to wage euphoria against justice

by queerlytired

Summary

They resume their lives for all of half a decade, before the train rushes ahead and leaves behind the familiar smell of the only ocean they have ever seen in their lives.

They’re back. They’re really back.

"I think he just wants a friend, to be honest," says Edmund.

Susan rolls her eyes. "Caspian has friends. I'm his friend."

He frowns. "He can have more than one friend, Su."

"By Aslan, Edmund. You can be so thick at times."

Notes

*yells into the void* anyone home???
this was originally supposed to go with stick figure-esque art, but seeing as i Cannot Even Do That Much, we're lacking.
When they tumble out of the closet, it is to meet the floor and the curious eyes of the Professor. It is unsure if perhaps the entire adventure was a mass hallucination they collectively suffered together, and Edmund does not quite accept that there is actual wood under him; rather, he is floating.

Then Susan lets slip a “Holy shit,” and they crash down and know, without doubt, it was real, for if Susan knows it, then why bother denying it?

They tell their stories to the Professor, who listens wistfully and in turn enlightens them as to how he built the wardrobe with his own hands from the trunk of the silver apple tree. They tell him how they ruled for fifteen years, and he tells them about dearest Polly and his own run in with Jadis and the chaos it caused.

Shockingly, Missus Macready doesn’t scold them for the window - they are curious as to what lie the Professor must have made up to keep her off their backs. Eventually, when (almost) all their stories have been exchanged, when all but Edmund are worn out and fast asleep, he creeps back into the kitchen and tries his best to replicate the Professor’s thick cocoa, only to run into the man himself, clad in pajamas and robe.

“Leave that to me,” he says amusedly, and Edmund steps away from the pot of milk.

“I couldn’t help but notice you were the quietest whilst retelling your tales,” mentions the Professor after a moment of silence.

Edmund clenches his jaw.

“It is my fault we are back,” he says quietly. “Hunting the stag was my idea.”

“Is it so bad to be back, dear boy?”

Edmund takes the steaming mug handed to him. He follows Professor Kirke to a small sitting area, illuminated by a bare window. He immediately sets the cocoa down again lest it slip through his trembling fingers.

“Lucy loves Narnia,” Edmund tries, struggling with what to say. “She loves Aslan, and so do Peter and Susan. I do as well, of course. I-” he looks down at his clenched hands. “I am twenty-five. And in my thirteen year old body. How is this supposed to work, Professor? What was the point of allowing us into Narnia only to return?”

Digory sips his cocoa. “I dare not say I know what the Lion was thinking,” he imparts humbly. “But perhaps it was what you needed at the moment.”

“Only to send us back to the exact moment?” Edmund near-scorns, unsure if he missed this easy, immature rage.

The Professor gives him an inquisitive look over the rim of his glasses. “But you are different now, no?”

“How different can I possibly be,” Edmund whispers, and tells him of how he almost loved Jadis enough to destroy his siblings, how he was unworthy of the way Aslan saved him, how he is - was
- the Traitor King in the beginning, how he doesn’t deserve the redemption he received at the hands of his people only twelve years ago, but in this world, never.

Edmund cries like never before, harder than when Father left, and relives how close he was to death by the White Witch’s hand, a second time no less, and ages later is unsure why he still lived.

He blames himself for his and his siblings’ return, that he should’ve returned alone, the stag was his idea, but he’d gathered his siblings to go with him, and if it were only him who’d gone, maybe they’d still be back in Cair Paravel, not just content but happy with their lives.

Professor Kirke lets him pour out his heart over the little table with mugs of hot chocolate in front of them, watching a young man in the body of a prepubescent boy, neither of whom he even knows, with sympathy and solace.

A part of Edmund’s soul appears to crack. “I’ve lived in Narnia longer than I’ve lived here,” he says, crestfallen. He looks into his mug and senses a stark pain in his chest that he hasn’t felt for years - for years, and yet just yesterday. A longing for his mother, and a regret of not saying goodbye properly.

*Please keep her safe,* he prays to Aslan or God or both or anyone who was willing to listen.

Drained, he sips quietly alongside the Professor; the latter wonders what the Lion was thinking sending this child - this man, to this place, when it is the wrong land, somewhere he does not require nor want to be. But it was not in his hands, Digory mused, so why question it?

Ed falls asleep on the plush armchair and wakes up to Lucy nestled into his side, asleep, both covered in worn out quilts.

*I don’t want to face reality,* he thinks blearily. He slowly cards his fingers through his sister’s short hair. *But I suppose I will, if Luce does.*

And he knows she will. Edmund vaguely wonders if a degree in politics will benefit him in this world as well.

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They resume their lives and keep their school grades up for all of half a decade, with enough of an accent for people to know they weren’t from around. Edmund is quite ready to deck Peter across the station for his thankless ass before the train rushes ahead and leaves behind the familiar smell of the only ocean they have ever seen in their lives.

They’re back. They’re really back.

Then they find the ruins and Edmund’s self-loathing rears its ugly head.

*This is all my fault.*

When Lucy places them on their old thrones, Susan concludes that while they have aged a long five years, Narnia herself has aged a longer some hundreds.

Oddly, it is Missus Macready Edmund is reminded of, with her strict rules and indignant shrieks when they placed grubby fingers on statues and artifacts.

Lucy blinks away tears at the thought of Mister Tumnus and the beloved beavers. Ed pulls her in
so she can hide while Peter and Susan rub her back, and hopes her too big heart won’t end up hurting her some day.

They wander until they find their things by luck, although Edmund suspects it was likely Lucy’s built in navigator. They open their trunks. Beneath their old, musty clothes, Lucy discovers letters.

“Oh, my!” She exclaims. “They wrote to us! Oh, I can’t even imagine-”

Edmund grabs a random bundle of some of his items and quietly retreats to the top of the stairs, where he can see both out and underground. He knows he did not receive any letters - he didn’t quite make many friends, even after his forgiveness.

“Mister Tumnus, the Beavers, the chef ladies, the children-,” he hears Lucy excitedly rattle off. He looks down at the unfortunate sacks and recognises one he put his carved figures in. He blinks.

*I don’t think I told anyone about these*, he muses, gently prying the bag’s strings apart.

Inside are *not* his wooden figures, but neatly folded squares of paper. Edmund stares. He disbelievingly pulls them out into his lap, unfolding the one tied shut with a thick black thread, expecting blankness.

Again, he is surprised.

*Dear Edmund,*

*I’ve kindly asked Mister Tumnus to write this letter - he quite enjoys putting Valiant Queen Lucy’s teachings to work. I still appreciate her attempts to teach me, despite the fact that all of me is hooves and no fingers. Though I can spell my name out in the dirt, if need arises. Do tell her that.*

His hands tremble.

*You’ve been gone for quite some time now. I believe it’s nearly been a month. Aslan says you will return, though no one knows when. I’ve retired to my family as of a week ago. I fear I might not be here for your return. For someone with an already declining health, you would imagine I’d have had this letter written sooner, but there you have it.*

*Edmund. You have shown me kindness more than a king is often known to show his subjects. And though you may not see me, or the rest as such, it is only because I am your best friend and you are mine, and you have yet to think of yourself as a king. Poor Tumnus is quaking as he writes this.*

*King Edmund and best friend Ed; I have no doubt you will still have a problem with following higher authorities when you return, so I hope you will take it from me, considering I am neither higher, nor authority. Be kinder to yourself. Narnia loves you as you are, and you must put a stop at your endeavors of being someone you are not. I’m aware I’ve told you this many a time already, but seeing as it has yet to take effect, I hope you shall allow me this a final time.*

*Truth be told, if I’ve failed to reduce you to tears by now, I’m uncertain as to the point of this letter. Thank you for taking care of the many times my health took a turn for the worse, and providing me a job I was proud of, for giving me a friend, for being the best ruler I will see in my lifetime.*
That ought to do it. Be at ease. Take care, my friend.

Your faithful companion (and steed, I suppose),

Phillip

Edmund carefully places the letter down onto the pile of closed notes - dear lord, there were more of these - and places his quivering fists in his lap, staring at the innocent sheet. A handkerchief comes into his vision.

“You’re crying,” Susan states. He takes it but rubs his face dry with his sleeves anyway, making Susan snort. Her own lashes are wet, nose pink. Out of the four of them, it is them who don’t divulge in the act of overcompensating in their emotions, the most level-headed of their family. She possesses a parcel of letters herself, and she steps outside, wordlessly inviting him to join her on the warm grass.

They read the rest of their letters - from Susan’s friends in the castle, the kitchen lasses and the laundry boys, chiefs’ daughters and the like; for Edmund, the Beavers, his favourite Narnian debaters, a note from every single outcast he’d saved and took into their kingdom, Mister Tumnus, surprisingly - in silence, barring the occasional sniffle.

It is some hours later that the siblings finally gather their emotions enough to further explore what is left of their country.

Edmund crosses off places they make their way through, marking off areas and sites on his old map that are now in shambles. Nothing has been spared, not the villages on the outskirts for refugees, nor the center town. They are uncertain if they should be grateful or not that there is a lack of rotting smell from stock stalls.

Peter presses his mouth into a thin line. “There aren’t even any bodies.” They each come to their own horrific conclusions.

When they stumble upon Trumpkin, they fall back into the way they used to fight seamlessly together a lifetime ago, as if not a day has passed. Trumpkin’s rescue is inevitable, and Susan is irked with herself at the escape of the other soldier.

Edmund is the only person capable of besting Peter in a swordfight, though he insisted on the knowledge not wide-spreading. And although he feels a right fool fighting a dwarf half his size, he goes through with it.

Wouldn’t make a great impression to see the damn kings squabbling over a dumb fight, Ed thinks mutinuously. I’ll stuff his wet socks down his bottoms later.

Then Trumpkin takes them on their way, all but Lucy fail to see Aslan, and the dwarf gets a front row seat to the dumbassery of the High Queens and Kings anyway.

Edmund means it when he takes Lucy’s side, long since having put every shred of his faith in his little sister.

With Peter and Susan taking the lead, Edmund takes his usual place at the back. Though this time, Trumpkin seems to have a strange sense of protectivity, and hangs awkwardly around him.

“We’re more or less always like this,” Edmund confirms. Trumpkin doesn’t quite manage to keep the flabbergast from his face.

Ed can’t help the snicker that escapes him.

“Pete’s twenty now, so don’t let him hear you say that. Keeps going off about how he should be able to support all of us himself by now.” He tilts his head in his siblings direction. “Besides. Don’t we each have thirteen hundred and some years on you now?”

Trumpkin looks like he’s about to go onto his knees out of alarm so Edmund hurriedly asks him how he and the rest of the Narnians have been living.

The initial rage that came with Trumpkin’s first impression returns in full force.

“Surviving’s more of a word for it,” he spats. “Narnia below knows the nightmare it’s been.”

He tells the horrors they’d entailed, starting from Telmar’s first invasion on the throneless kingdom, passing through hundreds of years. They’d had peace, for the shortest while when Caspian IX inherited the throne.

“Obviously that didn’t last,” Trumpkin snarls. “Butchered him in his sleep. Wasn’t any of us. Imagine his friends weren’t too keen on his peace plans. Ain’t nobody on that throne now.”

Whoever all were in charge still sent hunts out for the remaining Narnians, a scant number in the face of Telmarines.

“Whole damn world heard the horn blow not a day ago.” Trumpkin eyes them. “You lot work fast.”

“You mean to tell me someone stole my horn,” Susan says drily, eyebrow raised, “and blew it to summon us?”

“At least you don’t have to deal with the boy who didn’t get you were saying no,” Lucy points out. Peter snorts.

“As if he could take on a Queen of Narnia, anyway. You’d scare him off before the day was done!”

Edmund claps his hands. “A compliment!”

“That was almost flattery, Peter. Don’t get soft on me.”

Lucy giggles at Trumpkin’s bewildered face, and they watch as over the short journey the scruffy dwarf forms a fiercely protective stance in regards to their younger sister, inevitable as it was, as nearly everyone who meets Lucy does.

That night Edmund pretends to be asleep as his sisters talk in hushed tones, same as he knows Trumpkin is doing, by the stiff line of his back.

“Why do you think I didn’t see him?” Susan quietly asks about Aslan.

Because you lack faith, Edmund suppresses. He’d had no need to see the Lion himself, not holding the same love for him as Lucy did. He had no need to, for Lucy could tell him she saw the future of humans becoming machines, and he’d believe her without a doubt, his faith in her, boundless. He stifles the urge to move when Susan’s elbow hits the back of his hand.

“But you’re happy to be here, aren’t you?”
“While it lasts,” Susan replies, and Edmund vows he will make sure they stay this time, lampposts or trains or not.

His last thought is calculating the number of years they will likely stay this time before he wakes to two empty spots around the dead fire.
an emperor's legacy

Chapter Notes

i like susan y'all. sometimes u rlly gotta just focus on reality and get thru life u know?? we stan her.
i upped the ages of the characters from the books - currently, pete's 20, su and casp are 19, ed's 18, and lucy's 16. without the added 15 or 1300 years lmao

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Out of everyone, it had to be those temperamental halfwits that woke up first,” he mutters, shaking Susan and Trumpkin awake. “Why wake the rest of us up when you can wander into unchartered territories yourself?”

Trumpkin grunts, and the clang of swords ring through the air. They make a grab for their weapons and run.

Edmund’s first impression of the Prince of Telmar is amusing, to say the least.

He, too, would have expected older kings and queens when summoning help, especially in a time so perilous, but he also would have hoped not to have clashed with the High King of Magnificence before introductions could even go through.

The prince looks entirely wrong-footed and seemingly in danger of overworking his brain at the thought and reality of having sovereigns his age and younger, before he carefully shifts his face into a blank slate. He gives each of them a run over, pausing his dark eyes at the dead leaves that have made home in Susan’s hair. Realization dawns on her and Susan flushes in vexation.

“What, must I be in peak condition?” She snaps. Edmund runs his fingers through his own curls to shake off any possible twigs. “You’re not much better off, Prince,” she scaths, waving a hand at his entirety, covered in rips and mud, clothes having seen better days.

Prince Caspian opens his mouth in shock, about to defend himself before calling to mind precisely who he’s run into. He snaps his mouth shut with narrow eyes and doesn’t apologize either.

Edmund nods approvingly. “Smart,” Peter grunts, rolling his eyes.

His second impression of Caspian lies in a package of confusion and warmed chest when the Prince hesitantly attempts to return his own small smile to Edmund’s smirk. This anomaly causes Edmund to blink, his smug look replaced with surprise.

He’s well aware of his tendency to put people around him, never mind strangers, to discomfort with his strange mannerisms. So to have somebody attempt to be more than civil back - he is caught off guard.

By the time he thinks of returning the prince’s pleasant smile, Caspian has already looked away, impassive again.

The journey to Aslan’s How is filled with lush, overgrown plantation and crops that had no one to harvest them. The air is pleasant, the views are as beautiful as ever, and the Pevensies feel their
bones settle for the first time in five years.

It is also stilted and awkward.

Lucy is indifferent to the Prince, almost motherly towards him at times, if anything. She thoroughly enjoys being in the company of Narnians again, learning the new songs they have made, most of which contain the dark tales of their now-history.

In return, she teaches them songs that she and their Narnian ancestors once created from a happy, brighter time. They greedily take what she gives, and this time Trumpkin, too, watches as they all vow to protect her from any and all malice. She is all smiles and cheer until she stumbles upon a shy faun, her face falling slack.

“Oh, you- you’re-” she blinks rapidly. “You have. Tumnus’s nose.”

The poor faun looks ready to apologize for being burdened with the Queen’s old friend’s genetics, and Lucy clasps her hand before she can get a word out.

“I’m so pleased I could meet someone from his family,” she manages tearily, and dives into stories about her dear old friend, fauns and children clinging to every word with stars in their eyes.

Peter and Caspian are explosive when placed within ten feet of each other, a surprise to no one, when taking into account Peter’s habit of picking fights over the years. They quickly learn to stay out of each other’s way during the two days they spend caravan travelling, ensuring there are a number of people between them at all times.

When need be, they use Chief Glenstorm as a peaceful buffer, who has to put all his personal amusement aside when dealing with the finicky King and Prince.

Edmund understands it, of course - fighting unleashed aggression they could not direct out of themselves in many ways, and the occasional brawl seemed more favourable than hunting down a follower of the White Witch in England to slay. Even Susan had placed her fair share of bruises on snobby nosed students that strut down from America to study, and a broken arm on one memorable occasion.

(They all jab her with remarks of being the Gentle Queen every time, and she rolls her eyes as they recall their coronation, a time where Susan had quite literally paused in her curtsey as the Lion amusingly named her The Gentle.

“How does Aslan deem me gentle when Santa Claus himself gave me a bow?”

“Going out on a limb here, but I think Aslan ranks higher than Father Christmas.”)

She seems to have forgiven Caspian before the day is over - the Prince had given her his share of raisins in an obvious attempt at parley, and she had been gracious enough to accept.

“I despise raisins,” Prince Caspian informs Ed not two minutes after the deed. He tries to fight the grin taking over his face lest his sister sniff out the Prince’s falsehood; Caspian looks pleased with his reaction and walks ahead as dignified as one can with a skip in their step.

Edmund feels as though he has half-assedly passed a test with flying colours.

