

forty days to land

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by [impossibletruths](#)

Summary

He keeps stumbling across the others tucked away in all its corners, washed up like survivors of some great storm. They collect in ones and twos: here in the kitchen, here on the stairs, here on the balcony, here just outside the bathroom. Like they've come unspooled and settled where they've fallen only to scrape themselves up long enough to eke out something in the shape of living. They're all adrift in the big, hollow sea of an apartment, and he's the shipwreck, half sunk, all ribs and spars dragging them down.

It's a long road back to okay, but they're managing it as best they can, and they're managing it together, and that's the part that matters.

Notes

There are two things I intended to write post season 4. This is neither of them.

As a general rule I'm ignoring the last few episodes of s4 because I wanted to deal with a different set of issues, so we'll just assume that the gang managed to wrap up the major conflicts of the season in a satisfying and in-character way and are left with a little time to evaluate, breathe, and mull over what comes next.

For the prompt *We talk in the dark as we fall asleep, and we are objects in the night sky outside of time. (it is the exact opposite of alone.)*

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The blinking red numbers of the clock read just after four when he wakes, flailing and floundering in his big, empty bed. The tattered shreds of his dream are already unravelling, but the clawing panic rises like a wave in the dark and threatens to drag him under.

Well, shit. There go his chances of getting a full night's sleep.

He sits up, swings his legs over the edge of the bed and stares blindly into the dark while his eyes adjust and his heart rate slows. The cloth of his shirt is soft under his hands and cool against his back when he pulls it on, fingers finding the buttons methodically in the dark. Then he stands, and sighs, and pads down the hall to the kitchen.

The apartment is oceans-big, especially at night, deep and dark and dreary, and he feels like he could drown in all the empty space. He keeps stumbling across the others tucked away in all its corners, washed up like survivors of some great storm. They collect in ones and twos: here in the kitchen, here on the stairs, here on the balcony, here just outside the bathroom. Like they've come unspooled and settled where they've fallen only to scrape themselves up long enough to eke out something in the shape of living. They're all adrift in the big, hollow sea of an apartment, and he's the shipwreck, half sunk, all ribs and spars dragging them down.

God, that's depressing. Maudlin. He pulls a face—he wasn't made for *maudlin*—and braces himself against the kitchen counter, breathes in deep and breathes out long and slow, like he could rid himself of the crowding thoughts of ghosts and drowning and empty space as easily as bad air. He wants a drink almost as badly as he doesn't want to want a drink. He makes himself coffee as a compromise, coffee maker hissing and spitting, monstrously loud in the muffled four am stillness.

But then, no one sleeps at night anyway. Josh slips in, pours two cups without a word and vanishes again. Eliot cradles his in his hands—the heat is nice, too-sharp and grounding—and sits blindly on the couch as the stars turn and the grey of dawn creeps through the wide, arching windows.

When the first yellow light of day drips through the apartment he sets down the coffee, cold and barely-touched, and stretches himself out on the couch to doze.

Quentin doesn't talk to him.

Quentin doesn't talk to anyone much, except Julia. He finds them tangled up now and then, heads pressed close, drifting together. He never lingers. He feels enough like an intruder as it is.

Quentin won't look at him either. None of them will, not quite, not full-on. Even Margo, beautiful brave Margo, flinches when she catches sight of him unexpectedly, like a reflex, like hitting your elbow against the doorframe or jumping at the thundercrack. He doesn't take it personally, or he tries not to take it personally, and he can almost pretend those are the same.

In an effort to help, he makes himself loud, known. He keeps to the hardwood floors where his shoes go *click click click* and taps his fingers against the granite of the countertops when he brushes past and hums and sighs and rustles. He makes himself a lighthouse, a fog horn in the stifling, flat expanse of the drowned penthouse, *look out, here I am, here I come*.

It's strange to be the wreck and the warning, but he juggles it the best he can. It assuages the guilt as much as it provokes it, and he juggles that too as they drift together through the storm-shattered aftermath of the world's latest attempt to end.

