For Family Values

by SunsetSwish

Summary

Being the High Warlock comes with as many perks as obligations. Some of those are not like the others, which Magnus learns when he finds himself feeling responsible for an ex-Shadowhunter, current young father.

Notes

[For introduction: sexism against omegas exists in this world because people are still assholes, but this is NOT a sexual dystopia. Depending on race, family and social circles, omegas can potentially hold all kinds of positions of power. Biologically, it's my personal preference to have omegas with actual reproductive organs, making them hermaphrodites. So in case of male omegas it's clear from birth they are one and there isn't set presentation date for all dynamics. All children will gradually show behaviors or character traits appropriate for their later developed dynamic.

An Important bit: the story goes on as a result of demonic rape but it actually starts many months after the event so there won't be immediate aftermath shown. This is why I'm not tagging for Rape.]
"There is something I think you should know," Raphael says as a greeting when he joins Magnus in Pandemonium. The way he says it makes Magnus think it's an admonishment as well as an offer of new information. Raphael makes himself comfortable on the vacant spot next to him in the VIP lounge, then continues.

"Some members of the clan have been getting a fix of special blood recently. No problems came out of it so far but what matters is, it's omega blood and they buy it from the source."

Before Magnus can ask what's exactly the problem here, since there are no laws preventing anyone from willingly parting with a bit of their blood, Raphael adds, "The blood is also angelic."

"Shadowhunter?"

"Those who met with him say there are no runes to be seen but they also say he doesn't sell anything besides the blood so I doubt they ever saw his whole body."

Magnus taps his finger on the rim of his cocktail glass. "Unless he's wrapped head to toe there are always some runes beyond collars and sleeves. I'll look into it. Where exactly is this happening?"

"Apparently he's been around Hotel Dumort before without me knowing about it. Later the whole affair moved to you. If I had to guess I'd say it's because Camille's due to be back soon."

Ah. That last bit is probably also information Raphael meant to give to him soon, Magnus guesses.

"So that means your friends were smart enough to keep the source to themselves?"

Or were they protective of the omega?

Raphael shrugs. "If you do something about it it'll save me the trouble of becoming unpopular. The omega wasn't ever seen inside Pandemonium but he comes close enough to be on your territory."

That is a strange thing, for sure. Magnus knows why Raphael is bringing his attention to it, even though it sounds like it solely involves vampires. And the omega with angel blood, who has unknown reasons to sell it.

"Of course, I'll take on another of one of your problems." Magnus teases. "And I'll sate my curiosity. Thank you for letting me know."

Magnus is intrigued enough to start investigating the same night. After several conversations with bouncers at the entrance and with two or three random vampires he picks out from the partying crowd he knows that the omega shows up two times a week, chooses a client (because there are many willing to pay), lets them drink from his arm and leaves with the money. Everyone confirms the angel blood part. Worryingly, this seems to have been going on for months. Only recently, like Raphael said, they've moved to Magnus's territory. Vampires aren't exactly forthcoming with all the details of their dealings so Magnus is unable to get out of them all he wants to know. Still, he has more than enough to go on.

It wouldn't be wise to make a lot of noise around this case if he wants to meet the Nephilim rather than just scare him or his vampire clients away. So Magnus waits, goes to the club every night and
keeps alert.

It's three more nights before one of his men at Pandemonium brings him the information the omega has shown up. Magnus excuses himself from a little ring of a not very riveting conversation he's joined to pass his time and goes outside.

He comes upon a scene in an alley. It is indeed very close to the club so it's relatively safe with soft lights reaching it and within shouting distance from other people.

A pair is standing by the wall on the left side of the narrow alley. A vampire, who looks pretty average as far as his build and clothes go, is facing a man standing between the wall and himself. Magnus can't see his face in the shadows, only that his hair appears as black as his clothes.

There are no signs of distress that Magnus can see or sense so he doesn't step in. There's no reason why he shouldn't just walk right in on them and demand explanation… but that would be unsubtle and rude. Magnus trusts his eyes better than the words of people he doesn't know.

What his eyes tell him is that it does look like a trade. He must have caught the very beginning of it: the dark-haired omega is leaning on the wall casually, one leg bent and heel of his black boot resting against the brick. The position puts his eyes on a lower level than the vampire who's standing very close, one hand resting on the wall beside the omega's head. It's a creepy kind of intimate, even if they're not doing anything but talking.

The talking part doesn't last very long, however, and the omega lifts up his left arm, which the vampire takes without hurry or hint of violence. Then, predictably, he bites into the bared part of the offered wrist. While he drinks, the omega leans his head back against the wall and closes his eyes, waiting.

Now Magnus can see his face better, brought out from the shadows into a stream of yellow and pink light. He is young, attractive. Not a surprise considering his dynamic. If Magnus was a vampire he'd probably be able to smell the blood in the air by now and tell if it truly is angelic. What he can tell is that there really aren't any runes visible on the man. None on his long neck and none on the uncovered forearm. He might be Nephilim who was never given runes. He might even not know what he is, only that it pays to share the strange blood.

The omega decides when the deal is complete and makes it clear to the vampire. Pulling his arm back, he presses his right hand over the wound. The vampire lingers, saying something to him, which Magnus imagines is some sweet-talking. The omega listens to it but doesn't return it. Eventually, the vampire leans in to press a quick kiss to the omega's lips and leaves.

Magnus waits. He has to know where the strange omega stays when he's not here. He probably won't want to linger around with a fresh wound and with luck might be going straight home.

Once the vampire is gone, the omega reaches into his inner jacket pocket and pulls out a gray packet of some sort. Bandages, Magnus realizes. The man wraps his forearm in quick, practiced moves and puts the packet away, fixes his jacket and begins to walk out of the alley.

Magnus follows, having concealed his presence with a spell to make things easier for himself.

It's a leisurely walk. The omega isn't in a rush to get to wherever he's heading or he simply enjoys the evening. He moves with grace, carried by his long legs. He's tall and rather slender but Magnus has been around long enough to know hidden strength when he sees it.

The street they eventually turn to is known for Downworlder presence. The quiet, reasonable kind
of Downworlders, such as werewolf families with children. The omega stops in front of one house and pulls out a key that he uses to open the front door instead of using the intercom. Good, that means he actually lives here and isn't visiting. The building itself is a perfectly boring, common townhouse in a lower class but a mostly respectable neighborhood.

A hunch tells Magnus to wait before approaching. That hunch turns out to be just right when no more than five minutes later a woman leaves the house, strap of her bag across her shoulder and lit phone in her hand. She's not really looking at the street, paying attention to the phone instead. It looks like she'll be gone for a good while, whoever she is and wherever she's going.

Walking closer, the warlock lets himself into the dimly-lit staircase and easily tracks the omega to the right front door by his fresh scent.

There's a white button for the bell beside the door so he uses it once. A distant sound of ringing, muffled by the front door reaches his ears so he knows it works. He also knows the omega is inside right now. So he's patient when no one rushes to the door to answer. After a long while, he presses the button again, meaning to make it clear he's not leaving.

Finally, he gets what he wanted. The door is unlocked and opened, and behind it stands the omega. He has a swaddled infant in his arms and that... that ruins what Magnus has planned to say completely. In fact, for a few seconds, he is speechless, because there's such clear familial resemblance between the child and the omega that it has to be his. Same dark hair, same eyes. No warlock marks that Magnus can see but that doesn't automatically mean the child is pure Nephilim.

They stand on opposite sides of the door, Magnus staring at the child and the omega frowning at Magnus.

"I apologize for the late visit." The warlock says when he finally shakes the surprise off. "I thought I might talk to you? My name is Magnus Bane,"

"The High Warlock of Brooklyn, I know." The other man says calmly. "I knew you'd notice me eventually."

"Did you expect me to notice sooner?"

"Yes, but I didn't want you to. I'm on your territory, uninvited. Unmated."

"I have to say, I'm quite in the dark when it comes to your... situation. You are a Shadowhunter, correct?"

"I used to be."

"Were you banished?"

A nod. The omega hasn't told him to go to hell so far, so Magnus asks, "Would you like to have this conversation inside?"

He doesn't nod this time, just steps aside to make room for Magnus to step inside, then closes and locks the door. He doesn't offer Magnus a seat so he remains standing, watching the omega make his way to a plain brown couch on the left side of the living room. There he gently lays the infant in a ring made of blue blankets, where it's safe and cosy. When he steps back from the couch, he no longer obscures from Magnus's sight the other side of it. A second child, a blue child is lying on its back, raising and lowering its arms without much coordination and tracking the omega's movement with its dark eyes. Now that has to be a warlock.
Magnus frowns, confused. He's no expert on child development but he can tell just by looking at this tiny pair that it's impossible for both of them to be the omega's. They're not twins and they're too close in apparent age to be conceived, carried and given birth to by the same parent. It's biologically impossible. So one of them must be someone else's. Because of the dark-haired infant's looks, Magnus assumes it's the blue warlock who came from somewhere else. Would it be rude to start off by asking about it?

Either way, Downworlder children - even just one – seal the deal on making the omega Magnus's responsibility. No longer a member of the Institute and left to fend for himself in a world like theirs… Magnus is the High Warlock and he can't walk away.

"When did you come here?" He asks. Better to start at the beginning.

The omega, who in the meantime began a nervous task of picking up various items that didn't really need tidying, appears to do some mental math.

"Eight months ago. Unless you mean specific here, rather than the city in general. I've been with Karla for several weeks before Jon was born."

Magnus takes that in. "You were pregnant when you left."

"Yes."

"The woman who just left is a vampire, am I right?" He can smell vampire presence in this house and since it's as clear as omega's own scent then it must belong to someone living here.

"I got lucky meeting her. She offered me a room."

Magnus doesn't ask if he pays her with blood or the money from selling to other vampires. It's none of his business and a sure-fire way to make the man put an end to this conversation.

"Now I know your host's name and you know mine yet I still don't have a name to put to your face?"

"Alec."

"You're keeping your family name to yourself?"

"There's no family to connect it to."

Magnus knows this doesn't mean the ex-Shadowhunter is an orphan. Orphans treat their surnames in a different way than this.

This might just be one of the most awkward encounters in his life. Magnus thinks about it standing in the middle of the living room while the omega, Alec, resumes his fidgeting.

He's moving around but always stays between the couch and Magnus, never fully turned back to him. Shadowhunter's drive to be vigilant and a parent's drive to protect must be fueling him around a warlock he doesn't know and who is right inside his home. Staying put in the same spot he's standing seems to Magnus like the best thing to do for now while attempting to have this conversation done.

"I can't help but notice the child is a warlock." The child in question, who might be 4 or 5 or even 6 months old is raising his hands up whenever Alec gets closer and smiles every time he's paid attention to.
The omega rolls his eyes at that. "My children are both warlocks."

"And the delightfully blue one is also…?"

"He was left in my care. He's mine."

"I see. Is there anyone else you could ask for help? This place isn't bad, I'll be fair, but I've been told about what you do for a living. And you have a vampire for a babysitter."

"She's young. Didn't have time to turn jaded and she's trying to hold onto her mundane career."

Magnus takes note of how the ex-Shadowhunter defends the vampire. He also takes note of how he didn't address the other part of what Magnus just said.

How did he get into this situation? First, how did he manage to get pregnant while still being a Shadowhunter? There are only two ways to create a warlock child and one of them seems impossible to have happened here. Warlocks are only able to father a child – or become a mother – with a bonded mate and there's no bond, broken or otherwise, that he can sense on this omega. Even if his potential warlock partner had been killed, widowers didn't just become cleanly bondless. Which leaves only the other scenario, the worse one. It's too early to ask about it when at any moment the omega might decide he's had enough and ask Magnus to leave.

While Magnus considers this, the other man turns defensive. His arms are crossed on his chest and the way he's looking at him tells him he's not kicked out yet only because of who he is – an alpha and the High Warlock.

"I didn't break any laws." The omega says. "If you want me to I can leave. As I said, I know I'm uninvited on your territory."

"I don't think you can just leave. Where will you go?"

"I don't know but I won't be your problem."

He might not be his problem but he'd still be his concern.

Magnus looks at the children. Unless he's glamoured by an adult warlock, the omega won't be able to take the blue baby out to the city unless completely swaddled in clothes or blanket.

"They will both need magical education and practice," Magnus says carefully. "They might not show any magic for a long time or they might start having accidents very soon. It's impossible to predict. You can be a wonderful parent but you can't give them protection or magical advice. And it will get either them or you hurt. Possibly both."

"I would figure it out when needed."

"I believe you'd look for help. I also believe it might be harder than you imagine to find a tutor or at least someone able to put a glamour on them. I can provide all of it and I'm here, willing to help you right away. Magical protection and education. Aside from that, better living conditions, obviously."

"I'm not giving away my children." Alec snaps and takes a few steps back from where Magnus stands even if there's absolutely nothing he could do should the warlock attack him. Magnus puts his hands up. He's feeling calm, if sad on behalf of the banished omega so it's not difficult for him to project the calm onto the other man. Being alive for centuries has done wonders for his control over his emotions and the perks that come with his dynamic. He can't be obvious about it, since
omegas have always been very adept at sensing when they're being smothered with projections.

"That's not what I suggested. The thought didn't even cross my mind, I promise. I want to take you all in. You're their father and they need you, especially this young."

Alec stares at the High Warlock. He isn't sure what the man wants to achieve here. Of course, he's interested in any warlock children that would eventually come into their own magic in his city, but he isn't known for actually fostering any in recent times. So could it be that he's interested in them because there is an adult omega in the deal? Does he imagine taking the three of them literally into his own home to have a live-in omega bound to him by debt?

Next question is: does Alec mind? If it took him off the street, gave him a guarantee his children would never go hungry or lacking anything, if he wasn't hurt in the process, would it be so bad?

He's never given more than his blood to the vampires. More than one kissed him but they weren't bold enough to try to pressure him. At first, his pregnancy had protected him and later they knew him so no one wanted to risk being stupid enough to harm an omega. They could go out and f**k anyone else but they couldn't get his blood anywhere else. Whoring himself out would only make them think they could have all of him. Besides, bringing back the scent of a stranger on himself into his nest made his skin crawl just thinking about it.

If he went with the warlock, it would be different. He would live surrounded by the alpha's belongings and his scent. Alec would keep his blood where it belonged and he could give his body to the alpha instead. It has already been used by a demon anyway.

Karla was kind to him but she was only a temporary band-aid on his problems. If she got the job she's been hoping for so badly she would eventually move away too.

If the High Warlock became attached to him or at least to Alec's children, he'd care about their lives in the long-term. Alec might want to keep his freedom but it would be incredibly unwise to antagonize the one alpha with the most literal and metaphorical power in the city. Once he declined his help, a second offer might never come.

"I'll go with you." He says. "Not right now. It's too late and I don't want Karla to come back to an empty house."

"Naturally. How about you go put the babies to sleep, I'll have something ready for you to eat in the meantime and if you're not feeling too tired, we can talk some more."

"I'm not tired," is all the omega says. First, he picks up the younger child, pressing a kiss to the black tuft on top of his head while he carries him to the bedroom. The blue baby, whose name Magnus still doesn't know, looks around the room while making sounds at himself. His cheeks are adorably round and he looks even more round when he grabs for his feet with his hands and tries to pull all his toes closer to his mouth. It makes Magnus smile but he doesn't dare address the child or come any closer without his parent's permission.

When he's picked up by his father a moment later, the child only becomes encouraged to voice his excitement in a way a 5-month old can.

Left alone in the room, Magnus sits down at the kitchen table. He intends to conjure dinner once Alec comes out of the bedroom, so it's fresh and warm. He spends the time looking around the room: it's what you would expect from any normal person, except there are heavy curtains in each
window neatly secured to the wall with pieces of ducktape. Magnus assumes that when the omega is home during the day, there's daylight in the bedroom he's gone into.

The kitchen is open plan, joining with the small living room. There's a TV, bookshelves filled with books and DVD cases. Some colorful knick-knacks from holidays. So it looks like the vampire must be young, as the omega had said, holding onto normalcy.

Behind two other closed doors are probably a bathroom and the lady's bedroom. Magnus doesn't know what she is for sure, most likely a beta. The thing with becoming a vampire is that biology stops to matter in a big way. Vampires lose fertility and stop being affected by the usual biological needs of their dynamic such as heats. Their scent doesn't go away but it's significantly duller, making both omegas and alphas smell more like betas. Some people consider all of those points a great incentive to become a vampire.

About ten minutes later when the omega re-emerges and closes the bedroom door behind him softly, Magnus makes the dinner, including cutlery, ready. Alec eyes the food with suspicion but doesn't say anything against it, just sits down quietly and lifts up his fork.

"Here's what I want to offer to you," Magnus begins, "you'll live at my place and go on about your day as usual with the exception of making shady deals with vampires. I'll provide anything you don't already have for the babies and I'll help whenever you need me to. I can't claim to know much about childcare but I'd like to think I won't be too terrible at it. We can find a suitable babysitter once you're comfortable enough to allow one around."

"And payment?"

"You'll leave magical education to me, for obvious reasons. You'll let me help you with anything else you might need. You'll let me protect you to an extent I deem necessary."

Alec thinks none of that is payment but he won't push it for now. If the High Warlock wants to be coy, let him.

"Is there really no one looking for you?"

"The ones at the top aren't looking. There might have been someone but I've hidden for so long they can't possibly still be trying."

"I assume you weren't stripped of your runes months before they sent you away pregnant?"

Magnus watches Alec freeze up. His hand hovers over the plate and his eyes are locked on one of the objects on the table in front of him, unfocused. Then he begins to eat again without saying a word. He doesn't speak and neither does Magnus. They focus on the dinner for a while.

Magnus keeps his thoughts to himself. He doubts very much that the whole local Institute let one of their omegas just be banished and never spared him a second thought. There's simply not enough of them to be discarded when something's wrong with one. Shadowhunters are not his favorite creatures on Earth but they're not uniformly cold and violent. And yet… to strip someone of their runes when they're already in fragile state…

Magnus asked the question for two reasons: for Alec's sake, he would hope there is someone looking with his best interests in heart. On the other hand, there could be also a threat hidden in it.

It is possible that even those who cared about his wellbeing now believe Alec to be dead or gone away from New York if no one among his current Downworlder acquaintances has mentioned his existence to Shadowhunter patrols during past few months.
What if the Clave decided they didn't like a de-runed Shadowhunter running around after all and would rather be rid of him permanently? If they were cruel enough to do it to him while already a month pregnant, they might be capable of doing worse.

Alec eats rather quickly. He doesn't look malnourished beneath the unhealthy look of someone perpetually tired so it's probably because he rarely has something of this quality.

Magnus didn't try to be fancy with this meal but he did try to have diverse set for the omega to choose from. It appears he likes everything. Or he just wants to finish quickly to get rid of his guest. Or he doesn't want to somehow insult him by being choosy.

"When may I come tomorrow?" Magnus asks like the previous question didn't happen at all. The omega answers in kind.

"Um, around ten? I don't know. They- we still sleep a lot. We're usually awake at seven but then it's back for some more bedtime for all of us."

"All right. I'll have the whole day free just for you. How about you give me a call or even a text when you're ready and I'll come." He snaps his fingers to call into existence a card with his number on it.

"You really want to do this?" The omega turns serious gaze to him. "They are small children. They cry or they sleep and you need to be quiet. With two of them, caring for them takes up the majority of my time. I'm going to leave things around your place and forget them. Your trash is going to be full all the time and there's going to be all kinds of smells. I used to hate the formula's smell until I got used to it,"

"Alexander." Magnus reaches across the table to put his hand on Alec's. His fingers twitch but he doesn't pull his hand back. "It's all fine. I know those are things that come with babies. I want you three in a safe place and that's final."

"Okay." He breathes out. Magnus can feel him relax. "I- thanks for the food. Was this like a demo or just a one-time thing to impress me into agreeing?"

"Darling, you can have this every evening, morning or noon if you only ask."

Magnus knows he's doing the right thing when he's rewarded with an honest-to-god blush from the omega. He enjoys the sight for a moment, then stands up and magically returns the table to the state from before dinner.

"I'll let you have the rest of your evening now." He says, motioning at the front door. "May I open a portal inside? Would save me the trouble of looking for a suitable place outside."

"Right, sure. Thank you." Alec pauses, charmingly unsure of how he should feel. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Have a good night."

Alec watches Magnus until he's gone and the last sparks of closing portal disappear.
Chapter Summary

Flashbacks number 1 and 1a. The rest is basically shameless curtainfic trope.

- 6 months ago, Hotel Dumort -

(3 months along)

"Jean?"

Robert took one step into their bedroom and promptly rolled his eyes at the sight that greeted him. Jean sat sideways on the bed, one foot on the ground and the other leg bent where he was leaning over a man sprawled across their bedding. Lean body, dressed in all black stood out on the background of their red bedding. He was also an omega. Robert thought they had agreed to cut down on the number of 'thirds' Jean invited for fun but apparently his lover just could not resist.

There was a smell of fresh blood in the air and Jean was casually wiping his lower lip of its traces.

"I thought you were going to take forever and longer getting back." He said. "I've been waiting."

"You've been occupied," Robert said and walked towards the bed with more words of disapproval on the tip of his tongue, only to notice the stranger wasn't awake.

He was very still and there were prominent shadows under his eyes, like they've been there for a while now. Robert knew his lover did not like his one-night stands this limp and he also knew Jean had never killed anyone before so Robert refrained from assuming the worst.

It was hard to say since Robert had never seen the stranger before to compare, but he might be a little too pale. Every piece of clothing he had on was black so that didn't help either, reminding Robert of the shadow-hunting assholes. Which would make sense... because there was clearly a Nephilim inside this room.

Robert looked up at Jean sharply. "You knocked him out? What for? How did he get here?"

"Ah, you see, it was an accident. I wasn't planning anything like this. I was walking around a corner and he was just there, and we ran into each other, I didn't expect it I swear. So when I knew he was Nephilim I didn't have time to think, okay?"

"Not okay. Did he attack you or startle you?"

"The latter? I panicked."

Robert felt like his shoulders were getting heavier with every word Jean said.

"And bringing him here rather than leaving him the hell alone to wake up not knowing what hit him was the course of action that sounded the best to you?"
"I was going to... but, I mean, can you smell him? It's amazing. Just try it and agree with me it was worth it."

"Jean. That is a Shadowhunter."

"Well, it's too late and I'm not going to hurt him, just... take a little advantage."

"He's going to go show his friends the bite mark and bring them back right here."

Jean's face turned more serious than it was moments before. "I don't think he has friends anymore."

Under the sleeve he pulled up on the Shadowhunter's arm there were scars where Robert expected to see runes. Roughly rune-shaped, mostly uneven, jagged-edged scars stood out darker than the pale skin around them. Robert leaned in, having never seen anything like it in his life. He lifted the Shadowhunter's shirt at his right side and found more scars. He had only missed the big, uncovered one on the omega's neck when he had first looked at him because he was standing on his right side.

"Damn. They really did kick him out. What could he possibly have done to fuck up that much?"

He wasn't even an alpha. Alphas might have problems with staying out of trouble or they might become convinced they're too good to bow to authority.

Meanwhile, Jean recovered into his usual self. "Well! So you see, no harm done. Come sit with me, have a sip."

Robert took a deep, steadying breath. It was only one of many sighs induced by Jean and he foresaw many more of those in the future.

Then, just standing there and considering giving in to Jean's offer, he scented it.

He grabbed for the Nephilim's arm to get it out of Jean's reach, ignoring the other vampire's offended and surprised expression. Leaning over the omega's neck, he took a better sniff.

"...You can't bite him." He said slowly.

"What, why? I already did!"

"He's pregnant."

"Now you're making it up." Jean stood up, agitated.

"Did you ever have a sister? No. I did, all three of them. I know how pregnancy smells and this is it."

"He doesn't look like it."

Robert shrugged. He knew he wasn't mistaken. "Must be early."

"Does it even matter if we drink from him or not? Just a little."

"You know it affects people. Imagine you have a sister, now imagine she's pregnant. Are you going to give her a little Ecstasy and say have fun?"

"No?"

Robert ran his fingers through his hair. He needed to have this solved as soon as possible because
the scent of the omega's angelic blood was getting thicker in the air by the minute and he was very much not immune to the sweet, enticing aroma of it.

"He's a Shadowhunter, no matter how 'ex' he is. But even that aside, since I don't give a damn about him, risking a child's life is asking for bad karma and I'm not doing it. I also happen to care about you, so you're not doing it either."

Jean gazed at him for a long moment until he was certain Robert was actually serious.

"Okay, okay, you're right." He sighed and looked down at the omega with longing.

"How about you take this," Robert said while his eyes searched for the glass he knew they've left somewhere around here yesterday. He spotted it and handed it to his lover.

"Bleed him into this, have your 'sip' and let's get him out of here."

- A week later -

Jean was standing under a streetlamp, looking at his wristwatch like it might make time go faster. He was waiting for all the others to get there so they could all go together to have fun in the city.

For a second he thought he could hear them approaching but he was wrong. No one came out where he could see them and yet he was being observed for sure. Before he could call out whoever was doing it, a figure emerged from the shadows of the street, walking towards him without hurry. A male and somewhat familiar form... almost reminding Jean of the Nephilim omega.

He felt a little colder if that was at all possible. Crossing into the lamplight, the figure became the omega himself and he was looking at Jean like he remembered everything, including when he hadn't been awake in the bedroom back at Hotel.

"It's you." He said, and nothing else. He stopped a small distance away from Jean, where they could see each other very well.

"I'm always me, but what do you w-"

"Did you like me?" The Shadowhunter asked, his tone very, very cold.

Jean came to a quick decision that playing stupid wouldn't be beneficial to him at all. He went for the truth. "I did. You were unlike anyone I've ever come across."

The omega dropped his gaze. His dark lashes were ridiculously long. Jean stared, equally terrified and excited.

The next moment he was ready to defend himself when the other man reached inside his jacket. He expected to see the glint of a blade but it wasn't that. Instead, the omega showed him a plastic bag, not unlike ones seen in hospitals. It was full with something dark, moving like liquid. It must have still been warm, carried covered like that near the Nephilim's body, who shook the bag gently while Jean stared. Then he asked a question.

"How much is this worth to you?"
Magnus has to wait until five past ten in the morning for a text from Alec, even though he was ready to go since just before nine. Getting dressed had been an exercise in restraint when his common sense warred with alpha's vanity, which whispered at him to make an impression.

Magnus looks at himself in the standing mirror. He thinks he did a good job staying reasonable with a dark green jacket and emerald streaks in his hair to match. Green is a good color, calming and reliable which is how he wishes to appear to Alexander. It's also excellent fabric, thick and it has threads woven into it which make the green shimmer with silver in the right light.

He doesn't open the portal in the omega's house to avoid startling its inhabitants and instead walks the short remaining distance and rings the bell. Excitement bubbles inside him at the thought of what's about to happen. In the morning the whole arrangement feels more real than it had last night when he returned to his loft and for once Magnus finds himself unsure of what the future will bring. It's a positive feeling.

The young Nephilim opens the door as before, except this time he knows to expect Magnus. He looks harried and like someone who's thinking about a hundred things at once but his eyes are alert and shining. He has a gray hoodie on, with a text Magnus can't read because it's half-covered by a long and wide scarf-like material that Alec has wrapped around his middle and shoulders. More importantly, Magnus's attention is drawn to the child Alec is holding one-armed at his hip. It's the one with blue skin. In light of day, Magnus can see better the varying shades of his eyes and hair, quite different from Catarina's.

"Hello. How about you let me help." Magnus says and makes his intent to take the boy off of Alec loud and clear. Alec isn't immediately thrilled about the offer but he lifts up the baby up all the same and Magnus carefully takes him.

"Hey, Blueberry. Aren't you just wonderful?" The boy looks up at him, all wide-eyed and lost in intense contemplation of a new face in his life.

"His name is Max."

"And the short, dark and handsome is Jon, yes?"

Alec's lips twitch with the beginning of a smile. "He's, um, short for Jonathan."

"Oh? That's a serious one."

"It's a respected Shadowhunter name."

"I'm aware. Still serious. Where is he then?"

Alec makes an inviting gesture that points to the couch, where in the same nest of blue blankets is the smaller child, sleeping on his back.

Magnus tries to keep Max occupied while his father gathers all their things. He appears to be well prepared already: everything's packed in two medium-sized gym bags he can sling over his shoulder, plus two Ikea bags with baby stuff, mostly diapers and blankets which are not heavy but take up much space. All in all, there's really not that much to move over to Magnus's loft.
"I have a crib and plastic bathtub which were gifts from the werewolf pack." Alec runs his hand through his hair in a nervous gesture, making his already impressive bed hair even wilder. "I thought I might as well return them sooner than promised and have my own bought?"

"Of course, it's something we should do today, then."

Alec turns around slowly, taking in the room. He thinks he has everything but even if he's forgetting something, he should just relax. He's not leaving to the Moon, only a part of the same city. As the last task he picks up sleepy Jon from his little nest and puts him in the wrap, carefully tying it around himself.

Once he's done, he kisses the tuft of black hair on his son's head. It's a habit that developed on his own. He just always does it when picking Jon up and when he's putting him down to bed.

When he looks up he finds the alpha watching him.

"Ready to go?"

Alec nods.

"Let me send your bags ahead, no need to have our hands full." The warlock snaps his fingers and the prepared bags all disappear.

Next, he opens up a portal into his loft. Alec definitely doesn't feel relaxed around Magnus yet but he lets him hold onto Max, who seems okay with it so far. The warlock then stands closer to him and leads Alec through the portal with his hand on the small of his back.

They step inside the main room. Both infants take the magical travel okay, Max a little more excited for it than his younger brother. Jonathan is looking around, his eyes now open wide as if he's taking in all the things in High Warlock's home, sleepiness forgotten. Even if he's too small to process much at all, his father is plenty impressed for all three of them. His gaze jumps from detail to detail, first seeing the size of the loft, then the wealth of colors, decoration, furniture. He likes that it looks warm, like a place you want to be in.

He's not sure, however, if he likes knowing this is an alpha's den. Oh, his scent is very, very nice. It's not overwhelming and harsh, instead balanced against the slightly sweet scent of wood and something like perfume, like candles or incense, or scented oils which add to the beauty of the loft.

Magnus knows he has a lot of his belongings lying around, lots of items he keeps for their beauty, for their history, for their magic or for what they mean to him personally. He has a lot of books. He has a lot of hardware and ingredients meant for spells and potions. He had done the best he could last night to place some of the things in secure cupboards and drawers before deciding that it's not a task to be done in one go if he wants to hold onto some order and storage system.

More importantly, he'd spent time and energy preparing a whole new room for Alexander to take for himself. He put in a bed and a wardrobe with a matching desk, taking the liberty to choose the décor for the pillows, bedcover and curtains, leaving the rest of the room pretty much empty.

He takes Alec to see it first. He hovers by the door while Alec walks inside, looking around. No one needs to know the High Warlock of Brooklyn is nervous that an omega might say he doesn't like what he's offering.
"This is, this is pretty big," Alec says after a short moment passes.

"There's room for baby beds. I didn't put anything in because I thought I'd ask you first what exactly you need."

"Oh, it's still big. Even with two beds, it'd be bigger than what I'm used to."

"There's no need to be confined to small spaces when you can have better."

Alec shrugs. "When I want space I go outside or on the roof, depending on where I am." He points to the wooden wardrobe. "What am I supposed to do with this much shelf room?"

"Oh, I'm fully prepared to help you fill that up. Something tells me what you have in that bag is just more of those sad gray hoodies."

Alec gives him a skeptical look. He doesn't say he's mildly offended on behalf of his clothes, which are comfortable and take multiple washings well.

The room has an en-suite bathroom, which Alec explores next. A sink nestled in wide counter stretching along one of the walls, there's a toilet and then a stone bathtub doubling as a shower when you pull the glass doors to close it is taking up another wall. If he wanted he could use it with the baby bath and not be cramped at all.

"Anything you need, just make a list and I'll have it brought here. If you'd prefer, we can go shopping the mundane way." The High Warlock says. He doesn't get an answer right away. "Or you can go on your own, without me crowding you. Just, please, don't say you don't need anything when I know you do."

When he still doesn't get an answer, which is starting to make him nervous, he adds. "You won't be a burden. I want that to be clear from the start."

"Okay," Alec says quietly. He seems lost in intense contemplation of the bathroom counter surface. He's petting Jon's head absent-mindedly.

Magnus is still holding Max. The boy is completely entranced by the heavy pendant Magnus put on in the morning and tries his best to get tangled in it or grab it. It's hard to tell the intentions of a five-month old's hands. In hindsight, the pendant might have not been the best choice today and he'll have to remember about it in the future. Magnus offers Max his finger instead, the one with the signet ring. New shiny item draws Max's attention away from the pendant, which Magnus quickly slips under his shirt.

Wiggling his fingers in front of the boy draws a sound out of him, which in turn draws his parent's attention. Alec looks straight at Max when he turns around and Magnus gets the feeling the omega is avoiding looking at him.

"Let me unpack our mat first," Alec says. "Then you can stop holding Max and I'll sort out the rest of our things. We'll leave you to your business."

"I have all day for you, like I said. You're not a bother."

"I'll be fine," Alec says and it feels final.

And so Magnus doesn't insist. Alec unfolds a thick blue-and-green mat meant for children to lay
and play on. He chooses a spot for it between the wall and the bed on the opposite side from the
desk and the wardrobe, where light from the high window reaches the floor. Tiny Jonathan stays in
the wrap and Max is taken out of Magnus's hold and placed down on the mat, given a set of foam
blocks to push around.

Magnus leaves them to it, not wanting to impose on the omega's space any longer. Once Alexander
feels at home in this room, there will be etiquette for Magnus to stick to. Omegas' private spaces
are sacred and one shouldn't go inside when not invited.

It's too early to be optimistic enough to imagine an omega nesting in his loft.

Magnus takes a deep breath. Right. There is now an omega in his home. He is going to stay.
Magnus has had friends of all sexes, genders and races stay with him for more than a week before
and he's always made appropriate adjustments but this is a whole new arrangement. Alexander isn't
visiting to go sightseeing for hours at a time, he isn't here for a job which would also have him go
out.

His prolonged presence is going to bring the scent of an omega to all parts of Magnus's place.

Alec sits down on the edge of the bed, with Jonathan back to sleeping in the wrap. Max is making
sounds to amuse himself, having no issues with being left to lie on his mat for the time being. Such
a content child.

Alec thinks about their situation. He's in the apartment of the High Warlock of Brooklyn, invited to
live here. There really isn't any higher for him to go in the city. He doesn't care for money and
being in a smaller place, with less prestigious host would have made him feel more comfortable but
still, he can appreciate this. The most important gain for him is the protection of the most powerful
alpha around. Someone to stand between Alec's children and the Clave. Alec can't do that anymore.
He can always put himself between his children and a sword - and die for it in a second like a
mundane, having achieved nothing but delayed the worst.

He'd made some friends in his time spent on his own after leaving the Institute. He knows Luke
Garroway, who's a decent person, someone who won't turn away people needing help. Alec
couldn't stay around him, unfortunately, because there was the whole pack to consider. It was
enough that the violent change in leadership of the local pack was caused, indirectly, by him. He
had no wish to bring trouble Luke's way when he didn't absolutely have to and while he knows he
can count on them and he'll likely use it in the future, he doesn't want to become a bother.

Alec looks around his new room for a second time. With only three pieces of furniture in it, it's
certainly still impressive. Curtains match the plush carpet spread under the bed on which lie
pillows and a throw blanket, all in muted colors but with rich patterns. Alec has never seen fabrics
like this before.

The wardrobe and the desk with a chair are made of very dark, shiny wood. He can't tell if they
were made by a modern artisan to look like they're from a whole another era or if they actually are
from that era, kept in good shape by warlock magic.

Drawers, shelves and other storage spaces are all empty, waiting for Alec to make use of them. He
doesn't have much. His clothes, baby clothes, baby blankets. His boys are too small to want or need
many toys. Instead, he has bottles which he'll need to put in the kitchen later, pacifiers, baby
cosmetics and medicine.
He has three books on childcare, one of which he's bought himself and two which were given to him by a member of the werewolf pack who had them back from when she had been pregnant herself.

He doesn't have a phone. He has no one to contact through it and if he found himself in an emergency, there are always mundanes around who can be asked for help calling 911 or Luke. Even this morning he had used Karla's own cellphone to let the High Warlock know when to come. He said nothing of it last night, when the other man had given him the number because he didn't want to look even more pathetic.

He puts away his clothes. All gray, navy blue and black, functional and comfortable. Well-worn sweaters he doesn't want to part with yet.

When he's done he sits on the bed and talks at Max while waiting for Jon to wake up hungry.

When the time comes for feeding, Alec gathers his bottles and a box of baby formula and ventures out to the kitchen.

The High Warlock is sitting on a sofa in the open space of the loft, various books and papers spread in front of him on a coffee table. He turns when he hears Alec moving around and gives him a smile, which sends Alec's blood rushing a little bit faster. An honest smile makes everyone look good, but on an already striking face, it's just impossible to resist.

"Everything good? What do you need?"

Alec shakes the bottles in Magnus's line of sight. "A pot, some water."

"Let me show you around."

Alec watches with amusement as the alpha opens cupboards one by one and presents their contents to him with flair. They pick out a pot of suitable size for Alec's needs and Magnus shows him how to switch modes on his stovetop and oven. He tells the omega to store his food where it'll be most convenient for him. After that Magnus doesn't hover, instead letting Alec prepare the milk on his own.

Once it's ready, Alec retreats with two bottles into the bedroom.

Both his sons are awake now and he can already see the first signs of discontent on Jonathan's face.

"I'm here, love. All ready to get you fed." It's something of a technical puzzle to have both of them fed at once. He usually starts with Jon because he's younger and he's almost always done eating sooner, and Max is such a sweet, patient baby anyway, Alec usually ends up just holding him for some long minutes even after they're done with the bottle. Jonathan tends to drop off asleep, sometimes mid-drink.

Magnus gazes at the closed bedroom door from his spot on the sofa. He's long-abandoned his papers, thinking he's done enough anyway when he wasn't even planning to look at them today.

It's very quiet in his loft. If he didn't know there were three more people living here now, he would think he was alone. He's pretty sure he heard some cooing before when Alec left the door cracked open but other than that it's very peaceful.

It was to be expected, of course. Omegas are naturally skittish when they don't have anything to
give them confidence and this is certainly the case here. Rome wasn't built in one day and Magnus can be patient.

When he hears his name said softly from across the room and looks up, Alexander is standing across the room, waiting for his attention.

"Do you still want to go shopping with me?"

"Yes, of course. Do you want to go now?"

"If that's all right with you. I want to have the tub and cribs crossed off the list first."

Magnus glances at his watch. He's surprised to see it's only one fifteen in the afternoon. It felt like much longer while he waited alone.

"How far are we from Karla's?" Comes the next question from Alec. "Or Pandemonium? I've looked out the window but I'm not sure I got the map in my head right."

First, Magnus remembers to show his guest one more part of the loft. The balcony has been closed to keep the chill out so now Magnus opens the doors and they walk to the edge.

"You can have a much better view here."

"Wow."

"I like it too. It's not my first apartment in New York and I think I like it here the best." He turns to Alec. "You can use the balcony however you want, though you'll probably want to wait until spring comes back. May I suggest morning yoga?"

It's early fall and would only be getting colder. They probably have some warmer days ahead of them yet, but not many.

Next, Magnus shows Alec the map on his phone and points to where they are. Alec thinks about the distance to Karla's.

"That's too far... Could we walk for a bit, then portal the rest of the way? Will you glamour Max for me?"

"Yes and yes."

They return inside and Magnus follows Alec to the door of his room.

Alec gives him a sideways look. "Are you fine with carrying Max in your arms or would you like this?" He looks for and then picks up something grey made mostly out of straps... Magnus recognizes the item to be a baby carrier. It lacks the color and grace of the wrap Alec used before for carrying Jon and it actually makes Magnus want to step back from it. He puts his hand up. "No, thank you, I'll be much happier without it."

Then, he asks seriously. "You trust me to carry him?"

Alec looks him in the eyes. "I've accepted your offer so I've accepted you being in their lives for the foreseeable future. Now I expect you to actually be there."

The omega doesn't admit he is terrified of this – of letting himself believe someone will be there to support him, only to risk losing that support later on.
"I've already arranged with Karla to take care of them for one more day when she got back last night."

"You don't have a phone, do you?"

"No. I didn't really need it so far."

Alec is dressing his sons in tiny hats. They're already wearing onesies different than those they had before, now more suitable for outdoors. Magnus is leaning on the doorframe, watching Alec.

"I'd prefer it if you had one now that you'll be living with me."

"I know, it makes sense for communication. I don't really care about it so pick one for me."

"I will. Any color preferences?"

"Black?"

"I thought so. We've only met last night but I feel like I already know you."

Surprisingly, that brings color to the omega's cheeks. Magnus fights a smile because he doesn't want to push his luck so soon.

"As for Blueberry..." He begins, "I already have something in mind that won't require my presence to make glamour stick and will work just as well. For now..." He focuses on a spell manifesting in a pale blue sphere, which he sends towards Max. The boy tries to grab at dissipating tendrils of blue light as it surrounds him.

Alec waits to see it work but nothing happens.

"He looks the same to me."

"You have the Sight and you're his parent so you're familiar with him. For a child this small, who's covered up anyway there's no need for anything more than lightweight glamour. Mundanes won't pay enough attention and will be fooled easily. Vampires and werewolves won't notice unless they approach us. The fair folk and warlocks will see through it right away but you're not hiding from them. It's not advised to use magic on baby warlocks who haven't showed their own magic yet. It can throw them off tracks."

"Really? It's good I haven't been around any warlocks so far, then."

"It'd be fine so long as a spell isn't directed at the baby. Adults should be aware of it anyway."

They go outside. It's a nice enough day, a little too cool, a little cloudy but no threat of rain and no wind hangs in the air. Magnus leads a one-sided conversation with Max, while Alec hides his smile in the fluffy hat on Jon's head.

They don't talk much, except for casual observations about the people and establishments they pass by. Magnus can sense wariness surrounding the omega like a cloak, but silences between them aren't tense.

After they drop off the boys it's like the omega doesn't know what to do with himself around
Magnus. At least it's not fear but rather endearing shyness, forcing the young man to keep his eyes lowered or on anything else on the street that's not Magnus.

"Where to first?" The warlock asks, hoping to give Alexander something to focus on so he can be more at ease.

"You don't have a washing machine. That is, I didn't find one."

"That's true. I clean my clothes with magic since it's safer for them. Faster, too."

"Well, unless you want to come back to smelly home one day, I need to have a machine there. Or at least a bowl for hand-washing."

"You're definitely not going to do it by hand," Magnus says, appalled and for some reason offended. "It's not the 1600s."

And even if it was, he'd do something to make housework easier on the omega.

"After that, I'd like to stock up on baby formula and other small stuff. Any mall will do."

"I have an idea where we should start."

The store is a damn luxury showroom. It has complete bathroom mock-ups, rows of drywall on which they show off the variety of available tiles, paper catalogues of Jacuzzi sets and many other amenities you could have in your house but Alec has no need for and no wish to have.

He is supremely uncomfortable with the knowledge he fits neither here nor with Magnus Bane in general. He's like a gray mouse to Magnus's glamorous and commanding presence. Alec has been sneaking glances at the alpha since the morning and it feels like he can't get enough.

For Magnus, it's an adventure. They come in like a couple and the beta assistant, who can't be much older than Alec, treats them like a couple. He walks them through the large appliances section and keeps speaking to Alec, presenting all the options to the omega first. Whenever they come to the price of a machine Alec shows interest in, the assistant says it to him and then looks at Magnus to see his reaction. Honestly, Magnus would like to just say anything is fine but it wouldn't be a good idea to open himself up to easy exploitation. He can afford it but he doesn't like to feel used. So he simply plays the role of an alpha watching over his omega's shopping trip, appears to be considering their options and then says, "Darling, you know these things better than me."

"I guess I do." Alec gives him a sideways look but he seems pleased.

Within fifteen minutes Alec makes his choice to the assistant's happiness and they all agree on a delivery hour later the same day.

Next, they inquire about baby bathtubs. The beta eyes them both because when Alec asks about details he clearly knows what he wants so the baby must exist already, yet there's no bond or evidence of mating scent on either of them.

Oh well, at least the mundane has no idea just how many hoops need to be jumped through to let someone like Magnus have a child with someone like Alec.

There's even an upside to the scrutiny: the omega has noticed it happening too, and he drifts closer to Magnus from then on.
"Now the small stuff," Alec says, relieved to be back outside, no longer surrounded by thousand-dollar towel rails.

"I thought you might want to eat something first. It's long past lunchtime."

"I'm fine, we'll eat at home."

"I'm going to have to insist. I don't know when you've eaten in the morning and I have a feeling once we get back you'll find thirty other things to distract you from sitting down. Am I wrong?"

They have a staring contest. It's amusing to imagine the impression the omega would make using the same look in his eyes while wearing his all-black shadowhunter gear, staring down some poor trainees.

"Fine." He gives up because he's going against Magnus Bane, not baby shadowhunters. "Let's go eat."

For convenience's sake, they step into a small place specializing in pasta salads. Alec orders for himself and Magnus makes the first mental note of the omega's preferences.

"I knew it was a bad idea," Alec says after they've both finished and their plates have been taken away. "Now I'm feeling sleepy."

"Well then, there's only one remedy I can think of for that. We'll have some coffee too."

They spend another twenty minutes inside the little restaurant. Magnus can see the effort it takes for the omega not to fidget and insist on moving on. He'll start fiddling with a napkin and then drop it, lean back in the seat like he's trying to relax and actually pay attention to the conversation Magnus is trying to have with him. A few moments later he's back to being tense until he catches himself again.

It's difficult to tell if the man isn't interested in conversation or if he's simply shy and too preoccupied with different matters.

It's the first day they're spending together so it's hardly reasonable to expect the younger man to be sociable and talkative with Magnus, especially when the alpha knows the omega is afraid of him. It's not constant and it's very subtle but it's still there. The way he'll second-guess some things he says to Magnus, the way he'll glance at him in moments when he can expect Magnus to have an opinion contradicting Alec's. All small things that add up to a bigger picture.

But there will also be moments when Alec thanks Magnus for the meal and there's nothing but gratitude in his eyes.

They do move on as planned. When they enter the large mall it's like Alec goes into parent mode. He's not so out of place anymore, moving straight to where the banners over the shelves advertise baby food.

Magnus follows Alec dutifully, carrying the basket for him. He can't say he's ever done anything like this before. He's not planning to repeat this experience, fully planning to summon all the things
home next time. He only wants to see first what the babies eat, so he'll know in the future.

As much as Magnus would rather be somewhere else, he considers this fair exchange for being able to watch the omega move in front of him as he takes the lead. The boring hoodie is a lost cause but dark jeans and boots he has on do wonders for his legs.

The warlock is happily lost in his thoughts, standing to the side of the aisle to let other shoppers walk past him when Alec approaches him with two large cans of baby formula in each hand.

"I always give them this." He's showing a blue package with a white whale on it. "If it's not available, I get this." He raises a red one with a photo of a baby on it. "Jon is prone to rashes after other brands. Max will eat anything."

The market for baby food is especially diverse when targeting male omegas, who are unable to nurse their children and who give birth to basically premature babies. Nature has made labor easier on their hips by ending pregnancy right at the beginning of the eight month. Children born of male omegas remain smaller than their peers until preschool, sometimes longer. Some people would like nothing better than to use that to promote their disapproval of the mere existence of male carriers. Shorter pregnancy, no ability to feed their newborns, their perceived promiscuity, which in truth isn't much different than that of other sexes, all those become arguments in social debates.

Thankfully, nowadays those mostly happen in trash tv talkshows or are preached by people who failed to have anything more interesting happening in their own private lives.

"Should we get something for dinner tomorrow?" Alec asks when they're ready to go to the register.

"You can cook?"

"Yeah. I had to do it after I was... after I came to live here, but I knew how to cook a little even before that."

"Good to know. However, for the next few days, I think I'll be the one taking care of meals so you have one less thing to think about while you settle in. Is that all right with you?"

"Sure. Yes, why not."

* * * * *

Magnus thinks Alec looks exhausted. They haven't even been out that long, just under four hours including the walk earlier in the day and picking up the boys. It might be the social interactions the omega went through that wore him out. Or it's his usual state. Who knows how much sleep he gets every day?

Now they're all back in the loft and Magnus offers to either unpack the bags they brought in or watch after Max and Jon so Alec can unpack them. He can see the omega was fully prepared to do both on his own but he chooses the former. He disappears into the bedroom, leaving Magnus alone again.
He has to come out again later in time for feeding. He's looking at Magnus's TV while he waits for the water to be the right temperature. Like this, they watch an ending part of a reality show and then beginning of a nature documentary about birds of paradise. Alec is standing near the kitchen counter, Magnus is sitting in one of the armchairs. The warlock had the TV on quietly only for background noise while he tries to figure out how to go about making a more permanent glamour for baby Max.

Magnus watches Alec walk back to the bedroom as quietly as he had appeared.

Magnus was hoping he would return at some point to have something to eat for late dinner himself but eventually, he realizes the other man might just be too withdrawn to do it.

He goes to the guest bedroom door and knocks lightly. It's not closed, there's a small crack and dimmed lights coming through.

"Yes?" The younger man is now wearing a t-shirt and sweatpants that look as soft as they are gray.

"Will you come to eat something with me?" Magnus manages not to make his words sound too suggestive.

"I don't really feel hungry." It sounds like an excuse. Without signs of fear of discomfort to go with it, the warlock decides to ignore it.

"Have a drink then, something light."

"I don't drink."

"A glass of juice."

"Fine."

Alec perches on the armrest of the sofa, cradling his glass in his hands. He's not looking at Magnus, as is his habit. He also looks a little more wary, as if he's expecting to hear something he won't like.

Magnus makes a platter with canapés appear on the coffee table between them. He takes one himself.

"I wanted to talk to you because this is important." He says. "I admit, thinking about child-proofing my place terrifies me a little - all right, terrifies me a whole lot."

"They're too-"

"Too young, I know. They're not moving around on their own yet. They will soon enough. I also need to mundane-proof everything. Don't give me that look, Alexander. I keep quite a few powerful items. Now, not everything's dangerous or even magical in the first place but I'd rather you didn't do anything to yourself on accident. Only warlocks or Seelies have enough skill to know what's what at sight. I wouldn't trust a werewolf or runed Shadowhunter around here either."

He pauses and picks up the plate with food and offers it to Alec, who takes a piece almost automatically.

"So, before I manage to figure out the least painful way to rearrange my belongings, I'll ask you to only touch these places: bookshelves are for you to use. I keep magical tomes and scrolls in the office. You may touch the wardrobes, except for drawers with keyholes, even if they're unlocked.
The whole kitchen is safe. Anything decorative on bookshelves should probably be left alone for now. Oh, and plants. You might want to stay away from those too."

Alec is looking at him with raised eyebrows but he agrees. "I understand. Are you sure you want to allow me to read your books?"

"You can't make use of any spellbook that I have. Any old diary or history book would be rather beneficial, I think, to compare with what you've been taught. Anything you learn about magic will let you understand Max and Jon better when they grow up enough to become magic users. Other than that, I suppose I might fear you stealing precious books from me. Are you a spy from the Clave, Alexander?"

"I'm not a spy from the Clave."

"Good." Magnus offers him canapés again and Alec takes one more.

"I don't sleep around spies and sleep is just what I think we should have now."
– A few days after baby's birth –

Soft knocking on the door served as heads-up before Maia peered into the room. Alec was reclining on the couch, reading a chapter on "Most common mistakes first-time parents make" with Jon and Max sleeping beside him, swaddled like warlock burritos. It was late evening and he was supposed to sleep with them just as he promised Adelaide he would, yet here he was, not doing that.

"You have a guest," Maia told him.

"Me?"

She gave him a pointed look. "A vampire."

She didn't bother hiding her disapproval but she wasn't disapproving enough to not give Alec a choice if he wanted to talk to the vampire or not. One of the male alphas probably would have postured and tried to start a fight even before telling Alec anything.

The omega frowned. Why would one of the vamps come to him here? There was no way he'd be giving out his blood that day, not when he'd lost enough of it just three days ago. Besides, the werewolves wouldn't let him do that either. It wasn't common knowledge he's been doing that for money, Luke knew only because Alec had needed to trust someone.

He wouldn't be allowed to just go out with a man they didn't know. Maia didn't live here with Adelaide. She was here just for Alec. Betas got over it quicker while omegas and alphas remained sensitive and on guard where a weakened omega and their newborns were concerned. For this reason, werewolves set up a schedule for several alphas to come over in turns and be on guard duty. Sometimes they brought along their mate if they had one so Alec got to spend some time with fellow omegas. Sometimes they brought just their kids if their mates were in mundane jobs so Alec watched over all of them.

He was grateful and it actually made him feel better knowing he wasn't alone. He only wished he
could breathe easier at night when he lay in the dark, thinking about how all his life he'd expected Isabelle and Jace to be there with him when he started his own family.

He didn't get Izzy and Jace, he got Maia who was kind and kind of impressive, and who was looking at him waiting for an answer regarding the visitor.

"He says he won't take more than five minutes of your time. Has something for you, I guess." She sounded sceptical.

"Huh, okay, I'll come out."

Alec knew the man. One of his clients. He was waiting for Alec in the hallway by the front door, indeed holding a small, pattern-less gift bag. Alec couldn't say he was comfortable at the moment but he sure could be polite when he greeted the man. Then he asked simply, "Why are you here?"

"This is something I've been thinking about for some time," Leon started his explanation, "I remembered seeing it work well a long time ago but I couldn't remember the name or where to get it. Anyway, I did get it and here it is, for you."

Alec still didn't know what it was when took out a glass jar out of the bag. It wasn't modern glass, it was thick and a little cloudy, not clear. Inside there was some off-white substance that when touched reminded Alec of clay.

"What does it do exactly?"

"Try it on your arm."

He meant the one where a rune used to be. Alec was wearing a shirt with 2/3 sleeves and his scars were visible. The omega narrowed his eyes at the vampire, suspicious yet not finding a plausible ulterior motive behind this. He took the cream on his fingers – it smelled like clay and lots of herbs – and smeared it on the skin of his left arm.

He gazed down at his arm, seeing and feeling nothing. Or – maybe – he was starting to feel numbness of a kind, not intense enough to cause worry. He hoped.

Leon took hold of his wrist, bringing Alec's arm closer to see. Alec hated when vampires did this around him, moved too fast for him to react and touched before he could ask them not to.

"I suppose it takes time. Look here." He pointed to the edge of the remains of Angelic Power rune. There was a change on the faintest bit of the discolored skin: it was becoming paler before their eyes. The patch of skin under the cream was still numb. Alec felt... he felt a little faint, torn between wanting to rub the cream off right away and putting it all over himself.

He thanked Leon for the gift and the man left soon after, asking for nothing.

Even so, Alec hated having debts. He didn't mind being greatly indebted to Luke for all he's done for Alec so far because he liked the werewolf. He liked Maia. He didn't like any of the Night Children. That was why Alec sought Leon out two days later and made him the first vampire he willingly let feed on him.

As for the healing salve, it took three weeks for it to clear all reminders of his past from his body. How lucky, that by the time Magnus Bane found Alec in his home there were no hideous scars covering him anymore.

Only one remained and was not a scar: the last rune to connect Alec to Shadowhunters, standing
Magnus opens his eyes in the middle of the night. It takes him a long, confused moment to realize what woke him when no wards have been breached.

There are very faint sounds coming from another part of his loft. He can distinguish two voices: a crying baby and his father's soothing voice. Honestly, Magnus shouldn't have woken up at all to such low noises but the newness of them, made by someone other than himself, is enough to not let him sleep through it. He doesn't get up. Alexander wouldn't welcome him intruding needlessly and instead he might feel guilty for having interrupted his host's sleep.

Magnus lies on his side for a while, listening until all is silent again and he's drifting off to sleep.

He wakes up again when it's already bright and he feels like he overslept. It is closer to noon now. He didn't mean to be so late but he might have stayed up thinking too long last night even after he and Alec said their goodnights. He lay in bed scrolling through store pages, going down the rabbit hole of essential baby items.

His scrolling resulted in a decision which then led to action. He summoned the contents of his shopping list to the hallway and then finally went to bed for real.

Magnus pushes himself up from the bed, rushes through shower and dressing. Finally, he emerges from his bedroom and heads to where he hears movement: to the hallway.

Alec is crouched down, investigating the contents of the travel changing bag Magnus had added to his night shopping. The full-sized pram that was the main interest of the alpha is beside Alec, now folded neatly into a compact long shape. It's a relief that the huge contraption can really be folded as advertised, as Magnus had some doubts. The pram was advertised for twins, with two detachable carrycots.

When Alec notices Magnus he straightens and stands up to face him.

"Boring gray?" He teases, making a wide gesture at the folded pram.

"Darling, that's old silver. What do you think of wooden handles?" They're very nice, in his opinion, and for that pricetag, they should last a good while. Of course, Alec is never seeing the price.

"I like it. Classy." He sounds like he means it, so Magnus grins.

"Great."

They stand facing each other, the alpha with a small smile lingering on his lips, the omega makes an aborted move to run his hand through his hair.

"So I guess we'll be testing it out. If I can put it back up properly…"

"Am I hearing an invitation in there?"

"Well, if you think that's something you want to do. They're having a nap, which should be ending
They're making a circle around the building housing the loft with a side trip to a bakery.

Two days ago Magnus was only going through the motions: sleep in late, complete a job if he was paid for one, go to Pandemonium until he was bored enough to go to sleep. Now… now he is going for daytime walks with children.

"You know I have a lot of questions." He says to Alexander. "Some are invasive but I think I should know the answers to them."

"Then you should ask. I'll probably answer most of them."

"How old are you?"

"20."

Magnus assumed as much. Even dark circles under his eyes couldn't conceal his age.

"What about the boys?"

"I can't really know Max's age since no birth certificate came with him. Someone left him at the door, didn't even knock or ring. We decided that Max looked about two months old so I count his age from the day I found him, plus two months. That makes him 5 months old now. And Jon, he's five weeks old."

"May I ask who was 'we'?"

"He was dropped off at Karla's. It scared the hell out of me at the time because I've only been staying there for a short time and apparently someone already knew about it. I took him to werewolf pack to ask for help. I knew nothing of childcare, I was only starting to learn before Jon. I was six months pregnant and starting to really look and feel like it…"

It is difficult to explain the situation with Max when there are no witnesses. It's possible the mother was a mundane who happened to know a downworlder or two, maybe wasn't even aware of it. It's possible they knew of Alec's existence and they used him to get the child a safer place than they could have provided. Or maybe they were being cruel and put even more baggage onto Nephilim they disliked. It's all speculation.

"We'll probably never know who did it," Magnus says, "unless they have a change of heart and come back."

Alec looks at him, something hard in his gaze. "They're free to come back to leave with nothing."

Magnus understands the conviction behind those words. At this point, Alec has known Max for longer than his biological parent ever did. Even if that wasn't the case, the alpha felt Alec had the right to fight to keep the child.

Magnus takes a step closer to Alec to make more room on the sidewalk for a pair of joggers with a dog.

"How are you feeling? Physically." He keeps his tone soft without slipping into being too careful
around this important but sensitive topic. "You've allowed vampires to feed from you. There might be side effects to it that will be best remedied as soon as possible."

Alec gets what he means. "I was very careful. I couldn't risk being anything less than at my best around my sons. I… at one point I started to feel it take hold of me… so I stayed away for twice the usual time before coming back. I'm fine now."

"Good. I would have helped you if you needed it. I'm not judging your choices when you've had so little to choose from."

"Actually, I had an offer from the Seelies."

"Oh?"

"One of them walked up to me one day, weeks before I got Max so it was just me and Jon. The Seelie told me I'd find safe haven in the court of his Queen. I considered it for maybe a minute before realizing I really didn't want to risk it." He pauses, then goes on.

"They would take me in and I believe that for a while I'd have everything I needed. And then, one day, I'd wake up in Central Park alone with no way to go back… when I'd ask where my son is, no one would know what I'm talking about." Alec's fingers close tightly on the handle until his knuckles are white. He's all too aware that scenario might still happen, should the Seelies consider stealing Nephilim-warlock child worthwhile.

"I won't lie and say I don't think they'd do that to you," Magnus replies seriously. "Even if I'd like to assume the best about their intentions. I'm glad you're all here now."

"Yeah."

This is a new feeling for Alec, walking down the sidewalk and not looking over his shoulder every five steps. Back when he was freshly on the streets after recovering from the loss of runes, he still expected to not be seen by mundanes just like normal on patrols. Every time he saw people noticing him it felt invasive and physical like unwanted touch.

They were only seeing a man, one of the hundreds of passers-by. Maybe he looked a little bad at the time and maybe the mundanes thought he was a drug addict or something like that but still, they weren't seeing the supernatural in him, just a human.

He was scared of Shadowhunter patrols. He was scared of demons, which became even more of a threat to him than before. He avoided being out after sunset until that one time being out ended badly for him and he woke up with bite-wound in his arm, a headache and confusion. He was wary of mundane police patrols until one of them was not, in fact, mundane but werewolf one. It was how he met the pack.

Walking with Magnus Bane at his side is a whole new experience. As they continue their walk some people, usually omegas, are hoping to catch a glimpse of babies in the pram, which Alec doesn't mind that much after he gets used to it. He has to be vigilant but he can't be paranoid, as it wouldn't serve any purpose.

Those other omegas also never fail to steal a look at Magnus. The warlock is the one drawing the looks of betas and alphas alike. While Alec understands why and has no right to open his mouth about it, he doesn't have to like it.

Alec gazes over at Magnus the same moment the alpha is looking at him, giving him the feeling he's not going to like the next question.
"Were you told to leave the Institute because you wanted to carry the half-demon child to term?"

"Yes. In the short version, yes."

"You haven't planned on getting pregnant, you were assaulted."

"No one knew at first it had happened at all, not until my scent started changing. I was… attacked on a patrol when I was alone, being the look-out. I got back to the Institute as normal. I hadn't thought that..." Magnus easily hears the tension in his voice, can sense omega's unease. "I was stupid."

"You were scared."

"A lot happened after that… ultimately it was my choice to leave with Jonathan still inside me."

"I can't imagine how hard that was."

"I wasn't even close to showing when I left. I had nothing but a blood test and my own knowledge I was going to have a child… Only when he started growing and I could see it, did my choice become the easiest one I've ever made."

Something tightens in Magnus's chest.

* * *

The next day Magnus gifts Max with an amulet for permanent glamouring. It's a bit of a problem to keep it on a baby but Alec manages to have it tucked in the layers of Max's clothes whenever they go out. Magnus also adjusts his wards to let the omega and children to pass through freely.

They settle into peaceful co-existence. After decades of witnessing world history have its ups and downs it honestly is peaceful for Magnus to endure ten minutes of crying performed by an unhappy infant. Alec is the one becoming stressed when it happens, constantly on the verge of apologizing for it happening as if it's his personal failure.

There's a simple rhythm to Alec's life. Feeding, sleeping, changing diapers, rinse, repeat. A hidden talent of the ex-Shadowhunter is apparently sneaky cleaning. It becomes something of a race between them: will Magnus catch the messy thing and dispose of it with magic before Alec tidies it up himself?

Magnus has taken it upon himself to provide food, meaning keeping the fridge stocked for breakfast which they most often eat at different times, then summoning a quick lunch-time meal and later dinner which is fancier and for which they sit down together.

Dishwasher is not as loved by Alec as the washing machine. He washes the dishes himself as soon as he has the time to do it. He claims that it bothers him to have pots and mugs sit inside the machine all day when he could have them clean and ready for use in a minute or two.

It doesn't take long for Magnus to guess it's relaxing for the omega to clean up even if he's not actually that pedantic about his surroundings. He does his best not to add to Alec's workload but he also stops trying to always use his magic before Alec can find something to tidy up.

In the mornings a mug of coffee is always waiting for Magnus even if he's been out late and ends up sleeping late.
It starts like this: the High Warlock of Brooklyn is not a morning person. He shuffles from his bed to the bathroom with just his sleeping pants and a burgundy robe on. He went to check on Pandemonium the previous night, unexpectedly met some of his old acquaintances he hasn't seen in a long time and liked them enough to stay around to talk with them. They had drinks and then some more. He danced. At all times he had his phone on his person, set to vibrate so he could stay out later without guilt, not worried about his guest in the loft.

It's eleven twenty-four the following morning. Walking into the kitchen Magnus can tell Alec has already eaten. The space is spotless except for drying plates on the rack and clean baby bottles and nipples laid out on paper towels.

To his surprise, he also finds a mug with coffee, now lukewarm. There is one used mug on the rack with the plates already so he assumes this one might, in fact, be meant for him? Alec took to using the other mug, with a relief of New York skyline on it. Magnus takes the full one with "Rise and Shine" written in gold glittery paint over a purple background. Holding it in both hands he warms up the contents to a perfect temperature just so he can drink what Alexander made for him instead of making a fresh one.

It's like this every following day, except the next time Magnus makes sure to be up early enough to have the coffee hot and with Alexander's company to go with it.

* * *

"I'll be leaving very soon and I can't predict how long I'll be gone," Magnus announces one early morning in the middle of the week, strolling from his wardrobe room into the living space.

"Okay." Alec spares him one look, then does a double-take. The High Warlock is wearing dark colors today and the outfit might be a new favorite of Alec's. Not that he shares his list with Magnus. Mid-thigh length black coat, black pants and very shiny dress shoes. Under the open coat he has a matching black waistcoat and a dark purple cravat with swirly patterns in dark gold. It's all very… royal level serious.

Alec can't even hide how much he's impressed. His eyes are drawn to Magnus's, where a thicker than usual purple-and-gold eyeshadow makes them look stormy.

"What's the occasion?"

"Oh, warlock business, you see. It's not serious serious but I need to look the part in order to have it resolved quickly and out of my hair."

"…Okay."

Alec himself is in his sleeping shorts and a t-shirt with a bathrobe thrown on for warmth, sitting on a barstool at the kitchen isle. There's still a lot of coffee left for him to drink so there's absolutely no reason for him to leave the chair. He's not quite awake yet but he's enjoying the sunny morning and his fresh caffeine fix.

"Do you have everything?" Magnus asks, coming closer to pick up his phone from the counter.

"I think so. I'll be fine."

Alec looks down at his boys sleeping in carrycots. He placed them side by side in the maroon armchair which he had dragged closer to the kitchen area for his convenience.
Since they're sleeping, the alpha only says goodbye to Alec and then he's gone.

Back home missions would keep the Shadowhunter busy, keep him worried about the smooth running of the whole Institute. His days were filled up with work in the best interests of the Clave. Now it's all about childcare. He's proud of himself. He thinks he's done well so far with how little he had to work with. He managed to get some support, he managed not to make idiotic mistakes. His children are healthy and cared for to the best of his abilities. And now he's finally beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. He trusts Magnus as far as providing for them goes. He trusts the alpha to keep them safe.

He drinks his coffee until it's gone, decides to eat two more of those delicious salmon rolls they're keeping in the fridge and then settles down on the sofa with a book. He's picked three of them for start, judging them by covers and then by skimming through the pages. It's like Magnus suggested before, history of magic in the broad sense of word 'history'.

It's not that easy to get into. Alec knows Shadow World but he doesn't know magic. Like most Shadowhunters he's familiar with portals necessary to connect Institutes to Idris. Wards are also always there but it's not like they're visible so that's something he knows of. Pretty much like mundane technology for cellphones and Wi-Fi.

Some of the writing is truly hard for him to understand but he tries until he reaches something more interesting. After a while, when he has to stop anyway because of fussy infants, he gets a notepad and writes down questions to ask the warlock when they have the next meal together.

So far they had three European and two East-Asian nights. Alec found that he likes a wide range of vegetables and cheeses, and meats, though there were some foodstuffs he asked Magnus never to bring in front of him again.

Alec is starting to suspect he wasn't correct in his judgment of the alpha's intentions towards him. He's had the least experience in life with warlocks and Seelies so far, which means it isn't easy for him to read them. He's learned to understand werewolves better and while he doesn't know vampires he did become familiar with their attitudes and their mannerisms.

It's just that he can't imagine anyone could be so good at feigning kindness. With as much of it as the alpha has shown him so far it has to be his trait, not his game.

Magnus returns home in the early evening.

"Alexander?"

"We're here, taking a bath."

"I was just checking."

Magnus drops off his coat on the backrest of the sofa. While he does that he notices half of the coffee table is taken up with books and sheets taken out of a notepad. Half of them are covered in disjointed notes. Even though he's curious about them, he doesn't touch Alec's things.

"Have you eaten yet?" He calls out towards the bedroom.

"Uh, a little. I could eat now."

Magnus is pleased with the answer. While he's alone he settles down to simply rest for a while. He considers turning the TV on and then decides against it. He doesn't need the distraction.
He doesn't have to wait long for Alexander to come out, carrying Max in his onesie with white- and-blue cartoon ghosts on it. Baby Jonathan is probably sleeping already.

Alec stops nearby, gazing down at Magnus from his full height. He seems to be considering something. When Magnus shifts with the intention to sit up, the omega plops his son down onto Magnus's chest. The alpha automatically puts his hands and the boy's sides to keep him from rolling off of him. Max makes his usual noises at first but his eyelids are dropping and it doesn't take long for him to be deeply asleep.

While Magnus is child-blocked, Alec is back in the bathroom putting away the baby bath. The alpha doesn't know that once Alec is done he stops in the doorway and snaps a picture of him and Max with his new phone. Only then does he walk into the living room to pick up Max and to put him to bed.

"I almost got comfortable enough to sleep too."

The omega raises an eyebrow. "I was promised dinner first."

While they eat Alec remembers about some of his notes and they spend the rest of the evening discussing magic.

* * *

It's Friday and Magnus comes home to a disaster. It's a subtle disaster, small scale, small importance.

There are lights on in the kitchen area, Alec's room and through the wide-open door, he can see the bathroom is lit as well. The glint off of something shiny on the kitchen tiles catches his attention. It's broken glass. Tiny shards were strewn across the floor after something shattered there. Probably just a water glass. There are dark spots of liquid smeared on the biggest piece.

"Alexander?"

There's no immediate answer, then a defeated-sounding "Here."

Magnus follows the voice to the omega's room. Baby Jon is sleeping in the crib but Max makes an excited sound the moment he spots Magnus.

"Hello, Blueberry." He leans over the crib to pet the soft hair on Max's head. "I'm sorry but I can't stay with you. I need to check on your daddy now, all right?"

He enters the bathroom where he finds Alec sitting on the edge of the bathtub, his posture hunched and his hands cradled in his lap. He has a balled-up towel gripped in his right hand, soaking in blood.

"Allow me." Magnus holds Alec's wrist and gently pulls the towel from between his fingers. Cleanly cut edges have the nasty habit of not sticking together and not healing fast enough, instead bleeding and causing more pain than necessary. Magnus closes the cut on Alec's hand with a little push of magic and cleans his skin of dried and fresh blood.

"I could have healed those in a minute with a rune," Alec says, looking down at his palm. He's the picture of miserable omega, disappointed and defeated.

"I know angel, I'm sorry."
Alec doesn't seem to want to do anything but sit there. It makes Magnus feel bad but on the other hand, it's such a mundane coping mechanism he has to fight a fond smile. Having Alexander see it and think Magnus is being patronizing is the last thing he wants.

"Bad day?"

The omega shrugs. "I guess. Jonathan woke fussy, didn't want to eat, then cried because he was hungry. Max picked up on his mood and joined the crying. I broke a glass when it was too wet and slipped out of my hand. I cleaned it up. Ten minutes later I knocked it off the counter accidentally. Then I cut myself."

"What a tragedy." Magnus puts his arm around Alec, pulling him closer gently. He doesn't resist, leaning into Magnus.

"You'll feel better after you've slept. Did Jon eat at last?"

"Yeah. Eventually. They're both feeling better than I am at this point."

"I'm guessing you ate next to nothing all day?"

He doesn't get a verbal answer but sitting so near each other, he can feel the sigh go through the body beside him.

"In that case, what would you like tonight?"

"Carbonara."

"Excellent choice. I think Max might be still waiting for us to come out."

He disposes of the red towel with his magic and then looks Alec's hands over for remains of his blood. The younger man runs his fingers over the newly healed skin.

It reminds Magnus to say, "I thought you might want to meet an old friend of mine, a warlock and a nurse. She's the one you want in serious emergencies. I'll put her number in your phone so you won't have to go through me to contact her. She could come to visit to get to know the boys. And you."

"Sure. That sounds reasonable."

A thought hits Alec. "Am I keeping you from inviting your friends? I mean, do you not have guests over because of me- us?"

"Of course not. I admit, I made sure to avoid unannounced visits and clients for your sake but a week is hardly a sacrifice when I want you to feel safe. Anyway, most of them are warlocks so you can guess we've already spent decades together. I can always go to them or Pandemonium."

"Mhm. Your loft is meant for… social events, is it not?"

"True. I'll tell you this, if I happen to terribly want to throw a party any time soon, I have ways of soundproofing sections of this loft so you'd be free to sleep right through it undisturbed."

"You couldn't erase my scent, though."

"Your scent isn't your ID." He looks at Alec, who's staring at the floor now. "Are you perhaps worried about my reputation?"
He knows that's a direct question which Alec won't be able to answer either way, being too easily flustered.

"After you've known me for a while, darling, you'll know it's not easy to make me do something I don't want to do."

* * *

Catarina is friendly and warm, and when she drops her glamour Alec knows he can trust her. It'll be good for Max to know her growing up, so when he starts questioning everything about the world like children do, the obvious difference between himself and the rest of his family won't be as jarring to him.

Come to think of it, Alec has no idea what Magnus's Mark is. Obviously he's not going to ask and it's not like it matters. If he were blue or maybe some other color, Alec thinks he would have mentioned it by now for the same reasons Catarina has.

They spend a few hours together, talking about Jon and Max. Alec quietly listens to Catarina and Magnus catching up and trading recent stories from their respective jobs.

Jon and Max seem to be more vocal around more people, Max more so, being the older one.

At some point, when Catarina's cooing over them, something catches her attention. She's running her fingertips gently over Max's forehead.

"Oh that," Alec says, "I thought they were just dry patches of skin? I have baby cream for that."

She hums thoughtfully. Now interested, Magnus comes closer to take a look too. The two warlocks exchange glances.

"Well, that might be just sensitive skin and right care will make those go away, but… with it placed so symmetrically in just two spots… You should consider the possibility there might be something more going on with his demon blood."

Magnus quickly places his hand on Alec's arm. "She just means his warlock mark isn't finished appearing."

"So like what, he might grow something? Horns?"

"Yes." Magnus and Catarina answer in unison.

"Huh."

To Magnus, Alexander looks like he has absolutely no idea what to do with this new information and is stuck with no proper response to it. His perplexed face is oddly endearing.

At some point Catarina asks him about the day Jon was born. It's not a topic he would choose himself but he would have told this to Magnus one day anyway and he might as well do it now.

"Luke of the werewolf pack offered to introduce me to a packmate of his, a retired doctor. I was invited to come to her home when I needed it."

Kindness extended to Alec drove a wedge between the werewolves who were willing to help him and their Alpha and his like-minded packmates, who did not care to help any Nephilim. Alec did
understand his position but when it became an almost direct threat to Alec's safety, he shook off his
guilt over his role when the Alpha was challenged by Luke. There was more to it, of course. Alec's
presence was just the last of many straws weighing against the previous leader. Personally, Alec
trusted Luke a great deal and could imagine it would be beneficial to the pack as a whole to have
him as their leader.

As for the day Jon was born... Alec remembers a male omega, maybe two years younger than him,
holding his hand at some point. He remembers sensing his presence all the way until he held his
tiny son in his arms so the omega must have stayed there for him. Other than that there were two
beta women, Adelaide the doctor and her daughter. Alec knew the house was protected by at least

Omegas rarely experienced complications but in case something went wrong, they agreed to call an
ambulance and deal with consequences of a warlock child being seen by mundanes later.

Thank the Angel it went well. He was in pain and woozy for a few hours afterwards and he had to
let the others care for Max and feed Jon for the first time. When he was given his newborn back
they slept for hours together.

Magnus and Catarina are looking at Alec across the table. He's aware he fell silent and it probably
shows on his face he's not thinking fuzzy thoughts.

A warm hand slides over his where it's resting next to his glass on the table. Alec looks down at
Magnus's fingers curling loosely around his palm. Dark nails and silver rings, now such a familiar
sight.

The warlock doesn't say anything and there's nothing Alec can think of that he'd want to hear right
now.

Now it's Catarina looking at the both of them, her expression soft and not pitying.

It matters to Alec that Magnus's friends don't see him as a burden on the alpha, an unnecessary
complication. It matters to him that he himself is liked for who he is, or tries to be, just as it had
always mattered to him among Shadowhunters in Idris and the Institute.

Catarina clears her throat, Magnus gives Alec's hand a gentle squeeze before pulling back.
Going Forward pt. I

Chapter Summary

Today: news and visitors, next up: more bonding and more sadness

[I hope I didn't leave in broken edits and many typos because I'm a little tired while posting this. If I didn't post today then it would have to wait till Sunday. Thanks for reading!]

Chapter Notes

Another note about the world: there are three tiers in relationships. 1) casual one night stands, 2) mating, which implies loyalty and faithfulness of both partners, regular sexual relations and living together. Mundanes follow it up with marriage for legal perks. In Shadow World that's not necessary.

3) Bonding, which is permanent and it's illegal to forcefully separate Bonded mates. The only way to break it is to die. It's not done lightly, which is why warlocks don't end up having children of their own.

One can usually tell when someone has a mate but it's not necessarily obvious. One can always tell someone has a Bonded mate and it comes with privileges respected by everyone. It's like natural law. You can force someone to be your mate but you can't make one-sided Bond.

Luke Garroway calls on Monday. Alec answers the phone with one hand while juggling groceries in the other, standing right outside the door of the loft. He pushes the handle with his elbow, letting himself in while he exchanges greetings with the alpha on the other side of the line.

"Is there any chance you'll have a free moment to come down to Jade Wolf?"

"Today?"

"As soon as possible. If you absolutely can't then the world won't end but I could use some help here."

Alec thinks about it while setting his bags on the kitchen counter. He can hear Magnus's voice coming from one of the other rooms, possibly telling stories again.

"Okay…" He holds the phone more comfortably now. "I'll have to ask Magnus if he can look after the boys a little longer."

"Magnus? Bane?"

"Ah." Luke can't see the sheepish look on Alec's face but he can probably catch it in his voice. "I haven't mentioned that, have I."
"Now you have one more reason to come over."

"Right. I'll explain when I get there." He's not thrilled about it but he never kept his whereabouts secret from the pack members most interested in his wellbeing.

After the call ends he puts away stuff that needs to be refrigerated and leaves the rest as is in bags, then goes to find Magnus.

The warlock has moved both baby cots to his own room where he's sitting crossed-legged in the middle of the king-sized bed, the boys in front of him and both awake. The loose cobalt blue shirt he's wearing flows with the movement of his arms. His black pants look tight and soft at the same time, which, along with his hair lying in a wave rather than spiked up, makes him look like the embodiment of a free day. An attractive, free day.

He's in the middle of a story involving a plane and a president of a country, and he's telling it with a great deal of feeling behind the words he's saying. Alec is sure Max appreciates the movement of shiny rings when Magnus gestures for effect more than the plot. Meanwhile, Jonathan needs only warmth, milk and knowing he's not alone to be fully content, unless he's in a mood for crying.

Alec had worried about this- about leaving them with someone new, especially an alpha, especially a male one. He read about young children rejecting scents not belonging to their father. Scent hasn't been an issue with Karla because she didn't have much of one at all, being a vampire and a beta. Male alphas of the werewolf pack got nervous around any newborn and generally stayed a reasonable distance away, always finding an excuse and looking mildly embarrassed about it. Anyway, at the time Alec hardly left his children alone with anyone.

Here with Magnus, in his loft, it was only natural Alec would sometimes leave the warlock alone for whatever reason. Such as a quick grocery run, which Magnus insisted he could substitute with magic and Alec insisted on doing himself. There have been no issues with that so far and his boys only cried for other reasons, never rejecting the alpha's presence. They reacted better to Alec and were soothed much quicker by him, and both those things were normal for the omega parent in any family.

So far Magnus took over entertaining the boys himself or they'd 'watch' TV together, with his commentary to go with the images.

The High Warlock has a lot of stories to tell. Most of the time Alec hangs around to listen unless Magnus takes over so Alec doesn't have to sit at home in the first place. Sometimes, when he uses the help to just go and take a long bath in his fancy stone bathroom, the alpha sits in Alec's bedroom from where his voice carries into the bathroom. Alec knows he should listen because under the obvious and sometimes outrageous embellishments he can hear the true story of Magnus's long life.

He thinks he's quite decent at telling the lies from the truth but even so, he has some questions accumulated for boring days to ask the High Warlock.

Now, Alec leans on the doorframe, crossing his arms over his chest. Magnus looks at him briefly, sends him a wink.

Alec's face heats up a bit.

It's best to use diversion so he does just that in a convenient moment when Magnus isn't in the middle of a sentence. "Luke just asked me to come over to help with an emergency."
"As you can see we're perfectly fine here," Magnus says calmly, gesturing at his audience.

"Right. Can you handle feeding them?"


"While you were reading mine, I got my hands on yours." He makes the book disappear. "Anyway, I'm sure I can find a relevant tutorial on Youtube."

Alec responds with an expression of mock horror, gets a smirk in response.

Magnus raises from the bed in a fluid, cat-like movement. "I'll open a portal for you," he offers.

"Thank you."

* * *

Alec approaches the Jade Wolf wondering what his help is supposed to be. Before he gets closer one of the patrons walks out the door and spots Alec. It's the young omega, the one Alec has met at Adelaide's. He doesn't see Alec immediately since he's looking down at his feet while walking but when he does, his whole face brightens.

"Alec! Luke called you?"

"Yeah. I still don't know why."

"Oh, we've got a new one and a lot of trouble with him."

"Someone turned?"

"Not because of us. You know we wouldn't do that."

"I do."

"Let me take you inside, they're in one of the backrooms." The other omega turns back towards the front door and grabs Alec's wrist as if he's excited to show him around. It's endearing.

When they walk in Alec keeps his head down out of respect for the werewolves who might not like his presence in their space regardless of their new Alpha's opinion on it. It's also safer for him as an omega to not stand out more than he has to in a place he's not part of. Some of the men and women acknowledge him with a nod, many of them ignore him entirely.

He's led to the back of the building until he sees Luke himself standing in front of a big changing room with lockers. The room is closed off with bars and there's another man inside sitting on a bench, bowed and holding his head in his hands.

"Hey," Alec says.

"Thanks for getting here so fast." Luke turns fully to him. He looks just a bit worn. "Thank you too, Dustin, run to your class or you'll be late again."

The younger omega salutes and leaves with a grin on his face.
"Let's step away for a moment." They put some distance between themselves and the new werewolf, enough to talk in low voices and not be heard.

"We always handle them ourselves but sometimes... they're just too freaked out. I talked to him, Maia and Dustin did as well. It doesn't matter who tries, he asks if they're werewolves and shuts them out when they confirm." Luke rubs the side of his face with his hand. He looks like he hasn't gotten enough sleep last night and not enough coffee today. "He's afraid and thinks we're all in on it and won't listen to one complete sentence. One of us could lie but it'd come up later and bite us in the ass."

"I get it. So you want me to talk to him? As non-werewolf part of the Shadow World?"

"Yeah, it might help if you can honestly tell him about what's going on. You know, I don't expect you to say what you are, just try and get him to listen."

"I don't think I can do better than all of you but it's certainly in my interest too to have the guy calm down."

The man is a beta of average build and height, with bright brown hair. He's dressed in a zip-up hoodie that doesn't look to be his size. Alec imagines he might have bandages underneath it. He's mostly clean but it's clear he's been through a lot.

Alec stands quietly observing. It's best to get a read first if he's going to have to use his omegan talent. Betas are not as sensitive to scents but they are less stubborn than alphas and overall easier to manage by omegas, unless they happen to be scent-blind.

"Hi. I'm Alec."

"Great. Another one." The man says, not even looking up. Alec stands close to the bars, rests his hands on the horizontal piece running through them.

"I'm not a werewolf. I'm just friends with them. Why won't you hear them out?"

"You're kidding, right? It's their fault, they're spreading it to people like me!"

"You're kidding, right? It's their fault, they're spreading it to people like me!"

"They are people like you."

Alec doesn't want to try influencing the man right away. It's better to try and convince him to just listen and process his new reality.

"It's a sickness that comes from demons." He dives right into the supernatural because why not. "The afflicted are still people and people do a lot of cruel and stupid things. The one who hurt you might have been a violent asshole or they might have been not in their right mind. I don't know that. You're free to resent them but they're not here."

The beta just shakes his head, muttering 'demons' in incredulous voice under his breath.

"Yes, they're out in the world. Now that you've turned you'll be able to see them, see their evil. The people out there behind that wall are not evil, they're living their lives like you. Did you know Luke is a police detective? Maia wants to be marine biologist? They're not out to hurt you. They haven't hurt you so far, have they? You're only locked up."

"No shit."
"You're locked in here only to stop you from making a mistake you'll regret all your life. It'd be on you and on their conscience too. Most importantly, your life isn't ruined. You're not going to die from this."

The man just shakes his head. He's not telling Alec to go away so he might be too mentally exhausted now to protest even if his attitude is the same.

Alec very carefully opens himself up to use his persuasion. He chose to talk first and use logic while influence can wait. Too early and too strong, and he could get the opposite results of what he wanted.

The beta is already leaning towards listening, even if it's very passive. He wasn't really closing himself off before to the others, he was just lashing out at what he saw as a threat. He surely wants to have a solution to his problem, wants to be helped under the fear and anger.

Alec speaks softly. It's not his favorite thing to do, as he believes he's awkward at it. He only ever used that tone with Izzy and Max, his little brother he named his son after. He sometimes soothed injured Shadowhunters in the infirmary but it wasn't anything special or happening often. It came easier to him in those cases. Doing it on purpose makes him feel like an elephant handling china. Still, he tries.

"Luke helped me out when no one else would. I'm not a werewolf or a vampire but I've been hurt by demons too. He'll help you, for as long as you need it. If you just let them, they'll tell you everything there is to know about your new life. I'm not the right person to do that because I haven't lived through what you have."

While he says those things he can hear his mother's voice in his head saying 'Alec, we're better than them, it's time you acted like it'. That voice has been telling him many things, many times over a long span of time. He's no longer shutting it out, he learned to live ignoring it.

"Demons are the ones you need to be wary of, not other werewolves. There are no manuals for being one so the best you get is advice from those who have been here longer."

"So what are you?" It almost surprises Alec when the man speaks up.

"I'm..." He really doesn't think telling this man about his angelic blood will go well. It'd only make him look like he's in a better position in life and preaching. "I'm a Shadowhunter. We're tracking and killing demons and try to protect mundane people and the-"

"Downworld, that's the word the others used before."

"Right. There's a lot of Downworld for you to discover. Let the other werewolves get you something to eat, let them talk to you. Just hear them out, take their advice and you'll be home soon."

"I'm still not convinced, or happy about this."

"Happiness doesn't depend on other people, only on you. You let them rule you, it's your fault." It comes out a little harsher than he meant to say it. Frustrated with himself, Alec turns to the side. His gaze falls on some pieces of hardware but he's not really seeing it.

"All right, look," the beta speaks again, "tell the last one that was here I'll talk to him in exchange for coffee and something for lunch."

Alec turns back to the man and manages to smile with some effort. "Great, you won't regret it."
Thank you."

It went much faster than he expected it to. It's quite possible another werewolf would have gotten the same results simply because the poor newly turned man has had enough and resigned to listen.

"I think that went well," Alec says when he joins Luke.

"Thank you, I'd hate to keep him locked up until he believed us."

The omega shrugs, looks down at his shoes. "I just told him what I thought you'd want to tell him."

"You calmed him down, maybe Dustin should learn something from you to be more effective."

"Right, that's what omegas are for after all."

"That's what they're good at. Among many other things they accomplish."

"Yeah, well. I'm not a good one." He leans his side against the wall and crosses his arms. Not wanting anyone to overhear, he speaks with a lower voice. "They didn't want to keep me, for all my supposed virtues and usefulness."

"They made a stupid mistake, one I am certain they've noticed the next day you weren't there."

"Is that such a great thing to be proud of? Just a feature of my biology, not something I've worked for."

"All right, besides that," Luke says firmly, looking at Alec even if the omega's looking anywhere but at him. "Were you not working to be a useful Shadowhunter? Did you sit on your ass, looking pretty?"

"No."

"Were you the only omega in the Institute?"

"Yeah, for the last several years. There was another but they found a mate and eventually moved elsewhere."

"That's why you're so critical of yourself. If there was someone else, you'd have seen them work. You'd have noticed the influence an omega has on their surroundings. When it was only you, you thought nothing was different thanks to you and you ignored the proof. Like you're doing right now."

Alec meets Luke's gaze. He didn't mean to have this conversation, didn't want to be comforted. The first bitter sentence just came out on its own before he could hold it back. Now it's awkward for him to stand there and hear what the alpha's telling him.

"I promise you," Luke continues, "they've noticed lack of your presence regardless of their opinion of you at the time you left. Alec, you know what they say about work done well: it's noticed only when a fuck-up happens."

"Sometimes fuck-ups only happen because someone's looking to find one and bring it up."

"Sure, you get people like that everywhere. Just the consequences differ. Have you been thinking a lot about this lately? You can't bring yourself down for no reason." Luke puts his hand on Alec's
shoulder.

Alec takes a deep breath. "Yeah, I... I might have thought too much. Sorry."

"All right, now none of that. You needed to say that. So. Let's have lunch, tell me all about your new life."

Maia and Bat invite themselves to the table when the omega and the alpha sit down to have lunch. Since Alec and Luke are sitting opposite each other, Bat, being a beta, takes the seat at Alec's side and Maia joins Luke on his. They're the little team of Luke's loyalists, both of them young and liked among their people.

Maia has a piece of paperwork with her that she clearly intends to push towards Alec. Luke tries to grab for it and fails when she pulls back out of his reach.

"Maia, he doesn't have to deal with this."

"He doesn't, but he might not mind to," She says lightly.

"Do what?" Alec asks.

"He's not here to do anything more than eat now."

"He is here and he can read," Alec says, "so he'll see it himself."

Maia tries to give him the paper again and this time Alec is faster than Luke in snatching it. He sees the official header first. It came from the Institute. Just the fact that it's on paper is enough to make him want to know more.

It's official talk, a whole lot of nothing concrete, signed by a Lydia Branwell. He's not sure if he should be surprised it's not Lightwoods signing their own Institute's papers even after all those months. Branwell name is, of course, familiar to him but he's never met any Lydias.

"Did you get anything like this before?" He asks.

"Once or twice back in April. Or March maybe." That was back at the beginning.

"Signed by...?"

"A-something."

That's what Alec thought. Back then Aldertree would have still been in New York. He's very glad to not have to look at that name today.

He reads over the text again. It's one of two things: a whole lot of nothing that's meant to remind the Pack there's no hostility between Shadowhunters and them, and to be a base for future relations, or it's a base for future action. Whatever that could be, he doesn't know.

"They are either planning something and want the paper trail to prove they've approached the Downworld by the book since the start, or they want you to have the paper to know The Institute wants good-better relations. It's just a polite request for everyone to act in everyone's best interests." That means doing everything to make work easier for the Institute, answering questions when asked by Shadowhunter representatives, stuff of that nature. "I mean, you would have cooperated even without this if it were about safety."
Honestly, he could see himself sending out something like this for keeping up good appearances. He would have sent out something like this, expecting cooperation. Or, rather, he would have gone out himself because that's how they usually communicated with Downworld representatives back in his time. That's why Maia even bothered to show him the paper – because it was something different from the norm.

The werewolves nod at his words.

"So I guess we'll wait and see." Luke sighs. "Vague works both ways."

Alec's looking down at the paper in his hands, regretting he can't divine a person's personality from their signature. He's probably never going to know this new Head, especially since she's not introducing herself as a permanent one. He can only hope she's looking after the people in the Institute he cares about.

"Okay, enough of that." Luke finally makes a successful attempt to get his hands on the paper. "Alec has some news to tell us."

"Thanks." He mutters. He'd been hoping the alpha had forgotten all about it. "I've been asked to move in with Magnus Bane."

Alec briefly recounts the events involving Magnus Bane, leading up until this point. Once in a while, he catches himself when his tone slips into the one he used to use when giving reports to his parents.

"So that's why he's not in as often as he was before," Bat says, confusing Alec for a second before he remembers hearing something about a DJ and Pandemonium back when he was staying at Adelaide's. So that must have been about Bat and he's talking about Magnus now.

"You caught him?" The young werewolf punches Alec's shoulder playfully. "He's with you at home instead of partying?"

Alec makes an offended face. "He's working. And he's still going out."

"Uh huh, I've seen him party maybe once since he started coming less."

"I really don't know what you're insinuating."

"That's very good." Luke cuts in. "I think it's the safest you can be."

"It's why I agreed."

"However," Luke continues, "Bane has a reputation as a warlock and a reputation for other things. I hope you won't get hurt."

"I'll form my own opinion of him as I see him," Alec says firmly. He knows a beautiful, graceful alpha such as Magnus must have his own pick of willing lovers and hopeful mate candidates. All that doesn't matter, however, as long as he's not showing that side of himself in front of Alec. Sometimes it feels like the alpha is trying to fluster him on purpose but that's just superficial playfulness on his part. Alec knows he's a gray mouse to Magnus's peacock presence and he can't be swept off his feet with a bit of flirting. He's not mate material anymore.

Even when Magnus is trying to influence him, he's very subtle and safe about it. Alec knows the alpha has calmed him down before using alpha's suggestion on him. Like the night when he found Alec for the first time and later when he healed his hand. Both times the suggestion benefited Alec,
"He's the one looking after the boys today," Alec adds for no reason. "Actually, I think I'm starting to miss them… I don't think I've been away from them for this long during one day before."

"Hey," Maia says, "remember that I'm open to babysitting duty when they're older and safer to handle for someone like me."

"Are you afraid of infants?" Bat asks, now playful towards her.

"I'm not afraid of them." She says firmly. "You saw his kid, he's tiny. I was afraid of looking at him the wrong way when he was around."

"You'll be less afraid when he grows up to his father's height."

"I'll take care of kids who are old enough to speak about what hurts and what they need."

"Okay, thanks for the talk. I'm going." Alec raises from his seat. They all have to stand up, Bat to let Alec through and Maia to do the same for Luke who seems to be ready to leave too.

"Don't be a stranger, you know where to find us."

"I'm going back to the station," Luke tells Alec as they both step outside. "I'm supposed to be on duty but Alaric's covering for me for this emergency."

Alec nods. He hoped to talk to Luke about one more thing.

"I wondered… I need a trainer for fighting. Mundane one. I was going to look for one myself but since I'm here, maybe you know someone or heard of someone who might have the time."

He's been thinking about this for a while now. He would give a lot to have a chance to spar with Hodge again. Every day it felt like he was losing skill and stamina and he's had enough of that feeling. He wanted to be alive, not just surviving. He very carefully didn't think about training with Jace. It brought more pain than he was ready to deal with.

Right now what he needs is a good mundane teacher, someone who will bring out the best in him without runes and Adamas weapons.

Luke thinks about it but doesn't have an answer right away. "I'll let you know."

* * * *

When Alec gets back home Magnus signals him right away to be quiet.

"How did it go, whatever you were doing?" Magnus asks him when they're in the kitchen, standing on opposite sides of the kitchen isle, eating fried chicken out of a box.

"Fine." Alec takes a piece of chicken and dips it in the sauce that came in its own container with the big box. "Did you know you're the topic of gossip over at Jade Wolf?"

"Tell me more."
"Your prolonged absences from the flashy world were noticed. They're wondering what's keeping you away from your numerous admirers."

"Yes, I'm sure those are the words they used when telling you this."

"I told them I'm not the keeper of the High Warlock of Brooklyn."

"Mhm."

"I may have told them you've discovered the charms of family life and now you value the sound of a child's giggling over the pounding of loudspeakers."

"Those are also the exact beautiful words you've used?"

"Of course."

The rest of the early afternoon goes like normal, in sync with children's needs. Alec does everything himself since the alpha has done enough that day while Alec was out and he refuses to make him do more.

They spend one of the peaceful naptimes reading books on opposite sides of the living room. Alec's on the couch with his notes, Magnus in the armchair with an old text he's been planning to translate in forever.

Magnus steals looks at the omega, who's wearing a moss green cashmere sweater which was added to his wardrobe magically by Magnus himself. He's been doing that one piece of clothing at a time, each day since Alec's moved in. The sweater is the best quality it could be, soft and on the warm side.

Omegas appreciate comfortable, soft things. It's Magnus's weakness showing in the fact the sweater has shorter sleeves, which show off Alec's lovely arms. He likes watching the omega do things with those arms.

Magnus has also added some shirts with wider collars which might just let him catch a glimpse of Alexander's collarbones. He feels quite the Victorian way, hoping for and ready to swoon at a glimpse of bared skin. He's not going to feel ashamed of it but he's also surely not going to mention that to the omega himself.

Magnus is about to suggest something more entertaining, like maybe watching some of that political drama show Alec pretends not to like (but episode progress recorded by the smart TV does not lie), but doesn't get to say anything about it because there's someone at the door, announcing their presence with a rather insistent knocking.

Magnus has not set up any appointments for the evening. Exchanging glances with Alec, he motions for the omega to stay seated while he goes to check the door.

"Who dares disturb the High Warlock?"

"Jocelyn Fray."

Magnus opens the door enough to see the ex-Shadowhunter's face and not a millimeter further. She doesn't look hurt or stressed to him. Not in need of immediate help.
"What is so urgent you couldn't have called first?"

"The spell is weakening faster every time-"

"And? You still could have called."

"I don't want to redo it. I want you to reverse it completely."

That's new. It makes Magnus pause. "You're going to wait here." He closes the door, leaving her on the other side of it.

He walks back to where he expects to see Alec where he sat before but he's not there. He's already moved to his room, now standing at his door.

"Alexander, I apologize for the sudden inconvenience," Magnus says, actually feeling sorry.

"What's going on?"

"I'm going to solve this problem because the sooner it's done the better. If you go to the bedroom I'll put an illusion over your door to lock the sounds in, so no one will know you're here."

"Okay," Alec replies with a frown.

"I'm sorry-"

"It's fine, you have work to do."

"I'm sorry because the woman who's behind that door used to be a Shadowhunter. She ran away back during the war with Valentine. She has a daughter who is Nephilim too, and who lived under a memory spell for all her life. I cast the spell and now she wants to have it undone. So I'm sorry that you'll have to be reminded of Shadowhunters like this."

He's not sure what Alec is thinking now. His face is pretty much blank as far as emotions go but his scent changes to anxious one.

Magnus reaches out to put his hand on his wrist. "She won't stay long because I can't do what she expects tonight, even if her daughter came with her, which she didn't."

"Okay."

Alec retreats into the bedroom and Magnus raises the illusion. Then he sighs and goes to open the door.

"Was that necessary?" Jocelyn asks, arms crossed on her chest.

"You come into my house, you wait until it's convenient for me." They move to the living room. "Sit down please, would you like a drink?"

"No, thank you."

She's looking around the place, surely able to tell there was someone here with Magnus. She's not rude about it, just curious. It's best she thinks he took time to portal a lover out of here before letting her in.

"Are you sure that's what you want?" Magnus asks seriously. He has his own opinion on this situation but it's not his place to be influencing her so long as her choices don't affect him.
"Yes. I've thought about it for a long time. But... She's remembering more and faster the older she is. I can't keep stealing this from her, no matter my own feelings. The world's never safe but Valentine is gone and not coming back. I ran because of him and it's time to stop."

"I agree on that. What do you plan to do? Go back to Idris?"

"Probably, yes. I have the Mortal Cup, I've kept it safe. I'm hoping they'll be happy enough to have it back to let us in without much hostility."

"You have a life here, outside of the Clave."

Maybe it's a thing all Shadowhunters share, feel the pull of the past life, hear the siren call of their precious Law. Or maybe he's not being fair, maybe Jocelyn Fray wants to go back to being a Fairchild and have her friends from her past back.

"Yes, and Clary does too. It will be her choice in the end, but she wants and needs to know the truth to make it."

"Agreed again." He taps his finger on the glass he's been drinking from before. "It's not going to be as easy as casting a counter-spell."

"What do you mean?"

"For Clarissa's and my own safety I've fed her memories to a demon, who will need to be summoned and bargained with to get them back."

Her mouth makes an 'oh' shape.

"I assure you, if done right, there will be nothing lost and no danger at all. I'll contact you about the time and place, and what we'll need for the summoning besides two more people for the pentagram."

"You're not going to do it here?"

"Definitely not."

When Jocelyn leaves, Magnus leans on the front door for a moment. Just what he needed, more requests from Nephilim. It's his own fault he let her in, today and years ago.

He walks over to Alexander's door. The spell breaks when he knocks on the door gently. There's no answer. He says the omega's name but that doesn't get an answer either. He shouldn't, but he opens the door slowly, thinking Alec might be in the bathroom and doesn't hear him. It's dark inside. In the stripe of light coming from the open door, Magnus can see the outline of Alec under the duvet, curled on his right side. He can't hear sounds of wriggling babies so they must be sleeping too.

Magnus closes the door as quietly as he opened it. Strange. Yes, it was dark outside but in this season it wasn't late at all and the conversation with Jocelyn didn't take long, just as he told Alec it wouldn't. He can't help but be disappointed. He had plans for the evening to spend it with Alec even if they sat five feet apart like with a chaperone present. He hoped to get Alec to try some wine until he found one he liked or make him a soft drink, watch that show, maybe get the omega to talk about himself some more.

But it's fine, there's another day ahead of them.
Going Forward pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Today: the hardship of being sad and some fun with magic. Soon: more people, probably. And Magnus herding omegas like cats.

Alec isn't in the loft the following morning. He's out, walking the streets of their neighborhood with his sons bundled up in the pram. They're too young to be spending much time outside so he's prepared for that; he googled local family-friendly, particularly omega-friendly cafes and restaurants to make them stops on his walk.

At breakfast, he had decided it'd be better for the boys to be out in public rather than to sit indoors with their father and stew in his little cloud of anger and sadness. He went to bed angry and he woke up the same, all because of that Shadowhunter woman. He had thought about it and is willing to believe the same thing she does, that they'll take her back. He doesn't know her story and he's not planning to ask Magnus about it but what he understands is that she ran away because of her daughter, who Alec assumes is of age or otherwise old enough to understand joining their world. They'll surely take her in with open arms, if not her mother. She's probably a beta or an alpha, too. And isn't that just rubbing it in that he can't go back home? He spent his whole life being the best Shadowhunter he could be but the one thing he had asked for, to be allowed to keep his mix-blooded child was one transgression too many.

The walk won't make him feel better but it'll provide Max and Jon with mixed auras of other people. Besides, Max likes listening to voices so it'll keep him happy.

They're out for about two hours when Alec stops in his tracks while passing a row of stores. One of them advertises a variety of hunting and recreational weapons on its display. It includes a bow settled between a classic rifle and a set of hunting knives in a case. These all seem to be in a color and theme that doesn't appeal to Alec at all but surely there's more than one bow on offer inside. He stands there on the sidewalk, looking at the display.

It's not like he hasn't seen a bow before, in the time after leaving the Institute. The difference between then and now is that he has a credit card with his name on it in his jacket's inner pocket. Admittedly, every time he takes the card out in public to pay for his groceries he's expecting someone to jump out of nowhere and snatch it to steal it. It just makes him nervous. The account attached to the card is Magnus's. The surname on the card is also Magnus's since Alec hasn't told him his. The first time Alec saw the piece of plastic he looked at it for way too long, not sure how he felt about it.

Luckily it's accepted in society that well-off alphas provide their omegas with money when they aren't necessarily interested in marriage. The omega will keep their family name and be authorized to enjoy the perks of their relationship under the alpha's name so long as their bank is aware of the arrangement.

Alec does have a mundane ID as a Lightwood. It's amazing what a visibly pregnant omega can achieve with a subtle, believable sob story presented the right way to an alpha who deals in
forgery. He didn't pay even a half of the usual cost of a forged ID. The man had thanked him for the deal and sent him on his way promising not to say a word to Alec's imaginary abusive ex, should he come around asking.

The door to the shop has a 'push' sign on it and it looks heavy even though it's all glass. It's hardly a surprise, considering valuable stock inside. Alec pushes it with his backside and pulls the pram with him as he goes. Before he can put his foot out to keep the door open, the weight of it disappears off his side completely and he guesses someone is holding it for him. He pulls the pram all the way inside and says a heartfelt 'thank you' even before looking up at whoever helped him. A tall – and frankly good-looking – beta winks at him, replies "Anytime, baby," and goes on his way.

It's definitely not in Alec's favor when he reaches the counter with children in tow and a faint blush on his face. The man behind the counter immediately treats him like a bored house-husband who went out to fight said boredom with his mate's money. Him being an alpha makes the difference between them worse.

He only starts treating Alec seriously after he rejects several of the offered models while listing everything wrong with them each time. Alec knows when he's shown the real good bow but he doesn't settle for the first decent suggestion. If he's making use of his card, he's going to do it once and not regret his choice.

By that time the seller alpha has changed his tune and attitude entirely. He starts a conversation with Alec about how he prefers firearms in general but he does know relevant information about everything he has in his store. He tells Alec a bit about his time in the army. In return Alec serves him a back-story about his past experience and training that he makes on the fly, staying as close to the truth as he can to sound genuine. He enjoys talking about something different than his real past and childcare, so his goal to take his mind off of the wayward Shadowhunter and her daughter is achieved.

After he's made his choice and the box with his new bow is waiting on the counter to the side, they go over accessories, gloves and guards.

"Anything breaks – which it won't – and you come back to me, I'll sort it out. And here," the alpha slides forward a business card with thick blue crosshairs on it that appears to advertise a shooting range. "They're professional, you'll fit right in. And they have a wide choice of arrows they give out for testing. You can buy a set you like directly from them or come back here."

"Thank you."

Alec is stupidly relieved when the card isn't rejected. There's no reason it should ever be, only this is a significantly larger amount of money than spent on his usual baked goods and diapers and there might be limits put on it. It would be humiliating to discover publicly that his warlock alpha doesn't really trust him with his money.

To make it easier for Alec to take everything home they unbox the bow and fold the cardboard so it fits in the pram's basket. The bow goes into a soft case which Alec straps across his back. He's missed the feeling of having that familiar weight with him. He leaves the shop happy.

When they're back in familiar neighborhood Alec steps inside a café placed strategically next to a daycare to attend to his sons and to buy himself a bag of those mini-pastries the bakery supplying
this café excels at. He feels justified. He's bought himself a *weapon* and now he can behave like the omega he is, stuffing himself full of sugar to push back bad moods. It's not like he has to watch his weight anyway, not yet.

He remembers to let Magnus know he's heading back. A response text comes in, saying the warlock is about to leave and that he can't say when exactly he'll be back. Reading the text, Alec is equal parts relieved and disappointed. Being home alone is what he'd like today but being *without* the alpha is not so great when he wasn't expecting it.

It's quiet in the loft when they get back. Alec stores his bow in the wardrobe where he still has a huge amount of free space. Despite itching to touch the weapon, he leaves that for later in favor of taking care of his children. They don't need much, having had a day full of interesting things happening. Alec had also learned pretty early that it wasn't practical to put off diaper changes and feeding until after getting home. Saving time outdoors meant losing time and nerves at home when it was too late for damage control and the twin crying took over the house.

He changes into looser clothes, settles down on the couch facing the TV. He plans to watch maybe one episode while resting and then move on to something more productive.

He has sleeping Jonathan settled on his chest, his hand in his baby's soft hair. His other hand is resting on the edge of a rocking crib which was an unexpected gift he's found right after walking into the living room. It had a card placed in it, saying: 'Catarina, unfortunately, missed you earlier when she dropped by with this for you. She'd like to come again when you have the time.' And then, below: 'I missed you too. Have a good day, Alexander. Don't do anything I wouldn't do.'

The crib also had a baby blanket with cartoon stethoscopes on it. Alec eyed the design, wondering who came up with it for infants and who agreed to produce it.

He rests for a while. It's an omega thing to want to do nothing sometimes but be with his children, feel the bond between them resonate and grow stronger.

The child-parent bond becomes lighter, less noticeable as a child grows into teenage years in order to allow them to grow properly into their own person without emotional influence that might be misused by less-than-decent parents. Alec remembers very well having that childhood bond with his parents. Him being an omega had made the bond stronger than for example Izzy's had been. She's an alpha and she was reacting differently to their parents from the start. She was more active, more vocal, more confident and less inclined to take scolding silently and correct her behavior. Alec had always preferred not to deserve scolding in the first place since it hurt to feel the disappointment through the bond. The bond weakened over the years until he barely felt anything after reaching eighteen and a half years old.

That it never disappeared completely was proven to him when his pregnancy came to light and all the judgment that followed it from his parents was felt by him. Negative emotions translated easier than positive ones through the connection. He felt his parents' horrified disappointment when they understood he's been tainted. He felt some fear from them, some anger. Didn't they know his fear?

From the time of his private 'trial' with the Clave official sent to New York to *handle* him, to the moment he got on his feet in the city weeks later he'd felt nothing at all as far as emotions went, being frozen in shock and mental and physical pain.
He's been through these memories time and time again and so far it hasn't gotten any easier to recall them. Alec wishes Magnus were home. He texted him a second time and got an apology and explanation that he might be late. If he begged, the alpha would probably find a way to come back even if it meant dropping his work. At least Alec believed that, inside. He wouldn't try it, though. The last thing he wanted to be was a bother. And how would he explain himself? He had plenty of things at home to distract him from bad thoughts. Hell, he could go out again. Magnus doesn't need to know the omega he took in is becoming clingy.

