Looking For You
by msalexiscriss

Summary

Alec works as a columnist for The Shadow World, New York’s best-selling entertainment magazine. He loves to write, he loves his job, but he has a little problem...he hates celebrities. Well, not all celebrities, just the fake ones. The ones who according to him got everything on a silver platter. One day, he gets the chance to interview the star of the moment, Magnus Bane, everyone’s favorite singer and actor—and the very first name on Alec’s blacklist. What happens when the interview doesn’t go as planned? And worse yet, when he’s forced to keep seeing the man constantly? As a writer, Alec’s always been a master of reveals, a pursuer of the truth, will he manage to uncover the true face behind the superstar? Will he find what he was looking for?
Chapter 1

Prologue

Magnus was walking down the streets of Brooklyn, his favorite New York borough, enjoying the unexpected anonymity and freedom that the very early hours of the morning gave him. He was a celebrity, a big one according to some media outlets, so being able to walk freely and without being disturbed or followed by anyone in practically any part of the city was a luxury that unfortunately he couldn't afford very often. There were days, of course, like today, in which Lady Luck smiled at him and he had the chance to do it, so every time that happened, he tried to enjoy it to the fullest and
make the most of it.

He liked to walk aimlessly and just blend in with the city, enjoying the sights and sounds around him like a true New Yorker. It was relaxing, fun, better than being cooped up at home with nothing to do. He was an artist, a free spirit, he didn’t function properly when he was locked up—confinement tended to ruin his creative process.

He spotted a newsstand on the corner of the street he was exploring and walked toward it. He liked to read the newspaper from time to time to keep up with what was happening in the world. For the sake of his mental health, he wasn't allowed to do it on a daily basis, but he did read it occasionally. He always skipped the entertainment section, of course, reading it was a dangerous matter and he knew it, his name tended to appear on it more often than not, but that didn’t prevent him from enjoying the rest of the publication.

He took some dollars out of his pocket and paid for a copy of today’s newspaper. The headlines were about the new stupid remark that the current president of the country had made and the national and international political repercussions that this ‘incident’ had had—same old, same old—so he just sighed loudly and tucked the newspaper under his arm to resume his walk. But just as he was turning away to go find a place where he could sit and read in peace, his eyes landed on one of those entertainment magazines that people seemed to love so much, and the headlines caught his attention.

He always avoided them with his soul and tried to avoid them like the plague, but that became a bit of a tall order when his name was there, printed on the cover of one of them in a bright yellow font—like a freaking spotlight.

“Crap.” Magnus murmured.

He really tried not to succumb to the temptation to read it and just walk away with his newspaper, but he was an extremely curious man and knew that if he didn't read it now, he would end up looking for the article online sometime during the day—and that always ended badly. The internet was a very dangerous place for celebrities, so convinced that reading it now was the least damaging thing he could do, he grabbed the magazine from the nearest rack to read it. He knew he would regret his decision as soon as he knew what the tabloids were saying about him and that his manager would probably give him a lecture on 'why-you-should-never-read-these-things' later when he knew what Magnus had done, but it was too late to stop now—he already had the magazine in his hands and there was no way he would leave without reading it.

«Magnus Bane and Camille Belcourt back together! The couple was spotted in Paris sharing a romantic weekend! Check out all the exclusive pictures inside!»

Magnus rolled his eyes and opened the magazine, looking for the article and the so-called ‘exclusive’ pictures.

“Magnus Bane was seen this weekend in Paris enjoying some alone time with ex-girlfriend, model and actress, Camille Belcourt. Several eyewitnesses say the couple was seen showing some PDA in the city of love as they strolled through the most romantic spots.” Magnus read the first paragraph and couldn't help but chuckle.

These people always got everything wrong. It was true that he had been in Paris last weekend and it was also true that he had been strolling down the most popular streets of the city with Camille, but it had been for a movie. He had spent the last six weeks of his life traveling all around the world filming his new action movie, and last weekend he had wrapped all his scenes. Camille was his costar, the heroin to his hero, so of course they had been together in Paris—where the last sequence of the movie had been filmed—but they were definitely not back together. What they had had was in
the past, it was ancient history. Now they were just co-stars, acquaintances...nothing more.

“If you wanna read it, you gotta buy it, man.” The man in charge of the newsstand told him.

“Of course.” Magnus said, paying for the stupid magazine as well. He knew that this type of gossip wasn't worth his time or money, but he really wanted to read the rest of the article and see how these people had twisted what had really happened. The pictures he had seen so far showed them shooting the final scenes of the movie, nothing more, but he was curious about these ‘several eyewitnesses’ who had seen them ‘showing affection’ in public. He had been very careful to keep his distance from Camille when they hadn’t been filming to avoid these kinds of sensationalist notes, but apparently it hadn't worked.

“You kinda look like him.” The man said, pointing to the magazine as he gave Magnus his change.

“I get that a lot.” Magnus shrugged. “But anyway, keep the change and have a nice day.” He said, waving goodbye and walking away without looking back.

He couldn’t wait to go home and read what he had supposedly done with Camille all weekend.

Chapter 1

When the first rays of sun began to seep through the windows, Alec stirred in his sleep and instinctively raised an arm, placing it over his eyes to block some of the light from hitting his face. It looked like it was a sunny day like any other at this time of the year in the big old city, so still deeply asleep and completely oblivious to what that amount of light in the room actually meant, Alec turned around and went on sleeping, only being vaguely aware of that warm light now hitting the bare skin of his back. It felt good, like the soft touch of a lover—careful, sweet, tender. It was like a slow chill that ran through your body and awakened nerves that you didn’t even know were there, like a warm good morning kiss that-

Alec's eyes snapped open. “Good morning kiss! Morning! Shit!” He exclaimed, sitting straight up in bed, confused and slightly panicked. It was morning, the sun was already out and shining, so that only meant one thing: he was late for work.

Practically sprinting out of bed, Alec ran through his shoe-box apartment and hopped into the shower, coming out dressed and ready to go in less than five minutes—a new record.

He glanced at his watch and cursed under his breath. He had less than ten minutes to be in the office and knew that no matter what he did, he wasn’t going to make it. His office was in Lower Manhattan and although he lived in Brooklyn, not that far from there, God knew there was no way he could get there on time. Today was going to be the first time in all the years he had been working there that he would be late.

Alec worked as a writer and columnist for The Shadow World, one of New York’s best-selling entertainment magazines. After graduating from Yale with a BA in English, Alec had moved back to Manhattan—his hometown—to pursue a career as a writer. At first, he had tried to apply for jobs in renowned media outlets, aiming for the journalistic big leagues; the dream back then had been to write for the New York Post or the The New Yorker, he had always wanted his words to have an impact on other people’s lives, to have a meaning, but unfortunately he had quickly discovered that not all dreams could come true and that sometimes you just had to accept what life gave you, so he had ended up taking a job in his family’s magazine: The Shadow World.
It was no secret that the Lightwoods owned one of the most popular entertainment magazines in all New York. Alec's grandfather, Andrew Lightwood, who had been a well-known post-World War II journalist, had founded the magazine sixty five years ago and this had fallen into the hands of his only son, Robert Lightwood, after Andrew had died of a heart attack more than twenty five years ago. Alec had grown up wanting to be a writer just like his father and grandfather before him, so when he had finally obtained his degree and had found himself without a job and with broken dreams, he had had no choice but to accept his rightful place in his family’s magazine and start his career as a writer there. It hadn’t been ideal, writing for the entertainment industry had never been in his plans, that world had always seemed shallow and hollow to him, but over the years he had learned to love it, finding the beauty in it.

Of course he hadn’t entered the magazine being one of the main writers, he was a Lightwood, yes, but his parents had never treated him differently from any other entry-level writer. Like everyone else in there, he had started from the bottom, writing only very small articles that no one paid attention to and the horoscopes section. However, now, after almost four years of intense work, he was finally one of the magazine's top writers and even though he knew that what he wrote wasn’t Pulitzer material, he was happy with what he did. He loved his job, his life, and working for his family's magazine—shallow and hollow or not.

“Shit!” Alec exclaimed when in his haste to get all his stuff ready, he stubbed his little toe against the bedpost. “Shit! Shit! Shit!” He cried out in pain.

So far, his day wasn’t starting so well and that had already put him in a bad mood. He had overslept, he was in pain, and he knew that the moment he arrived at work, his bosses—who incidentally were also his parents—were going to kill him.

Without even bothering to grab a banana or at least have some yogurt for breakfast, Alec grabbed his bag, put his laptop inside and hurried out of his apartment, almost colliding against his neighbor, Mrs. Johannes, who lived across the hall.

Mrs. Johannes was a very nice lady whom Alec loved with all his heart. When he had moved into the building nearly five years ago, she had baked him some cookies as a welcome to the neighborhood gift and since then, they had become friends.

“I’m so sorry.” Alec quickly apologized. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry, dear. I see you’re in a hurry, did you oversleep?” She asked, as she resumed what she had been doing before Alec nearly knocked her down—watering the plants in the hallway, something no one seemed to bother doing except her.

“Yeah, the first time in almost four years.” He admitted.

“I’m sure your bosses will understand, but go, dear, don’t waste any more time, I’m fine.” She said, smiling at him and clearly noticing that Alec couldn’t stay to talk. “And have a nice day!”

Alec smiled. Mrs. Johannes had always been his favorite neighbor. She was simply the sweetest person he had ever met. She was caring, sweet, and overall a very good person. She was relatively young, Alec had never asked her about her age, but he guessed she was in her early fifties, and although she was a lonely woman, she was always smiling and greeting all the neighbors with her usual enthusiasm. Alec didn’t know what it was about her, but she always made people smile. She had that effect, when she was around, everyone just got a bit happier than before. Maybe it was because of the sweet and warm brown eyes or the lovely smile, but she really could make anyone smile—even Alec, who was having a bad day.
“Thanks, you too!” Alec said still smiling as he headed for the elevator. He felt as if his day had considerably improved with that small encounter he had had with his neighbor, but as soon as he reached his destination, he changed his mind.

Apparently, he had celebrated too soon. The elevator wasn’t working due to some last minute maintenance service thing and that meant he would have to take the stairs to get to work—all six floors.

“Great!” Alec exhaled sarcastically, practically flying down the stairs and for the first time really appreciating the fact that he was in good shape. In all the years that he had been living there, he had never taken the stairs, and it was until now that he was realizing that there were too many of them; if he hadn’t been killing himself in the gym for the past three years, he would have probably ended up giving up around the third floor.

When he emerged from the building, he took a deep breath to regulate his breathing, but just as some fresh air was entering his lungs, his bad luck struck again and some raindrops landed on his shirt.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” He exclaimed, cursing in silence. The sun was out, it was May, why the hell was it raining in the middle of the spring? Alec had no idea, but this day was definitely not improving and only getting worse by the minute.

Using his bag to cover himself and avoid getting to the office all soaked, Alec ran to the nearest subway station and rushed to work, praying to the MTA gods that his train wasn’t delayed—spoiler alert: it was.

By the time Alec made it to the office, the clock already marked 9:27 a.m.—he was officially half an hour late for work. He tried to be discreet and stealthily make his way to his office, but just as he had been expecting, the moment he set foot in the building, Lindsay, his mother’s assistant and the official eyes and ears of the magazine, spotted him, immediately beckoning him to her desk. Alec had really wanted to avoid the annoying ‘you’re late’ lecture that his mother was surely going to give him, but apparently there was nowhere to hide in this building—his mother, Maryse Lightwood, had eyes everywhere.

“Alec, your mother is waiting for you.” Lindsay said, giving him a very serious look through her square spectacles. On the outside, this woman looked like a really sweet person, that was why his mother had her as her assistant, but she could be cruel and cold as her boss.

“Of course she is.” Alec said with a sigh, reluctantly entering his mother’s office.

As a kid, he had always loved visiting his mother at work, not only because she let him sit and spin in her chair until he got dizzy, but because being in her office had always made him feel inspired. The view she had of the city and the Hudson River was impressive, Alec used to spend hours upon hours looking at the city from there, creating in his mind all kinds of stories that somehow came to life before his eyes through those huge windows. However, over the years, coming here had become less and less pleasant. The view was still impressive, there was no doubt about it, but that excitement and inspiration that this place used to make him feel had long since died.

“Mother.” He said as a way to greet her. He knew he had to find out his mother’s mood before saying anything. She could be very understanding when she so wanted to, but it all depended on her mood.

“You’re late.” She said, not even looking up from her paperwork. She was a very busy woman, she
was the second most important member of the executive board—the chief financial officer—and the reason why The Shadow World was still the renowned magazine it was today, even after all these years.

“I’m well aware of that.” Alec said, trying hard not to roll his eyes. He didn’t like being disrespectful in front of his mother. She was not to blame for the bad day he was having.

“What happened? You're never late.”

“I overslept.” Alec said, though he thought that was a bit obvious. One look at his appearance—and the dark circles under his eyes—and it became plain evident what had happened. The problem was that his mother hadn’t even looked at him.

“Why?”

“I...hmmm, I couldn’t sleep last night.” He partially lied.

He had stayed up writing an essay for school, and when he had decided it was time to go to bed, his mind had been too active to recognize his body's need for slumber. It had taken him three solid hours to fall asleep. Alec hadn’t told his parents that he was taking a graduate program at NYU in creative writing. In fact, he hadn’t told anyone what he was doing. He didn’t know why he had kept that from his family and friends, but he had, and now that he had been doing it for more than a year, it kinda seemed pointless to share it. He had told himself that he would tell them when he got his graduate degree.

“Are you sick?” His mother asked.

“No.”

“Okay, then. This can’t happen again, do you understand?” She said, finally looking up at him. “You’re our son and if we allow this type of behavior the other employees will start to think that you have privileges and that's not true. You’re a Lightwood, yes, rightful owner of this magazine, but—”

“Oh, for God's sake, mother! This is the first time I'm late!” Alec interrupted her, rolling his eyes in spite of himself. He had really been trying not to, but his mother was treating him as if this was a repetitive behavior and it was not. In the four years he had been working here, this was, literally, the first time he was late.

“That’s how your sister and brother started, and you know how that ended.” She said.

Alec knew his sister, Isabelle, and his adoptive brother, Jace, had both been degraded to interns for almost a year as punishment when they both had started to arrive late for work using their last name as an excuse. He remembered how much they had complained about the, according to them, ‘unfair punishment,’ but in the end it had served them to understand that the fact that they were the children of the owners didn't give them privileges within the magazine—they were just like any other employee here, with obligations and responsibilities.

“I’m not like them.” He said in self-defense. He had never been like his siblings, he had always been the responsible one—the sensible one. He knew that his parents had more important things to worry about than if their children were arriving late for work or not.

“I know, and that’s exactly why I’m just giving you a warning. I know you understand, Alec, so please, I don’t want this to happen again, understood?”

Alec sighed, he really didn’t want to argue with his mother at that early hour—he wasn’t in the mood
“Okay, mother, it won’t happen again. Can I go to work now?”

“Yes, go.” His mother said, dismissing him with a simple gesture of her hand. “Oh, and before I forget, there’s going to be a meeting in,” she glanced at her watch, “less than ten minutes in the conference room, Aldertree has some news to share with all of you, so don’t be late for that.”

Alec rolled his eyes at the acid comment, but didn’t argue back. “I’ll see you later, mother.” He said, walking out of his mother’s office and closing the door behind him.

He walked to his own office without stopping to greet anyone, as he usually did every morning, and just dropped his bag on his desk, sinking into his chair to take a deep breath before having to go to this meeting that his mother had told him about.

Apparently, it was a last minute one—and Alec hated those. They only meant trouble and more work, so every time they called one, he had to mentally prepare himself for it. He had no idea what this one was about, but if Aldertree, the editor-in-chief of the magazine, had called a last-minute meeting to *share some news* with them, then that just meant that whatever he had to say wasn’t going to be good. He had either decided that they had to redesign the cover for the issue they were working on or he hadn’t liked the final result of some article and was about to humiliate whoever had written it in front of all the other writers—something he seemed to enjoy doing quite often.

“Alec?” Raj, another of the writers and Alec’s office neighbor, knocked on his door. “I’m not sure if you know, but there’s a—”

“-last minute meeting, I know.” Alec cut him off. He liked Raj, well, most of the time, but he wasn’t in the mood for his smart-ass remarks—not today. The man had a tendency to say the most inappropriate things at the worst times.

“Well, Aldertree said it was very important that we all were there on time, so you know...hurry.”

Alec exhaled. “Do you know what this last-minute meeting is about?”

“No, but I guess we’ll find out soon enough. We have to be there in like...well, now. I’ll see you there. Have a good day, Alec.”

“Thank you.” Alec sighed because it was very unlikely that that last part happened today, he had woken up on the wrong side of the bed. “You too.”

There were days when nothing seemed to go according to plan and today was definitely one of those days, so resigned to attend a meeting that he already knew was going to leave him with a headache, Alec grabbed his notebook and laptop, and headed to the conference room.

The conference room was already crowded when Alec walked in. Both writers and designers were already in their respective seats waiting for the meeting to start. He scanned the people gathered there and found his siblings, Izzy and Jace—writers of the magazine as well—and walked toward them, sitting down in the empty chair they had saved for him.

“Hi.” He whispered, sounding as listless as his mood.

“Having a bad day, big bro?” His sister asked, eying him curiously.

Alec was sure she, and almost everyone else in the room, could see the black cloud hovering over his head. “Don’t even mention it.” He said, placing his things on the table and almost causing Jace’s
coffee to spill. Thankfully, his brother’s quick reflexes avoided the incident and saved him from making a fool of himself in front of all the other writers, but it had been a close call. “As you can see…” he pointed to the almost spilled coffee, “I’m having one of those days.”

“No kidding.” Jace joked.

Alec sighed. “Do any of you know what this meeting is about?”

“No idea,” Izzy answered, “I overheard mom this morning and she was saying that apparently there were going to be some changes in the upcoming month’s issue, she was with Aldertree, so I guess that’s the reason behind this meeting.”

“Really, but why?” Alec asked confused. They very rarely changed the articles for the upcoming issue, and much less when they were only two weeks away from publication day. They were a monthly magazine, so they always worked two weeks ahead of schedule. When an issue was published they already had the next one finished and so on. That was why Alec had thought that whatever Aldertree wanted to share with them was about next month’s issue, not this one.

“I don’t know, but rumor has it that-” Izzy was saying when Victor Aldertree, Alec’s direct boss, walked into the room to begin the meeting.

Aldertree wasn’t the friendliest of the bosses, he was rude and rather cold, so the moment he entered the room everyone went silent. He was the youngest editor-in-chief that the magazine had ever had. He was only a few years older than Alec and according to his resume, he had graduated from Oxford with a BA in English, a MA in journalism and mass communication, and a PhD in media culture and communication, and all of that under the age of thirty-two. Alec didn’t like him at all, but he had to admit that what he had achieved at such young age was impressive.

Alec watched as his boss walked to the head of the table with that air of superiority he carried with him wherever he went and sat down, taking some documents from the sealed envelope his assistant was handing him over and scanning them quickly before speaking.

“Good morning, people.” He said, in his slight English accent. “I seem to have some very good news to share with you this morning.” He announced.

*Good news?* Alec was intrigued—those didn’t happen so often.

“What is it?” Lydia Branwell asked equally intrigued. She was another of the writers and columnists of the magazine.

“Well, miss Branwell, the magazine just got a last-minute exclusive interview.” Aldertree said, sharing the news with excitement—something quite unusual in him. “A fifteen pages long exclusive interview to be precise.”

“What!!?” The whole table began to exclaim excitedly.

Alec’s eyes widened. They almost never got fifteen pages long exclusive interviews, it was very rare. Mainly because not many sponsors were willing to pay for that amount of pages, so this only meant that some big name had to be behind this sudden change. The last time they had gotten an exclusive that long had been two years ago when Miley Cyrus had married a former fellow Disney Channel star on some beach in Malibu.

“Who are we interviewing?” Izzy asked curiously.

Aldertree’s smile widened as everyone looked at him expectantly. “Magnus Bane.” He announced.
The table burst into exclamations of wonder and excitement for the second time in less than a minute. Magnus Bane was, without a doubt, the star of the moment. Everyone loved him and treated him like a god sent from Olympus. His music was heard in each and every station of the country, and his films and TV shows had the highest ratings and box office records.

“The Magnus Bane?” Clary Fairchild, one of the designers of the magazine and Jace’s girlfriend, asked with a surprised expression.

“The one and only.” Aldertree said. “His new album comes out next week and the guy is going to announce his tour in the following weeks. Also his new movie will hit theaters later this year, so his people want to promote him as much as possible, and this number seems to work best for him hence the sudden change.”

Soon, the whole table had transformed into a conglomeration of fans—more like groupies—gushing about their idol just before a concert. They all were lively sharing stories and fangirling over the singer slash acclaimed actor slash heartthrob of the moment that was Magnus Bane. Well, all but one: Alec. He was looking at his boss and co-workers with judgmental eyes. How could they be so excited about one of those plastic celebrities? Magnus Bane was as fake as a 13 dollar bill.

Ever since he had started writing for the entertainment industry, Alec had never hidden his disdain for what he called FPCs. Fake-and-plastic-celebrities, who, according to him, had acquired their luster very easily, ie, celebrities who had been given everything on a silver platter. In a world where connections, money, and influences controlled the popularity ranks, Alec couldn’t help but look at these pseudo-celebrities with disdain. He had a list of FPCs that he loathed with all his soul and Magnus Bane was, without a doubt, at the top of that list.

The man had been a nobody no less than four years ago, but then, one day the guy had released a semi-decent album that had done okay, and next thing Alec knew, the man was everywhere: radio stations, movies, TV shows...Broadway. Magnus Bane had shared the stage of the iconic Lyceum Theater, one of New York's oldest theaters, with none other than Barbra Streisand. Mrs. Barbra Joan Streisand! Who had authorized that Broadway atrocity? Alec didn’t know, but he still questioned that decision every day. The guy could be an okay-singer, but he was not an actor, or at least that was what Alec wanted to believe. He wasn’t a fan of his work, so he hadn't exactly seen any of his movies, TV shows or plays, he had only seen a few seconds of some videos here and there and the guy hadn't impressed him. To this day, Alec still couldn't understand the hype surrounding Magnus Bane.

Alec was so engrossed in his own thoughts that he missed when Aldertree began assigning and changing tasks for this impromptu new issue of The Shadow World. When he turned his attention back to the table, Aldertree was already asking Izzy, who was in charge of the fashion and style section of the magazine, to write a full report on Magnus’s outfits. Izzy immediately started to gush about how, according to the world’s top fashion critics, including someone named Robin Givhan who apparently was a big deal in the fashion industry, Magnus Bane was considered a fashion icon.

Alec rolled his eyes dramatically when all the heads on the table started to nod frantically. Could these people be more biased?

Aldertree then asked Jace to write about all the upcoming events that Magnus was going to attend, including the tour for his new movie by the end of the year, and all the charity events he would be hosting in the next few weeks—the guy was known for being a very ‘charitable’ soul.

“And you, Duncan…” Aldertree said, instructing the relatively new writer, who was in charge of the cinematographic reviews, to write about every single movie Magnus had made an appearance on, and to write a ‘what to expect’ of his upcoming film.
To Raj, who was in charge of the ‘under the spotlight’ section of the magazine, Aldertree assigned him the task to follow the guy around, to know what he was going to do in the next couple of weeks, and to coordinate some interviews with his cast-mates.

“Become his shadow!” He warned him. “And take one of the photographers with you.”

Alec let out a huff. Apparently, this month’s issue was going to be Bane-azzled and there was nothing he could do to change it.

Looking around, Alec noticed that slowly the articles of the magazine had been reassigned and that there were only two columnists left in the table without an assigned task, Lydia and himself. His boss hadn’t announced yet who would be the journalist in charge of doing the oh-so-amazing exclusive interview, but Alec already knew that they were going to choose Lydia for the job. Magnus, despite the fact that had come out as a bisexual man very early in his career, was known as a ladies man. It was the 21st century, but even so, the media had decided to ignore that part of the actor/singer’s life and had turned him into a heartthrob—every woman’s teenage dream. Girls swooned with all his songs and movies, and wet their panties every time the man did so much as to blink. It was plain obvious that they were going to assign a girl to do the interview. And although having an exclusive interview with that many pages had always been Alec’s goal, he was relieved not to interview this FPC. He’d rather go back to writing the horoscopes section as he had done back when he was just an intern than interviewing Magnus Bane.

“Miss Branwell.” Aldertree said, and Alec found himself holding his breath. “We won't move the Broadway interviews we had scheduled for this month’s issue. You still have to go to the ‘Love Runs Out’ opening night this week and interview the entire cast. Don’t forget to bring a cameraman for the after party.”

Alec gulped. Oh-Uh.

“Congratulations, Mr. Lightwood!” Aldertree exclaimed, looking directly into Alec's eyes. “You just got yourself your very first exclusive interview!”

The whole table started to cheer and give Alec little pats on the back, congratulating him on the incredible opportunity. However, all Alec could think about was the fact that today was definitely one of those days when even if he tried harder, it couldn’t get any worse.

When the meeting was over and everyone went back to their respective offices, Alec, who was still a bit shocked and trying to process everything that had just happened, approached his boss when the latter was on his way to the door.

“Aldertree, wait!” He exclaimed.

“What is it, Mr. Lightwood?” Aldertree said, turning around to look at him.

“Could I have a word with you?”

“Of course, let’s go to my office.”

“I...hmmm no, here's okay. I was just wondering if choosing me for the interview was the best option? I mean, we know who Magnus Bane is, right? And for obvious reasons,” Alec said, pointing to the lack of feminine curves in his body, “don’t you think it would be better if Lydia or some of the girls did the interview instead?”
“I have a question for you, Mr. Lightwood, what is your position in this magazine?”

“Hmmm...I'm a writer.” Alec responded a bit confused.

“Correct, and what is mine?”

“Chief editor.”

“Exactly, don’t you think that gives me the credentials to choose who I consider best fitted for this job? Yes, it does.” Aldertree said, responding to his own question. “I know this news may come as a surprise to you, but I found that person to be you. I need this interview to be perfect and since I can’t do it myself, I decided to trust in your skills.” He explained. “If this goes as planned, we will not only consolidate ourselves as the best-selling magazine in this city, but we could ensure ourselves a lot of new sponsors, which would help us improve our content. Money means more locations, more interviews, more exclusives and more everything, isn’t that what we all want for this magazine?”

“Yes, but…”

“Besides,” Aldertree continued, ignoring Alec completely, “if the interview with Mr. Bane goes well, we could even try to get a sneak peek of his upcoming tour. Do you have any idea what that scoop could mean for us?”

Alec just nodded because he was fully aware of what that possible scenario could mean for the magazine.

“Ms. Branwell can come across a bit abrasive and controlling at times and I don’t want her or anyone else to jeopardize this opportunity, so you better do a good interview, Mr. Lightwood, I would hate to let the rest of the writers and your parents know that despite bearing the Lightwood name, you’re not ready for the big leagues.”

Alec refrained himself from responding despite the clear provocation. It was always a bad idea to lose his temper in front of Aldertree, the man was protected, the executive board seemed to love him, and although Alec hated to admit it, he was good at what he did. “I won’t disappoint the magazine.” He said, exhaling in resignation.

“I’m glad to hear that, I expected nothing less from you. Anyway, I’ll see you later to give you all the details about the interview, start doing your research, you have no time to lose.”

“Yes, I-” Alec started to say, but had to stop. Aldertree had already left the conference room and he was all alone.

Alec sighed. He probably didn’t like this Magnus guy one single bit, but he was a professional and therefore, he was going to do his job and deliver the best interview this magazine had ever seen.

Later that day, Alec was engrossed in his research on Magnus Bane. He was trying to find information that might help him come up with better ways to approach the upcoming interview, but surprisingly, there wasn’t much about the guy online.

According to his official biography, Magnus was a Summa Cum Laude graduate from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, he had a BA in acting, a MA in text and performance, and had received musical training since the age of four. He was born in Boston*, and was the only son of the renowned businessman, Asmodeus Bane, deceased in a plane crash four years ago. There was no information from other members of his family at all, his mother was barely mentioned there as part of
the Bane emporium, but not even her full name was listed. In fact, now that Alec was looking at all the different tabs he had with Magnus's information, he was realizing that almost all of them talked about Magnus's career, his achievements, his awards, his charitable and social endeavors, but none of them mentioned anything about his private life. When it came to the man behind the superstar, there was literally nothing—no family, no friends, no hobbies, no nada. Of his personal relationships, the only one mentioned was the one he had had with that famous actress and model, Camille Belcourt, a little over a year ago, but that was it. Who was Magnus Bane? Nobody knew.

"Odd..." Alec whispered, surprised that there was so little about the man who was considered the star of the moment.

Of course that didn’t mean that the guy had a clean record when it came to rumors and scandals, as far as Alec could tell there had been several about him in the years he had been under the spotlight. Like, for example, two and a half years ago, when one of his high school friends had released an unauthorized biography of his life, recounting the time they had shared together during the years that they both had attended the Idris Academy for boys. It had been quite the scandal. Alec remembered reading some articles about it, but in all of them Magnus’s team had refused to address the book and had just asked the media not to pay attention to the people who were using Magnus’s popularity to sell a couple of books.

Then, a few months later, there had been a rumor that Magnus had been forced into rehab by his team to help him with his drug addiction problem. That information had never been confirmed, but the tabloids had started the rumor when Magnus had suddenly disappeared for a couple of months after the success of his first feature film—Pandemonium. Alec couldn’t deny that the whole situation had been extremely fishy, Magnus’s manager had flatly refused to explain where his client had been during all those months of absence and that had just fed the rumors, but without any proof whatsoever of what had really happened, no one could ever confirm or deny whether or not Magnus had dealt with any drug addiction problem.

And finally, about a year and a half ago, before the premiere of one of Magnus's new films, the media had been in a frenzy when some very compromising photos of Magnus and his co-star, Camille Belcourt, had been released to the press, confirming their torrid romance. It had been a couple of months in which the couple had been everywhere, getting papped left, right and center, and attending every Hollywood event together. The romance had lasted a few months, but just as it had started, it had ended, causing an even more chaotic media coverage. Magnus and Camille’s breakup had been cataloged as the breakup of the year. The audience and the media alike had mourned the separation and even today, after months of the couple being apart, they kept trying to link them together and begged them to be an ‘item’ again.

Alec didn’t know why people in general were so deeply invested in celebrity relationships, one thing was to be curious about the social life of the person they admired or in some cases were paid to write about, and another one was to violate their right to privacy—sometimes both the audience and the media really crossed the line.

Alec sighed, googling Magnus's name again to order the unauthorized biography—for research purposes, of course—and quickly looking for some pictures. Now he was curious to know more about this man. At first glance he seemed to be very open about his life, his carefree attitude reflected that, but with his little research Alec had discovered that that wasn’t the case, so...why was he so mysterious? What was he hiding? Were all the rumors about his drug addiction true? He was asking himself those questions as he scrolled down the never-ending pictures of the guy.

It caught his attention that in all the red carpet pictures of the events he had attended so far, Magnus was either with his personal staff or fellow cast-mates—never with a date. Well, except for Camille,
but now that Alec had the chance to look at the pictures more closely, he had the suspicion that that relationship had been yet another of the countless PR relationships that occurred in Hollywood every day. It was pretty easy to notice that Magnus didn’t look as happy when he was with her as when he was with someone else—his smile was a bit forced, lifeless. He seemed to be more concerned about the way they looked together in front of the cameras than about enjoying the moment and the fact that he was sharing it with his girlfriend—if that made any sense.

Because of his line of work, Alec knew how ‘relationships’ worked in the industry, it was widely known that two celebrities were better than one in terms of earning power and brand recognition; it made sense, strategically speaking, for ‘the rich and famous’ to date ‘the rich and famous,’ but people often seemed to forget that these celebrities were also real people with real feelings and real hearts that despite the circumstances could also get hurt.

With that last thought, Alec couldn’t help feeling a teeny-tiny bit of sympathy for the man. He couldn’t even begin to imagine what it was like to be forced to date someone just for promotional purposes—it was wrong. However, as soon as he changed the picture, that teeny-tiny, almost invisible bit of sympathy he had felt for the man dissipated into thin air.

Magnus was now posing all alone for the cameras and that annoying, cocky smile of his was back on his face. He really seemed to have the time of his life whenever the spotlights were on him.

“Why are you so arrogant?” Alec wondered aloud as he scrolled through the pictures. Magnus’s poses just got even more ridiculous the more he changed the pictures, the only thing that remained the same was that stupid smile that seemed to have a permanent spot on his face.

“Pathetic...” He murmured, changing the picture again and regretting it almost immediately.

The next picture wasn’t exactly what could be classified as appropriate material for the workplace. Magnus had made a half-naked photo shoot for Men’s Health magazine and, well, these pictures had clearly been taken for the sole purpose of showing how well-toned his body was. The photographer had made sure that the lights and shadows helped to highlight Magnus’s perfectly sculpted abs and arms, and legs and-

Alec felt the blood rushing to his cheeks, so as fast as he could, he changed the picture and took a deep breath. Fortunately for him and his beating heart, in the next picture that popped up on his screen Magnus was fully dressed and although, the memory of the previous picture was going to haunt him for a while, he was able to concentrate again.

Now Alec couldn’t deny that they guy was slightly attractive, well, not slightly, he was very attractive, with a body practically sculpted by the gods, but the fact that he was so sure of himself just made Alec feel the urge to punch him. For some reason he couldn’t, nor wanted to understand, he couldn’t stand him—not even a little bit.

“Mr. Lightwood.” Aldertree said, entering Alec’s office without knocking—a bad habit of his.

“Hmmm, Al-Aldertree...what-what happened?” Alec stuttered, realizing that if his boss had decided to enter his office ten seconds earlier, Alec would have had a really hard time trying to explain why he had a high-resolution picture of a half-naked Magnus on his computer. “I was just doing my research on Magnus Bane like you asked me to.” He quickly added, still trying to justify the reason why there was a picture of Magnus’s face covering almost half of the screen.

“There’s not much about him online.” Aldertree said, looking at the picture, but not really paying it any attention.
“I’ve noticed.” Alec murmured. He had naively thought he would find a lot of information about the man on the internet, with him being a superstar and all that, but to his surprise, Magnus Bane had turned out to be a complete mystery.

“Then let’s hope you can get him to share something else with you this Friday.”

“The interview is this Friday?” Alec asked in surprise. He had been expecting to have more days to prepare himself. He knew they were against the clock, but it was Wednesday, that meant the interview would be in only two days—it was too soon.

“Yes.” Aldertree said, placing a sealed envelope on top of Alec’s desk. “This issue will be out in two weeks, we need this interview and the rest of the articles to be ready as soon as possible, the board wants to review them next week. Anyway, here’s all the information you’ll need for the interview—address, date and time, specifications, restrictions, everything.”

Alec grabbed the envelope and ripped it open, quickly scanning its content. There were some specific requests for the pictures, wardrobe changes and technical stuff, as well as a list of forbidden questions—nothing new, but what made Alec frown was the location of the interview.

“His house!?” He asked in surprise.

“Yes? He never does uncontrolled interviews, they have to be in a studio or private place of his choosing.”

“Can’t we try to persuade him to do the interview on the outside, like the Battery Park or something?” Alec suggested, definitely not wanting to do the interview in Magnus’s very own house. When celebrities were in their own environment, they tended to be even more insufferable than they already were.

“Many media outlets have tried and none have succeeded. He is very picky about that part. He never, ever, does uncontrolled interviews.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “That’s exactly why I can’t stomach this guy. He’s so arrogant! Who does he think he is? I hate these celebrities who think they’re above everyone else.” He complained.

“Yeah, I hate them too, but they help us sell magazines, and this guy is going to help us sell lots and lots of them,” Aldertree said, “so if he wants the interview at his house, then at his house it will be.” He added firmly before walking away and closing the door of Alec’s office behind him.

Alec sighed and reluctantly resumed his research. The interview was in a couple of days, but he was already dreading the moment he had to be face to face with Magnus Bane.

Chapter End Notes

*Remember what I said at the beginning? Don't believe anything you read until Magnus confirms the information himself, okay? If you re-read that paragraph you'll see that it says, "according to his official biography," "according"...key words, people, key words ;)*
Anyway...I hope you liked it!!! I'm really excited about this story, I can't wait for you to see how their love story unfolds!!!

I'll see you all next week!!! The interview is coming, so get ready!!!
I'm back again, friends!!! Sorry for making you all wait so long for this update, but as I said in my last malec story (Pas de Deux), with Thanksgiving and what happened a few weeks ago with that certain cast member, I wasn't feeling very inspired and writing or editing my work seemed impossible, so I decided to take some days off to regroup and come back stronger. It took me a bit longer than expected, but as people say, it's better late than never.

Anyway, this chapter isn't as long as the first one, but still has 7K words, so it's pretty long (at least for me). As usual, I won't say much about it because I hate spoilers, but I really hope you like it. There are some characters appearing for the first time and this chapter marks the beginning of Alec and Magnus's story, so I'm excited for you guys to read it. Please make sure to share your thoughts in the comments and to leave some kudos if you can.

I'll see you all real soon, I promise.

Find me on twitter as @MsAlexisCriss or tumblr as msalexiscriss. Much love, Alexis.

On Friday morning, Alec and the team that his boss had assigned him for the interview, Aline Penhallow and Simon Lewis—the best photographer and cameraman of the magazine, respectively—were ready to go to Magnus’s house to do the oh-so-famous exclusive interview.

One of the magazine vans was parked outside the building and they were just loading the equipment they were going to need before leaving—cameras, cables, microphones, lights, etc. They had to be in the house of the ‘acclaimed’ actor and singer at ten o'clock in the morning to set everything ready and start the interview half an hour later. Magnus’s team had been very specific about the schedule, stating that their client detested tardiness and asking them to arrive on time.

“Alec! Alec!” Izzy and Clary exclaimed, rushing out of the magazine building and motioning him to wait for them—Jace was trailing behind them.

“What is it?” Alec asked, trying not to sound too exasperated. He had no idea what these three wanted, but he had no time to lose.

“Could you get us his autograph?” Izzy asked hopefully.

“Really, et tu, Izzy?” Alec asked not quite believing what he had just heard and just staring at the three with judgemental eyes.

“Hey! I don’t want one, don’t look at me like that.” Jace immediately said, raising his hands in the air. “I’m not that much of a fan, I mean, I’ve heard and seen his stuff and he’s pretty good, but I don’t need an autograph.”

“Can you get it or not?” Izzy asked. “This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, big brother, so you’re morally obligated to do this for us, it’s not our fault that Aldertree decided to choose you, Magnus’s
number one hater, to interview him.”

“I’m not his number one hater, I couldn’t care less about the guy, I just don’t think he’s the super talented singer slash actor you all think he is.” Alec said, trying to defend his point of view. Celebrities nowadays were more about looks than actual talent, that was why they reached the top so easily. A wink, a smile, and one or two favors, and the world gave them everything on a silver platter.

“Whatever you say, we’re not here to discuss your obvious blindness and lack of good taste, can you get us his autograph or not?”

“Oh, fine...I’ll try.” Alec said resignedly.

As his sister had pointed out, he was, indeed, morally obligated to do so—for his family, for his friends and for practically all the employees of the magazine. In the last few days, he had been receiving the same kind of request from almost everyone—from some very distinguished members of the executive board to the maintenance staff and mail people. Everyone wanted this guy’s autograph.

“Could you also ask him to sign Max’s collection too?” Izzy asked, handing Alec a bag with all the available formats of Magnus’s albums and movies: vinyl, CDs, DVDs, Blu-Rays, EPs...everything.

Alec knew that his teenage little brother, Max, was a bit obsessed with the famous singer and actor. He had been dressing like him for months and getting on his parents’ nerves with the excessive amount of eyeliner and nail polish he had been sporting.

“You told Max!” Alec asked in disbelief. He had specifically asked his siblings not to tell their little brother about the interview until it was done for a reason. He had wanted to avoid all this.

“Sorry? I was on the phone with him last night and it kinda slipped and, well, you know him, he made me go all the way to our parents’ place to pick up all this stuff and bring it to you.”

Now Alec understood why he had so many missed calls from his little brother. He had planned to call him as soon as the interview was over to share the ‘experience’ with him, but now he wasn’t so sure if that would be the best idea. If Max already knew about the interview, there was a good chance that the little imp was ready to interview Alec himself just to get all the scoop on his idol. As far as he knew, his little brother wasn’t interested in the family business and didn’t want to become a journalist like them, but he had it in his blood, so maybe it would be better to wait until he could see him in person and distract him with whatever he got for him from his encounter with Magnus than call him and risk being ambushed on the phone—the last time it had happened, he had talked to him for five straight hours.

“Well, you’ll have to tell him I can’t do this.” Alec pointed to the bag containing Max’s collection.

“This is a very serious interview, Iz, my first exclusive. Magnus is a busy man, I can't ask him to sign all this. Besides, I don’t think he’s going to feel very comfortable with me if he finds out that my little brother is one of his obsessed groupies, I could creep him out and—”

“But Max—”

“I’m sure Max won’t mind if I just get him a simple piece of paper with his signature on it, I had already planned to ask Magnus for a personalized autograph just for him. Max loves him anyway, so he’s going to combust no matter what I bring for him.”

“Yeah, that’s true...I'm sorry, but I had to try.”

Alec just smiled—he understood. They all loved Max to bits and if any of his siblings would have
been chosen to interview Magnus instead, Alec would have tried to make them get stuff for their little brother as well. “Don’t worry, I get it...anyway, I have to go now, it’s getting late and this idol of yours was very specific with the schedule for the interview, apparently he hates tardiness.”

“Alec…” Clary said, stopping him again. Of all the members of their little group slash family, he and Clary weren’t what could be called the best of friends, they liked each other all right, it was just hard for them to see eye to eye on things. “Could you get one for my mother too?” She asked, giving him her sweet smile. The one she used on a daily basis with Jace and that seemed to work miracles.

Alec chuckled—this was unbelievable. Literally everyone and their mother loved this guy. “Yeah, yeah...don’t worry, I’ll see what I can do for you all.” He said, playfully rolling his eyes at the ridiculousness of the situation and just getting into the van before they could distract him further. Aline and Simon had finished loading the equipment and they were already waiting inside. “See you later, guys!” He exclaimed, waving goodbye and closing the door of the van behind him.

“They wanted autographs too?” Aline asked, sounding not so surprised.

Alec nodded. “Can you believe them?”

Aline chuckled. “I got some requests as well.”

“This is unbelievable.” Alec sighed. “I really don’t get what’s so special about this guy, but anyway, let’s go! The sooner we get there, the sooner I can get this over with and forget it ever happened.”

“Forget it ever happened!?” Simon exclaimed. “Alec, we're about to meet the star of the moment! Magnus Freaking Bane! That's not something you can forget that easily. He's like...I don't know, Jared Leto, but better. You know, that guy from Thirty Seconds of Mars who also won an Academy Award? He's a bit of a dick and all, but he's done some great stuff and—”

"Simon..." Alec cut him off, meeting eyes with him through the rear-view mirror. He liked Simon, besides being excellent at his job he was a great boyfriend to his sister and therefore a good guy in Alec’s book, but he talked too much and his brain-to-mouth filter never seemed to work—something that managed to irritate Alec more often than not. “Just drive, okay?”

“Okay, yeah...driving.” Simon shut up, starting the engine and without further comment, taking them to their destination.

With each street they passed, Alec grew increasingly anxious and didn’t even know why. It was just another interview, probably with the biggest and most annoying FPC in existence, but still it was nothing he hadn’t done before. He had once interviewed Mariah Carey on the red carpet of one of her Christmas concerts and had lived to tell the story, so he could certainly handle Magnus Bane, who compared to the famous diva singer was very down to Earth.

“Simon, is it too far?” Alec asked after a while. They were on Fifth Avenue, just past the Grand Army Plaza and Apple's glass cube.

“No, in fact, we’re pretty close. His house is on the Upper East Side, ten blocks ahead.” Simon informed him.

Alec sighed and looked out the window as the van kept making its way through the ever-clogged streets of New York. He wanted to distract himself and not think about the interview until they got to Magnus’s house, but it wasn't an easy task, so despite the beautiful view that the passenger window offered, he found himself trying to go over the interview in his head and planning the most likely
Interviewing FPCs was always the same, they were so self-conceited that they could spend hours upon hours just talking about themselves, so in a way making them share things was never a problem, the problem was what kind of things they shared. Usually, they talked about stupid, pointless things that in the long run never had any impact on the audience and that was what Alec hated the most. He always tried to make these interviews interesting, worth reading, but when it came to FPCs, the script always changed. They always managed to twist everything and make a serious question—which could actually give people reading it some insight about them as human beings—about something else entirely, making Alec’s actual journalistic work seem like nothing but a joke.

“What do you know anything about this pseudo-celebrity’s house? I mean, is it a house or an apartment?” Alec asked in yet another attempt to distract himself. “I’m afraid I’m not very familiar with the way some celebrities live. I know some have very luxurious apartments and some other mansions, Magnus comes from a very wealthy family, so I’m guessing that since childhood he’s had a life full of luxuries. I don’t think that has changed much now that he’s a superstar, do you?”

“I’m afraid I’m not very familiar with the way some celebrities live. I know some have very luxurious apartments and some other mansions, Magnus comes from a very wealthy family, so I’m guessing that since childhood he’s had a life full of luxuries. I don’t think that has changed much now that he’s a superstar, do you?”

“No.” Alec admitted.

“Why?”

“I don’t know, it didn’t seem important.”

“Well, it’s not, we’re gonna see his house anyway, but I have to admit that this is very unusual of you. I mean, you’re always very meticulous with your interviews, you like to know every last detail about the person you’re interviewing. You not knowing from A to Z about this guy is weird.” Aline said as Simon turned left on 69th Street.

“I didn’t have much time to prepare myself, only two days, I had to prioritize my research.” Alec shrugged. “Anyway, I hope he doesn’t live in an apartment because no matter how luxurious it is, I’m afraid we’ll have some problems with the footage. You guys will have to do some miracles with the angles to get material for fifteen pages. You heard what Aldertree said this morning, he wants original shots and—” Alec’s words died somewhere in his throat.

They had just parked in front of a building marked with the number twelve on the front, and although it was a six-story building that could easily be mistaken for a luxurious apartment building, it was not. It was one of those very old New York mansions valued in many millions of dollars.

“Holy shit!” Simon exclaimed, gaping at what appeared to be Magnus’s home.

“A very hmmm... humble home.” Aline added, taking a quick picture of the impressive facade.

Alec rolled his eyes and jumped out of the van, immediately straightening his clothes. “Of course he lives here,” he said without surprise, “only a diva like him would live in a 100 million-dollar-valued mansion.”

“Jealous much?” Aline inquired.

Alec chuckled. “Are you kidding? Who would like to live here?” He asked, pointing to the ostentatious mansion, because seriously...who would like to live in a place like that one? Just by looking at it, Alec knew that despite all the luxury, no one could call this place a home. It looked cold, lifeless...lonely—homes weren’t supposed to look like that.
“Me.” Both Simon and Aline said at the same time. They were already taking out all the equipment from the van.

“Of course you would,” Alec said, rolling his eyes again as he rang the bell. They had arrived just in time.

A very tall, easy on the eye and dark-skinned man who, judging by the attire Alec assumed must be some kind of butler, opened the door and after checking their IDs, making them sign some papers and pass them through some security protocols, ushered them inside the impressive mansion.

The place could be cold, lifeless, and lonely, but Alec couldn’t deny that it was also impressive—jaw-dropping impressive. If from the outside the building looked luxurious, from the inside it was like stepping into a freaking museum. The art on the walls, the priceless antique furniture, the stunning paneled staircases in light oak...every inch of this place was exquisite.

“How big is this place?” Alec asked, unable to resist the curiosity to ask more about the palace that Magnus had bought for himself.

“It’s a six-level property with 20,000 square feet of living space, in addition to 2,500 square feet of outdoor space, which includes a roof deck with sweeping views of Central Park and the city, sir.” The butler told them.

“Wow…” Alec, Aline, and Simon exhaled, taking in all the beauty of the house.

Alec had once visited David Burtka and Neil Patrick Harris’s Harlem townhouse when the magazine had interviewed the famous couple and Alec had gone as an assistant to his father, but that place had nothing compared to this one. The Burtka-Harris household was impressive, yes, but this one definitely took the cake.

“You can settle yourselves here for the first photo session, I’ll send some refreshments right away and Mr. Bane will be here shortly.” The butler said, making a slight bow and walking away.

“Well,” Simon breathed out, already unpacking his camera, “I don’t know about you guys, but I would kill to become friends with this guy. He certainly knows how to live. Did you see the bar on the second floor? It’s the size of the Hunter’s Moon! Well, maybe a bit bigger, but I think it's just a matter of perspective, I mean, it’s hard to know exactly the size of that place without all the drunken idiots passed out on the tables, and-”

“Simon, stop fanboying for a second and set your camera ready,” Alec said, “we’re here to do an interview, not to befriend anyone—we’re professionals.” He added. It was true that Magnus’s place was impressive, in fact, what Simon had said about the bar in the house being the size of that Brooklyn bar that their group of friends used to frequent every weekend was true, but they had to act like the professionals they were.
“Okay, fine...relax, it was just a curious commentary.” Simon said. “It’s not like I was going to ask him to be my friend or anything like that, I was just making an observation about the size of that place. Hosting a party there would be totally cool, like, can you imagine? We could invite the whole magazine, I could even call my old band and organize a gig. There's room for a stage there and with the right equipment Rock Solid Panda could make a comeback and-”

“He literally never stops talking, does he?” Alec told Aline, who was rolling her eyes in exasperation —something Alec could relate to.

“No, he doesn’t.” Aline agreed. “He’s a lost cause, I really don’t know how your sister puts up with him.”

“Me neither, though she can’t shut up either, so I guess it's true what they say: there’s someone for everyone.”

“Hey!” Simon complained. “I’m here, remember? I can hear you both.”

As Aline and Simon readied the cameras, the lights and the microphones, Alec began to wander around the large living room, trying to observe as much as he could while he still had the chance. His grandmother used to say that you could learn a lot about people from their houses and, although Alec didn’t like Magnus at all, he couldn’t deny that thanks to this unexpected twist of fate now he was a bit curious about him.

So far what he had gotten from the man’s house was that, one, it was plain obvious that Magnus liked an expensive life, and two, that although everything did look cold and lifeless, Magnus seemed to have a very good taste. All the rooms they had seen so far were finely decorated with elegant furniture and exquisite decoration, the styles were a bit eclectic, but that didn’t make the mansion any less beautiful. Those classic touches mixed with the contemporary elements made the place look unique, quirky...very—and Alec hated to admit this—Magnus-like.

The living room that Magnus and his team had chosen as the first spot for the photo shoot was large and spacious, it was framed by a large chandelier that hung high above the cluster of armchairs and the coffee table; it had a fireplace in one of the walls, a black grand piano in the corner, sculptures and paintings almost everywhere, and of course, a spectacular view of the city.

A painting at the far end of the room caught Alec’s attention and he got closer to have a better look of it. It was a strange painting, full of all kinds of colors and sharp edges. The combination was chaotic, aggressive even, the forms were fractured and faceted, creating a kaleidoscope of colors that trapped the viewer in its colorful spiral. It was an intriguing and quite interesting painting, Alec was not an art enthusiast, but for some strange reason this painting made him want to be one. He wanted to be able to discover all its secrets, all its hidden messages—to decipher it.

“What do you guys think?” He asked his friends, without tearing his eyes off the painting. “Is it just me or this painting besides being extremely bizarre is kind of-”

“Kind of what?” Someone asked, interrupting Alec’s question.

Alec froze in his place. That voice didn’t belong to any of his friends, so very slowly, he turned around and, to his surprise, saw to whom that voice belonged. Standing on the threshold of the room and with a huge smile plastered on his face was Magnus Bane in the flesh.

“Oh…”
For a split second Alec lost his voice and just stared at the man standing in front of him. If he had admitted back in his office that the man was attractive, now there was no way he could deny it. Whether he liked it or not, Magnus Bane was extremely attractive. Tall, with a flawless olive skin, toned arms, amazing hair, strong jaw and the most beautiful pair of brown eyes that Alec had ever seen, not to mention his excellent taste in clothes. Alec wasn’t a fashionista like his sister, but he certainly knew how to appreciate good clothes when he saw them, especially when these fitted its wearer so well—and, well, there was no doubt that these ones did. The tight scarlet shirt Magnus was wearing accentuated his amazing body and those black pants hung in all the right places. The whole outfit made Magnus look like a supermodel, but...he still had that stupid, fake grin on his face and that killed all the sex appeal. It was like bursting a balloon with a needle.

“I apologize for that,” Alec said, quickly composing himself, “I was just-”

“Yes, you were saying that my painting besides being extremely bizarre was kind of...?”

Alec couldn’t help but blush a little. “Hmmm, very intriguing, actually, a bit hypnotic if I may add. The colors and the composition seem to put the viewer under a spell, making you want to, I don’t know, discover all its secrets...decipher it.”

Magnus let out a chuckle. “Well saved, mister...?”

“Alec Lightwood, writer for The Shadow World magazine.” Alec said, extending his hand in a polite way and offering it to Magnus.

“Short for Alexander, I assume?” Magnus asked, tilting his head a little—curiosity was evident in his eyes.

Alec nodded.

“You have a nice name, very powerful, the name of many rulers.” Magnus smiled, finally taking Alec’s hand.

The moment Alec felt that warm hand against his own, an electric current went through his body, but he put the feeling aside thinking that maybe it was just a reaction to having been caught blatantly criticizing a painting that, in fact, he had liked in the first place.

“I’m Magnus Bane,” Magnus said without letting go of Alec’s hand, “and to instruct you a bit about the bizarre painting over there, that piece is called ‘Battle of the Lights, Coney Island,’ by Joseph Stella. He was a very renowned futurist painter. I have another painting of his in my hmmm...private recording studio.”

“Thanks for the art class,” Alec replied, quickly retrieving his hand from Magnus’s unsettling grip, “but, may I introduce my team?” He added, pointing to the other two people in the room who, so far, had been stoically ignored. “Aline Penhallow, my photographer, and Simon Lewis, my cameraman.”

Magnus immediately turned around to politely greet them and Alec took those few seconds to jump into his professional journalist self again and calm down a bit. He couldn't deny that given what had happened with the painting and everything, Magnus had caught him a bit off guard, but he was a professional—he knew how to control himself.

“So...” Magnus said, returning his full attention to Alec, “where do you want me?”

Alec took a deep breath before replying. “Over here please, if you may, Mr. Bane.” He said, expecting Magnus to take a seat in one of the armchairs he had pointed at, but the man didn't move from where he was standing.
“Okay, you know what?” Magnus exclaimed, and Alec’s whole body trembled with anticipation.

He didn’t know what kind of over the top request Magnus was about to ask, but he was sure as hell that there was one coming up. That was what happened when you interviewed a FPC, they all had the same modus operandi.

“Let’s set some rules before we start with this, okay?” Magnus said, surprising them all.

“Okay...?” Alec replied hesitantly. He was literally just expecting the extravagant request that he was sure Magnus was going to ask and that Alec probably wouldn't be able to fulfill, causing with that the cancellation of the interview. He could already hear Magnus’s lecture about the magazine’s lack of professionalism because Alec had been unable to bring Holy water from the Vatican so that the man could wash his hands. And if that happened, Alec could start looking for a new job because he was sure that Aldertree was going to fire his ass and not even the fact that his parents were the owners of the magazine was going to save him.

“You and your team are going to call me just Magnus, not Mr. Bane, not Magnus Bane, just Magnus, and I’ll call you all by your names, is that okay?”

“What?” Alec blurted out. He had been expecting a more diva-like request, certainly not that.

“I want you all to call me just Magnus, is that okay?” Magnus asked again.

Simon and Aline said 'cool' at the same time and Alec just limited himself to nod.

“I don’t like the mister title, I’m way too young for that,” Magnus elaborated, “and besides, we’re practically the same age, right? I mean, I’m not going to ask any of your ages because that would be extremely rude of me, but you all look young, so I’m going to assume we’re about the same age and, therefore, we’ll drop the formalities, okay?”

“Yeah, sure.” Alec finally said, though it still came out in a whisper. His voice wasn’t completely back. This man had a strange effect on him.

“Good, now, where did you say you wanted me, Alexander?”

“Hmmm, just Alec...and over here hmmm, Magnus.” Alec said, stuttering a bit. He had no idea what was going on with him today, but he had to control himself or else this wasn’t going to work for anyone.

Alec turned around to take a seat opposite Magnus and used those few seconds to take a deep breath and get ready for the interview. “Are you ready, Aline, Simon?” He asked his friends and co-workers.

“Yes, we’re rolling, we can start whenever you want.” Simon said.

Alec gave Aline a quick look to get some sort of confirmation too.

“Ready.” She said.

“Are you ready, Mr. Ba-I mean, Magnus?”

Magnus nodded.

“I’m going to ask you some questions that I compiled myself. As you already know, we have to cover fifteen pages, so naturally I have a lot of things and topics that I want us to talk about. To be
precise, I have five different blocks of questions to cover different aspects of your professional life and career. Victor Aldertree, my direct boss and editor-in-chief of the magazine, personally approved each of the questions I’ll ask and made sure none of them came any close to the list of forbidden topics that you and your people so kindly provided to the magazine. However, if at any moment you want me to stop, change or rephrase any question, just raise your hand and we’ll stop rolling, is that okay?”

“I think it’s perfect, thank you, Alexander.” Magnus replied, smiling.

Alec wanted to tell him that he hated when people called him by his full name, only his parents did that and it was usually when they were mad at him and he was in trouble, but something stopped him from doing so.

“Okay, then...let’s begin.” Alec said, taking out his tape recorder and notepad.

“I’m all yours, Alexander.” Magnus said, winking and flashing him one of his crooked smiles, and although a flash of crimson ran down Alec’s cheeks due to that quite distracting sight, he took a deep breath and started the interview.

The interview went smoothly, after the first few questions, Alec was able to relax and now he was completely in his element. It didn’t matter who the celebrity sitting in front of him was, if there was something that Alec loved was his job and, although sometimes he had to do interviews and write articles about people he didn't like—like at that very precise moment—he couldn't deny that doing so was one of his passions.

“So, we’ve been talking about your sudden rise to fame and how all this has come as something unexpected for you.” Alec said, taking a deep breath. He was about to ask the only question that Aldertree had warned him about. Next to that question, his boss had scribbled a quick note that said: 'careful with this one.' At first Alec had thought about removing it completely from the list, but after thinking it through he had decided that he was going to ask it anyway. It was a somewhat dangerous question because the answer could go either way and Alec could lose control of the interview, but he trusted that he could handle whatever Magnus told him.

“You turn thirty this year, but you've already been in a couple of movies, you have a hit TV show currently airing, three platinum albums, two EPs and have shared a Broadway stage with Barbra Streisand, to what or whom do you think you owe your success? Or, is it just a combination of luck, money and what we call some very good and important connections?” Alec asked.

Magnus’s confident facade suddenly changed, and Alec wanted to high-five himself for that. He knew he had a way with words and that last question had undoubtedly shaken Magnus. The implication of his overnight success was clear and the star now seemed as if he were searching for the right words to answer Alec’s question.

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“Nobody, ever, had hmmm...asked me that question before.” Magnus admitted. “But, I’d say that no, it’s definitely not a combination of good luck, money and/or important connections.”

“Then, could it be because of the good looks?” Alec inquired.

Magnus chuckled. "You flatter me, you really do, but I don't think so either.”

“Then, what is it?”

“Hard work and sacrifices, Alec.” Magnus replied sincerely—the sudden change from Alexander to
Alec was strangely unsettling and made Alec frown. "I've been working very hard for a lot of years, trying to make all my dreams come true, and now we could say that all my efforts are finally paying off."

"So, do you consider all this sudden fame as your reward?"

"No, I don't." Magnus said firmly. "To be honest, I couldn't care less about fame."

"You say you don't care about fame, but let's say that tomorrow the world woke up not knowing who you are anymore, would you still don't care?"

"Of course I would care, but there's a very thin line between fame and recognition. I do not care about fame, but I do care about recognition. I want people to like what I do."

"So for you recognition is a reward." Alec stated.

"Isn't it for everybody?" Magnus retorted. "I mean, you are a journalist and you write articles and do interviews so that people recognize your work and say, 'Oh, look! Alec Lightwood did this interview or wrote this article. He's a very good writer.' It's the same for everyone. We all are always looking for recognition, from the doctor who just saved her patient's life, to the guy who cleans the streets. We all want others to recognize our work either because it entails a great effort on our part and we've put a lot of time and dedication into it, or because it is what we love to do and are passionate about. Everyone's situation is different, some work for pleasure others out of necessity, but I believe that all the things in this world that are done with even a little bit of effort, dedication, love, and passion are worthy of recognition, don't you agree?"

Alec nodded. He couldn't articulate an answer for that. He was confused by Magnus's response, the guy was showing a side that Alec didn't even know it existed.

"In this business," Magnus continued, "it is fame what keeps you relevant, yes, but it is recognition what makes you good at what you do. And if you're good at what you do, then fame is just a collateral damage."

"So, you don't like fame." Alec asked.

"That's not a question."

"Sorry, you're right. So...don't you like fame?" Alec rephrased.

"Not always. I mean, it certainly has its perks because I can reach a lot more people with my art, but it's not what I want. There's this phrase from an English novelist, Ouida, that says: 'Fame has only the span of a day, they say. But to live in the hearts of the people—that is worth something.' And that's exactly what I want. I want to live in the hearts of the people that like my art. I want them to love what I do, to recognize my work and say, 'Oh, look! Magnus wrote that song or made that movie.'" Magnus said, and somehow Alec knew that the singer had been sincere since the smile on his face was one that Alec hadn't seen before. It wasn't fake or forced, it was genuine and for just a fraction of a second, Alec's heart skipped a beat—Magnus truly had a beautiful smile.

"You seem to be speaking from your heart." Alec said. For some unknown reason, he had felt the need to acknowledge Magnus's sincerity.

"I am."

"I noticed." Alec admitted. It was very easy to tell when Magnus's answers were close to his heart. Alec felt as if he could read this man like an open book, something that until now hadn't happened
before—both professionally and personally. "And, well, your work has been recognized all over the world, so you must be doing something right." He added, a bit flushed as he tried to continue with the rest of the questions.

The interview continued without setbacks and once Alec finished with the first block of questions they changed locations using the bar, the dining room, the library and finally the pool to take more pictures and carry on with the questions. By the time the interview was over, it was way past lunch time.

“Thank you so much for the interview, Magnus.” Alec said, while his team picked up the equipment and started to take it downstairs to the van.

“It was my pleasure, Alec. You asked some very good questions, so I should be the one thanking you. If I’m completely honest, I’m not a big fan of being interviewed, it’s always awkward and a nuisance for both parties, but this experience was different. I like different.”

“Thanks for that, I’m glad to hear that this was different from what you were expecting.”

“Oh...definitely.”

“And also thank you for signing that advanced copy of your new album for my little brother, you really didn’t have to do that, although I’m sure he’s going to go crazy when I give it to him.”

“No problem, just make sure he doesn’t leak it online or else I could get in trouble.”

“He won’t, don’t worry. He practically worships you, he would never do anything to put you in danger.” Alec said because it was true, Max loved Magnus and would never do anything to hurt him in any way. Besides, Alec was sure that his little brother was going to turn that album into some kind of relic as soon as he knew that Magnus himself had broken a couple of rules just so he could have an advanced copy of it. “Either way,” he added, "I'll make sure to find a way to ensure that the album stays under wraps until it's officially released.”

“I appreciate that, and I really hope Max likes it.”

“I'm sure he will, so much so that I can assure you that by the time it comes out, he'll know all the songs by heart.”

Magnus chuckled. “So he’s a die-hard fan, huh?”

“You could say that." Alec said because 'die-hard fan' was an understatement when it came to Max’s love for Magnus. "But really, on his behalf...thank you.”

“Don’t even mention it, it’s people like your brother who keep me where I am, so it’s the least I can do for them.”

Alec couldn’t help but smile. “And also thanks for the signed posters, many people in the magazine are going to put them in their offices, I’m sure.”

“Are you?” Magnus questioned, raising one of his perfectly stylized eyebrows in a very inquisitive way.

“Hmmm, I don't think so. I'm not a big fan of covering walls with posters, I prefer pictures." Alec replied sincerely. He had no idea why he had shared that personal detail about himself, but he had
done it and there was no way to take back his words now.

“Well, I could always send you a framed picture if you want.” Magnus said, winking at him.

Alec blushed. “There’s-no need for that, but thank you. Hmmm, we’ll send your team a copy of the interview before publishing it, so we’ll be in touch.” Alec said all businesslike. He was trying hard to turn their little exchange into something professional again and put aside the feeling he had that Magnus had just somehow flirted with him.

It couldn’t be, Magnus was bisexual all right, but there were strong rumors that he was back with his ex-girlfriend Camille. Of course, Alec had been unable to get a confirmation during the interview since any question regarding Magnus’s personal life had been strictly forbidden, but it made sense—they both had filmed a movie together a few weeks ago, they were going to have to rekindle the romance for promotional purposes at some point.

“Thank you, I’m really looking forward to reading it. Are you sure that you and your team don’t want to stay for lunch? I can ask my people to prepare us something quick if you don’t have much time.” Magnus said, reaffirming the offer he had made once they had wrapped the interview.

“No, thank you, we appreciate the offer, but we really have to head back to the office.” Alec said. It wasn’t entirely true, they could go back to the office whenever they wanted, but Alec felt really uncomfortable and just wanted to leave. Apparently, Magnus was not the diva that he had first thought he was and he didn’t know what to make of that. In all the years he had been writing for the entertainment industry, he had never been wrong about a celebrity before and now it seemed that Magnus could be the first one.

“Okay, as you wish. Then I guess this is goodbye?”

“It is.”

“Well, thanks again for everything, Alec.” Magnus said, extending his hand in a friendly way.

Alec took a deep breath and grabbed it—the electric current he had felt the first time they had touched was still there and it was as unsettling as he remembered. “It was a pleasure meeting you.” Alec said, trying to be polite, but in truth, all he wanted was to run away from that house and never come back.

“Likewise, Alexander.” Magnus said with a smile.

Alec returned the smile, but turned around immediately. The ‘Alexander’ was back and it did things to him, so he just followed his team down the stairs and climbed into the magazine van before he allowed himself to breathe again.

The last few hours of his life were a bit hard to process, after the interview, Alec couldn’t match the opinion he had of Magnus Bane with the man he had just talked to for almost five hours. He was very confused. “Didn’t you guys find the interview a bit confusing?” Alec asked, looking for some guidance on what had just happened and why he felt the way he felt.

“Confusing?” Simon questioned as he started the van.

“Yes, the man we just interviewed is not the one the magazines and the media have been selling all these years.” Alec said, somewhat worried. “He’s different, I mean, you guys saw the way he answered all my questions, he’s clearly very polite, schooled, compassionate, committed...honest.”

“Isn’t that like a good thing?” Aline asked confused.
“No...” Alec whispered.

"Why not?” Simon and Aline asked in unison.

"Because that means he either lied to us or to everyone else.” Alec concluded.

That was what had been bothering him since they had wrapped the interview. He felt cheated. He had come here expecting to confirm the impression he had on the man, but had met a Magnus who didn’t quite fit the FPC mold, so either Magnus had been surprisingly honest with him and was really different from what Alec had thought or he had played pretend in these past hours just to charm them—Alec was inclined to believe it was the latter. At first, he had thought that he could read Magnus like an open book, but now that he thought about it, he knew he had been wrong. People couldn’t learn to read other people with only a few hours of knowing them...it was impossible. Right?

“I don't think he was lying,” Simon added, "my camera was on his face like all the time and I think he was being honest. You know how people say you can see when someone’s lying based only on their facial expressions? Well, I once read this book that described how FBI agents detected when someone was lying and it’s actually pretty simple. There are a series of facial expressions and associated reactions that are like these huge giveaways for them, like if a suspect’s eyes are darting back and forth when they're talking or if they are blinking rapidly, or-

“Simon…” Aline said to stop the rambling.

“Oh, okay...yeah, sorry, I can lend you guys the book later if you want, it's really interesting. But what I was trying to say is that I don’t think he was lying, in fact, I’m pretty sure he was being sincere. I think he's amazing, Alec.”

“Yeah, me too.” Aline agreed.

Apparently Magnus Bane had just won two new groupies for his army of crazy followers.

“I don’t know, guys...I wouldn't be so sure if I were you.” Alec shrugged, thinking that there was definitely something hidden behind that seemingly charming and honest personality. “He can’t be that amazing.”

“Why not?” Aline asked.

“Because he’s an actor.” Alec said as a matter of explanation.

“I thought you’d said that he wasn’t one?” Aline said, clearly remembering Alec’s words about Magnus’s acting skills—or lack thereof, for that matter. If Alec had said that Magnus wasn’t a good actor fifty times in the past few days, they were very few.

Alec exhaled loudly and looking out the window at the sun that was bathing the city with its warm light, he confessed. “Maybe I was wrong and he is, in fact, a very good actor.”
Chapter 3

I'm back!!! I really want to apologize for making you all wait for so long, but some things happened with this story and I needed some time to "fix" them. I'm not going to bore you with the details, if you want to know them you can always ask me about them on tumblr or twitter (find me as @msalexiscriss), but know that some of the things that I had originally planned for this fic changed (character-wise) and I had to sort everything out before continuing to post more chapters (it stressed me out not knowing how I was going to solve it). It's all fixed now, so I'll be able to update weekly as originally planned.

Anyway, enough about that, you have a chapter to read, so go on, read and enjoy! Please don't forget to share your thoughts in the comment section, give me some kudos, subscribe and/or bookmark the story!!! I'll see y'all this weekend for a new chapter!!!

Well, if life and work allow me, of course ;)

After the successful interview with Magnus Bane, the magazine was selling itself all over the city like fresh bread. Alec had been praised for his excellent work and professionalism, not only by his direct boss and parents, but by the entire executive board as well. In addition to all the recognition he was getting, he had received a financial compensation that had gone straight into his savings account and some extra points on his resume—what really mattered in the end.