So, mystifyingly, the Prince does not seem to mind when Edmund unsuccessfully holds back snickers at improper moments, nor when he gets excessively gloomy when blaming himself for the current state of this world, or at his possessive behaviour towards his belongings - and, well,
Edmund’s everything, really. Edmund often feels he is a mixture of his three siblings’ very distinct personalities, yet something else entirely, obscure.

Still the prince does not shy away from him, as some of the Old Narnians who are unsure of what to make of him do.

Now I have to be careful to not cock up whatever daft view of me he’s placed in his mind, he thinks amusedly. A Telmarine thing or royal naivete thing?

They reach Aslan’s How and are welcomed with swords above their heads. It is a passed down sign not only of protection over their crowns at all times, but that they would lay their lives down before any harm came to their High Rulers, as well.

A tingle starts in his toes and goes up, nearly causing him to sway with the brunt of raw emotions.

The High Queens and Kings of Narnia raise their chins and walk home.

Most of the walls of the tomb are inscribed with stories. They start with the creation of Narnia, from her first rulers in a tranquil age, long before the White Witch dug her claws into the country. There is a section on a pillar that matches the story Professor Digory Kirke told them when they returned.

I wonder if she was satisfied with just Narnia, Edmund thinks distractedly. Would she have taken this entire world if we hadn’t come along? The etching of Jadis portrays a silhouette in a dark robe, scraggly hair surrounding her face - an image of everything she was not. Edmund recalls her beauty with ghostly vividness.

“Suppose it’s easier to hate an unsightly creature than a beautiful one,” he mutters.

“Edmund, are you talking to yourself?”

He turns to his sisters, banishing thoughts about the dead witch. A vexed Susan watches him with her arms crossed, a ring of blue ribbons braided into her hair, and Lucy’s arm tucked in her elbow. Lucy beams at him, a green ribbon in her hand.

“How is anyone supposed to take us seriously if we walk around with coloured strips on our heads?”

“I’m sure you’ll manage,” Lucy dismisses brightly, and Edmund seats himself on a corner of the Stone Table for her to spruce up his hair.

“The only satisfying thing to come out of this is Peter barking at everyone with red ribbons done up on his head,” Susan mutters, pulling at a lock of hair, clearly resisting the urge to pull the strips of fabric out.

“I’d tied it into such a lovely bow at the back of his head, but he’d realised,” Lucy says mournfully. “Made me tie it into a knot. He doesn’t appreciate me, truly.”

“You’re his damn favourite, Lu.”

She sniffs haughtily. “I’m all of yours favourite. Besides, it’s not like we have crowns to wear right now.” She tugs his hair, finished. “These do quite nicely. You should keep your hair like this. I can’t braid it if you cut it again.”
“Isn’t that the point?” He spreads out sheets before them. “Su, point out loopholes before Peter yells at me for them.”

“There’s so many ways we could win this if only he’d let us wait longer,” Susan frowns, unsettled. Edmund clicks his tongue, wishing again they’d been fast enough to catch the Telmarine soldier.

“Element of surprise or not, Pete’s an idiot.”

There’s a few moments of silence as they go over the plans. Susan picks a carved minotaur off a scroll and places it behind the centaur. Edmund momentarily furrows his eyebrows before they smoothen out again, and nods. Lucy grows bored quickly and quietly withdraws from the room.

“What’ll we do if Aslan shows up in the middle?”

“That’s not a plan I’ve bothered making,” Edmund admits. “He did that last time and it worked out anyway. Like backup, I suppose.” She hums her agreement.

“Do you really think it’s best to keep Lucy here?” He asks soberly.

Susan pauses. “It’s not like she ever had a lot of fighting experience, or wanted it.” She glances up. “Why?”

“Just curious.”

She gives him an unimpressed look.

“It’s just - she knows just enough to defend herself from mugger. I was thinking about teaching her how to fight. Not now, obviously,” he says hastily. “After this, maybe, when we have some time.”

A shadow falls over Susan’s eyes and she looks back down. Edmund mentally berates his stupidity. Neither bother continuing the subject.

The day is over quickly, the sun setting before Edmund realises he hasn’t stepped out of the catacomb for hours. He grabs a sack he has not yet had the chance to check the contents of and makes his way outside.

Most of the young ones are fast asleep, including Lucy, in a messy row at the side of the tomb. There’s a dying fire some feet away from them, and another in the middle being stamped out by Ironhoof.

He passes by Peter and Glenstorm on his way up and nods at Asterius the minotaur. There isn’t quite anywhere without someone already present, so he walks over to where Lucy and the children are snoring and heaves himself up onto the side of the crypt, making his way up some steps clearly made to be climbed by giants.

Edmund places the sack onto stone and follows suit, stretching out his legs and tugging on the strings of the bag.

Mister Tumnus had, in his letter, informed Edmund of another pouch, that contained gifts from Phillip and migrants he’d help settle into the country.

He briefly wondered if there might be any sharp, poisonous substance in the pouch before thrusting his hand into it blindly, only to immediately yank it back with a hiss, a needle imbedded into his palm.
My bad, Edmund winces. Through the needle’s hole is a string attached to a note.

For King Edmund the Just; a needle for the art of piercings you told us about! It has been charmed to not let the wound fester, and be as painless as possible. Piercings have become quite the fashion among us migrants!

He wills himself not to cry again.

Along with the needle is an acorn, a metre of thick black cord, two gold-painted leaves skillfully carved from wood, some dark blue crystals wrapped in leaves. Edmund pauses.

We figured out how to make ‘molly’! The powder form was unreliable, so we added sugar syrup and flavour to it - works just as well, and tastes better, too! The other side of the note contains ingredients.

“I cannot believe I enforced this,” he mutters under his breath, delighted despite himself. The sound of a throat clearing itself makes him look up. Prince Caspian holds himself awkwardly, a flask in his hand.

“I see Lucy didn’t spare you,” Edmund says, staring at the white ribbon done up in the prince’s hair, and how the moon appears to make him glow ethereally. Edmund wonders if he is quite real. He is lovely to look at, a part Edmund’s brain that has obviously lost its wits thinks, and they stare at each other, one in surprise, the other in increasing embarrassment.

“Not quite. She didn’t have to persuade me much,” Prince Caspian admits. “Replacements for crowns, she said. May I sit with you?” He asks. Edmund decides he can catalogue how the prince’s hair catches in moonlight another time, and nods.

“It’s your country.”

The prince huffs a pleasant laugh. “Not yet. If ever.”

“Surprisingly pessimist of you. Hasn’t anyone ever told you to always wish for the best?”

“Yes,” Prince Caspian says, tone dry. “Unfortunately, life is unexpected and I find it best to be prepared.” His r’s are soft rolls, l’s lilting, lips red. Edmund looks away, unused to his lack of self preservation.

The prince extends his arm, offering Edmund the flask. Ed raises an eyebrow. “Is it poisoned?”

“Wha- of course not!” He exclaims in alarm. “Here-” he throws his head back and chugs two gulps quickly, some of the red liquid escaping from his lips. Edmund feels a strange mesmerisation as it stains gold skin, running under the prince’s collar to blotch his white shirt.

“I was kidding,” he says faintly. The Prince looks at him with wide eyes, red spilling over his cheeks.

“Oh.” He wipes his mouth with his sleeve. Edmund tells himself what he feels is relief and takes the flask. He identifies it as raspberry juice on taste.

“The Narnians taught me how to make it.” The prince looks at him inquiringly.

“It’s good,” Edmund says, watching as a smile stretches over the prince’s face. He takes another chug from the bottle before handing it back. He reaches back into the bag and draws out a pair of familiar daggers. Edmund had forgotten about them, having stumbled upon his sword first.
“I thought you preferred swords,” the prince remarks in surprise.

*In some ways,* Edmund refrains from saying. “I favour daggers. Swords are too wide-range, more of Peter’s thing.”

There is a glint in the prince’s eyes that eerily reminds him of his older sister. “Are you any good with them?”

“Any good?” Edmund repeats blankly. Prince Caspian nods seriously.

“Or are they for show?”

“Are they for- they absolutely are not! I’m very good with them, thank your royal rear-”

The prince is snickering.

“-oh.” Edmund stares at the flask. “Is there wine in that?” He demands.

“Barely, I’m afraid.” Prince Caspian gestures to the sheathed blades with an easy smile. “Would you have a go with me sometime?”

Edmund looks up at the star lit sky. He offers one of his daggers. “I don’t see what’s wrong with right now.”

He gets a sly look. “Are you sure?” The prince laughs. “I don’t imagine you’ve had much practice recently.”

“Is that a challenge, Prince?”

The prince takes the blade and beams blindingly. “Please. Caspian is fine.”

“Well. Edmund then.” They place the sheaths onto a high ledge, turning to face each other. Below are only the sleeping children, any possible audience out of view. Neither move.

“I confess, I’m not actually looking forward to harming a High King,” Caspian says after a moment.

“Doesn’t overconfidence literally get people killed?” Edmund lets his knife drop to his feet and moves, not giving Caspian a moment to process, using the flat of his hand to slam Caspian’s chin up, placing his other hand on a shoulder to flip over him.

He twists the prince’s arm back, causing him to drop his dagger into Edmund’s waiting hand. Edmund presses the tip of it to Caspian’s ribcage.

Caspian stares at the unused blade in front of him, feeling his own poke into his side. Edmund stares at the prince’s nape and wonders what reaction he’d get if he leaned forward.

“How did you jump like that?”

Edmund startles and lets Caspian go, taking a couple step backs.

“I practiced gymnastics with Lucy when we went back,” Edmund says, suddenly feeling awkward, despite the impressed look he receives.

“I’d like to try again,” Prince Caspian says in a low voice. Edmund quells the shiver in his spine. “If you don’t mind, Edmund.”
Edmund resolves to hear his name said like that as many times possible.

“Maybe some other night, Prince,” is what he says instead, steadfastly telling himself the emotion on the prince’s face is not disappoint.

“Caspian,” the prince corrects again. “I will hold you to that, Edmund.”

Again, a repressed shiver. He takes the dagger Caspian picks from the ground, holding each other’s gazes. Caspian smiles.

“Goodnight, Edmund.” He watches Caspian climb down the tomb effortlessly. Edmund perches himself on a ledge.

“What the fuck,” he whispers.

“Oh, is he gone?” Edmund swivels around with wide eyes to see Peter’s mop from a step below him. “That was horrible to witness.”

“Oh, of all people-” Edmund groans and buries his reddening face in his hands, “-by Narnia, why?”

“I was sharpening my sword!”

Chapter End Notes

are sex talk and mild gore cause to up the rating?? somewhere while writing this chapter the playlist pulled up some classic britney spears, so now we can all enjoy the mental image of edmund dancing to toxic.
The day of the raid is tense, increasingly so as night falls. Lucy seems to be most on edge, having had a spat with Peter, and again when he’d tried to apologise, and a third time when he’d tried convincing her he was right to call the attack tonight.

Two and a half stretched out days of planning are nowhere near enough to create a faultless plan, but Edmund likes to think he did more than a decent enough job of it anyway.

“We can still pull this entire thing off,” he stresses, for the umpteenth time. Peter’s eye gives an impressive twitch.

“Ed.”

He throws his hands up. “Alright! Hell. All I’m saying is no one’s going to judge you if you-”

Peter looks skyward, the last of his patience quickly running out. “Do you suppose someone’s figured out how to make molly here yet?”

“Peter,” Lucy scolds, scandalized, breaking her silence. Edmund thinks back to the crystals and makes a weird noise, resisting the urge to wring his hands in worry, a habit he was unfortunate to learn from his mother during her short visit.

Caspian joins them quietly, standing at Edmund’s side. Edmund can’t help but breathe in the Prince’s clean scent, having just washed. Caspian’s hair curls wetly around his nape. He tears his gaze away, not quite daring to make eye contact, the foreign feelings from the previous night making themselves known again.

“We should get going,” Caspian says, restless. Peter nods as Susan joins them, clad in chest armour and an unrestricted dress.

“Everyone’s ready,” she informs Peter, the embodiment of calm. Action has always suited her better than being holed up in a dorm or castle.

“I’ll lead the Narnians to the setting point.” Peter says, doing up the buckles on his vest. “I’ll meet you both there - good luck, Ed.” He moves to the front of the limited number of Narnians they have selected for tonight, and, seemingly effortless, the centaurs and fauns and minotaurs and dwarves and mice assemble themselves into lines. It is difficult to imagine Peter once never had the same commanding presence he has now.

Susan heads towards Lucy and Windmane; Edmund takes a deep breath and straightens, turns to go check on Perkeye the Gryphon. Perkeye strangely reminds him of Phillip, despite the clash in
personalities.

He is arguing the benefits of armour for the gryphon’s wings to a reluctant Perkeye to get rid of both their jitters, when they sight Caspian walking towards them. Perkeye dips her head slightly.

“I’ll wait for you at the pillars, my liege.”

Edmund frowns. “Don’t be ridiculous. What for?”

The gryphon blinks. “Er.” Caspian falls within earshot now, and she does not continue. Edmund raises an eyebrow but doesn’t push her.

“Edmund,” Caspian greets, smiling through his anxiety. Edmund’s stomach further twists itself into knots and wonders if he is that concerned at Caspian’s wellbeing. Perhaps the sight of the prince reminds him again of exactly how gravely serious tonight is?

“Could you put out your hand?” Caspian requests bluntly. Perk is shuffling away from them as subtly as her good heart allows, and Edmund is too flabbergasted to call her out on it.

“No poison,” Caspian adds when he doesn’t immediately comply. Edmund flushes in embarrassment and thrusts his hand out.

“What is-”

“It’s a good luck charm,” Caspian cuts him off. Edmund thinks he should be more offended than he is. “Well, more of a safety charm - my tutor taught me how to cast words of Ancient Narnian, though it is but a fable at this point.” He loops the cord twice around Edmund’s wrist before knotting it closed, brushing thumbs over the tendons. “Hence, more of a sentiment than anything.”

There is an intricately etched bead thread through the twine, carved with what look like swirls and dots, but on closer inspection are more likely to be a language. The oak of it isn’t painted, it’s natural beige still darker than Edmund’s pasty skin.

“Thank you?” Edmund says in bewilderment. Between Caspian’s ever-smothering gaze and the heat of fingers still touching his wrist, Edmund is fairly certain he should be awarded for still standing.

Caspian nods unevenly and slowly lowers Edmund’s arm.

“Good luck, your highness,” he says oddly. He half-nods again, more to himself, flustered. “I should get going.” He turns.

“untu, Edmund’s brain presents.

“Caspian,” he tries, too low. “Caspian!”

The prince whirls back, startled. Edmund’s heart firmly lodges itself in his throat.

“Be careful,” he blurts. “Stay safe, Caspian.”

The prince’s thwarted gaze slowly melts into something akin to soft awe.

“And you, King Edmund,” he replies, delight written over his face.

It suits him.
The prince turns a final time and sets out with Susan and Trumpkin and the mice. Edmund watches as they get smaller the further they get.

Perkeye delicately coughs.

“Shall we get going, your Highn-”

“Yes,” Edmund yelps. He makes an abortive gesture. “Ah, may I-”

Perkeye bends down.

“Yours to command, sire.”

He climbs on and holds onto the gryphon with care. Perkeye takes off with ease, and they advance ahead of the Narnians below.

“I hope you forgive my meddling, sire, that is,” Perk starts with a complete lack of waver, despite her words, “but are you and the prince-“

She pauses.

“Er, that is- involved?”

Edmund stares down at her, baffled.

“In what?”

“Well, in a, so to speak, cour-” she stops again, “Uh, well, it isn’t really any of my business, truly-”

“Perkeye!”

“Oh, the wind does seem to be getting strong, I can’t seem to hear you too clearly-”

Down they swoop, Edmund resisting the urge to pluck out her feathers in retaliation.

Edmund can blame the lack of time he’d had to put together a fail proof plot, which in turn pushes the blame onto Peter, which he unquestionably does not have a single problem with.

He and Perkeye are on the opposite end of towers from his siblings and Caspian, granting him an eagle eye view of their group. When Caspian knocks on the doctor’s window and it goes unanswered, he knows something is wrong.

Peter is resolutely not looking in his direction, to avoid giving Edmund the chance to signal the raid off. Edmund grinds his teeth and aims a kick at the passed out guard’s backside. Perkeye titters and flies off to conceal herself.

He backhands another soldier into unconsciousness and flickers his flashlight-made-weapon to alert the Narnians inside, a bitter taste in his mouth.

He is in the ensuing chaos that Edmund deduces Caspian’s teacher is missing; they’ve lost time besides that for a reason he cannot fathom; Peter and Susan have both come across Miraz’s child and did not think to take the tot for ransom; they are not going to make it out of this alive.

He opens his mouth before the last thought can go through, and Peter beats him to it, shouting the order to fall back.
Edmund is on the ground, back to back with Susan.

“Go,” he urges, deflecting a spear. “I have to go back up - Perk won’t leave without me.” Susan nods. She will leave after she has done all the damage she can, not a second before.

A soldier chops off the weight keeping the gate open.

Not all of them will make it out.

Edmund feels a strange calm settle over him.

Asterius the minotaur is holding the gate up bodily. He won’t last two minutes. Not even half the Narnians have made it to the other side of the gate.

Making his way up, Edmund drops his borrowed sword and switches to daggers, slashing through the arms that try and stop him.

He pierces between the shoulders of a Telmarine and vaults himself in the air, grabbing ahold of the gate’s severed chain, swinging wildly to avoid the sudden slew of arrows.

