Raison D'être
by gayhandshake

Summary

When Magnus gets his magic back, he gets his life back. But now he has to figure out what that actually means.

---

Alternately titled, "How Magnus Got His Groove Back."

Notes

Posting at the worst time, but I've been sitting with this for too long, and I! Really! Just! Need! To get it posted!

Quick warning: There are some racial microaggressions very briefly mentioned in "3". I don't want anybody to be taken by surprise and end up feeling gross. If you want to read, but need more details, feel free to ask.

You don't need to read the one-shot before this to understand since it takes place between "3" and "2", but I personally think you should. :) :) :)

See the end of the work for more notes
Luke hosts a weekly book club at his store that he has been trying to bully Magnus into joining for actual years. Magnus, for all he appreciated the almost aggressively good natured persistence with which Luke had kept in touch since Magnus had helped him through that first terrifying transformation, had rebuffed him repeatedly. He knew the occult shop attracted a fair number of New York’s increasingly meagre Downworld population, a group to which he felt he did not belong after he lost his magic.

Rubbing his fingers together gently to remind himself of the sparks running anew through his veins, Magnus pushes open the door to Luke’s shop, the German grimoire that had been the assigned book clasped tightly under his arm. The space is impossibly long and narrow with two floors connected by a winding metal staircase. The walls are painted a deep purple where they could be seen behind ceiling high bookshelves. Maia, who is nominally Luke’s archival intern and functionally Luke’s archival intern, clerk, and sales associate, is seated behind the bobble covered front desk. She smiles sweetly, almost, almost deceptively given what Magnus knows of her bite, when she catches sight of him.


“He’s a stubborn man, and he knows what he wants,” he replies, “And I felt like it was time to descend from my tower,” he continued, knowing Maia was aware of his self-imposed exile. Her smile spreads into a grin.

“Glad to hear it. The group’s upstairs, they should be starting in a few,” she tells him. He nods in thanks and starts making his way towards that precarious staircase. “Oh, and Magnus!” she calls, prompting him to turn around, “The way I hear it, it’s not just Luke who’s been waiting on you. People are gonna be excited to see you around,” she says, and throws him a wink before turning back to the stack of papers in front of her, effectively cutting off any questions Magnus might have had about what she meant. He shakes off her comment and continues his ascent.

At the top of the stairs he finds a cozy seating area of mismatched chairs and a low coffee table holding a colorful series of mugs and an electric kettle. A few people are sat around it chatting and sipping out of steaming cups. Luke sits on the far side of the table and a broad grin breaks out over his handsome face when he spots Magnus.

“You finally made it!” he says as he shimmies around the table and scoops Magnus into a one-armed hug, “It’s great to see you, man.” Magnus, despite his general aversion to touch, finds himself returning the hug happily. There’s always been something incredibly infectious about Luke’s easy comradery and affection, even at the tumultuous time in Luke’s life when they had met. Luke releases him and gestures toward the only empty chair left and says, “You’re here just in time, sit down, sit down, pour yourself some tea, we’re just about to start.”

Magnus complies easily, lowering himself into the plush armchair, placing the heavy book in his lap. He takes in the group and is a little surprised to see it’s nearly equal parts mundane and Downworlder. There’s only one other warlock in the group, which isn’t surprising; with no demons in a century, warlock numbers had become fixed, and they had never been much for community in the first place. But there is also a vampire and, somewhat shockingly, a seelie, who were hardly known to mingle before the Downworld started to integrate. The rest of group is made up of mundane hobbyists and Wiccans.

As Luke starts the discussion, Magnus is surprised by the thought and genuine insight the club members managed to glean from what was really a dense technical manual to some very old magics. Even the mundanes, detached from magic as they had to be, had thoughts on the potential medicinal applications of the potion work. He finds out one of them works as a nurse and Catarina
referred her to the book group, and vows to himself that he’ll do more than silently stalk her Facebook very soon.

After the group has dissolved – not without Magnus getting a few new phone numbers and, strangely, having his hand shook vigorously by the “honored, so honored to meet you” warlock – Luke pulls Magnus aside to catch up.

“Talk to me, Bane! What’re you up to, I haven’t seen you in person since that commercial shoot,” Luke says, jovial as ever. Once again, Magnus does little to resist Luke’s charm.

