When a High Warlock looking to end his celibacy streak meets a Shadowhunter after no-baggage thrills, the two make a deal: anytime, anywhere, no strings attached.
I think we all know by now that you can watch any film in the history of ever and somehow make it a Malec story. Well, here’s an attempt.
Many things could be said about Magnus Bane. *Celibate* was not one of them.

Yet it’s to his abject horror that he discovers it has been the case for the past year, having been too busy, too tired, too distracted with more pressing matters. The growing heat of Valentine’s rumored return has been spreading enough paranoia to pack Magnus’ schedule with all matter of business for months now, and what little time he has beyond the daily grind is dedicated to his nightclub, keeping up appearances at Warlock Council meetings and booking time with his beautician Jayla, whose ability to keep the exhaustion from setting around his eyes is worth every damn penny. But when it’s just himself and his Nightingale penthouse watching the sun sky turn to starry night, he dares wonder if perhaps the reason for his lack of sexual exploits is that he’s simply too reluctant to dip his toe back into that pool.

He’s had his fair share of heartbreak through his many centuries, both romantic and circumstantial, and each a little harder to bounce back from. Camille and her desire to play games had left him in too many pieces to pick up, and it’d taken a decade, countless heartache drinks and the blessed company of good friends to stitch himself back together. And even then, he’d let her damage him so irreversibly that he had subconsciously dismantled the good in every relationship he’d had since. Imasu, in particular, had paid the price for his caged heart, and Magnus had been left alone to confront the mauled remains of it yet again.

When he’d met Etta in the 50s, he’d found himself relieved and equally devastated to learn he remained capable of falling in love. The joy of being with her was shrouded in the fear that she would leave, or be taken from him. It had made his love for her desperate and intense when it didn’t have to be, and too loud and free when it needed patience. He’d expected to dance with her until her weary heart couldn’t possibly dance anymore, but it was his inability to fulfill her mortal dreams of children that inevitably bested him. And because her happiness was all he wished for, he’d let her go without resentment. He’d been lucky with how merciful that heartbreak had been, for it was nothing in comparison to losing her much later to her own deteriorating memories.

He’s had lovers since, but nothing that lasted beyond the midnight bell. His heart has stayed firmly behind locked doors, and his life has remained infinitely less complicated as a result. Just the way he likes it. And yet.

A year. *Can’t be*, he thinks. That doesn’t sound like him at all.

He dismisses the travesty, downing the remainder of his martini in a flourish. “Surely not.”

Catarina raises her left eyebrow purposefully, and *ungrateful Lilith* does she look amused. “A year, Magnus.”

“Oh, and I suppose you’ve been fluffing your nipples with Dr. Hotbody in comparison?”

“He’s also happily married with two little boys and *professionalism in the workplace* is a concept that exists. Clearly you’ve never heard of it.”

“I’ll have you know I take professionalism in the workplace very seriously,” Magnus raises his nose at her, “Everywhere else is open season.”

“Denial makes you look old, my friend.”
“I beg your pardon.”

Catarina chuckles, a flash of white teeth amidst the nightclub neons. She finishes her beer and taps out for the night. “Get laid, Magnus. It might help you unclench.”

Magnus nudges the empty budweiser bottle with a fingertip, like it’s presence is a putrid stain on his very existence. “I still can’t believe you make me stock this for you. Sacrilege.”

She waves goodbye as she navigates the stairs down. “A year, Magnus!”

Yeah yeah. He waves her off and leans against the banister, takes in the hundreds of bodies writhing on the dancefloor below. His own little kingdom of freedom and fun. Catarina’s startling wake up call makes him determined to look for a suitable outlet, even if the thought of letting someone physically close again renders him a little nervous. Still, now that he’s confronted with his lacking sex life, he’s reminded of the pleasures to be found in the sensations of the flesh and realizes how terribly he’s missed it.

Not tonight, he reasons. He’s tired, ready to call it quits and log in some R&R with his bathtub, and he’s got an early call out tomorrow for a young Warlock woman with a power blockage. It’s easy to see how sex has fallen by the wayside. When did I get so boring.