Bodies, bodies-

There are two Telmarine soldiers lying motionless a foot and a half away, and it is with sheer will that he drags them over whilst keeping his hold. He pulls and pulls until the chain is snugly wrapped around their necks and lets go.

The gate holds. One of the Telmarines cries out, apparently still alive.

Oops, he thinks.

They will make it.

“Cut them off!” A voice screams.

They might make it.

He runs back up.

An old man rushes past on a horse, doesn’t stop even when making it past the bridge. Doctor Cornelius, Edmund surmises.

Asterius is now grabbing hold of whom he can and throwing them either out the gate, or further in, depending on the soldier. Glenstorm has hauled Susan onto the back of one of his sons - she is out the gate, still shooting, blood dripping down her arms. Peter is limping, but has a horse nearby - he will make it out.

Caspian?

The Prince of Telmar looks to be seconds away from physically launching himself at the man with the goatee in the balcony - presumably Miraz - from the groundfloor he stands on, despite the arrow sticking out of his thigh. Edmund whistles to get Nikabrik’s attention, and gestures towards the prince. The dwarf looks at him with disgust, and obeys.

They will all make it, Edmund wills as he slips away from battlezone. They will make it, they will make it.
The hallways of the castle are empty. Edmund narrows his eyes.

Where’s the baby?

Abducting Miraz’s child had never been the objective. Their purpose had been go in, to slay and wound as many soldiers as possible, go out. He’d only shared the idea of kidnapping the suckling as ransom with Susan and Peter. For what, exactly, they could decide later.

He stops outside a door that is obviously the nursery, the cupid-like creature engraved into it telling.

Too telling. There is dead silence inside - no sounds of a baby or nurse. He looks down.

There is the shadow of two legs standing parallel to him, with only the door as a barrier. Edmund takes a shallow breath and runs.

The second he skids around the turn to another long corridor, the nursery door slams open, yells following him.

I played myself, Edmund rues, desperately hopes he will make it to the end of the hallway. He doesn’t dare look back; judging by the footsteps, there are at least a dozen soldiers after him.

He might make it out alive.

He turns once again, revealing an open room with multiple openings leading out. He throws himself against a large column, molding himself to it. The guards rush in and send a man into each exit. He pushes further into the marble - it gives way.

Edmund clamps a hand over his mouth to stop a shout as he trips inside the pillar, finding no floor.

He falls and falls until he lands in darkness.

When the party returns to Aslan’s How, it is in silence.

One of Glenstorm’s sons could not make it past. Reepicheep lost one of his. Trumpkin is barely grasping onto life.

They do not even notice a king is missing until Lucy heals Trumpkin and notices her brother has not come forth to greet her.

“Where is Edmund?” Her words are shot through the air, through Caspian.

“Perkeye is not back either, your Majesties,” Reepicheep confirms quietly.

The urge to behead leaves Caspian and Peter in half a breath.

“We have to go back-”

“Don’t be a fool, Peter,” Susan says sharply. “If they have Edmund, they will expect it.”

“Is he even still alive,” Lucy breathes. “How do you-”

“We will work on the assumption that he is alive,” Caspian says in a near-order. He feels the inklings that he has made a mistake prioritising his teacher - yet he cannot bring himself to regret it.
I regret it with every fibre of my being, Caspian swears, forcing his knees not to buckle. What fool am I? What did I think would happen? The sight of the doctor fills him with nothing but relief, but the thought of Edmund in the clutches of his uncle, maybe discarded into a river-

“We need a plan,” Caspian says loudly. “Your Highnesses?”

Susan nods jerkily.

The battle-weary Narnians straighten, fatigue and sorrow rolling off their shoulders.

---

Hours pass. Edmund has fallen numb, not having dared move for fear of making contact with something he cannot see in the dark. He cannot judge what floor he is on, does not know if Perkeye may still be waiting for him. He has counted exactly thirty-five people that have passed by the pillar he is inside, knows it is well into daylight. There is no way of seeing outside, just as there is no chance of escape.

Guess they didn’t include secret freefalls in the schematics of the castle. He waits for the sun to fall and feels around until his hands find a latch.

It is quiet outside. Edmund pulls. The sheets hanging off the ceiling indicates it is a laundry room. There is no one around.

Another trick? Edmund looks around warily before bolting out the door. He ignores the thumping of his heart, trying to focus on any incoming footsteps. He nudges the door open with his boot, waiting for a yell that doesn’t come.

They don’t think anyone could be hiding in the castle, Edmund concludes with surprise. Are they dull?

Within ten minutes, he has made his way to the outlines of the palace, evading guards like he was attempting to sneak out of his dorms back at school.

He is nearly out of the tower before he hears sobbing coming from underneath him. A glimpse out a window has his heart stopping.

Twenty Narnians, bound and gagged in a line, about to have their throats slit to bleed out over fresh grass. There are five soldiers, two in front of the prisoners, and Edmund is jumping through shattered glass before he finishes calculating the odds.

He lands on his feet, slashing across the throats of two troopers in one swipe, the piece of glass in his hand cutting into his own palm. There is yelling as he slices open the ropes on the leopards, who immediately set to aid him.

A thick rod hits his back and Edmund doubles.

“Go,” he chokes, and the unbound Narnians flee without hesitating. A disinterested order is given to follow them.

Eleven are still bound. A hand digs into his hair and yanks his head back.

“Now, Narnian scum,” a voice says next to his ear. “Who might you be?”

The man has a goatee. Miraz, then. Edmund spits in his face.

The hand twists further in his hair. He grits his teeth as Miraz wipes his cheek with a silk cloth.
“I’d best not do that again,” Miraz says softly.

A rag is fastened around his mouth before he can gather saliva again. He sneers at Miraz, who forces his head to the tied up Narnians.

They look at Edmund with fear in their eyes, quivering.

*I am so sorry.* Edmund squeezes his shut. *Fuck, I am so sorry.*

“Watch,” Miraz hisses. “Or I’ll do much worse than just slit their skinny necks.”

Edmund forces his eyes open, tears flowing. A faun trembles.

The axe swings.

Chapter End Notes

moral of the story? dont get separated from ur family at the mall. or the battlefield.
Something is different, she thinks when she wakes.

Lucy briefly panics, wondering if her siblings have left to rescue their brother already, but a quick look around ensures they are still asleep.

Oddly, every soul is asleep.

Not odd, Lucy corrects herself. Just unusual. No one had slept until long into the night, mourning the ones they could not save from capture and death, and planning how to bring Ed back.

I wonder what it could be. Rising from a slumber she is unlikely to return to, Lucy wanders further into the How, her bare feet swishing along cold stone. She walks into the room where the cracked Stone Table lies.

Lucy’s eyes meet the stone ones of Aslan’s statue. She tilts her head, knowing the moving strands of rock aren’t her imagination and dreams this time. It is as though there were a breeze underground and the fur wasn’t sculpted from marble.

Slowly, Aslan’s statue turns from grey to striking gold, and the rock crumbles. In its place stands the Lion, his mane ruffling as though he brought with him the wind, a glow from within him as though he carried the sun.

Lucy’s face stretches out into a grin.

“Hello, Aslan.”

The Lion smiles, eyes shining.

“My dearest Lucy.”

He doesn’t know how long they’ve been running. He doesn’t know how he was let go.

Once the last Narnian had been slain before him, Miraz turned to him, likely to order his head off next.

Instead, all he’d done was place a few scratches on Edmund, blinked a couple times, and order him to be released into the forest.

“A survivor to tell the tale,” he’d said, and shoved Edmund in the direction of the trees.

Edmund runs until he stumbles upon the leopards and the rest he’s freed before he throws up, instantly blacking out. When he regains his senses, he is on the back of a large running feline. He
tangles his fingers into short fur.

“Where are we?” Even his voice is frail.

“We’re nearly back to Aslan’s How, your majesty,” the leopard - Azrak, if he remembers correctly - running alongside him pants. “An hour’s half, at most.”

Rainstone is riding ahead of them. Glenstorm will be overjoyed at his son’s return.

*But you didn’t free them all. Edmund’s eyes slip shut. I’m sorry.*

“My lord?” Azrak sounds bewildered. “What are you-”

Edmund passes out again.

-

*Something is different,* he thinks when he wakes, immediately followed by, *fuck.*

Edmund looks around blearily.

He’s stuffed onto and under what feels like a dozen furs, gathered along a side of the Stone Table. Lucy is nestled into his side, wrapped in her own pelt. Edmund shuts his eyes, unwilling to read the Ancient Narnian inscriptions engraved on the Table.

The room is dark but for an oil lamp on the floor. In front of it sits Caspian. There is something small and concealed in one of his hands, a wood cutting knife in the other.

Edmund watches him for a few moments.

*Not a bad view to wake up to.* There is a lack of white noise in his head, which he faintly recalls from when he woke before - now his thoughts feel soft and calm, and he drowsily takes in the shadows reflected on the prince’s relaxed face. The flame moves slowly, bringing out different shades of gold in Caspian’s eyes.

A lock of hair falls away from where it was tucked behind Caspian’s ear, and a hand reaches to push it back. Caspian startles and Edmund realises it is his.

“You’re-” Caspian glances at Lucy, and pauses. “You’re awake,” he says again, softly this time.

“Regrettably,” Edmund agrees. He pulls his hand away, a finger brushing Caspian’s ear. Caspian shivers and Edmund wants to do it again. Edmund wants to do a lot of things in that moment.

Unfortunately, life rarely goes how Edmund would like it to. He hears Susan and Peter run into the room before he sees them, dropping to their knees to reach their brother.

“You were supposed to tell us when he woke!” Peter directs at Caspian crossly. The prince just barely restrains from rolling his eyes.

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“It’s barely been a minute,” Edmund says, voice muffled in Susan’s shoulder. She leans back and breathes in, letting it go slowly.

“Aslan told us you were awake,” she says. Edmund stills. “You’ve been out for half the day.”

“Aslan’s here?”
“I am,” says a voice from the entrance. They collectively turn to take in the Lion, identical to the last time they saw him, thirteen hundred years ago, and seventeen years ago. Edmund doesn’t notice himself standing until he is before the Lion.

“Why are you back?” He asks quietly.

The Lion cocks his head. “When Narnia is in need—”

“Why are you here?” Edmund repeats, louder. He hears someone behind him call his name hesitantly. “Narnia was in need more than a millennium ago. Where were you then?”

Aslan’s fur stands. His eyes narrow.

“Edmund—”

“Why did you send us away?” Edmund fights to keep his voice in control. “Why didn’t you bring us back sooner?”

He knows this isn’t the time. He knows, but time is something they do not have. The images of his butchered subjects return to his mind, along with the white noise. How he was forced to watch them be slain one after the other in front of him - he is suddenly furious, how dare Aslan hide until now, how—

“-dare you show yourself now,” he snarls, embracing his rage, the horror of running, leaving behind the bodies of his dead people, “you had all the time in the fucking world,” not even having to tell the Narnians their sons and daughters and brothers and sisters and parents weren’t returning, his useless self enough, “Lion, what can you possibly do to help us now, maybe send us away again? For what,” he spats. “To come back a millennium later when my Narnians are completely wiped out?” He questions, he roars, and there is a roar back, and Edmund faintly registers a stinging in his shoulder.

All at once he is on his knees in front of Aslan.

The Lion towers over him, fury he has never before seen in his eyes. Edmund feels a sick satisfaction at being the one to place it there. His siblings are frozen in horror at the scene, save for Lucy, who is trembling with it.

“I did not save your life and make you king,” Aslan is as near to growling as he can be, “insolent wretch, for you to question me on your baseless doubts.”

Edmund places his hand to the junction between his neck and left shoulder, bringing it to his face to see the blood himself. The left side of his shirt is slowly blooming red. He feels heady with the knowledge The Great Lion himself has struck him, though the rapid blood loss could just as easily explain his elation.

Ironically, when he sees one of his siblings take a step forward from his peripheral vision, the room becomes even more stiller. Lucy - idiotic, fearless, valiant Lucy - unflinchingly places herself between her brother and Aslan.

Edmund feels a fierce regret at putting her there.

“You will never lay a hand on my brother again,” Lucy speaks plainly, through her unnatural, quiet fury and her stupid, stupid bravery, as though she were speaking a simple fact, “or may you forgive me, I will renounce you and everything you are to me.”
Edmund is briefly grateful that the Narnians are outside. He refuses to ponder over who they would have supported in this, quite frankly, distressing revolt.

“Inconvenient,” he unintentionally mutters.

Caspian has moved towards him unnoticed, immediately followed by Susan and Peter, who stand with Lucy, white as sheets, though firm. They form a semi-effective barrier between Edmund and Aslan. Caspian carefully helps Edmund to his feet, pulling Edmund’s arm around his shoulders and his own around him, only to have Edmund’s knees buckles.

“This is-” Edmund tries taking a deep breath that sounds more of a gasp. He seeks out the Lion’s carefully blank gaze. “You need me Lion, I’m the one with the inside information-”

“Move aside,” Aslan quietly directs towards Lucy. “I will heal him.”

Lucy nods and steps aside, the other two not budging. Edmund twists his fingers into Caspian’s tunic, mouth set in a line, refusing to flinch when the Lion unhinges his jaw and breathes onto Edmund’s wound. The blood stops flowing over his chest.

Susan drapes her jacket over Edmund’s wound. There is no pain. Caspian uses his hold on Edmund to pull him out of the chamber, Susan on their heels.

I don’t want him to see me like this, thinks Edmund.

“I need a bath,” he mutters. Caspian turns them to the direction of the springs without question, swiftly making his way through the least crowded area. Caspian’s hand burns through Edmund’s tattered shirt, heat seeping into his skin. Edmund digs his teeth into his lip as Caspian soothingly strokes his thumb above his hip, likely unaware he was even doing it.

The springs are thankfully deserted. Caspian and Susan stand respectfully away as Edmund strips in record time, despite his shirt sticking to the blood. Keeping his lower undergarments on, he slips into the water. Susan wordlessly hands him a rag. He holds onto her hand when he takes it.

“Could you ask Caspian to leave?” He says quietly. She nods and stands, returning in less than a quarter minute. Susan raises her skirt and sits, placing her legs in the water.

Edmund places his head on her knees. She cards the trembling fingers of one hand through his hair, gentle.

“You are such a cretin, Ed,” she says, voice thick.

Edmund hiccups a laugh and tries to remember how to breathe.

Chapter End Notes

me, taking this chapter from 0 to 100 real fast: parkour so like i dont hate aslan, im just sayin, he sends some pretty mixed signals ja feel
Aslan’s Sigh doesn’t rid him of the wound. Edmund doesn’t know if the Lion was striving to teach him a lesson or be petty by leaving him scars - whichever it was, Edmund is now adorned with four diagonal lines from his left shoulder to across his heart, and a small fifth white line on his jaw. The injury had been shallower than he’d expected, yet the slightest more force would have likely led to him bleeding out.

Aslan has disappeared once again, without the Narnians ever knowing of his presence, much to their relief. There would be only panic knowing that the Great Lion had arrived, only to leave without a word.

Edmund tightens the laces at his neck. As long as the strings don’t come loose, the scars are well hidden, keeping his shoulder and collarbone covered. The line on his jaw is nearly indiscernible unless looked at closely.

People rush about outside the room, swords being lined up, dents in armour being hammered out. His reflection looks tired. He combs his hair with his fingers, unsuccessfully trying to smooth it down. Giving up, he reaches for a dagger at his belt, seating himself in front of the mirror.

The door creaks open, permitting Caspian. Edmund has not slept, but Caspian looks as though he has just woken, still dressed in a flowy white shirt and slack trousers. The prince smiles blearily.

“I woke up to Nikabrik standing over me,” he confesses. “I think I squawked, but I fled before he could laugh.”

Edmund presses his lips together, holding in his laughter.

“Very gallant of you, Prince,” he says, shortles escaping him. Caspian throws himself onto Edmund’s cot and groans.

“What are you doing?”

He waves the dagger. “Chopping my hair.” Caspian looks at him with dismay.

“Wait why? It looks perfect as it is.”

Edmund looks at him in surprise. The prince looks back with horror, face flushing.

“It looks perfectly fine, is what I,” Caspian looks up, “was trying to say, so, really, there’s no need to cut it.”

(“I hope you forgive my meddling, sire, that is,” Perk starts with a complete lack of waver, despite
her words, “but are you and the prince-”

She pauses.

“Er, that is- involved?”

Wait, really? Edmund stares. Oh, I am fucking stupid.

“Um. Thank you?” He wants to slaps himself. Why converse like a proper being? “But, it - gets into my eyes, so I’d rather just be done with it.”

“You could just tie it up,” Caspian mutters. He sits up and pats the cot. “Here, I’ll do it.”

Edmund hesitantly scoots back until his back hits Caspian’s legs. The contact feels too real. Caspian puts his hand out and he complies, placing the hilt of the dagger into his hand.

His eyes fall shut as Caspian gets to work, listening to the little snicks as the hair is clipped. A question rises to his mind.

“How did you make the bead you gave me?”

“I only carved it,” Caspian answers without stopping. “Why?”

“It was scorched when I came back.” Edmund raises his wrist for him to see; the bead is no longer the colour of pale wood, but charred black, as though burnt. Caspian’s reflection in the mirror is surprised, and he reaches into his pocket. He places newly carved beads into Edmund’s palm.

