

Mirage

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Mirage

by [wonder_boy](#)

Summary

The doctors tell him it isn't permanent.

Some days, he wishes it were.

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A sequel to [Petrichor](#).

Notes

mi·rage

(*noun*) something illusory and unattainable.

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A special Happy Birthday gift to the wonderful Sab, a person who I consider one of my closest friends and one of the sweetest people I've ever met in this fandom. I owe so much of my experience to her, and I can't thank her enough! Please go read her works and give her some extra love - you're missing out on the good stuff!! Hope you had a wonderful day, love!

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

The doctors tell him it isn't permanent.

Some days, he wishes it were.

Only then could he know what to expect and make a plan for how to deal with it. Anticipate the stumbles and setbacks and adjust accordingly. Without the certainty of a diagnosis, an unmistakable label for his condition, he is left bound to the will of his body, a temple that has been broken and tampered with. A temple he no longer has control over.

It's not permanent, so he can't predict when the ball's going to drop, or when his legs will lock up on him before he can get a chance to chew on a slice of toast.

It's simply not fair.

"Good morning, my love." The swish of the curtains grates against his ears. "Did you sleep well?"

He's back at the manor again. After a long week of playing house in Gil's townhome, his vacation time came to an abrupt end after their weekend in the Hamptons. Going back to work meant that they needed a new plan, a new method on how to handle Malcolm moving forward in the event of Gil's absence. They all needed to be on board with whatever conclusion they arrived at; Gil and Jessica made it a point to allow Malcolm some decision making in the process, but with his memory tarnished of a life before this, he only had so little to say.

All he requested was total privacy.

"I wanted to wake you up myself," Jessica chimes, too enthusiastic at this early hour.

Which didn't go over well with his mother.

"I hope you were able to get some sleep last night with all of this wind and rain; it's all gross and muggy outside..."

His primary caretaker. A new reality he's not sure he's comfortable with considering her boisterous behavior during daylight hours, but he knows she means well. Still, Gil was never this abrasive or awkward.

"What shall we do today?" The bed dips beside him and the smell of cherry floats over his nose. "We could watch a movie, maybe bake something. Oh, we can try flash cards! I know, you threw out the last batch behind my back but there are plenty more where that came from."

Malcolm scrunches up his nose, already sensing an impending headache from the perfume and her rather chippy attitude. "I don't need them."

Jessica rolls her eyes, unimpressed. Ever the chameleon, if her feelings aren't kept under the guise of a full glass, then she hides them behind a cold smile and vague threats she might

commit to. “Darling,” she drawls, “Esther told me about your session yesterday. You nearly blacked out in the middle of the lesson.”

He remembers the session with the housekeeper. Wasn’t a blackout, or at least he thinks it wasn’t. His mother is good for reminding him of his many, many failures.

She leans over into his space with the ghost of her touch on his shoulder. “What were you thinking about?”

A man. A psychiatrist who isn’t worth their degree pulling a stack of white cards from under a cubby, shuffling the deck in their lap while he just stares at him from the corner of the tattered couch. Waiting, floating, holding onto a lifeboat as if it was going to save him from what happened next.

A test. A measurement of his progress or lack thereof. A test he needed to pass in order to get a sign off on new, healthier treatment towards his release, but quicksand has him by the waist before he flicks the first image of a bird.

“Sunshine” is incorrect.

The second image is that of religious text, a photo of a brown book with the word Bible written in gold letters on the front. A sharp, shuddering breath and a hand under his breastplate.

“Ow” is incorrect.

The third image is a small blue mug. No engravings or liquid on the inside, just a cartoon portrait of a small glass cup. He blinks.

Crying is incorrect.

The memory of his deep sadness in that moment washes over his body in waves until he is rocked and separated from the boat. “I told you I don’t need them.” His word is final, so Jessica places the thought on the back burner for the time being.

Another deflection. “Breakfast will be served soon, your favorite—”

“I’m not hungry.”

“—and I want to start with some light exercise to work up an appetite. Sound good?” Before Malcolm has a chance to respond, Jessica claps her hands together and walks to lock his door behind her, pivoting on her heels toward his nightstand. A gray mat is pulled from between the bed and the stand, crinkled with overuse, and laid out on the floor in front of her. To his surprise, she takes off her heels.