Naturally, that’s when Magnus spots the Shadowhunter in his nightclub.

With all the talk of Valentine and the Circle possibly making a return, he’d cast a spell on the building to alert him to the presence of Nephilim, unsavory as they are. Which is why the Shadowhunter currently prowling his way through the bustling crowd is throwing off a cloud of lime green smoke for Magnus’-eyes-only, like he’s rolled out of a restaurant dumpster – a childish but ultimately satisfying joke he’d had in mind when he’d created the spell.

Magnus heads for the stairs to get a closer look, because his disdain for Shadowhunters may be strong, but the difference between a Circle member and one of their regular halfwits determines how dangerous he needs to be. Losing the Shadowhunter is next to impossible with the way he towers head and shoulders above the crowd, but he gets ever closer, sweeps the green cloud away with a finger snap and takes a decent look at his guest.

The Shadowhunter is visibly unarmed, though that observation means nothing with their ability to glamour the weapons they carry. However, the left side of the man’s long, strong neck bears a Deflect rune in place of a Circle branding, which makes Magnus reconsider immediately removing him from the premises. A turn of his head as he takes in the back left of the club wall reveals a devastatingly handsome face, and combined with the way he’s built like he could take down a Werewolf with his bare hands and pull off a Christian Dior suit, Magnus can’t deny he appreciates the view.

Still, he’s here for something.

Magnus is set to walk right up and find out what that is when the Shadowhunter’s eyes suddenly land on him, rendering him at a standstill. He waits for a sign of retreat, an acknowledgement, a pass, some inkling of the business that brings him here. Instead, he feels a slither of heat along the length of his spine as the Shadowhunter’s gaze trails downward - face, torso, crotch? – and back up again. With purpose. He’s---

He’s cruising.

He’s certainly not the first Shadowhunter, male or otherwise, to try his luck inside the walls of the
Pandemonium, let alone with the High Warlock of Brooklyn. But Magnus knows what he’s worth, and he doesn’t have the time or willingness to be the secret walk on the forbidden wild side so many of Raziel’s sex-skittish soldiers itch for. Except this Shadowhunter male – gigantic, dark and breathtaking in beauty– is staring back at him like he’d be pleased for Magnus to make a move, but will just as easily find another if he doesn’t. Clearly not his first rodeo. Magnus can’t deny he’s a little intrigued.

Satisfying is the way the Shadowhunter watches him approach, something deliciously molten stirring behind his eyes. Whoa is the smell of him when he’s finally close enough; the strange, fascinating mix of sweat, smoke and heated metal beneath expensive cologne. Tom Ford, of all things. Magnus is impressed. He inhales a silent lungful and releases it with a sigh. He can almost taste his adrenaline.

This Shadowhunter is fresh off a hunt.

“Here for more shadow-hunting, Nephilim?” he asks.

Said Nephilim angles his body full frontal, hands at his sides, stance offering permission for him to get close. Then, in a voice that makes Magnus think of naked skin on velvet, he finally answers. “Depends on what kind of hunting you mean.”

And while Magnus is certainly reveling in the mystery - priorities first.

“I’m asking if you’re a danger to my patrons.”

The Shadowhunter smirks, and it’s amiable. Warm. “Only if they want me to be.”

Magnus returns that smirk wholeheartedly before he can think not to. Of the few Shadowhunters he’s known in his time, those with a penchant to boast have always done so from a place of grandiosity. That this Shadowhunter seems likeable, and sincere in that likeability, is an unmatched feat. Magnus feels a little off his guard, in an exciting way.

“How bold of you.”

The Shadowhunter’s smirk darkens, and Magnus is suddenly excited for very different reasons. “You’ve got no idea.”

He’s playing a risky game out here in the open, nothing like the Shadowhunters that have propositioned him in the past. There’s no intention of covering his tracks. Instead, he’s freely offering lines in place of the typically subtle, paranoid hints that speak of the Clave and the embedded fear of punishment. Magnus, at the very least, is pleased to know he’s cultivated a nightclub culture that makes everyone feel safe to be who they are.

“You’re either utterly fearless or naïve,” is his casual critique. “I’m curious as to which one.”

