Rowing, Winning, and Gossip

by Moonbeam (luvsbitca)

Summary

Crown Prince Arthur is rowing for Camelot. Merlin Emrys is at his fourth Olympics swimming for Great Britain. They are about to meet – what comes next will be the most interesting part of the Games for both of them.

Written for the merlinolympics at LJ.

Notes

Disclaimer – I own nothing, Merlin and the Olympics are well beyond my scope.

This is the story I started to write for the merlinolympics challenge. I was thinking about what to write and I thought Arthur's still a prince and Merlin's English. But then how to get them to flirt - and decided it would be awesome to have Merlin basically dragging Arthur to
lots of events and knowing everyone from all of the countries. Then I contemplated what would they do while watching the other events and GOSSIP – from there it made complete sense to just fill the story will almost all of my ships – I have a lot of them. Then it got bigger and I ran out of time to get it finished for my posting date. Mainly because Sherlock just usurped a chapter. Now it's much longer than intended – not quite finished but almost there so you should get a new chapter every day.

I have fiddled with a few times of official race times to make the story work. I'll wave my artistic license flag now.

Also, some of the chapters are written like newspaper articles – my original intention was to have one between each chapter and then this got bigger than intended and they are only here and there now. I was also deluded for a few days that I might create images for the newspaper articles – I have been informed I try to jam too much in. But since next week is Children's Book Week simply posting a story is insanity.

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes
Prince Rowing For Camelot

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by Moonbeam

/// Prince Rowing For Camelot ///

Prince Rowing For Camelot

Crown Prince Arthur Pendragon has been selected for the Camelot Men's Eight Rowing team. Prince Arthur made a name for himself at the 2012 London Olympic Games when he led the Rowing Eight to gold against Germany.

His team going into the Rio 2016 Olympics will be long time cox of the team Leon Knight. Prince Arthur will be the team's stroke, position seven will be filled by Gwaine Chevalier – one of only two other members that also rowed in London. The new members of the team making up the engine room will be Elyan Leodegrance, Percival Vitez, Oswald Ritari, and Pellinore Ritter. Rounding out the team is the bow-team of Lancelot du Lac and Kay Ridire, Lancelot the last member of the team from 2012, and Kay being the youngest member of the team at only twenty.

When asked for comment, Prince Arthur said:

"This team has been working hard in the four years since London. While it was hard to lose Bors, Tristan, Owain, Geraint, and Gareth, this team has been rowing together since 2013 and while we know that there is more at stake here, at the Olympics, than anywhere else we also believe in our ability to take home a gold medal. That is our aim; we will not be satisfied with anything else. But the same can be said for the English, Dutch, and German teams and we know how hard they are going to be to beat. Every country that puts a boat in the water is here to win. If at the end of the day we nine can look at one another and know we did everything we can, that we did Camelot proud, there is nothing more that we can ask of ourselves."

Prince Arthur's team, affectionately referred to as the Knights of Camelot, won at the 2015 World Rowing Championships in France, and came second to Australia in the 2014 World Rowing Championships in Netherlands.

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Opening Ceremony

Chapter Notes

I am so overtired, I can't even tell you. And the stupid people I work with are just horrible but here is chapter two...enjoy :)

/// Opening Ceremony \\

Arthur rolled his shoulders.

"You'd think," Gwaine said, slapping Arthur on the back, "that as a Prince and all, you wouldn't be nervous about this."

"I'm not nervous about tonight."

"Then what are you worrying about?" Lancelot asked.

"I'm thinking about the heats," Arthur said.

Gwaine groaned and almost threw himself at Gwen where she was standing next to Lancelot. She laughed at him and pushed him away.

"It's three days away," Gwaine said. "And he's going to be a nightmare until after day eight."

Arthur gave him a look, Gwaine didn't react.

"It's not really about the rowing," Morgana said, walking over to them and nudging Arthur with her hip.

"Shut up, Morgana."

"Camelot," one of the Brazilian officials yelled. "You're next."

Arthur and Morgana stepped to the front of the athletes – this was what he hated. He and Morgana were not here because they were royalty; they were here because they had been working for this since they had been little. Yet still, they were singled out, they were separated from the rest of their teammates and told to stand at the front. He had had to demand that his father not place any pressure on the Camelot Olympic Committee to make him the flag bearer like he had tried to do in London. Arthur wanted to be one of the many but his father assured him that he could not be allowed to do that. Arthur remembered wistfully that Zara Phillips had been allowed to fade into the Great Britain team but Uther had never liked to be compared to a nation that had lost their regal power to a parliament.

"It's okay," Morgana told him quietly. "They do understand."

Arthur nodded. "That doesn't make it better."

"At least you're not Gwen," Morgana said, nodding at Gwen in front of them who was being handed the Camelot flag.
"Only because I threatened to publically refuse the honour if Uther pushed it again," Arthur said, eternally grateful that it was Gwen there. It was her first Olympics – the first time rugby had been included – but her amazing achievements and the fact she was the most loved athlete in Camelot had made her appointment universally approved.

"Are you going to let him ruin this?" Morgana asked.

Arthur shook himself off and smiled at her. "We're finally here together."

She pushed him away and pulled out her phone. "Smile."

Arthur did and she snapped a photo.

"Now we are going to go out there and have some fun."

He nodded. Arthur's eyes were glued to the back of Gwen's head, he could see her hands shaking around the flagpole, and he smiled – he had earned this, and Uther had no power over this, so he stepped out into the arena and felt that he had left Prince Arthur behind and was simply Arthur for the first time in weeks. He loved competing, but he hated the weeks that led up to it where he seemed to do nothing but give interviews about being royalty and representing his country at the Olympics. He had never been so thankful that their coach, Kilgharrah, was completely unfazed by Uther, the monarchy, and...everything that didn't happen in a boat really.

He heard the roar of support for them and beamed, waving at the cameras, and the crowd. He could feel the camera focussing on him but he ignored it – he had no one at home to wave to, and his father certainly wouldn't appreciate it. He felt Morgana wave directly at the camera and then pull him in, he smiled down into the lens and she turned to press a wet kiss to his cheek. He couldn't resist rolling his eyes and waving at the camera.

They continued around the stage and then into their spot on the floor – Arthur and Morgana encouraged over to plant the seeds as soon as they were standing in the athletes' section. Arthur smiled at the cameras as he pushed the seed in, Morgana blowing the camera a kiss as she did. Then they floated back to the middle of the Camelot team and got lost for the rest of the opening ceremony.

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Merlin Emrys, the elder statesman of the Great Britain Olympic swimming team was announced today as the flag bearer for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

At this morning's special press conference where the uniforms for the Olympic games were unveiled, Emrys was announced as the flag bearer – it came as no surprise to those in the know as the announcement was touted by most of the Olympic commentators in the run up to today's press conference.

Emrys competed in his first Olympics at 2004 games in Athens, and took two silver, one in his favoured event – the 1500m and one in the 400m, along with a bronze in the 400m individual medley. Since Athens, despite alleged pressure to limit his events to distance swimming, Emrys has won silver in the 400m individual medley at Beijing, topping it with gold in London. He also took the gold at both Olympics in the 400m and the 1500m – making him only the fourth person to win back to back in the long distance swim at two Olympics. If he can take gold in the 1500m in Rio he will be the first person to win three consecutive gold medals in the race.

There has been much speculation, given the conflicting times for the two 400m competitions whether Emrys would be competing this time around. He has qualified for both events but there has been no further announcement from Gaius Far, head of the Olympic swimming team, about their plans.

When asked at the press conference about the honour of being the Olympic flag bearer, Emrys responded in his usual style with a quick smile.

"My mum is very proud," the Olympian said. "And Ailsa of course, it's a great honour and I am looking forward to having the opportunity not just to represent my country at the Games but also to take the mantle as captain of the team and to help out some of our younger competitors – including Mordred Magia who is the youngest member of the great British swimming team."

When asked about his plans for competition clash he was much less forthcoming.

"I can't really comment on that, it's a decision that is really out of my hands. I'm always hopeful to swim in all three of my events but if I can't then that's a conversation that I'll need to be having with Gaius."
Winning

Saturday 6th August at 11am – Warm-up

Merlin smiled at Gaius.

Gaius lifted one eyebrow at the younger man – displeasure obvious on his face.

"It's going to be fine; so long as I qualify for both events I'm going to be okay. They've moved the finals over two hours apart."

"You are not, in fact, magical Merlin – you are not going to be able to recover in ninety minutes from a 400m event."

"We've had this conversation seven times, Gaius," Merlin told him. "I'm going to be just fine."

Gaius' eyebrow rose even higher, more disapproving. "Get in the pool."

Merlin nodded, throwing Gaius a salute, and then walked over to the warm up pool. He smiled at Phelps as he passed the other man, and slipped into the water. He knew Gaius was right and there was every possibility that he would regret every decision he had ever made when he finished the two finals but he had been practising this schedule from the moment they had announced the change. They were both distance events and he knew that almost every athlete who understood what he was doing would think he was insane.

He believed he could do it though.

Saturday 6th August at 1:02pm – Men's 400m Individual Medley – Heat 1

Merlin was not one of the athletes who wore headphones while he was getting ready for an event. He was listening for a specific voice – Ailsa, who he would be able to hear. He could always hear her over the din in the arena. Once he heard her he looked up and spotted her, and the sign she had obviously spent the whole night before creating for him. He lifted a hand, waving just for her when his name was announced and he didn't hear anyone but she and his mum.

He let out a deep breath and unzipped the tracksuit and moved to keep his muscles as warm as possible. He just wanted to be in the water – he felt nervous now, the moment he was on the starting block that would fall away but now keeping one eye on Ailsa was all that cleared his mind and she never stopped waving at him.

They were called to the start and Merlin pushed everything from his brain. All he needed to do was to get a good enough time to get him to the finals tonight.

He loved the distance swimming but there was a part of him that was only alive when he was doing this short, alternating type of race. Merlin dove into the water and the world completely disappeared – nothing in his mind but stroke, stroke, breathe, stroke, stroke…turn…lift…stroke. He was aware of the lanes only on turns, he wasn't pushing himself – he could tell his time was in the window that he wanted, but he couldn't see another swimmer that he was worried about. He turned for the last lap and allowed himself just a little out of his own world to look around him on the breath. He had a short lead on everyone so he dropped back down into the stroke and pushed until he hit the wall.
Merlin turned and pulled his goggles off, his eyes flicking over to Ailsa who was jumping up and down with glee. He let his eyes flick over to his mother to find her crying. He knew he'd done well when he saw those tears.

Saturday 6th August at 2:00pm – Men's 400m Freestyle, Heat 2

Merlin was tired, but he was through to the final in the 400m Individual Medley so he needed to just get through another four minutes of heat and then he could warm down, eat, have a nap, and get ready for the warm up for the finals.

He looked up when he heard Ailsa in the stands. He smiled at her, lifted a hand up at her, and then settled to keeping warm. He'd been told off at the last World Championships when he'd flat out waved up at her, but they’d talked about it and she knew exactly what he meant when he did that.

This was not his favourite event. He liked it, but it wasn't what he was 'magic' at like the 1500m, and it wasn't the one that he loved like the Individual Medley but this would have been the event he'd have dropped if he had needed to drop one. He suspected that was why Gaius had encouraged the Great British officials to lobby for a slight change in the timings for tonight. It still surprised him that it had worked but, given what the Americans got away with, it was nice all the same.

They were called up to the blocks and Merlin was pleased to let the world float away from him. He dove into the water and nothing mattered, his muscles weren't tired, his body forgot that it had already raced that day. There was nothing but the race and the stroke.

His hand slammed into the wall at the end of the race and his eyes immediately went up to the stands as he pulled off his goggles. He could feel the heaviness of his muscles now. Ailsa and his mum were waving at him excitedly and he waved up at her before he looked over at the time – it was a little slower than he was hoping but still where it needed to be. He looked around the pool and then started pulling himself out of the water. He needed to go through the media as quickly as possible so he could extend his warm down and sleeping time. He felt the adrenaline of the two wins, the two qualifying times, and now he needed to move into finals mode.

Saturday 6th August at 10:03pm – Men's 400m Individual Medley, Final

Merlin had slept, he'd eaten beforehand, the physios had worked on him, he'd warmed up again and he felt good. He knew he would have to fight to give both of his races his everything but this is the one he wanted. This is the one he desperately wanted the gold in. Ideally he wanted to leave with three golds but if he could only have one it would be in this race. He winked up at Ailsa who waved down at him madly with both arms, and then he focussed in front of him.

As he stepped up to the blocks he looked to the left and then the right. He liked the field and he felt confident as he slid into the water. He paced his race, pushed himself as far as he knew he could, and checked the competition only when he felt he absolutely had to. If he could he'd pretend there was no one else in the water but Gaius had been trying to beat that inclination out of him since he was eight.

He turned, slid into the freestyle stroke and kicked off hard from the wall, gliding under the water and then kicking up harder above and into his stroke. He was in front, he kept the pace in his head and lost himself in the stroke until the final turn, he looked again and could see fingers but nothing more so he set himself to pushing his muscles, reaching for the wall and the gold, and possibly a world record. Gaius had told him to be happy with a gold, after all, he had another competition, but when he was in the water, in a race, Gaius was the last thing on his mind.

Merlin slammed his hand into the wall, fingers pressed into the wet, firm surface and he smiled
below the water. He turned to the left and right, no one else there, so he took a deep breath in the moment before the Australian man in the next lane slammed into the wall himself. Merlin pulled himself above the water, looked to the Australian with a smile and then up at the stands. Ailsa was jumping up and down, red faced, and his mother was next to her screaming. He waved up at them and followed the other swimmers out of the water. He looked back at the time board and felt a thrill when he saw the official symbol next to his name – new world record, he checked the time, it was only 0.2 of a second but everything hundredth of a second was worth it.

He waved at the cameras and then turned and headed for the reporters, he spoke to each of them for a few moments as needed and then slipped out for the warm down. He would have to come out for the medal ceremony in the middle of his extended 'keep warm' but it was worth it. Gaius was standing on the other side of the door when he walked to the athletes' section.

"Straight to the warm down pool, then the physio."

Merlin nodded.

Gaius reached out and clapped him on the shoulder. "That was a stunning race."

Merlin smiled at him warmly. "Thanks, Gaius."

"Now get in the pool."

Saturday 6th August at 11:24pm – Men's 400m Freestyle, Final

Merlin hurt. He was tired, his body was feeling every single one of the strokes he had done in the three races today. But he could feel the adrenaline seeping into his body. He looked at his competitors before they walked out of the athletes' area and smiled. They were all fresher than he was, one...maybe two of them, might even be better than him, but he had things they didn't have and he didn't have another race until the end of the week and if he pushed himself until the point of exhaustion then he had plenty of time to recover. He knew for a fact that at least four of the other guys were racing again the next day.

He stripped off his tracksuit, motioned up to Ailsa, and then stepped up onto the starting blocks. He reached down, sliding his body into the right position and closed his eyes. There was nothing that could stop him but himself, so all he needed to do was ignore everything else but this moment, these four minutes that would feel like an eternity. He breathed with the starting officials words and then threw himself into the water, the cool liquid enveloping him.

He made his last turn, he could feel the water sliding off the Camelot swimmer next to him and pushed as hard as his legs would let him, kicking until his muscles ached, gliding along, he pressed on, his arms screaming at him, his legs protesting, and he pushed through, thought on the last lap of the 1500m and pushed. He wasn't sure who was ahead, it was too close for him to be able to work out even as his hand slapped into the wall. He reached out blindly for the bar under the starting blocks and pulled his body tiredly up above the water. He turned, made his eyes go to Ailsa before he turned to the official clock. He had known they weren't sure either about who had won. The results finally came up and Merlin slumped, it was only 0.04 between them but he'd done it – two gold medals.

He slowly made his way out of the pool, wanting nothing more than to slide onto the floor for a moment. He couldn't though, he turned around and caught his mother's eye – smiling and then headed for the cameras. He answered the same questions multiple times, everyone wanting a few words from the gold medallist, before he was able to slip back into the athletes' area. As soon as he opened the door he spotted his mother; Ailsa rushing over and throwing her arms around him. He
suddenly didn't feel tired at all.