His sheets are peeled back revealing a quiet storm beneath them, the loss of muscle mass in his legs obscured by soft gray sweatpants he won’t take off. Realizing he can’t get out of morning stretches this time, Malcolm begrudgingly pushes off the bed and drags his lower half to the edge of the bed where his mother waits.

“Grab onto me, dear.” Jessica ducks her head and drops her shoulders to level with his body, wrapping one arm around his waist as he hugs her back with an arm over her shoulder. When she gets a good grip on his smaller frame with most of his weight on her, she bends her knees and slowly lowers him to the ground until he sits upright. “This okay?”

The smell of her perfume is suddenly nauseating. “You can let go.”

Her hands fall from his body and Malcolm catches himself with his palms on the mat. It takes all of his core strength to sit up straight, and all he can think about is how much he depends on his mother for the smallest of things. Watching her untangle his legs at the end of the mat, rolling up the ankles of his sweats to check for any bruising before rubbing them up and down for circulation, on her knees scrunching up her thousand dollar dress for his own sake.

Taking care of him when he needs it the most.

Malcolm can’t explain it, but something about this entire display twists his stomach in crooked knots. Surrendering his mind and body to someone else still carries an underlying bout of pain that makes his skin crawl and floods his veins with adrenaline that prompts him to run on broken legs. He can’t stand it.

It’s too much and not enough all at once.

“Does that hurt?”

Slowly blinking up at the ceiling, Malcolm quietly registers that he’s no longer sitting up, but on his back with his mother leaning over him. Her question then filters in like someone turned the volume up on the stereo, reminding him that there is work to be done. He winces as his knee is guided towards his chest but shakes his head. He’s felt worse. “I’m fine.”

Jessica purses her lips without further comment and slowly pulls his leg back down after a ten count. She repeats the process on the other leg in silence. Both of his legs come up to his chest with Malcolm holding them to his chest, her hand hovering around his frame and waits for him to tuck his knees in before she counts.

It’s an uncomfortable silence that neither of them want to break. The state of Malcolm’s body ripples through their minds like an underlying current of reminders, every stretch just another indication of what he’s lost.

From what he’s been told about his time as a profiler, he wasn’t one to concern himself with physical prowess; if he took care of the mind, the rest of the body will follow.

A shiver jerks him out of his concentration. It’s something his father used to say.

“Break.” Jessica grabs the back of his knees and lowers his legs to the floor, and Malcolm’s arms fall to his side as he lets go of the breath he’s been holding. With the ache in his side no longer there, he finds it a whole lot easier to breathe. “How do you feel?”

“Like I just ran a marathon around Manhattan.”

Her eyes roll to the back of her skull. “Your legs, dear. How do your *legs* feel?”

“Who says I can feel them?”

An exasperated sigh short of anger. “Malcolm Whitly—”

“I’m fine, mother. Just sore from last night,” he says to the ceiling, avoiding looking in her direction at all costs. The only possible upside to his legs feeling like lead and being completely immobile is his inability to be a physical risk to himself. Night terrors burn holes through his mind on a daily basis – a facet he has experience with and can control – but nothing compares to the blacked out intensity of his nightmares when the lights go out.

Last night was a different level of disorienting. Still locked in his leather restraints and a mouth guard to barricade his teeth and gums from splitting, both became loosened while he thrashed and screamed himself raw with nowhere to run. The desperate twisting and turning left his lower back all out of sorts since his legs did nothing to free him from his father.

A headache starts to form just thinking about it.

Soreness. Migraines. Confusion. Stiff muscles. If it’s not one thing, it’s something, a weariness that can’t be placed into words. The hidden yearning for permanence rather than uncertainty and insecurity. Nothing seems to satisfy that.

And Jessica can sense it. “Maybe we should stop for now. I’ll have Louisa run a bath so you can relax for a little bit. Perhaps a light breakfast might help?”

He can’t find the energy to disagree. “Sure.”

She wants to say something. To use this window to reassure him, to comfort him, maybe even dig a little deeper past the bourbon and find the guilt she can’t seem to stomach most days. Rip out the apology she’s owed him ever since that night and from then on because she knows deep down that tailored meals and half-assed stretching isn’t going to put a dent in forgiveness.

So, she puts on her best mask and helps him up off the floor to a seated position with the promise of a relaxing day ahead.

Silence is a virtue.

Tangy copper seeps in between his teeth and stings the taste buds on the tip of his tongue as the last of his breakfast comes up with a vengeance. Then dry heaves start with such relentlessness, he is left with no choice but to let nature take its course.