“There isn’t much to tell. Business is good. The cats are healthy. My magic is back, and I’ve been seeing someone,” Magnus tells him, somewhat coyly. Luke splutters for a second before seeming to reboot.

“Oh my god, you know that isn’t the end of that story. What happened? How could you hold this back from me? I call you every week!” Luke nearly shouts indignantly.

Magnus throws his head back with laughter and starts to tell him about Luke’s own goddaughter from another dimension and his persistent new suitor.

--4--

Magnus finds he loves the book club and its motley collection of attendees, and he comes back from every meeting feeling like he’s learned something new, a thing that still feels miraculous after so many years spent stagnating. In fact, Magnus is finding his life overall has become significantly more colorful of late, in no small part due to the evidence of his blossoming relationship in the form pastel polos tucked into an emptied dresser drawer and the rainbow coffee mug that have somehow migrated into his home. Magnus feels like he was actually living his life for the first time in 100 years.

But he also discovers an itch within himself that he hasn’t felt in just as long. He wants to do something. He wants to give something back. He tells Ragnor as much during their monthly call.

When Magnus had first lost his magic, when he’d successfully isolated himself from nearly everyone and everything connected to his old life, Ragnor had clamped on and refused to let go like the world’s most irritable limpet. Magnus had stayed with him for months on end grieving, a mostly silent, chronically stormy cloud haunting Ragnor’s lair. But he had ultimately been the right person to get him through that roughest time, offering his special brand of tender care hidden behind profuse bitching and seemingly endless cups of tea. Even when Magnus was ready to stand on his own again, Ragnor had insisted on checking up on him, a task that had only been facilitated by the last century’s technological advancements.

“Well, I can see about getting you added to the warlock rotation,” Ragnor responds.

Magnus is baffled, “The what?”

“For the Downworld emergency hotline. We trade off being on call to address any incidents that arise, such as magical injuries, unplanned vampire bites. If things are really exciting, one might get to take care of some rogue elements; you know how the burden of eternity can begin to affect us. I know Catarina has assisted on a few werewolf births. I am positive you would be welcomed with open arms. And you could operate through our channels, as official as they can be, instead of picking up strays because you just can’t help yourself.”

Magnus shakes his head. He has missed far too much. But, firstly, “Luke is a special case and a
friend. I haven’t provided that kind of assistance regularly in a long time, though of course I would love to start again.”

Ragnor scoffs down the line, “Oh, right, you have completely successfully detached yourself from your own people. You know nothing of the lost Seelie children suddenly and miraculously finding their way back to the glades after wandering into the mortal realm? Of the other newly turned werewolves who have somehow ended up on the front porch on the only pack left in the Northeast over the years? Of Raphael Santiago?”

Magnus sucks in a breath. “I wasn’t aware you kept such close tabs on me, old friend. Are our chats not enough for you?” he replies, trying to regain his footing. He had thought his brief forays into Downworld aid since he’d lost his magic were sporadic enough as to go unnoticed.

“I don’t need to keep track of your business at all. When Magnus Bane makes an appearance, people take notice, despite his very best efforts to remain hidden.” Magnus clenches his jaw and remains silent. Ragnor sighs, “The world has missed you so very much, Magnus. It will rejoice in your return, and you are just going to have to deal with it.”

---

The first weekend Magnus is on call he reverses six curses, convinces a moony teenager that giving his boyfriend an irrevocably transformative bite is not the best way to show his love, and brews a potion for an incredibly tiny and ancient hedge-witch with knobbed and gnarled arthritic fingers. In return, he receives four slightly over-zealous handshakes, three distinctly uncomfortable hugs, and a standing invitation to Sunday dinner.

The next week, he treats a case of werewolf mange, refers a Sighted mundane experiencing actual hallucinations to a sympathetic and in-the-know psychiatrist, advises three younger warlocks on an old and complicated spell, and completes no less than 13 house calls that are thinly veiled excuses to have Magnus over for a drink. He starts to leave his business card after the fourth such call so the warlock line is clear for actual emergencies.

He wonders if Ragnor wasn’t fibbing after all, that the Downworld had felt his absence, that people were excited to bring him back into the fold. That his people were excited to bring him back into the fold.