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I know that I've taken, and will take, a few liberties with the fact that athletes get to watch other sports. Just go with me, it'll be more fun that way.

/// Relax \\ 

Arthur leaned back into his seat, disappointed for George. The swimmer was close; barely a finger between himself and Emrys from England but the Englishman had beaten him. He couldn't imagine that being beaten by the best pool distance swimmer since Kieran Perkins was much of a comfort when the other man had swam in another final ninety minutes before. Arthur's eyes trailed Merlin as the man stumbled a little sluggishly from the pool. He assumed it was a good thing that the 1500m wasn't on for several days.

"Okay," Arthur said, pulling his eyes back to Gwaine and Lancelot. "We've seen George race, let's get back to the village and training."

Gwaine groaned. "We've been here for less than two hours. We don't race for another two days; surely we can enjoy the swimming."

"We should be at the rowing," Arthur said, looking down at his phone. "If we get the same conditions as they are having now we could be picking up tips."

"Which we will get tonight from Kilgharrah," Lancelot said. "This is the only day we'll have to enjoy the other competition until after we have our final."

"We can enjoy the other competition when we have a gold medal," Arthur said.

"You need to learn how to relax," Elyan offered.

"I will relax when we win."

"No," Gwaine said. "You won't. I have never met another man who needed to get fucked like you do."

Arthur didn't even need to reach over and slap Gwaine on the back of the head – Percival did it for him.

"Gwaine," Percival said quietly. "You can stay; Arthur and I will go back."

"Thanks, Perc," Arthur said.

"You need to at least stay for the medal presentation," Gwaine said.

Lancelot's phone went off and he stood up immediately. "I'll see you at dinner."

Gwaine stood up as well. "Rugby!"
The whole rowing team stood up to follow Lancelot. Not even Arthur could argue about seeing Gwen's first time as an Olympian. They headed to the Rugby 7s arena where Gwen was captaining the Camelot team – as she had for the last six years of the International competition, leading the team to three world champion titles. This was her last competition, she planned to retire after the Olympics and Arthur still wondered if Lance would end up following her. As they walked into the stadium they were immediately ushered into seats and Lancelot disappeared to speak to a few of the other husbands, wives, and partners of the team before he sat down with his team.

Arthur made sure he sat on the edge of the row and pulled out his tablet – he pulled up the app for the Olympics and started watching the rowing. He'd been getting messages from his father about the conditions but he'd ignored them – thinking they would get back to the team room when George had raced. Though, since it was Gwaine who had promised him that, he should have known better. He hadn't been thinking about Gwen, and he should – she and Morgana had become friends through some pen pals scheme when they were children and then ended up meeting up when they were teenagers. She and Arthur had even shared their first kisses, and Morgana never let them forget it, so she had been in his life for a long time. He should have looked at her schedule but his first worry had been to ensure that his schedule was good, and that he would be able to go and see at least one of Morgana's field hockey matches. He would be able to see them if they made it to the medal matches – by then he would have finished his competition and it could be all about Morgana, but just in case they were knocked out he'd made sure he'd be at at least one.

He pulled up the live stream, sliding an earbud into his hidden ear and focussing on the screen. The conditions were choppy, too choppy; it was surprising that they hadn't called it. He could see whitecaps and he watched for another shot to see how the boats were moving for himself. He had downloaded more than one app – he liked to know what the commentators from other countries were saying and he knew that one of the 'Oarsome Foursome' would be commentating. The collective knowledge of the different commentators was a resource he was surprised more of the rowers didn't take advantage of.

Leon elbowed him gently and he looked up to see the team walking out, waving at the crowd. He cheered them on loudly, and then focussed back on the screen until the game actually started. His phone vibrated in his pocket and he ignored it, thinking it was his father, but then it went again – Uther would not deign to message more than once in a fifteen minute period, he would call. Arthur and Morgana had timed him once. He pulled out the phone, Morgana's name flashing at him. He sighed and pulled out his phone.

The conditions today will not be the conditions on your race day. Just enjoy the game!

Arthur! Don't ignore me.

Arthur tapped to start responding when the little dots appeared.

Yes, I know that it might be the same but you have all of tomorrow to worry about it.

Arthur sighed and kept the earbud in his ear but he turned his eyes to the game in front of him.

///
Crown Prince Arthur, is to be joined at this year's Rio 2016 Olympic Games, by his half-sister Lady Morgana Le Fay, who was announced as part of the lineup for the Camelot Aithusas field hockey team. Lady Morgana had been in contention for the team at the 2012 London games but didn't make the final team. Since then she has been a constant member of the Camelot team, and their leading scorer. She may face off against half-sister Morgause Le Fay, who is the Captain of the English team.

Lady Morgana was revealed to be the daughter of Camelot's King Uther Pendragon following her mother's death when she was only six years old. Since then she has been a constant companion to her brother and father at all royal events. Earlier this year she opened the Sessions of the Round Table at her father's side – the first time she has done so.

Although she did play briefly for the British team in 2010, as she was eligible due to her dual English and Camelot citizenship, she has played for Camelot since 2011. She maintains that she feels just as English as she is a Lady of Camelot but that she is a Princess of Camelot and she owes it to her people to represent them in all things, from diplomatic visits, to royal events, and on the hockey field.

Lady Morgana has not been crowned as a Princess of Camelot but there is speculation that the Royal Audience that is afforded to all members of the Camelot Olympic Team following the Games may be the opportunity that King Uther has been waiting for.
"Merlin," Freya said, letting herself into his rooms. "What are you doing?"

"Sleeping," Merlin mumbled, not opening his eyes.

"Are we going to go and see some competitions then?"

"I'm sleeping."

Freya poked him in the shoulder. "Come on, if we leave now we can go and see some shooting. I know how much you love to watch the Romanian shooter - Barnes."

Merlin groaned, he opened one eye and pulled his phone in front of his face – he had been asleep for a reasonable period of time but he could easily sleep some more…except, he did love to see Barnes shoot and he wanted to know if the Romanian was still making eyes at the slight American he'd been mooning over at London. He sighed and threw off the blankets.

"Breakfast."

"Breakfast," Freya agreed, painfully smug.

Merlin stumbled out of bed and pulled on a tracksuit – he'd showered this morning when he'd returned to his room and he couldn't smell himself, plus he knew he'd be back – needing to sleep again before long. The late races were annoying, he didn't like sleeping during the day like this but he had been practising the schedule for months – Ailsa hadn't quite known what to make of it but she'd been dealing with his weird schedules for years.

He followed Freya out of his rooms and towards the food area. The huge downside of his events being broken up so much was that he had days before he would swim again and as much as Gaius wanted him to keep training there were also much more important athletes who did have finals so he'd spend the next few days following the schedule they had already devised under the eagle eye of Alice. He walked into the large dining hall and headed straight for the food. He had his eye on the few sausages that were a couple of places in front of him – there were only three left but only two people before him. Then the blond standing in front of him took two and Merlin couldn't hold in the groan of disappointment. The other man turned around and looked at him.

"What's the problem?" the man asked.

"Nothing," Merlin said, shaking his head. "I was just hoping for one of those sausages.

The blond looked down at Merlin's piled high plate and frowned. "They'll have more out soon."

Merlin nodded. "I know, big night last night – never mind me."

"I know, I saw one of your medal swims."

Merlin smiled. "It's nice to be two-thirds of the way through already."

"Haven't started yet," the man said, Merlin felt like he knew him but he couldn't place the face. "Not until tomorrow."
"Ahh," Merlin said. "Nice to meet you, I'm Merlin."

The man smiled, almost like he was amused. "Arthur."

"Best of luck in your…"

"Rowing."

"Rowing heats."

"Thank you, Merlin, you're still not getting one of my sausages."

Merlin had to bite down on the desire to laugh. "You're a bit of a clotpole, aren't you?"

Arthur barked out a laugh like it caught him by surprise and then walked away.

Merlin turned around and walked back to Freya who was fairly vibrating where she was sitting. He put his tray down and looked over at her.

"Were you just having a moment with Arthur?" she hiss-whispered.

Merlin looked over at the other table where Arthur was sitting with a group of men, all looking back at him. He waved slowly at them and one of the men stood up, his hair magnificent even from this distance, and he strode across the eating area to slide into one of the seats around the table.

"Hello, Gwaine," Merlin said.

"Merlin."

"Oh…" Merlin said, his mind finally making the connection. "Prince Arthur."

"Yep," Freya said, slapping his arm. "Prince Arthur."

"I hear you have some time before your next race." Gwaine said.

"I hear you are rowing tomorrow," Merlin countered.

"I enjoy a good workout before I row," Gwaine said, winking at Freya after he smiled at Merlin.

"I know," Merlin said, picking up his fork and ignoring Gwaine. "Or have you forgotten you pulled this routine with me in London as well."

"It worked though."

"Yes," Merlin said, smiling fondly. "It's not going to work this time."

Gwaine shrugged and turned to Freya. "I came to talk to your friend anyway."

Freya laughed. "I'm a lesbian, thanks though."

Gwaine shrugged. "Oh well. Merlin, if you can make Arthur laugh like that again I will pay you money."

Merlin smiled, he looked over at Arthur who was staring at Gwaine's back, then his eyes flicking over to Merlin. "I'll think about it."
Personally, Merlin thought he would very much like to make Arthur smile again, and the upside of the Olympics was that he didn't need to worry about Ailsa finding out – what happened in the Village stayed in the Village.

"Come see us race tomorrow," Gwaine said.

"I'll think about it, I still do have a race to swim."

Gwaine shrugged. "You're totally going to win though."

"Thanks."

"Anytime."

Gwaine winked at them both in turn and then walked away from their table.

"Was he just pimping out a crown prince to you?"

"No, he was…I never know what Gwaine doing when it's not trying to sleep with someone."

"Is there any time when he'd not trying to sleep with someone?"

"It does seem to be his default setting," Merlin said. "But I've only seen him at some competitions, and you know how they are."

Freya smiled happily. "Yeah, I love competitions."

Merlin didn't say much in response, he knew very few athletes who didn't like that aspect of the competitions. Their lives were often so isolated it with nice to spend time with other people who were in the same situation as they were. Merlin and Freya finished their breakfast and headed out for one of the buses that would take them to the shooting complex. This was actually the best part of being in an Olympics, after the possibility of winning a medal, he loved watching the very best in the world doing what they were passionate about. He made a habit of trying to watch as many of the other disciplines as possible. He was lucky to only ever compete on, at most, three days out of the two week competition so he got to see more than a lot of other athletes.

They walked into the shooting arena and Merlin immediately looked around for the American gymnast, Rogers, that he could remember being almost glued to the Romanian shooter's side in London. He spotted the blond, slight and not wearing the USA colours, more tattooed than Merlin remembered, almost hiding behind another person and wondered where he was supposed to be – probably training.

Merlin and Freya settled in to watch the shooting, one eye on the Romanian – the other on the American.

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King Uther Not on Royal Visit

King Uther Not on Royal Visit

King Uther Pendragon of Camelot has been seen at many of the events at this year's Rio Olympic Games, unsurprising as the both of the King's children are competing at this year's Games.

He was at the first game for the Group A match between New Zealand and Camelot at the field hockey where Lady Morgana le Fay scored the winning goal. He is expected to move between the rowing and field hockey for the first week until the Men's Coxed Eight final where Crown Prince Arthur may win gold.

He is expected to be seen at Lagoa Stadium later today for the heats of his son's team. When asked if he was taking this opportunity for diplomatic networking, the King stared down the journalist and said that he was in Brazil "to see my children win gold. I am here as a father, not as a King."

Camelot go into the field hockey as a chance for the silver or bronze medal. They go into the Men's Coxed Eight as favourites for the gold.

///
Heat

Arthur wriggled his backside on the seat and breathed out deeply. He looked at Leon who nodded at him and flexed his fingers. Even Gwaine was silent behind him as they waited to start the race. The conditions were perfect, they were rowing against New Zealand, Brazil, and Switzerland but so long as they were in the top two they would be fine. Arthur knew they could be third as well, but he never entertained that as a possibility. Better that it be a pitiful consolation when they didn't achieve what they should have. Arthur had a feeling thoughts like that were the reason his teammates thought he was insane. But he didn't care.

Leon reached out and pressed his hand to Arthur's shoulder. "This is the part you have control over."

Arthur nodded.

"This is the part where we will win," Gwaine offered from behind him.

"Nine men working together," Leon said.

"Eight oars in the water," Arthur went on, voice loud enough to get to Lancelot.

"One line to cross," Lancelot called back, finishing their chant

"All boats at the line," the official said, checking each boat was ready before calling them to ready...set...the buzzer sounded and Leon called them forward. This was the moment when Arthur didn't have to worry, when the anxiety left and he could count on his ability, and his team to follow he and Leon.

The race felt longer than the few minutes it actually took, his muscles burning as they passed the 1500m mark but he pushed, pulling everything out of his team that he knew they had in them. Until they heard their final beat, the finish line sliding under their boat.

"Thank God," Gwaine said, slumping down into Arthur. "If we had have been in the Repêchage you would have been completely unbearable. Now we can relax."

"Now, we can get serious about gold," Arthur said, looking at Leon who rolled his eyes stoically.

"I need a drink," Gwaine said. "And perhaps to talk to the pretty blonde Australian guy...or the very cute Japanese lady."

"We need another choppy day," Arthur said. "We need to practise in those conditions – just in case."

"We just qualified, Arthur," Gwaine said, flicking Arthur with water. "We get to be happy today, tomorrow...no, the day after, you can start worrying."

"When I am your King," Arthur asked. "Would you have me wait until tomorrow...no, the day after, to act?"

"Yes!" his whole team said emphatically.
"Fine," Arthur said, planning on settling in his and Leon's room to plan for the day after. He knew their bodies did need a break but he had been taught from birth to push, always push.

They rowed their way off the water and climbed out of the boat. Arthur watched Gwaine looking around the crowd intently.

"Who are you looking for?" Arthur asked.

"Him," Gwaine said, pointing to the crowd. "The swimmer you were obviously flirting with yesterday."

"I wasn't flirting with Merlin."

Gwaine looked at him in judgement.

"Why not?" Lancelot asked.

"My love life is none of your business."

"He says like he has a love life," Gwaine said.

Percival looked at Arthur. "You're a Crown Prince, everyone thinks your love life is their business – at least we're your friends."

Arthur smiled. "He shouldn't be here – he hasn't finished competing."

"Merlin loves watching the Olympics – he loves watching sport in general," Gwaine said.

"You know him?" Arthur asked.

"I met him in London," Gwaine said. "But everyone knows Merlin – he's known for befriending everyone, and there is not a piece of Olympic gossip he doesn't know."

Arthur frowned.

Gwaine waved a hand. "He'd not a gossip; he just knows all of the gossip."

"Stop trying to help, Gwaine," Lancelot told him. "Let's go warm down so I can go and see the Rugby 7s – maybe Merlin will be there and Arthur can get to know him by himself."

Arthur shook his head not bothering to disabuse them of their ideas – he knew it wouldn't work. "Morgana's playing, I'm going to go and see her while I can."

Lancelot nodded.

///
Royal Sighting at Hockey

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

/// Royal Sighting at Hockey \\ 

Royal Sighting at Hockey

It was a royal affair at the field hockey game last night – King Uther and Crown Prince Arthur Pendragon were seen in the crowd at Lady Morgana's game where the Camelot Aithusas beat Argentina by a sound 3-1.

Photos below…

Chapter End Notes

I have no 'art'-artistic ability but imagine them sitting in the stands - Arthur in the Camelot tracksuit, Uther in an expensive suit. Both watching the game in a sea of very emphatic cheerers. With some security guys behind them. In my head it is very much a them in focus and the crowd around them a little blurry. Morgana down on the field - hair in a long braid down her back and vicious expression on her face as she takes a shot.
Merlin was eating by himself, he didn't mind, but he was surprised when all of a sudden bodies slid into three of the chairs at his table. He looked up to find Gwaine and Lancelot from the Camelot rowing team staring at him – along with a man build like the side of a house.