He almost, when the silence is particularly suffocating and he feels particularly cracked and splintered, craves a new disaster. To have something to band together against, to have something to fight. Then he could pour himself into that, make himself fit a shape instead of unspooling. But they're all struggling to keep their heads above the water; another storm could just as easily drown them all.

"Look," says 23, blunt as ever. "Just give them some time, okay?" He says it unprovoked, throws himself down on the couch across from him and scowls so fierce Eliot's honestly taken aback.

It's a nice change, the shock, the affront. Bright and incessant and unfettered, and he'd almost forgotten what that felt like.

"I am," he bites back, and that feels nice too. Can't he see? Can't he parse the care Eliot's taking, the patience, when he just wants to grab someone, anyone, by the collar and shout that he's *him* now, still, again, he's *himself* and he's half-drowned too, he's the one carrying their crooked glances and silence and doubt and—

"Yeah, I know, just. Don't feel bad about it, yeah?"

And, oh.

Oh. Comfort. That brings him up short. He hadn't expected an attempt from this Penny of all people. He's even more surprised to find it's almost... sweet. Penny-shaped, so rough around the edges and impatient, but sweet nevertheless.

So instead of saying something sharp and hollow and churning he pauses, and answers, slow and wry, "I'll try."

Penny's laugh is sharp and churning, so maybe he gets it anyway. "Sorry it sucks."

"Well, what else is new?" Eliot sighs with an edge of that old airy carelessness, and Penny pins him with a wryness all his own, and he never thought resignation could feel so nice.

Quentin doesn't talk to him, but he talks to Quentin.

"I think he'd like that," Julia says. It's midnight. He's making an attempt at eating yogurt, mostly by scooping around the little bits of fruit and flavor and sucking too long on the spoon, until he only tastes mouth-warm metal. It's peach flavored, because the universe has a

sense of irony and hates him. Though, also, he loosed an ancient pseudo-god child monster on the known universe like, eight months ago so he possibly deserves it, sort of.

Wreck and wreckage, and the world all unsteady waves around him. He sticks the spoon back in the container and sighs.

“I didn’t think he wanted anything to do with me.”

Julia doesn’t say *you’re a fucking moron*, but her face implies it pretty clearly. He winces. He possibly deserves that too.

“You weren’t, you know, here when he—” Her face twists in a way that makes his stomach twist, because he knows, sort of, what it was like, because Penny has mentioned it and Margo has mentioned it and even Alice had come up to him, after and said, “I hope you know what he did to get you back,” like that, all sharp and bitter and damning, *what he did to get you back*, and hearing that had struck him to splinters, so. He wasn’t here, but he thinks maybe that he’s the lucky one, for that.

It’s a horrible thought, and it settles in with the rest of the horrible thoughts that drag at him like anchors.

“Yeah,” he says, thick and heavy and drowning a little, still, constantly. His fingers tap against the counter. Instinct. *Here I am, watch out.*

“Yeah,” she agrees. He swallows. His tongue tastes like yogurt and metal.

“I’m sorry.”

Her eyes cut to him and she *looks* at him. He almost wishes she wouldn’t. “It’s not me you should apologize to.”

It strikes like Alice, *I hope you know what he did to—*

“I know.”

He drops the yogurt in the trash and his spoon in the sink and drifts, seeks some other momentary shelter in the wide, wild hollow of the apartment where he can unravel in peace.

The thing about Quentin—or one of the things about him, one of the many myriad, wonderful things about him—is that he is not at all like Eliot, because he is brave down to his bones, like there is a belief burning within him that will not let him be anything but. It is awesome in the grandest sense of the word, and terrifying, and it means that Quentin will not look at him or talk to him, but he will sit for long, long hours at the edge of Eliot’s space, like a satellite caught in orbit, like he can’t escape the undertow as Eliot sinks dragging everything down down down with him.