All in all, the outcome of having interviewed Magnus Bane hadn’t been bad after all. Yes, he had had to endure a one-on-one session with the man, but he had gained a lot of prestige with it and now he was just one step closer to officially becoming the head writer of the magazine—a goal he had set for himself when he had agreed to work for his family's magazine. He just needed to get himself another huge exclusive and the position would be his. People would recognize his work everywhere and he would be remembered as the best writer of The Shadow World magazine, the now best-selling entertainment magazine in all of New York—and the country, for that matter.

With that last thought, Alec couldn't help but remember what Magnus had said during the interview, "we all are always looking for recognition," and a smile escaped from his lips. The superstar had been right all along, we all were always looking for someone to recognize what we did, and Alec couldn’t deny that he loved the feeling when it finally happened to you. It was exhilarating and very motivating, the best kind of reward after years and years of hard work.

He was so lost in thought that he didn’t hear when his sister walked into his office without knocking and sat on one of the chairs in front of his desk.

“Did you hear the news?” She asked, snapping him out of his thoughts. “Your favorite celebrity of all time has just announced his tour dates.”

“He’s not my favorite celebrity.” Alec immediately said, rolling his eyes dramatically to emphasize his annoyance at such insinuation. Magnus Bane would never in a million years be his favorite celebrity. In fact, Alec didn’t even have a favorite celebrity. He wrote for the entertainment business, but that didn’t mean he was interested in it.
“But you do know who I’m talking about, so you mustn’t hate him that much.” Izzy said, giving Alec some knowingly eyes.

Alec rolled his eyes again, his sister could be very annoying when she so wanted to. “I wrote a fifteen pages long article about the man, Iz, and I don’t know if you’ve been living under a rock or something for the past week, but it’s selling all over the country like fresh bread. Of course I knew that his tour was coming, that’s why his people wanted our past issue to be all about him—to promote him. Besides, it’s kind of impossible not to know what he’s going to do next. I mean, Max, you and half this office are all day gushing about him and—"

"We are not." Izzy protested.

"Yes, you are, and even when you are not, I can't really avoid him. I mean, the guy is everywhere—ads, posters, billboards, magazines, online articles and even cereal boxes. Magnus’s face pops up around this city like daisies in the spring."

"Well, it's true, but at least he has a very pretty face." Izzy admitted with a mischievous smile.

"Hmmm, if you say so." Alec said, trying to sound nonchalant.

"Oh, come on, Alec! I get that you don't like the guy because you think he’s one of those plastic celebrities who got everything on a silver platter, but come on, big brother, don’t disappoint me! You like men and he’s one piece of a sexy man. He’s gorgeous with a capital G! You were inches away from his face, there's no way you didn’t notice his good looks."

"Okay, fine, the guy is handsome, so what?"

"Nothing, I just wanted you to admit it." Izzy said, giggling.

Alec rolled his eyes for the third time in a span of less than five minutes. “You’re impossible, did you know that?” He told his sister.

“Look who’s talking, Mr. Impossible himself.” She retorted. “No, but really, I don’t get why you hate him so much. He kind of proved that he's not the diva-star you thought he was."

“He may not be that much of a diva, but he's not that amazing angel you all think he is. I don’t know why, but I'm sure he’s hiding something.”

Izzy frowned.

“Why else do you think he refuses to answer questions about his family and personal life? Because he’s hiding something, Iz! He sells this image of a perfect man, but in reality, I think that Magnus Bane is a lot less perfect than all of you, crazy people, think he is."

"How are you so sure about it?"

"First, because the man is a complete mystery, nobody knows anything about him, which, let’s be honest, is quite rare nowadays for celebrities with social media and all that. We've talked about this, a celebrity whose personal life isn’t documented and exposed by its own fans on social media can’t be considered famous, but Magnus is famous, so the fact that there's nothing of him online is strange to say the least. And second, because nobody can be that perfect, Iz. There must be something there, what? I don't know, but my journalistic instincts tell me that there's a part of him that he hides for a very mysterious reason."

"Couldn't that reason be that he just enjoys some privacy? He’s human too, you know?"
"I thought about that, but isn't it contradictory that a guy who wants to have a very private personal life invites the media to his own house? He's certainly not worried about protecting his privacy completely, is he? He's hiding something, Iz, of that I'm sure. In fact, I think that whatever he's trying to hide from the public eye, he's hiding it in plain sight. He's very good at deceiving, I noticed that about him during the interview. He's confident and sure of himself, but his carefree and relaxed attitude is just a facade, a cover to divert attention from something. What? I don't know, but there's definitely something there."

Izzy sighed. "I think this time you're really reaching."

"I'm not."

"Alec, I know you, when you don't like someone you invest an excessive amount of time analyzing that person just to discredit them and, to be honest, that's not healthy. I mean, it's obvious that you don't care about this guy and that you'll probably never see him again, and yet, you're still here trying to prove he's a liar and not the person he claims to be."

"I'm not trying to prove anything, and I wasn't the one who came into my office to share some gossip about him. I do not follow his career at all or listen to his music. Who's the one investing an excessive amount of time on the guy, huh? Certainly not me. Yes, I interviewed him, I wrote an article about him and like any other I've ever written, as soon as it was published, I completely forgot about it. Right now, I was just expressing my opinion about him because you mentioned him."

"Fine, fine, dial it down a notch, okay?" Izzy said. "I admit that I follow his career, listen to his music, and that I was the one who came into your office to talk about him, but I just did it because I thought you'd like to hear the news before anyone else."

"Before anyone else? Should I remind you that I already knew about his tour?"

"I know you knew, but did you know that he's going to do more than a hundred concerts around the world, including venues in Asia and Europe, and all in like five months or so?"

"What!?!" Alec exclaimed quite shocked, because, well, it was clear that he didn't know that much about the upcoming tour. He knew it was going to be somehow long, Magnus had said so himself during the interview; he was going to visit some countries he hadn't visited during his first tour and he had made sure to share with Alec how excited he was about that, but doing more than a hundred concerts in a matter of months was insane. Some renowned artists did tours with twice as many concerts all the time, but it took them a year or sometimes more to finish them, not months. Who did Magnus Bane think he was to do so many concerts? The late Michael Jackson?

"What you heard, big bro, and that's not all." Izzy added, making a dramatic pause for effect—her specialty. "He already sold out half of the venues."

"You're kidding, right?"

"No, I'm not. He broke a new record and everything. They just announced the tickets half an hour ago, so this is going to generate a lot of buzz. Clary, Simon, Jace, and I wanted to go to at least one of the concerts he's going to give here in the city, but when we tried buying seats, there were no tickets left. Then we tried the ones in New Jersey and Washington D.C., but they had sold out as well—not even Max with his fangirl skills got tickets."

"Really?" Alec was asking when Lindsay, his mother's assistant, poked her head through the door.

"Alec, Izzy...we have a meeting in five minutes in the conference room. There are some big news
"Our parents? Both of them? What happened?" Alec asked intrigued. The fact that both his parents were going to be together at the meeting was big news already—that never happened. Alec couldn’t remember the last time such a thing had taken place. Staff meetings usually only involved Aldertree or Alec’s mother in very extreme cases, but never Alec’s father. Robert Lightwood was like this kind of mythical presence within the magazine—everyone knew he was there, but nobody ever saw him.

"All in good time." Lindsay said without elaborating.

"Don't be like that! Tell us!" Izzy demanded.

"Yes, tell us!"

Lindsay, besides being known as Maryse’s shadow was also known as the ears behind each and every wall inside the Shadow World building. To this day, Alec still didn't know how she did it, but she always knew in advance all the gossip that reached the halls of the magazine.

"Don't be so impatient, you will find out soon enough. In five minutes to be precise," she said, glancing at her watch, "well, more like three." She corrected herself and walked away.

Alec and Izzy shared confused looks and stood up, exiting the office and heading to this meeting as fast as they could.

When Alec and Izzy entered the conference room, they noticed that not only the writers and designers had been called for the meeting, but also the entire executive board, as well as the creative staff, including some of the interns who mainly worked helping with the official website and handling their social media accounts.

"All of you who can, please do us the favor of taking a seat. We're going to start the meeting." Alec’s mother said in a firm voice, and everyone in the room immediately began to sit down following her orders.

Alec and Izzy limited themselves to stand next to Jace, Clary, Simon, and Aline, trying not to generate more chaos than the one already reigning in the overcrowded room.

“Good morning everyone.” Maryse said, when the noise in the room ceased and everyone seemed to have taken their places. She was standing at the head of the table with Robert and the executive board sitting right behind her.

“Morning.” A few brave employees dared to respond, but the room remained mostly silent.

It was not a secret that almost everyone in the office was afraid of Maryse Lightwood. Maryse was a very strict and intimidating woman and she always demanded high quality in all the articles that the magazine published. Usually, when someone didn’t do what she had asked for, they ended up losing their jobs or writing alongside the interns as punishment, but deep down, Alec knew that she was less strict than she appeared to be. She just loved her job so much and was so passionate about it that she had the pressing need to deliver everything beyond the standards of perfection.

"We call you all in here because there is a big announcement to make and before this information reaches the other media outlets, we wanted you to hear it from us." Maryse continued. She looked genuinely excited, as did Alec’s father and the other four executives of whom Alec always forgot their names. They all had similar expressions of excitement on their faces. Alec knew that this was
something big or else his father wouldn’t be in the room and Aldertree wouldn’t look like if he were about to explode with happiness.

"This morning..." Maryse continued, "we received a very important and unexpected call. It is no secret that since last month's issue was published our sales have improved considerably and we have consolidated ourselves as the best entertainment magazine in all New York." She said with pride.

"Wait to hear what's next." Alec heard Lindsay whisper to Duncan.

"And only the best magazine in the city could have been chosen to do what has been offered to us today." Maryse said, making a dramatic pause just to leave everyone holding their breath. "The Shadow World magazine will be covering Mr. Magnus Bane’s world tour." She finally announced.

"What!?" The whole room exploded with cheers and expressions of surprise—Alec included. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. Despite his evident disdain for Magnus, Alec couldn't deny that these were incredible news for the magazine. Covering a superstar's world tour was something big, they were going to be unstoppable after this.

"I know, I know..." Maryse said, trying to silence the room that was practically buzzing with all the chattering going on at the same time. "This is a great opportunity for our magazine. We are the only media outlet that will be allowed to be there and, as you already know, Mr. Bane will give more than a hundred concerts around the globe, including some very important venues in Europe, Asia, and Oceania. This is the largest and most important coverage that this magazine has ever done, and, therefore, we have a huge responsibility ahead of us."

Raj, who couldn’t keep his mouth shut when something big happened, raised his hand to indicate he wanted to talk.

"Yes, Raj?" Maryse said, looking at him as if trying not to lose her patience already.

"Maryse, those are great, great news." Raj exclaimed rather enthusiastically. "I’m sure that with that coverage we will sell magazines as if they were free tickets for a Broadway opening night, but I can’t help but wonder...who is or will be the journalists in charge of covering this amazing tour? I must say that I have Magnus’s biography memorized by heart. I know all about the guy and I could definitely cover those twenty-four weeks of touring. Because I don't know if you all know, but he will be on tour for twenty-four weeks, starting at the end of June and ending in early December for a total of 112 concerts in a span of 164 days." He said, showing off that he knew all about Magnus’s tour and blatantly volunteering himself for the task.

"Thank you for the accurate data, Raj. I don't doubt that you know a lot about Mr. Bane." Maryse said, and Raj smiled pleased with himself. "But..." Alec’s mother continued, “if what you’re saying is true, then you must know that Mr. Bane is very, very specific when it comes to these kinds of things and, as per usual, he made a special request for this coverage."

With that last part, Alec found himself holding his breath. He didn’t know why, but he had a bad hunch about this and was already anticipating what his mother was going to say.

"He requested that the same team that did the previous interview was in charge of this coverage.” Maryse said, looking directly at Alec.

“What?” Alec couldn’t help but exclaim. He had already anticipated that something like that would happen. Magnus had clearly said during their first encounter that he didn’t like to be interviewed, but that he had liked his experience with Alec; it was only natural that if the magazine was going to be in charge of covering his tour and interviewing him continuously, he requested someone with whom he
had felt comfortable the first time.

“What you heard, Mr. Lightwood, you are the chosen one. Well, you and the team you took to the first interview.” Maryse added, pointing to Simon and Aline, who had huge grins on their faces. “Mr. Bane specifically requested for you to do the coverage for the magazine. It is a big deal for us all, so I expect only the best. Mr. Aldertree will give you all the specific details as soon as this meeting is over, but bear in mind that you will be taking an additional photographer and cameraman with you for the tour and that you’ll be directly responsible for them all. We are aware that it’s a lot of work for such a small team, but we are confident that you will make us all proud.”

Izzy, Jace, and Clary immediately hugged Alec to congratulate him on the amazing opportunity the magazine had given him, and the next thing Alec knew, he was being hugged by every person in the room—including his parents and the other four executives.

Apparently it was not a drill and he would be covering one of the most ambitious and lucrative tours in recent years. He was going to be the journalist to document it. And despite the incredible opportunity he knew he had before him, Alec still couldn’t be completely thrilled with it, not because these weren’t great news for the magazine and for himself as a professional, but because he had just realized that he was going to be stuck with none other than Magnus Bane for twenty-something weeks—or 164 days as Raj had pointed out.

“Now, please. We will need the support of all of you,” Maryse continued, “Ms. Branwell, you will take over Mr. Lightwood’s column for the next five months and Ms. Harris will help you. The rest of you,” she said, pointing to the other group of people, “well, you’ll have to work extra hard, especially those who are in charge of the most read sections of the magazine and our website updates.” She added, giving all the interns a warning look. “Mr. Aldertree will give you more details later in other meetings we will have to discuss this exclusive, but we’ll be posting daily articles with exclusive material on our website and social media platforms, so start getting ready to work as slaves for the next twenty-four weeks.”

Some nervous laughs were heard and Alec had to take a deep breath to calm himself a bit while his mother kept talking and giving instructions. He really had no idea how he was going to survive those long weeks that he now had ahead of him. The five hours he had been with Magnus a couple of weeks ago had been a living hell and now he was going to spend months—five to be precise—alone with the same man. If he was honest with himself, right now, he would change his position with any of the interns without even thinking about it. He’d rather work as a slave locked in one of those small offices on the third floor of the building than as an uncuffed prisoner following Magnus Bane all over the world like some crazy groupie.

“Mr. Lightwood, please stay here so Mr. Aldertree can give you specific instructions and all the details you’ll need for this exclusive. The rest of you, go back to work and wait for instructions. You’re dismissed.” Maryse said, ending the meeting.

Alec just sighed and closed his eyes—this was a nightmare.

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The conference room took some time to empty, getting everyone out after the good news they had shared was quite the challenge, everyone wanted to know more about the exclusive and how they had gotten it, but once the last person left, Aldertree closed the door of the now empty room behind them and asked Alec to take a seat at the table.

“People are really excited about this.” Aldertree said, sitting down in front of Alec.
“It is a big deal,” Alec said, “they have every reason to be.”

“Yeah.” Aldertree agreed, but said nothing more.

Alec remained silent just watching his boss take out some documents from one of the many sealed envelopes he had with him and placing them neatly on the table. He looked like a poker player getting ready to show his best hand.

“You must have made quite the impression with Mr. Bane when you first interviewed him,” Aldertree said after a while, “I'm not going to lie, this really came as an unexpected surprise for us.”

“Wait, the magazine didn’t try to get this?” Alec asked confused. His mother had said during the meeting that they had received an unexpected call to offer them the exclusive, but he had thought she meant that the magazine had made the offer first and that Magnus’s people had unexpectedly accepted their offer this morning.

“No, nobody knew the exact date in which he’d be announcing his tour or how many dates this would have, so all media outlets were waiting for the official announcement to make an offer. Not all magazines and mass media can cover more than a hundred concerts around the world, it's a very expensive tour.” Aldertree explained.

“So his team called to offer it to us?”

Aldertree just nodded.

“Why?”

“Well, I have no way of being sure since I don't know what were the reasons that Mr. Bane and his team had to specifically choose us, but if I'm allowed to speculate, I suppose they must have liked the way you handled the first interview. Anyway, there are a lot of things we have to discuss and sort out in order to start preparing for this exclusive, so let’s begin, shall we?”

Alec nodded. He was slightly overwhelmed with everything that was happening, from the big opportunity that he and the magazine had with this exclusive, to how weird this whole situation was. Magnus’s team had given them the exclusive just like that and Alec really wanted to know why.

“During the brief online meeting we had with Mr. Bane’s manager this morning we were informed that they would cover the cost of lodging and transportation for you and your team during the twenty-four weeks that the tour will last, which, of course, is quite beneficial for us. We don’t want to start spending the money we’re just getting, do we?” Aldertree said.

“I guess not.”

“However, it's important that you know that the magazine will cover all the additional expenses that you and your team could have during the duration of the tour. You'll be away for a very long time, but you'll have a budget and the magazine will provide everything that you may need no matter where you are. Also, as you mother informed you during the previous meeting, you’ll take with you an additional photographer and a cameraman to help you with the coverage and, as the official journalist behind the exclusive, you’ll be directly responsible for them all. So make sure you set your limits and parameters right off the bat, I don’t want any kind of internal drama during the following months, understood?”

Alec nodded. “Can I take another writer with me?”

“No, Mr. Bane’s team only authorized two more people. His manager originally only wanted a team
of three, but we told him that given how big the venues were, it was going to be very difficult for just one photographer and one cameraman to cover the whole tour, so he agreed to let us take two more people at most. It’s a very long tour and due to the logistics of it they can’t take a lot of people with them, hence why they requested a discreet team, Mr. Lightwood. I’m sure you understand.”

“I do, so just me.”

“We’re confident you can handle it. Anyway, in addition to Mr. Lewis and Ms. Penhallow, the board has decided that you’ll take Ms. Roberts and Ms. Blackthorn with you. I understand that you’ve worked with them before for some of your interviews?”

“Yes!” Alec exclaimed, perhaps with more enthusiasm than he should show, but hearing that he would be on this long adventure with some of his closest friends made him extremely happy. Maia and Helen, as well as Aline, Simon, and even Clary were his best friends in the office after his siblings. Being with four of them in this project gave him some sort of relief, of course he would have loved to take Izzy, Jace, Clary and even Max with them as well, but he understood that it was not possible.

“Here are the details that Mr. Bane’s manager sent us this morning. This is the general information about the tour,” Aldertree said, giving him some documents with dates, locations and general stuff about the tour, “and here,” he added, handing him a sealed envelope, “are the specific instructions you’ll need for the coverage.”

“Do I have to pass this on to Simon, Aline, Maia, and Helen?” Alec asked.

“No, a similar envelope will be given to each member of your team later today, we just wanted to talk to you first because the responsibility of this exclusive will fall on your shoulders and because...well, we need you to sign this to make it official.” Aldertree said, placing what appeared to be a contract in front of Alec. “It’s a non-disclosure agreement like the one you signed for the first interview you had with Mr. Bane.” He added.

Alec frowned. A non-disclosure agreement seemed like a bit too much for this. It was true that Alec had signed one for the first interview he had had with Magnus, but he hadn’t found it strange since the interview had taken place in the actor slash singer’s own house. It had made sense that Magnus’s team had had the need to protect their client’s privacy, but now? What could Alec possibly discover or hear during the tour that had Magnus’s team trying to do damage control so far in advance? Why did they have the need to protect themselves like this?

“What if I don’t sign it?” Alec wondered out loud.

“Well, if that were the case, we would lose the exclusive. Mr. Bane’s conditions weren’t many, but they were oddly specific. First, you had to be the one to do the coverage, and second, you and your team had to sign an NDA—no questions asked. If you don’t agree to his terms, then there’s no deal. We lose the exclusive.”

Alec rolled his eyes, apparently he had no choice. “So either I sign or I sign.” He said.

Aldertree nodded.

Alec sighed, he hated these entitled celebrities who thought they were so important that they could force people to do whatever the hell they wanted. He really hated them.

“Here’s a pen.” Aldertree said, handing him his pen.

Alec took it and quickly read the NDA. Magnus was protecting himself from everything Alec or
anyone from The Shadow World magazine could learn about him or his team during the tour. By signing this document, Alec agreed not to disclose any additional details of the tour and or Magnus's personal life, limiting himself to only publish the content that Magnus's team and Magnus himself authorized. He had to recognize that it was a very smart move, but a bit dangerous for them as a media outlet. The fine for violation of any of the clauses of that agreement was quite significant, the amount exceeded what the magazine generated annually in profits, so it was something they wouldn’t be able to afford if things went wrong.

“Can I ask for something in exchange for this?” Alec asked, quickly making up his mind. It was clear that he had no choice but to accept the terms that Magnus had set for this exclusive, but that didn't mean he couldn’t take advantage of the situation. It wasn't like him to do this kind of thing, but if Magnus was going to force him not only to go on this tour with him but to sign this confidentiality agreement, then at least he wanted to get something out of it.

“I beg your pardon?” Aldertree asked confused.

“I'll sign whatever he wants and I'll do the coverage for the magazine without asking questions, but in exchange I want tickets for one of his shows here in New York.”

Aldertree chuckled. “Are you seriously asking for tickets for one of his shows?”

“Yes.” Alec said firmly. “For my family. It is, to my knowledge, that most venues have sold out already, but I’m sure Mr. Bane and his team can do something about it and get me some tickets.”

Aldertree stared at him for a few seconds. “I guess I could try to call his manager.”

“Then call him.” Alec said, putting down the pen that Aldertree had given him on the table.

He had no idea where all this defiance was coming from, but he really wanted to get something out of this. He wasn’t a fan of the man, but he knew of some people who would be thrilled to hear that they’d be going to one of Magnus's concerts after all—especially a little someone who already knew all the songs of the new album and that happened to have some sort of shrine of the man in his very own room.

“Mr. Lightwood, I don’t think you are in the position to make demands.” Aldertree said.

“Am I not?” Alec retorted. “If I understood what you said, Magnus will only let us have the exclusive of his tour if I do the coverage and sign this NDA, I think that puts me in the position to make as many demands as I want. You better than anyone know that as a journalist, signing any kind of confidentiality agreement is like voluntarily cutting off your own wings, so I think asking for something in exchange for that isn’t actually that much to ask. Besides, I’m not asking for money or anything out of this world, just tickets for one of his shows in New York. I need four. That’s all.” He said, thinking of Max, Izzy, Jace, and Clary, since the rest of his friends would be with him backstage.

“So you’re serious about this.”

“Yes.” Alec said, holding his gaze firmly. It was always a bad idea to defy his boss, but today he felt brave and wanted, besides getting something for his family, to make some sort of statement—to at least let it be known that he couldn’t be forced or handled by some pseudo-celebrity.

Aldertree looked at him for what felt like an eternity and, after sighing loudly, picked up the phone and called his assistant, asking him to get him Mr. Bane’s manager on the line immediately.

The phone rang less than two minutes later.
“Mr. Fell.” Aldertree exclaimed when he answered the call. He sounded too excited to talk to him, something Alec knew couldn’t be further from the truth. “Victor Aldertree from the Shadow World Magazine, sir.” He said.

Alec just stayed there listening to one side of the conversation and getting increasingly nervous because, what if they said no? What if they refused to comply with Alec’s demands and they ended up losing the exclusive? He hadn’t thought of that when he had opened his mouth. His parents would kill him if, because of him, the magazine lost the exclusive, not to mention that he would probably have to look for a new job because the executive board would fire him before he could open his mouth to say sorry.

“Yes, we’re about to send you all the signed documentation with one of our messengers. I'm only calling because there is a small problem with our writer.” Aldertree said, looking at Alec. “No, not at all, sir, he's free to do the coverage, this is more about the NDA you requested.” He said. "I’m sure you understand that for a journalist, to sign any kind of confidentiality agreement isn't easy, these documents are a restriction, an obstacle to good journalism and Mr. Lightwood will be under the clauses of this particular agreement for a considerable period of time.”

_Five months to be precise._ Alec thought.

"No, no, he has agreed to sign it, but he does have a small demand in exchange for it.”

Alec held his breath.

“He was wondering if you could, by any chance, get him four tickets for one of Mr. Bane’s shows in the city.” Aldertree said.

Now that Alec was listening to his own demand out loud, it sounded a bit stupid and maybe even childish, but he tried not to show his emotions and kept holding his gaze. He did want those tickets for his family—they deserved them.

“Of course, we understand.” Aldertree continued.

Alec had no idea what Magnus’s manager was saying, but he hoped it was good news.

“Yes, yes, of course. Thank you very much, Mr. Fell. Our messenger will be in your office in no time, our lawyers have already reviewed all the documentation and everything seems to be in order. In fact, the executive board has already signed the contract and we’re just making our personnel sign the confidentiality agreements.”

Alec shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

“Will do, and thank you again for this opportunity, we’ll be in touch. Have a good day, sir.” Aldertree said, hanging up.

Alec looked at him impatiently.

“It’s done, you got your tickets for the first show. VIP tickets. Happy?“

Alec didn’t reply and instead just signed the NDA. “Thank you.” He told his boss, handing him the signed confidentiality agreement.

Aldertree rolled his eyes, but grabbed the document. “Anyway, for the duration of the tour you’ll be reporting directly to me and I will personally supervise all the material that we publish. Someone from Mr. Bane’s promo team will be working alongside with us to ensure that the content we share
meets Mr. Bane’s requirements, however, I need you to read very carefully the envelope I gave you so that you know your limits. The deal that the magazine negotiated with Mr. Bane consists of a series of daily articles, starting on June 25 and ending on December 5; behind the scenes content—video and photographs; monthly articles; and at least one column and one interview per week. We’re also going to publish a special edition of our magazine with exclusive material never seen before after the tour ends, so in addition to all of the above, you will have to work on that as well. I know it’s a lot of work for just one man, but you’ll have our entire support to make this work.”

“Okay.” Alec said. It was a lot of work for just one man for sure, but he knew he could manage. “Is that all?”

“For now, yes. Tomorrow we’ll have another meeting with you and your team to discuss the plan we’re going to follow for this exclusive, talk about the budget and make sure that you all have the required equipment to do your job.”

“Okay.”

“You should probably start preparing some material for the first few days, I’m sure you have additional notes that you didn’t use for your first article about him. From what I understand, you won’t have much time with him during the first few concerts, so you’ll have to improvise a bit. I also need you to coordinate with Ms. Branwell as soon as possible. As your mother informed you during the meeting, she’ll be in charge of your column during your long absence, so I need you to give her all your notes. Have you finished your article for the issue we’re working on?”

“Yes, well, I’m still editing it, but I can have it ready by the end of the day.”

“Perfect, email it to me so I can approve it and, please, don’t work on the next one. Leave that one to Ms. Branwell, I need you completely focused on this.”

Alec nodded. “Okay, so I’m gonna go to my office to finish my article and give Lydia my notes.” He said, because he needed some air. He was feeling a bit dizzy with everything that was happening.

“Yes, I’ll stop by your office later to give you a copy of the documentation you signed and the tickets you requested.”

“Oh, they’re sending them today?” Alec asked surprised.

“Yes, Mr. Bane's manager said that whatever you wanted would be provided as soon as possible, and since we're sending them all the documentation today, they're gonna send us the tickets with our messenger. As I said, I think you caused a very good impression during your first meeting with Mr. Bane,” Aldertree said, “make sure you take advantage of that when you’re covering the tour, maybe you can get something useful from it.”

Alec just nodded and stood up to leave. Now more than ever he needed some air.

"And, Mr. Lightwood?"

"Yes?"

"I know you signed the NDA, but this is a huge opportunity to finally show the world a little bit more of Magnus Bane. It won't be easy, but if you're smart and earn his trust, you could convince him to let you publish some private and intimate details about him.” Aldertree said with a smile. "I'm trusting that this," he added, grabbing the confidentiality agreement that Alec had just signed, "won't stop you from doing what any other journalist in your place would do."
"I..." Alec said, shaking his head at the suggestion that his boss had just made to expose Magnus Bane to the world. *Who did he think Alec was, some kind of tabloid journalist?*

"You're good at what you do, but if you ever want to become the head writer of this magazine as I'm sure you do, you'll have to learn to stop playing by the rules. I know it sounds wrong, but that's how this business works, and I think it's time for you to start...getting your hands dirty, if you know what I mean."

"Hmmm, I'll see you later." Alec just said, because seriously, *what the hell had all that been about?*

"I'm serious, Alec."

"I know you are." He answered, walking out of the conference room and closing the door behind him.

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When Alec left the office and took the subway back home, his mind was still a mess. A part of him knew that had been chosen to cover Magnus’s world tour was a great, if not momentous, opportunity for his career, but the other part of him was still struggling with the fact that he was going to spend five months of his life practically breathing the same air as that man. Call him childish or ridiculous, but that was something he couldn’t be excited about, not even when all his family and friends insisted he was the luckiest guy on the planet.

Right now, he didn’t feel lucky at all.

When the subway arrived at his station, Alec rushed out of the train and made his way home. The station was only a block away from his building, so it took him almost no time to get home. He needed a hot bath and a good night's sleep to try to get used to the idea that at this time, in two weeks, he would be packing to leave with Magnus and his team to the endless tour. And although he loved to travel and knew that he was going to visit places he never thought he would have the opportunity to visit, he wasn’t sure if some of his travel companions—namely Magnus and company—were the best he could have asked for.

Alec opened the front door of his building and took the elevator to get to his apartment. When the doors opened on the 6th floor, Alec was surprised to find his neighbor standing outside his door.

“Hi, Alec!” The woman greeted him with enthusiasm, she was carrying a bowl with some food. “I was just knocking on your door. I made some lasagna and I know you love it, so I brought a little for you, I thought you were home already.”

“Good evening, Mrs. Johannes. I had to stay late at the office, but come inside, please.” He said politely. “How have you been?”

“Fine, and you, dear? How was your day?”

“Fine,” Alec replied, “well, I’ve had betters, but come inside and I’ll tell you all about it while we eat that delicious food.” He said, opening the door.

Mrs. Johannes didn't hesitate and immediately entered Alec’s apartment, making herself at home. After almost five years of knowing each other, Mrs. Johannes knew her way around the small apartment and felt comfortable in it.

“I’ll go change very quick, but you know where everything is, I’ll be right back, okay?” Alec
announced and walked to his room.

Once inside, he changed his clothes as fast as he could and placed his bag and the envelope containing all the details about Magnus’s tour on top of his bed. He would have time to read everything in detail later before going to sleep.

“So…” Alec said, walking out of his room and heading to the kitchen to help his neighbor fetch the plates and serve dinner. Mrs. Johannes was somewhere in the living room watering the few plants Alec still had. She liked to do that, she always said that Alec shouldn’t have plants at all, since he never took care of them, but even so, she helped him water them every time she had the chance.

“I put the food in the oven.” She said, as if explaining why she was now watering the plants.

“Okay, you want something to drink?”

“Just water.”

“Sparkling or still?”

“Still. You were saying that your day wasn’t good, what happened?”

“Do you remember what I told you about the man I interviewed a few weeks ago?”

Mrs. Johannes nodded. “The famous singer you don’t like?”

“The very same…” Alec exhaled, “well, guess what?”

“Are you going to interview him again?”

“Not precisely,” Alec said, pouring his neighbor a glass of water and getting some orange juice for himself—he needed the sugar in his system. “He’ll go on a five-month tour around the world in a couple of weeks and I was chosen to cover the event.”

“Oh! That’s great, isn't it?”

“Professionally? Yes, it's a great opportunity. Personally? No.”

“Why?”

Alec just shrugged.

“You're not very excited about this, are you?” Mrs. Johannes asked.

“No, I’m not, but I guess I’ll have to resign myself to do it anyway, right? Work is work.”

“Don’t look at it like that, you should think of this as an opportunity—both professionally and personally. You’re going to travel around the world covering the tour of an international star, you're going to see the world while doing what you're most passionate about: your work. Opportunities like these don’t happen twice in life, Alec. Put aside all the negative things that you think this experience has and enjoy it instead of suffering it.”

“It’s a good advice.” Alec said, although he wasn’t sure if he would be able to follow it.

“Of course it is, besides...think about it, you’re going to visit a lot of places and meet new people, isn’t that like paid vacations?”
Alec chuckled. “Well, yes, but when you’re on vacation you’re with people you actually like, and remember that I hate this guy.”

“No, you don’t hate him.” Mrs. Johannes said sure of herself. “You just don’t like him. Hate is a very strong feeling that one must never hold in its heart, only bad people can feel hatred and you’re a good person, Alec.” She said with a smile.

“Do you really think I’m a good person?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Johannes nodded frantically, “I can see it in your eyes, dear, there’s pure goodness in you.” She said, making Alec blush. “That’s why you’re my friend.”

“Thank you.” Alec smiled.

“And you could be his friend too.”

“Ohose?”

“The singer.” Mrs. Johannes said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“I don’t think so. We have nothing in common, we could never be friends.”

“How are you so sure about that if you don’t even know him? Besides, why do you need to have something in common to be someone’s friend?”

“Because…” Alec hesitated a little, “having something in common helps you build a strong friendship. If you don’t have something that you both like, then you can get bored pretty easily and friendships aren’t supposed to be boring.” Alec tried to explain although he wasn’t sure if he was making any sense.

Mrs. Johannes laughed. “You, young people, think things too much, you take life too seriously. Friendships work best when built on common ground, that’s true, but that doesn’t mean they can’t exist between two people who apparently have nothing in common. Your friendship can be what you two share and then, over time, you can discover things you both enjoy and create that common ground that was missing. I know you don’t like this guy, but he could turn out to be someone you actually enjoy spending time with...people have the ability to surprise you in the most unexpected ways and when you least expect it.”

Alec chuckled. “I can never win a battle with you, can I? You always have good advice to give.”

“It comes with age.” She smiled.

“Why do you want me to be friends with him?”

“Because you’re going to be away for many months and you’re going to miss home and feel lonely. I don’t want you to feel lonely, so having a new friend could help you.” Mrs. Johannes said, taking the food out of the oven.

“I won’t be alone, some other people from the magazine are coming with me and they’re all my friends...really close friends.”

“That’s good, but new friends are always better when you’re embarking on a new adventure. Having someone new in your life whenever you start something is always the best way to make that new beginning something memorable, believe me.”
“I’ll think about it.”

“Don’t think about it.” She said, placing a plate with lasagna in front of Alec—it looked delicious. “If you think about it, then you’ll never be his friend, just go for it without thinking. Stop using your brain to make decisions for once and see what happens.”

“Okay.” Alec lied, not wanting to crush Mrs. Johannes' hopes. “I’ll try.”

“Good, and maybe someday he can even make it there.” She pointed to the wall where Alec had all the pictures of his friends and family. Only very important people in his life made it to that wall. That tiny space was the most valuable place in his home—a physical extension of his heart. “Can you imagine having a famous friend there? That would be a good addition to your collection.”

Alec just rolled his eyes and laughed, taking a bite of his food to avoid replying. He might find common ground with Magnus during the tour, even build a cordial professional relationship with him for the sake of his own mental health, but he was one hundred percent sure that Magnus Bane was never going to make it to that wall...not ever.

Late that night, when Alec was getting ready for bed, he opened the envelope that Aldertree had given him and read all the information about Magnus’s world tour in more detail. Like the last time, Magnus wasn't demanding a lot of things, just the usual stuff. He asked Alec, and consequently the magazine, to keep all the information that would be published in the daily updates, videos, weekly columns and monthly articles strictly about the tour and, in exchange, he would give Alec all the interviews he asked for and his team would be able to take pictures and videos of everything that happened during the tour—backstage, concerts, rehearsals, and even some parts during the many flights they'd have. Obviously, all the articles, pictures and videos would have to be approved by Magnus's team before publishing them, but Alec wasn't expecting anything less.

"At least he's willing to make this work." Alec said out loud. At first he had thought that thanks to the confidentiality agreement that he had been forced to sign they would be limited with the footage that they would be allowed to take and publish, but apparently that wasn’t the case.

Attached to that list of 'to do's and not to do's' there was also a copy of the full itinerary of the tour, with flight schedules, transportation, hotels, and even a meal plan—everything was planned down to the smallest detail. According to what Alec was reading, he and his team would be traveling and staying with Magnus’s closest circle, so most of their expenses had already been covered by Magnus’s team to avoid any kind of conflict with the itinerary and ensure that everything ran like clockwork.

"Some paid vacations..." Alec thought, remembering Mrs. Johannes's words and scanning the crazy schedule.

The tour obviously started in New York City with three concerts at Madison Square Garden. Then, they would be moving to New Jersey, where Magnus would be giving two concerts at the iconic MetLife Stadium to later move to Washington DC, where he was booked to be at the now Capital One Arena previously the Verizon Center for two more concerts. From there, the tour was going to be a series of concerts across the country. Plane after plane, Alec knew he would be spending more time in the air than in the states he was going to be visiting.

Major cities such as Chicago, Miami, and Las Vegas were scheduled to have three or four concerts each, but that didn’t mean much rest for Magnus and the entire team, on the contrary, it meant staying a few more days in each city and traveling right after the last concert without time to even
catch their breath. Los Angeles, which was the last city on the US leg of the tour, had five concerts scheduled with some days of rest that Magnus would be using for other interviews, promotion, and the taping of a music video. Then they would fly to Canada for seven concerts in the most important cities and after a few days, jump on a plane to go to some countries in Latin America and later across the world to Japan, China, Singapore, and Indonesia.

According to Magnus’s schedule, by the beginning of the twentieth week they would have to be taking a flight to Australia for a series of six concerts and then the tour would reach its final leg in Europe, with concerts in Germany, Italy, Spain, France, Netherlands, Scotland, Ireland and finally London, where Magnus would be giving three final concerts in the iconic O2 arena.

It was obvious that Alec would have some very difficult and chaotic months starting in two weeks. The schedule was very tight with little to no time to rest for anyone, but he understood why they had squeezed all the concerts that way—Magnus had to be back in New York before the end of the year to promote his new film. That new action movie that everyone was talking about and in which he shared credits with his ex-girlfriend Camille Belcourt.

Alec sighed, wondering if during the tour he would be forced to endure and document the impending ‘reconciliation’ between those two ‘lovebirds.’

“Please no.” He asked the universe.

He still had a few more days of freedom, so he put all the information about Magnus’s tour on his nightstand—next to the VIP tickets he planned to give his family tomorrow after their traditional Thursday dinner—and turned off the lights. His head was killing him and the last thing he wanted at the moment was to think about what the future held for him, so he just closed his eyes and tried to enjoy the few nights he still had to sleep in his own bed. Because it didn't matter how much he dreaded the moment, at this same time, in two weeks, he was going to be sleeping in a hotel room very far away from home.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Hello!!! I'm back!!! I'm sorry for the delay...again, but life is a bitch and there's little I can do about it, so please don't kill me, I'm trying, I promise. I know I said I would post weekly updates, but my boss decided that my plans didn't go along with his and these last two weeks have been a nightmare. I'm going to try to find a way for my schedule to work so that I can have some more time to write, just bear with me, okay? This adult thing ain't as easy as it sounds.

Anyway...let's move on to what matters: the story. I know some of you think that the tour starts in this chapter, but unfortunately (or not, depending on how you see it) we're not there yet. This chapter is about the night before the first concert, I know you're desperate for some malec, but this chapter needed to happen to establish some things of the plot and make it more entertaining, you'll see why once you read it. But don't worry, malec is coming, CH5 marks the beginning of this adventure and **spoilers** I can tell you that from there and until the end of this story, all the chapters will have both Alec and Magnus in them, so yay!!! :D

I hope you still enjoy this chapter, I don't want to say much about it, but I seriously had so much fun writing it, especially the last two scenes ;)

Please don't forget to leave your thoughts about the story, drop some kudos, subscribe and/or bookmark the fic, any kind of feedback is greatly appreciated.

See you guys soon!!!

Unfortunately for Alec, his few days of freedom passed in a blur and the next thing he knew, it was Wednesday—a day before the first concert—and his family and friends had organized him and the rest of the team that would be going with him to the tour a night out to release all the stress and anxiety, and to say goodbye. After all, they wouldn't be seeing each other in twenty-four long weeks and that was the longest time they had been separated from each other as a group since they had started working for the Shadow World magazine.

"Where are we going?" Alec asked his sister. It was a bit late and they were walking down the streets of Brooklyn, he didn't know what their destination was since Izzy had been very secretive about it, he only knew that they were getting away from Alec's neighborhood with every step they took. Alec knew his way around Brooklyn, even at night, he had lived in the populous borough for five years now, but even so, he had to admit that he was a little lost. His knowledge of places to go out at night was limited to the Hunter's Moon—their usual hang out place since forever.

"A new place," Izzy replied, "well, it's not new precisely, but it's new to us."

"And what's wrong with the Hunter's Moon?" Alec inquired because he wouldn't have minded spending his last free night there. He liked the place, it was cozy, fun, and cheap.

"Nothing, but we always go there, I thought we could try a new place for a little change." She said. "I've heard nothing but great things about this place and I've always wanted to-" she stopped mid-
sentence. “Stop buttoning up your shirt!” She scolded him when she realized what Alec was doing as they walked.

His sister had taken care of his outfit tonight. She had made him wear black skinny jeans that gave him the feeling that his legs couldn't properly breathe and a slim-fit gray shirt that, according to her, made all his features pop. She had also made him leave said gray shirt open at the collar to ‘tempt but not give a bad impression’ and roll up his sleeves above his wrists for ‘effect.’ The rolled-up sleeves were okay, but the open shirt was too much, hence why he was trying to reduce that temptation to a minimum.

“I'm getting cold.” He lied.

“Well, looking good always requires some kind of sacrifice, sometimes it's getting cold, sometimes wearing 5-inch heels and pretending you're wearing sneakers, so suck it up and stop ruining my masterpiece.” She said, unbuttoning Alec’s shirt back to its original state and ruffling his hair again—she had been doing that non-stop.

Alec rolled his eyes. He was aware that his sister knew what she was doing, after all, she had majored in fashion design, but he felt a little uncomfortable. Not because he didn’t like what he saw in the mirror or even the clothes she had chosen for him, but because he wasn’t used to dressing up like that.

“Iz…”

“Drop it, Alec, we’re almost there.” She said, grabbing his arm as if for support and pulling him with her across the street.

“And where’s everyone?” Alec asked because, as far as he understood, this 'night out' was a group thing, but he and his sister were the only ones who were walking down the street to go wherever this new place was.

“Already there,” she said, “Simon texted me when you were getting ready, so we have to hurry. We're already late.”

Alec sighed, but kept walking, following his sister until they reached some sort of alley. There was a lot of noise on the street and people walking by, so Alec figured they had finally arrived to their destination. He could hear music nearby even when the place was not yet visible.

“Is this some kind of clandestine club or something?” Alec asked doubtfully. The location seemed fishy.

Izzy laughed. “No? Although it’s a very exclusive place, so you should be grateful that your favorite sister got a reservation. Getting us in there tonight wasn’t easy, I had to call in a few favors to get us in. I couldn’t get us into the VIP section, but at least I got us a reservation...that counts, right?”

Alec chuckled. “We should have-” he was saying when they turned around the corner and found themselves right in front of a very large, noisy, dark, but sophisticated place. Pandemonium—said the red-neon sign.

“That’s a curious yet fitting name,” Alec said, looking at the impressive facade, “is it a bar?”

“A nightclub,” Izzy said, “I know it’s not our thing, but I figured you all could use the dancing and a few drinks to get rid of the first day jitters.”

Alec shook his head playfully and sighed. Clubbing the night before he left for a five-month
adventure didn’t sound like the best idea, but he was already there and knew that no matter what he said, he couldn’t really make his sister change her mind.

“Ready?” Izzy asked all excited.

Alec wanted to say no and find a way to go back home, but instead he just nodded and smiled. “Ready.” He said resigned.

Izzy smiled and after adjusting her dress and touching up her red lipstick, walked to the front door as if she owned the place.

“You guys have a reservation?” The guy at the door asked them. “If not, I’m sorry, but you’ll have to wait for your turn to enter.” He said, pointing to the end of the long queue.

“No, we have a reservation, our friends are already inside.” Izzy said.

“Name?”

“Isabelle Lightwood.”

The guy at the door looked at the list he had with him, smiled, and let them in without further questions.

Alec followed his sister inside. Just like the facade, the interior of the nightclub was large, noisy, dark and sophisticated. It was the kind of place he would never willingly visit. It was jam-packed with people and the atmosphere was very lively. Alec hadn’t seen the whole place yet, but it seemed to be filled to capacity with people from all ages, and they all were energetically dancing to the heavy-beat music that the DJ was playing—they all seemed to be having a great time.

“This place is loud.” Alec said, trying to talk over the music.

“What?”

Alec rolled his eyes. “This place is loud.” He repeated, practically shouting so his sister could hear him.

“Well, duh!” Izzy exclaimed. “It’s a nightclub, not a library, what were you expecting?”

Alec chuckled.

“Come,” Izzy added, “let’s go find the rest, they must be somewhere in here.” She said, pulling Alec with her.

Alec looked around to try to find his friends, but he couldn’t recognize any familiar faces in that sea of dancing bodies. Everywhere he looked, all he saw were blurry faces that moved in shiny dresses and nice outfits, and for once, Alec didn’t feel out of place. The clothes his sister had insisted he wore made him fit in. They made him one of those blurry faces in pretty clothes.

“There they are!” Izzy exclaimed, pointing to the distance.

Alec had no idea how Izzy had spotted all their friends, but she was right...they were there—Jace, Clary, Simon, Aline, Maia, and Helen—they all were together, and fortunately for them, they had managed to get a table.

“Looking good, Alec!” Aline exclaimed the moment she saw him, hugging him tightly.
“Izzy.” He whispered in her ear as a matter of explanation.

“Well, you look very handsome, the guys here tonight better watch out. You look absolutely ravishing!” She winked at him.

“See?” Izzy said. “And you thought I was exaggerating when I told you that you looked like a-”

“Don’t say it again.” Alec cut her off. Being compared to a piece of meat wasn’t something that he’d like to hear ever again.

“Anyway…” Izzy said, she had already greeted everyone at the table, “what are you guys drinking?”

Clary looked at her drink and shrugged. “I have no idea,” she said, “but it’s good. Strong, but good.”

“Let’s order another round.” Simon suggested, signaling the waiter to bring them eight more drinks. They were sitting very close to the bar and Alec had a feeling that that was not a coincidence. The plan for tonight was painfully clear: getting drunk as much as they could with the restricted budget they had.

After a few minutes that Alec seized to greet the rest of his friends, the waiter arrived with eight more funny-looking drinks. Alec’s knowledge of cocktails was limited to those served at the Hunter’s moon, so he had no idea what he was about to drink. It was blue—neon blue like the lights of the place—and it was served in a martini glass although it was clearly not a martini, it smelled of lemon and cranberry juice despite the peculiar coloration.

“I propose a toast!” Izzy exclaimed. “To the ones who are leaving us to go travel around the world as superstars. I can’t deny that I’m very jealous, I would have loved to go with you on this adventure, but I’m also very happy and proud of you all, so here…” she raised her glass, “to you, lucky bastards, I love you with all my heart. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” They all exclaimed, clinking their glasses in the air.

Alec gave his drink one last look and took a tentative sip. He had no idea what it was, he could taste the lemon, the cranberry juice and maybe some vodka, but Clary had been right, it was good, strong, but really, really good. It left a sweet electric feeling in your mouth that was a tad addictive.

“Now let’s dance!” Helen suggested. She, like the rest, had emptied her glass in one gulp.

“Yes!” Maia, Izzy, and Clary replied in unison, pulling everyone around them to take them to the dance floor.

Alec gave Aline a quick please-help-me kind of look. She understood him, she was like him, they preferred the quiet and not so energetic reunions where it was relatively easy to avoid the dance floor, but Maia and Helen were already dragging her with them, so she just shrugged and gave Alec a resigned smile.

“Come on, Alec!” Izzy said, taking his hands to pull him towards her. “Up!”

“But-”

“Oh, no, sir, no buts tonight, we’re here to dance and have fun, so come on!”

Alec rolled his eyes and after taking the rest of his drink in one gulp, followed his sister to the dance floor. He had a feeling that he was going to need at least four more of those blue drinks to really get in the mood that this place required.
Alec had to admit that the place his sister had chosen for the occasion wasn’t bad after all—he liked it. At first, the very fancy club atmosphere had taken him a bit off guard, but now that he had the chance to take everything in and with the eyes of someone having a good time, he couldn’t deny that the high-tech furniture and the incredible light effects were unlike anything he had seen before; and although it was loud and there were too many people for his liking, the drinks were good, or at least that was what he thought after the third whatever-the-hell-this-thing-was-called that he’d had.

“Thanks for this, guys.” Alec said, taking a sip of his drink. He had to admit that it was quite addictive. He had just recently discovered that he had a thing for sweet and strong drinks—they were his new favorites. “I really needed to relax a little before all the craziness started.” He admitted, looking at his friends who were sitting in front of him after having danced their butts off on the dance floor in the past half hour. “I didn’t know how nervous I was about all this until today.” He confessed.

“Really?” Aline asked surprised.

Alec limited himself to nod.

“But, why? You’re a pro! What’s making you nervous about this?”

“Thanks for the pro part,” Alec smiled, “and I don’t know, maybe the fact that I don’t like this guy or that I don’t know what to expect from this whole tour thing, but yeah, I’m nervous.”

“I’m gonna be completely honest,” Maia said, “it’s kinda my thing anyway,” she added before proceeding. “I think you have a very wrong perception about the guy and that’s what’s making you uneasy about the tour. Like, I get where you come from when you talk about these fake celebrities that top the popularity charts nowadays. Do you remember that time when you interviewed that socialite, the daughter of the famous singer, and I took the pics for your article?”

Alec nodded.

“Well,” Maia continued, “she was the definition of a...how do you call them?”

“FPCs”

“Those. She was arrogant, aloof, pretentious, fake as a three dollar bill, talentless—we know that she’s where she is because of her father, but Magnus? This guy’s a different story. Yeah, he’s wealthy because of his father's company, but Mr. Bane was a businessman, not a promoter. He sold, what? Cell phones for a living?”

“Technology in general.” Alec corrected her. He had done his research on the guy.

“See? How could he have helped him? With contacts? We all always get things because we know someone, that's how the world works. Also, you are wealthy too, well, not you, but your parents are and that doesn’t mean that they’ve helped you get where you are. I understand your apprehension towards the guy, but you have to see that the two of you ain’t so different.” She said. “I helped Simon and Aline when they were sorting out all the footage of your first interview with him and he seems like a really nice guy. I particularly loved the part where you asked him about that viral video of him falling in that charity concert he gave last year and how he, instead of getting angry or something, just cracked up laughing and reenacted the scene just for you. You have to admit that he’s a genuinely charismatic guy, Alec. He’s not like those celebrities you have every right to hate, because seriously, who do they think they are?” She asked, making eye contact with everyone else at
the table. “But this guy isn’t like any of them.”

Alec sighed. “Okay, I admit that maybe he’s a bit different from what I thought he was, that maybe he doesn’t quite fit into all the FPCs standards that I’ve detected again and again in all the celebrities I’ve met, but—”

“Here we go again.” Izzy interrupted him, rolling her eyes dramatically.


“Nothing, please go on, big brother, bore us to death with your explanation of why Magnus Bane should be burned at the stake.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “I don’t think he should be burned at the stake, I just think there’s something off about him, that’s all.”

“What?” Jace asked intrigued.

“I’m not sure, I kind of got this weird vibe during the first interview. Like, the way he carries himself, the way he talks, even his attitude, everything is a facade, a cover to—” he was saying when he was interrupted a second time. This time, however, not by his sister.

“Excuse the intrusion, sir.” A member of the nightclub staff said. He was dressed all in black and wore a security headset, like the guy at the front door. “I’m here to inform you that you’ve been upgraded to the VIP section.” He told them.

“What? How? Why?” Izzy asked, perplexed. She had told Alec before arriving that it had been impossible to get them access to the VIP section.

“I don’t know, miss,” the guy said, “I just follow orders. Although I was asked to deliver this to the handsome guy with the pretty eyes.” He said, taking out a folded note from his pocket.

Immediately, Jace tried to grab the small piece of paper, but the nightclub staff member stopped him.

“I’m sorry,” he said apologetically, “please don’t take this the wrong way, but I’m afraid that despite your more than evident good looks, sir, you don’t quite fit the description I was given.”

“Don’t feel bad, Jace,” Simon said, “you don’t always get to be the handsome one in the group,” he added, reaching to grab the note, but the member of the staff stopped him as well.

“I’m really sorry, but the exact description I was given was the tall, handsome, guy with dark hair and pretty eyes.” The staff member said, looking at Alec—the only other guy left in the group.

“Oh…” Alec said. This was a first, this kind of stuff almost never happened to him. He got free lattes from the guy from the coffee shop across the street and when he had been in college, one of his classmates had bought him lunch a couple of times, but that was it. He had never been upgraded at a nightclub, he wasn’t even aware that was a thing that could happen.

“Look what my good taste in clothes did for you, and by extension us, tonight.” Izzy added, smiling pleased with herself as she snatched the note from the guy’s hand and handed it to Alec. “Come on, read it!” She urged him.

Alec opened the note slowly and read its content. It was a very short message written with a very beautiful and stylized handwriting in gold ink. “Enjoy your night, pretty boy. Drinks on the house.”
“On the house!?" Helen exclaimed. Apparently she had glanced over Alec’s shoulder to read the note.

“What!?” Izzy exclaimed, grabbing the note to read it and passing it around so that everyone could read it too.

“Who-who sent this?” Alec asked confused. He had been called pretty boy, and that, too, was a first.

“The owner of the place, sir.”

Alec’s eyes widened, and so did everyone else’s.

“Now, if you please?” The staff member said, pointing to the VIP section. It was held apart from the rest of the bar on a raised platform, it had its own bar and was perfectly secluded with some curtains, but it had a perfect view of the rest of the place. The crowd there was elite, and it wasn’t as crowded as the rest of the place.

“I…” Alec hesitated. He wasn’t sure if he should accept this. He couldn’t deny that moving to the VIP section did sound tempting, but he didn’t even know this guy. He couldn’t accept something like that, not even if that meant giving up all those free drinks. “I appreciate the offer, but I think we’re good here—”

“Shhh!” Izzy put a finger in front of his mouth. “Don’t!”

“But, Iz.” Alec complained because, seriously, couldn't his sister see how wrong all this was?

“No, Alec, he just wants you to enjoy the night, that’s all. You wouldn’t turn down some guy’s polite invitation to have fun, would you?”

“How do you know it’s a guy and not a girl?”

“Good point.” Helen chimed in. “We are perfectly capable of running successful nightclubs too.”

“I know that,” Izzy rolled her eyes, “but this place screams and smells like testosterone.” She added, now looking at the staff member. “Is the owner a guy or a girl?”

“It’s a man, miss.” The guy confirmed.

“How?”

“Still, Iz, I don’t think we should—”

“Shut it! I know what you’re thinking, you don’t even know this guy, you can’t possibly accept this. But he just wants you to enjoy the night, brother, not take you out on a date. If he’d wanted to ask for something in return for this, he would have added his name or number in the note for you to call him and he didn’t. He clearly just thought that you were a very cute, well dressed, and handsome guy and wants you to have a good time with your friends in his place.”

Alec sighed. She had a point, this guy hadn't shown any interest in wanting to actually meet Alec, it was a mere invitation to enjoy the night—no strings attached.

“If I were you, I would say yes.” Maia said. “It looks nicer in there to be honest.”

Alec looked at her and then at the rest of his friends, they all were nodding, clearly agreeing with her, even Aline, who was the one who usually hesitated when these unexpected things happened. Alec suspected that this general agreement had everything to do with the part in the note that said they
would get free drinks.

“Okay…” He said resigned. He was a bit uncomfortable with this, but who was he to deny his friends a good time and some free drinks? If this guy wanted to meet him later, Alec could always make a run for it. It wouldn’t be the first time he did that to a guy.

“If you follow me, please.” The staff member said, taking them from their small table to the VIP section, where a very nice and spacious table with soft white couches awaited them. There was also a waiter carrying a tray with eight fresh drinks.

They all smiled.

“This is very nice!” Maia exclaimed, jumping onto one of the couches.

“Really nice.” Both Aline and Helen agreed, joining her.

“Let’s take a selfie!” Simon told Jace and Clary, but Jace just rolled his eyes and sat down, leaving Clary and Simon to take their ridiculous picture together.

“Thank the owner for this.” Alec told the guy from the staff. It was the least he could do, right? Be grateful for this guy’s generosity.

“Will do.” The staff member said with a polite smile and discreetly informed the waiter that their tab had been covered and that they were to be treated as one of the boss’s friends—whatever that meant.

The waiter just nodded.

“So another toast?” Clary suggested. Simon and Izzy had wasted no time and had passed the expensive cocktails around. These, unlike the ones they had been drinking, were neon pink and had a strong smell of tequila. Alec hoped they were as good as the blue ones.

“Yes!” Izzy exclaimed, immediately taking the floor. “To the tour, to new adventures, and to this mysterious and generous owner, whoever he is!”

“Cheers!” They all exclaimed, drinking the colorful cocktail.

After the first sip, Alec concluded that he liked the pink ones even better.

Getting free drinks had been a bad idea, or maybe it hadn’t, Alec wasn’t sure of anything at the moment, but since they had been upgraded to the VIP section, the drinks hadn’t stopped coming and Alec’s body was starting to pay the toll. He felt dizzy and a bit dazed, his vision was blurred and his head was throbbing with the beat of the loud music, but he felt so damn happy to be there with these people that he loved more than anything in the world that he could still ignore all the signs that his body was sending him to stop drinking.

“I love you.” He whispered to his sister who was sitting right next to him.

“I love you too.” She smiled her beautiful smile and hugged him. “I’m gonna miss you so much, Alec.”

“More than Simon?” Alec asked. He still remembered those years when he was the person his sister loved the most.

“Same as Simon.” She said, giving her boyfriend, who was dancing a few feet away from them, a
Alec could live with that, it had actually never been a competition and he had to admit that it was a relief to know that his sister had someone in her life who loved her as much as he did. “I’ll take care of him, I promise.” He told her. “I’ll make sure he behaves.”

“I always behave.” Simon complained. He was back at the table with Clary, they both had been dancing non-stop with Maia and Helen.

Clary chuckled, exposing him. She was tipsy and when that happened, all she did was laugh.

“Hey!” Simon complained again, gently pushing his best friend.

Alec laughed. He had no idea why everything was so funny, but it was. Jace attempting to dance better than everyone else and making a fool of himself? Funny. Helen giving the guys at the table next to them a ted talk about feminism? Hilarious. Maia having hiccups after drinking five tequila shots in a row? Fucking hysterical.

“You’re getting drunk…” Aline teased him.

“Look who’s talking.” He replied, looking at his friend. She was a mess.

“Oh, but I had every intention of getting drunk tonight, but I bet you didn’t.”

Alec shrugged. He honestly had no idea what he had been expecting from tonight.

“Are you guys ready for the tour?” Clary asked.

“Of course!” Simon replied. “I even learned all the songs from his new album, I’m a professional.” He said.

“And...are you a professional and learned all the songs from his new album too, Alec?” Aline asked him. She was looking at him all knowingly, she knew exactly what she was doing, and sometimes, just sometimes, Alec didn’t like her that much.

“No, I’m not.” Alec answered truthfully. “I thought about it, but then I decided that I didn’t want my poor ears to go through the suffering of listening to Magnus’s music just yet. I’ll have plenty of time to memorize Magnus’s howls during his tour.”

“Alec…” Izzy said as a warning. Everyone in the group liked Magnus Bane and every insult hurled in his direction was taken personally.

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry.” Alec apologized. “I know that you all love him and everything, but I can’t help it.”

“It’s okay, man.” Simon said. “We understand.”

“Of course we do,” Izzy agreed, “you’re blind and clearly deaf, but sooner rather than later you’re going to eat your words.”

“Excuse me?”

“What you heard.” Izzy laughed. "You're going to eat your words."

“Well, I don’t think so.”
"But I do, and you know I’m always right."

“I have to disagree-” Alec was saying when Jace interrupted them.

“Please, don’t start again, okay?” He said. “Your arguments never end well, plus, we’re here to say goodbye not to get mad at each other.”

“You’re right,” Izzy said, “but I still think he’s going to eat his words one of these days.” She added, trying to win the argument—as per usual.

“IZ...” Simon said.

“Okay, okay, sorry.” She said, raising her hands in defeat, but giving Alec a look that said she wasn’t sorry in the slightest. She still thought he was going to eat his words and when that happened, she wasn't ever going to let him forget it.

“Anyway…” Clary added, “have you packed all your stuff?” She asked them. Maia and Helen had just joined them, so the group was complete again.

Simon, Aline, Maia, and Helen all nodded. Alec joined them, but then he thought it better and shook his head. “I haven’t packed everything, but I’m almost done. I mean, we leave until Sunday although the tour starts tomorrow. He's going to give three concerts here, so technically, we still have some days to finish packing and get everything ready.”

“Speaking of tomorrow…” Izzy said, “Max is going crazy already. He sent me a picture of his clothes so I could help him choose the right outfit for the concert. I love that kid, he’s the only one of the men in my life who never gives me a hard time when I help him choose his clothes.” She said, looking at Jace, Simon, and Alec.

“That’s because he doesn’t know any better,” Jace said, “but he’ll come around and realize his mistake.”

“Haha very funny.” Izzy said.

“Max is a very smart little man, I’m pretty sure he knows what he’s doing when he asks Iz for advice. I mean, he always looks good, he clearly got Iz’s good taste.” Clary smiled at her friend. Alec knew that Clary loved their little brother, she had been responsible for Max’s obsession with manga a couple of years ago and that artistic phase he had had just last year.

“Thank you.” Izzy said.

“I’m just telling the truth.” Clary shrugged. “And, did any of you besides Iz talk to him? He must be losing his mind counting down the hours for the concert.”

“He’s really losing it.” Alec confirmed. He had talked to his little brother just a few hours ago to calm him down, it had taken him two hours to convince him that, yes, VIP tickets meant that he was going to meet Magnus before the concert.

“Alec is now his hero,” Izzy added, “since he was the one who got him the tickets and not just any tickets, VIP tickets.”

“How did you get them anyway?” Maia asked.

“I asked them in exchange for signing the NDA they requested as part of the contract with the magazine.” Alec confessed. He hadn’t told his family and friends how he had gotten the exclusive
tickets, he had just given them to them and had told them that Magnus’s team had sent them as part of the deal. He had kept the details of the transaction to himself.

“Wait, wait, wait...you signed an NDA?” Izzy asked surprised.

“Yes? And so did the rest.” Alec said a little confused. “You didn’t tell her?” He asked Simon.

“Hmmm, no, we were instructed not to tell anyone until the tour ended.” Simon said, and Aline, Helen, and Maia all nodded confirming the information.

“Oh…” Alec said. He didn’t remember Aldertree asking him not to tell anyone. “Well, I don’t remember being asked to keep this as a secret, so...oops. The cat is out of the bag. As part of the deal with the magazine, Magnus’s team made us sign a confidentiality agreement with a very significant penalty clause.”

“Why?” Jace asked intrigued.

Alec shrugged. “Well, I think he’s afraid of what we might discover about him or his people during the tour, so he’s protecting himself in advance. A smart move, if I’m honest. He made sure to put us on a leash before things could get out of control.”

“So he has stuff he doesn’t want the public to know...interesting.” Jace said.

“That’s what I think.” Alec nodded.

“I think it’s more like a technicality.” Simon said.

“Yeah,” Maia agreed, “like to make sure we don’t sell exclusive material to other media outlets.”

“Well, that could be, too.” Jace admitted.

Alec shook his head. “He knows we’re not going to do it, our magazine is the best in the whole damn country, we don’t need other media outlets to publish exclusive material, we can do it ourselves. This is because he’s afraid of what we’re going to learn about him during the tour. Think about it, all five of us are going to be with him practically 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for five months! A lot of things can happen during that time. Who knows what we can find out about him.”

“Well, if he made us sign because of that,” Helen intervened, “it doesn’t really matter, if you or any of us discovered something about him during the tour, we’d have to hand over whatever information we have to Magnus’s team. That was very clear in the NDA that we all signed, there’s nothing we can do about it, his secrets are safe with us, whether we like it or not.”

“There’s always a loophole.” Alec said. Because, yes, the NDA obliged them to inform Magnus’s team of the information they collected about any of them during the tour, but if done discreetly, there was no need to reveal how much they really knew about the man and his team, right? “I’m sure our lawyers could find a way to protect us if we really wanted to publish something that could go against the agreement.”

“Alec, you’re not actually thinking about violating the NDA, are you?” Simon asked. “I know Aldertree suggested that we dug a little deeper than was allowed, but I don’t think that’s a very good idea.”

“I don’t know, I haven’t ruled it out completely.” Alec said. Like Simon, at first he had thought that the idea was bad, even dangerous, but he couldn’t deny that he had been toying with it for some days now. He wasn’t considering fully exposing Magnus or something like that, he’d never do that to
anyone, but the idea of digging a little deeper during the tour and maybe even considering getting his hands partially dirty if the information was worth it, didn't sound as bad as it used to. “What if I discover something big enough to consider doing it?” He asked.

All the eyes on the table looked at him simultaneously. Alec didn’t need to read minds to know what they were thinking—that he had lost his mind.

“Alec, you’re not like that.” Aline said. “You take your job seriously, you wouldn’t expose anyone, not even someone you don’t like.”

“I’m not going to expose him,” Alec said, “but I’m going to uncover the truth. I’m going to find everything I can about him during the tour. I’m going to discover the real Magnus Bane.” He stated. Maybe it was the alcohol in his veins talking, but he was convinced that he was going to unmask him. “And if it’s big enough, I could find a way to share the story, to convince him, and his team, to let us publish it.”

“As if Magnus would ever let you publish something private about him.” Maia laughed. “The guy knows what he’s doing, he’s managed to keep his private life out of the public eye for years, that's not going to change anytime soon.”

“I know what I’m doing too.” Alec said in self-defense.

“Obviously, but do you really believe that he’s going to just let you publish his private life just like that?” She asked.

“I don’t know, maybe…” Alec said.

“And...what if it turns out that his private life isn’t a big secret worthy of publication? What if he’s just another normal guy who goes home after work and eats reheated pizza for dinner while watching some crappy TV show?” Aline questioned.

“Yeah, what if his life is not worthy of The Shadow World? What if you don't find anything mysterious or interesting about him? What if he doesn't have any secrets?” Izzy asked.

Alec looked at his sister and friend, both were looking at him with questioning eyes. “Of course he has secrets, we all have them, but especially celebrities. They all live these parallel lives, they all hide things. I know that you guys think that he’s some kind of angel sent from heaven.” He said and all his friends chuckled. “But I don't agree and, therefore, I’m going to prove you all how wrong you are. I’m going to uncover the truth. I’m going to take advantage of my sudden closeness to the source and I’m going to discover all his secrets. I’m going to unmask Magnus Bane!” He said with determination.

The seven pair of eyes in front of him shared looks of concern. They all knew that when Alec set his mind on something there was no way to make him change his mind.

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Aline asked carefully.

“Yes, I know you’re going to tell me that I’m crazy or like Iz told me some weeks ago that when I don’t like someone, I invest an excessive amount of time analyzing that person just to discredit them, but this is the only way I know that I’m going to be able to survive this tour. I’m a journalist, uncovering the truth is what I do for a living, so I’m going to do what the magazine needs to cover the tour and during my free time I’m going to try to figure out who's the real man behind the superstar.”

“Okay, but that’s very dangerous, Alec.” Helen warned him. “You signed an NDA, plus, you’re
going to be surrounded by his people, they could see what you’re doing and put a restraining order or something like that. We could even lose the exclusive!”

“I’m not that stupid thank you very much.” Alec said, rolling his eyes. “I’m not going to actually let them know what I’m doing during the tour. I’m just going to take notes and follow the guy around. I’m sure the drug addiction rumor is true.”

None of his friends dared to say anything. How could they? They all liked Magnus Bane and were aware of the thousands of rumors that surrounded him, including the one that implied that he had been sent to a rehab facility a couple of years ago.

“And what are you going to do with these notes? Sell them to the highest bidder?” Aline asked.

“No, I’m going to use them to write an article about him. We’re going to publish a special edition of the magazine after the tour ends, so I could seize the opportunity to show our readers another side of their idol.”

“So you’re going to blackmail Magnus and his people to let you do that or what?” Maia asked.

Alec didn’t respond. He hadn’t thought so far ahead, he had just toyed with the idea of uncovering Magnus, but Maia’s suggestion didn’t sound so bad, it was a good alternative. “Maybe…” He said.

“Really?” Simon and Izzy asked in unison.

Alec shrugged.

“So you’re serious about this.” Aline said.

Alec just nodded. He could see Izzy, Clary, Jace, and Simon exchanging concerned looks. They knew that Alec wasn’t just serious, he was deadly serious about this.

“Okay, okay, all that sounds very exciting and all.” Helen said. “I kinda like the guy and everything, but I wouldn’t mind bringing him down with a good article about his secret agenda, but,” she added, taking the rest of her drink in one gulp, “what if you little plan backfires, huh? What if all you think about him turns out to be false? What if your impression about him is wrong?”

“It’s not.” Alec immediately said because he was sure of it. He had always been very good at reading people and knew, for a fact, that Magnus was hiding something.

“But, what if you’re mistaken? What if he proves to you that he is, indeed, a very good singer, actor and human being? What are you going to do?” Izzy added to the conversation.

Alec remained silent for a few minutes while his friends watched him intently. That was a very good question for which Alec had no answer. He hadn’t thought about that remote possibility. He was almost certain that he wasn’t wrong about Magnus Bane. The man hid something and Alec was going to be the journalist to uncover it. “Then I guess I’ll have to invite you all for dinner as an apology and accept that I was wrong, but I don’t think that will ever happen.”

“You know what?” Izzy exclaimed with too much enthusiasm. “Let’s make a real commitment here.” She said, calling the waiter right away so he could bring them eight more tequila shots.

When the waiter returned and placed the deadly drinks in front of them, Izzy continued. “If…” she said, raising her glass, “this plan of yours backfires, then you, Alec Gideon Lightwood, swear on this precious liquid that you’ll invite us all for dinner at the restaurant of our choice and that you’ll wear Magnus’s merchandise for...what do you guys say, a week?”
Everyone nodded, smiling at the thought of seeing Alec wearing Magnus’s merchandise for a week.  

“His merchandise!?”