Alec lets out a frustrated breath. He pulls out his phone from where it's fallen between his body and the couch's backrest and pulls up the gallery. Looking at baby photos always helps him. It helps even better when he scrolls past the few files including the beautiful alpha. Most of them were taken by Alec in secret but there's one with Magnus looking at the camera, smiling widely. He's in the big red armchair with Max in his lap, still managing to look regal somehow with a baby pulling at his sleeves. Alec remembers he had Jon with him in the wrap at the time of taking the photo and Magnus was smiling at the two of them.

Biting his lip, Alec looks at the screen until it's too much. He makes sure all of his files are backed up and lets the phone drop back onto the couch.

When he gets up ten minutes later he occupies himself making easily freezable dinner (in case Magnus comes back really late and won't eat) and takes care of his sons once feeding time comes. After that, he sits down with his notes and surprisingly enough, manages to study for over an hour before his thoughts drift again. By then it's getting late by infant standards so bathing follows.

Alec walks aimlessly around with Max in his arms, waiting for the already sleepy boy to join his brother in actual sleeping. Max is opening and closing his little fist in a 'please give me' gesture which Alec can interpret only too well. It seems they're in agreement that something's missing. The loft feels cold to him. Lights in the living room, bedroom and anteroom are on to make the omega feel more at ease.

Upon making the second round in the living room Alec spots something interesting on the puff seat pushed up against one of the armchairs. It appears that a dressing robe slid down from the chair's backrest onto the puff and just lay there unnoticed. It's the warlock's robe.

Alec doesn't touch the garment until after Max is in the baby bed and Alec is free to do with the remainder of his evening as he pleases. The robe is silky and it smells like its alpha owner. Alec holds onto it with both hands and just breathes in. There's some kind of perfume in there too, which is nice and very Magnus but Alec would prefer not to have it distract from the alpha's own scent.

By the Angel, he's pathetic. A brooding, lonely omega.

Still, when he goes to bed he takes the robe with him.

* * *

- A year and some months ago, at the Institute -

Alec followed his mother from the briefing in the ops room to the office. He probably wasn't going to get many chances to talk for longer than two minutes with her, what with the reorganization and increased demonic activity in the city. He couldn't keep putting this off for much longer, not when
he was right now approaching twenty and would be twenty-one before he knew it.

This wasn't a conversation they didn't already have before – or rather he tried to make it a conversation while his parents presented a unified front, quoting the law and 'it's how it works' at him.

"Why can't I be with someone of the same standing we have?" He asked after closing the office door behind him. "I can lead the Institute, you know I can. If the alpha happens to care about his-our family at all, we'll be able to share duties and I could stay involved."

"Do you imagine you'd be fighting too, with a child depending on you?"

"Of course not. I wouldn't take unnecessary risks, I don't even take them now. But I don't want to be pushed aside to do nothing except look after children and shuffle other people's paperwork."

"If you express those thoughts while meeting candidates to be your mate you're not going to look very appealing to any of them." It was a deflection, not even a good one and he absolutely hated it when she did it. Would it hurt her to for once answer what he's saying?

"Going up for this family means going down for me, mom. If the alpha I mate with is supposed to be this great, respected representative of a prominent family, he will be looking down on me."

She looked him in the eyes like she wasn't moved at all. "Who else can I count on to make the right choices for our family? Jace and Isabelle already have a reputation and don't think I haven't noticed they're not interested in omegas."

It was true, Alec has noticed that as well. It was bullshit that it should stop his siblings from finding good matches, though. It was bullshit that he should be the one to get the short stick just because he's the eligible virgin. There should be no short sticks at all in the first place between him and his siblings.

"What does that have to do-"

"You know our community doesn't need more hindrances. We need to rebuild what we've lost in the war."

"And haven't we been doing that? It hasn't ended yesterday, mom. Not even ten years ago. It's been much longer from the war than that and I don't see how it has to fall to me to fix it."

She was making the problem sound worse than it was. True, alpha-alpha and alpha-beta heterosexual pairs sometimes had problems conceiving and didn't have as easy pregnancies as omegas did. Omegas were made for child-bearing. Conception during heat every three months was pretty much guaranteed while female betas, unless naturally more fertile, had to try for months and months before they were with child. It was harder for female alphas. Even with all those facts, there wasn't anything close to a fertility or population problem in the world, not even in Nephilim world. It had always been like this. It should not fall on Alec's and every other young omega's shoulders to make more effort than was reasonable to expect from them.

His mother was probably only concerned with how the Lightwood name would look if there was a 'delay' in the new generation of them coming to the world. It wasn't set in stone his siblings wouldn't go for omegas eventually. Well, Jace most likely wouldn't but Isabelle might if the omega was interesting enough. In Alec's eyes, they were both way too young to be judged for their dating history.

"I still don't see why I can't keep the Institute and have children. Even mundanes manage that.
Unless you expect me to have five of them at the least and I better start after the mating ceremony!"

"Of course I don't expect that, don't add drama to this."

He had a bad feeling this conversation was already over for his mother and she would just shoot him down every time he said anything.

"Look," she says, "we have hopes for some specific matches but I and your father will wait for you to meet at least several alphas and make a smart choice yourself."

"Right. Of course."

Yes, he still had some time. To find a 'worthy' mate he'd have to go and visit Idris anyway. There was no one for him here in the Institute and there wasn't exactly regular exchange happening with the rest of the cities and countries which housed Institutes. He could find someone who would see things more his way than his mother's way. He could find an alpha interested in partnership in work as well as in family life.

He knew how likely that was but it wasn't the time to give up yet.

* * *

- Present -

At night he dreams. He's sitting in his bedroom in the High Warlock's loft. Through the open window come sounds of the living city at midday and the light of sun uncovered by clouds makes the bedroom bright. It shouldn't be as warm as it is yet it feels like spring air is warming his skin. Alec can't hear anything beyond his bedroom door, which is odd because he's alone so everyone else should be in the living room. He stands up and walks to the door barefooted. There is no one on the couch nor in the kitchen area. The loft is colder than his sunny room and it's also darker despite the big balcony windows… which are dark. That's not normal. They don't pull the curtains all the way even in the evening.

Alec keeps walking until he reaches the balcony and opens the black, opaque glass doors only to see into one of the main corridors of the Institute. He turns around, expecting to see the loft which is no longer there, replaced by the other end of the same corridor.

No one is here either. Alec doesn't call out to anyone, he stays silently walking, feeling something building up inside him. He walks into the open space of the ops room and glances at active screens giving out a blue glow. No one's attending them. Nothing but the low hum of computer stations and air conditioning fills the air.

Drawn to the Head's office, he keeps walking. He never reaches his goal because he's distracted by a new sound. It reaches his ears when he's passing by a row of identical doors on either side of the narrow corridor and he stops, trying to locate the right door.

It's a baby's crying. He pushes open the door where the sound's the loudest and walks into a plain, small gray room with a single bed in it. Jonathan is lying on his back on a gray duvet, crying his heart out and there's no one to look after him in the cold room. Alec walks inside and the moment he's in the door shuts behind him with no one there pushing it. He turns around, spooked.

The door now has a keyhole when he knows for sure it wasn't there before.
He knows he won't be able to open it. He knows this was on purpose. It doesn't matter. He picks up his son and holds him to his chest.

**

Magnus comes back home sometime after one o'clock. As expected it's very quiet when he walks through the loft, quietly taking off the outer layers of his outfit. He's tired but he's not yet ready to sleep. He needs a moment to unwind, sit still, maybe have a very small drink. He does that, settling down on the couch and putting his feet up on the table where he won't disturb Alexander's things spread on it.

Magnus eyes the notes from his sprawled position. It wouldn't be rude to take a peek, would it? If Alexander wanted them secret he would have kept them in his desk. Magnus sits up and leans forward to pick up the first piece of paper he can reach.

He can immediately see it's a recipe with ingredients listed in bullet points and then below detailed instructions. The next sheet has another single recipe on it. Magnus recognizes them, he's familiar with those potions. Seems like they're copied from his notebooks and he doesn't mind, he's just curious why. So he reads them until the connection between the seven pages clicks in his brain. Those are all potions which do not require a magical push to start brewing nor do they require magical maintenance during brewing. In theory, if he had all the ingredients Alec could make them himself.

Magnus gazes down at the notes fondly, as if he's looking at Alexander himself. He's relieved the young Nephilim found himself something to do that will fill his time and that might actually benefit him. Magnus knows – now better than ever – that very young children are work 24 hours in the day and Jonathan is very young but he will also grow quick and Magnus would hate to see Alec lost once he has time to stop to think about his life beyond children.

Magnus returns the notes to their place on the table and gets up. When he passes by the door to Alexander's bedroom he catches the soft sound of a baby fussing. He freezes in the spot, listening in. The omega should wake up to the noise pretty quick but maybe it's still too low to penetrate his dreams. Magnus could step in now, save Alec work that he could do himself, save him some sleep. On the other hand, if he's already starting to wake up he'll see Magnus sneaking around in his bedroom and that might not go over so well.

The alpha hears some new sounds, a bit more insistent. He pushes the door handle gently and takes a peek inside. Alexander is in his bed, covered up to his face and unmoving. Stepping silently, Magnus makes his way to the left where the carrycots and the baby bed is. It's Jonathan who's not sleeping, turning his head as his eyes search for his parent. He doesn't protest being picked up by the alpha so Magnus carries him out of the bedroom and holding the child with one arm he sorts out the bottle at the kitchen counter. He does everything the usual way but at the end uses magic to warm up the milk.

He wonders if he should get Max too. He's older and has a bit different eating pattern but Magnus knows Alec tries to keep them both on a regular schedule to make caring for them easier for himself. So it might be a good idea to try and feed Max too, to avoid him waking up in twenty minutes and making all this useless.

Decision made, Magnus returns baby Jonathan to the bed once the boy is done eating and his eyes close after Magnus rocks him in his arms for a few minutes. There's no sign of waking from the omega when Magnus returns to the bedroom so he gets Max and repeats the feeding routine with him.
He feels oddly reluctant to return the boy now that he's holding him. It helps that Max isn't as quick to fall back asleep as his brother so Magnus thinks to himself it won't hurt to sit down and tell the Blueberry about his day for however long it takes for the boy to sleep.

* *

Alec wakes up when the room is so bright it has to be past eight in the morning, maybe even nine. He stretches his legs out under the duvet, soaking in the warmth of his bed. By the Angel, is it an amazing bed. He didn't have a bad one back at the Institute but it simply didn't compare to this. Not to mention the bedding set, silky under his fingers but not giving the illusion of cold when he slides under the covers every night. And best of all, he hasn't woken up with annoying neck-pain once since coming here, which improved his mood greatly even though he still gets the same amount of sleep.

It's then that it strikes him he has no memory of getting up in the night or at dawn. He has no memory of attending his children at all and it's day. It's also too quiet in the room. He pretty much jumps out of the bed in a rush because what he does remember is the nightmare he had and he has to see his sons now. He opens the bedroom door with a little too much force and strides into the open space of the loft, looking around.

Jon and Max are on the foldable mat between the couch and one of the armchairs, happily exchanging gurgling noises. Well, Jon mostly blows bubbles with his mouth while Max coos at him.

Magnus is at the kitchen isle with his back to Alec, making something to eat that includes pineapples which Alec can see cut up and piled up at one end of the isle.

Alec hates that his panic already faded enough to let him notice how the alpha's behind looks in those pitch-black pants.

"Magnus," Alec says, hearing the relief in his own voice.

"Good morning." Magnus turns to him with a smile. "Did you sleep well?"

"I guess. When did you get back?"

"Oh, long after midnight. You didn't wait up, did you?"

Alec joins him at the counter to take a peek at what he's making. They appear to be skewered pieces of tropical fruit and... seafood? There's some cooked turkey meat too. Alec steals a piece of mango.

"Not really, no."

With his curiosity satisfied, Alec steps sideways to be in front of the coffee machine. As he starts preparing his drink, he glances at the warlock. "Did you have one already?" He points at the coffee mug.

"No. It wouldn't taste as good as yours if I made it."

Alec ducks his head, warmly pleased. He reaches for the second mug for Magnus and goes about making their drinks.

"What are you doing today?"
"I'll do the summoning for Clary, get it off my list."

"Oh. I thought you've already done that."

"No, that was something else last night. I'm sorry. It should be the last thing this week."

"No, it's not a problem. I don't have anything interesting to offer you here instead."

"Darling, you're not boring or tiring me. I'd like to spend some time with you."

Alec pounces on the chance to get away from Magnus's warm gaze when Max makes a series of frustrated grunts that Alec has learned to recognize as a sign the boy can't roll over when he really wants to. It's best to help him before he starts crying about it.

Magnus, frustratingly, decides to follow him, taking over their coffee mugs and then placing them on the nearest table.

Alec's crouched by the mat, waving a rattle in front of Max. He didn't register it before when he looked at Jon but his baby looks like a cloud. A very soft cloud, as Alec discovers upon touching him. He's dressed in a knitted onesie with pom-pom like balls sewed onto it in places on top of the already fluffy yarn. It looks like someone's idea of a joke gift but it's just so soft and it does its job as clothing so why not keep it.

Max has on a long-sleeved, gray shirt with silver loopy text saying 'You remind me of the babe', which Alec is sure must be a reference to something and he should leave it alone but still, he asks, "What babe?"

Magnus grins, slowly and with unconcealed glee. "Babe with the power."

Alec opens his mouth, then closes it. Magnus is still grinning as if daring him to ask another question.

He pointedly does not ask another question. Alec picks up his hot drink instead and sighs after the first sip contently.

Magnus's gaze is like touch on his skin.

"I took the liberty to add some things to your notes," Magnus says, surprising Alec.

"Oh?"

"They're tips and tricks that I have memorized and so far didn't bother writing them down but you should know them if you're going to move on from theory to practice."

"I'm not planning to," Alec says quickly. "That is, I don't want to use up your inventory for something that will probably fail."

"Darling, ingredients are meant to be used. What's most difficult to replace goes into complex potions that likely won't turn up in your list at all. More importantly, should I need your help, I'd rather know you know what you're doing and it's not your test ride when it really matters."

Alec nods. "Then I'd better dedicate more time to it."

"Do what makes you feel content at the end of the day."

*Your presence makes me content*, Alec thinks.
Magnus eventually finishes his coffee and sets the mug aside. They each eat one of Magnus's skewered fruit creations and the rest is left for Alec to enjoy later. After that, the warlock puts on his coat and opens himself a portal. Alone again, Alec turns his attention to his sons before his thoughts have the chance to stray.

* * *

For the second time in as many days, Magnus is late. It's only four pm but he had left early and it shouldn't have taken him so long. Worrying about the High Warlock isn't Alec's duty and he's especially not authorized to control what the warlock does with his time. And yet, when Magnus says something he usually means it and his being late is causing worry to the omega. The previous evening he had told Alec he would be late and today there's nothing, not even when Alec caves in and texts him first. He gets no reply at all.

At twenty past five, when there's the distinct charge in the air from a portal opening at the front door Alec's up from the kitchen stool where he sat reading a book and is walking towards Magnus. It takes him all of five seconds to notice something's off about the warlock. It's in his walk and the way he acknowledges Alec a little too enthusiastically.

Is it because of the summoning? It must be, since that's what he went out to do.

The warlock says something about magical work and an amazing idea or ideas, and without taking a moment to take off his coat he sets off on a trip across the loft with numerous stops at his locked drawers and cupboards, the ones off-limits to mundanes. He's taking some items out and leaves others in after looking at them.

Alec follows five steps behind him.

He knows Magnus is not drunk but he acts like he is. He has a certain wild glint to his eyes, not alpha-wild, but more like insane scientist wild. This is out of the Nephilim's expertise. He doesn't know if this is magic-drunkenness or if something had happened to Magnus... either way, he's not comfortable with it and should probably find a solution.

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, great things, hopefully."

"Is it... important?"

"Mightily important. We're on the verge of taking a step into the- well, into more greatness."

Alec hears the 'we' readily assumes it does not include the other Shadowhunters but rather someone else Magnus has met today? A warlock friend?

"You've been gone all day," Alec tries distracting him. "I've been waiting."

"Yes, it was a quite eventful day. I wouldn't want to let the inspiration pass, I'm sure you understand."

"I do, I think... Can't you write it down? Leave the work for another day?"
"And risk losing the spark? This is best done when I have a clear vision in my head. I'm not having someone else do this before I can."

He's talking to himself, thinking out loud while Alec's doing his best to follow but he can't because Magnus is rambling *magical* things and he's probably not making much sense in general and it all sounds very concerning to Alec because experimental magic while high can't be anything but dangerous.

"Can you promise me this is safe or do I have to leave the loft?" Alec asks firmly and it's an actual question he wants to have an answer to. He means it to be a bit of a threat to make the other man stop.

It works, it makes the warlock pause. "You're absolutely right, I should have thought about it first. I'll take what I need and *I'll* move somewhere else."

Exasperation level rises two times over inside Alec. That's not the result he wanted. He has a mental block against directly ordering an alpha and his subtler asking didn't do anything so in order to ensure the warlock's safety, Alec resigns himself to bringing out the big guns.

He puts his right hand on his left wrist. The thin skin of the wrist is always sensitive but it becomes erogenous zone when touched by a lover. When rubbed and warmed, the small scent glands hidden there work with more intensity, letting an omega provide comfort for family members with their scent or to exchange marks with their mate.

Wrists are for family, close friends or when your first date is going well. The neck is for foreplay, sex workers trying to entice clients and for club-goers who know exactly what they want from a party. There are also scent glands on their inner thighs which are, well, for special occasions.

Alec has always blended in the background, his scent being average and easily covered by that of his alpha siblings who both enjoyed stealing attention. Now he needs to be a bit more noticeable so when the alpha isn't looking at him, he takes a breath and presses his thumb to the wrist and rubs the spot slowly, warming it up. He waits for his body to do the rest of the work. Meanwhile, to Alec's mortification, Magnus is actually doing some kind of spell. He has a ball of deep purple, smoky energy between his palms, which he appears to be contemplating. He then nods to himself and the ball dissipates.

"I'll leave you in a minute. You'll be free to get some sleep without me walking around."

"No," Alec says calmly. "You'll pay attention to me."

Magnus looks at him from across the room. "I always pay attention to you."

"You weren't just a minute ago."

"That's… true." The alpha doesn't take his eyes off of him, which is proof that Alec's plan is working. He even takes a step towards Alec, who stays still. "I didn't mean to make you feel abandoned."

"You're not obligated to look after me. But you've promised you would have time for me."

Alec's doing his best to keep his tone between soft and suggestive, not an easy feat, in order not to anger the alpha by insisting on distracting him. He closes the distance between them.

"Sit down with me." Alec takes Magnus's hand. His rings are cool and pointy under his fingertips and there's *something* in his touch as if static charge but without the bite you feel when your own
sweater zaps you in winter. They've touched several times before and it was never like this. It's as if all of Magnus is charged and Alec wonders if that's the cause of his weird behavior. Did he get hit with a faulty spell? Did side-effects of a good spell cling to him?

…Is he possessed?

No, no he isn't. Alec has intimate knowledge of how a demon-possessed human body feels up close and that's not it.

Alec sits down on the couch, folding one leg under himself and leans back. Magnus is standing in front of him, his hand still in Alec's. They look at each other. Some of the manic energy is gone, no longer reflected as intensely in warm dark eyes of the warlock.

It's unnerving how long he can just look without saying a word. Alec doesn't have any more bright ideas of what to say, so he waits.

Sitting down beside Alec, Magnus turns sideways so his back is to Alec and his feet can rest on the edge of the couch. He lays his head down into Alec's lap.

"Always wanted to do this." He says, looking up.

Corner of Alec's mouth quirks up. "Yeah?"

"Yes."

The alpha relaxes, lets one of his arms slide off the edge of the couch and the other lies bent on his chest. He closes his eyes.

The omega looks down at his dark nail polish. He thinks he's seeing flecks of red among the black. Magnus's eyelids are in matte black today, no fancy color added. And yet, Alec is mesmerized by how his black lashes look against his skin.

Strangely bold, Alec nearly puts his hand in Magnus's hair- and stops at the last second, placing his hand down next to it, so his fingers touch the very ends of it.

When Magnus opens his eyes again while Alec's gazing down at him, the omega has to hold back a gasp.

He's never seen this before. Golden eyes that almost shine with an inner light, black pupils slitted like an animal's... cat's. There are green flecks among the gold. They don't disappear after a blink or after the next. Alec stares into them, slowly coming to a conclusion that the warlock isn't aware he's showing them to him. Is it even possible that he doesn't know? Maybe, if he's still under the influence of whatever it was that happened to him. Alec drew him away from his 'inspired' plans but it's not like he changed him back to normal by making him lay down. So he says nothing. His mind's pushing a thought at him, that the cat eyes are beautiful and Magnus should know it but he keeps it to himself.

"Did you know your scent is exceptionally soothing?" Magnus says after he's completely comfortable. "Did you never suppress it?"

"No. Shadowhunters rarely suppress heats, much less scents. It's better to be bed-ridden for three days and jump right back into fieldwork than take pills and feel off for whole five days and risk impaired aim and judgment while still working. Not to mention the bad dreams."

"I didn't know nightmares were a side-effect of using suppressants."
"They are for us. I don't know why." Maybe a punishment from the Angel for smothering their nature. It didn't really matter because like Alec said, meds were rarely used at all. Contraceptives were used independently of suppressants so it all worked out if someone wasn't ready for children but they had a mate. Usually, omegas tried out suppressants one time early in their life to know how their body dealt with them and if it turned out they were for some reason naturally predisposed to do well on them, then they would continue to take them.

"You're not going to use them in the future?" Magnus keeps investigating the issue. "Would be a waste."

The alpha raises his arm and reaches to the side until his fingers touch Alec's free hand that was resting on the couch at his side.

"I… don't think so? It's too early to think about it but I don't see why I'd have to."

He doesn't see a point of using contraceptives either, even though he should be back to normal once his first post-pregnancy heat makes appearance six or seven months from now. He has no suitors and he'd like to think one rape was enough for a lifetime. A lot of things suck in his life but he doesn't consider himself that unlucky. Although… he doesn't know and probably will never know what became of the shapeshifting demon who'd attacked him.

"Why didn't you have a bonded mate?" Magnus asks again. He's full of questions tonight. Alec has stopped him from magical experiments so he's satiating his curiosity with Alec, who's growing tense. Magnus is now touching his wrist, an action which he wouldn't have done on a normal day. It makes a shiver run down Alec's spine.

"You're not averse to alphas' presence near you." Magnus continues. "You don't mind them close to you. I can see you crave contact and close relationship. You'd be best receptive to it coming from an alpha. So I wonder what stopped you from mating with one when you're so wonderful to be around and you should have had a line of dates."

Alec looks away. Having this brought up and thinking about it makes him a bit sick. He knows what Magnus is asking is 'why weren't you loved', not 'why didn't you have a family already at twenty like a good stereotype of omega'. It doesn't make Alec want to push him off of his lap and the couch any less.

To make this even more complicated, the alpha still has his arm hostage and he's drawing gentle circles with his thumb on Alec's wrist.

To calm himself down, Alec dares to thread his fingers through the warlock's spiked hair. He wishes there was no product in it so he could feel how soft it is. Product or not, the repetitiveness of running his fingers through hair is actually grounding Alec.

"There was one I wanted…" He admits though it hurts him to do so. "But he wasn't for me."

"Taken?"

"No. Uninterested in omegas. Or men."

"Ah."

"I wonder if he's found someone by now. Not in a jealous way, I just don't know anything about his life anymore."

"Couldn't you call him? And everyone else who misses you?"
"I… I never tried because it was highly likely their phones were bugged or confiscated. Contact from me would have made their lives more difficult, possibly they would have been banished too. I was also afraid of being tracked. And I don't have a stele for a fire message."

"I understand that and you were probably right to be cautious this way, but it's been a long time. The top might have given up and your friends are waiting."

"I can't begin to imagine how a phone call like that would go. I'd just… freeze up, I think."

Magnus's cat eyes hold his gaze. He is serious when he says, "I think they'd know it was you. Even if you said nothing."

Alec's fingers still in the alpha's hair.

"Yeah?"

"Yes. I think, if it were me, I'd like to have at least that. A sign that you're alive."

Alec bites his lip and worries at it.

"They know I'm alive." He says so quietly it's almost a whisper. Magnus shared his demon eyes with him (if unknowingly) and Alec believes he should give something back. So he says, "I have a parabatai."

At that revelation, Magnus shifts to look at him better. He doesn't let go of Alec's wrist. "How does that work?"

"In alpha-omega parabatai pairs, if the alpha is killed an unbonded omega dies shortly after. It's why such pairs are discouraged and rare, but never forbidden. If the omega has a bonded mate then the bond protects their mental health and they live on."

"And so you do have the rune because…?"

"Because if they destroyed it like the others and broke the bond it would have been execution."

"How merciful of them. Too squeamish to see you die but not moved enough to let you live properly."

"I took a lot of strength from our bond… even if it caused me – both of us – a lot of pain in the beginning."

Alec sits still under the intense gaze of those golden eyes. The High Warlock is obviously angry and it's on Alec's behalf.

"Then it's all the more reason to try and contact your people," Magnus says firmly.

"Maybe I will. Just… don't push me."

"I wouldn't. I only mean to encourage you."

"And I'm grateful. For everything."

Magnus laces their fingers together. There's still magical electricity on his skin that seems to buzz under Alec's skin as well.

"Everything will work out."
Magnus wakes up well-rested and frankly quite pleased despite the fact the day didn't even have a chance yet to provide him with anything to be pleased about. His great mood is all thanks to a whole evening of breathing in an omega's scent the previous day-

It all comes back to him.

Oh, god.

Magnus presses his hands to his face, covering his shame though there's no one to see him. He wishes he were actually drunk last night because then he'd have a chance of suffering from hangover amnesia. As it is, he remembers everything, especially the way he's made a total and complete ass of himself. He can recall with perfect clarity what they talked about and what Alexander did and how good he looked during…

If Magnus leaves his safe bedroom and smells him today he might just continue to dig his own grave with the omega.

But he can't stay in for hours. Not when Alexander might need him for something.

He leaves safety of the bed, showers, and takes extra care choosing his clothes and his look for the day so that he might at least look dignified if he can't act like it.

He opens the door of his bedroom only to meet face to face with Alexander, who's standing there with his arm raised to knock. They look at each other, neither expecting this even though they were both on their way to meet together. A beat passes and Magnus recovers first.

"Good morning. For me?" He reaches for the coffee mug that Alec's holding and Magnus recognizes as one of those Alec assigned to him.

"Yes, obviously. I thought you were never coming out at this rate. I was beginning to worry. Are you… back to normal?" Alec eyes him in a way that Magnus would appreciate any other day.

"Yes! Yes, I- I owe you an apology and also an explanation."

"You don't need to apo-" Magnus puts one finger to Alec's lips to quiet him.

"I do. Allow me. After I concluded all matters with the Frays I was coming home but I ran into an old… well, not friend exactly. You see, we used to study some aspects of magic together and we always had fun experimenting. For once I was actually eager to relive the past so we went to his rented flat together. He's from France, originally, and I wasn't expecting to see him anywhere near New York. We did some things yesterday that I'll spare you the technical details of, got encouraged and we tried some less than traditional and definitely not advisable things. One of them misfired but of course we didn't realize."
"So you were high? I'm hoping both of you because if he was aware and let you leave like that…"

Magnus laughs. "Yes. I'll send him a message later to see if he did something stupid. So thank you for keeping me literally on the couch rather than letting me send myself to a different dimension," He makes a face. "Not necessarily in one piece."

"You're welcome. I rather like your one piece." Alec says and turns around to walk away, leaving Magnus to replay his last sentence over and over in his head.

* * *

Two days later they're eating dinner cooked by Alec, all four of them seated on the couch, babies in their carrycots between the omega and the alpha. Someone chooses that moment to interrupt them, knocking on the door politely. They exchange glances and Magnus reluctantly stands up to go check who's there.

It's only Dot so he opens the door for her and probably looks as surprised as he feels because she notices.

"You're not too happy to see me." She teases. "Bad time?"

Of course she's welcome to visit any time and he's told her as much but he didn't think she'd come so soon.

"No no, please come in. I was just in the middle of dinner."

Her eyebrows rise a little which makes him wonder if he should feel mildly offended. All right, it's true he was rather known for his night lifestyle and fancy – but irregular – meals, but he didn't keep it up forever. It wasn't strange that he'd be having proper dinner at proper time.

He invites Dot inside, takes her coat to hang it up and then follows her to where she stops in the living room, now having Alec in her view.

"Ooh, I'm interrupting."

"Only the dinner but it's not going anywhere. In fact, why don't I get you something too, so you're not just watching us."

She ponders the offer. "All right but not the same, whatever that is. I ate before leaving and I'd be way too full."

Magnus gives her a confident smile. "I know just the thing you'll like."

Alec raises from the couch when she comes over to be introduced. This visit is much different than that of Jocelyn's. Dot is a warlock and basically the same ally as Catarina so Magnus feels there should be no problem with Alexander being right there instead of retreating to his room.

"Alexander," Magnus says, "this is my very old friend, miss Dorothea Rollins."

"Just Dot. The full name makes me feel like my own grandmother."

"You chose it."

"Yes, I sure did. Back when I was so young I wanted to have a name that would make me sound incredibly respectful in my line of work. I thought of myself as Madame Dorothea. Oh well, it was too late when I realized it wasn't really my thing."
Alec shakes her hand while Magnus continues. "And this is Alexander, my favorite, lovely roommate."

"Roommate or just flatmate?" She asks slyly, knowing Alec’s dynamic by his scent.

"He's also in line to be my new dear friend, for when I'll want to replace the old ones." Magnus replies flatly.

She just chuckles at that.

"And here?" She asks about the boys.

"My sons," Alec answers her with a little bit of pride in his voice.

She doesn't know what he is. She's going to think he's a mundane with warlock children until he mentions being a Nephilim. There are two possibilities: either she'll try to ask for details which they'll both deflect or she'll make her own assumption about what he's doing in Magnus's home and honestly, she probably won't be far from the truth.

"So," Dot says cheerfully, "Magnus is discovering the new joys of life. I'm surprised but approving."

"It isn't strange." Magnus defends himself. "I just never had the opportunity."

"We rarely do."

Magnus offers her a chair to sit down opposite of their couch where he returns to sit as well. He uses magic to conjure a plate of fancy salad for Dot and then a glass of appropriate wine for all three of them.

Alec isn't exactly relaxed but he's more at ease with every passing minute. Like he once said to Magnus, he'd hate to be an obstacle between the warlock and his friends. It'll be best to be at least friendly with them too. And it's not difficult to be exactly that when he's not seeing anything to dislike in Dot.

They exchange small-talk during the meal but once the empty plates are gone, Dot puts her arms out over the table. "Please, please, let me hold one."

Alec is hesitant because it's his natural state but even Magnus pauses, question in his eyes.

"Oh don't look at me like that." She grumbles. "It's been so long since Clary was small and now I don't even know when I'll see her grown up self again."

Alec glances at Magnus, who sees him do that out of the corner of his eye. "Yes, that Clary. Dot has helped protect her and her mother for a long time."

"Oh. Okay."

"What do you think, Blueberry?" Magnus picks Max up from his cot, knowing that the omega is much more protective of the smaller child and might protest. "Would you like to meet more strange people?"

He carefully moves the child from couch to Dot's arms. It's such short distance and yet Max manages to grip Magnus's shirt with special determination and it takes a some effort to get him to let go.
"Come on, let's meet your new aunt."

*I*

"I was thinking of a plan." Magnus announces over a second glass of wine. "For doing something with our free time. Don't say you're awfully busy, miss Dorothea, when I know you're not and these days you're more likely to mope around alone."

"Fine, I'm not busy at all. Though I do watch over my shop and the house."

"Wards will secure them just fine. The plan is: we go on vacation."

"Magnus-" Alec starts.

"Just hear me out. A very short vacation. A week, or five days. Even four."

Alec sighs. He'd cross his arms if he didn't have sleeping Jon wrapped at his chest. "Tell me where so I know how strongly to protest."

"Wherever you wish. Let's get out of here for a few days. Where have you ever been aside from New York and- and home?" Magnus nearly says Idris but catches himself in time.

"Nowhere." Alec admits.

"We could go somewhere warmer than here, load our batteries before winter."

"I, for one," Dot says between sips of wine, "am for this plan."

"Fine." Alec gives up. "My only requirement is moderate weather. I'm not going to sweat when I don't have to."

"Of course, darling."

**

They go to Spain. It's more or less a random choice, one of many beautiful countries they could have gone to. They're not looking at major landmarks anyway, just staying in a smaller scenic town by the sea with just enough tourists to let them blend in and not be crowded.

They spend their days at the beach or strolling along the cobbled streets, visiting remains of a castle and a broken line of medieval walls. They eat breakfasts and midday meals together at their rented apartment but in the evening, due to joint effort of Dot and Magnus, Alec lets go of his sons for a couple of hours to allow Magnus to take him out for late dinner while Dot stays inside.

Every evening they try a different restaurant out of those closest to the beach.

Magnus tells Alec more stories from his work as a warlock and Alec repays him with the most interesting patrols he'd participated in. It costs him more to talk about them because on almost every mission he had one or both of his siblings with him. So he ends up telling Magnus about them too, about the life they had as children and then as teenage Nephilim, learning to be good at their jobs.

"Actually, I have a good one." Alec says one evening while they're still enjoying local food. "I'm sure you already imagined us, two loud alphas and me between them. They went looking for trouble and I went after them with solutions but mostly tried to stop them at the first sign of trouble. They didn't like that very much. Sometimes I thought I might go grey before sixteen. I did
get reprimanded sometimes for not reining them in but it was done by our parents and they knew what was going on. So one day there was an older man who came from Idris. I was fourteen at the time, I don't even remember who he was supposed to be exactly, just that he was an alpha who had some respected position back home and he was going to many Institutes, spending there a day or two and moving on.

Of course we were warned and expected to be on our best behavior."

"Do go on." Magnus settles more comfortably in the restaurant chair, thrilled he's getting so many words from the omega at the same time.

"The warning didn't help." Alec continues. "Jace and Izzy got into their usual ways. The thing was, they had made some plans to go out and meet with these Seelies. We were all kids, there wasn't anything untoward happening and they just felt cool, I guess? Getting to hang out with Downworlders and trying to impress them with new runes. I always went with them to keep an eye on them but that one time I didn't care. I was angry. Maybe because of hormones, maybe it was something in the air. I was just… really angry that they couldn't give up this one time to stay inside when it mattered to me and to our parents.

They went. I stayed home and decided to be productive. I sneaked into the Head's office to take a look at some reports I was hoping to get a pattern of occurrences out of. We had a problem with demons and Downworld at the time and I was hoping to be more useful and maybe finally deserve some praise outside of teamwork…"

He has to pause when a server comes to collect their plates and take their order for dessert. He resumes from the same point when she walks away.

"I was very much not allowed to do that. Go through the paperwork, that is. Being a child of the Heads of the Institute is not a position and I definitely didn't get privileges from that. You can probably guess I was caught when the visiting alpha walked in on me there.

First he was surprised to see me, then he demanded an explanation. In hindsight, I don't think he was angry about it but my fear definitely made me think he was or would be soon enough.

So I lied. I mean, I told the truth but not at the right time.

I was only about to hit my growth spurt so I looked more like an omega than I do now. I was small and thin and prepared to use everything I had to my advantage. Like I said, I was already mad at my siblings… It was the best piece of acting I did. On any given day I was a bad actor, I was always nervous and it was obvious I was trying to lie. Only recently did I learn to be much better at it…

Anyway, I told him all about how my siblings emotionally blackmailed me to get them info on demon sightings so they could go out and impress everyone with their alpha hunting skills before it was age-appropriate for them to have that much experience.

The man believed me. There was no way a tale of two young alphas who were known to get into trouble together would stand against my word. Besides, they were out with the Seelies so they couldn't exactly be proud of that alibi. When they got back and were confronted about it, Izzy and Jace knew what I did but they kept quiet. They knew if they managed to prove their truth, I'd be punished for what I did and for lying while they would only get split punishment for the one thing and I'd only get a warning. I had peace and quiet from them for maybe two whole weeks after that."

Magnus is fully grinning at the end of the story. He's charmed, utterly charmed. Alexander has a light in his eyes he never had before, not since the time Magnus met him first. He's smiling at his
own memories, for a short while buoyed by them instead of being weighed down.

"Just so you're aware, I'm keeping this story memorized forever." Magnus warns him.

It feels like true happiness to be here with Alec, eat and drink, and talk.

While they're walking back to their hotel, shoes in their hands and bare feet sinking in the cooled sand with every step, Magnus tells Alec about how he learned to be a warlock instead of just existing in fear. How he was taken in and taught, how he trained.

Alexander is a wonderful listener but Magnus knew that already. He prefers to be the quiet one, the serious one. Unfortunately, also the one to hold emotions in and hurt in silence. Magnus is glad, and pleased, that it's been changing lately. Alexander was never timid, not after he accepted Magnus was not a threat, and he isn't one to keep his opinions to himself when he wants something to change but other than that he didn't really talk.

Every time he offers a tidbit of information about himself is a reason to celebrate.

The fourth night, the one they planned to be their last in Spain, they take a little longer than usual at the restaurant and it's later when they leave. Lost in conversation, like usual, they accidentally pass by the spot at which they should leave the beach to walk onto the promenade and then back to the hotel. The beach looks pretty much the same for its whole length and the charming houses don't differ much either so it was an easy mistake to make in the dark. They only notice when the black shape of an old pier appears ahead of them.

They would have turned back right away if it wasn't for movement near the pier on the sandy part. The first thought that they both unknowingly share is that they nearly walked in on a pair of lovers… but it's not that.

Magnus doesn't have a sixth sense for demons but he does have alpha's intuition for knowing danger when he sees the vaguest of signs. Especially with an omega at his side.

"Alexander, stay behind me."

There's not much Alec can do other than listen. No seraph blade, no stele, not even his new bow, which would do exactly nothing against a demon. If there were more demons he would have thought differently but with only one it's better to obey Magnus's request.

The victim is moving and still has a little fight left in them but it's useless when they're pinned and the demon has the advantage of having more than four limbs to anchor itself in the sand. It's ugly as hell and the sounds it makes constantly are nauseating even to the High Warlock and the ex-Shadowhunter who have met various disgusting creatures in their lives.

Magnus focuses on drawing destructive energy between his palms and he lets it fly, punching the creature off the mundane and sends it rolling in the sand.

Magnus runs after it, hoping to burn the demon off this plane as quickly as possible. Alec drops down to his knees by the mundane, who he now sees is a thirty-something woman. Her state really doesn't look good to him. Light this far from the promenade isn't very good but he can still tell the difference between water stains and blood stains, and the latter take over the woman's clothes.

Explosion of light from Magnus's magic lets Alec see more details, like where the actual wounds are under torn fabric. The demon must have stabbed her at least two times. There's also a bite on
her forearm after she protected herself with it.

An ambulance would have helped her if not for the demon venom that's killing her faster than her physical wounds.

For now, Alec can only wrap up the bite so it doesn't bleed freely. The worse wounds have to be looked at by Magnus, so Alec begins to pull apart her shirt where it's torn to uncover them.

It's not long after that when Magnus crouches down beside Alec, placing one hand on Alec's shoulder for reassurance.

"What do we do?"

"We heal her." Magnus replies decisively.

"Should we call Dot?"

"No, not when she's the only one to look after children. I can do this but I will need your help."

"Anything you need."

Magnus begins to heal the woman, blue wisps of magic pouring down from his fingers. Alec keeps watch over them, doubting that the demon would have a hidden partner in crime but not to be wary now would be plain stupid.

His eyes move between the stretch of beach around them and Magnus beside him. The warlock is completely focused, directing his magic where it needs to go.

Alec knows his two approaches to magic: effortless grace and focused professionalism. Worry for the mundane doesn't quite let him enjoy the sight of Magnus working but he's paying attention nonetheless.

Long minutes pass and the moment comes when Magnus has to turn to Alec for support. Without help from potions or another healer he is giving all he has into this. That means he runs out of power sooner than he can finish healing.

"I need to borrow your strength."

"You can do that?"

"Yes, especially from you- a Nephilim. I have little left of mine to fuel the spell."

"Of course, how…?"

"Give me your hand."

Alec does and Magnus grips it firmly. "Now just hold on."

It's not… pleasant. In fact, it hurts. As if there was a thread inside Alec that Magnus is unspooling and it tugs at his lungs and his heart as it goes.

Alec's hand is tingling with magic. This close to the warlock and during such powerful spell, he can nearly taste the energy in the air. He can't feel the damp sand under his knees anymore, he can't feel the night chill in the air. All there is is Magnus and his need for Alec's strength.

When it stops it jars him, pushing him back to reality. He can breathe easily now, so why does it
feel like he's missing something?

Magnus is breathing slowly but heavily and he wears more signs of exertion than Alec, who inches closes to the warlock to support him physically.

"Will she be okay?"

"Yes. The demon wasn't very vicious or very advanced."

"Good. What about her memories?"

"She's still scratched up a little so I modified her memory to fit mundane world. She's probably going to avoid animals for a long time. We can call help for her now."

They do that and after moving her to a more safe place, they walk away at the first sounds of sirens in the distance.

Alec keeps close to Magnus, his concern over the warlock not completely gone.

He also has other thoughts to occupy his mind.

"It sucks to be this useless." He admits out loud.

"I know, and I wish there was something I could do for you."

Alec shrugs. What could Magnus do? "I never got used to not having a concealed weapon on me. One that's actually useful."

Magnus doesn't have the words to comfort him, not when he's a warlock, who has his weapon with him always. All he can do is to try and think of solution for the future.

* * *

After they come home to New York Alec hints that he wouldn't mind travelling again some time.

They settle right back into daily life, now with the addition of archery training. Alec checks out the range from the business card and deems it good enough for his needs. While he considers how to set up his schedule so either Magnus or Catarina, or even Dot, can be there to look after children, he gets used to holding his new bow in the loft. At first he stands at one end of the balcony and shoots at a home-made target at the other end. It's extremely close distance but it's good practice for the start. It's not his aim that's the main problem.

His palms and fingers ache. No, they hurt. He has to pace himself better, knowing if he overdoes it now he'll take longer to recover and go back to square one. His hands never really lost the calluses from years of use but his skin is considerably softer and used to handling infants, not bowstrings.

So he gets used to the shape of the bow, to its all-black color. There's no adamas to be found in it. The weight is slightly different too. All the same, he likes it. It's his own. A little piece of himself he had lost contact with and now regained it.

To surprise of no one he eventually overdoes it one afternoon. It isn't because he pushes himself against better judgment, it's simply because he gets so concentrated on letting arrows out the way he wants them to fly, he stops feeling pain. It exists outside of his focus until he lowers his weapon, finally satisfied. It hits him then, the deep ache of overused joints. He was using finger-guards so at least open cuts are not an issue but his arms, shoulder to fingertips, are letting him know they
don't like him very much right now.

He does some relaxing exercises and goes inside the loft, locking the balcony door behind him. At first he takes a small towel and after soaking it in hot water he wraps it around his right hand for some quick relief.

Magnus isn't home. He's out for "no more than thirty minutes" according to the warlock himself and he has Max with him. Jonathan is sleeping, as he has been for the past hour but the older boy had clung to Magnus for most of the day and just before leaving the alpha surrendered to his fate with great dramatic flair and took Max with him. His mistake was to pick Max up after he dressed to leave and Alec felt no pity for him when the boy grabbed a necklace and held it hostage.

It was a fun challenge to put a jacket on a baby whose hands are occupied but Alec managed, all the time smirking at Magnus's inconvenience.

Alone now, Alec looks through his options for pain relief. This must be the best opportunity to check his potion-making talent so he skims through his note. There's one potion meant to be drank, a salve for healing (which he doesn't really need), another one to be diluted and used to soak the aching place or to soak bandages in it and wrap around the spot. Alec chooses the last one. He re-reads the instructions and raids Magnus's ingredient cabinet for what he needs.

He's standing at the kitchen isle, peering into the bowl he just poured water and the finished potion into. So far so good. The watery result he gets has the right color, though that doesn't say much when it's pretty pale. Like water.

"Here goes… well, something." He puts his right hand into the bowl so it's covered up above the wrist. The effect is nearly instantaneous. As if dissolved, the pain disappears even from the deep places inside his palm. It's even startling, the relief so sudden it's like his limb disappeared altogether.

"Huh."

He puts in his other hand and the effect's the same. He can't exactly have his whole arm up to shoulder in a small bowl and while the thought of bathing in it crosses his mind, for some reason he's not exactly willing to risk putting his whole body into a concoction that might have delayed side-effects. The next best solution is to grab the bandages from their mundane first-aid kit and make himself two mummy limbs.

He makes sure to have the bandages off before Magnus and Max get back and by then he's barely feeling leftover aches so it's okay to take them off anyway.

* A

Alec approaches Magnus one evening, asking if there's a way to shield an area so his arrows would not fall down on an extremely unlucky passerby at night. The neighborhood he can see from the balcony doesn't really have spots he can just shoot at safely and then sneak into to retrieve arrows.

As usual Magnus is the one with all the solutions. He sets up a ward-like spell for Alec, which works like this: each arrow needs a spell put on it before it's shot. Magnus conjures an invisible barrier in the air which reacts to the spelled arrows like a detector gate. Except detector gates inside shops don't teleport detected items to their previous spots, they just make noise.

It's a spell that another warlock was working on and the way Magnus knows it is very temporary and needs to be maintained. He should inquire after the other warlock's progress since it was meant
to be a security measure against thieves carrying out valuable items and it'd be useful to learn in its full form.

On the other hand, the underdeveloped version gives him perfect opportunity to stay near Alexander and ogle him from behind while he practices.

On one such occasion Magnus lounges in a weaved garden chair that Alec is sure wasn't there earlier. A red-tinted drink fills the glass balancing on the chair's armrest. The warlock's in a loose, deep blue shirt with variety of pendants around his neck and beads at his wrists. He has a long, ornate robe thrown on so he at least looks like he cares about what temperature is outside.

Alec himself has a leather jacket on and fingerless gloves completed with finger-guards so he's pretty comfortable.

He has tried standing with his back to the alpha while shooting so he wouldn't be distracted but when he did he could feel eyes on his back – and lower. He ends up standing sideways so he always has Magnus at the edge of his vision and it mostly works out. Every once in a while the alpha shifts, looking inside the loft through the glass behind which is the pair of baby warlocks, safely in warmth. Every time Magnus moves, his jewelry catches sunlight and draws Alec's attention right back to him and his unreasonably undone top buttons.

"I think you need some motivation, Angel." Magnus drawls from his spot.

Alec's about to turn to him to thank him for the observation very much but then a sphere of pale color appears in the air, some distance away from them. It's see-through, like an effect of a miniature smoke bomb gone off.

"Hit that before it disappears."

This little bit of magic is so easy to do Magnus would sooner call it tricks than spells. He could do this for hours without losing any of his power reserves. It's also worth it when Alexander stops thinking about what he's doing and just does it, eyes on the target.

Alec gets the first one but he fails with the next, which is higher and farther away. It disappears without being shot through. He gets the third one. They continue like this for some time, the warlock comfortable in his chair, the archer standing straight, working at his skills.

* * *

Around the same time a text comes from Alaric's phone about possible fighting instructor with one number included to contact the man and another number to the gym he frequents. Alec doesn't waste time, calling right away and setting up a date for first meeting.

After he arrives on that day they talk for a short while and then get to the proper practice so the other man can get to know him. Alec was told to come prepared so he can change into workout clothes.

The instructor is, predictably, an alpha. He appears to be older than forty but no more than fifty and looks trustworthy, if a bit serious. Alec much prefers dealing with mature alphas who know what they're doing and they're not looking to prove themselves. Although, in Alec's experience, age is no guarantee of reason. The Clave's treatment of him had taught him that.

The alpha proceeds to throw him around on the mat for good half an hour before Alec's instincts
wake up and his muscle memory starts to save his pride and save his body from some of the blows and attempts to trip him up.

Alec was never going to be a great fighter, not like his alpha siblings, but he had to be good to be an effective Shadowhunter. He does have the skills to show for it and the trainer appears to be pleased not to be dealing with a complete beginner.

Alec knows he is the right choice when for the whole duration of their session he hears not a single lewd comment about the position on his back when he's downed again. He's valued professionalism all his life and that's what he gets.

At the end he's in even more pain than from archery but he's feeling great. They agree to do this again and schedule several sessions ahead.

After they're done Alec returns home. Magnus is at Catarina's for the day, having agreed to help her with a medical-magical problem. They had talked about it the previous day and decided it would not be a problem if he took the boys with him. Along with Catarina they'd manage to work and look after them. They must still be at it, since the loft is empty when Alec walks in. There's no need to bother them with calls so he lets them come back when it fits Magnus.

Alec had showered and changed at the gym but his nose is still full of foreign gym scents and it rubs his senses the wrong way. Because of the nature of their training his body is still covered with the older alpha's scent, which admittedly wasn't that strong at all and besides that Alec could smell a mate-bond on him. It bothers Alec that it lingers because it's not the scent he usually has on him. It's not the one he's used to. It's simply wrong to smell like other men in the home of his alpha.

As soon as he's inside the loft he goes to his bedroom and grabs the warlock's stolen robe and finds himself thoroughly disappointed when he realizes his own scent took over Magnus's. He'll have to return this and take something else.

The robe goes into the washing machine. Alec carefully chooses the best 'delicate' program and lets it wash with some other softer baby clothes.

Next, fully aware of what he's doing, he creeps into Magnus's wardrobe and locates his scarves. It seems the best choice to him since a scarf is easy to miss and easy to hide. He picks one out of those which smell the best to him and is in muted colors, and retreats to his own room.

He wraps the scarf around his neck to have the desired scent near his nose and to have it cover his skin for later when he'll have to take the scarf off.

Since turning on the washing machine was pretty much all Alec has strength left for, he lies down on the bed to rest before Magnus comes back and he takes over watching the kids.

* * *

In the middle of the week the weather forecast promises last two or three days of sun before temperatures take a proper dip into late fall and clouds move in permanently. It's best to use those days to go for longer walks before they're forced to sit indoors or portal to other locations in the world, which Alec would rather not do too often.

They find themselves in Central Park, Alec's sitting on a bench in the best spot away from trees' shadows and the pram's parked next to him while he reads one of the books he found in the loft. It isn't one of the journal-type books or old print which he'd never carry out, but it's a book wearing
signs of frequent use so he picked it up out of curiosity. It's a fictional story, or he hopes it is, and he finds himself engrossed in it. A paper cup with coffee sits next to him on the bench and he takes a sip when he remembers it's there. He could not be more mundane if he tried. Lost among other people who got the same idea about the weather, with Max under the cover of glamour, he's like any other parent in the park.

He doesn't want to be mundane, obviously. He didn't even begin to like them. There must be some irony in there somewhere but he's not looking for it. When he was banished he found himself between Downworlders almost right away and much preferred to stay there. Now, a guest of the High Warlock of Brooklyn, he's guaranteed to stay in the Downworld and never really be a part of it except by association. And that's fine. He may be lost between two worlds but it's nowhere near the worst situation he could be in. He might even be happy as long as he doesn't dwell on the loss.

That is one of the reasons why he hasn't tried calling his family yet. The first reason is what he admitted to Magnus- plain fear of the unknown outcome. Another reason is that one of the outcomes would be establishing a connection to the Institute and Shadowhunters and he's not sure he'd be able to deal with that. It's selfish, he knows.

…And just like that he's lost his paragraph and is staring at the text blankly, trying to get back to reading instead of overthinking. Sighing, he reaches for the cup to finish his coffee and when he raises his head there's a girl standing in front of him with her full attention on the pram. She's pretty small, maybe six years old, maybe seven. Twin braids sneak out from under her pink-and-purple hat and matching scarf covers her neck and chin.

"Hello." Alec says, not sure how to proceed around unknown children. She looks up at him but doesn't reply. She's probably just shy and babies are more interesting to her than adults.

Apparently her curiosity is greater than her reluctance to speak to strangers because soon enough she turns to Alec and says, "How come he's blue?"

Max is under a blanket with firetrucks on it so she made an assumption about him being a boy and was correct, but that's not what matters. Alec stares at her surprised, processing what she just asked. He looks around just to check if any adults are noticing his blue child too. No one's interested in them but the little girl. So Alec decides to answer her.

"He was born blue. It's his… thing. To be blue."

"Is that because he's a warlock?"

"Yes. That's why. Are you one?"

She nods her head. Then, with great amount of hesitation, she reaches her hand up to the scarf she's wearing and pulls it down just a bit, enough for Alec to notice lines on her neck that appear to be… gills?

"What about you?" She asks the next reasonable question.

"I'm not a warlock but if I were one, I'd like to have something as cool as gills."

He manages to get the tiniest smile out of her and it makes him smile too.

"Are you here with your mom?"

"My nana."
"That's good too."

He wants to ask her where this nana is because it might be a good idea to meet her but before he can open his mouth to speak, there's a name called over the voices of other people and the girl throws him a quick "I have to go now, bye," and she's off, disappearing behind a small group of adult joggers and then behind the trimmed bushes on the other side of the alley.

Alec can't follow, not when he's not alone. All he has is the name which he might have heard wrong but he's pretty sure sounded like 'Madzie'.
Chapter Summary

Today: Camille :). Next up: How To Train Your Mundane.

Chapter Notes

This is one of the two heaviest chapters for Alec out of the story. Like I said at the start, no sexual abuse but there is non-con involving blood. You know what I mean. It was supposed to be finished much sooner but it also wasn't supposed to be 9k… The whole fluff part in the beginning wasn't even planned to be part of the chapter but there it is, basically wrote itself because it wanted to be here.

Magnus has covered one of the shelves with framed photographs. Alec stands in front of the bookshelf one morning and looks at each one in turn. Most of them are from Spain but there is one of Jon and Max in the loft and one of Catarina so it must be at her place. She's in her true warlock color and she's holding up Max with a big smile on her face. It probably took place recently when Magnus went to help her.

Alec gazes at the vacation set. He is sure he remembers a few of those moments and he is sure Magnus didn't have his phone out, so how did he get those photos?

There's one with Dot and Alec standing in front of the castle gate side by side, holding Max and Jonathan respectively. They were actually posing then and Magnus had told them to smile. Dot did much better job of it than Alec.

Then there's one of Alec holding up Max who's reaching for a sea green beaded necklace on a display somewhere along the promenade. That very necklace is now in Alec's desk at the loft because of course Magnus bought it and the omega brings it out like a weapon when they need to distract Max from Magnus's real jewelry.

There's one photo taken by Dot: Magnus and Alec are sitting on the thick blanket they laid down to protect them from the chilly sand and they're both reaching for something Max had managed to grab and chuck away before one of them could react. They're not looking at the item they're retrieving, they're looking up at each other.

It's so strange to see himself on so many physical photos. Izzy used to make him pose with her sometimes but usually she was happy to just catch him in a frame of a selfie with her and Jace, and even that she didn't do often. Alec wonders if she looks at those photos of him while he's gone. If Jace does. Alec wishes he had one of his brother Max. He must have changed so much these past months, grown a lot.

Alec had told Magnus about Max too. He explained he named his children after his siblings to have
a reminder of them and was only missing a daughter for the full set. He doesn't know what this half-joking little comment did to the alpha's imagination and what thoughts it planted there.

Magnus joins Alec in the kitchen once he's all ready to be seen by the world, which means his hair's flawless, his clothes are flawless and his make-up is perfect down to a line, to a dot. Once he's close enough his alpha scent hits Alec's nose.

"What's happening here?" Magnus asks looking over Alec's shoulder.

"Pureeing turkey."

"Hmm. That's quite gross."

Alec turns off the blender. "Luckily it's not for you. It's for Max's sixth month." Then he indicates coffee waiting off to the side by the coffee machine. "That's for you."

"A half-birthday? Why didn't you say?"

"Because." Alec turns to face him, leaning his hip on the cabinet's edge. "Because I let you get away with everything you bought in Spain. For Max, for Jon, for me."

"It wasn't everything. You vetoed several items." True, Alec said a firm no to a few things but still came back home with a full suitcase when he left with much, much less. And Magnus doesn't need to know how much Alec loves the soft sweaters in sensible dark shades of red, blue and green, it'd only encourage him to be worse about it. Alec also said yes to a suit. A black suit of excellent quality that was made to fit him within the several days they stayed on their vacation. Once Alec agreed to be measured for it, there was nothing to stop Magnus from ordering a set of dress shirts for him to be picked up later so the tailor didn't have to stress about them too much. There's a box of ties on the top shelf of Alec's wardrobe, waiting to be used with the rest of the clothes one day.

"Several items. Out of how many? They're babies, Magnus. They won't wear their clothes for more than a few weeks before they don't fit."

"Then Jon can have Max's clothes. And so on."

They look at each other. Alec crosses his arms. How can he argue about this with someone who takes time in the morning to put silver eyeliner under his eyes? And okay, the bright silver shade makes Magnus appear younger in a lovely way, and Alec appreciates that he makes that effort every morning... but that's not the point he was making to himself in his mind. Alec sighs.

"All right." He says. "What would you have done, had I informed you of this significant event?"

"We could have a party." Magnus replies.

"Of course. Warlock party."

"Yes! With Catarina and Dot."

"You just want to make them buy even more gifts."

"Or I just want an opportunity to serve drinks."

"How about you memorize the day so you know when one full year has passed. Then you can go all out for his birthday. And no drinks at my child's party."
"As you say, darling."

"Good. Now try this." Alec reaches across the counter to where a covered plate is waiting and pulls it closer. He reveals some sort of toasts with regular, un-pureed, sliced turkey and some kind of freshly made pesto on top. Magnus takes one and bites in while Alec watches.

"Good?"

"Very good."

After that Alec begins the complicated task of spoon feeding Max the mushy food. He has a highchair for feeding so they can all be around the kitchen isle. Magnus takes the other boy onto his lap and gives him a private magic show. They're sitting behind Max so he's not distracted by it but Alec's eyes wander to them from time to time.

It goes well for a while, if very slow, until a sneeze overcomes the boy so suddenly Alec has no time to pull the spoon back.

He freezes, staring down at the sprayed mess. He clearly hears Magnus chuckling and he shoots him a warning look.

At least it wasn't chewed up mess. Alec reaches for a box of tissues but the second he starts wiping the turkey disappears completely under magic.

"Better?" There's still laugh in the warlock's voice.

"Thanks." Alec turns back to Max and pats him on the nose playfully.

The sneezing accident pretty much ends the boy's interest in eating so Alec gives him a squishy toy shark to hold while he puts the bowl and the spoon away.

"What do you want to do today?" Magnus asks him casually when he returns to the seat with water to drink for Max and tea for himself.

"I'm not sure."

Magnus would love to suggest a quick trip to Tokyo or Berlin, or Delhi, but he knows better than that. Alexander isn't after excitement or a show of status. He's looking for peace and stability.

The alpha doesn't feel like sitting at home today but he doesn't want to go out without the omega so he has to figure something out.

First he goes for the familiar option. "How about we dress and go down to the café, get your favorite fancy vegan cake. We could eat the dinner out today." Then a thought strikes him. "How about the zoo?"

It makes Alec pause, surprised by the idea. "They're not going to remember any of it."

"Probably not but I want to go for you. I want to know what your favorite animals are."

"Why, does it say a lot about a person?"

"Sure it does, same as what kind of tie you wear and where you sit on a bus. Come on, you were raised learning about demons, you should spend some time with mundane creatures."
Alec makes a face. "I wasn't raised on the Moon, I know *animals.*"

"Great, then we'll go to the ones you want to see the most."

Alec holds Magnus's gaze for a few long seconds, deciding if the warlock's actually serious, while Magnus waits patiently with a small smile never leaving his lips.

"I'll go if you take Max in the carrier."

"Deal."

They get ready separately, then meet at the entrance to the loft. Alec has Jonathan secure in the wrap and he's holding the 'boring' gray carrier for Max. Magnus gives it a dirty look and shows Alec his own version because of course he somehow got one for himself. It has leather-like straps and is in a color theme much more fitting the warlock. It's dark plum with silver edging and Alec's never seen anything like it while browsing baby sites. Who knows when and from where it came to be in the warlock's possession? Alec just accepts it.

He helps Magnus get Max settled in and when the alpha reaches for Alec's travel bag, he says, "I can take the bag, Max is heavier to carry."

Magnus doesn't let go of the bag's strap. "And I can handle both."

"So can I."

"What alpha would I be in public eye if I let my omega carry a child *and* a heavy bag?"

"What kind of an omega would I be if I couldn't hold my own child *and* his things?"

They continue in the same vein until they're out of the building and on their way roughly in the direction of their destination. Magnus let Alec take the bag because he wasn't about to have a tug-of-war for it – though it could be fun – but he hasn't given up. They walk for the length of their block and then one more before they catch a taxi when a free one comes by. Once they're seated and the taxi moves, Magnus magics the bag from Alec's side of the backseat to his own. A gasp of mild outrage lets him know the omega noticed right away.

There is a protective gesture Alexander keeps up when holding baby Jonathan or when carrying him in the wrap. He'll put his hand at the back of the boy's head or lower at his neck and keep it there. When there's no hat in the way he'll pet his son's hair and place kisses on top of his head.

It's easy to guess the gesture carried over from when the omega was still pregnant, touching his stomach protectively.

There aren't many differences to be seen in the way he treats the two boys. Other than technical details dictated by the age gap, Alexander doesn't favor one over the other. Max gets his share of kisses and the omega is just as happy to pick him up to hold him, but this, the way he'll unconsciously protect his son, is unique to Jonathan. Magnus can understand that, given what he knows about Alexander's history. He'd lived in fear for Jonathan's safety from the very beginning of his tiny life and for months it was just the two of them, struggling to survive. Max was an unexpected addition, a baby lucky enough to be left with someone who had enough heart to take him in and keep him.
When the boys grow older and the age difference of a few months will matter much less, then surely the omega's worry over them will even out and identical concerns will apply to both of them.

Sometimes, when looking at the physical similarities between the father and his son, Magnus is afraid. He is afraid of the day when Jon's warlock mark comes in and he's no longer the picture-perfect child who could pass for a mundane or a Nephilim. If his demonic features remind Alexander of the demon who hurt him will he be able to look past them? Or will they make him relive his worst experience and cause him unnecessary pain in everyday life?

Magnus still hasn't shared his own mark with him. There isn't anything stopping him from doing it but his own fears. Alexander knows what he is but he hasn't seen it. He has only seen the best of him, the healing magic, useful magic. He's seen him get rid of a demon.

Thinking that Alexander will think less of him once his demonic heritage comes to light one day is a disservice to the Nephilim, Magnus knows that. Alexander isn't that shallow, that changeable. And yet… and yet he's scared of it just as he's scared for baby Jonathan because he had been rejected for parts of him before time and again.

Alexander catches Magnus staring, because of course the warlock let his thoughts run too far.

"Something on my face?"

"No no, I wouldn't let you walk around looking anything less than your best."

And he is lovely today. Between the mess of black hair, black lashes and soft lips, he is everything Magnus wants. There's curiosity in his eyes as he regards Magnus.

"I'd hope my looks don't matter that much since some of the attention should be drawn away from me by the animals… since we're in a zoo? To look at animals?" He teases.

They're in the aviary, which was Alec's choice. There really aren't many people around, considering the season but it's not like they're alone. Magnus has noticed more than one mundane checking them both out discretely. Mostly discretely. He doesn't tease the omega about it because there's nothing to gain but briefly flustering him and Magnus would rather see him relaxed.

Alexander does seem actually interested in the birds so they stroll through the area for a good while until fussing babies force them to make a stop at the zoo's changing station.

They live in New York so there's no need to stay longer than they're in the mood for, especially with small children. They can come back any time. They make a final stop at the domestic animals section where a fluffy cow with black fluffy ears replaces Magnus in Alec's heart for as long as he's looking at it.

Later in the evening, after they've put the babies to bed, they're watching the show Alec still pretends not to love. It's political drama which he finds very interesting for plot reasons. It's fun but it's also written well enough to be instructive, at least to him. Not that he'll get an opportunity to put the knowledge into practice when he's no longer on his way to lead the Institute. He should probably look into books in the same theme when he has the time, if only to keep his brain occupied.

It's not always easy to tell omegas from betas and betas from alphas when they're on the silver screen since you can't smell them or witness their aura up close but Alec's pretty sure one of the men in main cast is an alpha. It's only natural for the leads to be alphas or omegas, depending on
which characteristics the fictional person is supposed to have. This particular alpha is conventionally attractive but he also has brown eyes which are warm when he's not playing anger and it's just what Alec likes.

Magnus is very close, seated on the couch to Alec's left. He's nursing a drink in martini glass and follows what's on the screen but Alec's never sure if he cares for this particular show or just indulges Alec, watching him when he's not paying attention.

It's... a nice feeling, to have someone happy to do whatever you're doing just to be with you. He didn't have opportunities for stuff like this before. All they did together at the Institute was fight, train, investigate, train again. When Alec followed his siblings to parties he didn't enjoy it and it hardly counted as being 'together' when both Jace and Iz went after someone to dance (or do more) with, leaving Alec to do the same. So he usually sat at the bar staring into a glass of water or as they got older and he worried less, he stopped coming at all. Now, Alec has a drink of his own, some sort of sweet creamy drink that's easy on the alcohol part. He likes it.

Between the TV and the real alpha at his side, Alec ends up in a predicament. He's carefully not looking at Magnus but he can smell him and he can feel his warmth. At the same time he's looking at his actor crush and his body does the one logical thing it could come up with: it wakes up.

It starts slowly. He's comfortable and warm and at first doesn't notice he's warmer by the minute. Then he realizes his face is too warm and it's because he's blushing and- and there's something even worse. He knows his body well enough to know he's about to be wet. The next step is typically releasing pheromones and that's not what Alec wants.

Mortified, he shoots up from the couch.

"I thought I heard something." He throws as an explanation and almost runs to the bedroom. His sleeping sons aren't even stirring so he locks himself in the bathroom and splashes his face with the coldest water he can get from the tap.

"By the Angel." He whispers at his own reflection. Getting a breath of air not saturated with the enticing scent of the alpha does wonders for Alec's self-control.

He almost managed to forget what arousal feels like. During the every first few months of pregnancy he was horny half the time and then the need subsided as his child grew. He does not miss that time, not having anyone to have sex with but needing it so much.

It appears the hibernation is over.

But it's fine, he can deal with it. He'll just have his face red around Magnus half the time. Groaning into his hands he bows over the sink for another splash of cold water.

Okay. He can do this, he can go back out. He doesn't want to lose an evening with Magnus because his body doesn't know what platonic means. He'll just have to get less into it and maybe stare less at the alphas on the screen.

He comes out eventually, tells Magnus all's fine with the kids and settles back down on the couch, a bit closer to his end of the furniture than he sat before. If Magnus notices something off about him, he doesn't comment and it's difficult to say if he could tell why Alec ran. It's very easy to forget Magnus is an old alpha, experienced and smart. Alec does his best not to be so awkward it'd give him away and the evening passes as planned. They have a late meal together and then separate for the night.
Alone in his bed, Alec wonders how bad of an idea it would be to get himself off. Low level arousal is still buzzing under his skin, especially now that he's in comfort of his own bed, warm and cozy and it's the best way to keep an omega happy so his body's giving him hints to just go for it.

He closes his eyes and slowly moves his hand down until his fingertips reach the band of his underwear. He goes on, slipping his fingers under the fabric until they are between his legs, forgoing the erection that's waiting for his attention too. He finds there what he already knows, he's wet, now no longer fighting the arousal with the force of his will.

Biting on his lip, he pushes two fingers inside, nearly hissing at the sweet pressure. It's best to go slow, get used to what he usually did when he wanted to come. He doesn't rush it, thinking it might leave him more frustrated if he came too fast. He tries remembering his old fantasies but they get replaced with new faces. Warm-eyed imaginary alpha suspiciously reminding him of the ones he knows from TV. He even goes back to his memory of the hot beta holding the door for him in the shop. But no matter how hard he tries to hold that image, it slips away to reveal the one brown-eyed alpha he really wants.

He brings himself to the peak with Magnus on his mind and afterward just lies there, catching his breath and wondering how fucked he is.

* * * *

Alec's walking down the sidewalk along the high walls of Hotel Dumort. He has no issues being there during the day and he's only passing by anyway, his legs carrying him at good pace.

His eyes notice something and he stops suddenly and retraces a few steps to look into the back alley again to confirm what he thought he saw the first time. Yes, there's someone there, looking at the barred lower windows and inspecting the one pair of metal doors that open into the back alley.

It's obviously not a vampire since it's a bright middle of the day even with the cover of clouds. So a mundane then, and a shady one. Possibly one who's the worst burglar in history of crime because he's already noticed (by Alec) and he isn't having much success getting inside.

Alec's tempted to move on. It's not like the man's going to get in unless he's let inside so maybe he'll go away in a few minutes. But if he has other reasons to be there… It's Alec's job to stop a mundane from doing something stupid.

"Hey." He says calmly while approaching the other man. He didn't even hear Alec coming, so focused on gazing up the wall to the next row of windows.

"Oh," He startles. "Uh, I was-"

"Breaking in?"

"No! Of course not, that's absolutely not-"

Alec's not sure if he's dealing with a beta or an omega here but he's leaning toward the latter as the answer. The guy looks ready to flee at a moment's notice should Alec manage to spook him. He's
young, younger than Alec and looking completely out of place. Now that he's closer, he can see the man is not shady in a thief way, he's just totally nervous and twitchy.

"Look, you can go on, I was supposed to meet someone but apparently they're not in."

"Yeah? Did they tell you to meet them here at this time?"

"I don't see how that's any of your business."

Alec crosses his arms. He's not letting this go.

"They're in. If you're looking for vampires."

"Vampires!" The mundane's eyes widen and he stammers. "Of course I'm not- I'm not looking for vampires. Are you crazy?"

"All right, stop. You're coming with me."

The omega – because now Alec's certain that's what he's dealing with – backs away with his hands raised.

"Look, I have a problem, I think I'm- I'm turning into one, okay?"

Alec looks the mundane up and down. He's definitely not at his best but he's still better than dead. Dark circles under his eyes already tell Alec he's not a vampire since they're supposed to look perfect, if a little too dead. Frankly he looks like a college student after a bad week of studying and possibly taking drugs.

"Did you get bitten?"

"Yes." He admits and Alec believes him because he smells actual fear in the air.

"Did you die?"

"What?"

"Do you remember dying at any point in the recent past? How can you turn if you're right here, living in the day?"

"I don't know? That's what I'm here for! To get answers."

"All you can get is get killed or fed from, so you're going to come with me." Alec steps forward, intending to drag the other omega with him if he has to.

"And what are you? Why should I go with you anywhere?"

"You need help and to be as far from here as possible. I can get you help. I promise."

While the other man hesitates, already visibly leaning towards the option presented by Alec, neither of them hears the steps approaching from the other end of the alley, where it curves behind the Hotel.

*

Alec comes to on some sort of furniture that's very much unfamiliar to him. He's on his back, his fingers are touching cool ground on his left side. A throbbing pain in his head lets him know why
he was out in the first place. Well, it doesn't exactly tell him. He shuts his eyes again, cringing against the pain.

When he opens them again, he tries to orient himself.

High ceiling, very faint scents, quiet stillness.

He rolls on his side and pushes himself up to sit. High bars lock him in a square space, like a cage built inside a large room. There is another like it next to him and inside of it he sees the other omega. The younger man is looking at him as if he was awake longer than Alec and was waiting for him to wake up.

"You got in." Alec says. "Congratulations."

"This isn't exactly the fulfillment of my dreams."

"Was anyone here?"

"No."

"Great."

They must have been surprised by a human enthralled by the vampires, sent out to get them. Maybe more than one. Alec honestly can't remember and he's not even sure he remembers all of his conversation with the mundane on the street.

Alec doesn't check for his phone. He knows it isn't there because the familiar shape and weight isn't there in his pocket. There's also no point asking the other omega because surely his phone is gone as well.

They're probably at the heart of the lair and even if Alec was optimistic, which he never was, he wouldn't even imagine getting out of here on his own. Even so, he makes a remarkably short round trip of his cell. There's nothing inside but the fancy cot he was lying on and a square carpet that might be an actual antique. Outside is the rest of the grand, open room, with expensive looking furniture set in the middle and several sculptures standing by the walls and in the corners. All this expensive beauty isn't making him feel any better than waking up in a basement would have.

Glancing at the other omega, Alec decides to make time go faster by talking.

"So who are you?"

"Simon Lewis. Nice to meet you, I guess." He looks like he wants to put his hand out across the bars but Alec's unimpressed face stops him.

"I'm Alec. Look, you might as well explain to me why you knew about vampires and why you thought approaching them about anything was a good idea."

"Honestly, I didn't even know about this... this underworld until recently. I had no idea. Vampires, werewolves, Shadowhunters!"

Alec frowns. When mundanes have the Sight they usually stop at the Downworlders and demons because Shadowhunters keep low profile and only show up in the city when needed. He'd have to meet a Shadowhunter to know about them.

"But guess what, apparently my friend – who I have known for what feels like my whole life – is
actually one of them."

Alec rests his forehead on the bars and closes his eyes. "I swear to the Angel, if you say the name 'Clary'…"

Simon perks up at that. "Do you know her?"

"No. I very much do not know her yet everyone else in the city apparently does."

"I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean… But, anyway, are you… normal, or one of them?"

"I'm a normal Nephilim. I used to be a Shadowhunter."

"Really? Why aren't you anymore?"

"They didn't like me anymore. That's what they do to people who are too much trouble."

"For some reason I get the feeling it'd be in my best interest to give you the shortest version so you can't call me out on every word."

"Please do that."

"I tagged along when they went investigating something like a den? Do vampires have dens if they've got this place?"

"Yes. The worst ones do. They lure in or keep their human victims in there away from the eyes of the rest of law-abiding community."

"Oh. Well, it was something like that, then. Except apparently it was the wrong address and nothing happened… until we were followed and we were attacked, separated and then… I woke up somewhere with this woman who's now in my head."

"She bit you?"

"It's all pretty damn fuzzy, everything that's happened then. I know she used me and after I got out, with help, I only kept getting worse. Crazy."

Alec sighs.

"Why didn't you go to the Shadowhunters if you knew them? She broke the law and they should deal with it. You chose vampires, seriously? Do you go back to the bees asking for antihistamines after they sting you?"

"That's a weird comparison but pretty clear to get. Look, I honestly didn't know what to do, she was in my head all the time. Clary's phone would go to voicemail and I wasn't exactly rushing to go to the Shadowhunters because seriously, most of your kind are pricks."

"When there's a mundane getting underfoot, I bet they were." Alec mutters to himself. Aloud he says, "Let's try not to make it worse."

Clicking steps announce someone's arrival. A vampire walks in, wearing high heels and a tight red dress. She's beautiful and graceful, and frankly terrifying. Just seeing Simon's reaction to her tells Alec it's 'her'. The wide and thick, gleaming golden necklace she's wearing makes her look regal. He can guess by her clear alpha aura and the way she carries herself, she must be Camille. The one
he had been indirectly avoiding all through his time of selling his blood to vampires who were technically under her rule. There are two men with her, Alec assumes an alpha and a beta but he can't be sure.

"I'm impressed." She says when she stops in front of the cells so she has them both in her sight. "A dinner and a dessert."

"More like a breach of Accords and, surprisingly, a breach of Accords." Alec replies, his voice level.

He stands straight, looking at the vampire. She tilts her head, turning all her attention on him.

"I know my Caramel, but who are you?"

She makes a pause which Alec's not inclined to fill with words.

"They've told me about you, you know. What you've been doing in the night not so long ago."

She sniffs the air.

"A little lost thing. Angel blood without runes, children without a mate. You're quite something, aren't you. What else did you fail at in life?" She studies him, mocking expression on her face. "You are pretty though. I'd even go so far as to say you smell nice," she pauses. "If there wasn't Magnus Bane all over you. Does he even fuck you? Or is he only using you to make himself feel less pitiful by having someone even worse than him around? Magnus does love a good charity case."

"We clearly don't know the same person." He says, because this at least he knows better than her. There is no pity connecting Magnus to him.

"You're quick to defend him but not yourself? Are you being humble or honest?"

Alec doesn't answer. Nothing is compelling him to discuss himself or Magnus with her.

"Let us out and we'll both forget about ever having been inside this place."

"When you were a Shadowhunter, how many open cases did you have against me? How much proof? Was it… nothing?" She smiles coldly. "Your friends will still have nothing when they find your corpse."

Alec doubts he's going to die here. He's too rare of a catch for them and it's not like he has actual enemies among vampires. There's no reason to kill him for show or revenge, or any other reason. Vampires are literally bloodthirsty, not in the other sense of the saying.

"It is a shame I'll miss out on angel blood today but I don't take anyone's leftovers." Camille says with mock regret and turns to her small entourage. "Do you want him?"

Obviously they do.

The two of them come into Alec's cell. When Alec moves to avoid the first one, the second vampire moves faster than a human, pinning Alec against the bars.

The man grabs his chin and forces him to look up.

As a Shadowhunter Alec was taught to resist vampires' encanto but all the training in the world won't protect him when the enemy has the time they need to wear him down. It's like being
drugged slowly and having no way to escape, having your lungs fill slowly with poison and being unable to leave the room.

"Don't worry, we won't turn you. You breeders tend to be too clingy after you turn."

He has no willpower left to react when they bite him on the soft place just above the inside of his elbow. They don't take too much but it makes no difference to Alec when his thoughts are already swimming out of order due to the mind control. When they leave him alone and lock him in the cell he slides down the wall to sit on the ground.

The voice of the other omega reaches his ears but he has no ability nor wish to reply.

All he can think of is how disappointed Magnus is going to be.

The other omega still has a watch but Alec doesn't ask about the time. Staring off into space, he lets minutes pass him by. They're alone but she will come back. When someone comes into the room at last, there are no clicking heels so it might be another of Camille's subordinates come to have a taste of angel blood. But then the vampire's voice can be heard calling Camille's name, asking if she's there.

Alec perks up immediately at the vaguely familiar sound. It's one of the vampires he knows, the lover of one of his regular clients. What was his name? Alec's thinking fast. He has only this one chance at getting help. He'll have to use the omegan suggestion to get the vampire to do anything against his leader when they're inside the Hotel. That will only work as long as the man doesn't sense Alec influencing him and he won't sense it if there's no change in Alec's aura while they talk. Which means Alec has to do it right now, open himself up, reach to the omega's core and put the best effort he can behind this one chance.

"Alpha." He starts because it's the safest bet to get the vampire's attention.

The man turns his head to the cages, confusion clear on his face. Then his eyes widen just a bit when he recognizes Alec.

The omega knows this is going to be difficult to do: the man he wants to influence is the worst possible combination: an alpha vampire.

"I need help."

"Without a doubt." The vampire replies, his tone dry but somewhat surprised at the same time.

"I'm not going to ask you to let us out-"

"Good, because that's not happening. What are you doing here? Disappearing from the streets was the smartest thing you did… and now you're here? With Camille home?"

"I was staying away. Your leader was luring in the mundane, I couldn't leave him alone. Especially not another omega." He keeps his tone level, a bit quieter than is his normal way of speaking. He can't sound like he's making a request or a demand. He has to plead.

"I'm only asking for one phone call. Please, just tell one person that I'm here. No one will know you did it, how could they? You know I have children. I can't stay here, especially not dead. My son is barely two months old, he might- he might not take the loss well. He might die."
He knows it's working. His own body feels alien to him with how much effort he's putting into giving his words power. Sexual suggestion costs omegas much less but it's cruder and simpler way of getting stuff done for them. It's also useless to Alec when facing a vampire.

Everything's telling him to lower his eyes, bend his neck for a stronger alpha but he can't do that because eye contact is also a trick for him to use- make the other man see he's honest and that he's afraid.

Alec's ready to go on but the vampire sighs, looks to the ceiling, then says, "Fine. Tell me the number."

Alec does, watching like a hawk as the vampire puts in the number Alec dictates him and then waits while signal's ringing.

What Alec wouldn't do to hear Magnus's voice in that moment himself.

"Come collect your omega from Hotel Dumort." The vampire says, looking at Alec. Then he hangs up. "There."

Alec closes his eyes, leaning on the bars heavily. "Thank you."

Of course it's enough. Magnus doesn't need any more details to find him.

The vampire doesn't wait for Camille's return, instead he throws Alec one last look and leaves the room without another word.

Sitting down heavily, Alec settles in to wait. He's drained emotionally, mentally and physically. The bite wound throbs because it's very fresh but it isn't that big of a deal. What it symbolizes is worse.

"Hey. Are you going to be okay?" It's easy for omegas to read each other's mood and general condition so it doesn't surprise Alec that his cell neighbor sounds worried.

"If Magnus comes."

"Is he your alpha?"

"Yes." Alec replies quietly. He wishes the question didn't feel like yet another reminder he's mateless. He knows Simon didn't mean it like that, but he would have said 'mate' if he could smell that bond on Alec. He said 'alpha' instead. It's probably the best description of what they have, Alec and Magnus. He's the warlock's omega; Magnus is his alpha. If they had a bond Alec wouldn't have to rely on strangers to help him, Magnus would know he was in danger right away. With the true bond, he might even be able to track him.

* * *

Magnus steps into the open space of Camille's grand room and he's the greatest sight Alec has seen since the birth of his son. The alpha is all power and grace, moving with purpose. Alec would jump up to greet him if he wasn't currently forced to his knees by a strong vampire who has his hand at the back of Alec's neck. Alec hates every second of it. An alpha will touch omega's neck for two reasons: to comfort and caress or to subdue them with force. That it's happening to Alec now isn't helping his state at all. It only serves to make him more guilty for putting himself in a dangerous situation in the first place and then for being seen like this by Magnus.

They're now outside of the barred cells, Alec with the vampire and Simon sitting stiffly on a sofa.
next to Camille who's all but lounging there, waiting for Magnus as if he had requested an
audience ahead of time. She got the heads-up from one of her people when the High Warlock
appeared at the nearest location he could portal to and entered the Hotel with no care for physical
obstacles such as doors. He wasn't here to be polite.

"Camille." Magnus says shortly. Then, "Take your hands off him if you want to keep them,"
Magnus addresses the man holding Alec down.

The vampire looks to his leader and that's his mistake. Alec, who didn't take his eyes off of
Magnus for one second, dodges the spell by diving forward. The other man loses grip on him when
he's thrown back, pretty much sent flying. Magnus didn't mean to kill him so the vampire only
groans in pain and shock of the impact where he lands.

"I asked you." Magnus says. "You shouldn't have looked at her."

Alec hasn't seen Magnus this cold before. This controlled, getting straight to the point. Alec knows
how he can be with his clients, teasing, talking in circles or flirting until he gets what he wants.
And now… now he is angry.

"Magnus, why so violent?" Camille speaks up as if this didn't affect her in the slightest. "If you've
already come, uninvited, you should at least give us conversation first before acting barbaric."

"I have no time to give you, Camille. I'm here for Alexander." Meanwhile Alec stands up free and
makes his way to Magnus's side where he stops. His fingers find Magnus's wrist and close there.
Standing within scenting distance is like balm on Alec's nerves.

"I didn't want him. He was lurking around with my pick. If you want to keep him alive teach him to
stay home."

"He'll be where he wants to be. You've gone a step too far this time, Camille. Omegas are coming
with me."

"One. You take yours, I have mine."

Alec's fingers close tighter around his wrist. "Magnus, he's just a mundane. She already hurt him
once, fed him her blood. It's what drew him back. He doesn't want to be here."

The warlock nods, then turns to Camille.

"I'll do you a favor. By taking the mundane I'll save you from being pursued by the Shadowhunters
for taking mundanes."

She huffs. "No Shadowhunter will care about either of them, especially when they receive a
confirmation from this one he wanted to stay with me." She puts her hand on Simon's shoulder in a
gesture that's proprietary and threatening at the same time. "Letting him go would make me very
unhappy."

Magnus feels Alec's fingers squeeze his wrist nervously. He might not even be fully aware he's
doing it, this nervous closing and loosening of his hand. There are other signs, too, telling Magnus
he needs to get the omega out of here as soon as possible.

"I'd say we're all already quite unhappy right now, thanks to you. Let the mundane go or I'll make
you and I'd hate to have to do that."

They have a staring match. Magnus isn't going to play the waiting game, he's fully prepared to
fight for what he wants but he's willing to give Camille the chance to give up this time.

And she does.

She rolls her eyes, then snaps her fingers. "Go, if you want to be with his kind."

Simon jumps up from the sofa and walks to Alec's side. He doesn't look convinced he's doing the smart thing by agreeing to follow a strange unknown alpha but he already knows he doesn't want to stay with her. It's more like he's coming with Alec, a fellow omega.

"I'm serious, Camille." Magnus says as a goodbye. "Do not try coming after them ever again."

He raises a wall-like barrier around them just to be safe from foul play while the portal's open. Alexander's already at his side so Magnus grabs the other omega by his arm firmly and takes them home.

The mundane nearly falls down after they've passed through. Only the proximity of the couch saves him and he makes it there to sit down heavily to gather his wits.

Good. Magnus would rather have him stay put while he turns his attention to Alexander. There's something in his scent Magnus doesn't like. He can easily imagine it's fear, maybe pain. But there's something more.

"Are you all right?"

"I am now." The omega gives his heartfelt reply. "Thank you."

"Please, sit down." Alec's easily guided to the red armchair and sits down as instructed. Magnus summons a glass of tea with a bit of whisky and puts it in Alec's hands.

The omega takes a sip automatically and fails to cringe like he always does at alcohol. The non-reaction makes Magnus frown. He also doesn't like the way Alexander won't meet his eyes.

Focusing on the hint of pain in his scent, Magnus sends his magic out to check on the omega's body. He finds the wound in his arm and he can guess what caused it. He sends a pulse of healing magic to the spot without uncovering the skin.

The omega leans into his hand when he brushes his fingers on his cheek. He's a bit too pale but hopefully he'll calm down and rest a bit now. Magnus will prepare a potion to help him more in a moment, but first…

He leaves Alexander to turn to their guest.

"Who are you?" The unfamiliar omega is sitting on the couch, taking as little space as he can.

"I'm just Simon. Look, I already told the story to your friend. He's a Shadowhunter, right? Well, I have other Shadowhunter friends. One friend. I got involved in this supernatural business because of her, by accident. She used to be like me until recently." He speaks quickly to explain himself and the warlock is making him very unsure of himself.

Magnus closes his eyes. "Clarissa."

"Oh? You also know Clary?"
"Yes. I was the reason she stayed a mundane for so long."

"Well, thank you, I guess? She's my best friend and-

Magnus puts his hand up and the omega falls silent.

"What you did was incredibly stupid, not to mention dangerous. You almost got yourself killed and you almost got my- Alexander killed."

"I know that now and I can guarantee you, no matter what hallucinations I get, I won't go anywhere near there again."

"You need to stay away from all of us. You're a mundane, and that's not meant to be an insult. You're not prepared for anything our world can do to you when you're not sticking around someone who can protect you. You either stay in your own life or become best friends with someone stronger and don't leave their side. Especially as an omega."

Magnus paces. He's reliving the past few hours when his worry for Alexander was growing, sucking the air out of his lungs. He's home now, breathing in his and Alec's mixed scents but it's not helping when his omega's fresh scent doesn't match it.

"I know neither of you meant for it to happen but I ask you, stay away from the Children of the Night for good. Do you know how it felt to get an unknown caller tell me to come get you? I thought I'd be collecting a body."

"Hey, um," The omega speaks up. "I get what you're saying and I'll let you get back to this again but you need to stop."

"What?"

"You need to stop. Your friend looks halfway to a drop."

Magnus whirls around to look at Alexander. The other omega is right. Damn it.

Alec's sitting still, the glass still clutched in his pale fingers. His face is paler too, except for the small, unhealthy flush at the top of his cheekbones. Coming closer, Magnus sees the fine trembling that's running through his body.

An omega drop. A way for them to protect themselves or a way out of a situation they cannot deal with mentally. Magnus should have known the early signs but it's so out of character for Alexander to get this bad… he just didn't expect it.

"What happened to him?" He asks the other omega, urgency in his voice.

"One vamp drank from him. And then another showed up and he convinced him to call you."

Magnus was already aware of the bite so the second piece of information is the more valuable one. "Convinced? By using suggestion?"

"Yeah? He got pretty deep, I think. I mean I don't know him, I don't know what's his normal."

"Well, this is not normal."

Magnus drops to a crouch in front of Alec. He puts one hand on his knee for balance and for comfort and uses his other hand to take one of Alec's off the glass. His fingers are cold. Too cold. Once Magnus moves his fingers, the omega seems to lose the hold on the glass, like he isn't even
aware of it.

"I'm sorry." It comes from Alec and startles Magnus.

"No, Angel, you've got nothing to be sorry for. I'm not angry at you. I'm angry because you scared me so much I'll probably have nightmares about this for the next two weeks."

He knows his mistake now. He exposed the emotionally vulnerable omega to his own negative words and emotions too soon. He was projecting anger because he needed to let some of it go to make himself feel better. It doesn't matter that none of it is aimed at Alec. Magnus is the alpha Alexander leans on in everyday life so it also makes him capable of hurting the omega when he's not in his right state of mind. The omega wouldn't be reacting the same way to anger coming from another alpha.

Magnus moves closer, sets the glass aside and takes both of Alexander's hands in his own.

"I'm angry at Camille for taking you and at the other vampires for hurting you. Darling, you know you're home now? You're safe. I need you to be safe."

He doesn't get a reply so he moves up, pulls the omega into a hug and when he isn't rejected, he wraps his arms around him.

The moment Alec feels the alpha's warm, gentle touch at the back of his neck, he sags into Magnus's embrace.

This is all he wanted. All this time, especially during the first three months of his pregnancy before he gave up dreaming, all he wanted was to have an alpha hold him and tell him everything was going to be fine. That he loved him and would protect him. That he would be there. Tell him that it's safe for Alec to focus on their children, that he'd protect them all.

With his face in the crook of Magnus's neck and Magnus's hand on the back of Alec's neck he doesn't think he can be more comforted, more safe.

There's no stopping the tears now. It starts slowly, drop by drop and when he can't hold back anymore he sobs into the warlock's shirt. His fingers tangle in the patterned fabric, probably wrinkling it. He doesn't want to let go, he doesn't want Magnus to let go.

Magnus's eyes feel a little too warm too. It pulls at his heart to have this much pain in front of him, contained in one body.

At the same time he knows this might be a good thing to happen to the omega. He'll cry out his bottled-up emotions and feel lighter for it when he rests. This has been waiting to happen for a long time and only now met the trigger to overcome the omega's tight control of himself.

Knowing all that, the alpha's heart is breaking every time each heavy sob shakes Alexander's frame in his arms. He's at least relieved they avoided a real drop. During a real one an omega will become unresponsive, catatonic even, until their system resets, for a lack of better term. It's very hard to predict when the return to normal would happen, as it depends heavily on each individual omega. Alexander is subdued, reacting instinctively to avoid alpha's anger but he's very much conscious.

Once the crying starts to quiet down, eventually, Magnus holds the glass with tea and alcohol up
for Alec. "Finish this, Angel, and let's move you to the bed. You'll be much better in the morning."

The mundane omega has made himself scarce at some point so at least he appears to have some tact. Magnus will know if he tries to leave but hopefully he won't even think to do it.

Torn between the need to stay near Alexander and the need to do something actually useful, Magnus debates with himself if it's worth it to make a potion for the omega. Just a simple sleeping draught that won't make him woozy in the morning. Yes, it's probably best to make sure Alexander falls asleep and stays that way for a good number of hours. Magnus summons a blanket, the biggest they have for the boys and puts it around Alec's shoulders.

"Wait for me here." He says and goes to his apothecary.

He doubts very much Alexander will be able to eat anything right now and it'll be better to boost his system through magic until he wakes for breakfast. The warlock prepares two separate potions and then mixes them when they're done so there's only one cup for the omega to drink from.

Alexander is right where he left him when he comes back, the only difference being that he wrapped the blanket tighter around himself.

Magnus offers him the sleeping draught without explaining what it is and the omega drinks it when asked to.

"Come on, you'll be more comfortable in your bed."

Alexander looks up at him. Red-rimmed eyes and the remains of that unhealthy flush are still on his face.

"I'm sorry."

"I know," Magnus says softly, "and I've told you you don't need to be. We'll talk about this in the morning, now I want you to rest."

Alec simply nods and lets himself be led to the bedroom.

The mundane omega is sitting on a guest bed that he found, twiddling his thumbs. He looks up sharply when Magnus steps inside the door.

"Come to the kitchen."

"Is he okay?"

"He's sleeping. Come over to eat something. What would you like?"

"I don't know, what do you have that's easiest to heat up?"

"Nothing." Magnus says truthfully. Alec didn't have a chance to make anything fresh that day and as far as the warlock remembers there's nothing in the freezer at the moment.

"Well, there's baby milk if that's something you're interested in."

"Uh, no. Thanks. Where's the baby?"
"They're with my friend for the night. Is Italian fine with you?"

"Sure, I'm not going to be picky. Although… I haven't been eating much lately because of the vampire thing."

"Yes, about that," the warlock says, "start from the beginning. How did it happen?"

Alec drifts through his dreams up to consciousness at least once that night. His thoughts are slow and his body is heavy but an unnamed fear woke him up all the same. He smells his bedroom, his children's things, he knows they're not here because the scent isn't fresh but he remembers Magnus was taking care of them that day so it must be okay. Alec would reach under his pillows to pull out a corner of the alpha's scarf to comfort himself back to sleep with the scent but he doesn't have to. He can smell Magnus clearly and it's enough to keep the fear at bay. Still, there's tension through his body, reacting unconsciously to the blurred memory of the previous day and he can't seem to fall back asleep even though he's on the verge of it.

Until there's soft touch at his neck, warmth spreading through his skin at his pressure points, calming his nerves. A quiet request, "Sleep, Angel."

And he does.
Intermission

Chapter Summary

Today: Four conversations. Next up: Three missed birthdays.

Alec wakes up rested as if he's slept for two nights straight. Free of responsibilities for the time being, he's not too eager to get out of the bed and its warm comfort. He's already starting to miss his children but he assumes he'll see them after breakfast and there's no rush. They must be a portal away, with one of the warlocks.

More urgently, Alec wants to see Magnus.

Magnus, who has saved him yet again.

Turning on his belly, Alec digs under his pillows to find the scarf. He knows he needs a nest. He misses the one he had at the Institute so much but he can't have it. It probably doesn't even exist anymore. As it is now, baby blankets are just not enough. There need to be adult scents in there to make it work and he no longer has his siblings to provide it for him. Taking more of Magnus's things is the only solution and every day the alpha's scent becomes more alluring to Alec and he's craving its *closeness* rather than just its presence like the pieces of clothing give him. At this point, Magnus's scent is the one most welcome to Alec.

Oh well. He'll have to wait until the alpha leaves the loft for whatever reason and sneak in then.

He comes out of his room dressed and ready (mostly) to face the day. Everything's quiet and it appears he's the only one in the common space. He remembers that they have a guest and he can track his scent to one of the rooms on the side of the loft opposite to Magnus's and his own bedroom but he doesn't go there.

Without children to take care of, Alec takes time preparing food for himself to eat right away and more for Magnus and Simon for when they show up. Now that he's up and about, hunger becomes significantly sharper than when he first woke up. He vaguely remembers the last time he ate the previous day and it's a wonder that his hands aren't shaking yet. Magnus had given him something to drink last night, he knows that, but it's all pretty fuzzy in Alec's mind. Emotions are at the forefront of his memories, not details.

Which is why he really wants to see the alpha.

Thoughts keep skipping in his head between disjointed images from the previous day and imagining of what's going to happen today. Alec eats his cereal while glancing up in the direction of Magnus's bedroom, waiting.

Fifteen minutes later coffee drips into two mugs under Alec's watchful gaze when sounds of steps and soft rustling of clothes announce Magnus's arrival in the kitchen area.

The omega doesn't turn to say good morning, suddenly shy and apprehensive. He doesn't need to do anything because Magnus stops *really* close to him and then there are hands on Alec's hips and then… the alpha leans in closer to breathe in Alec's scent. The omega's hands still, hovering over
the spoon he wanted to pick up. Light breath fans over the skin on his neck, raising goosebumps in its wake. Alec freezes to keep the moment going, to not change anything and give the alpha reason to step back.

Magnus knows he's going too far. He had watched over the omega during the night but eventually returned to his own room, as was appropriate to do. It made him oversleep a bit but once he woke up his first thought was to see Alexander. He had to see everything was fine.

He smells good. Healthy, rested. There's no trace of that sharp, worrying scent which prevailed last night. This close to his neck, it's almost as good as when Alec had allowed him to indulge in his intensified scent from his wrists.

Unexpectedly, Alexander turns in his arms and puts his own around Magnus's middle. An honest to god shiver runs down the alpha's spine when Alexander's cheek touches the side of his cheek and the omega gives him a nuzzle just inches away from where Magnus's neck scent glands are. Alec holds him a little tighter, sighing in contentment while Magnus tries to decide if this is real.

"Thank you." Alexander says without moving back.

They both relax into it and let the hug last. Magnus can barely remember the last time he was this intimate with an omega. He had spent a long time with Camille who's an alpha and then a long time he was alone… One night stands, though very nice, didn't compare to this. It's barely a prelude to scenting, not destined to be followed by anything more and yet…

There's a light blush on the omega's face when they part and look at each other. Magnus can't stop himself from smiling, he's so happy.

He gets a smile in return, the shy one Alexander will always try to hide by looking down.

"Catarina will be here in a few minutes." Magnus says. His hands are still on Alec's hips.

Alec nods. "Good, I miss them."

Neither of them is quite sure how to put distance between them when they'd rather stay close. Eventually Alec distracts Magnus with food and they move away from the coffee and towards the kitchen isle where the warlock sits down.

Alec leaves the kitchen to go knock on the guest bedroom's door. He gets a muffled reply but it sounds more awake than sleep-talking so he says through the door, "If you want breakfast it's ready now. But it's still going to be there later if you're not up to it."

"Thanks!" Comes the much more clear answer. "I'll be out in a minute."

Alec returns to the kitchen isle and takes the seat next to Magnus.

"Did you talk with him last night?"

"Yes. He'll be just fine, only needs some time. I told him a little more about our world. You should too, from your side. Clary is new herself so she won't be the best source of Shadowhunter knowledge."

"All he needs to know is how to stay away."

Magnus smiles at the predictable reply. "I've told him that too. But he's an omega." Magnus makes his tone gentler. "Think how much it hurt you to be separated from your friends. It wouldn't be any
easier for him, especially when they did everything together for a long time."

Alec says nothing. Magnus turns sideways on the seat to look at him. "In the grand scheme of things, I'm glad you found him in time. I'd be happier, however, if I could have prevented everything else that happened around it. First... I couldn't reach you, then I got the message where you were..." His voice goes quiet.

"Yeah." Alec looks down at his cup then back at Magnus. "Look, I'm so-"

Magnus reaches for his hand, takes it in both of his.

"You're fine, we're all fine and that's all that matters. We both got scared but hopefully we can avoid something like this in the future."

Alec's not sure how it can be avoided. For certain he's going stay home after dusk unless Magnus goes out with him but other than that, shit happens in life. They both know the world isn't a safe place.

"I'm proud of you, Angel."

Praise washes over Alec like warm breeze. He's not sure how to deal with it, so he goes for distraction.

"I lost my phone." He admits. It's a good topic changer even if it makes him feel like a teenager who comes back home prepared for his parents' disapproval.

Magnus raises his right hand and a box in dusty rose color with a ribbon tying it appears on the counter after a flash of magic. "Voila."

Alec smiles at the flair.

"He did too." He adds.

Magnus lets out an exaggerated sigh but he makes another box appear, this time a black one with a popular brand name printed on the side. It looks plain next to Alec's box.

"Thank you."

"That's all I get?" Magnus teases. When Alec tilts his head the alpha thinks about all the reasons why asking this question was a stupid thing to do.

And then Alec leans closer and Magnus is getting a kiss on his cheek, a peck, really. It's probably the briefest, most chaste kiss Magnus has ever received and yet his heart rate definitely picks up. They're still holding hands and it's starting to feel electric to the warlock.

"Thank you." Alec repeats and then he's pulling away, standing up from his seat.

Helpless to resist, Magnus follows him with his gaze.

Alec moves some utensils around and he's just placing a down tray on the counter when there's more movement in the loft. They both turn when their guest shows up in the living room. They all share a few seconds of awkward silence before Alec moves first and asks, "Do you want coffee? Tea?"

"Coffee, please."
"Come sit down, don't stand there." Alec points at the two free bar stools at the isle.

Simon comes closer as asked and chooses a seat. He takes the plate Alec offers him and takes one toast without even asking what are all the additions on it. While he eats, Alec moves to the coffee machine to prepare one more cup.

When he's done and the coffee is set in front of Simon, Alec and Magnus both watch the mundane. Magnus isn't entirely sure what Alexander's expression means but it's thoughtful.

After a while Alec remembers the black box with the new phone and he slides it towards the other omega. "This is yours. No sim card, though."

"You got me a phone? Why? I mean, thanks, but you didn't have to."

"You're being treatedpanes's full care package." Magnus informs him. "And Alexander's food."

"Well. Thanks again. I mean it." Then he adds indicating the toasts, "This is good."

They eat a few more toasts in silence until Simon asks, "What's going to happen now?"

"We're about to have a visitor who was coming in anyway but who will now conveniently provide a second opinion about your current state."

"In order to cure me." Simon asks for reassurance.

"Yes."

* *

Magnus reacts to the newly opened portal first when its energy brushes his wards. Then Alec hears it too when a person appears outside their front door. They get up together and walk over to welcome Catarina. She's holding Max one-armed on her hip and has the handle of Jon's carrycot in her other hand. Alec takes Max from her while Magnus reaches for Jon.

"I missed you, Blueberry." Alec kisses the boy's forehead. He brushes his thumb over the tiny point which is now very obviously not just skin. "Hey, look at that. You're going to have horns."

"I hope that's okay." Catarina says. "I used a salve to make them break through faster, save him some itchy days."

"Sure, it's fine."

They move to the center of the loft, to the couch. Catarina initiates a spell which grows like a bubble over the coffee table. From behind the colors of her magic, the rest of baby accessories show up. Alec's always a little envious of this ability of the warlocks. He has to carry the whole bag himself when he's alone.

Simon's hovering by the kitchen isle, holding his half-finished coffee like it's a protective charm.

"Well then." Catarina says. "What's the problem of the day?"

She's wearing blue, ready to go to the hospital once she's done here. The uniform and Catarina's natural gentle aura helps to put Simon more at ease. It has always worked like that on Alec as well.

"Our new mundane friend got himself poisoned by vampire blood." Magnus says. "It pulls him
back to the one who did it." Then he adds, "it was Camille."

"Ah." Is all Catarina says.

They haven't talked about this, Alec and Magnus. Camille is a topic which is surely going to come back like a vicious boomerang and it's only in Magnus's best interest to get it over with sooner rather than later. He's not avoiding it, there just genuinely hasn't been any time for it since yesterday. It's not something you start your day with before breakfast. It's not something you talk about when you have a wonderfully smelling man hugging you.

"He was bitten too." Simon suddenly speaks up. Whether it's in an attempt to not be the sole focus of the gathering or out of genuine concern for Alec, he does manage to shift Catarina's attention to Alec.

"And I've dealt with it sufficiently." Magnus says quickly because this at least he is certain of.

"Well, I can make doubly sure you're both fine. Or will be fine."

She looks at Alec for permission before making a spell raise from her hands and the tendrils of it drift toward him. Alec focuses on how different her magic feels from Magnus's. He thinks, if he ever had to, he would be able to pick Magnus out of a group of warlocks just based on how his magic feels.

After finishing with him and moving over to the other omega, Catarina concludes her scan by saying she doesn't have anything more to add that they don't already know.

"Simplest way to deal with vampire blood is to drink holy water."

"You're serious?" Simon nearly squeaks the question out. It makes Alec sigh. Holy water is probably one of the least strange things on the list of what has happened to the mundane so far.

"The process isn't fun but it's foolproof. Drink it in doses throughout the day until it stops interacting with the demonic parts of the vampire blood and stops making you sick. Once you're drinking it like any other water, you're good to go."

"Is there nothing better? I mean, you both have magic?"

"There are warlock potions that will work pretty much the same as holy water." Magnus says. "Maybe faster but it'll also mean getting sick worse. There's no way to draw out vampire blood if that's what you're imagining. It's half-human so it's not as simple to sense it as pure demon venom. And it was ingested, not injected into your bloodstream. So no, we can't make it go 'poof'."

"Okay, I got it. So how long for it to work and be done?"

"How long ago did it happen to you?" Catarina asks.

"Several days. Four, I think."

"Depending on how your body accepts the holy water, or potion, it really shouldn't be long. Worst case three days, best case one day. I bet it'll be sooner rather than later, since you don't look that bad."

"Thanks. Oh, actually, I have a question. This… seeing thing. I never had that before but recently I've been noticing things that should… not be there? There were a few places where I thought I noticed graffiti that wasn't there before in my memory but when I really looked at it, I knew it
wasn't just paint."

They're all listening to him, guessing the answer as he describes it.

"Like a sigil? A rune?"

"See, I'm not sure because I didn't know what I was looking at? And I didn't exactly have the best
time to look at your peoples' runes," he says looking at Alec, "because of the sleeves and
stuff."

"Did they feel wrong? Did you get a feeling of dread? Or did you just not want to get closer?"

Simon hesitates. "I guess… the latter? Or they were neutral. Just, my head would start to hurt from
looking at them."

"They could have been someone's protections that have always been there. It doesn't have to be
malevolent." Catarina isn't too concerned about it and Magnus isn't either.

"Most likely. I wouldn't worry too much about those. When you see a demon, now that's cause for
concern."

Simon shakes his head in disbelief at the demon mention. "All right, so the question is, is it going
to go away after I'm back to normal?"

"Probably but I wouldn't bet hundred percent on it. Mundanes having the Sight aren't exactly ruled
by science. Either you'll lose connection to the Shadow World when you have no more vampire
influence in you-"

"Or?"

"Or maybe having the Sight one time will be like learning to ride a bike. You'll always know how
to ride the Sight bike." Magnus finishes the thought.

"What's with you guys and your weird analogies?" Simon asks, exasperated.

After the topic is exhausted and everyone knows what to do Alec gets up to see Catarina off
because she stands up first but she's not really moving to open a portal.

"Alec, may I talk with you?" She asks gently and makes a gesture at the open room to the side.
Alec really would rather not, since those words rarely mean anything good but he goes.

Simon stays seated on the couch since there isn't really anywhere else for him to be. Then he
remembers the box he was gifted but before he can move to get it and see what's inside, he gets a
lapful of one baby warlock. He stares at him at first, profoundly confused.

"Keep him from rolling down, will you." Magnus says simply and doesn't wait for an affirmation
from him.

"You've got a blue baby-" Simon notes. He holds the baby a bit stiffly but relaxes a little when he
receives a smile and a wave of a little fist. He takes in the unusual appearance of him. "Who's also
growing horns?"
"Yes." Magnus is placing the playmat in its usual spot, then goes about searching for Max's toys.

"How does it work?"

"It's the proof of his warlock nature. It could have been anything else but it is what you see." Magnus replies, stopping to look at the young man. "Or were you asking me to explain procreation to you?"

"Actually, you could say something about why you've got no mate connection between the two of you but you have children. Not that it's any of my business." He adds hastily, remembering who he's talking to.

"They're not mine."

"No? Sorry. He just smells like you." The omega shrugs.

Everything in the loft – except their bedrooms – smells like Magnus and Alexander. It's only natural that it would. But Magnus knows that's not what those words meant when the omega said them.

Magnus can see the young man is itching with more unasked questions and it's probably only because he's intimidated by Magnus that he does not ask them. The alpha prefers it that way.

When he takes Max back into his arms he buries his nose in the boy's curls just to check.

* * *

Meanwhile, Alec sits on the edge of the bed feeling awkward. It's obvious a conversation is coming and he's not exactly looking forward to being honest about… anything, really.

"Are you feeling all right?" Catarina asks gently and she doesn't have to specify she means it in more ways than one. She sits down on the bed too, a polite distance away from Alec. With her wearing her nurse scrubs, he's feeling like at a doctor's office, not that he's ever sat in one of those.

"Yes. I think everything's in order."

"That's good. I wanted to tell you I could refer you to someone who will listen to you… regarding the past. Or yesterday. I know your first answer is going to be 'no, thank you'. And I understand that. Just please remember there's a lot you can do for yourself, even if you've had no resources for it before and got used to dealing with it alone."

"I'm not implying I think there's anything wrong with you. We don't exactly have many opportunities to see each other but you seem just fine to me. How you feel is another matter. And you know, Magnus could be your first choice."

Alec barely stops himself from cringing. "I don't think so. I mean, I know he's a great… friend. But I'd rather not."

"Are you afraid of him knowing more about what you've been through?"

"He already took a chance on me, there's no need to put more weight on him."

"Do you think he has no baggage of his own? After living for four hundred years? You could share, both of you. Just remember he's the last person to look down on someone for something that happened to them in the past."
Alec looks down at his hands. In his heart he knows what kind of person Magnus is, but... But it's not easy to believe he'd want – really want – Alec when he can get someone better, someone more suited to the High Warlock's lifestyle, to his very presence. Digging into what still hurts Alec isn't going to make him look any better in anyone's eyes. Even after this morning... just because Alec knows Magnus is attracted to him doesn't mean he's interested in mating him.

Catarina is silent for a while, watching him.

"I was saving this for a later conversation but... I might as well say it now. Those two boys mean the world to him. If you ever have reason to leave, I hope you'll remember this and won't cut him off."

"I'm not going to leave." It comes out much faster than his brain can catch up with his mouth. He's not even sure what he meant when he said it.

"I don't mean this to be a preemptive accusation. I know you like him but I can't read your mind to know your reasons for liking him. You're young, you have a lot of life ahead of you..."

She implies he'll have opportunities to meet more people but it sounds wrong even as a potential scenario to Alec.