Regardless, Magnus couldn’t ignore the warmth in his chest that came with not only using his magic, but using it to do good. To provide help to those whom he had once considered as precious as his own blood.

--3--

Magnus grows a goatee. It’s one of the sillier things he’s done since he got his magic back, in his own opinion. He’d worn a mustache when they’d been in fashion over a century ago, at a point in his life when his magic had been at its peak, and he thought it might inspire him. Instead, it makes him feel like a fool with an itchy chin. He is not the man he was then, and Magnus isn’t even sure he wants to be anymore. He is, at this point in time, primarily a man who desperately wants the thing off his face.

It’s a shame he finds it so odious because, though he’s never said anything, he knows Alec fucking adores it. In fact, if Magnus is being honest, the goatee has only lasted this long because he is finding he would do many an odious thing to make Alec happy.

Case in point, he had spent the first half of his evening at the Lightwood matriarch’s home being
complimented on his grasp of the English language and told how interesting his career path was for someone like him before Alec had pulled his mother into the kitchen to have a less than quiet conversation while his siblings tried to make small talk. Max asked if he could do any magic tricks, and Magnus explained the difference between fake psychics and magicians before Alec and Maryse returned from the other room. The latter half of the evening was spent mostly in tense silence, despite Isabelle’s best efforts.

Following an equally silent cab ride back to the loft, Alec starts apologizing as soon as they’re through the door, “I’m so sorry, I should’ve told her you couldn’t make it-”

“Alexander, please, stop,” Magnus cuts him off before he can really get the anxiety ball rolling, “It’s alright. Well, it isn’t alright, but it was beyond your control. Don’t apologize for other people’s actions, you did what you could.” Magnus grasps Alec’s chin between his thumb and pointer finger to keep him in place and presses a hard peck to his lips. Magnus watches as Alec forces himself to relax with a deep breath and a deliberate wiggle of his shoulders.

“Still. I know what she’s like. I shouldn’t put you in a situation like that if I can help it,” Alec finishes. The shoulder wiggle evidently had not spread to his brain.

Magnus sighs, “This isn’t a conversation that will get us anywhere, my love, but I appreciate the sentiment.” He releases his chin and walks towards the sitting area, wriggling out of his jacket as he goes. He’s annoyed, with Maryse Lightwood and, ever-so-slightly, with Alec himself, but he doesn’t have the energy to deal with his boyfriend’s guilt right now. He wants to quietly snuggle up on the couch and not think about all the ways the world really hasn’t moved forward in his very long life for the night.

He can hear Alec following him, feet shuffling against the carpets. Magnus drops onto the couch and rests his head over the backrest, kicking off his shoes. He’s surprised into lifting his head when a considerable weight drops into his lap.

Alec throws an arm over shoulder and nuzzles into Magnus’s cheek, “Sorry. I’m making this about me. Is there anything you need, Magnus?”

Magnus lets out a soft laugh, shakes his head, and sends a silent thank you out to the universe, “No, no, this is good,” he replies, slipping his arms around Alec’s waist. Alec moves his nuzzling around to the front of Magnus’s face and rubs their chins together. Magnus laughs louder this time and catches his lips before he can move anywhere else. Alec inhales deeply through his nose and presses closer, both body and face. He clunks their foreheads together gently and tilts his head to deepen the kiss.

Magnus gave up the simple pleasure of the aimless make out when he decided to sequester himself from the world, but, unlike the facial hair, it was one he’d been happy to introduce back into his life. He responds to Alec’s attempt to add tongue by pulling back with a small wet sound. When Alec tries to follow him, Magnus pulls his bottom lip between his teeth and gently nibbles. He places damp, smacking kisses down Alec’s jaw before starting to work on his neck. Alec tips his head back with another deep sigh through his nose. Magnus deliberately scrapes his chin up the path he had just made, and Alec made an audible noise from the back of throat, the vibration tingling against Magnus’s skin.

“I’m going to think you like the goatee more than me if that’s how this night is going to go,” Magnus mumbles, grinning against Alec’s skin. Alec chuckles and grasps the sides of Magnus’s face, pulling him for a series of small kisses all over his face.

"I like most things about you, Magnus. I’ll like this goatee as long as it is connected to your face,”
Alec tells him, a serious look on his face, but a soft, mischievous glint in his eye.