“Yes, all the shiny stuff Max has.” Izzy said, smiling mischievously. “Deal?”

Wearing Magnus’s merchandise was too much, but Alec was sure that he was going to win, so he grinned and nodded. “Deal,” he said, "but,” he added, raising the stakes a little bit, “if I win, then you all will have to invite me to that restaurant you know I love, do my laundry for a month, and— and this is the most important part—you'll have to stop trying to make me like the guy.”

“Deal.” Izzy said without hesitation, clinking her glass against Alec’s.

The rest of their friends joined, and taking in one gulp the burning liquid, the group of friends closed the deal that one, or some of them, would regret later.

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Alec arrived at his apartment building long after midnight. He had taken an Uber to get there since walking home had turned out to be a physically impossible task. He had no balance, he was staggering to reach the front door, so to say that he was a bit drunk was a big understatement. It had been so long since the last time he had had a proper night out that between tequila shots and those funny-looking free drinks that had never stopped coming, he had lost track of how much alcohol he had ingested and now he was paying the consequences.

When Alec finally made it to the elevator, he rested his head against the cold metal walls and smiled broadly remembering the night he had just had. It had been good, really good, despite his initial hesitation, he couldn’t deny that he had had one of the best nights of his life.

The elevator came to a halt and the doors opened on his floor.

"That was fast.” Alec said in wonder. It was the first time he noticed how fast it was to climb six floors, it was like magic—you just pressed a button and voilà, you were 60 feet or so closer to the clouds.

“So wonderful.” He muttered to himself as he made his way to the door marked with the number 604.

Like any other person clearly intoxicated with alcohol, Alec had a lot of difficulties to open his own door. Everything was moving and putting the key in the lock seemed like an impossible task—even more impossible than walking.

“Aha!” He exclaimed loudly when he finally managed to put the key in the lock. “I beat you!” He said, giggling and shushing himself as he entered his apartment. “Shhhhhhh! You’re gonna wake up the neighbors.” He exclaimed.

Alec laughed at his own silliness and took off his shoes, throwing them by the door. His home was so quiet compared to the chaotic nightclub where he had spent the last hours of his life that he could hear a mild buzzing in his ears.

“That was fun!” He said, now throwing his keys in the air and making them land somewhere in the living room. “So much fun.” He added, wobbling his way to his room.

It wasn’t easy, Alec’s small apartment wasn’t so small after all, but once there, Alec flopped onto his bed and rolled left and right a couple of times, playing with the throw pillows that usually decorated
the bed. The last song he had dance with his friends was still stuck in his head, so he hummed it cheerfully, trying to sing it when he remembered the lyrics and smiling when, according to his untrained ears, he sounded good and hit the right notes.

“I’m a better singer than you, Magnus Bane!” He told a clearly invisible version of the famous singer and actor. “Why do you think you’re so special, huh? Who do you think you are?” He said, still having a one-sided conversation with nonexistent-Magnus. “Bah! I bet even I could get all you got. If, of course, I knew who to take to my bed.” He said, laughing at his own bold insinuation.

His laptop, which he had left on his nightstand when he had arrived home from work, was dangerously within easy reach. Everybody knew that any kind of communication device left at the disposal of a very intoxicated person was a great way to ensure a catastrophe, but no one was there to prevent Alec from grabbing it. So laughing, he stretched out a bit and grabbed his laptop, firing it up and immediately opening a new tab in his browser.

“Magus Bain.” He typed, clearly misspelling Magnus’s name.

"Magnum Bail" He tried again.

“Mangus Babe.” He typed one more time.

Google showed him some mercy and suggested what he was actually trying to type. “Did you mean: Magnus Bane?” The screen read.

“Yes, yes I meant that one!” Alec said, laughing and clicking on the name.

Like the last time he had googled him, a lot of results showed up, but he was not interested in the boring and biased articles about the man. No, he was looking forward to having a conversation with him, a serious conversation, so he surfed the net a bit to try to find a way to communicate with him. He didn’t have his phone number or email address, Aldertree had been the one who had communicated directly with Magnus’s team when the first interview had been published, and it seemed that the internet didn’t have that information either.

“Boo!” He exclaimed, and resigned, switched to the images tab and scrolled down the thousands of pictures that showed Magnus’s face.

He clicked on one and almost immediately, Magnus’s face covered most of the screen.

“You’re not even that handsome.” Alec said, pointing to the screen and making a face of apparent disgust. “The guy from the coffee shop across the street is more handsome.” He said, remembering that good-looking guy who had been giving him free drinks in recent weeks, but after thinking about it for like two seconds he changed his mind. “Well, no...he is not handsome. He is just a standard beauty, but so are you!” He exclaimed, changing the picture.

This new image was clearly a still from one of Magnus’s action movies. He was all dirty and sweaty, his clothes were torn and there was an explosion behind him, but his features were still visible under all the dirt and sweat. “See? Standard beauty…” Alec said, pointing to Magnus’s face. “Not even those chocolate eyes and the perfect abs I know you have under that shirt can save you.” He said, now focusing on Magnus’s mouth.

Alec had a thing for mouths, better said for lips. He liked to admire people’s lips. Why? He had no idea, but he liked them, and despite his hatred for the man, he had to admit that Magnus had very pretty lips. “I like your mouth…” he whispered, “it’s...pink!” He exclaimed, and burst out laughing.

“But you’re ugly…look at that!” He added, pointing to some new picture he found from a recent
photo shoot. Magnus was dressed like a freaking supermodel and was looking straight to the camera in a very seductive way; his hair was all messed up and styled in a very different way. Magnus usually used a lot of product to create his classic Bane-hawk hairstyle, but this time his hair was *au naturel*—Alec had to admit that it looked good that way. It made him look soft, approachable, gentle, less like a superstar and more like any other ordinary man.

Alec stayed in silence just contemplating the picture as if he were hypnotized. It was clear that alcohol was clouding his senses because he was finding the picture extremely appealing and arousing.

“Well, you do have something…” he admitted, more to himself, “but you’re not an angel, no, sir. I can see through that handsome face and charming personality. The smug smile can’t deceive me...you’re hiding something and you know what?” He asked the screen.

“I’m going to find out what it is and then I’m going to show the world who you really are. No more Magnus Bane here, Magnus Bane there...you’ll be just a memory. A shooting star that someone saw, but that crossed the sky too fast. You’re going to regret having requested me as your personal journalist! That’s going to be the best part.” Alec laughed. “Because I didn’t ask for this, you did! And if you look for Alec Lightwood, you’ll find him.” He said, closing his laptop.

“And you’ll see…” he whispered, now closing his eyes, “...you’ll see.”

Alec groaned and rolled in his sleep. There was a sound disturbing his beautiful dream, *or was it a nightmare*? He couldn’t even tell. Every loud and harsh sound coming from the device sitting on his nightstand was like ten machine guns being fired at the same time. Instinctively, he covered his face with a pillow and pressed his head against the mattress to try to kill the sound, but the annoying alarm just got louder and louder.

Still asleep, Alec reached for his phone to silence it, but threw it to the floor in the process. “Shit!” He exclaimed, opening one eye to see where it had landed and closing it almost immediately. The light was too bright for his very sensitive eyes.

“I’m going to kill them.” He whispered, remembering what his friends had told him the night before and how they had encouraged him to keep drinking. “*Get loose,*” they had said, “*it will be fun.*”

Having a terrible hangover wasn’t fun at all. He wanted to go back to sleep and forget about the world, but his damn alarm kept ringing, alerting him about something. *What?* He still wasn't conscious enough to know. He didn’t even remember setting the alarm in the first place.

Alec tried to clear his head and it was only then, when some of the fog in his mind caused by the alcohol started to dissipate, that he remembered when he had set the alarm and why he had to wake up so early: he had to be at Madison Square Garden in less than an hour for the sound check of Magnus’s first concert.

"Oh crap."

The actual event started at night, the audience was expected to start arriving around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., but Magnus’s team, and therefore Alec and his team too, had to be there before 10 a.m. It was a nuisance, but that was going to be the protocol for every venue they visited, no matter what time the concert started, they had to be there at least ten hours before everyone else. Magnus's team had made it clear that Alec and his team could never be late, but especially today. They had to interview
Magnus, take pictures and videos from all the backstage shenanigans, film the fans, and most importantly, be introduced to the staff and crew with whom they would be spending the next twenty-four weeks of their lives.

“And so it begins…” Alec murmured, practically dragging himself out of bed.

His head was killing him and although he was sure he felt better than he deserved, he still wanted to die. The only good thing he could think of at the moment was that these first three days of the tour were in New York, so he still had the chance to come back home at the end of the night and sleep in his bed—and for that he was extremely grateful. Especially when he was in such a need of a good night's sleep.

After taking a quick shower, Alec got dressed and while gathering his stuff, called his team.

“Simon, are you there already?” He asked, after all it was nearly 10 a.m.

“No, we’re on our way...I thought you’d be there already.” His friend said.

“I’m a bit late...do you think you could come here and pick me up?”

“Sure,” Simon said, “we’re actually pretty close to your place. I came to pick up Maia and you two are almost neighbors.”

“Perfect.” Alec said. “Then I’ll see you guys downstairs.”

“We’ll be there in five minutes.” Simon said, and Alec ended the call.

No less than five minutes later, his team parked the van they would be using these three days outside his building. They all were packed and ready to go.

“Hi there guys, thanks for picking me up.” Alec greeted everyone.

“You look awful.” Aline said, judging him from the back seat.

“I know, I feel awful.” He said, putting on the sunglasses that Helen was handing him to cover his eyes from the bright rays of the sun.

“But it was fun, wasn't it?” Maia said. She looked as cool as a cucumber. Alec had no idea how she—or any of them for that matter—did it. All his friends looked as if they had come home early last night and had slept twelve hours in a row, while he felt as if his soul were slowly leaving his body.

“Those free drinks were a bad idea.” He said, getting into the van.

“No, they weren’t.” Helen responded and everyone agreed. “We would have ended up poor if we'd had to pay for everything we drank last night.”

The whole team laughed.

“Shhhhh!” Alec protested, making them laugh even more.

“You are aware that we’re heading to a concert, right?” Aline said. She was smiling that mocking smile of hers. If Alec wasn’t close to death, he would have surely tried to strangle her.

“I know.” He said. "I just need some Advil and coffee—lots and lots of coffee.”

“Pit stop?” Simon suggested. He was, as always, the designated driver. After all, he was the one who
knew the streets of the city better than anyone. He had been an Uber driver back before getting his job at the magazine.

“Please!” Alec begged, causing, yet again, another round of suppressed giggles.

“Don’t worry, Alec. We got your back!” Simon said, turning the van in some local street and heading to the nearest CVS to get Alec some pills for his headache.

Alec just exhaled and closed his eyes. The *oh-so-amazing* world tour was just beginning and he knew he had started it off on the wrong foot.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I'm back!!! Sorry for the long wait, but when you have to adult, things can really get out of control and finding time to do other stuff is simply impossible. This chapter is really long, so even though I tried, I really didn't have time to finish it on time. I'm sorry, I'll try to do better next time. But anyway, enough with the chit-chat, the new chapter is here and that's all that matters.

As per usual, I won't say much about it because I hate to spoil stuff for you, but I hope you enjoy it. A lot of things happen, remember that it's the first concert, so everyone meets everyone, and Alec and Magnus have a couple of "strange" interactions, but I tried to condense it as much as possible, I hope I have achieved it and that everything makes sense. The next couple of chapters won't be this long, plus, we'll have some time jumps to focus on what really matters: the development of Alec and Magnus's relationship :D

Anyway, don't forget to share your thoughts, leave kudos, subscribe and/or bookmark the story, remember that your feedback is the only way that we, as writers, have to know that you're enjoying our stories.

See you soon!!!

When Alec and his team made it to Madison Square Garden, the first thing Alec noticed was that, although it was barely 10 a.m., the line to enter the venue was already forming. The concert started in about ten hours and yet, a group of at least fifty fans was already there, all geared up with banners and personalized t-shirts, ready to be the first ones to enter and with some luck catch a glimpse of Magnus before the concert.

"As soon as we are properly introduced to Magnus’s team, I want a camera filming the line. I want a speed motion video of this place getting crowded." Alec told his team, thinking that that would be a great introduction for their coverage of the tour.

"I'll take care of that." Helen said, volunteering herself for the task.

"Perfect, and maybe you, Aline, could take some pictures of the venue, the facade, the marquee and those things, but especially of the fans. Tell them we're going to upload them to our website—they're going to love it."

"As you order, boss." Aline said, saluting him as a soldier salutes its captain.

“Don’t call me boss.” Alec rolled his eyes in annoyance. He knew that, technically speaking, and according to Aldertree’s instructions, he was in charge of the team for the duration of the tour, but there was no need to call him boss or anything like that, they were friends—family.

“But you are our boss.”

“Aline...”
“Okay, fine, as you order, Alec.” She laughed.

They parked the van in the private parking lot of the venue and showed their magazine IDs to the security guard at the door. The man just looked at them and, without saying anything at all, pulled out his portable radio to call someone from Magnus’s team and inform them that the ‘people from the magazine’ had arrived—apparently, they had been waiting for them.

"Someone from Mr. Bane’s team will be here shortly to escort you inside and give you all the required badges to have full access to the place." The guard said.

"Okay, thanks." Alec smiled, secretly thanking for the few minutes to spare they still had. The pills he had taken for the terrible headache he had hadn't kicked in yet, the coffee he had practically drunk in one gulp had helped a lot, but he still didn't feel like himself.

Five minutes later, a dazzling black woman dressed very elegantly made her way to the door from inside the venue and greeted them with a very warm smile. "Hello, people from the Shadow World. My name is Catarina Loss, but you can call me just Cat, I'm Magnus’s personal assistant." She introduced herself with a quick wave of her hand, and looking at Alec she immediately added, "And you must be the famous Alec Lightwood."

"Hmmm, yes, that's my name, although I'm not sure if I could call myself famous." Alec said, politely greeting her by the hand.

"Oh, but you are, Alec, you are." She said with a wink, and Alec frowned a little confused.

"May I introduce you to my team?" He asked as he pointed to the group of four people standing behind him—he figured that was better than asking why he was so famous.

"Maia Roberts and Aline Penhallow, my photographers, and Simon Lewis and Helen Blackthorn, my cameramen." Helen cleared her throat loudly.

"My apologies," Alec corrected himself, "my cameraman and camerawoman." He added.

"A pleasure to meet you all," Catarina said kindly, "on behalf of Magnus and the rest of the team, I officially welcome you all to the tour. I hope your time with us is enjoyable."

“Thank you.” They all said at the same time.

“Now...is all your equipment still in your van?” She asked all businesslike and clearly noticing the black van with the magazine’s logo printed on it that they had parked not so far from there.

“Yes, we didn’t know if we should get it out just yet.” Alec explained. This was their first big concert and they didn’t know exactly how everything worked, so they had collectively decided to wait until someone from Magnus’s team gave them the green light to take out all the equipment they had brought with them for the coverage.

“No, I think it’s better if I first give you the mandatory tour and introduce you to Magnus’s team, and then, once you’ve settled in, I can ask someone from the staff to help you get all your stuff out of the van.”

“Thank you.” Alec said with a smile. Catarina seemed to be a really kind, patient, and understanding woman, and that didn't really surprise him because he figured that working for someone like Magnus should require of those qualities.

“You’re gonna be in charge of your team, is that correct?” Catarina asked Alec directly.
Alec limited himself to nod.

“Okay, good. I’m sure that all of you understand that as Magnus’s personal assistant, I’m a very busy woman and, therefore, I can’t go around giving instructions to each and every one of you whenever something comes up; so, for all our sakes and to make things easier, during these five months in which we’ll be working together, this will be our line of communication: I receive indications or suggestions from Magnus and the rest of his team, and I share them with Alec, who in turn will share them with the rest of you, is that okay?”

“Yes, perfect.” Alec said. “We understand, right, guys?”

“Yes.” His team responded, nodding practically at the same time.

“Thank you. Now, I'm obliged to ask...is this your first coverage of a tour of this magnitude?”

Alec nodded. “Is it too obvious?”

“No, not at all, I was just asking to know how much I’d have to explain to you, but it’s all good. I’ll try to make this easier for all of you. I know it must look a bit intimidating,” she added, pointing to all the people coming and going out of the venue carrying all kinds of equipment, boxes, etc. “but it’s not that hard. For this whole thing to go smoothly we all must work as a team. You guys work for a magazine, so I’m sure you know and understand how that is—as long as you don’t get in the way of other people’s work and you don’t mess with the daily schedule, then you all will be fine.”

Alec nodded. They certainly understood that, they did it on a daily basis. Working for a magazine involved exactly what Catarina had asked them to do—stay away from other people’s business and just do their job.

“But come on, let’s go inside.” Catarina added. “You'll be wearing these badges to identify you as part of Magnus’s team, so don’t lose them because you won’t be getting a new one.” She ordered them, handing them the special passes.

“Yes, ma’am!” Simon said, but quickly apologized when Catarina looked at him harshly. “Sorry…”

“It’s all good, but just Cat, okay? Anyway, you’ll need to keep them visible whenever you are around. This way the security guards and the crew in all the venues will know that you're with us.” She added, motioning them to put them around their necks.

Alec put it on and turned it over to read it. The small plastic besides having Magnus’s Tour name in large and shiny letters, had Alec’s own name and said «official press pass»—it looked fancy.

"Now, the first soundcheck is scheduled at 10:30 a.m., so we have to hurry.” Catarina said, quickly glancing at her watch. “I'll give you a brief tour around the place and then introduce you to Magnus’s personal team. I think it’s important that you all know who you're gonna be working with during these months, but don’t worry, it’s a small group, Magnus has always preferred it that way, so this should be quick.”

“And what about the rest of staff?” Helen asked.

“You’ll have plenty of time to meet all two hundred of them later,” Catarina said, "you wouldn't be able to meet them all today, even if you wanted to...believe me. Anyway, we should go inside, there’s no time to lose." She added, smiling and beckoning them to follow her inside.

Alec took a deep breath and, after giving his friends a quick here-we-go look, followed Catarina inside.
The place was definitely bigger than he had been anticipating, Alec had been there a couple of times for some events, mostly concerts that he had been dragged to, but he had never had the chance to see the place from behind the scenes. It was one of New York’s most important venues so not many artists had the opportunity to do shows there, which meant that not many journalists had the opportunity to cover many events either.

“This place is something else!” Simon exclaimed enthusiastically, as they walked down a hallway with thousands of autographed pictures of all the artists who had had shows there since it had opened in 1968.

“Totally!” Maia agreed.

“It’s Magnus’s favorite venue in the whole world.” Catarina shared with them. “Now, let’s start with a quick tour so that you all know your way around. As I already said, it’s important that you know where everything is so that you don’t interfere with the work schedule of the different teams, especially the technical team; they only have a couple of hours to set everything ready for the show, so as you can understand, coordination is vital for these events to be a success. Of course they never go 100% according to plan, but the goal is always to make everything work at at least 95%—Magnus is a bit of a perfectionist.”

They all nodded and followed Catarina in silence. Everything they were seeing, from the place and its endless corridors, to the experience of the beginning of the adventure itself, was too much for any of them to dare to say more than a few words, which incidentally, were only so Catarina knew that they were listening to her story about the first time they had been there with Magnus two years ago.

Alec had been expecting some kind of craziness, but nothing had prepared him for what he was witnessing. The hallways and rooms of the Madison Square Garden were like a big anthill with short passages and endless chambers, all busy with people running from one place to another. Wherever Alec looked, there were people working, talking, moving—it was an uninterrupted frenzy that he would have to get used to in one way or another.

“Follow me please.” Catarina said.

She began by showing them all the facilities, the several hallways that led to the stage, the service rooms, some of the technical booths, general areas and other available spaces in the venue. Alec had to admit that the quick tour was very instructive, not only because getting lost in all these hallways and rooms was a huge possibility, but because it allowed them to have a better look at how things actually worked.

It was impressive to realize how many people were needed for a concert to take place. One might think that a couple of technicians, a decent band, and Magnus’s own team were more than enough to make everything work, but it wasn’t like that. For such a big concert, you needed thousands of people…practically an army. Alec had thought that Catarina had been joking when she had mentioned meeting the other two hundred staff members, but she had actually been serious about it. Alec had already counted over a hundred people, and they still hadn’t seen the whole place—two hundred staff members didn’t seem like too many now that he thought about it.

“We’re running out of time.” Catarina whispered out loud as she looked at her watch. She had been doing that constantly, checking the time and a detailed schedule of the day’s activities that she had on her phone, probably to make sure they all were on time and following it to the letter. “The soundcheck is about to start, so I guess I’ll have to show you the rest of the place later. You must meet the team before the rehearsals begin.” She said, now addressing them.

“Okay...” Alec said, not really knowing what else to say, it wasn’t like they had a say in any of this.
They were there just to follow orders.

“Time is precious here.” Catarina explained.

“I can see that, and, well, maybe later you could give us a copy of that schedule you have? So that we know exactly what’s going on and we don’t end up ruining what you have clearly so carefully planned.”

“That’s an excellent idea, I’ll email it to you as soon as I can.”

Alec smiled.

“Alec…” Simon whispered to him.

“What?”

“Ask her if we’re gonna be allowed to film during the soundcheck.”

Alec nodded. “Hmmm, Cat...I have a question. Are we going to be allowed to film something during the soundcheck?” He asked, voicing Simon's doubts. According to what they had signed, they were allowed to film whatever they wanted, as long as they delivered a copy of all the material to Magnus’s team, but it was always better to double check the information. He didn’t want to cross some arbitrary line and bring problems to the magazine.

“Yes, your contract stipulated that you could film whatever you wanted, as long as a copy of all the material was delivered to us for reviewing, that’s the only condition. I’m sure Magnus’s publicist will tell you all about it later when he has some time.”

“Thank you, we were just wondering because, well, as you said, the soundcheck is about to start and we haven’t had the formal meeting with Magnus’s publicist yet to talk about the details of the coverage, so we didn't want to-”

“Oh, don’t worry!” Catarina interrupted him. “You can send your team to do what you consider appropriate for the coverage, you’ll have the meeting with Magnus’s publicist later today. Maybe around noon or something, so don’t worry about anything, you do your job and we’ll find a way to coordinate ourselves later.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“Also, before I forget to tell you,” Catarina continued, “I’ll always be at your disposal in case you have questions or need something, these first few days won’t be easy for any of us, the beginning of every tour is always chaotic, but I have instructions to be available to you at all time and-” she was saying when someone interrupted her, calling her from the other side of the hall.

“Cat! Cat! Wait!” A man in his late thirties exclaimed. He was tall and well-dressed, he had his phone in his hand and a funny-looking notebook under his arm. “I was looking for-” he said, but stopped mid-sentence when he noticed that she wasn’t alone.

“Ragnor.” Catarina referred to the man in question. “May I introduce you to the people from the Shadow World magazine?” She said, pointing to Alec and his team.

“Is he? I mean, are they from the magazine?” Ragnor asked, looking back and forth between Catarina and Alec’s team, but mostly fixing his eyes on Alec.

Alec had to admit that that made him feel a little uncomfortable. This man had a very penetrating
“Yes, I was on my way to introduce them to the team before the soundcheck started,” she continued, “I wanted them to meet Magnus’s closest team before all the action starts, getting everyone in one room later’s gonna be impossible.”

“Good...I mean, good thinking.”

“I thought you were with them?” She said confused.

“I was, but I had to take a phone call to check some last minute stuff, but anyway...” Ragnor said, shifting his attention back to Alec and his team, “it’s a pleasure to meet you all,” he added, quickly shaking hands with Simon, Helen, Maia, and Aline, and leaving Alec for last. “I’m Ragnor Fell.” He said.

“Alec Lightwood.” Alec immediately said, smiling politely at Ragnor. The name kind of rang a bell for him, but he wasn’t sure why.

“I knew it.” Ragnor muttered to himself, but it was loud enough to leave Alec completely confused.

“I told you that you were famous.” Catarina said as a way to explain Ragnor’s last odd remark.

Alec frowned again. He wanted to ask why he was so famous, but something inside him prevented him from doing so. It was one of those things that you really wanted to know, but deep down you knew it was better not to.

“Anyway,” Ragnor said, “I have to make one last call, so I’ll see you all in a few minutes. Are you heading to the break room?” Ragnor asked, directing his question to Catarina.

“Yes, that’s where I asked everyone to be, including you?” She said, rolling her eyes in exasperation.

“Of course, of course,” Ragnor said; he sounded like a person who could easily get distracted with the smallest things—like for example, his phone ringing. “Then I’ll see you there in a bit.” The man said, answering his call and quickly disappearing from view.

“Ragnor is Magnus’s manager.” Catarina explained. Alec had just realized that the man had introduced himself, but hadn’t really told them his position on Magnus’s team and it turned out that he was the manager. At least now Alec knew why the name had rung a bell for him—this was the man with whom Aldertree had talked to to ask for Alec’s tickets a few weeks ago. “You were supposed to have met him—and me—during your first interview with Magnus,” she added conversationally, “but some personal stuff came up and we had to leave before you arrived.”

“Oh, you two are...together?” Alec asked, wondering out loud if Magnus’s manager and personal assistant were a couple, the ‘something personal came up and we had to leave’ thing had sounded like something a couple would say.

“What? No, not at all, we’re just friends, very good friends, but my daughter broke her arm that morning and Ragnor had to take us to ER in a hurry.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, I hope she’s better now.”

“She is, thank you, nothing can stop that kiddo.” Catarina said.

“What’s her name and how old is she?” Alec asked curiously.
“Madzie and she’s almost six,” Catarina smiled, “you’ll meet her during the tour. I’m a single mom and I have no one to leave her with for such a long time, so I always take her with me to all my adventures. I know some people say that all this hustle and bustle is bad for children, but I think otherwise. I’d rather have her with me than with some stranger, especially when I’m not around in case something goes wrong—and with children something always goes wrong...believe me. Besides, she needs her mom, not a nanny, so even when I’m working, I always make time for her. It's a good thing that she’s been coming with me to work all her life because in a way, she knows the deal.” She smiled, and Alec felt that he liked Catarina even more now. She was a single, badass mom, working for one of the most famous celebrities in the entertainment industry at the moment and she still had time for her little daughter—she had earned his respect with that. “Anyway, let's get going, you all really need to meet the rest of the team before the soundcheck starts, it’s a very busy day for all of us.” She said.

Alec and his team nodded and followed Catarina again until they reached a large room where a group of six or seven people were gathered around a sophisticated and quite spacious living room. They all were wearing badges and some of them even Magnus’s official merchandise with the word ‘staff’ printed on the back. They were joking and laughing, talking loudly while eating some snacks. Alec was a bit surprised with the way the people they had encountered so far treated each other. They all acted like a massive group of friends who just happened to work in the same place, it was strange, although not so much for him since he practically worked with all his family and friends as well.

Catarina scanned the room and shook her head in disapproval. "Where's Magnus?" She asked a tall black man with intimidating biceps who was standing next to a snack table near the door. He was wearing a badge that said «head of security».

"With Camille on the phone." The man replied simply, pointing to the closed door located at the other end of the room. Alec supposed that it must lead to some kind of private facility. This room was for the staff to take breaks and things like that, but it was obvious that Magnus must have some private quarters to rest at some point in addition to his dressing room.

"Oh." Catarina exclaimed, frowning, and Alec had to suppress the urge to ask about that. Apparently, Magnus was talking on the phone with someone named Camille, so Alec couldn't help but wonder if that Camille was the same Camille Magnus had dated almost a year ago. Camille Belcourt—the ex-girlfriend who would soon be the 'girlfriend' again if the rumors were true.

“He asked us not to bother him, so you know him...it’ll probably take a while.”

“And what about the soundcheck?" She asked, sounding emotionally exhausted.

The security guy just shrugged.

Catarina rolled her eyes again and checked her watch. “That man, I swear. One of these days I’m going to kill him and you’ll have to help me bury his body.” She sighed. “Anyway, I guess I’ll have to start the introductions without him. By the way, guys,” Catarina said, addressing Alec and his team, “this is Luke Garroway, Magnus's head of security.” She added, before walking deeper into the room and asking everyone in there to gather around and pay her attention for some minutes.

"Can all of you hear me?" She asked out loud. The room was closed, but the commotion outside was such that Alec could still hear the murmur of voices and footsteps in the hallway.

The group nodded and responded with a series of 'yeahs,' 'yeps,' and 'ahas.' Alec quickly scanned their faces to become familiar with them and recognized the guy who had guided them inside Magnus’s home when the first interview had taken place. Alec had thought he was some kind of
butler, someone from the household staff, but apparently he was more than that.

"Okay." Catarina exclaimed. "This has to be quick since the soundcheck will take place any minute now and we all have work to do, but this is important." She said. “You all know that the Shadow World magazine will be with us for the duration of the tour, so before all the craziness starts I want you to meet the guys who will be doing the coverage. This is their first experience doing a tour this big, so make sure they feel right at home and try to help them in any way you can." She said. “We’ll have time to get to know each other better later, but I’ll make some quick introductions. Guys, these are Simon, Aline, Helen, and Maia,” she said, pointing to Alec’s team, “the technical staff of the magazine—photographers and camera people. And this…” she added, now pointing to Alec with a huge smile on her face, "is the guy who will be asking all the questions and who some of you were eager to meet, Mr. Alec Lightwood."

Alec smiled slightly and raised his hand in a waving gesture. All eyes were fixed on him and that made him feel terribly exposed. He couldn’t understand why all these people could be eager to meet him, he was an ordinary guy, a normal and boring journalist, surely they had met thousands of journalist before when working for a superstar like Magnus, right?

“Alec and company,” Catarina added, now addressing them, “these are Dot, Raphael, Tessa, Jem, Elias, Meliorn, and, of course, Luke, whom you all just met. They all are part of Magnus’s personal team. Choreographer, Publicist, Stylist, Stylist, Second Assistant and Media Guy, Trainer, and Head of Security.” She said, listing their positions.

“Pleased to meet you all.” Alec and his team said at the same time.

"It’s nice to finally put a face to the name." One of the girls, Tessa, said. She had a strong British accent and was tall and very beautiful. "I'm Tessa Gray, Magnus's personal stylist, I do all his hair and makeup, and my husband, Jem," she pointed to a tall, handsome, Asian man, "is in charge of his wardrobe, we’re his official glam squad.” She informed him, shaking hands with him.

“Alec.” Alec said out of courtesy since Catarina had already announced who he was.

"I was looking forward to meet you. I absolutely loved your article about Magnus." Tessa said, and Alec exhaled a bit relieved. At least now he knew why he was so famous—it was because of the damn article.

"I'm glad you liked it." Alec said, smiling pleased with the sudden compliment.

"It was amazing! We all loved it!” She said, and some members of the group nodded in agreement.

“I didn’t know it had caused such a commotion.” Alec confessed.

“Are you kidding?” Jem exclaimed, he, as his wife, also had a British accent. “No offense, but you media guys aren’t very nice to celebrities, so we’re used to reading garbage after garbage. Most of the articles that are published are stupid and/or offensive, so when we read yours, we all were pleasantly surprised with it. The day the magazine was released, Ragnor brought boxes with the issue to Magnus’s headquarters and we all read it together. Magnus even-” he was saying when out of nowhere someone interrupted him.

“Nice to see you again, Alexander.” A voice said.

It was Magnus. He was making his way to where they were standing. Alec noticed that his eyes were a bit red, he didn’t know if they were like that because he had been crying or because he was high on something. He was inclined to believe it was the latter, after all, Magnus was a FPC—maybe
not a conventional one, as all his friends had already pointed out, but one nonetheless.

“Magnus.” Alec said, extending his hand in a polite and professional manner.

“I see that you already met my team.” Magnus said as he greeted Alec with enthusiasm.

That strange electric current that Alec had felt the first time they had met was still there and was as unsettling as he remembered it. If he was honest, he hadn’t been expecting to have that same reaction again, but apparently something about this man still managed to catch him a bit off guard. He didn't know how, but he would have to work on that during the tour or else things could get uncomfortable between them—more so than they already were.

“Have they been treating you well?” Magnus asked, letting go of his hand.

“Yes, they all have been very kind, thank you.” Alec admitted, trying to compose himself.

“I wasn’t expecting anything less, this group of people are the best I know. We are all friends here, so I really hope that you and your team feel comfortable among us.” He said with a smile. “Nice to see you again, Simon...Aline.” He added, acknowledging the faces he knew and greeting them politely. “And I’m afraid we haven’t officially met?” He continued, now smiling at Helen and Maia.

“Alice Roberts.”

“Helen Blackthorn, sir.”

“Sir? Do I look that old? Please, just call me Magnus, darling.” Magnus said, winking at them.

Both Maia and Helen smiled, whispering Magnus’s name in unison and looking beyond smitten with the guy. Alec really had to fight the urge to roll his eyes because seriously? Was there anyone on this freaking planet who didn’t melt when meeting Magnus?

“And...have you settled yourselves in?” Magnus asked, directing the question to Alec.

“No, we were-” Alec was saying when Catarina interrupted him.

“I haven’t finished giving them the official tour around the place, but I wanted them to meet your team before the soundcheck started—getting us all in one room after it was going to be impossible.”

“Good thinking.” Magnus smiled at her. “Please, make sure they’re treated well, I want them to feel comfortable.”

“Of course,” Catarina said, “don’t worry, I have everything under control.”

“I know you do.” Magnus said, giving her a quick kiss on the cheek followed by a bone-crushing hug. “That’s why you’re my right hand and the only woman on this planet I trust completely.”

Catarina smiled at him and caressed his cheek tenderly. Alec had to look away, he felt uncomfortable seeing them, it was clear that Catarina, besides working for Magnus, was one of his closest friends and they were having a sweet and private moment that should remain only between them.

“Anyway, if you or your team need anything, just ask this woman,” Magnus said, looking at Alec, “she can solve everything, and by everything I mean literally everything. She’s a lifesaver, I still don’t know how she does it, but since she started working with me, I haven’t had to worry about anything in my life—even. I’m a very lucky guy.”

“That you are.” Catarina agreed.
Alec was watching the interaction and smiling in spite of himself.

“Did you know Beyoncé tried to steal her from me?” Magnus asked, and Alec shook his head. “This woman is a national treasure and she wanted her for herself, but I tripled the offer and made her stay.” He shared, winking conspiratorially with his assistant.

“What was Beyoncé’s offer?” Alec asked out of curiosity. Beyoncé was still Beyoncé, even when there were other big artists like Magnus out there.

“A lot of money and fame.” Catarina replied, smiling warmly at Magnus.

“And what did he give you to make you stay?” Alec asked intrigued.

“The same, plus some add-ons that I simply couldn’t turn down. And here I am, five years later, and I’m still helping him to conquer the world.” Catarina smiled.

Alec was curious to ask what those add-ons Catarina was talking about had been, but with all his years of experience interviewing people, he knew that if Catarina hadn’t shared the full story at the first opportunity, it was very unlikely that Alec managed to get a more detailed explanation today. He would have to wait and maybe later, if he managed to establish a cordial relationship with any of these people, try to satisfy his curiosity.

“Magnus!” A guy with dark hair, blue eyes, incredible bone structure, and excellent taste in clothes, exclaimed, entering the room. Alec didn’t know who he was, but he was with Ragnor, so Alec assumed he was another member of Magnus’s team.

“Will, may I introduce you to Alexander Lightwood?” Magnus immediately said. “He’s the journalist from the Shadow World magazine.”

“Oh.” The guy exclaimed, looking at Alec from head to toe. “Interesting...”

“Will...” Magnus murmured.

“I’m Will Herondale, the producer of Magnus’s shows.” Will said, shaking Alec's hand—another Briton, Alec thought. “I’m in charge of making this tour and any other unforgettable.” He added as a way to introduce himself. He was smiling in a funny way and still scanning Alec. “It’s nice to finally meet the man behind the oh-so amazing interview.”

Alec found that last comment a bit confusing, he wasn’t sure if it was a compliment or a sarcastic way of saying that it had been bad, but the guy was smiling, so maybe it was, indeed, just a compliment. “I take that you liked it?” Alec asked tentatively.

“I did, I mean, it wasn’t bad for an entertainment magazine, you have a way with words that’s a bit unusual for those of your kind, but I have to confess that I didn’t obsess about it as much as...” Will was saying when Ragnor interrupted the conversation.

“Magnus, look at the time!” He exclaimed very dramatically. “We’re running late! We’re supposed to be doing the soundcheck!”

“Oh, you’re right!” Magnus said, using an even more dramatic tone.

If Alec didn’t know that the soundcheck was, in fact, supposed to be happening at the moment, he would have thought that Magnus and Ragnor had just come up with that to prevent Will from sharing whatever he was about to share.
“I think we should go,” Magnus continued, “we’ll see you later, Alexander. Cat here will make sure that you and your team have everything you need. Come on, Will, let’s go.”

Will rolled his eyes and chuckled. “Of course, let’s go. A pleasure to meet you, Alec...and all of you, too, whoever you are.” He added, looking at Alec’s team.

Magnus said nothing more and simply walked out of the room followed by Ragnor, Will, and the guy named Raphael.

“Well, that was strange.” Simon said out of the blue. Alec had almost forgotten that his team was standing right behind him, they had been so quiet since they had arrived that it was hard to remember that they were still there.

“You don’t say…” Helen agreed.

“They’re a bunch of weirdos,” Catarina said, brushing off what had just happened as something common, “never mind them. Now, let me take you all to your headquarters.”

“Our headquarters?” Alec asked intrigued. The strange encounter with Magnus and his team now long-forgotten.

“Of course! Did you think we were going to make you all work standing in the hallways or something? Of course not! Come on, follow me! There’s a special room just for you!” She said with a wink.

Alec looked at his team and after sharing an excited look with all of them, followed Catarina out of the room.

It turned out that the Shadow World headquarters that Catarina had told them about weren’t that far from the staff break room, so getting there took them relatively no time. A couple of turns and a not-so-long hallway and they were standing in front of a door that said «The Shadow World HQ» in large and bright letters cut out from different magazines—mainly their biggest competitors.

Alec looked at his team and they all burst out in laughter. It was a weird, but at the same time, fun and welcoming gesture from Magnus’s team. Alec knew that if his mother had been there, she would have smiled at the shrewd suggestion that their magazine was so superior to all the rest that they could afford to write their name with the scraps of their competitors’ magazines.

“That was Will, Jem, and Magnus’s idea...as I told you, they’re a bunch of weirdos.” Catarina explained with a shrug. “But anyway, you’ll find a similar label in each venue we visit—perhaps just printed and not so carefully crafted—and that means that the room is assigned just for you. You can leave all your equipment in there and relax while you’re not working if you want privacy, although you can always hang out in the break room with us. The staff has orders to bring you everything you may need here, so don’t hesitate to ask. Right now I have to go and check some stuff about the soundcheck, but if you need me or someone else just use this to call us…” she said, giving Alec a pair of portable radios, “they all are on the same frequency...channel 2.”

“Thank you.” Alec said, grabbing the devices and putting them safely inside his pockets.

“Well, make yourselves comfortable and welcome again to the tour. I really hope that your time with us is enjoyable.” Catarina said, smiling at them and walking away.

Alec and his team looked at each other and entered what they assumed was going to be a relatively
small room, however, once the door opened they were greatly surprised when the place turned out to be larger than they had been expecting. It had a lot of space for all their equipment and was fully furnished with desks, comfortable couches, chairs, a table, and even a private bathroom. There was also a mini-fridge stocked with drinks and some food for the next three days, and a snack table similar to the one in the break room where they had just met with Magnus and his team.

“I don’t know about you guys, but I’m liking this whole tour thing so far. They all treat us like royalty.” Simon said, grabbing a bag of chips from the table and immediately sitting on the nearest couch to eat it.

“Of course they do.” Alec sighed. He wasn’t too impressed with the friendly welcome that these people had given them. Magnus’s team looked like a group of genuinely good people, especially Catarina—he couldn’t deny that—but he also knew that some of that friendliness they had shown since they had arrived had been planned. “They have to treat us well, they want to stay on our good side.”

“Here we go…” Maia said, rolling her eyes and joining Simon on the couch.

“What!?” Alec exclaimed. “It’s true. You know what they say, keep your friends close, your enemies closer. We signed their NDAs and everything, but we’re still press guys, we’re dangerous for them. They have to make sure we keep all the dirty stuff off the record and-"

“Okay, I’m going to put my foot down and stop you right there.” Aline interrupted him. “You have to stop with this witch hunt you have against Magnus. We know you don’t like him, we know what you think of him and we all heard your crazy plan last night. You know I don’t support it, nor encourage it, but okay, do it, go with it and obsess over it until you feel better with yourself, but don’t ruin this for everyone else. Let us enjoy the adventure, let us get excited because they treat us well and we’re having a good time; if you’re right and he and his people are a bunch of liars or whatever, then by the end of these five long months we’ll be on your side and if not...well, you’ll be on ours, but let us be.”

Alec remained silent. It wasn’t common for Aline to lecture him on something, they usually saw eye to eye on almost everything, but sometimes it happened that they didn't and, when that was the case, he never knew what to say. She, like his sister, tended to always be right. “I’m sorry, you’re right, you all should be able to enjoy this. I apologize for my attitude.”

“It’s okay, we understand, believe me. We know you and we also trust your judgment, if you feel like there’s something off about this guy, I’m sure there is, but this coverage is just starting and if you keep that negative attitude for the remaining 164 days that we’ll be here, we’re gonna end up wanting to kill you, so just relax. Let things play out they way they are supposed to, I know that, given your dislike for the man, it’s kind of a tall order for you; you’re mentally programmed to think that everything he does or says has some double meaning, but if there’s one thing I’ve learned with the years that I’ve been in this industry is that the truth always comes out. So take deep breaths and you’ll find what you’re looking for at some point—whatever that is.”

Alec smiled. “Sorry again, you’re right.”

“I’m always right.” Aline said.

“Don’t let Izzy hear you say that because that’s her line, I think she even patented it. She’s ‘always right.’” Simon said, attempting, but failing, to imitate Alec’s sister’s voice. “And of course she is, well, most of the time, but don’t tell her that either or she’s gonna make me sleep on the couch and I really don’t like that. It’s not good for my back.”
Alec chuckled, Simon always talked too much. “Anyway, I apologize again to everyone, and I ask you, as your friend, that if you ever see me lose focus or feel like I’m ruining this experience for any of you, call me out and make me see my mistakes. I’m human, okay? I’m stubborn and easily blinded, but I also know how to recognize when I’m wrong, so as my friends, please, I ask you that if this ever gets out of control do what Aline just did—call out my sorry ass. I won’t get mad, I promise.”

Simon, Helen, and Maia nodded.

Aline just smiled and patted him on the back. “That’s the Alec we all know and love.”

Alec smiled back. “Then, let’s start working. We have a tour to cover and despite my personal beliefs and what I’ve said and done since we got this exclusive, I really want this to be epic—for me, for you and for everyone back in the magazine. We have to cement our place as the best-selling magazine in the country, so we have to take full advantage of this opportunity and give our readers what they deserve.”

“What do you want us to do?” Maia said, clapping enthusiastically.

“First and foremost, we have to bring all our stuff here. I wasn’t expecting to have this much space, but since Magnus’s people are being generous, I want us to create some sort of small office here, so that we can work with our material and create the best content for our readers. We also need to establish a good line of communication with the people back in the magazine who’ll be helping us with the editing, the design, and all that stuff; if we maintain an organized space here, everything will be easier for them back there and therefore, for us too, so let’s try to make this work, okay?”

“Okay.” They all agreed.

“Also, we’re going to need material for those daily updates that Aldertree wants, so guys,” he added, looking at them straight in the eye, “I’m not kidding when I say we need cameras everywhere.”

“Count on that, Alec!” Simon exclaimed. “Where do you want them today?”

“As I said when we got here, I want a static camera filming the line outside and another one filming inside to see how the venue starts to get crowded. I want a speed motion montage of both for our intro video.”

“I can take care of installing both cameras.” Helen said.

“Perfect, also don’t forget to carry some small cameras with you, film everything and everyone. If they are interacting and you hear that their conversation is about the tour—film them. Film Magnus’s team doing their respective jobs, the rehearsals and whatever you find—we need a lot of material. And Simon,” Alec added, looking at his almost brother-in-law, “you’ll be with me most of the time today. I need you to follow me everywhere. I’ll try to interview as many people as I can. I want to get their first impressions about the tour, so get your cameras ready for that.”

“Yes, sir!” Simon exclaimed. “I mean, yes, Alec!”

“Maia and Aline, please, take as many pictures as you can. We need to upload some of them to our website and have material for the articles and the issues. Have you both synced your phones with our social media accounts?”

“No.” Aline said.

“I have...do you want me to start posting?” Maia asked.
“Yes, please. Remember to use the hashtags that Aldertree gave us and tag the venue and Magnus Bane. I also want you to talk to Magnus’s media guy, I think his name is Elias, but ask Catarina to make sure of his name, we don't want to offend anyone—you weren’t there, but it’s the guy that ushered us in back at the mansion. The one we thought was the butler.”

“I knew he looked familiar!” Simon exclaimed.

“Yeah, apparently he has a lot of roles in Magnus's team, but anyway, Maia, ask for him and once you’re sure he’s the right guy, ask him about the best spots to put our cameras for the concert. I want you to cover every possible angle when the concert is underway, I don't want us to miss anything.”

“On it!” Maia exclaimed.

“What about me?” Aline asked.

“I want you outside with Helen taking pictures of the venue, but most importantly, of the fans. If they are wearing Magnus's merchandise or something like that, make sure to take full body shots. I’m sure Izzy will be grateful for all the material to publish in whatever fashion section she’s gonna come up with for this coverage. Once the concert begins, report back to Maia and ask her what's your position inside.”

“Okay.” Aline smiled.

“Then, good luck people!” Alec said, placing his hand in the middle of the air to do the traditional good-luck circle. The rest of the team joined and placed their hands on top of Alec’s.

“We have a lot of work ahead of us, but let’s make this the best tour coverage that the world has ever seen!” Alec exclaimed. “The Shadow World on three…” he added, “1...2…”

“The Shadow World!” They all exclaimed excitedly.

After setting up their small office in the venue and having a brief meeting with Raphael—Magnus’s publicist—to go over some details about the coverage and coordinate their schedules, Alec grabbed his notepad, tape recorder, and cameraman (yes, today Simon was part of his personal equipment), and started interviewing as many people as he could find. As he had told his team, he wanted to get everyone's first impressions about the tour, get an idea of what all these people were expecting from this experience and, at the same time, put together a profile of Magnus as boss. Everyone knew the star, the famous singer and actor, but very few knew the boss—the, to some extent, creative mind behind this massive group of people.

At first, he thought that he would receive varied answers about the man, that always happened in all work environments; in their magazine, for example, half of the employees hated Alec’s parents with all their hearts, while the other half loved them and even aspired to be like them. It was what happened in every business, and although this wasn’t a business per se, it could be seen as one—as some sort of corporation where Magnus was the CEO. But to his surprise all the staff that worked with and for Magnus had a very good opinion about him. The answers were all the same: “He’s great!” “The best boss ever!” “So considerate, so humble.” And it didn’t help much either that they all were expecting only the best from this tour. No one was anxious, no one was hesitant about anything, they all were nauseatingly optimistic about it.

“Well, it seems that everyone is very excited about the tour.” Simon concluded, turning off his camera—they had interviewed more than ten people so far, so they had enough material for Alec to
write a short article about it though they still had some time to interview a few more.

“Yeah.” Alec sighed.

“Were you expecting something different?”

“Kind of, I mean, it’s day one, so I was expecting people to be excited and everything, but I also expected some uncertainty about the future or something like that. It’s a long tour and a lot of things can happen during that time—these people are way too positive about it. It’s weird.”

Simon chuckled. “Well, not everyone is as pessimistic as you are or have been raised by Maryse and Robert Lightwood.”

“Hey!” Alec complained.

“Sorry, you know I love them, but you Lightwoods are a lot to deal with. And I’m not saying this in a bad way, I’m living with one of you and I’m friends with the rest, so I’m kind of speaking from experience when I say that you all have your parents’ motto practically engraved on your foreheads. They made sure that you all followed their ideals of perfectionism, pessimism and dare I say, paranoia. They raised you making you believe that celebrities are some kind of enemies to the world. I mean, thinking like that has worked for them over the years, they’ve managed to keep the emporium that your grandfather started up and running, but even so, I think that always thinking that the worst will happen and that people can’t be trusted isn’t healthy.”

Alec rolled his eyes playfully. He couldn’t be mad about what Simon had said because he was absolutely right. His parents had always warned him and his siblings about celebrities, telling them it was their job, as journalists, to unmask them, to make them show their true colors because ‘they all lied.’ And that had been one of the many reasons why Alec had been so reluctant to join the entertainment business in the first place, he had wanted to avoid that life of always having to be wary of people, but he had ended up living it anyway; and Simon was right, it wasn’t healthy, in fact, it was very, very exhausting.

“But anyway…” Simon continued, “I’m pretty sure that in a couple of weeks you’ll get the reaction you were expecting—even from us. One hundred and sixty-four days sound easy in number, but after the first thirty days or so, we’re all going to be begging to go back home. You’ll see.”

Alec chuckled. “You’re right, we all are-” he was saying, when out of the corner of his eye he saw Raphael walking down the hall. It had been a couple of hours since they had met to talk about the tour, and although Alec knew he was busy, he couldn't pass up the opportunity to try to interview him. After all, he was Magnus's publicist, one of the most valuable members of his team.

“Raphael, wait!” Alec exclaimed. “Can I ask you a few questions?”

"About the the tour or are they for an interview?” He asked.

"An interview, but it'll be quick, just a few questions, I promise. I know you must be very busy.” He said. He knew that the chances of Raphael agreeing to this were almost non-existent, he didn't seem like a very talkative person, but it was worth trying.

Raphael looked at his phone and after a few seconds of consideration, he finally nodded. “Okay, yes, I have a few minutes.” He said with a sigh.

Alec smiled.

Simon turned on his camera again and positioned himself in front of them, quickly signaling Alec
that he was recording. Alec took a deep breath and started the interview with some standard questions.

“We’re here with Magnus’s publicist, Raphael Santiago, and although he’s a very busy man, he agreed to answer some questions for us, so...Mr. Santiago, as part of Magnus’s personal team, what’s your impression about the tour so far?” Alec asked.

“Well, it's too early to give an objective answer, but I have a good feeling about it. We’ve been working very hard for months to make this happen and now that we’re actually starting to experience it, it all feels a bit surreal. Sometimes I still can’t believe we’re here, starting the first of one hundred and twelve concerts.” Raphael said.

“It’s a very ambitious tour and some media outlets have voiced their concerns about Magnus not being able to keep up with the very tight schedule. There are very high expectations about the shows he'll give, so...” Alec said, “do you have anything to say about that?”

“Oh, yeah...we read a few notes about it this morning, but the fans have nothing to worry about. Magnus is a professional, he’s been taking care of himself and his voice to be able to...what was the word you used? Oh, yeah, keep up with the very tight schedule and give all the fans what they deserve—a first class show. Besides, he was on Broadway last year doing eight shows a week for six months, he’s going to be giving around five to six concerts per week during the tour, this isn’t very different from that experience.”

“You’re one of the people closest to Magnus, professionally and personally, so I think you’re one of the few qualified to answer one of our questions...how is it like to work with one of the biggest stars of the moment?”

“Don’t tell him I said this, but it’s great. No me puedo quejar, I love my job, and working with Magnus is the best job I’ve ever had. I’ve worked with some other artists, but nothing compares to working with him. Magnus, besides being extremely talented, is a great human being. As I’m sure you’ve noticed, being part of his team is like being in some kind of reunion with friends, so I wouldn’t change that for anything in the world.”

“Since when do you two know each other?” Alec asked.

“Hmmm, since we started working together four years ago. I was working as a producer for Capitol Records at that time and a dear friend of mine, Ragnor, you’ve met him—Magnus's manager—came to my office one day asking me to listen to some guy’s demo. I wasn't recruiting anyone at the moment, but I owed Ragnor a favor, so I listened to the material he had of him and knew we had a star in our hands. I tried to sign him right then and there, but unfortunately, Capitol had different plans for their artists back then and they wanted to turn him into something he was not, so we talked about other alternatives and since I had some connections at Columbia, we took his stuff there and the rest is history. Columbia gave us a great deal, I quit my job and immediately started working as his publicist.”

“So, you’re not the one who discovered him?” Alec asked curiously. That part of Magnus’s career had been a mystery until now. Nobody knew who was the man or woman behind Magnus’s stardom—that was why the rumors that he had used his money, or better said, his family’s money, to get to where he was were so strong.

“No, I’m not. I’m just the guy who knew Ragnor was right—we had a diamond in the raw.”

“So, Ragnor Fell is the one responsible for all of us being here today.” Alec said, somewhat surprised.
He had googled Magnus’s entire team earlier today and had found out that Ragnor Fell was the man behind some of the most important stars in the industry. Ragnor was known for launching only the careers of artists who he considered talented. In the past couple of years he had been promoting artists and bands that had proven to be extremely talented, and although Alec had his reservations about Magnus’s artistic abilities, he couldn’t deny that having Ragnor’s name behind his career did give him some credibility.

“Yeah, he has an eye for new stars, but anyway...I have to go,” Raphael said, “I hope that what I shared with you is of some help for your coverage.”

“It is, thank you for taking the time.”

“You’re welcome, anything for the Shadow World stellar writer. Nos vemos luego.” He said, saying goodbye with what looked like a smile before walking away and entering one of the many rooms.

Alec just frowned and turned around to look at Simon.

“Man! Magnus really put you up on a pedestal after the first interview! Stellar writer! Don’t let that go to your head!”

“Yeah, I’m starting to think that something like that happened…” Alec sighed, “but come on, let’s go. According to the schedule that Catarina emailed us, they must be done with the stage, so maybe, if we have some luck, we can get an interview with the tech guy and ask him to show us the stage and what to expect from tonight's show.”

“Good idea!”

Alec and Simon walked through the halls, making their way to the stage, but just as they were about to reach the tunnel that would take them straight to the main tech booth, a song coming from inside one of the many rooms they passed by made them stop dead in their tracks. The door wasn’t labeled like all the others, but the voice coming out of it sounded familiar—very familiar.

“He’s rehearsing!” Simon exclaimed excitedly, quickly approaching the door to listen more closely. “It’s a piano version, but I can assure you it’s a song from his new album!” He added as an explanation.

Alec didn’t know what to say. Of course he didn’t know the song, he had refused to listen to Magnus’s album before the concert out of stubbornness, but he had to admit that if Magnus was the one who was singing, he was good at it—quite good indeed.

“Do you think we can go in there?” Simon asked tentatively, both knew that getting a bit of that private rehearsal Magnus seemed to be having would be a great way to engage their audience and keep them checking their website and social media accounts all day to see more videos.

Alec hesitated for a minute, he really didn’t know if he was allowed to be in there or not. It was clear that Magnus was doing some warm-up session or having a private rehearsal that wasn’t on the schedule that Catarina had given them. Besides, Alec had already agreed with Raphael what they would be doing and filming today, including Magnus’s final soundcheck and the exclusive interview before the concert. However, his contract did say that they could film whatever they wanted as long as it was exclusively about the tour and everything was reported back to Magnus’s team, so following that logic, Alec didn't see why they couldn't film whatever Magnus was doing inside that room. Breaking in sounded a bit stalkerish, but they were press, it was part of their jobs to be stalkers from time to time.
“Raphael said we could film whatever we wanted, right?” Alec questioned out loud.

“He did, but what if-” Simon started to say, but Alec had already made up his mind and was opening the door.

The room was some sort of storage for instruments, it was full of all kinds of guitars, basses, pianos, drums and other stuff that Alec had never seen in his life, but not even the immense amount of musical equipment made Magnus go unnoticed. The man was sitting on a black grand piano that was in the center of the room, playing and singing. He was so lost in his song that he didn’t even notice when Alec and Simon made their ways inside and closed the door behind them. Catarina, who was also there chatting quietly with Elias, immediately waved as a way to greet them, and Luke simply stood up from his chair and crossed his arms giving them a dry look, as if stating that he was keeping a close eye on them.

After some minutes, Magnus finished his song and Catarina, Elias, Luke and Simon started clapping loudly—Alec joined them just to make his presence known.

“I didn’t know I had an audience, if I had known, I would have sung a different song—a better song.” Magnus said, turning the piano bench and smiling at them with his wide, bright smile.

“It was still great!” Simon said, letting his fanboy self to speak for himself. “That’s like my favorite song on the album and this piano version you just played is amazing, man! Much better than the original, well, not better, don't get me wrong, I love the studio version, but this one has more soul, more feeling. I mean, not that the other doesn’t have any but-”

“Don’t worry, I get it.” Magnus said, smiling. “Do you wanna know a secret? This is actually the original version. The one on the album was just a variation that I had to release to make it more…” He turned to look at Catarina for help with the word to describe the ‘variation.’

“Commercial?” Catarina suggested.

“Commercial.” Magnus agreed. “But I’m glad to know that you liked this one more, I seemed to be the only one with that opinion, so thank you, Simon. I really appreciate it.” He said, smiling again.

“You don’t mind we got this on tape, right?” Alec asked, before Magnus could ask him if he had enjoyed this acoustic version of the song as much as Simon had or if he shared his opinion about it. He didn’t want to answer that question.

“No, not at all, Alexander.” Magnus said, reaching out from where he was to grab his guitar. “I gave your magazine free rein, so don’t worry, you can film whatever you want...tour related, of course. I’m sure Raphael already talked to you about that.”

“Yes, he did.” Alec said, not knowing what else to say.

“Well, I hope you guys are excited about the tour…” Magnus said conversationally, “we’re going to have a lot of fun. I can promise you that.” He added, smiling as he played some chords on the guitar.

He looked so sure of himself with that half smile, half smirk, crossed leg, and superstar pose that Alec couldn’t help but say, “We’re here to work not to have fun, but thanks.”

Abruptly, Magnus stopped playing the guitar and looked up, meeting Alec’s eyes and staring at him intently. He was looking at him as if he were trying to read him, to see inside him and figure him out. “What’s wrong with having some fun while working?” He questioned, tilting his head a bit to emphasize his curiosity.
“Nothing, I guess.” Alec responded quickly. He didn’t like the way Magnus was looking at him. He could feel those chocolate eyes leaving permanent marks on his skin.

“It’s a wild guess,” Magnus said, returning his attention back to his guitar, “but I think that you, my dear Alexander, take life way too seriously for your own good.”

Simon chuckled.

“And you don’t?” Alec retorted. He would deal with his friend slash almost brother-in-law later.

Magnus simply shook his head; his fingers were now playing a lovely melody. It was a bit hard not to see him play, his fingers had shiny rings on them and were moving rapidly along the arm of the guitar—it was kind of hypnotic. “No, I never have and probably never will. And before you ask why, here’s the answer: because nobody ever makes it out alive anyway. George Strait, the King of Country, once said, ‘I ain’t here for a long time, I am here for a good time.’”

“Who would have guessed that Magnus Bane was an honorary member of the Y.O.L.O club.” Alec said, finding that new discovery about the star a bit amusing, but not surprising.


“Well, it’s true...you only live once, don’t you agree?” Magnus winked at him.

“Yeah...” Alec said, thinking that exactly that kind of mentality was what led celebrities to ruin their careers and sometimes even to end with their lives. They lost control at some point along the way and most of the time the results were fatal. “Well, we have some editing to do, so we will let you finish your...hmmm, whatever you were doing, we’ll see you later for the final soundcheck and the interview just before the concert.”

“Aren’t you going to be at the meet and greet?” Magnus asked—curiosity, once again, evident in his voice.

Alec frowned. “No?”

He had already discussed with Raphael what would be his and his team’s itinerary for today. It was a somewhat chaotic day for everyone, so they had agreed that trying to cover everything in one day wasn’t going to be an option, so Alec was going to limit himself to interview some people, get exclusive behind the scenes footage and snatch a quick interview with Magnus just before the concert, so he could share it with their readers and use it as a standing point to write a review of the concert when the night was over.

“Oh, I thought I’d see you there.”

“Why?” Alec asked confused.

“Your brother?”

“My brother?” Alec questioned—this conversation wasn’t making any sense.

“I sent you VIP tickets, you gave them to him, right? To little Max.”

“How do you know that?” Alec asked a bit paranoid.

Was Magnus spying on him? He remembered when Aldertree had called Magnus’s manager to ask for the tickets and he was 100% certain that his boss had never told Magnus’s people for whom Alec
wanted those tickets, just that he wanted them in exchange for signing the confidentiality agreement.

“Well, maybe I’m wrong, but you don’t look like the kind of person who would take advantage of a situation just because you can, but before agreeing to my demands for the exclusive, you asked for tickets to one of my shows in the city. I was listening to the conversation your editor-in-chief had with Ragnar on the phone back when we were still negotiating this coverage, and I clearly remember that he said that you asked for the tickets in exchange for signing the confidentiality agreement. I’m not gonna lie, it was a strange and random request, but it made me wonder why you had asked for something so silly as tickets and not for more money or something like that when it was clear that signing that NDA represented a problem for you and your work as a journalist, and I think your brother is the answer. Once again, I could be totally wrong, but I know that getting tickets was hard, not all of my fans were lucky enough to get them, so I figured Max had been one of them and since you knew you were going to be stuck with me for months and restricted by that NDA anyway, the least you could do for him was to get him the tickets that he couldn’t get. You specifically asked for four tickets, so I’m guessing that he’s either coming with friends or you invited someone else...maybe the rest of your family, I don't know.”

Alec was silent for a moment. Was he really that easy to read? This man had met him once and had already figured him out—that was impossible. “I…”

“I wasn’t wrong, was I?” Magnus smiled triumphantly.

Alec sighed softly. “No.”

“I’m good at reading people.” Magnus added and continued playing his song nonchalantly. “Anyway, Cat will let you know when your brother and other guests are here and if you want, you can join us. I was planning on meeting them first in my dressing room, as a personal favor for you...and the magazine, of course. You never told me you owned the place.”

“I don’t,” Alec said defensively, that last part had taken him by surprise, “my parents do. I’m just another employee.”

Magnus didn’t say anything, but looked at him again, scanning his face carefully. Alec wanted to turn around and leave, but knew that doing that would give away a wrong impression, so he just stood there—enduring Magnus’s unsettling gaze and trying to conceal how confused he felt. He was surprised to learn that at some point in the past few weeks Magnus had done his research on him and had found out that he was one of the children of the current owners of the Shadow World magazine. The name of his family was well-known in the entertainment industry, after all, they were respected journalists, but not everyone knew that they owned one of the most popular magazines in the country, and especially not celebrities who never bothered to get to know anything about anyone but themselves.

“Well, Alexander, I’m glad to see that you are exactly as I-” Magnus was saying when someone stormed into the room, making them all jump out of fright.

“Magnus!” Dot, the choreographer, exclaimed, “What the hell is wrong with you, huh? You have me, and all the other dancers for that matter, waiting for you like idiots in the other room! I thought you wanted to go over the routine and-”

“Why, Miss Dorothea, if you have an impeccable timing.” Magnus smiled at her.

“Sorry, did I interrupt something?” She asked, just realizing that Magnus wasn’t alone in the room and that among the people gathered there, one of them had a camera that was recording everything.
“No, we were just leaving.” Alec immediately said, wanting nothing more than to get away from there. “I...hmmm, we’ll see you later.” He added and headed for the door, hoping Simon had caught the hint and was following him.

Alec closed his laptop with a snap and took a deep breath. He had just sent Aldertree the last of a series of fifteen emails with all the material they had so far, a short text that he had written for the opening article of the coverage with the impressions he had obtained from the interviews with the staff, and some technical questions he had about the reviews he would be writing about each of the concerts. It had been some crazy hours since they had arrived and although he still had to send the interview with Magnus, the review about the first concert and the final material later today, he finally had some minutes for himself.

“You should eat something,” Aline told him, handing him a sandwich and a diet coke. “You haven’t eaten anything all day, just that coffee in the morning and you need some energy to keep that body of yours working.”

“To be honest, my stomach isn’t ready for food yet,” Alec confessed, “I’m still trying to process all the alcohol I drank last night.”

“Well, you’re doing incredibly well taking into account how drunk you were when you left the club, but you have to eat something, so don’t make me feed you as if you were a baby and just eat this.” She said, placing the sandwich in front of him. “Maybe you don’t realize it and people who don’t really know you either, but you look tired, both physically and emotionally, so be a good boy and eat your food.”

“Yes, mom.” Alec joked. “Why am I the only one who feels like dying?”

“Because apparently your tolerance for alcohol equals your tolerance for people.”

“Haha very funny.”

Aline laughed. “You know I’m just teasing you, we all are regretting those free drinks, believe me, but we’re more used to drinking than you are. Last night was, well, it’s safe to say we all lost control.”

“You don’t say.” Alec sighed, taking a sip of his coke.

“And speaking of last night,” she added, sitting next to him, “I kind of wanted to talk to you about it—privately. I know you were serious about unmasking Magnus, and you know me, I won’t try to persuade you not to, but be careful, okay? Not only because you could get into a lot of trouble if someone here finds out what you want to do, but because you could lose yourself if you make the wrong choices. You’re a good journalist, Alec, one of the bests I know, you’re honest and true, and you always try to make your words mean something to your readers. I wouldn’t like to see you lose that just because you want to, let’s say, expose a celebrity. It’s not worth it. And I’m not trying to play the devil’s advocate or anything like that, like I said earlier when we got here, I trust your judgment and I know that if you think something is up with Magnus, then something is up, but if this becomes an obsession and you cross that line that you’ve always refused to cross, then the only one that will end up losing everything won’t be him, but you.”

“I know and don’t worry, I won’t lose sight of what’s important and-” Alec was saying when there was a knock on the door.
“Alec?” Catarina poked her head through the door. “The meet and greet starts in half an hour, but your guests are already here. Magnus asked me to take them to his dressing room for a private meeting, and you, as he promised, are invited to come.”

“I…” Alec hesitated. “You know I didn’t ask for this.” He added because he didn’t want people to think that he was taking advantage of the situation or asking personal favors. It was just the first day, he wanted to make a good impression and not look like a spoiled child who went through life taking advantage of people and their privileged positions.

“We know, but as Magnus told you, it’s just a personal favor for you and for the magazine, besides, he really wants to meet your little brother, I guess it kind of touched him to know how much of a fan he is. Did you know that he had a very heated fight with Ragnor over that advanced copy of the album he gave you? Nowadays it's almost impossible to get a new album out into the world without it being leaked online first. If Ragnor had been there when you met, he would have stopped Magnus from being so...generous.”

“I…” Alec didn’t know what to say.

“Look, if you don’t want to join us, it’s okay, I’m just here to inform you what’s going on as per Magnus’s instructions. I have to go to the room where the meet and greet is going to take place and make sure everything is in order, but if you decide to join your guests, I’ll see you in ten minutes outside Magnus’s dressing room, okay?”

Alec nodded as Catarina closed the door.

“Go, Alec! Give little Max some moral support! He must be losing his mind!” Maia immediately said.

“Yes, go!” Simon added.

“Izzy, Jace, and Clary are with him.” Alec said.

“But you got him the tickets, besides, you’re his big brother, Alec, he trusts you more than everyone else, believe me.” Helen said. “And I know this, because in case you’ve forgotten, I have six little brothers and sisters.”

Alec sighed, pondering what to do. All the fans with VIP tickets were going to have a little meet and greet with Magnus in one of the rooms where Magnus’s people had already put out promotional stuff and the sponsors had brought their products, but Alec’s siblings were going to have a one-on-one meeting with the man himself in his very own dressing room—the wildest dream of any fan. He could already see Max’s face of joy and shock when he was in front of Magnus for the first time, his excitement when he finally realized how close to his idol he was. And that....that was something that Alec couldn't miss for anything in the world.

“Okay,” he said, “I’ll just eat this real quick and join them.”

Alec finished his sandwich in record time and after making sure he looked a bit presentable, in case Max insisted on taking pictures that would later be framed in his parents' home for all eternity, he walked from his small 'office' and headed to Magnus's dressing room.

The moment he stepped into the hall where it was located—very close to the stage—his little brother ran up to him and hugged him, almost making him fall. Max was growing up so fast and a hug that before wouldn't have managed to budge him, not even a little bit, today had almost sent him straight to the ground.
“Alec!” Max exclaimed. He was shaking from head to toe, but he was smiling broadly—like Alec hadn’t seen him before.

“I heard you were around.” He winked at him. “How are you feeling? Are you excited? Are you ready to meet your beloved Magnus?”

Max shook his head and then nodded just to shake his head again.

“He’s shook and internally screaming,” Izzy said. “His words, not mine.” She laughed. “Anyway, I thought we’d meet Magnus later, with all the other fans? Did you pull some more strings for this?” She asked, eyeing Alec suspiciously.

“No, he wanted to give you all a one-on-one meeting as a personal favor for the magazine—he knows it’s a family business.”

“You told him?”

“No.”

“Oh, then he did his research on you,” Izzy smiled. “That’s interesting.”

“More like creepy and annoying, but whatever,” Alec shrugged, “where are Jace and Clary?”

“Parking the car, they’ll be here in a minute, they gave us these badges to have access here and to the box where we’ll be watching the concert,” Izzy said, showing him a badge similar to Alec’s with the words «VIP pass» written on it.

“That’s cool.” Alec smiled.

“It is. And how’s everything going here?” Izzy asked. “The office was a living hell today. Aldertree had the brilliant idea of moving everyone who’s working on the coverage to the conference room, and you can imagine how that ended. It looked like a war zone after the first ten minutes, but we managed to survive the day, so I call that a victory. There’s a team doing double shift so that you have support 24/7 and mom ordered that—”

“Oh, Alec! I’m glad you decided to join us!” Catarina exclaimed, interrupting their conversation. She was quickly approaching them with Clary and Jace walking right behind her.

“Yes, for my little brother.” He felt the need to explain, although he didn’t know why.

“Of course.” Catarina smiled. “Now, if you please.” She pointed to Magnus’s dressing room door and opened it without further ado, which made Alec guess that they were probably a little behind schedule.

“Magnus.” Catarina said so he would know they were there.

Magnus was still getting ready, he had his back to the door and was standing in front of a series of mirrors. Jem was adjusting his clothes and Tessa seemed to be adding some glitter hairspray to his hair—similar to the one Max was also wearing. Alec wondered where the hell they bought that thing.