"Magnus doesn't have competition." He says and that's that.

She doesn't push him.

"Remember, if you need omega-specific medication, I can get you pretty much anything there is on the market. As for potions, you can ask Magnus for those too."

"Thank you. I'm good for now."

She pats his knee and gets up. Alec follows her to where Magnus and the mundane are, watching the kids.

"I think we're done here." She announces. "We'll be in contact."

"Thank you, dearest Cat." Magnus says. "You should drop by after work one day, just for company."

"Maybe I will." She smiles.

* *

After she leaves, Alec turns his attention to his children. He wants some time to himself to think about Magnus without being distracted by the alpha himself. It works out because Magnus goes to his office to prepare something to ease the process of detoxing. Alec knows there's a bottle of holy water in the stash because he's seen it so at least that's one thing off the list.

At some point Alec approaches Simon to talk to him.

"Before you drink anything, you probably should call whoever is going to be wondering where you are."

"Right." Simon winces. "I really should."

Since Magnus's phone is the only one fully working, Alec offers it to the mundane and then steps aside to not stand over him while he makes the call. He hears Simon flounder after someone picks
up – his mother – and he makes up a story about stomach flu which a band mate gave him the previous night. It's not a bad story, Alec thinks, if only the other man would be a little more sure of his made-up words while he says them.

It doesn't take the warlock too long to be done and he comes back to the living room saving Alec from being alone with the mundane.

"Holy water." Magnus points to a bottle which doesn't differ in any visible way from a bottled mineral water. "And this is for the ache. It's not going to be pleasant but it's not a major surgery. You'll be fine."

"So, if you had to compare, better or worse than appendicitis?"

Magnus raises an eyebrow at him. "I have no idea."

* *

The next 24 hours are quite a miserable experience for everyone involved. Except for Max and Jonathan who are blissfully uninvolved and carry on with their lives.

Alec walks around the loft with a perpetual sour expression at being inconvenienced and yet he's there whenever Simon needs him to be there.

On Alec's side that involves awkward pats on the back while in the bathroom and offerings of water and some concoction Magnus has made to ease the process. Shadowhunters don't really get sick, they get injured. Dealing with an injured friend is different than this. Maybe there was the one time when his siblings overdid alcohol before they learned to drink like adults but he had not been sympathetic then. So he doesn't really know what to do with this omega who's half a stranger still.

He doesn't have to do anything. He's not obligated to but for some reason it makes him feel worse to ignore it. So he settles for watching over the younger man for signs of possible turn for the worse or side-effects.

Meanwhile, Magnus wishes this was a situation where recording would be appropriate because for someone who's absolutely wonderful with children, Alexander is the most awkward when he has to do the same for a stranger adult.

Magnus only checks on them once or twice and instead of being a third wheel he makes sure to anticipate the needs of their tiniest cohabitants so Alexander will have less reasons to be grumpy about. Besides, he'd be quite useless himself if he were to try and take Alexander's position. Omegas with no access to family members or their mate will choose to be around someone else of their own dynamic when they're in need. Which is why the Nephilim had been walking on eggshells around Magnus when he'd first moved in.

It all ends well. Their guest must be stronger than he looks because he's pretty much cured by noon of the next day. He's not exactly the picture of health and will need to let his system recover but he's free of vampiric taint, as proclaimed by Magnus.

They have a light dinner conjured by the warlock later that evening and after that Alec takes Simon aside.

"I assume you're not going to break contact with your Shadowhunter friend."
"That's unlikely."

"In that case, do not mention me to her or anyone else. Ever."

"Why?"

"You can talk about Magnus, since everyone knows about him. As far as I know, it's still a secret that I live here. It needs to stay a secret. You can't possibly ensure that only friendly Shadowhunters will hear about it if you mention me. I can't risk that. And you can't risk endangering my children."

"Do they want you dead? Are you hiding some sort of disgusting crime from me or are they really a bunch of assholes?"

"I did a few things that added up in their eyes. This is serious. So I'm asking you, if you have to, only tell them that Magnus Bane helped you."

"All right, I understand. I don't want to bring you trouble. Thanks for everything and I promise to not breathe a word about my mysterious brooding savior."

Alec looks to the heavens. "Please, leave already."

* * *

Two days later there's insistent knocking on the door disturbing the peace of their loft just after nine pm. Magnus is in the shower or done with it but still in the bathroom and as Alec passes by his door, he gives it a few firm knocks.

"Magnus, the door!"

He walks over to see who it is and as he comes near, he hears a man on the other side knock again and then say aloud: "Magnus, you told me you'd be in today. Open up!"

Alec thinks about it for a second. Whoever it is, he already passed the first layer of wards around the building and they warn Magnus to any ill intent. Nine pm is late but not unreasonably late for someone who might have been otherwise occupied all day... So he opens the door without waiting for Magnus to come out.

It is a vampire. He looks Hispanic and he's wearing a neat black suit. Alec has never seen him before.

They look at each other, neither moving from where they stand. The vampire is more surprised to see Alec than Alec is to see the vampire. While Alec is less surprised, he's more on edge. He's not sure there's a polite way he could speak right now if he wanted to. Clenching his teeth so hard his jaw almost aches, he's too focused on pushing down the fear that his subconscious is trying to flood him with before his scent changes and signals his fear.

"Magnus didn't mention having guests over today." He manages to say as neutral as he can. It's not neutral at all.

"He also didn't mention not being alone despite promising to have time for me today." The stranger replies calmly. He's not exactly pleased but Alec's reading more confusion off of him than anything else.
Alec could very well close the door and hope the other man wouldn't stick his foot in... or he could invite him in. He trusts the warlock's wards. No one who Magnus doesn't already know can enter by force. Besides, Magnus is just in another room.

Most importantly, Alec would hate to be the obstacle between the High Warlock and the other Downworlders. Even if Magnus failed to give him a warning, he has no wish to be the cause for possible rumors about Magnus's conduct and his keeping of bondless omegas in his loft who are rude to visitors. Alec steps to the side, watching the vampire enter and then closes the door.

He doesn't care if the man takes a seat or stays standing in the hallway. Alec goes to pick up Jon from the playmat where he put him after feeding him and retreats to the bedroom where Max is sleeping.

Magnus comes out just in time to hear the omega's door shut and then lock. He's confused only until he sees Raphael. Closing his eyes, he takes a deep breath. This is going to go over great, surely.

"Raphael. For once I can't with clean conscience say that I'm happy to see you."

"You were supposed to see me."

"Yes. I have told you I would and that I would contact you."

Magnus summons himself a drink. He's going to need it.

"I even had to rush to look respectable and I'm not done." He's wearing a black silky shirt and a soft, deep blue jacket over it He didn't have time to highlight his hair to match the jacket.

Raphael completely ignores his complaints.

"When he was gone from the streets I thought you sent him away to some beachside villa, not that he's living with you." He says as he follows Magnus and looms over him when he takes a seat in his armchair, drink still in hand.

"You should know better than to waste money in this economy. Why pay for a second place when I can share mine? Besides, if I sent him away, he'd be back the moment warlock magic woke up in the children."

"First, you do keep multiple other places. Second, you're not the only warlock around. I can't believe you're doing this to yourself. A Nephilim? How long before he leaves you with the children and goes back?"

"Nephilim omegas are exactly the same as other omegas." Magnus says calmly. "Their Angel didn't take away their parental instincts and they don't abandon their own children."

"So he's still buzzed on hormones. Once that passes he'll be looking for an opportunity to go back."

"Stop, please. You don't know a single thing about him and you're only saying what you're saying because you're worried for me. And I appreciate it but it's unnecessary, especially when you're insulting Alexander."

Raphael throws his hands up.

"Fine, all right. He's here to stay then."
"I couldn't send him away." Magnus admits. "I was too worried. He wasn't in the best shape and I decided it'd be too big of a risk not to have someone qualified watching over them in case of magical accident."

"I can't believe this." Raphael shakes his head. "But you're the wise old warlock, you make the decisions here."

"That's a great conclusion of that issue. Now, let's talk about what you really came here for."

"Camille."

"Naturally." Magnus takes a long sip and refills the glass before even finishing it.

"You caused quite a stir, coming in and taking the omegas out. She's angry."

"Furious even, I imagine."

"Yes."

"Well, seeing as she wasn't in her rights to do what she did, I felt no remorse stepping in where I technically shouldn't." Ha pauses. "Be honest with me, Raphael. Is there trouble brewing among the vampires? You can't be caught doing anything questionable when the Shadowhunters take notice."

"I'm not doing anything questionable. But it's not exactly fun out in the city right now. Shadowhunter patrols have doubled already."

"Are they harassing anyone?"

"Not exactly. They're very insistent in their current investigations of which there seem to be many. There must have been a change at the top and whoever's in charge must be looking to get recognition for getting work done."

Magnus hums thoughtfully. He might consider a courtesy visit to the Institute. So far there hasn't really be a reason to do so but if there's permanent change coming, it might be wise to make sure he sees it coming ahead of time.

They discuss the issue for a while longer until there's nothing more to say until more information comes in.

Magnus is relieved to see Alexander sitting in the living room when they come out of the office. He's reading a book but he leaves it immediately and stands up to come closer to them. Then, to the warlock's surprise, Alexander puts his hand out for Raphael to shake.

"Alec." He says simply. Magnus can clearly hear the way he catches himself just before following the name with his family name.

Raphael eyes him, surprised and suspicious and Magnus wishes they were seated at a table because then he would be able to kick the vampire under said table to move. He does it on his own eventually, replying to Alec with his own full name. The two of them make a picture of politeness and yet Magnus is amused by how tense they both are.

Magnus steps in then, explaining to Alec just who Raphael is to him. He also apologizes to the two of them for the misunderstanding. With great relief he sees Alexander relax further.
When Raphael leaves, Magnus comes to sit beside the omega on the couch. "Thank you. For coming out."

"I figured you wouldn't invite or let in just anyone. It matters to me to be on good terms with people important to you. Although I admit it's much easier for me with other warlocks."

"I understand. Raphael can be… prickly. Actually, some of his personality should be familiar to you." He smiles at Alec's scoff. "I trust him to make the right decisions." Then he amends that statement, "Most of the time. And I can tell you this, you'll probably not have to see another vampire than Raphael in here. They're too proud to ask other members of the Downworld for assistance unless they're really pressed for it."

"Did he come here because of what happened?"

"Yes, but not just that. There might be a change at the top coming in more places than one. Hopefully there won't be too much flying debris involved."

"Camille must have a lot of like-minded followers. Or those more afraid of her than of anyone else."

"Oh, for sure. But there are also many vampires interested in living as far from violence as they can. Especially those turned in modern times." Magnus makes air-quotes around the adjective.

Either way, vampires are not Alec's issue anymore as far as their relations with the Institute go. Simon had mentioned Shadowhunter patrols checking for dens so at least that's getting done. It'll probably come back as a topic later but it doesn't require their attention right now.

Alec points to the balcony. "Will you make a few targets for to shoot at?"

"Of course, darling."

---

Three days later Alec is regretting not leaving when Magnus was still in the loft. Now he's alone fighting with the large pram but he's really in the mood to get some fresh air so he's not about to go back inside. He wasn't planning to go anywhere before but the need to see something else than the loft built up eventually. On the upside of not going before Magnus, right after the alpha has left Alec raided one of his closets for nest material and stashed it in his room. He didn't have a chance to do it before because he was always the one leaving the loft to go to the gym and if Magnus went out, he did it while Alec was gone and returned before Alec did.

Now he's walking out of the lift and already thinking about the heavy front door of the building he'll have to push, when someone steps inside from the street. It surprises Alec because no one ever comes in here unless he orders something including mundane shipping services.

It turns out this time it is also a mundane. It's Simon. Alec stares, confused. Why would he come back? Is something wrong? He's stared at in return, since his presence right behind the front door startled the other omega.

"Is Magnus in?"

"No. He left half an hour ago."
"I had a question for him..." Simon fidgets because it feels rude somehow to show up only to say bye and turn around.

"You couldn't have called him?" Alec asks, thinking it'd be so much easier and the question, whatever it is, probably doesn't need to be asked in person.

"I did call." Simon replies. "He told me to drop by."

It doesn't take Alec longer than five seconds to realize he's been set up. That kills all the guilt he had about stealing Magnus's clothes.

"Whatever it is you want, you'll have to try another time. Now please help me get this outside."

"Sure."

They step outside into the chilly day. Stilted silence falls between them, which comes as no surprise to either of them so they brave through it instead of trying to break it. Alec eyes Simon when it begins to look like he's tagging along for whatever reason, which the younger man notices.

"I'm going the same way, actually." He raises his hands when Alec's doubt is clear in his eyes. "It's true, I swear."

Alec thinks about where he wants to go. The café and bakery are destinations for very short walks and that's not what he's looking for. In fact, he'd like to talk with someone he knows before his social mood withers away. He had promised he'd show up more often at the Jade Wolf or Hunter's Moon… He had mostly avoided the latter because it's only safe for him to go there early in the day when Shadowhunters will be more likely to be sleeping off the night patrols than investigating Downworlders or going out for drinks. Despite the promise, even after the last visit at Jade Wolf, Alec found that Magnus's company (and Catarina's, and Dot's) pretty much fulfilled his need for human contact.

If he takes a cab now he'll have to take the kids out and fold the pram. If he takes the bus, he'll have to make the mundane tag along to help him lift it up and then to get off the bus to avoid depending on complete strangers to do it. He's not a fan of the subway; for some reason it makes him uneasy to go down there.

He quickly sends a text to both Luke and Maia to ask if they're in Jade Wolf or otherwise occupied. He gets a reply from Maia a few minutes later, saying she's currently at work in Hunter's Moon but her text looks to be encouraging him to come over. There's nothing from Luke so he's probably busy or away from the phone.

Alec thinks about his options. It's early enough to go to the Hunter's Moon. It'll also probably be overall empty so he won't be a bother to other patrons if he talks to Maia. Lost in thought, he doesn't notice the way Simon does a double take of Max. The twin carrycots are mounted facing the one who pushes the pram, not the direction they're going.

"Huh." Simon makes a sound loud enough for Alec to take interest.

"What?"

Simon points at the pram. "He's not blue."

"Ah. He's wearing a glamor. I couldn't go out without it."

"That's useful." Simon continues looking at Max until his head starts to hurt but he sees, he thinks,
a shade of blue taking over the regular skin color of a mundane baby. He shakes it off before he goes cross-eyed and the baby is back to 'normal'.

"So the glamor, is it a spell?"

"A spell on an item that he carries."

"Can it give you whatever appearance you want? I mean, what decides what you look like under it?"

"I… don't know." Alec frowns. He actually doesn't know what Max looks like under the spell because he can only see his real self.

"I guess there must be some intent in it because he looks like you." Simon continues the thought. "Well, as much as such a small face can resemble anyone grown…"

"He does? Look like me?"

"Sure. Dark hair, similar eyes." He makes a vague gesture in the air. "The nose isn't right, I think. He's overall rounder than you. And smaller like I said."

It'd make sense to give him familial resemblance but Alec honestly hadn't thought about it before. He'll ask Magnus later.

"So." He looks at Simon as they continue walking. "Do you do anything besides following your Shadowhunter friend?"

"I just started college, actually. Accounting."

"That's… probably boring, but practical."

"You're very right. I'm not going to defend it as if it was a dream of mine. I want my family to be proud that I'm doing something… stable. It makes my mom happy, so."

Alec doesn't reply to that, just nods.

"But! I have a band. I'm part of a band."

"Uh huh. So what, you sing?"

"Yes. Guitar and vocals, that's me."

"That's definitely more of a conversation topic than accounting but please don't expect me to be interested in more details."

"Do you like music at all?"

"Sure. I just… I like to have it in the background." Alec lets Magnus set the mood in the evenings when they're not watching TV. They'll both sit and read, and there will be always something playing that's pretty but not distracting. Or he'll put something on while Alec's practicing his archery. Magnus had asked once if he danced, to which Alec replied with a definite 'no'.

"So like for relaxing or work? I can understand that. If you ever want to, I can send you future dates of our gigs."

"Uh, sure, if you don't mind me not showing up, ever. So," Alec prolongs the word, "don't you
“Have classes today or something?”

“I did, earlier.” Simon shrugs. “I have the rest of the day free.”

Knowing that, Alec makes the decision to ‘socialize’. “I know someone you could meet who’s safer than the vampires,” he says to Simon. “Right now she’s tending the bar at one place so I’m headed there.”

“Okay? So you’re inviting me right now?”

“You’re right here, so yes. It’s a Downworlder bar. Some Shadowhunters go there sometimes too.”

“Okay… I assume we’re not going to see vampires at-,” Simon looks at his phone to check the hour, “eleven fifty seven.”

“No.”

“Then let’s go.”

“What about Shadowhunters?” Simon asks when they’re five minutes away from their destination. “Do you learn anything besides fighting and memorizing whatever you need to fight demons?”

“I studied diplomacy.” Alec replies. “And there’s whole specialized staff to run Institute who need to know what they’re doing. Heads of the Institute need to know the basics of everything to know what they’re doing when making decisions that affect the whole Institute.”

He doesn’t go into details, as it’s not something a mundane should know more about even if there’s nothing he could possibly do with such knowledge.

They make it to the bar and pick the best seats to be close enough to talk. Maia is quite pleased to see him, for reasons Alec still isn’t sure of. He’s not the most engaging conversation partner but neither is he hopeless at it. She doesn’t mind the tag-along he has with him. On the contrary, she listens to Alec’s brief explanation of how they met and asks many of her own questions.

In the end Alec talks the least while the other two get into mundane topics, pop-culture and music that he prefers not to be included in. They spend about an hour there, talking and drinking colorful non-alcoholic drinks Maia makes them.

At some point Alec texts Magnus with their whereabouts and the warlock eventually joins them in the bar once he’s free.

It’s still middle of the day when they leave together and Magnus sends the mundane away through a portal before taking Alec and the boys home.

* * *

Later that day, in the late evening, Magnus steps out to the balcony and raises a muting bubble around himself. Alexander is in the bathroom but he might come out at any time if he remembers he needs to do something all of a sudden so it’s better to be safe. He dials a number of the mundane omega and doesn’t have to wait long for the call to be picked up on the other end.

“Is Clary all right? I can’t contact her.” She wasn’t picking up and he didn’t want to try fire messages, not with such sensitive content. He also didn’t want to go through Jocelyn.

“She’s not in New York,” comes the answer. “She and Miss Frey went to Idris, apparently, to stay
there for a week or so I've been told."

That makes sense. So he won't be able to contact her at all. Magnus walks the length of the balcony and turns to walk the back.

"I have a request. You can consider it a payment for the past services and you and Clary will have one favor each free of charge in the future."

"That sounds good, but what is the request?"

"Once she's back, ask Clary to get a Shadowhunter blade for me. It doesn't have to be big, it just has to be one of their standard swords."

There's a noise of surprise. "Smuggle it out?"

"It is illegal, so yes."

"Isn't it dangerous? The weapon itself?"

"If you're cut with it, yes. I suggest if you touch it at all, you stay on its handle side."

"Uh huh. I don't know... isn't it a little too much to ask?"

"It might be. I realize we're not exactly friends and we barely know each other... which is why I promise you to make it worth the effort. Clary doesn't owe me anything and despite me knowing her almost all her life, she probably doesn't feel the same. It might be easier to pull off if she can pretend it was lost on a patrol or take two with her in the first place."

There's silence from the other side for a few seconds. Magnus is patient. He looks out over the city, lit up to chase away the settling dusk.

"Alec has asked me not to hint his presence to anyone." Simon says carefully. "Won't that be suspicious? I mean, Clary doesn't know about him. How am I supposed to explain doing all of this to her? Who's going to have need for Shadowhunters' weapons but a Shadowhunter?"

It is a bit of a problem. Magnus needs to answer the question whether the advantages of having the blade outweigh the risk of someone guessing the truth of where it went. He thinks they do. In worst case, he'll make sure the fallout is handled by him before it reaches Alec.

"Please try. It matters to me greatly to have it."

"All right. But I'm just the messenger, I can't promise how it goes."

"Thank you."

Magnus ends the call and watches the city for a few more minutes.
Alec reaches for the tv remote. In order to do so he has to move his hand from under the blanket he's currently wrapped in and it feels awfully unfair to him.

He had gone out very early to the gym because his trainer had planned some time off to spend with his mate so he squeezed Alec in the schedule for one more session before that. That wasn't the problem. The problem was that when Alec was going out the weather was a lot better than what he met with when he walked back out the gym's door. Wind came out of nowhere, bringing icy cold raindrops with it. He could handle the cold itself, it wasn't that bad since it wasn't winter yet but combined with wind and humidity it was terrible. He couldn't catch a cab right away and by the time one showed up he has had enough. The driver took pity on him and turned up the heat in the car for the duration of the ride.

And that's how Alec got home to do nothing but grab a blanket and hide under it on the couch. He's not feeling sick and he's not likely to catch a real cold with his Nephilim blood but the chill got under his skin so bad he can't shake it off. Unfortunately for Jonathan, he got involved in his father's quest for warmth and ended up wrapped in a blanket burrito at his side. Max is way too active to be confined this way so he only gets a warmer shirt and socks for his playmat time.

Magnus finds the omega this way when he walks out of his office: grumbling about inconsequential details and generally unwilling to move.

"We could go somewhere warm." The warlock says casually. "Sit in the sun, then have dinner."

When Alec looks up at him with badly concealed hope in his eyes, Magnus knows he already won. Still, he makes a show of looking through his phone even though he has already checked the relevant information.

"It's sixty nine degrees right now on Santorini. It's also still middle of the day so we could go there right now." He voices it like a question and waits. He doesn't have to wait long.
It's past dinnertime in Europe but it's too early for them, so they take a walk first.

"I like this." Alec comments when they're walking down a cozy little street between white buildings, because he means it and because it's good manners to be appreciative of Magnus's effort.

"Quaint little towns are your thing? Are you a New Yorker?"

Alec doesn't dignify that with a reply. He's looking around, taking in the views but also looking at the shops they're passing until he sees something that makes him stop. They're in front of a shop housed in a building like the others in the street, with large flower pots on either side of the front door, open wide. What catches Alec's attention is a pair of earrings hanging from a wrought iron stand which also holds bracelets and other decorative items. It seems they specialize in silver and white and grey ceramics. The earrings are silver spirals with roses in full bloom enameled in red on the bottom of the twisted metal. They're not necessarily striking pieces of jewelry but their form reminded Alec of Isabelle's snake.

"Well?" Magnus prompts, noticing his interest. "Shall we look inside?"

Alec nods.

Inside he says good morning and that's the end of his knowledge of Greek, which he only knows because he heard it a little earlier. The young woman who works there knows enough English to help him.

"Do you have anything else like those earrings?" Alec asks, pointing in the general direction of the display. He didn't look too closely but he's pretty sure there was just the one pair hanging there.

"Roses?"

"More like silver. And the shape." He makes a twirling move with his finger.

The woman thinks about it and begins to pull out the little drawers on her side of the counter and picks up a few pieces of jewelry that she puts down on a matte pad for Alec to look at. A pendant, two pairs of earrings, two rings and a bracelet. He knows he won't choose the bracelet so he looks at the other pieces first.

He knows he definitely wants the pendant. It's the biggest piece and it shows its beauty the best. It's perfect. There is a wide rose in the center of it, each silver petal standing out with a clear, not cheaply made shape. From under the flower, three lines of metal sneak out in an irregular whirlpool shape. Even Alec can appreciate the work put into making the spiral look light and fit with the rose. It's like it's all blooming out from the center of the flower.

He also chooses a ring to pair with the pendant. Not a spiral one to avoid overdoing the theme but it's light, made from three thin connecting rings and it also has a silver rose with pink quartz in the very center of it. Izzy likes red the most, he's aware, but he thinks she'll like this subtler color too. He wants her to have it.

While he ponders the rings, Magnus picks up the pendant to look at it closer.

"What do you think?" Alec asks him.

"I love it. And I'm sure your sister will too."

Alec hasn't said why he wants the jewelry but he knows it's not a difficult mystery to solve.
Especially not for someone as smart as Magnus.

"Do you know her ring size?" The warlock asks and gets a nod in reply. "Then if this isn't quite right, I'll fix it to fit."

Alec smiles at him. "Thanks."

They leave the shop with a little bag containing the pendant and the ring, which Magnus offers to send to the loft right away for safekeeping.

Later in the day they eat dinner in the first rays of a sunset, painting the white houses on the cliff a pink hue. They have wine with their fish and mussels and salad. Max gets rice with pureed fruit which was not a part of the menu but Magnus had no problem at all charming their waitress into taking their extra request to the chef.

"Your son needs his name changed to a Little Magpie." Magnus says after he's done with his dish. "He didn't know what to look at the jewelry store and now…" he makes a 'see for yourself' gesture at the boy, seated in a baby chair the restaurant provided for them. Max is trying to grab at anything with metallic parts. Cutlery, salt and pepper containers, the candle holder in the center of the table. He ignores napkins and a ceramic flower vase. In short, he tries to touch every part of anything that has even smallest shine to it.

"My son," Alec replies mocking Magnus's tone, "wasn't like this before he met you and saw all the bling one person could have on them."

Magnus chokes on the sip of wine he was having and snatches up a napkin to cough in it.

Once he's recovered, he looks up at Alec in disbelief. Alec, wholly unconcerned by his causing Magnus distress is sipping on his own wine, almost finished now.

"I think they're serving something a little stronger in these glasses than advertised." Magnus says.

Then he rests his chin on his hand, looking at Alec. "How about I order you another, maybe hear some more of your insights about me."

He realizes he's digging his own grave when Alec smiles a secretive little smile, hiding it behind his glass.

Before they get their dessert Alec goes up to the counter to ask for hot water for Jon's formula. While he waits, he sees a man approach Magnus at their table and start a conversation. When both the stranger and Magnus look over at him, Alec awkwardly turns away to the waitress. When he dares to glance over again, Magnus is giving the other man some bills in exchange for an item Alec can't quite see from where he stands but now he notices the man has a large bag with him and it's easy to guess he must be selling some items to tourists.

When he's gone and Alec returns to sit at the table, Magnus slides a wooden figurine of a bird towards him.

"Why did you buy this?" Alec asks, taking it in his hand.

"Well, he started his pitch by complimenting you so I listened to what he had to say and since I happened to agree with every word, I gave that good man some money which I won't miss anyway." Magnus says cheerfully.
"What?" Alec's voice raises on the question. "Why was he talking about me at all?"

"He wanted to be friendly with me by complimenting my mate, which is a very logical and business-savvy thing to do. I approve. Besides that, I thought it was pretty."

"…Right." Alec turns the bird over in his hands. It is pretty, most likely done by hand. It's not worth the 'tourist price' but at least it's not a standard dust-gathering knick-knack. Stroking the carved feathers, Alec thinks he likes the way the bird seems to be ready to take off in its chosen direction.

* * *

Maia calls Alec unexpectedly one evening. He picks up thinking it might be an emergency of some sort but the truth turns out to be the opposite.

"Will you come to a birthday party?" She asks in way of greeting.

"Whose?"

"Simon's."

He doesn't know anything about it and he wasn't invited by Simon himself so he's not sure why she's asking him. Unless it's a surprise, then it'd make sense for her to call instead. But then the question arises, when did she become involved enough in Simon's life to care or know about his birthday?

"Where is it happening?"

"Hunter's Moon. In the evening." She says and since she doesn't even specify the day that lets him know she already knows well enough he won't come. Even if it was at the Jade Wolf, there'd be many more werewolves than he meets during the day when some of them are at work. That'd be way too many alphas of different species for his comfort. Also too many of them for the mundane, which is probably one of the reasons why it wasn't planned there.

Alec starts apologizing and Maia interrupts him. "Yeah, I knew you'd say no. You owe me two lunches for that."

"What, why?"

"Because. Parties last more than three hours and I know you, you won't sit down at lunchtime for more than forty minutes."

"Fine. You know me. Why do I have to go at all?"

She ignores the question completely. "Are you free this Thursday?"

"I… guess?"

"Great. Lunchtime. Bring a gift."

"That's extortion."

"Nope, it isn't. I'm not threatening you, am I?"
"If you want me to buy him anything, you're coming up with the idea."

"Okay!" She says way too quickly. "I'm free tomorrow after three so come over and we'll go shopping."

It's not like she's able to use her alpha-ness on him through a phone so he's not sure why he's agreeing to any of this at all.

They're walking down the street. Maia keeps glancing over at Alec because while he is quiet as usual, the mood is different. She has a feeling something completely unrelated to Simon is bothering him and she's not sure it's appropriate to ask about it.

"I missed my sister's birthday." Alec offers an explanation of his own volition. "And then my little brother's. May and August."

"That sucks. Couldn't you send them something? They can't magically track you from a post office, right?"

"Not if I don't hold the package for very long. I've bought something for my sister, actually, before I even thought of birthdays but I haven't really thought of a way to send it yet."

"I'm not really qualified to help you there, sorry."

She keeps to herself her opinion that he should call them. It's too sensitive of a topic and it's not her place to push where he doesn't need the pressure. They've talked about Alec's siblings before, back when he was on bedrest under the pack's protection and she knows if he was ready for it he would contact them.

They reach the store she's leading Alec to and after they enter she heads straight towards the section she wants. She already informed Alec he's buying a second part of a box set she could only afford the first part of. It's clear on his face he has no idea what the movies are about or if they're popular at all but she just puts the box into the little shopping basket he's holding.

They also grab a gift bag and then, since they have the time, they stay in the store a little longer and make their way to the books to make fun of some of the self-help and pop psychology titles. They're a girl-turned-werewolf and a disgraced Shadowhunter, there's not much written in any bookshop that could help them. They move on to health and childcare section which Maia has no interest in but goes with Alec. He leafs through some of the theme and picks one which is more relevant now that Max is growing so fast.

There are also colorful albums for keeping baby photos and tracking milestones in their development. When he was alone he wouldn't consider having something like this, too cheerful and honestly a waste of money. But now… Now he's looking a little differently at his life. He already has a story ready to put into "baby's first overseas travel". There's no chapter for "baby's first spell" but he might as well write it in. It might actually be a great idea. His children are warlocks, meant to live for a long, long time. They will probably appreciate something like this in the future, a reminder of their past and, inevitably, a reminder of him.

He grabs two of the baby memories books and it becomes really crowded in his basket. Despite that, he's not quite done yet.

"I'm thinking I should get Max a book." Alec says, half thinking out loud, half to Maia to hear her opinion.
"Isn't he too young?"

"My brother Max."

"Oh right. The little brother."

"He's very smart. Sometimes a smart-ass. Let's say I go through with it and send a package to my siblings. I want to give him something that'll be able to hold his interest and something he could learn from."

"So how old is he now?"

"Eight."

She doesn't reply immediately but as they're moving through the children's books she's looking at the titles.

"Wow, you're really making me think right now. I don't have many ideas for that off the top of my head. I mean, there's so much stuff for kids now, including educational books."

They walk among the shelves, both a little overwhelmed by the selection. They separate around one aisle and meet on its other end.

"How about this?" Maia shows him a hardcover book with a nicely drawn picture of a vintage plane with a pilot in it. She hands it to Alec. "Biographies for children. It should be inspiring, I think. I skimmed the list of chapters and it could be good. You've got famous Shadowhunters, right?"

"Yes, mostly revered for their achievements in battles against demons or for their inventions."

"So, wouldn't it be good for your brother to learn about mundanes too? I know you act like you're never going to see them again but just imagine him coming to visit you, while you live here among mundanes. And werewolves. But I don't have a book about famous werewolves to recommend to you."

"Magnus might have one…" Alec says and then holds that thought. "That's a great idea, actually. I could copy some things from Magnus's books."

"I'll take this too." He decides, putting the book in the basket.

After they're done with their shopping, Maia makes Alec buy her a coffee so they stop to sit down and have cake with their drinks. Stirring his coffee a little too many times than needed, Alec asks, "Is it a gift if I buy something for Magnus with his own money?"

"I guess?" Maia thinks about it. "It's like when you buy your mom a gift but you're just a little kid and all the money you have is your mom's? Or it's birthday money from your grandma. It's yours to use on yourself so if you're not spending it on yourself, you're making a gift."

"I suppose that makes sense." Then he sighs. "I don't know what to choose anyway. He has everything and what he doesn't have, he can get in a second."

"There are two types of gifts." Maia replies. "Something practical you know the person would appreciate, like kitchen appliances for your friend with a new apartment. And then there are gifts that are supposed to remind the other person of you and that you're thinking of them. Try to pick
something that'll fit him but also something that you like because it adds your personal touch to the gift."

"You think?"

"Yes. For example, you know Magnus's wardrobe, right? Then you know what will go with, I don't know, his most used colors. Pick something small that you like and that'll go well with other things he owns."

"Is it enough? I'm not the one in my family with fashion sense. And I- I like looking at Magnus, but that doesn't mean I know how to choose something for him."

"Look, just be thorough in your searching. When you see the right thing I bet it'll stand out to you. Like… oh!," she grins. "I saw a tie clip once, shaped like a sword. Buy him a little stabby tie clip, that'll make him think of Shadowhunters for sure."

Alec watches, unimpressed, as she tries to keep herself from laughing at her own joke.

* * *

He complains a lot about it to no one in particular (which means Magnus has to listen since he's living in the same space) but in the end Alec goes to Maia's lunch as requested.

It turns out there's four of them including Bat so it's two werewolves, a mundane and a Nephilim who walk into a bar…

They go to a place none of them have been before but heard it was recommended. A coffee shop by day, a small bar by night. The place doesn't really matter so long as they get a nice table with a semblance of privacy around them. They go straight for desserts and colorful non-alcoholic drinks that are served there. Once again Alec's perfectly happy to be an addition to a conversation rather its object and with four of them it's not difficult to achieve.

"How's your Sight?" He gets to ask Simon at some point.

"Oh, I think it's here to stay… Too bad my real eyes are back to normal. Did you know I could see perfectly without glasses?"

"Perfect health is a vampiric quality so it was coming from the blood, sorry."

"Oh well, I'm sure not going to wish for that back. It was nice while it lasted but the rest of the package was the opposite of nice."

A few minutes later in the conversation, unfortunately for Alec, they begin to shift focus to him. They ask him about Magnus since quite a bit of time has passed since Alec was in Jade Wolf that day with Luke, Bat and Maia and since he's still staying with the High Warlock it's rather interesting to the them.

"Are you going to make a move on him?" Bat asks without easing into it and Alec pretty much glares at him.

"What? No."

"Funny, because I have it on good authority you're planning a courting gift."

Maia, the traitor, says.
Simon makes a sound between a chuckle and a cough which gets their attention.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing." From then on Simon looks intently into his empty plate in silence.

"It's not a courting gift." Alec informs them. "It's a thank you gift."

"Thank you for being the best mate material?"

"How do you know he is that? He might be terrible to live with."

"Reason one," Bat informs him helpfully, "your face is red right now and has been since Maia said the word 'courting'. Reason two, you've been there how long? Over a month? Unless you're trying to tell us right now that you're held under duress, I think it's safe to assume he is not, in fact, terrible."

Maia pats Alec's hand on the table. "Ask him. He tells you no, you know he's not that great after all and you'll know to start looking elsewhere."

Alec takes a deep breath, looks at the café's ceiling in search of patience and then replies. "I don't want or need any signs to start looking because I do not want to look for anything or anyone."

Both werewolves look ready to argue with him further but Simon speaks up first.

"It's not a great feeling to hear the 'no'. I mean, I got a very gentle 'I'm not right for you, there must be an alpha meant to be your true mate' instead of a no." He sighs. "She was – is – a beta and never even saw me as an option."

"That sucks." Bat says, understanding. "I don't believe betas should have to stick to other betas."

Maia and Alec agree with him. It's true alphas and omegas complete each other best but they're perfectly capable of being happy – and having children – with betas.

Alec taps his spoon on the table in a small nervous gesture. "I was in love with an alpha who thought omegas were too delicate and too much work to handle in a relationship." He finds that the pang of his memories is not as bad anymore when he says it out loud and while he was afraid to share it, he doesn't regret doing so.

"That's rough too. Hey, start a club or something, just think of a catchy name first."

They move on to other topics, including Simon's friend and her likely return to New York at the end of the week so she can take part in the 'real' birthday party planned by Maia.

When they're parting to go to their respective homes, Maia gives Alec a knowing smile like she knows where he's planning to go next.

Instead of going straight to the loft, Alec goes alone to search for a gift for Magnus. He thinks he wants to look for a piece of jewelry again, as he'll probably do a better job picking it than he'd do with clothes and he's definitely not getting any novelty ties. He considered looking for antiques, something rare that will be valuable for its history as well as beauty but then he changed his mind. An antique would be by definition something used, something someone else possessed before. What he wants Magnus to have, he wants to have history only with Magnus.
He doesn't know what he's looking for but he must appear determined to make a purchase because the shopping assistant is indulging him and doesn't mind him going over every part of the display, slowly. She shows him what's in the other two layers of drawers she has in the main counter.

Then he sees it. It is a bracelet made of very dark silver. Or it could be different metal, he's not sure. It's made of three parts: one wide arch plus two thinner parts which are supposed to connect together, closing the circle of the three-part bracelet. On the wide part of the metal there are three stones embedded in it. One is pitch black and it's set in the middle between two in brown hues with black dots scattered across them. It looks good, the framing of the stones is solid, well-made. The whole piece strikes him as rather masculine.

"Obsidian in the middle," the assistant tells him. "And mahogany obsidian on the sides."

It's not as obvious as Tiger Eyes but the dark spots among the warm brown of the mahogany obsidian remind Alec of Magnus's eyes. It's a positive association for Alec but will Magnus appreciate it? He hasn't shown his warlock eyes to Alec of his own volition yet. Maybe he doesn't ever want to do it and Alec hinting at having seen them might be a step too far. He could be overthinking it, too. It's just a two-colored mineral in two most common colors on earth. Magnus might not even make the connection himself. Either way, Alec is not backing out now that he found the bracelet.

The woman keeps describing the details of it to him but he's not really listening when he knows he wants it anyway. He asks for it to be packaged as a gift and gets a sleek silver box with a little bow and a black paper gift bag for it.

Now that he has it, he only needs to figure out the right time to give it to Magnus. No big deal, right?

* * *

Two days later something happens that takes Alec's mind off of any gifts, birthdays and anything else completely.

It starts small. Jon doesn't want to finish his evening bottle so Alec doesn't force him. They go to bed as usual and fall asleep. The peace doesn't last more than two hours and Alec wakes to crying. Jonathan has been very good lately about sleeping through long stretches of time and this hitch in the new routine isn't a problem. Or it shouldn't be. Alec offers him a fresh bottle and the boy seems interested at first but then turns his face away.

It takes fifteen minutes of rocking and whisper-singing for the boy to fall asleep again.

He wakes up crying three hours later. He doesn't need a diaper change yet and he still doesn't want to eat so Alec takes him into his own bed, hoping more warmth and his own scent will soothe his son and calm him enough to sleep.

By the time Max wakes up around seven as is normal for him, Alec has slept a little more but he's not sure how much rest his younger baby had. When Jon starts crying again, he doesn't accept any attempt to soothe him this time. He won't eat and bathing doesn't make him any happier.

"What's wrong, love?" Alec asks him a little helplessly. He should ask Magnus but the alpha will be still deep in sleep. He has been adjusting his life around Alec and his children but seven am is not a good time to bother him and Alec would hate to wake him, especially if the cause for crying
turns out to be something common and easily remedied.

Max needs his attention too and while Alec gets him washed, changed, and fed, Jonathan is making unhappy noises from Alec's bed where he left him. He isn't crying constantly and he'll appear to be calming down sometimes only to start again.

Putting Max back in the baby bed with his plush animals, Alec looks his younger son over again. He doesn't know what's wrong and he really needs help.

Knocking on the alpha's bedroom door, he fidgets nervously even before he hears any movement. Eventually Magnus appears, opening the door in just his dark robe and silk sleep pants. His hair, still in the state from the night, falls in a mussed wave to the side. Lack of black eyeliner makes him look younger but the interrupted sleep is also reflected in his eyes.

"Alexander? It's early…"

The alpha's face does a complicated shift from emotion to emotion while his brain catches up with what he's looking at and why is he awake at all. Alec is a bit of a mess himself, still in a t-shirt and sweatpants, barefoot and the missed hours of sleep must be clear on his face.

Looking at him, Magnus goes from pure surprise to tentative happiness at seeing Alec to clear worry, especially when his gaze falls on the boy in Alec's arms.

"I need help… but I'm not sure with what." Alec admits. "He's been crying and I can't find the reason."

"May I?" Magnus reaches out to take the boy from his father's arms and holds him in a way that leaves his right hand free for magic.

"What's wrong, sweet pea?" The so familiar wisps of blue magic manage to steal the boys attention enough to make him stop making the unhappy sounds.

Magnus frowns, focusing. "He's obviously hurting but he isn't hurt… or sick."

"I didn't change his food or anything else in the routine." Alec says. "He barely ate last evening, nothing at night and still wouldn't eat anything this morning."

"For now, I can prepare something that will get rid of the symptoms so he can at least eat. Maybe his belly bothered him in the evening and now he's just hungry because of that. A vicious cycle."

Alec takes a deep breath. Maybe. Maybe it's just that.

"Thank you."

Magnus puts his hand on Alec's arm. "Hey, it'll be fine."

Alec checks what Max is doing and then follows Magnus to the apothecary with Jonathan back in his arms.

They mix a little bit of the prepared potion with the fresh milk Alec makes and they both watch as the boy eats. When he finishes half of what he usually has, Alec's already relieved.

Magnus stays with them until they're done and then says he'll go get dressed.

"You can go back to bed-"
"No need, darling. I'll be out soon and make you breakfast, too."

Magnus reemerges from his room dressed in his looser, softer clothes and minimal make-up, which mean he's not leaving home today. It makes Alec happy and a little more relieved.

Jonathan had fallen asleep in Alec's arms soon after feeding so Alec puts him in blanket nest and goes to get Max out of the baby bad and into the living room to his playing space.

The crying starts anew an hour after Magnus and Alec finish breakfast. It's not loud, it starts slowly but something must be bothering the child to keep voicing his unhappiness.

"Are there magical illnesses? Or warlock illnesses?" Alec asks Magnus while they're both attending the boy.

"Not many. And I'd sense the wrongness of those. I'll ask Catarina to come."

She can't make an appearance before five pm – though she does say to let her know if there's an absolute emergency – and she promises to portal over the moment she's able to.

They're on their own until then. Magnus prepares some more of the potion for later feeding and he uses magic to soothe the aches but Alec remembers what Magnus had said before about baby warlocks and foreign magic influencing them. They also can't just feed such a small child potions or medication every two hours for a whole day.

Nothing changes before Catarina arrives. Magnus and Alec take turns caring for Jon and watching after Max, doing their best to keep the older boy from being affected by the younger. Still, he is a little quieter than usual and a little subdued, picking up on the moods of his brother and his omega parent.

Alec does his best to comfort his younger son with touch and scent whenever the potion wears off. He'll hold him and rock him or sit down in the armchair and hold him to his chest.

Catarina finds them this way: Alec on the couch holding Jonathan, Magnus just finishing cleanup after their late dinner which they had at the coffee table.

She looks tired from work but Alec's far too worried to be apologetic for asking her to come to them.

"It's not his belly." She says after she has enough time to examine him. "His gums are red and I think his tongue might be a little darker than is normal too."

Alec hovers nearby behind her. "Could it be teething? Max hasn't even started yet…"

"It's too early but not unheard of."

Alec already knows as much from his book. He's not quite optimistic enough to accept this as the true explanation just because it's within possibility. A rarer, more sinister problem might still be the cause. Both warlocks must read that thought on his face because Magnus comes closer and brushes Alec's cheek.

"We'll watch him for any change and we'll be ready to act."
"Okay."

"For now, let's assume it is teething." Catarina says. "There's a drug store nearby, right?"

"Yes."

"You stay home, I'll go get you a few things that'll help."

She comes back with a bag containing a box with a gel and two packets with colorful items inside.

"Silicone teethers." She says as she takes them out. "These can be chilled to make them more effective."

Alec picks them up to investigate. It's one pacifier in strange shape like a berry and one pastel silicone oval with nubs and bristles sticking out from different surfaces. He takes them to wash them and put them in the fridge.

"A numbing gel." Catarina points to the box next. "It's effective but easily swallowed so it might not get a chance to work sometimes."

She gives Alec some more advice on how often to use it and when they know everything there is to know, she leaves, promising to be in contact.

"We can share tonight." Magnus says to Alec a while later. "I'll take Max and you'll only have to look after the little pea. They won't wake each other up."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure."

Magnus has some concerns regarding his stronger scent in his room as it might irritate the boy used to sleeping in his omega parent's presence but there's no need to worry after all. The boy falls asleep without issues, his fist closed on Magnus's fingers. The man himself lies on his side with his head pillowed on one arm, his other arm outstretched toward the boy.

At first he's listening for sounds coming from the other bedroom but it's silent. Within minutes he's also falling asleep.

In the morning he gets up, changes Max into day clothes and takes him to the kitchen. He explains to the baby warlock what he's summoning for breakfast and then explains to him the secrets of the coffee machine.

Alec shuffles out of his room with hair a little wilder than normal and with the dark shadows under his eyes that tell Magnus he hasn't slept. He doesn't have Jon with him so Magnus assumes the boy is at least getting some rest now.

"Go sit on the couch, Angel."

He does as he's told, sitting down heavily and rubbing his face with his hands.

"Why aren't you using the opportunity to rest as well?"
The omega shrugs. "I couldn't."

He had spent a few hours in the middle of the night arranging half a nest on his bed, making a ring from blankets and pieces of clothing around Jon with just enough room for himself to lie next to his child.

Magnus doesn't offer him coffee, instead conjuring a herbal tea in a big mug. Then on the coffee table appears a big plate of bite-sized canapés, the ones Alec likes the most. It's a trick Magnus has learned to use whenever the omega claims he doesn't need any food. His sleepy brain accepts small bits he doesn't need utensils for and he ends up eating whole plate's worth, bit by bit, without thinking about it.

This time it goes no different. The omega starts eating automatically and, as Magnus hoped, he keeps on until half a plate is empty. Around that time a noise comes from Alec's bedroom, like a signal for the omega to rush over there. Before he can do that, Magnus points a finger at him. "Sit."

He goes to get Jonathan himself and brings the boy to the living room. He gives him one of the teethers and only when he sees the boy calming with it, he gives him back to Alec.

Their life that day circles around the couch and anticipating Jon's needs. It worries Magnus a little how much it affects the omega.

By dinnertime Magnus approaches Alec. "May I take over?" He asks, indicating his intention to take Jonathan from his arms. Alec lets him and Magnus magicks dinner in front of him.

"Now please eat something."

He does eat but at the first louder noise from his baby Alec is ready to jump off the couch.

"I've got him." Magnus says calmly but firmly. "Sit."

He puts a spell on the boy just so Alexander will stay down and eat something.

After dinner the younger boy falls asleep and slowly Alec does too. He was sitting on the couch at first, then bit by bit made himself more comfortable until he was lying down, one arm around the baby bundle.

The moment Alec's breathing slows and evens out, Magnus places a blanket over him, gently picks up Jon and moves him and his brother to another area of the loft where they'll be able to make more sounds while Alec sleeps. The alpha hopes he's tired enough to not wake up when he senses his son isn't nearby.

Magnus plays with Max and keeps an eye on Jon, watching for signs of him waking up. When he does wake sometime later Magnus gives Jon the cooled pacifier to chew on, hands Max his favorite toy to hold onto and tells them a story. The younger boy holds out for twenty minutes before the pacifier isn't doing the trick anymore and his tiny face screws up in unhappiness. He isn't crying, exactly, but it's obvious he's uneasy and restless. Magnus is becoming convinced it is indeed because of teething. They'll have to get through this the mundane way but Alexander might just get a few gray hairs prematurely because of it. Hopefully when Max decides to give them a repeat performance it'll go smoother.

For now, the omega's stress is stressing Magnus. The alpha ends up having to give the omega direct orders to make him comply multiple times that day. Omegas with children can be truly scary
creatures so Magnus is very, very relieved they've gotten so close Alexander is allowing him to interfere. It could be going very differently if the omega decided to view him as an annoyance at such sensitive time rather than someone to trust.

In the early night on that second day, having had enough of walking in circles around the loft rocking half-asleep Jonathan, Alec shuffles over to the couch. His tired mind is following the scent that's been luring him in for a while now and he finds himself in front of the couch, where Magnus has been sitting quietly. Even though he slept during the day, it only helped to rid Alec of a headache and did nothing to make him more alert.

Magnus has been watching him out of the corner of his eye, following his progress around the loft. Alec is walking across the room to the balcony door and back like in a trance, set upon one course and lacking the brainpower to stray from it. His eyes are red-rimmed and his hair's a mess from running his hands through it.

It's worrying but Magnus thinks it might all be because the omega is a first-time parent who so far had mostly easy sailing and he's taking his child's new pain like a personal failure. Magnus also remembers he's the oldest sibling, the one omega in the family who has caring for others in his blood.

When Alec starts shuffling towards him, Magnus shifts a little to make more room to his right on the couch and when he sits down, the warlock has his magic ready to conjure one of the blankets to fall over the omega's shoulders. Alec leans on him, pulls his feet up on the couch and somehow manages to find a stable position while keeping his child in his arms. Magnus remains still and when he glances at the man at his side a moment later, he finds him asleep.

Smiling softly, he wishes he could appreciate the sight of those beautiful thick eyelashes against pale skin more without the shadows under them.

He guesses they might as well spend the night on the couch. Magically he pulls a footrest closer so he can put his feet up on it. Max is content in his blanket nest to his left as he has been for the past hour, Alec and Jon are both perfectly still to his right. Magnus decides to renew a numbing spell on the boy and after that he manages to fall asleep too.

Alec wakes slowly, drifting between dreams and real sensations. He is warm and despite his unusual position, he is rather comfortable. Someone's arm is holding him close, fingers rubbing half-circles on his shoulder. He's breathing in Magnus's scent. He hears Max repeating his favorite syllables and vowels and he hears the whispered replies from Magnus.

His brain slowly catches up with what's going on and he realizes a night has passed and he slept through it, not even remembering going to bed. Not that he is in bed. He doesn't remember ever sleeping sitting up.

"Are you awake?" Magnus asks softly.

"Yeah."

"Breakfast?"

Alec sits up a little straighter, puts his feet on the floor. "Uh, maybe shower first."

"You could take a bath, take your time."
He hums noncommittally and seems unwilling to actually move yet. He leans a little more to the left, into Magnus, who moves his hand up from Alec's arm to his nape. Giving him a little massage, he makes the omega relax a little more.

"Take a long hot bath, take a cup of strong tea with you to drink." Magnus repeats. "We'll be waiting here for you."

"Take Max and go to the park." Magnus tells Alec at noon. "It's a little cold so put that panda hat on him. Get some air, spend an hour just with him." He rubs Alec's arms encouragingly. He wants the omega to get out for at least a short while, clear his head.

"Okay?"

"Okay."

"Good."

Alec straps Max in the carrier and puts the panda hat on his head. When he hesitates before leaving at the front door, Magnus is ready to give him a literal push.

It's hasn't rained that day but the benches are damp from the previous day and night so Alec keeps walking around, pointing out dogs and cyclists to Max. He himself is people-watching. There are several determined joggers and mothers with children, some people who are using the park as a shortcut to some other places they need to be. It's not the most popular weather or time of day to be out so there's not many people overall.

At one point he spots a girl. He almost doesn't recognize her because she's wearing thicker clothes but her braids remind him of the little warlock he's met before and once he's paying attention, he realizes it is her. Her hand is held by a woman whose face he can't see, but she is white. They're walking ahead of him and he sees their backs and a bit from the side. He's not sure he wants to be noticed right now but it might be a good idea not to let them walk away just like that. They're walking rather slowly at a pace matching the little girl's, without rush.

He follows some distance after them until he ends up looking at a large building from across the street. The woman opened the door with a key so they must be living there. Alec isn't too willing to come closer today even if he's really curious to see what's written on the plaque near the front door. Now that he knows this place, he'll be able to follow up another day.

Max's nose is red with chill by that point so Alec returns home.

He finds dinner ready and Jon temporarily content in Magnus's lap, drinking from his bottle. Pretending to be fiddling with the straps of Max's carrier, Alec snaps a photo of them.
Chapter Summary

Today: story picks up right where it ended last chapter + Lightwood family drama.
Next up: maybe a kiss.

Alec takes off his jacket and his shoes and undresses Max from his warm clothes.

Magnus watches him move out of the corner of his eye. The baby in his arms is almost done eating and soon he'll lose the reason to keep holding him…

Alec had been out with Max for about thirty five minutes. Twenty minutes after they left, Jon became more agitated than normal and by the time he calmed down under a healing spell cast by Magnus, there was something new about him. Tips of very white, very sharp baby teeth were peeking out his gums which were still red and a bit swollen.

Before letting himself panic, Magnus brought down the inflammation a bit. There was still something going on with the little tongue. It was red and it appeared narrower than before to the warlock's eyes, if his memory was good.

Now Alexander is back home and he has a baby with two rows of tiny shark teeth and a tongue which clearly wants to be forked. How is Magnus supposed to let the omega know? Against all logical thought in his head, it feels like he's giving back a broken child when it was under his care. It's a ridiculous thought but he can't help it. He's the warlock, he's been doing magic around these children since the start, even if it was rarely done on them and the Mark finally showed when Alec wasn't around.

This deep-seated fear of rejection is his only and on some level he's aware of it but it doesn't stop him from dreading Alexander's reaction. He's been dreading it ever since finding out Jon had no Mark yet.

So he sat with the boy for the remaining time before his brother and father returned from their walk, Magnus's thoughts circling around the same dark predictions. With Alexander back in the loft, bringing back his fresh, sweet scent, the alpha's feelings are even more jumbled.

"I think we're in the clear now." Magnus starts talking, carefully. "I think we won't be losing as much sleep after today."

Alec comes over and takes Jon back curiously. He peers down at his son and for a time he's not moving or saying anything, as if registering what's new.

The triangle-shaped tiny teeth came out all at once so he can see two full rows and he doesn't need to count them to see there's more than an adult human is supposed to have. They must be in a completely different shape and size from human ones to fit there.

Magnus watches him watch the boy. Then… Alec smiles, a confused kind of smile as he touches Jon's cheek.

"Oh, baby. Were you jealous of Max's horns? You didn't have to rush." He brushes his son's cheek
fondly. "You don't need these yet."

Something squeezes at Magnus's heart when he hears the omega speak softly. He stays seated where he was feeding the baby, the bottle is still in his hand.

Eventually, shaking off the fear that froze him, he sends the bottle away to the sink and then stands up.

"Hopefully they will grow at a normal pace now." He approaches the omega from the side. "Otherwise we might run out of bottle nipples and pacifiers when he chews right through them."

Alec chuckles. "We wouldn't want to run out of nipples."

The knot in Magnus's chest relaxes further. "Be careful with your fingers, too."

Standing beside Alexander, the alpha feels a need to put his arm around him, pull him closer, yet he doesn't want to distract him from his son in that moment.

"So…" Alec turns his head to look at Magnus. "That's one out of the way? Then Max's turn and then only magic manifestation times two to look forward to."

"Toddling, teenage rebellion…" Magnus teases.

Alec looks back at his son, who's beginning to squirm in his arms.

"I'll manage… so long as I don't have to do it alone."

"You'll never be alone with this."

"Magnus?" Alec says his name from across the room later that day.

Magnus puts down the old Bestiary he was looking through. "Yes?"

"Isn't this dangerous? He can't even control his arms, much less what his mouth does. He could bite his tongue off."

"Well," Magnus can't say he has any experience with that aspect of warlock marks. Scales, horns, tails and unusual colors aren't a danger in themselves beyond other people's reactions to them. "I'm sure he'll be fine. He'll probably get a few painful lessons first but I wouldn't worry about major injury."

'Nature finds a way' would fit as a saying here but he's not sure he should apply it here.

"Maybe you should keep giving him the teethers, let him get used to using those pearly whites."

After saying that, Magnus wants to laugh. Out of all the problems of the world, this is what happened to him.

And he's grateful for it.

Alec spends the next few hours playing with the children. He divides his time with them between encouraging Max's sitting practice and Jon's vocalizing. The omega seems intent on finding new
ways to cause the younger boy to smile and then watches his new Mark with wonder.

Around dinnertime, when Magnus is making a few adjustments to the food he's summoned, Alec comes up from behind him and wraps his arms around him like Magnus had done to Alec not long ago.

Magnus likes the reminder of how tall the Nephilim is. He enjoys how much he's changed, too. He remembers the day he first lay eyes on the omega. Too pale, too thin, too tired, too scared. And yet somehow still captivating, still worth the attention. And as time showed, worth the effort.

Despite his initial state, he's had enough time to bounce back from all that. Between safe home, proper meals, return to archery and workouts, he probably doesn't look much different from his Shadowhunter days.

Sometimes when Magnus watches Alec shoot he imagines him with runes, in proper hunting gear with a bow and a blade. He imagines him as a teamleader, serious-faced omega looking after his alpha siblings and other fellow Shadowhunters.

If there was a way to give all that back to Alexander, he'd try his best but there's no denying he is selfish. Right now he has the Nephilim's warm body at his back. The slightly possessive aspect of his hug is for Magnus only and he intends to keep it, should competition show up on the horizon. And he'd love to feel more of Alec against his body – preferably with less layers between them – but that's not even something he's comfortable fantasizing about. Not yet, when he doesn't know how the omega would feel about this.

Alec steps back and away from Magnus once their dinner is ready to be served and they move to the table.

Later they sit on the couch together, Magnus writing a reply to a fire message he received earlier and Alec is looking through his phone, answering texts from Maia and Luke.

Even later, Magnus decides to finish up some work in his office so Alec leaves him to it and looks after the boys until it's time to bed. He takes Jonathan to bed with him, wanting him nearby for a little longer even if just having the teeth come through greatly improved the boy's physical state. He was still showing some signs through the rest of the day but it was nowhere near the crying of the past days.

* * *

The next day Magnus calls out to Alec when he comes out of the bathroom after setting up the washing machine and is folding already washed clothes on his bed.

"Do you mind having company for dinner?"

"No? Who?" Alec says peeking out of his door. Magnus is standing by the balcony, phone in his hand.

"Your mundane stray, Steven."

Alec blinks slowly. "Why?"

"He has a special delivery for me, I thought it wouldn't hurt to feed him for the effort. And... I have a feeling he might be bringing a plus one."
"Did he say that?"

"No, I'm assuming." Magnus pauses. "You only need to say a word and you won't have to see any of them."

"No, it's fine." Alec doesn't want to appear like someone who can't handle anything to do with the Shadowhunters or his past. He likes his peace and his chosen solitude but it's not going to work for him forever to hide from all things to do with the Institute. He's not a child and he can't hide behind his alpha every time he doesn't like something.

Besides, the mundane-turned-shadowhunter might just be the point of contact he could benefit from. There's a very high chance she knows absolutely nothing about him from the Shadowhunters or his family. They'd probably keep it quiet. What he'd done will be kept under wraps unless he's now some sort of cautionary tale to tell every newly trained Shadowhunter.

He must be quiet for too long because Magnus steps directly in front of him and says, "I wouldn't be thinking of inviting them if I thought this might hurt you or put you in danger. I've known Clary since she was a kid. Granted, I didn't see her often, but enough. And with her mother's situation, they're probably the last people to knowingly endanger another."

He's using his softer voice with him and while it makes something in Alec's chest tingle with warmth, it also embarrasses him a little.

"It's okay." He says quickly. "I'm fine with it. In fact, tell Simon straight that she can come if she wants to."

Magnus searches his face for false bravado and then grins.

"Great! Then I'll arrange everything for the evening."

Alec isn't sure what Magnus told Simon but both he and the girl arrive dressed up, not like for a fancy restaurant but for a dinner with a- well, maybe with the High Warlock of Brooklyn. Alec somehow manages to forget that little detail about Magnus on occasion.

Alec put on one of the shirts added to his wardrobe by Magnus: a dark silver shade, classic cut. He forced his hair into some semblance of order after having allowed it to do whatever it wanted for the duration of the teething drama but honestly it's probably still artistic mess. Magnus, as per usual, stands beside him in a perfect outfit, always prepared to impress. His deep blue shirt sparkles when he moves and the gold details on his belt in black pants keep catching Alec's gaze.

He has his hand on the small of Alec's back when they welcome their guests side by side. It's for Alec's comfort and to reassure him in front of a stranger but Alec's imagination runs ahead to give him a scenario where they stand the same way with him as the High Warlock's omega.

The fantasy has to be shaken off in favor of shaking the girl's hand. She approaches him first, as is polite between betas and omegas. He notices the color of her hair first, then their height difference. Her red hair stands out against her nice green blazer. She's pretty and if he forgets that he's not a fan of her just because she took "his" place in the Institute, he'd say she has a friendly face.

She's looking curiously at him and at the loft in general, and he remembers she wasn't here before, only her mother. To Alec all the items, art, books and pieces of furniture that are more decorative than functional have become the norm. He sometimes thinks about his room back at the Institute and finds it hard to imagine himself going back there. Of course, the Institute has beautiful items in
it, starting with the massive stained glass windows, the library, then the Head's office which he had thought would become his room… He prefers to be around Magnus's weird plants that he still leaves to Magnus to take care of, and his potentially dangerous magical items, and his books.

The four of them exchange small talk at first, properly introduce Alec and Clary and they move to the table when Magnus invites them to sit, asks what they'd like to drink and summons the promised dinner, shrimp risotto.

The conversation revolves around Clary at first. Alec is personally curious how she was taken in to be part of the Shadowhunter society and what does her training look like. Apparently coming back with the Cup intact did earn Jocelyn some points despite everything that preceded her running off with it.

They traveled to Idris for a week so Jocelyn could take care of some of her old and new affairs and to show Clary her original home. They could have stayed there, however, a lot was keeping Clary here in the city.

Since it was her choice to be a part of their world and they wanted her there, she could go ahead and be assertive enough to set some of her own conditions. Past Alec would have frowned at that, thinking that when they needed staff to maintain safety of the mundanes and the Shadow World they shouldn't have to bother with any untrained Nephilim who go to art school at the same time. The Institute used to be his whole life which was why he had hated the idea of mating to someone who'd be taking over.

Current Alec, the one seated beside a warlock and opposite a mundane, the one who goes to bakeries and to zoos, who watches political dramas on TV while covered with a blanket and within touching distance from Magnus, who spends his time under the shower imagining what it be like to be legally mated to a warlock… that Alec sees Clary's side. He thinks she has the right idea to hang onto her path that she started setting for herself before discovering her hidden side.

He might change his mind about that if he sees she's not taking hunting seriously because that might result in very real danger to the other Shadowhunters.

"So, Alec. You lived at the Institute, right?"

"Almost all my life, yes."

"Why did you leave?" She's asking politely. Since so far she's been giving him the impression of a mild-mannered beta, he is willing to assume she's asking not out of nosy kind of curiosity but because she's now part of the very place he left so it might be relevant in some way to her future there.

He's prepared mentally for the question because it was obvious it was coming. He's tempted to deflect but that'd lead them nowhere. Besides, even her beta nose can tell there are small children in the loft. The boys are sleeping in their bed and even if one of them cries Alec doesn't plan on bringing them out. There's nothing of their items visible in the room but Alec has noticed her discreetly looking around more than just because she finds Magnus's art collection interesting and she must be wondering where they fit in the story.

It is better that both her and her friend know the truth about Shadowhunters. The good and the bad.

So he tells her: "The Clave doesn't take news of pregnancies out of wedlock well. With mix-
blooded children, no less. So, I was told to either stop being pregnant or get out."

Her face scrunches up in disapproval.

"You were cut off completely? What about your family, do you have one here in New York?" She doesn't ask about the father, just as Simon never asked.

"Yes."

"Well, do they not want to, I don't know, meet with you out here in the city?"

"I assume they would. It's not safe for them. Banished Shadowhunters can't just pop in for a visit when they feel like it and maintaining relations with them is not what you're supposed to do if you're a proper one."

He can see she has a hard time accepting that.

"Lydia is keeping us busy and she's doing everything to look good and make the Institute look good in the eyes of possible envoys. I can see her disapproving of your family going against the law to see you but I'm sure she wouldn't go after you. Besides, I'm here? In secret? No one is going to know about this dinner so I don't see how someone else couldn't see you."

"Maybe you're right that it's possible." Alec replies. "But I'm not going to do it."

She's opening her mouth to argue further but Simon interjects: "So, um. In related news, Clary keeps telling me all those stories about the Clave and the local authorities, whatever is the name. Honestly it sounds pretty shady to me. Why would anyone want to be part of that?"

"Power, authority and… power?" Magnus offers him the solution to the mystery.

"You mean over Downworld, right? But they're even fighting among themselves? I mean, the local Institute. I've only been there twice and not for long but Clary says they're going through leadership changes and have been at it for months."

Clary nods. "When me and my mom went to the Institute the first time, there was the new acting Head, Lydia Branwell. But we learned there was someone else for a few months in winter. Aldertree… something."

"Victor Aldertree." Alec supplies.

"Mom told me the Lightwood family used to lead for a long time. I met Isabelle Lightwood and her adopted brother, Jace. I understand Izzy isn't of the right age to be the acting Head yet but I hope she'll try for the position. She's very smart. And capable."

Alec doesn't say much to that except for agreeing with Clary's opinion. Treading on the slippery ground of the topic of his family, he's much more tense than at the beginning of the evening.

"If the Lightwoods were still in charge while you were there," Magnus says to Alec, "you might have been affected by the inner politics. If someone in Alicante was bored enough or vindictive enough and decided to go after the people involved in the last war they would have Lightwoods on the list too."

"Why?"

"They were on Valentine's side up until it wasn't the best option for them. They switched sides and
managed to keep their lives and their runes for a deal. They got the New York Institute to run if they stayed put. If there's someone interested in taking the Institute for themselves or just making life harder for the Lightwoods, then it'd be really convenient for them to jump on the opportunity to get rid of you first because of your role as an omega."

It's the second time, after Luke, that some points out Alec's dynamic as important to the Institute but Alec's brain is stuck on the other piece of information.

"So making Alec look bad would make their leadership look bad." Says Simon who is aware of the ways omegas need to take care to maintain their good image in society. Either it's their families blamed for not raising them right or it could be teams or other peer groups that the omegas embarrass when they act 'inappropriately'.

"Or, possibly, it was the opposite." Magnus continues talking, not yet aware how still and quiet Alec has become. "You were their subordinate and when you were – in their eyes – tainted, they treated you harshly because they wanted to get rid of anything demonic as soon as possible, just as they had wanted to achieve it during Uprising, just smaller scale."

Alec pushes back his chair noisily and stands up from the table.

The alpha, beta and omega at the table all startle at his reaction. Clary, being the most confused, watches him go. Simon and Magnus share the impulse to go after him but only Magnus actually does it, motioning them to stay seated.

Alec evades him when he attempts to touch his arm and hugs himself instead. He stops in the middle of the room, not even sure where he was running to.

"It's just what I could have expected." Alec says bitterly. "I'm not even near them anymore but they still manage to make me feel worse."

"Alexander…"

"Robert and Maryse Lightwood are my parents. My name is Alec Lightwood."

To be completely honest, Magnus wasn't expecting to hear that. He had wondered about Alec's family name but it didn't matter to him. His interest only lay in Alec himself, not the other Nephilim. Magnus knew Maryse and Robert but he hasn't been keeping up with their family affairs so he couldn't have possibly made any connection between them, their children's names and Alexander.

Now he sees more clearly what Alec has lost when he left the Institute. He was their oldest child, set to inherit their position…

"At this time next year I would have been Head of the Institute's mate." Then a helpless tone sneaks into his voice. "Were they harder on me because I was the next in line?"

"I don't know." Magnus tells him honestly. "It's possible but there are so many possibilities there, we might never know unless we ask them. In any case, you have done nothing wrong. I'm sorry. I'm sorry this is how you found out, I didn't know…"

Responding to the rising distressed scent, Magnus asks him. "Do you want us to leave you?"

Not particularly, Alec thinks. He'll want to be alone soon but right now he doesn't want to be left with this bomb of an information. "Make me a drink, please." He says instead.
Magnus snaps his fingers and a glass appears, containing a pale red cocktail. It smells of raspberries. Alec takes a sip, then three more.

He takes his drink back to the table, with the alpha following close. They sit down.

"It may not be the best time to say it," Simon speaks up, "but, I knew it. In hindsight."

They all look at him.

"Did you?"

"I'm the only one in this room who has seen both Isabelle and Alec more than once, right? There are certain phrases you say the same way Isabelle does. And sometimes you'll both cross your arms or get this look in your eyes."

Alec didn't think they had the same mannerisms but then he probably wouldn't know it without looking at himself and Izzy as an outsider. They have, after all, spent a most of the time together since they were small.

"They didn't talk about you," Simon continues, "otherwise it'd have been obvious to me. I mean, they didn't mention a third sibling. I think they didn't talk about you out of protectiveness. The jerk alpha might be all over Clary but even then he didn't just share all his life with her."

"Simon." Clary hisses.

"Jerk alpha? You're talking about Jace?" Alec asks.

"Yeah." Then Simon returns Clary's glare. "Come on, you know we really don't go well together."

"Did you ever try?" She replies, raising her voice a little.

"Yes! I'm just a mundane to him, he never tried."

"All right, that's enough." Magnus intervenes, waving his hand to get their attention. "You can sort that one out among yourselves."

Their guests, not used to his magic, startle a little when he clears the table and replaces their dinner with little empty plates.

"Panna cotta or toffee cheesecake?" He asks Alec first. He doesn't give him a chance to refuse altogether.

"The latter."

"Good choice."

Alec sinks his fork into the dessert but doesn't lift it up again.

"Are they all right?" He asks Clary.

"Yes," she replies. "But now that we know about you, it explains why they seem so sad sometimes. I had nothing to compare, I didn't know them before, but especially when it comes to Jace, I didn't think it was his normal character."

Simon is nodding as she speaks.
"What do you mean?" Alec asks.

She considers her words carefully. "He's moody sometimes, like there's something major bothering him that he won't talk about. And I thought that maybe it's about, I'm not sure what I thought, that maybe he lost someone in line of duty or that it had to do with his original family, since he and Izzy did tell me he was adopted. Sometimes I'd see them after they were alone together and I assumed that they were discussing something that upset them both but they wouldn't talk about it to me."

Another long silence falls over them until Clary speaks up again.

"Look, I still know almost nothing about you, but I know that they'd do anything to see you. And I'm sure they'd find a way to do it without being noticed."

"I'd prefer it if you dropped it." Now that he has the confirmation that they miss him, it almost hurts him to speak.

"But I don't get why you'd distance yourself from the people who'd surely like to help you?"

"This is not for you to get." He says in a way that might be just a little bit too sharp. "And not for you to try to fix. I did things which were the only choice or the best choice I had but it doesn't make me any less ashamed of them. I've gone against what I believed in, against my nature, just to avoid sinking lower."

Magnus reaches under the table to put his hand on Alec's knee for support.

"I'm not ready to admit it to my family and they're going to ask. I can be vague about it with you but they'll want to know how I lived just out of concern for me and I won't be able to look them in the eye and tell the truth. So until I can look myself in the eye in the mirror and say it's okay, I won't be able to see them. So I'd appreciate it if you dropped this and also didn't try to ask anyone else about this."

The table is silent because what can any of them say that'd be actually useful to him?

Alec closes his eyes, breathing slowly.

"If it makes you feel better," he begins talking again, addressing Clary, "I have something you could give to Izzy."

"Sure." She replies immediately. "Look, I am sorry for pushing. Obviously, I won't tell anyone even though I think you should just try."

Alec nods, then stands up and leaves the table to go to his room to get the package.

The moment he's out of sight, Clary gives the Nephilim blade to Magnus. She had it stored in the pocket of her blazer. It's wrapped in fabric and since it's inactive, it doesn't take up much space. Magnus sends it to his bedroom before Alec can notice and question it.

"I hope I won't get anyone in trouble for miscounting them in the armory. I took two with me when we went out for routing patrol, then hid it."

"Thank you, Biscuit. I truly appreciate it."

"It makes so much sense now that you'd want it. At first I thought you were blackmailing Simon for stuff. If that's for him then I don't regret doing it."
Alec comes back with box wrapped in black wrapping paper. He put everything together because Izzy would have to be the one to get the books to Max anyway. Now that the truth of his family is out he doesn't have to pretend in front of Clary and make up stories, and can just ask her to give it straight to Izzy. Since they're still seated, he puts it on the table next to him.

"You realize that I can't tell Izzy this dropped into my lap while I was eating breakfast one morning? Is this a gift? They'll know I've met you."

"Then tell them Simon met me in the city, not you. Tell them you don't know where I live... and that I'm asking them to not look for me, and I'm asking for more time. I wrote a note inside."

"I will do that. I can't promise they will listen though."

Alec chuckles sadly because he knows his siblings and he can fully picture them not listening.

"Oh, do you want me to give this right away? Because I haven't been planning to be at the Institute tomorrow but I can drop by."

"No, it's fine. In fact, I'd prefer if you delivered it the day after tomorrow, or the next. Just have Simon text me, or Magnus that you did it. Please."

"Okay."

A little later they say their goodbyes in a definitely darker mood than the evening started but that isn't anyone's fault. Alec tells Clary it was nice to meet her.

When they're alone with Magnus, Alec doesn't quite know what to do with himself.

"I always assumed," He says half to himself, "well, not at first but soon after I left, I assumed that they went through with banishing me because they expected me to fold and come asking to be taken back a few days later."

"Very possible."

"It's why I took extra care to not be tracked or contacted. I wasn't taking back my own decision."

"No matter how you look at it, at everything that happened, it was your choice to keep or not keep your child, Angel."

Alec doesn't reply. He moves back to the table and sits down. Magnus conjures a cup with fresh tea and another glass with French martini for him so he can choose which he'd prefer.

Alec sits at the dining table, staring off into nothing. His fingers are closed on a cup he's not really drinking from.

He's lost. He'd thought he found his balance and was resetting his life here with Magnus but now with the whole new information the rug got pulled from under his feet yet again.
Back at the beginning he had thought his parents might get over the fact he essentially threw away his career and they might come around to the idea of having a warlock grandchild. He had thought they might look at it differently if it was raised by him and within Nephilim community from the start.

Later, when that didn't happen and he was banished, he thought that maybe after sufficient amount of time passed, years probably, maybe he'd find a way to meet them again and they'd want to see the child. He thought they might one day miss him enough to be willing to look past everything they disapproved of in him or respond positively when he reached out first. But now he can't see it happening. Now he sees why they were so angry. They hated everything about his child and its blood.

It was one thing to be the 'perfect' Shadowhunter, doing everything the Clave asked for. He used to be like that, he lived and breathed the Law. It took having personal stakes in protecting a Downworlder, his own child, to make him see the world differently. His sister has always been the one more willing to be open minded and he definitely saw the good sides of it but he still thought himself better than them, the Downworlders. Despite all his shortcomings in the past, even he wouldn't entertain the thought of approving of the Circle's actions. They had taken it way too far, hurt everyone on the way.

His parents were part of it when it was happening! No wonder his mother pushed him so hard to find a worthy mate, 'better' than himself. He was their chance at getting something new to make them look better, such as a respectable alpha from a good family which was never involved in the Circle.

Alec goes through his memories, second guessing everything that his parents said or did. It hurts. At least he has his memories of his siblings that can't be tarnished by anything.

Magnus comes to him, his steps heavier than usual just to let Alec know he's there and isn't startled. The alpha has gathered up courage before approaching but is losing it fast when looking at Alec. He has something to give him and it seems the best time to do it now to lift the omega's spirits up a bit. On the other hand it might be the worst, insensitive time to do it. Magnus thinks that if he doesn't go through with it tonight, then one, he won't sleep, overthinking and two, he might lose the determination he's feeling tonight.

He exchanged Clary's piece of cloth for blue silk and a simple ribbon. Holding the wrapped item in his hands, Magnus takes a breath and stands at Alec's left side.

"Alexander."

The omega shifts, turns to look at him.

"I have something for you."

Alec frowns, confused at the offering. "What is this?"

Magnus hands the bundle to Alec, then pulls a chair for himself so he can sit down facing the omega.

"Please open it."

Alec weighs it in his hand. Then, he unwraps it. A gasp escapes his lips at the sight of carved adamas. A Shadowhunter weapon, here in his hands.
"It's my courting gift to you." Magnus breaks the silence that fell between them while Alec stared at the adamas.

Alec looks up, meets his eyes. "Courting?"

"Yes. It may be an old tradition but I find some traditions worth keeping."

"You're wooing me with weapons?"

"How stereotypical of me. And yet, your eyes are shining with something like want." He teases Alec.

Alec discards the silk and ribbon and holds the handle properly in his right hand. His fingers open and close on it in a nervous manner.

He doesn't say an angel's name but he thinks it as he activates the blade. A blue light, once so familiar, throws gentle glow on his skin. Something untangles inside of him. Angelic blood is all that's needed to use the blade but the fear was there inside him that it'd reject him. That adamas would know the extent of his fall from grace and his duty and it'd reject his attempt to use it.

But it works. A real blade, though not his old one, is in his hands. A gift, from the High Warlock of Brooklyn… who wishes to court him.

Alec closes his eyes.

"Thank you. I- Sometimes I feel like I can't ever thank you enough."

"Alexander, there are so many things I am grateful for to you." Magnus puts his hand on Alec's left one. "When you're not sad and hiding, it's a pleasure to just be around you even when we're not doing anything. And when we are doing something together – anything – well, it makes me happy."

"I've never heard anyone say it about me."

"I bet. You were around other Nephilim before after all."

Exasperated, Alec shakes his head.

"It's enough for you now but what if I'm actually boring? We devote so much of our time together to them." He tilts his head toward his bedroom. "What if when they're grown there's nothing left to keep us together?"

"Isn't what we have better than anything else? Would you rather we met partying and then discovered we don't work together at all while trying to build a family? I'd rather spend years as your partner as we are now than have anyone else more 'exciting' but ultimately a dead end."

"That's… a bold statement." Alec says but he smiles but the smile doesn't last. "I have... a lot of baggage, you know that."

"Darling, the point of the first courting gift is to make ones intentions clear. It's not the time to plan the next five years in detail. I'm making clear my interest in you and my intent to get to know you even better."

Alec feels his face grow hotter, just like when the werewolves teased him about the same tradition. The very idea of it happening happening to him wakes butterflies in his stomach.
He stands up abruptly, confusing Magnus. "Stay here." He says quickly.

Magnus watches him go to his room, stay out of his sight for half a minute, then come back carrying something.

Alec hands a silver box to Magnus, who doesn't waste time opening. The bracelet is resting inside.

"It's customary to return the first gift after seven days but I don't feel like waiting that long." Alec says. When Magnus looks at him, he notes the faint blush on the omega's face.

"Is it your courting gift? You tried giving me all those reasons for why you're not right for me, all the while hiding this in your things?"

"Yes." Alec bites his lip. "I bought it when I was going out with Maia and the others a few days ago."

"Really?"

"Yes."

A small laugh escapes Magnus. "You're full of surprises. I accept, of course, even seven days early."

Taking out the bracelet from its box, he opens the clasp and manages to put it around his right wrist and lock it again.

"These are good colors. Thank you, Alexander."

He takes Alec's hand into both of his. "Are you feeling better? You have the full right to be sad or angry about what you've found out today. If you want to be mostly alone tomorrow, just remember I'm here for you."

"I'll need time to process this. I almost can't believe it but…"

"But some things fit better now?"

"Yeah." He gives Magnus's hand a thankful squeeze. "I think I'll go to bed... Thank you for the dinner. It was, despite everything, pretty nice."

"I'm glad. Go get your rest."

**

Alec wakes up first the following day but after the morning feeding he takes his sons back into the nest with him and lies down for another hour.

He whispers to them words of love and promises of protection. Jon has his fist closed over his fingers, looking up at him with wide eyes. He's kicking his legs like he's attending fitness class and is happy about it. Max is squirming all over the place until Alec, unintentionally, rearranges the nest a bit around them and instead of his own scent, the alpha's scent is closer to Max, coming from the yellow-and-gold piece of fabric that Alec was pretty sure Magnus wouldn't actually wear, ever. It smelled a bit faint, only thanks to its proximity to the alpha's other things but it was enough for Alec's needs.

Max stills immediately, then starts to turn his head, looking for something. It takes Alec a few seconds to catch up and when he does, he pulls the yellow fabric closer for Max to grip. Max
bunches up the fabric and pulls at it in turns, then tries to put some in his mouth.

"I like it too." Alec tells him, pulling the scarf back to give the boy a pacifier instead.

When it's no longer reasonable to stay in bed, Alec gets up and makes himself presentable. Since he's in the mood to keep Jon close, Alec puts him in the wrap and goes to get breakfast with him. Magnus is there, almost everything ready at the table in front of him. He welcomes Alec with a smile and then closes the distance between them to take Max from Alec's side. It's becoming inconvenient to carry them both at the same time with how fast Max is growing. When Jon catches up to him the double pram will weight like a small car.

The alpha takes Max to sit in his lap and conjures a jar of mashed baby food for him. He takes turns eating his own toasts and giving Max spoonfuls out of the jar.

Alec eats his toast in peace since Jon isn't interested in a second breakfast yet. The omega knows Magnus wants to say something just by looking at him. He glances up at Alec once in a while as if he's trying to guess if the mood is right for a conversation.

Finally, he does speak up.

"I'm going to be honest, there is a lot of bad blood between me and your parents and their generation of Nephilim." He goes straight into it. "I don't think I will ever forget or be able to gloss over what they've done."

Alec lowers his gaze.

"I don't hate Shadowhunters, I fully believe you're needed in the world. But the Uprising is too recent for me and it wasn't a separate incident, it was just one more point on the list of wrongdoings against the Downworld."

He pauses until Alec looks up at him.

"I need you to know that it doesn't matter to me who is in your family. I've learned who you are when you kept your name a secret and you are all that matters to me. I'm sure I'd like your siblings as well, as they are also part of the new generation. I want to be optimistic about the future."

He pauses again and Alec notices, to his surprise, that the alpha is nervous about something.

"That said," Magnus continues at last, "just as you can't change your parents, I can't change mine… And I hope it won't matter to you who my father is."

Magnus blinks slowly and when he opens his eyes, they're the real warlock eyes he's been hiding. It became as easy and natural as breathing to him to keep the glamor on unless he wished to make a statement just by showing them.

He gives Alec time to react to them. The omega stares at first. Then, slowly, he smiles. Magnus doesn't understand what causes his face to light up with the smile directed at him.

"Thank you for sharing them with me," Alec tells him honestly. "They're beautiful."

Alec's hand finds his across the table and their fingers tangle together. "You're beautiful to me. Inside and out. Wonderful inside, fancy outside."

Magnus huffs. For once he's the one overcome with sudden shyness, not sure what to do with himself when the person who matters to him tells him such simple, honest compliments.
"If it's not uncomfortable for you, you could leave them visible always at home."

"Maybe… maybe I will."

The look at each other, both smiling like lovestruck teenagers until the blue boy in Magnus's lap demands he turn his attention back to him.
A sense of duty

Chapter Summary

Today: a look in the past. Next up: probably back to scheduled courting.

Chapter Notes

I heard you like emotional roller-coasters :) This chapter was supposed to look much different but here we are, with new unplanned scenes because I thought you might appreciate the angst. And I think I'm starting to get tangled in my own timeline...

Important: this chapter contains talk of/references to rape but I mostly keep it vague.

- Now, the Loft -

Alec sits at his desk, the two baby memories albums that he'd bought are open in front of him on first pages. He fills out the basics: name, date and time of birth for Jonathan, name and the date he was found for Max. He writes in eye colors, hair colors and in the spot for birthmarks he puts their warlock marks and the time it appeared for Jon. There's lots of spaces for details he doesn't know and honestly doesn't care about too much, such as first weight and measurements. These details would have been recorded as part of their family files if he'd still been a part of their society. As it is, it's up to him to keep what he wants remembered. At least that's something he's good at, making reports and keeping order. It even calms him.

There's space for the name of the doctor or midwife who attended the delivery so he writes in the werewolf women who helped him.

Two pages contain a list of firsts, such as first smile, first time sitting unassisted, first steps. First travel, which was those few days in Spain with Dot. Alec smiles to himself. A few months old and they've already seen Europe and surely they'll see much more soon, ferried around the world by Magnus's magic.

Leafing through some more pages, he makes a mental note to buy some simple paints to do the hand and foot prints and to cut two locks of hair to put inside the little paper pocket both books have for that purpose.

He pauses, listening to the sounds of the loft. He thinks he hears Magnus coming back but it isn't him yet, just louder noises from their street muted through the windows. Magnus had left for a meeting he had scheduled, leaving Alec to a quiet evening. Alec enjoyed that for some time after finishing up all bedtime-related tasks with the boys but soon enough he became bored. So this is what he does now, storing memories before his sons can remember them themselves.

He goes back to the beginning, where a whole page is supposed to fit a list of closest family members. He wrote his own name first, then Izzy's and Jace's as "aunts and uncles". There's also Max, of course, but Alec feels weird putting him in the same line because he's so young.
Hesitating over "grandparents" spot, he eventually decides not to be petty. Erasing his parents from the family tree is not something that would make him feel better so he writes their names too. Once that's done, he doesn't feel regret or anger. Anger comes when he thinks about Shadowhunter history and his parents' role in it but looking down at this pastel-colored book which is supposed to be all about family, he's only filled with sadness.

And finally, one of the most important information to fill about the baby- the second parent. His first thought had been to leave it empty until he was mated but he already knows who should be there, doesn't he? With his heart beating a little faster, he writes down 'Magnus Bane' and his hand, of his own accord, makes the 'M' much more loopy than he normally writes. His letters are always small and even, as he was taught to write in a legible way, easy to read by anyone when the time came that he'd be writing official papers. His neat little letters don't seem to fit Magnus's name. So he makes them bigger, loopy M and g, and a bigger B than his usual Bs. Done, he gazes down at the page.

* * *

- about 11-10 months ago, the NY Institute -

Alec was looking for Isabelle. He knew she was gathering information for a mission earlier but he didn't find her by the computers anymore when he went to look there. He checked the armory and the training room but in the end he found her in her own room on her bed, taking a break, flipping through her phone. She sat up when he knocked.

"Hey, can I talk to you?" He asked, looking inside her room.

"What's up?"

She frowned when he stepped further inside to close the door behind him before answering her. The frown didn't leave her face when he didn't speak, instead coming to sit beside her on the bed.

"Something happened?"

"I need a favor from you… a technical favor that I want you to perform so no one else knows."

She nodded, immediately agreeing. "Well, what is it?"

"A blood test."

"Okay, what am I supposed to test it for?"

If she was curious before, she became wary next, confused by his cryptic behavior. He couldn't get the words out for a long enough time that she put her hand on his.

"Please tell me, now you're just scaring me. Are you sick?"
"No." He closed his eyes. "But I might be pregnant."

"What?" She blurted out because it was literally the last thing she expected to hear from her big brother's mouth. Then she collected herself, didn't let Alec pull his hand away from hers when he tried to do it.

"What makes you think you are?"

"Can we just do it first, then I'll tell you. Okay?" He pleaded, unable to look her in the eyes.

"Alec, you know you can tell me anything. But fine, we can do the test first."

Izzy left, grabbed what she needed to draw blood and brought it back to her room, where Alec stayed waiting for her. No one was working at the lab at this time but to be safe they decided not to let anyone know the sample was his, should anyone be nosy.

She was instinctively careful with him, even though neither of them was a stranger to much worse things than a simple needle. When she was done, she took the vial and before leaving again she told him it would be okay.

He didn't move from her room, finding comfort in his sister's scent. He curled up on her bed and pulled the bed cover over himself. He waited.

Not sure how much time has passed (must have be hours), he only stirred when she came back and sat up to talk. Isabelle closed the door behind her, sat down beside him and took his hand again.

"How did it happen?" She asked. Nothing else, just that question. Her fingers were warm where they tangled with his.

Alec sat up straighter, pulled his knees to his chest and wrapped his left arm around them. He didn't let go of her hand.

"Two weeks ago, do you remember the patrol that turned into a hunt? You were in the back alley with Emily, Jace was chasing the demon towards you and I was on the roof." All that was easy for him to talk about, it was in the report anyway.

"Yeah, it was a success…"

"When I was on the roof… I thought you were drawing in all the demons with all the noise you were making. And I had my runes activated, I thought I was safe and should just watch Jace's back. But I wasn't safe." He had to pause, then collected himself enough to continue. "The demon was a shapeshifter, looked human. Attacked me from behind and then slammed me down. I hit the back of my head so hard I think it knocked me out for some time… My head was ringing, my vision was swimming and I couldn't think, I could barely remember where I was or what my name was and I couldn't move… it was too late to defend myself. It was stronger than its human appearance suggested."

Izzy was squeezing his hand, probably subconsciously. Her expression was pained. But she said nothing, letting him get it out.

"It couldn't take more than a few minutes… It hurt… After, it didn't want to kill me or hurt me worse… just left. I still… couldn't move. Until I heard you guys below, I think you were killing the last of your demons. So I picked myself up, used my Iratze. When we met I told you-"
"That a demon ran past you, you hit your head." She finished his sentence, remembering that night. Her voice was strained when she spoke.

"I had to say something since I wasn't all healed yet and Jace could tell something had happened."

"So if nothing came out of it," she asked gently, "you would never have told me it happened at all?"

"Yeah. That was the plan."

"Alec…" She moved closer, close enough to wrap both her arms around him, press herself to her omega brother. He didn't fight the hug, leaned into it, let Izzy's scent and perfume envelop him. She was radiating distress for him, but even so he wished they could just stay like that.

"What do you want to do now? I'll help you with whatever you decide. If you don't want to keep it, I'll go with you to mundane clinic."

"I don't know yet. I don't know what I need to do."

"If you keep it, we'll help you with everything, me and Jace."

Her fingers moved up from his back to his hair, began petting him in slow strokes.

"Thanks, Izzy."

"Are you blaming yourself for it? Because if you are…"

"Iz…"

"Alec, you were attacked."

"And I failed to watch my surroundings and protect myself like I was trained to."

"Because you were watching out for us, like always. But we weren't there to do the same for you."

Her eyes were dry and burning because she wanted to cry but felt she had no right to when he wasn't crying. He'd been so quiet these past two weeks, so tense. He'd snap at her and at Jace, and at other Shadowhunters for the smallest transgressions, he'd stay up much longer than necessary, working, or he'd retire too early and despite that reemerge hours later with dark shadows under his eyes. And now she knew why and she couldn't bear the truth of what he'd been going through while she and Jace went about their lives as usual.

"Will you tell Jace?" The simple question made him tense but he didn't pull away. It was easier for Alec to talk while they weren't seeing each other faces anyway.

"I can't… I- just can't."

"He'll know if you keep it."

"I know."

It was much different to tell her than to tell Jace. He just couldn't even imagine it. Mostly because of their genders, it was much more mortifying to him to admit to having been raped to a male alpha. There was also the little fact that he felt more for Jace than just sibling love and while that feeling didn't affect Jace, it made Alec more ashamed of himself.
That night he slept in Isabelle's room, wrapped up in her blankets while she was his big spoon. At least that night he didn't wake up to a feeling of dread overcoming him as it used to when he was sleeping alone.

* * *

- about 10 months ago, the NY Institute –

(One month along)

He kept the child. As the one month mark passed, his scent began to shift. It was the point where he could no longer pretend everything was normal. No one caught up immediately, since it was subtle and unless one was familiar with the scent of a pregnant omega, it was not easy to guess. Especially not when it was Alec whose scent was changing.

But his parents knew. They came in from Idris one day and they spent some time discussing official matters with him, and they knew.

From there it all went to hell.

With his voice shaking, he informed them he'd made his decision to keep little being that was growing inside him. He didn't mention how many times he'd debated with himself, changing his mind every night until he knew what was the right answer for him. He didn't mention the nightmares he had.

At first they were mortified for him, and even sympathetic. When they finally realized he was being serious about not planning to 'fix' his problem, they changed how they talked to him. It all became about convincing him to get rid of it before everyone could recognize he smelled of pregnancy and he could no longer pretend he was still a perfectly fine candidate for marriage.

One evening he was walking along a corridor and he overheard a conversation carried in raised voices. He located the door it was coming from behind, the office, and he crept closer only to realize he was hearing his family arguing. Izzy and Jace, and their parents. They were arguing about him. That was when he knew that Jace knew. Whether he realized it on his own just like their parents had, or whether Izzy told him, it didn't matter. What mattered was that he was speaking for Alec, just like Isabelle, against Robert and Maryse.

Alec couldn't really hear the details through the solid wood door and he didn't care to. Just knowing they were there, discussing him, made his heart rate go up and his lungs feel tight. He left.

Later that night Jace came to his room and without saying anything, pulled Alec into a hug. He held on until Alec sagged into him and let out a ragged breath. They were just like that for a long time, neither prepared to talk but both craving the reassurance of close contact. Eventually, Jace spoke.

"Is it still out there?"

Alec stiffened in his hold, the small hairs on the back of his neck rising.

"I just mean," Jace continues, "I want to find and kill it myself. Or find it so you can kill it."
In the end his parents pulled out the heavy artillery on him. They told him to go to the office one day and there he found people he hadn't seen before, who must have come from Alicante.

They were dressed officially and even their faces looked like they meant business. One older white man, an alpha, and the younger black man, a beta. The younger one at least welcomed Alec with a smile, though the omega couldn't quite read its sincerity. It was as if they were about to be friends, brought together by solving Alec's problem. The alpha man wore a neutral expression when Alec entered. Alec kept his face carefully blank.

They introduced themselves, Edward Montclaire and Victor Aldertree.

"Alexander Lightwood." The alpha, Montclaire began after Alec took his seat, opposite of them. "We're here to discuss your conduct."

It was nice that he held back on calling it 'misconduct' right away, Alec thought.

"You disapprove of my decision to remain pregnant outside of mated union."

"With a demon's spawn."

Alec shifted in the chair, then chided himself for it internally.

"It's a child. A warlock, but not a demon."

"A warlock wielding demonic magic which, when it manifests itself, will be a danger to its surroundings. Who will answer for it when it's uncontrollable?"

"Of course I'd take full responsibility for my child. His or her education and training."

"Alexander-" The beta, Aldertree started speaking.

"Alec." He corrected him automatically.

"Alec," the beta agreed. "You were raped and we recognize it was not your fault. We'd wish it on no one. We're hoping you will choose to stay with your people, instead of bringing an outsider among us, who you have no obligations to."

Alec leaned forward in the chair.

"Then recognize that it's not the child's fault either. I'm willing to keep it despite everything and I'm willing to do everything in my power to raise it well and responsibly. Among the Shadowhunters and if need be, with Silent Brothers' guidance. It cannot be an outsider while raised among us from the very first day."

"You can't possibly believe it's acceptable." The alpha said sternly, unmoving as he had been from the start. "It'd be one thing to dally with a warlock, be offered a mating bond by them. You were used by a demon and you're doing what it wanted from you. You already made a mistake by not being prepared to prevent it."

Alec's face heated. He meant contraception. Alec didn't point out he was a virgin, not having any opportunities in sight to fall into bed with anyone and even if those opportunities were around, he was too focused on his work and too interested in having a proper mate over romances that he wouldn't have taken them.

"Our community doesn't need you to bring demonic taint into it." The alpha continued. "It also
doesn't need a show of questionable sense of duty."

"My sense of duty-" Alec started but was interrupted.

"A single father omega wasted on raising one half-demon child is not what is *right.*"

"Can you not see the advantages this would give us? Not having to rely on true outsider warlocks to maintain our wards, for example."

He hated having to present the child like an asset but if that'd help his case, then he'd talk like this.

Alec did his best to be respectful and try to convince them to see his point. But they talked in circles and he was not getting anywhere. He wanted them to understand he was not being contrary, he was not being willfully obtuse to their arguments. He was not a hormonal omega. Well, he was but he hadn't lost his mind and logic.

The longer they were there the more Alec saw the beta man was supposed to be the "good cop" here. He'd add something into the conversation that smoothed the other man's words and he was much kinder to Alec but ultimately he was not on Alec's side.

It hurt. It hurt it was so easy to make him the bad guy, the one completely in the wrong. The alpha must have also wanted to put him in his place, below him on the dynamics ladder and below him as a Shadowhunter, a mere son of Heads of the Institute.

Alec had been reprimanded a few times before by his parents and he hated it every time but he could handle it. This was different. He could deal with their words but not with the consequences and not with what they expected him to do.

Yes, Alec recognized his mistake in waiting and overthinking instead of stopping the pregnancy the second he knew it started. But he did overthink it and here he was, unable to reconsider his decision at this point. He didn't want to think of ending it now but these men talked to him just like his parents had. That it was early, that he wouldn't even notice the difference. But he would, he'd know the difference.

At one point one sentence from the alpha, vague but suggestive, made Alec realize they might be considering telling him to get out if he wanted to keep the half-demon. It wasn't said directly but he read between the words. The mere suggestion might have worked on someone else, on an omega more fearful than Alec.

They were not here to hear him out. They were here to "handle him". Alec gradually tuned them out. The alpha probably didn't mind him looking down, somewhere at the surface of the desk between them. He probably thought Alec was listening and starting to agree. Meanwhile, Alec heard white noise in his head. His fingers tightened on the chair's armrests, his blood felt cold where it ran inside him.

It was like a switch had been flipped inside him. In that moment he understood there was only him and his child against everyone else. He could be thrown out for carrying a tainted child or he could bend to their demands and be a disgraced omega, childless and settling for the first mate who'd take him.

He knew his decision and they could all go to hell.

"I resign." He spoke up, interrupting the alpha, who nearly gasped at such rudeness. "Take my
runes, I won't be a Shadowhunter anymore."

"That's a little too dramatic," Aldertree was a little startled by Alec's declaration. He clearly wasn't thinking it would go that far.

"You're the ones being dramatic." Alec snapped. "You can't even consider letting me have this child."

"Because it won't be one of us. It'll have no place here and no purpose other than tainting you with demon blood. You are one of us, Alexander."

"No, I don't want to be."

"You're willing to go very far for this. It might be better if you do leave, if that's your true character."

"Yes, that's the truest part of me you'll see." Alec said and stood up. "Unless you want to arrest me right now, I'd rather go to my room and prepare to leave."

They let him go.

His mother caught up to him while he was shaking and only wishing to be in his room. He didn't know where she was during the past hour and he didn't know if she found time to speak to the men and then find him. He would have preferred not to even see her but she was already there and he could not evade her.

"Alec, please stop this." She made a move to touch his arm but he stepped back.

"Do you really want me to?" He snapped at her too. "Will you even be able to look at me the same if I get rid of it and forget it? Will I still be better than Izzy and Jace?"

"Of course, that'll be best for you-"

"Go on and tell me, if you're so ready to have me 'go back to normal', have you already made adjustments to your list of mate candidates? Crossed out all the top choices who for sure won't touch me now? Let me see it, let me see for myself how much I'm worth to you now."

Her eyes were wide and Alec didn't really care he was scaring her with the bitterness he spoke with to her.

"Alec. That's not the only reason why you're making a mistake!"

"I'm a Lightwood, mom. I made my choices and I'll accept the consequences. If you wanted a quiet omega son you should have raised yourself one. That's not me anymore. Maybe it was never me and I'm just seeing it now. I just needed something worth saying no to you for."

He left her in the corridor, nearly ran to his room and locked himself in. He dropped on the bed, breathing hard. What was he doing? What had he done?

"It's okay," he whispers to himself and to the child which he can't even feel yet. "It's okay, we'll do it, we'll be fine."

He would have ran right then, sneaked out, if they tried to force him to have an abortion but if they were asking him to leave, he could do that. He could still run, with his runes, but then they'd have strong reason to pursue him and that would be incredibly dangerous to his life. It'd be better to be
banished and then left alone.

It was a risk, he knew. He'd never seen anyone stripped of their runes and he didn't know how that worked. It might hurt him enough to hurt the child but he had to hope it would not be that bad.

Curled on his bed, still shaking, Alec could only hope it would be all right.

* *

It was terrible. They did it to him in the end, took his runes and he didn't fight it. Afterward he was left alone to recover before they sent him away.

He lay on a sort of stone bed, on too thin fabric between himself and the stone, trembling and clutching at his side where his last rune was left. It felt to him like Jace was hurt. And he might have really been. After all, he'd have tried to defend Alec, wouldn't he? He hoped his siblings weren't making their lives more difficult because of him. He wanted them to stay here, to be Shadowhunters. There was nothing to gain from them joining him and he'd feel safer knowing they were always out there, the best hunters on patrols. He hadn't seen them between the hearing and now and he hadn't tried to. It was too scary to think of seeing them, maybe thinking too much of what he was losing and maybe changing his mind.

A Silent Brother came to tell him it was time to leave. Alec found a black duffle bag by the door waiting for him, which contained his clothes and a wad of money on top wrapped in a letter written in Hodge's handwriting, telling him to stay safe and be smart, and apologizing for not being able to do more.

With all that, Alec left.

* * *

- about 5 months ago, New York –

(5 months along)

It was nearing evening when he was walking down a street when a dizzy spell hit him. It was not the first time and probably not the last, since it was not unusual to have these moments of weakness when pregnant. He found himself a place to sit down, which happened to be a bus stop bench.

The last of sun's light still brightened the sky to the west but it wasn't even visible much due to the height of buildings surrounding him.

He leaned back to rest his head on the ad-covered glass of the stop shelter and closed his eyes. His bag rested between his feet on the ground. Putting his hand on his stomach, now more obvious than ever, he rubbed slow circles on his shirt. 'We're fine, baby' he though as he took slow deliberate breaths and waited to feel better.

He hated being weak but he didn't blame it on his pregnancy, it just made him uneasy to be so vulnerable to possible attack. And with those dizzy spells it weighed more on him when he sold his blood. He was careful about the amount but he wasn't his own medical professional, he couldn't be sure of what was natural and what was his own fault.

He should rent himself a room for that night, he just didn't want to stand up and go anywhere once he sat down. The evening was pleasant and the night wasn't going to be chilly either, he could stay
outside as he'd done before, if only he found an appropriate place.

Resting on the bench, he lost track of time. Evening rolled in completely, taking the last of the day's light and giving street lamps' artificial light in exchange.

A car rolled by at one point and Alec didn't think about it until it reversed on the mostly empty street and stopped in front of his bus stop. It was a silver sedan and that was about all Alec knew about cars. There was only one man inside it, the driver, and he leaned over the passenger's seat to be able speak to Alec through the rolled-down window.

"Nothing stops here after eight, you know that, right?"

He didn't, but he also wasn't waiting for a bus. So he simply nodded.

"I'm just… resting my legs, I'm fine."

It wasn't enough to make the man go away. Alec tensed when he heard the engine turn off and the man started to get out. Alec briefly considered running away. He had a pocket knife that was probably also from Hodge on the inside his jacket and if need be, he'd have defended himself with that but he really didn't want to have to do it in the first place.

The man from the car was probably in his late thirties or maybe forties, handsome enough, dark facial hair to go with the dark curls on his head.

As he came closer, the stranger could better see Alec's state and his expression changed from the way it was carefully neutral before. His reaction confused Alec in turn.

Slowly, the other man reached inside his own jacket and pulled out what looked like a wallet. Great, Alec thought. Take me for a prostitute who doesn't even know how to use protection.

But it wasn't money the other man wanted to impress him with. It was his NYPD badge.

Even Alec's tired brain caught up to what just happened here. The man had eyed his black duffle bag when he came out of the car. Being taken for an idiot drug dealer would have been just what Alec needed but then, thankfully, his bigger stomach made the cop change his assumptions right away.

"Are you feeling okay? Do you need to get anywhere?"

"No, I just had to sit down, happens sometimes. Thank you, I'll go in a moment."

"Look, at this hour it might be better if I drive you home."

It would not have be better. Alec didn't want to protest too much and make himself suspicious again but he also didn't have other ideas how to make the man go away. The cop patiently watched him, then relaxed his stance more.

"I'm Alaric." He offered his name. "I'm a detective, I was just on my way to my night shift and I noticed you here alone."

Alec hesitated, then decided not to share his own name even if it was somewhat rude. He hoped the man, who was a beta, would not take offense. Instead Alec said, "All right."

He got up, grabbed his bag. He'd just say the name of the last hostel he stayed in and either really go in or wait for the car to drive away after dropping him off.
On the way there Alec told Alaric he wasn't from around here, didn't have a home in New York and he'd been staying in motels and such. He told the man the name of a real place he'd been at once and they went there. However, Alaric didn't stop the car at the front door, just slowed down while scrutinizing the building through the window. Before Alec could even think of getting out, he took them away from that street.

"It was the right place." Alec said, confused.

"Yeah, and I don't like it. This whole neighborhood is not what anyone should like, but you might not know it if you're new."

"So what, if I can't afford a nice place you won't let me go?"

"Look, I'll take you to the station, think about a better solution there."

This wasn't good. Alec wasn't panicking yet because he knew he was being taken for an abuse victim in the cop's mind. He knew how he looked—solitary, pregnant omega with one duffle bag sitting in the streets after dusk. And the scarf Alec wore to cover the scar on his throat might have as well been covering bruises from a beating. The man might have even believed he wasn't from New York, having ran away into a big city to disappear in the local crowd. He wished he could have lied about the place he stayed at but he couldn't think of any besides those he really knew.

They arrived at a station in a part of the city Alec wasn't very familiar with. Alaric opened the door for him and led him inside. Instinctively, Alec looked down when he was among alphas and betas who additionally had law on their side. He only noticed three people on his way in and it was probably to be expected at this time. Alaric led him across the building until they reached what appeared to be a break room. There was a brown faux-leather couch and a table with chairs, a coffee machine and a variety of mismatched mugs drying next to it on a cupboard.

"Would you like anything to drink?"

Alec had his own bottled water but he was unwilling to waste it when he could get something new here.

"Can I have tea?"

"Sure."

He got his tea, all the while waiting for bad news to come. What the cop was trying to achieve here, Alec didn't know. He held his still too hot tea and watched Alaric look through the contents of the small fridge in the corner of the room. The detective took out an unopened cup of peach yogurt and set it in front of Alec on the table, with a spoon. The omega didn't ask why there was a woman's name and a "don't touch!" hand-written on a piece of white tape stuck to the lid.

"Please, now just wait here a moment and don't leave the room."

"Sure."

Alec thought but didn't promise that out loud. He stayed alone with his hot tea and someone's appropriated yogurt, which he opened because he actually wanted it. He finished both and by then he was still alone and his bladder was telling him to do find a restroom.

Peeking out the break room's door, he looked around if anyone was there and to see if he could spot a restroom nearby. It was, in fact, right next door in the same corridor. Since he wasn't about to ask anyone if he could use it he walked right in, relieved himself, washed his hands and face and went back to the other room. Still no one had showed up to talk to him or to even see if he was there. They'd probably know he hadn't left because to walk out the front door he'd have to pass by
two people but there were windows here in the back that he could use if he was in the mood to climb them while five months pregnant. He was not in such mood.

He was, however, hungry. After fifteen more minutes passed, he stood up from the chair and went to investigate the other contents of the fridge. The yogurt was nice and he'd have appreciated something else tasting like peaches but no more cups stood in the fridge. A homemade chicken salad looked good to him and from the enthusiastic kicks he was experiencing from the baby he was carrying, the very idea of the salad sounded good to both of them. There was a good amount of it in there too, so if he scooped out a bit the owner would still have something to eat. He got second thoughts about stealing when he opened the plastic container but it was too late by then. He smelled the salad and he wanted it.

After scooping out some into his empty yogurt cup, he sat himself down on the couch which was much more comfortable than the chairs and ate slowly. From time to time he set the cup aside to put his hands on his stomach and just felt the baby move.

He hadn't thought of a name yet. That is, he had thought but was nowhere near a decision, or even top five choices, especially since he didn't know the gender. It didn't matter to him what it was going to be. Just as with a pure Nephilim child, both a girl and a boy would be taught to fight and to be strong and good. He thought he'd like a girl to hopefully raise her to be like Izzy, smart and independent. And he'd also like a son because it was a bit intimidating to think of having a daughter when he was more familiar with a boy's life.

Spending his time thinking and eating, Alec started to believe the cop, Alaric, had forgotten about him. The man wasn't obligated to inform Alec that something important like maybe his work happened and he couldn't spend his time dealing with an omega he picked up in the city but it'd have been nice to know what he was supposed to do. Maybe this was all what the man imagined to do with him. Tell him to stay put in a safe place, at least until morning.

He could try to walk out, since he wasn't arrested... but he didn't particularly want to. He couldn't be any safer than among police officers, he had a roof over his head, access to a couch, sink and toilet. What was the difference between here and a ratty hostel room? It was late by now and the thought of heading out when he couldn't afford to waste what little money he had on a cab made him shiver. Technically, he did have the money but he'd been saving majority of it for the future and spending the rest on food. He was very aware that out of all the things that required money, proper nutrients were not what he could save on. After the child was born he could eat less.

Eventually he lay down on his side on the couch, with his knees bent a little and his jacket spread over his side and arms like a tiny blanket. The mixed scents of stranger alphas and betas no longer irritated him and he could even tell some omegas worked here as well, though their scents took up little space.

The overhead lights annoyed him but he didn't turn them off. It was better to try and sleep with them on than risk being blinded when someone would inevitably come into the breakroom and light them.

Then, he slept.
sleeping. He could tell the difference between old and fresh scents and there were several fresh ones.

Same as before, he sneaked into the restroom but this time when he came back, there was a man waiting for him in the breakroom. An alpha, a black man in regular clothes instead of uniform so he was probably a detective like the one who had brought him in last night.

An awkward silence filled the room as they watched each other. Alec wasn't sure what to say because telling a cop 'good morning' in his own station, in his own breakroom didn't sound right. The other man was surprised to see Alec, even though he was clearly waiting for him because when Alec entered he was standing in the middle of the room, not doing anything.

He stepped forward first, reaching out to Alec.