Blood. That’s a new one, he thinks.

Lunch started off pleasant. A meal perfectly tailored to his ever-changing needs with the added approval of his mother and the diet plan he was given a few of weeks ago. Despite his mother’s constant encouragement to eat more than he could handle, everything was moving smoothly at the dinner table as if the circumstances weren’t drastically different from their new norm.

When it all seemed too good to be true, that Malcolm was finally going to reach a milestone, his stomach turned on him at the last moment, and he immediately excused himself and requested some help to get to his room. Another setback he can't endure.

Sluggishly, Malcolm lifts up his head up off the porcelain in the direction of the door.

His arms seize up at the thought of having to crawl his way back over to his bedside again. Though his phone is within reach to call someone for assistance, he immediately rejects the idea of being found like this and slumps against the seat with his forehead on the cool surface. The last thing he needs is to be pitied by another staffer.

He groans in protest when his stomach cramps up again from another wave that sits dangerously close to the breaking point like a spark without gasoline. He swallows the spit in his mouth despite the grim aftertaste and takes a steady deep breath in and out, relaxes, and repeats until his stomach subsides.

At this point, Malcolm has lost count of how many times he's ended up on the bathroom floor. The one silver lining in all of this – even if he believes there isn't one – is the lack of pain in his legs when they give out from under him and anchor him right by the toilet. A certainty he can live with.

In the silent, long-winded messages that were never sent to God, Malcolm continues to curse his fate as he hauls his body upright with shaky limbs. Once he sits up straight, he can't help but sigh, shoulders slacking with his posture. He can't find it within himself to care.

Back to the room.

It's all he has to do.

In the desert of his misfortune, Malcolm locks his arms and pulls his body forward, forever grateful for his daily exercises in the loft, and trudges on.

Malcolm abruptly stops all movement.

The loft.

His home. He shakes his head – no, *this* is his home. He whips his head around when the chirps of a bird breeze past his ears, only to find the wall staring back at him. The chirps – the same ones he heard when he was in *there* – filter in and out until a swelling pressure against his skull forces a cage to appear in front of him, a tiny enrapture with the door open and no bird.

Until a flutter by his ears catches his attention. Out of the corner of his eye sits a mix of yellow and green feathers and a small beak, its eyes staring back at Malcolm with its head cocked in curiosity. He blinks a few times to make sure he's seeing this; a palm to his eyes, scrubbing them until they hurt, and the bird stays right next to him.

Holding his breath, he stares in disbelief. "And who might you be?"

The bird only walks closer to his neck and perches on the edge of his shirt collar. His muscles relax as she relaxes against him, and he carefully props himself up against the sink cabinets to enjoy the little peace and quiet his mind has given him.

She keeps him company.

He can't keep his head up.

Fatigue has him by his wrists and ankles like invisible shackles from the basement underground, missing the bite of the blade but the absence of iron in his blood is just as apparent. A deep sigh escapes his lips under the harsh lights of the manor, the clack of dishes from the kitchen white noise to his ears, and without much of a fight, his head falls to the side onto his clenched fist.

His mother left the couch to do...something. He can't quite remember what. He blinks through the haze but nothing really happens. The thought is fleeting as his mind begins to wander off to someplace not here. He drifts through the woods off the waves crashing into the shore and over his toes to padded cell blocks with only one way out. His own private prison makes a brief appearance until he stumbles upon the one room in Claremont he dreads more than solitary.

The infirmary.

"My boy."

Somehow, somewhere, his father began consulting on medical emergencies of Claremont – though there were few – and weaseled his way back to the tools of his trade. His favorite: a scalpel.

Malcolm's eyes shut in protest as if he's going to be sick again, and with the vessel of his father standing above him just a bit too close for comfort, he might not make it this time.

He groans. "Please," he quietly begs, "not right now."

Martin frowns in feigned empathy. "You're in pain, Malcolm. Let me ease some of that burden – you seem tense. Tell me what's bothering you, son, I'm all ears."

"Just stop. Please." He's too tired for games. Weariness weighs on his shoulders, his chest, and down to the core of his being, too exhausted to deal with the nonsense of his subconscious mind.

Unfortunately, his father is not one to take no for an answer. "I know just the thing that'll cheer you up!" Martin disappears from his point of view and the room is no longer cold, and Malcolm blinks a few times. He sits up in his chair and looks around the room for his father, the one constant in his life he can't escape from, and slouches down in his chair when the room appears to be empty again.