“Only most things?” Magnus questions before he really starts to process what was said and starts to feel indescribably guilty; Alec doesn’t know most things about him. Alec doesn’t even know about the most integral component of his sense of self. Magnus knows how serious Alec is about them, has seen the extensive and meticulous “LB Wedding.xlsx” on his laptop, has met all his friends and family. And Magnus wants Alec to believe he’s just as serious. He wants to show him his life beyond video calls with Ragnor and dinner with his book club friends. He wants Alec to be able to say with absolute certainty and honesty that he really does like most things about Magnus.

A slow smiles creeps across Alec’s face, “Well, your wardrobe could use a little color,” he says, with considerable cheek. He pulls Magnus back down into a kiss, and Magnus makes up his mind. First, he’s going to shave his stupid distracting goatee, then he’ll tell Alec about his magic.

Well, maybe he’ll wait on the goatee, to soften the blow.

--2--

Magnus calls Catarina and opens with, “Hello, I love you, I’m ready to join the world again. How can I volunteer at the hospital?”

There’s a long pause before Cat answers, “Ragnor told me to expect a call from you soon. I thought maybe you might want to get a drink or something, not become a candy striper,” dry and sardonic. Magnus scrunches up his face, eyebrows furrowed apologetically, although Cat can’t see them.

“I’m sorry. I deserved that. I have been a truly terrible friend, and I am fully prepared to make it up to you for the next century if you’ll let me,” he responds. Catarina makes a long, drawn-out considering noise, probably with the express purpose of making Magnus sweat. It’s a tactic that has been unerringly successful their entire friendship, and he doesn’t see that ending today.

“Well, you can leave the mundane healing to me. But I suppose you can start making amends by buying me a cup of coffee. I’ll invite Raphael and text you the when and where. You can tell us all about this new boy Ragnor mentioned,” she finally says, steamrolling any protests he might have had by hanging up immediately. He sighs, thinking that they could not speak for the millennia, and she would always have his number.

He looks over to where said boy is curled up on the couch in one of Magnus’s lumpy old sweaters with a thick, historical tome in his lap, as he had been almost every night in the month since Magnus had told him about his magic. Magnus worries a little bit about what’s going on inside his head; he thinks Alec handled it too well. He didn’t have the freak out Magnus had expected either during the big reveal or in any of the subsequent weeks. Not that Magnus had been privy to. He hopes Alec’s tendency to internalize everything isn’t going to result in an unpleasant implosion.

As if he could hear the direction of Magnus’s thoughts, Alec looks up from the book. When he catches Magnus staring, he purses his lips exaggeratedly and lifts an arm to wiggle his hand in his direction. Magnus relents and walks over to meet Alec’s lips.

“Reading anything interesting?” he enquires. Alec’s eyebrows and lips pull into startlingly parallel lines. He pulls the book towards his chest to show off the cover. There’s no title, but an engraving of an Ouroboros. He’s apparently moved on from history books to actual spell work.

“Babe, c’mon. It’s a magic book. Of course it’s interesting.” He pushes the book back into his lap and returns to his reading. Magnus’s lips pull into a deep frown at his second dismissal in as many
minutes. He considers knocking the book off and climbing into Alec’s lap instead, but decides he’s too old for that kind of behavior, even if he apparently isn’t that mature. He wanders off to find his own materials to peruse while his boyfriend is deep in his binge.

---

When Magnus arrives at the café in Flatbush, Catarina and Raphael are seated in the big cozy armchairs by the window. They’ve pulled over a wooden kitchen chair for him. They already have drinks in their hands, and he’s sure they had been talking shit for at least an hour before he got here.

After he orders his tea, he makes his way over to their table, not at all shuffling his feet in dejection. They glance up with identical blank stares when he joins them.

“Nice of you to finally join us,” Raphael commented, voice deep and crackly with old age.

Magnus had found Raphael during a vampire attack when he was a teen. He had lost a lot of blood, but Magnus was able to get him to Catarina in time to save his life. Every single one of the 65 years since, against his better judgement and personal wishes, Magnus had found himself a guest at the Santiago family’s Nochebuena celebrations. Also despite Magnus’s misgivings, Raphael has been the daytime manager at the vamp B&B on Argyle Street for the last 60.