"Luke Garroway." He introduced himself. He had a steady, warm voice that would have put anyone at ease. It must have been useful in his work. Alec even didn't even mind his scent. It wasn't as overwhelming as some alphas liked their scents to be.

"Alec." He answered simply, which was more than he'd offered last night.

"So, Alec. My friend Alaric has told me about you."

"I doubt he had much to say, other than where he found me."

"That is true, we don't know anything about you. Except, do you remember talking with him last night?"

"I… did not talk with him." Alec replies, confused. "He left me here and told me to stay, so I did."

"You don't remember him coming in later? He tried asking you something and you weren't really cooperative since he tried to wake you instead of waiting until morning. But you did tell him, and I quote, 'I know mundane laws and I didn't break any. You can't keep me here.'"

Alec paled. He very much didn't remember any of that but if he had been too sleepy to be properly lucid and sleep-talked… What if it was something he did, just no one ever caught him sleeptalking before?

"What other laws do you know?" Luke asks him. "Not vampire ones, for obvious reasons. And you don't smell like a werewolf to me."

"I'm just a man." Alec says quickly.

"Running from what? Look, Alaric only brought you here because he was worried. You looked like someone running from an ex or bad family. As far as we know, you really didn't break any laws so you're not being detained. But we can help you."

Alec crossed his arms. "I've been alone so far, I can manage."

"You don't have to manage."

Meeting his eyes, Alec could read nothing but sincerity there and he really, really wanted to believe it was so easy to get help in his situation with no strings attached.

"We don't want to hear two days from now, a week from now, that we're being called to a body in an alley and it's you, when we could have done something about it."
Alec sighed. He also didn't want to end up dead but he didn't appreciate the alpha bringing up the worst case scenario just to scare him into agreeing to anything the man wanted to suggest. He really, really didn't want them to put him in any kind of mundane support system. He was aware that omega shelters existed but he couldn't bear the thought of staying in one. It was probably great help for the others but he'd never have fit in there. What could he talk about with the mundanes? He couldn't truly understand being beaten by one's mate or making a teenage mistake, or being widowed suddenly. He could maybe talk about how family can disappoint you. More importantly, he'd have to disappear anyway just to not let anyone see a baby born with demonic mark on them.

He didn't realize he was spiraling into mild panic attack until he was enveloped in an aura, a scent that he didn't even feel was building up. It was the alpha calming him and it worked. It was a bit of a smothering sensation, done so quickly without trying too much to be subtle but it didn't scare him.

He wanted to trust this man and he couldn't come up with a reason not to.

"Are you a werewolf?" He asked then, since when the man had said the word earlier it sounded like he was very familiar with it.

"I am. And I can help you within our world. No mundane needs to know about you." He paused. "It would be easier for me if I knew who you were."

Alec put his hand on his stomach. It could be a mistake, the man could just be very good at lying. Ten reasons not to trust circled in Alec's head but the alpha was very good at being convincing and nonthreatening when he wanted to.

"I'm a- I was- a Shadowhunter." He admitted finally, regretting it as he spoke the words but he couldn't take them back.

Luke's eyes widened in pure surprise. Alec knew how unlikely sight he was, how rare of an anomaly. The werewolf probably didn't even know what to do with him now.

"I'm glad we've met, Alec." Luke told him then and Alec believed him.

* * *

- Now, the Loft -

Alec and Magnus are sprawled on the new couch that Magnus insisted they absolutely needed and which they shopped for earlier that day. Alec admits that it's much more appreciated by his legs when he can stretch them out on the pull-out piece of the furniture rather than trying keep them from falling off of the fancy colorful footrests which Magnus collects like puppies. They're like on a wide bed.

They're eating mozzarella balls straight out of the container they bought it in and Magnus sips on some colorful drink that he made for himself and that Alec declined.

It's a quiet evening. Max went through a bad mood earlier after they got the couch home and that bad mood left Alec with a headache of his own but eventually the boy calmed down, accepted his evening bottle and after prolonged book reading and a few attempts at singing by Alec, he fell asleep.

After they were alone, Alec and Magnus have been watching a musical that was technically
impressive but ultimately boring to Alec and so he ends up listening to Magnus's story that he randomly remembered because of one scenes, or so he claims. Magnus is being his expressive self, making grand gestures at appropriate times and making Alec huff or roll his eyes. Still, the omega is smiling, in love with Magnus's vibrant way of being.

At some point the TV goes dark at a snap of Magnus's fingers even though the remote is right there within reach. Alec should be sleeping when the babies are sleeping but he doesn't want to leave where he is. He's comfortable, warm, in the presence of a man he wants to spend his time with.

He lies down on his side, arms wrapped around himself. Magnus mirrors him on the other side of the couch.

"Your eyes are closing on their own." Magnus points out with a smile.

"Mhmm."

There are still two or three pieces of mozzarella left in the container and last two cherry tomatoes on the tea plate between them. Somehow they both get the thought to finish them and their hands meet in the middle, fingers crashing. The alpha chuckles but Alec uses the opportunity to intercept his hand. In his sleepy state the shine of the rings draws his attention. Magnus lets him pull at his hand so that his arm is reaching across the space between them.

Now that he's holding it, Alec takes the advantage and nuzzles his hand. These small and rare displays of omegan affection never fail to make Magnus's breath catch. Especially when Alec moves to his wrist next, rubbing Magnus's scent on his cheek.
A busy week

Chapter Summary

Today: how to give your parabatai emotional whiplash. Next up: probably some plot.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the tragic delay! I work now and it steals my time but it also threw me off my rhythm and mood at first so I don't think it'll take this long the next time. I'll do my best to be quicker about it.
As always, I hope I edited everything that was supposed to be edited and that I left no mistakes.

The day Alec is told that Clary was back in the Institute and that Izzy got the package, his heart works a little faster all through the day. A kind of anticipation buzzes under his skin even though there's no follow-up to be expected unless he meets with Clary and asks her about how it went.

When the evening of that day comes and Alec is at his desk with the door to his room closed and his sons sleeping, he closes his eyes. He needs to be careful and patient. What he's doing is testing the parabatai bond. He needs to spy a little at first, find out if he can tell what's happening on the other end of the connection. What he's looking for is a hint of intensity. If his brother is in a patrol, if he's in a fight, then Alec should be able to guess it's happening and he'd back off for now since his meddling would be the opposite of a good idea. The last thing he wants is to surprise Jace in the worst possible moment.

There's pretty much nothing to feel, no second-hand rush of adrenaline, no pain, no anger. Jace might even be sleeping but it's unlikely at this hour.

Alec stands up from the chair and shrugs off Magnus's robe. Just in his sleeping t-shirt and sweat pants, he climbs into bed and lies on his back.

His heart is almost pounding in the silence of the late evening. Placing his hand over his rune, Alec closes his eyes and breathes slowly. There is no path that his thoughts could follow to reach Jace and the bond is not a telepathic link. But he can do something. He focuses on the thought of them together, on Jace, on where he might be in the Institute. He imagines himself there instead of at Magnus's loft.

It goes like that for a time, just this intense focusing, before he attempts to convey what he wants Jace to get. He thinks, I'm calm, I'm not in need. I'm safe.

There is a man I love. There is a man who loves my children.
I'm... almost happy.

Thinking all of that makes Alec warm inside because he already knew this but reminding himself
of those little facts doesn't get old. Repeating them to himself in his head makes them even more real.

He grounds himself in his bed, surrounded by the safe walls of his room filled with his furniture. He listens to the night, the same way it is every day. The faintest sounds of traffic through closed windows, his own breathing, a plane in late flight in the distance, circling above the city before it can land.

He breathes in the smells of the bedding warmed by his body, the hint of the fabric softener he uses for washing drifting in from the half-open bathroom door because he forgot to screw the lid back on. The twin scents of his baby sons. The scent of his nest.

This is what he meant to give to Jace. Hopefully his brother will understand Alec doesn't want to be tracked just because he's giving life back to their bond. It was smothered before, rejected by Alec as much as he could reject it through the force of his will, after he'd pushed back at Jace's stubborn tracking months ago, until he got the message and stopped the tracking.

After that their continued physical separation helped putting the connection to sleep. It would never disappear without one of them dying, though, so now Alec can use it to reassure Jace – and himself.

It's like sending thoughts into air or a void, hoping they will make enough of an echo to be noticed.

Reaching out doesn't feel like making a mistake to Alec. It feels like the start of making up for one made before. He wishes there was a way to get more out of the bond but all there is left is to hope that without the necessity born in a fight or from one of them injured, the bond will be enough to bring Alec's emotions to his parabatai.

* * *

Two days later Alec finds himself pacing the floor of the loft. He's having a déjà vu, like the day when Magnus wasn't answering his phone and returned late after meeting his warlock friend. Once again Alec hates that he has no way of sending fire messages. They're not limited by the placement of cellphone towers or sender's knowledge of the recipient's whereabouts. But then again, Magnus could send one to him and he hasn't done that so far so he probably wouldn't have answered one from Alec anyway.

Alec moves around the flat in aimless restlessness, only finding clear tasks to complete when his children need him and beyond that he feels useless.

He knew this would happen eventually. That if he gave up the power coming from his place in Shadowhunter society and from his runes, he'd eventually be left with no way to act when something happened to other people. Not that he knows anything happened to Magnus. And maybe he's overthinking this. Magnus has his work and he's not called on often but when he is, it's important. He is, after all, the High Warlock of Brooklyn. Whatever it is that he was called to do, it might be taking up all of his attention and it'll be safer for everyone if he just focuses on that. Hell, Alec doesn't even know if Magnus is currently on the same continent.

It would have been different in the Institute. If it was Jace or Isabelle not answering, then Alec would at least have known their mission parameters, would have another person to call since there would have been a team, or he would have been there himself in the same place as part of that team. It isn't like that with Magnus.

Alec gets information about the day and the time he'll be leaving and roughly when he'll be back.
Most of the time he's back right on time, which Alec greatly appreciates. But sometimes even Magnus can't predict the future or how his appointment will go and that leaves Alec increasingly worried and frustrated. He's not Magnus's teammate or his secretary, or even a member of warlock society. The only way he could keep track - to an extent - would be through a mated bond, which they don't have.

Magnus comes home magically worn out. The sensation attached to it is uncomfortable, like not being full enough or whole enough. He isn't physically exhausted because he wasn't doing physical work but his skin tingles unpleasantly and he just wants to sleep through it until he's recovered. Exhaustion of the mind spreads to the body and he's overall not happy.

Stepping from the portal into the loft he tugs at his collar to loosen it and then pushes his coat off his shoulders before dropping himself on the nearest piece of furniture meant for sitting. He nearly moans at how good it is to lean back and put his feet up and not think.

Unsurprisingly, quiet steps coming from his left announce Alexander's presence almost immediately.

"Are you all right?" The omega asks him.

He must have stopped behind Magnus because the next thing the warlock feels are fingers touching his shoulders, as if Alec's checking his physical presence.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just a long day."

"No experiments?" A tentative question.

Magnus chuckles at that. "No, Alexander. No experiments. I simply spent more magic than I expected I would have to spend."

"What can I do?"

"You don't need to do anything. I'll have it all back in the morning."

He knows very well Alec is still hovering. The intensity which Alec can sometimes put behind his gaze is almost like tangible thing. Magnus tilts his head back to catch sight of Alec but he's walking away, leaving Magnus to wonder where he's going. He fully believes Alexander will be back to hover twice as hard soon enough.

He's gone longer than the alpha expects and Magnus is almost dozing off by the time a cup is thrust in front of his face, presented like it's a threat as much as an offering.

"Drink this." Alec says as if there could be anything else Magnus could think of doing with the cup. He takes it from Alec's hand and sniffs it first. He recognizes some ingredients in it so he knows this is a potion, not herbal concoction. Wondering how offended Alec would be if he questioned his creation, Magnus takes a sip and then another. He knows what it is, then. A potion specifically made without the use of spells because it's meant for warlock recovery. It makes perfect sense the omega would have learned it as one of his chosen potions, though this one's much more advanced compared to the first notes Magnus had seen him make from his books.

Magnus drinks while Alec watches him like a hawk, which eventually makes the warlock set the cup aside and tug at the edge of Alec's shirt, drawing him closer again. Reluctantly, Alec moves and Magnus catches his fingers into his.
"You know the effects are not instantaneous, darling."

"But is it doing anything?"

"You've done a lot, I assure you."

Alec doesn't quite accept the answer as it is. Magnus calmly returns his gaze, then relents. "Honestly, it'll take a while and since I want to be asleep soon, I won't be able to tell you just how well it worked. However, I'm certain my sleep will be much better when I'm not completely spent."

During the silence that follows, Alec is reading him for honesty. Then, he says, "All right."

Magnus doesn't tell Alec that just his proximity is helping greatly with his headache. Some omegas fight the label of caretakers and they turn to any occupation or hobby which is considered 'not suitable' for omegas or they take a long time looking for partners who will accept them as they are so they don't have to fight the stereotype. But the truth is they are built to be caretakers. Regardless of their personality, their biology makes them always suited to soothe others. The effects increase with the relationships they're in, peaking at Bonded mates. Even as they are now, not yet mates, Alec's lovely scent does wonders for Magnus's wellbeing. The alpha only doesn't tell him that because he knows the omega will take it for a deflection of his original question about what he can do for Magnus.

Magnus takes the cup again and lifts the cup like in a toast. "I'll finish it, I promise. You don't have to watch me."

Alec sighs but does go away to get ready for bed. He doesn't say goodnight because he means to be back in the living room again but when he returns, he finds the empty cup set aside and Magnus asleep on the couch with a pillow under his head.

* 

Magnus spends the night on the couch for more than one reason, the most obvious one being convenience coming from the fact he was already there. Next reason, Alec didn't insist that he move. And finally, their faint mingled scents served better to put him to sleep than his own bed would have.

He wakes up to sunlight and to a swaddled baby lying in the empty space beside him, cradled by two pillows to keep him from rolling. Magnus is on his side, tangled inelegantly in a thick wool throw which keeps him warm. There are more pillows than he had last night and the throw wasn't on him when he was falling asleep. Comfortable as he is, Magnus watches the boy and thinks.

In the past he'd only wake up on the couch or in the armchair if he took the partying too far the previous night so this is something new. He's not hangover and in fact he's feeling quite fine. To have the thrum of magical energy back under his skin and ready to use at his fingertips is great. Being depleted is not a pleasant state but it's good to sometimes be reminded there are things that should not be taken for granted. He celebrates the occasion by conjuring light balls to float over Jon's head to amuse him.

He doesn't have to look up to know where Alec is. It's enough to listen to where Max's babbling is coming from and it seems it's somewhere around the kitchen isle. He assumes the omega has filled his morning with making food because he can smell the aroma of it. Magnus doesn't stay lying on the couch, getting up instead and bringing order to the pillows and the throw he used. He leaves the baby as he is, just makes his magic lights longer-lasting.
He could go shower and change, he has all the time he needs for it, but somehow it feels like standing under the shower would be a waste of the morning. Tendrils of magic envelop him at his command, replacing his old clothes with a new set that he chose quickly- honey-brown loose shirt with gold trimmings and soft black pants.

Alec isn't in the kitchen area, like Magnus had thought. He's actually on the stretch of empty floor between the kitchen and the recreational part with armchairs, coffee table and the couch. He's down on his back and he's doing sit-ups, pushing the rocking crib in which Max sits on every repeat. It's a sight Magnus wouldn't mind waking up to every day because Alec is lovely and all the black and grey he wears works to make the lines of his body more graceful.

Magnus walks closer, stands and waits, taking advantage of the sight. Alec must be counting in his head because he does seven more reps before stopping and pushing himself up. Only when they're face to face does he acknowledge Magnus, saying good morning with a smile which Magnus returns. He takes note of the once-over Alec gives him but the omega says nothing in reference to last night.

They move together to the table by the window from where Alec can keep an eye on both the crib and the couch. Magnus moves all they need for breakfast to the table with a snap of his fingers, ignoring Alec's pointed look.

"What you were doing yesterday," Alec begins speaking when they sit down, "was it important?"

"For the clients, yes. Quite important."

"Was it dangerous?"

"The spell? Not at all, but it's the same as making a physical item: the more effort you put in, the better quality it is in the end and lasts longer. I'll have you know I haven't gotten a bad review since nineteen ninety-two." He jokes but Alec only hums thoughtfully.

He asks some more related questions which the warlock answers much in the same vein – that is, not seriously – until he realizes that Alec is asking because he wants to know this, not because he's making conversation and that realization almost makes Magnus smack himself mentally.

He's aware the ex-Shadowhunter is bored. He's aware that Alec might not miss the danger and the fighting but he must miss things happening of a little more importance than choosing new foodstuffs for Max or what to do on a quiet evening.

Talking about theory of magic and stories from Magnus's past is not the same as making Alec feel included in Magnus's work. So Magnus immediately changes the way he talks, from light hearted attempt to lessen the importance of his work to actual details. He didn't mean to be dismissive, he only wanted Alexander to worry less, which apparently is the opposite of what the omega wants from him.

"I performed a complex concealing spell for Seelies who seek to live in the mundane world instead of as their Queen's subjects."

Alec's eyes widen at that.

"Yes," Magnus continues. "It's not something that happens often in Her court. And their heritage is considerably more difficult to hide in the city than yours." He pauses, then keeps speaking. "Which reminds me I never told you."

"What?"
"You have a little protective spell on you, too. It's imbued in Blueberry's pendant. You could say it's a mirror of a kind to prevent tracking. I haven't told you because for one I considered it a minor addition and two, back then I wasn't sure of your reaction. I didn't know great many things about you."

"Oh. That's fine. Thank you."

"I'm telling you now because it'll deflect Shadowhunter tracking and there might be a time when you wouldn't mind being found by some of them."

Alec nods, understanding. "I'd rather have it still work, for now."

He turns the topic back to where they started. "How dangerous is the Seelie Queen?"

"She's cunning and while in some ways she's predictable, in others she's a completely wild force. I suppose you could say a force of Nature, only with agenda that works differently from truly neutral nature."

"How dangerous is she to you?"

"Well, since she's not going to find out about any of what I did, not at all. I assure you, it was very thorough work I've done, hence my lack of magic yesterday."

Magnus can clearly see Alec is processing the new information, probably connecting it with Shadowhunters' knowledge of the Seelies.

"My clients didn't come to me because I am the High Warlock." Magnus continues, "They came because they knew I could complete what they need. It didn't stand in opposition to what I believe in, so I did it."

"I wish I knew about you like Downworlders do." Alec says.

"What do you mean?"

"Just… I wish I knew it was an option to ask you for help. I was doing everything to stay under the radar, and even then I failed. The vampires used me so I used them too. Alaric almost literally ran into me by accident and Luke had to make me accept help. I had thought I'd have to protect myself from all Downworlders because of what I was- am. Regardless of a warlock child. And Seelies, too, with their offer of sanctuary with unknown terms and conditions."

"And warlocks?"

Alec shrugs. "Without the database I didn't even know where to find one. And like I said, I didn't consider it an option to ask about the High Warlock. I might as well ask the mundane president, right? Even if I wanted to and knew where to find you, not having money to pay you would have stopped me."

Magnus nods because he understands all that but bringing up Alec's life between banishment and when he found him is a sore point for the alpha.

"And I regret not paying attention to Pandemonium's surroundings until it was pointed out to me you were there. But I believe that's no longer something to dwell on, not anymore. You shouldn't think less of yourself for not having all the right answers."

"And you can't be expected to know everything about everyone just because they're near-" Alec
pauses and a smile brightens his face. "Even though you like to act like you do know everything..."

Magnus shakes his head fondly and refills their plates via magic just because he knows it'll annoy Alec seeing him do magic without 'reason'.

"If you're happy now," Magnus says, "and if you feel safe-"

"I am and I do." Alec assures him quickly.

"#

In the evening Alec opens the front door of the loft to a pair of Seelie women because he was the one closest to do it when they knocked. He can see what these women are despite their completely mundane clothes; there's just something about their faces and hair that makes them very much not mundane. Then he notices a pale vine pattern on one of them and it's all the confirmation he needs.

They're beautiful and their very presence fools Alec's senses into thinking he's breathing fresh air from an open meadow. Even with all that, a woman's charms never did anything for Alec so he doesn't let the beauty and the charm affect him longer than a few seconds.

"Did you have an appointment with the High Warlock?" He asks neutrally.

"Not for today, no, but-"

"Then please make one. He's not going to see you on such short notice." He would have reacted differently if he saw an emergency like a wounded client but there's nothing that appears to be urgent about these two.

"Yes, about that." The Seelie to his right says. "We've come to pay."

"Ah."

Before Alec can tell them exactly what he thinks about the previous day, Magnus shows up beside him. He's the one with better manners, inviting the Seelies to step inside instead of standing outside in the corridor. He closes the door behind them and Alec takes the opportunity to speak before Magnus has a chance to.

"You've used the High Warlock's services and let him become weakened."

"But we didn't use him. We're paying the amount we've all agreed on for services we've also agreed on."

"That's true-" Magnus tries to bring this strange conflict to an end but Alec isn't having it. From the second Magnus joined them at the door he could sense the omega's feathers were ruffled.

"You let him spend even more on top of what he did for you to portal home in that state."

"What else could we do?" The Seelies are confused at this point but not willing to be rude or argumentative when standing in the house of the High Warlock and one angry omega who may not smell like it but appears to be said High Warlock's omega. "We weren't in what you could call a secure place to offer him room for the night."

"Alexander." Magnus puts his hand on Alec's arm to get his attention. "I would rather use the last bit I had to get home and rest here than keep my energy anywhere else."
Alec meets Magnus's gaze only for a short while before turning his head back to the Seelies. "Then you should have lent him energy. You're Seelies, I'm sure you have plenty to spare between the two of you."

The women exchange glances.

Alec is glaring a storm at them, his arms crossed on his chest.

"They did not need to do anything like that." Magnus says. "I'll accept my payment now and we can all return to what we were doing." All the while he talks has to keep himself from smiling at Alec's behavior.

Staying quiet now, Alec takes a step back and to the side. He says nothing for the remainder of the Seelies' visit, which is very short because there's nothing left but the payment. They give Magnus a satchel with contents unknown to Alec and they leave, saying their goodbyes. Magnus wishes them luck.

Once the doors behind them close, Magnus turns to Alec.

"Alexander, I'm deeply touched by how you've come to my defense."

"You're mocking me."

"No, I'm not. Maybe a little." Magnus can't help being amused even though he knows that annoys Alec.

"Energy sharing is something that's possible but not quite something that's done. People aren't batteries to be used and there's a level of intimacy to it that makes it a special case every time."

"But we've done it." Alec says stubbornly. "And I would have done it again."

"Yes, we have, because we were saving a woman's life. And because we trust each other. So with you I might do it again if there comes a day it's needed. But it wasn't needed yesterday."

Alec closes his eyes briefly and breathes out slowly.

"Fine. You were okay. I overreacted. I'm sorry."

Magnus reaches out to put his hand on Alec's arm.

"Like I said, I'm touched. And there is nothing for you to be sorry about. If you want to make it up to me... agree to have a dinner with me sometime soon."

Alec begins to form an answer that they have dinners together all the time and Magnus must predict that answer because he silences Alec with one finger touching Alec's lips.

"We'll leave the boys with Catarina or Dot and I'll take you somewhere very nice. We'll have dinner, maybe take a walk somewhere interesting. Or just somewhere quiet."

"That sounds... good."

"That's a yes?"

"Yes."

***
Alec and Simon cross the street and continue on their way along a row of shops and then some garages. Alec still isn't sure how it happens that he keeps running into the mundane or why Maia and Bat are hanging out with him. Because that's what's happening: the young werewolves invite Simon and sometimes Alec at the same time, except they don't tell Alec about it. So he ends up hanging out with the other omega as well, regardless of his thoughts on it and since he doesn't dislike Simon, he chooses to stay when they trick him like that.

Today they've spent an hour at The Jade Wolf celebrating the solving and closing of a case that had been causing Luke and Alaric sleepless nights for three weeks. The celebration was basically a meeting with food as the main attraction instead of drinks since it was happening in the middle of the day but it was fun enough, especially since it was happening because of a job well done. This one 'party' Alec came to willingly.

Alec and Simon left together and Maia didn't walk with them because she had other things to complete that day on a tight schedule.

They get as far as two blocks away from the werewolf restaurant before Simon speaks. "Please tell me I'm being paranoid and that we're not actually being followed."

"We're being followed." Alec replies immediately.

"I hate it when you're like this." Simon complains.

Simon keeps his eyes down watching the sidewalk under his feet but Alec walks confidently, focusing his senses to decide what to do. There is an overpass ahead of them that also has a sidewalk on it and a set of stairs for pedestrians to reach it. The stairs start six meters or so from their path and there's some bushes and a dirty ice-cream kiosk that's closed out of season.

The overpass is not where they meant to go but Alec turns in that direction, making Simon stop abruptly to catch up to him when Alec gives him no warning he was going to do turn.

"What now?"

"This is a good place to see who's behind us." Alec replies, stopping a bit off to the side so he's not immediately visible from the road they were originally walking along.

"Are you serious?" Simon stands in the middle of the path to the stairs so Alec pulls him closer by his arm but Simon keeps talking. "What about just going on our way sounds like a bad idea to you?"

He is of course right that they'd probably be able to keep going and stay safe so long as they kept to the street where they're visible to other passers-by. But it really doesn't sit well with Alec to go home knowing he was being followed and not know why and by whom.

He remembers perfectly what had happened the last time he thought he was safe during daytime but they're not anywhere close to Hotel Dumort right now and he has some faith that Magnus's intervention will stop anything like that from happening again any time soon.

He has an idea who it might be (besides a perfectly mundane mugger hoping to find an easy target in a pair of omegas) but he's not sure of it and he needs to be sure. So now they're both near the stairs and slightly off to the side between the kiosk and the bushes and Simon really wants to be anywhere else but there.
Alec is standing straight, waiting, his expression neutral but his body tense. A man comes into view, heading for the stairs where he must have seen them go. He shows surprise only for a second, probably because he wasn't expecting them to stand there, facing him.

Alec very vaguely recognizes the man's face so that confirms he's seen him before among the werewolves. Not today or last month—before, when Luke was facing trouble for bringing Alec among the pack. He's not the ex-alpha but he must have been (and probably is) among his loyal followers who had agreed there was no room for anyone but werewolves in the pack and the Jade Wolf. This man is an alpha too, not a small one, and Alec's mind is already running ahead to prepare for the possible outcomes of this encounter.

They stare at each other, everyone trying to guess each other's intentions and the next move.

"What do you want?" Alec asks, his voice showing irritation, not concern.

"You've spent enough time with our people." The werewolf says. "It's time you stayed in your place instead of messing up our relations. You were bad enough, but you had to bring a new one too. A mundane, too."

Simon is really, really not happy being looked at this way, with so much disdain. Even worse, it's personal, not like in passing or in a crowd.

"You should thank us for making the place smell better." Alec tells the werewolf. "More omegas would only be a benefit to so many alphas crammed in one place."

"We have our own omegas, so you mind your own business."

"We're being invited to come, unlike you and the rest of you, along with your alpha. How about you go ask the pack about this instead of coming after the two of us."

"No, I think I have the right idea. I don't know what you've told them or what tricks you use as omegas to make others dance to your tune but not everyone's weak to you."

"Oh, well then, thanks for not coming after me when I was pregnant, you had that much decency. But if you think I'm an easy target to bully now, you're wrong. If I were the only reason for why you and your Alpha were told to pack up I might apologize for it but you don't get to blame a single pregnant omega for a series of bad leadership choices. I was only the last straw and you should go back home and sit and think about it."

"No, who I'm blaming is a Shadowhunter bitch."

"Great. The one time you can't resent the Shadowhunters for something, you go and do just that."

It's not going to end peacefully after this and everyone presents knows it.

Alec can deal with this. The other man won't shift in this area and it'll be much easier to defend himself against a werewolf in human form than it'd be against a vampire. There's also the matter of what he intends to do. Alec's convinced the alpha would never go as far as kill or maim him, not when he's an omega that the other werewolves actually know and at least two thirds of them accepted his presence even if they don't care to like him. This man might hate his Nephilim blood but he surely doesn't want to lose any support he still has by seriously injuring an omega.

On top of that, Alec is fully willing to fight. There's a part of him that misses the thrill of a hunt and while he's never been violent, it is a part of his nature.
Simon protests immediately but Alec's decided at this point. He puts his arm out without looking back and gives the other omega a little push to stay behind him.

"Stand back." Alec orders Simon who complies right away.

The alpha doesn't move until Alec's body language makes it clear he's looking to fight too. At that point they both move closer.

Alec wonders if the ex-Alpha put this man up to this but maybe not. He probably would have showed himself instead of sending an underling.

The alpha is the first to move to attack, of course. His intent seems to be to grab at Alec, who evades him, skipping back. At the next try he allows the other man to move closer because that in turn allows Alec to kick at his leg, throwing him off balance successfully. Alec throws his own punch, which lands, but with the alpha bigger and stronger than he is, a single hit is only the beginning. From there there's a lot more evading from Alec and looking for openings for his attacks, which frustratingly don't come as often as he'd like.

Alec has been focusing on defense most of the time when in the gym. Partly because his coach pushed him to be better at it and partly because Alec's priorities are not the same since his shadow hunting time. It used to be all about getting the mission completed with success, now it's about being smart and getting home in one piece where his family is waiting.

Avoiding this particular fight would be an example of being safe but it wouldn't be entirely smart to avoid an unknown, potential threat. A threat that he now understands and is willing to get a few bruises to get his point across. Alec can't afford antagonizing the pack but he certainly can beat this one up.

Alec spares a thought for his coach- what would he think about Alec right now, enjoying the challenge? Maybe he wouldn't actually mind, since real life practice is always required to be good at anything. And no one has to know Alec has a failsafe on him: his blade, unseen in his pocket in its inactive form. He hopes, and doubts, that he'll have to touch it unless he makes a mistake in the fight first.

He doesn't want this to end in blood, his or otherwise.

Meanwhile Simon is both hoping and afraid of someone calling the cops on them. Hoping because they'd break up the fight and leave him out of deciding against Alec's wishes, and afraid because of the mess it would add on top of it particularly since it's not like Luke could magically teleport there and take over.

Several minutes into the fight Alec's face isn't particularly happy with him for the two bruises he carries now on his left cheek. His left wrist aches from the third punch he managed to block before throwing his own, this time managing to make the alpha stagger back. The man's now tired from trying to catch or hit Alec when he dances away, seeing the attack coming. Alec is a little tired too, but he's also the one more determined and probably the one more enjoying the fight.

At one point it gets worse before it gets better. The alpha manages to throw Alec off balance, making it impossible for Alec to escape the following attempt to grab him and they both go down, the alpha moving his hand to Alec's throat. On his back, with the other man looming over him, Alec wants to crawl out of his skin when the werewolf's fingers press too close to the scent and bonding glands on his neck.

He's not panicking yet. His coach had made him escape chokeholds so many times he at one point
wanted to quit practice altogether, so frustrated with the scenarios that made him uncomfortable and mildly humiliated by suggesting possible future rape attempts that he’d have to learn to escape. Of course, life likes to prove everything is versatile. Alec gathers energy, twists at just the right angle and kicks out with his right foot, pushing the alpha off of him and then quickly scoots backwards and rolls onto his front to push himself up. He can't pause to catch a breath now.

Angered by the alpha's attempt to hold him down, he attacks with more ferocity. He swipes his leg out under the alpha's and then pushes the man to make sure he falls.

This, Alec thinks, is the right time to end this. He doesn't want to become so tired he makes a mistake he'll regret, both for his sake and the other man's. He hopes the werewolf saw by now that he can't make Alec submit to his order to leave the pack and hopefully letting some steam off will help rather than make the man plan revenge.

Reaching into his inner pocket, Alec rushes to pull out his blade before the alpha can try to get back up.

Predictably, the man flinches when the blade glows and activates, and Alec can point it at his face. "Let it go." The omega says, his words separated by gasping breaths. "I've got nothing against you. Leave us the fuck alone and we won't even mention to anyone this ever happened."

He isn't getting any reply.

"Sort out your business with the pack, not us. Or make your own, I don't care. Just don't try this again. I'm going home with bruises so I hope that makes you happy."

His hand with the blade doesn't move up or down, he holds it steady a safe distance from the alpha's throat even though he could use it to get a faster response.

He looks down, the alpha glares up at him but eventually, finally, he relents. "Fine."

"Fine what?"

"Fine, I'm happy with messing up your face so whoever is fucking you won't even kiss you tonight."

Alec almost does something stupid but only almost. He stands up and takes some steps back, his eyes never leaving the other man. He keeps the sword ready, just in case.

He waits as the werewolf picks himself up and then leaves.

Simon is talking to him but Alec's mind is still buzzing with adrenaline and he's too focused on making sure his opponent actually leaves.

"Hey, are you okay?"

"Uh… I think." Alec needs a moment to switch back to 'normal' state. He looks around himself. There are tracks left by their boots in the dust covering the cracked concrete of the sidewalk. There is a smudge in the mud on the ice-cream kiosk where the alpha had pushed Alec onto the wall. Alec’s clothes are dirty in multiple places and he's starting to feel each and every point on his body where he was hit.

"Just so you know," Simon gets his attention, "you don't look that bad."
"How bad, then?"

At first Simon makes a vague gesture at where Alec feels his bruises but then the younger man takes out his phone and opens the camera app, turning the phone to Alec so he can look at himself. He cringes. It really isn't that bad, especially since he never took a hit to the nose so he avoided the mess that comes with nosebleeds but his lip is bloody instead and one side of his face is the color of a very fresh bruise. His hair's a mess and his face is overall showing signs of exertion.

"Are we calling a cab or Uber, or something now?"

"Yeah." Alec agrees. "Yeah, let's do that."

*A*

Alec walks up the stairs to the loft. He was dropped off first, leaving Simon in the car to go to his own home. The mundane omega kept glancing at him, as did their driver in the back mirror, worry in his eyes. Alec knew Simon was disappointed with him for going through with street fighting but Alec still believes he made the right choice there. And it all ended well, didn't it?

His split lip keeps bothering him and he knows it must be still bleeding every time he accidentally makes it move because he feels the sting from the injury. He cleaned up before but now he's just hoping to use proper sink instead of dry tissues and a bit of water from a bottle the surprisingly nice driver offered him.

He's not lucky or fast enough to sneak through to his bathroom to wash his face because Magnus is standing in clear view of the front door and he turns around to Alec when he enters. His eyes widen, he drops the book he has in his hands and walks to Alec.

"I'm fine. It's just this." Alec quickly waves at where he feels his bruises are. "You should see the other guy."

Magnus doesn't look amused at all. He touches Alec's face and a pulse of magic takes away the aches and the throbbing from the bruised flesh. Then his fingers move to Alec's lower lip and gently heal the cut.

"Much better." Alec says but Magnus isn't taking his hand away yet.

"What happened?"

Alec hesitates, which Magnus notices. There would be nothing good coming out of Magnus becoming angry at the werewolves and Alec doesn't want to tell him all about it. At the same time, he can't exactly lie and he hasn't thought about a story to tell while he was getting home. Magnus narrows his eyes at him.

"I had a point to make and I made it. Not very sophisticated but… Like said, I won."

"Good." Magnus says and that's all but the expression on his face tells Alec he has a lot more thoughts on this and is probably figuring out where to start.

Magnus looks down, takes Alec's wrists gently and raises them to look at them better. Fabric of Alec's sleeves slides lower with the movement and the alpha sucks a breath in at the sight. The left wrist bears obvious finger-shaped bruises. The right hand, wrist and some skin above it were scraped on the concrete when Alec was thrown down and are now still dirty and slightly bloodied.

"I was with Simon. He would have let you know if I needed help."
Alec doesn't know that when Magnus looks at his damaged wrists his imagination pushes an image to the forefront of his mind- an image of Alec and the demon. It's not how that had happened, the demon hadn't been holding him down like that and so Alec doesn't associate his new bruises with the night he was raped and right now he doesn't know that the alpha is thinking about it.

Silently, Magnus heals both limbs and then sends out magic to other places that need a little push to heal. There isn't much and nothing serious. Since there's nothing left for his magic to fix, his fingers hover indecisively, the alpha's mind telling him he's not doing enough. He watches Alec's face, taking it in to replace the memory of when he walked in only minutes ago.

"If you're still worried…" Alec says to clear the tense silence, "you could kiss it better."

They haven't looked away from each other so Alec sees every change on Magnus's face. He sees the way his cat eyes widen at his suggestion, then a sort of determination takes over other emotions on his face.

"I think I will." The alpha says.

He holds Alec's gaze while he moves in, closing the distance between their bodies and their lips. It starts simple, as they both have imagined it would. Touch of lips on lips, simple enjoyment of this new contact. A pause, where they separate just the smallest bit, both processing the moment.

Then Magnus kisses Alec again, this time harder, closer and the omega's lips part, allowing the kiss to transform into something deeper. Alec's hands fist in Magnus's shirt and he'll feel no remorse for wrinkling it. Magnus has his hand on Alec's face, cupping his cheek.

They part again, neither as composed as they were after the first chaste kiss. Alec's face is flushed and his eyes are on the collar of Magnus's shirt but they're unfocused. His body, already confused by the sudden magical lack of pain, is humming from within.

"Did it help?" He asks, his voice low.

"I don't know, you tell me." Magnus replies. His thumb is still caressing Alec's cheek and the omega leans into his hand.

"It did something." Alec bites his lower lip, a half-nervous, half-subconscious action. "I like when you use magic near me. I like it when you touch me."

"I love to touch you." Magnus tells him. "To have your scent around me."

"Can we do it again?"

"Kiss?" Magnus is grinning now, giddy with happiness.

"Yes. That."

Magnus is tempted to keep using words, such as 'yes, we can kiss' but instead he replies by doing it.

Alec gasps into the kiss when Magnus, without warning, magicks his coat off.

"I'm sorry. I didn't want it on you anymore. It smelled of someone else." He tells Alec, who lowers his eyes. Magnus moves his fingers from Alec's cheek to his chin to tilt his head back up so he can look him in the eyes.
"Did you really kick his ass?"

"Yeah. You can ask Simon about it. By the Angel, I hope he wasn't taking pictures since I forbade him doing anything else."

"My ferocious Nephilim."

It's said in teasing but instead of irritation, warmth fills Alec. More warmth, since being kissed multiple times in a row warmed him plenty already. He wants Magnus to never stop touching him, to never move away and put distance between them again.

Magnus must want the same, staying right there, touching Alec.

They would have remained stupidly content to linger by the front door if it wasn't for one hungry crying baby calling his parents' attention.

"I think he'll want to see you now." Magnus says cheerfully. "Dinner for us is on me today. What would you like?"

"Surprise me." Alec throws him the answer while already moving to where his sons are, looking back over his shoulder at the alpha.
Rainbow before the storm

Chapter Summary

Today: happy, soft and sad, sometimes all at the same time. Next up: maybe a new point of view, or two. Probably a continuation of the important conversation.

Chapter Notes

I didn't rush writing but I did rush editing so as usual I'm sorry for any mistakes. Other than that, pls enjoy!

Alec finds the time to follow up on the woman and the warlock girl he's seen two times in the park. He stands in front of the large building and its thick door, waiting for his ringing to be answered. The brick building towers above him, making him wonder what exactly is housed in it.

Alec is eventually welcomed by, and let inside, by the woman he was expecting to see today. He learns her name, which is Iris, and he also learns she is a doctor and the clinic which he stands inside is her own. The inside of the building looks like a home. It's a bit dark at the entrance, with no windows, just doors and stairs. The side room he's invited to sit in is bright and nice. It has all a guest could want- old-fashioned armchairs, a little table, even paintings.

Since he's the one visiting, it's Alec to explain why came knocking. He mentions the day he met the little girl, Madzie, and mentions having warlock child himself, hoping he's not going to cause trouble to Madzie for having been too friendly with strangers in the park when her caretaker hadn't been nearby.

Alec mentions having one warlock child because two of those would raise questions when they're not twins and he owes explanations to no one. The woman seems interested in his situation, that's for certain. She asks some questions and is respectful when it comes to how his child came to be. She doesn't ask him outright and doesn't need anything else from him than the statement that it 'wasn't planned'. Of course he's pretending, by omission, to be a mundane. She doesn't call him out on the lie so Alec assumes he's safe.

She asks if there's already evidence of magic and about warlock marks. For some reason Alec isn't exactly comfortable discussing that with her, even though she is a warlock too.

What he wants to learn through this visit? He's not quite sure. He's certainly interested in knowing about warlock children for the future when his own sons should have playmates, just like Mundane children go to preschool and like Nephilim children grow around each other, learn and train together.

They have discussed this briefly with Magnus and yes, he does know warlocks who are raising children but they're already older so before Max and Jon are big enough to appreciate more friends they'll be too big of an age difference between them.
"He's too young for interaction with other children," Alec says, "but I was wondering about the future."

"I assume you mean learning magic and seeing other warlocks like them?"

Alec nods.

"It is a tragedy there's so little of us, with so many gone in the Uprising or abandoned to death as children."

Alec nods again.

"There's a place for orphan warlock children but you wouldn't be allowed there. Other option is to find warlocks who have children under their care in the city and arrange with them to meet. So I suppose you did succeed at that."

Alec waits to see what else she has to say.

"You're saying you plan to raise your son," she pauses, "but if you find yourself in need of help, or find the task is too much…"

"I'm not giving up my son," he shakes his head, "no matter how difficult life might be." Especially not to you, he thinks. Although he understands why she'd say it, he doesn't like it.

"That's good. But it will be difficult when he has magic on top of just having Downworlder blood."

"Which is why I'm not sitting at home twiddling my thumbs."

"You're searching for answers before you have questions, which is smart- "

She means to continue her sentence but is interrupted by the sound of a very brief knock and then the door opening. Alec turns to look and doesn't see anyone at first because he assumed an adult was walking in. He lowers his gaze and sees the girl, the one with braids which aren't there now, leaving her hair in a halo of curls.

Madzie looks to Iris first, then to Alec. When he smiles at her and says 'Hello', she ducks her head and replies to his greeting quietly.

Then Iris is asking her what's going on and Madzie tells her aunt Anna isn't feeling well.

"I'll be right there, you can go wait with her."

Iris then turns to Alec, who's already standing up, seeing his time is up.

"I'm sure you understand," she says in way of apology. "This wasn't a scheduled meeting and I am quite busy with my patients."

"Yes, of course. Thank you for the time you did spare for me."

"Well, you may come again, discuss the future of the warlocks." She tells him while she leads him back to the front door.

"Thank you."

Alec steps out of the building and down the stairs to the sidewalk. He's not quite sure what to think. Something is off about this woman and despite her politeness he doesn't like her. Maybe it's his
Shadowhunter instinct or just omega intuition but he would go so far as to call her shady without having anything tangible to back that opinion up.

"Alexander." Magnus welcomes him with a smile when Alec gets home. "Come with me to Japan."

Alec pauses with one shoe off, one still on his foot while he's bowed over it. He looks up at the alpha and is immediately distracted by the shirt Magnus is wearing, showing a sliver of his bare chest down the middle.

"What?"

"I've received an invitation to a show prepared by my long-time acquaintance and it'd be rude not to attend when she's been mentioning wanting to do one since 1960s."

"What do you need me for?" Alec unties the other shoe and puts both neatly next to the others in their place on the shoe shelf.

"To be my plus one, naturally." Magnus hands the printed invitation to Alec, who peers down at it. It's nice cardstock in shades of purple with white rectangle in the middle with black text filling it. It invites Magnus Bane and his companion to a specified place on a specified date (tomorrow) to attend something that sounds like a day-long fashion event.

"I'm not sure-"

"It'll only take half an hour for us. We only need to be there for her part."

"But if you want to attend more of it," Alec protests, "you shouldn't have to adjust your day to me."

"I don't need or particularly want to see more than one set. After it's done we can go to a place more to your liking."

"You must have someone who'd love to be invited there instead of me."

"I'm asking you because you're the one I'm courting. I promise we'll only stay for her part and won't linger after."

Alec is still tempted to dig his heels in and stay home but what reason does he really have not to go? He's not afraid of other people. He likes to avoid strangers to avoid hassle and problems strangers tend to bring but other than that, what does he lose by being by Magnus's side when the alpha is asking him to be there? He might be bored for an hour and that's all.

"Well then. Fine, we can go together."

"Great!"

Magnus tells Alec a little more about the woman. He doesn't call her a friend but explains to Alec she was a business partner through several months in the past. Still, they were friendly with each other and when she sent out an invitation to a show, for Magnus Bane and his companion, he didn't think of one reason not to show up. It's not like Alec's schedule is so busy he needs to know such things in advance (the only exception being his gym training) but still Magnus apologizes to him.
for springing it on him at the last moment. The warlock explains he honestly forgot he had the invitation until it literally fell out of one book into his lap while he was handling it.

They go to bed early to get some sleep before leaving in the middle of the night to Japan because they'll be arriving in the middle of the day on the other side of the world. The change will be jarring but this time they're only there for a short visit and won't have the time to experience an equivalent of a jet lag.

Alec is, predictably, having second thoughts. He's awake, standing in his bedroom, all dressed up except for shoes and socks, looking at himself in the mirror. What is he thinking imagining he can act casual among fashion people? So right before they are supposed to leave Alec is almost ready to decline and stay home, until Magnus walks out of his room also all dressed up. Alec's mouth, which he opened to speak, stays open and no sound comes out. Magnus looks... he takes Alec's breath away.

There's a whole galaxy on Magnus's dark blue shirt and his dark silver jacket is like the cover of a storm cloud, equally captivating and dangerous. Right now it's mostly dangerous for the omega's breathing. The blue eyeliner around Magnus's eyes, not glamoured, make him otherworldly. Above the eyeliner there's splash of eyeshadow in what Alec would call peach gold. Or is it rose gold?

Alec knows he can't stay home now. He can't let Magnus go alone looking like that. They don't fit each other, outfit-wise. Alec's pitch-black matte suit is so much toned down in comparison. The dress shirt he's wearing is admittedly much more than Alec was initially willing to agree to wear; it's full of small, green and yellow flowers on a black background, creating a dense pattern contrasting with the black. He doesn't hate it. He has no jewelry – unlike Magnus – except for a watch on his left wrist.

Right before they pass through the already active portal Magnus puts his hands in Alec's hair and runs his fingers through it, messing it up. Alec startles at first because what the hell? Then he simultaneously leans into the fleeting touch and tries to swat at Magnus's hands. Only when he tries to protest again does the warlock step back, grinning at Alec and pushes him through the portal. Being on a street on the other side, Alec can't exactly put his hair back like it was without looking strange to possible passers-by and Magnus gets his way. His black strands stay mussed up in a way that leaves them half-intended, half an effortless natural mess. Magnus is quite proud of what he did in just a few seconds after a spur of the moment decision. Skin of his fingertips still remembers how soft Alec's hair was.

The day goes as planned: they arrive at the venue, Magnus meets the creator of the show, introduces Alec to her, they only talk for a brief time because she's busy and they part ways, Magnus turning his full attention back to Alexander at his side.

For Alec, this is the first time they're together where he's named and recognized to be Magnus's partner. All the other times, in and outside of New York, they simply let strangers assume they were a family because it was the simplest way to act natural and it benefitted them in various ways. Now though, with them actively wanting to be mates, Alec's no longer hoping for the fantasy and for the lying to strangers to be the truth. He is living the truth.

He still has a hard time believing he deserves to be at the side of Magnus Bane but he's beginning to get used to it. He knows he looks good enough in the black fitted suit and the dress shirt with
Alec enjoys the looks other people give Magnus and he enjoys having his beautiful alpha pulling their attention like a magnet. Not that Alec is ignorant of the looks he himself gets, but those he easily ignores. He's used to being in the background, to be the less interesting person in the room. He finds that when he's like that with Magnus, it doesn't sting as it used to.

Once they're all seated and the whole thing starts Alec's much happier. Even though his interest in the fashion show playing in front of him is almost non-existent, he wouldn't call it a waste of time when Magnus's hand is on his where it's resting on Alec's knee almost the entire time and Magnus glances at him every once in a while to see his reaction to one thing or another.

There is one particular item that catches and holds Alec's attention as the model who wears it makes his way along the designated path in front of the audience. The jacket, Alec thinks, is something that wouldn't be out of place in Magnus's wardrobe and its colors and shape would probably look great on the alpha.

Alec's gaze shifts between the model and Magnus until the warlock asks him what he's thinking.

"You should get this one." Alec tells him.

"Oh? You like it?"

"You don't?"

"No, no, I do. Good choice, darling." Magnus squeezes his hand in reassurance. He is wearing a bracelet on his left hand that's made of elegant, thin chain. From that chain begin three more lines of chains that meet at the ring Magnus is wearing on his middle finger. When he moves his hand, the chains move, slipping off Magnus's fingers and touching Alec's skin. Alec's senses are near to overloaded.

During the rest of the fashion show Magnus returns the favor of pointing out items he'd like to see Alec wear.

They leave right after the set's end, avoiding mingling with the guests afterwards. There was an after-party planned that Magnus would have attended had it happened before he met Alexander, if only for the food and cocktails. Today, though, he loses nothing by leaving early. Because of the event's schedule it's not late yet and there's still some sunlight brightening the city. They go for a walk, leaving the more crowded and modern part of the city in favor of finding a place to sit or just keep walking in the pink and orange light of the sunset.

Magnus notices a shop which reminds him that he has some ingredients he's almost running out of so he tells Alec he'll step inside for a few minutes. Alec remains outside because the air is nice and there is a shrine nearby that he prefers to look at rather than enter strange-looking store that he assumes is owned by a warlock or at least a human involved in the local Shadow World.

When Magnus walks back out into the street it takes him a moment to locate Alec. It's certainly not a difficult feat to spot a tall man who doesn't quite fit his surroundings but he's farther away than
the alpha expected to see him waiting. Magnus thought he'd be looking at the old buildings on the street but he's actually talking to two people. Too far to hear them, Magnus guesses by body language alone that the teenager in a blue jacket is translating for Alec who's talking to an older man. They're right in front of a wooden stand, one of the few that line the way to the shrine among the trees in the background.

Magnus begins walking towards them at a leisurely pace and before he reaches them, Alec's done talking. Magnus doesn't know if the omega was approached first or if he approached the stand out of curiosity but he appears to have bought something that he put in the inner pocket of his jacket.

"All done?" They both ask at the same time and share a grin.

"Do you want to head home?" Magnus asks next and Alec nods. "I know where to open a portal unnoticed."

He takes Alec's hand and the omega follows.

Back home the sky is still black and there's several hours of the night left. They will be getting more sleep after the unusual trip to a different time. First, however, Magnus pulls Alec close to him for a kiss goodnight, that become two kisses. Then one last chaste peck on the lips.

Alec lays alone in his bed, replaying in his head what little he saw of Japan in the short time they visited and then he thinks of Spain, of the permanent portals between Institutes and Idris, and tries to wrap his mind (not for the first time) around the power Magnus has in his hands. It's amazing. Impressive. Useful.

It sends Alec's mind spinning to think about what Magnus could do beyond what Alec already knows for a fact he's capable of and done in the past.

There's no fear associated with it now, no suspicion. Alec is a Shadowhunter in mind and soul, even if he has lost some of the heart he'd put in it all his life. With Iris, he didn't feel the same way he does around Catarina or Dorothea.

He was supposed to ask Magnus if he knew her. But he's too tired and then he manages to fall asleep and he forgets.

Alec hands the omamori to Magnus in the late morning. Magnus takes it with a bewildered expression, as if it's so unlikely that he'd receive anything or that Alec would give him anything. Alec isn't sure what's the reason but he waits nervously for Magnus to tell him it's silly that he'd buy a charm that he didn't even know existed up until several hours ago, belonging to a religion he doesn't follow. And how does its effectiveness even compare to the protection spells Magnus himself can put on items?

Of course Magnus says nothing of the sort. His fingers brush the rich red fabric of the small item. A token of affection and means of protection. Magnus is always the protector, the one with the power to do it. The one expected to do it, be it out of duty or as a paid job. He takes pride in it.

Alec shifts in front of him, reminding Magnus that he hasn't even reacted to the gift yet.

"Thank you, Alexander." He says, smiling. "I'll have it on me always."
"Please do."

**

"Is something on your mind?" Alec asks Magnus, who's sitting in the armchair with a large book in his lap but he's not turning any pages.

"Why?"

Alec adjusts squirming Jonathan in his lap while he tries to feed the boy.

"It's just, you said you forgot about the invitation and you're not one to forget things. I'm sure it's not me occupying you that much, so I wonder if something's wrong with something else?"

"Well, the Downworld is always on my mind." Magnus says at first and it could be a deflection but then he continues. "Shadowhunters have been busy. Finding and destroying blood dens, being actually useful to everyone."

"...But?"

Magnus closes his book and sets it aside.

"Camille might have been angry about it but at the same time she didn't really care when the vampires she didn't feel any loyalty to were caught by Shadowhunters. She has her own clique and I'm certain she won't be touched by the Institute's efforts. Mostly because she's not even in New York anymore."

"She isn't?"

"She has a lot more places to go to that she likes more than this city. She likes the power of being the leader but ultimately she doesn't want the position more than she wants to do her own thing, on her own terms."

"Who's leading now?"

"Raphael Santiago, who also let the Shadowhunters work because he didn't approve of illegal vampire activities. Now some people are becoming concerned, watching the Shadowhunters, waiting for them to go too far."

"What do you mean? Like pursuing innocent Downworlders?"

The expression Magnus makes a that is at once pained and difficult to read.

"Maybe not innocent but no one wants for it to end like this: after initial good record, what would you do?"

Alec frowns, confused by the turn of the sentence.

"You do a great job," Magnus keeps speaking, "you're praised for it, and then the job is mostly done. Complete. What happens then? You let your achievements become… unimpressive, of the regular daily sort? Or do you find a way to keep up by finding more work to complete?"

By finding less unforgivable crimes than bleeding out Mundanes in condemned buildings, by lowering the bar when Shadowhunter intervention is warranted.

Alec averts his gaze. He doesn't know. Magnus isn't asking about what Alec would do now; he's
asking about the Alec of the past, the one who used to be a Shadowhunter. And the current Alec isn't sure of the answer. It's not a situation he's been in. They've done good work in their Institute but they were always reacting to what was going on around. Demon sightings, feral werewolves, vampire attacks. Of course they cleared out dens as well, but in Alec's times they didn't get around to organizing a bigger operation.

The new Head of the Institute must be either very ambitious, organized and possibly came with more staff to do the work. He hopes that's the case and not that the old inhabitants of his Institute are hunting too much.

If it was Alec, if he was part of an operation like that, if he received recognition for it, praise from his parents… would he be able to stop? If it guaranteed he wouldn't fade into the background behind his alpha mate…

Magnus doesn't say anything more and Alec doesn't answer. The warlock's eyes are soft but sad when he's looking at Alec.

"I don't want to be pessimistic. However, having seen a lot, I don't have much reason to expect anything else than what happens time and time again."

Alec's shame over Nephilim history comes back to him.

As if tuning in to his father's mood, Jon coos at him, turning his big eyes up at Alec, who runs his fingers through the boy's soft hair.

"Not all Shadowhunters go through life-changing events that make them really see the other side…" Alec says softly.

And this time it's Magnus who makes a sound that's difficult for Alec to interpret. The warlock shakes his head.

"I think it was always in you."

"What?"

"You're a good man and you didn't magically become that when you were pregnant. Omegan instincts and hormones are a powerful thing, yes, but if those had influenced your decisions, you'd be suffering much more now from regret. You'd resent your child. But you don't. No matter what you thought about the Downworld before, I think you didn't have a change of heart. Just the right push to change your mind."

There's a curious expression on Magnus's face. A wistful smile.

"Imagine, if we met as what we are, in our line of work."

"I don't want to think about that." Alec answers almost immediately. "Magnus, I would have had a mate. A proper Shadowhunter mate."

"But not so soon. You would have had time until your birthday, correct?"

"Well, yes, I wanted to postpone everything until I absolutely couldn't anymore. But I would have agreed to someone. I wanted to have a career, no matter how limited. And if we met as acting Head and the High Warlock… there would be nothing between us."

There is physical distance between them- Alec perched on a barstool where he can reach for Jon's
bottle on the kitchen counter and Magnus sitting in his red armchair. Magnus's words make Alec feel the distance like it's a void of what-ifs and what-of-nots.

"I think – I believe – we would see in each other what we're seeing now." Magnus continues softly. "What I see before me."

Alec's chest is tight with regret, brought up by discussing the past but at the same time his heart is pounding from the way Magnus is looking at him.

"I have received a letter from the current Head of the New York Institute."

Alec straightens up, surprised. It's a change of mood. "You have?"

"Yes, regarding the wards."

"When are you going?"

"Oh, I haven't decided yet. I might let them wait for me a bit. I was waiting for a request to renew them, as it has been a while since I've last done it. Of course they're fine right now, I would never let too much time pass before going there myself, requested or not. Either way, it came quite late, which I imagine was caused by you and the changes in power."

"Maybe. It probably would have been my mother calling you to come if things were different."

"Maybe. Maybe it would have been you."

"And that's how you imagine us meeting? You coming to strengthen our wards?"

"Why not? I would see you and I would want to know more about you. What's hiding behind a face this pretty."

Alec shakes his head in fond exasperation while his cheeks are warming up. "You'd be a Downworlder alpha coming after a proper Nephilim omega."

Magnus's gold eyes don't look away for even a moment. "What I'm trying to say is... I don't want you because you're no longer a Shadowhunter. If you still were a part of the Conclave, if you worked as a Shadowhunter, I still would have wanted you."

Alec bites his lip.

"Following that line of thought, I haven't taken you out for the dinner yet." Magnus notes, because apparently he's fully intending to give Alec emotional whiplash tonight.

"Mhmm." The omega hums. "And whose fault is that?"

"All mine, darling."

"You know that I don't mind staying home with you?"

"And I enjoy that too, but I don't want us to become sedentary. Or bored. And I want you without distractions. A few hours, just us."

"And staff?" Alec asks thinking about a restaurant or similar place because that's what Magnus mentioned before.

Magnus makes a sound that lets Alec know he already has other plans, or an idea, that will end up
with them going somewhere else than traditional restaurant.

"What would you say about going to Europe again? We'd stay in a house, not a hotel."

"Where? Your house?"

Alec stands up from his seat once Jon makes it clear he doesn't want to eat anymore and he moves them to the couch, closer to Magnus.

"Italy, Tuscany. It's not mine. It's my old friend's, who doesn't even like Italy, never did, but he won the house and the land around it in a chess match and he'll probably never let go of it so long as the one he won it from lives."

"Let me guess, he lets you - and possibly others - stay here to remind everyone he now owns the place?"

"Exactly so. Look at you, gaining such understanding of warlocks. But I don't want to take you there so you can hear that story. I thought you might appreciate the open space for your archery practice."

"You're saying I need more practice?"

"I'm saying I want you to spread your wings a little."

Alec refrains from rolling his eyes.

* * *

They make plans and they end up going to Italy. They appear on a terrace made of stone behind the villa. Because it is a villa, not just a 'house'. What Alec sees first are the walls of the building in front of him and when he turns, there's several decorative trees mixed with rose bushes. Then, turning more to the left, he sees open space of the garden and some of the land surrounding the property. The terrace is empty of garden furniture because it's November and rain is expected. They arrive on a clear day and so Alec's first impression is positive. It's certainly warmer than New York, too. Magnus has promised to make them avoid rain by portalling to nearby towns and villages, and there is a lot to see.

This first day there's no plans, just staying put. Since they've agreed to separate from the boys for one day while they're under Catarina's care, Alec and Magnus have the one whole day in the villa to do what they want. Magnus gives Alec a tour of the house and its grounds and then, because the wind is mild, Alec ends up practicing shooting after all. At the same time Magnus sits in a wicker armchair that is part of the villa's furnishing and sips local wine, while watching Alec.

They talk about mundane things.

After that they have dinner, conjured by Magnus. They have wine and candles, and it's a date.

If this were anyone else but Alec, anyone less important or any of Magnus's past lovers, the stay at the villa would be looking very differently. And god, does Magnus want to come to the time when a trip like this with them alone would come with those implications.

But he doesn't want to fast-forward to it. This wait, this slow experience is good. It feels good, feels right.

It's just plain bad manners and bad etiquette to proposition a virgin omega away from their familiar
places unless they're the ones to ask first. The closer to the nest the better, although most omegas
don't actually want to have sex on the same bed they nest on.

Magnus has seen Alec's nest. It's not a full one, definitely not big compared to what Magnus has
seen other omegas he had in his life build for themselves. Seeing his things among the bedding and
baby blankets… well, Magnus hadn't had the time to process his feelings at that time because it
had happened when Jonathan had been teething and Alec had been distraught. Since that day
Magnus has seen the nest once or twice, no more, since he wasn't walking in or looking through
the door behind the omega's back. Magnus isn't sure Alec is even aware he's seen it. Maybe he
doesn't even remember Magnus picking up the boy from the bedroom for him.

Magnus could make a move of his own, could offer a piece of his clothing for Alec to add to his
nest but such an offer is supposed to come later in the courtship, not as an early gift. His sneaky
flat-mate will have to continue his practices for a little longer to fulfill his needs.

Thinking about their future is extremely satisfying and it's all too easy to lose himself in it when he
should know better. He does know better. Life has taught Magnus not to take people for granted
and not to rely on expectations, no matter how realistic they are.

So Magnus observes Alec, enjoys the time they spend alone and equally enjoys the time they
spend when there's four of them again.

On the days that rain doesn't seem to want to stop, they find another place to portal to and spend
their time in. Magnus takes them to Siena, to Florence, to a few smaller towns they read about and
find interesting.

They eat excellent food and Alec agrees to taste wines, drinking at a pace of half a glass to
Magnus's two glasses.

They add more photos of the four of them (plus one day with Dot when she decides to join them at
Magnus's invitation), to their albums. Comparing them with earlier photos it's so clear to see how
fast both Max and Jon are growing. Something warm tightens Alec's chest when he looks at the
screen of his phone. It's one thing to logically know they're growing, but another to compare picture
proof side by side and see the change in them.

Alec usually avoids taking photos of himself unless it's convenient for him to be in the shot while
the focus is on his children but he's beginning to mull over a certain idea involving photos.

The thought of seeing his family face to face and the thought of having to speak his thoughts is as
terrifying as ever but the guilt of keeping them in the dark is growing heavy. The letter he had
written was short, meant only to say the most important information. That he's safe and unharmed
and so is his son. He hadn't even mentioned Max because he didn't think it was something that
should be shared this way, but in person. Now though, when he's considering sending a photo of
Jonathan to his siblings, it doesn't seem right to him not to give them the 'full picture'.

The idea is settled in his mind for later consideration.

Even though he's content here, Alec finds himself becoming antsy being away from New York for
so long at once. He wants to give this time to Magnus and since he doesn't dislike anything about
Italy itself, he can bear a few more days before asking the alpha to take them back. There is no
reason why they couldn't spend a whole damn month anywhere in the world but a shadow hangs
over Alec, like he's supposed to complete something else before he's free.
There's also the little detail: Magnus only shows his real eyes to Alec when they're in the loft and Alec finds he misses them by the time they've been in Italy for three days.

They see more places. They always choose to carry both boys rather than push them around in a pram and they get smiles from strangers and kind looks from business owners when they prove to be no trouble with well-behaved little boys. Alec soaks in the silent approval his little family gets and nearly glows with it.

Meanwhile, while doing his own share of soaking in happy moments, Magnus never misses it when Alec stares off in the distance and stands or sits silently, deep in thought. Magnus hopes Alec will decide to take the leap and contact his siblings soon, just to take that massive weight off his chest. There's probably many things that occupy the Nephilim's head, as they have from the start of their relationship, but Magnus assumes this time the siblings are the most important matter.

Alec has been visibly happier, more relaxed and confident compared to the start. But on some recent days he's obviously weighed down and there's not a trace of that happiness to be seen. It's difficult to witness because Magnus can tell the omega isn't wallowing in self-pity, he isn't stuck in fruitless sadness.

Magnus can almost hear and see the cogs turning inside Alec's head every time his eyes become unfocused – or too focused – on a random item in front of him. He's working through something and Magnus wishes he could mind-read only to know if Alec is on the right track or if he's hurting himself by overthinking what doesn't need to be over-thought.

What Magnus can do is tap his fingers on Alec's hand where it's on the table to make him snap out of it.

"Tell me what's on your mind."

"My family." Comes the answer that's at once expected and a surprise. It's a surprise that he didn't say 'nothing' or that he was 'fine'.

"I fucked up." Alec adds bluntly.

"How?"

"I was cruel to them. I didn't ask to even see them between my trial and banishment. After that I could tell just how hurt Jace was. I was too, but I could tell I wasn't just feeling my side, his as well. It was… awful to live with it. Then, they looked for me and I did everything not to be found. Now… now I'm safer than I've ever been and yet I can't bear the thought of seeing them. I gave Clary a letter that barely explained anything and I've done it for myself, not for Izzy and Jace. I did it to make myself feel a little less guilty. But it's not really helping." His voice reaches a desperate tone at the end.

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

Magnus considers his reply carefully.
"Angel, the problem you're facing is that you've processed what had happened to you. You might be at peace with it, you even might sleep well at night, but you've never talked about it. Not with your family, not with me, nor with a professional."

Then, since Alec's not answering but he's listening, Magnus goes on.

"You can't imagine saying what hurts you out loud because you're afraid it'll change how things are for you right now, which is safe and familiar. Are you afraid anything will change for the worse if your brother and sister, or myself, know the details?"

"I don't know. It's not- not that. Not exactly. I- I don't want to fall apart. If I talk I'll relieve it and I won't be able to hold it in."

"You're allowed to." Magnus says gently. "To fall apart and grieve, and lose your cool demeanor."

Saying that, Magnus reaches out over the table, palm up and open for Alec to take if he wishes to.

"You've done that before. For slightly different reasons, maybe, but still."

Alec looks at Magnus's eyes, then down. He does put his hand on the alpha's.

"And I wasn't proud of myself afterward." Alec says.

"Because you had witnesses. But how did you feel after?"

"Better." Alec says after a long pause, so quietly it's almost a whisper.

"And where are now the people who did see you break? Simon is still your friend. And me, I'm right here."

Alec takes a shaky breath in.

"When you see and talk to your family the relief will be even stronger." Magnus finishes.
Intermission II. We need to talk about Alec

Chapter Summary

Today: I always keep adding scenes that weren't in the original outline. Next up: a party, which was in the second original outline, and which I'm sure you'll like.

Chapter Notes

I wanted to post this yesterday because it was my birthday but hey, close enough. Also please excuse the way months work in this story. I don't exactly keep track of days and I keep adding them lol. They have met at the end of September and just crossed into December in this chapter. I'm gonna get lost in my own story soon, I bet. Now please enjoy!

Alec thought that bad nights were pretty much a thing of the (recent) past but as the new weekend showed him, he was wrong.

It goes like this: he lays down to sleep after the boys are taken care of and also sleeping, which already took a lot longer than usual. He's frustrated at this point with himself for having thought he could handle this alone when Magnus has offered him assistance. But it's fine, they are all in bed eventually without bothering the warlock.

Only a couple hours later something in Alec's mind stirs and he's no longer resting. Unwillingly drifting towards consciousness, Alec rolls over, his eyes searching for baby beds automatically. All seems to be in order. No stirring babies, no crying, not even a hiccup.

And yet, what tugs at Alec's mind is restless and won't let him be. Wanting nothing more than to fall back into darkness, Alec stumbles out of his bed and shuffles out of the bedroom into the dark and silent main room. There's nothing out of order in there either. Floor is chilly under his bare feet as he makes his way through space so familiar he could navigate it blind. His head is filled with cotton, his eyes are hurting from not enough rest and his limbs are heavy but he has to go.

The tugging at his core doesn't ease up and it in fact only increases as he approaches the door to the alpha's lair. He pushes the door open and steps in.

Alec's eyes settle on the shape of the bed and the alpha on it. He shuffles further inside until he's right by the wide bed, looking down at it. This is it, the source of his unease. Alec's nose is filled with Magnus's scent, clouding his omegan mind. He's been in this room before but never right after Magnus occupied it for hours in a row, like he just did by sleeping in it. He was never here while Magnus was in it.

The alpha isn't awake and he's unharmed but the freshest hints of his scent are tainted with tension and fear and that's what registers the clearest in the omega's brain. Magnus is lying on his stomach, face turned to his left side, one arm outstretched across the mattress and his fingers curling over the edge of it. He's tangled in his satin bedding as if he were rolling in it.
Magnus isn't breathing evenly and it's rushed as if he was running rather than lying still as he is. Alec could wake him up but that's the opposite of the result he wants, isn't it? He wants the alpha to breathe slowly and sleep without fear tainting his dreams. Alec lowers himself on the floor by the bed and leans on the side of the expensive mattress. It's so nice to be supported by soft furniture.

Alec doesn't know what he's doing. He's not exactly thinking about whats and whys, he only knows he wants to sleep too and he wants the pressure on his chest gone. Since it's Magnus's scent that's not quite right, it has to mean Alec needs to be here. His fingers touch Magnus's and curl around them.

He puts his cheek on the mattress beside his and Magnus's hands and closes his eyes. He means to think about what to do but he's sleeping before he can do that.

Alec wakes up two hours later. He's being tugged at again but being near the alpha does nothing to help with that. Something else is wrong and he has to fix it.

Blinking slowly, the omega finds enough willpower to push himself up and away from the bed. His left leg twinges a bit since he was putting his weight on it while sit-sleeping but he keeps moving. Leaving the strong scent of his alpha behind is not welcome but he has to fix the tugging.

He makes the trip back through silent loft and when he's back in his own room, he reaches down to pick up squirming Max. He holds his child wrapped in a blanket and whispers soothing words at him. Running mostly on instinct has its good sides- the omega can guess what his child needs from him and it's not feeding or diaper change.

Alec takes Max into the nest with him and holds him close.

The tugging lessens eventually, same as before, and Alec sleeps.

It goes on like this for three days. Alec wakes up every time Magnus suffers from nightmares and goes to sit by his bed until one or both boys wake up crying and need him again.

Half of the reason is that it's Max's teething time. It's expected and almost overdue and the alpha and omega accept it without complaint. They have the silicone teethers and the gel, and potions, and it's not as sudden as in Jon's case. Caring for Max and Jon is something obvious and Alec knows he's capable of doing it even half-sleepwalking but he keeps waking up tired and he doesn't know why his nights are interrupted when Max doesn't need even half as much attention as Jon had needed.

He doesn't remember what happens in the first part of the night and it only gets on his nerves when Magnus wakes up each of the few days in better mood than him.

Magnus enters Catarina's home through a portal. He's holding Max to his chest and is also bringing a bag of alchemical ingredients as a gift to Catarina. She's sitting at her kitchen table, reading a book and from time to time taking a sip from a cup of tea by her right hand. She smiles and stands up to welcome her visitors, starting with praise of how much Max has grown even though it hasn't been that long since she saw him last. She takes him from Magnus's arms and then she notices the big, single front tooth that recently made an appearance in Max's mouth. His horns are coming out nicely too and the skin on his forehead isn't irritated anymore.

"Where's my other favorite magical boy?"
"Home with-" Magnus starts replying but she finishes the sentence for him.

"With his delightful father."

Magnus sits down at the table opposite of Catarina and chuckles.

"He's anything but a delight today."

"Oh?"

"Had a bad night, woke up displeased about it, then found more reasons to be displeased about. I knew he had hidden depths but when he started insulting my shoes I had to defend myself."

"By running away." Catarina bluntly says with a teasing smile.

Magnus has been teased and made fun of by his friends before but Alec's bite is on its own level. He started with telling Magnus to make his own damn coffee for once and wouldn't respond positively to Magnus's attempts at soothing him.

Magnus has woken up in a good mood and he was so pleased about Alec showing some more emotions aside from his standard serious worry, shy gratefulness or shy flirting that he could not take him seriously at all. He wasn't anywhere near to offended, either. And that only made it worse because not many things infuriate omegas more than being humored by alphas who think omegas are all bark and no bite.

"You're smiling about being chased out of your own loft…" His friend observes.

He is. He is smiling. He doesn't tell her he's been waking up and smelling Alec on his skin and in his bedroom for the past three days. He doesn't tell her he's been having a hard time recently fighting off memories from the past. It's not something he can control, it wasn't triggered by anything or anyone, it's just something that happens. With all the memories he's accumulated in his head and in his heart over the years, they just have to surface sometimes against his will. Magnus is familiar with these patches of darkness which either fill his nights with nightmares or send him back to depression. He's used to having bad few days, bad weeks, he's had bad years.

Now, waking up in the morning he knows he's had a bad night even if he can't remember what it was about... which is new. He usually remembers his dreams unless he made sure to be too drunk to remember the previous night.

But he doesn't remember now. He wakes up only mildly disturbed by the vague memory of having a nightmare and the lingering scent of Alexander further chases it all away.

Magnus has put together the truth of what has been happening and it feels like it's his truth to know. Alec hasn't mentioned it to him and he hasn't asked any questions. To be honest, Magnus can't tell if he's too shy to bring it to light or if he simply doesn't remember it. Is the omega sleepwalking? It's not impossible but Magnus doesn't know what would compel him to do so now exactly when the warlock needs it. It's been a long time since Magnus had a violent kind of nightmare, one where he'd make enough noise to wake someone else up. He doesn't think he's that bad now but maybe that's what makes Alec get up at night? Now that he's considering that possibility, he really should talk about it with Alec and ask him.

So with all this in his mind, of course he's smiling when thinking about Alec in Catarina's home.

"I'm simply glad he didn't hold back the bad mood for my sake." Magnus says. "I remember very clearly how he was at first. I know he had expected me to want something from him. It was in his
eyes the first few days… he watched me and waited for the catch. And he probably would have done a lot for the promise of permanent protection.”

He finishes on a serious note. Catarina nods. She can imagine it's the truth, considering the young Nephilim's position. Then she asks, "What else is bothering you?"

Magnus rolls his eyes exasperated. Trust Catarina to see right through him even though he couldn't have been that obvious.

"Oh, it's nothing." He replies in a sing-song tone. "It's only that I can't stop worrying being together from the start might have been a mistake. Living in the loft, he was constantly under my influence one way or another and what if he only wants me because breathing my scent conditioned him to want me?"

Catarina's eyebrows rise. "You know this works both ways, yes? You've been enjoying his scent too, growing used to it."

"Of course I have, but I am the one with the means to walk away should I want to."

"You think he wouldn't? Now, I mean."

"I don't know." And he honestly doesn't. Alec is strong and determined where it counts but would he choose to walk away?

"Anyway, how could I not want him? Seeing him on the street in passing would have been enough for me to want him simply because I have eyes."

She smiles again and the smile grows into a grin as she watches him. "You're so nervous now you're looking for excuses. Does Ragnor know?"

Magnus makes a pained sound.

"Of course you didn't tell him anything." She's almost gleeful now. "I'll tell him."

"I assume there's nothing I could say to stop you from doing that."

"That's right."

For a moment Catarina turns all her attention to the blue boy in her lap. He's reaching for the beaded necklace she's wearing so she magicks him something else to play with. It's a toy she'd bought and it was lying on a shelf, waiting for today. Once Max accepts and approves of it, she looks back up at Magnus.

"Look. He is very young but not so much he doesn't know what he wants and what he's doing. You've both taken the steps towards the future and you should not try to stop it now. You're both smart, responsible people and I don't see why anything should be wrong about what you're doing. And what if you had sent him away to be taken care of by someone else, or left him alone with just money and a place to stay? He wouldn't have known you then. You'd be a semi-stranger to him and if you tried to come on to him then, he might have actually rejected you."

Magnus sighs. "You're right as always, my dear."

They spend the hour together, talking about current warlock matters and then gossip about their other friends. When it's time for him to leave, Catarina returns to the original topic once more.
"Magnus," she starts, placing her hand on his arm. "You're saying you see how great he is regardless of how good he smells. I promise you, he sees what amazing person you are. Same as I see it."

*Isabelle flips through photos on her phone. Not for the first time she's looking at her older brother's face, preserved in the way it was so long ago. It probably doesn't even match the real thing anymore, not in detail. December just began and in less than two months it'll be a year since she last saw Alec.

What does still keep him from letting them see him? He must know by now that it's not like anyone's out for him and if he made contact with her or Jace nothing terrible would happen. They'd make sure of it. Lydia wouldn't have hurt him. Isabelle knows at least that about their new Head of the Institute. Lydia is an outsider and she came from Alicante, which automatically made her 'close' to the Clave in Isabelle's eyes. But Lydia was not there when Alec was banished and she didn't arrive immediately after so Isabelle couldn't honestly blame her for anything. She was better than having Aldertree or their parents stay in New York. And Lydia was even stricter than Alec but she was fair and she worked very hard. That, at least, Isabelle admired about her. Being an alpha wasn't always enough when one was a woman in position of power, or seeking a position of power and Lydia had her own struggles with it but so far she came out on top.

It was easier like that- accept Lydia's many assignments and lose themselves in work. Time passed faster that way.

Isabelle has thought, during long nights, that maybe Alec didn't want to reconnect with them or Nephilim at all. That there was something bitter inside him that stopped him, that made him choose solitude over reclaiming his family. That maybe at some point he had enough of their shortcomings as siblings- as alpha siblings. He might be tired of Jace's insensitive remarks, of Isabelle's own seemingly innocent comments that must have been stinging to an omega all the same. And as Alec's younger siblings and technically his subordinates, they've caused him more than one headache over the years. He'd complained about it more than once but they'd always brushed him off, either claiming his worries were unfounded or telling him to ease up on the discipline when they weren't at war or had a calm week with almost no demon activity. And they had teased him when they went out together, tried to encourage him to have fun when they knew he treated relationships and mating seriously.

On bad days she's so angry at Alec for not checking on them, for not knowing what Jace had gone through right after Alec's runes were destroyed and he was gone.

Alec doesn't know that his parabatai had to be restrained and locked up to stop him from fighting his way through to Alec and then to stop him from going after him.

Jace was sharing Alec's pain and fear, yes, but on top of that he was dealing with his own feelings. He was an alpha whose closest omega was hurt and then taken away, depriving Jace of any way of protecting him or exacting revenge in his name.

Then, long days of being locked up until his emotions calmed and he was collected enough to lie his way through a hearing, agreeing that he would leave Alec alone and that he'd return to his duties as a Shadowhunter.

At least there was still Isabelle, who wanted Alec back as much as Jace did, and she was now the one looking out for both of them, making sure Jace stayed safe. She had already began searching for Alec by then but she needed Jace and the parabatai bond to actually make progress.
Then came the day when Jace approached her during quiet time in the Institute and told her they had to stop. He told her that Alec didn't want to be found and that he'd keep running if they kept pushing. They decided it was better to let their brother stay in one spot without worrying about them coming after him. It hurt like hell to essentially give up but they lived with the hope he'd come back to them once he felt safe enough to do so.

Months passed and Jace came to Isabelle again, telling her that he was absolutely certain, despite the weakened bond, that the child their brother gave them up for was born.

Isabelle asked him what else he could tell, anything. His answer was that he didn't feel sadness or fear, or any sort of negative emotion that would indicate something was wrong with the child or Alec's health. So that's all they knew: that they had a niece or a nephew, that he or she was probably a healthy child and that it was not the monster the Clave had wanted Alec to believe it would be.

On bad days, Isabelle is angry that Alec has the distraction of raising and loving a child while she and Jace were left with nothing but worry and permanent not-knowing. But then she would remind herself that whatever distractions he may have, Alec was always the second side of the coin that was the parabatai bond and he'd always share in the pain that came from that bond being strained and denied. He wasn't living a cheerful life, wherever he was.

During the past long months she's felt cold like she never had before. Closed off from her parents and from the other Shadowhunters for their treatment of her brother. She distanced herself from those she liked because she didn't have it in her to be a good company and she didn't want to bring others down.

Eventually she'd made exception for Clary, who came into their world from the outside and carried in a whole new worldview. Even with Clary having no idea about what had happened, Isabelle was sure the new girl would have been appalled by the Clave's decisions. She was seeing Downworld in a whole different way than other Nephilim, even Isabelle, did.

And there was the matter of how Jace reacted to Clary. At first, the same as Isabelle. Careful detachment, keeping their distance and giving the newcomer only as much attention as was needed to keep her informed of their world and safe within the whole Shadow World.

As it turned out, Clary was quite difficult to ignore. It also turned out she fit with the young Lightwoods better than anyone else at the Institute. Watching Jace warm up to her and begin to care about something, even something as simple as training the new girl, took a little bit of weight off Isabelle's chest.

And then… then Clary brought in Alec's gift and a letter and Isabelle's world became a little warmer again. She read and re-read the letter not because it told her much, but because it was hand-written and it almost made her cry to see it.

Running her thumb over the details of the rose on the pendant that came from Alec, she lets herself let go of some of the resentment. Wherever he is, he has not forgotten about them and if he took this step, he might soon take another. They had, of course, tried tracking him but the items they received had no emotional connection to Alec beyond being gifts. Isabelle's jewelry and Max's books and the letter.

Isabelle wanted to be disappointed, to resent the silver roses for being mere material objects when it's not what she wanted from Alec, but she doesn't feel that way about them. They're like a promise, a reminder, a proof.
She always wears at least one of the pieces.

* *

On bad days Maryse Lightwood thinks about her oldest son and regrets that he was born an omega. She had thought he'd be different, always his calm and logical self and that he'd do what was right without being influenced by omegan emotions.

He'd protested against mating so strongly, yet the moment he found himself with child all thoughts of his career flew out the window. So he was just an omega after all, following all the rules which omegas claimed weren't fair or true at all. What a blow that was.

On good days Maryse misses her brilliant son who is alone out there with his first child, fending for them both on his own. She was supposed to be helping him. She's his mother and of course she had planned to be there when he would need her when his own family was starting.

Now she doesn't even know how he's changed during pregnancy, if he's healthy, if he has enough to eat, and how does support himself?

On good days, instead of thinking that it's his own fault, Maryse worries her son is being taken advantage of and she wishes there was a way to see him again. Her sweet omega son, always so dutiful and mindful of what makes a good Shadowhunter, always the guardian of his younger siblings.

If there only was a way to turn back time, she would have protected him better.

Even on good days she tries not to think about the child itself. She doesn't know its gender, she doesn't know what it looks like. She doesn't think of it as a half-Lightwood, she can't bring herself to and she doesn't try.

* *

Jace is sitting cross-legged on his bed, talking angelic runes with Clary. She's sitting on the bed too, one leg folded under her, the other touching the floor. A book and loose papers are between the two Shadowhunters and they have been studying runes (well, Clary has because Jace already knows all about them) for the past hour. It's not difficult for her to learn them but it simply takes time to go through all of them and to be certain she'll make no mistake when it matters on a patrol.

Having someone to coach her through it helps greatly and she has both Jace and Isabelle willing to teach her everything regarding Shadowhunting. Of course there's her mother, too, but lately she's been staying in Alicante quite often and Clary frankly prefers being with people her own age.

She hadn't liked Jace at the beginning. He was cold and brash, and his words when he dismissed her stung. But as she stayed at the Institute and people got used to her, Jace got used to her too. As more time passed, Clary realized what she saw first was not how Jace always was.

Clary didn't have particularly good social skills and she was a beta, but even she could guess there was something more going on that made Jace prickly when it was uncalled for. She thought she wouldn't have the patience to deal with that but somehow she ended up under the young Lightwoods' wings as a new Shadowhunter and all three of them grew closer.

Close enough for Clary to now sit in Jace's room on a quiet day, comfortable in the casual way they're doing the studying.

Ever since meeting Alec almost all the blanks were filled in Clary's head. She hadn't heard about
another Lightwood sibling before that- not from Jace, not from Izzy, not from anyone else. And it
became her secret that she knew until the day she came into the Institute bearing the little box
given to her by Alec.

She'd handed it to Izzy and didn't say what it was. Isabelle didn't come to her that night to ask
about it but she did come the next day. To be completely honest, Clary had been afraid they'd make
her tell them where she saw Alec.

She told the not-full-truth that it was her friend that met Alec through a coincidence.

Clary had answered lots of questions that day but they all revolved around the most important one:
was Alec safe and all right, and was his baby all right as well? She could, with all honesty, say yes
to those questions.

What she couldn't do was tell them where he was or who he was with. She hated being put in this
situation because by then she already cared enough about Jace to sympathize with the
disappointment in his eyes when she refused to break the promise she made to Alec.

Clary puts down her pencil and she stops acknowledging Jace's lecture on a rune until he notices
and looks up at her.

"What?"

"I want to tell you something."

"About?"

"About your brother."

He sits up a little straighter, watches her like a hawk.

"I have met him and talked to him personally, not just through Simon."

Jace is very, very still and she wonders what he's about to do.

"Recently or back when you said it was just Simon?" He asks carefully.

"Back when he gave me the box. But it's true Simon met him first and he didn't tell me for some
time. So yes," she goes on quickly before Jace can interrupt her. "I've actually seen him."

There are so many thoughts wanting to be voiced in Jace's head that he doesn't think which he
wants to know first, he just picks one. "You've seen the baby?"

She shakes her head. "I was too much of a stranger, he wouldn't have let me near."

Jace is disappointed but accepts it.

"Did he say anything about why he doesn't want to talk to us?"

"Kind of… he did. He's… he's just not ready yet."

"Yet."

Knowing the story, Clary knows how much time has already passed and even if she didn't, she
could hear it in that one simple word, just with the way it came from Jace's lips.
"Jace, he… it's not just about the baby but about what happened later."

"You do realize this isn't helping me understand, it just makes me angry. And worried."

"I get it." She says quickly. "Look, I don't agree with his choices but I promised and I honestly don't have any desire to hurt an omega, no matter how annoying."

She lets out a noise of frustration. She's just a messenger and she could have kept her mouth shut but she couldn't watch Jace suffer silently any longer. It leaves her where she is now, struggling to find the right words between protecting the omega and soothing the alpha. It's a good thing she was born a beta and it somehow always falls to betas to be mediators whenever alphas' and omegas' messy feelings are involved.

"Hey." She reaches across the papers to touch Jace. "I think he's going to come around soon. Honest. There's... history, but he's working through it. I think. There's nothing wrong with him now so just… just wait. Please. I promised not to tell and I want to tell you but it's important that we do this right."

Jace closes his eyes and breathes in deeply. He wants to believe the suggestion that Alec might be returning to them in some way.

By the Angel, the night when he felt life spark through the parabatai bond was a surprise and a shock. He clung to every emotion that came through, dull echoes as they were. He lay on his bed, his eyes hot with tears that didn't want to spill and he thought about what he was feeling, second-guessing himself and wishing so hard that Alec were there to explain.

It was so much easier for him to find rest that night. And now Clary's saying she's seen him, and Simon has seen him, but Jace can't. He wants to shake her and demand the answer but he still remembers how it felt to have Alec push back at him through the bond and he doesn't want a repeat of that, not when they're finally moving forward. He'd learned to live with hope rather than action these past months and it was hell to get used to, but he did get used to it. He can wait a little longer.

The 'we' in Clary's words registers in his mind too, gentle like a warm breeze.

* * *

Magnus dreams and it's the worst one yet. He's walking through a field after a battle, unable to tell the date or the country. There's no details that his eyes can focus on, he only knows the aura of death and the smell of blood. He is alone. It's at sunset and fog is rising, blurring his view.

And then he isn't alone. There are the Shadowhunters and there are Valentine's ideals and Magnus knows those are Downworlders dead at his feet.

He doesn't want to fight. He's so tired.

And he thinks: my mate is a Shadowhunter, this should not be happening, we shouldn't be enemies anymore.

And then he remembers Alexander is not a Shadowhunter anymore and if he's anywhere near, it'll be as one of the bodies covered in blood.

That can't be the reality. Magnus thinks it's not true, Alec wouldn't have been here, he would have been… at home. Magnus has to go home, now.

The stench of death leaves him when he snaps into existence inside a house. It is dark and quiet.
Empty. Magnus crosses the rooms, heading for the bedroom. He doesn't notice the layout doesn't match the loft. There's a draft moving curtains which cover windows and steal the light that should be coming through.

He sees the outline of a bed through half-open door and he walks in quickly. And stops. It's his mother's bed, isn't it? And that's the red of blood staining the white sheets, and there's a pale arm on the sheets.

Why isn't he smelling his mother's scent? What he feels is another's scent and it's so familiar… It can't possibly be his mother even if it is her room. It must be…

"Alexander." He gasps and snaps awake.

Shock of fear makes him move, push himself up on his elbow from his lying position. Something moves to his right and then he's looking into the confused, sleepy eyes of his omega.

This is Magnus's bedroom and he's in his loft. It's the middle of the night and he just woke up.

This is real. Magnus takes in all the tiniest details and tells himself over and over that it can't be a dream if he's able to tell the crease in Alec's left cheek is from his mattress, that Alec's eyes are puffy and still clouded with sleep, that his black hair is all messed up and pressed to his head on one side. You can't see details in a dream so this must be real.

The omega must be sitting down, using the mattress to pillow his head.

"Alexander." Magnus manages to say, even a whisper is loud in the silence of the night. "Come to bed, please."

His voice breaks on the last world and he falls silent, afraid of breaking further.

Alec complies, clumsily getting off the floor and crawling into the bed beside Magnus. Magnus pulls his body close, wrapping both arms around Alec's middle and tangling their legs. The omega's body is a bit cooler than normal from sleeping without a cover but he warms up very quickly.

Everything is right. Alexander, warm and breathing and pliant against Magnus's body. Proof of life and his presence. Magnus touches his nose to Alec's neck, where his scent is the strongest.

Fear and hate and disgust that he relieved in his dream rest heavy like a stone in the pit of his stomach but his head is filling with thoughts of Alec.

The omega is already asleep from the moment he found himself in the comfort of a bed, his head resting on Magnus's pillow that they'll have to share.
Sugar

Chapter Summary

Today: As the saying goes, the rating is rising from this chapter. Pandemonium. Next up: warlock community.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Warmth of the bed, comfort of a perfect mattress, sleep-warm body of his alpha. Alec stretches his legs out, then shifts so that his shoulder is more comfortable rather than trapped under his own weight.

It's bliss.

Alec's other arm is thrown over Magnus's side. Being the big spoon here, Alec has the view of the back of alpha's head. His usually styled hair is free of product and all wild from being pressed into the pillow. It looks very, very soft.

Alec props himself up on his elbow so he can look down at his bed-partner. Magnus is definitely asleep and not showing signs of waking. It's no surprise- the room is only gray with the first light of a cloudy winter sunrise. It's quite a normal time to be awake for Alec but what's unusual is the place he spent the night in. He should be getting up right away to check on his babies but he thinks there's no rush yet. He feels calm, no urge to move and no tugging.

He might have a little more time to indulge in the view.

Seeing Magnus's face without make-up is not new but it's certainly a rare opportunity which Alec's not willing to pass up by leaving the bed too soon. With his mess of black hair and sleep-soft face, Magnus is a vision as beautiful as his put-together, fancy self. Alec could count the warlock's eyelashes if he wished to.

Only he gets to see it, Alec thinks. He thinks: he's the one in bed with the alpha, he's the one who soothed his nightmares. His omegan heart sings.

Magnus is wearing just pants to bed, probably silk, and Alec's arm is touching his bare side. He's warm, so nicely warm to touch and Alec's body is warm too. He's very much aware that he's wet, that he woke up that way and that he probably smells like it. It would eventually wake up the alpha, surely, but Alec will be out of the bedroom, checking on his boys before it could happen. For now he watches Magnus sleep and lets his imagination fill in for him how this morning could go.

He would wake his alpha with a kiss and would have it returned. Then another kiss... and then another, deeper one. Magnus would want him as much as Alec wants him in this moment and he'd show it, his hands moving under Alec's t-shirt or under his boxers...

And that's quite enough because Alec's scent is about to spike with arousal. He presses a kiss to Magnus's cheek and then moves his face close to the alpha's neck scent glands. If he knew for sure
it wouldn't wake him up, Alec would love nothing more than to rub himself on his alpha to mix their scents.

But it's fine as they are and he's had his share of closeness this past night.

Alec is almost done making coffees when he hears Magnus approach him. He turns, holding the one ready cup but instead of taking it as usual, Magnus sets it back on the counter and pulls Alec into a kiss. At first the omega draws a breath in to protest but all protests are silenced when Magnus puts his hand on his cheek and then in his hair. His fingers hold onto a fistful of it. Alec knew it was getting too long and messy recently but to have it grabbed like this makes it really obvious. Not that Alec's thinking about scheduling cutting it when it sends a rush of heat through his body while Magnus holds him like this. Magnus is the one more demanding but Alec easily matches him with his own hunger for contact.

They kiss in the rays of winter sun which brighten the loft through the east windows. The day had started cloudy when Alec was awake before anyone else but the clouds cleared, letting them be bathed in golden glow.

When the alpha's fingers slide down from Alec's hair to his neck and brush his pressure points it makes the omega whimper. Magnus pulls back, takes in Alec's flushed face and blown pupils. His own warlock eyes show how affected he is for Alec to see. The omega actually went a little weak in the knees when Magnus touched his neck during the kiss and by the Angel, he wishes it was easy to take it even further. But it's not.

"Not exactly breakfast-appropriate behavior but I really wanted to do that." Magnus says, his voice low.

Alec's heart is still racing a little when they sit down to eat, the family complete with Max in his highchair and Jonathan strapped in the carrycot set on the chair to Alec's left.

Whenever Alec meets Magnus's gaze, what he reads in the golden cat eyes is 'I want to be having you for breakfast'. Every time Alec ducks his head and tries to give his undivided attention to his pancakes.

Coming back from the gym, Alec is moving quietly since he's expecting that at this hour Magnus might be trying to put the boys to sleep or has just managed to achieve that.

The unfolded couch is occupied. Magnus is on his back, wearing his 'domestic' set of clothes that still manage to fit him perfectly as far as his fashion sense is concerned. He's all soft and relaxed, two sleeping boys at each of his sides. Or, more accurately, dozing boys, because when Alec comes near, Jonathan's eyes pop open and he coos at his father.

"Hello, love. Did you have a good day?" Alec gently picks him up to hold him in his arms. "Did you wear Magnus out?"

When spoken to, Jon does his best to be responsive so Alec is already walking towards the bedroom to carry their voices away from the sleeping warlocks. He doesn't want Magnus to wake up. Yet.
He puts his son down and wraps him up the way he knows works best to make the boy feel safe. Then, kneeling down by the baby bed he hums a simple tune until Jon is truly asleep, which doesn't take long at all.

Alec returns to the living room and picks up Max, who's basically dead to the world. Only his little blue fist is closed on a fold of Magnus's clothes and it takes some finesse to separate him without waking either of the warlocks. Having had enough experience separating babies and the objects of their interest, Alec manages to do just that and carries Max to join his brother.

Then, finally, when he returns to the living room once again, Alec lies down beside Magnus and for a while just relaxes in the familiarity of the alpha's presence and their home's warmth.

Alec has been out for half of the day, first visiting the Jade Wolf and then going to his scheduled training session.

Having friends is still a bit new to Alec. He's self-aware enough to know it's sad he's just now learning to be social but since he's taking the right steps forward, he doesn't dwell on that.

It's been easier to accept the positive attention from others since meeting Magnus. It could be said that it's sad too, that he needed a crutch in form of a person (an alpha, no less) but that's how it worked for him. He needed a person in his life to lean on first and normally that's what friends are for but it was different for Alec. Maybe he would have reached this point in his relationship with the werewolf pack anyway, just slower, but maybe he's made this way, needing a solid backup before venturing forward.

Great many things have been easier for Alec since Magnus came into his life.

Magnus has his eyes lined with purple today, his eyeshadow on display on his closed eyelids. Alec watches him for a long while, enjoying this as much as he had enjoyed the morning.

Moving slowly, Alec puts his hand on the warlock's firm chest.

His need for physical contact isn't a sudden thing. It's been building up with every hug, every touch of Magnus's hand to Alec's face, every one of his dreams which leave him hot and bothered when he wakes up. Every movie night when Alec has to fight with himself not to get too excited at their thighs brushing.

Shifting forward, Alec plants a kiss on the warlock's forehead. Then on one eyelid, then the other one. His fingers close on Magnus's shirt when he takes the next step to a kiss on the lips.

That, at last, gets him a reaction. His eyes stay closed but corners of Magnus's lips turn up and Alec feels him smile during the chaste kiss. He also feels a hand sneak under his sweater, touching his bare side.

The kiss that follows is much less chaste. Their lips part, allowing for a proper, deeper one.

Alec gets to dictate the pace but Magnus has a way of influencing him, too, by taking his hand out from under the sweater and squeezing Alec's ass instead. The omega gasps and gives the warlock a look of disapproval that goes ignored. There's mirth in the pair of golden eyes and Alec is helpless to the need to just kiss the alpha again.

"Good evening," The omega says when they both feel like they've had enough of each other for the moment.

"Quite good."
"You were sleeping on the job."

"My job was sleeping, so I had to do the same."

"Of course." Then, "Are you tired?"

"Not at all. What would you like to do?" Magnus rubs Alec's side in a lazy manner. He likes how the Nephilim looks above him.

"Maybe just this. Is that acceptable?"

"More than."

Magnus does the thing where his palm fits Alec's cheek perfectly, giving the omega something to nuzzle into. Then he uses that to draw Alec back down so their lips meet again.

This is good. A lazy kind of making out, there's no rush of want because Alec's a bit worn out after the fighting session so his body is nice and warm but not urging him to do more than touch lips.

It's a little different for Magnus, which Alec can tell by his scent and the way he touches him but of course the alpha does nothing more than Alec wants.

Later, Magnus summons them a late dinner onto the coffee table and they eat it sitting cross-legged on some pillows they put on the floor. Then a movie plays in the background while Magnus teaches Alec a card game and they play a few rounds before the movie ends. They don't talk much, content to relax together like this.

When it's late enough for them both to retire, Alec is obviously wanting to say something.

"Do you want to sleep here tonight?" He asks, surprising Magnus.

The question why is almost on the tip of Magnus's tongue but he stops himself. He knows why and what Alec has done for him these past few nights. And maybe it would be best to do it again today. He's not certain he's out of the dark yet, not after how bad it was. Nightmares come and go but they don't stop and start suddenly, he knows that all too well.

The couch is their neutral ground between the omega's nest and Magnus's room so if they want to make this decision while they're both fully awake, they should stay on the couch with a few additions.

They shower, separately, and then meet again. Magnus summons satin bedding to the fold-out couch along with too many pillows and smiles at the look Alec gives the set-up. Even though it was Alec who suggested it, he now hesitates, blush rising on his cheeks.

"Alexander." Magnus says, softly.

Alec is in his predictable gray shades of a simple soft t-shirt and well-worn sweats. Magnus knows Alec usually prefers to sleep in boxers or shorts so he also knows this was a conscious choice. Which is funny because Magnus made a similar one: he's actually wearing a top layer to sleep. It's a matching silk shirt, as deeply red as his pants. There are small gold details along the collar. Magnus likes this set. Yes, it looks rich and it's in royal colors which some may consider obnoxious but he mostly likes it for how comfortable it was and for the memories he associates it with.
So now they're a mismatched pair, both looking at each other like they're here by someone else's wish and confused about what to do next. Well, mostly it's Alec who looks like he feels this way.

"Come here."

Magnus lies down first, inviting Alec under the duvet beside him. The omega follows, lying down on his side like he had before, facing Magnus. They keep their hands to themselves at first.

There's a lot of room to share on the couch and a lot of space they can put between them. But they choose the middle ground, just close enough to feel each other's presence. This is why they're doing it, after all: so they are a comfort to each other while asleep.

This is like having a sleepover that Alec never actually had in his youth. (His siblings sneaking into his room for comfort didn't count.) Now, though, Alec wants to talk. Maybe it's the dark, maybe it's unwillingness to sleep because sleeping means getting to the next morning too fast and ending this moment. It's like he's full of things he wants to say out loud but he doesn't actually know what he wants to say. There's nothing urgent on his mind.

Magnus is watching him, his expression so open. His eyes are brown now and Alec doesn't know if he just felt like having them glamored or if he forgot. Not that it matters to Alec.

"Did I ever tell you about the delegation from Marseille when I was seventeen?" Alec asks, as if he doesn't perfectly remember he didn't tell Magnus about this yet.

"Please, go on." Magnus replies and settles to listen.

* * *

On Friday Magnus is in Pandemonium. He'd been neglecting his property somewhat, finding it more interesting to stay home with a pair of babies and one enticing omega. But he still cares a lot about the club and he loves running it so he gets dressed and leaves to spend a few hours there.

Of course he asks Alec to come along. Of course Alec declines politely.

Alec stays at home, practicing standing up with Max. Jonathan is propped up in a carrycot, observing them and making cooing noises.

Alec is overthinking.

He doesn't like clubbing but that's not what Magnus goes to Pandemonium for, is it? Alec expects the warlock to dance, yes, if that's what he wants to do, but Magnus goes there to watch over his business and probably meets with his regulars and acquaintances that he doesn't invite to the loft so he doesn't really have the opportunity to see them otherwise.

A regret builds up in Alec. He should be able to follow his alpha to his 'workplace'. He wants to give that to Magnus.

And he thinks, that would be a whole new experience to him. Pandemonium is a different beast than going out with Magnus outside of New York. Different even that the fashion show they've attended. Alec used to sell his angel blood in the back alley by the Pandemonium. Downworlders who could know him go there. Hell, Shadowhunters could possibly be there too.

He had avoided Hunter's Moon for this reason and he should avoid Pandemonium even more,
but…

He looks down at Max's round face.

"What should I do, love?"

What if Jace or Izzy happen to be there? Maybe… maybe he wants to take the risk if it'd take the choice of meeting them out of his hands. If they happen to be there on this particular night it'll mean it was meant to happen.

Alec leaves Max with a toy to occupy him and calls Catarina. Knowing she's pretty much always busy with work, he hopes she'll have the time tonight. If not, he'll call Dot next.

Catarina picks up and lets Alec go through apologies for taking up her time first before he gets to the main point.

"I know this is last minute and you must have plans already but if it's possible for you to come look after the boys in half an hour or an hour…"

"Is something wrong?" She asks first. "With Magnus or with you?"

"No! No, it's only that…" Alec paces the room while he talks. "Magnus is at Pandemonium tonight and he had asked ahead of time if I'd join him, which I hadn't wanted to do-"

"But you do now."

"Yeah." A pause. "Do you think I should?"

"How about I come over and we can talk in person." She says like it's not a question and he rushes to stop her.

"Oh, no, I don't want you to make the effort if I just decide to stay in anyway."

"I'm coming over." Is her reply. "10 minutes."

When she ends the call Alec goes to stand in front of his wardrobe. He stares at its contents, his mind going blank. This is so out of his area of expertise it's almost funny. He knows what he looks good in when they go out but they've only had classy and casual dinners so far and it's very much different than a dark club.

On top of that, Alec doesn't know what his outfit should convey. That is, he's learned from Izzy all about going out to hunt for fun and about telling potential partners you're out looking for sex or just for a dance or two.

But he doesn't want to seduce Magnus, does he? He doesn't want to impress him, he just wants to join him. But that doesn't mean he can wear whatever. He has to fit there. He has to be, well, good enough to stand next to Magnus Bane in public.

"Is this it?" He asks Max and Jonathan while holding out a black satiny shirt for them to judge.

He already knows it's not it so he doesn't wait for their answer.
He has a lot of button-up shirts. Some of them he doesn't even recall seeing before today so that means Magnus is still adding to his wardrobe what he'd like to see Alec in. When he looks through the hangers and comes across a dark plum shirt, he pulls it out.

"How about this?"

Jon blows saliva bubbles while Max waves around his rattle.

Alec considers the shirt. It's nice. It's light and soft so he shouldn't be hot in it in a club. It has a shine to it so it might just fit the mood, even if it's long-sleeved and is a button-up. He chooses pants that go well with it, a black pair that's a little on the tight side. Then black, shiny shoes to go with them.

He's done dressing by the time Catarina shows up through her portal. She gives him a once-over and he reads from her expression that he managed not to fail.

"Dressing up to party is not exactly my thing but this is good. Very nice." She tells him.

She takes a look around the room next, locating Max and Jon and their toys and then their bottles on the kitchen counter. She nods to herself, then turns to Alec.

"Well, Cinderella, since your fairy godmother is here to take care of the tiniest ones tonight, you can go on." She gives him a shooing gesture.

Alec fidgets. There's one more thing he wanted to talk to Catarina about and this is perfect opportunity to do it when Magnus isn't around.

"Would you make the potion for me? Um, for omega matters."

"I'm assuming you don't mean suppressants but the other matters."

Contraceptives, yes. That's what he means. And by the Angel, he's never had to talk about those before because there was no need but now... It makes him a blushing virgin to talk about them.

"I know it's supposed to be safe until my heats resume after pregnancy but I just want to be safer even before that happens."

"Are you planning to do it?"

"No. Um. Not at all, but I want to have a potion sooner rather than later. And you know I can't ask Magnus. If it ever comes to... that, I want it to happen naturally and if I ask Magnus too soon, he'll know I'm thinking about it and that I want it and that it's going to happen--"

She moves close to him and touches his arm. "Take a breath. I understand completely and it's a smart way to go about it. Of course I'll make it for you."

"I wondered if I could learn to make it myself if it doesn't require magic?"

"It doesn't. I'll be happy to teach you."

"Good. Great. Thank you." He looks at his feet, takes a deep breath. That's one thing out of the way.

"Hey." Catarina says. "I'm happy for you. Both of you."

He manages a smile. "Thank you."
Alec exits the cab and stands in front of the club, the lights of the neon letters coloring red everything they shine on. He could have gone through Catarina's portal but he wanted the extra time to prepare himself mentally.

This is hard. Magnus is somewhere in there and Alec wants to get to him. But there is a crowd of people wanting to get in and there must be a much bigger crowd already inside.


Alec closes and relaxes his hand. He doesn't have his blade on him, he thought it was a bad idea to take it and he still stands by that decision. He just needs to get to Magnus and he won't have to think of how he can defend himself.

His feet carry him forwards until he's by the door. The big bouncer only takes one long look at Alec and lets him in outside of the line without a word. It's difficult to say if it's just because he's an omega and they want more omegas to draw more club-goers or if it's because Magnus had told all his staff what Alec looks like.

Alec steps into the club and his senses are overloaded right away. He should be tuning into the music, the atmosphere, the lights, but he can't. He's mentally on high alert, looking out for all the ways this can go wrong for him. He's overthinking it, he knows that, but it's not something he can stop right now. He just wants to get to Magnus as fast as he can. He has to locate the warlock first. It'd have been easier if he had liked clubs before and knew Pandemonium's layout. But he hadn't and he doesn't.

Loud music, too many scents and perfume, and the fake smoke mix together in a way that gets on Alec's nerves. It's fine for other people who come here to get lost in the fun, it isn't fine for a Shadowhunter who needs to know where the next danger comes from.

Too many bodies are around when he only wants to find the one person.

Worst case scenario, Magnus is somewhere in here, dancing in the crowd. Better scenario, he's at the bar or some other spot where people stand mostly still and Alec will be able to spot him.

He does spot Magnus. He's across the room, on a raised section like a dais that has leather sofas and tables for drinks. There are people there with the warlock, sitting around him, having drinks. The woman to his left says something to Magnus, he answers and when she speaks again, Magnus laughs. Alec moves forward, not taking his eyes off of his goal.

Someone touches his elbow and the Nephilim turns automatically. It's one of the vampires he used to 'know'. The vampire looks at him like he wasn't hundred percent sure he was stopping the right person but then his eyes twinkle when he confirms he was in fact correct.

"There you are, sweet thing." The man says to him, loud enough for Alec to hear against the music and Alec steps outside of his reach without even thinking about it. "We thought something had happened to you."

Alec relaxes just a bit, fights the urge to cross his arms on his chest.

"Something did happen. It just wasn't bad."

"Clearly." The vampire gives him a once-over as if he wasn't undressing Alec with his eyes from the start. "You look good. Just as good as you smell."
"Sorry, I've gone exclusive."

"Is he here?" The vampire asks as if he wants to try and compete. Alec's a little surprised that the news of what had happened between Camille, Magnus and himself didn't reach everyone but ultimately he doesn't care.

He simply inclines his head towards the VIP section.

"Ah." The vampire says after taking a few seconds to look over there. "Well. It's a shame. You've been missed."

"I bet. Have a good night." Alec tells him emotionlessly.

The vampire chuckles. "You, too."

He lets him move on.

After that the omega reaches the VIP section uninterrupted. Magnus finally catches sight of him, his eyes move over Alec at first and then snap back to him. The double-take makes the omega ridiculously pleased with himself.

"Darling." Magnus purrs. "What an excellent surprise."

"I thought you might like it." Alec says, fitting himself on the leather sofa beside Magnus, on his right side where the spot was vacated just a moment ago. Whoever it was occupying it before, they'll be sorely disappointed if they try to return.

"I do."

The warlock pulls him into a kiss - a kiss that anyone looking in their direction can witness.

"I'm not going to question the change of heart," Magnus says, his face close to Alec's, "but I want you to know I appreciate it."

"I wanted to be with you where you go. This is your place, I know you like it here." Alec shrugs self-consciously and then adds, "Consider this my courting gift."

Magnus's smile is as bright as the lights above them.

Alec gets a lot of looks while he sits at the High Warlock's side. Curious looks, envious looks. Less-than-kind looks.

He wonders what it'd be like to be here with his runes visible. Or even the scars that the magical cream had fixed on his skin. The High Warlock and a Nephilim, a disgraced Shadowhunter. This is what I am, Alec thinks, and he no longer is aching just from the thought itself. It's what I am, he repeats in his head, and he's feeling strangely bold, capable of dealing with anyone who would call him just that to his face.

Magnus has his hand on Alec's thigh almost all of the time they sit in VIP and Alec's skin tingles with warmth.

At first Magnus did it for Alec, who sat straight-backed and tense, then he did it for himself. He wants everyone to know Alec is his. He isn't a guest, he isn't the night's entertainment, he isn't the flavor of the week. There is no word for a mate-to-be but if there was, Magnus would wear a shirt
Magnus wasn't particularly interested in dancing when he came in today, he just wanted to breathe the atmosphere of Pandemonium. Now he looks at Alec and asks him if he'd like to try out the dancefloor area.