Tension slowly ebbs away from his frame.

“How about a cup of tea?”

Malcolm nearly jumps out of his skin and his heart skips a beat, Martin at his right side with a perfectly balanced ceramic teacup on a saucer with piping hot tea. The steam rising wafts in his direction is both sickening and sweet.

“It’s my special blend, so don’t drink it all in one go. I want you to savor this.”

“Go away,” he chokes out, fearfully eyeing the teacup in his hand, “I don’t want it.”

“Sure you do. After the long week you’ve had, I figured you could use a little relaxation. Nothing like a good cup to calm your nerves, no?” Martin inches closer until he practically towers over Malcolm, that cold, horrifying smile plastered on his face so full of himself. “Come on,” he coos, bringing the teacup up to Malcolm’s lips. “Just one sip.”

He jerks his head back as far as he can inch away – which isn’t far enough – and his father continues to press on. The eager smile on his lips awakens a fear so primal he can feel the twinges of death waft out of the cup like smoky black talons.

“Drink the tea, Malcolm. Don’t make me say it again.”

“Stop it, please.” He picks up the scent of earl grey as the steam travels to his nose and over his lips. “I’m not going to drink it.”

“Sure you are!” In an instant, Martin has Malcolm by his jaw, strong, calloused hands unhinging his mouth by strength alone enough for tears to prick at the corners of his eyes. “You were always this stubborn when it came to your medicine. Now, open wide.”

Trunks, girls in trunks. Bodies scrunched up in compact spaces as their organs begin to shut down to the sweet aroma his father so generously offers. Dying by his hands.

He’s going to be next.

The tea cup tips.

I’m going to die–

“No!” He twists his entire body away from Martin, spilling the tea and shattered glass all over his mother’s rug.

“Malcolm?” A soft voice echoes through the air. His mother hesitantly walks into frame with her hands outstretched in front of her, cautious but concerned. “Who are you talking to?”

What is he?

A victim?

A survivor?

Is he allowed to label himself either one? Does he have the *right* to?

“No one’s born broken. Someone breaks us.”

He’s not sure where he’s heard that phrase before, but it keeps on in an endless loop until a deep-seeded anger arouses him to move as far as his body allows him. Which isn’t far at all. He’s trapped. Trapped in his own body. If it’s not the night terrors that destroy his mind, then it’s his shit muscles that refuse to cooperate when he needs them to.

He strikes his thigh on impulse.

Nothing happens. Just the ripples of a numbness he is forced to live with. It’s not enough.

He strikes his thigh with his fists again, this time much harder than before. Not that he can tell the difference. Nothing happens. It’s still not enough.

Frustration boils within his chest until he feels like he might choke on it, and curses through gritted teeth, “Fuck.” He stares down at his lap with hands at his sides, fingernails digging into his palms. He curses again through unshed tears and brings his fist down on his thighs, striking them over and over and over as his frustration reaches a dangerous, destructive point.

The second he realizes how childish he looks, he immediately stops his assault and buries his face in his palms.

Even in the privacy of his own room, no one is allowed to see him like this.

His pride, his guilt, his shame is a crown he no longer wears with grace, but instead allows it to weigh him down because the war is finally over, yet he has emerged bloodied and broken and somehow victorious.

Victorious in his own pit of despair.

He doesn’t feel much of anything, and yet he’s supposed to be the victor and not the victim.

Even if he had his legs back, even if he could walk up the stairs, take a shower, eat, sleep on his own, nothing would erase that sinking pothole spreading within his chest until it’s easier not to breathe.

Quiet.

Tired.

Numb.

The steady rock of the waves might be enough to sink his boat and take him with it.

A knock on the door cuts through the misery like a sword, and perhaps his knight and shining armor is on the other side of the wood.

He tries to be discreet as humanly possible as he scrambles to clean his face with his palms and dry his eyes but it's next to impossible. He has never been good at lying. Frustration boils over irritation, so he promptly gives up on trying to look presentable and opts for lying on his side and pulls the covers up to his ears. It's easier than to face someone head on.

They knock again before the door handle turns, and the noise from the outside drifts in.
"Kid?"

Gil. As if on cue, he shows up like a lost dog dragged in from the rain.