“I assume the enchantment worked and that’s how you-” the prince looks away, clenching his hand into a fist, “-you were let go.”

Edmund narrows his eyes.

“It wasn’t your fault!” He hisses. Caspian eyes him balefully.

“If I hadn’t gone to find the doc-”

“It was not your fault,” Edmund repeats firmly. “It was inevitable. Peter was too thick-headed to call it off, and I shouldn’t have gone after Miraz’s child. These things happen, at many faults, or none.”

Caspian’s eyes widen. “You tried to kidnap the baby?”

“It’s not like we would’ve killed him,” Edmund says defensively. “Just- as ransom, if one of us were captured.”

Caspian pinches the bridge of his nose, brows furrowed. Edmund is both delighted and offended.

“If he’d found you with Regalos,” Caspian starts slowly, as if Edmund were a five year old, “or found you knowing his child was missing, he would’ve slaughtered you on the spot.”

“Ah, but,” Edmund raises a finger, “he didn’t.”

“Valkyries above, Edmund.”

“...isn’t that a Narnian swear?”
“Yes,” Caspian answers petulantly. “I don’t fault you for trying to take the child, but it could have cost you your life.” He shortens another lock of hair. “Nothing is worth that,” he says quietly.

Edmund looks down at the beads in his hands, slowly turning them over, feeling the engravings.

“Yes,” he says after a moment. “I discovered my father was murdered by Miraz. I’m afraid I let my emotions get the better of me and naively thought I could end him myself.”

Edmund gently untangles Caspian’s fingers from his hair, turning around and getting to his feet. Caspian avoids his gaze, lips set in a wobbly line, eyes bright. His posture is slumped, and so, so tired. Edmund raises his arms and puts them around Caspian’s shoulders, tangling a hand in the prince’s soft hair. He presses the prince’s face to his chest.

“I’m sorry, Caspian.”

Caspian slowly raises his own arms, wrapping them around Edmund’s waist, unsure. Edmund pushes closer when Caspian tries to muffle a sniff.

“He raised me as though I were his son.” Caspian breathes out, hot and damp over Edmund’s heart. Edmund buries his face in soft, brown locks. “I do not know that I could kill him if faced with the decision on the battlefield.”

“You needn’t,” Edmund says. He thinks of his own father in America whom he once loved dearly, whom no longer sent them letters. He would kill Miraz in a heartbeat if when the time came. “You have me.”

“That’s the most romantic thing anyone’s offered me,” Caspian laughs wetly. Edmund’s insides flutter with the sound.

They pull back slowly, not letting go entirely. Caspian looks up at him, making him swallow.

Caspian’s face does a strange thing.

Edmund panics. “What?”

Caspian reaches up, placing his palm against Edmund’s cheek. He cradles Edmund’s face, brushing a thumb against a cheekbone.

“Pffft.”

Edmund rolls his eyes, his pulse going wild.

“Oh, fuck off.”

“I didn’t finish your hair!” Caspian guffaws, tears starting anew. “You look like a pando cub!”

“By Narnia, Caspian.” He lightly kicks the prince’s ankle, amused despite himself. “Get it done with, will you?”

“I don’t know, it’s not so bad-”

“Caspian.”
“Alright, alright, come on then.”
They resume their positions, the occasional giggle making it past their lips, cheeks pink, chests warm, hearts full.

“Will you be alright?”
“Am I ever not?” He eyes Peter. “Will you?”
“Of course I will,” he predictably scoffs. “It’s my job to look after you, yours to be looked after.”
Edmund makes an unattractive face, mimicking the words soundlessly. “I’m just saying, maybe it’s better if I went up against him.”
“And have Miraz and the Narnians believe I’m a coward? I think not, thanks. Aren’t you supposed to be the political one?”
“I’m also the one who can knock your teeth out.”
Edmund, Asterius, and Bandhabit the giant are to depart at sunrise to the Telmar camp, offering single combat from Peter against Miraz. Peter inquires if his scars hurt.
“Nah. Cooler than any tattoo I could’ve gotten,” Edmund muses. Peter cuffs his unmarked shoulder, horrified.
“It wasn’t even that bad.” Edmund rolls his eyes. “Would’ve healed itself in three days, tops.”
“That’s not the point you imbecile,” Peter hisses. His hair is sticking up instead of at its usual silkiness, bags under his eyes. Edmund feels a twinge of guilt.
“Look on the bright side,” he tries. “You don’t have to go through with rescuing me, which, frankly, you were going to go about in a damn stupid way-”
Peter takes in a very deep breath. Edmund winces.
“Edmund,” Peter stresses, clapped hands faced towards Ed, forced smile doing nothing but making his tired features look deranged, “I, along with the rest of us, would appreciate if you’d rid yourself of your, frankly, suicidal fucking tendencies.”
Edmund feints observing his nails.
“I’ll think about it.”
The grinding of Peter’s teeth is audible over the rush of spring water.
“Isn’t swearing bad precedent for a High King?” Lucy calls, Susan snickering behind her. Peter points a stick at her.
“Not a word.”
“I’m High Queen!”
“Not right now you aren’t!”

“Spare me,” Edmund groans into his hands. Susan drops beside him on the rocks. The two in front of them have started throwing piles of dead leaves in each other’s faces.

“So,” Edmund starts nonchalantly, keeping his eyes on the chaos, “Caspian and I are - well. Courting, right?”

Susan raises an eyebrow.

“I suppose that’s a word for it?”

“Right, then.”

A few seconds pass.

“Is that it?” Susan asks in disbelief.

“Yep.”

“Oh my God. You didn’t know.”

“Shut up, Su.”

“I can’t believe you!”

“Can’t believe what?” Lucy asks, hold on Peter’s hair not budging.

“He didn’t know Caspian was trying to woo him!”

“What?!” Lucy yells, and drops Peter.

“I thought he was just curious! And,” Edmund looks away in embarrassment. “I don’t know, I thought he’d go after Susan, or something.”

“What, because he gave me raisins? Ah, yes, the height of romance,” Susan says sarcastically. “Besides, it’s not like it would’ve mattered.”

“Why not?”

They all look at him like he’s grown an extra head.

“Because I like girls?”

Edmund’s brain screeches. “What?”

“I thought you knew!” Susan’s eyes bug out. “Lucy knows!”

“Lucy knows?!”

“Ed,” Lucy says patiently. “Why did you think I slept in your room when Susan had sleepovers?”
“I thought it was because they talked about stupid things,” he says faintly. “So, Juanita Parrish-”

“Yes.”

“And Maude Chandler-”

“Yes.”

“And that Hester girl with the four brothers-”

“Yes,” Susan stresses. “I’d really rather you not list them all off, it makes me sound like I do little else.”

Edmund stares at her.

“Queen Mednea?”

Susan flushes. “Yes. Almost didn’t.”

“I didn’t know that one,” Lucy says, her and Peter looking both impressed and horrified. “What d’you mean, ‘almost didn’t’?”

“Someone tried to attack the castle while we - you know,” she flaps a hand, face flaming. “It was Agla, I think.”

“You’re a fuckin’ legend, Su,” Edmund says in awe. “Fucking Mednea.”

“Literally,” Peter adds, equally awed.

Edmund pauses.

“But you did sleep with that Kurt Marshal,” he clarifies. Susan pulls a face.

“I just wanted to try. Biggest mistake I made. He had half the school singing ‘zits on tits’ whenever I walked by.”

“He learnt from that,” Peter soothes. The younger three all think back to the public humiliation Peter had put Marshall through and collectively shudder.

“Marshall’s brother was quite good, though,” Peter says after a moment. Lucy gawks.

“You didn’t tell me that!”

“You didn’t tell me Tod Miller kissed you!” Peter sniffs haughtily.

“What?” Edmund and Susan cry out in dismay. “That kid has herpes!”

“No, that’s Stuart,” Lucy groans. “Tod wanted to, and I didn’t mind so I let him, and then he did this - I dunno, weird thing and got all tongue-y, so I kicked him in the balls and kissed Naomi, but I didn’t really care for that either, so I’ve decided I’m just not interested.”

In half a second, Lucy finds herself buried between bodies.

“Aw, Lu.”

“We love you.”
“You should tell us this stuff, you know?”

“Yeah, it’s good to talk it out!”

“I don’t want to hear that from you, Peter.”

“I only slept with him because Millie cheated,” Peter defends. “He’s her ex, and I knew it would pissed her off, and- oh, don’t look at me like that, it wasn’t my best moment.”

“Ah, shite,” Edmund croaks. “Pete, the day we came back here, what was the fight with Ruben about?”

Peter frowns. “I’d slept with his sister, who’d slept with his best friend, and he’d slept with some idiot while they were jacked up on liquor, all in the same day.”

Edmund is silent.

“The idiot was you, wasn’t it?” Peter puts his head in his hands. “That is filthy. I can’t believe I indirectly got your germs.”

“It actually could’ve been either me or Edmund,” Susan admits slowly. “We were both there, and I was drunk enough to consider giving it another go.”

“I hate you both.”

Lucy pulls a face. “I’m definitely not interested. You lot are disgusting.”

A chill passes over Edmund as his siblings laugh.

“Something’s wrong,” Edmund says over the mirth. He gets to his feet, wildly looking around. “Can you feel that?”

Lucy shivers. “Did it just get cold?”

It feels like the White Witch.

Impossible. The cheer and joy leaves Edmund in a flash. The crawling feeling is one he knows better than most. He runs back into the How, siblings at his heels.

The catacomb is cold. Edmund’s stomach shrinks. At most, it is only ever chilly, being a tomb, but never cold, and certainly never frosty.

Please let me be wrong, he thinks desperately. Just this once, let me be wrong.

They follow the freeze into the Stone Table room. Caspian is in the middle of a lit circle, a ghostly hand mere centimeters from the blood on his palm.

Edmund resolutely does not look in the ice, does not look at it. He throws off the grizzly creature that jumps at him, cleanly slicing its head off, and bolts to where a new Aslan statue stands.

Don’t let her- it know, don’t let it touch you.

Stuck between the symbol of his new phantom and a ghost of his past, Edmund raises the dagger high with both hands.

The flowing hair in the ice parts to reveal an appallingly familiar face. A smile stretches across it.
“My dearest Edmund,” Jadis whispers wistfully. “We could have ruled together, you know.”

“Stay dead,” Edmund hisses, and brings the knife down.

“You will never be rid-”

The ice shatters, revealing a puzzled Peter and Caspian. Edmund pushes the blade back into its sheath and flees.

During their fifteen year rule, Narnia had only ever known peace - history says it lasted a fifty decades after their disappearance, before things started falling apart. Fifty decades too many to hold true the ‘Narnia will only know peace when a daughter of Eve or a son of Adam rules’ guideline, yet fifty decades too less to set aside the necessity of humankind.

Yet, when they ruled, it was as though the end of Jadis had soothed the entire world’s wounds, ensuring a new era of peace for many countries. Alliances were secured, trades were arranged and held, people were free to travel across borders without fear. A peace treaty was drawn up, signed by thirty-three countries of forty-nine.

Among the countries that had blatantly refused to sign, or stayed quiet for it, was Telmar; one of the first to proudly refuse the signing. At the time, Telmar was commandeered by Queen Mednea.

There was not a kingdom that did not fear Queen Mednea. She took countries by force and trickery - a vision to behold when entering a room, claiming every living being’s attention, an aura powerful enough to make giants bow to her on sight. Never let it be said she let an opportunity pass by her. She never married, but had many children, all of whom she crowned, no one daring to protest. They loved her something fierce, and were loved in return, despite how they were repeatedly married off to suitors with sovereignties - suitors, all of whom eventually mysteriously died, leaving behind their fortunes and nations to Mednea or her children.

Each Pevensie had learnt something from her ways, be it her technique of swinging a double-edged blades, vanquishing empires, or never ending love.

When the gathering for the peace treaty was called, it was to the neutral, unruled land, Sacred Esmait, a place where no blood could be shed. Aslan, too, was required to attend, turning up for the first time in two and a half years. All four of the siblings had been necessitated to show up, so they’d left with Mister and Missus Beaver as regents, Mister Tumnus as second-in-command, leaving with high spirits and hopes of centuries of peace.

That had not been the case.

More than two dozen countries had laughed in everyone’s faces, only to watch in disbelief as more than twenty countries proceeded to sign over their freedom as warlords.

Peter had been a mere seventeen years old the time, facing a council of rulers decades older than him, younger siblings vibrating with anger behind him. Threats were made, weapons were almost used, war was nearly declared countless times. When Peter had been spoken over for the umpteenth time, Susan had walked forward, cocked her bow, and shot an arrow to the hollow between the babbling Lord Regent Kadri’s ear and shoulder, effectively silencing the entire council.
“You will listen to us,” Susan had put plainly, “and speak as the adults that you are. Bloodshed may be forbidden on this land, but there are ways to injure without making a person bleed.”

“Need I remind you,” Peter addressed the council over their low murmuring, “the sole reason we are here is to put an end to useless wars. Or are you lot so eager to use your people as cattle in the name of superfluous conflict?”

Edmund remembers the chill that had passed over him when Queen Mednea had smiled.

“Well put,” she’d said, and promptly declined putting her seal over the piece of parchment. Two days later, Susan was found passed out in their guest rooms in a pool of her own blood, not a single shred of evidence to lead the fault back to Lord Kadri.

With time, they’d learned. Within a year and a half of global meetings, Peter had earned the respect of of half the council, Queen Mednea included, and was no longer spoken to like a minor.

Narnian history does not catalogue the personal details of the former Queen of Telmar. They do, however, speak of her quest to rule the world. She’d taken a total of fourteen countries alone, her children and their children following in her footsteps.

And how she would be proud to know how many kingdoms her bloodline has destroyed, thinks Edmund drearily.

He stands before Miraz, who so vastly pales in comparison to his bloodthirsty ancestor, that Edmund considers giving him a history lesson himself in hopes of sparking up some power within the man.

This is nothing like back then. The atmosphere is dull, no camaraderie between the Telmarine soldiers. Miraz stares at him with poorly concealed astonishment, no doubt regretting letting Edmund go.

“I have a message from High King Peter,” Edmund dutifully announces, unrolling the scroll. Above are written Peter’s many titles. His eyebrow ticks.

“I, Peter, by the gift of Aslan, by election and by conquest, High King of Narnia,” Edmund reads out, entirely skipping over the extra headings, “in order to prevent the abominable effusion of blood, do hereby challenge the usurper Miraz to single combat upon the field of battle.” He lowers the scroll. “The fight will be to death, with the reward of total surrender.”

Miraz cocks his head.

“Why did they send you?”

“Who were you hoping for?” Edmund politely asks.

“Caspian, of course.”

He rolls up the scroll. “Of course. Unfortunately, we’re rather keen on his survival,” very much so, “and that involves staying as far as possible from you.”

“Naturally,” Miraz murmurs.

“Naturally,” Edmund agrees. “What are you?” He finds himself asking.

Miraz gives him an amused look, unbothered at being questioned.
Must’ve been a comedian in another life.

“Pardon?” Miraz says draggingly, despite having clearly heard him.

“What are you?” Edmund patiently repeats. “With Caspian alive, you have the weaker claim. Have they made you regent? Trustee? Perhaps you’ve become a democratic country?”

One of the Telmar Lords coughs, masking his chuckle. He will be ordered a beating, later.

Miraz barks a laugh.

“Tell me, Prince Edmund-”

“King.”

“Pardon?”

“It’s king.” Edmund says drily. “You know, the four High Queen and Kings of Narnia?”

Miraz seems entertained; it is difficult to categorize him as the person who raised Caspian, when faced with Caspian’s rash and sudden anger. They are vastly different in personalities - the man before him is patient to a deadly extent, and, more than that, cruel; Caspian is reckless and sympathetic, following both his head and heart.

He is unsure that Miraz has a heart to follow.

When the usurper questions their reasons for such a proposal, Edmund smiles. This, at least, is familiar.

“You bravely refuse to fight a man half your age?”

Miraz bares his teeth.

“I did not say I refuse.”

There it is. He has always loved dragging proprietors through their own messes.

Chapter End Notes

for a dead ship there's more of us left alive than i originally thought, huh. don't be too shy to leave kudos and comments!!

i don't wanna hear a single word about the overabundance of queerness in this!!! peter's bi, susan's a hardcore lesbian, ed's a goth gay, and lucy can be taken as aro or ace or both.

the most realistic part of this chapter is ed's broken gaydar; my bff doesn't know how to work hers for shit, despite having dated two girls and a nb (me).
“This is confusing. Can we make different names for these rooms? I went back to the Stone Table because you said table room, but no one showed up until Trufflehunter went searching for me and said it was this table room, not the main table room. And I don’t quite understand the need to meet here when the other room is so much larger.” Lucy huffs, arms crossed.

Peter nods sagely, clearly having had the same problem, but is more likely to die before he admits to it.

Trufflehunter places a paw on her arm. “We’ll do something about that, your Highness.”

Lucy gives him a glowing smile. The badger blinks, momentarily blinded.

“So,” Edmund starts, calling attention to himself, “We run on the assumption that whether or not Peter wins against Miraz, they’re going to go ahead with the attack.”

Collective nods. Edmund takes a deep breath.

“Susan and Lucy will head through the forest to Cair Paravel, so Trumpkin will lead the archers. However, the tomb will not be used as a fortress or defense, or retreat.”