Alec looks up at him startled, then ducks his head and, predictably, an apology leaves his lips. Magnus doesn't mind. He'd hate to push Alec to do something uncomfortable for him even if Magnus would very much love to share a dance with him.

Drinks are brought to them, a martini glass with something rose-pink in it for Alec and a dark drink in old-fashioned glass for Magnus. Alec tastes his drink. It's light on alcohol and actually tastes a little like roses. That's interesting, since Magnus didn't make it for him before at home. Maybe it's a special, reserved for Pandemonium's drink menu.

Magnus is observing his reaction with a small smile on his lips. The smile grows when Alec steals a sip of Magnus's drink and right away his face shows disgust at the alcohol content in it.

People come over to talk. It's not an environment conducive to actual business but it's good opportunity to keep up relations and people use it to remind the High Warlock of themselves for future opportunities.

Now that Alec's here, the interested Downworlders only have the left side of the sofa to do so. Even though there's room for one more to his right, once people notice how Magnus treats Alec they don't dare try to steal that spot for themselves.

He watches the crowd. There is a pair dancing that he recognizes to be werewolves he only knows by face, not by name. They hang out at the Jade Wolf but aren't interested in being friendly with Alec. It reminds him there might be more familiar faces around and he spends the next several minutes watching people more closely.

He doesn't see what he was tentatively hoping for.

At one point Magnus catches Alec's attention and wordlessly asks for another kiss. Somehow, as if by magic, each time their lips meet, each time Magnus looks at him like he hardly believes Alec's right there, it gives Alec confidence to bear being in the club. With the light buzz of alcohol inside him, the beat of the music finally getting under his skin, the lights, and Magnus's hand on his leg, Alec leans back on the sofa and enjoys himself.

He kind of understand why people like this. Clubbing. He just has other sorts of entertainment that he prefers to stick to. But he could do this again just to experience this kind of high again.

It's like he's in a bubble, untouchable, separate from anyone but his alpha. It's not bad. And his alpha is so pleased to have him there, Alec resolves to come with him once in a while.

Magnus probably would have stayed longer if he was alone but with Alec he is mindful of the time. He doesn't know who is watching the kids tonight but Alec would have told him if he needed to be back at a specific hour so he assumes they have the whole night. Still, it'd be a bad idea to push the Nephilim's limits. Not only is he used to babies' sleeping schedules but overloading his senses wouldn't be good either.
They return home and it's dark and quiet inside. Alec goes straight to his bedroom to check if
anyone's here but his nose is already telling him there are no fresh scents in the loft. Catarina took
his boys to her place and has probably intended to do so from the second he told her he was going
to join Magnus in the club. She knew what she was doing.

Magnus is behind him, not quite looking into Alec's room but guessing that Alec expected to see
their babysitter.

"You should be happy, Angel." He teases. "You'll get some real quiet."

He can't see Alec biting his lip while he makes a decision.

Alec turns to him, determination in his eyes. The alpha's mouth goes dry at the sight. He barely
remembers the last time someone looked at him this way.

"Magnus. I need…"

"Whatever it is, just say it and it's yours."

"I'm tired of making myself come on my own." Alec blurts out in one go and feels his face go hot.

Magnus blinks. Stares at him. Then takes one step closer to him and puts his hands on Alec's hips.

"Well. As it happens, I know how to help you with that. If you want me to."

"I want you."

Alec takes Magnus by the wrist and brings it up to rub his cheek on the alpha's scent glands.

"We can do what you want, Angel, and nothing more than what you're ready for."

"I don't know... I've never done anything, with anyone. You were my first kiss."

"And I'll be honored to be many other firsts for you."

Alec meets his eyes.

"You're not going to say you're flattered but it's too soon?"

"I don't think it's too soon if you don't think so. I think... you have your needs too, and you
shouldn't go so far to deny yourself good things." Magnus takes Alec's hand in both of his, rubs his
knuckles soothingly. "We're not going to have sex. You don't even have to take off your clothes.
Darling. There are so many ways to please an omega and that's not even counting magic."

Alec's staring at him, his naturally big eyes now channeling a deer in the headlights. Then he
blinks, swallows, remembers how to breathe.

He takes his hand back from Magnus and moves to undo his buttons one by one. His fingers are
clumsy, out of nerves or anticipation, he doesn't even know. Magnus doesn't move to help him or
to distract him. He watches.

A stretch of pale skin is revealed to him when the edges of the purple shirt fall apart, no buttons
left to keep them together. Only when Alec moves on to his belt does the alpha touch him. Magnus
places his fingers on Alec's, stopping him.

"While I'm happy to use all sorts of furniture for fun, I don't think by the wall is the right choice for you."

"The couch?"

Magnus nods, takes his hand, laces their fingers together and leads Alec to the middle of the room.

Chapter End Notes

:)  
And on that note, I'm going to leave you for longer this time because I need to turn my attention to Malec BigBang.
Magnus gazes down at Alexander laid out underneath him on the pillows. So much lovely skin, pale but healthy, all of it smelling wonderful to Magnus. It's an alpha's point of pride to have their omega in the best condition they could possibly be and Alexander is… He's perfect.

But Magnus doesn't just look.

Alec is expecting him to continue to undress him but Magnus moves closer instead, puts one knee on the couch beside Alec's leg and then braces himself on one hand, placed beside Alec's head. He covers the omega's body with his own, catches his lips in a kiss, makes the kiss last. A whimper escapes Alec's lips when something – a knee – presses between his legs right where he's aching to be touched and where he's still trapped in his clothes.

Magnus doesn't take the hint from him. He stays as he is above Alec, kisses lower and along his jawline, and when Alec gives him access he presses his lips to omega's scent glands. The alpha's many pendants touch Alec's bare skin, creating little points of contact which further distract Alec's brain. He struggles to process the wealth of sensations and emotions he's drowning in. One thing, however, couldn't be any simpler: Magnus is there and above him, and Alec can't see anything else beyond the alpha.

Both their scents are stronger now, laced with excitement and arousal. Alec's is stronger, as is natural for omegas, but the fact that between the two of them he has more skin uncovered adds to the effect.

Oh, Alec thinks, Magnus was right about what he'd said just minutes ago: he's not even fully undressed yet and he feels like he might just come if this continues. But… he doesn't want that yet. He moves his arms (which he has apparently temporarily forgotten how to use) down to his belt and begins to undo all that is keeping him trapped and uncomfortable. Magnus only moves to help when he's done with his buttons. The alpha leans back, kneeling over Alec and takes hold of his pants to pull them off along with underwear in one fluid motion. Alec helps him along by lifting his hips first, then his feet.

All the confidence that Alec may have in his body goes out the window when he's completely bare for the first time. It's the first time he's naked for someone, first time he's wet for someone who's actually going to touch him. For someone who's right there, looking down at him like there's nothing else in the world but the two of them.

When they'd started kissing Magnus had his eyes glamored, a little detail Alec didn't comment on, but now they're all real, slitted warlock eyes which Alec could get lost in. His strong, dark make-
up, meant for Pandemonium, creates a contrast to the gold of his eyes that's more striking than when they were dark brown.

A shiver runs down Alec's spine.

And then Magnus is close to him again, one hand going to touch Alec's hip, one used to support his weight. He caresses Alec's hip as if he means to calm him, soothe him. And maybe Alec didn't realize he needed it.

"What would you like?" Magnus asks as if he believes Alec is capable of giving him an answer that makes sense. As if he imagines that Alec's brain wants to process more complex thoughts than 'please stay close'.

Magnus stops petting him and his hand travels right to where his arousal is most obvious. He gives Alec a few strokes before the younger man's brain catches up. Yes, the warm pressure on his cock is amazing but it's not it. So okay, Alec can give a clear answer to the question asked after all.

"No." He says, his voice somehow cracking on the one syllable but he swats at Magnus's hand. "I can do that myself. Not enough."

He gets a fond chuckle in response that's mildly irritating to him at this point but then... but then he feels his alpha's warm hand on his inner thigh where his skin is softest and most sensitive. Fingers skim up close to his entrance and before they even touch there, Alec's toes curl in anticipation.

At first it's all exploratory, gently teasing, and Alec thinks Magnus might be waiting for him to back out, to ask Magnus to stop. It's the furthest thing on Alec's mind right now. He needs more, soon. His walls clench on nothing while his partner teases him. It takes him a while, getting over the strangeness and newness of having someone else than himself make him feel this way. Heat grows inside his body when he realizes he must be slick all over by now, not just inside. And Magnus knows it, and he must feel it there.

What Magnus is doing, is slicking his fingers up before going any further. The alpha doesn't rush, he bows down over Alec to wordlessly ask for a kiss, which the omega is all too happy to give him. And then, finally, there is pressure inside the omega, causing him to gasp even though he was expecting it. His thighs, up until now parted just enough to give Magnus room, fall more open in clear invitation and approval of what the alpha's doing so far.

Magnus is going slowly, two fingers pressed against silky walls of his omega's most intimate part. Just gentle rubbing for now, nothing special, but it's everything for the omega in that moment.

Magnus needs to learn all about his partner first, as is always the case. This time, however, he needs to commit every detail to memory because this, this is going to last. He has always been respectful of his lovers, especially omegas, but it's such a different thing to be making love to the one you want to keep. Right now Alexander fills his senses: his sweet, heavy scent, his gasps and the roll of his hips when Magnus moves his hand faster.

The omega's eyes are shut tightly like he's fighting something or too lost in sensations to allow something like sight distract him from his pleasure. He's delightfully wet, hot to touch and oh, how Magnus would love to be fully connected to him.

Minutes pass and they seem to be dragging on for the alpha, who's watching his omega flushed and trying to stop himself from squirming to chase his pleasure, but those same minutes seem to be rushing right past Alec.
When the omega's still lost, Magnus adds a third finger and when he moves them inside, the younger man tips over the edge of climax. He cries out, half-surprised, half in pure satisfaction, and he's left gasping for air, his eyes now wide open and meeting Magnus's. A lovely dark blush stains his face while he comes down from the high and Magnus moves in for another kiss. His hand sneaks to the back Alec's neck, cradling him and caressing him there, soothing. It's the right thing to do because the omega makes a sound that's suspiciously close to a purr.

They don't speak, just breathe like this, together. Alec's calming down, Magnus is trying to hold back his growing desperation. Once he's not focused on Alec, his own body reminds him of his own needs rather insistently, but he's old enough to be able to ignore that for now.

Alec settles further into the comfort of their couch. He's boneless and satisfied, and not yet noticing how sticky he is. Magnus settles half on top of him, mindful of his own weight and then Alec notices the brush of fabrics still covering his partner. Magnus has seen to Alec's needs without even half a thought for his own and that gives the omega an incentive to move his limbs. He wraps both his arms around Magnus and pulls at the edge of the warlock's shirt until its free from where it was tucked into the tight shiny pants.

"Come on." He complains, impatient.

"We don't have to do anything more-" Magnus begins to speak, and for once he sounds just a bit awkward.

Alec looks him in the eyes. "Are you kidding? One: it's your turn to come. Two: it's my turn to see you."

Gold eyes widen. Then, Magnus smiles. "You say the sweetest things, darling."

He pushes himself back and up to sit up and then kneel, once again, over Alec. He pulls his shirt off over his head even though there were only about four buttons that weren't undone all evening in the Pandemonium (not that Alec counted them). Then he begins to take care of the rest of his clothing, for which he has to get up from the bed. Alec's body mourns the loss of heat and he wonders why Magnus wouldn't just wish his clothes away. He gets that question answered very quickly.

While Magnus rushed with his shirt, he makes up for that time while getting his tight pants off. Alec props himself up on his elbows for better view and at this point he's lost enough shame to be able to just lie there, naked, admiring his alpha's body while he gracefully removes his pants.

For some reason he expected Magnus to go without underwear at all, considering the fit of the pants... but there is in fact underwear. It's silk. Black, sleek piece of silk that makes Alec's heart skip a beat.

That piece goes the way the pants did and there is nothing left to cover him. His jewelry, still stubbornly there, does nothing to help the vision that is Magnus Bane.

Alec swallows.

"May I?" Magnus gestures at the couch.

Alec nods.

Magnus joins him on the couch and settles down beside Alec, lying on his side and propped up on
his elbow, his cheek resting in his palm as he studies Alec again. As if he's seeing him for the first time.

They both watch each other, Alec turning on his side to mirror Magnus. Magnus touches Alec's hipbone again, rubs his thumb in half-circles over his skin.

Alec's hand goes out too, first hesitant touch of fingertips to the alpha's chest. Many thoughts go through Alec's head at the moment. Curiously, the one he can identify himself is relief.

He trails a pattern down from Magnus's pectoral, down over his abs. He's attracted to strength, he knows he is. To physical strength, to outward beauty. As for the inside... he'd never wanted a mate weaker than himself but he'd been afraid of being bound to an alpha who would be dominating him in their line of work and decisions at home.

He needn't have worried. What he got instead is... By the Angel, he never imagined meeting someone as complex as Magnus. On top of everything he has magic, power at his fingertips that's his to use as he wishes and which Alec can't even begin to understand. It's power that makes Alec only love him more.

Magnus isn't sure what it means when Alec's eyes glaze over for a moment there. He definitely becomes wary, careful, watching for any signs that'd tell him to back off.

"Alexander. You don't have to-"

Alec makes a wounded sound. Why is Magnus so concerned with him when he's the one being treated unfairly here?

"I told you I want you." Alec says firmly, honestly.

He's aware he's being affected by the alpha's arousal. He knows how it's supposed to work- make omegas more attentive and eager to please and Alec is very eager to please but not because he's compelled to. Yes, he's being affected in the sense that it's making him bolder, but that's for his advantage.

Magnus breathes easier. And he's very grateful for those words because he was starting to worry he might just go crazy out of want and neglect of certain body parts of his, if he really had to back off.

Alec's wandering fingers finally find the alpha's cock. A sharp inhale is the reaction, then an exhale that's actually more of a moan.

"Yes."

"Yeah?" Alec asks him and it sounds like he's amused.

"Yeah. Like this."

It's definitely true that Alec knows how to do this. His grip might be unsure at first but he quickly regains confidence, probably encouraged by Magnus's reactions. His strokes become regular, his grip tighter and he adds in a twist of his hand that just right.

The warlock's eyes close in bliss. He breathes in through his nose slowly, tries to hold back a little,
let this last a little longer than five seconds.

"Lie back." Alexander tells him suddenly, giving him a leading push to his shoulder. Wanting Alec’s hand back on him, Magnus goes with the instruction, lies flat on his back with the omega now above him.

Alec resumes his stroking and adds kisses to the mix, not unlike Magnus has done for him. Alec kisses the hollow of his throat, leaves teasing bites along his collarbone.

"You're talented." Magnus tells him when he opens his eyes again and notices that since Alec's been resting his weight on his right side all this time, he's using his left arm to touch Magnus.

"Oh. That." Alec would have shrugged if he could. "I need to be good with left-handed fighting in case of injury. With swords I mean. Can't shoot a bow one-handed."

His strokes slow down while he talks but he doesn't stop completely so Magnus doesn't continue that topic because he's now getting too close to the end and Alec must notice it too, on Magnus's face or in the hitch of his breath because he reacts accordingly. He picks up the pace, doesn't waste time on teasing and when it's time, he strokes Magnus though his orgasm, until he's asked to stop when everything becomes too much for the alpha.

Somehow, in reversal of roles, Alec ends up petting Magnus. Keeping his fingers away from the now sensitive length and avoiding the post-orgasm mess they've both contributed to, Alec caresses his alpha's abdomen, drawing random patterns on his skin.

"I was in heat once not long after an unlucky patrol." Alec says and it sounds like it's à propos nothing.

Still working on slowing his breathing down, Magnus just looks at him until Alec follows up with: "A broken bone needs a lot of time even with healing runes and no warlock magic. I had to make do with my left hand for three days."

Magnus isn't sure it's appropriate to be amused when at the same time he feels bad for the past, injured version of Alexander. Then he blurs out: "Luckily, you'll have a pair of mine at your disposal if you ever break your arm again."

Alec blinks, then snorts. "I'm so relieved."

They kiss, both smiling.

They're both sweaty and soon to be sticky in a bad way, but both are content and satisfied.

Magnus doesn't ask if it was good for Alec. He soaks in his omega's aura, reads his body language instead of asking such questions. He knows it was good and he's glad this evening went so well when they hadn't planned for it to go in this direction. He's grateful for Alec's courage to come to him.

Having Alec at his side, leaning on him, Magnus wraps his arms around him to keep him close. Neither wants to part from the other. Alec, as is his habit, takes the alpha by the wrist to scent him. In return, Magnus brings his free hand to the back of Alec's neck, gently pressing his fingertips to his sensitive pressure points with hopes of earning himself some more of that purring he heard earlier.
Alec lays his head down on Magnus's chest and the warlock gets the feeling they won't be moving any time soon. Which is perfectly fine by him. Mundane shower would have been great but Magnus goes with magical means of cleaning them both up this time. Alec's breath catches when tendrils of magic wash over his skin, raising the fine hairs on his skin in their wake. It's only a small, lightweight spell but with his body still sensitive and with him being emotionally, instinctively tuned in to his alpha, it almost feels like tangible thing. Like an intentional touch.

A blanket, summoned by magic, falls over them to make up for the loss of warmth now that there's no rush of blood and no arousal to keep their bodies running hot. A couch and a blanket is no nest but Magnus would have a hard time remembering the last time he was in a more perfect spot.

After some shifting and changes in their positions, Alec falls asleep with his head pillowed on his alpha's chest, his heartbeat a steady rhythm in Alec's ear.
It's always a demon's fault

Chapter Summary

Today: Max figures out some things while his parents are failing to do so. Next up: more plot, probably finally more warlocks.

Chapter Notes

I'm gonna try writing shorter chapters than my usual wordcount and see if they come out faster. It'll surely give me less to worry at once about while editing :p

Thank you all so much for reading! Your comments always brighten my day at work.

Morning comes and they're sharing the couch and the blanket. They've drifted apart in the night, Alec rolling onto his back and Magnus turning towards him, holding onto his pillow. No dreams came to either of them in the dark of the night, chased away by their burgeoning bond.

Magnus is the first to begin to wake, brush of magic at his wards giving him the reason to react. Alec stirs when the first knock sounds through the loft. They're now both awake but neither is moving so much as a single finger. They're wrapped in warmth of the blanket and their bodies while the flat is still dark gray and in winter time it's difficult to tell exactly how early it is.

"Catarina?" Alec asks, because it's the first logical conclusion he can come to. His voice comes out rougher and quieter than he meant it to.

Their gazes meet across the distance of the couch.

"Yes." Magnus closes his eyes, pressing his face into the pillow.

Alec's still looking at him. "Will you?"

"She's bringing back your children." Magnus replies, his eyes remaining closed.

"It's your door she's knocking on." Alec still doesn't move. He should, since the alpha isn't doing anything.

Magnus may not be seeing it but he certainly feels the stare on his face. Alexander will have to learn that this may work on others, but it won't work on Magnus. The warlock ignores Catarina's magical presence at his door and his omega's staring. If they love him, they'll let him be.

Twelve seconds pass.

"Do you really want both of us to suffer getting up early?" Magnus asks.

"You're already awake." Alec isn't letting him be. "And you could join us on an early morning for once."
Magnus shifts as if making himself more comfortable and Alec fully expects him to refuse to move. But then a hand finds its way to Alec's hipbone and strokes it.

"You're using compelling arguments." The alpha says.

But the Angel, if it was Catarina alone, Alec would just resign himself to being the rudest host and ignore her in favor of lounging in bed with his alpha. However, she's just done him a favor and he needs to go to her to get his sons back.

The warmth of touch on his hip disappears and that is a sign they will be getting out of bed after all.

Magnus summons them both robes once they're up. Alec would have much preferred to actually get dressed for the day and he knows Magnus did that on purpose, instead of magicking a whole outfit on him. It doesn't matter to Alec that Cat already assumes they've been together last night; showing up at the door in less than a proper shirt and pants makes him vaguely uncomfortable.

Magnus smirks at him but that grows into a genuine smile as he pulls Alec close, stopping him from going to the door.

"Good morning." He says and punctuates it with a kiss to Alec's cheek. It's enough for Alec to stop grumbling about the robe and he pretty much melts into the hug.

Catarina is looking a little harried even before her day truly started. She's holding both boys in each of her arms; Max clings to her work uniform but his attention switches to Magnus the moment he sees the older warlock. Jonathan, however, is the one with red eyes and his lips downturned in unhappiness, fresh proof of his crying visible on his face.

Alec reaches for him, takes him in his arms, kisses his forehead. The baby looks a little bit calmer now that he's within his father's scent.

"I think he just missed you." Catarina says. "Or he doesn't like my place anymore. I had guests the day before, maybe he didn't like what lingered in the air. I promise he's perfectly fine otherwise."

Alec believes Catarina, he trusts her. Anyone else and he'd be asking what they've done to make his son cry. So he simply says, "Sorry for that".

He doesn't like being a bother to others, especially people he relies on regularly, but Catarina waves his apology away.

"You know I enjoy taking care of them. I should be sorry for giving you back a crying baby. But. I really have to go. My job can't wait for me." She throws a not at all subtle glance at Magnus as she says the last sentence.

"Thank you again." Alec says while Magnus tells her to "Go save lives already, my dear Cat."

She leaves them with the boys and their travel bag on the floor by the door. Alec kind of expected her to comment on last night, throw an innuendo his or their way (which was why it annoyed him to be just in a robe at the door), but she didn't do any of that. Still, he's sure this is going to be a topic of conversation at some point.

Once they're all inside, including the bag with baby items, Alec pays attention to his sons beyond their faces and their moods.

"Why is it that whenever they're out they come back in new clothes?" He asks the air but he gets a
reply from Magnus.

"That's because all your baby-sitters are warlocks who don't have to go shopping to get new things?"

Alec gazes down at the blue-and-grey onesie Jonathan has on right now. There are fat little sharks swimming in circles on it.

He pouts. "You're not a shark, are you, love? Who ever saw a shark with a tongue? You're a dragon." He kisses the black fluffy head again. "Yes, a great dragon."

A chuckle comes from Magnus, who's now near beside Alec and holding his hands out to take Jonathan.

"Go get dressed, Father of Dragons."

The morning couldn't be calmer. Music flows through the loft, unobtrusive calming melodies that Alec associates mostly with coffee shops. Magnus sits at the table, phone in his hand as he scrolls through world news section. Alec's attention is divided between tending to his sons and watching his beautiful alpha. Jon is being 'talkative' today after the crying part is all over so Alec encourages him and it's made easier with Max sitting right beside them in his highchair, joining in.

Sometimes Alec remembers that he didn't give birth to Max, that someone else had and then abandoned the boy. And his heart breaks all over again for the sweet, happy child he'd do anything for. But on a morning like this it's easy to shake the heartbreak off when they're all here, together, safe and happy. When Alec glances back up at Magnus, their eyes meet. They exchange smiles as if they're whole sentences, a conversation without words passing between them.

"I have some work waiting for me that I might as well do today. I thought we could make a few potions together. It'll go faster with two pairs of hands."

"Sure."

They move the playmat to the entrance of the office-apothecary-workshop that Alec swears changes its layout (and size) at least twice a week, and leave baby warlocks on it, enclosed in a play pen. Alec takes a seat to Magnus's left and they both look at a list of ingredients that Alec can tell was written by a hand different than his warlock's. Since everything from the list is right here in the loft, they divide work by having Alec gather the ingredients while Magnus sets up the equipment.

Magnus remembers the young Nephilim being awfully serious about potions at the start, which he assumes had to do with Alec's need to be useful and to have something he could work on and complete, something he could do when not shadowhunting. Now, though, Alec takes the time to make faces at the more exotic ingredients (or the more smelly ones). Magnus has been updating his inventory lately so there are some items Alec hasn't seen before and he's making up for it now. He touches a lot of them, which might have to do with omegas' natural need to touch and experience… or it's just pure Alec.

Meanwhile, a blush threatens to bloom on Alec's face when he remembers his request for the special potion to Catarina and he recalls last night. He turns away from the alpha to hide it by actually looking for what they need in a shelf away from the desk where Magnus is.

They work for an hour, during which the omega has to get up twice: once to change Max's diaper
and the second time when Jonathan rolls into a plush toy face-first and startles himself.

Then they have a light second breakfast because they become hungry and is still too early for a dinner. That schedule is normal for the omega but for Magnus it's all shifted. Still, he enjoys every minute of it. While they're eating, a thought comes to the alpha's head.

"You know this is your home too?"

Alec makes a questioning sound while he can't talk with his mouth full.

"You said it's 'my door'. It's yours too."

Alec stares at him, swallows his food. "And you said they're 'my children'. I don't want any other father for them than you. If anything were to happen to me-"

At that line of thought Magnus has to intervene. He shushes Alec, who stubbornly continues.

"If. I don't plan on letting anything happen to me. But either way. They're your children. And I want you to, and expect you to take care of them."

Magnus looks at Alec, his gaze soft even though each bite that he just ate feels like lead now in his stomach. The Nephilim must not realize what thoughts this brings to Magnus's mind. Alec must be thinking about an accident, or the Clave, or some attack while Magnus's mind runs right ahead to the future, where Alexander's mortal nature will betray them all, betray his children and Magnus.

"Of course I would, Alexander." He says. "Anything it takes, I'd do it to keep them safe. And I will do it to keep you all safe."

They reach out for the other at the same time, their fingers lacing above the table beside their plates.

**

The next time Alec pays a visit to the Jade Wolf, he is stared at. Four pairs of eyes, three werewolf and one mundane, linger on him longer than is polite or necessary, or normal for them.

"What?" He asks a bit forcefully, while he sits down in the booth. Alec is sandwiched between Bat and Daniel, opposite Maia and Simon. They're not always meeting all together but it's become a more often thing recently. They are in full set today so the conversation easily moves between many topics, which is how Alec prefers it.

Maia is the first to react, which is to smirk. Simon looks between her and Alec and then he gets it, letting out an awkward "Oh." And then stops himself from saying any more words.

Dustin, the werewolf omega, stays silent but his eyes are laughing and then, eventually Bat catches up to everyone. His beta nose was making him slower but just observing everyone's reaction and the red color rising in Alec's face was enough to clue him in.

"Not a word." Alec tries to nip this in the bud. "Not your business."

"Of course." Maia mimes zipping up her lips.

"You're depriving us a reason to celebrate, you know. But not letting us talk about it."

"You're not getting drinks over my private life."
"But we're just so very happy for you." They're not even holding back their amusement around him and Alec huffs.

"I'm plenty happy for myself, thanks. That's enough."

It takes agonizing ten minutes for them to move on from throwing bad puns and innuendos Alec's way but eventually the conversation topic shifts.

At some point they order food and enjoy it together. It's a slow kind of day, when you don't expect anything to happen and then it's getting late (especially in winter) and you're going to bed before you know it.

So when a group of Shadowhunters enters the premises, it becomes surprisingly interesting.

There's three of them dressed in black as is expected but they don't appear to be on a hunt and they're not official enough to be on a diplomatic visit. Alec doesn't like them for these reasons. He doesn't know their faces. They're either new or from another Institute entirely. If it's the latter, why the hell would they come to Jade Wolf of all places? Is it a coincidence he's here? Since Alec doesn't know them, they shouldn't know his face either. Unless - unlikely - they're looking specifically for him and have been properly debriefed.

When one of them looks around the place and his eyes glide right over Alec, he knows they don't recognize anything about him. Shadowhunters have only average sense of smell and in a place like this, specifically housing werewolves, his scent is a drop in an ocean. Same as Simon's mundane scent. The two of them remain seated while their werewolf friends tense up. Particularly Maia, the one alpha at the table, whose instincts are telling her there are three omegas there technically under her care.

"They don't know me." Alec mutters while the Shadowhunters aren't paying attention to their side of the restaurant. "I've never seen them."

"Hm." Maia wears a serious expression while she looks at the intruders. By then pretty much everyone noticed and many pairs of werewolf eyes are now turned to the Shadowhunters, who stop, not walking further in. They carry themselves with pride expected from their kind but there's a little bit too much of it. Especially for werewolves' taste.

One of the Shadowhunters speaks first, before a rude question might be directed their way.

"There's been increased demonic activity recently and we're looking for who caused it."

A man sitting close to the entrance and nearest to the Shadowhunters, asks "What does that have to do with you wasting your time here?"

"There already have been problems with the pack this year," The Shadowhunters turns his gaze on the man. "It'd wouldn't be a surprise to find the one responsible connected to you, or one of you."

Alec is briefly confused by that claim until his brain catches up and he speaks up.

"There was proof presented by the Alpha that the man you're referring to was never part of the New York pack, never wanted to be and he didn't even stay in the city for more than two weeks." Someone kicks him under the table while he talks but he ignores it. "Right now Luke Garroway has the acknowledgment of that on paper, signed by a Clave member. If you want to take a look."

The werewolves were looking at him confused when he started talking but seeing as he didn't say anything to make the situation worse, they relaxed and he wasn't interrupted.
The Shadowhunters aren't pleased. They were definitely counting on getting some compliance out of the werewolves just by making them nervous but now they see the easy method failed. What Alec knows is that they meant to bring up a werewolf who was messing things up for the Downworld community months ago, before he was chased away for good. He was indeed dabbling in dark magic. Well, not himself, but with two other Downworlders as insane as he was.

Alec only knows about this from Luke because they'd discussed the best course of action where the Accords were concerned and they had done their best to keep the New York pack in the clear. Hence the paper Luke holds onto now for days such as this.

"We don't want anything to do with demons." A woman seated to their right speaks up. "They've already done enough damage to our blood, I think."

The woman has her teenage daughter, also a werewolf, seated beside her. The girl is a bit wide-eyed at the moment but she's old enough to keep the fear at bay. Alec wonders if she's already been taught to fear Shadowhunters or if she simply reacts to what she sees: men in black gear, their body language and the reactions that other people have to them.

There are mostly betas and omegas inside at this time of day. It is stereotypical, but most of their alphas are working now. Not all of them, however. Maia is the one to speak next.

"Listen, I'll be the first to report someone idiotic enough to be summoning demons. It's no one from here so you can go."

There are a few more voices agreeing that no one wants that kind of stupidity here, and also a few voices with more rude requests for the Nephilim to kindly get out. Which they actually do, because there's simply nothing to be gained here anymore unless they want a fight with civilians.

It takes a while for the air in the restaurant to clear of the mix of anxious and aggressive scents.

Alec frowns in thought. Those guys might have been assholes who wished and tried to find the guilty among Downworlders but they didn't make up the original reason. There is something going on, they just didn't want to look at facts and do honest research about it. Alec should probably talk to Magnus.

"I think it's time we go." He says out loud and moves to stand. Simon nods and Bat and Maia stand up as well to let them out of the seats.

"I'll tell Luke about this." Maia says when they're about to part ways outside the front door.

"I'll ask Magnus about the demons." Alec answers.

"Well, I'll just go home and study." Simon adds. "Maybe I'll call Clary about it. And hey," he addresses Alec, "I was waiting for one of the werewolves to say you don't even go here."

Alec blinks. "I do, though?"

Simon sighs in defeat but Maia pats his shoulder. "I got it."

* * *

Alec is welcomed home by spicy smell of dinner and a conversation that's happening between Magnus and his – their – children. Max's excited cooing carries through the loft and Alec can also hear Jon trying to join in.
"Alexander." Magnus notices him when he walks into the room fully. Alec's three warlocks are near the balcony window for better daylight, all of them on the fluffiest carpet they own. There's nothing like a toy near them, making Alec guess Magnus was using magic for them.

The alpha raises from where he was sitting cross-legged and comes up to Alec.

"Hello."

"Hey."

"What's on the menu today?" Alec asks, meaning the smell noticeable even from the front door.

"I thought I was getting a kiss... but if I was then I think you'd know that," the warlock's expression grows dramatically sadder, "and since you're asking me, then I guess I'm-"

Alec silences him with the kiss but that just puts a perfectly smug expression on the alpha's face. Alec steps back, shaking his head exasperatedly.

"Have they eaten?"

"Yes, both of them. They're recently changed, too."

"Mhm. Keep talking, I like what you're saying."

There's a new glint in the alpha's eyes. He steps even closer, puts his hands on Alec's hips and pulls him close.

"I think they're due for a nap soon. At least your little pea is."

Alec hums. "Then if we manage to tire Max out..."

"Then we could..."

"We could."

They eat the food first, then play with Max together. They accidentally invent a new activity: they sit down a little distance away from each other, with Max between them. Alec pushes a rubber ball towards Magnus, who is supposed to catch it and send it back. It's all within Max's reach, for him to catch if he can. Magnus uses magic, of course, the ball returning on his turns with a trail of light, like a comet. Alec's eyes track it with the same kind of wonder that Max's eyes do.

While they do this, Alec tells Magnus of what happened in Jade Wolf.

Magnus listens with a serious face but then the expression shifts. "I thought we were supposed to be setting a mood soon, darling. That's the opposite of it..."

"Well, yes, but we're not going to do anything about it tonight. I just wondered if there is in fact something going on? You'd know about it if there was increased demon activity?"

"Not always. But usually, yes."

"So there is something?"

Magnus sighs. He looks down at the ball which he now has in his hands. "There may be, but nothing major. Look, I'd rather let the Institute do their job first, it'll keep them busy."
Alec frowns. "And as I've just told you, it didn't exactly keep them away from Downworlders who are completely uninvolved."

"You've just also told me you didn't recognize them as locals. They might be passing through."

"How is that less worrying than local patrols?"

"It means they'll move on and be forgotten."

"After spoiling the air for the local community."

Max turns his head from his omega parent to the ball, then to his alpha parent. There's nothing happening? His baby instincts pick up on the change in air only a little, since there's no strong emotions involved yet.

He knows the ball's not getting any nearer and there are no lights by it. He reaches his hand out towards it, but it does nothing. It's too far.

"What exactly do you want me to do?" Magnus asks. "Go out to search for the demons?"

"For the source, Magnus. And what I want is for you to tell me if you know about it already."

"What are you going to do? Keep the information in, because there's no one for you to relay it to."

Alec clenches his jaw and looks away.

Magnus sighs, his shoulders growing heavy. "I don't mean to make light of the situation and I don't mean that we're not going to do anything about it…"

"It's fine." Alec replies. Magnus knows well enough how to read his tone to know it's anything but fine.

"You're right, someone will handle it." Alec says evenly. "Eventually."

"Alexander," Magnus stops when the omega stands up abruptly.

"It's already past Jon's feeding time. I'll go handle that."

Magnus doesn't stop him, watches him go, wondering how something so minor can blow up so fast. He turns his gaze to Max.

"I'm sorry, Blueberry. We'll give your dad some time and we'll come back to this later." He picks up the boy to hug him and then sets him back down on the mat. He raises walls of a play pen around him just in case, since he plans to go send a few fire messages.

Max sits feeling quite alone. Well, the adult scents are both fresh and constant and he can hear a voice (Alec talking to Jon) so all is well but… but the ball is still outside of his reach and he wants it.

He doesn't know why it stopped moving and shining but he liked it so much… His limbs fail to bring him to it. He can sit and roll, and crawl, but somehow his sense of direction is wrong when rolling and crawling just frustrates him. So he does the third action: sits up and stares at the ball intently.

In his memories the ball moves across the floor to him. In those memories, the ball is in his hands.
He reaches out again, this time also trying to talk the ball into moving. He throws all the vowels and syllables he knows how to make at it, but it won't budge.

Until it does. From his little fingers, still stretched, trying to grab the distant item, a thread of magic forms. It's weak, pale, unsteady. But it's sent towards a goal and it goes, like a mist over the playmat until it touches the ball. Once the connection's made, it sticks. It's easier to pull it back, along with the toy, back to the little warlock, where the magic belongs.

Soon enough Max is brimming with joy, holding onto the ball, all trails of magic dissipated.
It's always a demon's fault pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Today: how to make your archer happy and many other events. Next up: more warlock stuff.

Warning: a nightmare happens. Also smut. And look, I'm not going to tag individual sexual acts since I don't like seeing it in tags as a reader. Just remember that I'm pretty vanilla and that this is an ABO story, and there won't be bad surprises.

Chapter Notes

I said I was going to try shorter chapters, lmao. Pls enjoy 18 pages of words.

Magnus didn't want their conversation to end on the note it did so he sent out some messages and received quick replies to some of them.

Now he's sitting in his armchair, a glass of port in his hand, many thoughts filling his head while he keeps an eye on Max. Alexander is still in his room with Jonathan and Magnus assumes he won't be willing to come out soon. His door isn't closed but Magnus isn't going to go poking his nose in there right now.

He shouldn't have said those words to Alexander, not when it was such a sore, unhealing spot for the Nephilim but those words were also honest. They were something he was actually thinking. What could Alec do?

Magnus wishes they could go back to their tentative plans for this evening, the more up-close and personal plans. Since the night they have spent together the image of the omega's body and the way he looked giving in to pleasure was constantly at the back of Magnus's mind, coming up whenever he wasn't focused on something else. That clear memory is enough to send a wave of warmth through his body, forcing him to try and push it down before it makes his scent change.

Alec doesn't join him for the evening meal, he literally just grabs a toast with something to put on it and eats it while reading a book, curled up in the corner of the small sofa which stands by the wall with paintings. He only pays attention to Magnus when a flaming message flies through the loft to be caught in the warlocks hand. Magnus hums thoughtfully after reading it, then sends another one of his own. He can feel Alec's gaze on him even if he doesn't look up to check. The omega isn't exactly giving off warm and fuzzy vibes but even so, Magnus enjoys the continued attention. It's almost as if they're doing something together.

Nothing comes out of the messages that evening, not even a piece of solid information he could pass on to Alec. He doesn't want to give the Nephilim the bits and pieces he has because it'd be too much like throwing him scraps to appease him. Resigned to the silent treatment he's getting,
Magnus decides to just watch a movie or two, spend the evening in the most mundane way possible.

Alec stays in the main room, reading. He makes himself something to drink at some point and while he's not glaring a hole in Magnus's back, the warlock watches him in turn. Alec is wearing a dark, moss-green shirt with faux leather stripes running down his shoulders and arms. Magnus likes that shirt on him. He doesn't spare much thought for the pants, which in his opinion could be just a little bit tighter but still, those long legs look perfectly fine.

The omega is walking around in just socks, which brings to mind the stereotypical, ideal image of an omega barefoot in the kitchen, preferably pregnant.

As if on cue a sound comes from the bedroom, a little whine that both the alpha and the omega know to recognize as a call for food.

Magnus begins to push himself up to stand when Alec tells him "I got it." He makes a beeline for his bedroom where he takes a minute or two before walking back out with his son in the wrap on his chest. Magnus doesn't hope he'll be asked for help with heating up the formula and so he isn't disappointed when Alec does everything himself, even if it means his baby is growing impatient.

Then, to the alpha's surprise, Alec doesn't go back to his room, instead sitting down on the couch on the opposite end from where Magnus is seated. The omega focuses completely on feeding his son so Magnus is free to watch them both, the tv completely ignored.

He'll never get enough of the sight of those two dark, fluffy heads of hair close together when Alec's leaning over Jon, speaking to him in a low voice.

Suddenly, with an inquisitive hum, Alec stops the feeding and inspects the bottle before pointing it at Magnus, who blinks confused.

"Would you, please?" Alec asks, brandishing the bottle at him.

Then Magnus gets it and with a flourish sends a tendril of magic to fix the rubber nipple which was just bitten through by Jon's warlock mark teeth. Alec thanks him and the feeding resumes.

When they're done with the bottle, Alec sets it aside on the coffee table but he doesn't leave the couch. Fed and content, baby Jonathan becomes interested in conversation. Alec responds to his cooing, keeping his voice low as if he's mindful of Magnus's presence in the room. As if Magnus could possibly want to keep his attention on a movie rather than his family.

When Alec randomly looks up at some point and notices Magnus observing him, he immediately looks away, back at the baby, while his cheeks slowly redden.

It's like this for a while, the three of them sitting together, Alec interacting with his son until the boy's eyelids start to droop slowly.

Meanwhile, Max seems to be perfectly happy spending his time sleeping. He already slept longer than is his normal napping time but they won't be waking him up when it's not necessary. Maybe they did manage to tire him out playing before their conversation about the Shadowhunters went south. He'll probably be waking up in the middle of the night because of it.

Magnus wonders if he should try to feed the omega something more than that toast after all. He doesn't appear to be avoiding Magnus now but who knows, maybe sitting down at the table with him isn't something Alec is in a mood for. So the alpha remembers the easiest solution and with a wave of magic covers the coffee table with two wide plates full of finger-foods. They haven't had
those in a while but what he conjures is all that Alec liked best in the past.

And it works. With the baby safely in the wrap, Alec is free to reach out and grab what he wants from the plates.

Magnus switches his movie to the last episode of the show they have been watching together. They let the late evening pass in silence by their wordless agreement, eating the food, each of them thinking about many things while they share the space and companionship.

* * *

The next day brings no change but on the day after that there is an influx of fire messages, which Alec notices and pretends not to wait for Magnus to say something.

"There have been more demon sightings and several of those have all the signs of being the result of summoning rather than just your average free-range demons." Magnus says sometime around five pm.

Alec nods.

"I think I should lend my help to end this minor mess fast. I still don't think I'm needed there and I also still believe that's the Institute's job, but if this goes on my headache will only be growing...." He puts his fingers to his forehead in dramatic fashion as if he wasn't the one making inquiries in the first place. All because of one omega.

Alec nods again. "Good. It'll keep people safe."

"If we can actually track the source while we're out."

Yes, Alec knows perfectly well research is one thing, actual hunting is another and often it doesn't go as planned. Not that it matters to him when it's not his hunt.

As the day becomes an evening, Alec grows gradually tense as more phonecalls come in regarding the issue. And then, Magnus tells him that all is set up and that he'll be going to meet with other warlocks to investigate and hopefully resolve the matter tonight. Just as Alec wanted.

This is supposed to be warlock issue, not Alec's. He repeats to himself that he has small children to think of, that Magnus knows what he's doing, that Magnus is the High Warlock, that he doesn't need Alec of all people to tag along only to be a distraction, that... he stops himself, his thoughts getting blurry while he tries to stop them from getting worse but he doesn't have anything else to turn them to.

He looks at his fingers held in Jon's fist. He's given it all up for this small being. He can give up thinking about going out to hunt one more time, he can let his alpha go instead.

The change in Alec's posture is slow but noticeable, especially to Magnus. He hesitates, watching the omega instead of going out immediately. Alec's sitting down, his back to Magnus and he probably thinks Magnus is already heading out. His shoulders drop, he bows over the child in front
There's no need for Alexander to go with him. Magnus doesn't want him to go. But he also knows that it's an alpha's way of thinking and what Alec needs from an alpha is not that aspect of protection.

Torn between his instincts and his mind, Magnus weighs the pros and cons. Alexander isn't just an omega. He's part of Shadow World, a warrior, a Shadowhunter. Pregnancy might have made him softer but he never lost his edge or skills.

And Magnus is old. He's capable of imagining the future, having seen so much of life already. And he sees Alec, months from now, years from now, growing to quietly resent every single moment that he was made to stay behind, stay home, focus on children who won't remain tiny and fully dependent on him forever. He sees Alec hiding his real feelings just to make himself appear a 'proper' omega.

There will always be a Camille or a werewolf (or a mundane) looking for a fight, there will always be demons and other dangers. The Nephilim is trained and smart, and capable, and if he went with Magnus today, then Magnus would be right there to watch his back or send him home via portal if things went south. He can think of no reason not to give Alexander this. So he stands there, and he takes another second to decide it's the right thing to do.

Taking out his phone, he quickly texts Dot to come to his loft instead of waiting at the designated meeting place. She must have been looking at her phone when he did that because it takes almost no time at all for her to be portalling over, waiting outside the front door to be let inside. Magnus doesn't invite her in, he steps out to the hallway and closes the door behind him.

Dot's looking at him with her eyebrows raised. "What are we doing?"

"I'm going to give you that card set you've been trying to blackmail out of my hands for the past seventy years if you stay here tonight and watch Max and Jon."

"While you go out and have fun?"

"If you stay, Alexander will be able to go."

"Ah." She says and Magnus knows by the look on her face she's already willing to do it, but still she adds, "this is the moment when I ask for the French royal pen set I know you have and don't use."

"Because I've won that and I'm not letting go of it."

"You never use it." She repeats.

"I'm giving you the cards, which are more valuable than three pens and you know it."

She throws her arms up in mock 'I give up' gesture. "Let me inside, then." She sighs. "I regret bundling up for the night because I'll be taking it all off now."

Magnus holds the door open for her and they walk into the loft.

"Good evening, everyone." She says when Alec turns around to look what Magnus is doing coming back home.

"Hey." Alec's voice raises to a question even in this short word.
"It so happens," Magnus says, "that Dot is free and bored tonight, and looking for some little company."

Alec just blinks. He's perfectly aware Dot was supposed to be going with the other warlocks. Dot herself just rolls her eyes and magicks her coat and scarf away to land on one of the armchairs.

She walks over to where Alec is with the kids and she picks up Max for a hello kiss to his cheek. Next Jon gets the same greeting.

Meanwhile, Alec's silently looking at Magnus, waiting for the explanation.

"If you go get your bow and sword we'll go see to the demons together."

At that, Alec's eyes shine. Magnus doesn't know how else to call the excitement reflecting in the omega's face. Alec nods, says he needs a minute to get ready and he is truly efficient about it, as if there is a fear propelling him that Magnus will change his mind and leave without him. He comes out in different clothes than he wore before and Magnus is truly impressed at his skill in getting changed without magic to aid him. Must be something he learned at the Institute.

Alec is holding onto his bow in its case but understandably he has some doubts about its usefulness. It's a completely mundane bow, not capable of doing anything to a demon except maybe distracting a smaller one.

"Trust me," Magnus tells him. "You'll get to use it."

They go together. A portal lets them out in a spot chosen specifically because all the attending warlocks could open their own portals right there or nearby.

What they are today is a kind of a hunting party that's meant to figure the summonings out and dispose of the demons they'll most likely encounter. With luck, they'll encounter the original reason for the mess as well.

There's a pair of warlocks who have a mundane friend with the Sight who had almost been killed by a demon two days ago. They're Fiona and Othis.

There's a warlock who Alec knows about from Magnus's tales, who is a sort of an rival of Magnus's, though apparently only in that warlock's mind. No one actually considers him an actual equal of the High Warlock. He's Arthur.

There is a warlock who Magnus introduces to Alec as a great scholar and user of tracking magic. He's Cassius.

Then there is Magnus Bane himself and Alec is an omega brought in by him in place of Dorothea Rollins. And so, Alec gets some raised eyebrows while he in turn realizes Fiona's face is familiar to him. He figures he must have seen her in the Pandemonium and that her partner was also probably there. Alec's recent visit in the club and now his being here puts him firmly at the High Warlock's side in the eyes of all these people. He wonders what they think. He was just an omega who Magnus kissed in the club and now he's an omega with a weapon, joining their team.

"Bane brought Legolas." Arthur says, causing equal number of smiles and derisive snorts.

Magnus doesn't introduce Alec with full name, sensing he might not want that. It's different to reveal his family name to Clary, Simon or his werewolf friends than it is in front of unfamiliar
warlocks. He also says "my partner" rather than "my mate" to put Alec on more equal ground verbally. They do reveal that Alec is a Nephilim but not a Shadowhunter anymore. Magnus cuts of the questions about that before they even can be asked.

He doesn't ask if it's fine with them to have Alec there. Maybe he would have if Alec was an active member of the Conclave but even then he might just have decided without asking for others' input. Warlocks are considered solitary beings as opposed to werewolves and vampires but if they could be considered a pack, then Magnus Bane would be the alpha in this city.

Alec knows he'll be on the receiving end of some less than friendly glares all night but he doesn't hear anything from any of the Downworlders. Hopefully they're just as interested in success rather than petty, empty talking as he is.

"Give me your arrows." Magnus tells him before they set out and Alec hands the quiver to him. The warlock upturns the quiver to get the tips of the arrows out where he can touch them. When his fingers glide over the metal, red glow seeps into each of them. It fades within seconds but Alec knows whatever it did, the effect's still there inside.

"There." Magnus says, sliding the arrows back home. "Now with my personal touch."

"Thank you." Alec grips his quiver for a second before putting the strap back over his shoulder. "Let's go find something to test them out on."

Just being able to witness the glint in the Nephilim's eyes is enough to make up to Magnus the uncertainty of bringing him here.

For the first hour not much happens in terms of action. The warlocks make some progress looking for the summoner and they do encounter some demons. The creatures are probably not all related to the incident since they're found in different places, most of them pretty weak and even those stronger are not much of a problem to kill. Alec gets to use his blade more than the bow, all because of the short distance to the demons they keep running into. There are some complaints about the cold but no one actually means them. They're moving on.

Alec himself would rather be in warmth somewhere, especially as an omega. He does enjoy a winter Magnus, though. The High Warlock is wearing a sharp coat with a standing collar and a dark purple scarf around his throat. No hat could possibly be good enough to ruin the artful wave of hair on top of his head so Alec gets to admire the snowflakes settling in there, making dots of contrast with the dark hair. There is a streak of green in there, Alec knows that, but it isn't exactly visible in the street lights. Alec enjoys keeping this knowledge to himself.

Finally, something interesting starts happening when a pair of ravener demons sneak-attack them. They don't really succeed to hurt anyone seriously because the warlocks were actually being careful but if the two demons were sent out, there are probably more.

It takes significantly more effort to kill them than the previous creatures. Alec's blood rushes through his veins, his body fueled by adrenaline. He feels fear, too. It's just been so long since he saw and fought a threat more serious than a werewolf alpha. But in the end he's standing with his blade and boots dirty with remains of a demon, breathing hard but pleased with himself.

Magnus and Arthur got the second demon at the same time, incinerated it with their magical fire
shot at the creature from two directions.

When the group is attacked by the third demon of the same kind, as they all expected, Fiona and Othis dispose of it before Alec can gather himself to move.

"We must be going the right way, huh?"

Alec just nods seriously while the other warlocks begin a discussion of how to best proceed.

There comes a point where the magical signature they've been following becomes less clear and it's rather obvious they'll need to split up.

What's also obvious to Alec, is that the High Warlock should be going in the direction which is the most promising, so that he is the one dealing with the threat. Alec also happens to have an opinion on which way they should go. He doesn't necessarily think they should follow the same path, since it is entirely possible all unclear signs are worth checking and that there are multiple warlocks involved. It's where his opinions don't align with the other warlocks'.

What Alec says is this: "If I were alone, I'd focus on following the demon who got away, while it's still easy to track it."

There was an ugly, worm-like creature that they saw skittering away not long ago.

And to those words, Arthur immediately replies: "You mean you'd waste your time following a pest rather than the true threat?"

"It is a pest, but it's evolved enough to know where to look for shelter. Or protection of something bigger than itself." He means to continue his sentence but he's interrupted.

"Those demons only like company of sewer rats and others of their kind. They avoid anything that isn't easy prey."

Alec frowns. "Yes, because usually they have nothing else around but rats. However-

"They've been studied easily because of how weak and slow they are." Cassius interrupts him this time. "That one is already sitting in a hole somewhere nearby, trembling."

Alec takes a breath. "Yes, it would do that if there was nothing else going on. This demon is an opportunist and it has the opportunity now. I'm not a warlock or a demon and I can't sense energies, I can't even see them with no runes, but we all already know there's something happening here, with the use of magic, demonic powers or who knows what else."

"There is absolutely nothing in the books confirming this."

"Except my years of Shadowhunter practice."

Hunting worm demons was a great exercise for young Nephilim trained enough to be in the field but not experienced enough to be allowed dangerous missions. It was during those years that he learned that worm demons crawled their way to hiding places when outnumbered or overwhelmed and he also learned they know how to crawl to something bigger and stronger than themselves, effectively becoming bait for the Shadowhunters to follow.

It had happened once, that older Shadowhunters had to step in once they realized the younger ones were in danger. Young alphas – particularly Jace and Isabelle – had complained loudly about being told to step back but Alec, being a little bit older and an omega, had accepted the order and
waited for the events to unfold.

It had been a tough night. Worm demons had, so to speak, kicked hornets' nest, where hornets were actually shax demons. It took the whole team to take them all out and check the whole area until the team leader was satisfied with its safety.

Alec looks at his shoes, now dirty with typical dirty city snow. He waits for Magnus to say something, since he's the one who will have the last word here.

Alec had always taken orders while still in the Institute while preparing for a mission, but in the field it had always been his call ever since he was old enough not to have senior Shadowhunters looking after him. It stings not to have this power now.

"I'll go with Alexander to follow his idea." Magnus says. "If it's right, I will be there to deal with it. If the other way is right, well, you know how to call us back."

Fiona and Othis exchange glances, there is a muttered disagreement from either Arthur or Cassius, Alec doesn't know which one because he's looking at Magnus, trying to hold back a smile.

When they're alone, the other warlocks on their own way, Magnus tugs at Alec's coat to pull him near. Surprised, Alec goes with it and then he's being kissed.

Both their lips are cooled from the winter air but neither complains.

"What is this for?" Alec asks when they part.

"Oh, that's just how happy I am to finally be alone with you. I don't have to suffer their presence anymore."

"Why did you agree to do this in the first place?"

"Why did I agree to join them or why did I agree to do something about the demon issue?"

"Both."

"You know why, darling. And they're here because their friend was hurt and because they've been working on this before I got involved. It's only common courtesy. Now. Let's follow your hunch and prove you right."

They end up in an alley. It's not very dark or foreboding, in fact it looks just like a place where nothing ever happens in movies. But even Alec can tell something had happened here. His skin feels it, residue of a large amount of magical energy spent, such as is needed for a summoning or a large portal.

There isn't anything left to tell them there was a circle of any sort. No chalk on the ground, no scorched marks. No bodies, no demons. But it does make sense the little worm demon would try to make its way right here, sensing the magic. Who knows what happened to the creature. Maybe the summoner killed it, or maybe it got transported elsewhere along with everything else that has been here not long ago.

Magnus crouches down and hovers his hand above the ground. Deep blue magic comes forward
from his fingers, touching the ground like slowed down lightnings. Enchanted by the magic, as always, Alec just watches for a moment until his instincts kick in and he shakes himself. He's supposed to be on guard, especially when Magnus is concentrating on one task.

The alley isn't cramped but still it's not where Alec likes to be. He walks in a wide circle around Magnus and listens for signs of trouble. When he passes by a large trash container, he gets an idea. The container belongs to an old building, probably some sort of business that lasted there since it opened long ago. The point is, it's not very tall on one side. It has a flat roof over a part which is most likely storage room and Alec can get up there with the passive help of the trash container.

Alec meets Magnus's eyes and inclines his head towards the building. Magnus nods and turns his focus back to his magic.

It's quite an uncomfortable to climb when everything's freezing but Alec gets to where he wanted and concludes that the alley around his warlock is safe. Or appears to be safe.

Next, he finds a new way to get even higher and then cross over to the next building in line, which looks to be a fancy bookstore. Alec likes this roof. It's not very slippery and the high ends of various vents make for a nice cover for him. But he isn't there to admire a roof. There is something new to catch his interest. The distinct scent of an omega reaches his nose and he tries to guess which way it came from and how to keep himself downwind. It's the night air that allows for scents to be clearer where they don't belong, noticeable even for inferior noses.

The closer he gets to the edge of the bookstore's roof, the more he hears voices. There are two or more people there, one of them the omega he smelled. Since he can't tell much about the other people, they might be betas or suppressing alphas. Carefully peering over the edge, Alec nearly gasps.

Shadowhunters. Three of them. It's poorly lit down there, so he can't really see the details but none of them are familiar to his eyes as far as posture goes. They must be new too. Then he realizes they are young. Not exactly fresh out of Academy but young and new. And an omega among them.

Relief courses through Alec. He didn't even know he needed to know this little piece of information- that they haven't banned omegas from the field because of what had happened to him. After a minute of observation he assumes the girl is the omega and the two boys with her are betas or weakly smelling alphas.

They're talking among themselves, most likely deciding on their next step. Alec can't know if they're on a routine patrol or pursuing any leads. He hopes it's the former. While they're not moving, Alec watches them with a mix of fondness and envy filling his lungs. These are just kids, and while Alec has enough self-awareness to know he's not far from them in actual age, he feels decades older than them. He's happy to see them because they remind him so much of Izzy, Jace and himself. And he's envious for the same reasons. He's envious of their runes and their holstered steles.

They begin to move at last, walking into a path between two buildings which probably isn't any wider than three feet. Alec follows behind them on the roof, as if pulled by an invisible thread. It actually is a good idea to keep an eye on them as long as they're moving parallel to where Magnus is, until they begin to walk the opposite direction or get far enough.

They're not paying enough attention, Alec thinks, when he spots movement in the dark below him and behind the Shadowhunters. It crawled out through an open or broken basement window, like a cat. If Alec was their superior, he'd be pretty displeased with their mistake right now and probably let them suffer consequences on their own. As it is, he simply shakes his head and readies his bow.
When he pulls out one arrow his eyes catch the faint red glow of Magnus's magic still working. It's not exactly easy to get into the best position while being unnoticed by both Shadowhunters and the following demon but Alec manages to do just that. He lets the arrow fly and doesn't stick around to watch it hit target. He knows it hit because of the noise a dying and disintegrating demon makes. Alec knows the noise will get the Shadowhunters to turn back to investigate and he knows they might find the arrow but it doesn't exactly bother him.

He returns to watch over Magnus with a smile on his face. The warlock seems to be almost done and when he truly is done, he stands up and looks around until he spots Alec. Magnus doesn't know what his omega is smiling about but it's infectious. Actually, just sight of Alexander standing beautiful and tall above him, bow in hand, is enough to make Magnus happy.

The warlock raises his hand as if he was offering a lady help to step out of a carriage and waits while Alexander gets back down into the alley, until he puts his hand in Magnus's.

"What did you do?"

"Mm, just some shadow hunting. You might want to make sure the spell you put on us before is still good to conceal us."

Magnus pulls his hand back to clutch at his chest. "My spells never go bad."

They grin at each other like teenagers and Alec thinks there's nowhere else he'd rather be than here. Not with the Nephilim patrol, not at the Institute. He wants to be just here.

Magnus is the first to break the mood. He makes a wide, vague gesture at where he'd been doing magic.

"I wouldn't say we were too late but whoever it is, they're gone. They were two steps ahead of us even if it feels like we just missed them." He raises his hand to silence Alec before he can even open his mouth. "However, naturally, I did get enough relevant information that makes me confident this won't take long to solve."

"Okay? So did they leave traces?"

"Yes. Magical traces that can be used like fingerprints. Or more like DNA test."

"And?"

"And, my angel, I made sure to be able to track it once we're out of here. I'll notify the community and from there it'll be just a matter of time before the person responsible for this is found."

"Oh. I mean, that's good."

"Yes, it is good. I'm sorry you won't get to scare them with your prowess."

Alec huffs, not happy to be made fun of, even in a loving way. And yes, he is feeling a little disappointed in the whole affair. Then again, he shouldn't be so picky. He already got what he wanted this night.

After that it doesn't take long for the whole trip to be over. All warlocks meet together, report their findings (the summoning site on Alec and Magnus's side and more demons on other warlocks' side), and agree to have another meeting about this the following day. They part ways.

**
Alec is very happy to step back into the warmth of the loft. His nose must be red, if the way it's numb and tingling at the same time is anything to go by. He gets rid of his boots and his coat and makes his way to where Dot is, seated on their couch. She doesn't move only because she has a sleeping baby in her lap and another one in the carrycot beside her.

"Thank you." Alec tells her while he picks up Max carefully so as not to wake him up.

"That wasn't a problem at all. Especially since they were very calm tonight." She looks at Magnus. "And I helped myself to a glass of wine. And that cake you have on the counter. Actually, I sent myself a slice home for later."

While she gets her scarf and coat, Magnus gives her a brief recount of the events and after that opens a portal for her so she doesn't have to use her energy. With last 'goodnight's, she is gone and Magnus and Alec are alone in their loft. Alec keeps holding sleeping Max to his chest and Magnus comes closer to pet the dark blue curls.

Even as he's doing that, he looks up at Alec's face.

"Well, I think I'd like to shower now." Magnus says, because while being clean is a snap of fingers away, he'd very much like the comfort of hot water after spending the night running around in freezing weather.

"Yours or mine?" Alec asks and it's so sudden Magnus needs an extra second to process what he means.

"Well, mine is bigger, that's for sure."

Alec's blush makes an appearance, darkening quickly.

Magnus holds out his hand for Alec to take and when he does, adjusting his now one-armed hold on Max. Magnus leads him to the couch and picks up the carrycot with Jon. Then he leads Alec to the door of the omega's own room.

"I'll wait here." He says pointedly.

Alec nods, his throat strangely dry.

He puts Max in the baby bed and leaves Jon how he is, only sets the carrycot in the middle of his nest and makes sure it won't tip over under any circumstances.

Then he goes back to Magnus. Magnus, who is waiting, and who takes his hand as before. The lights in the loft are now dim, just enough not to trip over objects. It's definitely intended, Alec thinks.

They pass through the bedroom, which Alec knows from his sleepwalking and from his little theft trips.

But the bathroom… the warlock's bathroom is indeed something. There is large bath, not even a tub, built into the floor and then there is a shower cabin that could fit four people comfortably. Alec does not think about who'd been invited in here before.

Magnus turns the overhead shower head on before they get in, so that warmth and steam have time to build up. Then he turns to Alec and tugs at his sleeve playfully.

"May I?" He asks.
Alec nods. Magnus unzips the hoodie first, which was an item that Alec had bought for himself. Magnus has to concede that the thing is very soft and warm, and if only it was in anything but dull gray, he might be convinced to put it on himself. Under the hoodie is a black, long-sleeved shirt that must serve as thermal underwear. Magnus can easily imagine something like this being standard issue in the Institute during cold months. It's the plainest of plain blacks, but the alpha does very much appreciate the way it hugs the omega's body, his chest and arms, and he very much enjoys pulling it up and off of him. Alec patiently – or intentionally – doesn't move to help or hinder Magnus, just watches him move.

Alec loves Magnus's hands. Right now the warlock still has his rings on and a woven bracelet that has blood-red stones woven into it. Alec figures it must be some kind of a fancy thread, to be chosen by the warlock to wear. Anyway, the bracelet holds Alec's attention only for the shortest of moments because well, he's being undressed and soon to be stepping into the shower. For the second time, they're going to be naked together.

When the alpha is done with his belt and begins to pull his jeans down, Alec puts his hand out to brace himself on his shoulder for balance before lifting one foot. Alec gazes down at the emerald eyeshadow on top of Magnus's eyelids and at the emerald streak of dye in his hair.

This time he's left in his underwear while Magnus stands up and winks at him before making his own, whole outfit disappear. And okay, Alec was not prepared for that, he was expecting to have time to prepare his body and his feelings while Magnus took off his clothes.

"Shall we?" Magnus asks and his amusement makes Alec roll his eyes.

He makes quick work of removing his underwear and then joins Magnus in the huge shower. At first they both stand apart, both enjoying the simple pleasure of letting water do its work. The size of the shower head is probably meant to imitate rainfall.

By the Angel, it feels amazing. The touch of hot water on his skin is great but even greater is knowing he spent his time productively on a job well done. Coupled with a shower this is something he remembers from the Institute. He always liked the brief period when he had time to rest, to sleep, to do what he wanted without anything else waiting for him. When he was still pleased with his team and himself and taking the time did not make him lazy or feeling like he should be doing something else.

It's very similar right now, except he knows that after tonight there won't be anything else coming any time soon. He knows this is an exception, not a beginning of anything. Magnus won't be looking for trouble, so to speak and he definitely won't want Alec to make a habit of hunting anything…

Something other than water touching his hair snaps Alec out of his thoughts. He meets Magnus's gaze. The warlock puts both his hands in Alec's hair, and begins to massage it. Soon enough Alec can smell the shampoo that Magnus is using. It's the one Alec always smells on Magnus. He likes it.

Magnus works with a fond little smile not leaving his lips. Alexander tilts his head to lean into his hands when a particular spot must feel really good to him. Magnus takes time with that. When his hair is done, Magnus switches the spray from overhead to the one coming out of the wall so they're not being hit in their faces with droplets. Now he can get a kiss for his washing services, which Alec gives him happily.

When his omega looks at him expectantly, waiting for further cues, Magnus calls a bottle of shower gel to his hand and puts a bit of it on Alec's open palm, then the same amount on his own
before sending the bottle away.

He begins by touching Alexander's chest, smoothing his hand over those lovely muscles, feeling them under his fingertips. Alec lets him do just that for a while and Magnus assumes he might be a little bit lost and undecided where to touch back. When he does decide, Magnus feels him on his arm, smoothing the gel over his left bicep. Since he's moving, his hands on Alec, his muscles are working and he notices how his omega lingers on one spot where the firmness of his arm is best noticeable.

Water washes off and drowns out some of the scent and pheromones in the air but it's pretty obvious how they're feeling when they're both visibly hard. Magnus wishes that the purely omegan scent of arousal wasn't dimmed along with other scents but it's not like he's 'missing out' on anything here.

They continue to explore each other, spreading the shower gel unevenly, based on how attracted they are to each other's parts. Or how distracted they are by them.

Alec moves his fingers from Magnus's shoulder to his forearm, then his wrist. He takes Magnus's hand in both of his. "You chipped your nail somewhere."

"Huh." They both peer down at the dot in black polish on the ring finger. "Thank you for noticing, if I saw it later I'd probably become terribly distracted and would have to leave you to fix it." He says in his best serious voice while Alec stares at him.

Soon enough all thoughts of polish, chipped or otherwise, are forgotten because when Alec initiates the next kiss he moves a step forward, giving Magnus a push until the warlock also steps back. Magnus allows himself to be pushed until his back hits the wall of the shower. He doesn't mind when the stone is warmed up nicely. Only then does Alec stop as well, before dropping to his knees.

Magnus's brain ceases all function, except for processing what he's seeing and what he's experiencing when Alec puts his hands on where Magnus most needs it. A second later his lips follow, a gentle peck to the head of Magnus's cock.

The warlock is too stunned to speak, to say something like 'Alexander, you don't have to.' But oh gods, he trusts that the omega knows he doesn't have to and Magnus really, truly wants this to never stop.

He leans against the wall like it's his best support right now while Alexander is making his knees weak.

There's no finesse to it, no plan, not really a rhythm yet. Magnus knows for a fact he's the first man Alexander is doing this for and yet all memories of his most skilled past lovers fly out of his head when he's with Alexander. It's like every gasp, every moan the omega's lips coax out of him takes a memory with it until there is nothing left but the omega in front of him.

Alec isn't flirty, he isn't trying to add anything extra to what he's doing. He isn't looking up at Magnus to watch his reaction, he isn't pushing himself to take in more than he can manage. His eyes are closed like he needs it to focus but his careful, hesitant, gentle ministrations work miracles in a very, very short time.

Magnus gives his omega a word of warning just before he comes. Alec swallows, of course he does, but still Magnus wants to laugh when he sees the face his omega makes afterwards. It's such an Alec thing to do. But he doesn't laugh because he's too busy catching his breath.
Alec raises back to his full height, his flushed cheeks now better visible to Magnus.

"Thank you." The alpha says and touches the omega's cheek, gently drawing him in for another kiss.

"What do you need now, darling?" Magnus reaches down to Alec's cock in turn. "A return of the favor?"

"What you did last time." Alec replies, breathless but determined.

"Same thing?" Magnus asks, teasing.

"I liked it." Magnus's breath catches at Alexander's shy honesty. Those simple words, 'I liked it', are the best praise Magnus received.

"I'd like to make a better memory of it." Alec says.

"I'll be happy to help you with that, Angel." Magnus replies. "I think you'll be more comfortable lying down for that." He adds.

Alec just nods helplessly, his face red but eyes eager.

They make it back to the bedroom after Magnus dries them with magic. Alec lies down, with much more room than he had on the couch, and Magnus follows, finding a perfect spot for himself between the omega's thighs.

He'll never get bored of kissing. Deep, passionate kisses that make both their toes curl and other, smaller kisses that he plants on Alec's skin from his collarbones to his scent points, where Magnus pauses. He's very glad he just came not long ago because the potent aroma of his mate's arousal is like a drug. He knows there is welcoming wetness between his omega's legs right now and he knows how it feels to touch him there. Which is what Alec is asking for again.

So of course Magnus doesn't make him wait.

At the first contact the omega draws in a breath, freezes in anticipation of more, now that he knows how this can feel.

"Yes." He sighs when he feels firmer touch.

He's very wet and very ready, so the alpha doesn't bother going slow. He starts with two fingers but quickly adds a third and moves them confidently, rubbing the silky walls inside.

Alec curses, bites his lip. Magnus doesn't let him stay quiet. He sets a fast pace, doesn't waste time when finding the best spot inside Alec to massage to bring him to climax. Grabbing at the sheets under him, Alec tries to find purchase on the bed. It's intense, so intense, and he decides he likes it this way, he doesn't need to slow down.

Between the kisses and the fingers inside him, Alec's pleasure builds until it overflows and he comes, back arching off the bed. Magnus whispers words of praise and soothes him until Alec can find his own thoughts again.

It's only their second time doing this but he's already addicted.

* 

Alec wakes up in the middle of the night. A cloud of confusion makes the jumble of dreams and
memories an even worse mess. He can only focus on single thoughts at a time.

Wet concrete, cold, city, *demons*, fight.

Demons against him.

A fight. Won fight, lost fight… he's lost.

He's on his back on a roof and a demon is nearby… he cannot move. Eyes wide open in the dark, all Alec can do is breathe. His lungs won't let him make a sound.

Only, the thing is, Alec knows he is on a *bed*. He knows there is softness underneath him and softness covering his body. He isn't out in the open air, he's in a room. A comforted warms him.

The room smells of Magnus.

And yet. No part of his body will cooperate. His brain forgot how to send commands to his limbs, his lungs forgot how to work slowly. Alec pulls in shaky, shallow breaths, growing more panicked by the second even though there is no reason for the panic that he can name. In a little bit he's going to wake up the alpha with his increasingly distressed scent but he can't stop it. He's trying to think about Magnus but then the memories of his alpha's welcome touches are overlapped by phantom touches of the past and Alec no longer knows if he's feeling his alpha or the demon who had-

"Alec?"

And there it is: Magnus sounds so confused, only partially woken up and already focusing on Alec. Wanting to answer him, Alec draws in a breath but it ends up being a gasping, weak sound.

The bed beside him dips as Magnus shifts his weight, pushes himself up to see better.

"Alexander, what's wrong?" Their eyes meet. They're both used to the dark at this point so even without seeing details they can see each other.

Warm fingers touch Alec's cheek and he leans into them. It's so much better now that Magnus gives him this point of contact, a point to ground himself in. He still can't move the rest of his body. So he closes his eyes, thinks only of Magnus's hand touching his face. Somehow, breathing becomes easier.

A soft "You're safe, darling," reaches his ears. And then: "It was just a nightmare."

He nods, or he tries to. He knows it was a nightmare, he's suffered through so many before he's lost count of them.

They just haven't come to him in a while. And this one is already losing all its grip on him. Magnus continues to talk to him without requiring a reply and it helps immensely.

Magnus understands they've made a mistake. He was so ecstatic to have the omega in his bed and responding so well to all they've done so far, he got ahead of himself. He forgot to look after Alexander even when the omega saw no reason to be more careful himself.

They shouldn't have shared his bed so soon. Alexander should have been nesting for the night, should have been in his own territory, should have let the many events of the day get emotionally
sorted in his system. Today he was reminded of his past life, he fought and was with an alpha intimately, and then fell asleep in a place that can't exactly be called familiar to him.

It's easy to be smart in hindsight.

Magnus runs his fingers through his omega's hair, knowing there isn't much he can do other than simply be there. That's just how nightmares work, as he was reminded himself not long ago.

"Is the last of it gone?" He asks after a long while passes and they both lie in bed, their eyes open.

"Yeah. I think so."

"Good. Do you want to go check on Blueberry and Little Pea?"

Alec nods. There's no tugging in his chest that his sons need him but he wants to go back to his room for his own sake. Looking around himself, Alec chooses to take Magnus's purple bed cover hostage as his makeshift robe, leaving the warlock the comforter.

He protests when he sees Magnus getting up with him but the alpha shushes him and leads him out of the bedroom with his hand at the small of Alec's back.

They reach Alec's own door and stop there as if Magnus was taking him to his parent's house after a date. That's what comes to the warlock's mind, actually. So he smiles and says, "I had fun tonight. We should do it again some time."

"Hunting demons and blowjobs?" Alec says, relieved that he can joke after all, the nightmare almost forgotten.

"Doesn't it sound good to you?"

Alec's eyes dart away from Magnus's face. "It felt even better than it sounds."

"It's the same for me, darling. I hope... I hope I didn't ruin it for you." He doesn't specify the nightmare but Alec understands.

"I'll be looking forward to the next time." The omega says, knowing he must look a little silly with the big stupid grin on his face but he can't stop himself.

"It's a date." Magnus tugs playfully at the folds of Alec's oversized bed cover-robe. "Do I get a goodbye kiss?"

"You can have a goodnight kiss." Alec replies, already moving towards Magnus. They kiss, slowly and with matching gentleness. Then they part and without saying anything more, Alec disappears into his room. Magnus watches him go, assuming that it's the last he saw of his bed cover.
"I was thinking," Alec begins, fidgeting, "that since I already smell like you…"

Magnus raises his eyebrows, saying nothing.

"Well, I was wondering if you could make me a bottle of your shampoo?" Alec finishes his sentence, looking anywhere but at Magnus's face.

"If that's what you want, darling, I'll only be happy to give it to you." He teases. "You could use mine, of course but I'll brew one especially for you."

"Thanks." Alec replies, pink-faced. That is that.

They both turn to their tasks: Alec has a whole drawer in front of himself that he pulled out from his wardrobe. He's folding baby clothes so they make perfect little cubes in two rows in the drawer. Color-coded. Magnus wonders how Alec's drawers used to look in his room in the Institute if he's willing to put so much effort into this. Then again, it could be a new thing, he wouldn't know.

Magnus has an arrangement of metal and wooden pieces of jewelry in front of himself on the table. He's assembling a whole set of charms for a family of werewolves who live all the way in Chicago. He was commissioned to do it by a member of the local Pack and it's supposed to be a gift for the New Year's. While he's at it, he's also planning on making new charms for Alexander and the boys soon, while he's on a roll.

These are things they'd normally be doing in their rooms, or the office in Magnus's case. He still keeps potion-making to the apothecary but other things he brings out to wherever Alexander is. They drift towards each other, no matter what they're busy with.

"I have something to tell you, which is rather relevant." Magnus breaks the comfortable silence.

"Yes? To what?"

"Since we've been noticed together on multiple occasions…"

"Two."

"More than one occasion, the community as a whole took notice."

Alec looks at him, his hands pausing on a gray onesie patterned with storks. "You mean they spread the news."

"And they expect that I, as the High Warlock of Brooklyn, introduce you to them."

"Okay." Alec replies, his eyes back on his folding.

"Okay?" Magnus looks at him and waits but Alec's eyes are firmly on his work.
"I'm just saying I acknowledge the news. I do not want to do anything about it."

"As I'd thought. But darling, we should."

"For your reputation?"

"For me to show you off officially."

"Right. Is it for my reputation?" Alec meets his eyes this time.

Magnus sighs fondly. "Your reputation will be ruined the moment they all learn you're a Nephilim."

"This is why I'd rather not do this. I don't need the headache and you don't need to advertise dallying with a Shadowhunter to your people."

"I want to advertise it. And it is courtship, not dallying. I want you to be noticed and acknowledged as my mate." Magnus says with all the honesty in the world. And Alec knows, he knows Magnus wants this, them, but he has to think about him when Magnus won't take care of himself.

"Those we went out with for the hunt, they don't know about Jon and Max, do they?"

"No, they don't." Magnus says and Alec nods. Then, Magnus continues, "Actually, I should write down the stories that circle around about you."

"What stories?"

"Well, you know you didn't fall down from the sky onto my balcony. Other people have known you before I did."

"Yeah."

"So you were seen, or heard about, for quite a while and then you disappeared. Then you began spending more time with the Pack again. Then you came to me – with me – in Pandemonium. Now they saw you with me again. Some stories make you the seducer, coming after me for my money and power. In other stories I've stolen you and I'm keeping you in my dungeon until you bear me children and then I can set you aside."

Magnus watches Alexander carefully, waiting for a sign that those specific words affected him. Magnus hates to bring up rape around him but it's better that he knows the rumors before hearing them said by someone else than Magnus to his face.

"How is that supposed to work?" There is a little frown on Alec's face. "They must know you aren't Bonded to anyone."

Oh. Trust Alec to search for logic first before anything else. Magnus smiles.

"Who cares how their minds work? I must have some methods, surely, being me: Magnus Bane, the High Warlock with a reputation."

In the privacy of his mind, he adds: Magnus Bane, the son of a Greater Demon. He never wants Alexander to know that.

"Did you mean Magnus Bane: the defender of omegas, the best father, the wearer of the fanciest jackets?" Alec asks.
Magnus's smile widens. "So you admit you find them fancy?"

"Fancy doesn't necessarily mean a compliment." Alec says flatly, returning to his very important baby clothes folding.

"Yes it does."

"Then yes, they are fancy. You are. You are beautiful." Alec's eyes meet his again when he says it.

Magnus's chest feels too tight for how big his heart seems to grow. He's not sure what to do with himself. What to do with the wonderful, sweet omega looking at him right now like he wants to kiss him. So he follows Alec's example and tries to focus on charm-making.

* *

The next day Alec opens the door to see Simon waiting, a large cardboard box in his hands in front of him. He's covered with snowflakes and his cheeks and nose are red from the cold.

"Special delivery to the Lightwood-Bane residence." He says.

"Lightwood-Bane?" Alec's eyebrows rise.

"I did try saying it the other way but it didn't flow as well. Traditionally you'd put alpha's name first, so if you want it that way, I'll just step back, you close the door and I'll say it again."

Alec grabs the box. He opens it, since it takes hardly any effort when it's just taped over once. His breath catches in his throat. He's hit by the scents of both Izzy and Jace and it's coming from the box. Alec closes the box shut.

"Thank you." Alec tells Simon, who's watching him curiously, waiting at the doorstep.

Alec sets the box aside, though his senses are going a little haywire at the moment. He breathes in through his nose, trying to fill it with the usual: his and Magnus's scents, and their children's. Their home.

Simon understands the box topic is closed before it was ever opened. He says not another word about it, even though he meant to tell Alec who'd given it to him. Alec doesn't ask so Simon assumes he knows. Or he doesn't want to know.

Alec isn't ready to stay alone with the box. So he makes an inviting gesture, pointing the mundane to the couch.

"Did you have lunch yet?"

"No. I was going to eat something later."

"Do you want anything now?"

Simon eyes Alec, thinking fast. He's never sure if he should follow omega protocol or Alec protocol when around the sometimes-infuriating ex-Shadowhunter. He decides he should do his best to follow both, which means accepting the invitation because Alec made the effort to offer something that equals to Simon staying longer in the house. Simon wants this to happen again. For some reason.

For quite a while he has felt indebted to the strange omega who'd saved him from becoming vampires' plaything but as time went on, he's come to actually care, too. He's come to understand
that there is so much hidden inside Alec and it's not just the traumatic past, which Simon still doesn't know much about.

Now, Simon isn't a selfless Samaritan but he's a friendly person, okay? And he's willing to put more effort where he can maintain a relationship with another omega. It's hard enough to come by one in the first place, he doesn't want to miss the opportunity when one presents itself. He thinks he's done good enough job. He also thinks he should do it for Alec's sake, too.

Walking deeper into the loft, he looks around curiously, wondering if the babies are sleeping. He spots one of them, the older blue boy in a playpen, playing. And to be completely honest, he's not about to approach the baby, any baby, but it's interesting to watch one. Especially a deep blue one. With small horns. The kid is awfully cute though, with his big eyes and round cheeks. When he spots Simon and smiles, widely, Simon waves at him.

"Hey, little guy."

Isn't it the most awkward thing in the world? Being friendly with someone else's children? And yes, he's supposed to be an omega but Simon's even younger than Alec, who had his first child too early and there is no intuition at work here for Simon, only common sense when one is supposed to amuse a child.

It works out well enough. The child is amused, the father doesn't pay attention to Simon's awkwardness, all is well.

Alec's doing something at the kitchen island, probably preparing the food he asked Simon about.

Alec busies himself with it, giving himself the time to think of something not awkward to talk about when one-on-one with well, a friend. It's simply easier for him to be in a group, where more people contribute to a conversation at once. On top of that, it'd have been easier for him to be with Maia, or even Bat. The problem with Simon is that he knows Clary and he hangs out with Clary sometimes, and Clary belongs to the New York Institute now. Where Alec's family lives.

And now Simon brought him a box and Alec's struggling to 'change topic' from it to anything else.

Of course, all he could think about is useless because what they end up talking about a few minutes later is this:

"So." Simon says. "Your brother is dating my best friend."

Alec says nothing to that. It's half expected by Simon but he started it so he'll continue it.

"They spend so much time together, at the Institute, that she brings his scent around when we hang out."

"Ah."

Alec is the last person who has the right to have an opinion about who Jace can or can't be with. He'd lost his right to it when he'd left. The automatic, unwelcome sensation that jealousy brings makes Alec uncomfortable. He's long past this. He has Magnus now and when he compares what Magnus makes him feel to how Jace used to make him feel, well, Alec knows which one is the true love.

And yet. He'd left Jace behind, no plans of coming back, and now that's he's aware of Jace's new life, it stings.
Alec stirs his tea. Well, he can at least be sympathetic to Simon's problem, since he's all too familiar with how it feels to have the object of your hidden, smothered affection come back smelling like someone else.

Then, when he digs himself up from his own problematic feelings, a thought occurs to him. "What about you, always in the presence of both Maia and Bat? Are you bringing back old-fashioned triads?"

Alec watches, amused but not showing it, how the other omega's face slowly reddens.

"I'll have you know, even though the modern society has been focusing on alpha/omega relationships, triads are a good and tried out way… of making relationships work."

"By which you mean you're so interested in Maia, you've started to see how she looks at the beta? She's known him for a long time."

"Yeah, I'm aware. But she was the one who told me to come again sometime after you took me there the first time."

"She must have liked your talk more than I did."

"The feeling's mutual… Maia is a great… woman. Person."

"She is." Alec agrees easily. If he were interested in women at all, who knows how he'd feel about her.

Alec sips his tea. Then, "If you ever need courting advice-"

Simon perks up though he tries not to be obvious about it.

"-please don't come to me." Alec finishes.

They continue to talk about other things until Magnus portals home from his special job. He's not about to chase their guest out but Simon has already stayed far longer than he expected to stay and he has schoolwork to do anyway. He says his goodbyes and goes on his way.

Alec welcomes Magnus home properly when they're alone. The initial kiss becomes three, slow kisses and they have a hard time separating from the embrace they're in until the alpha's stomach rumbles with hunger and Alec chuckles, taking Magnus by the hand and leading him to the kitchen.

Later, sitting in the middle of his nest, dressed for bed, Alec takes the box and sets it in front of him. Mixed scents of Izzy and Jace assault him once again when he pulls out the items hidden in it. Izzy's red winter scarf. Alec buries his face in it before he can stop himself. Her favorite perfume is in there too, so familiar to him.

The scarf was covering everything else that was in the package. Most importantly, an arrow. It's his arrow, the one he'd shot to help out the young Shadowhunters. It being here is a message to him and it couldn't be more obvious- we know you're out there, and we won't track you.
Alec bites his lip. He's being given so much and he's too weak to give back.

Then, below the scarf, he touches leather. Pulling the jacket out, he recognizes one out of two favorite leather jackets of Jace's. They're some of the very few things that Jace actually takes good care of instead of shrugging and saying that he'll 'get a new one'. Alec knows what this means. Jace is giving this to him for the moment, but he'll want it back.

Alec's fingers tighten on the leather unconsciously. He sends thanks in his head.

He thinks that's it, the scarf and the jacket, but when he looks into the box properly, he finds one more thing, and an envelope. The last thing is a child-sized necktie, which he knows very well is Max's. He usually wore it in Idris, for his classes. Alec had a photo of Max in his very serious blue-and-green tie and very serious button-up shirt, with his big glasses on. He was posing proudly, unlike what a child should feel in an outfit like that.

Because of their age difference, and because of Alec being omega, it hurts even more not to be able to see his little brother than it is not to see Izzy and Jace. Alec doesn't know if the necktie is there because Izzy told Max about Alec or if she grabbed it without anyone knowing. He doesn't know what Max thinks of him, but he's scared. He's afraid his little brother resents him for leaving, if he can't fully understand the circumstances like adults can.

Setting the piece of fabric aside, Alec takes the jacket again and puts it around his shoulders, even though he's warm enough. He puts Izzy's scarf around his neck, too. Then he opens the letter.

"We're missing you, big brother." It begins in Izzy's handwriting.

"It's been too long now and every day I hope will be the day when you come back. We don't know what still keeps you away, we can only hope that it's your choice and not anyone else forcing you.

You know that whatever it is, we're ready to come for you. Wherever you are. You shouldn't think about the Clave, if that's the reason. They have more problems to deal with, and our new Head is too practical to pursue you just for making contact with us. Her heart is in the right place, I think. And even if I'm wrong, this time we'd be ready to protect you better. The Clave will always be the Clave, and if it's them you're scared of, please don't be. Please, don't let them keep us apart.

I'm seeing a Seelie now. Yes, more than six dates and we've been enjoying each other, so it might be a little more permanent than what you're used to seeing me do... So you see, I need you here to be my big brother so you can ask questions and frown at us and tell me I could do better. Jace can't do it because he's dating now too so he has no room to talk. It's good for him, I think. He's been doing better lately.

Not that it's all thanks to dating, right? I know you let him feel you again, through the bond. He says it's almost like you're happy, sometimes. He says it's very muted, still, but we want to believe you're happy. Please, don't give him reason to worry. Stay safe.

He needs you here, Alec. Or he needs- we need- to go see you. It doesn't get easier with time.

Are you afraid of us? That we'd judge? Resent you? That we'd see you as anything else than our older brother?

We love you and we miss you. And I know you probably don't want to think about them, but I believe mom and dad miss you too. They'll never say it but I think they'd want to see you, just once.
Max knows you're in New York somewhere and while he doesn't quite get the reasons why you had to leave, we've told him some things contrary to what mom and dad had told him. He doesn't understand but he wants to and he'll wait for you the same as we will.

Don't forget about us.

We love you.

Isabelle, Jace and Max."

Alec lowers his hands to his lap. He stares at the paper.

"I'm sorry I'm a coward, Iz." He whispers at the letter.

He's in his room in Magnus's loft, in Brooklyn. Safe. He's loved.

He still hasn't talked to his family.

Alec places the three pieces of his siblings' clothing in his nest, fitted between his alpha's things, his babies' things and his own pillows. He lies down, curling up in the comfort of his nest, which after a long time feels a little more complete. He's sleepy but he wants to enjoy it for a while. So he closes his eyes and lets his thoughts drift.

* *

Alec has been out shopping just to get out of the loft for a moment. Winter keeps him inside most of the time with a few exceptions but sometimes he just wants to be out in the city. Magnus's offers to take them across the world are fine, but not what Alec wants in the moment. He just wants to look at his city while standing on a sidewalk, not just from the windows of the warm loft. And he sometimes needs to go out to walk and think. For example, about the letter.

He's still not sure how it became so easy for him to spend so much time in what's essentially an alpha's lair. Before this, before Magnus, he had his patrols… and then he was a stray without a roof over his head. Then, to pay for a roof, he walked the streets where vampires were.

Since coming to live with Magnus, he only goes out to shop, to the gym, and to see the people who are his friends. The rest of the time he spends with his sons and with his alpha.

It's how he knows this isn't a mistake: accepting the courtship and taking the steps to grow their relationship. This tugging in his chest telling him he wants to go back now, after having his walk down Brooklyn's icy streets, is how he knows where his home is.

When Alec comes inside and hangs his jacket and scarf on the hanger, he glances towards the middle of the loft and freezes. Forgetting that he still has snow and salt-covered boots on, he crosses the distance between him and Magnus… who is crying. Magnus is sitting on a puff seat, bowed forward a little, his right hand covering his mouth. His eyes, fixed on a point in front of him, are red and puffy.

Max is on his mat as usual, sitting up and smacking a red block over a blue one, making wooden
noises. Everything about Max seems fine to Alec, from his appearance to his scent, so why on earth would Magnus look so distressed?

Alec lowers himself to crouch by Magnus, reaching out to take his hand, while his other rests on Magnus's back, giving him a rub.

"What's wrong? What happened?"

Magnus shakes his head, like he means to say it's nothing. But when he breathes in, it's wet and shaky, and more tears spill from his eyes. Alec doesn't understand. The alpha's scent is odd to him, distressed but not like there's an immediate threat. He isn't hurt or sick. He's been home the entire time Alec was out and there are no unfamiliar scents around so no one has visited.

A message, maybe? Bad news?

Alec wraps both his arms around Magnus's middle, pulling him close.

"I'm fine, darling." Alec hears and he can't help his exasperated huff.

"Still, tell me what I can fix."

"You don't have to fix anything."

Alec holds him and waits. He waits, and finally Magnus speaks.

"When I first used my magic… the first day I learned I wasn't human… I used my magic because someone was going to kill me and I had to kill them first."

"Magnus…"

"I burned someone and it was the first time I saw magic. From my own hands."

Alec holds him when a sob shakes his body.

"Max…"

"What about Max?" Alec asks.

"He did magic today, in front of me, because he wanted to play."

Not letting go of Magnus, Alec pulls back a little to look at the warlock. "He did?"

Magnus nods shakily, biting his lower lip. It pains Alec to see him so thrown off balance, so overcome with emotions that he can't hold them back at all. It pains Alec to hear what he just did about Magnus's past. Truthfully, his brain has some trouble processing the two pieces of information – someone had tried to murder Magnus, as a child, and second – that Max, his baby, is already using his magic.

"He called this to him when he wanted to have it." Magnus's hand, the one he'd kept fisted up until now, unfolds, revealing a green, plush frog that's a little small to be played with by small children so they only let him have it when they're paying close attention. "He pulled it to him and then he pushed it to me so I could have it."

Magnus pauses, breathes in, then out. Though his eyes are still wet, Alec can tell he's calming down. Very slowly. Focusing, calming down himself, Alec makes sure his own scent is calming to his alpha. It's the least he can do for him.
"And he made bubbles." Magnus says so quietly it's almost a whisper. "Just like those I made for him and Jon."

Alec moves closer again, gives Magnus an encouraging hug. Leaning his cheek on Magnus's shoulder, Alec says, "He's already learning from you."

Before Magnus has the chance to say something disparaging about himself, as Alec predicts he would by the way he tensed up in Alec's arms, the omega continues. "He'll learn all the best things about magic, because he has you from the start to watch over him. And Jon."

"It started with you." Magnus says, his voice thick with emotion. "You chose to have your warlock child and you chose to take in another. Their stories could have been the same as mine, were you not there."

"Someone else could have stepped in-"

"Could they?" Bitterness creeps into Magnus's voice. "I hate that you were hurt by fate but you were put on this… path, and you're the reason they have someone who loves them instead of trying to drown them."

Alec's breath hitches and he holds onto Magnus tighter.

"You're the reason they'll be blowing magical bubbles before they ever have to protect themselves." Magnus continues. "And I love you for it."

Alec rubs his cheek on the silky-smooth fabric of Magnus's shirt. He doesn't ever want to let go.

"We can only do this together, Magnus. I can't teach them. I can't protect myself from magic. It's why we came together in the first place." Then he adds firmly, "But it's not why we'll stay together. I love you, too."
A busy evening

Chapter Summary

Today: continuation of the last scene, parabatai feels and warlocks. Next up: More of the same warlocks.

Alec holds onto Magnus for a long time, until Jonathan wakes up and his cooing calls his attention. While Alec gets Jon, Magnus picks up Max and hugs him. He doesn't remember the last time he felt this raw. He's unprepared to deal with this, not on his own. It's painfully obvious now that he has not yet dealt with his past. Lived with it, yes. Pushed it behind the wealth of new memories acquired over the years, yes. But he was never willing to go back in his mind and relive any of it to see if it gets easier.

Magnus grounds himself in his home again. His home, which he's been caring for for months now, watching his (his!) children grow, watching his omega become comfortable and more sure of himself. Alexander's scent is fresh again after he returned home, especially strong in instinctive response to the alpha's need for comfort. The tears came because Magnus is happy. He's raw and happy at the same time, not sure yet what to do with himself to shake this off. Holding Max, he whispers praises at him, words of encouragement and love.

Holding Jon in one arm, Alec moves around the kitchen. He's having his own conversation with his son, who turns his big eyes at him.

There are no cries for food yet but Alec prefers to prepare ahead of time. He doesn't bother with blending food for Max at this time, he prepares two bottles of milk for both boys and once done with that, he hands one bottle to Magnus.

The slow task of feeding a child is surprisingly helpful for Magnus's shaken emotions. Max pretends not to be interested in the bottle until he is, and Magnus and Alec share the companionable silence until both bottles are almost empty.

"Would you like to nest with me tonight?" Alec asks him hours later, standing in the entrance to his room. He's already dressed for bed and the softness that the plain t-shirt and sweatpants lend him make Magnus want to hold him.

"You don't need to worry about me, Angel."

"Well, I do," Alec says. Then quieter, "you'll have nightmares if you sleep alone, won't you? Come sleep with me. I don't want to go to your bedroom tonight so you have to come to mine."

Magnus doesn't point out they still have the neutral ground of the foldable couch available. Alec chose his words for a reason.

It's actually something they shouldn't do until mated. That is, the alpha shouldn't enter the nest until mated to the omega who built it. But their situation is special so many ways… Magnus isn't
sure that it's enough to make it right for him to do this. But he wants to. Yes, it's true he doesn't particularly want to sleep alone tonight. And if Alexander needs his nest, then Magnus will have to be the one to follow him if they're to be together tonight.

So he changes into his pajamas, pants and shirt. It's one of his favorite pairs, soft and light, chosen just to make himself feel better.

Magnus has been to Alexander's room numerous times for various reasons before. Most of the time to get one or both boys out of there before they could wake the omega. This is different. For the first time he's invited to spend the night and it makes him feel like a teenager before a prom. He's never been to a prom but he imagines the comparison fits.

Alec lies down first, taking his favorite position in his nest - curled on his left side, his favorite pillow under his head. He gazes at Magnus expectantly, extending a hand towards him. Magnus comes to him, unable to resist. Finding a comfortable position for himself, Magnus faces Alec on his right side. He calls the duvet with magic to cover them both.

Magnus can smell the new additions in the nest. He hasn't smelled those two alphas ever before but since the sources of those scents are right there in the nest, Magnus can draw his own conclusions. He says nothing. It may be just a little jarring for his alpha nose to have that without a warning but that's his problem, not Alexander's.

The omega's looking at him, his eyes dark in the night but focused on Magnus's face.

"Your warlocks won't mind we're not mated?"

"Why?"

"When you present me officially, won't they mind we're not actually mated?"

"That's none of their business. All they need to know is that you're mine and all they need to do is accept it."

"Okay."

"What are you okaying this time, Angel?"

"Let's do it. Invite them."

Magnus searches his face for a sign that he's not actually hundred percent sure about this.

"Does the date matter to you?"

"Not really."

"Sunday, then."

"Fine."

"I love you," Magnus says. It's only the second time he's saying it.

"And I love you." Alec wants to say something more and Magnus waits. "I invited you in because of that, because of the mating issue."

"It's not an issue-"
"I want you to at least be able to say you nested with me. Same as I'll be able to say I know how it was to feel you inside me."

Magnus chuckles at that, surprised but delighted by the boldness of the words. Maybe he shouldn't be surprised by Alexander anymore.

"Very well. I'm sure we'll manage to make it clear to everyone what we are to each other."

They wake up on their own before either boy is awake and calling for attention. It's dark gray in the room, pre-dawn. Alec wakes first, more used to the babies' rhythm. He's free to watch his alpha calmly sleeping in his nest. Magnus's hair loses its sharp shape in the night, pressed on one side and curled on the other. He hasn't turned over in the night, just as Alec hasn't, but they both shifted on their pillows.

Alec likes seeing Magnus this way- his eyeliner and eyeshadow absent for the night, his eyelashes casting naturally dark, soft shadows against his skin. He's breathing softly through his parted lips.

Alec is used to lying like this with two babies, watching over their sleep.

When Magnus wakes, it's a slow process. His closed eyes scrunch up just so, his nose twitches. Alec's smiling to himself, waiting. He reaches out to touch the wayward locks of hair on the side of Magnus's head. His fingers run over the ends of the hair, not messing it up but teasing the waking man.

And then cat eyes open little by little and Alec is privy to the sight of the most powerful alpha around gather his wits which got lost somewhere in the sleep.

Those beautiful eyes crinkle when he smiles before saying 'good morning'.

Neither of them suggests that they move before they have to. A quiet understanding makes them enjoy the moment for what it is- a peaceful December dawn, no immediate worry on either of their minds. Just the warmth and the comfort of the nest, the mixed scents of their sleeping children, their laced fingers when they reach to touch each other.

* *

On Sunday Magnus stands in the middle of the loft, magic spilling from his hands and soaking into the floors and walls of their home. Alec stands nearby, both boys in his arms, though it's becoming a challenge to hold them both at the same time as they grow. The strong magic in the air makes his skin tingle, hairs rising where his skin isn't covered by his shirt-sleeves.

Magnus is changing the layout of the loft. The main room widens, the kitchen transforming so it resembles a bar more than a place you cook anything in. Another table joins their old coffee table and the armchairs multiply. Most importantly, the wall in which Alec's door is becomes a solid without a break in it.

The bedroom belonging to Magnus is still there but the warlock closes the doors to his wardrobes magically. There must be some more changes that Alec can't currently see, happening to the guest rooms and bathrooms. Possibly, the balcony has grown as well.

"There," Magnus says, magic fading as he lowers his arms. "All done."
He'd told Alexander earlier that day that he'd be doing this. He explained he doesn't want anyone to actually know their home and he especially doesn't want anyone to try to snoop in Alexander's own places. He has an omega and his privacy to protect.

Alec is grateful for it. He doesn't exactly enjoy the changes but it's definitely better now than when he'd worried about strangers being in their spaces.

"If at any point you want to go inside," Magnus says, leading Alec to where his room is hidden, "press your hand here and it'll let you through. It's quite a strong spell, different from when Jocelyn was here."

"Okay."

"Cat and Dot will also come, so it's not just you and me against the world." Magnus teases.

Alec lets out a long breath. "I don't want to think of them as... I don't know, someone to be dealt with... they're your people."

"Yes, and at the same time, they are all individuals as warlocks tend to be. We don't all like each other and we don't form bonds in groups like Werewolves or Vampires do."

"But you're the alpha, which is why we have to do this."

"They do have more connection to me due to my status." Magnus agrees. "And I do want to keep it that way. There are some people I'm looking forward to meeting thanks to this occasion."

*Alec is dressed in all black. Magnus is not surprised and he's perfectly aware this is Alec with armor on. Shadowhunter black, familiar and ultimately neutral color. The difference here is that regardless of their color, the official outfits that Alec now owns were picked out or suggested by Magnus himself. That means perfect fabrics and cut, additional little details that Magnus snuck in that Alec decided to ignore, and accessories. Standing in the middle of the room, fidgeting with his tie (which is already tied perfectly), the omega looks like a million dollars and Magnus takes a minute to drink the sight in. Magnus is pleased that at least the tie has some color. Yes, it is black but many small flowers bloom across it in reds and pinks and they have green leaves. In Magnus's opinion, it serves to bring out the color of Alec's eyes. Those eyes are wide but shining, full of anxiety but some kind of excitement, too. The last touch to Alec's outfit is a baby wrap. Magnus assumes he's planning on holding the little Pea literally close to his chest through all the evening. Magnus also hopes he'll be given a reason to relax a little and see that he doesn't have to be on guard against danger from all sides."

-The first guests arrive just after five pm. There wasn't an exact time set for the meeting, Magnus assumed that the two of them would be ready since four pm and wouldn't have to stress about anything at the last moment.

The first to come is the pair of warlocks Alec and Magnus had met before on their little mission. Since they've met Alec already, their interest lies in seeing the children that the High Warlock will
be claiming as his own by claiming the omega.

Max, who Magnus dressed to fit his own outfit, is for now placed in the playpen, babbling syllables at anyone who'll listen. Alec isn't sure what the boy would think of his clothes if he could see himself in a mirror.

Magnus is wearing burgundy dress pants with a black line running down each leg and a slightly darker burgundy shirt under a dark gold patterned vest. The shirt has a high collar and a purple-and-gold cravat under it.

How he manages to wear two pendants and a chain of varying lengths over this and not make it too much is beyond Alec's comprehension. Or maybe it's just Alec who's endlessly impressed by the alpha. Maybe it's what Alec likes in his alpha and always had, but never had the chance to discover it among Shadowhunters who mostly dressed the same as he did.

Alec likes the outfits, he likes the black nails and he likes the feeling of the heavy rings when they hold hands. He likes the stripe of red in Magnus's hair, which shines in the lamp's light. Alec might not understand the… black tassel with a gold ring that Magnus has attached at his belt but maybe it's some part of high fashion Alec will never understand.

On Magnus's right wrist he notices the bracelet he's given him as a courting gift.

As if he senses his staring, Magnus tilts his head and his eyes find Alec's. His eyebrows raise in a silent question. He's smirking and Alec blushes.

The eyeshadow Magnus is wearing today is dark and more noticeable than usual, and Alec likes that too. It's only thanks to how nervous he is about the tonight's event that the omega can hold back arousal that can wake in him just because Magnus looks good. And since he looks good always...

Any other time Alec would want to touch his alpha, not just look. But he can't forget they're going to have more visitors today than they've had since Alec came to live here. It would not be socially acceptable to get on his knees for his alpha in public.

Alec glances at the playpen to see what Max is doing. He's dressed in burgundy too, except the fabric is soft like all his baby clothes. He has pants and a vest, and a soft shirt with a printed-on shirt collar and buttons. Alec snaps a photo of him. The small vest is so endearing, especially since his outfit is completed with colorful anti-slip baby socks instead of shiny shoes like Magnus is wearing.

Alec, for his part, dressed Jonathan in a dark onesie with silver stars all over it. They're close to New Year's so it fits.

They've agreed to split the baby-watching duty: Alec holds Jonathan and Magnus is responsible for watching over Max, whether he's in the playpen or in Magnus's arms.

They've agreed that both boys will be glamored to keep their marks private. Alec much prefers it that way. Magnus is also concealing his true eyes under the brown irises. He'd told Alec there are two kinds of warlock events: meetings among friends, when everyone is free to drop their glamour and be themselves, and official ones like theirs, where warlocks come for show or politics, or out of duty and it's not the time to be open. It doesn't help Alec's anxiety over it.

The current glamor on Max is a different spell than what Magnus had put on the pendant. The latter is meant against Mundane eyes and the former needs to be more thorough than that. It's the
glamor Magnus uses on himself, and that means it'll work against Alec, too. Alec sees Max as a baby with dark hair and fair skin, no horns to be seen. His little nose, his round cheeks and the curls on his head are familiar, even if they're not blue. After Magnus had applied the spell, Alec gazed at Max, thinking.

"You shouldn't make him look just like me." He said.

"What do you mean?"

"It's not difficult for you to change the details of a glamor, right?" Alec looked at Max, wondering.

"It isn't."

"Then make him look like… like us."

Magnus blinked. There was only one meaning he got from Alec's words and it was the correct guess. "Do you mean mixed?"

"Just… you could make him darker? Like you." Alec's hand did that vague motion he always does when unsure of himself.

"You'd like that?" Magnus asked him, a smile on his lips.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'd like that."

Dot comes as the third guest and that does help Alec. She appears at the door cheerful like she's expecting an excellent party. Or at least entertainment.

Although, it's probably just that she's looking forward to Magnus's drinks. She greets both of them and then the boys, pointing out how much they've grown as if she wasn't seeing them almost once a week just like Catarina does.

She wasn't holding anything but her gloves when she came in, but now a giftbag appears in her hands. She hands it to Magnus, looking pleased with herself.

"A mating gift for the both of you."

Alec glances at Magnus. "Is everyone supposed to bring something?"

"Not at all. Those who like us will probably have something. Those who want to show off might bring something as well."

"Traditionally, they should." Dot says. "Especially since they can afford it and they're all old enough to remember it."

Magnus huffs. "Yes, well, it so happens that I'll be the last person to expect people to cling to any traditions. We're also old enough to know how that ends."

She pats his shoulder. "I know. You only like the romantic ones."

There finally appear guests who Alec has never met before. Magnus stays at his side, making proper introductions while Dot plays with Max. Alec is almost certain she's been giving Max bribes
in hopes of being his favorite aunt when he grows up enough to have favorites (beyond Magnus, who's his favorite already).

Isabelle should have a chance to compete with her and Cat, Alec's heart tells him unhelpfully. He shakes the thought off.

He focuses on the guests. There's another pair, two betas smelling like mates. They're from New York, too, and from what Alec sees, Magnus treats them like you'd treat someone you've known and been around for so long that even though you're not even friends, you feel obligated to invite them to birthdays and backyard grill. Alec should keep them in mind since they're local, but he doesn't bother being too attentive.

Then there's a young looking, red-haired man named Adam whose accent Alec can't quite place. It could be Irish but knowing that he's lived for who-knows-how-long, he might not be from there at all.

It turns out he's only here by lucky coincidence because he's visiting a friend who was personally invited today and so it was appropriate that he show up as well, for the High Warlock's event. He figured he might have another chance to meet him in fifty years.

The friend is a French warlock who moved to this continent recently, twenty years ago. She's named Clemence and she's quite short, though her head of curly hair tries to make up for it.

The other warlocks he and Magnus have hunted demons with show up as well, bearing gifts.

Alec takes his cues from Magnus. He does his best to read his alpha and when he senses genuine emotions, he reacts appropriately by being extra courteous despite not knowing the guests. When he sees Magnus being artificially friendly, he only does the bare minimum dictated by manners.

Magnus must notice this eventually because he sends a private smile Alec's way when they move from the door deeper into the loft so that Magnus can offer the guests drinks.

As more people appear, Alec's anxiety grows. They're still waiting for Catarina, who always helps his nerves but since she isn't there and Alec can't exactly ask Magnus to help him with that - well, he can ask but – he's not sure he should. Alec's brows draw together. They've drifted apart over time so he locates Magnus across the room and makes a beeline for him.

He doesn't speak so he's not interrupting the conversation Magnus is having but he presses himself against his side, his arm wrapping around him. He's not a small cute omega, even if he'd succeeded being in the background all his life in the Institute. Standing next to Magnus, he's too tall and impossible to overlook, and he just wanted the comfort of his alpha's scent…

Magnus doesn't stop talking but his right hand comes up, first to touch the small of Alec's back, then slides up to his collar. And then, as if he's reading Alec's mind, he touches the back of his neck. Warm skin and the rings he wears press against his skin right over his scent glands and the pressure points.

If they were alone, he'd purr. It feels so good, the rush of hormones through his body reaching his fingertips and toes, giving him exactly what he came to Magnus for. And it's subtle, just his a hand on his neck. Alec soaks in his alpha's attention.
After that they stay together for a while, Magnus leading him again to the warlocks he actually likes so that Alec can learn more about them.

"Is he sleeping?" The question calls Alec's attention. The woman who asks is a beta and she'd come today with another woman, an alpha, who is her adopted daughter. Alec would have trouble guessing which one is older since it looks like the time stopped for them at the same time in their lives. They both look like they could be from Europe, Greece or Italy.

"Oh, yes. For some minutes now." Alec runs his hand over the back of Jon's head. His baby is resting his cheek on his chest, one of his arms trapped between their bodies and the other hanging out of the wrap.

He napped less during the day since Alec was hoping exactly this would happen- that he'd be quiet and more interested in sleeping than being fussy while Alec needed to be able to give his attention to others.

Max had slept during the day as if he knew guests were coming and he needed to be at his best to enjoy their presence.

The woman, Eliza, is looking down at Jon fondly. Alec supposes she might miss having a little baby, though he doesn't know what age she'd adopted her daughter at.

So he asks and from there they keep discussing children, giving him the opportunity to learn more about raising warlocks.

All the while, Alec worries about the topic of Jon's mixed blood coming up. Not just while he's talking to Eliza, but in general. Magnus hasn't explicitly introduced him as his Nephilim omega. Those who've met him know, but it's not given that they'll be talking about it with everyone else. Still, it's most likely not a complete secret to the others, especially not to the New Yorkers.

Maybe they're aware that bringing attention to the uniqueness of the baby will not be well received by his parents and one would have to be bold and stupid to make the alpha High Warlock angry in his own home.

Max is bored. He likes being held by Magnus but nothing is happening, except talking. Both the alpha and the omega are well aware of Max's need for entertainment but right now Magnus also needs to hold up his end of the conversation.

Max begins to send bubbles up from his hands and it just so happens that they fly into Magnus's face. They either dissolve upon contact with him or they fly up in front of his eyes, distracting him.

Magnus waves his free hand, sending a ball of light which has one purpose- to intercept the bubbles. That works just fine to make Max happy, the boy making more of them to watch them pop.

The man Magnus is standing with is even taller than Alec, and an alpha, but one whose scent is rather calm, not getting on Alec's nerves. Magnus had introduced him to Alec earlier, saying he was from Ghana and they have met several times before when there were important events in the history of both mundane and Shadow World.

Alec does his best to remember the details Magnus or the guests themselves give him about their
home cities and about themselves but when they're warlocks, there's just so much variety. Alec gets lost in it. He used to have to remember the details of people visiting the Institute but that was much easier. He mostly knew them by family names and that helped him remember their Institutes or seats in Alicante. There are many more cities warlocks could come from or live in than there are established Institutes. Alec does his best to at least remember their names.