The Shadowhunter’s head tilts ever so slightly, dancing eyes travelling up from yet another perusal of Magnus’ body. His smile is wide and unashamed. “I think the word you’re looking for is licentious.”

Magnus bites his lip to hold his smile. “I’d say you’re more lascivious.”

That earns him a grin so big, it tickles the corners of his eyes. His new Shadowhunter acquaintance is clearly enjoying the new chemistry of their wordplay, and against all possible odds, Magnus realizes he is too. A lot.
“I was hoping for prurient.”

Magnus delicately runs his tongue over the ends of his front teeth, but he can no longer distract himself from the smile that threatens to come out. And it does, explosively. “Definitely concupiscent.”

The Shadowhunter emits a dreamy, half-pleading moan. “Can you be?”

*Good lord.* It must be the year-long celibacy talking, because Magnus can’t help the buzz of unbridled want suddenly pooling in his groin. This Shadowhunter has pressed every button he has and all systems are firmly, undeniably on. That heated, caressing gaze, the inviting voice and the warrior’s body beneath those clothes are all enough to have Magnus on board in any given situation. But it’s the intelligence to their flirtatious back and forth, the tease, the speaking to arouse and the startling absence of false pretense that’s proving a bit much to handle. It feels a lot like trading kisses - playful, pleasurable and provocative kisses - and Magnus is quickly deciding he wants to find out if the real thing is just as good.

He tries to keep his head, but he’s wavering. *God,* is he wavering.

“I don’t get involved in Nephilim affairs.”

As if to counteract that particular opinion, the Nephilim narrows the space separating them. Magnus’ arms fall to his sides at the new proximity, heart picking up. He’s way too affected.

“Why?”

Shadowhunters have been a thorn in Magnus’ side for centuries, and he could write a list of the bad experiences he’s had. But none of those have befallen his bedroom – his own self-preserving code of ethics. “Just a rule. Though I’ll admit, I’m currently failing to remember the reason.”

The Shadowhunter smirks again, baiting him, leans so close that Magnus’ every breath is now full of him. His voice drops in Magnus’ ear, as much as the club’s pounding bass will allow. He says, “I’ll bend if you will” in a way that paints a *very vivid picture,* and Magnus has to flex his right thigh to stifle the sudden tremor in his knee.

He should have been home five minutes ago. He should be sliding into his Cambodian silk robe and running the bath he’s spent all day yearning for. He shouldn’t be here, a hair’s breadth away from a criminally gorgeous Shadowhunter man and he certainly shouldn’t be entertaining plans to engage with his naked body.

*A year,* he thinks.

“Look, Shadowhunter---”

“Alec.”

Magnus looks up into those eyes - warm, hazel and clear as bottle glass, illuminated under the club’s overheads and so, so close – and he doesn’t see a Shadowhunter. Just a man, a very beautiful one, whose body promises a good time and whose mind matches him in the most basic of ways. It makes him mighty difficult to ignore.

As if sensing a window for negotiation, Alec slides a big, warm hand around Magnus’ hip and presses to the sway of his back until their bodies are flush. Magnus can feel Alec’s stance shift where their hips are pressed together, and he misses whatever he murmurs into his ear because every primal sense he has is now zeroing in on the *other* hardness behind the denim of Alec’s formfitting black
jeans. Just the thought of this Shadowhunter, this enticing, unpredictable Shadowhunter walking around his club sporting a hard on makes his own cock fill to meet it before he can think to control himself.

A year, he thinks again. And it’s all he needs to snip the final thread of his resolve.

“Come with me,” Magnus takes him by the wrist and tugs him through the club, feels Alec’s other hand latch to his forearm when the crowd shifts aggressively to the next new song.

They make it out back to the manager’s lounge between the dodges of quick-thinking bar staff, where Magnus kicks the ajar door so forcibly that it almost rips from its hinges. Alec’s all over him, frantically pushing them both inside with chest, hands, hips, until they’re over the threshold enough for him to shut them inside.

Then he grabs Magnus by the lapels and slams him against the door, hard enough to cause a horrible spike of ohgoditsreallyatrap adrenaline in the pit of his stomach, and Magnus is halfway to reprimanding himself when Alec’s mouth eagerly, thoroughly takes his.