“My lord?”

Edmund grins. It’s been a long while since he’s laid out a plan so flawless.

“It’s going to be our weapon. We’re bringing the crypt down.”

- 

He hasn’t exactly been avoiding Caspian, per se. Edmund just avoids being alone with him, dodges lengthy conversations, doesn’t quite look him in the eye.

Perhaps he was avoiding Caspian. The prince is brazenly confused, and has almost succeeded in getting Edmund to himself in a room three times in the last couple hours alone. The fiasco with Jadis had been like being doused in ice water, memories he’d left untouched forcing their way to the front of his mind.

Edmund figures it’s best to get it over with sooner rather than later, but can’t quite bring himself to hash it out with words. Seeing the White Witch again had put things into perspective for him, a reminder as to why none of his relationships during their fifteen years in Narnia lasted more than six months.

“I wish you’d told me sooner,” Alen had cried, and left the next day with a “I just don’t know if we’re right for each other.”
“I didn’t know that,” Elyah had yelled, and fruitlessly lasted a week.

“Why are you hiding that?” demanded Kaliar, and left that very night.

“What’s to stop you from doing it again?” whispered Frelai, louder than what any of the others had said, and disappeared.

It’s not as though the prince would be any different from the rest after eventually learning of Edmund’s history as the Traitor King. Caspian will be king, soon - he needs someone with a clean past, someone he can trust, someone his people will not doubt.

Edmund is not that person.

It’s better to let it end now, thinks Edmund, and withdraws from Caspian’s reckless smiles and gentle hands.

-

Edmund despairs.

The fight is going poorly, Caspian is missing, and Miraz’s general and Lords are obviously up to something. The happening facts themselves would not be so worrying if Edmund had an idea as to why they were happening, and what they would lead to.

Currently the only thing he is aware of is that Susan and Lucy are, or should be, deep into the forest by now, and even that isn’t something he can say with complete assuredness.

Peter brings his sword down again with a yell. Edmund keeps his eyes on the crossbow in the General’s hands, keeping his own on the hilt of a dagger.

The calculated odds of winning hadn’t been much in favour - they’d deduced a solid 50 percent for both sides. Miraz is broader than Peter is, broader than Peter was in his early thirties. But Peter is faster, more agile, uses his sword swiftly. Miraz uses heavy blows with more strength than precision - at most, Peter could take a total of five of those hits before he fell.

He’s already taken two.

They sight Caspian and Susan riding back, and Peter calls for reprieve.

“You left Lucy?” Peter hisses.

“I didn’t have a choice!” Susan hisses back. “Besides, it’s not like Aslan would let anything happen to her.”

“In case you’ve forgotten, we’re not on the best of terms right now!”

“Keep smiling,” Edmund snaps. He tightens the bandage on Peter’s arm; Peter raises his sword with more of a grimace than a smile, but it does the job, inciting cheers from the Narnians. Susan yanks his in with an arm around his shoulders, making Peter grunt in pain.

“Be careful,” she orders, and does the same to Edmund. She smacks Caspian on the back before going to join the archers. Caspian bravely holds himself up until she turns, slouching with a wince.

“She can do that,” Edmund says sympathetically. Caspian briefly glances at him and nods, immediately returning his eyes to the front.
Edmund’s jaw falls slack.

*It’s not like you’ve been paying him much attention either.* Edmund swallows, returning to Peter’s bandages. This one’s on him.

*I’m helping him dodge a bullet*, Edmund reminds himself, and looks back at Peter’s sweaty face.

“What do you think happens back home if you die in Narnia?” Peter wipes his face with a rag, sizing up Miraz. “You know Ed, you’ve always been there—*fuck, fuck.*”

Edmund knots the bandage, horrified. “Just kill the rotter, will you?”

“Ass,” Peter groans. He stands and doesn’t take the helmet. Edmund considers bashing it against his skull instead, as the cheers rise again.

-  

Lucy has been riding for not even twenty minutes before she hears more hooves behind her. She doesn’t look back - it is only a matter of time before Aslan appears.

The Lion does wait until the soldier has caused her horse to overthrow her to show up, but shows up nonetheless. Lucy watches in bemusement as the Telmarine runs off in fright.

“You shouldn’t leave your life to me, little one,” the Lion sighs. “What if I hadn’t shown?”

“Ah, but,” Lucy lifts a finger, “you *did*.”

The Lion is wary, and does not approach too close, cautious of what the small one likely feels about him now. Lucy feels his hesitation and steps forward.

“I’m not angry, Aslan. Neither is Edmund, honestly.” She carefully strokes his mane. “Susan’s broken his arm worse than that, and Peter accidentally dropped me onto my face once.”

“I am not a sibling,” Aslan says quietly.

“No,” she agrees. “You’re just the one who brought us here, saved Ed’s life, and gave us a place to be happy.”

The Lion laughs lightly, finally leaning into her hand. “I’m afraid you brought yourself, my dear. I only helped bring you back.”

“Whatever,” Lucy maturely huffs. “You just have to talk to Edmund. You’ll have to listen too, though, and boring as it can get, you owe him that.”

“That I do.” He shakes his head, smiling fondly when Lucy laughs at his overgrown mane.

“What time to go?”

“What time to go,” he agrees.

-  

When Caspian takes the sword from Peter, Edmund is fully prepared to go through with his promise.

Caspian spares Miraz.
“I will not be a king like you,” he says acidly, and allows Miraz his life.

Edmund has no place being proud of him, not that it stops him. Peter clasps Caspian’s shoulder and nods. Edmund looks at him with pride, having momentarily forgotten his self-induced ban; it’s worth it, when Caspian gives him a liberated look in return.

They are far too caught up in their victory to notice the drama happening behind them until it is too late. Until Miraz falls to the stone ground with a clang, red feathered arrow sticking out of his side.

“Treachery!” yells Lord Sopespian, thrusting his sword in the air. “The King is dead!”

“To your positions!” Peter yells. To Edmund, he mutters, “I hate when you’re right.”

“Not just you.” They roll their shoulders back. Edmund gestures at Peter’s wounds.

“You going to be alright?”

“Please,” Peter scoffs. “Don’t insult me now.”

“Keep your pants on.” Edmund keeps his eyes trained on the rapidly approaching army. “Caspian-”

“Right. Good luck.” Caspian clasps Edmund elbow, forcing him to look into bright eyes. “Don’t die.”

Edmund pries away the fingers and thinks fuck it. Before Caspian can grimace, he tangles their hands together.

“You too, Prince.” With unnatural confidence likely stemming from adrenaline, from the fact that they could die, he squeezes Caspian’s hand. “See you at front?”

“You couldn’t hide if you tried,” Caspian replies with a twinkle in his eye. He gives his own strong squeeze before letting go, turning to ride underground with Glenstorm.

“Nauseating,” Peter graciously waits until the prince is gone to say. “Weren’t you avoiding him?”

“We could die, you know. At least say something sentimental.”

“You won’t die. Your precious prince would cry for days.”

Edmund wisely does not respond and starts counting when the horn blows.

- 

“I’m fairly certain we took a wrong turn,” Lucy remarks. Aslan obediently turns into the direction she points him.

“Be it on you, child.”

“I lived here fifteen years once,” she says dryly. “How long have you been here in full?”

“I’ll have to get back to you on that,” the Lion laughs, and bounds through the wakening trees.

- 

They have the advantage of experience over the number of Telmarines. The Narnians know how to defend and attack, have been doing so for centuries - the Telmarines, on the other hand, have likely
never been faced with a serious fight in their lives, till now.

“We can’t escape through the How,” Peter pants, throwing the dead weight of a soldier off his back. “The catapults will-”

“I know,” Edmund huffs. He flings a dagger into the thigh of the soldier approaching him from behind, digging the other into the opening in her breastplate. “Call them to gather - we can’t fight scattered.”

Peter nods determinedly, calling out the orders. Edmund wills himself to believe this won’t end like the raid.

Like magic, as though the powers bestowed unto Narnia hated him, the catapults fire at the How, aiming for the archers. They watch in horror as Susan slips off onto a lower edge.

“Oh focus, will you?” She shouts when she notices her brothers watching in fright. She nocks her bow and flawlessly takes out three soldiers behind them. “There’s an entire bloody army behind you!”

“She’s okay,” Peter and Edmund say to each other, turning back to battle.

It is a relief to see the Trees. Edmund doesn't want to think that they were losing, and now he doesn’t have to. He gives a hand to help Caspian out of the pit, which is received gratefully.

The Telmarine army make for the river when the catapults are crushed, coming to a stop at the sight of the little girl on the other side of the bridge. Lucy cannot see her siblings through the soldiers, but feels their presence regardless.

She rolls her shoulders back, breath coming out as a sigh. Her siblings watch, hearts in their throats. She smiles slowly, feeling her canines elongate.

Lucy unhinges her jaw and roars.

Chapter End Notes

thank you SO MUCH for all the support all of you have been throwing my way, all y'all are appreciated as fuck
The coronation is an event to behold. It will be remembered alone for being the first celebration in Telmar to host Narnians, but also for a king who saw through with his father’s vision of peace, when no one else would.

Caspian had insisted on it taking place outside, in view of the public, of his people, despite the risks to his safety.

“What was the point of fighting a war if I cannot stand before my people and claim it?” He’d demanded. “I will give to them what they need, and unless I’m wrong, I will assume it isn’t another coward behind walls.”

Edmund had felt himself nosedive off another ledge of the mountain he thought he’d already gotten to the bottom of.

It is difficult to take his eyes off Caspian as he walks down the gravel to Doctor Cornelius, not that Edmund, or anyone he supposed, would want to. The new king is regal, dressed in a rich black tunic and protective vest, a heavy velvet cape fastened to his shoulders. The Queens and Kings of Narnia stand on either side of his path, in ankle-high grass, clothed in their own light and flowy traditional garments, in contrast to Caspian’s dark and heavy.

“How did you do that… whole river god thing?” He murmurs to Lucy, unable to prevent himself from returning Caspian’s smile when he passes by them on the aisle. It lasts for half a second, yet he has to hope he did not flush.

“Aslan told me how.”

Edmund makes a funny face. “He’s not trying to bribe his way into your good graces, is he?”


He shrugs. “Maybe.”

Caspian kneels in front of his teacher, head bowed. The crown is placed on his head, heavy in both weight and responsibility. Edmund watches, heart in his throat.

You will make an amazing king, he thinks. He knows.

“It’s good you can fight now,” he says to Lucy.

“I’m not going to bring up water Jesus every time I need help, Ed. And I do know how to fight.”
“My mistake,” Edmund says, and drowns in the sight of Caspian facing towards them, sun shining behind him at just the right angle. It sends back to the memory of Caspian approaching him at the How, as a prince, with the moon beaming at his back, and Lucy’s ribbon in lieu of a crown. Edmund places his hand across his chest along with his siblings, and bends.

Being a king himself had stolen the necessity of having to bow to other sovereigns. For Caspian, Edmund would willingly bow himself to, no matter the rationale. Edmund does not know where he draws the line, nor that he wants to know.

When they straighten, it is to find the King of Telmar in his own bow, for them.

“I will forever be indebted to you,” Caspian swears.

Edmund smiles and tries not to think too hard about the word forever. They walk back down behind Caspian, cheers going up in the air. This part is something well known, and Edmund readies for a day full of face cramps caused by happiness.

Drums resonate through the air, the atmosphere filled with cheer and loud singing. Telmarines and Narnians alike dance together, bare feet and hooves and paws pounding against grass, figures creating mesmerizing shadows cast by the large bonfires and torches.

When Glenstorm had said there were Telmarines on the outskirts of the city that provided them with supplies and shelter now and then, they had vastly underestimated the number of people who were eager to help the Narnians, despite the risk to their lives. Incredible numbers of Telmarines are present, none of which are resentful to the outcome of the fight.

It reminds Edmund of the families that used to live on the outskirts of Narnia, families of outcasts and the reformed, whom never failed to help passerbys.

The ones who are resentful, of course, don’t bother showing up. That was always something to be dealt with in the aftermath.

Caspian is near one of the fires that isn’t being danced around, but surrounded by children. They come up to the newly crowned king one after the other, requesting lines be painted above their brows, a token of good fortune. Caspian seems more than content to do so, sitting cross-legged on a flat stone. His shirtsleeves are pushed up to his shoulders, vest long forgotten somewhere. The children place their own fingers in paint, placing wobbly lines on his arms. The only thing differentiating Caspian from the rest is a crown of multi-coloured flowers on his head, in contrast to everyone else’s single coloured ones.

Peter flops down beside them on the grass, short of breath.

“I don’t think I can take another dance,” he pants, studiously avoiding eye contact with the young crowd vying for his attention. “We should start taking turns, and I’m definitely done with mine.”

“I just sat down!” Lucy says indignantly. “You’ve been up there for an hour’s half, old man.”

“You can bugger right off. I haven’t a single white hair-”

“You coloured it.”

Peter looks at her in mock outrage. “Slander.” Lucy sticks out her tongue. They turn to Edmund at his continued silence, and follow his gaze to Caspian.

“Edmund.”
“Hmm?”

“Just go dance with him.”

Edmund bodily turns away from Caspian’s direction.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’d rather go join Susan.”

They single out their sister through the mass, watching as she slowly dips a swooning girl older than her, expressions wanton.

“Or not,” Edmund amends. Susan twirls the dame around and they disappear into the crowd, delighted yells following them. Edmund runs a hand through his hair, remembers the feel of Caspian’s, and stops. He stands, much to his siblings’ excitement.

Then he walks in the opposite direction of where they want him to.

“Ed!” Lucy cries in dismay.

He forces images of white, freezing hands to the front of his mind in order to get away from the celebration faster, his skin suddenly feeling about to burst. Moments like these are irrational, he knows - with time, they’ve gotten better, and at times, they cannot be overpowered.

It isn’t difficult to find a hidden space empty of people, now that they aren’t at Aslan’s How, but Edmund longs for the high steps of the old place anyway. He starts searching for a house to climb, before realizing it’d likely be considered trespassing.

*Best not to ruin the new peace by invading someone’s fucking roof,* he thinks wryly.

To the castle it was.

He makes it to the palace with relative ease, pausing mostly to return the smiles offered to him. It’s sparse both inside and out the high walls, most of the towns out celebrating, or maybe plotting to overthrow yet another king or country. He scales the walls silently, the methodical movement of pulling himself up calming, and tumbles gracelessly into a window.

Edmund tugs the flower crown off his head, resisting the urge to fling it to the floor or throw it out from where he came. He sighs and rubs tiredly at his face, feeling older than he was, in all ways.

There are sheets of paper, stacks of books, and odd trinkets spread over the floor of the room. The chamber is comfortable, likely belonging to an advisor or relative of the royal family. There is a small section of wall decorated with weapons, a sword hanger obviously empty, and a fine layer of dust over everything. Edmund carefully makes his way through the clutter, to the balcony on the other side.

The stone is blissfully cool against his back. He lies quietly, watching the stars, his chest rising and falling the only movement.

He’s in the middle of wondering if this world’s magic allows constellations to change, because there’s no way *The Harbour* has thirteen stars instead of the seven Edmund remembers, when the door inside clicks open.

Edmund is on his feet in a second, reaching for the dagger his belt is empty of, and immediately going for the one in his boot. The tip of a sword in his face tells him he does not make it in time.
“Edmund!” Caspian yelps, and yanks the sword back.

“What are you doing here?” Edmund asks, flabbergasted, lowering his arms from their defensive stance. Caspian’s hands flit towards him as though to search for injuries, and stop halfway. He drops them back to his sides.

“This is my room,” he says in amusement. “Or it used to be.”

Edmund looks around again. “That explains it.”

Caspian walks back inside, Edmund following like a magnet.

“I think they assumed I’d be using the king’s quarters now,” Caspian wonders aloud. “I’d rather just stay here, I think.”

“As far as breaking traditions goes, it’s not all that treacherous,” Edmund bemuses.

“My apologies for the let down,” Caspian says dryly. “What are you doing here?”

Edmund opens his mouth and closes it again.

“I was trying to find somewhere quiet. Celebrations can get a bit much.”

“Not snooping, then,” Caspian teases.

“Did I look like I was snooping?” He says, fondly exasperated.

“No,” Caspian admits, smile stretching further. “But the best spies are never caught.”

“I’m not a spy, Caspian.”

“That’s precisely something a spy would say.”

Stop wasting time. You know how this will end.

Edmund blinks, merriment fading. He abruptly turns towards the door.

“I’ll let you rest,” he murmurs, forcing himself to look at Caspian. He lifts his hand to the door knob, his wrist falling in a ray of moonlight, catching on the carved bead.

“Wait.”

Edmund pauses.

“I was hoping we could talk,” Caspian seeks, voice soft. His posture is relaxed, and if Edmund didn’t feel so deeply for this man, he wouldn’t have found the hint of uncertainty to him. “If you are amenable, of course.”

Edmund lets his hand fall from the knob.

Of course he does.

Caspian smiles, and for a moment Edmund entertains that this could work.

“But first,” Caspian walks over to the show of weapons and plucks two small sheathed knives. “A rematch? Unless you’re too tired, of course.”
There’s that twinkle again.