The warlock watches Max with a fond expression on his face. He doesn't seem to mind that Magnus is being distracted. In fact, he lets himself be distracted as well. He raises his hand, the bracelets he's wearing making soft sounds, and he conjures some light magic himself. Having observed what Max did, the man makes blue and green balls appear, each one with two sparks circling them like satellites.

Max's mouth opens in silent awe.

That baby is too happy to be entertained by new people. He'd been perfectly happy to "ditch" Alec for Magnus when they came to live with him and now he's happy to do the same to Magnus and show his appreciation for another warlock's magic lights.

Standing to the side, free to observe, Alec bites on his lip in an effort to hold back a grin at the expression that takes over Magnus's face. It's a complicated shift through surprise, indignation and jealousy.

Hiding his smile behind his glass of wine, Alec goes to find Dot.

It's not as easy as he thought. He gets invited to the little circles of conversation that their guests formed with each other.

That's what he was afraid of before the party. He's not made for small-talk or making himself appear interesting as a person beyond what he was as a Shadowhunter. He never had to. His work was what he needed to talk about with other Shadowhunters and he never got to the courting part of his life in Idris.

Now he finds he's wholly unprepared to act like... like a host. Like a proper mate to Magnus. He knows how to be polite and keep a conversation alive but he doesn't know how to make himself interesting while giving out minimal details about himself. He also doesn't want to be someone who can only talk about their children. Maybe it would have been easier if he was just a Sighted mundane. He'd have led different life then, maybe he'd have a career that'd give him something to talk about with the others.

He's kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place where his background is considered. Showing pride in being a Shadowhunter might be badly received among long-living warlocks. But he also doesn't plan to distance himself from the Shadowhunters- he's not about to make himself look, well, pathetic by complaining about being left alone by them.

Since he prefers not to talk on his own, he ends up simply answering questions and when needed, deflecting some of them.

At some point Alec locates Dot, who is alone, helping herself to the fancy cherry muffins Magnus chose to appear for the guests among other types of food. Taking a look if Jonathan is still sleeping, (yes, he's drooling down the wrap's fabric), Alec stands near Dot as if he could use her to cover himself from the view of the open room.
"Fun, isn't it?" she says.

He makes a face.

"Don't worry, a few more bigwigs need to show up. Then Magnus will say you're officially dating and then he'll probably tell everyone to get out."

"Does he ever do that? Tell his guests to get out?"

"Oh, he has, twice that I know." She eyes him to check his interest. "Once it was because someone said too loudly that his cat was ugly. It was quite late in the night and everyone's had more than enough to drink, Magnus as well. He was so insulted on behalf of that, frankly ugly, cat." She grins. "The party ended right there because he took himself, the cat and the booze and food out of the apartment he was living in back then. Just portalled out."

"So he didn't tell anyone to go?"

"Technically, no. But everyone else didn't like each other enough to offer to conjure something else to share. So everyone left. I and one other friend of Magnus's stayed to watch over his stuff. We also were too tired to want to go home when we were comfortable there. He came back three days later, the cat in his arms, the damn thing looking as ugly as ever except it had a new bow on."

"So, he had a cat?"

"Oh, yes. He had more than one, but not at the same time. It started with a stray and after that, he kept acquiring more some time after the previous passed. Until the last one. I think he just liked that one so much, he wasn't ready to pass the name on to another cat. Yes, they all were named the same."

"Huh."

She tells him some more stories that are easier for her to remember now that she started with the first one.

While Alec's with Dot, his son wakes up hungry. The baby items aren't on top of the counters as always and Alec needs to think to remember where they went in the new setting. Dot tells him to not worry about it and she conjures a bottle, a brand new box of formula and everything else needed to prepare it. Then she convinces Alec to leave the feeding to her, as well. He's not exactly willing to lose this perfect excuse to stay out of the main room but then he remembers he wanted to make the effort for Magnus.

Since Alec can't go find Magnus to get another fix of alpha support, he begins to think of other ways to get his nerves to let up. Alec's pretty sure Magnus is in his office, magically emptied of potion-making equipment and ingredients for today.

Thinking about Institute meetings earlier brings Alec's mind to other things related to the Institute. His hand goes to his side, over the parabatai rune. There's no benefit to touching it but he's been doing it sometimes just to remind himself.

He thinks back to what used to make him and Jace work. For all the ways that Jace used to drive him up the wall with his behavior sometimes, he had as many ways to lift Alec up. On one hand, it was an alpha-omega relationship, the same he had with Izzy (including driving him up the wall), on the other, there was the angelic bond which let them use it more creatively. It also made it all
that harder for Alec to be alone.

Back at the Institute, Alec would take advantage of it whenever he was put in stressful situations involving strangers. He's learned to deal with almost everyone who lived at the Institute, with some exceptions who he ignored, but when higher-ranking Nephilim came to visit, it sometimes became unpleasant for him.

They'd stand in the hallway, waiting for the permanent portal to open and then the guests would come and Alec would see it in their eyes, what they thought when they looked at him.

Curiosity: 'That's the one you have to mate to get the New York Institute.'

Desire: 'That's the one you get when you become the new Head.'

And then there were those who didn't care about New York either way and were only displeased to have to talk with an omega, even if the omega wasn't the one currently in charge.

Alec would stand and talk, present his Institute and his people in the best light, and all through that he would know that at his back he had his parabatai, whether he was in the same room or not. They'd learned to share more than strength in battle, more than vital energy. Or maybe it was just Alec who learned to draw on the self-assurance Jace never lacked, and Jace let him.

Whenever Alec had to press against older Shadowhunters or against know-it-all alphas, he'd give himself a minute to focus on the bond. After that, if his siblings happened to be included in the meetings, he'd notice his brother smirking whenever Alec managed to stand his guard with minimal shaking hands. It wasn't that Alec was weak and the wrong person for the job. But he was just a young omega and he didn't have the time to grow a thick skin and to learn how to deal with his setbacks. Because of that, it didn't feel like cheating to lean on his siblings. It felt like levelling the ground.

So… How wrong of him would it be to do it now? Being among strangers who he needs to make a good impression on is the same situation as in the past.

Since he decided to let their bond 'live', Alec has carefully maintained it that way. Maybe it was stupid of him but he hasn't regretted it so far. Which is why he tests it now, his awareness of it becoming more than just subconscious.

Maybe it's stupid and selfish but he goes through with it. The trick to this was that Jace was always cocky and self-assured, and Alec could use that any time.

It's not just borrowing emotions, remembering how it was to have someone at his back, always, is a benefit in itself.

Alec doesn't even know if Jace can feel him poking and as always he hopes he won't be distracting him in at a bad time. Moments later, Alec's mind quiets when he feels the familiar sensation of not being alone.

Alec wishes he could pick up his phone and call. Just call and say 'hey, I'm at this dreadful party- I mean, it's not bad, Magnus made it, but you know for me any party is dreadful...' but he can't do that because the first thing out of his mouth needs to be 'I'm sorry'. 'I'm sorry' first and then 'I miss you' and then he'd just break down-

That's enough.

With the gentle presence of the angelic bond, Alec feels ready enough to go back to socializing.
A busy evening pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Look at the date :> We've been at this for a year. Thank you ALL so much for reading and for leaving me kudos and comments. It makes me happy to write the story and to see that you like it too.

On that happy note, some shit will be going down soon :) But today we're still at the mating party.

Chapter Notes

I just wish editing it wasn't so annoying this time... I hate too much dialogue. I hope I got the names right and caught the typos...

Catarina arrives before Magnus comes back to the main room. She looks around the place, taking in the architectural changes and the increase in the number of the "ancient" vases that Magnus has put in more places than any vases should be in.

Alec notes how nicely she's dressed, her hair pinned up differently than usual. He's used to seeing her in scrubs before work or in comfortable clothes after, so now it only drives home how unusual this occasion is. He's quite happy to see her and while he's welcoming her in the loft at the door, he can't stop himself from throwing a comment Magnus's way, referencing his not being there to see her and leaving Alec alone. He knows the alpha must want to get some things accomplished today while he has the opportunity, but still.

Cat hands Alec the gift bag she's brought. "Then it's lucky this is mostly for you."

Alec takes a peek inside the bag but the contents are also wrapped up so it has to wait.

"So," Cat begins when they walk deeper into the loft. "How are you feeling with all this?"

"Like I'd be happier standing on the street right now," Alec replies without having to think about it.

"I bet. Unfortunately, you chose to be with a warlock and you'll have to bear with many warlock things."

"Yeah. Well, this is so far not the worst."

"You probably don't realize how true what you just said is. Warlock affairs are in general... demanding, one way or another."

"They're certainly different. More personal..." he thinks about what he's trying to say, "while being impersonal. For Shadowhunters, it's all about the effectiveness of the work you're doing and staying within the lines the law gives you... Or your good family name, which you either do have or don't have. I knew how to defend my work." He deflates again. "And now I'm neither
Shadowhunter nor warlock."

"That only means you're not tied down by the rules of either society, doesn't it? You're your own thing."

"And how well has that been going for me before Magnus found me?"

"We're all half-human," Catarina says, softer. "We're not built to be alone or to fend for ourselves alone all the time."

"I guess. Sorry, I'm just frustrated. Again."

"I think you're simply nervous because of the number of people around and their scents. There are only a few omegas here tonight. By the way, how are the boys? I assume there's minimal magic done around?"

"Yes, I think Magnus has made it clear to everyone ahead of time what's not welcome."

Magnus still has Max with him and whenever Alec focuses on the parental bond he has to his boys, everything seems good. He doesn't really like having their scents covered by the guests but he has to deal with it.

Alec thinks of the presence of the omegas, which truly are only a few. Warlocks tend to be betas and alphas, which only makes Magnus's position more special among all the competition he has. Alec doesn't think that more of his own kind would have helped him any. He barely knows how to be around other omegas after having so little of them during his life in the Institute. He only started to learn how to thanks to the young werewolf who'd kept him company when Luke took him in and later when Simon showed up.

The dynamic of the person doesn't really matter to Alec, as long he knows them. No, it wasn't always great to be around his alpha siblings, especially when they were all younger and coming into their dynamic, flaunting it around him, but he knew them and he loved them. It was the same with Magnus. Alec felt perfectly well around the alpha because he knew him better than any random omega that could come his way.

In fact, there was a little fear at the back of his mind, that they might resent him more than Downworlder alphas and betas, for taking this spot that they could have had.

Finally, Magnus himself comes their way. Flashing a bright smile at Alec, he closes the distance between them in quick strides. Max is in his arms, completely occupied with something he holds in his fist. Alec recognizes the thing to be a copy of one of the bead bracelets that the tall African warlock is wearing. The man must have figured out Max right away, that bead necklaces and magic bubbles were the keys to his heart.

When Magnus spots Cat standing next to Alec, he directs his next smile at her. "Fashionably late, my dear."

"You're the host so you couldn't be late this time. I do this in your honor."

Magnus raises his eyebrow. "You're not still mad about the birthday in the 1850s?"

"No, but I am mad about the New Year's party in 1973."
"Ah. That." Magnus's face says he feels no remorse about at all and Alec quietly stands to the side, witnessing the glare that Catarina sends Magnus. Max sends a volley of syllables at her, or them in general, excitement coloring his voice. Catarina compliments his new toy and Max babbles on while the adults look fondly at him.

They talk for a little while, Cat now holding her favorite cocktail conjured for her by Magnus. She recounts her day at the hospital, which was made three times as difficult as usual by yet another outbreak of a mundane illness in the winter time. Alec admires her for her work for the Mundanes. He used to think his killing the demons prowling the city was a big enough favor for them and while he didn't do it for their *gratitude*, money or anything else, his general attitude wasn't exactly worthy of praise.

Then again, when he thinks about them now, it's still with exasperation. After all, what has happened so far to make him any fonder of the Mundanes? Pretty much nothing. He only got close to the Downworld. But it's fine. The next time he'll be doing something for the Mundanes, he'll just keep in mind he knows Simon.

When Cat asks to hold Max, Magnus hands him over and Max goes happily, his eyes now taking in the patterns on Cat's dress. Meanwhile, Alec looks to where Dot is with Jonathan but Magnus gets his attention back right away by taking his hand and rubbing his thumb over the skin.

"Ready?"

"For what?"

"The fun," Magnus says, following his words with a small chuckle. He's holding Alec's hand hostage and when he tugs, the omega has to follow.

"Dear friends and the rest of you lovely guests," Magnus begins, now holding a martini glass in his free hand which was actually free up until a few seconds ago. "Allow me to refill your glasses so you can raise a toast on this joyous occasion."

Alec gets a drink too, the sweet pink one he'd tried before and it almost startles him when it appears.

With the attention of the room properly focused on him, Magnus continues. "After many years I have found the one quite a few people have for some reason assumed I'd never want to 'settle down' with."

Alec notes Magnus looks at a few specific people as he speaks.

"I'd like you to know, he was found. He is standing by my side, where I love to have him. My mate, Alexander." A strategic pause. "Before any of you begin to whisper about this, you should only accept this: regardless of our current status, I'm not letting go of him unless he asks me to."

"He won't," Alec interjects, just loud enough to be heard.

Magnus looks at him and their eyes meet for a moment.

"Some of you might remember a-" he starts the next word but he's interrupted by the bearded warlock.
"The ball where you announced you were marrying the queen?" The man asks, crossing his arms.

Magnus sighs dramatically.

"Which queen?" Alec whispers.

"You always did have an obnoxiously good memory, Erwin," Magnus says, Alec's question ignored.

"Erik."

"Erik." Magnus agrees easily. Then he goes on with his original thought even though Alec is still full of questions. 'Which queen?', 'Did he actually know any?', 'He might have! But did she even like him?', 'Was he actually at the queen's ball?'

"Some of you might remember some of my distant past and some of you might still want to whisper about this but you also only need to know that myself and Alexander-

"Aren't going anywhere," Alec interjects once more.

"Alexander… who, exactly?" one of the warlocks asks and it's a fair question. "Do we get to know anything more than his name and face?"

Alec and Magnus share a look.

"Certainly," Magnus says. "His name is Alexander Lightwood. He's, in fact, a New Yorker like many of us in this room."

"Is he mortal?"

"Yes."

Then, someone more daring asks, "Shadowhunter?"

"No," Alec says.

"But Nephilim? Because the name certainly is."

"Yes."

There is the moment everyone expected, the tense silence while everyone wonders who'll be the first to say something that will make the pleasant atmosphere evaporate and everything will snowball into a mess.

But it doesn't happen. What comes instead from Erik is, "I have to say, after Belcourt I thought you couldn't choose any worse-"

Alec tenses, both at the mention of the woman and at what the warlock is implying.

"And I was right. It's a step up for you, Bane. And I'm curious just how you managed to snag a Nephilim."

At that point, Alec knows that something in Magnus's body relaxes. It's very subtle but visible to Alec.

"It was fate," Magnus says lightly and the other man huffs, unsurprised at the answer though
unsatisfied with it.

With a flourish, Magnus sends his magic out to refill the platters and bowls. "Now that the questions aren't coming anymore and I've heard no protests, let's go back to the easy part."

Alec is certain the questions and protests will only start coming now, in hushed whispers and circles of friends. Especially when Magnus cut them off at this point with his wording.

Alec knows how this works when you go with someone's official decision but you're free to complain about it later. He didn't do it often since he usually was the one pushing new orders in the Institute, but what he truly didn't like, he complained about later to Izzy and Jace. He's expecting he'll be asked something the moment Magnus goes to mingle apart from him again and isn't there to deter the attempts.

For now, there isn't a person in the room who doesn't raise a toast for the pair of them and that is enough for both him and Magnus. Alec downs his own drink and Magnus refills it immediately.

The guests don't know that Alec doesn't carry any runes but one. It's not like they know he should have one on the side of his neck and his shirtsleeves go to the end of his wrists, hiding most of his skin from view. The subject of his de-running doesn't come up and they don't expect it to. And even if some of them eye him speculatively, they will be trying to figure it out among themselves first.

From there, it's less small-talk and more congratulations that are customary after the official announcement. They're approached by the guests one by one or in pairs if they have partners.

"How did you two meet?" is a perfectly logical and expected question and it's dropped on the two of them first by a pair of French warlocks, an alpha and beta pair.

"The Oracle told me to be at the metro station on a Thursday." Alec deadpans.

When they look to Magnus to confirm or clarify the statement, the alpha has already managed to school his features into seriousness and he nods his head like it's the truest truth.

When Elias, the young warlock Magnus likes to look after asks a similar question, he hears that they attended the same baking course.

"What does the Institute have to say about this?" Othis asks Magnus at some point. He and Fiona have known about Alec since the demon hunting but Magnus has avoided the topic of Alec afterwards and only now the occasion comes to do it.

"They were not invited so I expect they have exactly nothing to say," Magnus replies.

"Let's hope they don't swoop in uninvited like the wicked godmother."

A cold glint enters Magnus's eyes. "They may try."

Then he says, "I did not steal him, if that's what you're worried about. Alexander has left the Institute long before I met him."

"So the kids… which are awfully cute, I will admit… you're adopting them?" Fiona asks.
"Yes. They will be considered my heirs."

They perform more of the perfectly polite mingling, Magnus in his gold-and-red and Alec in his black. Magnus makes sure everyone's happy with the food and drinks and Alec keeps an eye on his sons. Everything goes smoothly.

Sometime later Alec drifts towards the balcony windows. The door is open for the guests to go out and a magic barrier holds back the chill of the evening and the flying snowflakes. It does not hold back the sounds. Alec is hidden from view by the thick, purple curtains at both ends of the high windows and when he catches the first words from the warlocks outside, he stops before he could be seen at the edge of the curtain. Four warlocks are out there, three of them smoking. It surprises Alec to see the mundane behavior but then again, it's probably better when Downworlders do it without the chance of becoming sick from it. Peeking out from behind the curtain only enough to see that, Alec then takes half a step back.

What makes him stop and listen is the topic of the conversation. It's ongoing and he loses some of the context but he doesn't really need it.

"He didn't say anything about Bonding," comes a woman's voice.

"He didn't have to. That's private."

A huff.

"Isn't fucking your omega private, too? Announcing they will be mates is pretty clearly saying that."

"You're too old to be so vulgar."

"It's important, though, isn't it? For someone holding a position like this?"

"I guess. Still, it's mostly mundanes who always Bond after mating."

"I think everyone should do it."

"Of course you would think that."

They're mixed voices and Alec has no way of telling who says what when he can't see the people.

"Why is it so bad? I didn't mean will-nilly, but if you're spending your life with someone, you should do it."

"I wouldn't Bond if I were him."

"Why?"

"Because the omega is mortal and he isn't. Would you like to have the Bond broken and have to live with it for a longer time than your mate ever even lived for?"

"But they have to bond to have children?"

"They already have them and only the mating bond is needed to claim them. The community won't
have any issues with adopted children, everyone knows how difficult it already is for warlocks to conceive."

"Still, I don't know, you always risk living longer than your mate. They can be sick or run over by a car."

"But how likely is it for warlocks to be sick? For vampires and werewolves to have accidents? Not likely. He should save himself the pain and wait for someone else or not Bond at all."

Alec's soul nearly leaves his body when a voice speaks very near right behind him.

"You shouldn't eavesdrop, everyone only regrets it after."

Alec twirls around, facing the body the voice belongs to. The redhead beta, the young looking warlock is there, hands in the pockets of his dark jeans. He's looking at Alec with half a smile on his lips, clearly amused at his expense.

Alec clears his throat. "Yes, well, maybe I'm entitled to know what's said about me."

The man's eyebrows raise but he smirks. "I imagine you were expecting all if it, the good and the gossip."

"Maybe."

"Then you can imagine what they're saying and you don't have to actually listen to it."

"Maybe I like knowing I'm right."

The other man grins.

"Are you actually Nephilim? Or are the two of you pulling our legs? They seem to believe it because of your name but personally, I wouldn't know anything about it."

"Uh, yes. I am. And it's not a… secret, I just never introduce myself as one."

"Hm, you both looked like you wanted to lie about it but chose not to. I guess I get it. If I lost ties to my friends and couldn't do magic, I probably wouldn't say I was a warlock at introductions."

Alec doesn't think there is anything he could or want to add to that, so he just nods.

"What about you? You said you're here by chance so how are you finding the New York High Warlock?"

"Oh, very interesting. And impressive, I'd say, if I can judge him only by his aura."

"What do you do when you're not visiting friends?"

"Learning, practicing magic. I specialize, so to speak, in enchantments."

"Like, on items?"

"Exactly that. Not glamours, though. They're already well-studied in my opinion."

"So what is it then?"
"Added attributes. A pen that's warm when you hold it. A cup that clears your mind even when it's not coffee in it."

"Permanently?"

"Yes, that's the point of them. There are spells you can cast on yourself that will do the same but will run out. Same with potions. I'd love to demonstrate some of it but I've been working on weapons lately and I'd rather not be blown off the face of the Earth for summoning weapons in a High Warlock's home."

"That would be rather stupid." Alec agrees. He can see Magnus doing just that, if he believed anyone was in danger. Then, he says, "I had an enchanted weapon. I miss it."

The warlock takes interest in that. "Why don't you have it anymore? Exclusive club rules?"

"Yeah. I had to leave all my club gear. Someone probably got it in my stead. Unless someone hid it from view but that wouldn't be taken well by the top."

"That sucks. I'm sorry." It sounds honest. Alec's face probably showed more than he wanted it to, just how much it sucks to lose the one item he had the most connection to. Still, thinking about the bow is better than thinking about his stele.

Maybe he shouldn't talk about it at all and his old instincts do tell him to keep all Shadowhunter things secret but he's tired of it. He wants to live, to talk about what he wants to talk about. He'll never be open about himself but he should be able to at least discuss what exists within the Shadow World without having to constantly watch himself. Talking about his bow is not the same as talking about the Demon Towers of Alicante and some things just don't need his protection.

Magnus looks at his mate-to-be across the room, the frown on his face growing more pronounced. Dot, who stands beside him, smirks. "Competition came to make him smile?"

Magnus hums. Alexander is in what could be called a reasonably animated conversation with the young European warlock. It's good to see him do something else than nervous fidgeting with his hands or squeezing the glass stem too tightly. It's particularly noticeable when he has no baby to hold and hide behind like a shield. And while Magnus itches to know what they're talking about, he's holding back from walking over there and taking his omega back for himself.

For now, Magnus is standing with Dot and two other warlocks.

"How did you get one of their omegas?" Erik asks. "I get that he wanted to be with you, you're a catch."

Magnus's eyebrows raise.

"But we all know how they are." Erik continues. "One of their omegas out in the world? Free to be mated by anyone?"

Magnus bristles at the wording. "Alexander wasn't free for anyone. Except for being a free man. I was lucky he wanted to give me- us a chance."

Alec's situation is just so delicate… It's complicated to talk around it in a way that keeps his business private. It would have been easier if he broke the Law, acted out or fell into a movie-script romance with the wrong person. Anything but what had actually happened to him would be easier
to talk about with the others.

"Hm. Well, I'm not in a mood to break the rose-colored glasses you're obviously wearing so all I
have to say is that I hope none of us will regret this."

"So what you're truly saying is you wish me luck and happiness."

The man shakes his head exasperatedly. "I do, though I'm not sure why. By the way, where is
Fell?"

"Oh, my dearest friend is one of those who did not think I'd find my happiness so soon, if you can
believe that. I don't think he actually took my invitation seriously. The joke will be on him when he
deigns to show up and we've already been five years mated."

"If I were you, I'd expect some more of our people finding out about this belatedly. Especially
those who make it a point not to follow anything you do."

"I know." Magnus sighs. "But I still have some I look forward to. I've left a message for Tessa
Gray but she's out of reach. Must be something interesting keeping her away."

Magnus eventually finds his way back to Alec's side after he manages to retrieve Little Pea from
the circle of warlocks talking with Dot and Cat. Max is reigning over the playpen and he probably
should be left there while it's enough to keep his attention and make him happy.

"Hello," Alexander says when they're near, bowing down to kiss the top of the boy's head.

"And me?" Magnus asks.

"Hello to you, too." Alec plants a kiss on his forehead. He meant to aim for his hair like for Jon but
since Magnus tilted his face up for a proper kiss, Alec went with the other option. He gets a pout in
return.

After he receives the proper kiss (still too brief for his liking but he's not about to push Alexander's
shyness), he asks, "How are you holding up?"

"Better than expected, I guess."

"It's going rather well, no?"

"Did we just jinx it?"

"Nah. We're too good at this. Let's give the party an hour, hour and a half more and it will be polite
to end it there."

"Okay."


When the loft becomes quiet once more, Alec opens the balcony doors, this time with no magical
barrier to keep the air out. He wants a break from the many scents of other people and he wants it
now. Magnus joins him on the balcony, wrapping a coat that he conjured around Alec's shoulders.

"If you want to go and rest, I'll handle everything that's left to be done."
The boys are fed and changed into onesies for bed. When Alec was leaving them in his room they were falling asleep but they might still wake up again because of the exciting day and the slight change in their daily schedule.

"No. I'm not nearly that tired. I'm not that fragile."

"I know, I know," Magnus says. "But perhaps you wanted to be alone. It's just an offer."

"I rest while I'm with you."

"You say the sweetest things."

They kiss in the cold of the late evening, not caring for the snowflakes landing on their hair and skin. Alec's hands fist in the fabric of Magnus's shirt now that he's not wearing the waistcoat anymore. Magnus mirrors his movement, his hands landing above Alec's belt. It's Alec who deepens the kiss, demanding more from it. After he's had his fill, he pulls back.

"Like I said… I'm not nearly as tired."

It will be nice to fill their loft with their mixed scents again, Magnus thinks and his body is in agreement with Alexander's. Even in the chill of the night, they're starting to feel warm.

"Let's take this inside, hm?"

They leave the cold, fresh air behind. While Magnus is pushing the balcony door closed, Alec's sudden intake of air makes him turn around before he's done.

Alec's posture is rigid and his eyes are on something in the loft, which makes Magnus's own blood run quicker.

There is someone there, who is not *supposed* to be there after everyone's left. Ready to defend his home and his mate, Magnus is calling on his magic, the tingling of it filling his fingers before his brain catches up to what his eyes are seeing.

"Ragnor." Magnus breathes out the word with both relief and something like irritation.

Alec's eyes snap to him, waiting for a sign that will tell him it's safe or that he needs to defend his family.

"Now you're coming to visit?" Magnus asks, not at all thankful for the adrenaline rush his friend just gave him.

"I knew who was going to show up and you know very well I wasn't going to bother with that."

"Not even for me?" Magnus clutches his hand to his chest. Then he turns to Alec and puts his hand out for the omega to take.

"I thought you were going to ignore me and my invitation like I made it all up," Magnus says to Ragnor, walking closer to the other warlock, Alec in tow.

"Oh, the thought definitely crossed my mind, multiple times, ever since I first heard about *this*. But since it was Catarina who told me – which is a *not veiled* dig at you, my friend – I was forced to believe it's true."

"And what do you think about it, now that you can see that he actually exists?"
While he speaks, Magnus gestures to the armchair, inviting Ragnor to sit. After one of Ragnor's visit in May, when they've had a colorful disagreement about a certain magical theory that dragged out well into the night, Ragnor shows his disapproval of Magnus's way of thinking by being particularly obstinate and passive when he doesn't need to. It's a shame Magnus didn't have Alec's disapproving glare to count on back then to stop them from being ridiculous.

Afterwards, Ragnor blames Magnus for being a rude host, so Magnus remembers to be extra courteous every time just to avoid his grumbling. He has a feeling that might change back to normal now that Ragnor has a new thing to focus on.

Alec himself is stiffly following Magnus, clearly displeased with the interruption of their evening. He's also probably not happy about the scare, just as Magnus wasn't. Magnus is familiar with Ragnor and it's much easier for him to shake it off.

"Alexander Lightwood. I never would have thought." Ragnor says with actual wonder in his voice.

"I think none of us present expected that. But here we are."

When Magnus goes to sit down in one of the other armchairs, Alec isn't in the mood to do the same. He perches on the armrest of it, still eyeing the stranger. It amuses Magnus to let Ragnor witness the omega's scowl since he deserves it.

Meanwhile, Alec recalls the photos he's seen of the other warlock that Magnus has framed in the loft. Magnus has also shown him a photo album one day and told him a lot of stories involving Catarina and Ragnor.

He would have expected Magnus's friend to be more… respectful of their home if he knows about them but then again, Alec doesn't know what Catarina has told him and he doesn't know if it's actually plausible the warlock didn't believe Magnus was in a relationship.

"I give lectures at the Academy from time to time." Ragnor says and it seems à propos nothing, but then, "Maxwell is your brother, isn't he?"

"Yes." Alec replies immediately.

"A quick-thinking kid. Will be a lot of trouble when he's teenaged. Thankfully I don't get to meet your parents at all."

Alec's whole body language changes at the first mention of his little brother. Magnus doesn't want to think how much he must miss him and at the same time, he admires the way Ragnor got Alec to drop the scowl and replace it with interest.

Ragnor takes a moment to tell them more about Max while Alec drinks in every word. After that Magnus has some questions for his friend and Alec decides to give them some privacy. He knows there is no need for him to stay and that both warlocks will be better left to talk alone.

"I need a shower," he says, standing up from his perch on the armchair.

Magnus takes his hand, their finger lacing briefly. "Did you eat enough today? Do you want me to summon you something before bed?"

"I'm fine, thank you. If I want something after I shower, I know my way to the kitchen."
Before Alec gets to the shower, he has to spend some minutes soothing his younger son, who is awake when he enters his room. After that the omega decides a bath will be nicer and he sits in the hot water for a long time, trying to think about exactly nothing after his evening was filled with too many thoughts and emotions.

By the time he gets out, dries his hair and dresses for bed, he expects Magnus will be almost done talking with Ragnor. While he waits, he goes to lie on his bed for warmth but doesn't bury himself in the nest.

When there's the very light sound of steps and the closing of Magnus's bedroom door, Alec gets up.

Magnus just changed out of his outfit and into something more comfortable to sleep and he's stretching his limbs out under the royal red duvet when the door opens slowly. He sees the familiar silhouette in the frame of dim light coming from the rest of the loft.

"Alexander?"

"Sorry, I heard you go to your room." Alec steps in and closes the door behind him.

"And you're following me?" Magnus props himself up on one elbow to see better but he's not very willing to move more.

"Yeah. Did your friend portal home?"

"Yes, he never stays. Always says he can't sleep in my apartments, even when I change them."

He offers the spot beside him, pulling back the duvet for Alexander to get under. "Come here. What brought this on?"

"He interrupted us earlier," Alec says while he gets on the bed and lies on his side facing Magnus.

"He did and I will be reminding him of it every time he tries to point out anything I do wrong."

Alec settles in the softness of the bed, enjoying it as much as Magnus did minutes ago. The alpha doesn't miss the way Alec breathes in deeply the scent of the bedroom.

"Now it's too late and I want to sleep…" Alec complains and the way his voice sounds, low and soft, confirms the sleepiness, "but I still want you. So. I'll sleep here so we can pick it up in the morning."

Magnus smiles.

"I always appreciated your way of thinking, darling."
The summer pt. 1

Chapter Summary

Today we go to the past.

I. Max

- 7 months ago, June –

When Alec shows up at Luke's door at nine pm just as the Sun is setting, many thoughts cross the alpha's mind at once. Alec is holding a bundle in his arms, his eyes are almost wild and he looks shaken.

The first, most terrifying thought is that the bundle is a baby and that the omega has suffered a miscarriage two months early. Because it's logical: a bundle held like this must be a baby and since Alec was a pregnant omega, any baby he has in his possession must be his.

But then, when their scents reach Luke's nose, he can confirm there is a baby but one that's definitely alive. In those short seconds, Luke's brain is stuck figuring out the what the hell is going on. Alec can't have his own child two months early, especially considering that male omegas are already giving birth prematurely compared to female omegas, alphas and betas.

He looks down, below Alec's arms. The evidence of his pregnancy is still where it's supposed to be, stretching the t-shirt he's wearing. Luke's mind calms slowly.

"I don't know what to do," Alec says shakily and uncovers the bundle a little to let Luke understand better just what he doesn't know what to do about.

The baby face he reveals is as blue as the blanket is white. Luke stares.

"Where did you… find it?"

"Someone left it- them at Karla's door. While I was in. I have no idea who since there wasn't anyone outside that I could see when I picked the baby up," the words rush out.

"Any notes?" Luke asks while getting Alec inside the apartment.

"No. Not even a name for the baby," Alec says helplessly. "I don't even know if it's a girl or a boy…"

"We'll find out. Take a breath. Come on, sit down."

Alec sits, holding the quiet bundle close to his chest. When he looks down at it, there is as much panic as there is wonder in his eyes.

Luke needs a moment to gather his thoughts. He pours some water for both of them since the day is rather warm. Alec accepts it absentmindedly.

"Are you going to be okay alone for a minute? I need to make a call."
Alec glances up at him. "Uh, yeah."

Luke doesn't waste time, searching for the right name in his phone's contacts. They need a little help or at least a consultation.

When the call is answered and he gets what he needs, he returns to Alec. The omega is sitting down, gently rocking the baby in his arms. So far the baby is quiet and calm but Luke has no idea when it was last fed and changed and it might stop being quiet soon.

"Remember the midwife who agreed to help you when the time comes?"

Alec nods.

"She'll see the baby now."

"Okay."

Alec remembers what Luke had told him about her, a retired member of the Pack who will be the best and nearest help for a Downworlder baby. Alec wasn't supposed to meet her until he was due. Funny, how reality differs from the plans.

Luke takes him back outside to his car and they drive off. It's a short ride since pack members prefer to stay near each other when possible and at this hour the traffic isn't bad, either, letting them arrive faster.

The older woman waits for them at the door of the tenement apartment house she lives in when they find a place to park and go to her. The introductions are left for when they get inside her apartment but for now, she smiles gently at Alec as she invites them in.

The apartment is on the small side but very nice and the scent and aura of the woman are already enough to make Alec relax a little. Her kitchen looks like something that would fit a little prairie house, or at least that's the association Alec's brain supplies.

He's offered a seat and something to drink. He accepts the first and says no to the latter.

"My daughter will be dropping by soon. I assumed, from Luke's brief description of the problem, that you don't have anything the baby will need in the short-term?"

"No, I didn't even start buying anything for mine…"

"That's fine, my daughter will pick some things up on her way. I already asked her to." Adelaide puts back the glass he didn't take and comes closer to where he sits. "Now, let's take a look at your little guest."

When Alec found the baby he was too panicked to even try unwrapping the folds of the blanket around it. Now that he (reluctantly) hands the whole bundle over, Adelaide lays it down gently on the empty table and finally, they see more than a blue face. When its arms are freed, the baby begins to wave them up and down, blue fists with blue fingernails closed tightly.

"That is one healthy-looking warlock boy," Adelaide says.

If not for the color, nothing else would be out of the ordinary. The beginnings of curly hair on his head, five fingers on each hand and foot, a little nose and blue eyes with black pupils.

Blinking a lot, the boy seems to be taking in the scene above him: three adults gazing back down at
him, making a lot of sounds he can't comprehend yet.

"He's easily at least one month old and I'd say it's closer to two." The woman continues. "Might be exactly two months old, unless he was born by a male omega, which would make him around three-four months. But I don't think that's the case here."

"I can't imagine how anyone would keep their baby for months and then give them away," Alec says, feeling faintly sick.

"Could have been guilt that they were determined to do it either way and they decided to at least feed it for a while and not set a newborn on someone's doorstep."

"I hate it," Alec says.

"I know. We do, too. But it's okay, the boy is safe and we'll make sure he gets good care." Adelaide says, wrapping the baby up. The boy seems to appreciate the comfort of the snug blanket.

Luke doesn't know what goes through the omega's head when he's looking at the baby and he isn't sure yet if he should be concerned. Alec is the last person who needs a complication like this to fall on his head but it happened, and they have to deal with it.

They discuss what to do next.

For any baby that doesn't look perfectly mundane at a first glance, the options aren't many. Still, they consider getting him to a hospital after buying a warlock glamour. There are quite a few werewolves working in hospitals around the town. As a Shadowhunter, Alec didn't really have any idea about just how many were helping each other and the Downworld in general. He doesn't think about werewolves for long, however. He imagines the little baby ending up an orphan in a hospital, alone among other babies in need of care. How long before he got a Downworlder family to take him in?

Something must show on his face because Luke addresses him, "Alec? You don't like this?"

"Where is he going to go? Who's going to hold him? Nurses? I have two hands, I can take care of him."

At that, Luke's a little taken aback.

"You're going to have a newborn soon. Without a partner, it's going-"

"If I had twins I'd have to care for two, too."

A pause. The werewolves exchange glances.

"Well, yes. In that scenario. But you really don't have to do it. Someone just left the baby, they don't have the right to decide you're responsible for it now."

"It's a warlock, though. He can't be left in a hospital, glamour or not."

"Generally, it should be handled by the High Warlock," Adelaide says. "He's the one we go to when it's a matter between races and this is also obviously a warlock issue."

Alec frowns. "The same High Warlock who owns the club? How is he a better choice? And won't he charge for it?"
"He only needs to contact someone suitable and he's the one who'll certainly know everyone that matters. It's his business to keep baby warlocks safe, so he wouldn't doing us a favor that he should charge for. Besides, warlocks must already have some established way of caring for orphans of their kind."

"Maybe," Alec replies, unconvinced.

Alec isn't saying he definitely wants to keep the baby but he's also finding all kinds of problems in the solutions offered by the others, which pretty much reveals his real thoughts.

For someone who'd looked so terrified of the baby at the beginning, he's very unwilling to part with him when he's holding him again.

They don't resolve the issue during that conversation. When Adelaide's daughter arrives, they take a break from talking to feed the boy and eventually a nappy change is necessary too. Alec watches intently what the women do, committing every little thing to memory.

Alec is the first to pick the boy up once he's changed, cleaned and back in the onesie and blanket, not giving the others a chance to do it. For all it's worth, the baby seems to appreciate Alec's presence. He's the one the boy coos at, the first sound they hear from him.

Later, Adelaide and Luke are the only ones in the kitchen, still discussing the day. Diana, the daughter, has taken Alec to her mother's guest room with a nice fold-out couch to settle in for the night. The omega easily agreed to stay, the vision of being alone with an infant he knows almost nothing about scary enough to make him let go of his pride.


"The parent… Either they were acting in good faith, wanting the child to be safe for certain or they didn't care much for the child but they wanted to be sure it would stay there. In that case, they were taking advantage of your Alec. His hormones and parental instincts are at their highest and will be like this for a long time. Give an omega like that a child with no parents and they're going to bond with it like two magnets."

She sounds sad but unsurprised. She's seen worse things than this in her life.

"So it's not a good idea right now to suggest that he let us handle it? Or should we separate them as soon as possible?" Luke asks. He already knows the second option is what they should do.

"If the baby was left anywhere else… the precinct, one of our houses, the Jade Wolf, it'd be the Pack's issue. I think he might be taking it a little too personally because it was on his doorstep. Whoever did it might even be from his neighborhood and that's how they knew he was a pregnant omega. They really might have done it intentionally."

Luke sighs. He'd appreciate a drink right now but he still needs to drive back soon.

"I would hate to make him feel like we want to take something from him but if he overworks himself only because he thinks he has to…"

"I think, for now, it'll be best to let him handle the baby but with our help. Get him to stay the night and a few more after that. I'll show him how to care for the baby and we'll help with the schedule.}
He'll agree to it for the sake of his own child. He can't lose much sleep now."

Luke rubs his face with both hands. "I wish people who deserve a break in life would just get it sometimes without more mess piling up on them."

She stands up from where she sat at her kitchen table and goes to Luke, where he's leaning against the counter.

"It's going to be all right, you'll see." She puts her hand on his arm.

"Are you actually considering letting him keep the boy?"

"I would absolutely have him keep him if there wasn't the second child to consider. Once he gives birth…"

"He's going to run himself ragged."

"It's a shame he's a Nephilim. A werewolf would be easier to convince to let the Pack help. Even a mundane would be easier to handle."

"If, if," Luke stresses, "we try this and let him do this, we'll have some time to change his habits at least a little."

The woman smiles. "I think we should try. For this immediate problem and for the future. He's going to be part of our world, that's not going to change any time soon, if ever. It'll be best to have him become used to help."

* * *

II. Luke

Luke works, he solves his cases with Alaric, he checks on Alec and makes sure the werewolves on his territory are safe.

He goes home to Jocelyn, keeping the worlds with Alec and Jocelyn separate. He has a small apartment in his name but often he'll stay for the night at Jocelyn's.

Between her and Alec… it's strangely lucky that Luke used to be a Shadowhunter himself now that he seems to be surrounded with them again.

And Clary… Luke understands what drives her mother to do what she does. He understands the fear of Valentine, except he also completely believes the man, his old friend, is gone for good. Jocelyn's dreams are still reviving the fears, he gets it, but because of them she still pays for the memory spells. Luke disagrees with that approach.

It's not that he wants Clary to be a Shadowhunter. He disagrees with Jocelyn's plan to keep her forcefully mundane. It needs to be Clary's choice, whatever she wants to do as an adult. How can she choose if she doesn't know a significant part of her life? Besides, being a Shadowhunter isn't just the risk. It's protection too, it's knowledge and training.

Clary doesn't need to go back to the Institute to use her runes, they can figure out a way to get her a stele for her life here. The Shadow World will be drawn to her one way or another, bringing its dangers to her a week from now, a year from now. It's happened before, he knows that very well. And each of those encounters, which were ended by Jocelyn, was taken away from Clary's mind by magic. That's dangerous, in Luke's opinion.
At least it's easy to keep Jocelyn's and Alec's secrets secret. He doesn't mention either of them to the other and he does not reveal his past to the young omega. As all hidden things in life, it'll probably come to light one day but for now, he doesn't expect it to happen soon. It could possibly benefit the de-runed Nephilim, to know there is someone whose bad luck paralleled his, but Luke's not obligated to share. He's a werewolf now and partially because of Alec he's recently the Pack's Alpha, too.

He's allowed to have his secrets, too.

***

III. Maia

Alec meets Maia by chance, on a day Luke's taking him for a check-up. Luke's doing it because he has a car and because he doesn't believe Alec would go otherwise and Alec knows it.

First, however, the alpha needs to drop something off for another werewolf at the Jade Wolf and when Alec follows him in instead of waiting in the heat of the car, he sees Maia there. She's sitting alone, finishing whatever she was eating for dinner. She has some sheets of paper spread beside her on the table.

When she spots Luke, she remembers she had a question she wanted him to answer so she stands up, leaving her stuff in the booth.

She sees Alec following Luke two steps behind. She's heard about him and it's easy for her to identify him as the mysterious pregnant omega by scent. Others have seen him before, always in Luke's presence but she's only now getting a chance. Frankly, for all that she does not care for Shadowhunters, she is a little curious about this one.

He's not loud and proud. He's quiet and withdrawn when around strangers, and he smells sweet.

Luke introduces them and hints that it'd be good for them (for Alec) to sometimes hang out since their ages are close. Luke knows Maria's character and he knows it'll be good for the omega to have a reliable alpha whenever Luke himself is too busy to be around.

***

One day Alec runs his mouth stupidly, his loyalty and belief in the Clave still embedded deeply in his being. What he says isn't particularly ignorant or offensive but it's dismissive and derisive and it just is the wrong thing to say in Maia's presence.

They're sitting in the Jade Wolf, Maia, the recently turned Bat and Alec himself.

At first, it doesn't seem like Maia reacts much aside from telling him to think about what his mouth does.

Later, whenever she has the opportunity she asks him all sorts of questions, hypothetical ones involving the Law and Downworlders like she's writing an exam about it. She's doing it partly to learn more, partly to catch him saying something that's in her opinion stupid and dated, and very Shadowhunter-like. Whenever she sees the opportunity, she jumps on it to point out all the ways he's wrong for still repeating the same things that led to him being banished.

Later she lets up but she'll still grill him sometimes on it just to tease.
IV. Alec

Alec lives two lives. Or rather two half-lives. When he needs the sense of independence, of personal peace, he goes back to Karla's. Living with the vampire is pretty much like being roommates, even if he's not paying her nearly enough for it to be fair. But it's different than staying with the Pack. He and Karla live different lives on different schedules, which is also why he likes it.

When he's there, he can push the guilt away enough to do what he has to do.

He doesn't think about what Maia would say to his bleeding himself into a bag in order to sell the bag. He doesn't imagine Adelaide's disappointment with him. He just does what he can for his child and later for little Max.

He fills a blood bag, the weekly delivery. He keeps it hidden, close to his body so it'll keep his warmth. He puts on the lightest jacket he owns and goes out into the late summer evening. He needs to take as little time as possible, as a courtesy to his vampire host. They're sharing these hours of the day: he lives in the sunlight but needs to use twilight hours to get to his "clients" and then needs to get back so that Karla can leave her home at last for the rest of the night. Not that she stays out for all of the dark hours.

He's near the Hotel DuMort. He never goes close until he sees a familiar silhouette in the back street of the Hotel. He always recognizes the few vampires he considers "trustworthy" and he wouldn't risk approaching a stranger so close to their den.

Eventually, he sees the right shape and posture and he moves. He's glad to get away from the corner, where he would appear like a, well, a hooker, if not for his belly. The lines of his jacket cover it only a little and he's too far along to be able to hide it with any kind of outfit.

The vampire meets him in the narrow alley.

"Hello, beautiful."

Alec takes the bag and hands it over, not wanting any small-talk from the other man.

"I probably won't be back for some time," he informs him.

"Because of…?" The vampire gestures at his stomach. "It's fine, it's expected." His next words are a surprise to Alec. "Whenever you are back, you can't come here anymore."

"Why?"

The vampire leans on the wall casually. "The Clan leader returns and if she takes interest in you, it won't end well for you."

"Thanks, uh, for the heads-up."

Alec wonders if he'll be able to continue if she's to stay. Even if he doesn't walk around her territory, she might find out.
"Do you know Pandemonium?" the vampire asks.

"Yeah?"

"It has even nicer back alleys than this. I'm sure we'll be able to find each other."

The vampire hands him a gray envelope, as usual. "There's a little extra in there today. Consider it an incentive to keep coming back."

Alec was planning to be back regardless. He needs the money. He pretends not to mind when the vampire moves too close for comfort, breathing in Alec's scent from his neck.

"I wonder how sweet you'll smell when you're back," the vampire says as a goodbye.
The Summer pt. 2

Chapter Summary

Today: short chapter, more of the past. The bits and scenes aren't quite in a chronological order, you'll notice, but it's not important that they are.
Next up: we're back to the present, starting with some nice nsfw things :)

Being an omega, Alec could get away with not seeing a specialist for his pregnancy for so long. Omegas are built for carrying and delivering healthy children and having any problems is extremely rare for them. They are also built for caring for newborns, their instincts strong and steady for the early months of the child's life. It's why the first new heat doesn't come until around six months after labor.

It's a shame some people take those qualities and in their minds equal them to omegas being sex toys. Some people appreciate only those qualities and pretend omegas don't have any others.

The first time Alec goes near a hospital after leaving the Institute is when Luke makes him. It's just to be sure, Luke tells him and eventually, days later, Alec agrees.

The first time they can't risk letting a Mundane see the baby on an ultrasound's screen. They have no way of telling how many limbs the baby currently has. Does it have wings? A tail? Two tails? And by the way, how does one give birth to a winged baby?

The first time they do it is not exactly legal and not in the normal working hours of the hospital. A werewolf who owes the New York Pack a favor agrees to lead them to the proper office and perform the examination while the actual certified hospital employee is at home. The man is a diagnostic technician himself but not in the same department as obstetrics. Still, he's smart enough and agrees to do it, promising to get the hang of it and call them back.

When the day comes, it's not a good day for Alec. In order for the equipment to work, he knows has to bare his skin to the stranger using it. He'd rather be doing a hundred other things but he promised to go and he suspects Luke might try convincing him the alpha way if he tries to back out.

Alec wishes the technician was an omega, too. At least the beta man seems to understand it's an especially sensitive matter and all he needs to do is the work he was asked to do, keeping questions to himself.

At first, Luke offers to wait outside but it's not like Alec's getting naked and the alpha might as well see the ultrasound screen too.

Lying back on the examination table, Alec feels more anxious than he has any reason to be. When the man says he's ready if they're ready and he's temporarily turned away from Alec, the omega lifts his shirt but in a way that only the middle of his belly is uncovered. He puts his hands on the edges of the shirt so it can't ride up completely. He's painfully aware of the presence of the three scars and one full rune on both sides of his abdomen and he wants to keep them to himself. He's
allowed to.

The beta is surprised at first, confusion visible in his eyes, but since there's just enough space for the wand to move on the bare skin, he doesn't insist that Alec let go of the shirt. Alec tries not to think that the same probably won't work if they do visit a real mundane doctor.

As for where his Deflect rune used to be, Alec either goes with just a raised collar or when he's more sensitive about it, he wears a scarf or a lighter shawl-like fabric wrapped around his throat. It stands out a little but it's not something completely strange. It used to be something omegas did, in the old times. For their own comfort or because their alpha wanted this from them, they'd wear scarves to cover up their scent glands and their pressure points. It's very old-fashioned to do it now, especially in New York, but he doesn't have a choice.

Alec keeps thinking about his scars only until the beta takes the wand and touches it to the gel-covered skin of his belly. And then there is the image of his baby filling the screen. It's constantly changing, moving within the conical shape. Not just because the wand moves but because the baby is a living being. Alec can't look away. It's one thing to feel them moving inside him, knowing they're there, but it's another thing to see it. This is the second time he knows his choices weren't wrong. The first time was when he'd just started showing, beyond any doubt, that he was pregnant. From there it'd been so much easier to keep going.

He's lost inside his head for a while, just looking, while the beta does what they asked him to do— he looks the image of the baby over, confirming the number of limbs and other parts a baby should have.

"I think you should wait until an actual professional sees you to know the sex. I don't want to tell you wrong." He says later. They also have to remember they only have a little time to be sneaking around this room.

Alec snaps out of his thoughts. "Oh, no, thanks. I don't need to know. Not yet."

They know enough to try a regular visit, even if his pregnancy won't end in a hospital since it's impossible to tell from the ultrasound what color the baby is or if it's covered in strange skin, or scales.

* * *

Alec lies on his side, propped up on one elbow to keep his head comfortable to watch the screen of the TV. Maia has invited Bat and Alec for a movie night the same day Alec was scheduled to stay with the Pack. The omega is aware that they are, as a group, doing their best to "handle" him after the decision to keep Max was final. The blue baby warlock has become his and he's given him a name. After weeks of Alec carrying him in his arms, the baby took on some of his scent like he would from a real parent.

Alec knows the alphas sometimes influence him when they want him to agree to something and he doesn't love that but there isn't anything he can do about that. He'd rather be doing things his way but in the end, he can't be angry at them, not when they're only making sure he's safe and that the children are taken care of.

Now, Alec's almost eight months pregnant belly is dictating all rules of resting: his sleep position, the way he sits down and the way he takes up space on a couch. The young werewolves are used to working around him, always mindful of his needs. He hangs out with the same people: alpha Maia, beta Bat, omega Dustin. As for the older werewolves, he regularly sees beta Adelaide and her daughter, alpha Luke and Alaric. He has always preferred small but tight groups, such as his
siblings had formed. When he can't have that, he prefers solitude.

Being alone might hurt sometimes but he's not made to easily believe in strangers' kindness. He's not built to just trust. Until Luke basically forced him to accept help, Alec had lived day to day, his banishment and the distrust of strangers driving him from place to place, making the best of the money Hodge had slipped into his bag. Because of that, Alec still found it difficult to simply relax, simply enjoy a movies night.

Today, his feet have been particularly annoying in how easily they become achy and swollen. He'd managed to avoid this aspect of pregnancy for quite a long time but it got him eventually. He has his trainers and socks off, his feet lying covered by a blanket instead. He has some snacks within his reach and he's doing his best to enjoy the evening. Salty things have been particularly appealing to his senses lately, though not spicy ones. He can eat baked salt sticks by fistful and somehow he always finds sufficient supply of them around as if they're replacing themselves.

All things considered, he's quite cozy where he is, in his soft sweatpants and a light hoodie. He's pretty sure he'd be too warm lying like this at any other time but there's not much in his body that's "normal" for him at this point. There's a semi-interesting movie on that Alec makes an effort to focus on watching. His actual focus is on the baby inside him. So far along, he only needs to put his hand on his stomach to feel the kicking. It's not very frequent and it doesn't bother him but he tries to feel it as often as he can while he's resting. To be honest, it's not as appreciated while he's trying to fall asleep but from what he knows, he's having it easy anyway compared to other pregnant people. He can only hope that the calmness of his baby will be the same after they're born.

"Do you know the sex yet?" Bat asks at some point. Alec has answered this question a few times when it was asked by various pack members.

"No, I don't plan to know until they're born."

"Why?"

He shrugs. There isn't an actual reason or any superstition weighing on this decision. "I want it to be a surprise," he says.

"Usually people want to know, if only to buy stuff for them."

"Is it necessary? There are more colors than blue and pink." Alec replies and no, that doesn't mean he's planning to buy all black and gray, despite the teasing he's already heard from the young werewolves about his wardrobe choices.

"That's true." Bat agrees. "I guess we're just curious."

"It would be cool if this one was a girl," Maia says.

"Yeah," Alec replies, thinking of his sister. He already knows that if he has a girl she'll have Isabelle's name. A boy will be Jonathan. He still has a few weeks, depending on if they're early or late, before he meets his baby properly. Then he'll have all the time to find out all about them.

Max is sleeping nearby, wrapped in a blanket. He sleeps a lot and once he's out, even louder noises don't bother him. He also eats a lot. When he's not sleeping or calling for food, he's waving his arms, making up for his lack of coordination with enthusiasm. He doesn't cry often but he's still filling any room he's in with all sorts of sounds, usually charming anyone who's around.
Alec thinks that so far he's done well. He's learned a lot from the older Pack members. He's even met some mated and married omegas and betas who offered some baby items they still had after their own children grew out of them.

Having Max… it was different than he imagined would be with his own child. The Pack knew he was an abandoned baby and for some reason, it was easier for the Nephilim to accept that he couldn't do this alone. He knew very well the others used this opportunity to give him the things they'd meant for his unborn baby, knowing he'd accept them more easily when he suddenly needed them so much.

"It takes a village", he's heard or read this saying somewhere and he admits it might be true.

* * *

At night, Alec lies awake, listening to Max's breath while he sleeps. The baby inside him is calm too, not kicking.

Sometimes the omega simply doesn't want to sleep yet, though he needs it very much. It's because he fears the dreams. Sometimes he has a bad night, the dark and the silence letting dark thoughts cloud his mind. It doesn't matter where he is at the time, the Pack territory or Karla's house. When it's like this, he fears the dreams will take him back to the rooftop, to the cold, to the demon's touch and the pain it'd brought him.

Sometimes he wakes up feeling the rough concrete under his hands and the pain from his head injury. He remembers the violation like it happened hours ago. Each time, there's nothing to do about it but shake it off and move on. He can only look at Max's face and let the boy hold his finger in his little fist, and get his strength from that.

"We're safe, love," Alec says into the night, his hand on his stomach. He had feared, in the early days, that he might not be a good parent after all. There was a fear, deep, deep inside him, that for all his determination which he'd shown by leaving the Institute, he wouldn't be strong enough. That he'd find himself wishing he could take it all back, that he'd begin to resent a baby with demonic origins for driving him out of his home.

But he'd stood in front of a bathroom mirror one day, his hand on his belly as became his habit. He pulled his sweater and shirt up, revealing the skin beginning to stretch over a bump. It was right there, the proof of his baby, validating everything he's done so far. He hadn't left the Institute for an empty ideal, he left it for this. What he felt then was so far from resentment that he let go of that particular fear and it never returned to his thoughts again.

* * *

Sometimes he lies awake, looking at the round face of the tiny blue baby that was dropped into his life. He'd always wanted children. He'd never had a problem with that part of his dynamic. He didn't love being looked down on as an omega but he'd been looking forward to his future… until he grew up enough to understand politics and to understand his parents' plans for him. Once he realized he wasn't going to be free to choose his mate it didn't sound so good anymore. What'd originally sounded like a great future, was shadowed by the vision of him being pushed onto the sidelines, of his Institute being ruled by an outsider alpha who'd own both the Institute and Alec.

That didn't happen. Here he is, his dream of children fulfilled… and all his other dreams forgotten.
"What would you do if they came to ask you to come back?"

"If they knocked on the door right now and offered to let me go back?"

"Yeah."

"I'd say no. Until my child is born, I wouldn't go inside the Institute."

"What about after?"

"After... it's already too late for such changes of heart. If someone did ask me - and they would have to find me first - I don't think I could trust them."

* * *

Alec is standing in Adelaide's kitchen, a pot and a frying pan set on the stove burners in front of him. He's wearing a thick apron over his large belly and he has an open cookbook on the counter to his left, propped up by a pan so he can read it better from where he's standing. There's a radio on, turned up only loud enough to create background noise. Alec has listened more to Mundane news in the days that he agreed to stay with the Pack than he has ever heard in his life.

To be honest, he doesn't know some of the things they talk about. He never followed Mundane politics, he never had to be interested in the economy. After these almost-two months, he absorbed some of that knowledge without meaning to but he's still an outsider.

When someone enters the apartment he's expecting it to be its owner so he's surprised to see Maia instead. She's holding a grocery bag and her own messenger bag that he knows usually holds her textbooks. She's dressed casually and has another bag with her that is probably her own shopping. Seems like she has a whole day free today.

"I heard you needed some things," she says, setting the bag on the counter. "Diana is held up at work."

Maia begins to take out what she brought and places the items in one group of jars and packets.

"Oh, thanks," Alec says automatically, keeping his eyes on the pot he's stirring.

"What are you making?"

Not wanting to be too distracted at this point in cooking, he points in the general direction of the open book. Maia takes a look at it.

"So... Do you want me to open the tomato jar?"

"Uh," he tries to remember what he was missing from the recipe without looking. "Yes, please."

She opens and hands him the dried tomatoes. Seeing how focused he is on stirring, for some reason, she leaves him to it. Maia is supposed to be getting back soon because she has other things planned but she isn't in a rush, still having some time to hang out. Maybe she'll even get to try what he's making if he's done soon.

Looking around the kitchen, she finds little plastic containers lined up on the counter closer to
Alec, each containing some spice. One contains salt. They all look to be intentionally measured. Yes, there's even the evidence: the little kitchen scale sits nearby.

"Seriously?" She says out loud.

She picks one up to sniff it since the spice looks unfamiliar at first glance.

"Please don't move them," Alec speaks, nearly startling her. "They're in order."

"Seriously?" She asks again, turning to him. "Order of what, putting them in?"

"Yeah."

"It's one pot. They all end up together anyway. I mean I guess it matters if something's supposed to be added at the very beginning so it has time to dissolve or something, but," She goes to look at the recipe again. "You know you can add all of the stuff from this part together, they're just making you work more."

"If it didn't matter they wouldn't write it down in order."

"I think you just got the fancy kind of cookbook."

"It's not mine. It's Diana's. She's a good cook." He throws that fact like a defense shield.

"That's true but I will bet she doesn't measure everything out like this." She waves at the little containers. "And you're supposed to add things to your taste, not the writer's... Is this a Shadowhunter thing? You can't not follow the rules?"

Alec sighs when she brings up his past. "Rules are set for a reason. Some of them might be written by self-serving people but."

"Okay, enough." She throws her arms up. "You do you. Cook your thing. It smells good."

He thinks she's about to go but Maia sits down at the table instead, pulls her phone out of her bag and begins to read something or check her mail. Now he suspects she wants to try the dish and see for herself if he's messing it up or if his precision measuring ends with success.

There are five minutes left of cooking when he touches his stomach, wincing at the same time. He must make some kind of sound because Maia's head snaps up and she looks directly at him. She sees where his hand is and she pales by the second.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, it's fine. Don't worry."

"Has this… been happening today? Because I swear if it's what I think it is…"

"No. Not contractions. You can breathe now. Just hurts a little. I'll know when it's time, I promise."

She does not look convinced at all. In fact, she looks ready to either run to his aid… or bolt from the house altogether.

"You better be telling the truth because I don't have a car and I'm not riding a cab with you while you're giving birth."
"I'm not. I promise." He's being honest. Yes, he's had these little aches here and there but something makes him believe they're not it yet. Maybe he knows his body by now or it's omegan intuition, but he just knows he needs to wait a little bit longer before he sees his baby.

*

He gives birth two and a half days later after hours of feeling off, knowing the time was coming.

As promised, he has the two women to help and the comforting presence of one omega for emotional support. The poor young man is pretty shaken afterwards but he admirably focused on Alec's wellbeing for however long it was needed.

The first time Alec is falling asleep with two boys right beside him, it feels like he is dreaming.

*

In the few days after, Alec sleeps a lot during the day, his body needing to recover. He can't seem to be able to do the same at night. He's restless and anxious, the basic fear of what's in the dark driving him to be awake, watching over his children. He paces the room and sometimes the corridor, silent because he's barefoot, his eyes moving from shadowy corner to shadowy corner. His ears catch every sound, his tired mind amplifying the most benign of noises.

He knows, logically, that he doesn't need to do this. He's not alone in the house. There are even alphas nearby just for him. Still, he can't rest.

He needs his alpha. He's being watched over but there's no feeling of permanence and stability to it. He doesn't feel free to share his concerns with the werewolf alphas, knowing they will treat him with logic and common sense, and distance. He doesn't need to be told there's nothing creeping outside the windows and that no demons are sniffing him out in the tenement house.

He needs his mate to find him wandering the house, to hold him, lead him back to bed.

Whenever he does sleep, in-between the dreams of the demon he feels a pair of warm, strong arms closing around him and holding him near. A whisper reaches his ears: Everything will be all right.

Alec goes back to his room on his own to check again on his boys. He hasn't learned Jonathan's feeding habits yet. He's only lived for a few days, a tiny amount of time matching his tiny body.

Alec passes through the stripe of light falling into his room from the outside, reminding him that the world outside keeps going. It's a quiet neighborhood, not many cars pass by in the middle of the night but he hears the ones that do.

He sits on the bed slowly so it doesn't creak. He was gifted a crib, which is large enough to hold both the older boy and the newborn if they're swaddled so that Max doesn't accidentally wave his arm into Jonathan. It stands right beside his bed so he can touch it while lying down.

Instead of trying to sleep while they're sleeping, Alec just watches them, his heart full.

*

In the light of day, when his mind isn't stuck on stalking the corridor against the shadows, he has to think of other problems.

He doesn't say out loud how terrified he is of his future. Selling his blood - what is honestly quite a small amount - is only enough for food and necessities when you're paying ridiculously low rent
and when you're receiving hand-me-down items for kids from other families. What is he going to do once they begin eating more? When they need more advanced things?

What if they fall sick, if warlocks even can fall sick? He'd have to pay an adult warlock for help. And he'd have to pay even more to get a teacher for them.

He knows he won't be able to go on like this for years, not without eventually becoming addicted to being bitten. Keeping reasonable periods of time between bites isn't difficult for now but that will surely change.

He doesn't exist in Mundane bureaucracy and even if he could get papers for money, he'd make himself look suspicious just because he lived apart from their world and still didn't get some things. It's just not an option to try and get mundane help for too many reasons to list. He can't prove where he got Max from and he'd have to buy a glamor first if he wanted him to be seen. Just no.

Finding a job is a possibility, yes. He's aware he could get it without following Mundane law because Mundanes themselves do the same. If he tried it, however, he'd either have to work at a low paying job for long hours or it'd be too illegal for his taste. If he wanted to make use of his true skills and practice, he'd have to have some serious credentials or end up in a dangerous place.

Obviously, working a lot is not the issue. He knows long hours and tedious work, he's done it for the Institute. But if he did that now, when would he take care of his children? He doesn't want to consider being away from them for this long, he can't. He hasn't given up everything just to spend his days away from his children.

He also can't consider work that might get him injured and make him unable to care for them. He'd only end up being a worse burden on the Pack.

On days when the thoughts of the future won't let him rest, he comes to the conclusion, over and over again, that for him the only option is finding an alpha. He needs one alpha who would take him in, who would consider mating with him properly or at least taking him as a lover, so that he'd find it worth it to take care of them.

That's just hopeful thinking. No alpha will be interested in an omega who smells of family, of parenthood. And even if, they would probably think long and hard about becoming involved with one who'd been raped. Alec isn't mate material anymore.

* * *

On the night when Magnus Bane comes knocking on his door, Alec remembers all of those thoughts. They crowd in his head along with whispers of a warning that this particular alpha may be too powerful, too important, that the imbalance between them is just too significant.

His aura is strong, matching the reputation that Alec is aware of. On top of that, he's striking. His eyes, lined in dark color are sharp and clever and his body is covered by a choice of colors that Alec would never guess could go together.

He's a warlock, the best one, and he's there, extending the offer to Alec out of the blue.

Once again Alec reminds himself he can live with giving himself over to one alpha. He couldn't handle selling his body like he sells his blood, he would hate coming home smelling of multiple men… but if it's just the one it wouldn't be so bad. If he is serious, if he takes Alec and his sons to live with him, then laying with him might only be a technicality.
That's why the following morning Alec wakes up and texts Magnus Bane to come get them.
Maintaining relations

Chapter Summary

Today: we start in bed, have an important conversation and end up at a party.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

- present day -

Magnus wakes up with three long limbs wrapped around his body. Two arms around his middle, one leg hooked over his shin. He's pretty sure Alec's right arm must be seriously asleep by now, Magnus's weight pressing it into the mattress for who knows how long.

It feels exquisite to wake to his mate's fresh scent made stronger by his sleep, amidst warmth and comfort of Magnus's favorite bedding. To be fair, all of his bedding is his favorite since he got rid of anything that wasn't good enough.

Minutes pass while the alpha enjoys the simple pleasure of a slow morning. For as long as he wants, he can just feel Alexander at his back, his warmth shared by proximity under the duvet.

Slowly, gently turning around, Magnus has to move Alec's leg but he does his best to stay in the circle of the omega's arms. He wants to see his face. Alec is still asleep or fighting to remain asleep while he can. His lashes stand out against his skin and his hair is a soft mess, half-hidden by the pillow.

He looks like he belongs nowhere else but with Magnus in his bed.

When the time comes for his eyes to open, it's a slow process. It's just as well, because Magnus wants to memorize this as best as he can.

"Good morning," comes the rough voice, some letters slurred together due to sleepiness and lack of care for proper speech so soon after waking.

"Good morning, love," Magnus replies.

Alec stays awake even if his eyes close again. Magnus reaches out to run his fingers through the black strands of hair and a soft hum leaves the omega's lips.

Magnus has heard Alexander purr no more than three times, maybe two-and-a-half times, since the time they met for the first time and he doesn't expect to hear it now, considering how reserved the omega is with things like that. Still, having managed it even once was already enough for Magnus.

Alec's hand moves, his fingers running smoothly up and down Magnus's back as if he's trying to feel him for the first time that day. His eyes are open, looking into Magnus's own.

After the previous evening and night when Magnus wore his glamor, he woke up without it and he
knows what Alec sees when he looks at him.

Alec's eyes get a mischievous glint in them. His left hand moves from Magnus's back to his hip, then closer to the front and lower, where the waistband of his sleep pants is. He doesn't stop there, he doesn't take the time to tease and imply. He goes right for the prize, making Magnus suck in air sharply.

Alec doesn't give him the time to recover or process the sensations because he takes firm hold of him under the fabric and begins stroking. The angle is off but the omega proves again that he can use his left hand as well as his right.

On a particularly skilled upstroke, Magnus closes his eyes and bites his lower lip on a reflex. It's so, so good to start a day like this.

The air in the room begins to become heavy with their scents, both of them equally excited. Alec has been eager since last night but Magnus catches up to him with enthusiasm.

He decides it's time for a change. Holding Alec's wrist, he stops what his lover is doing, despite very much not wanting it to stop. He has other things in mind he wants to do just as much.

For example he wants to move, roll them over so he can cover Alexander with his body. First, he needs to get rid of the clothes his omega is still wearing. His intent is clear when he grabs the lower edge of Alec's t-shirt and Alec helps by shifting his body on the bed as the shirt slides up until it reaches his arms. He raises them to put them behind his head on the bed. Magnus slows his tugging at the shirt just to have more time to admire the view.

When the shirt is off and promptly forgotten, he moves on to the black boxer briefs, now too tight for holding his arousal. They go off too, Alec lifting his hips off the bed to help.

Magnus doesn't waste time for himself: his own sleeping pants disappear at a snap of his fingers. Free to touch Alexander's body with his own along its whole length, Magnus revels in the heat that built up between them. Chest to chest, hipbone to hipbone, his thigh fitting between Alec's thighs, they fit perfectly.

They both can't help but moan at the new pressure when Magnus moves forward a little, his lips seeking Alec's skin. He's instantly granted access to the omega's throat and side of his neck, where Magnus plants wet kisses, from time to time nipping at his skin to keep him on his toes. He moves his hips slowly, just so, teasing the both of them with sweet pressure that isn't nearly enough.

It's beautiful how his omega opens to pleasure, lets himself fall into it. Magnus can't wait to make him lose himself in full sex, he can't wait to be inside him. He usually tries not to think about that too much, stops himself from daydreaming about it because his imagination is particularly colorful when it comes to Alexander and then it's just being cruel to himself.

Sometimes it's like he wants to devour him. To take everything the omega will give him, eat him whole.

A thrill runs through him every time he tells himself he only needs to be patient.

Alec's hips buck when teasing electric magic licks over his nipple. Magnus has told him of the uses of magic - well, not told him, only hinted at the possibility and that he'd be very happy to show his lover all of it over time. Alec's reminded of it as the tingling heat sinks into his skin.

They seem to be on the same page as far as pace is concerned. Alec has started all this by coming into the alpha's bed last night and then he was pretty clear about his intentions when he began
touching him. When Magnus takes over the initiative, Alec seems to have no objections. With his half-lidded eyes, his head tilted back to bare his throat for Magnus to kiss… The alpha doesn't even have to touch him to know how wet he is, how ready. He smells divine and feels even better under his fingers and tongue.

His muscles shift when Magnus trails his fingers down from his chest to his abdomen. He's always liked strength in his lovers, be it physical or other kinds of strength. Alexander is a wonderful package of Nephilim body and his own unique soul, his strong mind. It attracts Magnus like nothing else.

Magnus is still so very pleased with himself for having contributed to Alec's recovery from where he was when he had found him. From that day, in his alpha heart it was pretty clear what he needed to do: You're an alpha so you provide for your omega, feed them, protect them. Once that's achieved, you make them gasp, shiver, make them cry your name… Make them purr.

All of that, all that Magnus needs, is pretty straightforward.

His fingertips continue the travel down over Alec's skin until they reach his treasure trail of dark hair.

"What do you want today?" He asks, his breath touching Alec's skin where he's almost kissing it.

"You." The omega says at first, the easiest answer. Then, he clarifies: "Your fingers, in me."

The usual. It's what he needs. For omegas, blowjobs and things like that are pleasant additions, afterthoughts to sex and what Alec truly needs aren't fingers, no matter how skilled. They both know it.

"Close your eyes," Magnus whispers. He has something in mind that he wanted to try for some time now.

His beautiful lover lies still, soft and pliant.

Magnus runs his fingertips down the inside of Alec's thigh, down to his knee. Then back the same way. They both like this part. Majority of omegas have erogenous zones on their thighs and Alec is no different. A shiver of sweet anticipation runs through him before Magnus presses inside him.

He begins to rub him slowly.

Gasped breath leaves Alec, his legs part more. Magnus shifts a little while maintaining as much contact between their bodies as is comfortable for what he's doing to his lover.

He doesn't give him any warning. He calls on his magic, the softest, lightest form of it. It runs to his fingertips, directed by his will into Alec's body.

When it reaches him, the omega's eyes fly open and a moan proves he likes what just happened. Capturing his lips in a kiss, Magnus silences questions.

Alec hasn't felt anything like this before. He's warmed from the inside and it's almost like when he's close to coming but different. Energy courses through him, up his spine from where Magnus is touching him. Then it changes. It's slow and heavy, spreading through him like honey. He sinks into the bed, boneless and relaxed. It's good. He realizes his alpha isn't even rubbing him anymore, he's just making him feel the magic.

He does kiss him, though. Alec's throat is tingling from the number of kisses and bites left there.
He never trusted anyone with his body as much as he trusts Magnus. He never thought he would trust anyone this much even before… And after he was raped, he hadn't even tried to imagine it, except in dreams. But even his imaginary dream alphas were less than this. Less than Magnus.

Alec doesn't want to think of all those things while he's on his back, legs spread and enjoying the attention of his mate. So he pushes all that away. Doing so has become easy with Magnus.

Pressed against Alec's side, he's a steady presence that makes Alec's heart feel full. The strength of his body reminds Alec of the safety he's found with him.

*They're sitting on the bed afterwards, freshly cleaned and still naked. Alec has one knee bent and his arms wrapped around it. He rests his chin on the knee. He's looking at Magnus.

Magnus looks back, his gaze steady. They're bathed in the light of the ascending morning sun. The bed cover Alec has put over himself like a cloak for warmth makes him the picture of softness. Magnus has only an emerald robe on, hanging from shoulders and open in the front.

"I want to mate with you," Alec says.

"What are you afraid of that keeps you from it?" Magnus asks.

Neither of them is surprised that this comes up now, spoken in words instead of just thought about. They're two halves of a whole, alpha and omega, yearning for a bond to connect them. They both need and want it equally.

It isn't true that omegas need bonds more. They have more vulnerabilities related to them but they're also the ones willing to admit to the need out loud, unlike alphas who cling to the image of stoic strength.

"I'm not afraid of- of the sex." Alec makes an aborted gesture between himself and Magnus. "Or you. I'm afraid that there's something wrong with me that I don't know of. I'm afraid I'll freak out or freeze without wanting to, even if- if I want everything."

"You won't freak out," Magnus says gently but firmly. "If you need me to stop at any time, I will. I want you like I've never wanted anyone before… but I promise I will stop any time you need me to. Whatever might happen, put you back in a bad place, we'll deal with it."

He takes Alec's hand to place a kiss on his knuckles. Alec looks down at their touching hands. He knows he can trust Magnus but he doesn't know if he can trust his own head.

Magnus continues, carefully: "If you want to talk to anyone first, we'll arrange it."

Alec sighs.

"What if talking about it at all, like this, just puts it back on the front of my mind and makes me worse?"

Magnus shakes his head empathetically. "No, love. If anything it'll make everything between us better."

"I don't want to talk about it," Alec tells him. "I don't feel the need. I'm just afraid something stupid will pop into my head in the middle of it."
"I'm not going to insist," Magnus reassures him. He hesitates briefly before asking the next thing. "But, Alexander… please, only tell me this: did the demon do anything other than… Did it injure you, hurt you in some other way, say something, threaten you?"

Alec clearly remembers sitting with Isabelle, telling her the same story. He shakes his head. "No. First, it knocked me down and I hit my head pretty badly. In the end, it was a good thing, I think. I stayed down… I didn't even know what was happening until it was on me and undressing me. I was too dizzy to defend myself and… I probably wouldn't have been able to win against it anyway. I wasn't distracted when it hit me but I still didn't sense it or hear it coming. It was too clever and strong."

For a reason he doesn't know, there is calmness in his heart as he speaks. He'd told some of it to Magnus before but it'd made him more nervous then. Maybe it's for the same reason he brought up mating: enough time has passed that he's ready to do it.

"It hurt when it was in me. I wasn't ready, obviously. And I thought I was going to die just like that, not even in battle. I didn't know that it wanted something else from me. It must have only been a few minutes... It came inside me... and left me." Alec stares ahead at a wrinkle in the bedding while Magnus doesn't let go of his hand. "It just left, knowing I couldn't even go after it. It didn't speak to me or do anything else. I began to heal myself with an Iratze and finished healing in the Institute. And that's it."

Maybe it's because they're sitting in the safest space of their home aside from his nest, bathed in their scents after being close, but Alec's feeling okay with talking about this.

"I had more nightmares about Jonathan's and then Max's safety than I ever had about that night." He shrugs.

Magnus nods. He has to take a slow, deep breath for his own sake.

His mind goes to the past when he had first talked about this and the omega had been "just" a stranger in need of help and who'd pulled at Magnus's heartstrings. It's different to talk about the same thing with the one he considers his love.

"May I kiss you?" He asks.

"Yeah. You should."

It helps them to shake off the heaviest of the emotions.

"Let's do it like this," Magnus says, his fingertips brushing Alec's cheek. "Promise me that if something, anything goes wrong when we do try to make love, you will accept some sort of help. Until then I promise not to bring it up again."

"Fine."

"And if you still feel scared, we can wait until your heat so your mind will be set on one thing then."

Alec shakes his head immediately. "I don't want my first time to be in heat. And it would be too long to wait, anyway."

He blushes lightly at revealing more of his eagerness.
Magnus very much agrees in his head that it would be a long time to wait. Two months at the earliest, most likely three or more than three.

"How about this... the next time we're both in the mood and you want more, we'll just go with it. No wondering at that point, only the promise to stop if we need to."

"Okay."

"Yes?"

"Yes, let's do that. Let's try."

It's enough to lighten Alec's thoughts because it's something tangible to look forward to. He kisses Magnus again.

After that, he knows there's no time left to laze in the bed. He's come to rely on his gut feeling to know when to attend his babies and when to give himself more time without fussing over them. Telling if they're awake or asleep is beyond his abilities but he certainly can tell when they're hungry or distressed.

Unfortunately, the warmth of his alpha's kisses can't cover the tug at his insides that tells him that he's needed back in his room. The boys have slept surprisingly long anyway, which was lucky for their parents' intimate time.

"Are you coming to help with feeding?" Alec throws Magnus's way, collecting the clothes he'd come in here last night.

"How can you even ask me this?" Magnus asks with great affront.

The rest of the day after the warlock party is as uneventful as Alec hoped it would be. He gets to read a book and almost finish it, they have a dinner of paella and flan for dessert, Max makes a mess of the puree Alec had made for him but Magnus cleans it up with a snap of his fingers.

They watch a movie later. Magnus has to deal with Max's enthusiasm for throwing out tendrils of magic in front of his face, obscuring his vision. Magnus suspects that the last evening has encouraged the boy a tad too much. Both the atmosphere of magic from so many warlock auras and the bubbles he's seen the guest make for him affected him. Magnus intercepts the weak magic with his own before it can do something else than shine in the air. There's little chance of it interacting with their surroundings, even if it can move small items but it's better to be safe. Max's magic seems to be developing very slowly, which is a good thing for everyone.

The next day Alec is standing in the middle of the room, staring down at his phone as if his gaze could speed up the updates it's going through, just when he wanted to use it for something. He's holding back from complaining about Mundane technology since he owes it way too much to be ungrateful. So while he's distracted by it, he barely looks up when a fire message flies through the loft. He expects Magnus to catch it, the warlock is right there, currently contemplating the curtains in the window nearest to where they usually have their breakfast if they're not eating at the kitchen isle.
Apparently, the alpha had enough time during the party to discuss home décor with one or two guests and he remembered that now. "Now" meaning two hours ago. Since then he's been walking around with a thoughtful expression on his face, going from window to window and standing here and there, considering the lights and shadows and Angel knows what else. Alec has been praying all this time not to be asked for any input.

When the fire message flies right at his face, only his muscle memory saves him in time. He catches the flaming paper at the last moment, almost flinging it back on instinct. He was sure it wasn't meant for him.

The phone, which Alec sacrificed to catch the message, makes a sad sound bouncing on the hardwood floor but its case saves it from being damaged.

It's very silent in the loft after that. Magnus is looking at Alec, who shakes the surprise off and begins to read the message. It's... not what he expected to receive. It's a request from another warlock, whose name Alec vaguely remembers from the party. The request is for Alec to clarify some of the laws for the man who is planning some kind of research, which he hopes to eventually announce publically and to do that he needs it to be within what's legal.

Magnus comes closer until he's looking over Alec's shoulder. Since he's not shooed away, he reads the letter, too.

"Isn't that a question for you?" Alec asks him. "You're the High Warlock, you're supposed to be counsel for your warlocks?"

Magnus hums. "I do love when not everything has to fall to me. You're the expert on the law, Angel."

"Too bad he doesn't realize I can't reply. I'm not a warlock and I don't have a stele."

"But you have a warlock. How about we answer together after dinner."

Alec's torn between wishing to not be bothered and getting to work right away. He might be growing too content with his life after all. Still, duty wins out in him and rather quickly.

"All right, let's do that." Alec agrees.

Magnus doesn't say out loud just how happy this message makes him. For his mate to be acknowledged by the community, even by just a few warlocks, is great. It makes him proud.

As planned, they re-read the letter later that day. They're cozy sitting close to each other with dimmed lights, except for the brightest lamp for reading but the contents of the letter make Alec run his fingers through his hair more than once.

"I don't get it. He's writing to me but he's using words I only recognize because I read your books and you taught me some things... but when the words are put together like this it's-"

"Black magic to you?" Magnus chuckles. "It's because he's easily excited by projects. He started writing simply but then he got truly into it. You should be glad that he so easily forgets you are a Shadowhunter."

"While asking me precisely because I am a Shadowhunter."
"We've already established this is meant to be done through teamwork. So let's get it out of the way."

Without being able to feel magic while it's being weaved, it's difficult for Alec to grasp certain aspects of it. It's one thing to accept he'll never know how it is for Magnus to be a warlock but it's another thing to know that he'll never be able to fully understand his sons. He doesn't mind the mystery when it's Magnus doing his magic, impressing Alec with the smallest things... but it's going to hurt when his children begin to learn and might need advice he'll be unable to provide. He'll always be different from the rest of his family.

Working on the problem, Alec and Magnus send a message back asking for clarification on some aspects of the project and receive a reply in a timely manner. It seems the warlock is eager to talk about it and get his answers.

"This isn't going to work," Alec says at one point, his hand pointing out a passage. "The Clave won't care how realistic the glamor for this is. If it's exposing any Mundanes to magic that isn't life-saving or isn't a glamor in itself, it's against the law."

"You do know how that ends, usually," Magnus says. "No one asks beforehand and they just go ahead."

Alec nods. "And no one knows any better because they glamored everything." He sighs. "The research would have to promise benefits to outweigh the drawbacks."

"Warlocks have been doing that for years," Magnus says. "Bribing the Shadowhunters with various things."

"Promising to share knowledge will only be a good idea if it comes from the research itself..."

"Because otherwise, the Clave might just demand whatever favor was promised without giving anything in return." Magnus continues his thought, knowing all that from life experience. "Well, what would you expect from this particular research?"

Alec says he'll think about it.

They have to leave the work when the time comes for diaper changes and later for bath time before bed. The evening has crept upon them unnoticed. While they take a break for the boys, they also take the time to eat supper.

"I don't know anything about the new Head of the Institute," Alec is saying later, "except for the letter she signed and sent to the Pack and what I know about the new patrols. I know she's civil and that she's, uh, hard-working." He means the increase in patrols and checking up on any problematic situations in the Downworld.

"But other than that, I have no way of knowing who she is. Is she ambitious and making her own changes? Or was she put in New York by the Clave and she consults everything with them?"

Magnus looks at him. "What would you have done?"
"With a request like that as the Head? I would have made my own decision." He smiles.

"And what do you think the decision would have been?"

"I don't know. In that alternate situation… would I have already met you?"

"I don't know," Magnus parrots. "Would you have already invited me to look at the wards?"

Alec grins. "Probably, yes."

"See, I'm sure our alternate selves would have solved this letter together as well."

* * *

The following Monday Alec receives an invitation to a birthday party on Friday. It's one of the werewolves who had taken part in guarding him when he'd needed it the most. The omega only really maintains relations with six or seven werewolves but by meeting with Maia in the Jade Wolf or rarely in Hunter's Moon, he indirectly meets the others, too.

"Am I invited?" Magnus asks when Alec tells him when the birthday is.

"The party is open to partners," Alec says. He's pretty sure there will be some mundane partners of the werewolves and if his intuition serves him right, he's expecting to see Simon, too. Magnus is a warlock so that's definitely better than a vampire and they should have no problem with him coming with Alec.

"Perfect," Magnus grins. "I haven't been someone's plus one in literally a century."

"How are you going to dress not to outshine me?" Alec teases.

"Oh, it's done the other way: you have to shine more."

"Nu-uh. We're not doing it either way. It's not our birthday to take over."

Magnus inclines his head. "It's a shame."

The glint in his eyes tells Alec that his mind is already running ahead to their birthdays in the future.

They decide not to take the kids. As far as Alec knows the party isn't going to be a loud affair, more like a house party except it's prepared in the Jade Wolf for more room. He knows he owes more visits to the werewolf betas so they can see the boys growing, but he'll have to just go visit them in their house. Someone else's birthday might not be the best time to turn the attention to the kids and besides, Alec kind of wants to go somewhere with just Magnus.

This time Dot is the one with enough free time to watch after them.

On the day of the party, they don't use the portal to get the closest to Jade Wolf that Magnus can go. Alec suggests that they take a taxi instead and Magnus agrees.

They dress for the cold. Alec takes a black coat but his scarf is cobalt blue and Magnus approves of this character development. He himself chooses to tone down his outfit for today for the same reason they leave the boys at home.
Pretending to want to fix the edge of Alec's scarf, Magnus steals a kiss from him before they go.

Holding hands, they walk down the street for a while even though they could catch a taxi anywhere. It occurs to them the last time they've taken a walk near the loft was when the weather was still good enough for walks with the pram. Travelling abroad is fine but they need to do this more often—just go down the stairs and walk in their neighborhood. It's closer to Alec's heart to be present in the city. Magnus has lived in many countries, in many homes and while he's intending to stay in New York for a longer time, in warlock terms, it's still different to Alec.

The birthday party is more to Alec's liking than the stuffy warlocks or a fashion show where he doesn't fit at all. The comparison drives it home to Alec that he now has, kind of, his people. No matter what happens from now on, he's managed to build something without trying to and without expecting that he could, something that's not based on his blood or career.

There are many werewolves present today that he knows. He usually sees them separately so it's a nice opportunity to catch up on everything that's going on at the same time.

Maia has invited Simon, which is not surprising, at least not to Alec. Simon tries to wave at Alec to join Maia and Bat in the booth they took for themselves but Alec is intercepted by Diana first.

"Hello," she says cheerfully. "You look good."

"Diana, hi." He greets her. "My partner, Magnus Bane." He grips Magnus's hand tighter.

She looks the warlock up and down in an exaggerated way, but she smiles warmly.

Magnus speaks first: "I'm honored to meet the people who took care of Alexander before I met him."

"It wasn't a hardship to do it," she says. "Except for making him accept it first." She looks at Alec. "And now it's difficult to get him to show up to say hi."

"I know I-" he begins but Adeline shows up then, interrupting him. "He's a courting omega, he has things to do that are more interesting than coffees with old friends."

Alec flushes.

It's true. Sometimes he felt as if he didn't need anything else that existed outside of the loft, Magnus and his boys. He was fully content wrapping himself up in the comfort of the home he built his nest in, wrap himself in the love he had never experienced before… He is embarrassed but not ashamed to be called out on it.

Magnus puts his hand on the back of his neck, just like Alec likes.

"It wasn't my intention to deprive the world of Alexander's presence," the warlock says. "However, I can't say I'm sorry for it."

"I bet not." Diana chuckles.

"As much as I'd like to keep him for myself, I hope he'll continue to be around other people. After all, he's the reason you currently have a Mundane, a Nephilim and a warlock in werewolf space."

"That is true."
"I wish I didn't do that by accident," Alec points out, "just because my life was a mess."

"Unfortunately, it probably wouldn't have worked the same with the perfectly put together Institute heir you were supposed to be." Magnus teases.

They talk for a while longer before they go meet the others.

Alec hasn't seen Alaric in a long time. They weren't in any way close since the day that Alaric has unknowingly changed his life by taking him to the precinct from the bus stop. The man has always been more interested in purely werewolf and police business while Luke was the one who dedicated time to help Alec out. Still, they were always on friendly terms and they talk for a while until the common topics run out. It's nice.

They do reach the booth with the young werewolves and one mundane in the end. They seem comfortable to stay there, half-full glasses and some food in front of them. Simon is the only one who can say he knows Magnus but the others pretty much stare.

Alec feels all the awkwardness of a teenager bringing his boyfriend to show off in front of his peer group. A boyfriend who goes to a different school, in a different city.

Bat has DJ-ed in Pandemonium several times but being in the club and seeing Magnus Bane were two different things most of the time, especially since he was limited to where the equipment was.

Maia is equal parts curious about Magnus and eager to know what kind of man he is. Alec has seen for some time now that her alpha nature is shining through stronger every day. He really wants the two alphas to get along.

Magnus isn't offended by her questions, which she has many of. Alec has to wonder if she's been thinking them up ahead of time.

Then he thinks that this is "just" Maia. There is still Alec's actual family to look forward to and between Isabelle and Jace, a future meeting of this kind will probably look wildly different.

An hour later, Alec isn't sure how, Magnus ends up making a few drinks with Maia in the bar section. They come up with some outrageously colorful creation, which Alec knows must have mostly been his mate's idea, and they present it to the werewolf who's turning thirty that day.

Alec certainly likes that Magnus is accepted as a party guest and hopes that he won't be pulled aside by anyone and made to listen to vague threats on Alec's behalf. To be honest, he thinks they're mostly impressed to see that Alec does have an alpha, that he's real and he is, in fact, the High Warlock of Brooklyn.

Alec finds it fun to be the one to show Magnus off. He can't hold back the smile that wants to be on his face all the time. He doesn't even care anymore to show to everyone who's looking that he's smitten.

It's a shame Luke didn't have the time off but it's okay, Alec will find the time to meet with him with Magnus some other time.
On this afternoon, Alec simply enjoys himself with nothing hanging over his head, no second-guessing himself, no insecurities about himself and Magnus and they end up staying longer than Alec thought he would be in the mood for.

Chapter End Notes

This is the last calm chapter :>
The blow

Chapter Summary

Today: the long-awaited action and plot. Next up: everything is angst.

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be up earlier this week but I've discovered Stardew Valley and if you've ever played it, you'll understand me :p

Also, I'm sorry I've bored some of my readers but there seem to be others who enjoyed the slow and soft and I have enjoyed writing it. I wrote it how I felt it so, you know, I'm not sorry for doing that.

During the worst period right after they were informed that Alec chose to leave the Institute rather than to do the "right" thing, during the period when Victor Aldertree spent his working hours pointing out every last flaw in Alec's past actions as well as their parents' actions as leaders, Isabelle retreated into herself.

In the beginning, she didn't even see Jace (not for her lack of trying) and she worried about him, too. He was under lock and key "for his own safety" and "he wasn't thinking right." Isabelle knew that he was hurt even worse than she was because of the bond he shared with Alec and because of his past losses, because of his missing family. It was just another blow on top of the other things.

With Alec gone, both Izzy and Jace lost their support and in a way, their peace of mind. They were on their own. Isabelle stopped all contact with their parents, which was difficult to do but she had to do it. What use did she have of parents if she could barely look at them through her anger? She'd turned to them at first, of course, pushed them to fight for Alec... which they didn't do. They refused to because "he'd made his own choices" and they'd expected differently of him. She looked at them, stunned wordless, not believing they were putting the Clave above their son's well-being.

They very quickly understood there was no amount of asking, pleading or reasoning with anyone they could do to get the decision reversed.

Their parents also didn't do anything to have Jace released sooner and Isabelle was angry about that but later she thought that it probably was better for Jace and his safety. When he was deemed fit to return to the Institute's halls and later allowed to go on patrols, Isabelle still worried about him. She was capable of waiting things out quietly before striking but Jace was different. He was all action, was all about proving himself. When he was cleared for field work, he took solo patrols because he was too angry to be a good team-mate for anyone but Isabelle.

The spaces between their trips to look for signs of Alec and the patrols which they both participated in were filled with pain. They'd turned their efforts to looking for Alec but even that ended with the last push-back from Alec himself through the parabatai bond and from there they agreed without words to wait for him.
Then two things changed: first, Lydia Branwell came to be a temporary Head of the Institute with the expectation she'd eventually be approved to stay permanently.

She was young, she was strict but fair and she didn't know *everything* about the New York Institute. Isabelle thought she'd resent her the same way she'd resented Victor Aldertree but there was a significant difference between them: Lydia wasn't there when Alec was banished and she had no part in it.

In fact, Isabelle found it easier to be part of the Institute again. Up until then, she'd only fought demons for the Mundanes' and Downworlders' sake, after every successful hunt hoping she'd prevented someone else from suffering the same way her brother has.

Ever since the things "calmed down" in the Institute after the Clave envoy left and Lydia appeared to take over the leadership, Isabelle has been working out her own rhythm of life as a Shadowhunter.

She'd lost her brother but at the same time she'd lost the person she'd been used to working with and whose orders, besides their parents, she took. Only after losing Alec did she see how comfortable they'd been, herself and Jace. They'd thought the future was simple, they'd thought they'd always be together, no matter if their brother had a mate next year or not. They'd thought they had the time to do what they wanted because there was always someone who constantly made sure that at the end of the day everything was done according to the Law.

When Lydia began organizing the staff for new tasks, Isabelle was there to volunteer in areas she'd felt she could do best in. She performed all examinations and research in the lab that Lydia asked for and then did more than Lydia even knew could be done.

Isabelle didn't do it *for* Lydia as the Head and she didn't do it to outdo her. She worked not to lose herself in Shadowhunter duty but to build something for herself. She wasn't going to support her brother anymore and she wanted to stand on her own two feet in the Institute. And... if there was some hope in her that Alec could return... she'd have so much to show him, show her own firm position and that she could, in turn, support him.

She did her own paperwork *perfectly* so that her mother couldn't use faults in bureaucracy to use as a pretext to contact her. She offered to help with Jace's reports, which was a task Alec usually did but strangely enough, Jace preferred to do his own paperwork, too.

Working on her own, having too much time to think, Isabelle realized she cared more about the Institute itself than she'd thought. She decided, then, she was going to keep the Lightwood name known through *her* work, not their parents' mistakes. She was going to do it for herself and for Alec.

Since she began spending more time in the lab than chasing demons and even though she wasn't the only lab staff, she took over it by being the one who knew the space and equipment the best.

It also helped that she was the one most interested in dealing with things which others deemed *gross* while she was interested in everything.

Meanwhile, Jace mostly fell into a routine of hunt after hunt. He wasn't reckless, not exactly, but he definitely focused on nothing but killing demons. Isabelle understood the drive. It was an Eidolon
demon who'd hurt their brother and who had been the cause for everything that went wrong.

Not wanting to hold him back, Isabelle only reminded Jace to be careful with his own health. It also worked in his favor, only making his reputation as a great fighter stronger and it made Lydia ignore some of the less positive aspects of his character. She hadn't known him before, she couldn't compare. She knew there was something there, between the Nephilim of New York that some of them liked to allude to but strangely they weren't too willing to talk out loud about it when asked. She knew there was some bad blood there but she wasn't willing to pull anything to light only to have to deal with the mess herself. Until it became an actual problem among them, until mistakes were made because of it, she'd let it go.

Then, Clary appeared.

Clary was the second thing that changed after Lydia. She was a breath of fresh air, a Mundane-raised Nephilim, knowing absolutely nothing about their world.

She carried Mundane ideals in her head and she found it hard to just accept some of the aspects of Shadowhunter society. Isabelle was curious about her and so was Jace.

Clary was a special case, unprecedented. She was welcomed into their society because new Shadowhunters were always needed and it wasn't like she was coming back from being banished. She never did anything the Clave wouldn't like.

She was also grown and couldn't be ordered like a child. The Clave wanted her to stay and they were willing to give her the space to do what she wanted if only she'd bolster the numbers of Shadowhunters. There was more to it, Isabelle knew, that had to do with her mother but not everything was public knowledge and Isabelle had too many of her own secrets to try and find out Clary's.

The girl was given choices, such as where she wanted to train: New York or Alicante. She did go to Idris with her mother to see where she came from but then returned to her real home in New York. She agreed to be part of the New York conclave, to train and learn until she was fit to receive runes.

In the end, she was always in-between, going to her mother in Idris, then spending time learning in New York Institute, then going out to see her Mundane friends.

Some of Clary's attitude towards the Law wasn't particularly smart, considering the existence of real threats out there that the rules protected them from. Jace grumbled a lot about her while she made mistakes but he still spent the time with her, showing her the ropes. Other Shadowhunters around their age were also curious and willing to socialize and train with her but they were less willing to have the new one on their conscience, should something happen to her on their team patrol.

Isabelle found herself joining hunts more often when it was her, Jace and Clary.

It was all worth it when Clary was the first person to make Jace smile after so many months.

* * * *

Alec watches his alpha getting ready to leave. Magnus is already mostly dressed except for
jewellery and a coat and he's gathering some papers he'd been working on the previous evening. The papers, neatly stacked, disappear when the warlock envelops them in a blue mist.

Alec is leaning his backside on the counter, his hands holding onto a cup he's taking lazy sips from. He's watching Magnus since there is nothing else he has to do and there is nothing else he'd rather do than watch the graceful movements of his alpha.

Although he's staying home, he's not the one taking care of the boys today. Magnus has announced he'd be taking them with him for the sole purpose of having a reason to get out of the meeting as soon as possible. Alec had scowled at him for naming that the sole reason and Magnus has amended his words with all the reasons why he would want the Little Pea and Blueberry with him. After that, he moved on to bestow ridiculously cheesy praise on Alec himself, which in the end made Alec laugh.

The plan for the day is as follows: Magnus will take the boys and go to his important meeting. He'll present his papers and talk as much as is strictly necessary before excusing himself three hours earlier than usual thanks to the kids he'll have with him. He'll avoid the pointless conversations that always follow and which he'd always had to sit through, gaining nothing from them. Once excused, he'll go to Catarina for much more pleasant conversations and they'll watch over the boys together while working on new potions.

As for Alec, he has a book he wants to finish and then he needs to go to the gym, as is in his habit. After that, he thinks he could check out the new shooting range opened in the neighborhood the previous week. They'd advertised crossbows on the poster next to guns so he assumes bows are ok to use, too.

Basically, Alec is free to do whatever he wants today.

He does finish the book. He watches the news while exercising a little and then it's time to go to the gym.

After training Alec rushes home as always to get the sweat and other alpha scents off of him and steals Magnus's robe to wear for a while to get the right scent back on himself.

While he's eating an early dinner by himself, Alec thinks of what to do next. He actually has something on his mind already. He had hoped to see the warlock woman with the little girl at the party but they weren't there even though they lived right there in New York.

Alec knows not everyone has to like Magnus Bane and not everyone has to care about appearances and contacts enough to appear to see the High Warlock's omega. She probably had enough on her mind without social gatherings on top of her schedule.

But Alec still wants to see the little girl and ask her caretaker some questions that he has a lot of and that Magnus can't answer for lack of experience.

And so, an hour later Alec dresses again and leaves the loft, taking with him his phone and the blade. Since he received it as a gift he always takes it with him when going out, especially after it'd come in handy when the angry werewolf had stalked him and Simon.
Sometimes he worries it'll draw the attention of Downworlders or demons because of the Adamas but nothing strange or worrying has happened so far and Alec prefers to always have it.

There have been clouds and sun taking turns on the sky today and by the time the sun begins to set, the clouds have mostly disappeared, making way for the light. When Alec gets to the big building where he'd visited before, the brick walls are painted even redder by the weakening rays and the polished plaque by the door reflects them into his eyes.

Alec rings and receives no answer even though he waits patiently. He even knocks. Then he wonders how rude it would be to try the door handle. Maybe they're inside but can't hear him, maybe the electronic bell is broken, maybe there's some sort of outdoor space on the other side of the building… Maybe it's Alec's Shadowhunter character making him eager to try and get in in spite of everything. Oh well, if it's too rude, he can expect to get smacked on the hand by the warlock's wards, right?

The doors open when he pushes the handle.

Alec is actually honestly surprised it worked and he waits, not moving, only peeking inside as much as the space between the half-open doors and the doorframe lets him. There's no sound coming from the inside and he eventually steps in.

"Hello?" His voice chases the silence away but still receives no answer.

He can't hear anything like music that could have drowned out the bell and his calling and the house seems empty. He can smell many scents, more or less fresh but none that he could say belong to someone currently inside.

There's no one downstairs in the large kitchen and dining area. There is an exit into a little garden dead and empty in the winter time but no one is there, either, so Alec only looks at it through the glass.

He continues upstairs.

He finds bedrooms, many of them, and he finds baby beds in half of them. It's curious but not suspicious. If the warlock woman was taking in children like Madzie, she could have been taking in mothers with children, too. Alec wonders about that. Is it possible she's been taking in women whose children showed magical abilities? Is it possible no one knew about her doing it?

Or is he thinking too far ahead and she's simply been providing space and care for money, which is how the building came to be in the first place?

He remembers her specifically mentioning "patients" when their first talk was cut short but he also remembers how he felt about her after leaving, which was not good.

And that is why he presses on. One of the smaller rooms looks like it could be Madzie's, based on the colorful bedding and rug, and some toys. It's not exactly a typical child's room since there aren't as many items as could be expected but still, it's curious and not suspicious.

Next, he finds an office with many cabinets holding folders which are empty. Or rather emptied. Going through shelves and drawers, Alec finds some loose papers and then a notebook. It's blank when he opens it but… something tells him to hold onto it. The paper isn't new and there is a
chance it was *made* to look blank. He puts it inside his jacket and zips it back up.

He's about to move on to the last cabinet when his ears pick up sounds that weren't there before and he freezes, trying to catch more.

Steps. Steps going down the corridor at a steady pace, not loud but not hiding. Purposeful.

He doesn't know who that might be but at this point, there is no one he would like to find him snooping around. So he retreats. He can't smell the person, there's no draft in the house to bring scents to him and he can't guess what's the best course of action to take if he can't hide. Does his own scent linger on the stairs and in the corridor? He's bundled up for the winter and not much of his skin shows but he's not *invisible*.

He can't consider the windows. On the floor he's at, he could jump out only to break a leg without a rune to support his body during the landing. There are no balconies or any part of a roof that he can see available as an escape route.

He manages to slip away from the steps through a door joining the office and next bedroom, and he peeks out into the corridor to see no one there. There are some soft sounds from the furthest room across the floor where he's been before, sounds like someone's moving objects just as he has. Alec turns and keeps sneaking through a sort of open common space near the second staircase. There's a chance he could make it down the stairs and evade whoever else is there by getting out to the garden or even through the front door.

He doesn't get the chance to even get to the stairs before someone literally appears beside him, aiming for him. A *Shadowhunter*, Alec's brain tells him, *concealed by runes*.

He ducks on instinct and luckily evades the first hit but he can't move away fast enough to avoid the next. It lands on his chest under his collarbone and it almost knocks the air out of him but he recovers quickly, defending himself from the Shadowhunter's next punches. Fortunately, the man who Alec can now tell is an alpha, isn't reaching for his weapon yet. Whether it's because he's confident in his skills or he, too, knows his opponent's dynamic and underestimates him, it doesn't matter.

Alec almost manages to trip him up but in retaliation, the man shoves him, hard, backwards. Alec's back hits a glass cabinet, shards from it raining down while he falls to the ground. They dig into his skin when he puts his hands on the floor to push himself back up. The Shadowhunter kicks him to keep him down and then prevents him from getting up entirely by blocking him with his weight. Kneeling over Alec, his hands go for his throat.

"*Omega.*" He sneers. Then he pauses, looking at Alec too long. "I know you. From the werewolf den. The fuck are you doing here?"

His fingers close tighter on Alec's throat and the omega can't answer anyway. He recognizes the Shadowhunter, too, from the team that came to Jade Wolf.

"Either way you clearly don't know your place." The alpha says viciously.

Alec can't tell if he's trying to kill him or deprive him of air only long enough to knock him out but neither of those is the better possibility. Alec *can't* allow either. If he's "arrested" under these circumstances he'll never see the light of day again, no matter what Magnus tries to do, if he ever finds out what happened to him.

There's no chance in Hell or Heaven Alec will let these Shadowhunters take him away from his
children or his mate. He's not losing his life over this.

If only he could reach his blade-

Thinking is becoming difficult by the second when he can't get himself free from the grip or the weight. He can't draw in a breath and the press near his sensitive points makes his skin crawl. He hates this, he hates it every time when alphas who aren't Magnus touch his neck.

The alpha Shadowhunter isn't significantly stronger or larger than him but he has runes activated and Alec can't win against that without a miraculous advantage of his own.

He hears shouting. It sounds like "Stop it" but Alec's vision is going gray at the edges and he can't trust his hearing either.

The next moment Clary's red hair passes through his line of vision like a flare when she runs at the alpha holding him down and tackles him right off of Alec. They roll, the alpha crying out in surprise first, then in outrage.

Alec gasps in a desperate breath and coughs while pushing himself up. His head is still spinning but now he has a chance to finally hold and activate his blade and he moves desperately. He's just in time to par an attack from a second alpha who joins the commotion. This one is coming at him with a sword already drawn, no hesitation.

Alec doesn't care if this man is also from the group that had come to Jade Wolf. He cares about one thing only: get out and get home. He's running on instinct, muscle memory, a sort of a tunnel vision taking over his thoughts.

Clary's shouting again, she's calling Jace's name and Alec registers that but he can't wait for Jace, he has to get out of here before one of the foreign Shadowhunters finds a way to incapacitate him.

He evades blow after blow, his injured hands aching under the strain, his grip on his blade like steel. He can't lose his weapon, not now. His new training and his old reflexes have to stand against a real Shadowhunter. This isn't a fight he can afford to lose, it's not like fighting a werewolf alpha who wouldn't have killed him. He has everything to lose here. The Shadowhunter is coming at him almost furiously, Alec's Angel blade confusing him but also making the alpha all the more determined to get it out of Alec's hands.

Jace is running up the stairs towards them, calling out the same "Stop!" that Clary has but he only wastes breath for words once. He sees Clary holding back one alpha, clinging to him from behind like a barnacle while they roll on the ground because she can't exactly attack a fellow Shadowhunter and anyway, she's smaller and less trained for that. After taking in the scene in front of him, Jace lunges at the alpha who's engaging Alec.

There is another Shadowhunter following in Jace's steps and it's not good because while Alec actually recognizes his face from the Institute, they've never been friends and it's impossible to predict what he'll do.

It all happens so fast. Alec can't be distracted, he can't, but his parabatai is so close he can scent him and the bond thrums under his skin.

The stranger alpha doesn't expect an attack on himself from another side when Jace kicks his legs
from under him, tripping him successfully.

_Help Jace, help Jace_, Alec's brain repeats as he stands frozen, breathing hard when he suddenly doesn't have to defend himself actively. But he can't help, can he? He's not supposed to be here, it's all _wrong_ and he's in danger. He has to go.

Clary cries out when the man she's been holding onto finally pushes her away into a large ceramic pot holding an exotic plant. The man leaves her and rushes forward, this time his target being Jace.

The third Shadowhunter stands as if stunned, undecided, confused by seeing Alec and the chaos in the room. There isn't a clear enemy for him to fight.

"Alec!" Clary shouts at him while's she's picking herself up and getting her stele out. "Go! Go now!"

It gets through to him like through thick fog but then he moves.

He runs.

* *

Magnus is halfway through a sentence when he pauses, losing the thread of his thoughts. Catarina looks up at him from their project, curious.

"What is it?" She asks confused when Magnus stays silent, his gaze unfocused for a second. They've been sitting in her living room, tiny compared to Magnus's loft but functional for everything she needs. It's also enough for them to sometimes set up a brewing counter, such as today.

He shakes his head and says truthfully: "I don't know."

It's as if his heart skipped a beat, his lungs skipped a breath.

It passes.

He says he's fine but Catarina keeps glancing at him and he's no longer focused on what they were doing. Things like that don't ever happen to him randomly and he's thinking about the cause. She can read him too well.

"We can get back to this another time," she offers. "It can wait."

He almost starts saying it's nonsense and that he's fine but… He feels it again. A pit opened up in his stomach, sucking the warmth right out of him.

Startled, he meets Catarina's eyes and she must see all written on his face.

"Something's wrong. I have to-" he hesitates. _What is wrong? What is he supposed to do?_

"Your wards?" Catarina tries a possible answer even though he should be able to recognize if it's that.

"I don't know. I have to go," he stands up while he speaks. His gaze falls on Little Pea sleeping in the carrycot on Catarina's sofa.

She speaks before he can even ask: "I have the kids handled. Go."
Magnus portals out of her apartment without another word.

It's the fastest Magnus has ever gotten home, his blood running cold because of an unknown threat. He doesn't appear in the middle of the loft but in front of the door, deciding it's the safer option. The door is closed and he can immediately tell the wards are intact. Nothing that shouldn't have passed through them today.

But there's blood on the handle.

He walks in and finds the loft completely dark save for the glow coming from the city lights through the windows.

Alexander's scent is fresh, it's full of fear and hurt but it means he's home and that he's alive. Magnus rushes to his bedroom to find it empty.

Magnus's own bedroom is the next logical place to check. It's closed and he remembers he left it open. More importantly, he can see more dark stains on the handle and the wood as if someone – Alec – leaned on it.

Coming closer, he can't hear any movement through the door. With his heart in his throat, Magnus chooses to knock first instead of barging in.

"Alexander?" His voice sounds strange to his ears. "It's only me. May I come in?"

There's nothing to answer him. Not a sound. Magnus puts his hand on the handle, then reconsiders. Instead of opening the door, he takes a magical peek inside through the wood, making it see-through.

Alec is indeed inside. He's huddled in the far corner of the room, wrapped in what seems to be Magnus's bed cover and a blanket. Right in front of the door, there's something blocking it from being pushed open and Magnus recognizes his decorative wooden chest that usually stands by the left side of the room, out of the way.

Leaning on the door, his blood still running cold with fear, Magnus decides he can't leave Alec be, not like this. His own breathing sounds too loud to his ears while he stands in the dark, his omega on the other side of the door.

He moves the piece of furniture by lifting it up rather than pushing it aside since he'd hate for the harsh noise to send the omega into further panic.