"Hi," Merlin said, frowning at them.

"Morning," the large man said, reaching a hand out to him. "I'm Percival."

"Merlin."

"Mind if we join you?" Gwaine asked.

"You already did," Merlin pointed out.

"Is it a problem?"

Merlin looked up and found Arthur standing next to him, holding a plate and staring at him. "No, no, sit down," he said.

Arthur smiled and sat next to Merlin. He gave Gwaine a look and then turned back to Welshman.

"Are you going out to watch anything today?" Merlin asked.

"We're still thinking about what to watch," Lancelot said.

"I'm going to the gymnastics," Merlin told him. "I have to see Natalia Romanov perform – there is a rumour this will be her last Olympics."

"Is she the redhead who looks like she wants to murder everyone?" Percival asked.

"Yep," Merlin responded. "She's the most terrifying woman I have ever known…hell, she's the most terrifying person I have ever met."

"She can't be that bad," Arthur said.

"Come with me and you'll see what I mean," Merlin offered.

Arthur thought about it for a moment. He wanted to, he had been attracted to Merlin from the moment he'd met him – and this was an opportunity to get to know him, and perhaps continue to get to know him better over the two weeks. But, he also knew he should be preparing…he had promised the team to hold off for a day though.

"Okay," Arthur said. "I'd like that."

Lancelot and Gwaine gaped at him.

"Excellent," Merlin said, focussing on his food.

Lancelot cocked an eyebrow at him but Arthur ignored them both to eat his breakfast. As soon as they were done, Merlin led Arthur to the gymnastics location. They walked mostly silently, but
neither felt any need to fill the silence.

"How do you know Romanov?" Arthur asked, as they settled into seats. Arthur allowed himself a moment to wonder if the cameras would find him and note that he wasn't sitting with the other Camelot athletes. Then he pushed the thought from his mind.

"I met her at the last Olympics," Merlin explained. "She is best friends with an American archer… they won't tell me the story of how they became so close. Anyway, Clint and I were playing a drinking game with his husband/coach/possible spy and—"

"Possible spy?"

"You have to see Phil, he's like a movie spy – I have only ever seen him smile once, he's the most stoic man alive."

"How does that make him a spy?"

Merlin smiled and shrugged. Arthur had to bite his lip at the expression – it wasn't much of an expression at all but he still had the urge to kiss it off Merlin's face. And he only had to wait another few days before he could ask to do it without guilt over a distracted focus. "You'll understand when you meet him."

"Will he be here?" Arthur asked.

Merlin's ears coloured. "Probably…maybe…but, we always catch up after the swimming is over and…well, I can see if they are here."

Arthur felt his chest tighten at the possibilities of what Merlin wasn't saying. He knew it was too fast, he knew that he should be more careful – especially in such a public place, but he couldn't convince himself that this was a bad idea.

"Or, you could just introduce me after the swimming and rowing is over," Arthur said quietly.

Merlin practically glowed at him at that. "Sure."

"Okay."

Merlin turned away and scanned the floor. "Umm, so Phil, Clint, and I were drinking – I think it was a drinking game of some kind. Clint and I were a little tipsy, Phil was not, and Natalia comes in – looks at us all, sits down, and drinks us under the table. I ended up sleeping in Michael Phelps room – he won't tell me what I did when I got there but I was wearing Natalia's costume and Spiderman face paint."

Arthur snorted in laughter and then flushed.

"Yeah, it was apparently a really good night and one day maybe someone will tell me about it."

Arthur nodded.

"That's her," Merlin said, pointing to a redhead gymnast in the Russian costume. "I think she's about to do the floor routine. She's also a master of krav-maga and I think she might secretly be a superhero."

Arthur wasn't sure what to make of that but he watched in gob-smacked amazement at the routine that occurred on the floor – he hadn't actually been aware that people could do that to their bodies.
Royal Gold Medal Hopes

The Camelot Aithusas have won against New Zealand in their most recent field hockey match. Lady Morgana le Fay scored one of their goals with Nimueh Sorcière scoring the other one. This has moved the Camelot Aithusas to the top of their pools and almost guarantees them a berth into the Quarter Finals unless there is a major upset in the game between Ireland and Argentina.

Lady Morgana one of the two royals competing at this year’s Olympics with her half-brother, Crown Prince Arthur Pendragon’s, coxed Men's Eight rowing team in the final on Saturday morning.

King Uther Pendragon said today that he had high hopes that both of his children will bring gold back home to Camelot.

It would certainly add something to the Prince's ruby encrusted crown to be worn with two Olympic gold medals. Prince Arthur won gold in London in the same event in which he is currently completing. This is Lady Morgana's first Olympic competition.

If Prince Arthur were to win gold he would be the first Prince, or member of a royal family, to achieve two gold medals – and only the second to win two medals of any colour. If Lady Morgana, and her team, takes gold she will be the fifth member of Royalty to do so, and make Camelot the only country to have two royal gold medallists.

///
Merlin walked down the line and frowned – they were completely out of sausages again. He didn't need them but he was carbo-loading and he needed a little something as a reward for eating so much pasta, rice, and potatoes. He left the line, waving his athlete's card at the sensor near the end of the buffet and then looked around – not sure where to sit. He was wondering if the Camelot rowing team were here – except he was really looking for a blond head and slightly crooked front teeth. It was ridiculous, he told himself, Arthur was a Prince…an honest to God, Prince who would be ruling a country one day. And Merlin had a crush on him.

"Merlin!"

Merlin turned around and tried to work out who had called him when he spotted the Winchester boys. He smiled at Dean who'd called out to him and walked over. He liked the Americans, they were closer than any two brothers he'd ever known, and they were always good value towards the end of a competition when the party started. Dean was a track cyclist and Sam was a water polo player. Merlin had never quite been able to work out how they had ended up in such different sports. There was another man sitting at the table, he looked half asleep but when he looked up Merlin was struck by how startlingly blue the man's eyes were. Then he recognised him – Russian, 10m diver, that looked like he was flying when he was in the air…by Merlin could not remember the other man's name.

"Merlin," Dean said, with a bright boyish smile. "Come sit."

Merlin did, and noticed that way that the Russian was watching Dean. Dean turned and smiled at the diver and their eyes caught, held, and Merlin felt like he was intruding just by watching. He turned back to Sam who rolled his eyes and smiled at Merlin.

"Congratulations on the gold," he said. "And don't mind them, I think Dean's in love."

Merlin looked at the two again and nodded. "It certainly looks like they are in their own world."

Someone pulled out the seat next to Merlin and everyone turned to look. Merlin's eyes caught sight of the red tracksuit, a bright gold dragon on a chest, and felt his stomach flip. He looked the rest of the way up and smiled brightly when he spotted Arthur.

"Hi, mind if I sit?" Arthur asked, looking straight at Merlin.

"Course," Sam said.

But Arthur waited until Merlin nodded before he slipped into the chair. Moments later half of the rest of the Camelot rowing team joined them and Merlin made introductions around the table when it became obvious that the Winchesters didn't know the Camelot team.

Then he turned to the last person at the table and Dean jumped in. "Castiel."

Castiel smiled at them all but didn't say much.

"What do you guys compete in?" Dean asked.

"Rowing," Lancelot offered. "And you?"
"Track cycling," Dean said. "And Castiel, the silent," Castiel frowned at Dean silently. "Is a diver."

Merlin was listening until he felt Arthur lean closer. "Missed out on the sausages again?"

Merlin rolled his eyes. "Yes."

"I got some."

Merlin turned to glare at him. "How?"

"I asked."

Merlin gaped at him. "Cabbage head."

Arthur laughed loudly, dragging all of the attention to them. Then he speared a sausage with his fork and flicked it onto Merlin's plate.

"I owe you twenty quid," Gwaine said, looking between Merlin and Arthur with something like glee.

"What's that for?" Arthur asked.

"You gave me a sausage," Merlin said dumbly, frown between his eyebrows.

Arthur shrugged. "I thought you might like it."

Merlin grinned broadly. "Thank you." He speared the sausage and took a happy bite out of it. "Gwaine said he'd give me money if I made you laugh again. Didn't think insulting you was the way to do it."

Arthur shook his head. "It's not – but who calls someone a cabbage head?"

Merlin grinned at him brightly. "Smart people who have to keep their naughty words to a minimum."

Dean slapped him on the shoulder. "You're a dork."

Merlin ignored him and asked the table. "What's everyone doing today?"

"We're practising this morning," Arthur said, "they had to shut down the stadium yesterday and we're hoping to get out there today."

"I'm going to the boxing," Merlin said. "My second cousin is competing."

"Not that tall, weird bloke," Dean said.

"Yeah, Sherlock."

"He's magnificent, I might come with you," Dean said. His eyes flicked to Castiel who cocked his head to the side.

"Yes, Dean," he said in a quiet voice with a soft Russian accent.

"Cool. Shame you guys can't come," he said to Arthur.

Arthur nodded. "It's windy; I'm hoping to practise in similar conditions to Day One."
"I saw some of that," Dean said. "It was terrible."

"It was downright reprehensible for the officials not to have called the racing off," Arthur said firmly. "If Olympic level rowers are being tossed out of their boats it is too choppy to race, and to have even continued when there were white caps on the water is-"

"Yes, well," Leon broke in. "Arthur can talk about it for hours."

"Right," Arthur said. "I'll just stop there."

"It is a shame you can't come," Merlin said.

Arthur nodded.

"I understand though."

"Maybe we could do something this afternoon," Arthur said quietly. "Or something."

Merlin smiled. "Maybe sounds good."

Arthur smiled and then went back to his breakfast. Merlin smiled to himself and started planning.

///
Badminton

Chapter Notes

I realised that the original chapter I was going to post jumped a step - so I had to slot something in and wrote this. There is a higher chance of mistakes as a result - if there is anything big let me know.

// /Badminton\\

Merlin told himself this wasn't actually stalking as he sat near the athlete's entrance until he saw Arthur and his team walk into the building. He waited, not wanting to be too obvious, but before he could decide when to make contact, Gwaine was standing in front of him – a knowing look on his face.

"Hi," Merlin said, lifting an awkward hand and waving.

"What are you doing?" Arthur asked, looking at the empty seats around Merlin.

Merlin shrugged. "Was just thinking about badminton."

Arthur frowned.

"What?" Lancelot asked.

"Badminton," Merlin said, forging forward and going with it. "I was thinking about badminton."

"Why?" Leon asked.

"It's such an interesting sport," Merlin said, wanting to just sink into the ground.

"I've never actually watched it," Arthur said.

"Nope," Gwaine said, beaming. "Badminton."

Arthur stared at Gwaine and Lancelot like they were insane.

"I was about to go and watch a match," Merlin said.

"Someone you know?" Arthur asked, turning his focus onto Merlin.

"Yeah," Merlin said, letting out a breath and trying to pull his…well, not cool, but maybe his…senses together so he didn't sound like a dollop head. "Philippines – Oliver, he's something of a computer whiz as well – we know each other through that actually. Then I found out he plays badminton and we have never actually met in person."

"So, you're thinking of going and watching him, and then meeting him?" Arthur said.
"Yeah," Merlin smiled, pulling together the last of his courage and standing up. "Wanna come?"

"Yes," Lancelot and Gwaine said together.

Merlin blinked at them slowly.

"Let's all go," Leon said.

Merlin realised that Arthur's teammates were actually helping him out. He wasn't sure if that meant they liked him or if they just felt really sorry for him. If it worked, he didn't care which one it was.

Arthur looked unsure for a few moments and then nodded. "I can watch the video after dinner I suppose."

Merlin beamed at him. "Great, let's go."

"Now?" Arthur asked.

Merlin took a moment to look down at his watch, as though he hadn't been waiting around like a creeper, and then nodded. "Yeah, just enough time to get there I think."

"Lunch?" Arthur asked.

"We'll get something there," Percival said.

The rowing team turned, a few of them frowning but following Gwaine, Lancelot, and Leon without question.

"You don't have to," Merlin said quietly when they were suddenly left alone.

"No, no," Arthur said, running a hand down the strap of his satchel. "Kilgharrah, our coach, said to relax this afternoon and this is good. I'm sure I'll actually relax with you. If I stay here my team will lock me in my rooms again."

"Again?"

Arthur shrugged. "They think I am obsessive and too focussed."

"You have to be focussed to become good enough to win a gold medal."

"I know," Arthur asked. "This is what I keep telling them."


Arthur nodded and turned to walk out of the building, Merlin falling in to step next to him.

"How did your practice go?" Merlin asked.

Arthur started telling him about it. Merlin really liked watching how passionate Arthur was about the topic and their conversation lasted them until long after they had arrived at the badminton and they had found seats.

"That's it," Leon said. "No more talk about rowing."

"I like hearing about it," Merlin said.

Gwaine patted his arm. "You're insane."
"Gwaine," Merlin started, shaking the other man off.

"Don't say it," Arthur whispered in his ear. "He'll just enjoy it too much."

Merlin turned his focus back to Arthur and stopped paying attention to the rest of the team. "That does seem like Gwaine."

Arthur nodded. "So, tell me about Oliver."

"He lives in the US," Merlin said. "Married to a lawyer – they have the cutest little daughter you have ever seen, seriously the last time he sent me a photo there were curly pigtails. Anyway, he and I get along quite well and we have a lot in common. I can't see Connor though – I thought he'd be here. Not that he knows who I am, but still."

"What does Connor look like?" Arthur asked, scanning the crowd.

"Dark, handsome, designer stubble type of guy," Merlin said. "Looks at Oliver like he literally hung up the moon and stars and then baked him the world's best cupcakes."

Arthur smiled. "That's a pretty specific description."

Merlin shrugged. "Ma and Ailsa describe that as the way Beast looks at Belle, or Li Shang looks at Mulan – it's the highest level of love."

The announcer's voice flooded into the room and Merlin turned to the courts – Oliver was announced and Merlin cheered for him. Arthur watched Merlin for a beat and then turned to the court.

"How does Badminton work?" Arthur asked.

"No idea," Merlin admitted. "I just love watching sport, almost all sport, and getting to know other athletes. How many people that you meet in life understand what it means to work towards something like the Olympics your whole life and then actually get there? And win, or lose, like the other people here. It's the best time to connect with other people like us, Arthur, and I love it."

"I've never thought about it like that."

Merlin smiled. "I love it all. Except golf and football – I just don't see the appeal of either."

Arthur groaned. "I hate having to play golf but my father does insist."

"I feel terrible for you," Merlin said.

Arthur laughed. "Very few people have ever said that to me."

Merlin shrugged. "I'm unique."

Arthur nodded. "You certainly are."

Merlin couldn't help but preen under Arthur's gaze at those words. Arthur and Merlin's eyes held for a few minutes and then, with a blush, Merlin turned back to the badminton.

"I'm sure between the two of us we can work out how this works," Merlin said, frowning at the game.

"Probably," Arthur agreed. And over the match, where Oliver won, they worked out the rules
together.
Merlin rubbed his hand over his face and knocked. He waited impatiently for the door in front of him to open but when it did he was looking, not at Arthur, but at a tall, willowy brunette with blue eyes.

"Hi," Merlin said, awkwardly lifting a hand. "I think I have the wrong room."

"Arthur?"

Merlin nodded.

"You must be Merlin," she said, staring at him intensely.

"Yes," he held out a hand. "Merlin Emrys."

"Oh, I know," she said. "You're kind of famous and all."

Merlin ducked his head shyly.

"You're just adorable," she said, stepping to the side. "Come in – Arthur's just having a shower."

Merlin didn't step into the room. "I don't want to intrude, I just thought...I was going to see if Arthur wanted to go down and watch the Men's archery."

She frowned at him. "He really watches events with you?"

Merlin nodded, a little offended that she hadn't introduced herself, or that she was so surprised that Arthur would spend time with him. He wasn't going to say anything but his mouth opened before he'd really decided what to do. "Is it that surprising that he would want to spend time with me?"

"No," she said, not looking apologetic. "It surprises me because Arthur is the most single-minded person in the universe, except perhaps our father, and-"

"Your father?" Merlin interrupted shocked.