“Well, hello everyone!” Magnus exclaimed, shooing Tessa and Jem with his hands and turning around to greet the small group. He looked like the superstar he was, all dressed in tight-fitting clothes with shiny ornaments, impeccable makeup, and amazing hair.
“Nice to meet you!” Izzy immediately said, getting closer to greet him.

“You must be Alexander’s sister.” Magnus smiled, greeting her by kissing her hand in a very pompous gesture.

Alec had no idea how Magnus had come to the conclusion that Izzy was related to him, it wasn’t as if they had shared personal information—ever. The only reasonable explanation Alec found was that Magnus’s research on him had been more meticulous than he had first thought.

“I have to admit that the resemblance is quite striking, what's your name, darling?”

“Isabelle Lightwood.”

“Another powerful name,” Magnus smiled, “like your brother’s, and you carry it perfectly, dear. You’re stunning, a natural beauty.”

Izzy smiled a little flushed. “Thank you.”

Jace and Clary approached him too.

“Jace Lightwood.” Jace said, stretching his hand to greet him.

Magnus frowned, looking at Jace closely, probably trying to find the resemblance that in this case was clearly lacking.

“Adoptive brother,” Jace added, “kind of a long story.”

“Oh, well, that makes more sense. Nice meeting you, anyway, Jace.” Magnus said.

“Likewise, Magnus. Now, may I introduce you to my girlfriend, Cla-”

“Clary Fairchild.” Clary interrupted Jace. Alec had always liked that about Clary, she didn’t need Jace to do stuff for her, she could do it for herself and she was never just Jace’s girlfriend, she was her own person.

“Nice to meet you too, biscuit.” Magnus said, immediately kissing her hand as he had done with Izzy’s. "What's with all the women in your life, Alexander? They all are beautiful."

Alec just shrugged. He knew that, Izzy, Clary, Helen, Aline, Maia, they all were beautiful.

"But anyway..." Magnus continued, shifting his attention to the only person who hadn’t said a word or moved a finger since the door had opened: Max.

Alec’s younger brother was paralyzed by the door, practically petrified next to Alec, as if he didn’t quite believe that he was really there and not in one of his dreams.

“I think I’m missing someone.” Magnus said, tenderly looking at Max.

Alec put a hand behind his brother’s back to encourage him to walk and greet Magnus, but he was truly in shock. Alec could feel the sweat on his back and the tremors that were running all over his body.

“ Aren’t you going to say hi?” Magnus asked with a soft smile. He was standing a few feet away from Max, giving him his space. It was obvious that he knew how to handle these kinds of encounters, Alec supposed they happened more often than not—he had to admit that meeting the guy for the first time could be quite intimidating.
Max didn’t answer and just kept staring at him.

“Alexander?” Magnus looked at Alec now. “Are you sure that this is the same Max you said knows all my songs and has seen all my movies?”

“Yes, he-”

“You know my name.” Max whispered. The shock and reverence in his voice didn’t go unnoticed by Alec. His brother was really starstruck.

“Oh, so he speaks!” Magnus exclaimed with a smile. “Of course I know your name, I mean, how could I not know the name of my number one fan?”

“I…”

“Your brother here says that’s what you are, or was he lying?”

“No!” Max exclaimed, “Me, I, yes… I’m your biggest fan!” He said awkwardly.

“Then come here, I want a proper hello.” Magnus said, opening his arms for a hug.

Max didn’t think it twice and ran to hug his idol. It was such a sweet moment that Alec couldn’t help but smile like a fool along with the rest of the people in the room.

“I can’t believe I’m here with you.” Max whispered loud enough for all of them to hear him.

“Well, you are, it’s real, so stop shaking and come! Let me show you some cool stuff.” Magnus said, taking Max with him to the back of the dressing room, where there was a clothes rack with different outfits that Magnus would be wearing later tonight.

Alec smiled, Catarina was recording the encounter with her phone and although he knew that his brother was going to get an official high-resolution picture with Magnus in the meet and greet later, he really hoped that Magnus’s team shared this video with him. The smile on his brother’s face at the moment was priceless.

“He’s amazing.” Clary whispered. She was looking at Magnus with the same Bambi eyes that Alec had seen in both Maia and Helen earlier today.

“Yes, he’s the best.” Izzy agreed.

“Iz, look!” Max exclaimed from afar, turning around and showing her what Magnus had just given him: one of his own jackets.

“No way!” Izzy exclaimed and got closer to help their brother put it on.

Max was delighted, admiring his reflection in the mirror and seeking approval not from any of them,
but from Magnus himself, who of course, was giving it to him.

Alec rolled his eyes and smiled.

“Our parents are going to hallucinate that jacket.” Jace wisely predicted.

“I can’t wait to see mother’s face when she sees him trying to take it to school every day.” Alec agreed.

“She’s not going to let him do it.” Jace said.

“He’s a teen, he's not going to care.” Clary added.

And she was right. Alec knew that no matter what their mother or the world said, Max was going to wear that jacket every day until it no longer fit or came apart in shreds—whatever happened first.

“Clary!” Max said, and immediately Clary and Jace approached the small group. Alec hadn’t noticed that Jace was carrying a bag—the same bag that Izzy had tried to give him when he had first interviewed Magnus—so he didn’t need to ask what was inside that small but heavy thing to know its content.

“Max…” Alec started to say to make sure that his brother knew that Magnus was a very busy man and didn’t have time to sign all that stuff, but by the time he got to them, Magnus was already signing each and every one of the items that Max was handing him with great enthusiasm while also sharing quite unbelievable stories about the time he had spent filming those movies or recording his albums. The man certainly knew how to hold a conversation for hours.

“Really?” Max asked in wonder from time to time.

“Really.” Magnus confirmed every time.

“You’re so amazing!” Max concluded.

Alec couldn’t help but smile again, Max seemed completely enthralled with Magnus, and to some extent, he envied him a little. When he had had his age, he had been so repressed and trying unsuccessfully to fight with all his demons that he hadn’t had the chance to have that carefree attitude that his brother now could afford to have, let alone admire people and aspire to be like them just because they inspired you. It had taken him eighteen years of his life and have been accepted into a university far away from home to come out to his parents and-

“What?” He asked in a whisper, when he felt his sister’s gaze on him. She was smiling broadly, with that Izzy smile that sometimes drove him crazy.

“Nothing.” She said, still smiling.

“I know you, Isabelle, that smile isn’t nothing. Tell me.”

“Nothing, really, big brother.”

Alec rolled his eyes and decided to ignore her, better focusing on Max again and how happy he was. He could have a bad opinion about Magnus, but he had to admit that he treated his fans in a way he had never seen before: with respect and kindness. He was tender and charming, he listened to them and showed genuine interest in what they told him, no matter how silly it was. He treated them as if they were special and made them feel validated, something that Alec was grateful that his brother could have experienced at this age because life was sometimes very hard when you were a teenager
and having these little memories that you could hold on to when you were at your lowest was important and-

“You’re so gonna lose.” Izzy said, interrupting his train of thought.

“Excuse me?” He asked.

“You’re so gonna lose.” She said it again with a smile.

“I’m not gonna-” Alec started to say, but Izzy was already ignoring him and talking to Magnus about his ‘amazing’ clothes, leaving Alec standing there unable to say anything and just eating up his frustration. Sometimes, just sometimes, he really didn't like his sister that much.

Alec made sure that Simon was recording when he approached Magnus minutes before he had to go on stage to start the first of one hundred and twelve concerts he was going to give. The opening show—in charge of some local indie artist—had just finished and the staff was getting everything ready for Magnus to take the stage and start his show. Alec knew he had a matter of minutes to get some impressions from Magnus before he had to leave, they had talked about this interview and, although they knew it was rushed, Magnus had agreed to do it—'for the fans,' he had said.

“Magnus, first of all, thank you for doing this and taking the time to talk to us. You're a few minutes away from starting the first of a series of 112 concerts, how are you feeling?” Alec asked, trying to speak as loudly as he could. The crowd in the venue was already chanting Magnus’s name, making it a bit difficult to talk without having to shout. Plus, Magnus was surrounded by people yelling all kinds of instructions to each other—it was a mess.

“Alive!” Magnus exclaimed with a big smile on his face. “That sound…” he added, pointing to the stage where all the voices were coming from, “is fuel for my veins. Each and every single one of those voices out there are what keep me alive. Can you feel it? The electricity? It’s everything!”

Alec nodded because he could feel it and it was a bit overwhelming if he was honest, thrilling, like nothing he had ever felt before, but overwhelming nonetheless.

“This is why I’m an artist, just for this, Alexander.” Magnus confessed with a smile.

“Are you nervous?” Alec asked.

“Of course I am! I always get nervous before a concert. I’ll worry the day I don’t because it'll mean that I have stopped caring about my art.”

“What can your fans expect from tonight’s show? Any scoop we can get?”

“A lot of surprises and good music, plus some very special guests. You’ve already seen them backstage, but don’t tell them who they are just yet...let me surprise them.”

“Of course, we wouldn’t like to ruin that surprise for anyone.” Alec said. He had seen Magnus rehearse with his guests their respective numbers during the final soundcheck and both were pretty well-known singers—A-listers. “Anyway, we know you have to go,” he added, when he saw Will signaling him from afar that it was time for Magnus to go, “but we have to ask, what’s going to make this tour different from the last one?”

“Well, for starters, we'll be visiting more countries, so that’s always exciting, but also that the show is different in itself. I can’t tell you much about it, you saw a bit of it during the rehearsals, but we
saved the big guns for tonight. And that’s an exclusive for the Shadow World...we’re going big.”

“Any last words that you want to tell your fans who’re going to watch this interview in a few minutes in our official website?”

“Thank you for always being there, I wouldn’t be here tonight without any of you. I really hope you like the show we’ve prepared for you!” He said, so excited that his smile was contagious. “Anyway, I have to go! See you on stage, Alexander!” He added, winking at Alec and squeezing his arm in what appeared to be the spur of the moment.

Alec didn’t say anything and just stood there, feeling the tingling sensation of Magnus’s touch on his arm and wondering why it had felt the way it had felt—like an electric shock, a chill, a blush, a rush of adrenaline, an epiphany, a jolt, a dizzying wave of...significance.

“Alec, I’m gonna go look for my spot, see you on the other side.” Simon said.

Alec nodded as if he had understood what Simon had said, but the truth was that he had no idea what had happened in the last few seconds of his life. He was in some sort of trance in which, for some reason, he couldn’t take his eyes off of Magnus and everything around him. He was aware of his presence just as he was aware of the air he breathed. Magnus was standing on the platform that would help him get onstage while his team adjusted his outfit and touched up his makeup very last minute. People around him ran, moved, and yelled instructions, making sure everything was ready so that he could give what promised to be the best show in history. Everything was so surreal and magical. Magical—that was the word. Alec had never thought of concerts like that, but that was the only word he could find in his still confused-trance mind to describe what he was witnessing, what he was feeli-

“Alec.” A man said, tapping his shoulder to get his attention and snapping him back to reality. It was Will, Magnus’s producer. “You can see the concert with us if you want. Ragnor, Raphael, and I have a small box with access to the stage to see the whole thing. You can experience it better there.”

“Really?” Alec asked, a bit relieved, though the relief in his voice wasn’t because he was apparently going to be able to see the concert from a better angle than the one he currently had, but because he was in control of himself again. He had awakened from that strange trance he had just experienced.

“Of course, you’re going to write a review about it, right? Then, you need to really see the show for it to be objective. We want good press.” He winked conspiratorially at him.

Alec couldn’t help but smile back. He was glad that at least the cards were on the table and they weren’t pretending otherwise. The reason they were there was because they wanted The Shadow World—the best magazine in the country—to give Magnus good press, nothing more. “Okay.”

He followed Will until they reached the small box from where he would be seeing the concert. It was really small but it had a perfect view of the stage, besides, as Will had mentioned, it was two steps away from it, making it easier for Magnus's team to be there for him if necessary.

“You are free to join us in all the concerts,” Will added, “I think this spot will work for you as well, you can see the concert and have easy communication with your team if you need it.”

“Yes, thank you.” Alec said.

They settled into their seats and remained silent for a few minutes. The whole place was vibrating with the chorus of voices that were clamoring Magnus’s name, who, of course, was making the crowd wait on purpose. It was an old trick that all artists used to make people go nuts, and it was
working. Alec could feel and almost taste the anticipation in the air. The more than twenty thousand people who had gathered here tonight were literally on the edge of their seats and about to lose their minds, but there was no sign of Magnus or anyone from his band yet, the stage was completely empty except from the instruments.

Alec took advantage of those minutes that he knew he still had to look around the place and find the box where his family was. He had already spotted the rest of his team in their respective positions, Aline and Maia on both sides of the stage to capture every moment; and Helen and Simon, one filming from the tech booth and the other from the right side of the room, where most of the cameras that Magnus's team had installed were.

“If you’re looking for your guests,” Ragnor said, “they’re literally on top of us, so you can’t see them, but don’t worry, they have one of the best boxes. I can assure you that they will enjoy every minute of the concert.”

“Oh.” Alec said. “Thank you.”

“It’s our pleasure.” Ragnor winked at him.

Alec didn’t know what to say, so he limited himself to smile. He was realizing just now that today there had been many times when he had run out of words, and he couldn’t not notice the irony of that statement. He was a writer, words were what he knew what to do, his weapon, what he had mastered over the years and used to express, defend, and protect himself; but apparently today, all that was only on paper because he had been feeling completely helpless and overwhelmed all day. That strong connection he used to feel between his brain, heart, and tongue was gone. Completely gone.

“It’s about to start!” Will whispered enthusiastically and leaned against the parapet of the box to get an even better view of the whole thing. Alec was just noticing that he had an earpiece and a portable radio that he was using to communicate with whom Alec assumed was his technical team.

The lights went out and after a sharp cry from all the fans, the whole place fell into a deep silence, so deep that you could drop a needle and hear it hit the floor. Every soul in the iconic Madison Square Garden was holding its breath, anxiously waiting for Magnus to make his grand entrance.

The minutes stretched and it seemed that the silence was going to reign forever, but just when the audience was least expecting it, the first notes of one of Magnus’s most popular songs started to resonate through the speakers of the place; the stage lit up and from behind a giant screen with stardust being projected on it—Magnus’s album and tour were called that, stardust—Magnus emerged, greeting the audience with his usual enthusiasm and making every corner of the room roar to the rhythm of his electric guitar.

"Hello, New York!” Magnus exclaimed while the rest of his band climbed on stage and joined him in the song, giving it more life and making all the fans scream even more.

It was a bit hard to believe if you weren't seeing it, but in a matter of seconds what had previously been an empty stage, a blank canvas, was now an electric composition of colors, music and lights—many, many lights.

“Amazing entrance.” Alec heard Ragnor whisper to Will, who had a clinical eye on the stage. He was, after all, responsible for what happened on the show tonight—good or bad.

Magnus started to sing and Alec immediately felt pulled to him. Once again, he couldn’t stop staring at him. Magnus had a different presence when he was on stage than when he was rehearsing or even
acting. He looked more comfortable, in his element, and that gave him power. He was in command of everything around him—the stage, the music, the audience. His fans moved, cheered, and sang at his will. It was like seeing a conductor leading his orchestra, or a sculptor molding and bending his artwork at will.

And it was because of that that Alec had a hard time trying to define his musical style, not because it was bad or anything like that, in fact, it was good, more so than he would like to admit out loud, but because it was like nothing he had heard or seen before. It was a combination of a lot of things, not only in musical terms, but in everything that was part of his show. His songs were eclectic, unique, and although clearly influenced by other artists—Madonna, David Bowie, Michael Jackson and perhaps Queen—they were still very Magnus. His lyrics were poetic, powerful, and meaningful, every word that Magnus sang felt like a message sent directly to the heart in a deep, but still emotional way. After a couple of songs Alec was able to conclude that his music was a statement—a statement to love, to complicated feelings, to heartbreak, to life.

As a member of the audience, Alec now understood why Magnus could fill this place three times and sold out an entire world tour in a matter of minutes. His theatrical performance was an experience in itself. His vocal command was undeniable and it resonated through his particular style and meticulous performance. What Alec had witnessed backstage, that attention to detail in all aspects of his personal presentation, were reflected in each step he took and in each note he sang. His extensive stage experience was seen in the ease with which he could refine and redefine his image through his clothes and other imagery, which in the end were essential to how he chose to inhabit his songs, captivate his audience, and showcase his individuality. The man was a complete spectacle in itself.

Alec took out his phone and snapped a couple of pictures. He knew that his team had every angle covered, but there were never too many pictures they could have and he had a pretty good spot. Some of these pictures could be posted on their social media accounts as a preview of the videos and HD pictures they would post later tonight.

“The angle here is great, isn’t it?” Ragnor said.

“Yeah, do you get to see all his concerts like this?”

“Most of them, yes, some venues have better boxes than others, but there’s always one that has a terrible view, you’ll get used to it. This is one of the best.”

Alec just nodded and returned his attention to the stage. The concert was in full swing and Magnus was giving quite the show, changing outfits practically on stage and dancing his ass off to some of his best hits. His music was a mixture of classical rock, pop, and electronic music which left plenty of room for flashy performances and complex dance routines.

After almost an hour of jumping from one side of the stage to the other, Magnus took a well-deserved break and while drinking some water to hydrate himself, he began to chat with the audience, asking them how they were doing and if they were enjoying the show. The response was so loud that Alec could feel the place vibrating from corner to corner once more.

“And now...” Magnus announced, pulling a stool from somewhere behind the set of instruments and placing it in the middle of the stage so he could sit down, “it’s time for us to get a little...romantic.” He added, winking at the audience that just went completely crazy.

Alec didn’t know that Magnus’s repertoire included a set of acoustic songs, but apparently that was what was going to happen because someone from the staff had already handed Magnus a guitar—the same guitar he had grabbed when Alec and Simon had caught him rehearsing in the room where the instruments were kept—and some of his musicians had sat on similar stools just a little behind him.
with acoustic instruments in hand—mainly percussions, strings, and other guitars.

Magnus looked at his band and, after a silent nod between them, began to play. The sweet notes of the guitar began to resonate all over the room and all Alec could do was look, look like a damn fool because finally, after a bit more than an hour, he had finally been caught under Magnus's spell completely.

“That song is good.” Alec couldn’t help but whisper. It was an admission he had trouble doing out loud, but it was the truth. For some reason, what had made him recognize Magnus's talent hadn't been the complicated dance routines or the upbeat songs he had been singing for more than an hour, but these, the most intimate and sweet melodies. The ones that felt real and stripped of all that glamour that used to be part of Magnus's stage persona.

“Right?” Will, who apparently had a very good ear, said. “One of my favorites.”

Alec got lost in the song—it was beautiful, like a poem. It talked about those little things that made the person you loved so special, it talked about how you found happiness in the shape of a smile, the intensity of a look, and the rhythm of a heartbeat. And for just a moment, Alec longed for all that, for that man he was yet to meet and whose smile, look, and heartbeat would mean so much to him that he would want to sing him a song just to tell him.

“He wrote that song for Catarina.” Will said, pulling him out of his reverie.

Alec turned around confused. “He and Catarina...dated?” He asked almost appalled. He had seen them interact all day and they didn’t act like ex-lovers, more like brother and sister, if he had to label their relationship.

“What? No! Of course not, she’s like the big sister he never had. He wrote that song when Cat got pregnant and little Madzie, Cat’s daughter, was born.” He elaborated. “Madzie’s father disappeared a bit before Cat knew the baby was on the way, but Magnus always supported her—emotionally and financially. He’s Madzie’s godfather.”

“Oh!” Alec said, now understanding everything. “I’m sorry, the lyrics...well, the lyrics make it sound like a love song.” He explained.

Will laughed a bit. “Well, it is a love song, but as a writer, I’m sure you know that love comes in many different forms. In this case, it’s the love of a mother for her daughter. Obviously, most people don’t know that about the song, so like you, they assume it’s just another generic love song like the thousands that are out there, but it's not.”

“It’s not that generic.” Alec admitted. “He writes love songs as if they were poems, not all songwriters can achieve that.”

“Magnus is a romantic, he’s in love with love, so I’d say he has a gift when it comes to knowing how to express and write about love in its many, many forms. He’s one of those fools who believes that there’s a right person for everyone in the world and that we just have to find them.”

“Really?” Alec asked surprised. He would have never taken Magnus as one of those people who truly believed in love. He looked very...experienced in the dating sector.

Will just nodded.

“Does he think he’s found it? The one, I mean?” Alec asked.

Will remained silent for a moment. “I’m not sure, but that’s not a question I’m qualified or allowed to
answer, but if you really want to know, you can always try to ask him yourself."

Alec didn’t say anything and just fixed his eyes on Magnus. He doubted that the man would ever share something so personal with him, but he couldn’t deny that now he was very curious about it—more curious than he dared to admit.

The first day of the one hundred and sixty-four that he was going to be with all these people was about to come to an end, and although it was really hard for him to admit that Magnus had somehow managed to impress him with his talent and good treatment towards his fans and all the people working for him, he had to admit that the man had, in just one day, become the greatest mystery in his career. He had so many doubts and questions about him, but he supposed that with time he would get all the answers he wanted, especially that of knowing what he had been wondering since they had given him this exclusive—who was the man behind the superstar, would he ever get the chance to meet him?
Chapter 6

I'm finally back!!!! First of all, I want to apologize for taking so long to update this story. I had this chapter almost ready back in June, but then they cancelled the show and that kinda ruined everything. One, because all my free time (aka writing time) was now being used to try to save the show, and two, because thinking about these characters that I love so much made me extremely sad, so writing about them hurt... a lot. Fuck Freeform, bro!

But anyway, life must go on and all that, so I'm back. This chapter is really, really long, so I hope it's worth the wait. As per usual, I won't say much about it to avoid spoilers, but know that we're making progress with the story and from now on we will see a lot more interactions between Magnus and Alec. Remember that it's a slow-burn romance so everything will happen in due time—just have a little patience. In the meantime, don't forget to leave kudos and/or share your thoughts about the story in the comment section, you know I love reading what you guys think of each chapter.

See you soon!!!

After the successful concerts in New York City, New Jersey, and Washington D.C.—where the former presidential family had been among the VIP attendees—it was time for Magnus’s tour to continue its journey to the north of the country and for them to take a flight that would take them directly to the fourth of the sixty-four stops they would be making: Chicago, the windy city.

Magnus was scheduled to give two concerts at the Soldier Field Stadium—the largest venue they had visited so far—starting with one of the them that very same night. It was Friday and they were at the end of what would be the second week of the tour, and if there was one thing that Alec had managed to conclude even after such a short period of time, it was that the schedule had been exactly what he had predicted from day one: chaotic.

These past two weeks had passed in a blur and he felt very tired, as if instead of having been working thirteen days, he had been doing it for thirteen years. There was no doubt that life on tour moved at a different pace, everything happened so fast and in so little time that it was practically impossible to stop and catch a breath. The only day off they had had so far—after the two concerts in New Jersey—Alec had spent it working and trying not to fall asleep before he could send his boss the article of the day. He was in dying need of a full night's sleep, but he knew that that would be impossible. Magnus's schedule was planned to the last detail and although there were more days off in the near future, he had learned pretty quickly that those days were used to travel between destinations, finish any pending work, and solve problems, not to rest.

"Are you okay?" Aline asked him as they entered one of the many private areas at the Ronald Reagan National Airport in Virginia to wait for their flight to take off.

"Yeah, I'm just tired," he said, "all the hustle and bustle of the last few days is finally catching up on me and I'm exhausted."

"Good thing we don’t have to take a commercial flight," she said, winking at him, "you can nap all
the way to Chicago without anyone bothering you—well, the hour and a half that it takes to get there, anyway.”

“Yeah…”

Unlike the rest of Magnus’s staff who were forced to take commercial flights at insane hours to move from one place to another and arrive in time for the next concert, Alec and his team had the ‘privilege’ of flying with Magnus and his closest team on a private flight. Apparently, Magnus’s team had taken the coverage very seriously and that had meant that Alec and company were practically glued to the famous singer 24/7. It was a luxury they hadn’t asked for, but for which they were very grateful. Alec would have been okay with traveling with the rest of the staff on a common flight, but he couldn’t deny either that it was nice to travel in less crowded planes and without annoying people making the flight-time between destinations a living nightmare.

“Anyway…” Aline said, “you can also take a power nap right now if you want, we have a few minutes to spare.” She suggested.

“I’ll probably just do that.” Alec admitted with a smile. Their flight was scheduled for 7:30 a.m., so they had to wait at least twenty minutes before they could board the plane. He could close his eyes for a few minutes to recharge himself, he had always had trouble sleeping on planes.

Aline just smiled and walked away to join Simon and Maia who were in line to buy coffee, probably to recharge themselves too. Last night, they all had arrived from the last concert after 2 a.m. and had only slept a couple of hours before having to take the van that had brought them to the airport. Alec knew that all his friends were as tired as he was.

Alec sat down next to Helen—who had her headphones on and seemed to be doing some last-minute editing on the material they had—and closed his eyes. He had every intention of taking that power nap to have more energy during the day, but the murmur of the people in the room and the constant roar of the building every time a plane took off made the task impossible, so resigned, Alec opened his eyes and exhaled loudly.

He thought about joining Simon, Maia, and Aline, and buying a cup of coffee too, but he was too tired to move, so having nothing else to do, he started to look around the room to distract himself and lose some time. Everybody was minding their own business, some lost in their phones or just talking to each other, so Alec began to observe them one by one until his eyes landed on Magnus.

The singer was with Will and Jem, laughing at something they were watching on Will’s phone. He looked tired as the rest of them, but also happy and relaxed, as Alec very rarely had the chance to see him. The man was always working, dancing, singing, rehearsing, moving; he was like the energizer bunny, living in an uninterrupted frenzy all day every day, so to see him relaxed and just enjoying his free time with his friends was a bit strange.

In these past days, Alec had been trying to get to know him beyond his celebrity facade, to decipher the man and not the superstar, and although his opinion about him—professionally speaking, of course—had changed significantly since the first concert, Alec, now more than ever, was certain that his intuition was correct and that the man was hiding something. He was talented, yes, he wasn’t a FPC in the strict sense of the word, that was also true, but he was definitely not who he said he was. Alec had been watching him, following him closely, and there were a couple of things that he had noticed that had helped him confirm his suspicions about him.

For starters, Magnus got phone calls all day long, and although that wasn’t strange—the man was a very popular celebrity after all—what had made Alec pay more attention to it was the fact that no matter what he was doing, he always answered them. If his phone rang, Magnus would stop
whatever he was doing, answer the call and leave the room—every single time. His phone only went off during his concerts, so Alec couldn’t help wondering who was the person who called him all day and why it was so important for Magnus to answer.

And then there was his, sometimes curious, routine after the concerts.

It wasn’t strange either that celebrities had certain routines and security protocols after mass events—concerts, premieres, etc—they had to be very careful and protect themselves from stalkers and crazy fans, but Magnus’s routine after the concerts sometimes made Alec wonder if they went through all that trouble to really protect Magnus or just his hidden agenda. Some days, after a show, Magnus would go right into one of the security vans with Luke and leave for the hotel before the fans could follow him—nothing suspicious there. But some other days, he would only pretend to climb into one of the security vans to later sneak off to some car discreetly parked in the venue and drive away on his own.

It had only been seven concerts, but this had happened in three of them, once in New York, New Jersey, and Washington D.C. respectively. The first time it had happened, Alec hadn’t even questioned the sudden change in the routine. They had still been in New York, so he had assumed that Magnus had only wanted to go home without being noticed, but when the same thing had happened in the other cities, Alec had started to suspect that there was something else behind all that. It hadn’t helped either that in those last two occasions Magnus had made it to the hotel until the next day, making Alec wonder if those mysterious disappearances were actually just a coincidence or were related to something else. Logically, if Magnus had to stay out all night that meant that whatever he had to do took him a long time, so if all that suspicious stuff he had seen wasn’t a coincidence or a product of his sometimes very creative imagination, then, it wasn't hard to conclude that Magnus had a hidden agenda that probably included all kinds of excesses. Drugs and sex, the Achilles heel of all celebrities.

He had tried to ask around and find out more about it—the mysterious calls and the sneaky getaways—but the people he had asked, technicians and other members of the staff, had been very protective of the star’s personal life, so a very harsh, *don’t ask us,* was all he had gotten for an answer. And although that hadn’t been the information he had been hoping to get, it had helped him to confirm that indeed something wasn’t right and that he wasn’t imagining things.

Of course he hadn’t shared any of this with anyone from his family or team, he knew it was too early to draw any definitive conclusions, but he was convinced that he was right and that there was something Magnus was hiding. What and why? He wasn’t sure, but he was going to find out one way or another, he knew it was only a matter of time before Magnus made a mistake and-

He was so lost in his own thoughts that when his phone rang notifying him of a call from his sister, he jumped from his seat, almost falling in the process.

“Are you okay?” Helen asked, taking off her headphones and looking at him with some concern in her eyes. Alec knew he had startled her too.

“Well, don’t sound so happy to hear me, good morning, big brother.” His sister said.
“Sorry, I’m tired, good morning, Iz.”

“Tired? You’ve been there for just a few days,” she said, “how can you be tired?”

“Well, this tour thing is more complicated than you think, but anyway, what are you doing up so early?” He asked. His sister wasn’t known for being an early bird, on the contrary, actually. “And wait, are you already in the office?” He asked again when the commotion in the background became clearer. He could hear people talking and discussing stuff, as they did every time they had meetings to discuss their articles or upcoming issues of the magazine.

“Yes, most of us stayed here last night to be able to finish this week’s coverage and help polish what you guys send today. Our numbers are insane, Alec! We’re selling three times more than what mom had anticipated we would be selling, so we need all hands on deck.”

“Oh…” Alec exclaimed a bit surprised. He had expected the magazine to become more popular with the exclusive coverage, but to hear that they were doing three times more than what they had been expecting, and in such a short time, was great news. It made all the stress and fatigue he felt at the moment worth it.

“Mom and dad are beyond themselves, and of course, everyone here is talking about the excellent work you guys are doing. You’re heroes among us.”

“I’m glad to hear that our hard work is being appreciated.”

“Very.”

“But anyway, how are you? How’s everyone doing back home?”

“We’re okay, like I said, mom and dad are going crazy with the magazine, Jace, Clary, and I are working hard, and Max is still on cloud nine after the concert and having met Magnus.”

Alec chuckled. He hadn’t been expecting anything less from his little brother. “Has he been wearing that jacket Magnus gave him 24/7?” Alec asked curiously.

“What do you think? Mom already threatened him to bleach it three times and it’s only been two weeks.”

Alec laughed. “He knows that mom would never do that.”

“I know and that’s why he doesn’t care what anyone says. He wears that jacket all day, every day. Have you checked his Instagram?”

“No, you know I never open that thing. I don’t even think I have the app on my phone anymore.”

“Well, you should download it again and check it, in fact, that’s partially why I’m calling you so early.”

“To talk about Max’s Instagram account?” Alec asked confused.

“No, well, kinda. I overheard mom and Aldertree last night, and they were saying that they were going to call you today to ask you to do something else for the magazine. So I thought it would be better if you knew what they’re going to ask you before they call because I’m sure you’re not going to like it anyway.”

“What is it?” Alec asked, standing up despite the fatigue and heading to one side of the room to have
“Hmmm, have you been checking the magazine’s social media accounts?” She asked.

“No, why?” He said.

He knew that his team had been sharing behind-the-scenes footage of the tour and that Maia had coordinated with the social media team in New York to schedule certain publications, but he hadn’t checked them personally. Although technically speaking, he was the boss here, that wasn’t his responsibility. He was just the writer. The content that was published was Aldertree’s direct responsibility.

“Oh, well...a few days ago.” Izzy started to say and Alec could already hear the storm coming—his sister sounded nervous.

“What happened?”

“Nothing bad, I promise, but...do you remember that picture that Simon took of all of you in the small office that you set up at Madison Square Garden?”

“Yes, why?” Alec asked. He remembered that picture, Simon had insisted on taking it right after they had set up their small office in the famous venue. Back then, Alec hadn’t seen the problem with it, now, however, he wasn’t so sure.

“Well, he sent it to me almost immediately and I shared it with mom when I went home to pick up Max to go to the concert.”

“And?”

“Hmmm, I didn’t know, but she showed it to Aldertree and I don’t know what happened, but at some point they decided to post it on our social media accounts and tag you all.”

“They what!”

“They wanted our readers to know the team that’s doing the coverage and, well, the point is that, since then, all of you had gained a shit ton of followers. Simon, Maia, Aline, and Helen have been pretty active sharing some pictures of what you guys have been doing and of the cities you’ve visited so far, but you haven’t.”

“And?”

“I heard mom and Aldertree discussing that last night and they were saying that they were going to call you today to ask you to post some pictures too. You’re the most popular of the five, your name is under all the articles we’ve published about Magnus and the tour, so people know that you’re the closest to him. Plus, Max has been telling everyone who asks him on Instagram that you are Magnus’s friend and that’s how you got him that extra meet and greet with him.”

Alec rolled his eyes, he was going to have a very serious conversation with his little brother as soon as he had some time to call him, but for now, he had to deal with this nonsense that his sister was sharing with him. “Well, I’m not going to post pictures just because mom and Aldertree want, it’s not part of my job here.”

“Come on, Alec! Be a team player!”

“I am a team player, I’m doing the coverage, aren’t I?”
“Yes, but we need to engage our audience in any way we can.”

“Why? You said our numbers are insane, didn’t you? You don’t need me to ‘engage’ the audience, they’re already engaged.”

“Well, yes, but if we want to keep those numbers going up during the remaining 150 days of the tour, we certainly need you.”

Alec sighed. “I’ll think about it.”

“Mom is gonna force you somehow, so I think it’s better if you do it on your own. Save yourself the trouble. That’s why I called.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “Can you keep her from calling?”

“No, you know that.” Izzy said. “Just say yes and post a picture, it can be of anything: the ceiling of your hotel room, your shoes, the window, whatever. They just want people to keep a close eye on us...that’s all. Besides, I know you like pictures, so I’m sure you have enough material on your phone to use for this ‘special’ request.”

Alec sighed. “I’ll see what I can do about it.” He said resignedly.

“Anyway, tell me everything that’s happened! Are you at the airport?”

“Yeah, our flight takes off in a couple of minutes.”

“You’re heading to Chicago, right?” She said. “We’ve been following the tour very closely. Clary and I put together this huge interactive world map to know where you guys are.”


“It’s a silly thing, we just wanted to know where you guys were and all that. I managed to get a copy of Magnus’s schedule with Aldertree’s assistant, so Clary designed a map with the route of all the places that you’re going to be visiting, and then we just printed it. We have small magnets with your faces to keep track of where you all are. You’re gonna love it when you see it.”

“As long as you don’t share that online, I’m okay with it.”

“Oh, don’t worry, that’s just for us. It’s a way to feel like we’re there with you guys, we miss you.”

“We miss you all too.”

“I somehow doubt that,” Izzy chuckled, “you all are living like rock stars, you don’t have time to miss us. Remember that I have a pair of eyes there giving me a full report on everything that happens every day.”

Alec glanced over to where Simon was. “Well, don’t believe everything he says, you should see him right now. He looks like a zombie and is relying on coffee to keep going, he’s anything but a rock star.”

“Oh, my poor baby, he needs his beauty sleep. Please, give him a hug and a kiss from me, and-”

“I’m going to stop you right there, I’m not going to give your boyfriend anything.” Alec laughed with just the thought of giving Simon a hug and a kiss from his sister. That was a line he wasn’t willing to cross.
“But-”

“Nothing, you can give him all the hugs and kisses you want when we're back.”

“But it's gonna be months before that and-”

His sister was saying when Alec noticed that everyone was standing up and walking towards the boarding gate. Apparently, it was time to go.

“Iz, I gotta go.”

“Okay, we’ll talk later. Say hi to all the others for me and at least tell Simon I'll call him later, okay?”

“I will.”

“Well, consider what I told you about posting some pictures, you know mom.”

“Yes.”

“Have a safe flight and don't forget to have some fun.”

“Okay.”

“I'm serious.”

“Me too.”

“Liar. I know you, Alec, I know that these days you've only been working like the workaholic you are.”

“Simon told you.”

“He doesn't need to tell me anything for me to know, I'm your sister, remember?”

Alec remained silent.

“I know you too well, big brother, I know that for you work always comes first, but use the free time you guys have to do something different. You're traveling the world, enjoy it! Do crazy things and make some friends!”

“Okay.” Alec said, he didn’t feel like arguing with his sister.

“You promise?”

“Yes.”

“I’m having a hard time believing you, but anyway, before you go, tell me real quick...how are you doing with that investigation of yours to ‘unmask’ Magnus?”

“I'm working on that.”

“Well, our bet is still on, so if you wanna have even a small chance to win, you'll have to up your game a bit, big bro. How do you plan to prove that Magnus isn’t who he says he is if you’re at the hotel or in the venues all day long doing nothing but work?”

“So, are you suggesting that I get close to him? Keep your friends close, your enemies closer? I
thought you weren't okay with this.”

“I'm not, but we made a bet and the only way you're gonna find out more about him is if you learn to know him...and his team too. Who knows, maybe with some luck, Max's little lie comes true and you end up becoming his friend.”

Alec rolled his eyes. ‘I'll talk to you later.”

Izzy laughed—she knew what she was doing and how much that annoyed Alec. “Anyway, take care, bye, Alec.”

“Bye.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Alec took a deep breath and hung up the phone. What his sister had just told him had left him thinking. She had made a point, if he wanted to know the truth about Magnus, he had to improve his game a bit and maybe even consider stepping out of his comfort zone. He knew that befriending the singer to get to know him, as his sister had suggested, was going to be impossible, they had nothing in common, but maybe he could try it with his closest friends. It was going to be hard, if not impossible, but-

“Alec!” Maia exclaimed from the door. He was the only one left in the room.

“Shit! I'm coming!” He said, grabbing his bag and running towards the gate. He was going to have the whole flight to Chicago to plan what to do.

The hotel in which they were going to stay the four days they were going to be in the city was one of the most luxurious that Alec had ever stayed at. It was located in Downtown Chicago and had the most spectacular view of the city and Lake Michigan—one of the five largest lakes in North America. His room—which by the way, he was going to share with Simon as he had been doing since the tour had started—was like a dream come true. It wasn't a suite like the ones in which Magnus and some other members of his team were staying, but it was still too luxurious for a hotel room. It had all the amenities that they could imagine, a huge bathroom, a small living room with a coffee table, views of the city onto some famous street, and two full-size beds with custom Pratesi linens. It was like sleeping in a modern palace.

“Undoubtedly, the best room we've had so far.” Simon said, running to one of the beds and plopping down on top of it. “Even the mattress is out of this world, do you think it's orthopedic?”

“I don't know.” Alec said sincerely, putting his stuff on top of the other bed and sitting down. Simon was right, even the beds were perfect. He had no idea how much it cost to stay one night in this place, but he was afraid to even find out. He had a hunch that it cost more than his monthly rent.

“Do you think the girls’ room is bigger than ours?” Simon asked, being his always curious and talkative self.

“No, they are only a few rooms away from us, so I suppose their room is identical to ours, although I do think their view is better ‘cause their room faces the other street, so they get to see the lake and not the street.” Alec said.
“Well, we’re going to stay here for four days, so we can ask them to let us stay in their room for one night so we get to have a great view too,” Simon said, “although this one is not so bad either.”

“It’s not.” Alec admitted.

“Anyway, have they sent you today’s schedule? Can we go pee before we leave or are we supposed to be in the stadium already?”

“Let me check.” Alec said, taking his phone out of his pocket and checking his email. Catarina had just sent him a copy of the schedule for the day and after a quick scan, Alec was surprised to read that they were actually going to have some hours to rest before they had to go to the stadium; even if that meant that later they wouldn’t have time to breathe. “According to this, we have to be at the stadium at noon.”

“What? Until noon? Why? Didn’t they say the first day that we had to be in the venues 10 hours before each and every concert? I thought we wouldn’t even have time to rest. Are you sure it says noon?”

“Yes, read it yourself, I just sent you and all the others a copy of the email.”

“Why do you think they changed the schedule?” Simon asked confused.

“No idea, but to be honest? I’m grateful because that gives us some time to breathe.”

“And sleep,” Simon added, “I’m really tired.”

“I’m kinda more hungry, though.” Alec said. He was tired too and probably sleeping was a better idea than eating, but his stomach was reminding him that he hadn’t eaten anything since yesterday’s lunch and, taking into account the busy day they were going to have once they arrived at the stadium, it was probably better to eat than to sleep.

“You can order room service, it’s already paid.”

“I know, but I prefer to go downstairs, I want to see the restaurants. We’re going to be here a couple of days, so it’s better if we find out what they have to offer now that we have some time, I’m not sure if we’ll have that luxury later. Do you want something?” Alec asked. Simon seemed ready to take a long nap and didn’t seem to have the slightest intention to move from the bed.

“Nope.” Simon shook his head. “I’ll order something later, I really need to sleep.”

“As you wish.” Alec said, grabbing his phone and wallet, and walking out of the room. “I’ll see if the girls want to join me. Sleep tight, I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah…” Simon said, but Alec knew he was already falling asleep.

Alec quickly texted his friends, but like Simon, they all were going to take a nap before they had to leave. So resigned to eat alone, he walked to the elevator and headed to one of the many restaurants that the hotel had, taking a seat at an empty table and ordering something for breakfast.

The restaurant, just like the rest of the place, was very elegant. Alec felt a bit weird to be there dressed so casually when the decoration around him called for a more formal attire—a tuxedo, perhaps. But he wasn’t the only one who hadn’t dressed for the occasion, there were more people sitting at the other tables dressed in casual clothes, so he just shrugged off the slight discomfort that he felt and pulled out his phone to kill some time while waiting for his food.
He checked his emails, added some notes to his drafts, and was about to open a new book to read for a while when he remembered what Izzy had asked him to do that very morning—post pictures on his Instagram account. It was a nuisance and he didn’t want to do it, but he knew that his sister had been right, it was better to do it on his own terms than to wait for his mother or his boss to force him somehow. So resigned, he sighed and installed the app on his phone again, opening it as soon as the now colorful icon was available.

He was typing in his email address and password to log in when a little voice distracted him.

“Alec!” Madzie, Catarina’s little daughter, exclaimed, running towards him and jumping on his lap despite the cast that she still had on her arm.

Madzie had loved him since day one. They had formally met when they had traveled from New York to New Jersey and, since he had said ‘hi’ to her, the little girl had instantly shown a genuine liking for him. She had even invited him to play with her that day and they had had a really great time. Alec knew that he was good with kids, being more than ten years older than his younger brother had helped with that, but he also couldn't deny that he had had a special connection with the little girl.

“How are you, little one?” He asked her. He hadn't had a chance to talk to her since yesterday morning. “You were asleep on the plane and all the way here.” He said.

“But now I'm awake.” She smiled mischievously.

“Awake and very hungry,” Catarina added, joining them. “That's kinda the routine with kids: they eat, play, and sleep on a loop. But anyway, are you on your own? Where's your team?”

“Sleeping.” Alec said smiling.

“Well, it seems that we're the only ones awake, we knocked on everyone's doors to see if they wanted to have breakfast with us, but they all are asleep as well.”

“You can sit with me.” Alec offered, pointing to the empty seats at his table.

“Thank you.” Catarina smiled. “I have to go check some stuff at the front desk, but I’ll be right back, can I leave her with you?” She asked, pointing to Madzie.

“Of course.” Alec smiled, high-fiving the little girl while Catarina left.

“Do you like my doll, Alec?” Madzie asked, showing him the doll she was carrying. It was the same Barbie that the girl had been carrying around since he had met her, but it'd apparently had a major makeover in the last few hours because her hair was now dyed in all colors and she was wearing custom-made clothes. “Uncle Magnus helped me dress her, isn't she pretty?”

“Very.” Alec smiled.

“She's wearing one of my uncle’s tees.” Madzie added, taking off the doll’s jacket so that Alec could see that, indeed, the doll was wearing a miniature version of one of the t-shirt designs that Magnus's team was selling for the tour. “Uncle Magnus asked Uncle Jem to make Cindy a wardrobe for the tour.” She explained.

“Oh.” Alec exclaimed, not knowing what else to say.

In his opinion, making a custom-made wardrobe for a doll was a bit too much, but when he thought about it more carefully, it kind of made sense that Magnus had asked for something like that. One,
because the man was the definition of extra, so ordering a custom-made wardrobe for a doll sounded like something he would definitely do. And two, because he was Madzie’s godfather, it was only natural that he would take every opportunity he had to spoil her.

“Uncle Jem made me a lot of clothes, do you wanna see them?” She asked without waiting for an answer and just taking out from her small bag hundreds of thousands of miniature outfits. All were perfectly tailored, with details that only designer clothes had, it was obvious to anyone with a pair of eyes that these had been made by a professional.

“This is my favorite.” Madzie added, showing him a tiny sparkly blue dress completely made with sequins.

“It's very pretty.” Alec said.

“Do you like it too? We can put it on after the concert,” she said, “Uncle Jem said it was a dress to go out with friends, so if you want, we can play going to the club later. We can also change her shoes to match and add some accessories, she has to look very pretty. Uncle Magnus has told me that clubs are very exclusive, like Pan-”

“Madzie, put all that stuff away.” Catarina said, returning to the table and discreetly scolding her daughter.

“I was showing Alec Cindy’s new clothes.”

“I know, but this isn't the place to do that. Put all that away, you can show him all you want later.”

Madzie made a face, but started to put all the clothes back in her bag.

“That doll has a better wardrobe than mine.” Catarina told Alec, taking a seat next to him.

“And mine.” Alec added, chuckling though it was true.

“Magnus and all the rest spoil her too much.” Catarina said as a matter of explanation. “They've always spoiled her too much.”

“Can I go play?” Madzie asked, pointing to the kids area that wasn't far from where they were sitting.

“Yes, but I want you here for breakfast, okay? I don't want to have to call you twice.”

Madzie nodded. “Would you take care of Cindy for me?” She asked Alec, handing him her doll.

“Of course, I'm gonna sit her right here, okay?” Alec said, sitting the doll in the center of the table as Madzie ran off to go play.

“She really likes you.” Catarina pointed out. “That's her favorite doll and not everyone can take care of it for her. The only ones allowed to even touch it are Magnus, Jem, Tessa, Ragnor, and me, so consider yourself special.”

Alec smiled. “She's an adorable girl.”

“What can I say? I'm her mom, so naturally, I think she's the best in the world.

“You've done an excellent job with her, especially if we take into account that you're on your own and busy practically all the time.”
“It hasn't been easy.” Catarina confessed.

“I can only imagine.”

“But anyway, tell me...was your room okay? Is it comfortable?”

“Are you kidding? It's perfect! This whole place is perfect. I’d never stayed in a hotel like this one. It's very...luxurious, like a modern palace.” He said.

“Well, get used to it ‘cause there are a couple of hotels where we're going to stay that will make this one look like a motel.”

“You're joking, right?”

“No, Magnus likes to be comfortable when we're on tour, so he doesn’t skimp when it comes to lodging.”

Alec’s eyes widened with that. Although, if he was honest, hearing it didn't really surprise him that much. Magnus was wealthy—always had been. His father's company was still to this day one of the most profitable technology companies in the world, and there was also the fact that the man was a superstar. Alec knew that for Magnus money wasn’t a problem.

“But never mind that,” Catarina continued, “I sent you an email with today's schedule. We need to be at the stadium until noon for the soundcheck. There were some problems with the stage and we're behind schedule, and although that's an inconvenience, at least it gives us a couple extra hours to rest.”

“Oh, yeah, I got it and sent it to my team so they knew when to be ready. I was wondering why you guys had changed the schedule, I thought we wouldn’t have time to unpack before we had to go to the stadium.”

“Me too, but you know...technical stuff. That always happens. In fact, we had been lucky so far, we had managed to survive two weeks without incident—that's a new record.”

Alec chuckled.

“But tell me, are you enjoying the tour?” Catarina asked casually.

“Yeah, it’s been good so far,” Alec admitted, “exhausting, but good.”

“Life on tour is very exhausting, but you’ll get used to it eventually. The first few weeks are always the hardest ones, the first time we went on tour with Magnus, I wanted to give up after the first week, and Ragnor and Raphael had both signed their resignation letters after the first concert, so having you all still here with us and willing to keep working is a good sign.”

Alec chuckled. “Well, quitting isn’t an option for us.”

“True, although technically, and legally, you could. That would bring huge problems to the magazine, of course, but you could. However, you don’t look like a guy who knows how to give up.”

Alec smiled. “My father says that’s always been one of my biggest weaknesses.” He confessed.

“I don’t see it as a weakness, quite the opposite, actually. I think that’s what makes you so different from the other journalists we’ve met along the way.”
“My stubbornness?”

“No, your determination.” Catarina smiled. “You take your job seriously, and that's very admirable. You don't see being a writer for an entertainment magazine as something less serious than writing for I don't know, the New York Times or some other serious publication. You see what you do with a lot of professionalism and like I said, that's really admirable. I haven’t known you for long, but I think you're a very honest and responsible person. I don't know if someone has told you or if you've noticed, but the way you write—your words—they really reflect who you are.” She said, and Alec tensed a bit. He suddenly felt very exposed.

During the whole flight from Virginia to Chicago, Alec had been thinking about the conversation he had had with his sister and had come to the conclusion that his only alternative to make some kind of progress in his research on Magnus and win that silly bet, was to befriend some of the people closest to the actual source. He had never been a very sociable person, so this was a real challenge for him, but he had no choice. Being a journalist sometimes included doing things that you weren't used to or comfortable with just to get information, and although Magnus's people were extremely loyal, he had decided that he had to at least try it.

Of the ten people who were part of Magnus’s closest team, he had ruled out Elias, Dot, and Meliorn almost immediately because even though they were nice enough to him and treated him well, it had been clear, from the very beginning, that they couldn’t care less about him. Luke, Tessa, Will, Jem, Ragnor, and even Raphael, he had considered them since they seemed to genuinely like him, but unfortunately, he didn’t have many opportunities to talk to them outside of a work environment, only sporadically, so that had left him with only one option: Catarina. The person he had talked to the most in these past weeks, but who, guessing by their current conversation, had learned to know him way too quickly, complicating everything.

“You're one of those people,” Catarina continued, “that no matter what, they do what they have to do, even if that’s not exactly what they want to do, you know? Don’t think I haven’t noticed that you’re not Magnus’s biggest fan and yet you’re here, doing this for your magazine and always keeping a very professional attitude.” She added.

“I…” Alec hesitated a bit before replying. It was clear that he would have to rethink his plan because this woman was really good at reading people and had already deciphered him. He would never be able to get anything out of her, much less pretend to be someone he wasn’t just to get information—she already knew him too well. “No, I’m not, Magnus’s style isn’t my thing. But it’s nothing personal,” he hastened to say, “I’m not a fan of any celebrity, to be honest. I’m a bit weird in that sense, I’m not really immersed in pop culture. I’m like a caveman most of the time. What I know, I know from my siblings and the world I work in, but that’s it.”

“That’s okay,” Catarina admitted, “to each his own and all that, right? But tell me that at least you’ve enjoyed the concerts so far, even a little.”

“Oh, yes, of course.” Alec confessed. “They have been very revealing.”

“Revealing? How so?” Catarina asked.

“You’ve met my family, they all are Magnus's fans.” Alec explained. “For years, I’ve heard almost everything about him, but I hadn’t actually listened to his music or seen any of his work. Somehow, this tour has made me see what they see.”

“You really hadn’t heard or seen any of his work?” Catarina asked stunned. “I mean, you work for the entertainment business, how did you manage to avoid it? I don’t want to sound like a presumptuous assistant, but Magnus is one of the most famous celebrities out there—it’s kind of
impossible to miss what he does, especially if you work in the business.”

Alec shrugged. “I would say it was sheer luck, but it was actually just that all the people around me are very respectful and never forced me to like him. They tried, of course, telling me to check out his music or inviting me to the movies when a new film came out, but I never found the appeal. And not only with Magnus, but with many other celebrities. I think that working for the industry has made me this way, someone would say that I know too much to buy all the lies they usually sell.”

“But now that you’ve seen a bit of what he does, has that vision changed?”

“Of course,” Alec confessed, “it took me only one concert to understand the appeal.” He added, blushing a little. He hadn’t admitted that out loud to anyone—this was the first time.

“He’s very talented,” Catarina said, “and I’m glad you gave yourself the opportunity to appreciate his art. It’s very inspiring.”

“You’re very proud of him.” Alec stated the obvious. One look at Catarina when she talked about Magnus and you knew she was like a proud sister watching her brother achieve great things in life.

“How could I not be?” She said. “I’ve known the guy since forever and seeing him succeed after all he’s been through makes me feel like the proudest of friends. If there’s someone out there who deserves all good things in life, that’s Magnus.”

Alec wanted to ask what were those things that Magnus had been through that had made Catarina say that, but he knew that she probably wouldn't share that stuff with him, so he opted for a more casual question to keep the conversation going. “So you’ve known Magnus for a long time?”

“Yes, almost all my life. We practically grew up together and went to the same school since fifth grade. Well, I was in fifth grade, he was in fourth grade. I’m a year older than him, but we were always friends. My mother used to work for his father, so we have some history together.”

“Really?”

“Yes, then, well, then he left to study abroad in London, but we kept in touch. When he graduated from college and started having all these crazy ideas of becoming a superstar, he asked me to be his assistant. He needed someone he could trust, so I said yes and immediately became part of his team.”

“I need to ask because it’s been eating me alive since we met, but when does Beyoncé enter your life? Magnus is pretty famous and all, but Beyoncé is still Beyoncé.” Alec asked, hoping to finally hear the full story.

Catarina chuckled. “People don’t call her Queen B for nothing, right?”

Alec nodded.

“Well, she contacted me two years after I joined Magnus’s team.” Catarina shared. “Magnus’s first album had been a massive success and, before working for him, I had worked as an assistant at B&E.”

“Magnus’s father's company.”

“Yes, so I had some experience and, well, Beyoncé was looking for a new assistant and since I had worked for a renowned entrepreneur for a few years and was behind the biggest rising star of the moment, she tried to recruit me to be part of her team, but as you already know, I turned down her offer.”
“Because Magnus offered you something else, right?”

“Yes, what he offered me the first time we met: a family.” Catarina confessed. “I don’t want to bore you with the details, but I owe Magnus and his family a lot. My life hasn’t been easy either, but he’s always been there for me and my family. My mom was also a single mother, my father died when I was four, and we were pretty much just the two of us for years until the Banes appeared in our lives. My mom worked at B&E as part of the maintenance staff, but gradually, she started to get a better position until Mr. Bane himself asked her to be the housekeeper in his mansion. That’s why I know Magnus practically all my life, we grew up together in that big house. Anyway, when my mother became ill and passed away, I felt like dying, but having Magnus by my side helped me get through the terrible loss. It was a very difficult time in my life because right after that happened I discovered that I was pregnant with Madzie. I was completely alone, the girl’s father and I had split a couple of months before that, so you can imagine how I was feeling. It was as if, all of a sudden, my whole life had turned upside down."

"And what about Madzie’s father? Didn’t he support you when he found out about her?"

Catarina shook her head. "No, when I went to tell him about the baby, he unfortunately or fortunately—I don’t even know anymore—was very clear about his position regarding that and said he didn’t want to have anything to do with her, ever."

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’s okay, it was a long time ago, I’m over it now. And like I said, I don’t even know if that was actually the best thing that could happen to us both. But anyway, as you can imagine, I was desperate, scared, and alone. This happened back in 2011, Magnus was about to get his masters in text and performance and had decided to stay in London for good, but when he found out what was happening to me, he came back to New York just to be with me. Not permanently because he was still studying and was also determined to live on the other side of the world for some personal reasons, but he stayed a few months and then came back every month for my doctor’s appointments and he, of course, was by my side when Madzie was born. He offered me a shoulder to cry on and the company I needed during the darkest part of my life. Losing your mother and having a kid on your own is terrifying, but he made me realize that I wasn’t really alone, because despite everything that was happening I had him unconditionally—as a brother and a friend.”

“That’s sweet.”

“Yes, he was a great support for both of us,” Catarina continued, “that’s why when a couple of months later he offered me the position as his personal assistant, I didn’t hesitate to support him. He had been there for me all these years, it was my turn to be there for him. Besides, working for B&E was hard, it was really time consuming and Madzie was just a baby, so working with Magnus was a better option at that time.”

“So you moved to London?”

“Yes, I packed my bags and went with my little girl to follow her crazy uncle. We stayed there a little over a year, until...well, until we were forced to come back when Magnus’s father had that fatal accident.”

“Oh…” Alec whispered.

“Then, well...things here turned out better than any of us would have ever imagined and he became the superstar he is today. Obviously, that made us all get more job offers. When an artist becomes an overnight success, they don’t do it on their own, there’s always a team behind them, so all those big
stars who are trying to get some fresh blood for their own teams usually try to recruit the teams behind the new stars.”

“That’s why Beyoncé contacted you.”

Catarina nodded. “But I couldn’t leave Magnus, you know? Yes, Beyoncé is Beyoncé and working with her means instant fame and fortune, but I knew that I was going to get the same working with Magnus—fortune and fame—but I was going to get something better out of it; a family for me and my daughter. And I wasn’t wrong, Magnus, Ragnar, Raphael, Tessa, Jem, Will, Luke, Dot, and all the others became my family and I wouldn’t change that for anything in the world, especially for something as stupid and fleeting as fortune and fame.”

Alec nodded in agreement.

“For me it was a no-brainer to stay with Magnus,” Catarina continued, “besides, I wouldn’t sacrifice the stability that being with him gives my little girl. He is, in many ways, the father figure she’s never had. Well, more like in an uncle way because you’ve seen how he is with her—he spoils her too much. Sometimes I think he loves her more than me.”

“I sincerely doubt that.” Alec smiled, remembering all the times he had seen Magnus and Catarina interact in the past two weeks. There was no doubt that Magnus loved Catarina with all his heart. “He wrote you that song, didn’t he? ‘Heartbeat.’” He said.

“He did. How do you know? Did he tell you?”

“No, Will.” Alec confessed. “The first time I heard the song—during his first concert in New York—I…well, I felt something. I really liked it and I mentioned something about it, and, well, Will, who was with me, shared the story of the song. It’s a beautiful song.”

“He has a very beautiful soul, so all his songs reflect that.” Catarina said. “The first time I heard the song I couldn’t stop crying. Magnus and Ragnar were making fun of me because I was a crying mess for an entire day, but in my defense, I was pregnant and hormones were playing games with me. Besides, the song is really beautiful, the lyrics hit close to home. It’s been one of the best gifts I’ve ever received.”

“I can only imagine, not everyday someone writes you a song and years later, it becomes a hit worldwide.” Alec said. “Isn’t it weird to have a famous friend?”

“Sometimes, especially when I talk about him. People tend to have a very different opinion about him just because he’s a celebrity, so whenever I share a story about him as my friend and not the superstar, people doubt that I’m really talking about the Magnus Bane.”

“Well, he’s hard to read, so I don’t blame them for doubting.”

“Do you really think that?”

“What?”

“That he’s hard to read.”

Alec nodded.

“That’s weird,” she said, “I mean, I know he shows different versions of himself to the world, that’s always been his defense mechanism, but I have the impression that you see beyond that—that you see what he normally doesn’t let people see.”
“I don’t think so, I find him impossible to read.” Alec said.

Catarina stared at him for a couple of minutes. The waiter had, conveniently, just arrived to serve them some coffee and he seemed to be taking his time, making Alec’s discomfort increase by the second. He had to admit that Catarina’s stare was very intimidating. She had very warm brown eyes, but when she looked at you intently, you felt as if you were naked—as if she could read your soul or something.

“Impossible to read or so easy that it seems impossible?” She questioned as soon as they were alone again. “Just like you’ve been watching us closely these past weeks, I’ve been doing the same, Alec—I know he intrigues you. I know you see something in him that all the others don’t see. I also know you’ve been asking around about him.”

Alec shifted uncomfortably in his chair, he felt naked for the second time in less than two minutes. He had thought he had been discreet with his investigation, only asking people he thought wouldn’t share anything with Magnus’s closest team, but apparently, it hadn’t been like that, and now the fact that Catarina, of all people, knew that he had been trying to find out more details about Magnus’s private life could get him into a lot of trouble.

“Relax, you’re not in trouble.” Catarina said, practically confirming that she could, indeed, read minds or something like that. “You haven’t done anything wrong, as I said before, I really admire your determination and dedication to your work.” She said, and Alec exhaled a bit relieved.

This was the reason why he never did anything out of his comfort zone, he was bad at it, it wasn’t who he was. “I have so many questions about him.” He confessed.

“I know.”

“But you’re not going to give me any answers, are you?” He asked, even though he already knew the answer.

“No,” she said, “his life is his and I am no one to share it or make it of public knowledge. Magnus avoids entertainment magazines for a reason, Alec, he's always been a very private person, even before becoming who he is today. His life hasn’t been easy, remember who his father was. From a very young age he learned and was taught to protect his privacy.”

Alec exhaled.

“Look,” she said, giving him a smile, “he respects your work as a journalist or else you wouldn’t be here, so, my advice? Don’t believe everything you read about him online, you know how that is, there’s always more to the story than what is shared, but it’s not your job here to reveal it. You do the coverage for your magazine, and if you’re interested, and want to maybe—and this is a huge maybe —get some answers to your questions, not as a journalist, but as a, let’s say friend, then give yourself the chance to learn to know him. I can’t promise that he will open up to you and share his life, he’s doesn’t trust people easily, but who knows? Anything can happen.”

Alec sighed. It seemed that not only his sister thought that what he had to do to get answers to his questions was to become Magnus’s friend, but now Catarina—Magnus’s very own personal assistant and best friend—thought so too.

“But anyway,” Catarina continued, “enough about me and Magnus, it’s your turn to share something about yourself. How come you ended up working for the entertainment business if you’re not a fan of this world? There must be quite the story behind that decision. Was it because of your family? Did they force you to work for them?”
Alec chuckled as he shook his head. “It’s kind of a long story.”

“Then it’s a good thing we have until noon, don’t you think?” She winked at him.

If there was something that hadn’t ceased to amaze Alec in the two weeks he had been having the chance to witness the rehearsals for the concerts was the amount of effort, dedication, and coordination that everyone put into each and every one of them to make sure that when the actual event took place everything was perfect.

The audience came and enjoyed a quality show for about two or three hours, but they almost never stopped to think about all the work and time that was behind each concert. They didn’t know that everything, from the lights, the sound, and the special effects, to the choreographies, the songs, and even the logistics of the event were rehearsed over and over again for hours. It was almost like giving the same concert two or three times a day, but only one of them had an audience.

“Can we go over that song one more time?” Magnus asked from the stage.

He and his dancers had been rehearsing the choreography for tonight’s show without stopping for a couple of hours now.

Due to the dimensions of the stadium and some last-minute audio limitations that they had encountered, Will had had to make some changes in the design of stage for the shows in the city, so Magnus and Dot had been adapting the original choreographies to the new stage since they had arrived.

“You need to eat and rest.” Catarina told him.

She was standing next to Alec, who, by the way, was there just waiting for a chance to interview Magnus the moment the latter took a short break.

“Just one more time.” Magnus said. “I need to make sure that we all are perfectly synced during tonight's choreographies.”

“Magnus…” Catarina objected.

“Cat, look at that.” Magnus said, pointing to the pit that had formed between the two catwalks that Will had added to the stage to help with the acoustics. “That could be dangerous for any of us tonight. A misstep, a lack of coordination during one of the songs and any of us could end up on the floor—all the way down there.”

“And if you don’t eat and rest, you could pass out and there wouldn’t be a show to worry about tonight.” She said.

Magnus rolled his eyes. “I’m fine, I promise.”

“Okay, do whatever you want, but later, when you’re on the floor and the doctors say you cannot do the show due to over exhaustion, don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Catarina said, rolling her eyes too.

Alec tried not to laugh at the exchange. He understood why Catarina had asked Magnus to take a break and eat something, the man had been dancing non-stop since they had arrived at the stadium a little after noon, and it was already 3 p.m., but he also understood Magnus’s point. He and his dancers had to be perfectly coordinated tonight to avoid a catastrophe during the concert. Magnus’s choreographies were very elaborate and physically demanding, and the stage was very high above
the field, so a fall could really hurt any of them badly.

“Cat, don’t get mad at me.” Magnus said.

“Sometimes I have to, you never listen to reason, Magnus, and that always causes problems.”

“But I do listen, I promise, and like I said...I’m fine.” Magnus said, winking and dazzling her with a dashing smile.

Catarina just laughed, rolling her eyes again. “It’s practically impossible to get mad at him.” She murmured only for Alec to listen.

“He’s kinda right...I mean, it’s pretty high, a fall could be lethal.”

“I know, but sometimes he doesn’t know how and when to stop and that worries me. Besides, it’s late. You need to interview him and he needs to eat, warm up his voice, and get ready for the meet and greet. We’re running out of time.”

Alec nodded in agreement. The schedule for today’s concert was very tight, they really didn’t have much time to spare and were quite behind schedule.

The music started again and all the dancers, along with Magnus, began to rehearse the recently-changed choreography one more time, counting each step and trying to coordinate themselves as much as possible. It had been less than two minutes when, out of nowhere, a small explosion was heard somewhere behind the stage, making them all jump. The music stopped almost immediately and technicians and security personnel ran to the stage to see what had happened.

“What was that?” Alec asked. He wasn’t too worried about the incident, it didn’t look like something serious had happened, there was only a bit of smoke behind the main stage, so he assumed it had been a short circuit or something like that. However, an explosion no matter how big or small, couldn’t be good news. Much less when the concert was less than five hours away.

“I don’t know, but that shouldn’t have happened.” Catarina said. She seemed worried.

Will ran to the back of the stage and after a few minutes came back to inform them of what had happened.

“There’s was a short circuit in one of the consoles.” He said, addressing everyone. “No one’s hurt, but we have to evacuate the stage for safety while the technicians fix it. It’s going to take about an hour, so the rehearsal can’t continue until further notice.”

Alec saw Magnus rolling his eyes dramatically before walking to where they were standing.

“This was a sign from the universe that I was right and that you had to stop before you killed yourself up there.” Catarina told Magnus, who kept rolling his eyes to emphasize his annoyance.

“Anyway,” she continued, “I need you to eat, give Alec the interview he needs, and then get ready for the meet and greet, so hurry up.” She added, snapping her fingers.

“Yes, mom.” Magnus said petulantly. “She’s so bossy! Sometimes I feel really bad for my sweet-pea Madzie.” He added, looking at Alec with a smile.

Alec chuckled. “Well, in her defense, she’s only looking out for you and making sure that everything goes well and on time. Today’s been complicated enough to add you getting sick or hurt to the list.”
“Thank you, Alec,” Catarina said, “I’m glad to hear that at least someone here values what I do and understands why I do it."

“I’m not liking this alliance forming between the two of you.” Magnus said, looking back and forth between Catarina and Alec.

“What alliance?” Catarina said. “He’s just telling the truth. Now, Magnus, go and take a shower, you stink! We’ll see you in your dressing room in twenty minutes for the interview. You’re gonna eat while Alec asks his questions, that wasn’t the plan, but as usual, you didn’t follow the schedule and now I have to fix the problem.”

Magnus just laughed and walked away. He was still murmuring ‘so bossy’ under his breath much to Catarina’s discontent, and Alec really had to press his lips into a hard line to keep himself from laughing. Sometimes, just sometimes, he found Magnus’s antics pretty funny.

“Alec!” Simon exclaimed, quickly approaching him.

“What is it?”

“Apparently, this new technical difficulty is gonna take some time to get fixed, so we decided that it was better to work with the material we already have and let the experts handle the crisis. Helen and Aline are installing some cameras for later, and Maia and I will start sorting out what we have in the office, but I wanted you to know.”

“Oh, yeah, it’s fine. I’ll see you guys in a bit, I still have to interview Magnus. I’m going to see him in twenty minutes in his dressing room.”

“Do you need a camera for that?”

Alec shook his head. “I’m going to interview him while he eats, so no. We’re behind schedule, so I’ll just use my tape recorder, don’t worry.”

“Didn’t you want to post a video with him or something?”

“Yes, but the plans changed, so we can do that tomorrow, we have enough material for today...I think.”

“Okay, then we’ll see you later.”

“Yeah, sure.” He said, and Simon disappeared from view.

“I have to go check that Madize is fine and hasn’t managed to drive anyone crazy yet. Also, I need to make sure that this,” she added, pointing to the stage, “really gets fixed in an hour, if not less, and review with Ragnor and Raphael some details about the meet and greet, but I’ll see you in Magnus’s dressing room in twenty minutes. Please, use this time to eat something too, okay?”

Alec smiled. Catarina really was like everyone’s mom. “Yes, I’ll see you there later.”

Catarina walked away, and Alec, who had nothing better to do, started to make his way to the staff room where he knew he could find food. He wasn’t very hungry since breakfast with Catarina and Madzie had been quite filling, but he knew that, given all the delays in the schedule, he probably wouldn’t have another chance to eat later. He had to transcribe the interview, send it to Aldertree, and start writing his review about the city and the venue.

He was heading to the staff room when something caught his eye. It was Magnus. He was discreetly
sneaking out of the stadium and heading towards the parking lot despite the fact that according to Catarina’s instructions, he should be taking a shower. He seemed nervous and was constantly looking over his shoulder, as if to make sure no one was following him.

Alec stopped dead in his tracks, debating what to do. He could keep walking and go eat something before meeting Magnus in his dressing room for the interview or he could follow him and find out what he was up to. It was a very difficult decision. He risked a lot if Magnus managed to catch him spying on him, but at the same time it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because he knew for a fact that every member of Magnus’s team was busy due to the recent problem with the stage and all the schedule delays, so the man was, for the first time in weeks, really on his own.

“Fuck it!” Alec told himself, taking a deep breath and deciding to follow Magnus stealthily.

It was wrong, but in his defense, curiosity had always been one of his greatest weaknesses and he couldn’t deny that this man intrigued him a lot. Besides, with this, he confirmed, once again, that his journalistic instinct had been right and that this man was hiding something.