With his way free, Magnus steps inside carefully.

His presence doesn't get much reaction from Alec. He's awake, his eyes are open but he doesn't even look up at Magnus who closes the door behind him and then stands a distance away.

"Angel, can I come closer?"

With no cues from Alec, he has to make his decisions for himself. He walks over, slowly but not hesitating. Next, he kneels to put his eyes at Alec's level so that there's no possibility of the omega mistaking him for anyone else. Hopefully, his scent will help him out.

Magnus reaches out, not very slowly but carefully, to take Alec's hand into his. He has to make it stop gripping the fabric he's bundled up in first. His hand is bloody, cut-up in many places. There
isn't even a flinch when Magnus unintentionally presses one of the deeper cuts and that scares him more.

He doesn't ask for permission before sending out his magic, ordering it to sweep over Alec, closing the cuts and healing the bruises. It heals everything there is to heal with his body but it can't heal anything else that's wrong.

Slowly, Magnus sits down beside Alec, simply holding the omega's healed but cold hand and rubbing it with his fingers. He can't seem to bear to lose physical contact now that he initiated it.

In the continued silence from his omega, he has to guess what happened: Alexander was in a fight, a bad one. He either won or escaped and ran back home, where didn't find his children or his mate and ended up trying to find any comfort in familiar scents. Magnus's bedroom had to suffice, being the best source of his scent to the omega.

All of it piled up, the violence, the absence of his family in the loft, that must have affected him strongly. He's in a drop, a full one. Magnus knows that, he recognizes that now. No amount of potions with whisky will help with that.

He tries not to focus on it because it scares him when he still doesn't know the original cause for it.

Who was Alec fighting? Was he attacked or was it a chance encounter? Why did it shake him up badly enough to send him into a drop? What did he fight? Possibly a vampire, possibly a werewolf, possibly a demon. Magnus doesn't know.

Magnus doesn't know that Alec ran home while his mind screamed at him for leaving Jace behind. He doesn't know how Alec got home, finding it empty and cold, his children out of his reach and his mate not there to soothe him and reassure him.

He doesn't know yet that Alec's phone had cracked under his weight when he hit the cabinet but even if it was still whole it wasn't certain he'd be lucid enough to make a call.

Alec was alone, regret squeezing his heart while his home gave him no rest or real safety, the darkness enveloping him like a shroud while he wrapped himself in Magnus's scent like a last lifeline.

After some ten minutes, Magnus makes the decision to move them.

"Come to bed, love. You'll be warmer and safe there."

He maintains contact with Alec's skin- first his scent glands on his wrist, then he dares to touch his neck and when he isn't rejected, he presses gently on the back of it. Alec always loved that and Magnus can only hope it's helping now.

"Alexander. Come with me."

At that, finally, the omega meets his eyes.

"We're moving to the bed. I'll be with you," Magnus says clearly but softly, moving his hand back to Alec's wrist. He tugs at it while he gets up slowly. Alec goes with him like a doll on strings.

At least it's progress and it'll get him to a more comfortable place to recover. Magnus takes off his boots for him, then his jacket which he still has on, then the sweater, leaving the omega in his
long-sleeved, warm undershirt. Magnus tries not to think about the dark, still wet stains on the outer pieces of clothing he took off. He magicks away his own shoes and blazer and sends away the pendants so they don't get in the way.

He tugs Alec to lie down.

Once they're properly under the covers, Alec curls on his side on his own accord, facing Magnus. His eyes close on their own as if they're heavy and he appears to fall asleep while Magnus runs his fingers through his hair.

It only lasts an hour. The peace and the hope Magnus has while Alec sleeps shatters when the omega wakes up with a gasp, attempting to sit up to suddenly. He falls back on the pillows, his fingers clenching while a whimper leaves his lips.

Magnus doesn't understand what's happening, he's absolutely certain he'd healed him completely and no hidden injury remained. His magic is useless while Alec cries out in pain, his hands going to his stomach. He clutches his side and it makes Magnus believe there is some sort of injury but maybe it's done by something from the Shadow World and he didn't sense because he didn't look hard enough.

Several seconds pass before he gets it - the solution comes to him like a bucket of cold water on his head.

Where Alec's trying to press on is his parabatai rune, the sight of which Magnus is so familiar with by now. Magnus pulls the edge of Alec's shirt up, revealing the rune which currently looks like it's burning while fading at the same time.

With crystal clarity, Magnus recalls what Alexander had said in the past: unbonded omegas die with their parabatai.

"No... no no no, don't do this. Please," Magnus pleads, not knowing what to do, where to touch, where to even begin reversing this damage. There are constant whimpers coming from the man in his arms, still no coherent words. He can't alleviate the pain where Alec is grasping at his side, his hands trembling.

His eyes are open, blank and unseeing. For the second time in one day, Magnus reaches a whole new level of terror because of one person. If this is it, if this ends Alexander's life, Magnus isn't sure what he'll do. What he'll do with himself and to the Shadowhunters who come across his path. There have been times in his past when he's been helpless to save or aid people he cared for but never before has his helplessness been so literal.

It all must last only a few minutes but it's like an eternity in Magnus's mind.

There are no more sounds of pain coming from Alec and his breathing isn't gasps anymore but it is shallow, uneven, shaky. He's not all there anymore, even more distant than when Magnus found him in the drop and the alpha can't do anything but watch over and hold him. Alec is, at least, leaning into him rather than away. Once the worst is over, his head droops slowly onto Magnus's chest and they stay like this, close together.

Magnus reaches for one of Alec's hands. It's cold and clammy with sweat and Magnus hopes to warm it with his own. He twines their fingers together, brings their hands to rest them on Alec's
chest. He moves his other hand to pet Alec's hair again.

"It's all right. I'm here, Angel. You'll be fine, you can rest."

He stops himself from babbling on.

'Please stay,' he thinks.
The inbetween

Chapter Summary

Today: we continue the events of the previous part.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alec is drifting. Cut off from the Shadowhunting world definitely, he can't gather enough will to stay awake in the world he's living in now. His last rune, gone. His body no longer actively hurts but there's a phantom ache inside of him.

He's lying on the bed in the master bedroom, where he'd ran for comfort ages ago. He doesn't even feel time. There are pillows under his head and to the sides, cradling him, wrapping him in the scent they're soaked in. That's the only good part.

He keeps his eyes open but focuses them on nothing for more than a few seconds. He's blinking slowly. It's easy to let his vision blur, patterns of the rich wallpaper he never paid much attention to becoming a soothing background to his equally blurry thoughts.

He can hear movement in other parts of the apartment but with his time so stretched and borderless, he doesn't track its continuity.

He knows his alpha will tend to their children in his absence. Remembering they were with Magnus for the day, Alec trusts they're safe. He could always depend on Magnus.

It's late in the night. At one point Magnus dared to get up from the bed and leave Alec alone after hours passed and his omega was still breathing, still with him. At that point he let himself breathe, too.

Standing just outside the door to his bedroom, he sends a message to Catarina who must be worried after getting no information from him at all after he left so abruptly.

Then, looking back inside, Magnus watches Alec.

It's hard to tell if his body is in shock so he can't speak or if his mind is too far away, or if he simply doesn't want to speak. At least, with the way he let the alpha hold onto him before, there's the optimistic thought Magnus was providing him with something he needed.

He keeps thinking that if they'd been Bonded - fully Bonded - he could have known it sooner, react while his mate was still out there and fighting. He could have tracked him, found him, stepped in before it spiraled out of control and ended in an omega drop.

But it's not his fault they're not there yet. It's nobody's fault. So long as Alec is breathing and living, it's still all ahead of them. They'll be all right.

Magnus debates with himself for a while whether it's a good idea to go to Catarina's. On one hand,
it'd make him feel better to have everyone where he can see them and it's possible it'd make Alec feel better too. On the other hand, if Alec gets worse and needs help, Magnus would have to handle everything on his own.

In the end, optimism wins over and he portals over to Catarina's. He knows she's awake because she sent back a reply to his fire message.

She tells him both boys were very quiet that night. It's known that young children of omega parents are better attuned to them and the bond they have is strong enough to carry over emotions. Could they feel something was wrong even at a distance, even if they were much too young to understand? It breaks the alpha's heart to consider it a possibility. He gathers both boys and their things, tells Cat not to worry and that he'll talk more with her tomorrow, and goes home.

Magnus does his best to keep some balance, projecting the calm of his alpha side even if he doesn't exactly feel that way, for the sake of both the children and the omega.

There's no question of Alexander leaving the bedroom so Magnus prepares to have all of them sleeping in his room tonight. He needs to handle night feeding first because it's the time for it and Cat didn't have a chance to do it yet. Both boys were awake for the trip home but Jon's eyes are falling closed every other second so Magnus attends to him first.

Alec appears to be sleeping but when Magnus steps inside the bedroom with an already fed baby in his arms, he opens his eyes to look at them. Then he reaches out to them with both arms, silently asking to be handed his child.

Walking closer, Magnus smiles at Alec.

"Here's your son, love. All ready to get some sleep, just like you should be."

Once he's holding him, Alec rubs his cheek on Jonathan's soft hair. He settles back on the many pillows Magnus has gathered for him, shifting a bit to accommodate the baby. Magnus leaves them to feed Max and sometime later, holding Blueberry on his hip, he grabs a mug with a potion with his free hand to bring back to the bedroom.

Somehow he manages to get them all settled around Alec. Max, with his sleepy eyes, stubbornly tries to follow the movement of Alec's hand while the omega is petting the navy blue curls on his head. Jonathan is already asleep at his father's side with a pillow completing the makeshift nest on the other side.

Magnus interrupts the silence.

"Will you drink this for me, please?"

He offers the mug to Alec, who looks away from Max to first glance at the offering and then at Magnus's face. He nods slightly and pushes himself up on one elbow. Magnus helps him drink, slowly. Alec doesn't have to have all of it for the potion to do him some good so Magnus lets him stop when he wants to and later puts the mug away.

For a while, Magnus sits on the bed watching the omega watch their children.

Only when they're properly asleep, the warlock stands up from where he sat on bed take the babies
to their cribs, summoned beside the large bed. He gently picks up Jon not to wake him up, then carries over Max.

Alec is watching him, still silent. His eyes are red-rimmed and dark but no longer so empty. Even if he doesn't speak, Magnus knows the worst is over and they came out of it alive and mostly in one piece (because Alec is in one piece, only now it's smaller, forever missing an important part).

Magnus changes the clothes he's been wearing all day into something sleep-appropriate. Before he can ask Alexander if he can join him in the bed, the omega reaches one arm to him, the same way he's done for Jonathan before. Magnus smiles. He slips under the covers, taking some of the pillows for himself. He lies close to his mate, feeling his warmth radiating on the mattress and the covers around him. He takes comfort in it.

They hold hands between them and fall asleep.

Magnus barely sleeps that night, woken every other hour by his own anxiety even though he keeps telling himself everything will be all right. The fear isn't baseless and it got so deep inside him earlier he probably won't get rid of it for a while. It is the age-old problem of the night: in the dark, the shadows loom over you.

Every time he wakes, the alpha checks that his mate is breathing and that their children are comfortable and safe. If it wasn't for him being a warlock and for his trust in his wards, he'd be prowling the whole loft through the night, looking out for threats.

When the gray morning comes, too soon, he's woken by the usual helpless noises of a baby who needs to be changed and surely fed again. Somehow, Alec sleeps through it so Magnus quickly picks Jon up and goes to Alec's bathroom where the baby supplies are kept.

When he returns, Max is having a one-sided conversation with Alec, who's awake and lying on his side, three of his fingers held in Max's little fist. Alec must have gotten out of bed just to take Max to him to fill the space Magnus has left empty.

Alec almost smiles when Max gives him his brightest grin and his most cheerful syllables but that almost-smile is a pale thing. His gaze flicks to Magnus when he realizes he's standing in the doorway.

"I'll take him for breakfast, all right?" Magnus steps inside the room. "I promise I can make as delicious and just as gross-looking mashed vegetables as you prepare them."

He comes over, pets Max's curls and then bows to plant a kiss on Alec's forehead, who closes his eyes.

"You can sleep some more if you want to," Magnus tells him. "Everything's handled."

Alec doesn't say anything but when Magnus leaves the bedroom, he curls up and presses his face to the pillow to sleep for another thirty minutes.

When he wakes up next, he slips out of the bed and goes straight to the bathroom to shower. The hot water that hits his skin feels like the first real thing not coming through his mind like a hazy dream.
Sinking to sit on the floor under the warm spray from above, he cries for a long time.

In the meantime, Magnus tries to call Clary. He would have called Alec's siblings directly if only he had the numbers but he doesn't have them and he's not about to send fire messages to fly through the whole Institute, so Clary has to do.

She doesn't pick up.

She could be unable to for dozens of reasons but that she's not picking up today doesn't help Magnus's suspicions. He tries Simon next because he's Clary's friend. Simon does pick up at the last moment when Magnus is about to stop trying and he sounds confused and half-awake.

"Sorry, uh, we had a long band practice last night," he says as an explanation for his state after Magnus tries to ask him first questions.

"Was Clary there by any chance?"

"Uh, no. Why would she be? Anyway, she's supposed to be on patrols this week. Or something."

"Will you please try to contact her and tell her to call me? It's important."

The strain in his voice must give him away because the next thing Simon asks is, "Is everything okay?"

"No. It isn't." Magnus admits. "You'll have to forgive me but I won't tell you why."

There's silence on the other side of the line and then, "Okay. I'll get back to you the moment I talk with Clary."

"Thank you."

Magnus puts the phone away. He's worried about Alexander's family. With all the hope he has in him, he does his best to assume that the brother isn't dead. For the time being. There are other reasons why a parabatai rune could disappear and out of those causes, Magnus hopes it's not the same thing that they'd done to Alexander. He can't guess it himself and he shouldn't drown himself in assumptions which only serve to overcrowd his mind. He needs Alec himself to fill in the blanks for him because Magnus is holding three pieces of a puzzle and the whole picture eludes him.

He waits patiently until the Nephilim comes out of his bedroom, dressed only in one of Magnus's warmer bathrobes. He shuffles into the main room and then towards Magnus, who moves to take him into his arms. He holds Alec, pulling him close with one arm around his waist and the other hand goes to the back of his head.

Their cheeks touch, both of them leaning against the other for comfort, to scent each other.

"Come, eat something with me." Magnus pulls him by the hand to sit at the kitchen isle.

He would love to see the omega eat a full meal but he knows better than to try and make him. Food would have been the last thing on his mind if he were in Alec's shoes, too. He conjures a light breakfast for both of them and doesn't push the omega to have more than he chooses to have. He also makes them both some strong tea. They don't need coffee today.
Alec eats a little and then leaves to go sit with Max on the playmat. Magnus sends the remaining food to the fridge and goes to sit with them, opposite Alec who's helping Max stack blocks on top of each other.

"I know you probably don't want to speak." Magnus begins. "I know you're not- you're not fully yourself now. And I understand that."

Alec's gaze drops to his hands.

"I have to know what happened," Magnus speaks gently. "You know that, Angel. You can nod to my questions, all right?"

Alec nods.

"There are two things I know: you were in a fight and then something happened to your brother. I have to assume these are connected because otherwise, that would be some incredibly bad luck in one day. Did you run into Shadowhunters?"

Alec nods.

"I imagine they tried to take you in. Your brother was there, too?"

Another nod. Alec's fist closes on a fold in the robe on his knee.

"He defended you." It's not a question. "Was Clary there?"

Another yes.

Magnus would have preferred the answer to be no, for Clary's sake. Now he knows for sure Simon won't be able to talk with her, either.

Alec can't answer the other questions that Magnus wants answered, such as "how much trouble are the two young Shadowhunters in for helping Alec escape?" and "what can be done about it?". All of that Magnus will have to find out himself.

There's silence between them, while Alec looks down at his hands and Magnus is deciding what to do.

"I think it's time for me to go check on the wards in the Institute," he says.

Alec's gaze snaps to his face and his eyes show surprise.

"I want to meet the new Head of the Institute," Magnus continues. "We have more than wards to discuss. You don't need to worry about anything, Angel."

He takes Alec's hand. Alec squeezes his in turn. An agreement and a reassurance in one.

"I wasn't going to die." Alec says.

"What?" Magnus says without thinking. He's holding onto Alec's hand tighter.

"I knew I wasn't going to die from it, while it was happening " Alec keeps talking and Magnus is drinking his every word in. "Too much holds me here."

He pauses, looking down at their hands. "I'm not as weak as I was before."
"I know you're not. You're so strong. But I didn't know last night, if…" Magnus exhales deeply and doesn't finish the sentence. Instead, he says: "Good. I'm glad. In fact, I'm happy. I'm too young to be a single father."

He smiles and the sound Alec makes is almost like a snort.

* * *

The previous night, Isabelle stood in front of the glass of the Institute's holding cells and it was a nightmarish deja vu that she could not wake up from. It was real and it was happening.

Jace looked bad. He was no longer pacing the floor and trying to break out, again. He sat on the floor with his back against the wall and his knees drawn to his chest. It made the burn hurt worse but he wanted to feel like he was holding himself together.

He could only sit and wait.

What was done couldn't be undone and two hours have already passed. It was too late for anything except revenge.

"What if I killed him?" He asked when Isabelle appeared in the line of his vision, allowed to come down to the holding cells. The question wasn't really directed at her or anyone in particular because no one could actually answer this.

Isabelle bristled inside, not at her brother but at his words.

"What? Jace, what are you even saying? If anything you saved him. You and Clary."

Clary was in a similar glass cell but not the one nearest to Jace. She was pretty much unharmed, whatever scrapes she had healed long ago with the help of runes. She'd stopped her pacing, too, sitting down on the narrow bed instead, her leg bouncing while she waited.

"But then I let them do this-" Jace said, his voice breaking when he touched his side. "What if that killed him?"

"It didn't." Isabelle said with all the conviction she had inside her. "He's done too much for the baby already, do you think he'd just- just let this kill him and orphan them?"

If anything, that made Jace only sadder.

"It's not about 'letting' things happen and not about what we want or not want to happen-"

The bond was broken, the rune was only a wound on his body. He felt cold where his brother used to be in his mind.

"Jace." Isabelle pressed her hands to the glass. "Listen to me. Alec isn't dead. I would know. Somehow, I think I'd know."

She wanted to touch Jace, hold onto him, steady him. "I know it's different for you two than it is for me, but try to think about it. Do you really think he's gone?"

"I don't know." He admitted.

They'd erased the rune connecting him to Alec and everyone knew how parabatai bonds worked. Yes, Jace knew that Alec had met someone. He must have, for his mood to have changed so much that even Jace felt it. He was happy. But Jace would have known if Alec had a Bond mate. He's
certain it would be a significant enough event for Jace to be aware it happened, no matter how vague the sensation of it.

Of course, he doesn't want to believe Alec is dead because of this but it's just so difficult to keep hoping and hoping, and believing the best when there's been nothing good happening for any of them...

Except for Clary, but now even she is in as deep trouble as they are because of them. He briefly wonders if her mother's been notified already.

He doesn't care if their own parents have.

**

Lydia is angry. Wait, no, she's been angry, furious even, before and she knows how that feels. Now, for the first time in her life, she might be pissed. She always thought herself above such feelings but it aptly describes what she's going through right now.

The Shadowhunters she'd hosted in her Institute were going behind her back even more than she was aware of, their orders only ever coming from Alicante and never from her.

She'd thought it was fine, that it wasn't strange or unusual for different teams to come to Institutes to do additional work from Alicante but these men were leaving a mess behind them. And that mess was within her jurisdiction.

First, she'd received a letter from the concerned Werewolves, then the offended Vampires made it clear they were only willing to let the Institute go so far. They couldn't say anything when the terrible dens were found and destroyed, saving Mundane lives, but they weren't about to let Shadowhunters to walk over the law-abiding vampires, which the four men of the outside team did.

Lydia still dreads a message from the Seelies, although they've been keeping themselves more separate than usual. She's glad she was able to delegate contacts with Seelies to Isabelle Lightwood so far.

And now. Now, the team that wasn't her own dragged her Shadowhunters back to the Institute after they left for a mission delegated to them by her to find and bring in Iris Rouse, who was officially recognized as a threat along with two other warlocks residing in the city.

Lydia thought it was going to go well. She sent three of her Shadowhunters and three of the visiting team. They were all objectively very skilled, maybe with the exception of the new one, Clarissa, but she had asked to go with Jonathan Wayland, who was currently the Institute's best warrior.

Clarissa had a particular talent for learning runes and she's has made much progress in her training overall and so Lydia agreed, believing she needed the real field experience anyway. Six Shadowhunters were many for a mission and it was expected to go well.

Five minutes after the team returned, an official envoy appeared at her gates, coming through a portal from Idris. Lydia knew nothing of it and it made her flounder at first because she had no idea what she was supposed to be even saying. She always took care to be following official routes, to be always following protocol and etiquette but she wasn't being given back the same.

Apparently, the three Shadowhunters have messaged their direct superiors from the road, before
they even got back to the Institute, before they informed her of anything. That's why she's pissed. She has the right to be the first to be informed of anything to do with her people and New York.

This is how the mission went: they met no Iris Rouse but they did find something stranger. What it was took Lydia way too long to find out properly and it was only because Isabelle Lightwood eventually volunteered some information later that night.

Before that happened, however, Lydia had to demand an explanation for restraining her subordinates from the men who did the restraining.

At the time they were brought in, Jace was still reeling from seeing, with his own eyes, his brother being so close. It was the last place he expected them to meet again. To see him attacked… it had boiled Jace's blood. And Clary, too. Two of his important people in danger at once… it wasn't difficult at all for him to decide what he needed to do, at all. He had no trouble going after the alphas who were strangers to him.

When Alec ran, Jace remembered the last member of the team was supposed to be around outside to make sure they didn't miss anything and there was a chance Alec would run into him. But he didn't.

After that, his and Clary's positions were very difficult. If they continued to fight the others, someone would eventually end up killed and that would be catastrophic in consequences for everyone. Yes, Jace hated them in that moment but with Alec out of the picture, he wasn't acting single-mindedly. He had to think of Clary, too, and her future.

In the meantime, Clary had a lot to say. She definitely didn't hold back complaining about how unfair and what "assholes" the other Shadowhunters were. For a beta, she had a lot of energy to try and squirm out of the hold and to keep talking in defense of herself and Jace.

As for Lydia, she continued to be pushed aside by the men and then by the delegate sent to deal with the matter. She still couldn't get the information about who exactly was so interested in meddling in her Institute's business, who exactly was the one at the top here. Eventually, she was told to stand down and that the matter of Jonathan Wayland would be handled by the people who were previously involved in "his family's failings".

By the following morning, what Lydia knew was this: Jonathan Wayland had a parabatai, who lost his runes and left the Institute because he wasn't fit to remain a Shadowhunter.

They ran across the parabatai in Iris's house and he was there for reasons unknown to anyone, including Wayland.

The team attempted to arrest him for trespassing and for unknown reasons Clarissa Fairchild and Jonathan Wayland stopped them, defending the banished Shadowhunter and allowing his escape.

Lydia tried to speak in defense of Jace, since he was her best fighter and he'd been doing a great job training the new Shadowhunter. It could be said that Lydia trusted him more than the alphas from Alicante. She didn't want him stripped of his runes and banished as well and she didn't want him imprisoned. It was a true possibility they'd do one of those things, with the way they treated him.
Lydia spoke in favor of only removing the parabatai rune to disconnect him from the man he was bonded to, to remove the natural drive to protect him. She wanted to try and remove the problem without removing another Shadowhunter from their society.

At the time, she still knew nothing of the other man. She hadn't known Wayland had a parabatai at all, since it's a private thing to ask about and usually it's visible when such pairs go on missions, anyway.

Alpha-omega parabatai bonds were so rare she'd automatically assumed the other man was a beta.

That night she had no time to go looking through the files the Institute computers held which would tell her more.

* * *

Magnus opens the door when the light knocking sounds through the loft. It's Simon who stands on the other side of it, as requested by Magnus.

Behind Simon stands Maia and that surprises the warlock because he only called the Mundane.

"Hi," she speaks first. "I can go. No problem. We were actually together when you called and it didn't sound good… I guess it sounded like you wouldn't mind more of us, but I honestly can go."

Magnus thinks about it. He called Simon because one: Catarina works, Dot is traveling and two: he doesn't need a guard for Alec, he needs some company for him. A fellow omega is an easy solution and while the warlock isn't sure how he feels about him coming with an alpha in tow, these two are both Alec's friends.

So he steps aside to invite them in.

Alec comes to the living room when he hears the visitors to see who is it. Magnus hasn't told him to expect anyone and Simon wouldn't have come without asking first so Alec turns a questioning gaze to them.

Magnus goes to him, his hands resting on Alec's hips, to which Alec crosses his arms on his chest.

"This is for me," Magnus says, imploring. "Please, don't be mad. I won't have to worry about you when I'm not home."

Alec sighs but doesn't fight it. "Fine."

"You don't have to talk to them." Magnus says.

"Rude." Simon mutters from behind him.

Ignoring him, Magnus keeps looking into Alec's eyes. "I'll be happier if I know someone's here with you. Someone adult."

"I said it's fine."

Magnus looks at him for another few seconds, just watching the face of the man he loves.

"Okay. I best go on my way, then. We want to find something out, don't we?"
When he leans in for a kiss, Alec gives him that.

* *

The moment Magnus leaves the loft, Alec's mind goes in overdrive because something is going to come out of this. It has to. After seeing Jace, after putting him in danger and causing him pain, Alec can no longer pretend he's only getting ready to contact his family, stretching the time and putting it off and off.

He doesn't know what will happen while Magnus is in the Institute and Magnus doesn't know either. The High Warlock will meet the new Head, try to find out what kind of person she is, try to see what's happening in the Institute after last night.

On one hand, Alec fully trusts Magnus to go and come back safe with something, anything, to tell Alec.

On the other hand, there is something that feels wrong about this and finally, Alec figures out what it is.

It's that his alpha's going to do what is Alec's job. Obviously, not the going to the Institute in person part. Maybe the warlock won't see anyone but the leader, maybe he'll do his warding job, hear something about last night, ask a question or two and will be sent on his way. But let's say that he runs across Isabelle. Let's say that somehow she finds out Magnus knows Alec. Hell, she might even smell him on Magnus. Let's say the truth comes out somehow.

How will that make Alec look, to have his family talk with Magnus first and not with him?

This is his past, his problems and his siblings. He needs Magnus to be a medium between him and the Institute but not between him and Izzy and Jace. It's his responsibility to contact them first.

Alec is thinking all of that while preparing coffees for his guests.

For the moment, Maia is curiously looking around the loft, having never been inside before. Simon is also checking out some items that interest him, the absence of the alpha owner encouraging him to be a little more nosy. The two of them are whispering to themselves about the stranger items they find, items that Alec has seen so often he even forgets they're on the shelves.

He leaves them to it, retreating to his room to get his phone.

* *

When Isabelle goes to her room for a few minutes to calm her thoughts, sit down and try to just breathe, she doesn't expect to get a call. She nearly startles at the sound of her phone going off where she'd dropped it on the bed and forgotten about it. The number is unknown to her but she hits the green receiver.

"Izzy, hey-"

She hears the words and all her thoughts grind to a stop. Is she dreaming?

"Alec?" She asks, suddenly afraid her own voice might chase away the illusion…

"Yeah, it's me."

Isabelle sits down, almost afraid her legs might give out from the sheer relief at hearing her
brother's voice. Relief and surprise. She's been hoping for a sign from him for so long...

"I- Is Jace- is he okay? Please, I need to know." He asks her, his tone echoing the painful desperation she heard from Jace.

"Alec... He isn't okay but he's alive."

"He isn't anywhere around you, is he?"

"No."

"When you can, please tell him I'm all right. Tell him I'll see him... soon. I'll see you soon."

She waits for more words from him, more confirmation that he's alive and okay because she still doesn't believe this is truly happening.

"I love you, Iz."

"We love you too, big brother," She replies, feeling like she might cry. "We miss you."

"I know. I know, I'm so sorry. I promise I'll- I'll fix this, we'll fix this."

She shakes her head even though he can't see her.

"Alec, you stay safe, you hear me? We'll be okay if you're safe."

"I am. Believe me, I'm safe. Look after Jace, please."

She wants to keep him talking, she wants to never hang up but this isn't the time for this. Her brother sounds broken even if she believes him he's safe and she knows it's because of the same reason Jace is broken.

She has to let him go even though her inner voice stomps its feet and tells her to never let him go.

"Alec."

"Yeah?"

"We'll see you soon."

"Yes. I love you." He repeats. "Please wait for me."

Chapter End Notes

By the way, thank you guys so much for reading and for kudos and comments. I don't reply to all of them but they're all precious to me. ❤
Today: the truth comes out. I mean, it's just one of the many truths that need to come out. Next up: what everyone's been waiting for.

When the High Warlock of Brooklyn shows up on the Institute's doorstep to fulfill his part of the contract he has with said Institute to protect it with magic, Lydia lets him in. After all, what's one High Warlock on top of what she already has on her plate? For example, this late morning Maryse Lightwood has come to 'visit'. Lydia isn't sure if she went down to see her adopted son but why else would she come? She did talk with the Shadowhunters from Alicante but Lydia wasn't privy to that conversation.

With everything considered, Lydia will be damned if she allows one word to be said against her for not maintaining the wards while she's in office and that's why Magnus Bane is invited in to do his work.

She's never seen him before in person but somehow she isn't really… surprised when she does see him. Even in her current mood, she remembers this is the man with whom her ancestor had worked together to make the portals for everyone to use. If she feels a little excitement at that meeting, it's her private business.

Still, when she personally welcomes him and introduces herself, she makes it clear he'll be receiving an escort for the time of his stay and she apologizes for whenever she won't be available for him to talk to. He's to come to Head's office later after he's done, for payment.

Magnus accepts everything she says and with the Shadowhunter escort, he goes to re-establish his old wards. He focuses on that for a while since he does want the Institute to be protected. His guard is a quiet woman and Magnus doesn't think he'll get anything interesting out of her. He does remark on the particularly busy atmosphere and she doesn't deny it, answering along the lines of "If only it came with bonuses…". She sounds as mundane at that moment as a Shadowhunter can get.

Magnus pays attention to the other Nephilim who pass by them while he works but he doesn't see anyone who'd click in his mind as Alexander's sister. There are quite a few attractive and black-haired Nephilim around but none fit what he imagines Isabelle Lightwood would look like. Even if his imagined image of her is wrong, he knows he'd recognize her at first sight.

The building itself is the same as he remembers it- as grand as the Clave's ego, too oppressive for his Downworlder sensibilities even though it has many beautiful features, too, which he can appreciate. He always did like stained glass.

Once he's done with the spells, his escort shows him the way to the Head's office. There, he finds not only Lydia Branwell but in front of the grand desk where Lydia sits, stands Maryse Lightwood herself.

'Well,' Magnus thinks, 'it might as well happen now'. In his gut, an ugly feeling grows and thickens. He's not happy at all to see this woman, not for the violent past and not for the recent events
involving Alexander.

She looks him up and down, saying nothing but he can read all that she'd like to say in her eyes. It's been a long time since they were anywhere near each other and it'll be best for everyone that it stays like that after today. Even though he has a lot to say to her, Magnus has no desire to make a scene.

"You've come for the payment," she says and there's not a hint of a question mark in there.

"Thank you, warlock Bane," Lydia says before he can choose an answer. "Is it the same amount you've been paid before?"

"I do have another request," he replies. "There is a necklace in the possession of this Institute that had been commissioned by me and gifted by me to another member of the Downworld. It hasn't been sold or gifted to the Shadowhunters and I'm going to have to ask for it to be given back."

"And that's in place of money?"

"No. I will take my usual rate and the necklace."

"That's a lot to ask for, warlock," Maryse interjects, "for service you've done before that doesn't take that much effort."

Magnus holds in a sigh.

"I'm asking the same for my services as always. The rest is overdue child support payment."

Lydia almost says 'what?' inelegantly but she catches herself. Her "Excuse me?" is almost an echo because Maryse says the same a second earlier.

"There's nothing this Institute owes to anybody," Maryse says firmly.

Magnus is not surprised in the slightest to hear that claim.

"You may believe so, but you're still going to pay if you want these wards permanent."

Lydia is looking between Maryse Lightwood and Magnus Bane and she's more lost than when she woke up this morning.

"What child did you mean?" she asks because that's what she has to know.

Magnus turns to her.

"A warlock child born of a Nephilim, who fell under the care of the Downworld after his own people wouldn't keep him."

Magnus completely ignores Maryse even though he sees her move and focuses on Lydia. "Haven't you checked if everyone of your Shadowhunter flock is accounted for when you took over the Institute?"

Her eyes narrow. "I take it you're going to tell me your meaning even if I don't answer that?"

"You're missing one omega that should have been here. I wonder how many omegas, adult ones, currently live here. Don't answer that, I don't really care to know."

"What do you mean, that one is missing, how would they even-" she stops and then it all begins to
"What have you done with the man who defended the omega?" Magnus asks, pushing the conversation forward because he's not here to be considerate of these Shadowhunters.

For a second the Head is silent, her thoughts still stuck on one thing.

"The parabatai was an omega?" she says slowly, half as a question and half as thinking out loud.

Those words are also half of an answer to Magnus.

"Did you remove just the parabatai rune or did you banish that one as well?"

At this point, Maryse speaks up: "What does it matter to you who out of the conclave needs to be disciplined?"

Magnus huffs. "It really doesn't. I do care about fairness, however, and I don't approve of needless cruelty, no matter the race."

"Why are you bringing this up, why do you even know about this?" Lydia asks, her irritation and desperation for answers raising.

"Clearly, I must know the omega in question. I'll answer your questions about him if you tell me about his parabatai first. These aren't Clave secrets," he looks at Maryse while saying this because he can almost sense her preparing to protest, "I'm not going to magically use any of this against the Institute. How would I?"

Looking back at the younger alpha, he adds, "In fact, I would say this is a private matter. This whole conversation could be considered private."

"You want to know about Jace Wayland," Lydia says, wanting to confirm they're actually discussing the same thing.

"That is right. Jace Wayland, whose parabatai up until last night was Alexander Lightwood."

That gets a larger reaction out of Lydia. "Lightwood? How could he be a Lightwood…"

"Ask his mother how," Magnus says and for a second he enjoys this.

Maryse doesn't let Lydia say anything to that, asking instead, "What have you done to him?"

Magnus almost laughs.

"What have I done? I've given him back what your kind took away from him: safety and a home."

Lydia stands up, puts her hands on the desk with a thud.

"Why am I finding out all this from the High Warlock and not from the official files or the family?"

"If I may interject, at this point, I'm going to claim I do have more to say about Alexander than his mother. And I am his family but your question, miss Branwell, is still a very good one."

"You're claiming all this because…?"

"I'm his mate."
"You never met him," Magnus says to Lydia, "you wouldn't be able to tell his scent on me. I don't really have proof to show you. I do have photos but those are for me to look at."

"You're saying you've been taking care of him," Lydia says. She thinks she can't be any more surprised today and her tone softens.

"Yes. He's been taking care of himself but when I met him but I did everything to help him. Right now, I will do everything to protect him from the institution that hurt him in the first place and if I have to, I will certainly protect him from his mother."

Lydia sits back down in her chair.

"I have a lot of question, especially about what had happened that he was banished... but to me, right now, the most important question is why my team met him in the house of a warlock we've marked as a threat."

"My mate came home bruised and bloodied and then was hit with a severed bond that almost killed him. Do you truly think I've asked him about such things?"

"But he lived?"

"Yes, he'll live."

Magnus closes his eyes and gathers his calm.

"I haven't asked him," he repeats. "And I haven't come here today with the intention to talk about what he's done, only to ask about his family so no, I can't speak of what happened because I wasn't there. However, I am absolutely certain he didn't break the law. I want to hear from you what happened that night."

Lydia watches him, trying to read his honesty. She nods. "It'll probably be best that we figure out the whole story before someone makes more unfortunate decisions."

Maryse doesn't like it but, fortunately, this is Lydia's call. She recounts the preparations for the mission and the evidence they have against Iris Rouse. Magnus accepts all of it. He can't defend this woman even as the High Warlock and he hates, absolutely hates that Alexander hadn't said a word of this to him. If he only had mentioned knowing of her residence before... Lydia repeats what the team had reported about meeting the 'intruder'.

Magnus calmly listens to her say how Alexander had been the aggressive one, resisting the reasonable attempts to stop him for questioning. He asks if his brother said the same and Lydia can only answer "he wasn't in the room from the start."

"Are you planning to take steps against him for resisting... arrest, even though he was not anyone's target or breaking the law?"

Lydia knows her own answer to that but she cannot ensure that someone doesn't step all over her authority again. Until her position is actually firm and secure, she can't make promises to someone as important as the High Warlock.

"I want to talk with him." She says, determined. She's feeling calmer now that she's seeing a light
of an answer in the distance.

"I can't make him and I can't make promises for him," Magnus answers seriously.

"I understand. Tell him I want to meet him. If he agrees, we'll set up a time only I will know so no one else can do… anything ill-advised."

"Thank you, I do appreciate that. If he agrees… please remember, his safety is my responsibility."

Magnus leaves the office after receiving the promise he'll have the necklace returned as soon as Lydia can order it found.

Lydia's head almost hurts from everything. How ironic that the presence of more omegas could have helped with that just thanks to their normal soothing scent in the air.

She's not sure what she's supposed to do now to move forward from this in a way that will benefit the Institute and not place her in a precarious position with the Clave.

Left alone in the office with Maryse Lightwood, she says, "As the Head of this Institute, I request that you tell me the truth of how your son has left it."

Meanwhile, stepping into the corridor, Magnus doesn't find his escort. Instead of the familiar woman, there is another one, black-haired and beautiful. Her eyes are tired but determined and something about her seems to be buzzing with energy. Like she's been waiting.

"Have you been listening for long?" Magnus asks.

"Long enough… and not long enough." She says. And then, "You're the one who made Alec so happy even Jace could feel it."

She says it so simply it makes Magnus's heart ache. In her hands, she's squeezing something, like a piece of clothing.

"It's good to meet you at last, Isabelle." He says, smiling at her.

She smiles back.

"If you weren't a warlock, I'd follow you home just to know."

"If I were in your shoes, I'd probably do the same."

"Alec knows we're waiting… until then, this is for him." She puts her hand out, wanting Magnus to take the bundle.

'Ah', he thinks. 'For the nest'. He takes it gently.

"Tell him Jace isn't going to be punished with anything else. I think for once mom did something right for us."

"I will."

She fidgets, wanting to say something more so Magnus waits patiently.
"And tell him he should agree to speak with Lydia, it's a chance to straighten everything-"

He interrupts her, puts his hand on her hand.

"Before he does that, I'm sure he'll want to talk with you first. We'll discuss everything then."

She breathes out. "Do you think so? Yes, you're right, we'll talk."

"Now, as much as I'd like to stay, which is not much at all, I want to get home."

"I bet."

She walks with him to the Institute's door, from where he portals home.

* *

When Magnus returns, he finds himself in his mate's arms within seconds. Alexander must have been waiting for him and it's understandable that he needed him. After last night, they both need to be close but the visit to the Institute was necessary.

Magnus puts his hand on the back of Alec's neck, their cheeks touch, they're breathing in each other's scents.

Since Alec has made the call to Izzy, he's not immediately asking Magnus questions. The most important thing is already known to him and he'll hear whatever else Magnus brought back in a moment.

"I have something for you," the warlock says when he pulls back. He calls to him two items that have been concealed by magic while he travelled home. Alec takes them, his nose recognizing his siblings. These are fresh scents, 'today's' scents and it's both from Izzy and Jace. Gripping Jace's scarf, Alec wills himself not to cry over it. His throat is tight.

"I've seen your sister, Angel."

"And your mother."

"Oh." A coldness of a kind passes through Alec. "She came to see Jace?"

"Yes. And to do many other things, I imagine."

"And... you talked about me?"

"Yes. I didn't go in with the intention to do so but once I was in a room with the current Head and your mother, I didn't want to pretend. So we talked about you."

"That's fine. I don't want to pretend, either."

"I said the truth, that we're together."

"Good."

"The Head of the Institute will want to talk to you. She wants to know why you were found in the house of a warlock. I'd like to know that, too."

Alec's aura changes. Magnus feels shame and regret radiating from him.

"I just- I saw a small girl in the park once," he begins. "She'd asked about Max's blue skin. She had
a guardian, Iris, and sometime later I figured out where they lived. I've been there once but for no more than ten minutes. She wasn't here when the other warlocks came so I thought...

"You went there again?"

"I wanted to ask about children."

"While I wish you'd mentioned that, you know you didn't do anything wrong, yes?"

Magnus comes close, puts his hands on Alec's shoulders and rubs them. "This is what we want, after all, for Downworlders to be treated as people and not as criminals every time. I don't want you to be afraid of meeting new ones, the same way I don't want Shadowhunters to always assume the worst of us..."

"Yeah. I should have asked, I should have mentioned her or even the girl. Her name was Madzie."

"It was just incredibly bad luck..."

"She escaped."

"Iris?"

"I was there first before the team and there wasn't a single person in the building. She must have run. She took the girl and whoever else lived there."

As he's saying that, Alec's eyes widen. He remembers now the one thing he'd brought back in his jacket and he leaves a surprised Magnus behind to go get it. A minute later he hands the warlock the blank notebook.

When Magnus touches it, sparks fly, literally. They both drop the notebook- Alec out of surprise and Magnus because he definitely didn't enjoy the sensation of clashing magic.

"Hm. I suppose that will require a little more care to handle." He snaps his fingers and sends the notebook away to his office. He doesn't want to do anything about it right now, no matter what secrets it contains.

He needs his omega. He needs to spend the time with him.

They will talk about everything, about Lydia Branwell and the questioning, and Iris. Later. For today, he's had enough of everything except Alec.

So he only says, "Your siblings want to see you. Your brother is free to go. Whenever you tell them, they'll come to visit."

Alec acknowledges this with a shaky nod. It's time. This week, he'll see them. His heart races at the thought. For now, he's with Magnus and for now, he isn't in the state to do anything about it. He doesn't want to think of the future, of the Institute and the mess he's made.

He's too raw, too shaken still. It's too soon. He wants to be allowed to be weak, just for one more day. He wants Magnus, he wants his alpha.

While Alec is thinking that, Magnus is thinking he's had enough of New York for today. His mind is clearer to think about the future, about Alexander's status in the Clave's eyes and what will come out of all this... But he also carried home that ugly anger that woke in him in the Institute. It's his anger, years-old and justified, but he doesn't want to carry it around his family.
"How about you pack what we'd need for a few hours out in mild weather. Think early spring. Without the pram." He says, his hand cupping Alec's cheek to make him look at Magnus.

"Okay."

He takes them through a portal straight onto a beach. The beach is made of big, gray stones and gray sand between them. The day is sunny with a little wind and frequent but light clouds drifting above them, on their own way to somewhere else. It's not warm, exactly, just enough to walk barefoot on the stones with just a sweater on.

Alec looks around curiously. There's no one to be seen in both directions along the shore.

"I can't even tell what country we're in."

"Let that be an inconsequential detail."

"And you've been here often?"

"Often enough."

Alec looks along the beach. The gray sand and stones stretch far, as far as the eye can see. In the other direction, the beach curves and disappears behind a cliff, giving space to the sea. Or the ocean, Alec doesn't know. Large pieces of driftwood break up the monotony of the beach but they don't take away from the impression of infinity when Alec stares too long at one point on the horizon.

He doesn't know where they are, even what time it is exactly. He can only guess by the Sun.

It is just him and Magnus, and their children. The hole in Alec's soul traveled with them but it's easier to breathe with it here.

Everything's moving too fast, Alec thinks. He wasn't ready, he wasn't ready to screw up so badly. The fear of facing his siblings and having to tell them the truth of what he'd done… it comes back to him.

So he closes his eyes tightly and then opens them to look at the waves and the line of the beach and he tries to make his mind empty. Magnus is silent beside him, keeping his eyes on Max who begins to collect stones in front of him on the blanket that they put down to sit on.

Alec simply breathes. He chooses to sit on the washed-up trunk of some long dead tree rather than the blanket.

The air is salty, he realizes. Saltier than on the other beaches they'd visited so far.

Three white birds with slender, long wings fly from one end of the beach to the next, wherever it is, making noise as they go. They break the illusion that they were all alone in this piece of the world but that's okay.

A little later Alec moves down to sit beside Magnus on the blanket. He leans on the alpha, puts his cheek on his shoulder.

Magnus thinks back to what Isabelle has said to him. He's heard many things in his life: "You're the warlock" is most frequent. "You're the demon-spawn". "You're the one who can make this spell for me". "You're the one who can make this potion for me".
But he never heard what she said: "You're the one who made my brother happy".
They spent some more time on the beach. Alec sat leaning on Magnus and Magnus soaked in the closeness.

Max built towers out of the stones, which Magnus kept up with magic by making the stones stick together. When Jonathan woke up in his carrycot, he wasn't crying for food yet so they let him be, looking up at the sky and making curious sounds.

Eventually, they return home. They return to New York, where everything is. All their problems and family, and issues, and wounds, and all the other knots that need to be unknotted.

In the safety of their home, they don't have to touch those issues until the new day comes.

They have the evening meal and then Alec leaves to go to his room with his children. Magnus leaves him to it, letting him have the time on his own. In the meantime he sits in the armchair, his thoughts going back to the Institute.

Alec puts Max and Jon in their cribs for a short time and turns his attention to the nest. With the new additions from his siblings in his hands, he begins rearranging things slightly. He likes the way he's built the nest so far so he doesn't want to undo it but he shifts some items until he perfectly likes how he's surrounded by the scents. Yes, this is a good nest.

Getting out of it, Alec moves his children into it with him and waits until they're both sleeping. He watches their round, sweet faces and thinks about how lucky he is. Thinking about their future fills him with happiness because he knows he's going to do everything to protect them. With his alpha at his side, his 'everything' might just be good enough this time.

He lies with his Little Pea on his chest and dreads the day when his son grows out of this. He'll be growing up, which is a good thing but Alec already knows he'll be missing this, when he's still so small and Alec is comforted by feeling his weight, by the closeness that he's not ready to give up yet after being pregnant. He keeps his hand on Jon's back and his other hand pets Max's head softly, to soothe him and not wake him.

A little later Alec carefully moves and stands up to pick up his sleeping children one by one and moves them back to the safety of their cribs for the night.

Then, padding through the loft with bare feet, he makes his way to the alpha's bedroom to curl up in the middle of the silk bedding.
Magnus, who's spent the time sitting quietly in the living room and was unnoticed by the omega, stands up to follow. He smiles at the sight of Alec trying to be so sneaky he misses Magnus's presence.

Inside the bedroom, one of the night lamps is on, giving out enough light to put the omega in a warm glow.

Magnus can choose if he wants to face his love or lay behind him and he chooses the latter, becoming the big spoon and pressing himself close to Alec, wrapping his arm around him. They simply lay together for a while before they both fell asleep, no words needed between them.

*Alec wakes Magnus with a kiss. A series of kisses, soft and light on his lips and his eyelids when he stubbornly keeps them closed. It's early, earlier than they usually wake and he should be giving Magnus the time to sleep more but if Alec doesn't start this now, they'll never have the chance to get too far before he has to run to tend to their boys.*

When Magnus kisses back, Alec asks for more. It grows intense, deeper, hungrier.

Then, comes the part Magnus loves the most: the first touch of Alec's hand on his bare skin, the first show of intent. Usually, it's his chest or belly or sometimes, when his omega is particularly demanding, he literally gets in his pants first. Today, Alec's fingertips run down his chest while they kiss and then his fingernails dig in a little when they're lower.

Magnus hums. It's going to be a good morning.

Alec pushes himself up to sit and then straddles his alpha, bowing down to make a trail of kisses from the hollow of his throat down to the bellybutton.

Magnus is feeling lazy, still, but apparently, his love woke in a different mood and Magnus is always ready to meet Alexander in the middle or wherever he wants them to meet.

His hands rest on Alec's hips, pushing his boxer briefs lower so he can touch bare skin. He loves those hips and those thighs. While he's being kissed he caresses them, his fingers retracing a path they've traveled often before. He squeezes Alec's butt playfully, earning himself a squeak.

They're both hard by then, the air between them heating and filling with pheromones. Yes, this is a very good morning, indeed.

It's time for Magnus to do something, too. He snaps their clothes off, sending them to a pile somewhere, probably the floor. Alec gasps and then draws in a sharp breath when Magnus moves, pushes him off to flip them over. Magnus looks down at him, admires his soft, now-red lips and the way his eyes widen with want. His omega is lovely and Magnus isn't feeling so lazy anymore when there's so much in front of him to have.

It's his turn to kiss and he goes for the lips, asking more, asking to be let in. He's on top of Alec, his knee between Alec's thighs to tease. He knows how to return the favor of hickeys, hard kisses and the tease of teeth against the sensitive skin of the throat and collarbones. He knows where Alexander likes to be kissed best. He knows all about his scent glands, where to touch at the back of his neck to make him see stars when they're like this.
And Alexander gasps, bares his throat to Magnus and his thighs fall apart a little more, making room for Magnus in a wordless plea.

His scent drives Magnus crazy.

Pushing himself up on one arm, Magnus reaches for Alec's hand with the other. Their fingers lace, the back of Alec's hand is pressed against the mattress beside his head.

"Magnus… Magnus, please…"

When has he ever denied his omega? Keeping one of Alec's hands trapped, Magnus reaches between them to give a stroke or two to Alec's cock.

They both moan. One because of the touch, the other because of sympathy. Gods, Magnus is just as hard and he'd love some relief just as much.

He can be patient. Not easily, but he can. To distract himself from thinking with his body-parts other than his brain, Magnus spares a thought to their bedding. It's silvery gray at the moment, pale blue Greek patterns running along the long edges of the sheets and the duvet. Magnus changes them to warm gold which makes Alexander's skin glow when he's laid on it. His omega deserves gold.

The heavy-sweet scent of slick lets him know how ready his omega is. Sinking his fingers into that wet heat, the alpha doesn't waste time to tease anymore. He knows what Alec likes best. He goes for the spot, rubbing it, spreading his fingers for best effect.

A gasp, a moan and then: "Magnus, come on, I need you."

His voice is breathy, colored with need and that tone of slight disapproval that makes Magnus chuckle.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes!"

Magnus kisses the last of the short word from his lips. He believes Alexander is ready but he might not be, not mentally. So he doesn't think, he goes with what is instinctual and in his case, well-practiced.

When he lines up and presses in, all thoughts disappear from his mind. Right then, it's only them, the two of them and the sensation, tight heat, searing pleasure.

Alec gasps, his breath caught in his lungs, his whole body stopping, focusing on this one thing. Magnus inside him. Not his fingers, not this time. Angel, this time it's so much more.

The stretch is new, it's sharp but oh, he's ready for it. He's been waiting for this in general since his first heat and he's been imagining it in detail since Magnus became more to him than "the High Warlock of Brooklyn".

The reality is not what Alec imagined. He could not have imagined the wealth of sensations, from burning the surprise, to pleasure that's hot and thick, sinking into his very cells.

His mate doesn't go in all the way at first, he pulls back slowly and then pushes back in, sending a
wave of hot pleasure up Alec's spine. And then, then he does it again and the sweet pressure against his walls that fingers never quite managed makes all of Alec's toes curl. It comes in wave after wave with each careful push.

They both have the other's name on their lips, whispered praise and gasped pleas, their heartfelt moans for punctuation.

Alec gets lost in it completely.

Magnus does not care for virginity and to him, what had happened to Alec does not count as the first time, not really, not in a way that surely makes the omega ashamed of himself. Still, he can't forget about that. There's no room to make mistakes here and Magnus is glad for his experience which means he knows what he's doing. He knows how to be patient and he knows how to be slow and soft with an omega lover.

It isn't easy, however, even for him, not to get lost in it. Breathing in the sweet scent, getting sweeter with every minute they move together and against each other, hearing the moans falling from his lips, Magnus fights hard against the instinct to claim him 'properly'.

Alec's leg hooks over his and when Magnus lets his hand free from his hold, Alec wraps both arms around him. His short nails dig into the skin of Magnus's back, sending a shiver up his spine. He won't be able to last long today, he knows it. Excitement at this happening, finally, makes his blood rush faster, makes the height of pleasure easier to reach. He puts his hand on Alec's thigh to push it up a little more. He doesn't let go, his fingers will probably leave bruises there.

It takes them both by surprise when Alec comes with a cry, his hold on Magnus tightening. It was to be expected that neither would last long but especially not an omega during his first time.

The alpha gasps, loses his rhythm – or rather stops completely – and without thinking, sinks his teeth into his omega's shoulder because he really does not want to come yet. That makes Alec cry again, though that's more due to surprise than real pain. Magnus draws him into a kiss both for an apology and just to kiss.

Soon enough he moves again, slowly while his omega is still riding the aftershocks of his climax. Magnus wishes he could make him come twice but he's too close himself to manage that. Next time, he'll make sure Alexander comes twice.

Alec never felt like this before.

He's mated. He's finally a mated omega. Magnus could have backed off, could have held back from having sex with him, deciding to only care for him and his children without ever claiming him. But he did, he claimed Alec and he's still moving, has yet to come inside him. With his senses completely drowned in pleasure, the omega is helpless to do anything but hold on. His skin tingles from all the kisses and nibbles to his throat, the place which bears the bite-mark throbs, and the core of him is like lava. It's like he's made liquid, boneless, drifting in the hold of his alpha.

And then Magnus comes, too, and the sound he makes can't be faked, can't possibly mean anything else than that Alec managed to please him, too.

Their quickened breaths fill the space between them and fill the silence of the room.
Alec's hands fall back on the mattress, his thighs are still accommodating his mate but he's no longer holding on so tightly. He's just boneless, spent, satisfied. He's a little sore, too, but he doesn't really feel that yet.

Magnus finds his hand again, laces their fingers and Alec squeezes back. The alpha doesn't want to put any distance between their bodies but he pulls out, gently, and when he rolls on his side, he pulls Alec with him to face him. Magic takes care of the wet spot before it can become uncomfortable.

Alec's being quiet. Magnus puts his hand on his hip, caresses it. Then he moves up, to draw patterns on Alec's back.

"We're mates..." Alec says.

"Yes. We've mated. I'm yours."

"And I'm yours?"

"Yes. You're mine."

"Was it good... for you?" Alec's voice is a little quieter. "Even though I'm not- I wasn't-"

Magnus has to figure out the rest himself. 'Even though I wasn't a virgin', he thinks it was supposed to mean.

This is the part that makes omegas fragile, this is the part that gets exaggerated and turned into a stereotype. They're emotional. They have weak points. They sometimes think too much about certain things. Omegas are curious creatures, following as many laws and stereotypes as they defy. As strong as they are fragile.

This is where Magnus is met with his omega's weak spot. He's been so strong about his past for so long, it came back to bring him down because of the truly intimate moment they've shared. In his eyes, Magnus can read the question is serious and he expects an answer despite having finished the sentence.

Alec's pupils are still large with arousal and despite that, like a shadow, insecurity colors his voice and expression.

"It was just like I imagined, Angel. Better. It was perfect- you were perfect." Magnus brushes Alec's cheek, making the omega lean into his hand. He's so sweet, pliant, warm. And he's Magnus's.

"I can't wait until we do it again."

The blush that was slowly fading on Alec's face returns at this promise of the next time.

"I didn't know it was supposed to feel like this."

Magnus hums. "I imagine what you've done for your heats was never enough. And what we've done so far was far from enough, too."

Alec just nods.

"I can't wait to smell you during your heat," Magnus says before he can talk himself out of voicing this thought that filled his mind.
Alec's eyes widen and he meets Magnus's eyes. The alpha continues, "If this is your normal for making love... I'm not sure I'll survive it when you're in heat."

Praise settles in Alec's belly, warring with the twist of embarrassment. He ducks his head, wishing to hide his face in the fold of the bedding underneath.

They lie in silence for a while, simply enjoying the closeness, both of them thinking of what just happened between them.

Magnus resumes the pattern-drawing on Alec's back.

A little later, Magnus begins to speak.

"I used to think I didn't want to Bond."

Alec looks at him. "Because you'd have to live after losing it?"

He clearly remembers the overheard conversation between the warlock women.

"Yes. Losing your Bonded mate is part of life, you re-join them eventually in whatever afterlife awaits you... but that's not true for immortal beings. We live on, after everything. I'd thought that I love you so much already it was going to hurt a lot even without me having the Bond to lose as well. I didn't want to hurt more."

Alec stays quiet, waiting for the alpha to get all his thoughts out.

"It was the wrong thinking," Magnus continues. "That night, when I found you and I held you, thinking I was losing you... knowing I couldn't hold onto you if you left me, being helpless... I realized avoiding pain wasn't what I wanted. I thought I was too weak to enter into a full Bond with you but now I know I'm too weak not to do it. I would rather have it and lose it than let you slip through my fingers without having all I could have with you."

Alec's listening, wide-eyed.

That night will be a sore point for both of them for a long time. It's only been days from it but even when more time passes, it'll hold weight because of the scare they had and because of the loss Alec suffered. However, that night isn't what Alec's mind is taking out of Magnus's words right now.

"Do you want to Bond now?" he asks, hope and joy growing inside him.

"Yes, I want to be your Bonded mate. If that is what you want as well."

"Now now?"

A chuckle escapes Magnus. "Yes, Angel. Now if you wish to. It's best to do it after- well, after sex."

"Okay. I- I want you to know I don't want to do it today specifically just to fill the hole left by my parabatai bond. I want this for us," Alec says because this is important, it's important that his alpha knows he isn't anything but the most important man in Alec's life.

"I know that, Alexander, I know," Magnus reassures him. "Do you know how it's done? Every race has its own details for making the bond."

Alec hesitates, then says: "I'd have a rune to show for it... I used to expect to have three runes... my parabatai rune for my bond with Jace, then a marriage rune on my hand from my mate to show
others and then a rune over my heart drawn by a Silent Brother after we've bonded."

And now he has none. Not a single one left.

As for the Bonding itself, Alec knows he has to want it. He has to welcome and want the Bond, he has to want his mate. Both mates have to truly want each other and dishonest feelings can't be jumped over.

Alec remembers hearing it called by someone the 'mating of the souls'. With his body still feeling the physical mating, he shivers with anticipation.

Then, a cold shard of insecurity lets itself be felt inside him. What if they're incompatible despite their willingness? What if they're too different with their different blood?

'No', Alec pushes away the thought. It's not going to serve anything to worry now, when they're so close to having everything.

Magnus tells him: "Warlocks have their own bonding tradition. I can do my part of it but you won't be able to return it without magic of your own."

Alec pushes himself up, sitting up to listen with his legs folded. Magnus follows to sit, too.

"What do warlocks do?" Alec asks.

"I'd give you a little bit of magic, a spark, to always be inside you. It's mostly symbolic like your marriage runes and it's like a, hmm, like signing, an identifying mark for anyone who could sense it. More importantly, it'd make tracking of it easier for me."

"Oh, all right."

Magnus takes Alec's hand and makes half-circles with his thumb over it.

"Are we doing it?" Alec asks.

"I want nothing more."

"Give me your spark, then."

They share a smile. For both of them, it starts small in reaction to Alec's words but then they're smiling wider, the giddiness contagious. They're like a pair of teenagers, giggling at the thought of a first kiss.

"Come here," Magnus says.

They're already close but they can be closer and for this, he needs to put his hand on Alec's chest. It's not just first random piece of magic he's going to use. He prepares it, makes it within himself first, cradles it because it's going to serve an important purpose and if it's going to be inside his most important person, it has to be special, too.

Alec waits, quietly watching Magnus even though he can't see the magic. When Magnus touches him, putting his palm in the middle of Alec's chest, the omega stops breathing out of fear of messing it up.

Magnus smirks but doesn't tell him to relax. He focuses on his part: he sends the spark from his body, from where his magic pools, to the Nephilim's body so it can settle there.
Alec knows how his mate's magic feels very well. He's so familiar with it that it's almost normal for him to accept it now, to feel it on him or in the air of the loft while Magnus works.

He feels it pass through his skin and then the sensation disappears as if the spell dissipated. He knows it's there, as it's supposed to, because Magnus looks satisfied.

"Kiss me."

Alec does as told, leans close so their lips meet. It's not as heated a kiss as the ones they've shared during sex but it's deep, it's long. When they part, their foreheads touch.

Alec tries to focus on the little spark of magic. He imagines it since he didn't actually see it, as a ball of light smaller than the ones Max loves. He imagines it very bright with a softer shell, blue as Magnus's magic is. That image itself is warming him from within. He'd love to be able to return this, to be part of the warlock tradition and have Magnus carry his piece of magic.

He thinks of his love, their love. He thinks of how Magnus brought light to his life that he could bask in, light that chased away the fear for future and all the little fears that darkened his dreams. Magnus's love chased away the loneliness and gave him so much more.

Magnus's hand is so warm on his, their knees are touching, their legs are tangled in the silky covers on the bed.

The tingle of power that Alec can always tell is right there under the warlock's skin is there now, stronger, and even though his eyes are closed, Alec can feel Magnus beyond the three points where they touch.

The warmth and happiness that fills Alec grows and he realizes it's like an echo, a doubled sensation.

This has taken a long time. They've been aligning more and more every day until all parts fit, until all elements worked in harmony. An alpha and an omega, a Downworlder and a Nephilim, the true perfect match.

This is what they've built. Slowly and with hesitation and with fear at first but then they grew sure of each other, willing to give everything of themselves to this cause.

It's been more than four months. Such a short time to build and to get where they are but they're not a regular couple by anyone's standards. They've come together and once they crashed, they couldn't be separated.

"That's it," Magnus whispers, his voice full of wonder.

'This is it' Alec agrees but he doesn't speak. He feels his mate and it's not his imaginings anymore, it's not himself falsely convincing himself that he should be feeling this.

It's like a twin heartbeat in his chest. He knows it's only this intense because they're right next to each other and because they're connecting for the first time. Everything is fresh, intense, glorious.

Magnus takes a shaky breath. His fingers tighten on Alec's.
When Alec tilts his head, their noses touch.

"I love you," he tells Magnus.

A startled laugh is his answer. Magnus seems more shaken by all this than Alec's feeling. That is, Alec can feel it, too, and he's beginning to separate the different sensations: this is his love, this is Magnus's love. This is Magnus's nervousness which Alec doesn't understand why it'd be there.

"I can tell, Angel, I can tell."

"I love you," Alec repeats because he needs Magnus to understand it fully so he can not be so shaken by their Bond. While it reassured Alec and filled him with confidence, it seems to have worked differently on the alpha.

"I've never felt anything like it," Magnus whispers and Alec understands then. He's only past twenty while Magnus lived for so long without someone to Bond with. It must be so much more significant to him because he's waited for so long, been afraid of it for so long.

"I'm yours," Alec says. His lips touch his mate's lips. "I'm yours, I'm here."

And then, he asks: "Now, can you feel this? Through me? They're awake."

He lifts their joined hands to press them to his chest, over his heart.

"I- I'm not sure."

"Maybe that's too faint. We should go get them."

"Wait, please, just kiss me one more time."

Alec does, soft at first just like he did a minute ago and then the kiss deepens and Magnus savors it.

"Now, let's go," Magnus says so they untangle from the golden sheets, replace them with dressing robes and with Alec leading Magnus by the hand, they leave the bedroom to begin the day as Bonded mates.
Alec is walking on clouds. He's smiling through all their morning rituals with children, not forgetting about the strict routine he's doing his best to instil in Max for everyone's sake. Jonathan, being younger, is still a little more chaotic but all is good.

Magnus watches them, his emotions more complicated than his omega's. *His omega,* that's what Magnus's thoughts stop at and revolve around. He's mated. Not only mated, he's a Bonded alpha now. It's not something he knows how to handle yet because it's a first, a whole new territory for him.

He has a whole person to complete him now in so much more than the simple sense of companionship and support. No, nothing is familiar right now- even as his own turbulent emotions cloud his head, the light of Alexander's pure happiness warms him from the inside and lightens his own anxieties.

And Magnus does have anxieties. Not second thoughts, not at all, but now that it's real, it's *done,* the Bond is even more of a big deal than he's imagined. Alexander is his for the entirety of their lives, his to protect and to cherish and to count on to be always at his side. Like a steady rock.

Being in love and hearing it returned from the omega was one thing and Magnus has already believed it to be true. He would have trusted any promise they could have made to each other in words but a Bond goes beyond all that. The very laws of nature are on their side now and no Downworlder or Nephilim can come between them. Not Alexander's parents, not the Clave, not warlock society should they be displeased.

Magnus holds onto the coffee Alexander made for him as usual like it's helping him focus. It's not that he's just sitting there while the omega is handling their children but he wants to memorize the sight so well it'll never leave him. His mate is so beautiful, so happy and making his sons smile, too. They're quick to pick up on his mood and their little hearts echo it because what's better to feel than their parent's love so easily and clearly?

Alec's lifting Jonathan up, pretending he's a plane or a bird. Magnus thinks of baby angel.

"I talked with Izzy," Alexander tells him later. "I asked them to come over tomorrow."

He's fidgeting, he's waiting for Magnus to agree it's okay. Of course, it's okay.

"Will dinner be involved?" Magnus asks.

"Yeah, since we decided on seven pm."

Magnus nods and then says, "I'm glad. I'm glad you're going to see them and that I'll get to meet them on friendlier grounds than the Institute."
"Yeah…"

Magnus doesn't tease him for overthinking.

"Don't worry." Magnus puts his hands on Alec's arms and rubs them encouragingly. "You've got absolutely nothing to look forward to but getting your brother and sister back."

Alec closes his eyes. "I know." He takes a breath and looks at his mate. "In one way, I know that. But I still have all this… all the past I'll have to tell them…"

"Yes, you do. There's no need to do it all the first time. Tomorrow, you're only meeting your family. You're not obligated to speak of anything you don't want to. They'll want to see you. They'll want to meet their nephew. All two of them. Hopefully, they'll be interested in knowing me better as well."

"You're right." Alec breathes out.

"Of course I am, love." Magnus smiles. "But that's only because your head is full of thoughts that have no business being in it. Don't worry."

* *

To be honest, Alec can't stay anxious about the meeting when he's still running on the high from the mating.

He's buzzing with a need to tell of what happened to someone. Yes, he's going to tell Izzy and Jace when they come but that's not enough. He'd like everyone to know. In fact, a thought crosses his mind to send his parents a fire message with a borrowed stele when Izzy and Jace get here to tell them just where he's in life now without them and without their hopes for his career. Look at him now, following their wish to get a high-standing alpha to mate with.

He pushes the spite and his parents away from his mind and thinks instead of what's closer: the pack, Luke and Maia. Hell, he might as well send a message to the Mundane: 'Hey, guess what…'.

In the shortest words: Alec is happy. And he wants the world to know. He wants everyone to know that Magnus Bane is his.

All the internal excitement aside, the day progresses as normal; Alec plays with his sons and tries to teach Max full words. He's still receiving syllables as answers but with how quickly Max progresses with magic, surely he'll be also talking to them in no time. They're also practicing his mobility, pulling himself up and moving around the mats, which they'd bought more of.

Alec thinks of himself like this: an omega with children, sitting on the playmat in his indoor, softest clothes versus the image of him that used to exist in the Institute, the version of him that his family remembers. It's not better or worse but it's so different… He's not going to have small children forever, he won't have to be so focused on them forever but for now, he is. For now, this side of him is at the front.

And he hopes he's still recognizable. He knows he's himself. He's gotten helping hands before he could have broken alone and he can be honest enough with himself to stop and analyze his own thoughts and actions to know he's remained himself. He can only hope his siblings see it the way he does.
During that day, Magnus receives two or three messages from his warlocks and answers them without much delay. By then Magnus has let go of his anxieties and let himself soak in the warm, bright emotions that are both his own and coming from Alexander. The senders might be surprised by how favorable the answers from the High Warlock are but they accept it happily and don't question it.

When Magnus picks up Max at some point, he talks to him as usual, always giving the boy the time to 'answer' him.

"Did you hear, baby? Your aunt and uncle will be coming soon to see us. You've got a whole family now. Two uncles, as a matter of fact, and one of them has the same name as you do."

Magnus assumes the youngest Lightwood won't be able to come over any time soon. He must be with his parents in Idris, he's probably in the Academy. Still a child, he won't be able to do what his older siblings can do and go anywhere he wants.

Magnus is looking forward to meeting Alexander's adopted brother, out of curiosity. He used to be the most important alpha to Alec by virtue of being his parabatai and now it is Magnus who took the spot permanently. Magnus doesn't want that to be a source of any conflict between them, no matter how small.

They have dinner together, half of it made by Alec, half conjured by Magnus. They have a layered honey cake for dessert which Alec doesn't think he'll be able to finish but it's so good he actually does. Since coming to live with Magnus he's eaten more sugar than he has during his whole life before that.

Meanwhile, Max makes a cheerful mess of his blended fruit before either Alec or Magnus can stop him.

It's all normal. There's no change that anyone could notice from the outside. And yet, so much changed.

Touching his hand to his chest, Magnus breathes. He can sense his mate, his proximity, the echo of his emotions. He thinks of how true it was what he's told Alec about his fear of missing out on this. Now that he has it, he can't imagine continuing on with his life without a Bond.

* 

In the evening, Alec is eager to have a repeat of the morning, now that he knows how it can be. His body is almost aching for it, his memories still very fresh and he wants to reinforce them. Soon.

Unfortunately for both lovers, they're not just new mates but also still young parents and they're reminded of that while they're already in Magnus's bed, kissing.

Alec doesn't need any bond to his children to know he has to leave his alpha and the kisses: they can both hear Jonathan crying all the way from Alec's room.

Alec gives himself a second to sigh deeply before he slips out of the bed and makes his way to his room with Magnus following.
He knows his son isn't hungry yet and he checks if he needs changing but it's not that. Alec sighs again. It's probably just another bad night and it will have to pass on its own.

Magnus lingers in the door. "I could take Max to my room so he can at least get uninterrupted sleep."

Alec picks up Jon and holds him close.

"Yeah, it's probably a good idea."

Magnus comes into the bedroom, lifts Max into his arms and then grabs the first thing out of the nest he can reach to take with him. Alec's scent is strong in Magnus's bedroom but a nest is a nest and Max will probably sleep better with a piece of it.

Alec's rocking Jon, making calming sounds but it doesn't seem to help much so far. Magnus moves closer to him to give him a kiss on the cheek.

They both know there's no point in both of them staying up. At least one of them has to be awake enough in the morning to face the new day with new parenting challenges.

While Magnus settles to sleep with Max in his bedroom, Alec does the same in his nest with restless Jon.

* * *

In the morning, Magnus emerges from his room with Max on his hip, the boy holding a piece of the alpha's jewelry like it's a trophy. He's found it on the ground while Magnus put him down on the carpet so he could have free hands to retrieve something he needed. He only turned for ten seconds and it was enough for Blueberry to find what he wanted and hold onto it.

In the kitchen, Magnus makes sure that Max eats his milk and some banana. While they're waiting for the rest of the family to join them, Magnus looks through baby food items that fill one shelf in their kitchen to check if they need to shop for more.

When Alec comes out with Jon, he doesn't look too bad. That is, he doesn't look very tired from the night. They share a kiss when Magnus walks to meet him halfway. They have a long, lazy breakfast together.

As Magnus predicted, Alec is pensive throughout the day. He's not looking afraid, exactly, but he spends most of the day inside his own head. Magnus stays out of his way, not trying to force conversation.

Alec cooks. He's spent an hour last night looking up recipes. When Jonathan was falling asleep, Alec, in turn, couldn't so he stayed on his phone, scrolling and now he's following one recipe religiously.

Magnus assumes Alec is making full meals for the next few days because he can't possibly expect two additional people to eat all of this in one evening. The alpha doesn't say anything, just lets Alec take over the kitchen and lets him spend all of his nervous energy there. He takes over child care for the day completely, occupying Max with magic. Jon is unsurprisingly sleepy since the morning and Magnus hopes that won't mean another sleepless night for him and Alec later but he lets the baby sleep when he wants to. Hopefully, he'll be more lively by the time they have guests.
When Alec takes a second to step away from the counters and the oven, Magnus gets an extra sweet cup of coffee in return for his efforts to keep their sons from calling for Alec. Magnus tilts his head up for a kiss and gets that, too.

Since Magnus has free reign over their sons for the day, he's free to dress them how he wants, too. He conjures several sets for both boys and tries them until he chooses his favorites. He'd never be able to do it without magic, he knows. Dressing and undressing small children is a feat and he's glad to have magic for it.

At the appointed time, it's Magnus who opens the door to a pair of Shadowhunters waiting behind it. Alec is hovering five steps behind him, fidgeting. His nervousness reaches Magnus through the Bond but the alpha finds it easier to ignore it.

There is a second of pause between them because the two Shadowhunters are so focused on the thought of Alec, on their knowledge that Alec is supposed to be behind those doors which Magnus just opened…

And since Alec is right there behind Magnus, their eyes skip right over the warlock to their brother. It's a wonder they don't just run in, that they actually wait for Magnus to speak.

"Isabelle, Jace. Welcome, come in."

Isabelle looks away from Alec long enough to return the warlock's greeting but Jace seems to only see the one sight before him.

Despite that, Izzy is the one to throw herself at Alec first, her arms going around him and her cheek pressed to his chest. He holds her too, pressing them even closer.

Jace is standing still, looking at Alec as if he's trying to get his fill just by sight and Alec has to reach for him to pull him in, make Jace join them in the hug.

Magnus closes the door quietly. He's making himself unnoticeable so the siblings can have this moment.

It's honestly touching and heart-breaking to witness the reunion. These two young alphas have grown up with their older omega sibling always there for them. They had him to look after them and looked after him in return. They were violently separated when they knew he needed them the most... It doesn't matter what they are, Shadowhunters or not. Magnus's heart goes out to them even more now when they're not a concept, when they're right there in person and not just existing in Alexander's stories.

Alec has worried unnecessarily about this moment; what fills him is not shame about his past, no anxiety, no worry about the impending conversation and questions. What he feels is immense, encompassing relief. He's relieved to see Jace okay, alive, in one piece. He can touch him, he can make sure he's fine. He can hold his little sister close, feel her warmth, he can breathe in her scent once again.

And Jace… with their bond broken, Alec has to depend on his instincts instead. They're still an omega and an alpha, capable of rekindling the platonic kind of connection their dynamics can have. Alec has already been thinking about it. First, they need to reassure each other through physical touch.
At first, there are no words between them. None of them quite knows what to say and is it even necessary that they speak? All that needs to be understood is in their tight hug and in how long it lasts. That's what each of them needed.

When they do let go, Izzy is smiling widely at Alec, even though her eyes seem a little misty.

"You look good, big brother," she says.

"You do," Jace agrees. Then, he notes the most important thing. "You're mated."

Alec ducks his head, somehow embarrassed. "Not just that."

"You've Bonded?" Izzy exclaims. Her eyes are wide but she's smiling, a little disbelieving. "It must be new…? We didn't sense it right away."

"Yeah, um. Since yesterday." As he speaks, Alec can't hold back the return of his own smile. He doesn't specify that both the mating and Bonding took place yesterday.

"So you're happy?" Jace asks tentatively because this is their new reality: he has to ask or he has to guess because he can no longer feel it. He does remember the glimpses of Alec's emotions in the recent past and he knows those glimpses were of happiness but he wants to hear it from Alec's lips.

"Yes. Yes, I'm happy. Now that you're here… I have almost everything I could have wished for."

"Speaking of which, show us the baby!" Isabelle's eyes shine with curiosity and eagerness to meet the new addition to their family.

"I'll get him," Alec says and then gestures towards the main room. "Go sit down, we won't be doing this standing by the door."

Magnus steps in to take the lead and he shows the Shadowhunters in properly to their loft and offers drinks.

When Alec returns with Jon, all eyes are on him.

"Wow," Isabelle is first to speak. "He's beautiful."

"He looks just like you," Jace adds.

"You can hold him," Alec offers. "His name is Jonathan. We usually call him Jon for short."

Or Little Pea but that's Magnus's thing so Alec leaves that for Magnus.

Alec doesn't specify who can hold him but Izzy pushes Jace forward and Jace can't exactly say no, can he?

So he takes the baby from Alec's arms, overthinking every second the way he's holding him because this boy is so small. Jace is no giant, he's a perfectly average Nephilim but by the Angel, he certainly feels like a giant right then. Only once he's sure of his hold does he relax a little.

The baby is looking up at him wide-eyed and confused and he knows it's because he's a new face, a new voice and a new scent.

"Hey," he begins because it's the easiest way to talk to a baby, right?
The baby blinks. His eyes are the same as Alec's. It's too early to say much about other features but the hair and the eyes are Alec's and by the Angel, Jace wishes Maryse and Robert could see the baby now and try to deny he's anything but a Lightwood.

"Hey, little man," Jace goes on. "I'm your uncle, I guess. Sorry for getting here so late."

It hurts. It hurts that right now they're strangers to each other and there's no bond between them at all, even though this is his parabatai's child. He should have been there for them from day one, he should have been the one to protect them… instead, they've gone almost a full year without even seeing each other once.

But they'll make up for it, no matter what happens after this, no matter what the Law says.

The little boy smiles and makes a sound back at him, and Jace sees…

"Oh," he breathes and draws Izzy's attention. She looks over his shoulder and sees the same thing: the smiling baby has two rows of very sharp teeth and a forked tongue on top of that.

They both just stare for a while before Izzy says, "That has to be the most adorable sinister thing I've ever seen."

They both share a look and chuckle.

"He's perfect," they decide.

They sit on the couch together, Jace holding the boy and Isabelle trying to get him to smile again.

Being in Alec's home is like getting a glass of water after traversing a desert. Yes, there's the strong alpha scent mixed in with his but the sweet omega scent is easily distinguishable and it works like a balm. It's familiar, soothing, and it's what the Institute is missing. Has been missing for months and months. To Jace, it's like a cure on raw wounds that stayed hurting until he saw his parabatai in person. It can't fill the hole in his soul but it's definitely something that helps.

Meanwhile, Magnus retreats to go to check on Max, who is quietly playing with the big plushies he has in his bed while he's waiting for his own big reveal. Magnus knows in his heart there is no possibility of Alec's siblings doing anything else but accepting the little blue warlock but he can't know for sure their real thoughts. They're Alec's family and since he loves them so much, they must be like him, they must be good. Still, Alec's family will always be aware that Jonathan is half-Nephilim while Max is 'only' human and demonic.

Magnus knows Alec has also worried a lot about how to present Max to his siblings and that was a separate worry from the other worries on the omega's shoulders. Alec hasn't said a word about it to Magnus but the alpha knows him well enough to guess it on his own.

Magnus lets Max play with the rings on his right hand until Alexander pokes his head in the bedroom. He's smiling.

"Hey. Not sleeping?"

"No. He can hear voices he doesn't recognize."
"Will you come out to us now?"

"I thought you might want to have a private conversation?"

Alec shakes his head.

"Just like you've said, we're not doing the talk tonight. You've given us enough time, we could eat now and I want us all together."

"All right."

Magnus picks Max up and follows Alexander back to the main room. Isabelle and Jace are still sitting on the couch, close together and talking to Jonathan. They know Alec came to stand nearby but they're too focused on their current youngest family member to look up until Alec speaks up.

"I have something else to show you. Someone."

When they do look up and notice the blue child in Magnus's arms, they're both not sure what it means.

"A second baby?" Jace asks at the same time as Izzy asks, "Who's this?"

"He's um, he's mine, too. I adopted him." Alec clarifies quickly before they're too confused by it.

"Adopted? He's a warlock, right? Obviously?" Isabelle stands up to come up to take a better look, while Jace remains sitting because he's still too afraid of making a wrong move while he's holding Jon.

"Yeah. He's a warlock and he was abandoned."

She frowns. "Because he was born blue?"

Alec nods. "He didn't have horns from the start, they're still growing but yes, he was blue from the first time I saw him. In fact, I had him before Jonathan was born."

Izzy takes the new information in.

"So you really adopted him? He's our family, too?"

"Yes."

"You're amazing, you know that?" Izzy says, her voice changing. Magnus hopes she won't cry because he's sure that it'll make Alexander cry and Magnus isn't sure he'll be able to handle that even though the cause itself would be good.

"I named him Max," Alec says.

He doesn't speak of the reasons he chose those names for his sons, he doesn't speak of that dark time when he'd thought he might never see his siblings again. Yet. He'll speak of it someday and Izzy and Jace are too smart not to guess some of it. They learned the names and they must already draw some conclusions of their own.

"Okay, let me hold him. I want my turn, too," Isabelle says, the thick emotion no longer choking her once she shook it off.

Max goes to her happily because while she's an unknown person to him, there's enough shiny on
her to make him interested. She's wearing the jewelry Alec had gifted her through Clary and her dark red shirt is decorated with silver rings sewn down each sleeve. It isn't possible to hold onto those rings but Max still tries, his little fists grabbing onto the fabric.

Isabelle grins. "That's right, you know what's good. Finally, I'll have someone to appreciate my wardrobe. I'm sure your dad also knows what's in fashion," she says glancing at Magnus, "but even if he didn't, you'd have aunt Izzy to guide you."

---

They sit at the dinner table. Alec takes Jonathan from Jace to put him in the carrycot for the time being. Isabelle holds onto Max for a little longer, sitting him in her lap.

Alec watches them fondly.

When Jace isn't occupied with the baby, he's watching Alec instead. Magnus can see it, the way he's unwilling to look away in case Alec decides to disappear. Magnus understands that particular fear rather well after all the scares he's had with his omega. It's good that they're taking the step forward to get Alec's family back if only because Magnus will appreciate having more people to contact in case something, anything happens in the future. Especially because they're Shadowhunters, which Magnus has lacked on his 'acquaintances' list.

Magnus knows the young Lightwoods are holding back around him and he knows it's because of his place in the Downworld hierarchy and because he's the older and the stronger alpha. He doesn't want them to be wary of him but while they're meeting for the first time, it's better that they're more careful than not.

Alec puts the highchair next to Isabelle and takes Max from her. "Come on, we don't want your aunt's pretty clothes to be messy."

Magnus sets the table with magic but he makes sure to say the food was made by Alec. Both Jace and Izzy stare at the omega.

"What?" Alec frowns. "I've cooked before."

"Sure. Pasta with sauce from the jar," Jace points out.

"And pancakes," Izzy adds as if she has any leg to stand on here.

Alec shrugs. "I've had the time to branch out. And you loved that pasta, don't pretend you didn't."

"All right," Isabelle turns to Alec after taking only one bite from her plate. "Tell the whole story. How did you meet?"

"By chance," Magnus answers first. "I saw him and I had to know who he was."

He and Alec look at each other.

"Magnus found out I needed a little help and he offered it." Alec continues.
"So how long have you been living here?" Jace asks.

"Since September." Alec glances at Magnus trying to remember if he's saying the correct time. "Yes, it was the end of September."

"And before that?"

"I was with the New York Pack," Alec answers shortly.

They're surprised but not overly so.

"I have friends among them now. I guess I could say I was adopted into the Downworld society. I got lucky."

"That's good," Isabelle says. "We're glad you weren't on your own."

Alec agrees but doesn't meet their eyes.

---

Isabelle is looking between her brother and his mate. She's getting used to the reality of this new relationship (new for her), she's becoming familiar with the new scents and that strange aura of a full Bond which, now that she knows it's there, is easy to sense.

Yes, she's spoken to Magnus back in the Institute, she'd instinctively accepted him as someone good, but now she's got the time to see him and Alec together and she has the time to judge if she was right. She knows she was.

The way Alec is looking at Magnus is reflected in the way Magnus is looking back. She can't see any fault in the alpha's behavior and that is, of course, as things should be. She knows Jace is more wary, more distrustful, but she came here resolved to see the proof of Alec's happiness and safety and nothing else.

More superficially, she notices the expensive fabric of Alec's shirt, which is exactly the dark color he has always chosen to wear. His clothes are very Alec but they're visibly leagues above what he used to wear. Hell, they might even be tailored.

And he looks good. He looks healthy and his aura is good as well. Clearly, her brother has been thriving here.

As for Magnus Bane, he is a beautiful man and the way he dresses and carries himself is the fanciest she's seen so far. He's not at all what she would have thought her brother would go for but apparently, he's exactly it. His power is obvious but it comes naturally, not obnoxiously and she can see that although it's his home, he's holding back to let Alec, Jace and herself talk and be together.

Magnus Bane is a catch but Alec is too.

Izzy thinks of how they've missed out on teasing Alec's boyfriend, they've missed out on telling the man of all the ways their brother is special and worth only the best treatment.

Now, it's his chosen Bonded mate and that's too big of a deal to treat him with anything but respect. Besides, both Izzy and Jace would have used their alpha status "against" whatever Clave-approved mate their parents had wanted for Alec but it wouldn't be proper against the High Warlock.
Maybe with time, they'll get to the delayed teasing, they'll get to do what they never got to do while the courting was happening. With time.

For now, Izzy sees the easy, honest affection in their eyes and she's content with that and hopes that Jace can see it too.

They do reach the touchy topic, the Institute. Alec admits he hasn't thought much about the Head's invitation yet because he was too preoccupied with the mating and then planning to see his siblings.

"You know that you can set the conditions," Isabelle says because she wants this to happen. "She'll agree to meet you outside of the Institute and you'll have all of us there for you in case of foul play. Which I don't believe will come from Lydia. She's not that kind of person."

"You're on good terms?" Alec asks.

"She's fair. Actually, she's a lot like you. Just like you've been while you were leading us. Fair and strict. Very serious." Isabelle smiles at the memories.

"But she's also loyal to the Clave and the Law," Jace adds. "She might decide you're not deserving of amnesty or however they'd like to call letting you be."

"There's a possibility," Izzy replies, looking at Jace "but look at how she's treated us so far. Put the worry about Alec aside for a moment and think, do you believe she'd be acting worse to him than to us?"

"Maybe not," Jace admits.

Magnus speaks to Alec: "You know I'm in favor of you taking the chance to improve your standing with the Institute, if not the rest of your society. What Isabelle said: we can meet wherever and if you're afraid of doing it, I can promise you now you'll be well protected."

Alec looks down at his plate.

"Yeah, I know. I don't really want to discuss this right now."

"Of course, darling, we don't need to."

"I'll do it," Alec adds. "I just don't want to think about it tonight."

"All right, big brother. Though we'd probably insist that you hurry up if you weren't with the High Warlock." Isabelle says.

Magnus doesn't point out that "being with" him hasn't helped Alexander much when he was in Iris's house but maybe it's different now with the Bond in place. Magnus should now be able to know more, sense more, be able to act quicker. Besides, even without discussing it, both he and Alexander will want to stay together and lay low for the immediate future.

Alec gets to talk about Magnus for a change, instead of talking about himself. He tells his Shadowhunter siblings how much he's learned about this side of the Shadow World, how much he's seen of the High Warlock's work. He doesn't mention he has potion recipes memorized in his
He talks of Max's magic (though the boy doesn't show any of his bubble talent that evening). He talks of what a wonderful father Magnus is and for once he's the one to make the alpha blush.

After that, he mentions the gym and his replacement bow. They bring up that single arrow he'd left behind while helping out the patrol of young Shadowhunters.

"I've noticed you're not flabby from your new rich life," Jace teases. "We'll have to spar sometime, see if you're still any good."

Alec grins. He'll be happy to try himself against Jace. They won't be able to do it as they used to in the Institute, but there are plenty of places for them to go to in New York.

- 

As minutes pass, Izzy and Jace are less like outsiders and instead become more at home in the atmosphere of the loft. That is the goal, to get Alec's blood family back permanently and that'll mean more visits.

Though they are reluctant to leave, Izzy eventually suggests that it's time to go. She'd love to stay, grab a blanket and curl up at Alec's side to sleep... She's already planning the next time they'll come over but for now, she's thinking that there are small children to think of and even if Alec wants them to stay as much as they want to stay, there's no need to push it this late into the night. Maybe if he were living alone they could sit all night talking but this is another alpha's home, too.

The hug for goodnight is nearly as long as their 'welcome' one.

"Hey, Jace," Alec remembers he wanted to say something.

"Yeah?"

"We could go out sometime, you could bring Clary."

Jace's eyes widen but then he smiles at the mention of Clary's name. It makes Alec happy to see it.

"Sure. I'll see you soon?"

"Nothing will stop us now."

Izzy and Jace go, leaving Alec uplifted but also empty when they're out of his sight.

* 

That night, when they go to bed together, Magnus remains awake after Alec's eyes close and his breathing slows, and he's watching the omega. There are many thoughts on the warlock's mind.

He's realizing that ever since he met Alec he's had many reasons to worry and yet it's not what's driving him in his life with Alec. He's not acting on worries, he's acting on hope.

He'd hoped, at first, that he'd be able to care for the strange single-parent omega. He'd hoped that the omega wouldn't find himself another alpha before Magnus thought it was appropriate to show
his own intentions. After that, he'd hoped his feelings would be returned and then that Alexander
wouldn't change his mind about him. Hope, hope, hope. That they'll be able to live openly in the
Shadow World without fearing the Clave.

For all the bad that Magnus has experienced in his long life, he has a good feeling about this.

* * *

In the morning, they make love for the second time. Not so overwhelmed as he was by his first
time, Alec is definitely more active and Magnus loves every second of it. He's known his omega's
appetites from the first time they began being intimate and he's happy to be reminded of them in
the best of ways.

His demanding lover has a leg hooked over his, his nails are digging into his back. The alpha
thrusts deep, making his omega gasp. More sweet sounds follow and when Magnus means to slow
down, he's urged not to.

He dots Alexander's throat with more love marks and he's sure he's gained some marks of his own.

Magnus had missed having a steady lover. He'd gone without one on purpose (at the same time he
hadn't met anyone who'd make him want to change his mind) but it didn't mean he enjoyed being
alone with only one night stands to break up the monotony.

His lips find Alec's and they share another kiss. They're both close and the kiss is messy, rushed,
perfect.

Alec comes first with a cry and the way his body tightens around Magnus makes the alpha want to
sob. He's so close, too. And finally his pleasure reaches that point of no return and he comes inside
his omega.

The air is heavy with their scents and the sounds of their quickened breathing. They're both left
trying to catch their breaths, both holding onto the other, separating only enough to change position
to lay comfortably beside each other until it's time to face the new day.

* *

Alec calls Luke. He's lucky to catch the alpha when he isn't too busy to pick up and have a short
conversation with him. Alec's at home, unable to take a walk outside because of the atrocious
weather that surprised the city at dawn.

"Hey, Alec. What's up?" Luke's voice sounds like he's moving somewhere but there are no signs of
urgency and it doesn't sound like he's at the precinct, so Alec goes on with what he wanted to say.

"I was wondering, since we missed you back at the birthday party, if you'd like to have dinner or
lunch - or breakfast if you want – with me and my mate."

He waits for an answer and for Luke to catch the word.

"Sure! Of course I do. Your mate, huh?"

"It's a new thing." Alec tries to act casual and mostly fails. "We haven't really told anyone except
my siblings yet… which is another thing we can talk about in person."

"There's a lot to catch up on, then? All right, so this week? I've got… let me think, I've got time the
day after tomorrow, so that's Thursday. We can have a long lunch then."
"Great. I'll text you the place if we decide on somewhere else than Jade Wolf?"

"Sure. Hey, Alec?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm happy for you."

Alec smiles before he replies, "Thanks, Luke."

* * *

Magnus gets his enchanted pendant back from the Institute's vault. He barely spares a thought to Camille while he reads the text at the back of the silver jewelry. His heart is too full now, it is taken care of so well by love that all the power Camille used to have over him over the many, many years is broken. It's in the past, it's not a part of his life anymore.

He has his rock now, his true rock.

Magnus intends to send the pendant to a warlock who's capable of breaking the stone apart without breaking the enchantment on it and he can remake it into anything Magnus wishes. What Magnus wishes is this: a ring for Alexander, to warn him of demonic presence and for him to carry as a token of Magnus's love. He knows Alexander isn't interested in jewelry for himself but with the practical use of the enchantment he'll surely accept it and wear it. The other parts of the gem he wants to be made into little rings that their sons will be able to carry as pendants while they're still young and then while they're teenagers. Later, they'll be able to commission the same warlock or another one to make something else for them, depending on what'll suit them best.

Magnus knows that'll take some time to craft, what with the high demand the warlock is in.

After discussing it with Alec, Magnus sends news to his warlock friends. They haven't really found the time to get all together after the official party and it's high time they do so. If Ragnor had shown up for a short while before, he'll surely show up again if he knows Magnus has Bonded. Magnus is looking forward to seeing his reaction to that.
"They're really in love, aren't they?" Jace said when he and Izzy walked out of the door of the building where their brother's new home was.

They walked into the cold night, both immediately missing the physical and the emotional warmth they'd basked in moments before.

His words weren't really a question but Izzy answered. Yes, they were in love. Their brother was safe, taken care of and has found love.

"I don't think I've seen anyone else this happy in a relationship…" Jace spoke again.

It was true. Since meeting Clary, Jace has been starting to truly understand how another person could make one happy but it was still a new thing to him and they were dating. Meanwhile, for Alec, it was so much more. He chose his bonded mate and to Jace it seemed so soon. Before, Alec hadn't wanted to mate by 21 as was expected of him… Now, Jace guessed that love made all the difference and considering that Shadowhunters love for life… well, there probably wasn't any reason for Alec to delay mating. His career was no longer a part of his problems, either.

Jace was quiet the rest of the way and Izzy had a lot to think of, too. She thought of Max, who used to ask about Alec every time she saw him but who had eventually accepted that he had to wait until any news appeared. Since this day, Izzy looked forward to seeing Max. Things were going to be different. They might not have gotten Alec truly back, they were not getting him back in his room in the Institute where he used to be within their reach, but they've found him. They had him back in their lives, knowing where to go to see him and it was enough.

Isabelle's thoughts skipped from issue to issue, such as Alec's future meeting with Lydia.

She did not think of their parents, she did not care to think of them. Neither she nor Jace would be mentioning finding Alec to them until Alec himself wanted to contact them.

They were coming back to the Institute with a secret, but a secret that made them lighter for knowing it. They were going to sleep well that night. Knowing where they could run to, should Alec need them, knowing the number to call, knowing that he lived with the High Warlock who provided the best security to be found in the city: all that made the Lightwood siblings breathe easier after long last.
There was a reason why Lydia didn't send out an official request for the High Warlock to assist with the investigation against Iris Rouse. One, the investigation is continued the Shadowhunter way, through Shadowhunter means and two, it's because the High Warlock's already well aware of the issue. It doesn't matter if Lydia trusts that he's the right man for his position, if he's a man who'll do what's right even if it's his people that are wanted.

Lydia's met him and she's had the chance to look into his eyes and what she knows is this: he's an alpha whose omega was hurt, even if indirectly, because of Rouse's actions on the wrong side of the law. He's not going to leave that alone and he doesn't need letters from the Institute to remind him of the issue.

She's less sure if she'll get any information from him if something's done about this before the Shadowhunters find Rouse but that's a question for a later time.

Magnus indeed did not forget about Iris, her house or the notebook Alec had brought back with him. He didn't go immediately because the place surely was crawling with Shadowhunters for at least two days and during those days Magnus has been otherwise occupied. He's been focused on Alexander, his well-being, then his brother's well-being. Many things were more important than going to a place Magnus knew would be cleared by the warlock woman, anyway.

When he does go there, he's certain that he'll be the only one present there, no more Nephilim around. Magnus doesn't expect much and he doesn't find much. Remains of wards, echoes of magic that he can easily sense but which no longer serve a purpose. This building is abandoned, signed off as a loss and it's not because he wasted time getting here. Still, it might tell something someone as old and skilled as Magnus is. He walks the corridors, he finds the evidence of a fight. A broken cabinet, long-dried and darkened blood. He does his best to ignore it.

There are ingredients, some items with magical properties but they're commonly used in the warlock society and therefore of no use to him.

He goes through each room, finding evidence of babies and their mothers living here before. He moves on from the living space back downstairs until he discovers the door down to the basement levels. Now there, he does find something.

Demonic residue, a strong evil aura that he can sense both as a warlock and as an alpha fills a cell-like room which Magnus finds at the end of the corridor. Bars in the window, bars on one side of the room… chains.

There isn't anything living in there and hasn't been here recently. Whatever demon used to be trapped here, Rouse must have banished it or killed it the day she disappeared with everything else. Shadowhunters must know this, too, and Magnus can imagine what they were thinking about warlocks.

Magnus calmly goes back to the ground level and sends a fire message to Catarina, asking her to find some time for him.

He waits. When she answers that she's free, Magnus portals to her home and then takes her back to Rouse's house with him to save time.

Only when they look through the house together and end up in the basement again, does he allow
himself to let go of the forced calmness.

"I can't even focus on ideas for finding her because I'm thinking that he was here, in this building, alone. Anything could have happened to him and I wouldn't- I wouldn't have even known." Magnus is saying, his voice raising a little because he can't hold it back.

Catarina doesn't offer any quick reassuring words because she, too, realizes the danger Alec had been in.

Knowing what Magnus told her of what Alec had told him, Catarina assumes that the fact that he already had a baby warlock made Alec not a target. If he had the baby with him at the time of the visit, however… Well, it was good that Alec had enough sense to avoid that.

Catarina helps Magnus run a second magical scan but they only confirm what they already found and there's nothing new to be sensed and used.

There's still the notebook with protections on it and Magnus needs to plan how to approach it again safely for him and to avoid destroying it while attempting to undo the protection.

For now, they are left with the problem of stopping anything like this from repeating in a new location. They'll have to talk about it, not just among the two of them but with the other warlocks as well.

This is what Magnus hates the most – his people doing evil things when the world's already filled with them.

They leave the building in worsened moods.

* * *

On Thursday, as planned, Alec and Magnus get dressed, pack the pram and bundle up the kids. They're meeting Luke for dinner and they take a cab to get there.

It's all very mundane.

They get to the place first and get settled, Alec taking Max to sit in his lap while Jonathan stays sleeping in the pram. Magnus had suggested this restaurant, where he didn't have the opportunity to bring Alec yet but it's a nice place for the sort of social meeting they're about to have. It's not too fancy and it has decently sized booths to provide comfortable privacy.

Magnus orders a warming, non-alcoholic drink for Alec while they wait for Luke to get there. They look through the menu to pass the time.

When Luke joins them, coming to their booth with freshly fallen snowflakes on his coat, Magnus stands up to greet him and Alec would, too, if Max wasn't currently trying his best to twist out of Alec's arms and onto the floor. He does stop the attempts, though, because Luke is someone familiar to him and he takes up Max's attention.

The werewolf alpha is smiling at them, looking especially fondly at the squirming boy.

After greetings, they sit down and order food quickly, since Alec and Magnus had the time to choose what they wanted before and Luke picked the first thing that sounded good to him. When the waiter leaves, Magnus speaks.

"I wished to thank you for taking care of Alexander when he'd needed it."
"Oh, it was nothing. Maybe except for when he made it difficult by trying to squirm out of accepting help just like the little one is doing right now," he says, pointing to Max.

Alec huffs, acting offended, but he accepts the remark as the truth.

"It was nothing?" Magnus repeats, amused. "Except for when it contributed to a change in leadership among your people?"

Luke leans back in his seat and waves his hand dismissively. "It was nothing," he repeats.

They pause their conversation when they're served their food. Alec takes the time to reconsider the earlier offer of the restaurant's baby chair which he'd declined because he planned to keep Max in his lap but it seems it'll be better to put him somewhere with convenient straps. Alec also thinks about how spoiled he is by his warlock mate, who – if they were at home – could call the highchair to them with a thought and a snap of his fingers.

When they're alone again, Magnus continues, "I do know Alexander's proud and capable but no one's meant to be all on their own. Especially not someone whose life changed so much suddenly."

"Original credit goes to Alaric," Alec interrupts before Luke can say anything, wanting to take the focus off of himself. "He was the one who'd stopped the car that night, though I never did ask him if he'd thought I was a drug dealer or a prostitute. Or a drug-dealing prostitute."

And if Alec has his way, Alaric will never know that he'd ended up being a blood-dealing omega.

"Well, I'm willing to personally thank everyone who made sure you stayed safe so I got to meet you in the end," Magnus says and gives Alec that look which makes the omega warm with happiness.

"So. Is there going to be a party?" Luke asks, looking between them.

"We're not getting married," Alec answers. "At least not now, but Magnus will probably want to. He loves social.. stuff," Alec adds, looking at his alpha.

"Of course I'd love a wedding," Magnus says easily. "But we both agree it's not the time for it."

Weddings are for the friends and family and when Alec's family is still divided, he's not in the mood for anything resembling a wedding. Unfortunately, for him, a made family of friends is just not enough. And maybe Alec's heart beats stronger at the thought of it – the briefest image in his head of a ceremony where he could show everyone his mate and yes, he'd like to have it. Just not any time soon.

"The pack will at least expect a good evening of drinks at the Hunter's Moon," Luke hints.

"Yeah, I'll be telling Maia about us soon," Alec says, knowing that telling Maia will include Bat, the other young werewolves he knows and Simon, who's not a werewolf and it's a wonder how the pack members who see him the most often deal with that. Alec figures it's his dynamic making him easier to accept with all his talking but Alec himself being an omega is immune to it. Or maybe it's Alec who's too sensitive to it. Or maybe he's only pretending to be annoyed at this point.

"I'm happy for you and everyone else will be, too," Luke says warmly, looking at Alec.

Alec knew to expect nothing else than this but hearing the words still gives him a good feeling. He's not going to get anything near this acceptance of his relationship from his parents, so he wants to get it from somewhere else.
Remembering how their phone call went, Luke asks: "So, your family? You've met with them?"

Alec nods.

"Yes. My sister and my brother. It was… I'd been waiting for it and I wish I could see my youngest brother too, but… getting them back, it almost makes it all all right." Alec searches for words, his fingers flexing in a nervous manner. "I mean, having Magnus and having them back, it's almost enough."

"But the things that are missing are too important to get over," Luke completes the thought. "I get it, I really do."

Magnus puts his hand on Alec's.

"I do believe you can get more of those things back, Angel. Starting with making your presence in the city and your position in the Shadow World clear with the Institute."

Luke gives them a questioning gaze.

"The Head of the Institute expressed her interest in meeting with me." Alec clarifies. "I guess it's to hear my side of the story."

"Well, I suppose you don't have to worry about your safety if you do meet with her. And if you only ask, we can make doubly sure no one tries anything."

"Thank you, I don't think it'll be necessary. I don't expect anything from her… although I can't be certain about someone else trying anything." Alec sighs. "I don't even know if they still care about me at all."

Him being attacked by the Shadowhunters had nothing to do with his past, with him as a person. They didn't have any idea who he even was at the time and it was his mistake to be there in the first place.

He's probably never getting rid of that original fear for his baby's safety from the Clave but it's so much easier to handle his fears now that he feels Magnus's presence constantly in his soul.

They talk about it some more, they eat their food and Max makes a mess of the fruit mousse he's received. Alec apologizes for it to the passing waiter even though he knows Magnus will clean it up perfectly before they leave the restaurant.

Luke mentions pack matters that could be of interest to Alec and to Magnus as the High Warlock. Things have been going rather well lately and the werewolves haven't been encountering many issues as a group.

After the strong activity from the Shadowhunters, the vampires were mostly left alone, as well. Magnus knows that from Raphael.

As for the Warlocks, Magnus is always waiting to hear any news from his people about Iris Rouse but she's pretty much disappeared with the child – or children – that she had under her questionable care.
There are moments in their conversation when Alec has the impression that Luke has something on his mind, like he wants to say something more but holds back. Alec has no idea what it could be and he doesn't comment on it since he might just be imagining it. Even if he isn't imagining it, he's the last person to be pushing others to speak what's bothering them.

After they part ways with Luke, the Bonded pair goes for a walk even though there isn't much to see around that particular street. They take another taxi to the park, making the most of the acceptable weather of the day.

Magnus enjoys their walks in the city if only because it fills him with pride to see how passers-by look at his family: his beautiful mate and their equally beautiful children. Magnus's alpha nature in the past has been partially fulfilled by his leadership role and his taking care of Downworlders who needed it but… having his private life finally complete is what he'd truly needed.

He's always been self-aware enough to know he couldn't substitute that with the number of acquaintances he had, the parties, even the respect he'd gained for himself over the years. He's known he would always be missing the family life he'd lost when his age was still in the single digit. But now, Alexander walks at his side, his hands on the handle of the pram, hazel eyes moving between the path ahead and his boys inside the pram. When he feels Magnus is watching him, he turns to him. They share a smile.

* *

When Max and Jon fall asleep at the same time, Magnus manages to entice Alec to join him in the large tub in his bathroom, for a long soak. It's actually all that Magnus wants (for the first half-hour, at least) and they enjoy the warmth of the water and the bubbles scented like tropical flowers and some other weirdly-named (in Alec's opinion) thing.

Alec's leaning back on his alpha, the back of his head resting near Magnus's shoulder. Magnus can rest his cheek on the top of Alec's head, his black curls a soft cushion.

Magnus runs his fingertips up and down Alec's right shoulder and arm, spreading foam as he repeats the lazy movement. They talk about insignificant things, whatever comes to their minds. Magnus makes music play in the background and they exchange artificial light overhead for a variety of candles on the tub's edge and around the sink. Time is running slowly.

In his half-lying position, Alec's submerged up to his collarbones and he feels like he's never getting out of the tub. Why would he when he has his mate as his backrest, their legs are touching underwater, Magnus is telling him stories in a soft voice and Alec isn't sleepy but he's relaxed and his mind is clear of thoughts.

Alec knows he's grown spoiled by Magnus, he's gotten used to this sort of life he was brought to and then the sort of life they've made together. He knows it isn't a bad thing but he's been a Shadowhunter far longer than he's been here in the loft and guilt sometimes reminds him of all the things he's not doing… but usually when it does, soon enough he hears crying which reminds him he's most certainly not on a year-long holiday or he's helping Magnus in the apothecary on a particularly urgent order, or he gets a call from Maia asking for his input on a problem… and he feels good about himself again.
In the bathtub, his body is like warm jelly. Even with the wonderfully firm muscles of his mate's body in constant contact with his own body, Alec's not thinking of anything sexual. He's too content just as they are.

Magnus shifts a little bit, reaches up to Alec's hair and puts some foam in it before calling the glass bottle of shampoo to his hand to pour a little out on Alec's head.

Magnus's magical fingers massaging the shampoo into his hair is the last thing that was needed to make the omega purr. Treating the task seriously, Magnus leaves no hair untouched and then proceeds to raise spikes out of them. Then he builds a mohawk, then slicks all the dark hair back to rinse the shampoo off.

"Did I ever mention I used to be a hairstylist for a time? I don't think I did."

"You didn't. And I'm not surprised." Alec says, tilting his head back to glance at Magnus.

"No? I'm predictable?"

"Hair, fashion," Alec pauses, "I don't really see you making jewelry but the other things, sure."

"I do enjoy pretty things. Besides, the world always worked this way that being involved in art gives one more… slack. It's easier to be different when the others can wave it off as eccentrics of an artist. Or when you're old, then it's easier, too."

Alec huffs. "Maybe, but not when you constantly look to be in your absolute prime."

"Is that how you see me? Thank you, Alexander."

Alec leaves it at that. They sit in silence, Magnus busy putting the conditioner into Alec's hair.

"I can't imagine how difficult life must have been for you- as a warlock and everything else. I mean, all about you is special and I can't picture you just blending in the background anywhere."

Alec says, immediately mentally cringing at himself.

"I was always… too much." Magnus agrees. "A warlock, an Asian in the Western world, and then I became open with my sexuality."

Alec's doing his best to read Magnus to know if he should be apologizing for bringing this up at all but it seems it's okay. He knows what his mate just said is just plain facts, he's not mocking Alec's words.

"You're not too much," Alec says because this, at least, he's sure of saying out loud. "You're exactly enough. For me." And then he keeps going because sometimes his mouth doesn't know when to stop when he's with Magnus. "In fact, sometimes I feel like I might never have enough of you."

Alec feels his alpha's arms wrap around him.

"This feeling's mutual, Angel."

Alec relaxes, leaning against his mate.

"I can't imagine how hard it had been for you," Alec begins again after a minute or two, "because, I think, if only I'd been born an alpha, everything would have been perfect for me."

Magnus makes an encouraging sound, listening to what Alec wants to say.
"I liked being a Shadowhunter. I loved it. I never wished I'd been born as something else than Nephilim. It was hard work but I wanted to do it. If I'd been an alpha, I would have had all the same things, the career I wanted… and I would have none of the sacrifices I was expected to make as an omega. I would have the position I wanted and my mate would need to be suitable but they'd be my choice… and I'd meet them without resenting them from the start. I know I could love them."

Magnus is silent for a short while. Alec's looking at the ceiling bathed in candlelight and he's thinking about this life that never happened.

"But you're an omega, love," Magnus tells him gently, "and you're an exceptionally good one."

"Does this imply I'd be a lousy alpha?"

Magnus chuckles. "Not at all. I believe you'd indeed be perfect as one. But don't think for a moment I wouldn't have met you then and that I wouldn't have done my best to seduce you."

At that, Alec laughs. They don't speak about the heavy things anymore.

After a while, the alpha hums. "I sold real estate, too."

Alec's eyebrows raise. "Oh?"

"It had to do with a request from an acquaintance, the money I already had and the fact I didn't have anything better to do. I sold their house and land for a better sum than they were expecting to get… After that, I got rid of some of my own apartments and then I somehow ended up continuing for a while. It was entertaining. And good money."

Alec makes a thoughtful sound. "Good to know I've got such a versatile man for my mate."

There's a second of silence from Magnus and then, "You have no idea how, darling. But that conversation might be better left for another evening."

Eventually, they wash off the scented foam, shampoos and conditioners and get out, helping each other dry off with the extra-large fluffy towels.

Soon enough they're in Magnus's bed, the alpha enjoying the bath-warmed body of his omega in his arms and the sweet scent filling his nose.