Morgana laughed. "Yes, you don't know who I am, do you?"

Merlin frowned. "No, I don't really socialise outside of competitions. It's basically just training...and work."

"Work?" Arthur asked, stepping into the room wearing nothing but a towel.

Merlin swallowed thickly and nodded dumbly. "I'm a freelance software designer, I...I find it nice to have something else to do, and one day I'm not going to be rowing anymore."

Morgana laughed. "I do believe you meant to say swim."

Merlin closed his eyes and nodded. "Yeah, I'm sorry for interrupting you, I'll just...go."

"No," Morgana said, reaching out to snap his wrist. "Arthur will get dressed and then the three of us are going to go and watch the archery."
"Archery?" Arthur asked, rubbing a towel over his head. "Let me guess, you know someone who is competing."

"Clint," Merlin said. "I'm only going to be able to go for a little while – I'm booked in the pool this afternoon, I'm going to do a practise swim for Saturday."

"Now that," Morgana said, stepping closer, "is something I would like to see."

Merlin frowned. "Why?"

"I like watching swimming," she said, looking behind her at Arthur. "Get dressed, we'll go down and steal some sandwiches. Meet us down there."

Merlin blinked at her.

"Come, Merlin," she said and turned to led him down the hallway. "Tell me about you."

"What about Arthur?"

"He's a Prince," she said. "He knows how to follow instructions."

"Orders," Merlin corrected.

Morgana laughed. "And I'm a Princess; I know how to give orders."

Merlin nodded and followed her down the hallway and towards the food hall. They did collect sandwiches for them all, and Merlin and Morgana stood near the exit to the outside.

"You know you still haven't introduced yourself, right?"

"Merlin!" a male voice called out from behind him. Merlin turned to look at Lewis, one of the rowing team's coaches. He was a good friend of Gaius's and had, once upon a time, asked Merlin if he'd ever thought about trying his hand at rowing. Merlin had laughed – Gaius had cocked the 'eyebrow of death' and Robbie had slapped the older man on the shoulder.

"Hello Robbie," Merlin said, forcing himself not to call the other man Mr Lewis anymore. "How are you?"

"Good, good, just waiting for me rower to come down so we can head to the Quarter Finals," Lewis said.

Merlin opened his mouth to speak and then spotted Arthur walking towards him, and tall, lanky blond walking beside him. "I think he's here."

Lewis turned around and looked, he frowned when he spotted Arthur and his rower walking towards them.

"Sorry," the blond rower said, then spotted Morgana and Merlin. "Hello, Morgana."

"James," she said with a smile. "Good luck today."

"Thanks," he said, eyes darting away.

"Well, lad," Lewis said. "You are full of surprises, but we had best get along."

James nodded and turned to Arthur. "Best of luck in the final."
"You too, James."

"Bye Arthur, Morgana."

Lewis and his rower walked away and Merlin smiled at Arthur. "I'm not the only one with friends from other countries."

"I know all of the rowers," Arthur said. "Rowed against James when he was rowing for Cambridge – this is his first Olympics."

"If you'd prefer to go and see him row…” Merlin said, fading away at the end.

Arthur shook his head. "I'm interested in seeing your friend Clint."

"Okay," Merlin said, turning. "Follow me, did I tell you that Clint learned to shoot arrows in the circus?"

"No," Arthur said, offering his sister his arm. She took it and walked at his side. Merlin saw it and paused for a moment – it had been such a completely unconscious move but it drove home to him, again, that Arthur wasn't just Arthur – the rower that Merlin was flirting with, trying to get to know, kind of hoping to really get to know when they'd both managed to win a gold medal. He was also – Prince Arthur and Merlin didn't know what to make of that. It was probably for the best that he didn't think about it. He'd spent the morning with Ailsa and his mother at the Equestrian event – Ailsa loved horses, and often talked wistfully of owning one. She and his mother were planning to go to Ipanema beach this afternoon and Merlin couldn't go with them. They did have plans to spend a week in Rio after the Olympics were over so the two of them were just going to a few places until Merlin had finished his programme and would be able to give them more time.

"He did," Merlin said, pulling himself back into the conversation and pushing thoughts about royalty from his head – he'd never get anywhere if he focussed on that. He would like to think about continuing to get to know Arthur after the Olympics but he knew that wasn't possible. "He grew up in the circus – doing trick shooting, then one day Phil took his niece to see the circus, sees Clint shoot, and offers to train him for the Olympics. Clint swears that the hardest part of the whole thing was convincing Phil to date him. Phil says it was teaching Clint to learn how to use a precisely balanced, high-calibre bow."

"How do you know so much about them?" Morgana asked, settling onto one of the bus seats and nodding Merlin to the one next to Arthur that she had left empty.

Merlin shrugged. "I talk to people."

"Gwaine said you know all of the gossip," Arthur said.

"Nah, I just talk to people," Merlin said. "Like I was telling Morgana, competitions are my only off-time; it's when I socialise with adults."

Arthur frowned at him but before he could ask the bus slid to a stop.

"Come on," Merlin said. He led them into the stands and then froze, looking around, until he spotted the Camelot red and started walking towards it.

"Where are we going?" Morgana asked.

"I figured," Merlin said. "If anyone is going to spot one of us it's going to be you and it will look better if you're sitting with your country."
Morgana stepped into the row of seats first. "How very thoughtful of you, Merlin. Come sit next to me."

Merlin looked at Arthur and then stepped into the line of seats.

"Tell me," Morgana said. "Can we come and see you swim when we leave here?"

"You really want to watch me do a practise swim?" Merlin asked. "They are very boring. Just me swimming back and forth and my secondary coach telling me what I'm doing wrong."

"Oh yes," Morgana said. "Arthur practised this morning. I'm not allowed to do anything more strenuous today than eat and walk, so I think we should definitely come and see you swim."

Arthur frowned at his sister even as he nodded. "I won't get to see you swim in the final so it would be nice to see you do it once in person."

"Okay," Merlin said, not sure why they would want to be there but happy to have them anyway.

A few minutes later, Clint was called up and Merlin was silent as he watched the very impressive showing by the American.

///
Morgana turned and looked at her brother, his eyes flicked to her and then away. They were sitting in the seats above the swimming pool and Merlin was just diving into the water below them.

"Arthur," she said.

"What?"

"Do you have a crush on the English swimmer?"

Arthur turned to glare at her. "Either be quiet or go away."

She settled back into her seat and smiled. "I like him."

"Apparently all athletes feel like that about him," Arthur said.

"Everyone feels like that about him," someone said from behind them.

Arthur and Morgana turned and looked at the man staring at them – he was wearing a Great Britain track suit, tall, thin but well-muscled, a contained mane of dark brown curls, high cheekbones and full lips. Arthur couldn't help but think that the other man looked like Merlin only bigger.

"Yes, I am his cousin," the man said, stepping in and sitting next to Arthur.

Arthur gaped at him.

"Hi," the other man with Merlin's cousin said. "I'm John, this is Sherlock – he's rude."

"Really, John," Sherlock said. "Why would you give everything away so easily? Are you also going to tell them that you're the team doctor and that you used to serve in the army?"

"Manners," John said. "And no, I hadn't planned to until we got to know them better." He turned to look at Arthur. "Sherlock spotted you watching Merlin and wanted to come up and meet you."

"I did not want to meet you," Sherlock corrected, voice dismissive. "I wanted to see why Merlin had mentioned you."

"Mentioned me?" Arthur asked.

"When he congratulated me on my win at the boxing."
"You're the boxer," Arthur said, suddenly connecting the dots.

"That is what I just said. I can see you aren't here for your brains."

Arthur bristled, folding his arms across his chest.

"But you are here to watch Merlin," Sherlock said. "Which is strange, you are here to prove yourself at the rowing – you need a gold medal to prove that your time spent in a boat isn't wasted. Father issues – he's withholding, no maternal affection…dead, early, and an only child for much of your life, and the only heir to a Kingdom. It makes no sense that you would be obsessively focussed on something other than the expectations of your father. The rowing is an anomaly – not something for your father, something for you. As is taking focus from that to my cousin. Obviously you have designs on him."

"Designs?" Arthur asked, voice low and annoyed.

"How dare you talk to Arthur like that," Morgana said. "How dare you speak to anyone like that?"

Sherlock looked down his nose at her. "That is what I do."

John looked apologetic but didn't say anything – Arthur got the distinct impression that he was waiting until things got worse before he said anything.

"You insult people?" Morgana asked, meeting his look with one of her own.

"I read people."

"And you can read my brother?"

"I can read everyone," Sherlock said, turning around and surveying the other athletes, all thankfully far enough away that they couldn't hear what was coming next. "The Danish tennis player who dominated the sport with his sister for twelve years was actually in a sexual relationship with her for much of that time – her children are obviously his-"

"Sherlock," John hissed. "Don't say that."

"Why, John, it's true. He's no longer sleeping with his sister – she's in a mental institution; delusions of grandeur and sociopathic tendencies – tried to kill her son's partner though they kept that out of the papers. She killed her late husband as well, people think it was an accident – people are stupid. He shares custody of the children with his dwarf brother and he has sights on the woman he is now training – British woman 6'3" tall – quite skilled and should win gold."

Arthur couldn't resist turning and looking at the two that Sherlock was talking about.

"Of course I can read that your brother has feelings for my cousin, only question is what type. I'm interested, Merlin is one of the only members of the family that isn't megalomaniacal – he and Quincy, though Quincy's partner Bond does believe he's invincible which is quite insane so that more than makes up for it."

"And you?" Arthur asked. "Are you megalomaniacal?"

"Oh no," Sherlock said, waving his hand. "I'm a sociopath."

"No," John said. "He isn't, just has no interest in, or need for, social mores."

"John!" Sherlock said, indignant.
"Who else can you read?" Morgana asked, looking at the sea of athletes around them.

Arthur's eyes flicked to John who looked partially horrified and partially amused that Morgana wasn't horrified. The blond doctor shrugged at him.

Sherlock settled into his seat and started deducing the athletes around them. "Blind diver from America is hiding the fact that he can 'sense' more through his other senses than most people – is in love with his university roommate but hasn't admitted yet that he's gay – Catholic sensibilities. He will be over it by the end of the year, Easter at the latest."

Arthur turned and followed their eyes to see a man sitting quite a distance away from them, his back tensed and his head cocked. Arthur's eyes tightened – he knew a man who was eavesdropping, being royalty had its advantages and disadvantages, one of the main ones was journalists attempting to get information from him by listening in to conversations. Arthur had learned, at a disappointingly young age, how to recognise someone listening to a conversation at a distance.

"Yes," Sherlock said. "He can hear me…possibly going to be when he returns to America that he will admit to his feelings now."

Arthur could see a little colour on the man's ears.

"Interesting," Morgana said. "But, how about we test your skill a little?"

"There is no one here-" Sherlock preened.

"Drama Queen," John muttered under his breath at Sherlock.

"Yes, John, I know your thoughts on the matter. As I was saying, there is no one here who would be a test to my abilities."

"Right," Morgana said, scanning the crowds and then pointing to three different people.

"Him," Sherlock said, surveying an American that Morgana had pointed to. He had black hair, broad shoulders, and seemed to almost be hunched down into his seat with a line of other Americans sitting on one side of him – younger and all enthusiastically watching the pool. He looked like he was the only one who didn't want to be there. "American, California; but north of the state. He's been playing rugby for a long time – European family, probably brought a love of the game to America with them. He's the only one left of another team – the captain but doesn't feel like he's connected to the new team. They look more to the one sitting next to him and he knows it. This is his last Olympics, he's only stayed because…favour…obligation…oh, yes, pride – he was the only one young enough to get to Rio from the other team, the only one who could get an Olympic medal. He's pretending he doesn't want to be here, watch his reaction with the man in lane six climbs out of the pool."

They all turned their focus to the sixth lane of the pool – Arthur had been focussed on the 8th lane for most of the time since that was where Merlin was swimming – his pale back very noticeable as he swam back and forth with a woman walking along the pool at his side. The man that Sherlock had directed them to was just hitting the wall. He stopped swimming and their eyes flicked back and forth between the man in the stands and the swimmer. The swimmer, stretched out his neck and then braced himself on the wall and pulled himself out of the water. Arthur's eyes flicked to Merlin for moment, and then to the rugby player in the stands. Arthur noted the tensing of shoulders and a quick flick of the head between the pool, his teammates, and then back to the pool. Arthur looked at Sherlock and thought on what Gwaine had said about Merlin and wondered if it
was a genetic thing to know everyone, or everything about them.

"Merlin is lazy," Sherlock said, looking at Arthur. "He likes to talk to people instead of just looking at what they are doing to tell him everything. Almost as bad as Quincy, who just uses his computer...you'd think the man didn't have a mind."

John looked around Sherlock. "Q is actually quite brilliant and downright dangerous with a computer."

Sherlock made a face. "Them," he pointed to the next group – a Scottish man, an Englishwoman and an Englishman, an older Chinese woman, and a younger Chinese woman of Eurasian descent, along with three Americans – two men, and a woman. They looked like they all knew each other but even Arthur could see that one of the Americans – tall with old school Hollywood looks, was sitting apart from the others. "What do you want to know? Who is sleeping with whom – the Scot and the African American are sleeping together – the Scot has aphasia – brain damage that's why he's not competing that these games. Or would you like to know who used to sleep together – the other American and the older woman from Macau were sleeping together but stopped when she realised he was also trying to sleep with her protégé. He's also been caught doping but not officially – he will have been caught by the end of the Olympics." Arthur wondered if that was because Sherlock was going to tell someone. "Perhaps you'd like to know about their families – the Scot and the Englishwoman have been friends since they were very young, they are also geniuses. The younger Chinese woman was raised in America, an orphan, was homeless for at least...three years. The Englishman and the American woman are married...no, used to be married, but they are sleeping together."

Arthur wanted to tell him that it was crap but he had been raised to always assume that ill-mannered behaviour would be reported and reflect badly on their kingdom and his father, his family.

"You don't believe me," Sherlock said.

Arthur shook his head, eyes down on the pool where Merlin was twisting down into a turn – his body sliding through the water quite impressively. Arthur would like to have been closer, he was a passible swimmer but it would be good to see someone like Merlin up close.

"After I do your sister's last choice, pick someone you know."

Arthur turned and looked at Sherlock. He nodded his head in agreement and turned his focus back to Merlin – just letting the words that Sherlock was saying wash over him.

"Who else did you pick?"

"The Americans over there, the man's in a wheelchair," Morgana said.

"Shot in the back, some kind of military action, he looks like a..." Sherlock trailed off and Arthur turned back to him. He turned to follow the other man's eyes and caught sight of a group of people sitting a few rows away. The one staring at Sherlock had a mop of dark, messy hair, emerald green eyes and a scar half hidden by his fringe. Next to him was a woman with brown hair braided away from her face. There was also a red-headed man with them and a woman with silver hair who seemed to be staring at nothing at all.

"Sherlock?" John asked.

Sherlock and the green-eyed man seemed to be locked together in a stare. Arthur looked down at
the water to see Merlin stop swimming and pull himself from the water. He turned to look up at them, his eyes flicking away for a moment and then he turned and waved up at Arthur. Arthur waved back and his eyes followed Merlin for a moment and then returned to observing the green-eyed man.

"Who is he?" Morgana asked, turning to look at the man. His eyes flicked away from Sherlock's for a moment and swept over Morgana and Arthur before he turned and said something to the woman next to him. Then the group stood and walked away.

"Sherlock?" John asked again.

"No one," Sherlock said. "The woman with the man in the wheelchair is a gymnast – trained from a young age, an orphan, he's a hacktivist – you'll have seen his viral blogs about the activities of certain parts of government. It's your turn, Prince Arthur."

Arthur felt that Sherlock was mocking him by using his title but turning the other cheek had become something he was very good at.

"Him," Arthur said, pointing to the group that was just finding seats. There was a range of people, two men – one tall and blond, the other shorter and brunette. They were flanked by four women, two older – obviously sisters, and the other two were younger but did look like they too, might be sisters."