Alec saw Magnus rushing through the parking lot of the stadium—where the vans and trailers that had been used to bring the equipment from the hotel and the airport to the stadium were parked—until he got to a black car parked at the far end of it. Almost immediately, a man—whom Alec didn’t recognize as someone from the crew—climbed down and greeted him with a smile.

Magnus shook his hand very cordially and conversed amicably with him for a few minutes. Alec tried to get closer to be able to hear what they were saying, but there weren’t many places to hide and he risked been discovered, so he had to resign himself to watching the scene from afar and not being able to hear a word of what they were saying.

“What are you up to, Bane?” Alec murmured softly as he continued watching the curious exchange. Magnus and the mysterious man were still talking, but the man had walked to the trunk of the car and had taken out an envelope he had given Magnus. Alec couldn’t really see what it was, because Magnus had hidden it inside his sweatshirt almost immediately, but it wasn’t small and that had made Alec wonder what it could be. The scene looked like something out of a Hollywood movie, where a group of gangsters met at some clandestine spot to exchange illegal stuff. Drugs, was Alec’s first theory. It made sense and-

“What are you up to, Bane?” A voice said, surprising him. It was Luke, Magnus’s head of security.

“Luke.” Alec exclaimed discreetly so as not to alert him of Magnus’s presence and to appear as innocent as possible in case Luke already knew that Magnus was there. He didn’t want him to know that he had been spying on the singer—that could get him into a lot of trouble, especially after his conversation with Catarina that morning.

“What are you doing here?” Luke asked.

“I came to-I came to get my tape recorder from the van.” He improvised. The van that Magnus’s team had assigned to the magazine to bring their equipment from the hotel was parked only a few cars away from him. “With the delays in the schedule I won’t be able to film the interview with Magnus, so I’ll have to do it very old school.” He said, taking his tape recorder from his pocket and showing it to Luke. He always had it with him. Regardless of whether he filmed the interviews or not, he always made an audio copy of his work, but Luke didn’t need to know that. “And you, what are you doing here?” He asked.

“I’m looking for Magnus.” Luke said.
“Oh,” Alec said, “well, I haven’t seen him here.” He lied, trying to distract Luke so he wouldn’t see Magnus and the mysterious man. “Catarina told him to take a shower, have you looked for him in his dressing room?”

“I just went to check, but he’s not there. Cat’s furious.”

“Well, he’s not here either.” Alec said. “Maybe he decided to eat something before taking a shower? I know he hadn’t eaten anything all day.”

“Can be.” Luke said, but there was some doubt in his voice.

“I was on my way to the staff room to eat too, I have to see Magnus in fifteen minutes for the interview, if you want, we can go there together. Maybe you’ll find him there.”

“He’d better be there or else, Catarina is going to kill us both.” Luke said with a sigh. “My job is to protect him and know where he is at all times, but no matter what I do, he always manages to disappear. He’s too good at sneaking out and that makes him a permanent headache for me.”

Alec smiled at him sympathetically. “Shall we?” He said, pointing to the opposite side of where Magnus was.

Luke nodded and started walking back to the stadium. Alec took a deep breath, relieved that Luke hadn’t discovered him blatantly spying on Magnus and followed him; but before completely joining him, he couldn’t help but look back to where Magnus had been chatting with that mysterious man just a few minutes ago. He wanted to make sure that Magnus hadn’t discovered him standing there so close to where he had had that clandestine meeting, but to his surprise, both Magnus and the man had disappeared.


“Yeah, I’m coming.” Alec said, frowning in confusion.

Luke was right, Magnus was way too good at sneaking out and, while that meant permanent headaches and problems for other people, like Catarina and Luke for example, for Alec that meant mystery and secrets, which made Magnus ten times even more intriguing.

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After interviewing Magnus—who Alec still didn’t know how he had managed to sneak back into the stadium before them and be bathed and ready by the time Alec had knocked on his door to interview him—Alec rushed to transcribe the interview and send it to Aldertree, so that the latter could edit it and make the changes he deemed necessary. They, too, were behind schedule. The technical problems that had been happening all day had also affected them, but now—after hours of hard work—everything seemed to be running smoothly. His team was finishing up their work and fine-tuning some details, and Alec had just finished what he had to do at the moment, so all that remained to do was to wait for his boss to get back to him so he could go and find Raphael and ask him to review the final article, so they could finally publish it.

“Has Aldertree answered yet?” Maia, who was sitting right next to him, asked.

Alec shook his head, refreshing his email inbox one more time just in case.

“He’s taking too long, don’t you think?” Aline pointed out.

“A bit.” Alec agreed. Aldertree usually replied to his emails in less than ten minutes, but today
something seemed to be going on because it had been more than twenty minutes since Alec had emailed him and he hadn’t heard anything from him yet.

“He’s probably in the middle of a meeting or something.” Simon said. “You know his rule, ‘no cell phones during meetings,’ I bet he hasn’t even read your email.”

“Probably.” Alec said, checking the time and assuming Simon was probably right. New York was an hour ahead of Chicago and it was very likely that Aldertree was in the end-of-week meeting that took place every Friday at the same time—5:30 p.m.

“Do you wanna help us with the pictures?” Aline asked. “We could use an extra pair of hands.”

Aline and Maia were sorting the pictures they were going to send to the New York team so they could update the gallery on their official website. They were the high resolution pictures of yesterday’s concert in Washington D.C.

“I don’t think I’m very good at that, I feel like I’m just going to make you guys slow down even more, so I kindly pass.” Alec said, and instead pulled out his phone to kill some time.

He thought about finally opening that book he had been wanting to read for days now, but remembering that he hadn’t done what his sister had asked him to do that morning, he chose to open Instagram instead to post some pictures. His mother hadn’t called him yet, but he had a suspicion that as soon as Aldertree called to talk about the article, he was going to bring up the topic to the conversation. And if he was honest, he’d rather avoid the absurd request.

When Alec finally logged in—he always used the same email and password—the first thing he noticed was that the seventy-odd followers he remembered having, family and friends, had multiplied in number and now he had around 17K, something that according to him didn’t make any sense. The last picture he had posted had been almost a year ago and he wasn’t even in it, it was a picture of Izzy and Max at the latter’s birthday party. All these people—who by the way had also made sure that his pictures had more ‘likes’ than he could remember—were following a virtually inactive account.

“What’s the point?” He murmured out loud.

“Did you say something?” Maia asked.

“No, just talking to myself.” Alec smiled, resuming what he had been doing and deciding to give these poor people some content so that the follow was worth it.

They would be visiting 64 cities during the tour, so to make things easier and to not commit himself to be active all the time, he decided that the best thing to do was to make a post per city with a couple of pictures for each one. From New York, he had thousands of pictures of the city stored in his phone that he had accumulated over the years, so he selected the best ones he had and some others from Magnus’s concerts at Madison Square Garden, and posted them, captioning the publication as «#1» and adding the official hashtag of the tour—#StardustWorldTour—to later do the same for the other two cities. By the time the pictures of Washington D.C. were up, his phone was already blowing up with notifications from the hundreds of thousands of people who were commenting and liking his pictures—including his almost brother-in-law, Simon.

“What the hell?” Alec exclaimed, looking at Simon from the other side of the table. “How did you know that I posted pictures so fast?” He asked equally surprised as creeped out.

“I turned on your notifications a long time ago.”
“You turned on, what?” Alec asked confused.

“Your notifications. Instagram allows you turn on notifications for accounts you like and sends you an alert when they share something, so you don’t miss what they post.”

“But I never post anything.” Alec said, still not understanding what was the point of turning on the notifications of an inactive account.

“I know, but I knew that this day would come.”

“Izzy told you.” Alec assumed.

“What? No. Wait...what did she have to tell me?”

“Nothing, forget it, just tell me, what do I have to do to stop my phone from dying? These people are going to make it blow up if they don’t stop commenting or liking the pictures.”

“Let me.” Maia laughed and snatched the phone from his hand, quickly changing the setting so that he only got notifications when the people he was following commented or liked his pictures.

“I’m going to need a tutorial to relearn how to use this thing,” Alec confessed, “it’s very different from what I remember.”

“They added some new features since the last time you used it, but it’s not as hard as it seems, in fact, it’s pretty simple. Do you want me to help you get the hang of it?” Maia asked.

Alec nodded, and Maia, without wasting time, helped him become familiar with the new features that the popular social media platform offered. She was telling him how to use the filters in his stories and all that, when his phone rang, notifying him of a new incoming call from his boss.

“The devil is calling.” Maia said, tossing him his phone as if it were on fire.

Alec chuckled.

“Mr. Lightwood,” Aldertree said the moment Alec answered the call, “please, if you’re with the rest of your team, put me on speaker. I don’t have much time and I need to talk to all of you.”

“Okay.” Alec said, putting him on speaker. “Everyone is listening.”

“Perfect. Hello, everyone. I have instructions for all of you, so please, pay attention, I don’t have much time.” Aldertree said, and Alec shared looks with all his friends. They all were rolling their eyes at the same time.

“Mr. Lewis and Ms. Blackthorn, I need you to finish the video you said you were working on, I want to include it in the article Mr. Lightwood wrote today.”

“We’re almost done, but-” Simon was saying, but Aldertree didn’t let him finish.

“I want it ready in 30 minutes.” He said. “Ms. Roberts and Ms. Penhallow, the team here in the office informed me that you haven’t sent the high-resolution pictures from last night’s concert. What happened, why haven’t you sent them?”

“There was a delay here and we’re just finishing sorting them out, but we’ll send them right away. Half of them are already in the cloud.” Aline said.

“Okay, well, as soon as you finish uploading them, I need you to post some others on our social
media accounts. Ms. Roberts, you are in charge of that, aren't you?”

“Yes.” Maia replied.

“Well, I want new pictures, not the same ones in all our accounts, I want different ones. We need people to go look for new content everywhere, understood?”

Maia rolled her eyes. “Okay.”

“Mr. Lightwood.”

“Yes?”

“I just read your interview and, although it's okay, I want to make some changes in the order of the questions, but I want to wait for the video to see if we can include some sort of introduction based on that. This interview was very short and we need more content.”

“Magnus didn't have a lot of time, as Aline already informed you, there were some delays here and we had to change the plans we had for today—the questions for the interview included. I wanted to film that fire questions video we talked about the other day, but I had to move it for tomorrow.”

“I understand, those things happen and you can’t control that, but it's Friday, we need to close the week strong, so we’ll try to give our readers a little bit more of content.” Alec’s boss said. “By the way, I noticed that you started to share pictures in your personal Instagram account, I was going to ask you to do just that, we need to keep the audience engaged on all fronts, so please, keep doing it regularly. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you’re the most popular member of the team, so we need to take advantage of that.”

“Yes.” Alec said, trying not to sound as annoyed as he felt. He hated that part of his work here now included being used to promote this further, he was just a writer.

“Anyway, you can start writing the draft of your review for tonight’s concert while we wait for Mr. Lewis and Ms. Blackthorn to finish the video.”

“Yes.” Alec said, although he had already drafted it. He just needed to add his thoughts about the concert and the audience, but everything was almost ready. “Then I’ll wait for you to call me back so I can add that introduction you want.”

“I’m going to have an extraordinary meeting with the board in a few minutes, so I probably won’t be able to call, but I’ll send you an email with the changes and my notes for the introduction. I trust you can handle that without me having to revise it.”

“Okay, then I’ll wait for your email.”

“Is Mr. Bane’s team aware of our delay?”

“Yes, I informed Raphael, his publicist, about it after I finished my interview with Magnus, and told him that I would have the article ready for him to review later today. He said we could take our time. They understand that the situation got out of control here and that affected us all.”

“At least they can recognize their mistakes.” Aldertree said. “Anyway, we’ll be in touch, and good work everyone.” He added, hanging up the phone without saying goodbye.

“And good work everyone.” Simon said, imitating Aldertree’s voice and making them all laugh.
“I swear he thinks we’re machines or something.” Maia said.

“Yeah,” Alec agreed, “but you heard him, we need to hurry, so chop-chop.”

“Aye, aye, captain!” They all said at the same time, and Alec just rolled his eyes and resumed what he had been doing before Aldertree called.

He opened his Instagram account again and started to go through his comments. He ignored the ones Magnus’s fans were posting and concentrated on those of the people he followed. Some of his friends from college and people from the magazine had made some comments about his work or how great the pictures were, but the one that caught his attention was the one his little brother, Max, had just made.

“Say hi to Magnus for me.” It read.

Alec rolled his eyes and opened his brother’s account curious to know how bad the situation was. Izzy had warned him that their brother had been very active telling everyone that Alec was friends with Magnus, so he had to know exactly what Max had been saying so he could scold him later.

Max’s profile picture was a selfie he had taken with Magnus in the latter's dressing room during the private meet and greet, and all his recent pictures were about him and the concert. His Instagram account looked more like a fan page dedicated to Magnus than a personal account.

He opened the most recent picture his brother had shared—a picture of Magnus helping him put on the jacket he had given him—and smiled. The picture was clearly a screenshot of the video that Catarina had shared with them from that special moment, so it was a bit blurry, but it didn't matter because Max's million-watt smile said it all. He looked like the happiest man on Earth and that made Alec immensely happy too. The picture had almost 100K likes and thousands of comments, so curious, Alec started to go through some of them to see what people said about it.

In almost all of them, in addition to expressing how much they envied Max for the opportunity he had had of meeting Magnus, people were asking him how he had managed to visit Magnus’s dressing room and get one of his jackets, and his brother's response was always the same: ‘my brother is his friend.’

Alec wanted to reply and clarify that he wasn’t Magnus’s friend, but he knew that publicly denying Max's words wasn’t the best option for anyone, so he just rolled his eyes and closed his brother’s profile. He would try to call him over the weekend to talk to him about it and ask him to stop doing it. He didn’t want people to think that the magazine had gotten the exclusive as a personal favor. That wasn’t right, first, because it was a lie, and second, because that damaged their credibility as a media outlet.

Alec opened the magazine’s account and quickly went through the publications. His team, and all the people responsible for the social media accounts back in New York, had done an excellent job. There were hundreds of thousands of videos and pictures promoting the tour and the different articles they had been publishing about it, as well as their other non-tour related articles and issues; and all of them had a considerable amount of likes and comments, which confirmed what his sister had shared with him that morning: the engagement of the magazine was better than they had expected.

“How many times a day do you post about the tour in the magazine’s social media accounts?” Alec asked Maia.

“I post three times, one when we arrive at the venue, then during the soundcheck, and finally, just before the concert starts, but the New York team makes around 4 or 5 more publications per day,
“I was just checking the account and I got curious...everything seems to be doing better than expected.”

“Yes,” Maia confirmed, “our engagement is amazing and we get hundreds of new followers every day. Grettel, the girl in charge of the social media team in New York, told me that next week they’re going to start posting some ads along with the publications, and that’s good because it means that some brands want us to promote their products in our social media accounts.”

“Oh, that’s really good.” Alec said, because it was true. Ads always meant extra money.

“It is.”

Alec resumed what he had been doing to stop distracting his friends who still had work to do, and went back to his profile. After reading Max’s comments, he was curious to see what people said about his photos, so very slowly he started to read the comments under his publications and noticed that a lot of Magnus's fans asked him if he could confirm if Magnus was with someone on the tour—with Camille, his ex-girlfriend—to be precise.

“Why does everyone want to know if Magnus brought Camille to the tour?” Alec couldn’t help but ask out loud. He felt a bit offended on behalf of the magazine. “We’re an entertainment magazine,” he said, “but we don’t do tabloids, we’re not that type of magazine.”

“You know there are rumors that Magnus and Camille are together again.” Simon said. “It’s kinda normal that people want to get some sort of confirmation from us, we’re the only media outlet with access to Magnus at the moment.”

“Yes, I get that,” Alec agreed, “but they should know better, they’re Magnus’s fans. They know the guy better than any of us—he doesn’t share this kind of stuff with the media.”

“Well, yes, but he kinda did during his last tour.” Maia said.

Alec frowned. He didn’t know that.

“Camille was with him during his previous tour.” She elaborated. “Magnus never gave interviews about it, but she was spotted attending multiple concerts. His fans even had this online game of finding Camille among the guests at the concerts.”

“That’s true,” Simon said, “I remember all the pictures. They tried to keep it on the DL, but they had just confirmed their romance when Magnus went on tour, so it was all people were talking about.”

“Romance,” Alec said, making sure to use his hands to emphasize the air quotes.

“Do you think they lied about it?” Aline asked.

Alec shrugged. “I don’t know, but I wouldn’t be surprised if their ‘relationship’ had been just for publicity. All the big stars do it, why wouldn’t they jump on the PR bandwagon too? Both are pretty famous, it would make sense for their respective teams to try to pair them up for promotional purposes after working together.” He said.

“That’s true,” Aline agreed, “that’s Hollywood 101, and let’s be honest, being together did help them promote that movie they filmed together. They completely smashed the box office. Do you think they’ll do it again for the new movie?”
“I don’t know, I don’t think so.” Helen joined the conversation. “I haven’t seen or heard anything these past weeks, besides, I don’t think they’ve pretended to date just for publicity. Don’t ask me why, but I have an eye for these things and I honestly think that they were a couple, a toxic and very problematic one, but a couple nonetheless.”

“I’m with Helen on this,” Maia said, “I don’t think they’ve pretended to date either, but I’m not sure if they’re gonna get back together. It’s been a long time since they broke up and I’m sure that both have moved on, but we don’t know the details of their relationship either, so everything could happen. We know that they will have to promote the new movie together at some point, so who knows, maybe spending some time together again will help them rekindle their romance.”

“I don’t think so,” Helen added, “like I already said, their relationship was very toxic. Everyone and their mother knew what was happening between them on and off cameras, and Camille made some pretty questionable statements after the breakup, I don’t see Magnus getting back together with someone like her. You guys have seen how he is off camera, he’s sweet and funny, very down to Earth, I don’t see him getting serious with someone as shallow and empty as Camille. She’s a very stunning woman, I’ll give her that, but not everything is about the looks.”

“Hmmm, you have a point there, he definitely doesn't seem like the kind of guy who would date a woman like Camille, but love is blind,” Simon said, “proof of that is that they were already a couple and we know they’re still in touch, so…”

“Do we?” Alec and Aline asked at the same time.

“Don’t you guys remember the first day of the tour?” Simon asked somewhat surprised. “At Madison Square Garden, when Catarina was about to introduce us to the team, she asked Luke where Magnus was, and I clearly remember that he said that he was on the phone with Camille.”

“That’s true!” Maia exclaimed. “I had completely forgotten about that. Do you guys think she called to maybe ask him to invite her to one of his concerts?”

“Well, if she did, he didn’t invite her ‘cause she wasn’t at any of the shows in New York or any of the other cities we’ve visited so far.” Helen added.

“Yeah, but she could be at the shows in LA, she lives there, right, Alec?” Simon asked.

Alec frowned. “What? Why on Earth would I know where she lives?”

“Because you did your research on Magnus for your first interview with him and then for the tour?” Simon said as if that were the most obvious thing in the world.

“Well, yes, I did, but my research was on Magnus, not his ex-girl-” Alec was saying when the door of their little office opened and Raphael entered.

“Alec, can I have a word with you in private, please?” He said, all serious.

“Alec, can I have a word with you in private, please?” He said, all serious.

“Hmmmm, yes, yes, of course.” Alec said, a bit nervous. He didn’t know if Raphael had been listening to their more-than-inappropriate conversation. The door to their office hadn’t been completely closed when he had walked in, so he could have heard what they had been saying just a few seconds ago.

“Do you think he…?” Maia asked discreetly.

Alec sighed. “I hope not.” He whispered before standing up and following Raphael out of the room.
Alec walked with Raphael until they reached the room that was labeled as his, Catarina, and Ragnor’s office. All the way there, Alec went thinking what to say in case Raphael had overheard the conversation that Alec and his team had been having when he had entered their office. He didn’t want Magnus’s publicist to think it was something that happened often; they were professionals, they didn’t go around gossiping about anyone’s private life, let alone Magnus’s. This had been a one-time thing, a slip, a silly conversation that had gotten a little out of hand.

“Sit down, please.” Raphael said, pointing to one end of the large, and quite ostentatious, couch that was in the room.

Alec sat down and waited for Raphael to join him to start talking. “Did we do something wrong?” He asked. “Did we publish something that goes against the contract? If this is about what we were sayi-”

“What? No, not at all. You’ve done nothing wrong. I just wanted to talk to you in private because I want to ask you a favor.”

“Oh.” Alec said, relaxing almost immediately. He had been expecting everything but that. “Okay, what is it?”

“Look,” Raphael said. He looked nervous, he was shifting uncomfortably on the couch. “I know that the engagement of your magazine is pretty good at the moment. I’ve been checking the numbers and interactions you guys have about the tour, and I know that you’re completely dominating social media with this coverage.”

Alec nodded. He had just learned about that today, but Raphael didn’t need to know that.

“And well, I want—if possible, of course—to use that in our favor.”

Alec frowned a bit confused. “Isn’t that what we’ve been doing all this time?” He asked. The reason why the magazine’s engagement was so good was because they had been exploiting—not literally—the exclusive about Magnus’s tour.

“Yes, of course, technically speaking that’s what we both have been doing. We’ve been using you guys to promote and get good press for the tour, and you’ve been using us to sell magazines and increase your online presence; but, well, I can’t share the details, but let’s say that I need you to use your services for something else. I need the magazine to help me with a little problem I have with Magnus’s fan base.”

“A problem with Magnus’s fan base?”

“Yes.”

“Okay...hmmm, what is it?”

“It’s kind of a long story, but to put it simply, they aren’t focusing enough on the tour and the new album, they’re kind of making this about something else entirely, so I need you to help me change that. I need Magnus's fans to talk only about the tour and his new music, and not about his upcoming movie.”

Alec frowned again. "Okay, I’m officially not following you, do you see them focusing on the new movie as well as in the tour and his music as a problem? I thought you guys wanted people to focus on both? The magazine is going to cover the release of the movie by the end of the year. We’ve been including articles here and there of what we know about the movie, and this month’s issue even includes some behind the scenes content that the director shared exclusively with us when he learned
that we would be covering Magnus’s world tour. My boss told me the other day that he already got some interviews with part of the cast and the production team for December—during release week.”

“Yeah, I know, Magnus is among the cast members that your magazine will be interviewing, and I know for a fact that your boss has done an amazing job promoting the movie.” Raphael said.

“But?”

“Dios, this is so hard to explain when you can’t say much.” He sighed. “Well, the thing is that yes, originally we wanted people to focus on both. We were going to use all the promotion for the tour and the album to promote the movie as well, kill two birds with one stone. From a PR point of view, that is what had to be done. It’s logical, we already have all the spotlights on us because of the album and the sold-out tour, so why not use them for something else, right? But things have become complicated and let’s say that I haven’t reached an agreement with Magnus on the matter. And now I need to make some changes to what I had originally planned because he’s being stubborn and a pain in the ass—more so than usual.”

“Oh.”

“Again, I can’t share the details, but to put it simply he doesn’t want the tour to be about hmmm, about the new movie, just about his music. That’s why I need your help, well, the magazine’s help.”

“Okay. What can we do to help then?”

“I’m sure you’ve noticed that Magnus’s fans tend to ask more about...hmmm, his private life than the tour, and as you can understand, if I want this to be exclusively about his music and the new album as Magnus wants, I need to find a way to stop that.”

Alec remembered all the comments he had read under his own pictures and that had led to that gossipy conversation he had had with his team about Magnus and his private life, and he immediately knew what they were talking about. “Is this about Magnus and Camille?”

Raphael nodded with a sigh. “We knew this was bound to happen sooner rather than later because of the movie they did together. And like I said, I had a plan for that, but things changed and now I really, really need Magnus’s fans to stop asking about her and the relationship between them. Unfortunately for us, for the people and the media, both things are linked to each other, that’s why I need to pull the focus from the movie and center it on the tour...at least for the moment.”

“Well, I’m going to be completely honest with you: I don’t see Magnus’s fans ever stop asking about his personal life. Fans get invested in the lives of the people they admire, that’s normal. Magnus is a public figure—and a pretty famous one—there are thousands of rumors that he got back together with Camille because of the new movie, we’re not gonna be able to stop people from asking about them. Like you said, for everyone, both things are linked to each other. The movie is being promoted everywhere and with Magnus and Camille as the main couple, so no matter what we do, we won’t be able to stop that.”

“I know, and you’re right, we won’t be able to stop it completely. That’s why I find this situation so complicated, but I was thinking that maybe, if we worked together, we could help tone it down a bit, you know?”

“How?”

“By distracting them.”

“Again, I don’t see how.” Alec said sincerely. Fans weren’t stupid, they knew when celebrities were
playing with them—a diversion wasn’t going to help much.

“Well, to be honest? I also don’t see how...yet, but I do know that there must be a way. Look, Alec, I’m in some sort of predicament here because, as a publicist, I know that the best thing to do in these cases is to go with the flow. Use the tour to promote the movie, feed the rumors, even start new ones in some cases, but Magnus, well, he’s not been very understanding, and as his friend, I get why, but still...”

“What exactly do you want me to do?” Alec asked. Raphael really looked conflicted about this and although a part of Alec told him to stay as far away as possible from this mess, another part told him to lend a hand if he could.

“I don’t know exactly because I don’t know how much you guys can do, but I need you to help me find a way to take the focus away from the movie and center it exclusively on the tour. I’ve been thinking a lot about this, trying to solve it on my own, but no matter what I do, Magnus’s private life is the only thing his fans are focusing on.”

Alec went silent for a minute, trying to think carefully about all this and how they, as a media outlet, could help without getting too involved in what seemed to be a mess in the making. He honestly didn't see Magnus's fans dropping the Camille subject anytime soon, they were too invested, but Raphael was right, they could find a way to distract them. Maybe if something else happened, things could change. The best option, of course, would be for Magnus to publicly date someone other than Camille or at least let his team spread some rumors along those lines, but taken into account the man’s history with the whole sharing-his-private-life-with-the-world thing, he didn’t see that happening—ever. So their only other option was to find a way to somehow force his fans to talk about the tour without requiring Magnus to do anything else but maybe boost whatever plan they came up with.

“I could, I don’t know,” Alec said, thinking out loud, “force his fan base to talk about the tour maybe by making them part of our coverage? That way the interactions between them and us would be exclusively about the concerts and his new album, not the upcoming movie. That would help focus all the attention on his tour from our end, they aren’t going to stop asking on your end, no matter how much Magnus helps with this, but at least it’s something.” He suggested. “Right now I’m thinking about offering some kind of prize for the fans, maybe a signed album or even VIP tickets to some of the concerts, and make people answer trivia or specific questions about the tour on social media. I don’t know…”

“That’s a great idea! We could make that work.” Raphael exclaimed enthusiastically.

“I just need to think this through because things could get out of control and complicate everything even more, plus, I have to consult it with the magazine. I’m just the writer and although I do have a creative input in all of this, I can’t make content decisions without first getting my boss’s approval, but I can definitely try to help.”

“Yes, of course, I understand, and I’m grateful for everything you and your team have done so far. Do you think you could talk to your boss today?”

“I could try, he said he was going to be busy, there's an extraordinary meeting with the board, but if I tell him that you personally asked me to talk to him about this, I’m sure he can make some time for me later tonight. I’m waiting for him to send me back today's article for you to approve, but I could seize the opportunity to talk to him about this.”

“Thank you, yes, that would be incredible. We have to act quickly, it’s only been two weeks of tour, so I’m right on time to make this experience what Magnus wants.”
“Can I give you an advice?” Alec dared to say. “I’ve been working in the industry for quite some time now, and I know how things work and how complicated everything is, but if there’s one thing I’ve learned in all these years, it’s that audiences react best when celebrities are honest with them. So, if Magnus and Camille are together again, then they should come clean about it. Maybe release a statement where they ask for some privacy and explain that they don’t want their relationship to become a media circus, but to say it, you know? Maybe at first everyone would focus on that and the tour would take second place, but it would only last for a couple of weeks, then Magnus could fully concentrate on the tour and leave his love life for the privacy of his home.”

“I know, but the problem with this is that they-” Raphael was saying when the door opened and Magnus, ready for the meet and greet, entered the room without knocking.

“Santiago, what the hell! The champagne is ready and we’re just waiting for you to join us. Rag-” He stopped mid-sentence when he noticed that Raphael wasn’t alone. “Alexander...” He added with a smile.

“Magnus.” Alec said to acknowledge him.

“Is everything okay?” Magnus asked, looking at Raphael.

“Yes, I was just checking with Alec some details about the article he’s going to publish today, you know I have to do that before they publish anything.” He said, standing up.

“Have you already transcribed the interview?” Magnus asked Alec.

Alec stood up too and then nodded, after all, he wasn’t lying. He had transcribed it about an hour ago, but he hadn’t had the chance to review it with Raphael yet, he was still waiting for his boss to send him back the edited version of the article.

“You’re fast.” Magnus said.

Alec just shrugged.

“Anyway,” Raphael said, looking at Alec, “then I’ll see you later, Alec, after you make those changes we talked about.”

Alec nodded. He had understood right away that that meant that Raphael didn’t want Magnus to know what they had been really talking about before he interrupted them. “Yes, don’t worry, I’ll start working on that immediately.”

“Thank you…” Raphael said, “…for everything.”

Alec nodded again and walked to the door to leave.

“Are you leaving so soon?” Magnus asked, blocking the door with his body.

“Yes, I have work to do.” Alec said.

“Don’t you want to come with us?”

“Come with you? Where? Don’t you have a concert to give in...” Alec checked his watch “…less than three hours?” He asked equally intrigued as confused. He didn’t understand why Magnus wanted him to go with them; one, because the man had a meet and greet to attend and a concert to give in a couple of hours, and two, because it wasn’t as if they had been sharing a lot of time together. Yes, sometimes they had lunch together and all that, but Alec was never alone, someone
from his team was always with him.

“Of course I have a concert to give, but we’re just going to my dressing room to have some fun before all the craziness starts.” Magnus said, winking at him. “I always make a toast as some sort of good-luck ritual before each concert—just with my closest team. The meet and greet starts in half an hour, so we only have a few minutes to enjoy ourselves.”

“Hmm, thanks for the invitation, but I really have work to do.”

“Playing hard to get, I see.” Magnus murmured.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing, raincheck?” Magnus asked with a broad smile. “You’re practically part of the select group to this point.”

Alec just nodded because, what else he could do really? He didn’t want to be rude. He had managed to establish a polite and somehow cordial relationship with the man in these past weeks, he didn’t want to ruin that—for his own sake.

“I’ll hold you to it.” Magnus said, moving from the door to let Alec leave.

“Hmm, yeah, right...anyway, I’ll see you later. Bye.” Alec said a bit confused. He really didn’t know why Magnus wanted him, of all people, to join his famous private good-luck ritual. It made no sense, they weren’t even friends.

“Alexander?” Magnus added, making him stop for the second time in less than five minutes. “I mean it, you’re free to join whenever you want.”

“Hmm, okay...thanks.” Alec said and left the room.

For some reason, he suddenly needed to be anywhere but near Magnus.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hello, I'm back!!! I'm not going to say much about this chapter because spoilers, but I really hope you enjoy it. There's a lot of malec, so happy reading!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

At the beginning of week five of the tour, Alec was walking out of Raphael’s room at the hotel where they were staying in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He had just had a meeting with him to analyze the results of the elaborate plan they had plotted together to make Magnus’s fan base focus on the tour and not on his upcoming movie or his personal life. It had taken them almost two weeks to put it all together, and it had only been a couple of days since the magazine had started posting new dynamics on social media so that Magnus’s fans were part of the coverage; but so far, the results had been extremely favorable and everyone seemed to be happy with the direction things were taking. Even Alec’s boss, who from experience, Alec knew was very hard to please and much less to impress.

Alec closed the door of Raphael's room behind him and made his way to the elevators to get to his room, located just a few floors below. But just as he was turning around the corner of the long hallway, he noticed that there was a man standing on the right side of it, looking at the city skyline from a window while talking to someone on the phone.

The man was none other than Magnus Bane.

Alec hesitated what to do. The call that Magnus was having seemed to be important, he was telling whoever he was talking to that it didn’t matter how much the thing they were talking about cost, that money wasn’t a problem, but that none of that could be known. He sounded angry and annoyed, as if he had been repeating the same thing over and over again. He had his back to Alec, so there was no way he could see him yet, but Alec knew that the moment he walked past him to get to the elevators, he would know he was there. And Alec didn’t want that because he knew that once Magnus noticed his presence, he would either end the call abruptly because the man was mysterious like that or pretend he was talking to someone else, which would only leave Alec more confused and with more questions than he already had about him.

Deciding that it didn’t hurt anyone if he overheard a bit of the conversation, Alec slowed down his pace to see if he could understand more of what Magnus was saying and finally make sense of this great mystery that the man represented for him. However, Magnus was pausing a lot as he spoke, trying to argue with the person he was talking to on the phone, so Alec knew that no matter how slow he walked, he wouldn’t be able to pick up more than two sentences before Magnus saw him there. So, thinking quickly, he knelt down right at the beginning of the hallway—away from Magnus, but still close enough to overhear his conversation—and pretended to tie his shoe.

It was a silly thing to do and Alec knew that the chances of being discovered were high, but ever since he had seen Magnus talking to that mysterious man in Chicago, he had been paying more attention to his every move, trying to figure out what all of that had been about. He was well aware that it wasn’t really his place to know—after all, it was Magnus’s private life—but he couldn’t help it, he was a journalist. Knowing and uncovering the truth was what he did for a living, and sometimes, just sometimes, to do that he needed to do things he wouldn’t normally do. Like untieing
his shoes just to tie them up again, for example.

“I told you the other day,” Magnus was saying while rubbing his temple continuously, “there’s too much at stake, so no, the answer is and always will be no. I can’t do that. No one can ever know about this, so just say the amount you need and I’ll send it to you. Once again, money is not the problem, I just need absolute discretion.”

Alec grimaced in intrigue and looked down. What was that thing at stake that Magnus didn’t want people to know? His career? His reputation? He wondered while still pretending to tie his shoes. He was trying hard not to look up so often so Magnus wouldn’t feel his presence, but it was a bit difficult, Magnus had this magnetic presence wherever he went that made it hard not to look at him.

“I know that, I’m not stupid, but this isn’t something I’m willing to jeopardize, so either you do as I say or I’ll find someone else to do it. I’m getting tired of saying the same thing over and over again.” Magnus said.

Alec had never heard Magnus talk to anyone like that before, he was usually very friendly and polite, never rude or mean.

“Well, I’m the one who pays the bills and I said no, so find another way. I don’t care what you have to do to—” Magnus was saying firmly, but stopped mid-sentence.

Alec knew there were only two options for that. One, he had been interrupted by the person he was talking to, or rather arguing on the phone, or two, he had discovered Alec. But no matter which of the two options was, Alec didn’t dare to look up and just tied his other shoe, pretending that he hadn’t seen Magnus there at all. It was his best option.

“Alexander, is everything alright?” Magnus asked.

Alec felt himself blushing. It had been option number two: he had been discovered. But instead of panicking and exposing his flushed face by looking up, he tried to play it cool and respond casually. “Yeah, yeah, I was just tying my shoe.” He said with his eyes fixed on his laces.

“What are you doing up here?” Magnus asked. His tone wasn’t rude or mean as it had been with the person he had been talking to on the phone, on the contrary, it was polite, gentle, and almost sweet. “It’s your day off, you should be catching up on some sleep or out and about exploring the city with your friends.”

“I…” Alec hesitated as he stood up, “I had a last-minute meeting with Raphael to share with him some of the new things we’ve been doing for the tour in the magazine.” He said, finally looking Magnus in the eye. “But I’m actually glad I ran into you.” He added to try to save the situation. He had just noticed that Magnus had hung up the phone without even saying goodbye to the person he had been talking to—just as Alec had predicted Magnus would do as soon as he saw that he was there. “I wanted to ask you, if you could, maybe, give me a brief interview today? I know that technically speaking is your day off too and we didn’t schedule an interview for today, but I’m working on a little something for both the articles and the new social media dynamics that we’ve been posting, and I’d like to add some thoughts of the star himself; and maybe even share a small video of you asking your fans to follow our coverage closely or something along those lines because we have a huge surprise coming up for them. I understand if you’re tired and you’d rather we do this tomorrow at the venue or—”

“It’s okay, I’m not that tired. Meet me back in the lobby in fifteen minutes, I need to make an important call.”
“Okay, great.” Alec said with a polite and somewhat relieved smile, but then he realized that Magnus had asked him to meet him in the lobby, which made no sense at all. “The lobby?” He questioned confused.

All the interviews Magnus had given him so far had been either in his hotel room or in the venues. The lobby was way too public for Magnus’s standards.

“Yeah, I haven’t eaten anything all day and Will wants us to go check the venue later tonight with the rest of the team. They’ve been working on the stage all day and he says he has a surprise for me.” Magnus said. “You know how since Chicago, he’s been adding small changes here and there to make the stage unique for each city or whatever, so you’ll have to ask your questions and record that video you want during lunch.”

Alec was a bit taken aback with that. If the lobby was too public for Magnus’s standards, a restaurant was even worse.

“If that’s okay with you, of course.” Magnus added promptly.

Alec nodded. “Yeah, yeah, it’s okay, I just...I just thought you didn’t like giving uncontrolled interviews? A restaurant seems too public for you.”

“You’re right, it's too public, but I’m tired of room service and I don’t see any other way to make this work today. Besides, with you, I’m always willing to make an exception.” He said.

Alec didn’t know what to say to that. “Okay…”

Magnus winked. “Then it’s a date. I’ll see you in a bit.” He said and disappeared down the hallway, opposite the elevators and into his room.

“What?” Alec whispered out loud.

Alec was waiting, sitting in the lobby of the hotel for Magnus to arrive, but the man was late. The singer had said he would see him in the lobby in fifteen minutes, but it had been twenty minutes already and he still wasn’t there. So to kill some time, Alec took out his phone and decided to text his best friend from college, Underhill, to see how everything was going. Underhill had called him last night to ask for some advice, but Alec had been in the middle of Magnus’s last concert in Indianapolis and hadn't been able to talk to him; now, however, it seemed that he had some time on his hands.

“Morning, sorry about last night, what happened? Is everything okay?” He wrote.

Despite the time zone differences, the reply arrived almost immediately.

“Not really, but it's kinda long, can I call you? I know you’re busy, but I really need you. Do you have some time now?” Underhill’s text read.

Alec looked toward the elevator, but there was still no sign of Magnus, so instead of replying, he just called his friend. They had met back in Yale and, since then, they had been inseparable. Now they both worked in different places and lived on opposite sides of the country, which made it impossible to hang out often, but they were still in touch and tried—when their adult lives allowed it—to keep each other up to date with their respective lives.

“Alec…” Underhill answered in what sounded like a sob.
“Oh, shit, it’s bad.” Alec immediately said because he knew that tone. He had heard it a million times in the past and it always meant one thing: boy trouble.

“You could say that…” Underhill said, his words were barely a whisper.

“What happened this time?”

Underhill sighed. “Not much, I only asked Mark to move in with me…” He said, but he really didn’t need to say more for Alec to know what had happened.

Mark was Underhill’s boyfriend for more than a year now, he was a really nice guy and Alec knew—if all the videos and pictures that his friend had shared with him served as a parameter—that they both were head over heels for each other. So if his friend sounded so miserable after having asked such an important question to his boyfriend, then that only meant that Mark had said no.

“Are you okay?” Alec asked worriedly.

“Not really, I don’t know what went wrong.”

“Are you two not together anymore?” Alec asked carefully. He had no way of knowing for sure if things had gone that wrong between them, but he supposed that Underhill’s ‘I don’t know what went wrong’ was some sort of confirmation to his assumption that they had probably ended their relationship.

“I’m not sure,” Underhill said, “as soon as I popped out the question, he just froze and walked out of the apartment not even closing the door behind him. I’ve been trying to get in touch with him, but he’s not answering any of my calls or text messages.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, but maybe he’s just in shock?” Alec suggested. “Maybe he needs time to hmmmm, assimilate your proposal. Moving in with someone isn’t a decision that can be taken so easily, it requires a lot of careful thinking.”

“You think?”

Alec wasn’t 100% sure, this topic wasn’t his area of expertise, but he had read enough books in his life to know that making the decision to share your life with someone wasn’t something that could be taken so lightly, it was a big step. Besides, it was clear that Underhill needed to hear something positive, he was in a dark place, so he tried to reassure him as best as he could. “Of course! Give him some time to think this through. He loves you. I’m sure he’ll call you back as soon as he’s ready or he’ll just show up at your door carrying all his bags.”

Underhill chuckled. “If he does that, I’m going to make him sleep on the couch for a week for making me go through all this suffering.”

Alec laughed.

“Thank you…” Underhill whispered, “I guess I just freaked out and really didn’t know who to call. You’ve always been like my very own tree-sized Jiminy Cricket—the official voice of my conscience.”

“I’m not sure if I should take that as a compliment or as an offense, but whatever, I’m glad I could help.”

Underhill laughed again. Alec liked to listen to his friend slowly getting back to his cheerful and always positive self, it hurt whenever someone close to him was suffering.
“But anyway...tell me about you. I’m busy with work and all this relationship drama, but don’t think I haven’t been following that super exclusive coverage you’re doing. I want to know all the secret deets that you surely have, all the juicy things that you’ve seen, and heard, and loved. I want to know everything about the experience.”

“There’s really not much to tell, it’s not a big deal.”

“Not a big deal? Are you fucking kidding me right now? This is the exclusive of all exclusives, Alec, and you’re the man in charge of it.”

Alec chuckled. “Well, okay, maybe it kind of is a big deal, but why do you want to talk about this when we can keep talking about you and Mark? You know that I’m always here for you. Maybe we don’t see each other as much as we used to—the perks of adulthood and living on opposite sides of the country—but I’m always here for you, you know that, don’t you?”

“Of course I know, silly, why else do you think I called you yesterday of all people? I have other friends, but I knew that you would tell me what I needed to hear in order to calm down. And I think you’re right, Mark loves me, so he probably needs time to think, I kind of asked the question out of nowhere, so he probably freaked out. You know how I am, I can make a big deal out of something simple.”

“Moving in with someone isn’t something simple.” Alec said. “It’s a big step in every relationship.”

“And speaking of relationships, have you finally met someone?”

“What?”

“It’s been months since the last time we saw each other, so I’m curious...have you finally met someone? Can I finally cross ‘get to see Alec with a boyfriend’ off my bucket list?”

“No.” Alec said sincerely. He wished he could say yes and talk for hours with his friend about this incredible man in his life, but unfortunately, he was still single. “I think I’m going to die alone and I’m afraid that that will be the only thing on your bucket list that you won’t get to cross...ever.” He confessed because at this point in his life, he had a strong suspicion that he would remain single forever. He had been out of the closet for ten years and, although he had kissed a couple of boys back in college and had met interesting men over the years, he hadn’t met the right one and, therefore, had never dated anyone for real—as pathetic as that sounded.

“I think your problem is that you set the bar way too high, Alec. The perfect man doesn’t exist, it’s a myth, believe me. You can attest that I spent years of my youth looking for the bastard, but it turned out that he was just a product of someone’s imagination and not real. So all that remains to be done, my dear friend, is to go out there, put your heart on the line and find that perfection in someone else’s imperfections.”

“Are you a poet now or what?” Alec scoffed at his friend, although what he had said had been beautiful. Underhill had always had a way with words that Alec loved and sometimes even envied.

“I’ve always been. Do you remember that time I wrote this straight guy a love letter for Mr. Thompson’s class? I still think he fell a little bit in love with me despite his apparent dislike for cock.”

Alec laughed. He remembered that day as if it had happened just yesterday. And if he was honest, he missed those days when everything was simpler and watching his friend hitting on straight guys for a grade was his main source of entertainment.
“Anyway, are you going to tell me about this tour you’re covering or will I have to call Izzy to get a full report on what’s going on behind the scenes?”

“You don’t need to call my sister, I can tell you, but there’s really not a lot going on behind the scenes. The schedule is very tight and we almost never have time to just be and rest. Today is the first time since this started that we’re getting a real day off.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, being on tour is completely different from what people would think, there’s so much work to do all the damn time. It’s exhausting! Days off aren’t really days off, just days that we use to finish stuff we haven’t finished and, sometimes, travel between destinations. Today we actually had some luck and we’re having free time, but I swear that all this work and traveling will end up killing me. I’m really tired. So, if I don’t make it back in one piece, send flowers to my grave, okay? Roses. I know they are considered cliche, but they’re still my favorites.”

“Don’t be such a drama queen, you’re not going to die, you handle work and exhaustion like a pro. Remember that I saw that first-hand for four years…roomie.”

Alec chuckled.

“Anyway, I have to ask you.” Underhill said. “In fact, I’m morally obligated to ask you on behalf of all gay, bisexual, and pansexual men in the world.”

“What?” Alec asked intrigued.

“Is Magnus Bane as handsome in person as he looks on the screen?”

“You too?” Alec asked, rolling his eyes even though he knew his friend couldn’t see him.

“What? I have eyes and they work perfectly well, so…is he?”

Alec took a deep breath. “He’s even more handsome in person.” He admitted only because it was Underhill he was talking to.

Underhill was one of the few people with whom he could say stuff like that and not feel weird about it. Alec had come out of the closet the moment he had been accepted into Yale and Underhill—who had also turned out to be gay—had been his first friend there. So the whole experience of exploring what it was like to feel free and comfortable in his own skin, he had lived it with him, and that had strengthened their friendship in a way that only they understood.

“Really!? That’s quite the compliment coming from you.” Underhill said. “Have you seen him without all the makeup and celebrity glamour? Maybe he’s not as-”

“He is, believe me.” Alec said.

In the past few weeks he had seen Magnus with and without makeup, dressed like a freaking supermodel or just wearing a pair of old sweatpants and a baggy shirt, and he still looked incredibly hot.

“Damn! Why did some guys get the god-like good looks and we only got the brains? It's not fair!”

“Speak for yourself!” Alec teased his friend.

“Oh, yeah, I almost forgot how incredibly handsome you are. I wonder why that is?” Underhill
made a pause for effect. “Oh, that’s right...it’s because I never get to see you anymore.” He said.

Alec knew that his friend wasn’t saying that with the intention of making him feel bad or anything like that, but it still hurt. With all his responsibilities in the magazine and in life in general, he almost never had time for his old friends. Especially those who lived far away, like Underhill.

“I’m sorry about that...I really am, I wish I could travel to San Francisco all the time, but you know I love you, don’t you?”

“Don’t go all sappy on me now, Lightwood, but yeah...I know, and I love you too. And we’ll see each other soon, when you’re here with Magnus’s tour. I don’t have tickets, but I can go visit you at your hotel or something.”

“Yes, I’d love that, I really miss you.”

“I miss you too.”

Alec smiled and blushed a little when he looked up and noticed that Magnus was there. Standing just a few feet away from him as if to give him some privacy, but still close enough to be able to hear part of Alec’s private conversation. He couldn’t get mad, though, it seemed that this eavesdropping-on-each-other’s-phone-calls thing was a two-way street, but that didn’t stop him from panicking. He had no idea how long Magnus had been there and if he had heard that he had openly called him handsome. In the midst of his panic attack, he couldn’t remember if he had said Magnus’s name when Underhill had asked him about his good looks. He was 95% sure he hadn’t, but that other 5% was making him sweat like crazy and wish for his early death.

“Hmmm, I-I...have to go.” He told Underhill. “Can I call you later?”

“Of course, but why? Don’t tell me you have work to do.”

“Something like that.” He said, trying to calm down. Now that the initial shock of seeing Magnus standing there had passed, he was sure he hadn’t said anything compromising during his conversation with Underhill. Even if Magnus had overheard the whole thing, Alec was sure that the man had no idea that they had been talking about his good looks at some point.

“Don’t let them exploit you, Alec, it’s your day off. For once in your life be a rebel and do nothing. Go out with your team and forget about this tour for a day. I’m not sure what city you’re in right now, but maybe your man is waiting for you somewhere out there, so go find him.”

Alec chuckled. “You’re not gonna let that one go any time soon, are you?” He asked resigned.

“Duh, of course not! I’m pretty sure I’ll have to fight Izzy to the death for this at some point, but I want to be the maid of honor at your wedding. I know that the best man will be Jace, but I will fight your sister for the honor of helping you plan your dream wedding.”

“You’re crazy.”

“No, I’m just an optimist. I’m sure that glorious day will come...eventually.”

“Keep dreaming. But anyway, let me know what happens with Mark, okay? And don’t worry about it, everything will be fine. You guys are going to be okay.”

“Yeah, I know...thanks. Again.”

“Anytime...bye. Love you.”
“Bye! Love you more.”

Alec hung up the phone, standing up to approach Magnus, but Magnus was already there—standing right in front of him.

“I’m sorry for the delay, Alexander.” Magnus said. “I’m not usually late, but you know Ragnor, he said he wanted to talk to me about something important just to tell me we could talk about it later. And then, well, then I didn’t want to interrupt your phone call.”

“It’s okay,” Alec said absentmindedly because he was trying hard not to think about the fact that Magnus wasn’t wearing the same clothes he had been wearing when they had spoken outside of Raphael’s room half an hour ago—jeans and an official hoodie of the tour. He was now all dressed up in a slim-fit, long sleeve, button-down navy blue shirt with a golden floral design, and a pair of tapered-fit black pants. His makeup was done to perfection and so was his hair. He looked ready for a photo shoot or a-

Alec shook his head.

For some reason, the word ‘date’ was the first thing that had come to mind with Magnus’s outfit, but he quickly dismissed it because it simply couldn’t be. As far as he knew, Magnus was already dating someone and, despite what the media said, he didn’t seem like the cheating kind of guy. Alec hadn’t managed to get official confirmation about the romance from anyone on Magnus's team just yet, but he knew it. All the things they were willing to do just to pull the focus from Camille and Magnus were enough confirmation for him to know that the two were together again. Plus, there was also the fact that Magnus was a celebrity, surely he was all dressed up because he didn’t like going out without looking like the superstar he was—even if it was for an informal interview.

“Ready?” Magnus asked.

“Where are Luke and all the other bodyguards that accompany you when you are out in public places?” Alec asked. It was very rare to see Magnus walking freely around the hotel. If someone from his team or Luke wasn’t with him, then at least one of the ten bodyguards Luke was in charge of was with him. He was almost never 100% alone when he was in public places.

“It’s their day off too.”

“But—”

“It’s okay,” Magnus said, “despite your profession and the fact that I’ve had one too many unpleasant encounters with the press in the past few years, I do not consider you a threat to my safety. Besides, we’re just getting lunch, Alexander, everything’s going to be fine, so, shall we?”

“Yeah, sure...hmmm, where do you want us to go? I asked and the hotel has three restaurants, but only two of them have private areas and—”

“I know,” Magnus smiled, “I already made a reservation in one of them and asked for security.”

“Oh.”

“So...can we go now?” Magnus said with a smile and pointed to the other set of elevators that were used exclusively for the customers of the restaurants the hotel had.

Alec nodded and started walking behind Magnus, who was beaming as he explained how amazing the food in that place was and what dishes they should order, but Alec wasn’t really paying much attention. He was distracted, thinking that this whole ‘lunch interview’ was the strangest thing he had
had to do on this tour so far.

“Are you alright, Alexander?” Magnus asked him.

Alec hadn’t realized he had stopped walking and was standing there, in the middle of the lobby, looking like a fool.

“Yes, it's just...it's just that...are you sure you want us to do this interview in a restaurant?” He couldn’t help but ask again.

Everyone knew that Magnus was staying at this hotel. Last night, when they had arrived at the hotel from the airport, they had been greeted by a group of fans who had been waiting for Magnus outside the main entrance just to say hello. That had been at four in the morning, so it wasn’t completely unreasonable to think that some of those hardcore fans could be staying at the hotel or waiting in any of the restaurants to—with some luck—run into Magnus and take a picture with him. “We could ask for room service if you’re that hungry and do the interview in your room as we always do or even reschedule it for—”

But Alec couldn’t finish what he was saying because Magnus silenced him, putting one of his long fingers in front of his mouth.

The unexpected closeness sent a shiver down Alec’s spine.

“Shhh, it’s fine...like I said before, I’m a bit tired of room service, I’ve been eating that crap for a month. Besides, the restaurant is quite private, I’m sure we won’t be disturbed.”

“O-Okay…”

After eleven—well, twelve, if they counted this one—luxury hotels in which they had been staying, Alec was no longer surprised with all the incredible amenities and services that all these places offered. What Catarina had said a few weeks ago about other hotels making the hotel in Chicago look like a mere motel had been nothing but the truth, and this place, like some of the others, was proof of that.

Of course Alec had noticed that since they had arrived the night before. There was no way of not noticing how beautiful the place where they were staying was when his room, although shared, was the definition of paradise. But it was only now that he had the chance to see the whole place in broad daylight and through the incredible view of the restaurant in which they were going to have lunch—located right in the middle of the building—that he realized how spectacular it truly was.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Magnus said, pointing to the view.

Alec limited himself to nod. He believed that beautiful wasn’t a word that adequately described what his eyes were seeing, but he didn’t have time to look for a more fitting word because the next thing he knew, the host of the place was escorting them inside the restaurant and to their table, not giving Alec the chance to really take in his surroundings.

Of course that with a reservation for none other than Mr. Magnus Bane himself, they had gotten the best table, which was conveniently located very far away from all the other commensals—in the far corner of the restaurant—and had its very own private balcony. There was an army of seven staff members situated around the small area, giving them complete privacy, but also secluding them from prying eyes. It was clear, at least for Alec, that everyone in the place knew who they were dealing with because they were treating Magnus, and by extension Alec, as royalty, and making sure they
were as comfortable as they could be.

“Your waitress will be here in a moment to take your order, sir.” The host said, directing his words to Magnus. “If there's something else I can do for you and your guest, please let me know.”

“Thank you very much.” Magnus said, giving the host a smile that made the poor man’s ears turn a dark shade of red.

Alec couldn’t help but laugh a little with that exchange. He had been observing Magnus’s behavior for a month now, but it was still amusing for him to see how people reacted to his presence and how he behaved when in public places. He was always confident, as if he owned wherever he went, relaxed and casual, but at the same time vigilant. It was clear that he was comfortable in his own skin, but he never acted cocky, on the contrary, he was always kind and humble. And that was strange because those types of behaviors and qualities tended to contradict each other. If you seemed like an extremely confident person, then people assumed that you couldn't be humble or kind, it was-

“Is everything okay?” Magnus asked, eyeing him suspiciously from the other end of the small table. “You're acting very weird today.” He admitted.

“This is weird.” Alec confessed.

“What? Having lunch?” Magnus questioned, raising an eyebrow. “Allow me to inform you, Alexander, that eating—at least the very last time I checked—isn’t weird, it’s a basic need for all human beings. A mere act of survival.”

“Yes, I know.” Alec said, unable to stop himself from rolling his eyes at Magnus’s smart-ass comment. “But I mean this…” he pointed to the table, to them, to the view, “us, having lunch together, here...alone.”

“Well,” Magnus said, grabbing a piece of bread from the basket on the table and popping it into his mouth, “you wanted an interview or whatever for that thing you’re working on and I had to eat, this was the best solution for us.”

“Right.” Alec said. It was true, the only one making it weird was Alec. This was nothing more than a professional lunch between colleagues. In an over the top restaurant, but still. “Do you think I can film in here?” He asked, looking around. He had already planned to film the interview to be able to take some notes later, but the idea of filming it now, with the view they had, was making him feel almost giddy with the anticipation of all the amazing footage he was going to get for the magazine.

“You were serious about that video, huh? But how are you going to film it? I don’t see you carrying around one of those big cameras that your team has every time there’s an interview.”

“Of course I was serious. And it’s obvious that I’m not going to film it with a professional camera, but I do know how to operate an iPhone, thank you very much.” He said smartly. Two could play that game.

Magnus laughed. “A man of many talents. But anyway, I don’t think they have a problem with you showing everyone in this place how well you operate a smartphone, and if they do, I’m sure they’ll let us know and we’ll figure something out.” He added.

Alec rolled his eyes and pulled his phone out of his pocket, along with the small tripod that Simon had given him so he could record the entire interview without having to hold the phone up all the time. He set it on the table and then took out his tape recorder and notepad, to have an audio copy of his work and be ready in case he had some observations he wanted to write down.
“Always so professional…” Magnus observed.

“Yes.” Alec replied without looking at him. He was making sure that everything was in the right position for the interview.

“We’re getting looks.” Magnus announced, raising his hand to call the host again. “I think it’s better if we fix this before it becomes a problem.”

Alec looked around and noticed that, indeed, they were getting looks, but he wasn’t sure if those looks were because it was clear that he was about to film an interview inside a private establishment or because the other commensals were finally realizing who was in the place having lunch with them and wanted to catch a glimpse of him.

“Anthony, darling,” Magnus asked the host using his polite, yet somehow seductive voice, “is it okay if we record a quick interview while we eat? We’re kind of very tight in schedule and this is the only time we found to do this. You don’t have a problem with this, do you?”

“Hmmm no, of course not, there’s no problem at all, sir.” The host said. “You can do whatever you want.”

“Thank you very much, dear, you are very kind.” Magnus smiled again as the host walked away bowing.

“You have to stop using your smile to get things done.” Alec couldn’t help saying. He had noticed that Magnus hadn’t given the host the chance to say no. The yes had been given from the moment he had called him ‘darling’ and had flashed him with that smile of his.

“Excuse me?” Magnus asked amused.

“The poor guy is having heart palpitations every time you do so much as smile at him, you certainly know the effect you have on people, don’t you?”

That made Magnus crack because he started laughing out loud, not even caring that he was drawing even more attention to their table.

“It’s not funny,” Alec added, although he was trying hard not to laugh, “you deliberately take advantage of people and that’s not fair, not everyone can resist to your charm.”

“Well, I happen to know a few who apparently can…” Magnus said, staring at him.

Alec tried to ignore the look on Magnus’s face because, truth to be told, the way the man sometimes behaved and acted around him made him feel uneasy. He didn’t know why, but this man could have a strange effect on him when he so wanted to. “Anyway, should we wait for the waitress to take us the order or do you want us to start right away?” He asked.

“I don’t even know what we’re going to do.” Magnus said with a smile. “You said you wanted a small interview and a video of me asking my fans to follow your magazine or something like that for whatever surprise you mentioned. But if I’m honest? I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about, but now that we’re here, can I ask you something? Did Raphael put you up to all this?”

“What?”

“I know you two have been talking a lot lately and there have been some changes in the content that you’ve been publishing in the magazine. My people aren’t the only ones following your coverage, I am too. I know Raphael, I know how he operates, and if he asked you to do something you’re not
comfortable with, you can tell me and I’ll stop it immediately, you-"

“It was the other way around.” Alec lied. It was clear that in these two weeks, Raphael hadn’t fully informed Magnus of their plan to manipulate his fan base to focus on the tour and the album, and not on the upcoming movie or his romance with Camille, so he wasn’t going to be the one to tell him the truth. Raphael knew Magnus better than Alec and if he thought it was better that Magnus didn’t know the specifics of what they were doing, then Alec trusted Raphael’s judgement. God knew what Magnus could do if he wasn’t on board with this. “We were having some issues with the engagement of the magazine,” he said as if to explain the sudden change in content and why he was spending so much time with Raphael, “so I had a talk with Raphael about it and asked him for permission to post new material online and include some social media interactions with your fan base to help the magazine. That’s all.”

“Oh, so that’s why the magazine’s now giving away signed albums and VIP tickets.” Magnus said.

“Yes.” Alec tried to smile although he hated lying.

“That was clever of you, I mean...directly using me to manipulate your online traffic? That’s a good plan. Brilliant, I would say.”

“It is, but I’m not using you, I’m using the tour, which I’m covering, so in a way, I have every right to do it.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Anyway, we should-” Alec was saying when the waitress approached the table to take their order.

The waitress, like the host, seemed nervous around Magnus, but she managed to take their order without embarrassing herself or making it too obvious that she was freaking out on the inside because she was talking to the Magnus Bane.

“And what would you like to drink?” She asked finally.

“Sweet tea.” Both Alec and Magnus said at the same time, which caused them both to look at each other.

“I’ll be right back with your drinks.” The waitress said and practically sprinted from their table, surely to recover herself from the encounter with Magnus. In these past weeks, Alec had seen way too many people having similar reactions when meeting the superstar not to recognize the symptoms.

“So...?” Magnus said, still looking at Alec.

“Yeah, right.” He said, making sure his phone was still pointing at Magnus’s face and hitting record. “I’m ready.”

“Then shoot.” Magnus winked. “Just make sure to delete the parts where I’m eating, okay? I don’t want my fans to turn me into a new meme or reaction gif, there are enough of me out there already.”

Alec chuckled.

“I’m serious, I love gifs and memes, but when they are about me, they become a weapon for my friends to make fun of me for weeks.”

“Okay, don’t worry, I will make sure that the editing process of this video is detailed to prevent any unflattering material from ending up on the internet. And, in fact, I’m actually just recording this right
now to be able to-” he hesitated; he had never had to explain to anyone how his work process was and why he needed specific material for all his interviews, and although technically speaking he didn’t have to do it right now, for some reason he felt as if he should, “-well, hmmm, to see how you react to the questions.” He said. “When interviewing people, sometimes you have to take notes or look down to your list of questions, and in those seconds where you aren’t looking are usually the ones in which people are more honest with their answers because there’s no eye contact whatsoever. So I always try to watch all my interviews several times to spot stuff that I missed—expressions, reactions, those little things.”

“So you psychoanalyze people while interviewing them.”

“Kinda. Well, no, yes, I do that...a lot. I know it sounds weird and-”

“It’s not weird, it’s just different, and it actually explains a lot.” Magnus said. “What I liked most about our first interview was that, when I read your finale article, I got the feeling that you had seen me—the real me—and that you were letting everyone see that through your words. That’s why I wanted you and only you here with us during the tour. I wanted people to be able to read accurate and unbiased material about my tour.” He confessed. “Your writing is quite unique, Alexander, you have a gift with words. You structure your articles in a way that makes the reader feel as if they had just interviewed the artist themselves or spent an intimate time with them, when in reality they just read a piece of paper or an article online. When you finish reading any of your stuff, you’re left with the feeling that somehow you know a little better the person you just read about, and now I know why. You really take the time to try to understand exactly what the artist you’re interviewing wants to say, you read between the lines and are honest about it. I like that.”

Alec blushed at the sudden compliment. He had wanted to know why Magnus had specifically asked for him to do this coverage and now that he knew why, he didn’t know what to do with that information. It was flattering and made him feel good about himself, and he was bad at processing such emotions.

“Anyway, so this video that you’re recording right now isn’t exactly to use for footage, right? It’s merely for your amusement.” Magnus said with a smile.

“Not for my amusement, for my work, but yeah. I’ll probably use some of the footage for clips and things like that because the view is spectacular, I’m not going to throw away all this exclusive material. But the video that I told you about before is actually a promotional video that I need you to record to invite your fans to keep an eye on the magazine’s social media accounts for a special surprise we have planned for them and that we’ll be announcing in two weeks. It’s an international contest that we’re organizing with your PR team, so the video is more like an ad if you want to label it. We can record it once we’re done eating. We could make good use of that balcony.” Alec added, pointing to the small area in front of them.

“Oh, okay, I like that.” Magnus said and visibly relaxed. “I was getting nervous, I didn’t know what your plans for today were. But just so that we’re 100% on the same page...I can eat like a caveman and be sure that none of that unflattering footage will make it online, right?”

Alec chuckled. “Yeah…”

“That’s good to know because I’m famished. I certainly can’t promise to keep the elegant pose for a long time. The moment the food is here, I’m going to devour it.”

Alec just smiled. The waitress was back with their drinks and was placing them in front of them.

“I’ll be back with your food in no time.” She said.
“Thank you.” They both said at the same time for the second time tonight, although Alec pretended not to notice.

“So…” Magnus said, “have you eaten anything all day? If you had a meeting with Raphael in the morning, I’m guessing you didn’t have time for breakfast?”

Alec nodded in confirmation.

“Then you must be starving too.”

“I’m not starving, but yeah, I’m hungry.”

“See? Lunch was a good idea.”

Alec barely nodded. “Anyway, I’m going to start with the basics,” he said to change the subject, this casualness between them confused him, “like how you’re feeling, what you’ve enjoyed the most so far, what are your expectations for the other concerts and then we’ll move on to the coverage. I’m going to ask you a bit about what you think of what we’ve been doing, what you-” He was saying when Magnus’s phone rang, interrupting them.

Magnus took it out of his pocket and instead of answering it—as Alec had expected him to do—he silenced it, not even glancing at the screen to see who was calling.

“You can take it, I don’t mind.” Alec said. He really didn’t mind, Magnus was a very busy and popular man, he had important calls to take all day long. Plus, maybe overhearing this call would help him understand what he had overheard that morning.

“No, I’m going to ignore it just for you.” Magnus said, leaving his phone on the table.

Alec didn’t know what to say or what to feel about that. Magnus could have decided to do that—ignore his phone for Alec—because he really respected Alec’s work, or because he knew that Alec was nosy and would probably overhear the conversation as he had done this morning. But since he had no way of knowing with certainty what Magnus’s intentions were, he just took a deep breath to try to jump back into his professional self again and not think too much about the whys. “Let’s start, shall we?”

“I’m all yours.” Magnus winked.

Alec cleared his throat. “So…Magnus, it’s been a bit more than a month since you started your world tour. Tomorrow you will give your twentieth concert, how do you feel with the incredible response that your fans have had not only for your new album but for the tour?”

“Like in a dream.” Magnus answered honestly. “This whole experience, from releasing the album to jumping on a plane to go on tour around the world, has been incredible. I’m sure you’ve seen it during these weeks, but every place we’ve visited, every concert we’ve given has been unique and, as an artist, that’s all I can ask for. This journey is practically just starting, we still have a long road ahead of us, but I’m already loving every bit of it. We’ve been to amazing cities, we’ve met wonderful people along the way, we’ve eaten delicious food…what else could anyone ask for, really?”

“That’s true,” Alec agreed, “I think I’ve gained a few pounds in the last five weeks.” He admitted casually.

“No, you haven’t, you’re perfect.” Magnus said, taking Alec completely by surprise.
But Alec didn’t take his words too seriously. During these weeks, he had learned that Magnus had no filter at all, so what he had said about Alec being perfect—well, perfect shape-wise—had probably been said just as a mere observation and not as a compliment. Magnus was like that.

“Well, my pants may disagree, but anyway...tell me more about what this experience means to you on a personal level. Now that the tour is officially running smoothly and that we have some concerts in our bags to serve as a parameter, what would be the thing you, Magnus, say you enjoy more of the whole experience?”

“Connecting with the audience when I’m on stage.” Magnus said, and Alec smiled—that was something Magnus had told him since the first interview they had had at Madison Square Garden. “When I’m on stage, it's like being transported to a different dimension. The energy that the people transmit is intoxicating, like being high all the time.”

Alec shifted uncomfortably in his seat with that last part. “I wouldn’t know how that feels, since I’ve never been high.” He confessed, but before Magnus could say anything about it, the waitress arrived with their food. Carefully placing their dishes in front of them and making sure everything was in order.

"Is there anything else I can do for you now?"

“No.” Alec and Magnus said.

“I hope you enjoy your meal.” She said.

“Thank you.” They both said at the same time—once again.

“Twice in a row and four times today,” Magnus smiled, “that’s definitely not a coincidence. I think we’re in sync, Alexander.”

Alec blushed a bit. “So it seems, but keep telling me about the tour, what else do you like about it? One is the audience, but what would be the second best thing?”

Magnus started eating, but answered the question immediately. “The fact that I get to share the experience with some of my best friends. When you get to do what you love with the people that you love, every experience just improves exponentially. You can certainly relate to that feeling, right? You work with your family and friends in the magazine.”

“Yeah, although I have to admit that working with family and friends can be stressful too because when things get out of control, and they do—that’s life—it’s harder to yell at your sister or best friend than at a coworker you barely know.”

“I agree, although overall I think the good things of working with people you love and care about overshadow the bad things. When things get tense in my team, we have this rule that we just tell each other what’s bothering us, try to let it all out, and then work things out—like rational adults.”

“That’s a good thing to do.”

“It’s certainly better than bottling up everything and then letting it all out at once. That never ends well. You’re more likely to hurt people if you do that—believe me—I’ve learned that the hard way.”

“Yeah...” Alec nodded because he knew that too, he used to bottle things up as well and, as Magnus had said, it had never ended well. “And what are your expectations about the other concerts? I must admit that I thought that no other city was going to top New York, but I was wrong. People from all the other cities have been amazing, making each and every one of your concerts a unique
experience.” He said, taking a bite of his food.

“What can I say?” Magnus said, smiling tenderly as he ate. “I have the best fans in the world.”

Alec smiled. His very own siblings and best friends were some of those fans, so he couldn’t exactly disagree with that statement. Magnus did have the best fans in the world.

“How’s your food?” Magnus asked, out of nowhere.

“What?”

“How’s your food?” Magnus asked again.

“Hmmm, good...” Alec said, not knowing how to react to this sudden change in the conversation.

“Just good?”

“Well, no, it’s actually delicious, and yours?” He asked out of courtesy. This man was weird.

“Certainly more delicious than yours.”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.”

“And how do you know that?” Alec asked confused.

“I just know.” Magnus shrugged with a smile.

“Well, I don’t believe you.” Alec said.

“Wanna try?” Magnus asked, pushing his plate a bit so that Alec could grab a bite if he wanted—as if sharing food with people you barely knew was the most natural thing to do in the world.

“No, thank you.”

“But you have to,” Magnus argued back, “you don’t believe that my food is better than yours, so you have to try it to either back up your words and call me a liar, or admit that I was right. And you have to let me try yours so this is fair.”

“Are you out of your mind?” Alec asked because he had no idea where all this had come from. A minute ago, they had been talking about the concerts and the audiences and the perks and drawbacks of working with family and friends, and now they were discussing whose food was better? He felt lost to say the least.

“No, I just want to know whose food is better.”

“Why?”

“Curiosity.”

“Well, I’m not going to let you try my food.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s mine.”
“Oh, come on, Alexander! Just a teeny-tiny bite.”

Alec rolled his eyes. Magnus was giving him some puppy-begging eyes, and what Alec hated the most was the fact that they were actually working. He didn’t know what it was, the innocence he could see in them, the mischievousness or the combination of both, but he could no longer say no. “Fine. Go on and give it a try. But know that I’m just doing this to prove that you’re wrong. I’m not one of those people you can smile at, charm with some eyes, and expect me to do what you want.”