Go, he means to say. *Don’t let me drown you too.*

But there is a difference between intending bravery and acting it, and he thinks maybe sometimes being brave means letting someone decide to take the plunge, even if you feel raw-wretched and unworthy.

So. Q seeks him out, and he talks to Q.

He says, “Sorry,” first. That’s the most important. He’d said it when he first surfaced, when everything was all chaos and cracking and Quentin had been there, a port in a storm. He’d said it with his hand bracketing Quentin’s face, because when the fog and darkness cleared and he was in his body and not just his mind it had been a miracle. He had hoped, yes, but there is a chasm between hope and belief, and he in his deep-drowned heart hadn’t thought to see him again, the real thing, flesh and blood and imperfect in a way his memories never managed to capture. He’d said it like it was a lifeline and he the drowning man, *I’m sorry I’m sorry Q I’m sorry*, and Q had held on just as tight as the storm had raged and roiled around them.

And then the waters settled and he found himself the shipwreck not the sailor, and nobody will look at him now for fear of remembering the storm.

He can’t bring himself to blame them for that. Not much, anyway. It was his fuckup. He’s trying to own it.

So. “Sorry,” he says first. Testing the waters. Quentin, folded over the meal in his lap—a microwaved instameal in a little plastic tray that smells almost good enough to make him hungry, even though he knows it probably tastes like cardboard and too much salt—doesn’t respond. Doesn’t look at him. But he shifts, barely, towards Eliot.

And Eliot is all ribs and spars, open and splintered and drowning, so he talks himself a lifeline.

“I thought of you,” he says delicately. Q spears some... macaroni, maybe? God it looks terrible. Q spears some macaroni on his fork and tilts his head in Eliot’s direction, which is invitation enough. “When I was. Stuck. In there. Better than talking to myself, right?”

There is a pause for Quentin to answer, and he doesn’t. Eliot presses on. *I think he’d like that*, Julia had said. Eliot hopes so.

“And Margo. Of course. Not as good as the real thing, but— Well, neither of you were. None of it was. It was mostly...”

Horrible. Terrifying. A cloying mess of too-sweet memories and digging through half-remembered moments of red death and broken things and *wanting wanting wanting* until he had nearly drowned in it.

But he hadn’t, so. It was fine. Would be fine. Something in the shape of fine could be constructed from it. Besides, he’s here now, right? So what the fuck does he have to complain about. He’s not the one who had to live with—

Well. Anyway.

“Boring,” he settles on, and laughs thin and false, and Quentin chews his macaroni. His hair isn’t long enough to hide his face anymore; Eliot can see the creases around the corner of his eye, the flat line of his mouth, the way his jaw works and how it pulls at the skin of his temple. He wants to touch him, chin jaw cheek hairline, but.

But. He swallows.

“I met the other, mmm. Host? He was kind of sweet, actually. You would have liked him. He helped me get out, to. To see you.”

Q’s eyes flicker in his direction then settle back on his food. Eliot fiddles with one of the buttons on his waistcoat.

“I did have to confront my most traumatic memory, which is nowhere near as thrilling as it sounds I promise but it— Heh.” He tries to keep his voice, his expression, even, but years—a lifetime—of shutting it all out is. Hard to ignore. His eyes close, mouth twists into a facsimile of a smile. One hand flexes in search of a light or a drink or an anything to put between himself and everything roiling inside him. He takes a moment to let it pass. Breathes in. Breathes out. Makes his hand sit on the couch next to his leg, patient, still.

Somewhere in the apartment a door opens and closes, but no one joins them in the living room, so. So.

“I lied to you,” he says, and oh, his voice is strong, steady. He’s proud of that. “When I said I wouldn’t choose you, and you wouldn’t choose me, I lied, because I was afraid and running away was easier.” He breathes in, out. His hand flexes against the couch. “I’m sorry, Q.”

