant freckles on Arthur's sun-kissed skin. When he looks up again, the Druid is gone, slipped from the room with a stealth that makes Merlin's hairs stand on end.

He doesn't know how this game started, or how he got sucked in to the middle of it, but the thought of losing fills him with dread. So as his king shifts in his sleep, drawing them closer together, Merlin lets himself play the fool - he's had enough practice at it after all- and lets himself believe that whatever the cost, he's strong enough, determined enough to win because if not…

Merlin shuts his eyes, presses his nose to Arthur's chest and breathes him in until he's full of it, until there's no space left unfilled, no more room for Merlin left in his own body; until every nook and cranny is all Arthur; everything, Arthur; always, Arthur.

It becomes easier, then, alone in the dark, Arthur a steady, solid presence under him, his sleepy breaths the only sound to soften the oppressive quiet of the room, to shut out the alternative to this twisted little game.

But there isn't one, not really. Not when the stakes are simply too high to lose.

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