“I’m starting to think you find me after long days on purpose,” Edmund finds himself saying. He takes the dagger. “Am I supposed to go easy on a newly crowned kings with no regard to their safety?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” Caspian laughs, carelessly throwing the sheath away. “Let me be king tomorrow. Feel free to destroy the room.” He gestures at the bed, hidden by drapes. “There’s arrows in there from where I assume they tried to kill me. I’d rather have—”

“—new rooms altogether,” Edmund guesses. His mind offers him another way to destroy the bed. “I would, too.” He throws the dagger from hand to hand, letting it settle in his left. Caspian’s brow furrows.

“Last time you used your right.”

“Surprised?”

“No,” Caspian snorts. “I saw you out on the battle. You fight—magnificently. Like a dance that could kill you.” His voice lowers. “I would like to see that again.”

The backs of Edmund’s ears and neck heat up.

“I could say the same for you.” Caspian had been the perfect mixture of brutal and merciful; never killing, as far as Edmund had seen, yet inflicting the damage to fully incapacitate his opponent.

He drops his eyes back to the messy floor. “Destroy the room, right?”

Caspian hums in affirmative, falling into position. Edmund does the same, crouching low.

He grabs ahold of a stack of sheets and throws them in Caspian’s face.

When he jumps, he expects to see Caspian shocked, or offended, or anything but the utter glee painted over his face. Edmund’s own eyes widen as he just barely falters, only to have the opportunity taken for what it is and have his leg kicked to the side. He bends his knee as he falls, having to dodge a swipe to his rib, pushing onto his hands to jump back up.

“You’re not going to—”

“—complain? Please,” Caspian scoffs, and rips a drape off the headboard. He makes for Edmund, feinting a left swing, and though Edmund knows what he will do with the sheet, he doesn’t quite believe it until Caspian throws it over his head.

When the music below starts anew, wafting through the open balcony and window, it no longer feels stifling. Edmund takes it in along with the sweet air, breathes in Caspian whenever they come near to each other, grasps at this moment.

He lets himself have this.

What seem like hours, but could not have been more than a couple, pass by in seconds. Edmund finds himself on the floor for the fourth time, Caspian holding a dagger above his throat, breathing heavily.

“I believe that results in a tie,” Caspian pants. “Again.”

I don’t know if I can force myself to forget you, Edmund thinks in wonder, dazed from the lack of
air. Caspian startles, knife nearly slipping from his hold.

“You don’t have to,” Caspian breathes, staggeringly close. “Forget me. You don’t have to.”

“Oh,” Edmund gapes. “I didn’t mean- shit, sorry, I-”

“What are you afraid of?”

“I’m not afraid-”

“Cautious, then. Vigilant. Guarded.”

Edmund does not want to be having this conversation. Edmund does not want to be on his back for this conversation, but the only way to sit up would result in him smacking into Caspian’s face, and by the looks of it, this is a fact well-known.

Logically, he could roll over and sit up, or wrestle Caspian down, instead, or slither away if he deigns himself to look like a fucking coward, but logic seems much too far away with Caspian face almost touching his.

“Am I pushing you?” Caspian questions in an almost-demand. “You could gut me right now, and I won’t complain about it. You could tell me you don’t feel what I do and leave.”

Edmund sucks in a sharp breath.

“There are things you don’t know,” he snaps. “Hell, there are things I don’t know about you. We’ve known each other not two months!”

“So ask me,” Caspian presses. “Ask me and there is nothing I will not tell you. Just ask.”

They know how strange this situation is. Here lies Edmund, Caspian towering over him, sweat cooling on their skins. Their shirts have more than a couple rips through them now, and Edmund shivers when another gust of wind blows inside.

“There are some things better for you not to know,” he whispers brokenly. When Caspian finally leans back so he can sit, it shouldn’t hurt. “Caspian.” When the king looks up again, Edmund cannot for the life of him read him. “You didn’t - aren’t pushing me. I don’t know how I can explain, or if I want to risk your hate - Caspian, there is nothing I can possibly give you, either.”

Edmund looks down at his clenched hands.

“You are King, now. My past aside, I no longer have that title, not in any way that isn’t just a name - I’m no longer a ruler this world recognizes. No fortune, no kingdom, no-”

Caspian is kneeling in front of him, making for Edmund’s hands before pausing and retracting, unsure. Edmund loathes himself.

“You forget I had none of those things either, just yesterday,” Caspian says quietly. “I’m aware that I have no right to say this, as the sole reason you were brought here was to help me claim my throne - but the chances of my kingdom being returned to me were just as high as our chances of loss.” Caspian’s eyes bore into his. “Did you not want me a day ago just because I could not give you anything?”

“It isn’t that easy.”

“It can be, if you let it.” Caspian reaches for him again. “I’ll show you, if you let me.”
Edmund moves automatically, hands coming up to cup Caspian’s face. He wonders what the fuck he’s doing, what in the Stars has led him to this moment, what in Narnia’s good name he believes he deserves this.

*Do I deserve this?*

The back of his neck warms again. When Caspian sways into him, eyes wide, placing his hands on Edmund’s knees, and softly asks, “May I?”, Edmund knows. He knows how this will end.

“You don’t need to ask,” he breathes. He knows what he’s allowed, yet still gasps when Caspian’s lips touch his, impossibly silky. Both their eyes flutter shut as they lean into each other, heads tilting.

When Caspian pulls away, Edmund thinks he’s realized his mistake; he’s rethinking, maybe needs time, or-

Caspian leans in again, hands having found their way to Edmund’s hips, lips gliding smoothly across his, wetter. Edmund’s fingers curl around the hair at Caspian’s nape, pressing every inch of his body possible to Caspian’s.

Edmund knows how this will end.

He holds on and thinks he’ll try again anyway.

- 

Aslan has summoned them, to which Edmund isn’t quite elated about, but is aware of it having to be done.

He and Caspian had fallen asleep on the floor of his old room. He’d woken half sprawled across the king, said person’s face smushed in the junction of his neck, Caspian’s arm tight around him. They’d gone no further than kisses, which Edmund decides is a fairly good thing, considering he’d lain there until a maid stumbled across the room, mortified at being caught in such a state, mortified at being caught watching Caspian sleep, mortified at the maid’s mortification, and mortified because she hadn’t recognized him and proceeded to thoroughly tell him off.

“What if someone besides me had found you?” She’d shrilled, which was a *very* valid point, with the peace so new. Caspian had no doubt informed her of who he was after he left the room with his- his what, exactly, his *someone*, his Caspian snickering in the room as Edmund had played the part and slunk off in shame that was only half faked.

Not shame about being caught with Caspian, of course. Only that Caspian had been found with Edmund by his side.

“I know that look,” Susan grouses. “You’re thinking shit again. Stop that.”

“For someone who used to govern armies, you’re shit at giving me orders,” Edmund mutters.

Before them, their siblings are visibly upset, Peter pacing short, quick steps in the very large room. Susan, too, is unhappy, but managing it considerably better.

“But why can’t they just stay longer?” Lucy urges again. “If it upsets the balance, then Edmund and I can leave, if we’re to come back anyway.”

Edmund’s grip on the chair’s back tightens.
I’m not leaving. Not now.

Aslan looks at him. “I think we all know Edmund is not going to leave. Not for a while yet.”

There’s a few moments of silence. Edmund looks down, afraid of judgement.

“I don’t want him to have to go back either,” Peter finally sighs. “I just thought we’d get longer.”

“As did I,” Aslan says, nodding at Lucy.

“Time to say goodbyes, then,” Susan declares. “Much as I’d love to spend the rest of my life here as a soldier, there’s a shite lot in England to fight for, too.”

“Valid,” Peter groans, draped across a chair, eyes on the ceiling. “You’re right, and yet.”

“And yet,” Susan agrees.

When they trickle out of the room, he turns back to Aslan.

“A moment, Great Lion.”

Aslan pauses. He watches silently and Edmund is comforted that he doesn’t feel any intimidation. Just sorrow and remorse. He lifts his chin.

“I didn’t want to say this in front of Lucy, though I don’t doubt she knows this already,” Edmund starts, staring Aslan in the eye. “What you did was treason.”

Aslan’s eyes flicker towards his shoulder.

“‘When a Narnian subject strikes their sovereign, it will be punishable by death’,” Edmund recites from memory. “It probably doesn’t apply now, but both us are bound by the old laws.”

“I brought you here.”

“You always insist Lucy did that herself,” Edmund counters. “A church does not have power over a marriage just because they solidified the vows, just as you hold no power of us—me, “just because you crowned us.”

“That is correct,” Aslan sighs, and sits back on his hackles. Edmund unsheaths a dagger and steps forward. He remembers Lucy in his arms, sobbing about nightmares of when Aslan was captured and shorn of his magnificent fur, and put to death. He resolutely puts it out of his mind and takes a handful of fur by Aslan’s right ear with care.

He cleanly chops it off.

“It will grow back someday,” Edmund says quietly. With forgiveness, he doesn’t need to say.

“As the scars on your skin might fade someday,” Aslan replies in acceptance.

-  

“We’re to hold a ball next week,” Caspian says in disgust, face perfectly set in a smile for the crowd.

“That’s wonderful! You’ll be going together, yes?”

“Lucy.”

“I would be delighted to!” Caspian beams.

Edmund lightly elbows his sister. “I can do that myself, thanks.”

“You’re just so darn slow.”

It’s been a week since the coronation. Things are new, in all matters. Yesterday, Edmund had requested Caspian ask the dwarves, or even Doctor Cornelius for what happened before the Four Queens and Kings of Narnia became so.

“I heard the Doctor is half-dwarf,” Edmund had said. “You should ask him what happened with the White Witch. The dwarves always remember.”

The only reason they almost never spoke of it was because the dwarves, too, were redempted. The past, as always, was better left where it was.

“I will,” Caspian had promised, and diverted their attentions to current affairs.

Judging by Caspian’s good mood, Edmund thinks he can safely say he hasn’t yet had the time to request the information.

All the better, he decides. The longer he takes, the longer this can selfishly last.

Queen Prunaprismia is the first to step forward, prepared to go through the Gate within the tree, swiftly followed by General Glozelle. She nods to Caspian before she leaves.

“I will not apologize, as they were not my actions,” she states firmly. “But you deserved better. You deserve better. I am sorry for any pain I may have caused you.”

Caspian smiles and says, “Go freely. I wish you both good lives.”

Susan and Peter and Lucy stand forth as well. Edmund feels so, so miserly again.

“Oh, come off it,” Peter scoffs, or attempts, at the least, drawing him in for a poor excuse of a hug. “We’ll see each other again before you know it. Bet I’ll have a full beard again.”

“You could try, old man,” Edmund says, and pinches Peter’s side. He gets slightly more emotional when Susan hugs him, and more so when Lucy does, despite knowing he’ll see her sooner than the rest.

“I hate when you cry,” Lucy sniffs. “It turns me into a bigger crybaby than I already am.”

“I’m not crying,” Edmund lies. “Don’t let Peter do dumb shit.” They step away to the tree, together. A little girl comes forth, a bundle in her arms.

“A gift,” she offers shyly to Lucy. Lucy smiles widely and reaches for it, and the cloth falls away from the little girl’s arms, revealing a familiar arrow. She looks up at Lucy, smile intact.

“This is the arrow you shot my father with,” she says to Susan, not budging from in front of Lucy. “I hope you feel the same pain too, miss.” She grabs ahold of the red feathered arrow, aiming for Lucy’s heart.
Edmund doesn’t know he’s moved until he knows the arrow is in his heart. He can feel it, lodged deep inside his chest. It isn’t a nick. He’s fucked.

Several voices cry out, some strangled versions of his name. A soldier hauls the child away, who defiantly kicks Edmund’s chest, as a last farewell.

It pushes him back, Lucy still behind him. He stretches an arm out, trying to stop his fall right into the Gate. The last thing he sees are arms reaching back for him and Caspian’s look of utter terror.

-He doesn’t want to open his eyes.

The train roars deafeningly in front of him, people talking loudly in familiar accents. Different familiar, but familiar nonetheless. He can feel the weight of his uniform and hat on his body. Peter’s hand is on his wrist, same as it was when they left.

“Edmund,” Susan says quietly.

“Fuck,” Edmund says, finally opening his eyes, staring at the floor and the shoes that come into view. He doesn’t register the average Finchley chaos around them. Not really.

“Fuck,” he repeats.

Chapter End Notes

i laughed writing the end of this?? like wtf kinda sadist???
ok so. guys. might need somewhat of a long(er) break after this, cuz exams in a month, and then more time to actually write a chapter. thank you SO Hecking mUcH to everyone who's been here this far, i was so sure i'd post this fic to a dead void. i'll say it again. for a dead fandom? we kickin', y'all. i love all of u.
(sidenote,,,, i'm writing another casmund, a oneshot, that is likely what i'll focus on until exams are over. check by for that two weeks from now! <3)
something i forgot to mention in the prev chap: the arrow kid was inspired by the scene in which they're rescuing trumpkin, and susan shoots a soldier off the boat who falls into the water - the arrow kid is supposed to be that soldier's kid. i thought it'd be cool to make her some avenging angel for her father, because tbh everyone has their story.
i wrote this in a Day and A Half to avoid studying

“Eustace!” Edmund yells. Lucy twists her hat in her hands, glancing fervently at the clock. “I swear if we miss the chance to say goodbye to them-”

“God! I’m almost finished, hang on a minute-”

“Oh for As- Christ’s sake, Eustace!” Lucy cries. “We’re leaving! Catch up!”

“Or don’t,” Edmund calls, avoiding Lucy’s jab. He grabs Lucy’s hand and they sprint out of the house, calling goodbyes to Uncle Harold. The pendant under his shirt is warm against his chest and he resists the urge to press a hand against it.

“Fuck’s sake,” Edmund huffs. “We’ve five minutes, they’ve likely boarded the train-”

“So they can bloody well unboard,” Lucy pants. “I don’t care, we won’t see them for a year.”

“Imagine the quiet!”

“I don’t know why you like saying things you don’t mean!”

They make it in just in time. Susan and Peter stand near one of the train entries, waving frantically. Edmund and Lucy push their way through the crowd and jump into their older siblings’ arms.

“Oh, it’s going to be so boring with just Edmund,” Lucy whines. “Please write often, I’ll go mad if you don’t.”

“You know we will,” Peter laughs. “Well, maybe not Susan, what with her countless new responsibilities, but you can count on me to write her biography.”

Susan punches his arm.

“We’ll write,” she promises. She pinches Edmund’s cheek. “Write back, will you? I’d like to know how many mistakes you make on a weekly basis.”

“Monthly,” Edmund brokers, and swats away her hand. “Good luck with bachelor life.”

“That goes for you too,” she laughs.

“You haven’t forgotten anything, have you?” Lucy frets. “Shipping is expensive!”
Eustace arrives just as the train starts to pull away, and offers a hesitant wave to Susan and Peter’s faces through the window, face pinched.

“They’re going to come back all American, just you see,” Eustace declares haughtily. “Noses in the air and strutting like peacocks.”

Lucy raises an eyebrow. “That’s a very accurate definition of yourself at the moment, cousin.”

Eustace splutters. Edmund lowers his face, covering his nose into his scarf. A child stares up at him with eerie, dark brown eyes.

“Hello there!” Lucy drops to her knees in front of the boy, beaming. “Are you lost?”

Eustace mutters about the impropriety of a lady getting to her knees in a dirty public scene. The boy glances at their cousin curiously, and nods. Lucy offers her hand to him and he takes it unhesitatingly.

“Let's go find your parents, then.” Lucy straightens her legs and brings the boy’s hand to Edmund’s. “Ed, you carry him so he doesn’t get lost again.”

“You carry him!”

“You’re taller,” Lucy insists. “Maybe his parents will spot him. What’s your mother’s name sugar?”

“Mama,” the child provides.

Edmund rolls his eyes and picks up the small boy, lifting him high into the air.

“You both are so embarrassing,” Eustace hisses. Sure enough, they hear a woman call out “Percy?”

“You don’t look like a Percy,” Edmund informs the child. The child blinks down at him silently, as if to say what can you do?

“Percy!” Queen Prunaprismia says again, reaching for her son.

“What,” Edmund says flatly.

“Oh,” says Queen Prunaprismia.

“Would you like to come for tea?” Lucy offers faintly.

“Why do you know a random lady but not her baby?” Eustace demands.

Edmund pours hot water from the kettle into the teapot, stirring slowly. He glances at Eustace from the corner of his eye, who is pretending to clean the dust off one of Aunt Alberta’s vases in an effort to eavesdrop.

Do I send him on an errand? He doesn’t even listen to me. He drops the pot of sugar onto the tray next to the cups and just stands there, thinking. Maybe I can get Uncle to send him off? Uncle doesn’t listen to anyone. If Aunt Alberta weren’t working today, he could talk her into sending Eustace away, but then they’d have to find away to stop her snooping.
He’s about to lift the tray, before making for the cabinet instead, pulling out biscuits. The kid probably had teeth. Maybe chocolate would be better?

The last piece of chocolate’s existence in the house is hidden at the bottom of Edmund’s messenger bag. He decides against it.

He carries the tray to the upstairs sitting room, setting it down on the table between Lucy and Queen Prunaprismia. He shuts the door with a soft click and gives Lucy a helpless look.

“I don’t know how to send him away,” he whispers uselessly. “He’s loitering outside rearranging the books in who knows what order.”

Lucy stuffs her blanket into the space below the door.

“That should do it,” she says satisfiedly. “Me and Miss Prunaprismia were talking about where she’s travelled! She’s been to so many places, while all we do is stay here.”