Silence for a moment, then a door again, upstairs, and footsteps, but no one appears on the catwalk or clatters down to interrupt them, so. He swallows, holds white-knuckle tight to the shreds of this lifeline he’s speaking for himself. He stares at his hand on the couch. He can’t bring himself to look at at the bare sliver of Q’s face, can’t bring himself to see what he’s feeling, if he’s feeling, if he’s hearing. If he doesn’t get this out now he might never manage it.

Courage, as it turns out, is a bitch.

“I’m trying to be braver,” he says, quiet. “I promised myself if I got out I would be— I’d stop running. From. Things that matter to me.” He is an ocean inside, all at sea, unmoored. His hand flexes, straightens, flexes; he folds it beneath the other one and places them on one knee. The perfect picture of control and his pulse pounding his his ears and wrists and chest. “So I’m. I’m going to stay, okay? I’m going to stay and try to be braver. For—” He bites down hard, and swallows, and forces his eyes open. There is no one else around. He glances over now, quick and uncertain. Quentin has finished his meal; he sits with his head bowed so Eliot can’t see his expression. One hand wraps around his fork. The other holds his empty microwave tray.

Eliot says, as steady as he can manage, “I’m going to stay and try to be braver for you.”

Quentin doesn't move. For a long, long moment he doesn't move, and Eliot sits there half watching him, everything bared, everything hoping, everything burning.

Then his head dips once, twice. A nod. Acknowledgement.

He doesn't look at Eliot. He doesn't say anything. And Eliot feels like someone has carved out everything inside of him, left him curiously light.

"Okay," he says, and he nods too, and then they sit in silence, just at the edges of each other's space, until Margo gets back just before dinnertime.

"Jesus," she says, hands on her hips to find them lurking in the half dark of the living room. "This is the saddest thing I've fucking seen."

She chivvies Q off to shower—and he complains as she does, *I'm not a kid, Margo*, and she bitches right back, and Eliot watches it all happen like a ghost, scooped out and empty and spectating from an ocean away.

Then she turns to him, and says, "You look like absolute shit," and bullies him into the kitchen to eat something, and *something* is another one of those terrible instameals. Chicken pot pie. Margo drops it in front of him with a fork.

"Eat."

"This is probably going to poison me. Doesn't Josh cook?"

"Eat or I'll feed it to you and neither of us is gonna enjoy that."

Eliot eats. He burns his tongue for his trouble, and he was right—it does taste like cardboard and salt, and the worst of it is that it doesn't even matter because he's suddenly ravenous. Margo watches him eat, cocked eyebrow and cocked hip and her particular brand of impatience that says, *Well? Get on with it.*

"It's fine," he says to the question she's not asking. "We were just talking."

"Uh huh."

He raises an eyebrow at her and she raises one right back, and it's only a little ruined by the way her gaze half slides off him, the way she won't quite meet his eyes.

He puts his fork down, not so hungry anymore. Reaches an arm out to her.

She folds willingly against him. Sitting at the counter he can just press his lips to her hairline.

"We're figuring it out," he says. "I think."

"I hate it, El."

"Yeah. Me too."

“I miss us.”

“I know, Bambi.”

“Why is this so hard to fix?”

Eliot swallows. The barstool feels an island; the world rolls and crashes and breaks around him, all waves, and he is still splintering, storm-tossed.

Adrift, he thinks, tired, and he murmurs, “I don’t know.”

Margo sighs full and heavy against him, and he sits there and holds her with his eyes closed, wishing for solid ground.

Sometimes Quentin talks near him, or around him, includes him slantwise. Sometimes like now, when they pass too close to each other and all their tattered edges get tangled up. Usually there is alcohol involved, like the beers Josh has set on the coffee table, a siren call for the unemployed twenty-something. Even Alice, who turns her nose up at the drink, crosses her ankles and sits with them, humoring the topic of conversation, which is:

“Is there *anything* good about Fillory?” Kady looks around at them. “I mean, given our track record.”

“Kinghood has its pluses,” says Margo, considering.

“You aren’t a king anymore,” Alice points out, and receives a nasty glare from Margo she weathers with only a flicker of a frown. “What? It’s true.”