Now he's not sure what to feel. On one hand, he wants Gil to be his reprieve, to cling to his oasis as if he's dying of thirst – dying for this to be over – and on the other hand, the childish urge to push him away sits on the tip of his tongue, waiting for the right moment to strike.

The door shuts behind him and Gil quietly debates how to phrase whatever he's about to tell him.

"I know you're not sleeping."

Malcolm briefly wonders where he's heard that before. Then again, no one ever misses an opportunity to comment on his state of being; rather, what's left of it. If it's not his terrible sleeping habits, then it's his unkempt hair, the dark circles under his eyes, his baggy clothes, and slurred speech. The night terrors alone rob him of so much in his life, and yet people continue to trample on the small window of respite to remind him just how low he's sunken to.

In the deepest corners of his mind, frustration ignites again in the ashes of a torn psyche. Over and over and over again he is reminded of what he is, of what he lost in the fire all those months ago as if he isn't stuck living with the consequences every damn day.

"You're not sleeping, you won't eat, and your mother is worried about you."

He knows. He knows and he's sick of being told every time something is wrong because *he knows* something is wrong and none of this is right. His irritation boils until it bubbles over and spills onto the gasoline laid by the two people who claim to care about him. "Is that why she called you here? To clean up the mess you made?"

Silence rocks the room. The bite is much stronger than he anticipated, his words laced with venom pouring out of his tongue, and he regrets them immediately. He knows it's unfair. Gil never gave up on him and did everything he could to fix the mistake, but he's hurting, and unfortunately for Gil, he's in his line of fire.

Miraculously, Gil is still standing there seemingly unfazed by the accusation. "No. Just wanted to check up on you."

Somehow, it sounds like a lie.

"I brought you something. Before all of this, food never came easy, so on the off chance that you *did* eat, you ate these." Gil pulls out a small white box from his coat and waves it around

like a shiny object. “Thought it might help.”

Without waiting for comment, Gil takes a seat on the edge of the bed and starts to undo the box in front of him. A few easy pulls and the box rips right open.

“Here,” Gil takes the white pouch by the fingertips and pulls the plastic apart, specks of grain flutter through the air, and splits the seam down the middle to open the rest of the sleeve. As expected, they’re plain saltine crackers. “Take one.”

Gil shoves his hand forward with the sleeve on top, opened and ready to be plucked at, but Malcolm stares it down as if there are maggots crawling through the cracks. Even so, he can’t deny how famished he feels. He winces at the sharp tug in his stomach that aches for food, and ignores how his mouth waters ever so slightly at the smell, silently wishing Gil never brought them up here in the first place.

“I can’t,” he mumbles to his lap. A small shake of the head and the twist of a frown, the smell of the crackers slowly becomes a new craving despite the journey his stomach has taken to reject everything that enters. “I can’t, Gil.”

Meekness isn’t something he is comfortable with embodying. Vulnerability isn’t something he’s comfortable showing. The guards used to love it, though; what started off as a disguise to lessen the constant pain and abuse became a permanent fixture, a mental state that willed him to appease those in charge. He’s a free man now, but no treatment or therapy will erase the scars they left behind.

He braces himself for disappointment.

Gil hums. “That’s okay.” He steps off the bed for a second to place the opened sleeve on the nightstand next to his phone, and returns to his spot next to Malcolm. “I won’t force you, but you need to get something on your stomach.”

He narrows his eyes a bit, waiting for the catch. Another option. Malcolm finds it hard to reject when he’s given the opportunity to help himself especially when Gil has the patience to wait with him all day if he has to. It’s still an adjustment; the free will of having a choice is so foreign that it makes him uncomfortable and apologetic for not following the rules when there are none.

The cycle is broken, but he can’t stand the emptiness of it all. It makes him nauseous all over again.

Maybe Gil’s right.

Without answering, Malcolm leans with his hips towards the nightstand and plucks one of the crackers from the sleeve. His hands fall in his lap as he stares, quietly going back and forth between the risk of eating after so long. The reaction from his stomach could be worse than what he expects, or it will cramp up and tell him he needs to eat more than just a single cracker.

He takes one last look at the trashcan next to his bedside before his eyes slide shut and he takes a deep breath in and out. He brings the cracker to his mouth, places it on his tongue, and bites down.

A slow crunch between the teeth as he anxiously waits for the crunch to become muffled and disappear, but he works his mouth more than he has to, trying to hold off the inevitable.