“I am exactly on time, I know you two planned this,” Magnus grumbles in response. Catarina smirks behind her mug. His irritation evaporates slightly. Even all these years later, it’s impossible to stay mad at her, particularly when he’s near and can feel the light that emanates from within her. “You don’t seem as dedicated to making me grovel as you led me to believe,” he comments as he drops into the chair. Her smirks blooms into a full blown grin.

“What’s 100 years when you have an eternity, sweetheart?”

Magnus feels his own smile growing. Her happiness has always been infectious.

“And so he does.

--1--

Magnus takes up tai chi again.

Magnus tries not to hold on to regrets; he might drown in them if he kept that up, with the amount of time he’s had to accumulate them. But he does allow himself a moment to mourn the years he had lost to wallowing. He thinks he might not be centuries old and trying to give his life a new purpose if he had continued to use tai chi for the self-reflection even without his magic.

Now that he’s gotten back into it, he feels more balanced, more clear headed. He can feel each incremental change in the power of magic, but, more importantly, he thinks he can see the next step he needs to take. It isn’t enough that he feels like a warlock again, that he’s started reintegrating into his community, reconnecting with his friends. Pre-dormancy Magnus had never been content to do the minimum, and Magnus can now feel that need to fill his time, and ultimately his life, with work and people and meaning.

It’s when his finishing his daily practice that he gets his idea. It’s the kind of idea that would never even have occurred to him a year ago, but that he knows will plague his thoughts until he follows
through now. He rushes through his post-work out shower and snaps himself into the day’s outfit before hurrying out the door to find a realtor.

When Magnus returns from signing the lease, he comes home to an apartment full of his loved ones, gathered around his dining room table for what has become a near-weekly potluck. He watches Luke smile and bat his eyes with exaggerated coquettishness at Catarina, watches Raphael show off photos of his newborn granddaughter to a beaming Alec, watches Maia whisper in her girlfriend’s ear and make her throw her head back in a laugh. He looks around at his friends, collected through the centuries, people whose lives he’s touched, and lets out a gusty breath.

“I bought a bar,” he announces without fanfare. He expects an explosion of noise, questions from all corners. Instead, everyone stops talking and looks at him expectantly.

He thinks about a time in his life when he would have drawn it out for the drama and imagines some time in the near future when he might do so again. But today, he sits down at the head of the table, his boyfriend seated to his right and his oldest friend to his left, and explains his first impulse purchase in a century.

“The book club is wonderful, and Luke’s store is wonderful, and the hotline is wonderful, obviously,” he says in one breath. He looks down and starts playing with his own fingers before he continues, “But I think Downworlders need a more…permanent safe space. A place where they can come any day at any time and find someone to help them. Or even just someone to listen. I want it to be a place where they’re comfortable gathering, without worrying about being found out. Where they can be sure they’re safe. We don’t have community spaces anymore, and I want to provide that,” he finishes, not looking up until Alec gently pries Magnus’s hands apart and squeezes one reassuringly. He glances over at him and finds him smiling, closed mouth, eyes crinkling.

He continues his glance around the rest of the table and finds similar reactions on most faces. He thinks Luke might even have tears in his eyes.

Luke clears his throat and swipes at his face, confirming Magnus’s suspicions. “We’re all happy to help to however we can, man,” he says earnestly. He claps his hands together once and says, “Alright, fun stuff first, we’ll get into the nitty gritty after we’ve eaten: what’re you gonna call it?”

Alec catches Maia’s eye, and they immediately start hollering at each other.

“Pandemonium.”

“Bane of Your Existence.”

“The Lair.”

“Warlock Watering Hole.”

“No name, just a ten foot sign of Magnus’s face.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, just call it Downworld and be done with it,” Ragnor cuts in, ever the fun sucker. They laugh at him before launching back into the banter.

Magnus leans back in his chair and can’t keep the smile off his face. He doesn’t notice Catarina has left her seat until he feels small, strong hands squeeze his shoulders. She leans down to knock the side of her head into his and says, “I am so proud of you and where you are, Magnus.”
Magnus looks up at her and can’t contain the spread of his smile. He feels real warmth in his chest and knows in the current trajectory of his life, it will only grow.

End Notes

Thank you for reading!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!