They sit back on the bed, facing Prunaprismia and Percy.

“When we came here, it was to Italy,” Prunaprismia explains. “Work was difficult to find, so we went to France, then to Germany, and eventually here.”

She sips at her tea, humming appreciatively. Percy does, in fact, have teeth, and munches a biscuit professionally.

“You changed his name,” Edmund says. “From Regalos.” He doesn’t want to be obvious, but although Percy’s features are so like his mother’s, his eyes are very much from his father’s side of the family, same as Caspian’s, as is the sheen to his hair, and the bronze of his skin. It’s difficult to look at him and not recall and compare.

“I did,” Prunaprismia says, pleased. “I’m surprised you remember. I, too, am now Eliza Fleming.”

“That’s a lovely name,” Lucy beams. “Should we call you Miss Eliza?”

“Ah, no. I quite enjoy hearing my name again.”

“Miss Prunaprismia it is.”

The former queen looks exactly as she did the day they all left, but healthier. She doesn’t have the dark circles she had then, though the lines around her mouth are the same. She carries the bonnet the same as she did the crown.

“You haven’t bothered changing your accent,” Edmund notes.

“No,” she agrees. “I tell people I am from Italy, and most have never been, so do not question it.”

“Didn’t you come here with General Glozelle?” Lucy asks, echoing Edmund’s thoughts. “Did you part ways?”

“Glozelle passed eight months ago.” Percy frowns at the following silence. Prunaprismia sighs, setting down her cup.

“I did not expect to run into you, here. From what I knew, at least one of you,” she looks at Edmund, “were to stay behind.”

“Unfortunate circumstances,” Edmund replies, and feels a sharp, phantom pain in his heart.
Prunaprismia accepts this.

“But now that I have, I would like to make a request. I am dying, and I need to find someone to care for Percy.

“Glozelle passed because of something he caught in Germany. No doctor we found had seen it before, to which I could only conclude was due to the differences in our world and this one. One doctor went as far as saying Glozelle’s blood was different from anything he had seen before - this was before the disease had fully developed. I believe I have the same condition.”

Lucy covers her mouth with a hand. Edmund leans back thoughtfully.

“Peter might have been able to help you with blood testings,” he says slowly. “But you just missed them both. They won’t be back to visit for at least a year.”

Prunaprismia smiles down at her son fondly. He beams back. “I’m afraid I don’t have that long. Less than six months, I estimate.”

Lucy’s fingers find the cuff of Edmund’s sleeve. Their mother had passed just last year. It was the only thing that made Edmund grateful he’d been sent back, to be by her side. She wasn’t the best at keeping in touch after they’d parted ways, but the sight of her in bed had brought back all the memories of the time before she sent them off, the happy memories and the petty squabbles.

Percy, who has barely lived four years, is to lose his mother in six months.

“How do you know?” Edmund asks. “If you haven’t found a doctor who knows what it is-”

Prunaprismia cuts him off. “I have my doubts that it is a disease at all. What I believe is that our bodies are not compatible for this world, that the very air is different, that the physical manifestations of Telmarines are different to those of human beings.” She looks away. “Or at least, that is what I believed at first. However, I have found others who were sent here along the way, and they are thriving. So I can only believe Glozelle had something in himself that I now have, that does not operate well here. I believe in fate less than I used to, but even with Aslan’s blessing-”

“We will help you.” Lucy slides off the bed, covering Prunaprismia’s tightly clasped hands in her own. “We’ll help in any way we can.”

Edmund nods.

“We can’t promise anything. But we’ll help.”

Prunaprismia shakes her head. “All I ask is that you care for Regalos. That is all I care about.”

“Ed and I can barely give our share of rent,” Lucy says gently. “And we don’t know how long we’ll be staying in Cambridge. But Susan knows a school in America who would take him-”

“I’m afraid the only person I trust to care for Percy is your brother.” She looks Edmund in the eye. “I know it has been three years, and I do not know the reasonings as to why you are here and not in Telmar, or Narnia-”

“Sabotage, let’s say,” Lucy supplies. Prunaprismia pauses. “Against his will.”

“That only increases my trust in you,” she admits. “I was not witness to it for long, but I saw, even if only for a few days, how deeply you cared for my nephew. I know that you will care for Regalos, if only because he is related to Caspian. Am I wrong?”
It makes me sound fucking pathetic when you put it like that, Edmund thinks. It sounds so very strange to hear Caspian’s name said so casually, after so long. He doesn’t talk about him, and neither do his siblings. He hopes his irritation shows on his face.

It only seems to satisfy the Telmarine Queen.

- 

They ask around for an apartment to lease while Prunaprismia stays at an inn. Edmund gets her a job at the bakery, one of the places he works at. She has the current manager fired and replaced with herself within two days.

“He was taking the bakery’s money,” Prunaprismia shrugs. “He tried to silence me by choking—”

Lucy swallows down the wrong pipe. “He tried to kill you?”

“I only broke his arm in three places,” Prunaprismia says without missing a beat. At their slack faces, she realizes, “Oh. You were worried about me. That is sweet of you, but men here are very weak compared to home.”

Percy is often left at their house on the days Lucy isn’t tutoring, otherwise taken along to the bakery with either his mother, or Edmund, when Prunaprismia is working at at the tailor’s. He’s a quiet child, which shouldn’t come as a surprise, considering neither his mother or father were, or are, known as loud people. Edmund supposes he thought he’d be more like Caspian, even though he doesn’t think Caspian ever had a chance to actually meet his baby cousin before Prunaprismia left. Caspian certainly wasn’t known to be a quiet person.

It starts to hurt again.

Brown eyes, brown skin, soft lips, soft grins, black hair.

Edmund pushes it away.

If I wanted to stop trades with Stomarl I would have fucking done it already, Caspian thinks wrathfully. What he says is, “I have already given Stomarl my word I would send them help.” Then, because in the end he is king, he adds, “If I anyone cares to say another word about it they do so giving up their seat.”

That shuts the advisors up. Caspian nods sharply and all but flees the room.

“Call on Lord Drinian,” he says lowly to Reepicheep. “We’re going back to sea.”

“For real, this time, your Highness?”

Caspian makes a face. “Yes, for real.”

Reepicheep bows, radiating amusement. “At once, my liege.”

Caspian remembers when he once thought he would inherit the kingdom after Miraz retired. He’d rule with his uncle and teacher by his side, known to his people and his people known to him.

Then his cousin was born, and Miraz was taken out of that picture.

But to replace him, he’d had the Narnians. Narnia’s people, then her rulers.
And then he’d suddenly been left with less he’d started out with.

No uncle.

No four Queens and Kings.

No Edmund.

Caspian has never been one to dwell on things that were not likely to pass, or chase after things he had irrational want for. Nor is he used to relying on people, as growing up without parents oft leads to.

But by the Stars had he wanted Edmund.

They were both young, and the odds of their feelings lasting for life may not have been the best. People come, and people go. But Caspian liked to think they would have lasted, for a while, if not forever. Three years haven’t been nearly enough to diminish the feelings he carries for the former ruler of Narnia. The young boy made king from England.

Caspian by no means has let the downfalls in his life get in the way of his happiness. As a child, he ignored the whispers of the court, murmuring about the Orphan Prince, and befriended the caring kitchen staff instead. He put a false face before haughty sovereigns, and made firm allies in their children who would one day inherit kingdoms instead. Falling into bed with welcoming hands became a hobby.

Not so much now.

Before Edmund, he hadn’t thought he was capable of the feelings he felt. He knows what the siblings had told him. They had to leave, and they wouldn’t be coming back. Definitely not any time soon, if ever. Not in his time.

In a way, it may have been a good thing. Edmund could have helped him build his empire, but if ever things ended badly between them, Caspian isn’t sure he would have been able to keep things together. But even that was one mere if in a million and a half.

Caspian sighs miserably at the mountains of scrolls.

Having rarely let people into his head and heart, he feels the few he has allowed have never quite left - not completely. They leave metaphorical threads as they go, a momento to their time with him.

There would have been one connecting him to Susan, had they time to strengthen their friendship. Perhaps even Peter over time, and by extension, Lucy. There were frail strings attaching him to the children that he once played with as a child, that moved away with their families to escape Miraz’s rule. Doctor Cornelius’ was a like the rope that held an anchor. Firm, never to fray.

Connecting him to Nedni was a wide ribbon, flimsy and easy to destroy if a single thread of it were pulled, just as their relationship had been. Nedni had left after giving him a proper dressing down; they had both been people hurting from being left behind. Caspian, in his fear of it happening again, had subconsciously tried to prolong their disaster.

“Why are we bothering if we cannot find happiness within each other?” Nedni had said exasperatedly, swinging her arms around animatedly. “That’s the entire point of this, Caspian.”

He’d reluctantly agreed. The second time, he’d cut things off himself. It shows, in how the thread
that used to link him to Ja’Lin feels hair-thin and shredded. He hadn’t thought himself the type to fall for a man’s whispers about how gorgeous he was, how a king’s money meant nothing to him. After it was made clear to Ja’Lin that marriage would not mean the inheritance of a portion of the kingdom, catching him sneaking out of the castle was more satisfying, than unexpected.

Caspian isn’t quite sure what went wrong with Esteja, still. They’d met while on sea, and though Estaja had never held any significance to Caspian having a country of his own, something seemed to change as the day for Caspian to return to land came near.

“I was made for the sea, Caspian,” Estaja said. They looked confused and upset, although it didn’t feel directed at Caspian. “I belong to it. I was born on a boat, and will likely sink with one. I cannot be your spouse, waiting for you at sea, and having to see you back at shore every few months.”

They parted ways with sadness, different to the upset anger from Edmund’s abrupt disappearance. It was the type of sadness in which they knew they could have had something in another life. So off Caspian went back to his castle, trailing behind him a braided cord, the colour of Estaja’s auburn hair.

Edmund’s is a chain.

Edmund’s are multiple small chains, gold and intertwined, as if for all their missed opportunities. Caspian thinks if he tries, they would all snap if he pulled hard enough. Or if he works through them slowly, one by one, snapping them as he goes.

He does not dare touch those chains.

Caspian pushes back his chair abruptly, standing.

That’s enough.

He picks the open, moving bundle on his bed, and makes his way downstairs to fetch a horse. He’s overdue a conversation with Glenstorm.

The very next day after the High Queens and Kings are gone, Caspian barges into the Doctor’s study. His eyes are tired, hair unkempt. Cornelius does not think he is aware of it, or the time.

“Tell me,” he demands the good doctor. “Tell me about the White Witch and the dwarves and Edmund.”

Cornelius stands from the bed, pulling on his robe and glasses. He brings out a tightly rolled scroll from behind a row of books, glancing at his king. The boy looks much like he did five years ago, similar to as he did when dear young Limdel had to move away because of Miraz’s tax laws. He sits back on the bed, popping the seal on the scroll.

“Before the High Queens and Kings of Narnia came to have their titles,” Cornelius begins, “before they defeated Jadis and her rule, there was much that transpired. Much that was left unsaid for the sake of peace, for the sake of forgiveness, about His Highness, King Edmund the Just. Amongst the followers of the White Witch, it is only the dwarves who remember this tale, for it is they who have had their history pit against them most, and the memories of dwarves are long and hard.”

Caspian listens in silence, huddled on the floor, a blanket hanging off his shoulders. Cornelius spares a thought for fret, that perhaps hearing this story might change Caspian’s feelings towards
the recently gone boy. The doctor immediately vanishes the notion right after he has had it. After all, the doctor himself had a hand in raising the king. Caspian’s feelings will remain unchanged.

This is merely knowledge. A fact, from many, in history.

Through the hour, Caspian’s expressions come through. Horror, when he learns of the manipulation the White Witch put Edmund through, fury when he was thrown into a cell alongside Mister Tumnus, Queen Lucy’s lifelong friend. Confusion when the Great Lion bargained his life for the boy’s, which clears upon the Lion’s revival by the power of the Stone Table. Rage at Jadis’ nearly successful attempt at murdering Edmund after he broke her staff.

When he finishes, Cornelius rises again, pouring himself water from the pitcher. He drinks first, then refills it before handing it to Caspian.

“He said to ask you,” Caspian says finally. “About his history. He said it as though it were something he could not bare to speak of, like it was terrible. And it is, but not in the way I imagine he believes it to be. I do not know why he thought it would change my opinion of him.”

Cornelius imagines this is what the wise old men that he made fun of as a child felt like. He hums.

“I imagine it was fear stemming from experience,” Cornelius hazards a guess. “You forget, he once lived half a life. One finds people and confides in them.”

Caspian gazes darkly at his full glass of water. “They were fools to think anything but good of him.” He raises his eyes to his teacher’s. “What do you think?”

Cornelius looks down at Caspian in amusement. “To me, it is what it is. A child who was manipulated by the hands of a tyrant. But to him, I imagine it was a life-defining event.”

Caspian watches the water thoughtfully.

- 

Glenstorm stares at the creature in Caspian’s hands. It looks smaller than it probably should be, more so when held with such care.

“I found it just sitting in a tree, wailing louder like a banshee,” Caspian recalls. The little thing flutters its wings. It would be elegant if it weren’t so small and fuzzy. It eyes Glenstorm with disdain.

Caspian racks his brain for the list of extinct species from his history book. The creature is definitely bird-like, what with the wings, but has distinct cat-like features as well.

“Is it… a bat?” Caspian asks slowly.

“Bats are extinct,” Glenstorm says confidently. “And bats were told to be more… magnificent. Perhaps it is a descendant.”

“Decidedly less grand,” Caspian agrees. The creature squawks in indignation.

“At any rate, it seems to understand us,” Glenstorm muses. “It definitely is not Narnian, but could be from the southern countries. I believe migrating season started as of a month ago.”

The little thing hops down from Caspian’s hands, and proceeds to continue to hop all over the map spread out on the table. Glenstorm does not look amused.
“If you don’t have a name, I’m going to name you Isra.” Caspian touches his finger to little Isra’s nose. They startle and fall over, looking wildly at his finger. “It is hardly my fault you cannot speak yet.”

“I’ll ask my wife to see if it has a gender-”

“Oh, no need.” The creature reminds him of Estaja. It reminds him of when he’d first smiled at Edmund, causing him to startle. “I think I’ll let little Isra choose.” He picks the creature back up, lifting it to his face to make eye contact.

Isra smacks his nose with their wing.

That night, after Isra has sufficiently tired themselves to the point of passing out on Caspian’s bed, Caspian rises from the desk and follows their example.

“Being king involves so much more paperwork than anyone lets on,” Caspian mutters. He lifts Isra into a small woven basket, dropping a handkerchief on top of them. “It’s all glorious in the stories, riding into war, coming out victorious - but in reality, it’s all, King Caspian the Tenth sat behind his desk week after week, and sometimes ran into the sea to avoid his responsibilities.”

Isra chortles.

“Oh, yes, laugh at me.” He pokes the basket gently. “It will not be quite as funny when you have the village pets chasing after you. Do not presume to come to me then.”

Isra opens an eye, as if to convey that yes, I entirely believe you would willingly let harm befall me.

“Spoilt,” Caspian mumbles.

Before he falls asleep, his mind wanders to his web of tangles, as it does every night. He reaches the familiar chains of untarnished gold and stops.

Maybe.

Three years is a long time.

Maybe it is time.

He carefully untangles a couple individual chains, cautiously, as though it were a forbidden act.

Maybe just a few, he thinks, tightening his hold on them.

Maybe some tonight. Maybe some another night.

Through the haze of sleep, he tugs.

Chapter End Notes

yeah, babey casp's pan. wow i just realized i added two babies. when i started this story, it was with the intention with no babies. that out of the way, now we reset the timer! i'll see y'all in a month. again. thank you
all for the sweet messages you've been sending my way <3 sometimes i reread them and hallucinate writing another chapter on the spot before i see the exam papers in front of me again.
in the belief of a chance

Chapter Notes

oKAY. i delayed this way too long ;_; but here we are!!

WARNING: this chapter contains character death! if you would prefer to not read it, search ahead to 'The funeral is the quickest event', and if you would prefer to skip the funeral as well, skip ahead to 'Once again, life resumes.'

i hadn't planned this when i began the story, so i apologize if it's not what you were in for! the fic's warnings have been changed accordingly.

He dreams, sometimes.

It is often of nothing.

It is often of something.

There is one that oftens - he roam a familiar dark forest. Familiar only in a way that he is aware that he knows the trees; can never speak to them, not like Lucy can, but he knows they have names, and he knows their barks and roots, and they know his story, his soul, and his silence.

Those dreams, he refuses to acknowledge. When he wakes, he waits for the imprint of the visions to disappear, until it leaves him with nothing a bitter taste starting at the back of his throat, down to his ribcage.

Those days are never good.

Never.

So when Edmund wakes up with the feeling of nausea, his head pounding in time with Lucy’s banging on his and Eustace’s door, he knows today will never be good.

“Something’s wrong,” Lucy blurts when he opens the door. Her eyes are wild, filled with tears that just barely hold. Eustace rolls out of bed and onto the floor.

“Let’s go find Pr-” he shoots a look at Eustace, and Lucy smoothly amends to, “Miss Eliza. She might know something.”

So they rush out of the house like that; without breakfast, at the crack of dawn, sockless feet in their boots, swaddled in only their coats without scarves and hats, all the way to the little apartment that holds Prunaprismia and Percy.