“I’m always a goddamn king,” says Margo, and Alice’s expression flickers again. She doesn’t say anything.

“The opium,” posits Josh, and gets a round of tired looks. “Oh, come on. You can’t tell me you’re not thinking it.”

“I liked the stars,” Q says. Penny snorts.

“Really?”

“What?” He shrugs, defensive. “They moved. That’s pretty cool.”

“They move here too, dumbass,” Penny says, but Eliot understands. The stars in Fillory are nothing like the stars on Earth, because in Fillory they are magic and alive and when they walk across the sky it isn’t a metaphor for the rotation of the planet.

“The castle is nice,” he says to pull the attention away from Q, and there is another round of sighs, more wistful than anything.

“The castle *is* nice,” agrees Josh, and even Penny looks like he’d consider it, which he’ll count as a win when it comes to 23, and really any of the Pennies.

“It’s not that nice,” mutters Alice, but that seems more for the sake of argument than anything else. Besides, Alice’s experiences with Fillory have been... less than pleasant. He can’t blame her for not being a fan.

Penny leans back. “Isn’t there that one forest that gets you really fucking high?”

“Yeah,” says Q. Then, “You know, when you look at it maybe all the drugs aren’t surprising.”

“Because everything’s batshit?” Julia asks. Quentin nods.

“Pretty much, yeah.”

“The only reason anyone likes Fillory is the contact high,” Kady says, like she’s won the argument, and it splinters from there. Eliot leans back and watches them break into pairs and trios as they argue and disagree and laugh, watches the way they spark to life when struck together, everyone feeding off each other, knotting and tangling and somehow buoyed instead of sinking. Survivors holding tight, moving forward.

Quentin, sitting on the other side of Margo, tilts his head towards Eliot, as though he can feel the weight of his gaze. He doesn’t look at him, not quite, but his mouth tilts a little, the frail edge of a smile, and Eliot’s split and splintered heart soars.

“Hi,” he says to Quentin, who sits out on the balcony, flotsam washed up on the narrow spit of concrete that juts above the chasm of another indistinguishable New York alley. Q tilts his head in his direction at the intrusion, but his eyes stay fixed above, staring at the low bank of clouds stained old-bruise yellow by the light pollution of the city. Eliot takes another step forward.

“Can I join you?”

“Yeah.”

It comes soft, but it comes nevertheless, and Eliot’s heart does a curious, bobbing, buoyed thing in the cavity of his ribs. He sits carefully, legs folded beneath him. It’s warm out, the humid-hot edge of summer. He thinks it might rain. He hopes it might rain. Pathetic fallacy and all that; he thinks maybe he might feel better if the outside matched the in.

By force of habit he fishes for a cigarette, lighting it before he realizes he doesn’t want one, not really. He watches the end glow orange, narrow trail of smoke curling up into the sky.

Quentin has a cigarette too, one he’s clearly been nursing; the end is burnt low and when he sighs he spills smoke into the night. The apartment glows at their back, quiet chatter slipping through the cracked window. Penny is bitching about something, it sounds like, and Alice is arguing back, and it’s loud and careless and strange in its familiarity, like they’ve begun to remember how to take up space and matter and form and function, like they’re learning how to be people again instead of ghosts.

Eliot asks, “Have you thought about what you’ll do now?”

Quentin hums, a talking-not-talking answer, and then says, “I thought I might go back to Brakebills.” He still doesn’t look at Eliot; he stares resolutely up at the low-hanging sky, but. Talking is good. It shivers across the pulled-open timbers of him.

(“I like it when you talk to me,” he had said, folded up in the hall just outside the bathroom where Eliot had nearly tripped over him, and his hammering heart had made it difficult to understand what Quentin was saying. “You don’t sound like him when you talk. You still— You look like him, sometimes, but you don’t sound like him. He never talked like you.”

And he had been torn between *I’m sorry, Q* and *Of course not; no one could possibly sound like me* and found the middle ground to be, “I— Oh.”