“Oh, I know that, Alexander. You’re like no one I’ve ever met before.” Magnus smiled pleased with himself, and using his fork, reached for Alec’s plate and took a small bite. “Uhhmmm, it’s really delicious…” he admitted, “but not better than mine. Go on, give it a try.” He said, pointing to his plate.

Alec sighed and obliged, taking a small bite of Magnus’s dish. He put it in his mouth and tried not to react because, of course it was delicious and way better than his. Magnus had been right.

“And well?” Magnus asked with a smug smile plastered on his face.

“What can I say, Magnus?” Alec said with resignation. “You have excellent taste in food.”

Magnus smiled triumphantly.

“Stop smiling like that.” Alec said a bit irritated.

“I can’t, you should have seen your face when you took that bite, I told you my food was better than yours. You should start believing me now when I tell you something.”

“Well, it’s not better...just different.”

“Of course it’s better, you’re just too stubborn to admit it, but don’t worry, we’ll sort this out immediately.” He said, raising his hand to call the waitress.

“What are you doing?” Alec asked, alarmed.

“Getting a partial opinion.”

“Are you serious? People will think you’re crazy.” Alec said, laughing nervously. This was all kinds of ridiculous, he didn’t know what to do, or think, or say. He was completely out of his comfort zone, but not exactly in a bad way.

“I am crazy, Alexander, no news there.” Magnus said, making Alec laugh again.

“Did you call, sir?” The waitress said. “Is your food alright?” She questioned. She looked nervous.

“It’s excellent, thank you very much, dear, but my friend and I have a question for you.” He said all serious.

Alec was trying really hard to repress a smile. This was the craziest and most random situation he had ever been in and that was saying something since Jace was his brother and he was an expert on getting himself—and everyone else around him—in the most crazy and random situations all the damn time.

“What is it, sir?” The waitress asked.

“Whose dish do you think tastes better, his or mine?”
The waitress looked puzzled for a second.

“Come again?” She asked, and Alec couldn’t help but laugh. The confused expression on the waitress’s face was the perfect reflection of how ridiculous the situation actually was.

“What you heard, whose dish tastes better? Feel free to try them out if you need to.” Magnus said, and Alec laughed again.

“I...I…”

“Come on! Don’t be shy, this is serious. We’re having a bit of a disagreement here and we need a partial opinion on the matter. I’m sure you’ve tried both, so just be honest, darling, tell us whose dish you think it’s better. My friend here thinks that his is better than mine, but I strongly disagree, so…”

The waitress, after realizing that Magnus was dead serious about the question, replied. “Well, the chef always recommends your friend’s dish, sir.”

“See?” Alec said, now smiling triumphantly. He didn’t know why, but it felt nice to win an argument against Magnus Bane.

“But…” the waitress continued, “personally, I think yours is better.”

“Then you, Mary,” Magnus said, clearly reading the label on the waitress uniform, “must have very good taste in food. I agree with you.”

The waitress turned red, but managed to control herself. “Is that all, sir? Can I do anything else for you?”

Magnus shook his head. “Thank you, Mary, you did enough. Maybe bring us the dessert menu in a little while?”

The waitress nodded and left their table without saying another word.

“You’re so weird.” Alec said. He was still laughing. How could he not? That had really been all kinds of ridiculous, funny, and random.

“We’re all a little weird. And life is a little weird. And when we-”

“Robert Fulghum wrote that.” Alec interrupted him. He knew that quote by heart. “Since we met, you’ve quoted a lot of different people from memory, I didn't know you were so...intellectual.”

“Why, thank you for the compliment, Alexander. And I don’t go around telling this to the press, but believe it or not, I like to read...a lot. And I quote different people because I can’t quite quote myself.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have nothing interesting to say.”

“I sincerely doubt that.” Alec said, making Magnus blush. “I mean, people use the lyrics of your songs as quotes, you should use them too, some of them are pretty wise and deep.”

“Do you really think that?”

Alec limited himself to nod. He had no idea why he had said that, not that it wasn’t true, he had already analyzed some of Magnus’s songs and had come to that conclusion, but he had never meant
to say that out loud, much less in front of Magnus himself.

“Maybe I’ll do it one day.” Magnus smiled.

Alec gave him a slight smile in return. It had been a while since he had enjoyed a meal so much and he couldn’t believe that the person he was having such a great time with was none other than Magnus Bane.

“You truly are a-” Magnus was saying when a fan, who must have slipped through the security circle the staff from the restaurant had placed for them, approached the table.

“Can I take a picture with you?” She asked all flushed.

Alec noticed that she was young, maybe around Max’s age.

“Sure!” Magnus smiled. He didn’t seem bothered by the interruption or the breach in the security, which spoke volumes of his good nature. “I’m in the middle of an interview, but I’m sure our friend from the Shadow World magazine here won’t mind if we take a two-minute break. Is there a problem if I take some of your time to snap some pictures with her, Alexander?” He asked, looking at Alec, who just shook his head.

Magnus grabbed the girl’s phone and immediately took a couple of pictures with her as the girl rambled on and on about how much she admired him and loved him.

Alec seized the opportunity to look at Magnus again and analyze his behavior. He had already noticed how nice with his fans he actually was, he always paid attention and engaged in whatever thing they said, even if it was nonsense. He made them feel important and seen, and that only meant one thing: that despite all that mystery and secrets that surrounded him, he was a good man. A good man with a big heart.

The realization of that quality about the man sent a shiver down Alec’s spine. He had been too hard on him, judging him wrong, basing his opinion about him on things he really didn’t know; so a bit ashamed of himself, he quickly looked away, placing his eyes on the table. He needed a distraction, something that could get him out of that uneasy feeling he was trapped in and allow him to concentrate again in order to survive the rest of this lunch interview.

Fortunately for him, the distraction was quickly provided by Magnus’s phone. The device was lighting up with a new incoming call. Curious, Alec glanced at the screen to see who it was and, to his surprise, discovered that it was none other than Camille Belcourt—Magnus’s girlfriend. And he was sure it was her because that was how Magnus had her registered on his phone. It was a bit cold and unromantic—one would expect a pet name or at least a heart emoji next to the name—but maybe there was a reason behind that. Maybe it was a security thing. If anyone from the press managed to get a glimpse of Magnus’s phone, as Alec had just had, they could easily take a picture of the screen and use it to confirm the romance in the tabloids; this way, there was no way to be sure they were a couple unless they confirmed it themselves.

Alec grabbed his glass of iced tea and took a small sip, discreetly monitoring the phone call until it went to voicemail. The moment Camille’s name disappeared from the screen, Alec put down his glass as an excuse to take another look at Magnus's phone.

He only had a few seconds, but he managed to see Magnus’s background picture. He didn’t know what it was, but it looked like a picture of an old book with something written on it. He tried to decipher what it said, but it was very blurry from afar.
The screen went black again and just as he was about to look away before Magnus noticed that he was openly snooping on his phone, a new text message arrived. This one was also from Camille.

“And what if I did love you?” It read.

Alec frowned in confusion. What had that been about? What did that even mean? He wondered, but he didn’t have time to dwell on it too much because the girl who had interrupted them was just leaving and he had Magnus’s full attention on him again.

“Is everything okay?” Magnus asked, staring at him.

Alec nodded, swallowing slowly. “Yes, of course...we should-we should continue with the interview. I don’t want to take much of your time.” He said.

“It’s okay, Alexander. I leave until five, so we have all afternoon if you want.” He smiled.

Alec slipped the card to open his room late in the afternoon and walked inside the room, trying not to make a lot of noise in case Simon was asleep. But his roommate was wide awake, still in his pajamas and lying on his bed as Alec had left him before heading down to have lunch with Magnus. He had clearly made the most of their day off, catching up on some sleep and doing absolutely nothing. He looked rested and refreshed, as he hadn’t looked in a very long time.

“Hi.” Alec said.

“Well, hello, there! It looks like someone had a great time.” Simon said as soon as he saw him.

“What? Why?” Alec asked confused. He was about to say the same thing about Simon. That he looked like he had had a great day, resting and playing, and doing all those Simony things that he liked to do.

“You’re smiling.” Simon said, pointing to Alec’s face.

“Oh.” Alec hadn’t realized he had been smiling. He had had a great time at lunch with Magnus, they had talked about everything and nothing while Alec interviewed him, but he wasn’t aware that he was still in the afterglow of their time together; and, of course, he wasn’t about to admit that to Simon—or anyone else for that matter. “I was talking to Underhill.” He lied.

“Right now?”

“Yes.” It was a big-fat lie and he knew it, he had talked to him earlier today, but he didn’t really care about that at the moment. He cared about selling the lie. It would be really hard to explain why he was smiling, he didn’t even know why himself. “It’s nice to catch up with friends.”

“And how is he doing? We haven’t seen him in so long. I know Izzy invited him to the goodbye night-out she organized for us, but since it was in the middle of the week and he had to fly all the way to New York, he couldn’t make it.” Simon said.

“Well, he’s not doing so good, he’s having some issues with the boyfriend.”

“The one he took to Jace’s birthday party last year?”

Alec nodded.

“I thought they were serious.”
“Yeah, me too.” Alec said, sitting on his bed.

“Did they break up?”

“Not really, but I think that’s what’s going to end up happening, obviously I didn’t tell him that.”

“Why do you think that?”

“I have a feeling…” Alec shrugged.

“And what else did he tell you?”

“Not much, he asked me about the tour and stuff, apparently he’s been following the coverage and wanted to know all about it.”

“Everyone is following the coverage.” Simon said proudly. “I’m glad to know that the good old Underhill is helping with our numbers, though. I think it would be nice to go see him when we’re in San Francisco, don’t you think? It’s really been so long since the last time we saw him. But anyway...how was lunch with Magnus?”

“It was okay…” Alec tried to sound nonchalant about it.

“Did you get all the material you wanted?”

“Yes, I’ll send you the video that we’re going to post on our social media accounts in just a second, so you can edit it a bit and add the magazine logo and all that stuff. We recorded it on the balcony of the restaurant, it looks really good.” Alec said. “And, by the way, thanks for the tripod, it would have been impossible to record the interview and eat at the same time.”

“Where did you guys end up going?”

“To one of the restaurants in the hotel, the one with the panoramic view of the city. He had already made a reservation.”

“Fancy.”

“Yeah.”

“You two were together a long time.” Simon said in what sounded like a mere comment, but coming from Simon, Alec knew that it could be much more than that.

“Kinda.” He said, although it was true. They had been together most of the afternoon, but Alec really didn’t want to share that with Simon because he knew he was going to turn this into a huge deal, and it really wasn’t. Besides, there was the fact that he shared everything with Izzy, and if Simon was difficult to deal with, Izzy was ten times worse—even if she was miles away from them. “He was late and then some of his fans recognized him while we were eating, so we had to take a lot of breaks during the interview.” He stretched the truth.

“Well, that was his fault, he wanted to go to a restaurant.”

“Yeah,” Alec said, “but it wasn’t that bad, the food is really good, expensive, but good.”

“Was he a gentleman and paid for the meal?” Simon asked, jokingly.

“No, he wasn’t...it was a courtesy of the hotel.”
Simon laughed and seemingly satisfied with the answers Alec had given him, resumed what he had been doing when Alec had arrived: playing on his laptop.

Alec lay down on his bed and closed his eyes. The last four hours with Magnus were replaying in his mind. He had really had a great time with him. It was hard to admit it, but for a moment he had forgotten he was with a superstar and had just had fun with Magnus—no famous last name attached. He wondered if he tried that again, to be alone with Magnus, if he could finally get to meet the real man behind the superstar or if he was slowly already getting to know him. There were things he had noticed, behaviors and even expressions that were familiar to him now, but he also had to be honest, the man was still this great mystery that he wanted to solve.

On the one hand, there was this thing about the mysterious calls and sneaky getaways, and that man he had seen him with in Chicago, not to mention all the secrets surrounding his relationship with Camille. The text message that he had accidentally read today had left him thinking. Why had she sent him a message saying ‘what if I did love you’ if they were already a couple? It didn’t make any sense. Alec had assumed they were together again, but that given the timing, they were just waiting for the right moment to announce it. Their new movie could certainly use the free promo, but now? Now he wasn’t so sure about it and the curiosity to know what was really going on there was killing him, although he didn’t know why. It wasn’t as if that would make a difference in what he had to do there or anything like that, but it would certainly help to quench his never-ending curiosity. It would be like finally getting an answer to one of the millions of questions he had about Magnus and-

In that moment there was a knock on the door, so Alec opened his eyes and moved as if to get up.

“No, don’t worry, I’ll get it.” Simon said, getting up from his bed and heading for the door.

It was Maia.

“What’s up, guys!?” She said, entering their room and immediately taking a seat on Alec’s bed. “What were you two doing?” She asked.

“Simon was playing and I was about to transcribe an interview I had with Magnus today.” Alec said.

“You interviewed him today? Isn’t today supposed to be our day off?”

“Yes, but I had a brief meeting with Raphael in the morning and he asked me to do some stuff, so I asked Magnus if he had some time and he agreed to do the interview.”

“Over lunch.” Simon was prompt to add.

“You had lunch with Magnus!?” Maia asked half surprised half intrigued.

“Yes.”

“ Alone?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“Nothing, it was okay, I got to ask him a couple of questions and he recorded a video that we’ll be able to upload to all our social media accounts to announce the contest that we’re going to launch in two weeks. The London all-access VIP experience.”

“Oh, that’s great! We can edit the video a bit to start teasing our readers, but can you transcribe the
interview tomorrow?"

“No, tomorrow we have to be in the venue at 10 a.m. and I’m not planning on waking up at 4 a.m. just to have everything ready before we have to leave.”

“Okay, well...how long will it take you to transcribe it?”

“An hour or two, maybe less.” Alec said. “Why?”

“Well,” Maia added, looking at Simon, “I was talking to Will and Jem during breakfast this morning, and they both told me about this place in West Seventh. It’s a small bar right in front of the Mississippi River...Joe’s and I don’t remember whose else Pub & Grill, and they said it’s great. They’ve been in the city a couple of times before, so they know what they’re talking about. They told me they have the best craft beer in the whole country, so I wanted us to go there tonight. They texted me the address and it’s not far from here.”

“I pass, I prefer to stay and sleep.” Alec said.

“No, Alec, you won't stay here again to be a hermit and work all night long, we’re going out tonight.” Maia said firmly.

“Yes, we’re going out.” Simon joined Maia.

“But I’m tired!” Alec complained. He wasn’t planning on working, just sleeping, really.

“So are we, but sometimes going out helps with that.” Maia said. “Also, it’s not like we’re going out to get drunk or something, we’re just gonna go for a couple of beers to relax and forget about the tour for one night. The next time we have time, we’ll be in Greensboro, three weeks from now, so we gotta seize the moment.”

“Okay, fine.” Alec said, resigned.

It was true, the next couple of weeks were going to be a bit chaotic with them going from Kansas to Nashville, St. Louis, Des Moines, and Omaha in a matter of days. And then there were Fargo, Arlington, and Lexington before they made it to Greensboro and had a proper day off again. They certainly weren’t going to have too many opportunities to go out in the near future.

“Awesome!” Maia exclaimed, getting comfortable in Alec’s bed.

“You’re going to stay here?” Alec asked. He didn’t mind, but he didn’t want to feel like he was being supervised or something. Transcribing this particular interview was going to be a bit personal since half the time he had been with Magnus, they hadn’t really talked about the tour or Magnus’s career, but about food or other trivial things that Magnus had kept bringing to the conversation, and he didn’t want anyone to see that.

“Yeah, I don’t have anyone else to hang out with at the moment.”

“Where are Aline and Helen?” Simon asked.

“Out.”

“Out?” Alec asked as he waited for his laptop to turn on.

“Yeah, they went for ice cream, but they’re gonna meet us at the bar.”

“Oh, right... ‘ice cream,’” Simon said, using his hands to emphasize the air quotes, and Maia made
him a face that Alec couldn’t quite decipher.

“Am I missing something here?” He asked, looking back and forth between his friends.

“No.” “Yes.” Maia and Simon said at the same time.

Alec looked at them one more time. Simon looked exasperated, and Maia as if she wanted to kill Simon, and although he sometimes related to that feeling—wanting to metaphorically speaking kill Simon—Alec had no idea why Maia looked so dead serious about it at the moment. It wasn’t as if there was some huge secret between Aline and Helen that couldn’t be revealed, going out for ice cream with friends wasn’t that big of a deal unless it was-

Realization hit him.

“Oh!” Alec exclaimed. “Did they go out for ice cream as in...on a date?” He asked.

Simon and Maia looked at each other, and Maia finally said. “Maybe…?”

Alec’s eyes widened because that ‘maybe’ was definitely a ‘yes’ and that meant that two of his best friends were currently on a date together. It wasn’t the first time that that happened, his entire circle of friends consisted of a series of couples, Simon and Izzy, Clary and Jace, but Aline and Helen? He hadn’t seen that one coming. He knew that Aline was a lesbian, they had formed the very-closeted-but-still-very-gay club back in high school with only the two of them as members, and Helen had never hidden her attraction to both men and women, but them? Together? That was weird. Not because they didn’t look like a cute couple, both certainly were incredibly beautiful and made a gorgeous couple, but because they had been friends for a very long time and had never shown any kind of romantic interest for each other, at least not that Alec knew of.

“Are you mad?” Maia asked.

“What?”

“Does this bother you?”

Alec frowned in confusion. “Why would it bother me?”

“Because, well, you’re the boss here and a relationship between two co-workers in such a small work group could cause a lot of problems? That’s kind of why they haven’t said anything and-”

“Relationships between co-workers aren’t prohibited in the magazine.” Alec said. “Besides, I trust that they both are professional enough to keep their private lives away from their work. Since when is this being going on?” Alec asked curiously. He was usually very observant, he wondered why he had missed all this.

“Hmmm…” Maia hesitated.

“Since the night at Pandemonium.” Simon answered for her.

“Simon!” Maia exclaimed.

“He was going to find out sooner or later, and he’s totally cool with it, so chill.”

“Yes, but that’s not your place to tell.”

“Why not? We all are friends, now he knows they’re dating, so why not update him with all the gossip? It was weird having to hide this from him in the first place.”
Alec felt a bit hurt that his friends thought he was going to get mad if he knew about this new couple, but he didn’t blame them, it was his fault. Since they had started this tour, he had been telling them again and again that work always came first and that attitude had probably scared both Helen and Aline to come clean about their budding relationship.

“I can’t believe they’ve been dating for a bit more than a month and I missed it.”

“You’ve been kinda busy stalking Magnus.” Simon said.

“I’m not stalking him!” Alec said in self-defense. “I’m working.”

“More like trying to win that silly bet.” Maia added her two cents to the conversation.

“Well, that too, but I’m mostly working.” Alec admitted.

“If you say so…” Both Maia and Simon said at the same time.

Alec grabbed two pillows and threw them at Simon and Maia’s direction, but his two friends moved fast and dodged the blows.

“You don’t want to start a pillow fight with me, Alec,” Simon said, “I’m the champion of pillow fights. When I was in middle school, there was this guy, Robert Steven. Oh, how I hated him. He always invited me to his house just to start fights with me, but-”

Alec ignored Simon and looked at Maia. “Were they ever going to tell me?”

Maia nodded. “Aline’s been looking for the right time to tell you, but it’s hard for her to share this kind of stuff…you know that.”

Alec nodded in understanding. Helen was Aline’s first formal relationship, he knew that much. He and Aline were pretty honest with each other when it came to their romantic lives—or lack thereof. Both had practically come out at the same time and then had focused on school and then on work to try to compensate for the disappointment they thought they had caused their respective families.

“Well, you can tell them that I found out and that I’m totally fine with it, in fact, I’m paying for tonight’s night out in their honor.” He said, smiling.

“For real?” Simon asked.

Alec nodded. His friends’ happiness would always be his happiness too and it deserved to be celebrated.

Maia smiled and scooted closer to Alec on the bed to rest her head on his shoulder. “You’re the best, did you know that? They’re going to be so relieved to hear this.”

Alec smiled. “Text them. I’ll try to transcribe the interview as quickly as possible, so that we can go to celebrate at this place you want to go.”

Maia smiled again and kissed him on the cheek.

Alec, Simon, and Maia entered the place Magnus’s friends had told Maia about and sat by the bar. It was nice and cozy, not very crowded, and that reminded Alec of the Hunter’s Moon—their favorite hang out place in New York. It even had pool tables and a mini stage. It was quite literally Saint Paul’s version of his favorite bar in New York.
“Where’s the happy couple?” Simon asked, looking around the very small crowd.

“On their way…” Maia informed them, “they made a quick stop at the hotel, but they’ll be here any minute now.”

“They’re fast.” Simon said suggestively.

“Simon…” Alec said, knowing exactly what Simon’s tone and funny face had meant.

“What? They’re dating, sex is normal, you know?” He objected. “Anyway, Maia, can I ask you how are the sleeping arrangements in that room? Do you have to cover your eyes when they, you know, or do they-”

“No, no, no, no, no we’re not doing this.” Maia said, literally shutting Simon up with one hand and using the other one to order some drinks.

Alec smiled. “How long have you been waiting to ask that question?” He asked Simon as he waited for his drink.

“Since I discovered their dirty little secret, aka since I saw them making out at Madison Square Garden.”

“You saw them?” Alec asked curiously, passing around the beers the bartender had just handed him.

“Yep...that’s the only reason why they told me, actually. The only one who knew about them from this group was Maia because, well, girls code or some shit like that.”

“From this group?” Alec asked confused.

“Oh, you know…” Simon shrugged, “Izzy, Clary, Jace, and pretty much everyone back in New York already know. But don’t feel bad, you’re the boss, they were being cautious and-”

“Simon, relax, I completely understand,” Alec said, “and I’m not hurt or mad, I'm just happy that they’re happy together.” He said sincerely. If he had been in their place, he probably wouldn’t have shared it either, he would have kept it to himself for as long as he could—not that there were any chances for him to find love any time soon. He was cursed. Love practically ran away from him.

“We should play.” Maia said, pointing to the pool table.

“So that I can beat you all again?” Alec asked, sounding perhaps a bit too pretentious.

But in his defense, he was very good at playing pool and he always won. None of his friends had ever come close to defeating him, not even when he had drunk a little and his senses weren’t as sharp as when he was sober.

“I’ve been practicing,” Simon said, “to finally be able to beat you.”

“Yeah, right,” Alec said, laughing, “in your Sims game or where?” He asked.

“Ouch, I take that as an offense and no, I practice all the time at the Hunter’s Moon. FYI, the Sims 4 still don’t have a pool table, although we all know they should. I mean, come on! All the other versions had it and it was the ultimate extravagant lounge item. This version has so much potential, it’s almost a crime that we don’t have access to that kind of extra fun just because it’s too hard to add a freaking pool table to the game. Of course there’s CC everywhere and you can add one if you want and all that, but it’s not official and-”
“There they are!” Alec exclaimed, both happy to see that his friends had arrived and that he had a way to stop Simon’s never-ending rambling. “I guess that congrats are in order?” He said, standing up and hugging Aline. “You kept it quite a secret.”

“Sorry.” Aline whispered. “I…”

“Shhh,” Alec said, looking at her. “It’s okay, I understand. I would have done the same thing. But I want you to know that I’m so happy for you both.” He added, pulling Helen into the hug. “Like Simon would say, I ship this.”

Both Aline and Helen laughed.

“We should probably grab a table,” Maia suggested, “it’s not like the place is full, but we’re going to be more comfortable there anyway.”

Alec nodded, immediately walking with Aline and Helen to pick a table at the far end of the place, so they didn’t have to be constantly interrupted by people walking between tables to get to the bar for a drink.

“I propose a toast,” Alec said; Maia had wisely asked the bartender for a round of tequila shots and now she was passing them around the table, “for the new couple. Here’s to you two, may you find the happiness you’re looking for in each other. Cheers!”

“Cheers!” Everyone exclaimed.

“Now, I want all the details that I missed,” Alec said, “Simon and Maia told me a bit about the story, but I want to hear it from you.” He said, looking at his friends.

If there was something he loved about his group of friends and family, was that they always ended up sharing everything. There were no secrets between them. Some things took more time to be shared, but in the end, they all knew everything about each other.

“It was kind of a surprise for both of us, right, Aline?” Helen said, tenderly grabbing Aline’s hand. Aline just nodded and smiled a smile that Alec hadn’t seen before, which made him wonder—for the umpteenth time since he had found out about them—how on Earth he had missed all this. Aline and Helen looked at each other in the same way his sister looked at Simon, even when the latter was saying nothing but nonsense; or how Jace smiled and got excited every time Clary said she had gotten them tickets for some art exhibition that she was dying to see, even though Alec knew that his brother didn’t care about art or museums in the slightest.

“We were dancing in Pandemonium,” Helen said, “and then it just happened. We looked at each other and I don’t know, something changed between us, so we went to the bathrooms and—”

“Skip that part.” Alec said wisely.

“Okay,” Helen laughed, “I’ll keep it PG.” She said, making Aline blush. “Anyway...we were pretty wasted that night, all of us, so we thought it had been a one-time thing, you know? But then…”

“Then, the next morning, I told her that I had had a crush on her for years.” Aline confessed.

“You what!?” Alec asked. “And why did you never tell me? You know I can keep a secret, especially that kind of secret.”

“I know, but I didn’t want to tell anyone because I didn’t want it to be weird. I wasn’t sure if she was...well, if she was really into girls or was just pretty open about complimenting women.”
“Seriously?” Alec said, rolling his eyes. Helen’s bisexuality had never been a secret.

“What? She never actually said, ‘hey guys, I’m bisexual.’”

“That’s true.” Maia said. Alec supposed that she had heard this story thousands of times before, but she was still paying attention to it. She was a really good friend.

“Anyway…” Helen continued, “at Madison Square Garden you kind of sent us together to take pictures of the facade, place the cameras, and film the crowd outside, so we got to talk about everything and I told her I had feelings for her too, but that I thought she wasn’t interested because she had friendzoned me since day one.”

“So they made out.” Simon said.

“Simon!” Aline, Helen, and Maia exclaimed.

“It’s true.”

“Well, yes, but it wasn’t just that, we did our job very responsibly, because we take our jobs very seriously, and when we knew that everything was set and we were ready for the concert, we kinda used the magazine van to…express our feelings.” Helen said.

“And that’s where Simon saw you.” Alec guessed.

“Yes.” Both Aline and Helen answered in unison.

“And all the rest? ‘Cause as far as I know, everyone knows.” Alec asked.

“Well, Clary saw us in Pandemonium, so I guess she kinda assumed that things developed from there,” Helen said, “and they did. And she obviously told Jace, and your sister learned through Simon and you know her, she made sure everyone back in New York knew about it.”

“And since when it’s official? Like since when are you two a couple?”

“New Jersey.” Aline said. “Our day off? You were working that day and didn’t want to go with us to explore the city. We kinda detached from the group at some point and just decided to go on our first date.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah,” Helen said, “but then we decided we didn’t want to waste any more time with the silly dating phase, we knew each other well enough to jump right into a relationship, you know? And we did. So I asked her to be my girlfriend and she said yes. And that’s it, that’s the whole story of how we got together. It’s been hard keeping this from you, but we didn’t want you to think we weren’t doing our job and all that. It was one of those things that you want to share but at the same time you don’t want it to become a problem and—”

Helen was saying when two men approached their table.

“I see you decided to come after all.” Jem told Maia, greeting her with a smile.

“Jem, Will!” Maia exclaimed, standing up to greet them too. “We had to make the most of our day off.” She explained.

“Us too.” Will said, pointing behind him where a group of five or six people were entering the bar. Alec recognized them all as soon as they entered—Tessa, Ragnor, Raphael, Dot, Luke, and, finally,
Magnus. Obviously, the singer was in disguise, wearing a ridiculous hat, glasses, and a baggy jacket, but even so Alec was able to recognize him. Besides, it made sense that he was there. Almost all the members of his close team had come tonight, the only ones missing were Catarina, Elias, and Meliorn. Alec supposed that Catarina had stayed with Madzie, and that Meliorn and Elias had probably been too tired to come after visiting the venue.

“It’s going to be some weeks until we can do this again.” Will continued.

“That’s what we thought too.” Simon said. “Do you want to sit with us?” He immediately asked, pointing to all the empty tables that surrounded them and that could easily be rearranged to make one large table for everyone to fit.

“You don’t mind?” Tessa asked, politely.

“Not at all! The more, the merrier.” Maia said, quickly moving the chairs, so that they could add another table and more chairs to their corner and they all could sit together.

“Alexander.” Magnus said, sitting down in front of him with a smile.

“Magnus.” Alec said, trying to remain neutral. He didn’t want Magnus to tell everyone at the table that they had had a great time at lunch—it would be awkward to say the least. He hadn’t shared anything about this afternoon with anyone, so he was sure that if Magnus started talking about what had happened, he would never hear the end of it from his friends.

“I’m going to order some drinks for everyone.” Will said. “What were you guys drinking?”

“Beer.” Maia said.

“Five beers coming right up.” Will smiled.

“I’ll go with you.” Jem added, leaving the group to go and help get the drinks.

“So...how was your day off?” Tessa asked, directing her question to everyone at the table. “We just came back from the venue and you all are going to love it. It’s brilliant! Will added new lights and screens, and it all looks spectacular!”

“Really?” Helen asked, and soon the conversation started with everyone from Magnus’s team sharing a bit of what they had liked about the venue—the Xcel Energy Center—and later, as it happened in all large groups, having multiple conversations at once.

The drinks arrived along with some snacks, so time started to fly and the next thing Alec knew, he had already had four beers. The conversations were no longer about work or the tour, but about life and other mundane things. Everyone was talking to everyone and, although it was hard to keep up with all the conversations going on at the same time, Alec was happy. He hadn’t realized how much he had needed this—to relax a bit and just enjoy a night out with friends.

“I want to propose a toast.” Magnus said when the next round of drinks made it to their table. “To all of us, because in all my life, I’ve never met such an incredibly talented and nice group of people, so cheers! To all of us because we’re pretty awesome!”

“Hell yeah!” Simon, Maia, Will, Dot, and Helen exclaimed together.

“Cheers!” The rest joined.

Alec noticed that Magnus was staring at him as he drank his martini, but he ignored him and just
started talking to Aline, trying—perhaps a bit unsuccessfully—to forget that the man was even there.

“Are you happy?” He asked his friend almost in a whisper.

“The happiest I’ve ever been.”

Alec smiled. “I’m glad to hear that, you know that’s all I want for you, right? I want you to be happy and Helen too. You both deserve it. Do you remember in high school when we used to say that we had to find ourselves a prince and a princess to rescue us from our castles? Well, you just got your princess.”

Aline smiled. “The good old days of our lives as Narnians. Those years were tough, but I think they helped us to be who we are today.”

“Yeah…”

“And you? When are you going to find your prince?”

“Never.” Alec said resignedly. “He doesn’t exist.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic, I used to think the same thing and now look at me.”

“Aline, I’ve met people, the whole purpose of coming out and telling my family before going to college was so that I could live that free life I always wanted and find someone to share it with, but it hasn’t happened.”

“You haven’t let it happen, and that makes all the difference.”

“That’s not true.”

“Of course it’s true, we both did it, we both focused on college and then on work to try to balance things out with our families.”

“Maybe at first yes, but that’s not the case anymore…I’m just not lucky in that department. You know that I’ve always dreamed of meeting someone I can be 100% myself with, someone who makes me smile, and laugh, and cry, and get angry all at the same time. Someone who makes me want to be a better version of myself, someone with whom I can talk for hours and share my life with, but he’s not around.”

“Alec, I think he’s out there, you just-” Aline was saying when Will’s very loud voice interrupted all the conversations.

“Does anyone play?” He asked, pointing to the pool table.

“We do,” Simon said, “but we’re kinda not that good at it. Alec always wins. No one’s ever come close to beat him.”

“Magnus is our best player.” Jem immediately said. “He always wins too.”

“Is that so?” Maia said smiling mischievously, and Alec started sweating with anticipation. He knew that look on his friend’s face and it always meant trouble—at least for Alec. “What if we both send our best players to the ring tonight and the group that loses pays for all the drinks at the end of the night?”

“Deal.” Magnus said, standing up without hesitation and taking off his jacket.
“What? No, that’s-” Alec started to complain, but Simon interrupted him.

“We believe in you, Alec, you’re our undefeated champion, don’t worry, you have this victory in the bag.”

Alec wanted to say that he wasn’t worried about losing, he knew that not even Magnus was going to break his record of no defeats—a record that, by the way, he had established back in his college days—but that the prospect of being so close to Magnus again after this afternoon had him sweating. He was still trying to process their time together, it was too soon to relive it. Too, too, soon.

“Come on, Alexander, are you afraid of some competition?” Magnus asked with a grin on his face.

Alec looked at Magnus. He hadn’t just said that, had he? That had been a direct challenge and Alec never back out from a challenge, no matter who the challenger was. “Never.” He said, standing up and taking off his jacket too.

“Now we’re talking!” Will exclaimed excitedly. “This is going to be fun!”

“We’re so gonna crush your sorry asses.” Maia said.

“That remains to be seen, darling.” Magnus added with a wink.

“Let’s do this!” Alec said, drinking what was left of his beer in one gulp. He was going to crush Magnus, even if that was the last thing he did.

Alec, Magnus, Will, Jem, Luke, Simon, and Maia walked to the nearest pool table and positioned themselves on opposite sides of the table. Alec, Simon, and Maia on the right side and Magnus, Will, Luke, and Jem on the left. It was pretty clear who was with whom and how things were going to be tonight—team Magnus and team Alec.

“Any specific rules?” Alec asked Magnus, grabbing a cue and applying some chalk to the tip, deliberately doing it like a professional would do so Magnus knew who he was dealing with from the get-go.

“No, just no cheating.”

“I don’t need to cheat to win.”

“Then, let’s play.” Magnus said with a smile.

“Let’s play.”

The game started and Alec had to really concentrate because, admittedly, Magnus was the best player he had faced in years. It was a good game, both sides of the pool table were ecstatic with each and every play they made, and cheers could also be heard from the other table, where the rest of their friends had stayed to watch from afar and not overcrowd the small space.

It took them some time and things were pretty even between them for the duration of the game, but in the end, Alec managed to win despite Magnus’s best efforts to distract him from pocketing the eight ball—the winning ball.

“Yes!” Maia and Simon immediately exclaimed, hugging Alec who couldn’t stop smiling.

That had been fun. Really fun.

“Well, I guess you’ve met your match, kid.” Luke said, patting Magnus on the back and returning to
the table, immediately resuming whatever conversation he had been having with Dot and Tessa before Will suggested the game.

“You had one job, Magnus, one job.” Will said, walking away like the sore loser he clearly was.

“Well played, Alec, you won fair and square.” Jem said, and Alec smiled again.

“Let’s go order more drinks!” Maia said. “Now that we’re not paying for them…” She winked at Magnus and Jem, and dragged Simon with her.

“I’m going to tell the bartender to put everything on our tab.” Jem said, walking with Maia and Simon.

“I’m surprised, Alexander.” Magnus said. He hadn’t said a word since Alec had won, but he hadn’t stopped staring at him either. “Nobody had defeated me in a long, long time.” He confessed.

“Well, there’s always a first time.” Alec smiled.

“That there is.” Magnus smiled back. “I think I’ll have to ask for a rematch.”

“Now?” Alec asked. Magnus was side-eyeing the pool table.

“Now.” Magnus said firmly.

“Are you sure you’re ready to lose again so soon? You really should savor the defeat, Magnus, let it sink in and-”

“Who says I didn’t let myself win just to please you?” Magnus questioned.

Alec was a bit taken aback by that. He wouldn’t dare, would he? But he had no way of knowing for sure, Magnus could have done just that to be nice to him, but something inside him told him that it hadn’t been like that. So he looked at him and did what he did best: analyzed him. “You don’t look like that kind of guy.” He concluded after a few seconds.

Magnus chuckled. “Like what kind of guy do I look like then?” He asked. “You’ve psychoanalyzed me enough times already, so share your conclusion, what kind of guy do you think I look like, Alexander?”

Alec’s slightly intoxicated mind immediately thought ‘the handsome one,’ but he shook his head to get rid of that thought.

“You’re not going to tell me?” Magnus asked, clearly misinterpreting Alec’s gesture as an answer.

“Why do you want to know what kind of guy I think you look like?”

“Curiosity.” Magnus smiled.

Alec looked at him again. “You are a very curious person, Magnus Bane.”

“So are you, Alec Lightwood. We all are. So...?”

“If you insist,” Alec smiled, “I think you look like the kind of guy who’s going to lose again.” He said, grabbing the chalk to get his cue ready to play again.

Magnus smiled broadly. “Oh, it’s on, Alexander.”
“Well, like you said, before...that remains to be seen.”

Magnus grinned, but that grin soon died when Alec managed to win not only for the second time, but for the third and fourth time.

“Maybe the fifth will be the charm?” Alec said, tossing Magnus the chalk so that he could put it on the tip of his cue and play again.

Magnus looked at him and just cracked up laughing.

Chapter End Notes

*Was that flirting??? Oh, it definitely was!!!* Anyway, I'll try to update this fic next week, but if for some reason I can't, know that I'll post a new short story next monday. So in any case, you'll get more malec. Yay!!!

Kudos, bookmarks and comments are always appreciated and make this writer, aka *moi*, very happy. Besides, they kinda help me know that you're still here.

Find me on Twitter as @MsAlexisCriss!!!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

I'm back!!! I'm so sorry for the delay, but it turns out that sometimes I don't know how to control myself and I write too much, and although that's a good thing, it can also be bad when a chapter ends up being way too long. So, long story short, I had to split this chapter into two, so it obviously took me some time to restructure everything so that it made sense and followed what I've been doing so far with the story.

The good news is that because of this, CH9 is almost ready, I just need to tweak it a bit, but you should have it available soon. I'm not gonna say when because life tends to get in the way and then y'all wanna kill me for not updating when I promised, but keep an eye on my twitter for updates, I tend to post about my process there. (You can find me as @MsAlexisCriss)

Anyway, I'll stop talking now and better let you read the chapter. As always, I'm not gonna say anything about it because spoilers, but I really hope that you enjoy all the malec. If you live-tweet make sure to use the #LFYfic hashtag so I can read your tweets. Also, please, don't forget to leave kudos and/or comments, these help authors to know if you're liking (or not) a story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec sat down with Helen and Maia at the long table the hotel had set for them to have a quick snack before going to bed. They had landed in Nashville from Kansas about an hour ago and, although they all should definitely be sleeping—it was almost three in the morning and they were exhausted both physically and mentally—they hadn't eaten anything since that morning, and considering their schedule for the next 24 hours, it was better to eat something now than to wait until later. They needed to recover some of the lost energy.

Magnus had given his last concert just a few hours ago and, right after that, they all had taken a flight to move to the next city without even stopping to catch a breath. Some days were crazy like that, things got out of control during the day and sacrifices had to be made—like eating and sometimes even sleeping.

A member of Magnus's crew sat at the table next to Maia and smiled at them. His name was Bat, Alec had seen him a lot in these past weeks hanging out with his team. He was one of Magnus’s official photographers, so naturally, he had immediately gotten along with all of Alec’s friends.

“Where are Simon and Aline?” He asked casually.

“Sleeping.” Maia replied.

“Well, I don’t blame them, I would be sleeping too if I wasn’t so hungry. Today was a mess.” Bat said with a sigh.

Alec nodded although he thought that ‘a mess’ didn’t even begin to describe what the last 24 hours of their lives had actually been, maybe ‘a chaotic mess’ was a better way to describe them.
The day had started like any other with breakfast at the hotel and then off to the venue, nothing seemed to indicate that things were going to spiral out of control at some point until they did. First, two crew members had had to be rushed to the hospital after part of the stage had collapsed when they had been repairing one of the trap doors that Magnus used to move around the stage; then, Magnus had pulled a muscle during one of the rehearsals—nothing too serious, but still; and to top it off, there had been a blackout just minutes before the concert started, making them all go into panic mode for the few minutes that the lack of power had lasted.

“For a second I thought there wasn’t going to be a concert.” Alec admitted.

“Me too,” Bat agreed, “but fortunately, we sorted it all out.”

“ Barely…” Alec said, remembering everything that had happened and how, at the very last moment, Magnus's team had managed to resolve the situation.

“Do we have news about the crew members who got hurt?” Helen asked.

“Last thing I heard was that they were fine,” Bat said, “bruised and scratched, but they should be joining us in a couple of days. I don’t know exactly what happened to them, but I heard Cat telling Tessa that they’re going to fly directly to Des Moines from Kansas, and we'll all be there in about six days, so that means they must be well enough to fly, right? I do know that Magnus went to see them at the hospital just before we left, though.” He added.

Alec raised his eyebrows in surprise. He didn’t know that Magnus had taken the time to visit the crew members. He had seen him leave the venue with Luke minutes after finishing singing the last song and then again at the hotel about an hour later when they were all getting into the vans to get to the airport, but he had no idea that Magnus had actually used the time between one thing and the other to go to the hospital and make sure that the people working for him were fine.

It didn’t surprise him, though, not really, there were so many things about Magnus that Alec still didn't know. The man was as unpredictable as he was talented, the only thing Alec knew for sure was that with him, the unexpected was always expected.

“It’s good to know they’re fine,” Helen said, “our cameras were rolling some tests when the accident happened, so I have footage of the whole thing and it looks bad. To be honest, I thought the worst. But I’m glad to hear that they’re not badly injured and that Magnus visited them.” She added. “It was really scary to witness what happened.”

“Don’t even mention it,” Bat said, “I was about to go on stage to set some of our cameras when everything happened, I was two seconds away from being among the injured. I still-” he was saying when someone distracted Alec from the conversation.

“Hi, do you mind if I sit here?” Magnus said, pointing to the empty seat next to Alec.

Alec was surprised by the request since there were a lot of empty chairs and tables all around them where Magnus could perfectly sit alone or with his close team, but he managed not to show his surprise. The unexpected, right? Besides, he had noticed that since that day off in Saint Paul that they had practically spent together, Magnus had been acting differently with him, he had changed his attitude towards him. Not in a bad way, of course, Magnus had always been extremely kind and polite to Alec, but now he was more open, more carefree, he joked all the time and behaved differently around him—as if something had been holding him back from doing it before that day.

“No, not at all,” Alec said with a soft smile, “be my guest.”
“Thanks.”

“How’s your leg doing?” Alec asked politely. He could see that Magnus had patches of ice tied with bandages on both sides of his right thigh, probably to help speed up the healing process and prevent any swelling. After all, he had a concert to give in just a few hours.

“It’s doing better, these are just to prevent further damage.” He said, pointing to the ice patches.

“You shouldn’t have danced so much tonight.” Alec couldn’t help saying. He had heard what the doctor had said when he had checked Magnus on stage during the rehearsal: if Magnus wanted a quick recovery, he had to tone down all the dancing during the concert to prevent further damage to the muscle. But of course, the man hadn’t done that, on the contrary, Alec had seen him purposely dancing even more during the concert, as if he wanted to prove to everyone that he was more than okay.

“You too?” Magnus said, rolling his eyes in exasperation. “Catarina, Ragnor, Raphael, Meliorn, Dot, and even Tessa have been pestering me all night about that.”

“Well, I don’t blame them, the doctor said you had to-”

“-the doctor doesn’t know my body as much as I do, I’m fine.” Magnus said, interrupting Alec. “His job is to make any injury look like a big deal, but it really wasn’t. I’m fine, I promise.” He winked.

Alec rolled his eyes and just chuckled. Magnus was impossible to argue with, he had an answer for everything.

“Are you tired?” Magnus asked, clearly changing the subject.

“Yeah, but I was also starving, so I decided that eating something before bed was probably a good idea. Today was-”

“-hectic? Chaotic?”

“A nightmare.” Alec confessed.

"Welcome to my world."

Alec chuckled, suddenly acutely aware that despite the fact that they were still sharing a table, he was now completely ignoring Maia, Helen, and Bat. But his friends didn’t seem to mind, they were as engrossed in their own little conversation about the day as Alec was in the one he was having with Magnus.

“Have you been here before, to Nashville?” Magnus asked as he ate.

Alec shook his head. If he was honest, this new...cordiality between them still caught him a bit off guard.

“So...first time?”

Alec nodded. “I’m guessing you’ve visited many times in the past?”

“Not as many as I’d like, just a couple of times during my tours, but I love this city. It’s one of my favorites.” Magnus said. “It has excellent food, drinks, places to visit, culture...music. In fact, the history of music this place holds is unbelievable. You would be surprised. That’s why for a lot of artists Nashville is a must stop during their tours.”
“Really?”

Magnus nodded. “Did you know that Elvis Presley recorded more than 250 of his songs at the RCA’s historic Studio B on Music Row?”

Alec shook his head. He had to admit that his knowledge of famous musicians was very limited. If he was honest, Magnus was the first artist he learned to know so much about. His job had always required him to know a thing or two about musicians, actors, and celebrities in general, but never in such detail.

“Well, he did. The Christmas lights they installed for him are still in the studio to this day as a way to remember him.”

“The Christmas lights?” Alec asked confused.

“Yes, they installed some lights when he was having a hard time getting into the holiday spirit while recording a Christmas album in the middle of summer.” Magnus said casually.

“You’re joking.”

“No.”

Alec made a face, Magnus had to be kidding, that was so silly it couldn't be true.

“I’m not lying!” Magnus exclaimed with a chuckle, quickly fishing his phone out of his pocket and googling the curious fact just to show it to Alec. “See?” He said, handing him his phone.

Alec grabbed the phone and, of course, Magnus’s wasn’t lying. The picture of the studio showed the red, blue, and green lights that had been installed for the rock and roll legend. The caption described exactly what Magnus had said. That Elvis was having trouble finishing his album because he was unable to get into the holiday spirit while recording in mid-July; so to fix the matter, the crew had installed holiday-colored lights, put up an artificial Christmas tree in the corner, and cranked up the air conditioner as high as it would go to create a festive atmosphere.

“This is as silly as it is crazy.” Alec said, laughing.

“Getting into the right creative mindset to record an album is hard, believe me.” Magnus said.

“I imagine, but this is a bit too much, don’t you think? Christmas isn’t always cold, the countries located in the Southern Hemisphere are in the middle of summer when Christmas takes place. Besides, he was from Mississippi, right? It's not that cold there.”

Magnus laughed. “Well, yes, you're right, but he was a unique and very eccentric artist.”

“You don’t say…”

“He's often described as the American music giant of the 20th century who single-handedly changed the course of music and culture in the mid-fifties. I guess that title gives him a pass on stuff like this. He was a legend, he could do whatever he wanted—even ask for his own Christmas in the middle of the year.”

“Yeah, he was one of the great ones. And I guess that you have a point, it must have been hard to get inspiration to record a Christmas album when it wasn’t really Christmas. I wonder what other eccentricities the King had? Especially when it came to writing songs and recording albums, I bet they were as ludicrous as what you just told me about that ‘Christmas in the middle of summer’ thing
that he asked to finish his album.”

“Well, I’m not sure about his eccentricities when recording, but I do know he didn’t have many when writing songs because he actually didn’t write any.” Magnus said.

“Come again?”

“He never wrote any of his songs. He recorded more than 600 songs during his entire career, but he didn’t write any of them.”

Alec’s eyes widened in surprise. He didn’t know that.

“But even so he was a great musician, dancer, and performer, so we have to give him that.” Magnus added.

Alec nodded.

“Disappointed?” Magnus asked.

“No, just surprised, there’s so much I don’t know about the music industry, it’s like a whole new world for me. There are so many artists, so many people that I didn’t know about that paved the way for today's artists. And then there are the cities and countries. Before covering your tour, I used to think that artists chose the cities and countries they were going to visit during their tours at random, that they chose them because they were convenient—geographically and economically—for the schedule planned for the tour. But I was wrong, you actually visit them for a reason. They are not just convenient, they're important, emblematic—they're part of the history of music, and I think that's amazing.”

Magnus just smiled.

“It seems that I’ll have to up my game a bit from now on,” Alec continued, “dig a little deeper, learn as much as I can about all the cities we’re visiting. I want people to know all this too, to understand the meaning behind everything.”

“I can share with you what I know about them, only if you want, of course. For example, I don't know everything there is to know about Nashville, but I do know a thing or two that could be useful for what you want to achieve with your articles from now on.”

Alec smiled. “That’s actually not a bad—”

“So…” Helen interrupted them. She, along with Maia and Bat were getting up from the table, it seemed that they were done with their respective meals, “we’re off to bed.” She said, addressing them both.

“Have a great night, guys.” Magnus said, smiling. He hadn’t paid any attention to them since he'd sat down at the table, but Alec knew it wasn’t because he didn’t want to. Magnus was always kind and friendly to everyone, he and Alec had just gotten lost in their own little conversation.

“You too, I guess we’ll see you tomorrow at the venue.” Helen said, smiling at Magnus. “Are you coming with us, Alec?” She asked, now looking exclusively at Alec.

Alec wasn’t sure if he should join his friends or stay a little longer with Magnus. The conversation they were having was interesting and it could definitely help him with the article he had to write about the city and all that. Besides, he still hadn’t finished his dinner. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow.” He said, deciding to stay.
Both Maia and Helen nodded, while Bat simply smiled.

“Then good night.” Maia said.

“Night.” Alec said, watching how, almost immediately, his friends disappeared from view and left him alone at the table with Magnus.

“Nashville is known as Music City.” Magnus continued speaking as if they hadn’t been interrupted in the first place. “From its very beginnings, Nashville grew from a foundation built on music. The first around-the-world tour by a musical act was by the Fisk Jubilee Singers from Nashville’s Fisk University and, well, as you can imagine that put Nashville on the map as a global music center. Nashville’s most famous music venue, the Ryman Auditorium, was built sometime in 1892 if I recall correctly, when a riverboat captain completed what was originally named the ‘Union Gospel Tabernacle.’ When it opened, it was the largest auditorium in the south of the Ohio River. It is nicknamed the ‘Carnegie Hall of the South’ and to this day, it attracts musicians and fans from all over the world.”

“Really?”

Magnus nodded. “In 1925, the city established and launched the WSM radio station—the Grand Ole Opry—which further secured Nashville’s reputation as a musical center and sparked its nickname of Music City.”

“You sound like a tourist guide.” Alec couldn’t help saying. Magnus was throwing facts of the city that could be easily found in a brochure about Nashville's main attractions.

“I know my history.” Magnus winked. “Anyway, the Opry—still staged live every week—is America’s longest-running radio show, it’s been in continuous production for more than 90 years. It’s also ignited the careers of hundreds of country stars and lit the fuse for Nashville to explode into a geographic center for touring and recording. That’s why Music Row—a collection of recording studios, record labels, entertainment offices, and other music-associated businesses—populates the area around the 16th and 17th avenues in the south of the city.”

“To only know a thing or two about Nashville, you certainly know a lot.” Alec laughed.

“What can I say, Alexander? I like to know things.” Magnus shrugged.

“And let me guess, this is the part when you quote someone who said something about the importance of knowing things or something like that.” Alec joked. He had learned to know Magnus a lot in recent weeks and knew that he always—always—quoted people when he wanted to make a point.

Magnus looked at him and cracked up laughing. “I was actually about to quote Einstein. He has this quote that says, ‘Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.’ And I kind of live by that, but never mind that now, I’m more curious about your apparent ability to read minds.”

Alec laughed.

“Don’t laugh, I’m serious...can you?” Magnus asked, clearly joking.

“Read minds? Oh, yes, of course, it’s my secret talent. You’ve discovered it, please don’t tell anyone.” Alec smiled.

“I won’t, my lips are sealed, but we gotta put that secret talent of yours to the test. What am I
thinking right now?”

Alec stared at him just to play along, although he had no idea what Magnus might be actually thinking. “You’re thinking that I’m completely crazy and that I definitely cannot read minds.”

“Good try, but no.” Magnus said. “I was thinking how a terrible liar you actually are. I’m disappointed, Alexander, you just confirmed my theory: you’re a sham. You got me thinking for a second that I had met the real life Edward Cullen.”

Alec burst out laughing. “You didn’t just say that.” He said, still laughing. Of all the things Magnus could have said, he hadn’t been expecting that.

“Twilight, really?”

“What?” Magnus complained, although he was laughing too. “I read the books and watched the movies, okay? I was young once and really into fictional vampires. Don’t judge me.”

“I’m not judging you,” Alec smiled, he had actually read and watched the movies too, his high school self had wanted to be in Bella’s shoes so many times that it was embarrassing to even think about it now, “I’m just shocked. You’re turning out to be a box full of surprises, Magnus Bane.”

“So are you, Alexander Lightwood, although I must confess that I’m quite sad to discover that you’re not actually a mind-reading, sparkling vampire. You could have fooled me there.”

Alec chuckled. “Sorry about that, I’m quite mundane, so no superpowers or supernatural good looks for that matter.”

“Well, I wouldn’t sa-” Magnus was saying when, out of nowhere, Will arrived and sat down right in front of them.

Alec hadn’t seen him since they had checked into the hotel, so he had thought that, like some of the others, he had gone straight to bed, but apparently, he had been wrong. And although Alec usually enjoyed his presence—Will really was a very funny guy—he had to confess that at that precise moment, he was a bit annoyed that he was there being his usual loud self.

“Guess what!” Will exclaimed enthusiastically.

“What, Will?” Magnus asked, rolling his eyes. It seemed that Alec wasn’t the only one annoyed by the man’s presence.

“So I was talking to this very sweet lady at the front desk and I don’t remember exactly how it happened, but I ended up telling her that it was a bit unfortunate that we weren’t going to be able to visit any of the sights of the city because we’re only staying for a couple of days. And guess what?”

“What?”

“She pulled a few strings for us and we’ll be able to visit the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum tomorrow.” Will announced with a smile on his face. He looked quite proud of having gotten that unexpected trip to the museum.

“I have a concert tomorrow.” Magnus said. He didn’t sound thrilled with the news.

“I know, you idiot, the visit is before the concert, like very early in the morning, actually. Before the museum opens to the public.”

Magnus looked at his friend and rolled his eyes.
“What?” Will exclaimed. “It’s the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum, Magnus! The other day you said that you’d always wanted to visit it, but you’d never had the chance.”

“Yes, and I was aware that I wouldn't have time to visit it this time either. It’s past three in the morning, Will, I haven’t slept well in days and you expect me to get up in just a couple of hours to go to a museum?”

“Come on, it’s going to be fun! I already called the museum and they’re very excited that a superstar like you is visiting them. Plus, I got access for everyone, even for some members of the crew.”

“And what about the sound check and all that? We can’t just-”

“It’s a quick visit, an hour maybe two, and we’re done. You’ll be back right in time for the sound check, the meet and greet, and all the other stuff.” Will said.

“How are you so sure about that?” Magnus asked.

Will was already getting up from the table.

“I’m the producer, Magnus, I know the schedule of the concert better than you.” He smiled, winked, and left as quickly as he had arrived.

“He can be so annoying when he so wants to.” Magnus whispered loud enough for Alec to hear him.

At the moment, Alec agreed with that statement, but he couldn’t just say that, so instead, he just smiled and said, “Hmmm, he’s okay. Besides, if you told him you wanted to go to that museum a few days ago, I think it’s a nice gesture that he's found a way for you to visit it despite the lack of time. He’s a good friend.”

Magnus looked at him, shook his head, and smiled. “Do you always see the positive side of everything?”

“Not always, but I try to.”

Magnus smiled again. “You’re a good person, Alexander, and very honest, I like that.” He said, and Alec felt himself blushing.

The air between them was changing as it had been happening these last few days. One minute they could be talking and joking and the next, something happened and Alec felt exposed—as if he were naked. The feeling was unnerving and very new to him.

“I’ve met a lot of people in my life, good and bad,” Magnus continued, “and I can assure you that you’re definitely one of a kind.”

“I could say the same about you.”

“Really?”

Alec nodded. He had no idea why he had just said that, he really hadn’t meant to share what he thought of Magnus out loud, much less in front of Magnus himself. “Anyway,” he said, standing up, he had already talked too much tonight, it was time to go before he kept saying things he didn’t want to, “it’s getting very late. We should probably go to sleep.”

“Yes, of course.”
“Have fun tomorrow at the museum, though.”

“What? Wait. You’re not coming with us? Will said that he had gotten access for everyone and that includes you and your team.”

“Well, I don’t know about my team, but I can’t go.” Alec said, not because he was trying to avoid Magnus, but because it was true, he couldn’t go. “I have an online conference with my boss first thing in the morning and with the time zone differences, it’s gonna take place around eight for me, so I really can’t go. But you guys have fun. Museums are always fun.”

“How about you?” Magnus asked with a smile. He seemed intrigued.

“Yes, although I’m not sure if one about Country music would be on the list of my absolute favorites, but who knows? Maybe it’s worth the visit.”

“I happen to know that it’s one of the largest museums and research centers in the world, so it’s probably not a bad place to visit.” Magnus added.

“Sounds tempting…”

“Then reschedule your conference and come with us.”

“I can’t do that, my boss has been planning it for days. Besides, the executive board of the magazine will be there too, I can’t just ditch them to go to a museum. They’re the bosses.”

“Always so responsible.” Magnus smiled.

“It’s my job.”

“And you’re very good at it. This world needs more people like you. Anyway, if you can’t join us, I guess I’ll have to buy you a souvenir, then.”

Alec chuckled. “Good night, Magnus.”

“Good night, Alexander. Sleep well.”

Alec suppressed a smile and just replied, “you too,” before walking away and heading to the nearest elevator to go to his room.

When Alec entered his room, his thoughts were a mess. For days, he had been analyzing the change in Magnus’s behavior towards him since that day off they had unintentionally spent together, but he hadn’t stopped to think about his. What had happened just a few minutes ago and what had been happening between them since that day—the casual conversations, the jokes, and even the sudden tension in the air—were all things to which both had contributed to. The change between them was mutual.

Of course it was nothing that he had done consciously, it had just happened, naturally. He had no idea why, maybe because they saw each other every day, or because slowly, they were getting to know one another better, but there was a part of him that—although a bit reluctant to admit it—thought that maybe the reason behind that was that he actually didn’t dislike Magnus as much as he thought he did and that-

“Are you okay?” Simon asked, interrupting his train of thought.
Alec had thought that his friend was asleep, he hadn’t realized he was awake and watching him from his bed while Alec just stood there by the door looking like a fool.

“I’m sorry, yes, I was just thinking.” He said, walking into the room. “I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“It’s okay, I wasn’t really asleep. I’m so tired that I can’t sleep. Has that happened to you? I hate it.” Simon said. “But anyway, are you sure you’re okay? You seem...troubled.”

“Yes, I’m fine, just thinking nonsense, don’t mind me. You said you can’t sleep? Do you want a pill? Aline gave me some the other day, I still haven’t taken any, but she swears that they work like magic.”

Simon looked at his phone to check the time and then nodded.

Alec took out the bottle of pills from his suitcase and handed it to Simon, who, without wasting time, took a pill with a large gulp of water.

“I’m going to take a shower so I can sleep a bit more in the morning.” Alec informed his friend. “I have that conference with Aldertree and the executive board, so you know.” He added, grabbing his toiletries. “Oh, and there’s a visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame Museum scheduled for tomorrow morning, everyone’s invited, so you have to get up early if you want to go. You must have all the details in your email, I’m sure someone from Magnus's team already sent them.”

“How do you know that?”

“What?”

“That there’s a visit to a museum scheduled for tomorrow morning, the email they sent us when we got here didn’t say anything about a visit to a museum.”

“Oh, because Will just told Magnus about it. It was a last minute thing.”

“You were with Magnus right now?”

“We all were with Magnus,” Alec partially lied, “he was at the restaurant having something to eat as well.”

“Oh, I thought he was gonna go straight to bed, he looked very tired when we got here.” Simon said. "And the visit to the museum sounds like fun, but I’m too tired, I think I’m just gonna sleep until we have to go to the venue.”

“Yeah, I get you. In fact, I’m not sure how many are going to go to this thing, it was very last moment, plus it’s very early in the morning and we're all exhausted. Anyway, get some rest, I’ll take my shower now. Good night.”

“Night.”

Alec entered the bathroom, turned on the water and hopped into the shower. He was in desperate need for a place where he could just think. Before Simon interrupted his thoughts earlier, he had been having this scary thought about his change of behavior towards Magnus and now, he couldn’t stop thinking about it.

_Had he really stopped disliking Magnus to the point that he actually enjoyed his presence?_ He wondered, but immediately shook his head to get rid of that thought.
It wasn’t that he enjoyed Magnus’s presence per se, he was just getting used to it, which was completely normal and to some extent totally expected. His change of behavior towards the man was just a natural reaction to getting to know him better. He had come to this tour with a completely different opinion about him, so the things he had been learning about him—good and bad—were confusing him. That was all.

In all this time they had spent together, he had learned to know a person who wasn’t just talented and passionate as the magazines had been selling for years, but who was also nice and compassionate, fun, schooled, very cultured, and with excellent taste in food and clothing. It had only been six weeks and there was a long road ahead for them, but it was enough time to get to know a person, or at least a side of a person; because Magnus was equals parts mysterious as he was secretive, and Alec couldn’t just forget that.

He wished he could somehow get to know the other side of Magnus because maybe then things would make more sense to him, especially when it came to his opinion of him both as a person and as an artist; but there was no way to get answers to his millions of questions. They were now on friendlier terms, but he couldn’t just bombard him with questions. He knew that if he started being nosy, he could risk losing whatever was blooming between them and he didn’t want that. He couldn’t explain why, but the thought of Magnus suddenly hating him for sticking his nose where it didn’t belong sent a shiver down his spine. Six weeks ago, when all this had started, he wouldn’t have cared, he would have taken full advantage of the change in their relationship and asked away to try to get some answers not caring about the consequences, but now? Now he just couldn’t.

When had things changed so much? He sighed, letting the water hit him in the face for what felt like hours, but was probably only a couple of minutes.

It felt good, it was soothing and relaxing. It helped him forget a bit about everything. He had spent weeks just thinking about Magnus and his many secrets and now, with the way things were changing between them, he felt more frustrated and confused than ever. He wanted answers, but at the same time he wasn’t sure if he was going to like those answers. Everyone outside Magnus’s circle, mainly press and other artists, said that the man was trouble, someone had even dared to publish a book about him to expose that and-

“The book!” Alec exclaimed, remembering that unauthorized biography he had ordered back when he had first interviewed Magnus and that, fortunately, he had brought with him to the tour. He had never had the chance to read it, but now it seemed like a good time to catch up.

With renewed hope and a spark of new interest, Alec turned off the water, tied a towel around his waist, and walked out of the bathroom, quickly rushing to his suitcase to get the book. He rummaged in it until he found it—it wasn’t even open. He had thought about throwing it away after the first interview with Magnus, he had had no intention of seeing or knowing anything about the man ever again, but for some reason he had completely forgotten about it and had never gotten rid of it. When he had learned that he would be covering the tour, he had decided to pack it just in case he needed it, and good thing he had because maybe this book had the answers he was looking for.

“Simon?” Alec asked to make sure his roommate was already asleep. He didn’t want to disturb him if he left the lights on. His plan for the night had changed and now it didn’t include actually sleeping, but staying up to read.

Simon didn’t budge, so Alec quickly changed into his pajamas and got into bed, taking the book with him and getting ready to read it.

The cover was simple, but very telling. It was a black and white drawing of Magnus’s face. It covered the entire book and was extremely detailed, it looked almost like a photograph. Magnus’s
eyes were closed, and the title—Magnus Bane: the “making” of a superstar. An Unauthorized Biography—was right where his mouth should be, in a white stripe that looked as if it had been ripped out of the paper. The author was a guy named Lorenzo Rey.

Alec had no idea who this man was, only that he had been Magnus’s high school friend during the time they both had attended the Idris Academy for Boys. And he got a confirmation of that when he turned the first page and saw a picture of the two together. They looked young and wore the same uniform—gray pants, a blue blazer, and a striped blue and green tie. The caption of the picture read: (L-R) Lorenzo Rey and Magnus Bane at the Idris Academy for Boys, 2002.

Alec smiled at the picture of young Magnus. The man hadn’t changed a bit since then, his features were the same, just a bit more mature. The roundnesses of his face had turned into sharp edges, and the thin boy with a shy smile into the built and very confident man he was today, but he was practically the same. His style was, perhaps, what had changed the most. Young Magnus combed his hair differently, very formal with a line to the center, and he didn’t wear any makeup, however, he still looked different from the rest—in this case Lorenzo—more elegant, unique.

Alec gave one last look at the photo, turned the page, and started reading.

Introduction:

“True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.” — Kurt Vonnegut.

“The Idris Academy for Boys, or simply the Academy, as people know it, was and remains to this day a very exclusive private institution where only the children of the very powerful are able to attend. Famous people you see today not only on television or on the big screen, but behind important positions of power, they all studied there. It is a place where you go to learn not only about Math, Science, Religion, and Politics, but about the world, how to control it, and your place in it according to your last name.

“I know you’re probably wondering why someone like me, the son of a humble and hardworking Spanish immigrant ended up in such a place, but my story isn’t as interesting as the one I’m about to tell you. I was just a lucky kid, my father was the Dean of Academics at that time and as his only son, I was granted a scholarship. But once again, the reason why I ended up in that place isn’t important, what’s important is what I learned in all the years I spent there. I studied, slept, and lived with the children of powerful people, so powerful that if I told you their names, you wouldn’t even believe me. Spoiled children who’ve always had everything on a silver platter, who grew up surrounded by luxuries and a plethora of opportunities, who didn’t have to do anything to be where they are today but to be born. And the most spoiled of them all was none other than the man you know today as Magnus Bane.

“What? The Magnus Bane? That charming actor, singer, and dancer that everyone loves and idolizes? Yes, the very same.

“What complex creatures superstars are, don’t you agree? If you examine closely any of the hallowed few at the pinnacle of fame, you will discover a heady collection of masks and secrets. Connections, money, and power rule the world and shape it for these people to take full advantage of it, and no other star of the modern era has taken more advantage of who he is than Magnus Bane. He’s the pop’s industry ultimate chameleon. He delights in deceiving his audience, making radical changes in his
Alec made a face. Before the tour happened, he had had a pretty similar opinion about Magnus to the one Lorenzo Rey had, and that intrigued him as much as it worried him. His opinion had been based on what he had seen and learned from the industry for years, but Lorenzo’s was based on actually knowing Magnus for years. So, who was really Magnus Bane? The person Alec was learning to know or the one Lorenzo claimed to know?

Of course Alec knew that he had to take every word written in that book with a grain of salt—it was an unauthorized biography, after all—but it was clear that he wasn’t going to be able to put it down until he read the very last word. He was already too hooked to not do it.

He sighed and turned the page again.

One:

“No man is rich enough to buy back his past.” — Oscar Wilde.

“The rooms were all the same for everyone at the Academy, double-bedded, spacious, elegant, and designed for the rich and powerful—expensive carpets, expensive curtains, expensive ceilings, and expensive furniture. Wherever you looked, it smelled of money and power, and for almost four years, a room like that was the place I shared with the person this book is about. I'm not going to lie and say that everything was bad, there were good times, but it was definitely an experience that marked me forever.”

The next morning, Alec was already more than halfway through the book. True to his word, he had stayed up all night reading it, and when the sun had started to come out, he had moved to one of the hotel's restaurants to have breakfast, continue reading the book, and wait for Aldertree’s call without disturbing Simon. The pill that his friend had taken had been very effective and the man had slept like a baby. He had still been snoring when Alec had walked out of the room.

“Do you want more coffee?” The waiter asked him.

Alec limited himself to nod. He was too engrossed in the story he was reading to even bother to open his mouth or look up. The book was poorly written and clearly very biased—Lorenzo’s intentions were clear with every word printed there—but he couldn’t deny that it was also very entertaining. Imagining the life that all these boys had had in that school intrigued him a lot. Everything, from the lessons, the places they visited, the events they went to, to the place itself, it all sounded like both a beautiful dream and a nightmare.

He was about to start the chapter that marked the beginning of Magnus’s Junior year when someone sat next to him and distracted him.

“Good morning, Alexander!” Magnus exclaimed, flashing him with a wide smile. He looked fresh
and ready to go despite the early hour.

“Hi, hmmm...good morning, Magnus.” Alec replied still a bit surprised by the interruption. He hadn’t thought he would see Magnus until they were at the venue later today. He had thought that he, along with the rest of the people who were going to visit the museum, had already left.

“Please tell me you’re not actually reading that book.” Magnus said, pointing to the book that Alec still had in his hands.

“I am.” Alec confessed a little flushed.

Magnus rolled his eyes, but laughed. Alec got distracted for a second. That sound, since the first time he had heard it, had made him feel things he couldn't explain.

“May I ask why are you reading that crap? I thought you had better taste.”

“This has nothing to do with taste,” Alec said, rolling his eyes, “I’m reading it because I’m covering your tour and writing articles upon articles about you. Your life isn’t exactly an open book and for my work, I kind of need to know more about you.” Alec explained. “I ordered this when I interviewed you for the first time, but since I didn’t have a lot of days to prepare myself for that occasion, I never had the chance to read it. Now it seemed like a good time to catch up.”

“Well, it’s full of bullshit, so it’s not going to help.” Magnus said, grabbing a strawberry from Alec’s plate and eating it nonchalantly.

“Really?” Alec inquired curiously.

Magnus nodded, still chewing. “I think one of my yearbooks could be a more reliable source than that.”

“Is that so?” Alec asked, his journalist self was taking control of the conversation.

“Yes.”

“So you’ve read it.” He assumed.

“No.” Magnus said.

“No? Then, how do you know it’s full of bullshit if you’ve never read it?”

“I just know. I know Lorenzo and what he wanted to achieve with that book.”

“So you really haven’t read it?”

“No,” Magnus said simply, “why would I read it?”

“Because it’s a book about you?”

“No, it’s not.” Magnus said, grabbing another strawberry from Alec’s plate.

This was starting to become a thing that Magnus did whenever he had the chance—steal Alec’s food. And Alec wasn’t entirely sure if he liked it or not, but he was too intrigued by Magnus’s apparent openness to talk about this book to dwell on it too much.