"Tall one is a sailor," Sherlock said. "The two girls are trying to sleep with him because he's a wealthy gold medallist. He's not actually interested in either of them. The sour woman is the wife of the other one – the girls' brother and a rifle shooter. The last one, plain but smart, is an equestrian – she is interesting."

"Oh?" John asked.

"No reason to be jealous, John," Sherlock said. "She's a middle child – that is her younger sister with the sour face. She had an affair with the sailor two Olympics ago – he missed the last one and this is the first time they have been together since."

"And?" Morgana asked.

"They will be married in Vegas before the Olympics finishes," Sherlock said. "But you didn't know them, Arthur – the point was to prove it to you. You need proof."

Arthur blinked and nodded. He looked around the seats – trying to see someone he knew. Finally his eyes fell on Damon, Alaric, William, and red-head that Arthur didn't know. "Them."

Sherlock turned around and looked. "Who are they – always easier to use names."

Arthur named each of them.

"William and Damon are male gymnasts – focussed on the floor and rings for William, pommel horse and high bar for Damon." Arthur nodded – though William was also quite good on the high bar. "William's third Olympics, Damon's second. William has a medal – bronze."

"How did you know that?" Arthur asked.

"He's relaxed – content, and studies have showed that bronze medallists are the second happiest, behind gold, but in front of silver."
"Really?" Morgana asked, leaning forward.

Sherlock huffed. "Predictable."

"What about Alaric?" Arthur asked.


Arthur nodded. "With Damon."

"John, is it strange for a man to begin a sexual affair with the man who was sleeping with his wife?"

Arthur couldn't resist the smile that took over his face.

"As a general rule," John said. "Yes."

"Then they are strange."

"They are one of the strangest couples I know," Arthur agreed.

"Hey," a familiar voice said behind them.

Arthur turned to look up at Merlin, his hair was wet – the slight scent of chlorine hitting Arthur's nose.

"Hi," Arthur said, "you looked good."

Merlin beamed at him. "Thanks, it was nice to clear out the cobwebs a little – I'll be training again tomorrow morning. And luckily Alice was distracted by someone else so I got away without a long debrief."

"Merlin," Sherlock said, standing. "You are tiring in the last two laps."


"You are a distance swimmer. Do you expect to win another gold if you can't swim the whole race."

"It wasn't a race," Merlin said. "It was a practise, and I'm not trying to overtire myself, as you well know. We can't all just 'read' our opponent and knock them out."

"It's your fault for choosing the wrong discipline then," Sherlock said.

"I didn't choose the wrong sport – I'm a great swimmer."

"Yes, you are," John broke in. "Sherlock, stop being annoying."

Sherlock looked at John. Arthur assumed that the man would take the order badly, that he would possibly return with an insult, but all Sherlock did was to nod and turn back to Merlin. "Would you like to play a game, Merlin?"

Merlin rolled his eyes. "Why don't you play with Mycroft, he's here."

"Too busy sleeping with the ex-British swimmer who's supposed to be here to commentate; as per usual Mycroft is taking advantage of his position."
"Mycroft is not that bad, and he and Greg are living together – them sleeping together can't be that much of a surprise."

"Boring," Sherlock spat.

Merlin smiled. "I'll remember that when I send you and John a housewarming gift."

John laughed. "Quite right, Merlin."

"You should simply be pleased you don't have a sibling, Merlin," Sherlock said, ignoring the last two comments. "They are not worth it."

Arthur looked at Morgana who laughed.

"Well, you didn't know you had a sibling until a later time. Your experience is not average," Sherlock said. "Though how you could have not know that Gorlois was."

"Whatever you are about to say," Arthur said, jumping in. "Don't."

Sherlock looked at John who shook his head. "Yes, well, game, Merlin?"

Merlin nodded, jumping into the awkward void. "Who?"


Arthur looked around and pointed to a group of hirsute men sitting in metal grey tracksuits with the symbol of a mountain emblazoned in gold on their backs. He recognised the one sitting in the middle – his long grey-flecked hair and beard were untied, he also knew the smaller, curly haired man next to him. He allowed his eyes to trail along the line until he spotted the other two he knew, he could guess who the rest of the men were and thought this might give him an advantage – he could know if they were completely making it all up.

"Erebor Rugby 7s," Merlin said. "Thorin-"

"King Thorin," Arthur threw in. "Nice man but very stoic and awfully formal at events."

"Yes, though I'll take your word for it about the events," Merlin agreed. "He plays with his nephews, both were a young selection into the team but have more than proved their skills, the rest of them are Dwalin, Ori, Bofur, Bifur, Bombur, Nori, their coaches Dori and Balin, as well as Thorin's consort Bilbo."

"Names are boring," Sherlock said.

"What is interesting?" Arthur asked.

"The things that people try to hide," Sherlock explained. "Such as, the fact that Dwalin and Ori are hiding a relationship from Ori's brother Dori."

Merlin rolled his eyes. "Is that the best you've got?"

"Bifur has a brain tumour," Sherlock said, "look at his left eyelid."

"What?" John asked, sitting up.

"He knows," Sherlock said. "But has managed to keep it from the team and his doctors."
"He shouldn't be playing rugby," John said. "I need to tell his coach."

"Why?" Sherlock asked. "He's made an informed decision."

"It's madness."

Sherlock shrugged. "And his decision."

"Someone else," Morgana said. "I don't think I believe that you can diagnose a brain tumour based on someone's eye but let's move on."

"John's turn," Merlin said.

"Those three," John said, pointing at a family sitting near the very front of the water polo crowd.

"Blond is the child's father," Sherlock said immediately. "Even though she looks more like the brunette."

"Brunette used to be military," Merlin offered.

"Both police now."

"On their honeymoon, with the blond's daughter."

"Live in Hawaii, brunette was born there."

"Blond is from New…York."

"Jersey," Sherlock corrected.

"Yes," Merlin agreed.

"How do we know if anything you're saying is real?" Arthur asked.

Merlin smiled. "You don't believe me?"

Arthur flushed. "Just seems a little unreal."

"It's not," John said with a smile. "But if you want Sherlock will go down there and prove his deductions."

"It's my turn," Morgana said, she scanned the crowd and then pointed at two men, one older and the other younger and slouched in his seat.

"Golfers," Sherlock said with a sigh.

"Obviously," Merlin said. "Everyone knows who Harry Hart is."

"Who?" Sherlock asked.

"Right," Merlin said. "Forgot it was you for a moment, Harry Hart – veteran golfer. The younger man is Gary Unwin – his protégé."

"His toy boy," Sherlock countered.

"His protégé first, then his partner."
"The age difference is interesting," Sherlock said.

"Why?" Morgana asked. "You don't seem like the type to care about something so boring."

"I don't," Sherlock said. "But those social mores that John was talking about make it interesting."

"They simply connected," Merlin said. "You know how important that is."

Sherlock looked at him. "Age differences that large fit into three categories."

"Four," Merlin argued. "You always forget about love."

Sherlock rolled his eyes. "You are too sentimental."

"Thank you."

Arthur noticed that the seats were filling up around them.

"It's almost time for all of the finals to start," Merlin explained. "Phelps is going for two gold tonight, if he gets them, he will be the fifth most prolific country in Olympic history."

Arthur nodded. "Worth staying for then."

"I'll go and get us some food," John said, standing.

"Not hungry," Sherlock said.

"I don't care," John told him, leaning down and pressing a kiss to Sherlock's lips. "You'll eat it anyway."

"Would you like some help?" Arthur offered.

"Yes, thank you."

John and Arthur stood up and left the other three in the seats, having to fight against the tide of people coming into the stadium.

"So, a prince," Sherlock said.

"Yes, he is," Merlin responded.

"I'm going to the bathroom," Morgana said, standing.

"There is no reason to give us time alone," Sherlock told her.

She waved a hand at him. "I'm going anyway."

"What of Ailsa?" Sherlock asked, as soon as Morgana had left them.

"She is will my mother, she doesn't know what happens in the Olympic village and that is the way I intend to keep it."

"He is royalty and you are 'connected' to him."

"I'm also smart enough to know that it will end here."

"But you don't want it to."
Merlin sighed and pressed his hands to his eyes. "Yes."

"He would like it to as well."

Merlin nodded. "I know."

"I hope you have a generous stock of condoms for after Saturday."

Merlin groaned.

"It is only sensible," Sherlock explained. "John has assured me that safe sex is non-negotiable."

Merlin laughed. "I'm glad you met him."

"As am I," Sherlock said. "Now, I believe we were playing a game."

"That group," Merlin said, nodding at the group of people walking in – an Irishman, two Englishmen, an American man, two American women, and an Australian.

"All handballers," Sherlock said.

"But why are they together and not with their respective countries?"

"The older Englishman and the blonde American are siblings…adoptive," Sherlock said. "But you know all of their names, don't you?"

Merlin smiled. "I like to talk to people."

"And what do you know by talking to them?" Sherlock sneered.

"Erik, the Irishman played for Germany at the last Olympics. His wife left him and he moved to Ireland to raise his two children with the help of his aunt. His parents died when he was small and she raised him."

"He didn't tell you any of that."

"No, Charles did, that's a man who can hold his liquor, but not his tongue."

"Older Englishman, sleeping with Erik at events but neither of them have admitted that they want more."

Merlin smiled. "I'll be sure to drop a few hints."

"You would be more successful by flirting with Charles – he will flirt back, cannot resist, but Erik will react – possessive tendencies."

Merlin nudged Sherlock with his shoulder. "We should organise a family dinner thing, Mum would enjoy it."

"I will consider it, only because I like Hunith."

"I'll tell her and she'll make you come."

Sherlock made a face. "The woman with the strange white stripes in her hair is pursuing the Australian."

"I'm sure you find the age difference here interesting too."
"No," Sherlock said. "That one makes sense – he is a very attractive person."

"Harry Hart is rather fit for a man of his age."

"For a man of his age," Sherlock repeated. "Logan is fit for a man of any age."

"What about the other Englishman and the American."

"You know they are living together, the American is planning to move to England."

"Really?" Merlin squinted at them. "I knew they'd gotten rather close in London but Alex hadn't worked out how to stop insulting Hank at the time. I just kind of thought it was hate sex."

"Poor socialisation," Sherlock said.

Merlin laughed so hard he started to cry. Arthur and John returned while he was still doubled over, tears streaming out of his eyes.

"What happened?"

Sherlock frowned. "I simply pointed out that the American handballer over there had poor socialisation and that was why he had been insulting the man he was attracted to and Merlin began to laugh."

John let out a bark of laughter and slapped Merlin on the back.

"John?" Sherlock asked, voice confused.

"I got you pasta," he said. He opened the bag given to him by the athletes' food stand in the staging areas. He handed the container and a fork to Sherlock.

Sherlock peered down at the container. "What did you get for yourself?"

John rolled his eyes. "Savoury rice and chicken."

Sherlock held out a hand and John handed the food over.

Arthur frowned but Merlin elbowed him, he leaned close and whispered in the prince's ear. "John did it deliberately, Sherlock is a shite eater."

Arthur nodded, biting down on the desire to shiver in reaction.

"Pasta," Arthur said loudly. "Pumpkin and chicken, or sweet potato and pork."

"Pumpkin," Merlin said immediately. "I hate sweet potato."

Arthur looked at him in surprise. "How can you hate sweet potato?"

"It's disgusting," Merlin and Sherlock said together.

Arthur shook his head. "Unbelievable."

Merlin shrugged and took the container of pasta. "I also hate avocado."

"Well at least that's understandable," Arthur said. "Were you two still playing your game?"

"Yes," Sherlock said, nibbing at his food. "We were just about to start with the two beach
volleyballers."

"Where?" Merlin asked, starting to eat. He'd have to eat again when he got back to the athlete's village but this was a good snack.

Sherlock gave him a look.

Merlin sighed and looked around the seats until he spotted them. He held in a smile – he knew them and that made this a lot easier. "Do you recognise either of them?"

Sherlock shook his head.

"The shorter of the two is son of American film star Aaron Echolls, surely you know that name."

"Killed his teenage lover," Sherlock said. "Tried to murder the ex-sheriff and his daughter before he was caught."

"The blonde is the sheriff's daughter, I'm not sure who the one with the awesome hair is though." Merlin squinted at the woman, her hair had obviously been brunette once upon a time but now the sides of her head were shaved and the gravity defying concoction on top was a vibrant red.

"Hacker," Sherlock said. "Look at the nails."

"The big blond is also a surfer," Merlin said.

"Obviously," Sherlock responded. "He's also got a nasty little drinking habit."

"Not surprising," Merlin said. "Given what happened to his brother."

Sherlock sighed. "Boring."

"It isn't," Merlin said. "But since you can't deduce it, I can imagine you think it is."

Sherlock waved a hand dismissively. Arthur watched the way that John was watching Sherlock eat and had to wonder at the boxer – surely an elite athlete was able to look after their own energy intake but Arthur was getting the impression that without John, Sherlock would be happy to sit and play this bizarre game with Merlin without any thought of his body's needs. Arthur didn't know much about boxing – it had never been one of his interests, but he assumed it took just as much dedication as the rest of the sports at the Olympics. He couldn't see that Sherlock was that focussed on it though – more on proving he was the smartest man in the room.

"Them," Morgana said, interrupting and pointing to three men sitting close to the railings.

"Them?" Sherlock said, pointing to three men – one America, one New Zealander, and one Italian all sitting together.

"I was mainly talking about the one in the middle – the Italian," Morgana said.

"Spock," John said.

Sherlock whipped around and looked at him.

John shrugged. "I'm not always with you."

Sherlock looked annoyed but nodded. "Spock, Italian... America mother."

"He's a sailor," Sherlock continued, as though John hadn't spoken. "Married to the American."

"No, he's not."

"Really, John," Sherlock said. "Look at the chain around his neck – obviously carrying a wedding ring."

John squinted and then shrugged. "I'll have to pass on my congratulations."

"Why?" Sherlock asked, "they are obviously hiding it."

"Hiding it or not telling people?" John asked.

"What is the difference?"

"There is a big difference," Arthur said.

Sherlock turned and looked at him, eyes scanning the other man. "He's not royalty."

"Yes, he is," Arthur said. "Not Italian, Vulcan – a small principality in the south of the country, he's the second son of Crown Regent Sarek."

"Vulcan?" Sherlock asked, frowning.

"They don't put up their own team," Arthur explained, "not like the Monégasque. You will note that any Vulcan to compete, Spock is only the second in history – the first was long-distance runner T'Pol, they have a slightly different symbol on their left breast patch – denoting them as Vulcans. Very few Vulcans participate in competitive endeavours, preferring instead to focus on academic pursuits. You may have heard of the VSA?"

Sherlock nodded. "Of course."

"Vulcan Science Academy," Arthur continued. "It's not well known to most people but it is the place for scientists and mathematicians to work. Their PhD and Masters degrees are the most heavily sought after in the academic world. Queen T'Pau is a wonder."

Sherlock frowned, as though he was trying to remember something.

"Why is she a wonder?" Merlin asked, pulling Arthur's attention back to him.

Arthur looked at Merlin for a moment, the clear blue eyes, the messy, still wet hair, the full lips the other man was currently biting, and his wide ears. Arthur had a sudden flash of want, he wanted Merlin's attention, and he wanted to be here with Merlin alone. He was thoroughly enjoying watching Merlin and Sherlock – Sherlock was quite a wonder himself, not that he was sure that he believed everything the man was saying. But he really wanted it to be days from now when both of their competitions were over and Arthur could find out if he was reading all of this right and Merlin wanted him too. He blinked the thought away. "Sorry?"

"Queen T-Pau," Merlin said, a soft smile on his face. "Why is she a wonder?"

Arthur tried to work out how to explain Queen T'Pau. "She is…majestic."

Morgana laughed. "She is terrifying."
"That too," Arthur agreed. "It's very hard to describe T'Pau."

"If you youtube T'Pau Vulcan High Assembly," Morgana said. "You can see for yourself, no one
knows how a video camera got in; the Vulcans see no logic in media like that so they have the
strictest laws surrounding media in the world. Their royal family is the only country to have never
had a televised wedding or coronation. They are a very secretive country all around."