He's not sure why he holds his breath as if he's waiting for a cosmic-level explosion or the next Big Bang, but to his complete surprise, nothing happens. He chews until there's nothing left and swallows the chalky paste with a grimace when it scratches the back of his dry throat.

Not bad.

He reaches for another cracker to see if this is the straw that'll break the camel's back, but just like before, he chews through the grains and nothing happens. He takes a third, and then a fourth, and then a fifth until the taste of nothing fills him up like a hearty meal should, and pushes the half-eaten sleeve toward Gil. "Thank you."

An easy smile breaks and a hand flies to the back of his neck. "Don't mention it."

Malcolm ducks his head as Gil squeezes once before letting go, and sits in the silence of a victory he hasn't felt in ages. He still feels crummy from the lack of food and water his body struggles to hold down, but his stomach feels settled as it adjusts, and he can't thank Gil enough for a food option he can manage.

It's enough to satisfy his stomach, but worlds away from being a remedy to fix a problem he can't even see. He isn't good for keeping secrets, because Gil has his hand on his knee with the same look on his face when he carried Malcolm out of the bathroom and did his best to get him ready for bed, concern coated in something far too complex.

"Tell me what's on your mind, kid."

Ever the mind reader. "It's not supposed to be permanent," he mumbles, and Gil turns his head as if he didn't hear him the first time. There is no comment, so Malcolm swallows the lump in his throat and continues. "It's not permanent, but they didn't give me the answers I needed. Basically, I'm supposed to wait and hope that one day I can take a shower or dress myself without calling Louisa. Maybe eat actual food, walk around the park, go for a run; everything is just tedious and exhausting."

Gil's frown deepens the more he talks, and the longer he listens, the more concern wells up within. Every time he sees Malcolm like this, he's reminded of his own failure, a promise he couldn't fulfill in time. The fact that he was a second too late to save him from feeling this.

"I can't sleep – I don't *want* to sleep. All I can think about is them and what they did to me. What my father did to me. And I'm tired of it, Gil. Of mom, of this, of everything," he bites his bottom lip and stares down at his lap, stabbing at his palms with his nails. "Of life." The last bit comes out as a whisper, desperate and defeated. "Sorry. I didn't mean to dump that on you."

Gil's not sure what to say to that. Malcolm isn't in the mood for optimism, so he scrambles to seize the moment while the thought exists. "You went through hell every single day for nearly seven months. Of course it's going to affect you. Just give it some time, okay? It'll all work itself out."

A deep sigh through the nose with his eyes still trained on his lap. He just can't stand it. "Why did it have to be me?" Fists clenched with the urge to strike his legs again, Malcolm keeps his emotions intact, not spilling over. "Why me?"

Then Gil's there, reaching across the aisle to meet him halfway with his palm on the back of his neck again and his fingers gently massaging the muscles. A touch that always brings him down when he needs it, a comforting gesture that will withstand the test of time. Gil looks him in the eye and levels with him. "I wish I had the answers, kid, I really do. What I do know is that you are more capable than you give yourself credit for, and I know it's hard to see that right now, but one day you will look back on this and remember how hard you fought to be here. You just have to wait a little while longer, that's all."

For as long as they've known each other, something that feels indefinitely longer than several weeks, Gil always had a way with words. He loves him without having to say it, like a home he can always come back to when the world feels like it's collapsing in on itself.

An anchor in a sea of uncertainty.

Guilt resurges. "Sorry," Malcolm mumbles.

Gil traces the hand through the back of his hair then rests it on his neck again. "There's nothing to apologize for. Just promise me that you'll call me if you need anything, okay? Or text, whatever you want – I just need to know that you're okay."

Shying away from the touch, feeling its warmth as well as the slight uncomfortable intimacy that comes with being vulnerable, Malcolm forces a small smile. "I'll try."

"That's all I can ask for." Dropping his hand and keeping it firm in his lap with the other, Gil resists pulling him into a hug that feels right for the moment, an extra touch to ensure that Malcolm knows he is cared for, but he doesn't push his luck and chooses to keep his distance.

After a moment of careful consideration, Gil turns toward Malcolm with a newfound weight on his shoulders. "Tell you what. I know just the thing that'll cheer you up."

Malcolm raises a brow, waiting for him to finish the thought.

"How would you feel about seeing the team?"

End Notes

Feel free to scream at me on tumblr @wonder-boy. Thanks for reading!

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