“It’s a book about my alleged high school life, which is very different.” Magnus added.
“Okay, good point, but how could you not read it?” Alec said. “It’s a book that talks about you.”

“I know…” Magnus said, laughing, “but then again, why would I read it?”

“Because it’s a book about you?” Alec said confused. “How could someone have a book about them and not read it?”

“Well, I didn't.”

“You didn't even skim it?”

“Sure, I skimmed it, but I didn't read it. I looked through a couple of different sections and I was mortified, so I threw it away.” Magnus confessed.

“Why? Was there something there you were probably ashamed of? Or maybe that you didn’t want to relive? High school experiences can be traumatic for some people.” Alec said. His journalist self was the one making the questions, but there was a small part of him that was genuinely curious. His personal high school experience had been great on the outside, but deep down he had been living in hell and dealing with a lot of demons. In hindsight, the closet hadn’t been the best place to be.

“No, on the contrary, I think that my high school experience was one of the best times of my life, but Lorenzo published that book with very different intentions and, therefore, he had to twist what really happened in order to sell more copies. It didn’t work, though, my fans and the people I care about know who I really am, so…”

“True,” Alec admitted, he had already read more than half of the book and had come to the conclusion that the Magnus described there was nothing compared to the Magnus he had learned to know in these past weeks, which explained why the book had been an epic failure. “The book is listed as one of the worst literary failures of all time.”

“And I’m glad about that.” Magnus admitted with a mischievous smile, and Alec couldn’t help but smile back.

“So, is it really full of bullshit?” Alec asked.

Magnus nodded. “If I were you, I wouldn’t even bother finishing it. I mean, if you need to know more about this Magnus Bane guy you're writing articles upon articles about, you could always ask him directly. His life may not be an open book because he considers himself a very private person and there are things that he wouldn't like for the public to know, but I don’t think he would say no to you if you asked nicely.” He said, winking at Alec, who had partially lost his ability to speak.

“Magnus!” Luke yelled from the other side of the restaurant. “We’re waiting for you!”


Alec nodded, pointing to his laptop. “My boss can call me any minute now. It's almost 9 in New York.”


Magnus rolled his eyes. “I have to go, but I’ll see you later, okay? In theory, we’ll be back in time for the sound check, but we'll see. I really hope that this museum is worth getting up so early, if not, I’m going to kill Will and you’ll have the exclusive of the whole thing. How I did it, where I buried his body, and who’s my next victim.” Magnus said, getting up to leave. “Anyway, I was serious about
what I said before, not about the murder, of course, but about me. Feel free to ask if you want, I may have some answers for you.” He said.

Alec just looked at him.

“We’ll talk later. Bye, Alexander.”

“Bye…” Alec whispered.

---o-o-o-o-o---

Alec grabbed the cameras Simon and Aline handed him and walked right behind them to help them take them to the stage. The concert was only three hours away and they still hadn’t placed a single camera in the entire venue. They had been busy all day brainstorming the changes that Aldertree had informed Alec that morning that they would have to do to some of the content they had been publishing. The magazine's board had expressed concern about the possibility that the readers would lose interest if they kept sharing the same type of content during the remaining 18 weeks of the tour, so they had asked Alec, and therefore his team, to come up with something new to prevent that from happening.

It had taken them all day, but they had finally pitched an idea that had been approved not only by Aldertree, but by Ragnor and Raphael too—Magnus's manager and publicist, respectively. They were going to start interviewing Magnus’s creative team as part of a special weekly section they were going to call ‘The unsung heroes behind the Stardust tour,’ and that it was going to help highlight the hard work and effort of the thousands of people involved in Magnus's concerts. The goal was to show the world what all these people behind Magnus really put into the making of all the shows.

Alec’s first interview for this was going to be with the producer of the tour: Will Herondale. He wanted to start with him to get a detailed description of every aspect of Magnus’s concerts, from the intention in the stage design and lighting, to all the technology used during, after, and before each show. He had already scheduled the interview with Will for tomorrow when they were back in the venue for Magnus's second and last concert in the city, so all he had left to do today was wait until the concert was over to write his review.

“Where do I put this?” Alec asked Helen, who seemed to be the one in charge of organizing all the equipment.

“Over here, please.” She said, pointing to the small space that formed between the stairs that lead to the stage and the security hall.

“Can I help you guys with something else?” He asked. He wanted to be useful, his team had little or no time to set everything ready before the concert started and he knew it was a lot of work for only four people.

“Could you maybe help us start unpacking everything? Just put it on the floor and we’ll come pick it up as we need it.” Helen said.

“Sure thing.” Alec replied and carefully, started to unpack all the cameras, cables, lenses, tripods, and other stuff that his team needed for the concert.

When he was done, he looked up and noticed that the stage was a bit of a mess at the moment. It was like watching a busy ant hill on a warm summer's day. Magnus was going over the setlist for the concert as he always did, the technicians were installing microphones and carefully gaffering the cables to the floor, and the musicians were tuning all the instruments. Alec could see Ragnor and
Raphael on the right side of the stage overseeing everything, and Catarina with Madzie standing on the opposite side. Catarina seemed to be lecturing her daughter about something because Madzie kept rolling her eyes in a very adorable way. Will was nowhere in sight, but that didn’t surprise Alec, the man was usually behind the scenes checking the consoles or up in the cabin bossing around all the technicians.

He sighed and stood there watching everything unfold. He paid special attention to his team and noticed with amazement how easy it was for them to know where the best spot to place the cameras was. There was no doubt that he had four of the most talented people he knew with him and he was proud to be able to call them friends as well as co-workers. His love and admiration for those four people knew no-

“Hey there!” Magnus said, approaching him from the stage. Alec hadn’t even realized that the music had stopped. “Long time no see.”

Alec rolled his eyes playfully. “I saw you this morning.”

“Well, that seems like it was a long time ago, it’s past four, can you believe?”

Alec half smiled. “I was busy with work.”

“I figured. Did your online conference with your boss and the board of the magazine go okay?”

“Yes, they were just concerned about keeping the readers engaged, normal stuff. But we’re going to start giving them even more content to prevent that. Your team’s already approved our ideas, so don’t worry about that.”

“I wasn’t worried,” Magnus smiled, “I trust your judgement and I know you’ll only publish what’s best for both of us.”

“Both of us?”

“I mean, your magazine and my public persona, of course.”

“Of course.”

“Hmmm, could you wait here for two minutes?” Magnus asked suddenly. He seemed a bit nervous. “I need to go get something, but don’t move from there, okay? You’re very hard to find today.”

“Okay…” Alec said, a little confused as he watched Magnus sprint from the stage and disappear from view.

Less than two minutes later, Magnus was back, visibly out of breath and carrying a gift bag. “Here,” he said, handing the bag to Alec, “for you.”

Alec eyed the bag even more confused—if that was possible. “What’s this?” He asked.

“The souvenir I promised last night.” Magnus said with a smile.

Alec felt the blood rushing to his cheeks, but he grabbed the bag. He didn’t want to be rude and leave Magnus hanging.

“It’s a notebook,” Magnus said, just as Alec took the gift out of the bag, “I thought you’d find it more useful than, say, a mug or a shirt.”

Alec grabbed the notebook. “It’s beautiful,” he whispered because it really was. The cover was very
colorful, with yellows, reds, oranges, and blues, all mixed together. In the center and in large, bright red and yellow letters was a quote: ‘Keep on the sunny side of life.’

Alec looked at Magnus and tilted his head with curiosity.

“It’s a Country song,” Magnus explained, “it was a Country music museum, so there weren’t many options to choose from.”

Alec chuckled, opening the notebook to admire its pages. Each page was letter-pressed, and, like the cover, they all were decorated with the same color combination, making the typography and imagery from the city and its history—old ticket stubs, logos of past centuries, etc—really stand out. But what Alec loved the most were the interior pockets, they were so detailed with little quotes about the history of the city that he couldn't help but smile.

“Did you like it?”

“You didn’t have to.”

“Of course I did, I promised you a souvenir.”

“Thank you,” Alec said a little shyly, “I did like it.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Magnus smiled, “and if you’re curious, I think you’d really enjoy the museum. It’s big, so you have to walk a lot, but it’s also different, which is always interesting. I think the visit is totally worth it.”

Alec chuckled. “Maybe some other time I’ll come back to this city just to visit it.”

“Yeah, that’s a-”

“Alec!” Madzie exclaimed, running from the stage and jumping right into Alec’s arms.

Alec caught her just in time. “Careful, little one!” He warned her. “You can’t just jump from up there, you could fall if there’s no one down here to catch you. Do you want to break your other arm?” He pointed to the cast on her small arm, which should come off soon, but still served as a reminder of what had happened to her a couple of months ago.

She shook her head.

“Promise me that you’ll be more careful.”

Madzie raised her hand in promise and smiled. Alec smiled back.

“Did uncle Magnus give you your book?” She asked.

“It’s a notebook, sweet-pea.” Magnus said.

“It’s still a book.” She said, and both Alec and Magnus laughed. “Did you like it? I helped choose it.”

Alec nodded. “It’s very beautiful.”

“Uncle Magnus got me some coloring books, but I left them in his room.” She said.

Alec assumed that by room Madzie meant Magnus’s dressing room. She usually stayed there during the concert with either Meliorn, Tessa, or Jem taking care of her.
“Would you like to come and color with me?”

“Tomorrow, okay? You know I have to work until your uncle’s concert is over.” Alec said.

Madzie nodded.

“You know what? Maybe tomorrow we all could-” Magnus was saying when Catarina approached them.

She was talking to someone through one of the portable radios. “Magnus,” she said, “it’s here.”

“Oh, so soon?” Magnus exclaimed. “That’s great.” He added, walking away without saying another word.

Alec looked around a bit confused, wondering who was here and where Magnus was going, but then he realized that Magnus wasn’t really going anywhere, he was just walking to get a microphone from one of the technicians.

“Hello everyone, can you hear me?” He asked through the microphone—his voice echoing throughout the room. “Good, good. Could everyone, please, come on stage? I need everyone who’s listening to me right now to come to the stage immediately. I repeat, I need everyone who’s listening to me right now to come to the stage immediately.”

Alec looked at Catarina. “What’s going on?”

Catarina just winked at him. “You’ll see.”

Alec climbed the stairs that led to the stage with Madzie still in his arms and stood next to Catarina. People were quickly starting to gather around the place. Helen, Maia, Aline, and Simon stood close to him.

“What’s happening?” Maia asked in a whisper.

“I have no idea.” Alec said sincerely.

“What’s that?” Maia asked, clearly noticing the bag that Alec carried with his free hand.

“A notebook that Magnus brought me from the museum.”

“Cool.”

“I chose it.” Madzie chimed in.

Maia smiled at the little girl and then looked at Alec. “Are you friends with him now?” She asked discreetly. “You stayed talking to him last night.”

“What? No, we’re just...cordial with each other.” He said. “I stayed last night because he was just telling me about the city and those things, so I thought I could use the information for my article.”

“Of course, because you couldn’t find any of that information online.” Maia said in that tone she used when she wasn’t buying a word of what you were saying.

“It’s not like that, okay?” He said.

“I never said it was.” She smiled.
Alec rolled his eyes and was about to protest when Magnus’s voice interrupted the small conversation he was having with his friend.

“Meliorn, come here, please.” He said.

Meliorn immediately walked from among the large group of people and went to where Magnus was. He was smiling and shaking his head as if he already knew why Magnus was calling him. Alec was very intrigued by the whole thing. He had no idea what could be happening.

“Happy birthday to you…” Magnus started to sing while some members of his team brought a huge cake, huge enough so that everyone could have a slice or two.

Alec smiled—it was Meliorn’s birthday.

“That’s so sweet!” Helen whispered behind him.

“I didn’t know it was his birthday,” Aline said, “I talked to him like half an hour ago and he didn’t say anything.”

Out of nowhere, Tessa started passing around party hats and balloons, and in less than two minutes they all were having an impromptu birthday celebration.

“Does he always do that?” Alec couldn’t help but ask Catarina, who was still standing next to him.

“With every single person you see here, so get ready to eat cake once in a while because the long list of birthdays has just begun.”

Alec chuckled, but couldn’t help but glance over to where Magnus was—hugging Meliorn—and smile. It was nice to discover that in addition to taking the time to visit the crew members at the hospital, Magnus had also taken the time to celebrate Merlion on his special day. It reflected his good nature, humanity, and-

“Put me down!” Madzie said, snapping Alec out of his thoughts, “I want a balloon!”

Alec put Madzie down just in time to see Meliorn blow out the candles and cut the cake. The room was cheering in unison.

Soon, everyone started to get closer to Meliorn to congratulate him and take a piece of cake, so Alec stepped back and decided to wait until the crowd dispersed a little to approach the birthday boy and congratulate him.

“Cake?” Magnus said, emerging from the mass of people. He was carrying two plates of cake.

Alec smiled. “Thanks.” He said, grabbing one of the plates. “That was nice.” He added.

“What?”

“You, ordering the cake for Meliorn. I didn’t know it was his birthday.”

“Well, I don’t know what’s your position regarding birthdays, Alexander, but I think everyone’s should be celebrated no matter what.”

“I’m all for birthday celebrations.” He said with a smile.

“Anyway, I forgot to ask you before,” Magnus said, “did you finish the book or did you follow my advice and throw it away?”
“What do you think?” Alec asked.

Magnus looked at him closely for a few seconds. “You finished it.”

Alec laughed, nodding.

“And?”

“What?”

“I want to know what are your thoughts about it, you know I haven’t read it, so I’m really curious to know what you think of it.”

“Hmmm,” Alec hesitated before replying, “I do think it’s full of bullshit. The author’s intentions are clear from the very beginning, so once you get that, it’s kind of hard to buy his story. But I’m not going to deny that I’m very curious about the real story behind you and this Lorenzo Rey guy. Because if I can tell you something after reading the book, it’s that he hates you and with a burning passion. So what was your real relationship with him? He claims that you humiliated him and took advantage of him, but as I told you, I don’t buy that, so what exactly did you do to him? Because he published that book to get back at you, to try to ruin you…but why?”

Magnus chuckled. “I didn’t expect you to have so many questions about him, but you’re a smart man, of course you have them.”

“Any chance I can get an answer? Off the record, of course, I’m just curious.” Alec asked, wondering if that was ‘nice’ enough.

“My story with Lorenzo is a long one, he was not only my roommate, but he was my friend for almost three years. Unfortunately, I don’t have time right now to tell you all about it. But...what do you say if I share my side of the story tomorrow morning over breakfast?”

“Over breakfast?”

“Yes, off the record, right? That’s the only time of the day where I can be just Magnus and not have an army of people all over me interrupting me just to tell me what to do.”

Alec looked at him. “Okay, then breakfast it is.”

“You know this is the first time I’m going to talk about that-” Magnus was saying when Jem approached them.

“Magnus, it’s time for you to get ready, come on, let’s go.”

Magnus gave Alec a ‘see?’ kind of look, and Alec realized that the man had been right about what he had said a few seconds ago. People always seemed to interrupt him just to tell him what to do—he really didn’t have time to just be.

“Duty calls, so I guess I’ll see you later, Alexander.” Magnus said, smiling and walking away with Jem.

Alec just stood there and when Magnus was completely out of sight, he took a bite from the cake and smiled.

The concert was about to start, the local band in charge of the opening act was finishing their set.
Alec was not in his usual spot with Will, Ragnor, and Raphael in one of the boxes. It had turned out that the only one available for them had been too small for all to fit, so Alec had decided to just watch the concert from behind the scenes.

He was standing next to some speakers, perfectly hidden from the audience, but with the best view of the stage. If he was honest, he thought he had a better view than some members of the audience themselves. He, unlike them, could see everything on and off stage. He was up and close, and right now he was thoroughly enjoying the band chosen to open tonight’s concert.

“They’re pretty good, aren’t they?” Magnus said, scaring the crap out of Alec, who hadn’t been expecting Magnus or anyone else for that matter to just show up there.

“You almost gave me a heart attack!” He exclaimed.

“Why?”

“Why? You’re not supposed to be here, what are you doing here?”

“Snooping on the band.” Magnus said.

“Clearly, but aren’t you supposed to be getting ready to sing in like ten minutes? Don’t you have to warm up your voice or something?”

“Well, yes, but I really like this band and I wanted to see them in action. To be honest, I didn’t think I would find anyone in here. This is my secret place. Will knows that, regardless of the venue, he has to leave a space behind some of the speakers so I can see the audience before the concert.” Magnus confessed. “But anyway, what are you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be with the guys up in one of the boxes?”

“It was too small for all of us to fit, so I decided to stay down here to watch it. Besides, I promised Madzie that I would watch the concert with her and you know that Catarina only lets her see a bit and from the side, so...”

“That girl has won you over, hasn’t she?”

Alec nodded, there was no point in denying it.

“She owns half of my heart.” Magnus confessed.

A part of Alec wanted to ask who owned the other half, but he refrained himself from asking such a stupid question. He knew that Magnus had said that just as a way of expressing that he loved Madzie very dearly, not that she literally owned half of his heart.

“Did you choose all the bands that are opening for you?” Alec asked instead.

Magnus nodded. “Have you liked them so far?”

“Yes.” Alec said.

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“I really like the fact that they’re not famous bands, that you’re giving local and unknown artists the opportunity to shine.”

“I was also a local and unknown artist once.” Magnus said.
“Really?” Alec asked intrigued. “I thought you had jumped straight to the-” he was saying when Luke’s voice, coming from the portable radio he was carrying, interrupted him.

“Has anyone seen Magnus?” Luke asked. “He disappeared...again.”

Alec looked at the device and then at Magnus.

“Shit, he’s already looking for me!” Magnus exclaimed with a mischievous smile as he took the radio from Alec’s belt to turn it off.

“He doesn’t know you’re here?” Alec asked.

Magnus shook his head. “I said I was going to the bathroom. And-Oh shit! Here he comes!” He exclaimed, ducking at the speed of light so that Luke wouldn’t see him. “Alexander, what are you doing?! Get down! He's gonna see you!”

“And? I'm not-” Alec was just saying when he felt Magnus’s hand pulling him down to force him to duck. “What the hell?” He exclaimed a tad offended.

“If he sees you, he’ll want to ask you about me and he can’t see me here.” Magnus whispered, making sure they both were perfectly hidden behind the speakers. “If he does, he’s going to kill me and I can’t give a concert if I’m dead, can I?”

Alec rolled his eyes. Magnus could be so dramatic.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

A few minutes passed and Alec’s knees began to ache. "Magnus we-"

“Okay, the coast is clear.” Magnus said, letting them both finally stand up. Apparently, Luke was out of sight now.

“You should give that man a raise.” Alec couldn’t help saying as he stretched his legs. “You make him go to hell and back every time you sneak out on him.”

Magnus looked at Alec and tilted his head as if to ask why Alec knew that Magnus tended to sneak out on Luke more often than not.

“He told me.” Alec hurried to add. He didn’t want Magnus to know that he knew because he had seen Magnus sneaking out on him more times than he’d like to admit.

“Well, I need my privacy.” Magnus said to defend himself.

“And can’t you just tell him that?” Alec asked.

“Where’s the fun in that?” Magnus said with a wink, and Alec couldn’t help but chuckle as he playfully rolled his eyes.

“But anyway, here’s your radio.” Magnus said, returning to Alec the radio he had taken from his belt. “You can turn it on now and say you never saw me here.” He winked again.

“You’re impossible, did you know that?”

“I’ve been told a couple of times.”
Alec rolled his eyes at him.

Magnus smiled. “You roll your eyes a lot.”

“I do not.”

“Yes, you do, and you also fidget with your hands when you’re nervous,” Magnus observed. Alec was, in fact, fidgeting with his hands at the moment. “But don’t worry, I think it’s cute, both the eye rolling and the fidgeting.”

Alec didn’t know what to say.

“Anyway, are you going to watch the whole concert from here?”

Alec simply nodded. He still didn’t dare to speak.

“Okay, then I guess I’ll see you in a bit.” Magnus said, squeezing Alec’s arm ever so gently before disappearing from view.

Alec looked down at his arm, where Magnus had just touched him, and felt as if his skin was on fire—it was burning. The feeling was unsettling, but not as unsettling as the one currently settling in the pit of his stomach, making him feel as if he couldn’t breathe.

Not knowing what else to do, Alec started to walk away from where he was and ended up in the small office they had in the venue. Once he closed the door, he took a deep breath and thanked the universe that his team was outside getting ready for the concert and that he had the place all to himself. He needed a few minutes alone to calm down and try to process why Magnus’s company was affecting him so much lately.

He had been doing okay, handling the tour and learning to know Magnus and the people around him, but slowly, things had started to change and he was now confused and worried all at the same time.

“What is happening to you?” He reprimanded himself even though he knew the answer to his own question. He had analyzed it during his midnight shower the night before and although he had tried to fool himself into thinking that his change of behavior around Magnus was only a consequence of learning to know him better, the truth was that it was much more than that. He liked Magnus and enjoyed his presence—a lot.

He shook his head. He was here to work, to cover a tour and help consolidate his family’s magazine as the best entertainment magazine in the entire country. Besides, he couldn’t forget that Magnus wasn’t who he said he was. It was true that he seemed to be more open to talk about stuff with Alec now, they were going to have breakfast together tomorrow to talk about the book and Lorenzo Rey, but still. He knew that he really only knew one side of Magnus, the side that was nice, and funny, and smart, and interesting, and-

“Don’t, Alec, just don’t.” He told himself, but deep down he knew it was pointless. The last few days since Saint Paul kept replaying in his mind: that night at the bar playing pool until they had had to practically drag them from the table, the jokes, the talks, the silly moments together…the notebook.

Alec exhaled. He knew there was something that was starting to grow inside him, he still couldn’t label it, it was too scary to even think about it, but he knew he was royally screwed.

“No, Lightwood, you can’t like him. You can’t.” He said.
“You can’t like who?” Aline asked, coming out from the small bathroom they had there.

It turned out that the room wasn’t alone after all.

Chapter End Notes

See you really soon!!!

Oh, and in case you didn't know, show!malec are killing me, BUT if I don't make it, don't worry, my ghost will continue updating and publishing malec fics until the end of time. That much I can promise you.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

And I'm back!!! I know it's been too long and that y'all have been waiting for this update for months, but as I've told you before, my life is a mess right now. My girlfriend, aka my official beta/editor, got a promotion at work, so proofreading such long chapters has been a bit difficult for her lately. But don't worry, I just got myself a new beta (everyone say thank you, Meghan) and she's already helping me polish the chapters/stories a bit faster, so hopefully, you won't have to wait that long for a new update. Go read her stories here and give her some love for being so awesome here!!!

But anyway, enough with the chit-chat. Enjoy the new chapter!!! Can you believe that we already passed the 100K+ mark and we're not even halfway through the fic??? This story is going to be one monster of a fic, I can promise you that. Will we make it past 500K??? I guess we'll see.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec opened one eye, he was a bit disoriented. He couldn’t remember exactly what he had been dreaming, only that there was a phone ringing somewhere in the room where he was and that he couldn’t find it. But to his surprise, the phone hadn't been ringing only in his dreams, but in real life too, and it had actually been the one that had awakened him. It wasn’t his phone or Simon’s, though, both rested quietly on their respective bedside tables. The intrusive device was the phone in the room —the one that nobody ever used, but to call the front desk or ask for room service.

Very confused, Alec answered it.

“Hello?” He said, expecting to hear someone from the front desk. Maybe Magnus’s team had requested an alarm to wake them all last minute.

“Alexander, hi!” A loud and very excited voice said on the other side of the line.

“Magnus?” Alec asked even more confused. Why was Magnus calling him? It made no sense, at least not for him.

“Were you expecting someone else?” Magnus asked. He sounded curious, but mostly amused by Alec’s confusion.

“I wasn’t expecting anyone to be honest.” Alec replied. He had no idea what time it was, but some light was already seeping through the curtains of the hotel, which meant it was morning, even though he felt as if he hadn’t slept at all. “How did you know-?”

“-what was your room?” Magnus completed the question.

“Um-hum.” He said. His brain was still struggling against the need to continue sleeping, his eyes were closing in spite of himself, and Magnus wasn’t making things any easier with his soothing almost enchanting morning voice.

“Well, it wasn’t rocket science, Alexander. I just called the front desk and asked them to connect me
to your room. I didn’t have your personal number, but I had to talk to you, so..."

“What for?” He asked.

“Did you forget breakfast?” Magnus asked. He sounded a bit disappointed and maybe even hurt, Alec wasn’t 100% sure, but he opened his eyes anyway and took his phone from the bedside table to check the time.

“I didn’t forget,” he said just to set the record straight, “but it’s barely eight.” He added in what sounded and was, without a doubt, a complaint.

“I know, I’m sorry I woke you up, but if it’s any consolation, I literally just woke up too.”

“You sound very awake to have literally just woken up.”

Magnus chuckled. “You’re not a morning person, are you?”

Alec shook his head, but then realized that Magnus couldn’t actually see him, so he voiced his thoughts instead. “No.” He murmured. “I can run with little or no sleep if necessary, but I don’t like being woken up when I can still sleep a little longer.”

“I apologize, once again, for waking you so early. But I had to call you, I was looking for places for our breakfast—” there was a long silence before Magnus continued, “—appointment and I think I just found the right one. It’s nice and cozy, not very fancy, but it has excellent reviews. And I was wondering if you were okay with it or if you wanted me to keep looking for another place.”

“Sure,” Alec said absentmindedly, “on what floor is it?” He asked, because all the hotels in which they had been staying had restaurants, and this one, like the others, wasn’t the exception.

“Are you even listening to what I’m saying?” Magnus asked. He didn’t sound upset by Alec’s apparent lack of attention, quite the opposite, he seemed to be really enjoying Alec’s morning confused state.

“Yes, you were telling me about breakfast and that you were looking for places and something about one with excellent reviews.” Alec said as the realization of what Magnus had actually said hit him. “Wait, you said you were looking for places?”

“Oh, you were paying attention after all! Well, at least a part of your brain was.” Magnus laughed into the phone. “But anyway, yes, I was looking for places and I just found this little cafe in East Nashville, Sky Blue Cafe. It looks nice and very private. Are you okay if we go there?”

“We’re not going to have breakfast here at the hotel?” Alec asked because that last part—the part where he was going out with Magnus for breakfast outside the hotel—had finally managed to wake him up completely. It was definitely way more than what he had signed up for at first.

“No.” Magnus said. “The hotel only has one restaurant and everyone is going to be there, and I really don’t want them to overhear our off the record conversation. Jem didn’t let me tell you this yesterday because he interrupted us, but this is actually the first time I’m going to talk about that book with anyone outside my family and friends. My team can’t know I’m doing this or else we would both get in trouble.”

“I...you—you know you don’t have to do it, right?” Alec felt the need to say.

“I know, but for some strange reason, Alexander, I want to. Really. So...does that place I told you about sound good to you or do you want me to find another one?”
“No, it’s okay... wherever you want it’s okay with me.” Alec said.

“Okay, then I’ll meet you in the lobby at nine, okay?”

“Okay.”

“See you in a bit, Alexander.”

“Yeah, see you.” Alec said, hanging up the phone and exhaling loudly because, breaking news: he, Alexander Gideon Lightwood, was going out for breakfast with Magnus Bane. If he was completely honest, the mere thought of it made his stomach turn into a knot and fill with butterflies. Which was a bit ironic since he was going out for breakfast and apparently, now all his appetite was gone and it had been replaced by imaginary flying insects. This wasn’t the first time they were together for a meal, they had had a lunch-interview the other day and they had technically had breakfast in the same place every morning since the tour had started. But this was different. This wasn’t work-related, was it?

“Who was on the phone?” A very sleepy Simon asked. His eyes were still closed.

“Magnus.” Alec said, trying to sound casual. He knew it was better not to lie in case Simon had overheard part of the conversation. He was in enough trouble as it was with Aline to add Simon to the equation.

Last night, after Aline had come out of the bathroom and confronted Alec about his little breakdown, he hadn’t been able to say a word—quite literally. She had asked him again and again who the person Alec had been talking about, but he had just paralyzed and not a single word had come out of his mouth. She had taken him completely by surprise. Fortunately for Alec, at that precise moment Helen had decided to enter the room and without asking what was going on between them, she had dragged them both outside. But Aline had been texting him non-stop since then, asking him about it and telling him that they had to talk as soon as possible.

Alec had no idea what he was going to tell her once he had to face her, it wasn’t as if he could lie to her, she knew him too well and God knew how much she had put together the night before. Also, it wasn’t like there were that many options to choose from at the moment, the only men Alec had regular contact with were Magnus, Ragnar, Raphael, Will, Luke, Jem, and, sometimes, Meliorn, so it wasn’t so hard to guess who he was. However, that didn't mean he wanted to share with her—or any other person for that matter—that it was actually Magnus. It was true that last night, he had come to the pretty shocking conclusion that he liked him, but it wasn’t as if he liked him that much. He just found him interesting, and handsome, and funny, and smart, and maybe-

He shook his head.

“Are you okay?” Simon asked him. He was now wide awake and sitting on his bed, looking at Alec with some concern in his eyes.

Alec hadn’t even realized that he had zoned out at some point.

“Yes, why?”

“I asked you why Magnus was calling our room. Did something bad happen?”

“Oh, no, everything’s fine. I just, we just...” Alec hesitated what to say, “we have an interview scheduled for today, he was calling to ask me if it was possible to do it over breakfast.” He lied. Sometimes, it amazed him how good a liar he could actually be when he wanted to. “I asked him yesterday if he’d like to be part of our new weekly special, and he agreed, so we’re going to talk a bit
about his team and all that.”

“Oh, okay, are you going to need cameras for that?”

“No!” Alec immediately exclaimed, perhaps a bit louder than he originally intended, “I want the main focus to be Magnus’s team, not Magnus himself. I’ll just ask him a few standard questions about each member and that’s it. I’ll add his opinion on them as part of my introduction.”

“Okay, cool.” Simon said. “Makes sense.”

Alec just smiled.

“You look excited.” His friend pointed out.

“I’m not, I mean, I am, but just because I’m excited about this new section we're working on.” He said, but he could feel a nervous flush rising to his cheeks. Was it too obvious that this ‘off the record’ conversation had him over the moon?

“Of course, so...are you leaving now?”

“No, first I have to shower, get ready, and all that.”

“But it’s not a formal interview, right?”

“No, but still. But you go back to sleep, it’s still early.” He said, getting up from his bed and practically running to the bathroom to escape Simon’s inquisitive gaze.

Maybe he had been too obvious, or maybe he hadn’t, but he didn’t have time to worry about that now. He had less than an hour to get ready and meet Magnus down in the lobby, and there was something already troubling his mind—he had no idea what a person should wear for an off the record breakfast appointment with a person you liked, but you certainly didn’t like that much. Where was Isabelle when he needed her the most?

Alec had to admit that walking the streets of Nashville with a disguised version of a superstar like Magnus and without any kind of security whatsoever was the definition of terrifying. Alec hadn’t really thought about what it would mean to go out somewhere away from the hotel with Magnus until he had found himself standing in the middle of a crowded street and completely paranoid that anyone could recognize the man.

When they had left the hotel using the back door and Magnus had informed him that no one from his team had any idea where he was going and with whom, Alec had tried to go back and call Luke himself to ask for security. He knew how crazy some fans could act and how dangerous it was for Magnus to be out and about in such an important city, but Magnus had stopped him and reassured him that everything was going to be fine, that he did this all the time. Of course, Alec had argued back and tried to persuade Magnus to at least take Luke with them or inform him of their breakfast appointment, but when Magnus had practically begged Alec for a moment of peace and quiet without anyone from his team ruining it, Alec had really had no choice but to accept.

He had seen—for months now—how hard Magnus’s life actually was, so if sneaking out for breakfast at a remote place for a couple of hours was all Magnus could do to have that moment of peace and quiet he clearly longed for, who was Alec to ruin that?

Obviously, he had regretted his decision the moment they had hit the crowded streets. Magnus was
in disguise, but still, he stood out from the rest of the crowd like a sore thumb. He had a way of walking and moving that rarely went unnoticed by people; not to mention that even when he was wearing fake prescription glasses, baggy sports clothes, and a silly cap that read ‘Nashville city of dreams,’ he still looked extremely attractive. Alec was well aware of all the looks the man was getting.

“We are you sure you’re not going to get into trouble?” Alec asked for the umpteenth time.

Magnus nodded. “Relax, Alexander. Everything’s going to be just-” Magnus was saying, when Alec had to push him out of the way before a bicycle ran over him.

“Fine?” Alec said sarcastically. “I’m not even sure if we’re gonna make it to the restaurant in one piece.”

“Sorry, I can’t see well with these things on.” Magnus said, taking off the glasses.

“No, don’t take the-“ Alec was saying, but Magnus had already tossed the glasses into the nearest trash can.

Alec looked around fearfully. He really felt as if suddenly all eyes were on them. Going out with celebrities was, as of right now, Alec’s least favorite thing to do in the entire world.

“Stop looking around, Alexander, you’re drawing attention.” Magnus said quietly.

“You are drawing attention.” Alec argued back.

“No, I’m not, you’re the one with the crazy paranoid look.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “Are we close yet?” He asked. He knew that he could keep arguing with Magnus and end up winning the argument because really, he was the one who was drawing attention, but he really wanted to get off the streets as soon as possible, so he refrained himself from doing so.

“Yes, it’s actually just over there.” Magnus pointed across the street where, right in the middle, you could see the small establishment—Sky Blue Cafe.

Alec exhaled with relief and followed Magnus.

They entered the place and Magnus immediately requested a table for two in the most private area possible. Alec felt himself blushing at the look the lady at the door gave them. She didn’t seem to have recognized Magnus at all, but Alec was certain that she had come to the conclusion that they were there on some sort of romantic date or something.

“The waiter will be here in a moment to take your order.” The lady said, giving them a smile before leaving them alone.

Almost immediately, Magnus started to, layer by layer, get rid of parts of his disguise; taking off the cap first and then the hoodie. Alec felt a bit of sympathy towards him and couldn’t help but wonder if his life was always like that, if he always had to go to such extremes to have a moment of peace and quiet as Magnus had called it. The man said that he did this all the time, so it was safe to say that the answer was yes, Magnus always had to go to such extremes to have a nice moment. And that, that was depressing.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Magnus asked.
Alec blushed, but still answered. “I was just wondering, do you always have to do all this to go out? Is it always like this?” He asked.

“For the most part,” Magnus admitted, “but it’s not as bad as it seems. Normally, I don’t have to go out in disguise, but people know I’m in the city, the chances of being recognized on the streets are higher. Besides, some of my fans are actively looking for me outside the hotel, you’ve seen them, so I couldn’t risk being followed here.”

Alec nodded as he sat facing Magnus in the small booth.

“Most artists,” Magnus continued, “don’t take as many precautions as I do when it comes to protecting their privacy. Some of them even let their fans see part of their private lives on purpose, it’s all part of the strategy to stay relevant that PR people force us to follow, but I can’t do that. It makes me feel anxious to even think about it. I grew up with people always around me. My father—I’m sure you’ve read about him at some point—he was a very renowned businessman, his life and, consequently, mine wasn’t easy. We were surrounded by people all the time, day and night. From a very young age, I was taught to protect my privacy and value it since it could be both a blessing and a curse. You have no idea how many times I’ve been shoved into cars by security guards to avoid people taking pictures of me and how many times I’ve been told to keep a low profile when I’m in public. For me—as sad as this may sound to you—this is a lifestyle. It’s not easy, but it is what I have to do to continue doing what I love to do; perform. Not to mention that it also helps me preserve my sanity and have some kind of normalcy in my life.”

“But is it worth it? I mean, going through all this trouble to get something as silly as breakfast outside a hotel?” Alec wondered.

“At the moment?” Magnus said, staring at him. “Yes.”

Alec couldn’t help but smile at that.

The waiter arrived just in time and, after serving them both coffee and introducing himself, he gave them the menu and left, telling them that he would be back in a few minutes to take their order. Alec barely scanned the menu before putting it back down on the table.

“Are you hungry?” Magnus asked, tilting his head in curiosity.

“Very,” Alec admitted; he had lost all his appetite after the phone call with Magnus in the morning, but he had recovered it during their long walk to the restaurant, “but I don’t need to read the menu to know what I want.”

Magnus gave him a questioning look.

“Pancakes.” Alec said simply.

“You’re a pancake guy? I thought you were more of a waffle guy.”

“I can do both, and crepes too. I love crepes.”

“So you like your breakfast sweet.”

“Sometimes.” Alec smiled.

The waiter returned to the table and just as Alec was about to order, his phone—which was resting on the table—rang. He looked at the screen and couldn't help feeling a twitch in his stomach when he saw who it was. It was his friend Underhill. The screen showed an old picture of Alec and him
hugging each other the last time they had been together: at Jace’s birthday party last year. They hadn’t talked since the other day when Underhill had called to tell Alec all about Mark and, although Alec had tried to contact him to know what had happened, Underhill hadn’t responded, not once.

“I…” Alec said, because he had to take this call, but he didn’t want to be rude or-

“Take it.” Magnus said as if he were reading Alec’s thoughts. He was eyeing the phone from his side of the table. “I’ll order for you. Pancakes, right?”

“Yes. Thank you.” Alec said, answering the call and standing up from the booth to have some privacy. He couldn’t go far, the place was very small and he didn’t want to draw unnecessary attention to them—now Magnus looked a lot like Magnus—but it was better to talk alone than with Magnus watching his every move.

“Underhill! I’ve been calling you for days! I was worried!” He said the moment he answered the call.

“Hi, I know, I’m sorry.” Underhill immediately said, he sounded sad. Alec didn’t need to know more to guess why was that, he had had a bad feeling about all this since that first call. “I was going to text you because it’s easier, but you’re one of my best friends, so I thought you deserved at least a call since I can’t really visit you right now.”

“What happened?” Alec asked although he already knew.

“Mark and I broke up.” Underhill said.

“What!” Alec exclaimed, trying to sound surprised for the sake of his friend. He had suspected that that was going to happen all along. Relationships, love, and all that stuff wasn’t his forte, the whole thing was a mystery he had yet to discover, but he had good intuition. He was a journalist for a reason. “Why?” He asked.

“We talked and, well, he wasn’t ready to move in with me.”

“So he just broke up with you instead?” Alec asked indignantly.

“No, I broke up with him. He told me that he wasn’t sure if we were going to work in the long run, so why delay the inevitable, right? That’s why I didn’t answer any of your calls or respond to your texts. I was still trying to process everything.”

“Don’t worry about that now, I understand, and I’m very sorry to hear that you had to make that decision, but if he really said that, then it was probably for the best. Though I’m still sorry to hear that you’re not together anymore.” He said because he truly was. He had wanted to be wrong about his hunch so badly, he had wanted Underhill and his boyfriend to find a way to be together despite the bump in the road. He really had. “I thought everything was going to work out in the end. You two seemed pretty serious about each other from the very beginning.”

“That’s what I used to think too, but it turned out that I was wrong.”

“I’m sorry…”

“Don’t be, it’s not your fault. Anyway, I’m feeling a little better now. Some friends took me out last night and that helped, it was good, I met some new people. I don’t think I’m ready for a new relationship just yet, but who knows? Maybe my real Prince Charming is next on the list. But never mind that now, do you have time to talk? I want to see your face, we could video-chat and-”
“I’m kinda busy, actually, about to start an interview.” He lied. He wanted to talk to his friend, but Magnus was waiting for him.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t know. Who are you going to interview? Magnus?” Underhill asked.

“Yes.” Alec lied again. It was the same lie he had told Simon, so he might as well use it as if it were real. He hadn’t talked to Magnus about what they were going to say about this ‘off the record’ conversation, but if the man hadn’t told his team where he was going and with whom, then he was sure that he would like to keep this little encounter under-wraps.

“Is he with you right now?” Underhill asked. There was a new excitement in his voice, one that hadn’t been present a few seconds ago, and Alec knew it was all because of Magnus. Underhill, like the rest of the world, was platonically in love with him.

“Yes…”

“Can I talk to him?”

“What?!”

“Can I talk to him?” Underhill asked again.

“Are you serious? Do you really want to talk to him?”

“Yes, why not? I mean, it’s Magnus Bane, Alec! And he’s right there with you! Not every day one of your best friends is with a superstar like him. You have to agree with me that I can’t miss the opportunity to at least say hi.”

“Underhill, I can’t let you talk to him.” Alec said, covering his mouth with his hand to muffle his voice. He wasn’t sure if Magnus was overhearing Alec’s call, but he didn’t want him to know that he was, once again, part of his conversation with his friend.

“Why not?”

“Because it’s gonna be weird? He doesn’t even know who you are.”

“You haven’t told him about me?”

“No? Why would I? It’s not like he and I are friends.” Alec said.

“You’ve been traveling together across the country for weeks, are you seriously telling me that you’re not even on friendly terms now?”

“Well, no, we kinda are, but still…it would be weird.”

“Okay, fine, you’re right, it would be a little weird because he doesn’t know me, but at least tell him that you have a friend who says hi and is very sorry for having interrupted your interview. Oh, and if you can, let it slip that I’m very single now. You never know what can happen.”

Alec put aside the pang of jealousy he felt because he knew that his friend was only joking and that he was being ridiculous. “Of course! I’ll make sure to tell him that my friend, whom he doesn’t even know, says hi and wants to know if, given his new single status, he has a chance to get into his pants.”

“He wears very nice pants, so if there’s even a remote possibility of something happening between us, I’m not saying no, you know me. Also, make sure to show him a picture of my handsome face so
he has a good reference. I can even send you some nud-”

“Don’t even dare to finish that sentence.” Alec immediately said. For some reason, that pang of jealousy he had felt before had now turned into a full-on green monster. His friend couldn’t be serious right now, could he? He had literally just said that he wasn’t ready for a new relationship, so why the sudden interest in Magnus?

“You’re a buzzkill, Alec.”

“I’ve always been.” He said, maybe a bit more cold and terse than he normally would.

“What’s that new tone that I’m detecting? Is it, maybe, jealousy?”

“What!? No, of course not!”

“Alec, do you like Magnus?” Underhill asked.

“No.” He said, trying to sound convincing.

“The truth?”

“The truth.”

“Hmmm, I’m not sure if I believe you, but okay, we’ll let this one rest...for now.” Underhill said.

Alec rolled his eyes.

“I can hear you rolling your eyes, you know?”

“That’s because you know me well.”

“I do, and that’s why I’m going to give you this advice, whether you like it or not. If you ever find yourself feeling attracted to a certain superstar you’re working with, don’t waste time over-analyzing what you feel and just make a move, you idiot. You’re handsome, and smart, and practically with him every day. Take advantage of that and let those sparks ignite.”

“I don’t like him.” Alec whispered.

“Whatever you say. I’ll let you work then...we’ll talk later, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Alec hung up the phone and sat down again in the small booth. He had the feeling that Underhill had already guessed his huge crush on Magnus, but he also knew that his friend wasn’t going to pressure him to admit it anytime soon, so he didn’t have to worry about him. “Sorry about that.” He told Magnus, turning off his phone to prevent another interruption. The waiter was nowhere in sight, but there were two bowls with fresh fruit on the table. “It was a friend from college, he was just calling to-”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to explain.” Magnus said with a smile.

To be honest, Alec didn’t know why he had tried to explain who Underhill was and why he had
called in the first place, it wasn’t as if Magnus really cared who called Alec, right?

“I’ve noticed that you always eat some fruit when we have breakfast at the hotel, I hope this is okay.” Magnus said, pointing to the bowls on the table.

“It is,” Alec smiled at the gesture, “thank you.”

“So, how do you want us to do this?” Magnus asked, eating some fruit. “You ask and I answer or-”

“Well, this may be surprising, but I don’t know how off the record conversations actually work.” Alec admitted. “If I’m honest, I’ve never done one before, but why don’t you just talk? Tell me your version of what happened during your time in the Academy and what’s Lorenzo’s real role in your life, and we’ll go from there, okay?”

Magnus smiled. “Okay, I like that.”

Alec smiled back.

“I don’t know how much you know about the school I was in, I suppose that Lorenzo wrote a lot about it in his book,” Magnus said, eating his fruit nonchalantly, “but the Idris Academy for Boys is a very exclusive private institution. Not all get accepted and those who are, are usually the children of very powerful people.”

“Yes, he mentioned that in his introduction.” Alec said, taking the book out of his satchel and putting it on the table.

“You brought that with you?”

“I made some notes while reading it, so yeah...”

“Of course you did.” Magnus said, playfully rolling his eyes.

“Anyway, so you were telling me that only the children of very powerful people get accepted, obviously your father was one of them.” Alec said.

Magnus nodded. “I knew I was going to attend that place since I was old enough to understand what school was, but that’s not important.” He continued. “When I finally reached the age to be able to attend, my father drove me there and after taking the official tour around the place and meeting some of my teachers, I was assigned a roommate: Lorenzo Rey.”

Alec already knew that, it was also in the book, but he let Magnus continue.

“Lorenzo wasn’t a bad person, I still think he’s not. He was just...jealous. Jealous of the life I had, one he couldn’t have. I was never like the other kids there, you know, I was always the weird one, the...how did Lorenzo once say? Oh, yeah, the ungrateful one. You have to understand, Alexander, that I never asked for the life I got, I didn't ask to be born rich. I was never interested in all the luxury and power that money can buy. And that, well, that made a lot of people think that I was an ungrateful son. My father started his company from the bottom up. What he did, he did it all on his own, and I’m very proud of what he achieved, but I would be lying if I said that I liked my life when I was a little kid. I hated it. I would have traded it with Lorenzo’s without thinking twice.”

Magnus paused as the waiter arrived with their food.

“Anyway, Lorenzo never understood the way I saw things.” Magnus said once they were alone again. “He lectured me repeatedly about that, telling me how lucky I was to have been born into such
a powerful family and making me feel bad for not caring enough about it. But despite all that, we became friends. Good friends. We were living together and, slowly, we started to get to know each other better. I liked him. He was funny and smart, he supported each and every one of my crazy ideas and was always there for me when I needed him. It was refreshing to have someone who seemed to care about me in that place. At home, I always had people who cared about me, but in that place? I was completely alone.”

“So you two became best friends?” Alec asked. That was how Lorenzo had described his relationship with Magnus in its early years.

“I wouldn’t say best friends, but we were friends. Real friends. You have no idea how many fake friendships are formed in that school. But anyway, little by little, Lorenzo began to convince me to play along with the rest of the boys there, to try to be like them so that we could both belong. I was coming to terms with my sexuality, so all I wanted was that: to find a place where I could belong. So I did it. I played along and embraced my ‘rightful’ place in the Academy as my father’s son. I wouldn’t say it was a bad choice in itself, it was fun while it lasted, I wasn’t just another kid, I was Magnus Bane—Asmodeus’s son. I liked the attention and acceptance that came with my name, and Lorenzo liked it even more. We started meeting people, going to all the events that the school had, and I even introduced Lorenzo to all the powerful people I knew thanks to my father.”

Alec was listening in silence to the story Magnus was telling, it matched Lorenzo’s, but in a different way. In his book, Lorenzo had written himself as the poor kid who had been used and manipulated by Magnus for years, but everything seemed to indicate that it had actually been the other way around. Alec already knew Magnus enough to know that he was a people-pleaser, he liked people to like him, so a young version of Magnus wishing that Lorenzo and everyone else in the academy liked him wasn’t that hard to imagine.

“We did that for years and, as I already said, it was fun. I had the time of my life. The people we were friends with were all spoiled children, but somehow we had managed to find the least deplorable of the bunch. We didn’t do all the crazy things that people in our circle usually do, just the normal stuff people of that age do: parties, alcohol, some recreational drugs here and there, vacations to remote places in the world that we certainly couldn’t afford, but our parents could, sex...you know, everything that involves ‘finding yourself.’ I’m sure you also did some crazy stuff during your high school years.”

Alec nodded. “But I don’t think anything can be as crazy as what you guys could have done, even if you didn’t do what other people in your circle usually do. You had money and power, you literally had the world at your feet.”

“That’s true, and I can tell you that at some point we got lost a bit because of it.” Magnus said. He seemed lost in his own thoughts. Alec wanted to ask him what he was thinking, but he knew it was better to let Magnus continue at his own pace. “I’m sure Lorenzo talked about what I just told you in his book and I’m going to assume he twisted it to make it look like I dragged him down the dark path, but it wasn’t like that. We both let ourselves be dragged by the environment in which we were living.”

“It’s understandable.” Alec said. He could see a great fear of being judged in Magnus’s eyes.

“Yeah...well, we had fun. We lived the life Lorenzo had always wanted and that I had refused to live all my life. I don’t regret it, though, it kind of made me see both sides of what my life could be, so to speak. Very rich people tend to think that they have everything and that they’re untouchable, they tend to think that because they are who they are, they’re above everyone else. But I’ve never been like that, I’ve always known that money doesn’t make me a better person, my actions do.”
“So we could say that for some years you let your actions say the opposite of what you believe?”

“Yeah, for some years I was another one of the rich guys,” Magnus chuckled, “and so was Lorenzo. But then, something happened.”

Alec bit his lips to refrain himself from asking what had happened.

“It was during the summer break between my Junior and Senior year.” He continued.

Alec remembered that in the book, Lorenzo had marked that summer as the summer in which he had realized Magnus was a bad influence on him and his friends at the Academy. That it had been during that summer when he had decided it was better to stay away from Magnus for good and save himself before he, too, ended up as lost as his friend was.

“I don’t really wanna talk about what happened, it’s not related to Lorenzo and what happened at the Academy, so it doesn’t affect the story, but it made me reevaluate my life—it made me think for the first time in seventeen years what I really wanted. And it turned out that what I wanted most in my life was to stop being my father’s son.”

Alec was really intrigued by that. Magnus didn’t talk much about his family, but the few times he had mentioned his father in some interviews, he had done so with respect and admiration. He had even expressed that it saddened him that he wasn’t there to see him succeed.

“When I returned to the Academy for my senior year, I decided to make some drastic changes in my life that, of course, Lorenzo didn’t approve of.” Magnus continued. “He wanted me, us, to continue doing what we had been doing in previous years, but I had had enough. I was sick and tired of everything and everyone, and even more so because I had never wanted to have that life to begin with, you know. I had agreed to live it to try to belong, to be part of something, but I couldn’t keep doing it, I couldn’t keep living a lie. And when I told Lorenzo that, he lost it and stopped being my friend.”

Alec’s eyes widened, but he wasn’t that surprised. Magnus’s story actually made sense. The way Lorenzo had written his version of what had gone down between them only reflected the jealousy he clearly felt towards Magnus, jealousy that had evidently only intensified when Magnus had decided to stop humoring him.

“He transformed completely after that. He was very resentful and, in an attempt to even the scales, he started to spread thousands of rumors to damage my reputation. He went around saying that I was a spoiled brat who thought I could do anything with the money I had, that I was a drug addict and that I had even dared to sell some drugs at school even though I knew it was illegal. That I was a pervert and hired prostitutes all the time to satisfy my twisted needs, and many other things. All those rumors, obviously, reached my father at some point and got me into a lot of trouble, he was very strict and cared too much about what people thought of us. But anyway...ultimately, I didn’t care that Lorenzo continued spreading silly rumors about me because I knew they weren’t true, but there was one, just one that hurt me—deeply.”

Alec put down his fork and looked at Magnus.

“Cat and I grew up together,” Magnus said. That was something Alec already knew because Catarina had told him herself, but again, he didn’t say anything and just let Magnus continue. “We went to the same schools all our lives since fifth grade, well, fourth grade for me.”

“Wait, but this was an Academy for boys, wasn’t it? You couldn’t have gone to the same school here.”
“Yes and no, the Academy has an all-girls institution: Alicante.”

“Oh.” Alec said—that, he didn’t know.

“My father paid for Cat’s education, her mother was our housekeeper and my father’s most trusted employee. Cat and I have always loved each other like brother and sister.”

“I know.”

“Well, Lorenzo knew that too and just to hurt me, he started telling everyone that Catarina was actually my father’s bastard daughter, that she was my half sister and that my father was so sick in the head that he had his mistress—Catarina’s mom—working for him as a maid.” Magnus said. “Now that I think about it, I know how stupid all that was too, we all knew it wasn’t true, but back then, it hurt. I loved Catarina and her mother a lot, and I didn’t want them to be part of all that mess.”

“What did you do then?” Alec asked. This part of the story, he had no idea how it had played out because Lorenzo’s version was how he had seen his best friend destroy himself and those around him for a year; how he had tried to help him, but hadn’t been able to, and instead, had only gotten hurt in the process.

“I confronted him.” Magnus admitted. “It wasn’t pretty, I was really angry and hurt, so I wanted him to suffer too. I pushed all his buttons, I knew how to, we had been friends for a long time.”

“He also knew how to push yours, so you were on even ground.”

Magnus nodded. “Things escalated pretty quickly, we both lost our temper and said stuff to hurt each other. The entire school witnessed our heated conversation.”

“Oh.”

“Yes, and that little show we put on cost me two weeks of detention, a very long and painfully annoying conversation with my father about public image, learning how to control one’s temper, and the importance of bloodlines. Plus, he grounded me and I didn't have any privileges for almost two months—not that I really cared about that last part.”

Alec chuckled.

“After that, Lorenzo’s hatred towards me only intensified to the point that with his charm—because he is charming, the son of a bitch—he turned half my class against me.” Magnus said. “To be honest, I didn’t care either, I had other things going on in my personal life that kept me busy all the time, and I really didn’t have the time or inclination to feed the stupid rivalry I had with Lorenzo. But this is Lorenzo Rey we're talking about, so my lack of interest only made things worse. Lorenzo craved attention, he's always had. He needs it to feel like he belongs and I wasn’t giving him any.”

“Well, he deserved the cold shoulder.”

“Yeah, he did.” Magnus laughed. “Then, well, then the day we graduated, he told me, in front of all his friends and the rest of our class, that one day I was going to work for him and when that happened, he was going to make sure that I ended up cleaning toilets for the rest of my days.”

Alec almost choke on his food.

“I laughed so hard, Alexander, I was shocked by the nerve he had to actually tell me that to my face.”
“But didn’t you tell him anything in return? He clearly crossed a line.”

“Of course I did! I was a total ass and told him that it was okay, that when that day came, I was going to use my money to pay someone to do it for me. Obviously, I didn't actually mean it, I was mad and wanted to shut him up somehow. I had no money, all 'my money' had always been my father’s, but as you can imagine, that response kind of cemented Lorenzo’s rumor that I was a spoiled brat who thought I could do anything with the money I had.”

“Well, in retrospect, and taking into account what had happened between you two in that last year, it wasn’t the smartest thing to say.” Alec admitted.

“It really wasn’t, but I was eighteen, you couldn’t ask me to think like a rational adult. Besides, my father was there, I wasn't going to let Lorenzo humiliate me in front of him, especially after everything that had happened.”

"Of course not." Alec shook his head and smiled.

“When my career took off, one day, Lorenzo went to my father’s house to pay me a visit.”

“You mean to your house? The museum-like mansion where I interviewed you for the first time?”

“Hmmm, yeah, well, that place isn't really my house, it’s still my father’s and I only use it occasionally, but that’s a story for another day.”

Alec tilted his head in curiosity. He was very intrigued by that little piece of information that Magnus had let slip.

“Don’t ask, I won’t talk about that-” Magnus said, stealing a bite from Alec’s plate as if to distract him, “-yet.”

Alec rolled his eyes, but didn't press the issue. “Okay, continue…”

Magnus smiled. “Unfortunately, I was there that day and I had no choice but to talk to him again. Of course, now he was all kind and friendly, as if nothing of what had gone down between us had ever happened. That pissed me off so much! People always treat me differently because I’m famous and, obviously, Lorenzo wasn’t the exception.” Magnus made a pause and sighed deeply. He was clearly remembering what had happened that day. “I guess I could have treated him better that day, we weren’t kids anymore, so I have no excuse for how I acted after we talked, but in my defense, I wasn't in the right state of mind to deal with him and his nonsense. I don’t like double-faced people, Alexander, in fact, I hate them, so after exchanging a few words, I lost my patience and threw him out of the house escorted, or rather, dragged by one of my security guards—Luke, actually. And well, that book that you have right there,” Magnus pointed to the book that still rested on the table between them, “was his response to that day.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah…”

“That’s why he’s so mad at you. He tried to be part of your world again and you didn’t let him.”

Magnus simply nodded. “But, of course you’re free to believe whatever you want to believe. I don’t want you to feel like you have to take my version of the story as the only one there is, because as you know, there are always two sides to every story, but I wanted you to have both versions—just in case. You know I didn’t read the book, so I’m not sure how Lorenzo described everything we went through together, but I didn’t want you to have a wrong impression of me. I know I’m not a saint,
but I’m not a monster either and—"

“I think that even though we don’t know each other that much, deep down, I know who you are, or at least I have a pretty close idea of who’s behind the superstar facade.” Alec said, smiling shyly. It was a very honest confession, one he hadn’t dared to utter out loud, not even to himself; but this conversation felt like a turning point in their relationship, Magnus had trusted him, and Alec felt the need to return the favor and be completely honest with him as well. “And I appreciate you sharing this with me. But let me clear something up, I wanted to know what had happened between you two, not because I had taken Lorenzo’s words seriously, but because I wanted to understand what had happened back then that had ended up in the unauthorized publication of this book.” Alec said, grabbing the book from the table. “And I think I do now. You both hurt each other deeply, things got out of control, and here we are. But having said that, I also believe that Lorenzo crossed a very serious line with this book.”

Magnus smiled. “He crossed many serious lines, Alexander.”

“But it hasn’t affected you.”

“Technically, it hasn’t. As I told you the other day, my fans and the people I care about know who I am, but between you and me, it hurt a lot when he first published it.”

Alec smiled, of course it had hurt, Magnus was a good person with good feelings, seeing how someone he had once considered a friend had betrayed him should have hurt him deeply. “Have you considered ever contacting him again to clear the air between the two of you?”

“No.” Magnus said. “There are some things that aren’t meant to be and when that’s the case, it’s better to let them die on their own. If I tried to contact him now, what do you think he would want? He can’t take back his words, he dared to publish them! Contacting him would make no difference.”

“Well, he could tell the truth and confess that he published the book as an attempt to get back at you for that silly rivalry you both have going on since high school.”

“And paint himself as a liar and a fraud in the process? It’s not going to happen, Alexander, I know you try to see the best in people, but Lorenzo doesn’t have it in him.”

Alec sighed. Magnus had a point, Alec couldn’t really see Lorenzo admitting that he had lied just to try to ruin Magnus because he had gotten mad when things hadn’t continued the way he had wanted more than ten years ago.

“Can I ask you something?” Alec said, timidly.

“Sure.”

“Have you forgiven him?”

“Lorenzo?”

Alec nodded. “Have you forgiven him for everything he did? The book, the stupid things he said back when you two were young?”

“I think I have,” Magnus said, “when I first heard about the book, I really wanted to make him pay for every printed word there, but I knew I couldn’t do much because I had that one coming. I had provoked him—even when justified—and for that reason, I never tried to sue him or force him to offer a public apology. I knew that that would only make things even worse between us, not to mention that it would be free publicity for his book. But then, one day, I had the rare opportunity to
take a break from everything and everyone, and while I was going through some old stuff in my house, I found one of my yearbooks. There were lots of pictures of us and moments that I had completely forgotten, and for the first time I saw our friendship from a different perspective. It was then that I realized how much we had hurt each other. The bond we had formed when we were young had been good, but we had ruined it, so I decided to let go of the past and move on. I took responsibility for what I had done to him and then I removed him from my life completely. I hadn’t really thought about him for years until I saw you reading that book.”

“Sorry about that, I—”

“Hey! No! Don’t apologize, please. I’m actually surprised that it didn’t occur to me that you were going to find that book and read it at some point. I should have known better. You have proven to be the best journalist I’ve ever met. You wouldn’t be the Alexander that I’ve learned to know and admire in these last few weeks if you hadn’t read that book.”

Alec smiled at him, and without saying another word, he stood up from the table and threw the book into one of the trash cans near their table. The smile that Magnus gave him was worth the almost 30 dollars he had spent buying it and that he had, unceremoniously, just thrown away.

“So...now what?” He asked, taking his seat in front of Magnus again. “It seems we’re done with the off the record conversation.”

“Well, I don’t know...” Magnus said, suddenly getting all shy. “Maybe we could have a normal conversation now? Like the one that two people who barely know each other would have if they were having breakfast together?”

Alec looked at him and smiled. “Okay.”

“Okay.”

Alec and Magnus arrived at the venue together. Fortunately for both of them, no one was there to see them getting out of the same car, laughing loudly and playfully pushing each other as they tried to make their way inside the place undetected. They had had such a good time together that they had almost forgotten that they had to be back in the venue for the sound check before noon.

It was almost one o'clock in the afternoon.

“Are you sure this is the right door?” Alec asked, looking around nervously.

They were outside the Bridgestone Arena, Nashville’s venue for the concerts in the city. They had been able to pass through the parking lot gate without so much as a blink because the guard had recognized Magnus, but now, they were trying to actually break into the place to avoid having to call someone from Magnus’s team to let them in. They both knew that they were going to kill Magnus for having disappeared as he had done all day.

“Yes.” Magnus said with conviction.

“But, what if it’s not and we trigger the alarms?”

“Then my people will have to bail us out of jail.”

Alec’s eyes widened.
“I’m kidding, Alexander, even if we triggered the alarms, everything’s going to be okay. We would make quite the entrance and that certainly wouldn’t help my case with my team, but you don’t have to worry about anything. Besides, like I said before, this is the right door.” He said, pushing the door open.

To Alec’s relief, no alarms were triggered and their entrance was satisfactorily undetectable.

“Have you been here before?” Alec asked out of curiosity, trying to figure out how Magnus had known which door to use. “I mean, have you given a concert here before, in this same venue?”

“Yes, last year.”

“Oh.” Alec said. That explained everything.

“I told you I knew how to get inside without being detected.” Magnus winked at him. “You have to start believing me when I tell you something, Alexander.”

“Yeah…”

"Anyway, I'll see you later, okay?” Magnus said, giving him a smile. "I have to go calm my team down, I'm pretty sure they're going crazy trying to find me. Ragnor probably already called the FBI."

"Okay," Alec smiled back, "and good luck with them. I hope you don't get into too much trouble because of this." He added.

"Don't worry, I won't. I know them, they're just going to scold me as usual. But even if I got into trouble, I'd say it was worth it, I had a great time today. Really."

"Me too." Alec admitted.

Magnus just smiled again and without saying more, he walked away, disappearing through the halls of the place in seconds.

Alec stood there for a moment and sighed. He knew that what awaited Magnus wasn’t going to be very pleasant. The man had deliberately turned off his phone and snuck out of the hotel without telling anyone where he was going and with whom. Alec could already hear Luke, Catarina, Ragnor, and Raphael, all yelling at Magnus at the same time for doing what he had done while Magnus just smiled and pretended it hadn't been his intention to make them worry.

Alec shook his head, smiled, and walked to the opposite side of the hall through which Magnus had disappeared just a few seconds ago, to the small office that his team had in the venue. He had less than an hour to prepare himself for the interview with Will, and although he usually preferred to have more time for that, he wasn’t complaining about the lack of time. As Magnus had said, it had been worth it.

*Totally worth it.*

Alec opened the door of his office and was greeted by a choir of four voices exclaiming at the same time: “Where the hell have you been!”

He looked at all his friends with a bit of a shock. If he was honest, he hadn’t been expecting that reaction from them, from Magnus’s team for sure, but from his own team? It hadn’t even crossed his mind. First, because it wasn’t *that* late for them, they still had plenty of time to get everything ready for the concert; second, because they didn’t need Alec to place the cameras, the experts on angles and shots were them; and third, because he had told Simon about his ‘interview’ with Magnus. They
knew where he had been and with whom, it wasn’t a secret.

“Well, hello to you too,” he said sarcastically, “and if you must know, I was interviewing Magnus. I told Simon about it this morning.”

“And I told them, but it’s one o’clock, Alec. You left before nine.” Simon said in self-defense.

Alec didn’t say a thing. How could he? He was very aware of what time it was.

“You were with Magnus this whole time?” Helen asked.

“Yes.” He said, trying to sound very casual, as if it were normal, not a big deal. “Interviewing him, but yes, I was with him. As you can guess by the time, the interview ran a bit longer than expected.”

“Alec,” Aline said, looking at him worriedly, “Magnus disappeared since very early in the morning, his team’s been going crazy looking for him.” She added. “We told them that apparently you had an interview with him scheduled for today and we tried to call you to confirm that information, but your phone was off, which just made them worry even more. Everyone was thinking the absolute worst. You know that people like Magnus receive threats all the time.”

“I ran out of battery.” Alec lied. He had turned off his phone after Underhill had called him. “I had no idea Magnus hadn’t told his team where we were going.” He lied again.

“Where did you two go?” Maia asked, looking at him suspiciously.

“To a cafe nearby,” he said without giving more details of the exact location of said cafe, “some of his fans were in the hotel restaurant when we got there, so we had to flee.” He added. That had been the official story they had agreed upon telling after they had realized they were going to get in trouble for taking so long to come back.

“Magnus could have told that to his team.” Aline said.

“I guess he could, but it’s not my fault he didn’t, is it? So, are we done with the police interrogation or do you all have more questions? I have a lot of notes to transcribe before interviewing Will.” He said to prevent his friends interrogation. He wasn’t that bad of a liar, it was something he had discovered in recent weeks, but he wasn’t good either. He couldn’t risk having his friends—who knew him better than anyone—discover the truth. Besides, he really was in a very good mood and didn’t want them to ruin it.

“So Magnus is back safe and sound too, I presume?” Helen asked.

“Yes, we took a taxi to get here faster when we realized how late it was.” He said, without looking at them and just grabbing his laptop as if to write down all those notes he had talked about. He had some, Magnus had been kind enough to give him some material to add to his weekly special, but he didn’t have that many. They had talked for hours, but mostly about themselves, their likes and dislikes, their interests.

“Do you know why he didn’t inform his team of this interview?” Helen asked. She seemed to be in a very inquisitive mood and that wasn’t good news. Especially if Aline had already shared with her what she had overheard the night before.

“No.” He said, not daring to look up. He could feel all four pair of eyes on him. “Maybe he forgot, or he told them and they just didn’t remember? Who knows.”

“Well, either way, he’s gonna be in so much trouble.” Helen said. Alec’s last response seemed to
have made her lose some interest in the subject, which had Alec exhaling with relief. “You should have seen everyone when it was time to come here and they couldn’t find him.”

“I can imagine…” Alec said, finally looking up and smiling with a casual smile so they wouldn’t suspect anything. “I’m gonna start working now, okay?” He said to put an end to the whole conversation once and for all.

He opened the document that he had started the other day and typed some of the notes Magnus had given him about Will. He wanted to start drafting his interview with him. He already had some things written down, but he wanted to structure it better so that it would be easier to write later when he had all the material.

“Alec?” Aline said, sitting down next to him.

“Do you need something?” He said, without looking at her and pretending to be very busy adding things to his document. He knew that she was going to try to talk to him the moment they saw each other again, but he wasn’t ready to face her just yet—much less after this morning. “I really need to transcribe what I got from Magnus before interviewing Will.”

“Alec.” Aline said again, and Alec had no choice but to look up. She was giving him one of her classics cut-the-crap looks.

“What?”

“We need to-”

“Oh!” Alec exclaimed loudly as if he were suddenly remembering something very important. “Before I forget,” he said to try to change the subject, “do you guys remember what I told you about Underhill and his boyfriend?”

They all looked at him intrigued and nodded.

“Well, bad news...they broke up.”

“What!” Maia exclaimed in surprise.

“You were right!” Simon said.

“Yeah, I was. Although I’m not happy I was, I wanted to be wrong so badly.”

“And how is he?” Helen asked.

“Still dealing with it, that’s why he had been ignoring my calls and texts.”

“Poor thing, it must have been really hard for him.” Aline said. “They were together for more than a year.”

“Yes, but he doesn’t sound so bad, I mean sad, but he’s handling it. He has great expectations for the future, he even told me that he’s already meeting new people and that he hopes to find his Prince Charming next time.”

“I hope he does,” Simon said, “he deserves all the happiness in the world. Everyone deserves a great love story.” He added.

“Did you just quote the tagline of a movie?” Alec asked.
“Did you just recognize the tagline of a movie?” Simon asked back.

Alec chuckled. He really was in a good mood. “Love, Simon is a classic in my book, it would be a crime if I didn’t know the tagline.”

“Well, I love it ‘cause it has my name on in.” Simon laughed, and Alec laughed too because of course he did. Simon, loving the movie because it had his name on it, was the most Simony thing in the world.

“You’re in a very good mood.” Aline observed quietly.

“What?”

“You’re laughing with Simon, not at Simon, that doesn’t happen that often.”

“I guess I am.”

“Why are you in such a good mood?”

“I don’t know,” he lied, “I guess I’m just excited about these new interviews.”

“Yeah, right…”

“Hey, Alec?” Simon said. “What are you going to need for the interview with Will?”

“Hmmm, two cameras. I want to take a couple of pictures to upload on social media and, of course, record the whole interview.”

“Okay, I still have to finish editing this material that I’m working on. Aldertree’s been bothering me for days because they want to update the site or something like that, but-”

“Don’t worry about it, take your time and finish what Aldertree wants, I’m gonna use Helen and Maia for this interview.” He said. It wasn’t just the right time for his other friends to have more responsibilities, but it was also another excuse for not being alone with Aline.

“Okay.”

“We get to be there?” Maia asked sarcastically. They all knew that the official cameraman and photographer of the tour were Simon and Aline, since they had more experience.

“Yes.”

Maia and Helen smiled.

“Anyway,” Alec said, “the interview starts in about half an hour, so maybe get your stuff ready?” He told them. Maia and Helen immediately started unpacking cameras, lights, lenses, and all sorts of cables.

“Really?” Aline whispered next to him.

“What?”

“You’re taking them just to avoid talking to me?”

“I’m not, Simon is clearly very busy and I think it’s time we give Helen and Maia a chance to do more, don’t you agree?”
“When you put it that way, of course I agree and I'm happy for them, but I still think you’re avoiding me.”

“I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No, I’m not. I promise.”

Aline gave him another of her looks. Alec really hated those looks.

“We’ll talk later tonight, okay?” He said, in an attempt at reassurance. They were going to talk at some point, just not yet. “Or tomorrow on our way to St. Louis.”