"So," Merlin said. "It's not a surprise that Spock is hiding his marriage to the American?"

"He wouldn't be hiding it," Arthur said. "Vulcans don't wear wedding rings."

"And yet there is a wedding ring around his neck," Sherlock said.

"And his husband is American," John pointed out. "I can believe that Spock would wear one just
for Jim."

"But he is not wearing it."

"And neither is Jim," John said.

Sherlock turned and squinted at the American. "I can't see his hand."

"I saw him this morning – no ring, I would have noticed."

Sherlock huffed. "Boring."

"That's Sherlock for I don't understand," Merlin said. "It's obvious – Spock is wearing a ring for
Jim, Jim is wearing his around his neck because Vulcan's don't wear wedding rings."

Sherlock turned and looked at Merlin. "Boring."

"Love," Merlin countered.

Sherlock's eyes flicked to John. "Pedestrian."

Merlin beamed at him. "And answer me this, if John insisted that you wear a ring, would you?"

"John wouldn't be so mundane."

"Yes, John would," John said.

Sherlock turned to look at John and let out a small sigh. "Then I will."

Merlin grinned. "Love."

Sherlock flicked out the edges of his coat and sulked.

Merlin grinned in triumph. He turned and looked at Arthur and quirked an eyebrow at him. "This
is quite good, isn't it?"

"Yes," Arthur agreed.

"Let's just watch the racing," Merlin said, eyeing Sherlock.

Sherlock huffed but didn't argue. He did put his food down and John frowned.

Merlin elbowed Arthur. "Phelps is about to swim – then we can get out of here."
"He has two races," Sherlock informed him.

Merlin rolled his eyes at Sherlock. "Finish your food."

"Wash behind your ears," Sherlock countered.

John sighed. "Can you imagine the Christmas dinners?"

Arthur shook his head.

"I think they'd be a ball," Morgana said.

"I only go because of Hunith and John," Sherlock said.

"And we only put up with you because of John," Merlin said.

Arthur looked over at Morgana who smirked at him.

They watched Michael Phelps win his 21st and 22nd gold medals and then Merlin and Arthur left Morgana with Sherlock and John.

"That was interesting," Arthur said as they waited at the athlete's bus stop.

"Yes, sorry about Sherlock, he can be a bit hard to take."

"Was that serious, what he did?"

"Oh yeah," Merlin said. "He entertains himself as a consulting detective which basically means that he makes a nuisance of himself to the police and then solves the crimes before they do. Me, that was mostly knowing the people and some deducing. Mycroft, Sherlock's brother, and Sherlock used to make Quincy and I play with them. I'm a very good judge of character and I can actually do a little of what Mycroft and Sherlock can do."

"Mycroft?"

"Sherlock, Quincy, and Merlin – our family is not good with the whole naming thing."

Arthur laughed as the bus pulled up and they climbed on to head back to the athlete's village.

///

Chapter End Notes

See, he just took over a whole chapter. It was a ball to write though.
"Hey Mum," Merlin said, holding his phone on his chest as he stared up at the ceiling.

"I've been speaking to Sherlock," she said immediately.

Merlin sat up. "What did he tell you?"

"You know exactly what he told me," Hunith said.

Merlin sighed and sunk back into his bed. "He shouldn't have said anything. What happens at a competition stays at a competition."

"And what about Ailsa?"

Merlin sighed. "She doesn't need to know."

Hunith tsked. "She already does."

"I'm going to kill him."

"She wants to meet your new friend…he is a Prince after all."

Merlin huffed. "I'm not going to see him again after this fortnight, Ma."

"She will ask to meet him. You had better come up with a decent lie."

Merlin could hear the disappointment in her voice. "Will you be there on Saturday?"

"Of course we will – as if you even need to ask such a thing."

"Good," Merlin said. "Just checking – I know you're annoyed at me."

"I don't want you to get hurt, and I don't want Ailsa hurt. A prince is very different from that American swimmer."

Merlin smiled but tried to hide it from his voice. "Ma, she will never know that anything happened."

Hunith huffed down the phone. "You are too hopeful for words."

"I know, I'll be careful, I promise." Merlin said. "What are you and Ailsa doing today?"

"She wanted to go to the Museum of Modern Art and since she will want to go again regardless we think it's best to go nice and slow around today and then when you join us we can see the highlights."

"She knows how I feel about Modern Art."

"And you know that she loves it."

"Which is why I'll go with her after the Olympics."
"Have you seen much of the competition?"

"Yeah," Merlin said. "I've been going out and about between my practise swims. I'm surprised Gaius hasn't yelled at me yet."

Hunith huffed. "Quite honestly," she said, "I am surprised it took him this long to give up."

Merlin laughed and they talked for another couple of minutes before he said goodbye and dragged himself to the shower.

///
Fencing

Merlin didn't even pretend he wasn't looking for Arthur when he walked into the player's canteen after speaking to his mother. He spotted several red tracksuits with gold dragons on the back but none of them were paired with that blond head and Merlin forced his face to be expressionless as he turned for the food instead. He piled his plate high, then turned and jerked to a stop— Morgana standing in front of him. His eyes flicked down to the plate, glad that it hadn't fallen on the floor in his surprise.

"Morgana," Merlin said, looking back up at her.

She gave him an impervious look. "Lady Morgana."

Merlin nodded. "Lady Morgana."

"I'd like to speak to you."

"Of course," Merlin said. "Are you eating?"

"No."

"Let's go sit down then."

Morgana nodded, turned on the ball of her foot, and glided away like she was walking down a royal procession. If Merlin weren't a bit intimidated, he'd be very impressed. She picked a table away from the rest of the athletes and sat down. Merlin took a seat across from her.

"You start," Merlin said, pulling on his own untouchable persona, and staring her down.

Morgana's lip twitched and her eyes grew darker. "I want to know what your intentions are with my brother."

"None of your business."

Morgana's look turned positively glacial. Merlin forced himself to lift a forkful of waffles to his mouth and not shrink away from the expression.

"He is my brother."

"Yes."

"And I have the power of one of the most well-trained special forces units in the world at my command."

Merlin laughed, loudly. "Did you seriously just threaten me with an entire country's military might?"

"Yes."

Merlin laughed again. "Thank you."

Morgana's eyebrow cocked.
"I'm not going to hurt Arthur," Merlin said.

"Are you just planning on sleeping with him when he's finished competing and then never speaking to him again?"

"I don't honestly know what answer you are looking for," Merlin said, hating that she was laying bare his secret worry about whatever was happening between he and Arthur.

"The truth."

"Then you should probably ask Arthur," Merlin said, putting down his fork – his appetite gone. "It's the Olympics – who knows what is coming after the Closing Ceremony."

"You must know what you want to have happen."

Merlin nodded. "But it really is none of your business."

"Arthur is a Crown Prince," Morgana said. "That brings with it unfortunate consequences – the motives of people who show interest in us is one of them."

Merlin sighed. "I'm not spending time with Arthur because he's a Prince, I'm not looking for anything from him but the opportunity to get to know him and spend some time with him."

"Just understand," Morgana said, leaning over and glaring at him. "If you-"

"Morgana," a voice said from next to their table.

Merlin and Morgana turned to look at the tall blond man standing next to the table.

"Oliver?" Morgana asked, surprised and blinking at him. "What are you doing here?"

Oliver smirked. "You really didn't pay any attention in London, did you?"

Morgana shrugged.

"I'm competing in the archery," Oliver said. "I won gold in the team event with Barton and Hawthorne."

"I saw that," Merlin said. "It was some very impressive shooting."

Oliver turned and smiled at him. "Hello, Oliver Queen."

"Merlin Emrys," Merlin said, reaching out and shaking Oliver's hand.

"Oh I know," Oliver said. "My wife loves to watch you swim – I should be jealous I suppose."

Merlin felt his face flush. "No, we all have athlete crushes."

"Yes," Oliver said. "I'm in awe of Everdeen – Hawthorne even gave me a talk about it."

"Did it stop you being in awe of her?"

"No," Oliver said, laughing. "But, I love Felicity, so it's nothing to worry about – as Hawthorne knows."

"Exactly," Merlin said. "We all look at other athletes and wish we had their skills. Mine is Usain Bolt – I watched him run in Beijing. When I met him in London, I turned red and just lost the
"ability to speak. He was very gracious about it."

"I hear he's very nice," Oliver said. "But I haven't had the pleasure of meeting him."

"He is very nice."

"It was nice to see you again, Oliver," Morgana said, taking over the conversation again. "But Merlin and I were in the middle of an important conversation."

Oliver nodded at them, choosing not to be offended.

"I'm sure we'll see one another again," Merlin said. "Maybe you can introduce me to your wife."

"She would like that," Oliver said, nodding at them both and walking away.

"That was rude," Merlin reprimanded.

Morgana shrugged.

"So, how do you know Oliver?"

"None of your business."

"Exactly," Merlin said. "Arthur and I will work ourselves out."

"I want to protect him," Morgana admitted.

Merlin smiled. "That's good."

Morgana sighed. "Oliver ruined the moment."

"I don't mind that," Merlin told her. "I appreciate what you're doing but you've picked the wrong person."

"You never know who is looking for a story, or a blackmail opportunity, the world knows that Arthur is gay but a story would still earn someone a lot of money. And other people don't even see us as people – just these two things that they want to own, or say they had. It's a horrible way to live and Arthur has always had a lot more of that than I have. People are scared of me."

"I can't understand why," Merlin said, his appetite coming back.

Morgana smiled. "Why thank you."

Merlin picked his fork back up, to start eating.

"What about Ailsa?" Morgana asked.

Merlin shrugged. "What about her?"

Morgana looked displeased but didn't say anything else – she had no right to judge him on his life and he was not going to allow her to.

Merlin went back to eating his food. Morgana rolled her eyes at him and stood up. Merlin shook the conversation out of his head – he was going to continue on as he had been. He finished eating and then pulled out his phone and looked to see what events were happening soon that he could go and watch. He finished breakfast then stood up to leave the canteen.
He spotted Arthur, and the rest of the Camelot rowing crew, sitting in one of the lounges watching the football on the television. Merlin wasn't sure if he should go and say hello – especially given what Morgana has said but then Gwaine spotted him and nudged Arthur. Arthur turned to look at him, smiling brightly, and stood up to walk out of the lounge, leaving his teammates behind.

"Hey," Arthur said, stopping further away from Merlin than normal.

"Hey," Merlin said, suddenly shy. "How's everything going?"

"Good, you?"

"Just got ambushed by your sister at breakfast."

Arthur grimaced. "I feel I should apologise for her."

Merlin shook his head.

"Ignore everything she said," Arthur said firmly.

"Everything?"

Arthur sighed. "In my experience that would be best."

Merlin felt the tension leave him. "What are you doing today?"

"We're rowing this afternoon," Arthur said, trailing off and staring at Merlin.

"Come on," Merlin said, sliding his hand down Arthur's arm and catching his wrist.

"Where are you taking me?"

Merlin smiled, mouth wide and a little silly, "fencing."

"Fencing?"

"Fencing."

"Why would we go and watch fencing?"


"No, I row, and play rugby, and sit through long, boring meetings."

Merlin shrugged with his whole body. "Oh well, I have a mate who fences so we're going to watch him – come on."

"Who?" Arthur asked, following Merlin rather happily.

"Japanese man, Sulu, you're going to love his husband – this Russian genius, Pavel, who is a legitimate rocket scientist – but he's got about three PhDs as well."

"Do you know an athlete from every country?"

Merlin thought for a moment. "I think so."

"Okay, so we're going to go and see Sulu."
"Yep. And we can meet Pavel; I want to take Pavel home every time I see him."

"Why?" Arthur asked.

Merlin blushed. "He's just so adorable, and likable and…Pavel. If I had to have a sibling it would have been one like Pavel."

Arthur looked dubious but followed Merlin onto the bus and towards the fencing.

"I don't know anything about fencing," Arthur said as they walked in.

Merlin grinned at him. "Tell Pavel, he'll explain the rules…but ignore him when he starts talking about fencing starting in Russia. According to him everything was invented in Russia."

"So, he's delusional."

Merlin shrugged. "I don't think so – it's actually really endearing – there he is." Merlin led them up into the seat – he could see a youngish man with brown curls holding a large sign painted with the Japanese flag and the name Sulu written across in the Russian tri-colours.

"Interesting sign."

Merlin smiled and slid into the row next to Pavel. He introduced Arthur and then turned and was welcomed by the entire Sulu family who seemed to know Merlin well. Arthur blinked at the strange Welshman he was falling for and settled into the seat next to him.

"When is Sulu competing?" Merlin asked.

"Two more matches," Pavel said in a thick, rolling Russian accent. "He will win."

Merlin grinned. "I'm sure he will."

"I have run the odds," Pavel said. "He will win."

"Strange things can happen in the Olympics," Arthur said.

Pavel shook his head. "No, he will win. I have already planned our celebration following the gold medal ceremony."

"Anything safe for work?" Merlin asked.

Pavel flushed lightly. "Nothing I can speak of here."

"Understandable," Merlin said, smiling at Pavel.

Pavel leaned close and whispered in Merlin's ear. Arthur caught the word – adopt, but wasn't sure if he had overheard correctly.

Merlin made a high pitched noise and wrapped Pavel in a hug. They pulled apart and Pavel and Merlin were both grinning brightly.

"How is Ailsa," Chekov asked.

"Ailsa?" Arthur said quietly. He turned to ask Merlin but the other man was beaming.

"She's wonderful, she's been watching me compete with Mum." Merlin said.
Arthur frowned and felt like he lost track of the conversation for a minute – Merlin had no siblings, he knew that, but who was Ailsa. He came back to the conversation to hear the next words.

"I'm thinking of taking her on a holiday after the games are over. It's been a big ask for her to have put up with my schedule and she's been an absolute trooper about the whole thing. More than it's fair to ask really."

Merlin…had a girlfriend? Arthur thought to himself, not understanding what was happening. He'd thought, he'd…but…he frowned down at the fencing happening below them. It made no sense – except, who else could Ailsa be than a girlfriend who was watching the Olympics with Merlin's mum and that he was going to be taking on holidays after the games were over.

"Oh!" Chekov said. "Sulu is up, be quiet."

Merlin nodded with an indulgent smile. He turned and grinned at Arthur and turned to face the match. Arthur turned to the match without seeing anything – the mixture of Russian, English, and Japanese encouragement coming from next to him floating over his head.

As soon as Sulu's match was over he turned to Merlin apologetically. "I have to get to Lagoa Stadium – the wind is picking up and we need to practise in those conditions in case they show up in the final."

Merlin frowned at him but nodded. "Okay, do you mind if I come and watch?"

Arthur wanted to say no, he needed time to think about the fact that he'd been so very wrong about Merlin. Unless he was wrong and Merlin was hitting on him when he also had a girlfriend. He knew that some people didn't have his staunch beliefs in loyalty. And he knew that the Olympics was definitely a place where cheating would be easy. Both ideas were crushing to him – he was now aware of just how much he wanted Merlin as more than just a casual Games hook-up and he wasn't even going to get that now.

"I don't have to," Merlin said, face turning shy and awkward. "Sorry, I…"

"We've got a meeting with our coach after the practise," Arthur lied. "I just wouldn't be able to see you after we row."

Merlin nodded. "I understand. I should go and do a practise myself later. I suppose we'll catch up another time."

"Definitely," Arthur said, standing up. He said his goodbyes politely and smiled at Merlin before he walked away from the group. He didn't bother to get the bus, just pulled his jacket off – looking less like an athlete, and started walking back to the athlete's village. He didn't intend to walk the whole way – he was just going to walk until he could work out what to do with the information he'd just gotten. He didn't believe he could be wrong about Merlin's intentions and he couldn't work out how he could have been so wrong about Merlin's personality but…Ailsa?

Before he knew it he was back at the athlete's village. He immediately went and found the rest of his team and organised them to practise early. He pushed them harder than he had since the finals of the last world championships. As soon as they were finished all of them turned on him.

"What was that?" Lancelot demanded.

"A practise," Arthur said.

"That," Kilgharrah said, rushing over to them, "was perfect."
"That," Pellinore argued, "was torture."