Edmund shivers when they reach the building. He’s never been so adept to empathy - it’s more Lucy’s area than his own. His is practicality, objectivity - realism. So when he tips his head up at the window that looks into Prunaprismia’s home and sees the curtains still drawn despite the sun lifting, and rushes for the stairs, Lucy racing behind him, it is with a new feeling of dread.

“Eliza?” Lucy yells, pounding on the door. “Eliza! It’s Lucy and Edmund!”
Two minutes go by. Edmund digs his hand into the left pocket of his coat, digging out a lockpick. The door clicks open before he can put it to use. Percy stands behind the door, his height coming to the handle, which he had to twist with both hands to open. He looks pale, in a way children should never be, because it never means anything good, and never will.

“Mama won’t wake up,” he whispers. It’s not playful; it’s not curiosity. His tone holds an unhealthy amount of worry, in a way children should never have to. “I don’t know why.”

“Stay here with Lucy,” Edmund says. Something settles under his skin, slightly, because at least now he knows for sure something is wrong, and that it isn’t just some impending feeling. “We’ll go for breakfast in a bit, ta?”

Percy nods. Lucy puts on a brave face, standing in her coat and nightgown, trying not to crush Percy’s hand in her grip. Edmund does not give himself a brace period, and walks briskly into Prunaprismia’s room.

He does not stop when he sees her prone figure, laying still under the blanket, chest unrising. He thinks, don’t stop. Don’t stop. Just check. Don’t breathe in. Just-

Edmund presses an unwavering hand below Prunaprismia’s collarbones; he presses two fingers solidly into the side of her neck for her lack of pulse; he checks her wrist, though it won’t make a difference. Her body is cooling fast, as if the only warmth she had was the residual heat inside the blanket she herself made before she-

Edmund slips back out of the room.

He knows death.

He shakes his head at Lucy, who reacts only with a hard swallow, so as to not alert Percy, who sits at the kitchen table, nibbling at a biscuit slowly.

They both know death. They have dealt with it, countlessly, tirelessly, have fought against it and come out alive. Not untouched, but alive.

But Percy has not. Regolas has not.

“I’ll have to talk to Uncle. For- arrangements,” Edmund says hoarsely. Lucy nods, and takes Percy away, probably to hide him in her room until they can-

Until.

The funeral is the quickest event Edmund has ever gone through. It isn’t even a suffering.

Prunaprismia did not make many friends, purposefully, after coming to their world. Edmund and Lucy are present with Percy. Someone from the bakery she and Edmund worked at cared just enough to attend. Her landlord. Eustace, out of formality. Uncle Albert, because he arranged it. Aunt Rosmerta, driven by pity for a stranger.

Percy does not cry.

It’s alarming. It is worrying, and a cause for concern, and Edmund wonder if he’s not latching onto the strangeness of it to distract from the tragedy himself. Trauma is handled different for every
person, but Percy, a seven year old child, does not cry at the news of his mother’s death, or at his mother’s funeral, or afterwards when they take him home.

“I’m going to change, alright?” Lucy says to Percy. The boy holds still, as if unsure that her reason is enough to warrant her absence. “Ed will be right here. I’ll be back in ten?”

She’s put on a brave face for three days, not letting the tears filling her eyes fall, even when Percy has slept; Edmund knows she can’t hold it in much longer. He sends her away with a nod, and the bags under her eyes seem to hollow further as she goes.

Edmund sits on the floor, leaning against his bed. Percy hovers uncertainly, and though he knows both Edmund and Lucy, he’s never had to live with them for longer than half a day, and now, on the fourth, must be coming to terms that something in his life has permanently changed.

“Are you hungry?”

Percy shakes his head. Coming to a decision, he sits himself next to Edmund on the tiles. Edmund tries to remember the last time Lucy fed the boy. He wonders when Susan and Peter will receive the letter he sent two days ago. He wonders-

There’s a quiet snifflle next to him.

Edmund fights all the muscles in his shoulders to not tense.

This is normal, he thinks frantically. He’s a child who just lost his mother. Of course he’s going to cry. But why now, with me?

Percy burrows his face between his own knees and sucks in a wrangled breath. The sound has Edmund moving before he can register it, pulling Percy to him. Percy doesn’t hesitate, and reaches up to wrap his hands in Ed’s suspenders, making him curl over the small boy - then he starts really sobbing.

Edmund stays stock still for the three minutes it takes for Lucy to return, who lightly slaps her own forehead at Edmund’s shocked, motionless figure.

Comfort him, she mouths, mimicking a rubbing motion with her hands. Edmund hesitantly complies, lifting a hand to Percy’s back and rubbing it in the circle-y motions his sister is making.

It makes the boy cry harder. But Lucy sends him a thumbs-up, so he figures it’s fine, despite the child in his arms insisting it isn’t.

Dolt, Lucy adds.

Edmund lightly drops his head on top of Percy’s, breathing out slowly.

I’m not ready to be a parent, he thinks wearily.

-

Once again, life resumes.

One wonders how many times drastic events can be experienced before life stops doing that.

They take leave from work to spend a day at home hovering around Percy, and the very next day Percy quietly asks when he’ll go back to school because he’s missing out on what the rest of the children are learning.
It’s just the second grade, and doesn’t cost anything Edmund and Lucy can’t afford (or can’t be afforded by Prunaprismia’s leftover funds that neither of them will acknowledge), so Percy goes back to school, and they go back to work.

A week passes.

Edmund fishes a neatly folded piece of paper out of his pocket and shoves it in Lucy’s face. “Aunt asked us to get groceries.”

Lucy bemusedly takes it.

“‘Asked’?”

“Strongly suggested,” Edmund says drily. “She did the face- you know the one.”

“The ‘I dare you’?”

Edmund clicks his tongue in agreement.

“Why are we living with mean people?”

They both look down at Percy, who’s watching a stray cat feed their kittens in an alley.

“Percy, has Aunt been mean to you since you’ve been with us?” Lucy asks seriously.

He blinks. “No. But she’s very bossy to you.”

Edmund snorts when Lucy presses her lips together to physically stop herself from cooing.

“It’s nice of you to be so thoughtful,” she beams. “But we’re fine as we are! Besides, in a year we should have enough to move out, and then no one will boss us.”

“We could move out now.” Percy looks up at them, hat slipping a bit to the side. Edmund absently tugs it back into place. “With Mama’s money.”

They both freeze.

“You know, I do think you should do the grocery instead, Ed-”

“What?” Edmund squawks. “Aunt told you to do it!”

“You’re much faster at it than I am!” Lucy insists. “I’ll do the post office work.”

Percy tugs on Edmund’s sleeve. “They stopped moving.” He points to the trashcan the cats are behind and-

They’re not moving. Their tails are high in the air, and there they stay, without a twitch.

“Where is everyone?” Lucy breathes.

They’re still on the road. A car is a bit off the side from them, wheels at an angle, the driver’s seat empty. Kilton is no longer behind the newsstand, the baker’s girl no longer outside chatting up the rich banker’s son, and when they look back, the cats, too, have disappeared.

“But. But he said-”

She’s right. It doesn’t matter.

Of course it doesn’t.

He would trade this life for just a chance to go back.

Lucy yanks his and Percy’s bags off his shoulder, swinging them over her own so Edmund can sweep Percy onto his back. They make a run for it, hope climbing higher and higher in their throats as they go.

Lucy leads, because it has always been her who has known where to go.

The desire lodges under Edmund’s tongue when Aunt’s house comes into view. It is when they near, that they spot the river flowing out the bottom of the front door and the upstairs windows, and when Lucy unlocks it, the gorgeous, clear water flowing down the stairs.

There is only one kind of water in the universe that can shine so fresh.

He knows this ocean.

Wanting fills him, threatening to burst from his lips as they run up the stairs, and when they see the painting it does, it spills from him and wraps around his soul instead, at the sight of the sea that falls and sprays out, the ship that looms, because-

Just once more.

It will never be enough.

But.

Just once more, Edmund believes.

And, as if it were in wait for them, the force of the water strengthens. The room fills in seconds, as does the house steadily; Edmund brings Percy to his front and holds out a hand for Lucy.

“Hold on.”

Lucy’s eyes dance.

The water reaches their knees. Percy watches, eyes wide, no doubt thinking they’ve lost their minds, but does not make a ruckus, as though he, too, knows not to be afraid.

It is the essence of the world he was born, after all.

It reaches their waists. It reaches their elbows, and their shoulders, and their necks, and they breathe in, salt filling their lungs-

And impossibly-

Eustace Scrubb floats up the stairs and into the room.

“What the bloody fu- gugughg- guh-”

Just once more.

Just once.
and perhaps it was a fool’s act to believe in what was not a promise

Chapter Notes

hello!!

so! thank you all so much for all the support this fic has gotten. i never thought it would hit off even as much as it has, but it's been amazing to know this fic has gotten people back into narnia, or into shipping casmund, and that it actually means something to them - i genuinely don't know how to thank all y'all. all of your kudos, bookmarks, and comments that i see and read and reread mean more to me than i can describe, and though i started this fic for selfish reasons, you guys give me reasons to continue it. i hope i manage to keep every one of you stuck with me till the end of this story.

hope you enjoy! (and surprise! made a thing as a thank you)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s few things calmer to him than bodily submerging into water until his mind’s a blank space; the colour of water, and the sounds that come with it.

Edmund always forgets just how much he longs for the ocean until it's in front of him again.

Or until he's in it, apparently.

It’s peaceful. It's quiet, and it’s clear, and he can see rays from the sun above the water continuing through the surface in front of him.

His first thought when he breaks the surface is Percy and Lucy.

His second is, we're in the middle of the fucking ocean, followed swiftly by, we're about to be crushed by a giant ship.

The same ocean and ship from the painting in Lucy's room. Bloody hell, had it always been an entry into Narnia? Just sitting there? Just waiting for a call from the other side to bring them back?

"Percy! Luce!"

He dives back in and sees nothing. Rising again, Edmund gasps, ready to plunge back-


Eustace? His eyes follow the thrashing his ears hear and he spots his cousin, desperately trying to stay afloat. Oh, you’ve got to be fucking kidding me.

To top it off, there’s people jumping off the ship and swimming towards them at an alarmingly fast rate.

“Eustace!” He yells. “Fuckin’ swim!”
Ignoring his fury, Edmund dives again, murderously recalling the times Eustace would boast about going to the pool and winning the water races. Wonders if his cousin might have the gal to drown if Edmund doesn’t reach in time. Maybe the awfully burly man might reach Eustace first. Edmund isn’t sure he could take him down under water.

And then, horribly and terribly, not five feet from Eustace, an arm snakes around Edmund’s waist and pulls him back up to the surface. Edmund thrashes, ready to throw a punch with whatever momentum he can muster, when, right as he twists, before he can even raise his arm to swing, he gets a good look at the person holding him up.

“Caspian.” He says in disbelief, hand dropping back into the water with a smack, voice barely heard over the ocean. “Caspian?”

The man's eyes widen in reflected disbelief. He stares up at Edmund with the same honey-brown eyes from three years ago-

“Edmund,” Caspian gasps.

Edmund’s fingers unconsciously curl into themselves with the familiar sound of his name from lips that he- lips that stretch and spread until they’ve formed a smile, the same lips Edmund touched what seems decades and just yesterday ago.

Caspian’s alive.

Caspian’s alive.

“You’ve grown.”

Ocean water drips into his eyes, and Edmund reluctantly blinks. He doesn’t want to look away.

“So have you,” he breathes, thumb absently moving over Caspian’s jaw, where in place of shaved skin, there’s a beard.

He finally let it grow out.

Edmund's not sure he didn't just drown and end up somewhere else entirely. He has strands of Caspian’s hair curled around his fingers, palm pressed to the soft prickle of his beard, and it tickles.
It tickles, and Edmund doesn't know how to let go. Doesn’t want to know how.

His hair is longer. There's beginnings of crow's feet at the corners of Caspian's eyes, and the permanent kind of dark shadows under them that Lucy tells Ed he has. There’s a tan in his skin that makes him shine, the kind you get from being on sea just long enough, and there’s no crown on his head, but-

Here, in the water, holding Edmund up, Caspian holds himself like a king. No longer a prince.

_I missed you so much_, Edmund thinks, but can’t say it. He can’t, because-

He’d never prepared to come back.

And maybe this is just a fraction of what Susan had felt.

They're pressed too close together. Caspian's still mostly holding him up with the help of the ocean, a hand at Edmund's hip, another under his thigh.

He’s firmer than he was- before. Or maybe that’s just Edmund’s failing memory.

Edmund swallows.

"You hold all the boys underwater like this?" He asks teasingly, voice far too breathless, far too little than he likes. Caspian's eyes widen, clearly not expecting the- joke? Flirt? Clearly not expecting _it_, and Edmund starts to try and pry his way out of Caspian's hands, and hates every second of it.

"Only the pretty ones," Caspian says after a second, lowly, grin on his face, his hold firm. Edmund knows the heat in his face isn't only from the sun anymore.

_I can’t believe you’re alive-

“Hello there, _cousin!”_ Eustace roars, any effects dulled by the burly man unamusedly dragging him through the water. "If you're done having a _tete-a-tete_ with that _stranger_, hopefully you could _spare me a thought!"

Caspian raises an eyebrow. "Cousin?"

"He's whacked in the head," Edmund assures.

"Am _not!”_

The ship, once they’ve all been pulled aboard and handed towels, is a thing of beauty - and Edmund’s seen a _few_, once. Smooth brown wood curving the hulk of it, bigger than the one Lucy had been gifted however many years ago by a suitor who’d looked too far into her acts of kindness.

A few minutes in have Lucy and Edmund reminded of the lack of practice their sea legs have had recently. Percy, having boarded with Lucy before Edmund and Caspian, detaches one of his hands from Lucy’s skirt and fists it into Edmund’s pant leg.

Caspian’s eyes fall to the child. His arm falls away from Edmund’s waist.

“’You have a child,” he says in surprise. He doesn’t seem- _mad_, as he says it, or upset, but - clear-faced, and Edmund realizes maybe Caspian has grown more into kinghood than he’d initially thought. Because Edmund can’t tell what he’s thinking.
Because that’s what ruling a kingdom does to you.

It teaches you to hide what can be used against you, and Caspian is doing exactly that with his thoughts.

“Well-” Lucy starts brightly.

Edmund pinches her side at the same time Eustace lets rip a scream.

“I will sue you if you touch me!” He yells, sounding hilariously close to a sob. “Don’t even think-”

“Just knock him out,” Edmund sighs, right before Eustace turns, spots the Narnian ox, and does the job for them.

- 

He has to wait until they’re in the safety and privacy of a cabin, turned and changing into dry clothes, to say, “I’m telling them Percy’s my kid.”

There’s a deliberate pause as Lucy processes this.

“If you’re done changing?” She asks.

“Yeah- ow! Luce-”

She smacks him with the pillow again. “You’re telling Caspian you have a kid! Why?”

“He’s still king!” Edmund hisses. “And keep your voice down, there’s no point if they know it’s a lie!”

“What, so you’re going to have Percy to call you dad?” Lucy hisses back.

They glare at each other for a few seconds. Percy slowly swings from the hammock that isn’t occupied by Eustace, watching silently.

“Listen.” Edmund takes a step back when Lucy doesn’t budge, keeping her arms on her hips, glare on him strong. “Caspian’s still king. Percy is still Miraz’s child. We don’t know how Caspian felt about him three years ago, and even if he didn’t want him—” he glances at Percy, “gone, that doesn’t mean he wants him back-”

Lucy smacks him with the pillow again.

“What are you even saying!” She whisper-yells. “Do you even hear- this is Caspian we’re talking about! Not-not some cruel, evil royal prat-”

“Even if Caspian doesn’t not want him here,” Edmund says over her, “there’s no way that his advisors will. Why risk anything if we - Lucy, we don't even know how long we're for.”

"You sound like Susan," she says, and it's less mean than it is a fact, but it makes Edmund want to pull at her ears all the same.

"And she was right."

Lucy lips thin into a line. She hands the pillow to Percy to place back in the hammock.

“Go on.”
“He’s still Miraz’s son,” Edmund says again, suddenly and already tired by the thought of all the lying that lies ahead of them. “He has a claim to the throne—”

“Oh, come **on**—”

“He has a claim,” Edmund repeats firmly. “Even if Caspian doesn’t care about it, is **fine** with it, even, he won’t just **keep quiet** about having his cousin back. And it doesn’t matter how good his advisors are at heart, because their job is to make sure Caspian stays on the throne—”

“Fu- **frick,**” Lucy says heartfeltly. “**Bullocks.** Not five minutes back here, and you’re already back at it. Christ. Aslan’s mane. Paraval’s boss—”

Edmund tilts his head back and takes a deep sigh.

“Perce, you’re fine with pretending I’m your dad for a while?”

Percy kicks his foot out lightly, gently swinging the hammock. “You kind of are.”

“Oh,” Edmund says around the strange lump in his throat.

“I am **not** going to be the one to explain this to Eustace,” Lucy says warningly.

Eustace snores a little louder in his sleep behind them.

Chapter End Notes

might take a bit for the next update as i hash out the details of where da babs are gonna go. i’ll be editing this too, because i learned some of you are actually rereading all this, which is wild and i appreciate the fuck out of u. so, gotta fix up/add shit. maybe doodles for some chapters? decisions, decisions.

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