It takes a moment for Magnus to catch up, because fucking Lilith they’re really doing this. But there’s nowhere for him to go between Alec’s hot, oh-so-firm body and the door rattling under the urgent, hungry push of them. So he slides both hands into Alec’s sweat-damp hair and surrenders to the kiss, lets his body catch and cradle Alec’s weight. He’s barely got his mouth open before Alec’s tongue is a languid, nerve-tingling heat inside him and holy hell. Magnus knows how he managed to go without sex, but he wonders how on earth he’s survived this long without a decent kiss. It’s positively knee-melting, and it’s been so long that he’s certain he can get off with the talent of Alec’s kiss, his insistent undulations, and the needy moans he lets loose at Magnus’ hair pulling alone.

His senses are overloaded. The unexpected heady scent of Alec’s recent demon-slaying on his skin makes his head swim in some deeper, instinctual way, and the taste and heat of him makes everything else muted until it’s just them, their starved breaths and the throb of Magnus’ pulse behind his ears. His hands map the unyielding curves of muscle and shoulder blade, spine and buttock, the mouth-watering grooves of Alec’s hip bones and the tickle of a happy trail yes above the warm leather of his belt. Magnus briefly opens his eyes to the lush, dark lashes fanning against Alec’s cheeks, sees the Stealth rune inside his sleeve as he reaches up to cup his face, but he’s quickly closing them again to fully appreciate Alec’s bodily shiver when he continues exploring that fine trail of hair up, up, over an impressive set of abs, firm pecs, budding nipples. A flick of a thumb is all it takes to have Alec shunting Magnus back against the door.

They’re both suddenly ravenous to be on each other - Alec roughly tugs Magnus’ shirt from his pants waist and laboriously begins unbuttoning, as Magnus pushes Alec’s jacket from his shoulders, discovering that they’re just as sexy and broad without it. He gets Alec’s t-shirt up around his neck just as his own shirt is finally pried open – and then it’s left there, entirely forgotten, when the feel of their naked skin finally meeting pulls matching groans from each of their throats. Magnus, particularly, is a man who appreciates the effort of immaculately groomed chest hair more than most, but he’s never wanted the delicious sensation of it on his skin, his nipples, quite as much as he does now.

Alec makes quick work of Magnus’ belt and fly, apparently in favor of urgency. Magnus would usually lament the sad reality of bypassing the thorough exploration of a partner this compatible, but then Alec is shoving one big, hot hand right down Magnus’ boxer briefs until he's palm to balls and Magnus is so caught off guard that he wrenches his mouth from Alec’s on a tight gasp, a full bodied twitch rocking him through his very core.

Alec observes the display of shock on his face and the black-painted nails Magnus has embedded in
his pecs, gives a smug grin. “Easy.”

Magnus grunts, eyes falling shut on a pleased sigh when Alec makes a point of massaging them. Alec must enjoy how docile he’s become - he’s close to purring which is all kinds of embarrassing - because he chuckles, nuzzles beneath Magnus’ jaw to suck a kiss there. Which makes him sag further against the door; which makes Alec laugh, which is a really great sound in Magnus’ skewed opinion. He eventually gets his wits about him enough to unclaw from Alec’s chest and smooth his palms over the hardened nubs of his nipples. That quickly knocks Alec off kilter, his neck kisses now including teeth, and he visibly jolts when Magnus drags his nails down his furry abs, hips thrusting mindlessly against Magnus’ thigh.

He gets inside Alec's jeans with a magical flick of his wrist and peels his underwear down over the root of his cock - takes his sweet ass time when Alec groans his encouragement insistently - and down, down, down over the head until the entire glorious length bobs free. Magnus’ lips go slack against Alec’s kiss. Fucking hellfire, he's proportionate.

With Alec making no move to progress beyond the teasing of his balls, Magnus thinks teasing him back is, really, the only logical thing to do. A well-placed scrape of his thumb nail has Alec clenching all over; a high, soft gasp of surprise on his lips, a reflexive squeeze of Magnus’ balls. Magnus follows that with a single circle of his finger tip. And another. And another. Then another along the ridge; light as a feather. Alec's gasp turns to a whine.