"It was the fastest that you have ever rowed," Kilgharrah said.

Everyone turned to look at Arthur.

"We are doing that again on Saturday," Arthur said.

Kilgharrah walked over to Arthur and yanked the blond down to his height, hands on either side of the Arthur's face. "What changed you?"

"Nothing," Arthur lied. "I just want to know that we can beat the Dutch and the British."

"Something in your eyes has changed," Kilgharrah said. "You are different."

Arthur tried to shake Kilgharrah off but even though the man looked like he was one hundred and fifteen he was surprisingly strong.

"You have opened your heart to someone," Kilgharrah said in a raspy voice – quiet so the rest of the team couldn't hear.

"It isn't like that," Arthur said.

Kilgharrah suddenly let him go and Arthur rocked back but was stopped from falling over by Leon's hand on his back. "Change nothing before Saturday. We will win now that Arthur can reach his full potential – his coin has two sides, you are prepared for a gold medal race. Make sure you all eat pork with your dinner tonight." And then he turned around and walked away from them.

"Your coin has two sides?" Lancelot asked dumbly.

"Pork?" Leon said dumbly.

"That man straddles the lines between genius and insanity," Elyan said. "But he's right; we are a good gold medal contender if Arthur pushes us like that again."

"We should go see the physios," Arthur said, not wanting to answer any more questions about why he had pushed everyone so hard. He didn't feel any better about the situation with Merlin but he was convinced that he'd been misreading Merlin's intentions. Merlin knew everyone – was friends with everyone so of course Merlin was just trying to be his friend but it obviously came off a different way. Arthur was determined to stay away from the other man until after the gold medal final. He could not afford any more distractions in the lead up to their race and Merlin was a distraction. Time would also allow Arthur time to get over his misplaced feelings. Then, after their race, he could hang out with Merlin and pretend that he'd never thought there was anything but friendship between them.

///
I don't want to go

Chapter Notes

I'm watching Rocky Horror Picture Show and I'm wondering what it says about me that I ship Rocky/Janet, and have since I was quite young.

/// I don't want to go ///

Arthur shook his head. "I'm too busy to go."

Every one of his teammates stared at him like he was insane.

"We are two days out from the final," Arthur explained. "None of us have time to go."

"It's fifteen minutes," Gwaine said. "Thirty minutes at a stretch."

Arthur shook his head. He didn't want to see Merlin, and he didn't want to go to the swimming complex. He didn't want to spend his time there looking at the crowd and wondering who Ailsa was. He had also resolved not to google Merlin and Ailsa to see what the internet could do to make him feel even worse.

"We have to go," Lancelot said. "It's his heat."

"We can watch it on TV if you're that interested," Arthur said, planning to make sure he wasn't in the room when they did.

"We're going," Leon said. "Even if you don't."

Arthur shrugged. A part of him wanted to tell them all that he couldn't see Merlin, and why – he knew the team would support him. Some of them might think that Merlin had been doing the wrong thing, and some of them might think he was a fool. But he couldn't do that; Arthur had never learned the skill of sharing personal things with people – even if he considered them friends.

"Arthur," Lancelot said, stepping closer and dropping his voice. "Why don't you want to go?"

"Because I'm not here to watch anyone else compete, I'm here to win."

Lancelot frowned at him. "Arthur, are you…okay, okay, we won't go."

"What?" Gwaine demanded.

"Lancelot?" Leon asked. He looked at the other man for a few moments and then turned to the rest of the team. "Let's get some food and we can settle in to plan the next few days."

The team, bar Lancelot and Gwaine, left the room and as soon as the door closed behind them Lancelot and Gwaine turned on Arthur.

"What's going on?" Lancelot asked.

"I have too much to do."
"Yesterday you were telling me that you wanted to see all of the heats for the 1500m so that you could see the competition," Lancelot said.

Arthur shrugged. "I came to my senses."

"No," Gwaine said. "You've been weird since the practise yesterday. Did you and Merlin have a falling out, or something?"

"How can we have had a falling out, we've only known one another for a few days – we're not even friends yet."

Both of them gaped at him.

"What?"

Lancelot and Gwaine turned to look at one another. Then, after a beat, turned back to Arthur.

"There is something you're hiding from us," Gwaine said. "And it has something to do with Merlin. But if you don't want to tell us you don't have to. And we can stay here and not go and see his heat but we definitely can't go and see the final tomorrow so think about whatever it is that has upset you. Is it something unforgivable? Is it something that he should be punished for? Is it something that you'll get over and then you'll regret not seeing him swim in person when he's the reason you're there?"

"What Gwaine said," Lancelot said after a few silent moments.

It was somehow comforting when Gwaine was the sensible, logical one and Arthur took a moment to think about it. He had been looking forward to seeing Merlin race – it wasn't the same as the final but he knew he wouldn't be able to get there on the day before their final. It would be irresponsible. Should he allow his ruined hopes to stop him from seeing something so historic, something he wanted to see, someone he wanted to see. He knew one of his faults was an excess of pride, and he wasn't sure what to do now that it was wounded.

Arthur let out a puff of air and nodded. "We'll go."

"Are you sure?" Lancelot asked.

"Yeah," Arthur said. "You're right I do want to see Merlin race. Let's eat and then go."

Lancelot stared at Arthur for a few moments and then nodded, as though he was convinced this was a good idea now. When the rest of the team returned, they took the change in stride, and before long they were on board a bus, at the swimming stadium, and then sitting with other Camelot athletes ready to watch the heats. Arthur was wedged between Lancelot and Gwaine who seemed to have been next to him since the conversation in his room. He appreciated their silent support especially since they didn't know why he needed it.

That didn't stop Gwaine from leaning forward in his seat and introducing himself to two people in the row in front of them. A red-headed woman from the US, and a guy with flame tattoos on his wrists, long black hair with blood-red highlights from Italy.

"Hi," Gwaine said. "I'm Gwaine."

They both turned and looked at him, then at each other. Arthur watched them try and work out which one Gwaine was talking to. He always enjoyed watching people try to work out who Gwaine was flirting with…and the realisation that he was flirting with everyone.
"Warren," the Italian said with a slight American accent to his words. He held out his hand and Gwaine shook it.

"Layla," the woman said, smiling.

"And what are you here for?"

"The Olympics," Warren said, voice flat.

Gwaine nodded. "Very true, and you, Layla, what are you here for?"

She smiled at him brightly. "Canoe slalom."

Gwaine nodded. "Never seen it, but it sounds interesting. First Olympics, old hand, tell me all about it."

"My first," Layla said. "But Warren's here for the BMX cycling – he's here for his second Olympics."

Gwaine smiled in that way he had that made people want to talk to him, feel relaxed in his presence. Arthur had seen Gwaine pick up any number of people where Arthur had never actually seen the other man do anything other than chat to them. He occasionally used pick-up lines on people – normally ones he already knew, but overall he just chatted to people until they were dating or having sex, whichever suited.

"Very first Olympics," Gwaine said, settling into his chair. "Always a lot of fun, have you competed yet?"

"Yeah, I didn't make it into the medals but that's okay. I'm just happy to have been here."

"Hippie," Warren muttered.

The heat before Merlin's was called and Arthur turned most of his attention to the race while Gwaine continued chatting with Layla, and Warren - who barely spoke.

"Are you a hippie?" Gwaine asked.

Layla shook her head. "Oh no, that's just something Warren calls me."

"Why?"

Layla shrugged, but in the face of Gwaine's honest interest she ducked her head and explained. "He's been calling me that since we met – you'd have to ask him why."

Warren shook his head, obviously not planning on saying anything.

"My best friend Will and I went to university and met Warren. He's such an outgoing type of guy that we instantly hit it off and he started calling me a hippie."

Warren looked at Layla but didn't comment, just turned back to the swimming.

"What are you studying?" Gwaine asked, smiling at Layla.

Arthur smiled at his friend; this was the thing that separated Gwaine from most of the men that flirted with everyone. Gwaine managed to never come across as sleazy because Gwaine honestly liked people and he was interested in them. He did love sex but most of the people he'd ever had
any type of relationship with still spoke to him, and did things like invite him to their weddings and in one case, made him the godfather of their twins.

"Horticulture."

Elyan perked up. "What focus do you have?"

"I'm hoping to go into the scientific plant propagation side of it when I graduate and focus on increasing crop yields and pest resistance especially for areas of drought."

"Fascinating," Elyan said. "I have an interest in high density horticulture for cities. Especially low socio-economic areas and the cost effective improvement of health and education through community gardening."

And then Elyan and Layla started talking quickly about plants, propagation, and other things that sailed over Arthur's head. Gwaine smiled at them both and then turned his focus to the swimming heat because Warren was obviously not the chatty sort.

"What's happening?" Gwaine asked Arthur.

"It's not Merlin's race," Arthur said. "The Italian is winning this one but I don't know enough about this race to know how he's going and how that will compare with Merlin."

"He's doing well," Warren said. "Under world record time and the form coming in placed him as a possibility for gold along with the Australian, the Chinese guy, and Merlin."

"You know Merlin?"

Warren shook his head.

The Italian won the race below them and Arthur pulled his phone out of his pocket when it beeped at him. He pulled it out and saw Morgana's name – he would have liked to have ignored her but that never ended well for him.

Merlin's about to race

Arthur typed his response – I know

Good.

Arthur could almost feel her smugness coming from her message so he slid the phone back into his pocket. Merlin's race was called and Arthur turned all of his attention down to the pool deck. He wanted to look around the crowd and see who else was focussed very closely on Merlin in the race. He didn't think he'd be able to work out who Ailsa was, but he might have been able to spot Merlin's mother. He assumed she must look at least a little like Merlin. He couldn't do it to himself though – somehow it was easier to just wallow in his crush for a little while longer and pretend that he had never wanted to have a chance with Merlin.

Merlin stepped up to the blocks and bent down into start position. Arthur let the noises around him fall away in the same way that he did during a rowing race, and focussed on Merlin. He sat for the next fourteen minutes focussed completely on the pool and Merlin's back as the Welshman swam through the race and won in Olympic record time. Arthur sat back when he was done, watching as Merlin pulled himself out of the pool, water cascading down his chest in a way that thoroughly wiped all thoughts from Arthur's mind. He watched Merlin pull off his swimming cap, look around the stadium and give waves. Arthur's eyes caught on Merlin's and the other man waved up at him –
bright smile on his face, before he walked towards the journalists.

Arthur kept his eyes on Merlin as the other man gave his interviews, his chest heaving with each breath, the swimming suit hugging Merlin's backside in a way that Arthur found every distracting…and a little inspiring. He sighed when he reminded himself that that type of inspiration was pointless.

Arthur pulled his attention from Merlin and the pool deck as the other man left the area, finished speaking with different journalists, and then Arthur refocussed on the people around him. Gwaine was sitting forward, his attention on Layla. Warren was focussed on the pool, not paying much attention to their conversation.

Gwaine smiled brightly at Layla. "What are you doing after this?"

She laughed. "Going to lunch with Warren."

Gwaine nodded, taking the words as they were meant. "Now, we're planning a party for Sunday, come gold medal or crushing defeat we're having a party on our floor. Do the two of you want to come?"

Layla shook Warren. "Party with these lovely gentlemen after their final."

"I'll still have my race to come."

"You don't have to stay that long but it's going to be fun, it's amazing who shows up at a party when a legitimate prince is attending. Our parties are always fun."

Arthur allowed himself a beat of annoyance that he was a sight to be seen at the Olympics, and then realised that Gwaine had probably already invited Merlin and if Merlin was done he might being Ailsa and then Arthur would see them together. He wasn't that sure he wanted to go to the party himself at the moment.

"He finally work out that we're together?" Warren asked.

Layla smiled.

Gwaine frowned for a beat and then smiled. "Even better - you make a nice couple. So the party?"

"You just ignored him while he was flirting with your girlfriend?" The woman sitting next to Pellinore asked. Arthur wasn't sure where she'd come from, and he didn't recognise her.

Warren shrugged. "Yep."

"Why?"

Warren looked at the woman and shrugged again. "The hippy can look after herself. She can flirt with anyone she wants to."

"Course I can," Layla said. "And I wasn't flirting, I was chatting, as was Gwaine. He didn't hit flirting until right at the end there. It was an interesting conversation. Why should Warren worry about it – if we had to worry about one another's loyalty then we wouldn't be together."

Pellinore nodded. "Good point."

"Thank you," she said. "But it's not that strange."
"It shouldn't be," Leon said. "But there are a lot of people who aren't as sensible or confident in their relationships."

"It's a sad comment on our society," Layla said.

"Yes," Gwaine said. "But it doesn't change anything. Come to the party, I will continue to chat with you because you're very interesting, and then when Warren's finished his competition we can all go out and have a good time. Have you met Merlin? You'll like Merlin."

"I haven't," Layla said. "But that sounds like fun."

"And tell us when Warren is racing," Gwaine said. "We'll all go and watch."

Warren turned and looked at him.

Gwaine smiled brightly. "Never watched BMX racing but I think it will be fun."

"It is," Layla said. "The seeding starts on Day 12."

"We'll try and be there," Gwaine said.

Arthur checked his watch, impatient now that Merlin's race was over, he wanted to be gone before Merlin decided to come up and see them…if he was thinking about coming up and seeing them. "We need to get back to the athlete's village."

Gwaine turned and looked at him, then nodded. They all said their goodbyes to Layla and Warren – Arthur was certain they would end up at the BMX, and then left the swimming building.

Later that night, Arthur's phone beeped at him. He frowned when he saw the name on the screen – he wasn't sure how Merlin had gotten his number, and how Merlin's number had made it into his phone. But that was the name shining at him from the screen. He stared down at his phone in confusion until it vibrated again and he snatched it up – looking at the display. He put his thumb on the sensor and then went to the messages section.

Hey, saw you at the race today! Couldn't catch you.

Just wanted to wish you the best for your practise tomorrow.

Arthur stared at the messages for too long and had no idea what to say – he knew what he wanted to say but he didn't know what he should say. Finally he just typed something that wasn't enough, and didn't really say anything, and then turned his phone off.

It was a great race. Good luck tomorrow.

Arthur grabbed his tablet, queued up an audiobook and slipped it under his pillow to distract his mind while he drifted off to sleep.

///
Ailsa will be explained tomorrow. Anyone want to take a stab at who you think she is?

Merlin woke up with his phone singing out *Monster Mash* and he took a moment to regret letting Ailsa anywhere near his music list. He pulled the phone closer and swiped off the alarm and then his chest tightened in excitement. He thumbed it open and held his breath as he brought up the message and then let it out on a slightly disappointed sigh. He was glad that Arthur had responded – Merlin didn't think he would have when the swimmer had gone to bed the night before. He'd been exhausted and hadn't been able to wait any longer to see if Arthur got back to him.

But, he didn't know what to do with *It was a great race. Good luck tomorrow.* And there was nothing he could do about it today. Arthur's race was the next day, and given how focussed the other man had proven himself to be, he wouldn't be thinking about anything other than his upcoming final today. Merlin let out a huff of breath and turned his phone off. He'd look at it again after the race. He knew other people would be messaging him, calling him, wishing him well – all knowing that he wouldn't have his phone on until after the race. Merlin flipped over and buried his head into his pillow. He knew he was fucked. He'd lied to his mother. He'd been lying to himself.

He wanted to go on an actual date with Arthur, and he wanted to get to know him, and he wanted things he had convinced himself he would be completely fine without. Because he had Ailsa and he was okay with that being his life. Except, now he'd met Arthur.

He was so fucked.

Merlin pushed himself up and out of bed. He went into the shower and looked down at his chest – still smooth from the waxing he'd done before the competition and pulled out the things he'd need to shave the dark stubble off his cheeks. When he was done with swimming, and was living happily in Ealdor, writing code, and being that guy in the village who'd gone to the Olympics, he was going to grow a beard and he would never go near wax again...he might even start an online campaign to encourage the world to give up waxing. He'd need a catchy tag line. He rubbed shaving cream onto his cheeks and neck and thought about anything he could except for Arthur and how completely he had ruined his life, and the contentment he'd had.