“Yeah.”

It had been like an offering, like a one of those little floating rescue rings people tossed off boats, and Eliot had grabbed it with both hands, metaphorically. He had sat in the hallway too, careful not to touch—even though he wanted to more than anything, wanted to put a hand on his knee or arm or shoulder or neck.

But he hadn’t touched. He had said, “I hate this,” and Quentin had said, “Yeah,” and they had sat like that until Josh had stepped out of the bathroom with his damp hair sticking up every which way, towel around his hips, and said, “Oh jeez, sorry, I didn’t realize there was a line.”

And now here they are, sitting on the balcony.)

Eliot says, “That sounds nice.”

“It does.” Quentin speaks slow and considerate and like he means it. “I miss it.”

Eliot hums. He misses it too, sort of, in a strange way. Misses what it was, maybe. Misses when things weren’t such a complete mess, or were a different sort of mess anyway. It’s that old, sweet lie of nostalgia. Quentin’s head tilts in his direction again.

“Did I tell you I found out my discipline?”

“No.”

“Minor mending.” He says it pleased, chin up a little, chest out, and the line of Eliot’s mouth softens into a smile.

“That sounds right.”

Quentin laughs, a delicate sound that makes Eliot feel like he could fucking float. “Yeah, right?” A longer pause and then, even quieter, teasing: “Explains why I was always so much better at fixing shit up than you were.”

Eliot’s heart settles somewhere in his mouth, and his fingers flex around the cigarette he’s wasting. He doesn’t think he could smoke it right now even if he wanted to; he’s fit to choke on nothing but air. “I wasn’t that bad at it,” he returns in protest, and ruthlessly squashes the uncertainty in his chest. He’s being *brave* dammit.

Quentin's head tips in his direction, and Eliot catches the glimmering edge of a smile. "You were pretty bad, El."

Character assassination, he means to accuse. *Slander and lies*. But something crashes inside the house and they both jump, twisting to look over their shoulder to see Julia sheepishly shrug through the window, Penny folded over in laughter just behind her, Alice rolling her eyes at the both of them. Eliot shakes his head and turns back to Q and Q is—

looking

at him.

Somewhere in his chest his heart stutters to a stop, and then thunders on in double time to make up for it.

"Hey," Quentin says, mouth crooking, a little awkward.

"Hey," says Eliot, all awash with... with uncertainty, yes, and fear, and hope too, maybe, and something bigger and brighter than hope, a different four letter word that blinds him like the sun, and he's trying not to look away.

He grabs onto that feeling as tight as he can, tight enough that it burns, and he says in a rush, "Can I show you something?"

And—brave, he is being brave; he is splintered and hollow and half drowned and being as fucking brave as he can be—he stands and holds out a hand.

For a long moment Q considers it, long enough that his gut twists and something in his throat sours.

He thinks, *Be brave be brave be brave*.

And Quentin looks at him— *looks* at him, full and open, for the first time in— In months, maybe, it must be; for the first time since he can remember since Blackspire, since before Blackspire, since—

Quentin looks at him, and Quentin takes his hand, and like that the fear and desperation washes out of him, leaves him hollow, all ribs and spars. He sags. Quentin keeps looking at him, fingers warm and solid and pressed into his palm.

It is like an olive branch, forty days at sea and the white dove bringing proof of land. Q says, "Show me."

So Eliot takes him by the hand and leads him back through the apartment, the whole hollow heart of it, past laughing Penny and frowning Alice and sheepish Julia, past three sets of raised eyebrows. Leads him down the hall to Quentin's room, with the clothes all over the floor and the bed unmade and the books spread across it like a storm has blown through and left everything upended.

"Close your eyes," he asks, and Quentin looks at him and does.

Eliot steers him forwards, careful of the debris, and sits him on the bed, coaxes him back until he's lying down, and only then does Q say, hesitant, "El?"