**

They're just finishing their late dinner on Saturday when there's someone at the door. Alec, who's finished eating faster than Magnus and is currently standing by the counter, puts away the freshly cleaned baby bottles and turns to his mate, telling him to stay seated and that he'll get it.

There's Jace behind the door, alone. Alec can't stop himself from looking him over, right away searching for signs of injury because why would Jace show up… but no, he's looking just fine, wearing a holster with his sword but there are no signs of a recent fight on him. There's water from melted snowflakes in his hair.
He's looking at Alec expectantly and Alec's brain catches up to what's normal. He asks Jace to come in.

"Is it a bad time?" Jace asks, stopping before going in deeper into the loft. "I haven't called and I know you've got your own stuff now-"

Alec interrupts him.

"No, it's actually a good time. Did you… just come to visit? Or is something going on."

Jace shakes his head. He follows Alec into the loft.

"Everything's fine, I was just not far from here and I thought…"

As he's speaking, Jace is looking around the place, taking it in for only the second time. He acknowledges Magnus with a nod and Magnus, in turn, asks him if he'd like anything to eat. Jace shakes his head.

Magnus doesn't miss how the young alpha's attention switches between Alec and the kids constantly as if he's still on limited time to see them. Jonathan's in a nest of blankets on the couch, Max is on his playmat, as usual.

"It's strange, you know," Jace tells Alec, "before, I could just find you in the office or in your room, or training. Now you've got," he gestures at the loft in general, "a whole life."

"I do," Alec agrees. "But you're still my family and I want you in my life, too. I won't be as easy for you two to bother as before but you don't have to wait for an invitation to come over. Just, you know, let me know first."

"Okay."

They're in silence for a few seconds and in those seconds, Alec makes a decision in his head.

"Magnus, will you…" Alec begins, wanting to ask the warlock to take over looking after Max and Jon. He's understood right away.

"I've got everything. Go talk to your brother."

Alec shows Jace his room. He hasn't done that the first time they'd visited with Izzy. Jace eyes the nest, bigger than Alec ever made in the Institute. He spots the items they've sent him, too, including his jacket.

Jace didn't come here with a purpose in mind other than to see Alec again but he can clearly see Alec is wanting to speak. So he waits, while looking around the room curiously. Beyond the wealth of soft items on the bed and the baby crib and other baby items by the wall, the room is very Alec. There's not much to be seen on the furniture: the desk is clean, the nightstand has only a lamp and a glass with water. Everything else is tucked away in drawers and shelves, behind the dark wood door of the wardrobe.

Meanwhile, Alec fidgets.

"You can sit," he points to the chair by the desk and Jace does. Alec sits on the edge of his bed a
few seconds later.

He'd clearly like to pace instead, Jace can tell.

"You've got to know," Alec begins, "a lot had happened after I left."

"No shit," Jace replies. "Alec, we know you had it tough. If you're trying to explain yourself to me, you don't have to."

"No, I do. Need to. For myself. It's not something I can or want to keep to myself."

Jace doesn't say anything else and he waits.

"When I was really on my own," Alec begins, "I didn't just... sit in the park and wait it out. I had some money at the beginning which I knew I had to hold onto as best as I could but no matter what I did, it was only enough for a while. I had to do something and I admit it was by accident and I wouldn't have come up with it otherwise."

Alec stands back up and Jace watches his brother pace, watches his hands moving in an attempt to help get his words out and the frustration is clear in his body language. It's so familiar to see all those things that were always a part of Alec and Jace drinks them in, on one hand relieved to see that Alec is still Alec and he hasn't become someone Jace wouldn't know after this past year. On the other hand, he can't be happy about it, because he's also using his ears and what Alec is trying to begin to tell him... Jace knows it'll hurt him and it'll hurt Alec to remember it.

He listens and it's difficult but he doesn't interrupt Alec and he tries not to imagine all the worst case scenarios Alec might be talking about. Jace doesn't ask questions which might speed it up because he'd made enough mistakes with Alec in the past and the absolute last thing he wants now is to make him back away and reconsider telling Jace the truth.

"So I sold my blood," Alec says plainly, getting the main point of it out in as few words as possible, surprising both of them. "I got money from vampires for bags of my blood."

He's ripping the band-aid off, one fast pull. Jace's eyes are wide.

"I got bags, I filled only one at a time to sell it. Once I wasn't carrying Jonathan anymore, I raised my rate and let them bite me. I got a lot more this way and it was almost enough for everything that I needed."

Then, Alec deflates. "But I didn't have a plan for the future. I was going day to day, and I had a newborn and a two-month-old and I didn't have anything figured out."

Jace is still giving him the wide-eyed look, his lips are parted as if he really wants to say something but does not have the words.

"And then Magnus showed up at my door," Alec goes on, "and it terrified me at first but... he had all the answers. I knew he was probably the most powerful alpha around and he had money and magic that I'd need later on."

Alec's whole posture relaxes a little and his face softens when he speaks of the warlock and none of that escapes Jace's attention.

"I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for him but I'm not with him because I didn't have a better choice. I want that to be clear. He was the best father to my children before we even considered the possibility of the two of us... being something to each other."
"And he makes you happy," Jace says.

"Yeah," Alec smiles. "I didn't even know I could feel that way. From the day I met him, it was like- like I was getting my sanity back bit by bit every day."

"We can see that. And about everything else- you know that doesn't matter to us, right?" Jace raises his hand when Alec opens his mouth to protest. "It's not just words, okay? I'm not… ignoring or dismissing everything you just told me. I know what you're thinking, that doing what you did disgraced you as a Shadowhunter."

Alec nods.

"I'm sure someone would think that but it's not what I think, or Izzy."

Now it's Jace who grows agitated, running his fingers through his hair.

"Look, what I really want to do right now is to go out, find the vampire bastard who put the idea in your head to do that- I know you didn't come up with it yourself, Alec. And you said it was by accident or something so I just know someone tried something with you."

"I turned it to my advantage," Alec says as if it makes it better.

"Yeah, of course you did, because you're smart and you're-" Jace searches for words. "You also always had the answers and you always knew what was the right thing to do. Without you, we were so lost."

"I'm sorry." Alec answers immediately, his heart remembering the pain it's gone through for his siblings. "I'm sorry, I couldn't have done it differently. I couldn't have known for sure if it was safe for you and for us. I can't change the past and I wouldn't have changed it if I could because there wasn't another way."

"I know." Jace sighs, resigned. "But you could have… I don't know. Let us know something. Anything."

Alec smiles ruefully. "Be honest, if I'd done anything to contact you, it'd only have encouraged you two."

"Probably, yeah! And maybe it'd have led to something other than what we ended up with!"

Alec's lungs are tight with the hurt he's feeling radiate from his brother.

"Jace, I'm so sorry about our runes, it was an accident that we ran into each other-"

"Fuck, Alec, of course it's not your fault that it happened. I just wish you didn't keep us in the dark. I said you don't need to explain yourself to us but I can be angry about you hiding from us."

Alec looks at the floor. The emotions are running high in them both, and it's evident in the scent filling the room. Still, it's not a bad thing. This was supposed to happen.

Taking a step forward, Alec reaches for Jace's hand with both of his.

"I can't change the past," he says, softer. "And like I said, I wouldn't have changed most of my choices. But I'm making different ones now. I'm not alone anymore and I'm not scared anymore. I still have my sons to protect but I also have Magnus to do it with me. I want to make it all up to you and Izzy as best as I can."
Jace looks at his hand in Alec's. He takes a breath.

"Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah, let's just… let's move forward."

"Am I forgiven?" Alec smiles tentatively but he already knows what his brother will say. Jace makes a face. "I guess. If you promise things will get better now."

"Yes, I promise," Alec says, determined. "We're only going up from here."

When they leave Alec's room, Magnus is on the balcony, watching the city. He returns inside when he notices them in the living room.

"Everything all right?" he asks, looking at Alec.

"Yeah. Everything's good."

The omega goes around the coffee table to pick up Max from the playpen.

"Here," he says when he goes back to where Jace is standing. "Hold him for a while. I want them to be familiar with you and Iz."

Magnus is once again amused by the young alpha's almost terrified expression at the prospect of holding a baby. Under the amusement, his emotions are a little more complicated when he's looking at a Runed, dressed-in-black Shadowhunter holding his child. He'll have to get used to the sight.

When Magnus stands near his omega, he puts his arm around him. Even if he didn't just feel pain and anxiety through their bond, he could get it all from the scent of his mate. He doesn't say anything, just plants a kiss on Alexander's cheek.
Friends

Chapter Summary

Today: Lydia. Next up: Pandemonium, more Lightwoods

They go out of the city to meet with Magnus's friends. In fact, they go "out of" the continent. With Alec being the only non-warlock among them, the location matters little to them and they're free to choose anything.

Where they go is a house – a cottage, really – with a large garden which creates a wall of greenery around the quaint building, giving it a nice feeling of privacy.

Magnus, Alec and Catarina make use of one portal, sharing the burden of two boys and their supply bag between them. They step out of the portal on a lawn in front of the house, between a stone path and a line of yellow and orange flowers. It's a nice change from snowy New York to see so much dark green.

The house, as Magnus tells Alec, is something of a shared possession between them, used as needed. Lately, Ragnor has been occupying it the most often so he ends up being the host this time.

They're welcomed and invited inside by Ragnor as if they've never set foot in this garden and the house. Magnus accepts the treatment with a roll of his eyes but it has the unintentional effect of making Alec feel less like an outsider to the three warlocks' life and friendship even if he knows it's just acting.

Dot will be joining them but she will travel from France, where she found a buyer for one of the enchanted items from the shop she had established with Jocelyn. Jocelyn left it all to Dot to do with as she wishes and the warlock decided to keep it for as long as she feels the desire to maintain it. Warlock businesses are different from mundane ones; when you're very old, waiting for a shop owner to return from a season-long break to sell you a magical pair of glasses or stones, or scissors is almost expected.

For the time being, Catarina, Magnus and Alec settle in inside the charming little living room. Both Max and Jonathan are lively, excited from the portal travel as they often are. Alec predicts more bubbles from Max in the very near future because of all the magical presence around them. In fact, Alec himself can sense this house is something special. It must be heavily warded. Maybe the little bit of magic Magnus had given him for their Bonding is helping him to be more sensitive to it or it truly is that filled with energy.

They have a casual conversation, mostly news about the New York community that Catarina and Magnus relay to Ragnor and later when Dorothea shows up to join them, she brings more news and gossip from her recent travels.

Alec isn't always clueless when it comes to all the names they mention. Magnus has taken him to many places since they've met and sometimes they come across various acquaintances of the warlock's. Alec always keeps to himself when it happens and Magnus never pushes him for more.
Unless they're Magnus's friends, Alec doesn't really want to have any more people in his life. He has more people close to him than he ever expected to have and it's almost too much to handle at times. He wonders about it sometimes, if there might be something wrong with him or if it's normal to be like this, just a result of his upbringing and then his hiding from the world. It probably is normal and with the major change in his life that happened over a year, it probably is only to be expected he has his limits.

So with the strangers he meets through Magnus, it's easy to play the quiet omega at his alpha's side and whenever Magnus reads his mood correctly, he plays his part too, making it even easier for Alec to just be his company (because Magnus always wants Alexander's company) but not have to entertain anyone with conversation. As usual, the two of them make things between them work.

But now they're with Dot and Cat and Ragnor (who is, admittedly, still somewhat unknown to Alec) and the atmosphere is great.

They talk about their baby warlocks and their future a lot, and Alec is specifically interested in finding a way for them to have similarly-aged friends once they're grown enough to appreciate playmates. They'll always have each other as brothers but Alec knows better than anyone how siblings can drive one mad... Heaven knows how many times he's sat in Izzy's room to keep himself from strangling Jace for something or other and how many times he and Jace hid from Izzy when she was the one in a mood to annoy them.

Even though the original reason for the meeting in the cottage was the new Bond, it isn't the main topic or even the most often appearing topic during the days they spend there.

Alec listens to the warlocks discuss magic, the Spiral Labyrinth, new discoveries. He listens to gossip about people he never even heard about before. He listens to them complain about other Downworlders, the Mundanes and Shadowhunters. Amused, he listens to them complain about the weather.

They take walks around the house, along a creek and at the edge of the woods. Alec goes with Magnus or he goes with Catarina while Magnus stays inside with Ragnor. Or it's Magnus and Dot who leave while Cat and Ragnor stay with Alec on the porch, all of them watching over Max while he crawls around.

It's nice.

Alec knows they must be discussing him when he's not present but it's okay. From them, he doesn't have to fear anything.

- 

Alec is in the house when this conversation takes place but he's not in the room, having left it to get himself a drink (which, in the presence of three warlocks is seen as the strangest thing he could do. Alec stubbornly doesn't answer Magnus's "What did you want, Alexander?" and goes to make himself tea, since it's too late for coffee). While he's at it, he also makes a detour to the bathroom.

"You not only found yourself a Nephilim boy," Ragnor says to Magnus, "but apparently he's not as estranged from his family as one would think. You're aware that now all of your in-laws are Shadowhunters, yes?"

Magnus doesn't say what he really thinks of that fact because he hasn't felt the consequences of it
yet, beyond having to look at Shadowhunters in his loft.

"His family, for now, is just his siblings who are even younger than he is and who I trust will be as open to change as Alexander was. They must be, considering how they did not start off their first visit by demanding I let their brother go from my dirty warlock lair."

"Did someone else say that to you?"

Magnus waves his hand. "Oh, Maryse Lightwood tried to say something but since she wasn't listening to what I was saying about Alexander and myself, I, in turn, didn't pay much attention to her. Admittedly, that was before we were mated so I truly was nothing to her but I don't believe that little detail would have changed anything."

"And she hasn't shown up on your doorstep yet?"

"I don't see how she'd know where to show up. None of her children will tell her. Anyway, I'm not sure how much power the Lightwoods have at this point. Alexander was the one supposed to marry up and since he's here with me, well, I don't expect Maryse to have much going for her right now. I'm sure she has quite a few friends but I'm not exactly expecting a lot to happen."

"I guess we do live in better times. They may be as cold times as ever but I also wouldn't expect a raid on a High Warlock over this."

Alec comes back to his place at the table and sits down where he was before at Magnus's side.

"In fact," Magnus says, continuing the topic, "I worry less about what might be thrown at us and more about the future of the politics around us. If Alexander rejoins the Institute, we'll be a particularly… interesting couple."

"You say 'if' but you sound quite certain I will," Alec points out.

"I'd be happy to keep you safe and sheltered forever but I also want you to have your world back. We both know you want it too. Unless the Clave makes more of the same unreasonable demands of you as they had before to take you back, I'm sure you'll be able to win the current Head over."

"We believe you should do it," Catarina says. "Shadow World needs something like this: as you called it, an interesting couple."

"Regardless of what he wants for himself," Ragnor says, "his son is part of two worlds and it won't change."

"And so will be any future children," Dot adds.

And okay, that thought is not new in Alec's head. Angel knows he's thought about it many times, in different contexts, such as imagining how it'd be if Jonathan was Magnus's from the start. How it would be to have more children, eventually.

They haven't even shared his heat yet and the general idea brings a blush to the omega's face. Of course, at this point there will be no talk of any new children, it's just absolutely not the time for it.

"Who knew you needed to look in the strangest places to find the One." Catarina teases at some point.
"And he is, without a doubt, a step-up from Magnus's other choices... Do you play any instruments, Alec?" Ragnor addresses the omega.

"No. I never tried, my brother is the one who knows how to play the piano."

"He can play?" Magnus asks, a little surprised because the image of the blond alpha is made more interesting with this new information.

Alec nods his head. "He does it well."

Ragnor makes a "see?" gesture at Magnus. "You didn't even have to learn to play anything to woo him."

Magnus, looking wholly unimpressed with his friend, puts his hand on Alec's on the table. "Yes, I couldn't have it any easier with Alexander."

One late evening, almost night, Alec's looking up at the stars from the porch and he's joined by Ragnor who begins to tell him stories about the stars above them.

Alec knows that the warlock didn't find him to talk about legends and astronomy but he relaxes and just listens. And then Ragnor gets to the point.

"Even before you two courted, he became more serious in his letters. Not boring, Magnus Bane could never be that. But he settled, in the best possible meaning of the word. You've grounded him."

Alec listens.

"My friend has a lot of masks, some obvious, some not so. I'm sure you're aware of it but I'm also sure you don't realize the extent of it."

Ragnor pauses.

"And now you have to be careful," he says and Alec doesn't know what that's supposed to mean, exactly.

"You've met Camille. He walked away from her broken and he remained like that for a long time. He was mostly recovered by the time he met you. Unfortunately, life went this way that Camille was what Magnus needed at one point in his life, no one will argue with that. And it's just as unfortunate that owing her for that doesn't make up for how she treated him afterwards. You, of course, are a whole different person and your relationship is completely different. Camille was a fluke from the start but we didn't know that."

Alec is indeed aware Magnus carries a lot of hurt from the past. Some of it he spoke of to Alec but not all.

"If he loses you... we will, one way or another, lose our friend. We are his oldest friends but it seems that you are his soulmate."

Alec blinks, not sure what he should even try to say to that.

"Now, I wouldn't call you a fool because you aren't one but you are a born and bred Shadowhunter and even now your head must be full of Nephilim ideals. You absolutely are a free man but I can
and I will ask you to be careful with yourself. I'm sure you already are for the young ones' sake, I'm just not sure you realize how important it is."

It makes Alec's blood run colder to think of anything bad happening. He'd been scared when he thought the Shadowhunters were going to kill or arrest him and right now he's reminded of how that felt. He manages to push it back.

"I… can promise to do my best not to die."

Ragnor nods. "That is all you can promise and all that I can demand from you."

He claps his hand on Alec's shoulder.

"Now, this wasn't meant to be a gloom and doom talk. No one's dying. I only wanted to make sure you do right by Magnus."

"He's my Bond-mate, as you said," Alec replies. "I wouldn't dream of hurting him… and I can't say he's my everything because I have my sons… but he's what I need to have everything."

Pleased, Ragnor is looking at him with kind eyes.

-  

"So. What is the gossip about us?" Magnus asks during one of the dinners they're having in the cottage's wooden kitchen.

"There isn't much," Dot answers. "Mostly because Alec doesn't do anything noticeable and even if he did, it's either around the Pack or it involved Camille. Werewolves are too pack-oriented to let the internal news get out much."

"They're too protective." Catarina agrees.

"As for Camille, she got into trouble with the Law and her own Clan so she ended up dealing with that rather than spreading news, fake or not, about you."

Yes, that's what Magnus knows from Raphael.

"Hmm."

"There is some floating gossip between warlocks and werewolves who are friends but it's mostly positive, I guess."

"Oh?"

"Well, it goes two ways: romantic ideas or scandal gossip. Either way, it's in favor of you two."

"I imagine it improved after we announced it officially," Magnus says.

"You're not going to follow it up with news of your Bonding?"

"No, let them find out in time. If they didn't believe my intentions when I presented Alexander to them, I don't see how that's my job to repeat it to them."

Magnus turns to Alec, "We should go together to Pandemonium again."

Alec tilts his head.
"We can… if you remember all I did was sit with you."

"I remember you did more than that, darling," Magnus grins. "You glared away about one-third of my usual company."

"And that's what you want to happen again?"

"When we get home," Magnus leans in close and his voice is lower, "I will explain to you in detail just how it feels to have someone so beautiful be possessive about you."

Later at home, Magnus does bring up the idea again.

"We can go to Pandemonium, I'll have one of the side rooms prepared with sofas and some tables. You invite your friends and I was thinking we could invite your sister, your brother and Clarissa."

"Do you think they'll all want to be seen together?"

"For you? Of course. I'd like to think they should want to, too, if they care about the future of the relations between the Downworld and the Institute."

"I guess they should."

Alec thinks about having his two worlds coming together- Maia and Bat, his Nephilim family. And surely mundane Simon.

"Okay, fine. We can do it this way."

"Great. You invite them whenever you want."

Alec comes by the Hunter's Moon while he's out in the city. He meant to simply call but since he's already nearby, he goes in to check if Maia's in today in person. She is and at this time of day, she's not really busy so Alec approaches the bar to ask for something warm to drink. He underestimated the temperatures today and his hands are starting to really get cold even with gloves, making him miss his runes.

"What's up?" she says in way of greeting while he sits on the barstool in front of her.

"Everything's good, same as always," he says automatically because everything's okay but… "Actually, I just lied- I mean, everything is okay, but it isn't the same."

Maia, knowing him well, just lets him stumble his own way through the words.

"I'm seeing my family again. And I want to do everything to keep them in my life from now on. You know they're Shadowhunters, active ones.

She's surprised by the new development but she waits before asking all the questions that are already coming to her mind.

"So I came to ask you out," he says, knowing his choice of words will amuse her.

"All right? Where are we going?"
"Pandemonium."

"Oooh, so your place. I've been there with Bat a couple of times. So what is it gonna be? A fancy invitation from your rich, club-owning mate?"

"Something like that," Alec admits. He does, of course, note her tone on the word 'mate'. By now, their bond is settled, fully established and recognizable by anyone, from Mundanes in the street to Nephilim. His new status soothes Alec's lingering insecurities about his failings as an omega.

"We're going to get some space to sit in if you come," he tells Maia. "You, Bat, the mundane, I guess."

She smirks.

Alec continues: "My sister, my brother and his girlfriend who is at the same time Simon's best friend."

"Okay, that sounds interesting. So you and Clary – we're talking about Clary, right? – are pretty special, huh?" She gestures at him, "You're between Downworld and the Nephilim, she was raised Mundane but is actually a Nephilim."

He nods.

"Magnus thinks that's a good thing. That we're like this, that we're... not set in our ways, I guess, like the Clave."

"It is a good thing," Maia says, confusion coloring her voice, "so I don't get why you're saying it in that tone?"

"I just... I got points for choosing my baby over the Clave but it isn't that I specifically chose a warlock over my Shadowhunter reputation – I chose my baby over the wishes of people I didn't care for, even over what my parents wanted. But that shouldn't make me better just because of that."

Maia reaches over the counter to touch his arm. "Hey, you know that what matters is what you do now and what you've been doing even before you met Magnus and became all heart-eyes for him. You can be a right ass if you want to be and I'm sure some of that is your Shadowhunter 'charm' but that doesn't make you a bad guy. Maybe you used to be worse as a Shadowhunter? I don't know." She shrugs. "You could have been. But that would be in the past. I have shit in mine that I don't want anyone to bring up, ever. We're friends, right? I wouldn't be friends with someone who isn't worth it."

"I guess you wouldn't."

Maia leans back, taking up a cleaned class to put back on the shelf.

"I'm not about to promise no comments against the Shadowhunters but I can say that I expect good things rather than bad from your sister and your brother," she says.

"That's good enough for me."

"Great. So when's the date?"

"Actually, it depends on you, Simon and Bat. Magnus and I have a lot more freedom with our time."
"I guess that's true. What about your Shadowhunters? Are they going to be free from patrols to frolic with the Downworld crowd?"

Alec can't stop the snort. "They never had problems finding the time and ways to sneak out even when I was at the Institute and I was the one trying to make them stay in."

* * *

Before Alec can spend the time with his family, blood one and found one, he has another meeting he needs to attend first.

There is a café&bar that Alec has noticed at some point in the past and it comes to his mind when he's planning to see and talk with Lydia Branwell. He doesn't want to go anywhere he's been with Magnus or his friends so he has to choose another place suitable for Shadowhunters to talk about Shadowhunter business in the Mundane world. He's still second-guessing that choice and maybe they should go to some secluded place but he thinks that wouldn't work well for him. Even if he knew Magnus was nearby, an "unnatural" setting would make him nervous. No, he's now used to mundane spaces and he doesn't want to make things awkward.

It's actually a café that's popular with young businessmen and women, older students, generally people who wear button-up shirts and if not suits, then at least dress jackets.

From what Alec knows about Lydia from Magnus, she might appreciate the place.

What Alec knows about Lydia is also very little. He trusts his alpha's impression of her but knowing that she's open to hearing him out is only one facet of her as a whole person and as the Head of the Institute. Because of that, Alec doesn't know what to expect when he gets up and dresses on the day of the meeting. Magnus is going with him and the kids will be watched by Dot.

Dot reminds him she's expecting only good things to come out of it. She reminds him of her friend, Jocelyn, who'd lived a Mundane life and rejoined the Shadowhunter society but Alec, in turn, reminds Dot Jocelyn had the Mortal Cup as her ace card.

There's a second while she talks when Alec notices she catches herself before saying something. Then she continues but it's clearly another thought, not what she almost said. Alec wonders if there is more to Jocelyn's life that he might find out.

Alec doesn't tell Dot that his own feelings about the other woman are still colored by that original jealousy he'd felt when she came to Magnus to get her daughter's memories back. After that, Clary brought him more good than bad but that petty first impression remained somewhere in his mind.

They're both early, Alec and Lydia. They meet at the door to the café, Lydia alone and Alec with Magnus at his side, the warlock's hand a steady touch at the small of Alec's back. They exchange greetings, all three of them the picture of neutral politeness and good manners.

Lydia knew to expect Magnus there as a safety measure and she wasn't offended. So long as the actual meeting with Alec Lightwood was private, she wouldn't be bothered by it.

When they enter, Magnus chooses where he'll sit for the duration of the meeting and leaves them alone, as was agreed.
Alec and Lydia move almost to the opposite side of the room, not just because Alec wants to make sure Lydia sees that Magnus is only there for his safety, nothing more, but because the table there is nice: it has large planters placed behind each chair so it puts some more distance between them and the other people.

Alec asks Lydia what she'd like to drink before they're even approached by anyone for order and she says plain flat white. Alec supposes he had no reason to expect anything more elaborate, not when they're too similar. He takes plain black coffee.

It's not exactly easy for them to begin. Alec has a whole list of reasons why and Lydia must have her own. For Lydia, it's mostly the number of unknowns in his story. She knows the general Why of what made him leave but she's here today to know the details. If Alec were in her place, he wouldn't know what to say either.

As Magnus said when they met with Ragnor, Cat and Dot, Alec does want to make this work. Until Lydia Branwell gives him a reason to change his mind, he might just try and make this easier for her. Alec noted from the moment he saw her for the first time that her eyes are sharp but they aren't cold.

"I want it to be clear I've broken no laws since leaving," he says. "I was careful to have good relations with the Downworld in case my behavior reflected on the Institute."

"What about the Adamas blade you've reportedly used to defend yourself with?"

Ah. Alec knew it'd be an issue and he's prepared to be asked about it. From the first time he'd used it to scare off the alpha werewolf, he was prepared to defend himself. Now, he says:

"It was a gift and I haven't used it for anything but self-defense. It recognizes my blood and I feel justified in using it. I didn't steal it."

"No, you didn't."

Alec can't read her tone or her face for what she's really thinking. She's just stating a fact.

"You're going to ask about the fight," he goes on.

"Well, tell me about it. I've heard it from the team, including your Parabatai and Clary Fairchild, who, as I now know, knew you before."

"We've met. Once. I asked her to keep the secret for me from my family, not from the Institute. It was a personal favor and she knew I had my new family to protect. She shouldn't suffer any more consequences for it than she already has for it."

"I see."

"That day, I was attacked," Alec begins to recount the events. "The Shadowhunters present were unfamiliar to me and hostile. I was confused about their purpose there. One of them mistook me for a Downworlder because he'd seen me one time in the presence of the werewolf Pack and believed me to be one of them. He thought it was enough reason to arrest me even though he had no proof of anything else that I'd done except that I stood in the house of the warlock. Which, may I remind you, was advertised as a clinic. I wasn't aware at all that Iris Rouse was wanted. I wasn't aware she did anything wrong because I've talked to her in person for all of ten minutes. I can tell you everything I remember from that visit but it was so short I seriously doubt it will be of use to anyone. It wasn't of use to the High Warlock, either."
"I guess that is true. Of course, I'll want your report—account of that."

Alec nods. "I have nothing to hide."

Letting vampires feed on angel blood will always be a shadow on his past but prior to this meeting, Alec has discussed the problem with Magnus and they agreed that Alec wouldn't mention this at all. His family is a whole another matter and it was in Alec’s own interest to tell them, to come clean about it so that it wouldn't weigh him down... but the Head of the Institute? Or his parents? They don't need to know.

It will work because the vampires won't brag about it to Shadowhunters for fear of being arrested for it. Besides, Raphael was accepted from a temporary clan leader to a full one and no matter what's his opinion of Alec himself, he'd make sure Magnus's interests were properly protected.

"I didn't know that there was supposed to be one more Lightwood present," Lydia says after a pause. "Once I did know, it turned that out your file wasn't deleted but it was moved where I didn't have any reason to look and find it. I don't know if your parents had anything to do with it or not but your mother certainly didn't think it was important to inform me of these things when she was present in the Institute while I was taking over."

"What would you have done if you knew?" Alec asks.

"Not much, probably. It wouldn't have been among my priorities to do anything about it for quite some time. Besides, I'd have no idea where to even start looking for you. I suppose at best I could encourage your family to look for you. You weren't banished for a crime and you aren't on a wanted list. You're... your own case."

"I had to give up my runes."

"Yes. That is a major issue... But your situation changed. The child is his own person now and you are, too. I don't see why I'd need to do anything about you one way or another except to accept that you're living in the city, technically under my care as the Head of the Institute. You want peace and I want it too."

"I do. I have no desire to make problems for you. In fact, it's in my interests to have as good relations with you as I possibly can, for myself, my mate's position and my children's future. So what do you think about me? Do you believe me?"

"Your situation is quite unique," Lydia says. "You didn't do what you did because you rebelled, were corrupted or even had a bad sort of romance. I do believe it was your choice what to do with the baby and you shouldn't have been made to choose between it and your life as a member of the conclave." She pauses.

"Your child, are they a warlock?" she asks and it's a reasonable thing for her to want to know.

"Yes, he has his warlock mark but so far we observed no magic," Alec answers honestly. "He's too young."

Lydia takes the information in.

They drink their coffee. Someone's phone rings in the café but it's silenced quickly.

"What did you expect from this meeting, coming here?" Lydia asks him next and it makes Alec consider his answer.
"I don't want anything from the Institute. I only want Isabelle and Jace to be allowed to come see me freely. I want to live in this city as Nephilim mated to the High Warlock, with warlock children. I don't want to fear being snatched off the street for some kind of made up questioning. I don't want to be seen as someone who went against what we- what Shadowhunters stand for. I don't want to be asked to pretend I'm a Mundane."

"Your sister thinks very highly of you," Lydia says. "She's a brilliant woman. Your brother is the best fighter we have. So I'm willing to believe there's something exceptional about you, as well."

It isn't an answer to what he said but it seems she's going somewhere with this.

Alec tilts his head. "Didn't you hear? I'm the omega of my family. I had the honor of seducing a new influential alpha to our family."

Lydia smiles. "Yes, quite the honor. Haven't you fulfilled it? The High Warlock of Brooklyn, Magnus Bane, the inventor of portals."

Hearing those words makes something inside him relax. A little. He sees a real chance... at something here.

"As the Head of the New York Institute, I want to give you my promise that I won't do or approve of anything that'd harm you or your freedom in the city. I'm going to update your file accordingly but I will need your report. A thorough report. You were trained to head the Institute, I'm sure I don't have to tell you what's important."

"I've already written it," Alec tells her. "I'm not holding it but Magnus will summon it from our home."

Her lips quirk up. "Excellent."

Then, more seriously, she says: "I want to believe you. I can't sense deceit from you."

That makes Alec think about how she's an alpha, how she has the power to use her influence on an omega. The last time he'd felt it was in Camille's lair and he'd tried very hard to forget it. It helped to have Magnus use it after that whenever he had to for Alec's sake. It washed the wrongness of it away.

With Alec being mated and Bonded, he won't be an easy target for anyone who isn't his alpha. He can imagine someone else trying it on him. Like that alpha who'd come to question him and convince him to terminate his pregnancy. That man probably wouldn't have hesitated before using his power on him.

Magnus watches the two stand up and exchange a firm handshake. It looks good. That is, it looks promising. It seems they're parting on what could be called good terms in their situation.

Magnus stands up as well and they meet halfway in the middle of the café. Alec tells him he'll need him to conjure the folder he'd left on the kitchen table before they left and Magnus pulls the envelope from the inside of his jacket as it's always been there.

Lydia takes it into her left hand and then offers her right to Magnus.

"I look forward to working with you as the High Warlock from now on. I know we've already met because of our wards but that day had turned out to be more interesting than I could have expected."
I didn't get to talk with you as I should have about things we should discuss for our future cooperation."

"Yes, I had my own agenda on that day as well. I am, of course, willing to redo it, no distractions."

"Good, we will be in contact. Quite soon, I think."

Before they part, Alec brings up one more thing.

"You said you'd have my file updated. I want my name to be changed to Lightwood-Bane."

"Alexander Gideon Lightwood-Bane," Lydia says, accepting the request.

Magnus chuckles as he puts his arm around Alec.

"Alexander Gideon, of course."

Alec gives him a fake glare.

"Well," Magnus says, "in that case, I ought to have my own Clave file updated as well. After all, Alexander isn't my possession, we're each other's."
Alec wakes up when Magnus moves on his side of their bed. Cracking one eye open and judging by the light in the room, Alec decides it's very early so rolls over on his other side to return to sleep. He's confused as to why Magnus is moving but if he needs to go to the bathroom, well, he should go.

Then, Alec feels a kiss on top of his head and he mumbles something in response to it that makes sense in his head but it only makes Magnus chuckle.

Alec sleeps and Magnus gets up and leaves the loft after checking in on their sons.

When Alec fully wakes at a normal time, he isn't happy. He's gotten used to morning sex and he wants it today. Now.

And his mate isn't even in the loft.

Alec goes to shower alone, dresses alone and moves his sons to the living room to put Max in the high chair with a bowl of bananas and boiled carrots for him to pick up and eat on his own. Keeping an eye on Max, Alec feeds Jonathan, who's also been growing faster lately. He's not so small anymore, not so obviously a child of a male omega, born prematurely.

His adorable tufts of dark hair have become an actual full head of dark hair just like Alec's. His eyes are still hazel, but a little lighter than they were after he was born.

Alec loves him more and more every day.

They spend the day in the living room, sitting where the winter sun reaches them through the windows. It's a good day to go out but Alec isn't in a mood to deal with the pram and winter jackets all on his own. He watches the news instead, Max sits and plays with blocks and Jon practices crawling.

It looks like Magnus will be gone the whole day and that just makes Alec more sour about the
morning. He knows he's the last person who should complain about it because it's not like Magnus has a job that keeps him away from home five days a week for ten hours each day. He really isn't gone often because the High Warlock's services are special. Besides, Alec knows how he himself would be acting if he had a job as essential as High Warlock. Or the Head of the Institute.

Of course he knows that raising two happy warlock boys is as essential as it gets, but still…

Isabelle knocks on the door to the loft sometime after eight in the evening on the same day. She's prepared to hear that she's knocking at a wrong time and she won't mind leaving and coming again another time but she really wants to see Alec tonight.

She was out in the city, having met with Meliorn earlier as they'd planned to do. Once they parted ways, she decided she might as well pass by the High Warlock's home and see her brother and that's why she's there, knocking.

Alec opens the door after she's been waiting long enough to almost turn around and go home. He's clearly pulled away from something, interrupted by her. His hair's standing up, probably from running his hands through it too many times or possibly from changing his shirt over his head recently.

Izzy is familiar with this state of his brother, although maybe not to this degree. She can guess that's where having children will get you.

"Is it a bad time?" she asks, smiling.

"No. Come in." He basically pulls her in by her hand and she follows into the warmth of the loft.

Izzy comes into the main room to see it in disarray, baby stuff on the couch and the coffee table, plates with dinner still unfinished on the kitchen isle.

"So I take it Magnus isn't home?" she asks, turning around.

Alec's making a beeline to the squirming baby he left in the nest of blankets to get the door. Jonathan is no longer so easy to manage, what with his improving rolling and crawling, and his eagerness to do said rolling and crawling.

"He hasn't been the whole day," Alec tells her.

"Mmm-hmm. Do you need a hand?"

"Yes. Please. Go sit with Max. Just… occupy him. I need to get Jonathan washed."

"You got it, big brother."

Max eyes her curiously when she approaches, his blue eyes taking in all details of her face and clothes. Izzy's still in her coat and under that, she's got the red dress she'd put on to go out earlier. If she's going to stay a while, she'll probably have to do something about the outfit.

For now, it works well to get Max's attention to stay on her. Izzy talks to him until she starts to get syllable-replies from him and then maintains their conversation.

Alec's gone for ten minutes or so and when he comes back he's got Jonathan in a fresh diaper and his night onesie with swans sleeping on clouds. Alec isn't sure who's out there designing these
things but so far he's got unicorns on clouds, whales among stars, dogs sleeping on Moons and other patterns that surely only Mundanes could come up with for baby clothing. He's also got those cartoony medical equipment blankets and pillows from Catarina.

"I'll feed Jon and then I'd like to clean up this place at least a little- wait, you're probably not comfortable like this." He takes a better look at Izzy. "Were you… at a club or somewhere? When Jace came by he was coming from a patrol."

"'Or somewhere'. I was seeing Meliorn."

Alec remembers her letter mentioning a Seelie so he asks, "Did it… go well?"

"It's nice. It's nothing serious but we're both aware of it and we have fun." She shrugs. "I like him."

"Okay. That's good." Alec nods, feeling a little awkward in this topic. He knows what he'd have said about this in the past but now everything's different. He's different. So long as it's what Izzy wants, it's good enough for him.

"You know…" Isabelle says, "now that you're back, I actually feel like going to a club. Before I… never felt in the mood."

Alec isn't sure what he could say to that except to give her another apology which will do nothing and which she probably doesn't even want or expect from him. He doesn't like the thought of his siblings in any sort of "mourning" for him, even though he knows that's what they'd felt.

No, wait, he does know what to say tonight.

"Actually, since we're talking about clubs, I wanted to invite you to one. You, Jace, Clary. My friends from the Pack. I wanted to um, get you all to meet. Magnus will be there but probably not all the time because he'll have his business to attend to."

"Are you talking about his place?" Izzy's grin is so wide it brightens her whole being. "Pandemonium?"

And okay, Alec knows he doesn't get the appeal. He's been there and it was only nice for him because he sat with Magnus where everyone could see him being the one at the alpha's side. No one made Alec dance or talk to strangers at the bar, no one told him to "loosen up". When they go now, hopefully no one will say this to him either. Alec reminds himself that Magnus will give them a nice spot to sit in, separately from the usual crowd of club-goers and besides that, his mated status will give him a nice excuse not to dance. Yes, he knows Magnus would love to take him to the dancefloor but he also knows the alpha would never insist on it beyond the first "I'd rather not" from Alec.

So he sees his sister's excitement as if she's received an invitation from a celebrity, as if she wasn't able to go to Pandemonium on her own anytime she wanted in the past. He knows part of her happiness is simply due to the promise of them spending time together, no matter the place, but the place adds to it for sure.

"Don't count on free drinks," Alec tells Izzy, half-jokingly, half because he doesn't actually know if Magnus will want to give free service to his Shadowhunter part of the family. He's pretty sure Maia would get drinks free, and Bat as well, especially since Bat actually works at Pandemonium.

Isabelle chuckles. "Of course, we wouldn't want you to miss out on the money earned to feed your family."
Somewhat later, after Alec has given Izzy some casual clothes to change into and after they've eaten the food Alec prepared from what they had in the freezer and the leftovers from the previous day, Izzy brings up something else.

"I think Hodge is onto us. I think he's the only one to notice a difference in us- me and Jace."

Alec freezes, but only for a second.

"You're… happier now?" he asks because that's his guess.

"We sure are! We tried to act "normal" since we saw you but I guess we just changed and that can't be hidden. Though, mom and dad aren't around enough to even see that."

Then she adds, "He was really worried about you, you know."

Alec just nods in acknowledgement. Hodge has always looked out for him and he'd made sure Alec was a well-trained Shadowhunter but his approach to that training was different than Alec's parents'. When Hodge pushed him to do better, Alec felt he was doing it for Alec's own sake. When his parents pushed him, he knew they did it only partially for him and the rest of it was for themselves, to make sure their omega son didn't even for a second look worse against the other Shadowhunter children and later young adults. No Lightwood was allowed to be anything less than the best, especially not the first-born.

Hodge hadn't been looking for any acknowledgement and recognition for his teaching.

Alec wonders if he could possibly see the older Shadowhunter but he'd have to be the one to go inside the Institute for it, considering the ex-Circle issue with Hodge. Hodge had been the one to give Alec money to help him survive and he deserves at least a thank you from Alec.

The omega remembers his parents being part of the same organization and serving a completely different sentence. He didn't hear it from them but he understood, when he thought about it, that their being in the New York Institute for years must have been part of it. His childhood had been spent there rather than in the Academy and of course he hadn't questioned it for a long time. The Institute had been his whole life and that was a large part of the reason why it'd hurt so much to be told he had to give it up for an alpha from a different family.

Alec remembers that Izzy and Jace don't know about their parents yet. He's not sure he should bring it up when they're together the next time (not counting Pandemonium, obviously). Maybe it's not the best time to put this on them yet.

Magnus comes home and hears Isabelle Lightwood's voice, clearly conversing with one or both of their children.

He wasn't expecting it but he smiles, coming into the main room and seeing her on the couch, her feet propped up on it and her knees drawn to her chest. She's wearing Alexander's clothes (a t-shirt and gym shorts) which make Magnus wonder if she came from a patrol in ruined clothes – but no, he notices the very red dress carefully folded over the back of one of their armchairs. That explains it. Looking closer, he spots a pair of very high and also very red shoes under the same armchair. A date night, then?

She must have looked quite stunning in that outfit. She's the same kind of a dark beauty his
Alexander is but she's the 'opposite' of him, bold in a different way, charming and finding it easy to be in company. In that way, Magnus and she are similar.

"Hello," Magnus says, primarily to Alexander's sister but also to the whole room. After all, he's been gone since the early morning and he was eager to see his family. Actually, he still needs to see his mate because he isn't currently in the room so his hello only reaches their children.

Isabelle straightens, then a smile brightens her face and she gets up to greet him. "Alec's in the bathroom," she says. "I think he's filling the washing machine."

"Oh, thank you. I won't interrupt him then."

Magnus takes his jacket off and as he does, he feels his back muscles twinge with the movement. He sends the jacket away to the wardrobe and then moves his shoulders, trying to relieve the tension.

Isabelle notices, of course.

"Long day?"

"Quite, but please don't let that chase you out. Have you had dinner yet?" He looks around the living room, taking in more details and clues as to what the two Lightwoods have been doing so far.

"We ate a little but I think we could have a proper meal now," Izzy replies. Being an active Shadowhunter and an alpha, she usually has room for more food.

Magnus nods.

"Let me change into something more comfortable and I'll get us all a nice dinner."

As he walks to his room, he passes by Max to pick him up and kiss his cheeks. He picks up Jon, too, and he plants kisses on his face. He gets enthusiastic reactions after the day of them not seeing each other and not having each other's fresh scents.

Magnus changes into one of his favorite deep blue tunics and black silk pants. It's his 'home' outfit and he supposes he shouldn't worry about putting on something fancier when his mate's sister is around and she's sporting Alec's t-shirt and shorts.

Done with his clothes, he comes out of his room and goes to find Alec.

The omega's in his own room, using Isabelle's presence and her watching over kids to do some quick housework that he's been putting off since the day before.

"Hello, darling," Magnus says from the door. "Come have dinner with me?"

"In a minute," Alec answers.

Not discouraged by the neutral treatment, Magnus comes closer and stands behind Alec who's trying to finish putting clothes away in the drawers. The alpha wraps his arms around his omega's middle, without restricting his movements, and nuzzles the side of Alec's neck.

"I'm sorry I had to leave for the whole day."

"You've got work to do," Alec states the simple fact.
"Did you miss me?"

"No."

"Your love is a cruel mistress, Alexander."

He purrs the last word, pressing his lips against Alec's skin. He kisses up, to his pulse point and his arms tighten around Alec's waist.

"Magnus," Alec hisses, trying to turn around. "My sister's here."

"So I can't kiss my mate?"

Alec escapes his hold and steps away.

"You left your mate in the morning, alone in the bed."

His arms are crossed on his chest now and Magnus puts his up, not coming closer.

"I am very sorry for that, darling. I will make it up to you when your sister leaves. If you give me a kiss now."

Alec levels him with a stare.

"At least come eat with us?" Magnus tries again.

Alec looks to the ceiling and sighs.

"What are we having?"

"Anything you want. Or maybe we should ask Isabelle, as the guest of the evening."

It's a little different tonight than when Izzy was here with Jace. Most importantly, this is their second meeting, not the first, and she now knows a little more of what kind of person Magnus Bane is. (Technically, she's seen him one more time, in the Institute).

Today she's seen more photos of them from their travels, she's seen Alec's baby memory books for Max and Jon. (Alec noticed her eyes getting a little misty while looking through the little facts and baby-steps he's written into the book and it's just the confirmation of what he already knew, that buying and keeping the albums was a good idea).

She's breathed in the atmosphere of the loft a little more and she's still so happy for her brother.

Tonight, she asks more questions of Magnus. Many of them Alec knows the answer to but she has some that he didn't even think about to ask and she avoids anything that might bring heavier things to their minds tonight. It's not like the first time, when both Izzy and Jace chose to step carefully to make sure they didn't make some mistake around their brother's powerful alpha.

On said alpha's side, Magnus is growing rather fond of Isabelle quickly. His sister-in-law, as Ragnor had called it, is a bright young Shadowhunter that gives Magnus much hope for the future, just as he'd told Ragnor. There's nothing forced between them when they're just like this, casually meeting.
The t-shirt she's wearing leaves several Runes on display but Magnus is getting better at ignoring them. He wonders briefly if she might have photos on her phone with her brothers, where Alexander's runes would show as well.

In the end, it's Izzy who decides it's time for her to head home. Magnus notices how Alexander's face falls but he shakes it off quickly. Magnus speaks up then, reminding them that Isabelle's welcome to return any time since he knows very well bitter-sweet for Alec to have this, to be able to see his family but not be part of the Institute anymore.

Magnus puts his arm around his mate after Izzy's gone and pulls him close to his side. He's glad to be able to drop his glamor now that they're alone.

"I enjoyed this evening but I want something for dessert after the dinner," he says.

"We had dessert," Alec reminds him like he's a child. "Izzy's favorite."

"Yes," Magnus agrees. "Now I want my favorite."

They missed out on morning sex but they get to make up for it once they get to the bedroom. They don't go as heatedly at it as their earlier needs would suggest because it's late and they're both somewhat tired but oh, it's as good as always.

Alec gasps at every thrust because it's just right but it's not intense enough to get a moan out of him each time and that's just how he likes it. He's not an omega who needs fireworks every time he's with his alpha. He wants the satisfaction and he wants his hunger for his alpha to be fed but how they get there doesn't need to be 'mind-blowing' every single time.

Of course, since his mate is absolutely gorgeous and thoroughly experienced, it's difficult for Alec not to receive more than he needs every time they're in bed.

And even though they're both tired and after sex they should be both out like a light, they turn to each other, lying on their sides, making themselves comfortable. Somehow, Magnus always knows when Alec will most appreciate his hand at the back of his neck. He's used it for a specific purpose before, to calm him down and comfort him but they've been together more than long enough for Magnus to know his mate just likes to be touched. He's a tactile person and he's sweet and Magnus wants nothing more than to give him everything that he wants because he's giving so much in return.

After that they fall asleep, their fingers touching on the sheets between them.

* * *

The day of their night at Pandemonium is getting closer and Alec finds himself actually giving some thought to his outfit. That is, he always makes sure to look presentable next to his mate whenever they're out but there are different levels to his involvement in his own outfits depending on the occasion. Alec may like t-shirts and black long-sleeved shirts with sweatpants when he's at home but he knows the meaning of proper dress. After all, he'd been groomed all his life for an official role in Shadowhunter society. And yes, the same Shadowhunter society treasures its black outfits, which Magnus loves to point out overly dramatically but those black outfits include good
suits as well. Sadly, Alec can't wear suits to clubs so he has to figure something out if he doesn't want to ask Magnus to choose for him.

"I was wondering about something..." Alec begins while they're sat on the balcony with the protective spell for warmth around them. They're sitting in woven armchairs that scream summer and which weren't here until Magnus summoned them thirty minutes prior. They have warm drinks with them because the snow's falling slowly outside the balcony and outside their magical bubble.

"Yes?"

"You mentioned you did hairstyling professionally and even if I didn't know that, obviously you know fashion. But knowing that, I wonder why you never suggested I should do something about my looks."

"Oh, that question has the simplest answer: I love your bedhead, Alexander," Magnus says. "I want to just run my fingers through it much more often than I actually do it."

"That's... that can't be the actual reason."

Magnus tilts his head, looking at him.

"Yes, I like my clothes and my eyeshadows. I wear them and use them because I like them. I don't want to change you, darling. I love the way you are. You do the same for me, don't you? You'd asked me not to hide my warlock mark."

"But you're beautiful as you are, too. Without the eyeliner and the other stuff..."

"Thank you. It's a little different... I don't put the "stuff" on to be pretty. It's my armor, my tiger stripes. You've got your black clothes and your frowny brows, I got my eyeliner and my pendants. Sometimes I simply want my hair to match my nail color. Sometimes I do it only because I feel like it and I know you're not like me in that regard.

Don't overthink it, darling. I'm happy when I can get you to wear two colors other than black in one outfit. So! If you want me to, I could make some suggestions for tonight but only if you have trouble making a choice yourself."

When an hour later a fire message zooms through their living room, ending up in Magnus's hand, he makes an excited "ah" sound. A moment later, a small bundle of brown paper appears not unlike the message and it hovers in the air for a while, waiting to be caught.

Pleased, Magnus takes it and moves to the table to open it immediately. Alec watches him but doesn't come closer. If it's something interesting, Magnus will show him anyway.

And Magnus does indeed come closer and addresses him.

"Alexander? There is something I want you to wear, after all."

"What is it?"

"Give me your hand."

Alec puts his hand out, curious. Magnus takes it and then gently slides a ring over Alec's ring
finger. It's a dark silver band with a rather large, red stone set in it.

"This shade of red might not be your color... unfortunately, for this to work, it couldn't be changed." Magnus says, turning Alec's hand this and that way, admiring the ring.

"Work? Work how?" Alec asks, wondering about it. Magnus already has ways to track him so it's probably not that.

"This is an enchanted jewel," Magnus explains, still holding Alec's hand. "It reacts to demonic presence nearby, alerting its owner by lighting up. It's an old jewel, which used to be in a pendant that I'd bought to gift to someone who hadn't deserved it... Now, I had it made into smaller pieces so that you, our Little Pea and Blueberry can have them as well."

Alec takes the information in.

"Oh. Thank you. That is useful."

"This is the only thing I'll insist that you put on and keep."

"Of course. Thank you."

Alec closes the distance between their lips for a 'thank you' kiss.

*

In the end, Alec puts on black jeans and a deep-green shirt with shimmering thread. He pays some more attention to his hair, doing what could be called 'styling' in his standards. He doesn't forget the enchanted ring. When Magnus sees him ready, he only has one change he wants to make- undo the top button of the shirt, letting a little more of his skin show.

Magnus's own wardrobe choices are, of course, a different thing. Alec knows he's dressing for a purpose in Pandemonium. He knows the eyeliner's particularly black tonight for a reason. There was a time when he would have felt insecure next to his perfectly beautiful alpha but it's not like that anymore. Now, with the warmth of the bond constantly living between them, Alec doesn't overthink it as he'd used to.

Magnus wears dark red, the choice a contrast to Alec's green without them planning for it. With both colors being on the darker side, they work together somehow rather than clashing. Magnus is wearing gold to go with the shirt. There are subtle chains connecting the two edges of the shirt over the stretch of visible skin of his throat and below that, he has his long, golden pendants and then the gold metal trimming on his shoes finishes the look.

Since they've already handed their sons over to Catarina's care for the evening, they leave the loft by way of a portal which Magnus opens into one of the private spaces of Pandemonium. From there, they step into the proper space of the club, the music and lights enveloping them and pulling them in.

They get there earlier than the time Alec told his family and friends to come, just so they can spend some time as a couple. Magnus gets them drinks, they take the VIP seats and they soak in the atmosphere of the club. It takes a while before the regulars try to approach Magnus as they would have before Alec was in the picture. They're taking their cues from the alpha, in case maybe he is open to having more than the omega at his side. Since Magnus keeps his hand on the omega's thigh the whole time and he only talks to the others when they address him specifically, they get the message loud and clear.
Magnus tells Alec things about Pandemonium that didn't come up in their conversations before, he points out a few patrons who he has interesting things to say about. They spend the time as peacefully as can be done with the dancefloor in front of them, the thumping of the music making Alec's heart try to match the beat.

Alec spots Maia first and soon after he sees Bat. They're moving through the crowd with ease, making their way to the bar. There's no need for Alec to go to them right away, especially since they know where to find him, even if they didn't look towards the VIP area when they came in. Alec knows to expect Simon no sooner than in twenty minutes because the Mundane has just texted him with that information.

As for Izzy and Jace, it's not so clear when they'll be here but it shouldn't be long, either. There's no rush.

The drink in Alec's glass is finished and Magnus gets him another. It's okay since they're rather light, perfect for the omega's preferences. He sips the new one slowly, enjoying it when Magnus's hand returns to its place on Alec's thigh, warming it through his jeans.

There's someone to the warlock's left, talking to him while Alec's watching the crowd, waiting to see his siblings come in.

And then they're there and Magnus notices them, too, so he dismisses the Downworlder he was talking to and he stands up with Alec. They meet the Shadowhunters halfway and at the same time, Magnus catches eye contact with the werewolves across the space, where they are still talking at the bar.

Magnus leads the three Nephilim to the side hallway where the werewolves catch up with them. It's better for the introductions to happen where the noise is lower and the crowd isn't an issue.

Magnus's hand on the small of Alec's back helps the omega with the nervousness that fills him now.

It's strange, having his two worlds meet. At first, Alec's the one to present his family to his friends and then the other way, introducing Maia and Bat to them. They're still missing one of them but Simon's the one person who got to know everyone currently present already, so it's not like he's missing out on this part. Well, Clary is missing out but at the same time, she's not Alec's close person so Jace might as well be the one to introduce her to Maia when she shows up.

(Clary came with Jace and Izzy but she's outside right now, waiting for Simon to show up. Jace grumbles something about her wanting to speak with the Mundane and he's clearly not the most thrilled about it. Alec may be a little amused by it.)

Magnus shows them the room, acting as the host. There's a sofa much like the one on the VIP dais, a loveseat and some armchairs. There's a low, fancy table that probably costs thousands (or so Alec assumes).

While they're all looking around curiously, Magnus makes an inviting gesture towards the plush seats so they each pick a spot to sit in. Alec ends up in the loveseat with Izzy while the werewolves take the sofa, saving room on it for Simon. That leaves the armchairs to choose from for Jace and Clary.
Magnus isn't going to linger long so he doesn't care to sit. What he does instead, is being the gracious host, telling them a little about the private rooms of the Pandemonium while he summons them food which Alec is quick to notice includes most of his favorites. Magnus also gets Alec, Maia and Bat the drinks they ask for and for the rest of the group, he summons various things to drink onto the table beside the food.

And then, to Alec's mortification, Magnus says how glad he is to have his mate's friends and family as his guests and adds other things that make Alec's face become increasingly red, as if they're still in the period of courting. It reminds him of how they were in those early months whenever a server or a seller assumed they were a couple and Magnus was only too happy to play along with it. They're proper mates now and even now, whenever Magnus talks about him to other people, it makes Alec warm and flustered inside.

- Maia and Jace do not get along. That is, for now, there isn't really a point of conflict but the air is there and Alec can sense it. The other probably can as well because Izzy's smirking whenever Maia says something biting to Jace and Bat is silent but eyeing them in a way that says he'd rather not have any trouble come out of this.

Bat has always been rather calm and quiet, and him being a beta plays a role, too. Jace and Maia, though, they're both alphas and they're both strongly keeping to their opinions. Alec knew to expect clashes between the alpha Downworlder and his alpha siblings but clearly Izzy is much more acceptable to Maia than Jace. Alec isn't surprised.

He also knows Maia well and in the past he'd been on the receiving end of the treatment she's giving his siblings now. She's not afraid to question any Shadowhunter she meets in person and she isn't afraid to protect her rights and the rights of her people. And Jace, well, he's being himself.

Bat catches Alec's gaze across the table and they exchange an understanding look while the alphas completely take over the conversation for a while.

Six minutes later, one of Magnus's bouncers whose face Alec vaguely remembers, leads Clary and Simon to the room. That disrupts the topic for a good while and diffuses the slight tension for the time being. At this point, there are two omegas, two betas and only three alphas in the room, so that helps the atmosphere significantly. Alec almost welcomes Simon's ability to take over the talking part of any meeting. Almost.

It's good. It goes as well as Alec had hoped it would be and just as well as Magnus had reassured him it'd go. They're from a different world, all of them- two Downworlders, two Mundanes with one turned Shadowhunter, three Shadowhunters including the one grown as Mundane... and Alec, born Shadowhunter turned father of baby Downworlders.

That aside, they're all young, not that far off from each other in age. And maybe Alec might feel a decade aged in the last year but he's been feeling more like himself every day since Magnus has taken so much of that load off his shoulders... Besides, Maia is like him. She's gone through more in life so far than she should have and they will always have that in common.

And he can finally speak freely with these people, not concealing this or that from them. He no longer needs Simon and Clary to keep quiet about him and he doesn't have to hide his hurt caused by missing his family from the werewolves. He can be whole.
He thinks: these are his people. His brother and sister, his pack even though he's not a werewolf himself, his mundane friend and then Clary, who's indirectly connected to him as well. Tonight, Alec gets to thank her personally for what she's done for him at Iris Rouse's house, for the way she'd come to his defense without even thinking about it.

So tonight, Alec just enjoys himself. He enjoys the sweet cranberry drink, he likes how the music reaches their room muted but still creating an upbeat background. The rhythm carries through the floor and the walls into his body. He enjoys the presence and mixed scents of people he chooses to surround himself with.

"Magnus works for some time. Meeting with… certain individuals here is truly work for him but certain meetings are overdue already and while Magnus is very good at avoidance, he's feeling responsible tonight.

At some point, someone more welcome shows up at his Pandemonium 'throne', approaching him without hesitation.

"Raphael! I wouldn't have expected to see you here," Magnus speaks cheerfully while he stands up to properly greet the vampire.

"I didn't expect to be here either but I found the time to come. I've had a lot to do."

Magnus sits down and Raphael does as well, making himself at home on the VIP couch.

"Still? I thought it was quiet in the Clan by this time," Magnus says. He always tries to stay aware of what's happening in the Downworld but it isn't possible for him to know what's happening inside the Clan or the Pack unless he's told about it. After the Shadowhunter activity with the criminal vampire dens, things have settled and calmed down between the Institute and the Clan. That is what Magnus knows because the hunts and raids mostly ended once the Institute decided they've done good work. The Pack had no more complaints against the Shadowhunters, as well.

"It mostly is quiet," Raphael replies, "but it's not about the change from Camille's leading. I've been thinking lately about things I don't want to stay the same as they've always been."

"Oh? Do go on."

"The city is changing. There's the new local Shadowhunter leader, the High Warlock is mated to one of the Angel children, the Pack is apparently willing to be more cooperative with the Institute…"

"And all of these are good changes," Magnus points out.

Raphael is quiet for a moment but he nods. "For now, yes. I would say they're good."

"You don't expect them to last?"

Raphael looks him in the eyes.

"Do I really have to say out loud what you're thinking, just as I am thinking it? These are changes in leadership that might as well be reversed a month from now or half a year from now and any shows of goodwill are not permanent changes for any of us."

Yes, Magnus knows that. He's lived through similar scenarios but to him, this is different. He
chooses to believe it's different. For the first time in his long life, he has a mate. A Bonded mate. And of all races, he fell for a Nephilim. If that isn't a sign of new times, he doesn't know what is.

As if Raphael is thinking along a similar track, he says, "Maybe I'm seeing it differently because I'm the same I've been. I may have stepped up to lead the Clan but nothing has changed for me. You have changed. He did that to you."

Magnus looks away from Raphael and back at the dancing crowd. He taps his finger on the edge of his glass.

Before Magnus can say that it's not that Alexander did something, it's that Magnus had been waiting for a change, for a sign of better times, for something good, Raphael continues to speak.

"I didn't trust him when he lived with you and I wouldn't have trusted him as just your mate... but I have to honor the Bond. Even I can sense it on you, it's so strong. Since he wanted to do this with you, to be bound to you, he must be as worth it as you'd said he was."

Magnus is glad, hearing this from Raphael. His opinion couldn't have changed anything about what Magnus thinks of and feels for Alexander but it does matter to him that the vampire he also cares about accepts his mate, even if he does it a little begrudgingly. Just as Alexander wants his friends to get along with his family, Magnus wants his Downworlder friends and family to approve of his mate.

Magnus keeps to himself the thoughts that having the Bond has reassured him, too, for different reasons.

After Raphael leaves sometime later, Magnus takes one more visitor and then sits alone, watching over his club. There are quite a few Mundanes in the crowd tonight. Magnus never minded them, as evidenced by their presence being possible in the first place. His focus has always been on the Downworld but he's fond of these Sightless people, too. As an alpha, he protects them as well whenever he has the ability to do so. Besides, it's fun to see them among the crowd, unaware that the girl they're sneaking wistful glances at is a werewolf, that the guy with the best moves on the dancefloor is a Seelie.

Magnus thinks back to when he'd gone about his nights completely unaware that his future mate had been just around the corner, making deals with vampires.

The alpha is very happy to know that Alexander is inside right now, safe within his kingdom rather than outside of it. When his drink is finished, Magnus leaves the dais and goes to join Alexander and his guests in the side room to spend the rest of the night with them.

* * *

Life goes on as usual. Alec's really looking forward to spring and summer by now, tired of the cold. He still goes to the gym but he doesn't go to a shooting range with his bow much. He asks Magnus sometimes to assist him on the balcony but he doesn't want to overuse Magnus's magic which protects them from the cold and creates the shields to stop Alec's arrows from falling onto streets and buildings.

Now that he has Jace back in his life, Alec also makes plans with him to get back into training together, not necessarily in Alec's gym but they have to do it where Alec can go freely.

Alec still goes out for groceries if he feels like it but when he doesn't feel like it, Magnus just
summons whatever they need. To get their boys out in some fresh air, Magnus takes them out for afternoons away from the snow and the sleet and cold.

One day, Alec receives a letter from the Institute - not a fire message, but a physical letter that he can keep - stating in official words that he continues to exist on files as a member of New York Nephilim society and Alec is both surprised by it and not surprised at all. He isn't surprised because he hasn't committed a crime and no matter what dark thoughts fill his head on bad days or at night, he knows he doesn't deserve to be truly banished. He is surprised that the same people who were so insistent on him making "the right choice" aren't interested enough anymore to get back on him for doing what he wanted to do and aren't stopping Lydia from reaching out to him the way she does.

In the further part of the letter, he's allowed to wield Nephilim weapons in self-defense and in defense of his family. Alec snorts. He supposes if he ever wants to repeat that hunt they went on with Magnus and other warlocks, he'll have to remember to use only his mundane bow.

He wonders about his parents, if they know by now. Probably, yes. His thoughts circle around their past and then back to the alphas sitting up in the Clave's high and mighty seats. He remembers that old alpha who'd pretty much written his sentence to be stripped of his runes and he remembers the younger one who seemed to be the more sympathetic – or at least the more realistic one - and he gets angry all over again, now from the safety of his home.

If he moves plates and pots and other solid items with more force than necessary through the day, that's his right.

He'd probably go for a run if the weather allowed it (or if he still had his runes to protect him from the elements) so instead, he pulls out a mat and exercises on it.

His mate watches him but doesn't approach, feeling his muted emotions through the bond.

* * *

Magnus seeks Alec out one evening. They've been at home most of the day but they didn't spend the majority of the time together. In the morning Alec had gone alone for a little shopping and then later Magnus was alone in the office, working on a spell he'd promised to complete for someone. If it was a potion then Alec could have helped him with it but since it wasn't, the warlock was left to work alone, Alec making sure not to disturb him.

After that, Alec took a nap in the nest with Jonathan. The nap was nice because it was comfortable to just lie for a while but Alec didn't wake up with any more energy than he had before.

He thinks of the things he needs to do before the day's over: baby dinners, change the bedding in the cribs, maybe wash some of his clothes that were supposed to be washed already.

He deals with the items that need a change and a wash and then when he goes out to the main room and he's busying himself between it and the kitchen, Magnus makes him stop by gentle touch.

Magnus has been watching him and now he's making the omega stop just so he can not do anything for a moment. There's nothing in their home right now that requires immediate attention from either of them.

Alec leans his cheek into Magnus's hand, his eyes closing briefly.
"My sleepy wonder," Magnus says fondly. "You've been moodier lately. I thought something new might be bothering you but… might it be your heat is coming soon?"

"Yeah," Alec says simply, without thinking much about it, because yes, he knows that's it. He feels it.

"How soon, do you think?"

"Not soon-soon. Maybe next week, I don't know."

"All right. Then we shall prepare for it with time to spare."

Magnus runs his fingers up and down Alec's nape.

"I want to have those few days uninterrupted since it's going to be our first and it's unlikely to be like your usual ones in the past."

Magnus is saying what Alec knows, both from his talks with Catarina and from books on childcare which also included chapters on omega health. He's aware of it all but he hasn't really been giving his heat much thought when so many other things were happening and needed to be done and taken care of. But if it's coming, it'll need to be dealt with properly like Magnus said, with preparations.

"I want us to be alone," Magnus continues, "so you won't have anything to worry about and because I want to have you all to myself."

The alpha's words and touch and scent are getting to Alec, clouding his mind but not with lust. He's just enveloped by it all, like a fog.

"Okay," he says.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," Magnus says. "Now, I think, it's time for you to go to bed and sleep."

Alec blinks, looks up at Magnus.

"Not with you?"

"I think you need your nest, Angel. If you need me for whatever reason, you know I'm right here."

Alec agrees but he doesn't move because he doesn't want to lose the touch of his mate's warm hand on his cheek. Magnus lets him have it for a few more minutes before sending him off to bed.
Stay close, darling

Chapter Summary

Today: The real reason why this fic is rated M. Next up: Lydia.

This chapter is PWF (porn with feelings). There will be exactly what you can expect from a heat chapter but you know you should also expect fluff and family feels from me.

Merry Christmas.

Time flies fast for them once they know for sure they're waiting for their first heat together.

Magnus meets with Catarina to ask her for help and then makes sure he has no unfinished requests at this time because he certainly doesn't want to be surprised by inquiries while his in the middle of, well, things.

He makes sure Alexander is getting proper rest during those days, with most of his nights spent in his nest. The nest itself has grown in size since the omega got his family back. And, of course, ever since they had moved from courtship to the proper mating, Magnus has been free to offer his things to his omega whenever he feels like it.

They've lived together for half a year now. The warlock, having lived through many years and many changes, was slow to accept in his heart and mind that Alexander's room was something permanent to the loft.

Magnus has had many houses. He had quickly learned the difference between the building and where his heart was. He'd made Catarina, Ragnor, Raphael (and Camille) his home.

New York was never meant to be permanent. He planned to stay a long time, yes. And yes, he treats his position as the High Warlock seriously and despite the negative fame he's got among the Shadowhunters, he's worked quite hard for it. He's grown to treat the city as his. For the time being.

Change is good. He's a warlock and change is just what happens, day after day, decade after decade.

Now, he has an omega nesting in his home. His omega. A partner who is young and meant to live for many, many years to come, even if he's ultimately mortal. On top of that, he's a Nephilim, immune to most earthly illnesses and the failings of the Mundane's bodies. Runes or no runes, he's trained and because of that less likely to end up in an accident.

(Even so, Magnus lives in a constant, background-of-his-mind fear that his Alexander is going to get hurt by people who wish Magnus ill.)

And their children… Magnus has taken many a Downworlder under his wing during his time. They were mostly older teenagers and young adults but he's temporarily looked after smaller children as well. Now he can say with confidence that it's not at all the same as having his own children. Alexander's children, who were lovingly put under Magnus's protection.
From the very first hour he'd met them, he'd been utterly charmed and from then on he only grew more attached every day until he began to dread the moment the omega decided he wanted to be on his own after all. Of course, that never happened.

There is no other future Magnus can imagine at this point but with Alexander at his side and their Little Pea and Blueberry growing up to be as good warlocks as they can raise them to be.

(Magnus can imagine more than that. More than Pea and Blueberry, he can imagine another baby to give a name to.)

* *

One of those pre-heat days, Alec wakes up around ten am, confused at first and then sitting up in a rush of fear. He doesn't know the actual hour and the heavy clouds carrying snow make everything gray regardless of the time of day but he feels it in his bones he's overslept. Nearly tripping over his feet to get out of his nest, he spares a short glance at the cribs even though his nose is already telling him the boys aren't there.

Alec doesn't know if Magnus has left for a job today. He doesn't know if his children are safe with his mate or if they're alone and Alec completely failed to wake up on time…

Magnus is in the living room, Jonathan awake in his lap and Max sleeping curled up on the sofa, a small blanket covering him for warmth.

"Good morning," Magnus says cheerfully but then he takes in the expression on Alec's face and he grows concerned.

"Alexander, is everything all right?"

Alec shakes his head as if he's clearing his thoughts. Magnus is familiar with the feeling.

"Yeah… yes," Alexander says. "I just- I slept too long."

"You must have needed it. We've been doing just fine on our own."

He looks down at Jon, who's holding onto and nibbling on one of the teething toys.

"I don't even know when you've picked them up," the omega says helplessly.

"Oh, quite early. I believe sirens or maybe a car alarm woke me. Then I heard some noise from your bedroom so I came to check on you all."

Alec's brows draw together.

"And I slept through it…?"

Magnus would like to come to him and touch him to reassure him, but he stays put because of the baby in his lap.

"Darling, it's all right. It's probably your incoming heat putting everything out of balance. That's what you have me for, no? I'm your alpha, who is not just a pretty face."

Finally, he gets a lopsided smile.

"You're definitely more than a pretty face," Alec says.
"Right. That's why, even if you're not at your hundred percent, everything's going to be all right. Don't worry so much."

Alec decides to listen to that and focus on getting himself a breakfast instead. Magnus has prepared some simple things which are waiting on a plate to the side on the counter so Alec just adds some more things he likes and moves the plate to the table to sit opposite Magnus.

Before he sits down, he also makes them both coffee. Magnus has already had one, right after he'd fed their children but he's ready for another one, especially since he still prefers coffee poured by his mate.

While Alec eats, Magnus talks.

"You already know Catarina's willing to take those days off for us to take our boys in but I've also been thinking that we can't always expect her to do us favors."

Alec nods, in full agreement. They're in luck and she'll be able to move her shifts around with her coworkers at this time. It couldn't be helped that this particular heat was "unpredicted" but the following ones should come regularly and they'll be able to plan their lives around them in the future. Many couples have to deal with everything on their own at the same time.

Magnus continues: "I thought she could give your family some lessons in childcare."

Alec pauses eating his breakfast. His expression is rather confused as if he's not sure if he's hearing this right but also willing to keep nodding along to what Magnus is saying. It's amusing to watch.

"Before my heat or…?"

"It's too late for teaching them before, I think, so if they're willing, they could go to her while she takes care of our Blueberry and Little Pea. I think it's rather perfect, in fact."

"She'd do that? Won't she mind having Shadowhunters around?"

Magnus hums thoughtfully.

"I imagine she'd mind them the same way I do, which means she knows they're a package deal with you. And she'll be more than happy to teach Shadowhunters how to take care of warlock children."

"I'm not sure how I feel about it. I mean, we've all looked after Max but mom only trusted me to handle him when he was really small. Izzy and Jace watched him when he was already a toddler."

Magnus hums thoughtfully.

"They were teenagers themselves at the time. In my eyes, they're still very young but I expect they'll be better suited to help out now."

Alec doesn't look entirely convinced about the idea but he also can't deny that they're going to need this in the future. They can't always expect Catarina to be their go-to person just because she's the safest and the one with the best experience and knowledge both in magic and mundane medicine.

A moment later Alec puts his face in his hands and Magnus watches him, confused.

"What is it?"

"Oh, nothing," Alec says, his words muffled. "I just thought- I used to tell them about my heats
without a problem because I needed them to help me out a little and I needed them to make sure I wasn't bothered by anyone. If I go tell them now… it's going to be clear I won't be sitting in a room alone like I used to."

Magnus grins widely.

"Definitely not. I'll make sure you're well taken care of, darling."

Alec groans. "This is what I'm talking about."

Magnus only laughs.

"Don't blame me for wanting everyone to know you're getting everything you need."

"Please stop."

* * *

Alec goes out to meet with Isabelle and Jace in the city in a café. There's no particular reason for the choice of place, he just felt like leaving the loft for a little while. Besides, he likes being free to see his family wherever he likes. If they only ever met in the loft or the Pandemonium, he'd feel as if they were hiding.

It's a little strange when they're out for something else than a patrol. Both Jace and Isabelle are dressed more for comfort than practicality and Alec is wearing that dark blue scarf Magnus likes so much.

(Magnus likes him in dark blue, in dark green and maroon. One evening, Magnus has listed all of the colors he'd like to see Alec in just to annoy him.)

Alec tells Izzy and Jace about the heat and about the plan for them to come over to Catarina's. They are, of course, excited. They'll be meeting her for the first time but they've already heard quite a lot about her from Alec. All three Nephilim are unsure how it's going to work out once they're at the warlock's place but Izzy and Jace are definitely interested in spending time with the kids and learning about them.

They make plans and discuss the best possible patrol schedules for those days. It's almost like being at home in the Institute, with Alec within reach and talking about work like normal.

Alec finds out that the Shadowhunters have been annoyed lately by some cult of mundanes who got fooled and are led by the nose by a bored Seelie with bad intentions.

He's happy to listen about it even if he can't do anything about it except to speak with the High Warlock, which he isn't going to do. He just wants to know what's going on.

He asks them some more questions he has about Lydia, about her leadership, and whether she's still treating them well in the Institute.

They're kind of avoiding talking about their parents but then again, there's not much to say. They've been in Alicante all the time since the day that Magnus ran into Maryse in the Head's office. Neither Izzy nor Jace can tell, or guess, if they're back to pretending Alec doesn't exist or if they're actually planning to do something about it.

Isabelle tells Alec about their Max, still in Alicante. She's gone there for a very short visit, not even informing their parents she would be there. She went straight to find Max in the Academy to tell
him all about Alec. Max still treasures the books Alec had sent him but he is, to no one's surprise, a little resentful that he can't see him in person. Isabelle had to talk to him for a while to make sure that the boy understood he had to keep to himself that he even knew that Isabelle and Jace were visiting Alec. Their parents were going to figure it out on their own eventually but there was no need to cause trouble when they could avoid it.

Max promised her he wouldn't ask their parents about it and Isabelle hopes he really won't. It's not that she doesn't trust her little brother but he's just so young still, just a child, and he might blurt something out when emotional. She'd shown him photos of Alec that she'd taken specifically to show Max. It was hard to have to leave Idris without being able to promise Max anything. She couldn't promise he'd see Alec any time soon.

She wishes their little brother could be with them, sitting in the café. She knows the same thought must have crossed Alec's mind as well.

When they part ways sometime later, Alec gets hugged as if they're not going to see each other for a long time. It's okay because he still feels the same way his siblings do. They're still making up for the lost time, for the fear and the uncertainty and at the same time, that fear isn't completely gone. None of them can feel completely safe yet.

And then, when he thought he avoided it, Alec gets all of the innuendoes, the joking dirty advice and the knowing smiles piled on him. Isabelle is as bad as Jace is to him and Alec is grumbling his complaints but can't stop the heat rising in his face.

* * *

Then comes the day when the omega and the alpha decide it's time to be alone. Alec wakes up feeling off that day and it doesn't pass during the breakfast. It's impossible to predict if the heat will start that night or the next morning, or maybe it'll suddenly hit the omega before dinner.

Magnus opens them a portal to Catarina's and together with Alec, they move the kids' things over there. Alec finds it difficult to say goodbye his boys, even if it's only a temporary separation and they'll be a portal away. Catarina offers them a few last pointers to make sure Alec gets through the first heat after the pregnancy all right. As much as it makes Alec flustered to discuss this, neither of them wants to make any mistakes.

After kissing his little warlocks goodbye, Alec lets Magnus take them back home. They send a fire message to Isabelle to let her and Jace know it's time and send the details of the meeting with Catarina. From there, they'll make their own arrangements around their work at the Institute.

Then, they have to get through the rest of the day somehow.

The wait is… tiring. They can't go out anymore because Alec's scent is changing rapidly and the TV isn't interesting to either of them. They pass the time talking about inconsequential stuff and then they prepare some small meals for them to have during the day. Unfortunately, preparing them and eating them lasts only a short time as a distraction.

At some point, Magnus is struck with an idea to go to the apothecary. They can do something simple that needs to be done but that Magnus would have put off on any other day.

He doesn't ask Alexander if he wants to help. He says instead: "I need your help, darling. Come
with me to the office."

The omega follows.

Magnus puts a bowl in his hands and tells him to sit. Then he collects a few things and puts them in the bowl. They're all powdered ingredients so Alec mixes them dutifully when Magnus hands him a silver spoon.

While Magnus sets up the burner, the bowl's being mixed perfectly. It's just one of the medicinal potions which require boiling in some diluted mermaid blood. Now, mermaid blood is not one of the common ingredients but Magnus happens to have an old contact who consistently supplies it to Magnus.

Once that's put over the burner, Magnus makes more requests and his mate fills them.

It was a perfect idea to do this. Repetitive tasks and Magnus giving Alec some soft instructions is good for both of them. It's all simple stuff and Magnus wouldn't have looked twice at his Nephilim doing this any other day but today he's watching to make sure his pre-heat isn't affecting him too much – or rather, he's watching for the moment it will affect him more.

Magnus loves watching Alexander work with his hands. They're particularly beautiful hands, strong and graceful and Magnus loves when his mate wears shirts with sleeves rolled up to show his forearms…

And maybe at this moment, it's the horny alpha in him focusing too much on these details but it's still true any other, non-horny day.

When Alec points out they're missing an ingredient while they're in the middle of making the third potion, Magnus smiles, pleased.

"You're exactly right, darling."

Alec gets the missing herb from its assigned shelf and adds it on his own, everything according to the instructions.

Heat or no, Magnus enjoys having his Shadowhunter helper in his warlock space. They've done this more than once, more than ten times already and yet it's still something that makes Magnus happy.

Now, with his scent changed, Alexander is fascinating for Magnus to watch in any setting. The rare sunlight from the cloudless sky comes in through the window, touching Alexander's skin and hair, making them look so soft. The alpha doesn't want to take his eyes off of his omega.

* *

In the evening, they end up close together on the sofa. Alexander is wearing his softest sweats, choosing his clothes for the least discomfort they cause him. Shivers are passing through him and Magnus feels each of them but for the time being, he just holds the omega closer to his side with his arm wrapped around him. By that time, Alec is very distracted, easily losing track of what he was doing or was planning to do. Whenever Magnus touches him, he leans into the touch but he isn't seeking out more contact than that. Keeping an eye on him, Magnus hopes the hormones won't muddle his mind too much. He'd hate for the omega to feel unsafe because of it.

There's no point in jumping straight to sex. Yes, it might help but it'd be a waste of energy at this time. It'd be like a meal eaten when you're not hungry yet and won't fully appreciate it. Young
mates will usually do it in excitement and end up tired too soon but eventually they learn to better pace themselves.

Magnus already knows better than that but it doesn't mean it's easy for him to make the reasonable decisions when his nose is filled with the most inviting and delicious scent he's ever breathed. They are going through this heat being already mated and Bonded and the first time Magnus is experiencing his mate in heat, his mate's scent is specifically meant for him.

As any biology textbook teaches, evolution made is so that omegas with mates become less attractive to everyone else. It's unfortunate that people still use it to claim that unmated omegas are somehow less morally pure and that they are trying to "seduce" any random alpha around just because their heat scent is good for everyone.

Biologically, it's served to keep couples happily monogamous. Once an alpha knows their mate's true scent, there would have to be something quite wrong in their relationship for them to seek another person to be with.

Magnus is very, very happy to be a very monogamous, mated alpha.

Wherever Alexander is in the loft, moving around, his scent is a siren call to Magnus. He breathes it in, lets it fill his nose and lungs. He wants to enjoy it without the sex, he wants to know it so well he'll never be able to forget it.

For now, the omega needs comfort and closeness and while sex definitely implies both, it's better to wait until he asks for it.

Magnus moves his arm to be able to touch his neck and massages his skin. He's touching that spot which calms omegas down but he tries not to rub too close to the scent glands on the sides of his neck, trying to avoid bringing another wave of the scent on himself.

Alec complains that he can't quite make himself comfortable on the sofa, even when he's pressed to Magnus's side.

Magnus suggest that they eat and drink something and stands up. Alec follows him, taking the blanket with him like a cape. Magnus isn't sure if it's for warmth or to have something around him.

They eat a little, they listen to some music and then, when the first wave of the true heat is still not there yet, Magnus directs them both to bed to sleep.

* *

Just as he suspected, they don't really get to sleep. They get comfortable, yes, and they rest for a while with only one soft nightlight on. Alec's head is pillowed on Magnus's chest and the alpha feels the continuing shivers in his omega. It's quiet.

Then, slowly, Alec becomes twitchy as if he's no longer able to be comfortable at all and his scent shifts to something heavier and sweeter.

And when he tilts his face to kiss Magnus on the jaw and then lower, giving nibbling kisses on his throat, the alpha's blood sings.

There's the smell of arousal, plain and clear, and the alpha's body is only too happy to respond in kind.
Alec's hands are already sneaking into Magnus's pants, impatient and looking for a clear goal. Magnus pushes Alec's shirt up, making him stop what he was doing so the alpha can pull the fabric up over his head, freeing his arms again. Their pants will be easier to deal with so they don't rush.

Kissing is good enough. It's nice. Magnus loves those full lips, he loves feeling the gasping breath his mate takes when Magnus's fingers find his nipple. He teases him, runs his hands down and back up his sides, all the while not breaking the kiss. Magnus wants his mate thoroughly worked up before they get things further.

Alec whimpers. He loves everything that Magnus does but he needs more of it. More of everything. He loves the taste of his lips as ever but he hungers.

It's all not enough. Even when Magnus rolls on top of him, the weight of him making Alec shiver pleasantly, it's not enough.

There's an ache inside him that can be sated by one thing only.

Magnus is grabbing his wrists, pinning them on the bed to the sides of Alec's head.

"Don't move," he mouths against Alec's lips.

Then he lets go and Alec doesn't move while Magnus pushes himself up just enough to be able to move back on the bed, moving down Alec's body.

The alpha makes a trail of kisses as he goes, from the collarbone to the navel. Alec's world narrows to the satin under him and the alpha over him. He knows nothing but the touch of his mate and the ache inside him.

He's wet already so he doesn't understand why his mate isn't taking full advantage of it.

"Hands in place," Magnus reminds him when he moves and Alec flushes, embarrassed.

Alec knows he's going to get what he needs so it'd be a shame to disappoint his alpha before that. He can be good.

Magnus makes an appreciative sound.

"That's better."

Magnus's hands are on the waistband of Alec's pants, which for some reason are still on... but not for long. The alpha undresses him and then tosses the clothes somewhere to the side.

Once the unimportant things are out of the way, he picks up where he left off the trail of kisses.

Alec's hands stay where they are but his fingers tangle in the sheets when he closes his fists around the fabric. He's wet and hard and his mate's lips finally touch where he needs them.

There's no hurry in the alpha while he sucks him off. The omega really doesn't want it to stop so he holds as still as he can.

He gasps and moans, and Magnus hums, pleased, the extra sensation going to Alec's cock.

And then he's coming, almost too soon, and he's surprised by it because he was expecting the alpha
to drag it out, to tease more or stop completely to do something else.

The release clears his mind a little. Alec takes in deep breaths but he knows he'll only be sinking deeper from there. It's always been like this. This is only the beginning and he has to rely on his mate from now on. It's like falling back and expecting the person behind you to catch you.

Alec came but Magnus hasn't yet and he doesn't seem in any hurry to do it.

Deciding that he's probably free to move now, Alec reaches for Magnus to pull him closer to kiss him. It's a deep kiss, almost filthy but at the same time, it's perfect.

He can feel the hardness where Magnus is rubbing against Alec's leg to give himself some relief and all Alec can think of is that he wants that inside him, now.

...But he's not sure if he can make demands because his alpha has already made it clear he wants to lead today.

Alec gets his kiss that he wanted but then Magnus is moving again, his own plans in his head. He makes Alec's skin tingle from the bites and kisses to his throat, his scent glands which are already working overtime, his collarbones and lower.

Alec's nose is full of the alpha's scent. It's stronger than usual, stronger than it was back when they were still curled on the couch and the omega was rubbing his cheek on the alpha's wrist, as he likes to do.

"Magnus-"

"What is it, darling? Not enough?"

"It's... good," Alec says and he sounds frustrated and confused, and it makes Magnus chuckle. He thinks he can understand what his omega is trying to say. It's good but it's not enough. He moves his hand to press his fingers between the omega's legs.

By Lilith, he knew what to expect but feeling that perfect slickness is different from smelling it.

"Is this better?" Magnus asks, his voice low. He's pushing his three fingers in carefully but he knows there's no need to be too gentle. He already knows Alexander's body quite well and with the heat affecting him, everything's easier.

He gets a deep inhale as a reply and then, a "Yes."

With his throat bared, his thighs open and his whole scent calling for Magnus, the omega could not be a more inviting sight. At this point, the alpha's delaying only because he's enjoying the anticipation a bit too much. Knowing what's coming but not getting it yet is a sweet thrill.

It's almost the same for Alec but only almost. The omega has needs that have to be fulfilled and that's why Magnus doesn't drag this out much longer. He makes sure that his mate is gasping from what he's doing with just his fingers before he stops and withdraws.

He does quite enjoy the dismayed groan he hears.

Magnus doesn't say anything, he just adjusts his position so they'll both be comfortable before he finally guides his very neglected, aching cock inside his omega.
And it's bliss. For both of them. Through the soul bond, their emotions echo between them and
Magnus has never experienced anything like it in his long life.

Alec hooks one leg over Magnus's to make sure he can't withdraw now. He's finally being filled,
the sweet pressure exactly where he needs it.

As for Magnus, the tight heat around him is perfect. It's hot, it's wet, it's perfect.

Once he's all the way inside he stops moving, not to tease but to just feel for a moment, enjoy the
initial sensation before they take it further.

And they take it further.

The alpha pulls back and pushes back in, and they struggle to find their rhythm tonight because of
the heat but they do find it eventually.

Alec may have come once but he wasn't sated in any way and now it's as if the foreplay hasn't
happened at all. He's no longer keeping his hands on the bed and his fingertips dig into Magnus
back instead. The alpha suspects he'll end up with some scratches before they're done. Well, he
hopes he'll give his omega enough reason to do that.

Magnus will never not be careful with Alexander in bed but today he doesn't have to be gentle.
Heated omegas generally don't want or appreciate gentle. Heated omegas have straightforward
needs and once they have a steady alpha in their lives, they expect those needs to be met without
delay.

Magnus has already encountered the demanding side of his lover and he can't wait to see it again
while in heat.

He keeps up a steady pace that's only broken when Alec cries his name or when his voice breaks
on a moan.

They're headed for the finale quite fast, to no one's surprise. There's no way for them to prolong
this, not for Alec who's desperate and not for Magnus, who's waited for this from the moment they
got naked. With the soul bond, their pleasure is shared in more than one way.

The omega's clenching around him, making pleasure spike in both of them. At the first sensation of
the knot at this entrance, the omega reacts.

"Don't tense up," Magnus mouths at Alec's throat. "You can take it," he purrs.

He shifts his position a little, using his right hand to find Alexander's, move it back to the mattress.
Their fingers lace together.

It's a whole new experience for the omega. The demon had taken his virginity but it hadn't taken
this: Alec's first knot from his alpha.

It's a little scary. He knows it's normal. He knows omegas and alphas are meant to fit together but
still… the stretch inside his most sensitive parts is scary when he's never experienced it before.

He's hearing the words of reassurance from his alpha and he wants to be good, to be exactly what
his alpha wants from him… He reminds himself he's no longer spending his heats in a lonely room, being looked after only by his siblings. He reminds himself this is exactly what he's wanted through all those years: a protective alpha to give his body exactly what it needs and what he wants.

"That's it," he hears.

His mate's knot is settled fully inside him, stretching those parts of him that no toy had ever satisfied. It stings a little to be pushed almost to the limit but Alec is okay with that. He focuses on his mate, his body on top of his, his scent and voice.

Instead of want, Alec's mind is now fogged by pleasure.

"You're perfect," Magnus tells him, his lips seeking Alec's for a kiss.

He shifts his hips and the omega inhales sharply at the overwhelming sensation.

Alec bites his lip. He already thought this can't get more intense but if Magnus keeps moving inside him, he doesn't know how he'll survive it.

And he knows it's not over yet. A proper mating doesn't just end when the knot appears.

He wonders how long they'll be connected in the most intimate way but he's not in a rush to go anywhere.

Another kiss from Magnus is a good thing to focus on.

"You feel so good, you know that? So lovely for me."

Alec soaks up the praise, no longer even able to be flustered by it. Magnus keeps talking, telling him filthy compliments which are as elaborate as they are true.

They both gasp when Alec's body clenches on the knot. It's just an involuntary movement, a reaction. After being still for a while, Magnus moves his hips slowly, only a little, as much as their joining allows.

"Is this all right?"

A breathy "mmhmm" is his answer.

They're both beyond sensitive right now, having come already and it's only their first time tonight.

Alec's throat and the sides of his neck are all marked up by hard kisses and nibbles. All of his skin is tingling, aching for more. The knot sits heavy inside him and his alpha's presence is overwhelming above, around him.

He feels spent, thoroughly used even though he's faintly aware all this didn't even last that long, what with them both drunk on each other and with the Bond echoing their emotions back and forth.

Most importantly, he does feel sated. All the love bites throb on his skin and his body is still getting used to the knot's size but that is infinitely better than the empty ache he's had to live with regularly since the day his body matured.

The omega knows when his mate comes inside him again and he shivers. Even with contraceptives, the drive to have a successful breeding is strong. That is the purpose of a heat and it makes sex work differently than usual.
A while later, their breathing slows a little, their blood doesn't rush anymore but their bodies are close together, hot and sweaty.

Alec's fingers find their way to Magnus's hair and he buries them there, earning an appreciative sigh when he begins massaging there gently.

He's too blissed out for it to be much more than an absent-minded action but since his alpha is just as content, the petting draws another sound out of him, suspiciously close to an omega's purring.

Their bodies calm down, cool down, and when they're no longer inconvenienced by the knot, Magnus drags Alec out to shower. He almost literally has to drag him because the omega complains instead of moving, claiming he's never going to move again. At the same time, he complains about his sweaty, sticky body and the sheets.

Magnus huffs.

"I can't change the bed before you take your cute butt out of it. I'm not putting fresh bedding just for you to sweat on it."

Alec goes because Magnus acts as if he's going to go shower alone, leaving Alec behind.

In the bathroom, they decide on a bath instead. Magnus is hoping that relaxing in the water after sex will let them fall asleep for at least a little while before the omega needs another round. Maybe they should have tried to nap before during the day but then again, it probably wouldn't have worked, not with how anxious they were about the first signs of real heat.

They soak in rose water for a time and they don't actually wash themselves – Magnus does it with magic, just so that they can do nothing in the full tub. Afterwards, Magnus dries them with magic, as well. He's intending to keep using it for all the small things because it's not like he'll have any major use for it during those few days.

Wrapped in bathrobes, they return to the now aired bedroom to fall back into the fresh bed.

* *

The next day, at gray dawn, Alec wakes with a groan, kicking off the comforter from his body. It's too hot.

He makes time for a bathroom trip and then he asks more attention from his alpha. Magnus rolls them over, pins him down like last night. Alec is perfectly fine with a repeat of what they've done before. He doesn't care for variety; he cares about being filled.

This time he knows how being knotted feels but he's still a little hesitant, his body naturally apprehensive before the stretch. He gets what he needs, though, from his beautiful alpha with his big knot.

It's still very early when they're done with the first round of the day. Magnus calls them a breakfast in bed but from there the day isn't flowing smoothly.
The omega is slowly overwhelmed by his hormones. He's too hot one hour and then back to normal the next one, switching clothes when he doesn't want to wear the same t-shirt anymore. He's too warm more often than not, however, and even though the sex helps him, he complains about being uncomfortable afterwards.

His eyes are unfocused sometimes.

Magnus makes sure he eats enough and drinks enough water. It's not new to him, taking care of a heated omega. He's done it for his past lovers and he's looked after his omega friends. It's almost familiar… but not. This is different because the omega in his care right now is his. His mate, his to protect and to make sure he's happy and well-taken care of. There are some herbal potions he can give him to alleviate the inconveniences of a heat but they're only to help a little, not make it go away.

By noon it's not just the heat but Alec is feverish and it worries Magnus a little but he hopes that's just the return of the heat hormones that unbalanced his body. The omega doesn't need sex at this point, he needs comfort and closeness. Magnus holds him, his arms wrapped around his back and one coming up to the back of his neck so he can press his palm to the back of his neck.

Their legs are tangled and they're both very warm, mostly because the omega is giving off that feverish heat which Magnus hopes will pass soon. For now, he also hopes to soothe the omega to stay still and rest.

Eventually, Alec falls into an uneasy sleep, which after a time changes to proper, deep sleep.

Magnus is quite tired himself but caring for his omega is a sweet burden. He's waited for something like this for most of his life and his Alexander is the born caretaker so Magnus wants to be there for him whenever he needs it.

When he wakes and with an unfocused gaze and a breathy, desperate voice he tells Magnus he needs him, the alpha is still worried.

He's more careful then, in their love-making, making sure that Alexander gets what he needs without unnecessary delay and without ending up too sore.

Afterwards, when they cool down, his eyes are clearer and the flush in his face goes away. Magnus breathes easier.

Later, Alec straddles him and makes it clear he wants to be on top. They've tried this position before and although it's incredibly hot to see his beautiful lover on top of him, setting the pace, Magnus has some concerns about his stamina on this particular day.

But that's what the omega wants and Magnus isn't about to deny him. He lies back, very aroused and very ready when Alec sinks down on his cock.

There's no pause for adjustment.

The alpha sucks in a breath, knowing he won't last long if his lover manages to keep up this pace and he seems determined to keep it up.
Magnus puts his hands on Alec's hips to have something to hold onto. He loves feeling the strong muscles work under the hot skin. Sometimes Magnus thinks about the runes, about how it would be to try a few out in bed… His Nephilim omega would have probably appreciated a little help with stamina for doing this- riding Magnus.

Alec seems completely focused on his pleasure. His head is tilted back, his eyes are closed and his lower lip is caught between his teeth. Small gasps and loud breaths are escaping him.

He comes once and Magnus is drinking in the sight of pure bliss on his face. He's prepared to roll them over and take over the work but Alec moves first. He resumes his previous movements but now they're slower, more deliberate.

He looks down at Magnus, his eyes dark with lust and if Magnus didn't know better, he might just think he's bedding a succubus. He wanted to say something but he finds himself speechless. He can only hold on.

When he reaches his own release, the knot binds them together yet again.

Alec shifts, his thighs now a little tighter around Magnus. He bites his lip again while he takes the stretch and the sharp pleasure it gives him.

Then, he moves his hips a little, experimentally. Magnus's nails dig in his skin.

Comfortable with the knot, Alec keeps doing those little movements, as much as their position allows.

"Alexander, you're trying to kill me."

Alec gives a breathy laugh. He leans forward, puts his hand on the bed beside Magnus's head and dips his head for a kiss.

* 

They nap between the waves of need and make love when they have to. It doesn't matter if it's one am or four am, an omega has no say in choosing the hours. At least now he has an alpha to meet his needs instead of his last coping method- curling up on his side and pushing back tears of frustration.

The third day in the very early morning, Alec's head is clear of anything that isn't relevant to the moment. His mind isn't fogged by the heat, he's clean, he's comfortable, he's eating food that tastes so good because he's hungry. His kids are taken care of, New York doesn't need him, he's spending a heat with his mate. It's a little strange how rarely Alec gets to feel like this: just being himself on his own, living in the moment rather than letting his thoughts run ahead to the next hour, the next day, the future in general.

They don't even talk, they just enjoy their breakfast – or what their meal could be called at four am. Magnus is looking at him with a soft smile.

After breakfast, they move to the sofa to cuddle under some blankets. Their sleep pattern is temporarily messed up so they're not exactly sleepy despite the darkness outside.

They watch the news, then some reality tv. Just because he's not drowning in lust, doesn't mean Alec can do anything more productive than that.

Magnus is aware of how the omega is seeking as many points of contact with him as he can and
Magnus can't get enough of it. Just as Alec, for those few days, Magnus doesn't have to be anything else but an alpha. Not a warlock, not the High Warlock, not the leader, not even a father to children or adults. He likes this feeling. It doesn't even bother him that he frequently wakes up while Alexander is sleeping just because his alpha instincts tell him to watch over his omega while he's vulnerable.

It simply feels right.

Later, they return to bed and when another wave of need hits Alec, they make love again, slowly at first until Alec has to have more.

When breathy pleas fall from the omega's lips and the alpha doesn't want to rush his own body to come, he still has some tricks up his sleeve to make his omega happy. He uses magic. Little sparks sink into the omega's body only to spark to life again in his spine, drawing out a gasp from him. He's tipped over the edge of his release, his back arching and his walls clenching on the cock inside him.

It's a wonder Magnus doesn't come with him but he manages to hold out a little longer.

By noon, Magnus has knotted him two more times and after that, when Alec decided he's going to take a bath, Magnus drops asleep alone.

When he wakes up, with Alec back at this side, it seems the omega is sated, he's clear-headed, had a nice bath and is thinking about food more than about sex.

It's a good time to message Catarina, asking for updates. Magnus uses the phone instead of a fire message because he doesn't want to send a flaming paper to where his children are.

Catarina responds with "All things good, boys fed and playing". There are photos attached, too. All seven of them. One is a photo Catarina took of herself smiling and holding up Max. Another is of both boys wrapped up in blankets, sleeping.

Next, there is Isabelle, posing to the camera with Max in her arms. She's grinning and Max looks excited. Alec wants this one printed out to put it on his shelf with the others.

There's one of Izzy and Jace and Izzy is in different clothes than in the first one. This might have been taken without warning, seeing as they're not looking towards the camera and they're both focused on the kids. Alec looks at this one the longest.

Jace has a light grey shirt on, his sleeves are rolled up. Alec wonders what they've been doing that day. After all, they were supposed to be taught all kinds of things by Catarina so it's not just playing around.

Jace, slightly turned away from the camera, looks completely focused on little Jonathan.

Magnus makes some comments on the photos and Alec is content to be cuddled at his side, looking at his family on the screen of the phone and listening to Magnus talk.

They're resting like this for a while, not rushed to do anything by the heat. They even doze off at some point, still close together and comfortable under the blanket.
Magnus doesn't believe in Fated Mates. It's a romantic concept best left for romantic books, movies and songs and it frankly makes him uncomfortable. Magnus doesn't like the idea of such important things being "fated". He's always been a fan of choices and making the right decisions.

That said, he's willing to believe in *soulmates*. It's a different concept and one that he'd hoped could be true. He'd waited for someone *for himself* decade after decade, century after century.

He doesn't like the thought of Alexander Lightwood being *fated* for him, but oh, he loves thinking Alexander is his soulmate. How could he not be, when everything about him makes Magnus's soul and blood sing.

Magnus wakes up from their nap in the morning of the fourth day and he takes in the face of his sleeping mate. His cheeks are flushed now, clearly a sign he'll be waking up soon from discomfort. Magnus will be there, ready to help him out.

While he waits, he lets his thoughts drift to what they've already done. He lets his imagination bring back the details of his lover's body. The taste of salt on his skin, the heavy scent of his arousal... They've aired out the bedroom but Magnus can recall it all with perfect clarity.

He's growing hard now and he doesn't try to stop it because Alexander will be waking up soon anyway.

He's thinking back to how it felt to be deep inside his lover, feel him clench on his knot...

The omega stirs at his side, his bent knee now digging into Magnus's thigh. His eyes are still closed while shifts some more, seeking comfort.

One of those charming sleepy sniffling sounds escapes him and Magnus can't hold back a smile.

"Good morning," Magnus says, even though it's not the morning.

He gets to see those hazel eyes, at last, opening and finding him right away.

"Hello," Magnus says.

"Hello," Alec replies, a smile curving his lips.

"How are you today?" Magnus asks, a silly mood taking over him.

Alec hums thoughtfully, curling up more, moving his head to a more comfortable spot on the pillow.

"I'm hungry."

"You are?" Magnus pushes himself up on one elbow. "Well, you only need to say what you'd li-"

Alec interrupts him. "For you, alpha. I just want you."

Magnus huffs, amused. Who is he to deny his mate? He dips his head to get a kiss from Alexander and then moves completely to hover over the omega, who's still on his side, mostly curled up.

Alec turns his head for the kiss and as it continues, he's beginning to turn over under Magnus because they've cuddled enough before and during the nap. Now he wants to spread his legs for his alpha.
Magnus helps out at first, making room for Alec's long legs under him but then he orders: "On your hands and knees, darling."

Alec scrambles to do as asked, especially since it did not seem like a suggestion.

Magnus makes a sound of approval.

"Hands on the headboard."

He runs his hand down Alec's back, making a shiver follow in the wake of his fingers.

"That's perfect."

Alec heard that word several times already and he doesn't want to believe it but all the same, it falls on him like a warm blanket, making him even more eager to please his alpha.

Magnus doesn't have to touch him to know just how wet his omega is right now. It's beautiful how he reacts to praise, including filthy compliments, so Magnus keeps talking. He makes it clear he expects the omega to not move.

Alec grips the headboard when it's clear his mate is about to push in and fuck him.

At first, Magnus planned to play with him a bit, start slow, but he changed his mind quickly. He goes for fast.

"You're not going to come before I've knotted you," he says, his voice almost catching on a moan because the tight heat of the omega's body is just too delicious.

"Do you understand?" Magnus asks to give Alec a chance to say no.

"Yes," the omega gasps, arching his back to meet the next thrust at a better angle.

Magnus puts his hands on Alec's hips, squeezing the soft flesh. Keeping the pace he's set for himself, Magnus doesn't talk anymore, he just does.

Without the filthy words, the silence is filled with the noises. Just in case the omega thinks he can't speak, Magnus says,

"You're not to move but you can talk, darling."

The endearment is a tease in itself, the way Magnus says it. Alec is tempted to talk back but at the same time, he's not sure what Magnus wants from him beyond the physical submission.

He's decided it's safe to make noise without talking. Besides, his alpha has never asked him to be quiet before. Magnus has never seemed to like quiet even in play.

All those thoughts go through the omega's mind and it also crosses his mind that it's unfair he has to think about it while in heat…

Then, those same thoughts calm down. If Alec's wrong about what his alpha wants, he'll be told that. What is he worrying about?
He lets out a breath that becomes a gasp. On the next thrust, it's a moan.

Fingers dig into the skin of his hips. His alpha fucks him a little harder, now, and Alec likes that. He no longer tries to hold back. For a moment he even forgets he's supposed to last until the knot (and truth be told, Magnus briefly forgets his own order as well).

They're chasing the same goal: the completion, the knot, the omega's satisfaction.

Alec keeps his hands on the headboard, which serves as a very good support while his alpha drives into his body again and again.

At one point, Alec's tempted to drop to his elbows, just put himself on display for Magnus, put his face on the pillow… and Magnus might even like it… but that definitely isn't what Alec was asked to do, so he doesn't try it.

He's close. He's very close and it isn't surprising. Between his alpha's scent and the feel of his cock inside him, there was no chance that Alec could hold out against that.

Magnus's breath hitches, too. His hips stutter. He's close, as well, and Alec only needs to wait for the knot.

It's the last time they're tied together for this heat but they don't know it yet at that moment.

Magnus praises him for doing as he asked and Alec feels warm once more.

The next time they do this, before dinnertime, there's no knot. The pheromones which affected the alpha are still there but too weak and weakening still, even though the omega's scent is still heavy and changed for the heat.

Alec's disappointed but he's also relieved that it's over. There's no doubt they'll still have sex at least a few times today but they'll also have the whole day to recover from the pheromones.

Their sleep pattern is completely changed to fit around the waves of need and most of their meals are eaten in bed or on a rare occasion on the sofa, so it'll be good to have a normal night's worth of sleep. They have a conversation to decide whether they should get their boys back from Cat's sooner and although Alec wants to see them very much, he knows it would be too much for him.

"Let's get proper rest so we can handle them in the morning."

"That's what I was thinking," Magnus says, "But, I also thought you might really want them back."

To that, Alec smiles. "I do want them back but I can make do with cuddling you for tonight."

**

The next morning, the Lightwood-Bane family is back together. They have a portal open between Cat's home and the loft, and they get all of their baby things back.

Alec hugs his sons tightly. He's happy to hear they've handled the separation okay. According to Catarina, it was good for them to become used to Jace's and Isabelle's scents without the distraction of their parents' scents.

As for Izzy and Jace, Alec will meet up with them soon but for now, he isn't in the mood for having more people around him. He only wants his sons, his mate and his nest. That's all he needs.
After the heat, he goes back to nesting, like he's done before it. Magnus misses him in his bed but he can get his kisses during the day.

Things are back to normal.

* * *

Two days later, Magnus goes to the Pandemonium and even as he's asking Alec if he wants to come with him, he already knows the answer will be a decided no. The omega wants to be home right now, nest and enjoy the peace and quiet with his children.

Magnus goes because the last time he's been in Pandemonium was back when Alexander had his friends there. He doesn't want to neglect the club because even if most of the regulars don't realize it, it's his presence there that keeps it running smoothly.

People don't have to know who he is. They don't have to know he's the High Warlock or a warlock at all. They just need to know there is an alpha looking over the club and there are things he won't let happen on his territory.

Magnus needs to keep an eye on it especially because Alexander and his family are likely going to keep visiting it sometimes.

He puts red streaks in his hair because he feels like it. He puts on a deep-red shirt because it matches and then some gold pendants because he's been avoiding wearing them around Blueberry and he misses them. The shirt has no buttons all the way to the navel.

Before he leaves the loft, he makes sure to check in on his mate again. Alexander is half-buried in the nest, both boys in there with him. He isn't sleeping but he looks like he might be the moment Magnus is gone.

He tells Magnus to enjoy his evening, his voice a little muffled.

It was a good idea to come here tonight, Magnus thinks from his sofa-throne in the VIP area. The moment his Downworlder regulars notice he's there, he gets buried under requests, concerns, and even some indecent proposals.

He also realizes that he needs to pay more attention and that some shady businesses have tried to take root in the side rooms of the Pandemonium. He makes sure his opinion of those businesses is well known and that these particular shady deals won't happen again.

He wonders if there's gossip about him being mated and therefore less interested in looking after Pandemonium… if so, well, he's going to make sure everyone knows he's still very much around.

He sees the young werewolf DJ, Bat, that night. Since he's Alexander's friend, Magnus, of course, has the time to talk with him. From what he says, it seems like the Institute has so far managed to maintain good-enough relations with the Pack, which is always a good thing.

Magnus is used to taking care of more than just warlocks. He's immortal and he has the powers to help anyone he wants to help. Before Alexander and Max and Jon, the only children he could have were the Downworlders he looked after, such as Raphael.
Since the Pack's Alpha is something of a substitute father to Alexander, Magnus is quite interested in the werewolves' wellbeing.

Later, Magnus dances for a short while because he feels like it. He likes the music, he likes the steady pulse of his club. That's why he created it. He talks to the warlocks, he talks to other VIP regulars…

And then he goes home to his mate.

Alec is still up.

He's in the kitchen, putting away some plates and cutlery after washing them. When he hears Magnus return, he turns to him and comes over.

Magnus moves as well, closes the distance between them and grabs him by the shirt, his fingers tangling in it. For a moment he's not sure if he wants to kiss Alec right there or if he wants to push him against the wall. So he kisses him right there.

"Is this all right?" he asks after they part. "I couldn't stop thinking about you."

Alec's eyes are a little unfocused for a second but then he gathers his thoughts.

"Yeah-yes, you don't have to stop."

Now, Magnus crowds him against the wall. "All those people in the club… and I couldn't stop thinking that my beautiful mate was at home."

A whimper leaves Alec's lips when Magnus dips his head to leave love bites on his throat.

"Are you going to make up for it?... or are you happy to see me?"

Feeling daring, Alec's hand finds its way to the front of his mate's black pants. A silly thought takes over his mind and he snorts, surprising Magnus.

"Are you happy to see me?... or are you happy to see me?"

Alec feels even sillier for voicing his thoughts, especially when his mate pauses all movements to take in what Alec just said. And then he's getting it, mirth brightening his eyes.

"I'm very happy to see you. This is happy too, if you're willing..."

Magnus kisses Alec's throat and presses himself against him, trapping him against the wall.

"By the Angel..."

Alec surrenders to it, lets Magnus take what he wants.

Yes, his hormones have already settled after the heat and he wants peace and quiet but his memories of it are fresh and it takes only a few skilled kisses to awaken his body. Anyway, how can he not respond when his mate is dressed like that and smells of the club, his alpha scent and
that cologne…

A minute later he's wet and ready to go but Magnus seems quite happy to be just kissing him.

They undress each other, rushed and uncoordinated, and at first Alec thinks Magnus is planning to have him right there against the wall but the alpha pulls him to the sofa and Alec follows.

It's rough and hungry between them because 'hungry' is how Magnus came home. He's setting the pace because Alec lets him, wants him to.

They have sex on the sofa and Alec misses the knot again when they come.

Magnus expects his omega to head to the nest for the night but he follows Magnus instead. They slip under the covers in the alpha's bedroom together and Magnus makes sure his mate is well-wrapped for the night even without the nest.

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