Merlin was a happy person, he liked his life, and now he was already sad that he wasn't going to see Arthur ever again in a week. He shouldn't have kept putting so much effort into seeing the other man, he should have waited until after the meet was over. But, he thought he had this under control and now...now, he was on the cusp of being able to make a move and he could actually see the heartbreak he had set himself up for.

There was a knock on the door and Merlin wiped the line of shaving cream on his ear before opening it to see Gaius standing on the other side.

"What are you doing here, Gaius?"
"Good morning to you too," Gaius said, eyebrow cocked in a judgemental way.

"Sorry, Gaius, good morning, what are you doing here?"

"I wanted to check on you."

"Why?"

"I was speaking to your mother and she told me about Prince Arthur."

Merlin groaned. "I'll just get changed."

Gaius stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. "I know King Uther."

"How?"

"I lived in Camelot when I was younger and worked with their swimming team."

"I didn't know that," Merlin said, frowning at Gaius. "Are you trying to warn me not to get involved?"

Gaius looked at him for a moment. "It's too late for that."

Merlin flushed but didn't say anything.

"I'm here to make sure you're focussed on today."

"I'm always focussed on the race."

"Normally that's true," Gaius said. "But you've been different for the last few days. And I am worried that you are more distracted than you should be."

"And you waited until today to mention it?" Merlin asked.

Gaius looked disappointed. "I never thought I would need to said anything at all."

"And it doesn't need to be said now," Merlin said. "I am going to go into this final focussed on winning it. I have just as much of a chance as anyone else in that pool."

"I know you can win the race," Gaius said. "If you are focussed and you want it enough, no one can touch you in the pool. That has never been in question, Merlin, but if you're distracted."

"I really like him, Gaius," Merlin admitted. "I could see myself actually in a relationship with him and I know this is terrible timing and I know that it is not going to work because he's a prince and I have Ailsa and I'm not going to do anything to hurt her. You're right, I'm a bit distracted. But that is for tomorrow, for the day after, when we are both finished and I can get it out of my system. I am going to leave this room and I am not going to think about him again, Gaius."

Gaius looked like he wanted to argue but the line of his mouth firmed and he nodded. "Eat and I will see you at the pool in an hour."

"See you there, Gaius."

Merlin watched him leave and then got changed and went downstairs. He could see Sherlock sitting at a table, obviously watching for him, but he didn't really feel up to talking to his cousin. Or anyone for that matter. He turned his back on Sherlock and found a table by himself. He kept his
word to Gaius though and thought about his race plan, what he needed to achieve before the race, and everything else that was race related and not related to Arthur.

Sherlock sat down across from him, obviously having not taken the hint; as per usual – Merlin should have known better.

"Not this morning, Sherlock."

"He wants more than just the rest of the week from you as well," Sherlock told him. "Don't be boring. If I am able to develop a functioning relationship, I believe you shall be able to too. Now, focus on the final and win – you are related to me, I expect excellence."

"You had me right up until the end where you made it about you, Sherlock."

Sherlock shrugged. "I'm going to go and meet Hunith and Ailsa. Mycroft and Lestrade shall be watching the race as well."

"So no pressure."

Sherlock looked at him with judgement. "All of the pressure of an Olympics final, Merlin, please pay attention."

"Thanks, Sherlock, I'll see you later."

Merlin took his tray to the station and then headed to the buses that would take him to the swimming complex. He saw the physio, did his warm up, changed into his official swim suit, and then went into the pre-swim area. He knew this might be his last Olympic race ever. There was every possibility he was going to retire – he was getting to the upper age for swimmers who could look to the next Olympics with any sort of certainty. There was so much to think about that wasn't the race. There was always so much else to think about when he should be thinking about his race, his Olympics, but Merlin had always been good at pushing all of that out of his mind when it really mattered.

So, when he was called out – Lane 4 because of the Olympic record he'd set, the rest of the world left him behind. He listened for Ailsa's voice and lifted his hand up in a wave for her before he moved around to keep his muscles warm and waited for the race to start. He'd seen Sherlock sitting on Ailsa's other side – for some reason she loved Sherlock when most other people, except for John, tolerated Sherlock because he was family and family was important to them.

They called them all to the blocks and Merlin stood up, stretching down for his toes and smiled – he felt good, he felt like he was going to win, and then he was in the water and there was nothing else. There was only the stroke, and the beat in his head telling him if he was on track. The Italian was in lane four, the Australian in lane three, and other Italian and the America were next to them. But he wasn't thinking about any of them. A month before the Olympics he'd done his new personal best in a time under the world record so he was counting the same beat in his head. At the second turn he was in front, and he was at the pace he wanted. He did miss Gaius yelling at him as he made the turns and telling him if he was on pace, but Merlin felt confident being in front. At the fourth turn the gap between him and the Italians was longer than it had been but he didn't let up – keeping the pacing in his head. He'd always been good at his pacing; one of the few good aspects of the fact that Merlin was completely in his own head when he was racing. After the fifth turn he pushed the rest of the race out of his head and focussed inwards instead just 'swimming his own race'.

He heard the bell above him and smiled into the turn – there was no one in front of him, no one he
could see, and he knew he was going to win. He just needed to keep focusing on his stroke and he was going to win another gold medal. He slammed his hand into the wall and turned, looking down both sides of the pool and smiled when he saw that he was alone. He looked up at the crowd and smiled – Ailsa and his mother were jumping in excitement. Sherlock and Mycroft looking smug while Greg held up a mobile phone – probably for Quincy who hadn't been able to leave London for the Games. He waved up at them all, and then turned to look at the official time. Merlin couldn't have held in the smile if he'd been paid to do so – new personal best, and new Olympic and world records – he'd gone five second under 14:30 – something only he and Gaius knew he could do. They had kept the new PB a secret in the led up to the Games and he'd managed to smash his own record. Now Merlin could be sure that Gaius' eyebrows would be at half-mast and he wouldn't get reprimanded by them for at least another twenty-four hours.

He pulled himself out of the pool and waved up at the crowd, spotting the athletes in the stands that he knew. He saw Pavel, and Sulu's family waving at him, Castiel and Sam sitting in the stands – Dean nowhere to be seen but that wasn't surprising. He could see Phil, Clint, and Natalia – Clint the only one with an expression. And the Romanian shooter next to them, with Rogers tucked into his side. Merlin's eyes flitted over the rest of the crowd but he knew he wouldn't see a blond head in Camelot colours. He moved over to the journalists and then out the back. He looked at Gaius and smirked.

"See, completely focussed," he told the older man.

"Yes," Gaius said, his eyebrows not moving at all. He reached over and pulled Merlin into a hug. "I'm so proud of you; you swam the way I knew you could."

"Thank you, Gaius," Merlin said, his eyes pricking with emotion.

"I support you with what comes next as well," Gaius said gruffly and stepped back. "Now, go and get ready for the medal ceremony."

Merlin nodded and then turned to walk away. He went and did a quick warm down with the physio, then showered and changed into the official tracksuit. Then he froze – he'd won his third gold in the 1500m freestyle at the Olympics. He'd made history. He, Merlin Emrys, the dorky kid from Ealdor with wingnut ears was the very first person to ever swim sub 14:30 in this race, he was the first person to win three gold in this race. He was the first person to have done those things and no matter who else ever did them he would still be the first. Merlin smiled to himself in the mirror and then turned for the line out for the pool deck.

He walked out smiling. He accepted the medal with a cheek-aching grin. He walked around the pool deck with a stupid smile on his face. He went back out to the athlete's area still beaming and he had a feeling the smile wouldn't drop off his face for days. He rushed out to find his mother, Ailsa, and the rest of his family and was yanked into hugs by his mother and Ailsa. Mycroft shook his hand, Greg rolled his eyes at the man and hugged Merlin. John and Sherlock gave him their congratulations and then all of them, along with Gaius, went out for a celebration dinner when all of Merlin's commitments were over.

That night, when he turned his phone back on he looked at the message from Arthur again and smiled. He'd talk to the other man after the rowing final, and he'd see if they both actually wanted the same thing out of this. He couldn't wipe the smile off his face while he fell asleep, and his dreams were sweet.

///
Arthur looked down at the gold medal around his neck again and couldn't believe that it was his. He could feel it, his entire body could feel how hard he had been pushing it, but it still hadn't quite sunk in yet. Then his phone buzzed – he pulled it out and saw Merlin on the screen. His heart started beating faster and his breath caught.

**Where are you? I want to introduce you to someone.**

*Boat shed, I'll come out.*

**Nah, I know where it is.**

Arthur frowned down at his phone – how did Merlin know where it was? But, he couldn't say he was sad that they would be alone. The only person that Merlin could want to introduce him to was the illusive girlfriend – Ailsa. He turned and looked at Gwaine, Lancelot, and Leon and explained that Merlin was coming to see him. He told them to head back to the bus without him but Gwaine rolled his eyes so hard it looked like he might lose his balance.

After what seemed like an eternity, Arthur turned to see Merlin walking into the boat shed. He wasn't alone, but instead of the adult woman that Arthur was expecting there was a child – about six years old, blonde hair pulled back into twin braids. She was dressed in a miniature version of the British official Olympic tracksuit.

"Hi," Arthur said, frowning at Merlin.

"You won," Merlin said, with a brightly broad grin.

"I did…we did," he looked around at the team and waved at them weakly. "It wasn't just me."

"Of course," Merlin smiled awkwardly. "So, I know this is a bit weird but I wanted to introduce you to Ailsa, she-"

"This is Ailsa?" Arthur interrupted.

Merlin frowned at him. "Yeah…"

"Oh," Arthur said, thinking back quickly over all of the times that Merlin had spoken about her and realised he had made a stupid assumption.

"I mean…you knew she was my daughter, right?"

Arthur flushed.

"Who did you think she was?"

Arthur shook his head.

"Daddy?" Ailsa asked, looking up at him. "You didn't finish introducing me to your new friend."
"Sorry, poppet," Merlin said, smiling down at her. "Ailsa, this is my new friend Arthur – I've been watching some of the Olympics with him. Arthur, my daughter Ailsa – when she found out I'd met a real like Prince she begged to be introduced to him."

"I'm not his biological daughter," Ailsa said. "But he's my father."

Merlin's ears coloured. "Yes, well, Ailsa likes to let people know about that."

"It's very honest," Arthur said, completely off-kilter; he had no idea what to do or say now.

"I thought you knew," Merlin said.

"Hey, Ailsa, right?" Gwaine said. "Have you ever sat in a rowboat?"

She nodded her head at him. "Yes, but they aren't rowboats."

Gwaine laughed. "Very true, have you ever sat in a sculling boat?"

She shook her head. "Daddy?"

Merlin nodded, eyes on Arthur before they flicked down to her. "Would you like to?"

She nodded enthusiastically.

"Okay," he walked over and she stepped into the boat.

"Merlin," Gwaine whispered. "This was so you could talk to Arthur."

Merlin frowned at him.

"Jesus, man, he didn't know she was your daughter…obviously."

"Right," he looked down at Ailsa and then up at Gwaine. "Will you be okay?"

Gwaine rolled his eyes. "Kids love me."

Merlin stepped back; he would still be able to see them both, if Gwaine proved to not be good with kids. When he returned to Arthur the other man looked a little more composed.

"So…" Merlin said. "You didn't know she was my daughter."

"No."

"And you thought I was basically trying to…whatever, when I had a…girlfriend, wife, something?"

"I thought I was reading you wrong," Arthur admitted. "I knew I wanted you to be trying to…whatever me, but I thought I was wrong."

"You could have asked."

Arthur nodded.

"I assumed you knew," Merlin said. "They trot the story out every time they write anything about me."

"I don't read news articles," Arthur explained. "I have a press secretary that does that for me."
Merlin laughed. "Shit, I'm trying to date a bloody prince."

"Date?"

Merlin flushed. "Yeah, I mean...I was hoping it wasn't just...you know...because it was the Olympics."

"It's not," Arthur said. "Dating sounds good. I mean, it's a pain to do for me, but I'd like to do it with you."

"Good."

"But you have a daughter."

"Yeah, my best friend – Willa, she got pregnant in University. Guy was an arsehole, didn't want anything to do with Ailsa and disappeared from her life. I told Willa I'd help her raise the baby, which might have been youthful insanity given that I was trying to get into a position to come to my second Olympics around the same time. But, we contacted the guy and got him to agree to sign over all parental rights. Willa and Ailsa moved in with me and my mum because her family was pretty useless and then she got sick. I adopted Ailsa the first time Willa went in for surgery to remove the cancer. She died eighteen months later and now I'm raising Ailsa."

"Wow," Arthur said, stepping closer. "That's a huge responsibility."

Merlin nodded. "My mum helps, a lot."

Arthur nodded, looking at Merlin intently – in a way that made Merlin feel like he was visibly sweating.

"Probably insane," Merlin said. "I've got a kid and you're a Prince."

"Probably," Arthur said, eyes darting over towards Gwaine before he stepped closer and kissed Merlin softly. "Want to go and see the final Camelot field hockey game tonight?"

"Yes."

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Chapter End Notes

So, originally there is was going to be more to Arthur thinking Ailsa was someone else but this just worked better so here we are. Almost done, just an epilogue to come.
In what is now becoming a tradition for Crown Princes, Crown Prince Arthur Pendragon of Camelot has announced his engagement to Merlin Emrys, eight time Olympic gold medallist for England. The two met at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and have been dating since though they only went public with their relationship eighteen months ago.

King Uther Pendragon announced this morning that his son and the Welshman had officially become engaged over the weekend.

"I am very pleased to announce the engagement of my son, HRH Crown Prince Arthur Pendragon, first in line to the Kingdom of Camelot, son of Uther and Igraine Pendragon, to Mr Merlin Emrys, of Ealdor, son of Balinor and Hunith Emrys, father of Ailsa Amison. The engagement was made on Sunday, 17th November 2019."

Merlin Emrys, who will be competing at his final Olympics next year, assuming he qualifies, said that they will get married after the Olympics as he intends to compete for England before retiring to join his fiancé in his royal duties.

The three time Olympian has been raising his best friend's daughter, Ailsa, since her mother's death in 2012 shortly after the London Olympics. Following their marriage Merlin will become Prince Consort Merlin and his daughter will take up the title of Lady Ailsa, she will not be in line for the throne.

When asked about the royal line, and his duties to provide an heir, Crown Prince Arthur said: "I'm sure we can work something out, our focus is on Tokyo and then the wedding. After that we'll see what we can do."

Prince Arthur is hoping to go to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics with his coxed Men's Eight Rowing team. He, and the Camelot Knights, have won the last two Olympic gold medals in the event

The End

Chapter End Notes

We're done. I'd love to know what you thought!

End Notes

The couples (in order of appearance):
Lancelot/Gwen (Merlin)
Steve/Bucky (Captain America)
Clint/Phil (Avengers/MCU)
Cas/Dean (Supernatural)
Connor/Oliver (How To Get Away With Murder)
John/Sherlock (Sherlock)
Mycroft/Lestrade (Sherlock)
Q/Bond (Bond movies)
Jaime/Brienne (Game of Thrones)
Matt/Foggy (Daredevil)
Derek/Stiles (Teen Wolf)
Mack/Fitz (Agents of SHIELD)
Logan/Max (Dark Angel)
Jared/Miss Parker (Pretender)
Harry/Hermione (Harry Potter)
Anne/Fredrick (Persuasion – Jane Austen)
Damon/Alaric (Vampire Diaries)
Spike/Willow (Buffy tVS)
Thorin/Bilbo (Hobbit)
Ori/Dwalin (Hobbit)
Steve/Danny (Hawaii Five-0)
Eggsy/Harry Hart (Kingsman)
Charles/Erik (X-men)
Rogue/Wolverine (X-men)
Hank/Alex (X-men)
Veronica/Logan (Veronica Mars)
Mac/Dick (Veronica Mars)
Spock/Kirk (Star Trek)
Oliver/Felicity (Arrow)
Katniss/Gale (Hunger Games)
Sulu/Chekov (Star Trek)
Warren/Layla (Sky High)

Hope I didn't miss anyone :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!