She stared at him for a few seconds before standing up to get back to the table with the others. “You're not running away from this one, Lightwood.” She said, pointing a menacing finger at him.

“I know.” Alec said with a sigh because he knew. He knew.

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Alec, Helen, and Maia, walked to the office where they had been told that Will was waiting for them. When they opened the door, however, Alec had to do a double-take to make sure that he was in the right place. For a moment, he thought he had walked right into Magnus’s dressing room. The place was packed with clothing racks, mirrors, and all kinds of beauty products, not to mention that both Jem and Tessa were there helping a man get ready. But the man wasn’t Magnus, it was Will.

“Do I look alright?” He asked the moment he spotted Alec and the girls by the door.

Alec was taken aback by the question. He did look alright, Will was a handsome man, but Alec didn’t know if he had asked because he really wanted to know or if he was just being his usual coquettish self.

“I want to look good for the camera,” Will continued as he checked himself in the mirror, “my face is going to be in the most popular entertainment magazine in the country, I better look good.”

“You look great.” Both Maia and Helen said.

“Thank you, ladies.” Will smiled, pleased with the compliment. “So, how do we do this? Do we set some chairs and promotional material for the interview, or-?”

“We can do a sit-down interview if that's what you want, but I was thinking that maybe it would be better if you gave us an official tour of the venue to explain to our readers all there is to know about what you do here. We can do a full behind-the-scenes interview with the man responsible for everything that happens behind the scenes.”

“Oh, I love that. Yes, let’s do it.” Will said, standing from his chair.

“Well, if you need us,” Jem said, grabbing Tessa’s hand to leave the room, “we’ll be in Magnus’s dressing room getting everything ready for the concert.”

Once Jem and Tessa disappeared behind the door, Alec, Will, Helen, and Maia walked to the main door of the venue and stepped outside, so that Helen and Maia could record and take pictures with the facade of the building behind them. Alec had to admit that the Bridgestone Arena was a very imposing venue. The building was completely covered in glass with a rather peculiar roofing system.
The seating capacity was approximately 20,000 people. According to google, the seating configuration was notable for the oddly-shaped south end, which featured two large round roof support columns, no mid-level seating, and only one level of suites, bringing the upper-level seats much closer to the floor.

“Guys, are you ready?” Alec asked his team. Both Maia and Helen nodded. “Are you ready, Will?”

Will straightened his clothes one more time, checked himself in the pocket mirror he was carrying around, and then nodded. “Ready.”

Alec took a deep breath and looking at the camera, he began the interview. “We’re here outside the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville, Tennessee, just a few hours away from Magnus’s last concert in the city. And with us to give us a tour of the place and tell us everything that happens behind the scenes is William Herondale—the producer of the Stardust Tour. As many of you know, Will, as he prefers to be called, has been producing Magnus’s shows since the beginning of his career. But this is, and please correct me if I’m wrong, Will–” Alec added, now addressing Will and not the camera, “–the largest and most ambitious tour you’ve ever produced?”

“That’s correct,” Will said with a smile, “I’ve produced shows for many artists and all of Magnus’s previous shows as you well-informed the audience, but all those tours were relatively small compared to this one. I would say they were almost local. The Stardust Tour is without a doubt the biggest tour I’ve ever produced.”

“Magnus’s tours didn’t use to be this big.” Alec added because he had done his research on the man and knew that Magnus’s last tour had only had 40 shows in 25 different places. This one had 112 concerts in 64 locations. “Why almost triple the number of shows and try to cover so many places in such a short time?”

“Well, it’s what Magnus wanted—an attempt to give all his fans the chance to see him. And, as you know, with the promotion of his new movie and the filming schedule of his TV show, we had very little time for him to do this—just these months—so we tried to cover as much ground as possible with the time we had. It’s impossible to go to all the places in the world that Magnus wanted us to visit, but we tried to cover at least one city in all five continents.”

“It’s a pretty ambitious tour, I have to admit. How do you handle all the pressure of working on such a huge project?”

“By making sure that everything runs like clockwork,” Will laughed, “you’ve seen how everything works in these last few weeks, it’s not easy, but we try to make it seem as if it were.”

“That you do. Now tell us about the venues, how did you choose them? Were they entirely your decision or did Magnus have a say in the matter?”

“Well, not really. All decisions are made between Magnus’s publicist, manager, and me—and of course, the executive board of the venues. There are some places that Magnus always begs us to try to book for tours, but ultimately, it’s not in his hands if it happens or not. It’s in the hands of the people who own these places. For example,” Will said, pointing to the building behind them, “this is an all-purpose venue, but it’s also home of the Nashville Predators—the local hockey team. So it can be used for concerts and other events, but if the Predators are in season, then it’s practically impossible to book this place, you know?”

“So it all depends on the schedules.”

“Yes, and between you and I, in which event generates more revenue. The one that brings the most
money to the table always wins. At the end of the day, it's all about the number of zeros in the final check.”

Alec nodded. It made sense. “Everything is a business.” He said knowingly.

“It is.”

“But anyway, tell us...what does a venue have to have for you and the rest of Magnus’s team to say, 'yes, we want to try to book this place for the tour’?”

“For this tour in particular?” Will said in response, and Alec just nodded. “First of all, the capacity. We wanted as many people as possible at the concerts, so we went big, arenas, stadiums, etc. This place, for example, has a seating capacity of 18,500 for end-stage concerts, which is our case, but it can seat more than 20,000 people for center-stage concerts, and if you think about it that's a lot of people per event. But anyway, there are many other things that we need for a place to work for us.” He said.

“Would you mind showing us around a bit and telling us all about those other things?”

“Of course! I’d be my pleasure.” Will exclaimed. “Follow me, please.” He said, walking towards the door of the building and opening it.

Alec and his team followed him inside. Will wasted no time and started sharing the things which were a must when choosing a venue for one of Magnus’s concerts. The accessibility, the services offered in the facilities, the technical equipment available on site and its limitations, the acoustics. He went on and on about the technology that was needed for this tour—Magnus's shows were very visual with huge projections on screens and lighting effects—and the importance of acoustics as this helped not only to give a quality show (sound-wise), but to determine the number of loudspeakers that were going to be used in total for the concerts.

They walked around the venue for almost an hour, showing the audience, through Helen’s lens, how everything looked from behind the scenes while Alec asked questions. Will was completely in his element, which made the interview run smoothly. He talked about the logistics of each concert and showed them everything he could in detail—the platforms they used to move the instruments around without detuning them and how they managed to move Magnus's crystal acrylic grand piano from one side of the stage to the other in the span of a song; the props that all dancers used throughout the concert which were carefully arranged in labeled boxes stacked a few feet away from the stage; and finally, the many entrances and exits to the main stage.

“These doors, for example, are what we call trapdoors.” Will said, pointing to a set of doors that Alec knew all too well; they were hidden in the structure of the stage both horizontally and vertically, allowing Magnus to move around between songs, have express wardrobe changes, surprise the audience, and, sometimes, even just to hydrate himself. “They have many uses, they're vital before, during, and after each concert, but they're mainly designed to help Magnus and his dancers move around the stage with ease. We have the lateral ones over here,” Will pointed to the doors hidden in the structure, “they look like normal doors, but when you open them,” he said, opening one, “you see that it’s just a corridor, although narrow, connecting to the other side of the stage. And then we have the ones on the floor.” He pointed to the nearest trapdoor on the floor. “These are the most dangerous for all of us. If any of them is left open during the stage setting process or even the rehearsals, someone could fall down and be seriously injured, that's why they have this warning tapes all around them. But during the concert, they’re essential to help the show go smoothly.”

“We’ve seen it countless times now,” Alec said, “Magnus uses one of these to disappear from the stage during his final song, the one before the encore. Could you show us how he does it?”
“Sure!” He said, opening the door. “As you can see, there’s nothing down there right now,” he said as they all peeked inside the hole to verify that, indeed, there was nothing in there, “but during the concert, we install a container with a safety net, so Magnus can land safely when the door opens and he disappears from the stage. Give me a few minutes and I’ll show you exactly how he does it.” He said and using his portable radio, he ordered someone from his team to bring the security container to the trapdoor number seven.

“Anyone willing to jump?” Will asked, once the container was placed and secured in its place. "It's totally safe, I promise."

Alec looked at the pit and, although it didn’t look as safe as Will promised, he knew it was, so he volunteered for the task. After all, Magnus did it all the time and he had never been hurt. “I’ll do it.” He said.

“Great, but we’re going to do it the way Magnus does.” Will said, closing the trapdoor and using his radio to indicate someone in the booths to activate the mechanism of the trapdoor for the last song. “Stand on the trap door, please.” Will instructed Alec, who hesitantly stood on the now closed door. He felt as if it would open at any moment and he would fall to his death. “Now, when I give the order, the door will retract and you will fall into the container. Don’t worry about the height, like I said before, it’s totally safe. Just keep your hands and legs together and you’ll be fine.”

Alec took a deep breath.

“Ready?” Will asked.

Alec nodded and next thing he knew, he was in the container, lying on his back on the safety net and laughing like a little kid. It had been like landing on a trampoline.

“How was that?” Will asked from the stage.

“So much fun!” Alec exclaimed.

“Now, get out of there and meet us back here. Use that door.” He pointed to one of the doors downstairs that connected directly to the stage.

Alec did what he was told to and just when he was about to hit the stage again, he ran into Magnus.

“Having fun without me?” The man asked with a smile. He was with all the dancers, surely on his way to the stage for the finale rehearsal, which Alec knew also served as warm-up for the concert.

“I’m interviewing Will, he let me use the trapdoor you use for your last song, so I had to climb back up.”

“It’s fun, right?”

“It is, although a bit scary at first, it’s like one of those trust exercises where you have to just let go without thinking much, or a dunk tank. Do you know them? That water game that you can find at fairs. I love that game.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, it’s all about the anticipation. When we were kids, our parents used to take my siblings and I to this fair outside the city and we spent all day there, trying to dunk each other. My aim was always better than Jace or Izzy’s, so they used to team up to try to make me fall into the water. They never succeeded, though, so if you ask them, they hate that game. I-”
“Alec!” Maia exclaimed from the stage. “We’re heading to the tech booths now.”

Alec nodded. “I have to…” he pointed to where Will and the others were waiting for him to continue the interview slash backstage tour.

“Yeah, go…I’ll see you later.” Magnus winked.

Alec smiled and started walking to join the others, but Magnus stopped him.

“Alexander?”

Alec looked back at him.

“We should totally go find a fair somewhere, I happen to have the best aim in the world. I could take revenge on behalf of your siblings. I can assure you that I can dunk you in the blink of an eye.”

“Is that so?” Alec smiled. The idea of spending a day with Magnus at a local fair was filling his stomach with butterflies—again.

Magnus nodded, he had a smug smile plastered on his face.

“Well, that remains to be seen.” Alec winked, before joining the others.

The concert was in full swing, the audience was singing along to each and every song, and the music was blasting out of all the loudspeakers available in the huge arena. Alec was, as per usual, watching everything from behind the scenes. He enjoyed watching the audience’s reaction to Magnus, his songs, and the show in general. It was always fun to see the fans—especially those sitting in the front rows—crying, screaming, and singing along with Magnus; but lately, he had been finding himself enjoying just watching Magnus a bit more.

The man was truly hypnotizing. Of course he had noticed it since the first concert. He even remembered comparing seeing Magnus on stage to seeing a conductor leading its orchestra, or a sculptor molding and bending its artwork at will. Because Magnus did that, he commanded all the people around him—he conducted them and bent them at will.

“How are we feeling, Nashville?” Magnus asked the audience, who replied with cheers and cries of joy and excitement that almost deafened Alec.

“You have some lungs, Nashville, I love that.” Magnus said, grabbing one of the water bottles he had on stage and giving it a few sips. “I was thinking,” he continued, addressing the audience, who, like Alec, couldn’t help but follow the man with their eyes as he walked aimlessly around the stage, “I always play a song to honor the city I’m visiting, yesterday, I sang ‘Nashville Without You,’ even though Country is definitely not my genre, but today I wanted to do something a bit different. This city is special, you all know it, you live here, or at least you live close enough to be able to come see me tonight, but I’ve been having such a good time here that I don’t want to go without paying homage to someone who had a very long history with your city: the King of Rock ’n’ Roll himself.” Magnus said, and Alec smiled, remembering the conversation he and Magnus had had about Elvis Presley just two nights ago.

“The King, you say?” Magnus continued, “But he was the King of Rock ’n’ Roll not a Country artist, and yes, he was, but before he got that title, Elvis Presley was known as the Hillbilly Cat. He was a boy from Mississippi, but he moved to Memphis. He grew up listening to the Grand Ole Opry and singers like Ernest Tubb and Red Foley. Sometimes, the substantial role that Country music
played in his sound and in his career is overlooked. But anyway…” Magnus made another pause to drink more water, “I’m not going to bore you all with Mr. Presley’s entire biography, you can google it if you’re curious. But I want to sing a song that he recorded right here in Nashville, down on Music Row, in the now historic RCA Studio B, and that helped him conquer the pop charts and shaped him into the legend he is today. This one is for all of you, Nashvillians… ‘Heartbreak Hotel.’” Magnus said at the same time that the notes of the very popular song began to play, causing people to freak out even more.

Magnus turned around, his back to the audience and, for just a fraction of a second, he looked at Alec and winked at him, as if he, too, was remembering that conversation they had had about the King a couple of nights ago.

Alec smiled as Magnus began to sing.

It was impossible not to. Granted, Magnus wasn’t Elvis Presley, but he could give the song and the King some justice. His deep voice fit right in with the song and his sexually charged onstage presence honored the Legend in a way no one in the audience could have ever imagined.

“It’s him, isn’t it?” A voice said, snapping Alec back to reality. He had been in some sort of trance for the entire duration of the concert.

“What?” He asked, looking at the person standing right next to him. It was Aline.

“Magnus is the one that ‘you can’t like.’” She said, staring at him.

“No, of course not.” Alec immediately said, but then his eyes were on Magnus again. The man was putting the audience under a spell with his beautiful voice and almost sinful dance moves. His smile was huge and his eyes shone so brightly that they made the stage lights look pale in comparison. He looked completely ecstatic. And maybe Alec was imagining things, but he was sure that he had seen that very same look on Magnus’s face before. The day off they had practically spent together, first at lunch and then when they had played pool and Alec had completely kicked his ass; the other night, when they had stayed up late talking about Nashville and its history and connection to the music industry; yesterday, when he had given him the notebook that he had brought him from the museum; this morning, when they had been having breakfast together and Alec had dared to share a thing or two about his personal life.

Could it be? He wondered as he smiled, but then remembering that Aline was still there, staring at him, he sighed and nodded because there was no point in denying the obvious.

“I’m so screwed.” He confessed.

“Oh, Alec.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Alec, indeed!!! We're getting somewhere, fam, but we're not quite there yet, so bear with me, okay???
Anyway, I hope you liked it. Kudos, comments, live-tweets (#LFYfic) and all that stuff is more than welcome!!!
See y'all soon.
Hello folks, are you still here??? I hope so. I know I have no excuse for making y'all wait so long for this chapter, but life is complicated and, unfortunately, I have to work to pay the bills, so finding free time to write is getting harder and harder. But don't worry, this doesn't mean that I'll abandon this story, I'll finish it and publish new stories for as long as you guys let me. I love Malec and they'll forever be my top OTP, so if you let me, I'll share my stories with you until the end of time, just have a little patience with me and my crazy life, okay???

Anyway, as per usual, I won't say much about the chapter to avoid spoiling anything, but I really hope you like it. It's long like all the others, but it has some revelations and sweet moments here and there that I hope you enjoy reading. I'll see y'all sometime soon. There's a multi-chapter update in the near future, so keep an eye out for that.

You can find me on twitter (and tumblr) as @MsAlexisCriss. If you live-tweet the story or something, make sure to tag me or use the #LFYFic hashtag so I can find your tweets.

All my love, Alexis.

Alec and Simon were sitting in the lobby of the Magnolia hotel in Omaha, Nebraska, waiting for the rest of their friends to join them. The vans which were going to take them to the venue in the city, the CHI Health Center, were about to arrive. Alec was a little restless. Aline, Helen, and Maia had gone upstairs to get some stuff they had forgotten and, although they had said it wouldn't take long, it had been more than fifteen minutes already and they weren't there yet.

“What’s taking them so long?” Alec questioned out loud when he noticed how late it was getting. Since the tour had started, he had always made sure all the members of his team were on time and ready to leave when Magnus’s team came downstairs. It gave a good and very professional impression.

“Don’t know...” Simon replied distractedly. He was busy killing time playing a game on his phone. “Women are like that.” He elaborated after a few seconds, as if to instruct Alec on a subject he had no knowledge of. “They say that something won't take long, but it always does. If they say five minutes, it will take them at least ten.”

“I know.” Alec said, because he knew that much growing up with a sister and a mother who was...well, the reason his sister was who she was today. He might not be an expert on women, but he liked to think that he knew how most of them were and behaved.

“Your sister, for example,” Simon continued, “takes hours to get ready. Her five minutes are three hours.”

Alec chuckled, surely Simon was exaggerating. He knew that Izzy took her time to get ready—when he was in high school he used to share the bathroom with his siblings every morning, and if he or Jace didn't claim it before Izzy woke up, taking a shower became an impossible task. But that had
been a long time ago, since then Alec had seen his sister get ready and put on her makeup in less than ten minutes.

“It’s true.” Simon said. “Remember the dinner at your parents’ a few months ago?”

Alec nodded. After the magazine’s stock market had closed unexpectedly higher than calculated in the first quarter of the year, his mother had insisted that the whole family gathered to celebrate the good news—significant others included. So both Simon and Clary, Izzy and Jace’s respective other halves, had been there.

“Well, she started getting ready around ten. We were supposed to be at your parents’ at five. It took her seven hours to get ready, Alec. Seven! It was a whole new record. Not that anyone’s counting or anything, but-” Simon was saying when Alec’s phone rang, interrupting their conversation.

“Speaking of the devil.” Alec said, looking at his phone.

“It’s Izzy?” Simon asked a bit alarmed.

“It’s from the office, so it could be?” Alec said with a shrug. The only people who ever called him using the office phone were Izzy, his mother, and his boss, but since New York was an hour ahead of them right now, he doubted it was either of them. Usually, they both were in important meetings at this time. “I have to take it.”

“Yes, of course. And if it’s my girl say hi again from me, okay? We talked during breakfast, but still.”

Alec nodded before standing up and answering the call. “Hello.” He said.

“Good morning, son.”

“Mother?” Alec questioned, trying not to sound as surprised as he felt by the fact that his mother was calling him. If he was honest, it was never good news when Maryse Lightwood called—no matter what phone she used. “I-I wasn’t expecting your call, is everything okay back home?” He asked.

“Everything’s just wonderful!” Maryse said. She sounded very happy, as if she really meant every word and everything was just wonderful.

“You’re in a good mood.” Alec couldn’t help noting.

“I have every reason to be. You’re a genius, son.”

Alec blushed at the sudden compliment. “Why do you say that?”

“The London All-Access VIP Experience contest has been up and running since last night.” She informed him.

“Oh.” Alec exclaimed.

He was aware the magazine contest—which was part of a strategy to help Raphael with Magnus' fan base—was set to be released in the next few days. These past weeks, they had been working really hard on it, making sure everything was ready and sorting out all the annoying legal details which a contest of such magnitude always entailed. But he had no idea that they had launched it already. As far as he knew, the magazine was still tying up some loose ends here and there.

“I tried calling you last night to share the good news with you, but-”
“I turned off my phone when we left Des Moines.” Alec said as an explanation.

Last night, after the only concert Magnus had given in the capital of Iowa, they had traveled straight to Omaha, for the two concerts that Magnus had scheduled in the city. Alec had turned off his phone the moment they had boarded Magnus’s private plane and had only turned it on again this morning.

“The server went down minutes after we launched it.” His mother continued. “Our IT team has been working like crazy trying to keep it up, but it’s been glitching ever since. So far we’ve had almost a hundred thousand subscriptions, in less than twelve hours.”

“That’s great!” Alec exclaimed, he was genuinely excited. In part because this meant his plan had officially worked on all fronts; this now meant Magnus's fan base had something more important to focus on than his private life and also, it was great business for the magazine. One of the many rules of the contest was that all participants had to subscribe or already be subscribed to the Shadow World magazine newsletter email list to be considered for the big prize.

“It is, and all thanks to you.”

“It wasn’t just me,” Alec said modestly, “Magnus’s team helped a lot and—”

“But this contest and all the new dynamics we’ve been having in these past weeks were your ideas, Alec.”

“Well, yeah, but—”

“But nothing, it was all you and you should be proud of what you’ve accomplished.”

Alec smiled. “How’s Max?” He asked, changing the subject. He appreciated his mother recognizing his hard work, but there was no way he would ever get used to receiving compliments. It was too strange for him, he never knew what he was supposed to say. Thank you? It sounded way too presumptuous in his opinion.

“He’s fine, and I’m glad you mentioned him because I was wondering if you could talk to him.”

“Why, what happened?”

“Nothing bad, but I need you to have a conversation with him about this contest. He insists that he wants to participate for the chance to win the trip, but he doesn’t understand why he can’t. I told him that due to legal issues, no one with connections to the magazine could participate, but he just doesn’t care about that. He says he’s not part of the magazine. He is, and I’m quoting, ‘just another fan like all the rest and should have the chance to win the prize like them.’ Your father and I tried to reason with him, but you know him, he’s stubborn. He’s not listening.”

Alec sighed. There was no denying Max was definitely growing up and reasoning with him was no longer an option, sometimes Alec missed the sweet boy who always listened and never complained about anything. “Don’t worry, I’ll call him later today, okay?”

“Thank you, maybe if he hears it from you, he’ll finally understand. You’ve always been the only one who truly gets him. Besides, he already met Magnus, what else does he want?”

“Yes, don’t worry, I’ll fix this.”

“Thank you.” She said. “And how are you? How are the others?”

“We’re all fine, a bit tired with all the traveling and the crazy working schedule, but fine.”
“Maybe I shouldn’t tell you this, but you all are going to have two weeks of paid vacation as soon as you’re back.” She said.

“Really? Well, I’m glad you did ’cause we’re really going to need them.” He admitted.

“Yes, I know, but don’t tell your team just yet.” Maryse warned him. “I don’t want them to get distracted thinking about the future when they have to be working on the tour, especially Simon. If he tells your sister, she’s going to focus on that instead of our work here and I can’t allow that, especially now. So keep it on the down low for now, okay?”

“Don’t worry, I will.” Alec said. “But you do know that giving Simon two weeks off means giving Isabelle those weeks too, right? They always make trips together, she’s been saving her days for a few years now, so be prepared to lose your main fashion writer for two weeks also.”

“I know and I’ll ask her to leave columns in advance when the time comes, but that’s why I won’t tell them until it’s inevitable. Anyway, it was nice hearing from you, son. I’ll call you some other day, okay? I have to go now, I was supposed to be in a meeting, but I really wanted to talk to you and share the good news.”

“Okay, take care, mom.”

“You too, and congrats again, Alec. You’re really making us all proud.”

“Thanks.”

“Bye, son.”

“Bye, mom.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Alec hung up, took a deep breath and sat down again with Simon, who was looking at him with expectant eyes.

“Was it Izzy?” He asked as soon as Alec took a seat.

“Nope, my mom.”

“Oh. And how is she? Why did she call? Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, she’s fine, she just called to tell me they launched the London contest last night—it’s a success.” He shared with a smile.

Simon high-fived him. “I knew it would be! It was a brilliant idea! The cherry on top to your wonderful plan.”

Alec smiled again.

“How many subscriptions so far?” Simon asked.

“Almost a hundred thousand!”

“Oh my God!” Simon exclaimed in surprise.
“I know, right? It doesn’t make sense, I expected a number like that when the contest was over, not in the first twelve hours.”

“Well, if you think about it, it does make sense. It’s an international contest for the opportunity to win an all-access experience in London to see the final concerts of Magnus’s tour. It’s practically a paid vacation to one of the most beautiful cities in the world, with the add-on of not only meeting one of the stars of the moment, but also seeing him in concert and getting a glimpse of everything there is to see behind the scenes. I would totally sign up for it if I wasn’t here already.”

“Well, yeah, you have a point there, it’s every fan’s dream. I just-” Alec was saying when Raphael approached them.

“Good morning.” He said in his usual polite and neutral tone.

“Morning.” Alec and Simon replied in unison.

“Alec, can we talk in private for a second?” Raphael asked.

“Sure.” Alec said, giving Simon a quick wish-me-luck kind of look and following Raphael across the lobby.

“I guess you already know the good news.” Raphael said, as soon as they were far from Simon and the other people sitting in the lobby.

“I just got a call from the magazine, so yes.”

“I don’t even know how to thank you. This London contest you came up with was the icing on the cake you baked for us.” Raphael said. He seemed genuinely grateful and at a loss for words. “I don’t think you actually know this, but you probably saved my job. I’ve been monitoring Magnus’s social media accounts since last night and the contest is everything his fans are talking about. It took you and your magazine less than three weeks to do what I couldn’t do in months, first with the new dynamics in social media and now with this. I’m impressed, Alec. Truly. So thank you, you really took one for the team.”

“You don’t have to thank me, all this is helping you guys as much as it’s helping us. It’s a win/win situation for everyone.”

“Yes, but you didn’t need to do it. Your magazine was doing better than expected, the ones with the problem were us. Well, me and Ragnor, and you saved us both. Everything you came up with for this—from the new content the magazine is publishing, the actual contest, to the dynamics to win the signed albums, the VIP tickets, and the big trip. Everything was more than I could have ever expected, so thank you for helping us make this a reality. It would have never happened without you, so really Alec, thank you.”

“Yes, thank you, Alec.” Ragnor added, joining the conversation. He had just come from the hotel restaurant. “When this fool shared with me everything you had come up with to help us, I couldn’t believe it. You fixed what we couldn’t fix and the fact that you even vouched for us in the magazine to make this happen means a lot to us. I-”

“Vouched for you in the magazine?” Magnus asked, interrupting them. He was covered in a light sheen of sweat and dressed in sportswear. He often did light training after breakfast. “What were you three talking about? Why would Alec have to vouch for us in the magazine to make something happen?” He asked, eyeing them all suspiciously.

“Nothing.” Ragnor immediately said. “You heard wrong. We were saying that-”
“Don’t, Ragnor. I didn’t hear wrong.” Magnus said, looking at Ragnor with hard eyes. “I want to know what’s going on here. Tell me, why would Alec have to vouch for us in the magazine to make something happen? We have a contract with them. So, what’s really going on here? Alexander, what were you guys talking about?” Magnus asked, directing his last question to Alec.

Alec didn’t know what to say, he didn’t want to lie to Magnus, not after everything that had changed between them in recent weeks. “The London contest.” He confessed.

Magnus frowned, confused. “The London contest? Why would you have to vouch for us in the magazine for that to happen? Wasn’t that contest part of what you and your people were doing to get more engagement for the magazine? That’s what you told me the day you asked me to record the video announcing it.” He said, looking directly at Alec. There was confusion and maybe even anger in his eyes. Alec was too mortified to tell the difference.

“I…” Alec didn’t know what to say to that. He knew exactly what he had told Magnus and why. “I…” He said again, looking desperately at Raphael for some help, but Raphael just looked at Ragnor who in turn sighed.

“We can explain.” Ragnor said.

“Explain!? What’s there to explain, huh!? That you all lied to me!? That you specifically disobeyed my orders!?” Magnus said, pointing a menacing finger at Raphael. “I told you I didn’t want you to drag Alec into any of this and-”

“Magnus…” Ragnor said, interrupting him, “not here.” He added discreetly.

Magnus had raised his voice a few octaves and now some hotel guests were aware of his presence and the heated conversation he was having with his team.

Magnus made a face of clear discontent, but stopped yelling. “My room. Now.” He said in a low but very firm voice.

“Magnus,” Raphael said, “the vans are about to arrive, we can talk on our way to the venue and-”

“I said my room. Now.” Magnus said again, giving them one last look and storming out to the nearest elevator without adding another word. He looked really angry. Alec had never seen him like that before.

“Well, he didn’t take the news so well.” Ragnor said in a whisper that both Alec and Raphael could hear.

“We should-” Raphael said, pointing to the elevator that Magnus was holding open for them.

“Yeah.” Ragnor said, taking a deep breath and walking towards the elevator.

Alec didn’t know if he should go with them or not, he was part of this mess, but he wasn’t sure if he was invited. The look on Magnus’s face right now said no.

“Stay here.” Raphael said as if he had read Alec’s mind. “I think it’s better if we handle this on our own. It’s our mess after all, you had nothing to do with it. You helped us, but the decision not to tell Magnus was entirely ours.”

“But-” Alec started to argue because he was just realizing that even if he wasn’t invited and the idea of facing this version of Magnus scared him a little, he did want to go. He wanted to explain what had happened and tell Magnus that he hadn’t meant to lie to him, that he had trusted his team knew
what they were doing when they decided to hide the true meaning behind some decisions they had
made.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine. We know how to handle him.” Raphael said, walking away.

Alec sighed in resignation, watching as the elevator doors closed behind the three men and
wondering if that blooming cordiality or whatever he and Magnus had been developing in recent
weeks had just been ruined.

Alec was distracted. He had been distracted ever since they had arrived at the venue. What had
happened that morning—Magnus discovering what they had done—had been all he could think
about. When he had agreed to help Raphael with all this, he had never stopped to think how much it
might affect him, on a personal level, that Magnus knew about the plan and wasn’t okay with. He
had acted on an impulse. Raphael had asked for his help and he had just said yes, but now? Well,
now he wasn’t sure if what he had done had been for the best.

The ‘distraction strategy’ as they had been calling it and what it was going to bring professionally to
both sides of this new arrangement was great, but Alec knew that the intentions behind it were what
probably had Magnus so angry at the situation. For weeks, they had been using their respective
platforms to manipulate Magnus’s fan base and use them as they please, which was bad, but
probably not as bad as the fact that they were going to continue doing so until pretty much the end of
the tour.

Of course none of this was unheard off in the entertainment business, all celebrities and media outlets
did it on a daily basis, the manipulation of the masses was where the money really was, but after
getting to know Magnus a little better, Alec could see why even the idea might bother him. Magnus
loved his fans, he appreciated and valued them, using them like this wasn’t something he would
approve of unless it was strictly necessary. Which left Alec thinking, had all this been strictly
necessary? Manipulating them like this, with prizes and rewards, had that really been their only
solution?

Deep down, Alec knew the answer to that question. Of course it had. He had been in the business
long enough to know that in order to make this tour what Magnus really wanted, they would have to
use his fan base in some way or another. But even so, the knowledge didn’t help him to ease the
feeling of uncertainty which had been slowly consuming him since that morning.

Alec sighed, pulling his phone from his pocket to see if he had a text or email from Catarina. Magnus
and his team hadn’t arrived yet, so Alec had called Catarina to ask if his interview with Jem and
Tessa—which was supposed to take place today—was still on, but she hadn’t answered. Some staff
members had ‘informed’ him that Magnus and his team were delayed due to a last-minute emergency,
but that they would be there soon. The official version that was passing around all crew members
was that Magnus had hurt himself while training in the gym and he’d had to go to a last-minute
checkup before the concert.

Alec knew that version couldn’t be further from the truth. The last-minute emergency which had
occurred had been Magnus finding out about the silly plan the magazine and his team had devised to
solve the problem with his fan base and he hadn’t liked it.

“Are you okay?” Aline asked, sitting beside him.

Up until a few seconds ago, he had been all alone in their small office in the venue. His entire team
was busy installing cameras around the stage and getting everything ready for the concert.
“Yes, I am.” He lied.

“No, you’re not.” Aline said. “You weren’t this quiet during breakfast and you’ve been very pensive since we left the hotel. What happened there, huh? We saw you talking to Ragnor and Raphael when we walked out of the elevator, and practically everyone in the room noticed when Magnus showed up. He was upset, right? We could see him arguing with all of you. Did he tell you something to make you feel bad?”

Alec shook his head.

“But this is about him, isn’t it?”

Alec nodded.

“Talk to me...you know you can trust me.”

Of course Alec knew he could trust Aline. She was the only person who knew about his recently-developed crush on Magnus and even after a week of knowing, she hadn’t told anyone about it. Not even Helen, whom she was dating. “Magnus found out we helped his team with the problem they were having with his fan base.”

“And?”

“Well, he didn’t take it well, he was quite upset with all of us. I wanted to apologize, but he went upstairs to talk to Ragnor and Raphael. I thought we would have a chance to talk once we were here, but look at the time, it's late and they haven’t arrived yet.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I’m sure they’ll make him see reason. Maybe not knowing his team had collaborated with our magazine for this extra help upset him, but I’m sure he’ll understand it was something which had to be done to make his tour what he wanted it to be.”

“Maybe…” Alec sighed.

The truth was, he wasn’t sure about anything anymore. He knew what they had done hadn’t been something bad—professionally speaking—but he also knew he didn’t know exactly why Magnus had wanted to make his fans talk only about his music in the first place. He knew it was related to Camille, but he didn’t know much more and Magnus’s real anger could be rooted on that specific part he was missing and-

“There’s something else troubling you, tell me.”

“I’m afraid…” He confessed.

“Of what?”

“Of Magnus suddenly hating me?” Alec said. “I know what we did wasn’t bad from a professional point of view, but we did lie to him for weeks and he doesn’t like to be lied to, Aline. He’s told me on several occasions that he hates two-faced people and, you know what? I’m one of those people. I’ve been lying to him since this tour started and-” He choked on his own words, feeling a bit overwhelmed.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. Breathe.”

“When we were in St. Louis a couple of days ago,” Alec continued after a few seconds, “...Jace called. We were talking about work and life and then he asked me about the article I said I was going
to write to unmask Magnus. I told him that I was working on it, but the truth is that for days I had completely forgotten about it. I know I’m right about Magnus and that he’s hiding a lot of things, some of them quite personal, I can tell you that much. There’s a lot I don’t know about him and I still want to discover, but I don’t have it in me to-

“-to do that to him.”

Alec nodded. “Maybe I’m wrong, Aline, maybe I should do it, you know? Put aside my personal feelings and do what any other journalist in my place would with all the information I’ve been discovering and that I’m sure I’ll continue to discover in the following months. After all, I have Aldertree’s blessing to do so. He really wants me to do it. But after seeing Magnus so angry this morning and for this stupid thing we did to help him, I realized that no matter what I might discover about him in the future; even if it was something huge or bad, I would never, ever, do anything to make him so angry again.”

“Well, don’t write the article and problem solved. When we’re back home, you can tell Izzy she was right all along, take us all to dinner at a nice restaurant, and proudly wear Magnus’s merchandise for a week. I don’t think wearing his pretty face on a shirt’s gonna bother you that much now.”

Alec chuckled. “It’s not just that. Honestly? I don’t care about that silly bet anymore.”

“Then, what is it?”

“I’ve been trying to tell him.”

“Tell him?”

“Yes, Magnus. Ever since I spoke with Jace, I’ve been trying to find the right time to tell him what I was planning on doing. I wanted to be honest and share my original intentions with him because regardless of what I feel, he deserves to know, you know? He’s been surprisingly honest with me, and I want to be honest too. But now this happened and I don’t know if coming clean is such a good idea after all. What if he thinks I’m just telling him to protect myself? He could think that I’m pretending to be honest with him just to earn his trust and betray him later. And, what if he already hates me? I-”

“You’re overthinking everything as per usual, Alec.” Aline said. “I don’t know if you actually know this, but you’re a terrible, terrible liar. I’m sure he’ll know you’re being honest with him the moment you two have the chance to talk, so try not to worry. He’ll know.”

“So you think I should tell him?” Alec asked.

“Yes, maybe not today, but yes. Clearly, what you feel for him is stronger than a crush, so for your own sake and-”

“It’s not stronger than a crush.” Alec interrupted her. “I told you, I just find him attractive, that’s all. He’s an interesting man, I like him as a person. As I pretty much like the rest of his team.”

Aline rolled her eyes. “I’m not going to argue with you right now, you and I know you’re just trying to fool yourself. You like him and you’re feeling things you’ve never felt before. So as I was saying before you interrupted, for your own sake and the sake of whatever the future holds for both of you, you must be honest with him.”

Alec sighed. “He’s going to hate me.”

“Of course he’s not, Alec. Maybe you were a little nosy at the beginning of this whole thing, but
that’s part of your job as a journalist and he knows that you take your job very seriously. If I were you, I wouldn’t worry so much about this impending confession. I know I’m not an expert on this kind of thing, but I don’t think he’s suddenly going to hate you. In fact, I think he is aware of more—” Aline was saying when the door to the small office opened and Magnus himself poked his head through it.

“Alec, can we talk in private?” He said, looking at Alec.

Alec swallowed slowly equally scared and relieved to know that at least he and Magnus were still on speaking terms. “Of course.”

“Sorry for interrupting, darling.” Magnus added, now addressing his words to Aline. He looked visibly calmer than he had looked that morning and was being courteous as always, but Alec could see the tension emanating from him. It was all over his eyes—Magnus had very expressive eyes. “I hope I didn’t interrupt anything important.”

“Don’t worry, you didn’t,” Aline smiled friendly, “we were just talking about work related stuff.” She lied. “But nothing too important, just a few notes that I wanted him to pass on to our bosses. I’ll leave you two alone. The rest of the team probably needs me out there anyway.”

Magnus gave her a very forced smile.

“I’ll see you later, Alec.” Aline added before walking away and disappearing from view.

“So…” Alec said once they were alone, “you wanted us to talk?” He asked tentatively.

“Yes, but not here,” Magnus said, “...follow me.”

Alec followed Magnus through the venue until they reached a staircase that led them directly to the upper section of the place—to the very last row of seats to be specific. Alec had no idea why Magnus wanted them to talk there, it wasn’t as if people could interrupt them in Alec’s small office. His entire team was busy getting everything ready for the concert and Magnus’s team almost never set foot in there, but he didn’t dare to ask either. In fact, he hadn’t dared to utter a word since they had left the office.

Magnus sat in the first row to which he had access and looked at the empty seat next to him, as if inviting Alec to sit beside him.

Alec did so in complete silence. He didn’t know what to expect from this talk.

“You know?” Magnus started talking. “I’ve always liked to sneak out and take a look at the stage and the venue when they’re still empty. It comforts me in a way I can’t put into words. It’s like the storm before the calm, so to speak.”

Alec nodded in understanding. The venue wasn’t as big as some others they had visited in recent weeks, but it was big enough to manage to take Alec’s breath away. Seeing the stage so still and silent when he was used to seeing it come alive every night was an experience in itself, so he understood exactly what Magnus meant. In a few hours, when people started arriving, this place, as well as the stage, were going to be crammed from corner to corner. They were going to be the opposite of what they were right now.

“The first time I had the opportunity to admire an empty venue like this one was after the release of my second EP, the one which later would turn into my first full-length album.” Magnus continued.
“For some reason that I still can’t quite wrap my head around, people seemed to like the music of the emerging young artist that I once was and wanted me to play my songs live somewhere. I didn’t think it would be possible, you know? Nobody knew me enough to want to hire me for a concert. But Ragnor being Ragnor pulled some strings and got me the chance to play in this small venue in West Hollywood—the Troubadour. It’s an old nightclub, inspired by the actual Troubadour cafe in London. Many famous artists have history with that place, Sir Elton John, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Guns N’ Roses, just to name a few. That was my first big concert and I remember everything that happened as if it had happened just yesterday. Have you ever visited that place?”

Alec shook his head. He had been to Los Angeles a couple of times in the past for work-related matters, but he couldn't say that he had visited any of the nightclubs or bars there. He had never been known for being a social butterfly and when he traveled, he usually did it alone.

“Well, it’s not a big venue, like I said, it’s pretty small. You can fit around five-hundred people all standing and that's stretching it. So imagine me, young and naive, standing with my guitar in hand at the top section of the place looking at the empty room and thinking, ‘there’s no way I can fill this place, there’s simply no way for an unknown artist like me to accomplish this feat.’ But somehow I did, and now look at me. I’m filling big stadiums and renowned venues all over the world. I have the great privilege of playing my songs in front of 20,000 people every night. It’s insane! I don’t tend to think about all that too much because it always messes with my head, but when I do, I can’t help but realize how crazy it all actually is.”

Magnus took a deep breath as if to take in the real impact of what he had just said.

Alec remained silent, he was letting the man speak. He felt as if he owed that to him after what had happened that morning.

“You work for the entertainment business, so you probably know what I’m talking about, but being famous isn’t easy to handle. It may be for some people, but for me, it’s been a real struggle ever since it first happened. I am no stranger to fame, to being noticed, I’ve told you this before, but being my father’s son came with some...inconveniences. When I decided I wanted to become an artist, there were people all around me warning me about the fame that came with showbiz and how much it could change my life, and you know what I thought?” Magnus asked, although he didn’t seem to be waiting for an answer. “I thought, ‘I got this. I can handle fame, it’s no big deal. I’ve been doing it all my life.’ But it turned out I really had no idea how different this kind of fame was from what I was used to.”

“I don’t think you remember,” Magnus kept going, “but during our very first interview you hit me with a question that I wasn’t sure I had the right answer to: the reason behind my success. You asked me to what or whom did I think I owe my success to, and pretty boldly insinuated that it was all a combination of luck, money, and important connections.”

Alec nodded very slightly. He remembered that question. In fact, he remembered every question he had asked that day.

“I didn’t lie when I said that nobody had ever asked me that question before. The media don’t go around questioning success, on the contrary, they feed on it and milk it to their own benefit. But you did it and made me—for the first time, if I may add—publicly answer a question that I had asked myself years ago; when I had first stood there, at the top of the Troubadour, watching an empty stage slowly getting crowded and wondering how I had gotten there.”

“I…” Alec muttered. He didn’t know what to say, should he apologize for asking that question? Should he let Magnus continue? If he was honest, Magnus’s speech, although honest and somehow enlightening, wasn’t making much sense regarding what had happened that morning.
“Hard work and sacrifices was my answer.” Magnus continued. “And again, I didn’t lie. When you put the words luck, money, and connections in front of that question, I realized that despite having all three aplenty, I hadn’t gotten there thanks to any of them. I had gotten where I was, where I am because I had fought for it. I made tremendous sacrifices and worked my ass off to achieve all my dreams. My success was and still is just the result of it all.”

“I know.” Alec said because now he knew.

“People tend to think that celebrities have these perfect lives, but the truth is that we really don’t. Well, at least most of us don’t. We lose a lot in order to gain a bit of recognition—our lives, our privacy, and sometimes even our dignity. I love what I do, don’t get me wrong, being an artist is all I ever wanted and I’m eternally grateful for the opportunity I have to do what I love and actually make a living out of it. I know that not everyone is lucky enough to say the same thing, but there are days when being who I am gets a bit difficult and the realization of how much my life has changed hits me harder than it did the day before. And between you and I, I never know how to act when that happens.”

“Magnus, I…” Alec said, because now the conversation made sense. Magnus was trying to justify himself for this morning and-

“Thank you.” Magnus said, finally looking him in the eye.

“Excuse me?” Alec asked confused.

“Thank you.”

“I…What for?”

“For what you did, helping Raphael and Ragnor with that little problem we were having with my fan base. You didn’t have to do it. It was more than what you had signed up for and I’m really sorry you’ve been dragged into the mess that my life sometimes can be. I knew Raphael could ask for your help when I brought up the issue with him, that’s why I specifically asked him not to, but-”

“You’re not mad?” Alec asked even more confused. He was 100% sure that Magnus was going to be furious with him. He had every reason to be.

“Not at you.” Magnus said.

“It wasn’t Raphael’s fault.” Alec immediately said. He wasn’t exactly Raphael’s friend and the man certainly didn’t need someone to defend him, but he understood the situation and knew why he had felt forced to ask for help even when he had been asked not to do so. In a way, Alec felt it was his duty to make Magnus see that, to make him understand that they all had done what needed to be done—professionally speaking, of course—to help him. “He was desperate and just wanted to help, he-”

“I never said I was mad at him either.”

“Oh.”

“I’m mad at myself.” Magnus confessed.

Alec looked at him intently.

“Sometimes I forget that besides being my friends, all these people who work for me are also professionals and have to do their job. A job that, by the way, I don’t make easy. Today was a huge,
huge reminder of that.” Magnus took a deep breath. “Did Raphael tell you why you had to do all that? Why I had asked him to find a way to make my fan base focus on my music and my music only?”

“No.” Alec said, although he did know it all had to do with Camille and the rumors about their relationship.

Magnus stared at him. “And you still did it?”

“He told me it was what you wanted and-”

Magnus chuckled. “You really are your own species, Alexander.” He told him with a smile. The smile was genuine, unlike the one he had given Aline, it was reaching his ears.

“Well,” Magnus continued, “if you want to know why, I can tell you myself.”

Alec looked at him. He knew that Magnus would have just told him in that speech he delivered earlier if he had been ready to talk about it, but it was clear he wasn’t. He just felt forced to do it due to the situation.

“I do want to know, believe me, I’m very curious,” Alec said, “but not yet. I don’t pretend to know you, we’ve known each other for only a few months, but I’ve noticed you only talk about things when you feel ready to do it and, in fact, when that happens, there’s actually no need to ask, you just talk. So let’s leave this conversation for some other day, okay?”

“Are you sure?” Magnus asked.

Alec saw the flash of relief in Magnus’s eyes, so he nodded. He was sure.

They remained silent after that, both of them just looking at the crew working on the stage. Alec had never felt comfortable when he was with someone and there were sudden silences. It was always uncomfortable and made him want to run and hide, but with Magnus things were different. It didn’t feel as if either of them had to actually talk, they were just keeping each other company and it was enough. It felt...right.

The minutes stretched and, after a while, Magnus took his phone out of his pocket and snapped a picture of the stage. The technicians were doing some light tests and it looked really beautiful.

“It’s beautiful.” Magnus said, as if his thoughts were in sync with Alec’s.

“It is.” Alec agreed, taking out his phone and snapping a picture too. He had to upload pictures of the city to his personal Instagram account as soon as they reached their next destination—Fargo—so he might as well add a few of the venue as well.

“Will really outdid himself with this tour.” Magnus shared. “When he first showed me the ideas he had for the stage design, I wasn’t sure if what he had in mind was going to work. I had my doubts about all those moving platforms and how they were going to look on stage, but he knows what he’s doing. He clearly does. Everything’s perfect, and-”

Magnus’s words were interrupted by Catarina’s voice coming from Alec’s portable radio. At first, Alec didn't understand everything she said, but it seemed that she was asking about Alec. He had heard his name at least three times already.

“Alec, if you can hear me, please answer.” She said.
“Hi, Catarina, this is Alec.” He answered immediately.

“Oh, thank God you had one of these with you today! My phone is dead and I couldn’t call you. I asked Simon where you were and he had no idea. I thought I’d have to send Luke and his guys to look for you all over the venue. But anyway, I just wanted you to know that Jem and Tessa are ready for the interview. They’re waiting for you along with Simon in Magnus’s dressing room. Don’t take long.”

“Thank you, I’ll be right there in a second.”

“Are you going to interview them today?” Magnus asked.

Alec nodded. He had already interviewed Will, Dot, and Meliorn for the weekly behind-the-scenes special he had been working on in these past days. “My sister is going crazy with this interview in particular. Jem promised us an exclusive look at your wardrobe for the international leg of the tour.”

“You sister writes the fashion section of the magazine, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if my wardrobe for the tour drives her crazy, she should see my closet. I’m sure she would lose her shit completely. It’s bigger than my own room.” Magnus said.

“I don’t think your room can be smaller than my entire apartment, though.” Alec said. “That place you own is enormous and-”

“Not that room.” Magnus added.

“Oh.” Alec exclaimed. He remembered that Magnus had hinted at the existence of a different place back when they had talked about Lorenzo, but the man hadn’t shared with him that story either.

“So you really only use your father’s place occasionally? That’s not your home, home?” Alec asked, remembering what Magnus had said when he had let it slip that the mansion wasn’t really his home.

Magnus limited himself to nod.

Alec wanted to ask so many questions about that. Why did Magnus have another home? Why didn’t he live at his father’s house? His father was dead, so technically that mansion was now his, wasn’t it? To say that he was extremely curious about the topic was an understatement.

“I’ll tell you all about it someday.” Magnus said, looking at Alec with a soft smile dancing on his lips.

Alec smiled. “Okay.” He said, standing up. He didn’t want to go, it was very peaceful up there and the company wasn’t bad at all, but he had work to do.

Magnus stood up too.

“Don’t.” Alec said, motioning him to remain seated. “You don’t have to walk me back. I know my way around, you stay here, it seems that you need a little bit of-” he tried to remember Magnus’s own words, “peace and quiet again.”

Magnus just looked at him and smiled.

“I’ll see you later.” Alec said and made to go, but Magnus stopped him, grabbing his hand in a soft and quite unexpected gesture.
Alec felt every fiber of his being come alive with the intensity of that simple touch.

“Thank you, again, for everything.” Magnus said, squeezing it a bit.

Alec just smiled at him and walked away. He had the feeling that words weren’t necessary at the moment. Recently, he had learned that sometimes a smile said more than words could ever say.

Alec took a deep breath to compose himself and started climbing down the stairs. It was a long way, but he felt lighter than he had the first time he had climbed them with Magnus.

He was about to reach the second half of them, when he got a notification on his phone.

«Magnus Bane just published a new photo.»

He had activated Magnus’s Instagram notifications a few weeks ago—for professional purposes, of course—so he knew when Magnus published new content. He opened the Instagram post with a quick tap on the screen. It was the picture Magnus had just taken of the empty stage. The caption read: peace and quiet.

Alec couldn’t help but smile.

Alec entered Magnus’s dressing room, both Jem and Tessa, along with Simon, were waiting for him. The only person missing to start the interview was Aline, but Alec knew she should be on her way with all the equipment. He had noticed that Simon didn’t have his camera with him.

“Sorry for the delay,” he said as soon as he closed the door behind him, “I wasn’t sure when you guys were going to arrive or if the interview was still on, so I went for a tour around the venue to get familiar with it.” He added. He knew it was better not to say where he was and with whom exactly, there was no need to give so many explanations.

“Don’t worry, we didn’t know when we were going to be here or if the interview was going to be possible either.” Tessa said with a warm smile. “Cat just told us it was still on and practically locked us up in here with Simon.”

Simon nodded. “I don’t even have my camera.” He said, showing his empty hands. “I was on my way to our office to get some cables we forgot, when she ambushed me and dragged me here. She asked me not to move until you were here, so I didn’t. She even pointed a finger at me. I have to admit that she’s a bit scary when she’s stressed.”

“She didn’t handcuff us together because we don’t have any handcuffs with us, but she was this close to borrowing some from the security team.” Jem added. “We haven’t even changed clothes for this, we’re not interview-ready. Look at us! Magnus’s glam team in sweatpants!”

Alec chuckled. Both Jem and Tessa seemed really mortified by that. “You guys go get ready while the rest of my team arrives and Simon gets his camera.”

Jem and Tessa smiled grateful for the understanding of their situation and walked out of the room to go change clothes and get ready for the interview.

“How are we gonna do this one?” Simon asked. “What do you need me to bring?”

“Hmmm, whatever you used for Will’s interview,” he said, “it will be pretty similar. Last night I talked with Jem and Tessa about it and we agreed on some things. They’re going to show us
Magnus’s entire process when getting ready for the concerts, so we’re gonna be following them around the dressing room and filming whatever they do. First Tessa, and then Jem. They’re going to ask Meliorn to volunteer to get his face done and all that.”

“Okay, great! I’ll go get my stuff, I’ll be right back.” Simon said, and just as he was leaving, Aline entered the room. She was completely out of breath.

“Are you okay?” Alec asked her.

She motioned him to wait a few seconds while she caught her breath. “I’m fine,” she finally said, “I just had to run a lot and clearly, I’m not in my best shape.” She explained. “Catarina practically chased me down the stage to get here. She went with me to find my camera, escorted me to the door and then left, she’s stressed, man! She was muttering something about how she always ends up cleaning up the mess and trying to fix everything that everyone ruins.”

Alec smiled.

“But how are you? How did the talk with Magnus go? Is he mad?”

“No, he’s not. And it went well, pretty well actually. He doesn’t hate me.”

“Of course he doesn’t.” Aline said, rolling her eyes, “I told you he wasn’t going to suddenly hate you for doing your job, but you love to overthink everything. Classic, Lightwood!”

“I wasn’t overthinking.” Alec said in self-defense. “I’ve had the chance to know him better and I know for a fact that he doesn’t like when people lie to his face or do things behind his back. And you know that I’ve been doing both, so my concerns were completely valid.”

“If you say so,” Aline shrugged, “but I still think you were overthinking. What you’ve been doing isn’t as bad as you think, Alec. You’re a journalist, he’s a celebrity with a rather sketchy behavior, it’s completely natural that you’re curious about it. You wouldn't be the Alec we all know and love if you weren’t.”

Alec rolled his eyes.

“But anyway, when do you think you’re going to tell him about that article you wanted to write to unmask him, huh?” Aline asked, as she unpacked her cameras and changed the lenses.

“I don’t know, I’ll look for the right time. But I want it to be soon, I don’t want to keep lying to him. The mere idea that he could be mad at me and hate me was...well, not something I want to experience ever again, so the sooner I come clean the better.”

“Awww look at you!” Aline exclaimed with a smile, “all worried that your crush could get mad at you.”

“Shut up!”

“What? It’s cute!”

“It’s not cute, it’s stupid. What is happening to me?” He questioned out loud.

“I think you know the answer to that better than me, Lightwood.”

Aline was saying when the door of Magnus’s dressing room opened again and Catarina and Magnus himself walked in.
“Alexander, we meet again.” Magnus said, giving Alec a soft smile.

“Magnus.” Alec said to acknowledge him. It was better if he didn't say much, he could already feel himself blushing just by seeing the superstar again.

“Where are Tessa and Jem?” Catarina asked, looking around and cursing under her breath.

“They went to get ready.” Alec said when he saw the look of complete exasperation flashing on Catarina’s face. Now he understood what the others had been saying about her; Catarina was really stressed. “They couldn’t do the interview in sweatpants, they’re Magnus’s glam team. They have a standard to keep.” He said as a matter of explanation.

Catarina took a deep breath. “You’re right, I just-well, I wish everyone here knew how little time we have to do everything today. This little... detour we took in the morning,” she said, giving Magnus some killing eyes, “it’s costing us a lot.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make the interview shorter than the others.” Alec said. He knew he didn’t have much time, Magnus had to be ready soon for the meet and greet, and the concert. He was lucky they still had an interview to start with.

“No, it’s not fair.” Catarina said. “They deserve the same amount of time as the rest, if not more, they’re the only ones here who never give me a headache.” She added. “That’s why we’re going to change things up a little bit. Jem told me that you guys were planning on asking Meliorn to be your model to show your readers Magnus’s glam process. Well, I have news for you all, things just got a bit more interesting because the model will be Magnus himself.”

“Oh.” Alec said, quickly glancing at Magnus who was just smiling.

“He’s the one responsible for this delay, so he’s the one who’s going to fix it. It’s a win/win for everyone, isn’t it? Two birds, one stone.”

Alec limited himself to nod. The idea of being able to unapologetically look at Magnus without anyone discovering what he was starting to feel for him was equally unnerving as it was exciting. He was going to have an hour, maybe two to freely stare at Magnus without anyone questioning it.

“Great, so let’s get this going, okay?” Catarina said. “I’ll go hurry Jem and Tessa. You,” she added, pointing a finger at Magnus, “don’t move from here, did you hear me?”

“Yes, mom.” Magnus said, in a mocking tone.

“If you were my son, you would be grounded for life already.” She rolled her eyes and closed the door behind her.

“I apologize for her behavior.” Magnus said, looking at Alec and Aline with a smile. “She doesn’t handle unexpected changes in schedule that well. Much less when I’m the one causing them. You should have heard the lecture she gave me when we were on our way here. ‘I can’t believe how irresponsible you are, Magnus!’” Magnus said, making a very poor imitation of Catarina’s voice. “‘You’re making us all late!’ And while I am truly sorry for that, what’s done is done, right? I had already made us stay at the hotel, there was little she could do to change that. Time travel isn’t a thing yet, unfortunately.”

Alec and Aline chuckled just as Simon re-entered the room. He looked at Magnus and then at Alec and Aline, as if asking what he was doing there.

“We’re behind schedule,” Alec explained, “so instead of using someone else to demonstrate
Magnus’s glam process, Jem and Tessa are going to actually glam Magnus up for the meet and greet.”

“Oh, cool!” Simon said. “The readers are gonna love this.”

Alec nodded. “But anyway, start setting your cameras and lights, guys,” he told his friends, “Jem and Tessa will be here any minute now.”

“Magnus?” Simon said. “Would you mind sitting in the makeup chair for us? That’d help us speed up the process with the lights a bit.”

“Sure.” Magnus said, following Simon and sitting in the chair located at the other end of the spacious room.

Alec took those seconds alone to take some deep breaths and get into his professional self again. Having Magnus there wasn’t something he had been expecting, he wasn’t complaining about the sudden change, but still, he had to mentally prepare himself for the next two hours.

“Lucky you.” Aline said, standing next to him and whispering discreetly. “You’re gonna see your man getting ready.”

“He’s not my man.” Alec whispered back.

“But he could be.”

Alec gave her a look.

“What? Don’t tell me you wouldn’t like that. Besides, are you blind or something? It’s obvious that he’s not indifferent to you. I think we all have noticed—” she was saying when Jem and Tessa, followed by Catarina and Madzie entered the room.

_They all have noticed, what?_

Alec had to admit it, Magnus and his team seemed to have impeccable timing. They always knew when to enter a room to interrupt important conversations.

“We’ll talk later.” Aline whispered with a wink and went to join Simon.

Alec barely had time to nod before he had to catch Madzie, who had jumped into his arms.

“Alec!” She exclaimed, smiling. Without her cast—which had been removed just a few days ago—she was more restless than ever.

“Hello, little one.” He said, while she gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. “How are you today?”


“We’ll play later, okay?” He smiled at her and put her down.

“So it turns out,” Magnus told Jem and Tessa from the chair where he was sitting, “that I’m gonna be your model for your stellar interview.” He winked at them.

“We’ve heard.” Jem said.

“Don’t sound so excited, my friend.” Magnus joked.
“What can I say, Magnus? You’re our model every day, so…”

“True, but today we have some pretty special company, so you have to make me look not good, but great.” Magnus said.

“You always look great.” Tessa smiled.

Alec was internally agreeing with that statement and fighting really hard with himself not to frantically nod to help validate Tessa’s argument.

“You flatter me, darling, but you don’t need to get on my good side, I already love you.” Magnus said, and Tessa just rolled her eyes.

“Anyway,” Jem said, trying not to laugh, “We’re ready when you guys are.”

Alec looked towards his team. Simon was making the last adjustments on the lights and microphones, but he seemed almost ready. Aline was already taking pictures.

“Just a few more minutes.” Alec said.

“I have to go,” Catarina added, “but call me if you need anything. Come on, Madzie, let’s go.” She told her daughter.

“No.” The little girl said. “I wanna stay.”

“You can’t stay, they’re working, come on let’s go.”

“No, I wanna stay.”

“I’m not going to say this again, young lady, let’s go.”

“No.”

“Madzie!”

“Leave her,” Magnus intervened, “I can take care of her.”

“No, you can’t, you’ll be busy getting ready.”

“But she’s gonna behave, aren’t you, sweet-pea?” Magnus asked, and Madzie nodded.

“Magnus…” Catarina said, “We’re already delayed, kids can get restless when they’re bored and-”

“She knows how to behave, Cat, she’s already bored let her stay.” Magnus insisted.

Catarina sighed. “If we get more delays in the schedule because of this, Magnus, I swear-”

“I know, I know,” Magnus interrupted her, rolling his eyes dramatically. “You’re going to kill me and give Alec’s magazine the exclusive about my sudden demise from this world. Don’t worry, we won’t delay your precious schedule anymore. We’ll all be on our best behavior.” He added with a bright smile.

Alec suppressed the urge to laugh.

“Fine. But consider yourself warned.” She raised her finger.

“Yes, ma’am.”
“If you need me to take her away,” Catarina added, looking exclusively at Alec, “Just call me. She knows how to behave, but she’s a kid, I know things can get...complicated.”

“Don’t worry, I’m sure we’ll be fine.” Alec smiled.

She took a deep breath, warned her daughter to behave and let everyone do their job, and left the room without adding another word. She wasn’t in her best mood today, that much was clear.

Alec started to take out all his stuff while Tessa and Magnus got ready for the first part of the interview. Alec had prepared a series of questions and, as usual, he wanted to record the interview. This one was going to be longer since he would be interviewing two people at the same time, so he had to make sure to have not only an audio copy of everything, but also to take a lot of notes. Remembering what had been said in long interviews was always a difficult task.

“What’s that?” Madzie asked, pointing to the tape recorder Alec had just placed on the small coffee table.

“A tape recorder.” Alec said.

“What is it for?”

“To record stuff—audio. I use it to record my interviews and listen to them again later, when I’m writing the articles for the magazine.”

“And what’s that?” She asked, pointing to a microphone that Simon was finishing installing.

“That’s a microphone, we use it to hear more clearly what the people we’re interviewing say.”

“And what’s that?” She asked, now pointing to a series of lenses that Aline had unpacked and placed on the floor for easy reach.

“Those are camera lenses,” Alec explained, “Aline uses them to get different hmmm, pictures.” He said. He didn’t have time to explain all this to Madzie, but he knew the girl was bored and seeing all these new things made her curious. Besides, she was at that age—the age at which kids asked absolutely everything.

“Are you going to interview Uncle Magnus?” She asked, eyeing the whole set up.

“Not today. I’m going to interview your Uncle Jem and your Aunty Tessa. They’re gonna show me how they help your Uncle Magnus get ready for his concerts.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” Jem chimed in, “I’m going to show Alec and his friends all of Uncle Magnus’s pretty clothes. But right now, I need you to let Alec work, okay?” He said. Surely, he had noticed that the little girl was distracting Alec a lot.

“Can I show him my clothes too? The ones you made for my doll? They’re like Uncle Magnus’s.”

“Not right now, sweetheart, we have work to do, but I’m sure Alec and his friends would love to see them some other day.”

Madzie got a bit sad and Alec couldn’t really handle it. Kids were a soft spot for him.

“You know what?” Alec said, kneeling beside her. “If you want, once I’m done interviewing them, I can interview you and your doll...Cindy,” he said, remembering the doll’s name, “And you both can
show us all the amazing clothes you have.”

“Really?” The girl asked. She had lit up like a Christmas tree.

“Yes, but for that to happen, right now I need you to go sit back there and let us finish this first, okay? You can rehearse what you’re going to say, interviews aren’t easy. You need to know what you’re going to answer and what you’re going to share with the audience. You have to be prepared.”

Madzie nodded, ran to the chair Alec had pointed at and sat down immediately, taking her doll out of her bag and sitting it next to her, probably to make sure they both were ready for their ‘interview’ later.

“You’re good with kids.” Jem said with a smile.

“I like kids.” Alec shared.

“Do you want to have your own someday?”

“That’s the dream.” He answered sincerely, although at the moment it was hard for him to picture himself with kids and a family when he didn’t even have a boyfriend.

“I’m sure one day you’ll be a great dad. I don’t think I’ve ever asked you this, but are you dating someone? Are you already engaged? Married?” Jem asked casually.

“No, I’m-

“Everything is ready.” Simon interrupted him.

“Oh, okay, let’s do this.” Alec smiled. “I…” he added, looking at Jem.

“Go do your job, I’ll take care of Madzie until it’s my turn.”

“Thanks.” He smiled and joined the others.

Alec climbed the stairs that led to the box where, along with Magnus's team, he would watch Magnus's concert. The place was empty at the moment, but that didn't really surprise him, it was still early—the band in charge of opening the concert was still on stage.

He smiled and taking advantage of the unusual situation—he almost never had the opportunity to choose where to sit—he took the best seat. The one that gave him a full view of the stage.

The truth was, after thirty concerts, seeing Magnus on stage had become something that Alec could do almost on his sleep. He certainly didn't need the best seat to be able to do his job, he knew what he had to do and what he had to particularly pay attention to in order to write a great review. However, lately, he hadn’t just been watching the concerts from a professional point of view, but from a personal one too. And for that, well, for that he did need the best of seats.

"Thank you, Omaha, and good night!" The band's vocalist said when he finished what Alec assumed was their last song.

The audience clapped and Alec could feel the usual buzz of anticipation that tended to fill all the venues seconds after the opening act was over. Alec knew that from there, he would only have to kill about fifteen or twenty minutes before Magnus took the stage.
“Alec!” Raphael said, entering the box and taking a seat next to him. It seemed that both Ragnor and Will were a bit late. “I’ve been trying to talk to you all afternoon, but first you were busy interviewing Jem and Tessa, and then I was busy with the meet and greet.”

“It’s been a complicated day.” Alec said with a smile. "A lot of work and very little time."

"Tell me about it!" Raphael added with a chuckle. "But anyway, I wanted to apologize for this morning, I—"

“It’s okay, you don’t need to apologize.”

“Yes, I do. I shouldn’t have asked for your help in the first place. Magnus had specifically asked me not to get you or your magazine involved in all this and I still did it, so for that, I’m sorry. I’m not completely sorry for what we did once I asked for your help, everything worked out for both of us, so I don’t regret that. But I do want to formally apologize for dragging you into all this mess and getting you into trouble with Magnus. I know he went to talk to you after we got here and he was still mad, so I also want to apologize on his behalf if he was an ass towards you. He’s usually very reasonable when it comes to understanding this kind of thing, he knows that sometimes we have to make complicated decisions for his own good, but sometimes he can also be a bit of a jerk.”

“He wasn’t mad at me.” Alec said.

“I know, but he was still very much upset at the situation, so I wanted to make sure he hadn’t done anything stupid. He’s an expert on that.”

“He just thanked me for helping you, that’s all.”

“I’m really glad to hear that.” Raphael said, seeming relieved.

“You were actually worried about this, weren’t you?” Alec couldn’t help asking. “You thought he was going to get mad at me.” He said, trying not to lose his temper. The fact Raphael could have known that Magnus was going to get mad at Alec for helping him with this and never told him bothered him.

“No, on the contrary. I knew he couldn’t get mad at you, that’s why although I knew I could get into a lot of trouble if Magnus found out, I asked for your help and did all this through you and not your direct boss—Aldertree or whatever his name is. But I was still worried he could snap and say something he would regret later. Please don’t tell him I told you this, but whenever Camille is involved, things always get messy. She tends to bring out the worst in him.”

“Who tends to bring out the worst in whom?” Ragnor asked. He was just joining them.

“Camille in Magnus.” Raphael explained. “I was apologizing to Alec for this morning.”

“I hate that woman.” Ragnor said in a tone that Alec hadn’t heard before, but that left him with no doubt whatsoever that he had meant what he had said, he hated Camille—for whatever reason.

“Who are you talking about? What woman?” Will asked, also joining them.

“Camille.” Raphael said.

“Magnus’s Camille? Well, you can hate her all you want, but she’s hot.” He added.

Both Raphael and Ragnor gave him a look.
“What? It’s true.”

“Perhaps,” Ragnor said, “But she’s a horrible person.”

“But still hot.” Will added, taking a seat next to Ragnor.

“Not everything is about looks, Herondale.” Ragnor argued back.

“I know, I was just saying that she’s attractive. As I said, you can hate her all you want, but we have
to give her credit for knowing how to use her looks in her favor. I agree she’s a horrible person, but
you can’t deny that she knows what she’s got and how to exploit it for her own benefit, why else do
you think people lose their minds around her?”

“They don’t.”

“What about Magnus?”

“Magnus was-”

“-crazy about her, and for good reason.” Will said.

Ragnor rolled his eyes. “You understand nothing.” He said.

Alec suddenly didn’t want to be there anymore. Listening to these people referring to Camille as
Magnus’s Camille and saying how she could bring out the worst in him and make him lose his mind
wasn’t something Alec wanted to know. He had no right to be jealous of anything because Magnus
was nothing to him, not even a friend in the exact meaning of the word, but the truth was that he was
jealous. Very jealous. Just the idea of them being together at some point in time made him see red,
something which had never happened to him.

“But anyway-” Raphael said, trying to get Alec’s attention. Ragnor and Will were still arguing about
Camille. “I just wanted to say that I’m sorry for dragging you into this and thank you for everything
you did. Without your help and the magazine's, this could have ended up in a catastrophe—at least
for us.”

“I was just doing my job.” Alec said modestly.

“You were doing more than that and I’ll always be grateful to you for it, you saved us—and
Camille’s team—from doing extra work.”

Alec just smiled and tried to hide the pain he was feeling inside. All these weeks he had been
wondering if Magnus and Camille were together or not. First, he had thought they were because it
kind of made sense, but then that message he had accidentally read on Magnus's phone had managed
to confuse him and make him believe maybe they weren’t. But now it was becoming clearer. If
Magnus and Camille’s teams were in touch and working together to control both their fan bases, then
that meant the two stars were probably on their way to getting back together.

It wasn’t something that really surprised him, he had predicted it ever since he had first interviewed
Magnus—two celebrities were always better than one in terms of earning power and brand
recognition. It made sense that they were planning to get back together for the release of their new
movie, but that didn’t mean that the confirmation hurt any less. The feelings he had been developing
lately were new to him and, although he knew the chances of him and Magnus actually being
together were virtually non-existent, he had allowed himself to dream. He had allowed himself to
think that maybe, if things arranged in a certain way, he and Magnus could get closer at some point
and explore their attraction. He knew what Aline had said a few hours ago was true, Magnus didn’t
seem indifferent to him, Alec himself had noticed it during their first interview when he had thought Magnus had openly flirted with him, but-

“Alec, are you okay?” Raphael asked.

Alec nodded. “Yeah, I just…”

“Went away for a bit?”

“No, I just remembered I have to call my boss.” He lied.

“Right now? The concert’s about to start.”

“Yeah, sorry.” Alec said, standing up and practically running away.

He needed a few minutes alone to clear his mind and make sense of the whirlwind of emotions he was feeling inside. Because it didn't matter if Magnus and Camille were together or on their way to be, there was one thing Alec now knew for sure. He didn’t just find Magnus attractive and liked him as he had told Aline today, he was slowly but surely falling in love with him.

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