"It's okay," says Eliot, stepping back. His hands flicker through simple motions—it isn't complicated spellwork, not really—and the lights dim, and he watches Quentin through it all, face turned to shadows and soft lines in the faint yellow glow of the light pollution creeping through the window. "Open them."

And he does, and—

"Oh," says Q, and in the dark his eyes shine with the reflection of dozens of tiny, glowing stars moving in slow, deliberate patterns across the ceiling. It's a poor approximation of the Fillorian night sky but it's something, anyway, small and familiar. Julia helped him with the ladder and Alice with the enchantment because, well, it *is* her discipline and he's not too proud to admit she's the best magician of all of them.

Q breathes out, unsteadily, and then in, and his eyes shine, and it takes Eliot a moment to realize he's crying.

"Q?"

"I'm okay," he says. He's not crying hard, just quiet little gasps that sneak up on him, make his shoulders shake. He raises a hand to press it against his mouth. Eliot hovers in the star-studded dark, uncertain.

"What can I—"

"Just, come here? Please?"

And what is he to do at that but go to him?

He sits at the edge of the bed and Quentin turns towards him, curved parenthetical. Eliot's heart aches, ribs split open and bloody. He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know what he's allowed.

He asks, "Can I touch you?" and receives in answer the jerky nod of Quentin's head at his hip. His hand moves slow and careful to rest lightly against the curve of his skull, and when Quentin does nothing but shudder again Eliot cards his hands carefully through his hair. Quentin presses his forehead against him, and they stay like that, two points of contact strung between them, hip and head and hand and hair. Eliot feels like he's the one who has been crying, wrung out and raw and exhausted, worn down to bone.

He lies back, stares up at the wandering constellations above. There's a book stuck under the small of his back; he tugs it free and marks the page carefully and sets it aside. Quentin, a moment later, crawls up to lie next to him, parenthetical again and not quite touching, forehead against his shoulder.

"Is this okay?" Eliot asks, and he means the stars, and he means the talking and the looking, and he means lying here in Quentin's bed, Quentin's knees against his and Quentin's head at

his shoulder.

“Yeah,” says Q, voice thick, and his hand drifts across the gulf between them to find Eliot’s hand. He laces their fingers together. Olive branch. Forty days and the promise of land. Something swells in the hollow of Eliot’s chest cavity where he’s been carved out and left split open. “Thank you.”

“God,” says Eliot, almost a laugh, and that surprises him. “What for?”

“Being brave,” says Q, and the *something* in his chest bursts, fills him, overflows. The green glowing stars start to blur on the ceiling, and Eliot has to close his eyes against the tears.

Q, if he notices, doesn’t say anything. Q, who notices, squeezes his hands tighter. Eliot tips his head to press a kiss against the crown of his head, hair soft against his lips. Quentin rolls slightly, tilts his face up to meet his eyes. His cheeks are damp and he’s smiling, big as anything, smiling at Eliot, and when he pushes himself up enough to press their lips together Eliot drinks him in, settles his free hand where it fits perfectly against his neck, thumb pressed just below his ear.

“It’s okay,” Quentin says when he pulls back, staring at him with those clear, open eyes. “We’re okay,” he says, even though Eliot is the one trying to comfort him, even though it is Eliot’s fuckup to fix, even though it’s Eliot who wrecked them in the first place. “We’ll be okay.”

“You sound awfully sure about that given how not-okay things have been lately.”

“We’ll get there,” says Q, all eyes and hands and talking and looking and burning belief beneath it. So Eliot looks back, and takes his hand, and holds on to that terrifying, bright thing inside him as it grows and grows and grows. Quentin smiles and sets his head back down on the rumpled comforter, and Eliot tilts his chin up to stare at the ceiling.

The stars turn above them. Q presses up against Eliot’s side like he could pour himself into the open space of Eliot’s chest and live there, unraveled edges tangled together. Outside thunder cracks and the sky opens, thick dark rain rattling the windows, but that doesn’t matter. They are inside, safe and dry and striking out for land.

End Notes

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