“Easy,” Magnus smirks against the shell of his ear.

Perhaps finally realizing he's only going to get what he gives here, Alec leans back and departs from his maddening fondle - brushes a finger along the crease where Magnus’ butt cheeks meet like he's determined to have the last word - and raises his palm to his mouth where he licks it, wets it, enjoys the way it now thoroughly holds his attention. Then, with no more preamble, he takes Magnus’ neglected cock in hand.

Magnus’ hips curl toward him on the first pump, his breath shuddering between their parted mouths, because it's been a year since he’s had anything besides his own hand and it’s a lot. He thrusts with the slow dance of Alec’s hand, stares up into those bottle glass eyes and lets himself be played like an instrument. Alec stares right back; unwavering, intense, hand working him in measured, precise strokes as if he wants Magnus to feel every single one like a thrust from head to toe. Like he wants to get inside Magnus’ head and fuck him there too.

It's dangerously enjoyable, this strange, quick connection he has with this Shadowhunter, and it reminds him of the joys he’s found in previous one-night lovers. How he went so long without this, he doesn’t know. But he’s surprisingly glad he took the opportunity, as off-brand as it is for him to delight in the company of a Shadowhunter, and he finds that he doesn’t mind giving his body over, safe in the knowledge that this is all it is; safer still that this, too, will be but a good memory.

Undulating to Alec’s hand, he smugly thinks: What a way to get back on the horse.

He says, “Kiss Me”, and Alec slowly moves in to comply; kisses him with the same gut-fire intensity as his fist.

Magnus can feel the rise of that fire in his ribs, until it's in his chest, his thighs, in the strain of his biceps growing hotter, whiter, more, and Alec must feel how tightly he's strung because he strokes harder, faster, letting Magnus’ body tell him what he needs until—God, he’s there, there, there, there, spilling hotly along the grooves of Alec’s abs with a wretched, guttural groan that rips through the very depths of him.
Alec squeezes every pearly drop from the crown, and releases his cock and mouth only when Magnus is twitching from it, gasping and laughing with it, too sensitive to take anymore. Alec laughs too, at the way Magnus melts against his shoulder like he needs a minute, and then they're both just giggling at the sound of each other, pleased and easy, the flood of endorphins doing its thing. Magnus gets a good look at the way his spendings glisten on Alec’s impressive stomach - files the image away for a rainy day - then does the man a favor by cleaning him off with a finger snap.

Recovered, he fastens himself back into his pants, enjoying the post-orgasmic zing of his nerve endings.

“So,” Alec breathes, grinning.

Magnus yanks him around by the belt loops and plasters him against the door now, matching that grin. “So.”

Alec is clearly past drawing it out and promptly brings Magnus against him, smiles down at him, then plants his mouth on him, tongue in him. Magnus lets the kiss last until he brings his own palm up to lick, because after that orgasm, he’s more than eager to return it - except Alec snatches his wrist before he can; a no on his lips.

He confesses. “I like it dry.”

Magnus would be surprised, but he’s yet to meet a Shadowhunter who doesn't luxuriate in a little pain and punishment. He supposes it’s all part and parcel with Raziel and his insistence that his soldiers mutilate their bodies to invoke his power. It’s no wonder they’re all so righteous, serious, self-important. But now Magnus has a pretty mental picture of Alec working his own cock, dry and hard - locked away from anyone who can see his pleasure, his vulnerability - and it’s enough to cause a thrill.

In that vein, he follows a hunch; twisting Alec by the shoulders and pressing his beautiful face to the door. He holds him there by the neck as he struggles, typical warrior fight or flight instinct kicking in because Magnus is someone – a Downworlder - he doesn’t know, and he yanks Alec’s jeans and briefs down over what is his delectable ass, slap-groping one muscular cheek. Alec’s body jumps at the impact, and the way his gasp cuts into a low groan tells Magnus he’s very much on the right track.

Finally pulling Alec’s shirt over his head and tossing it aside, he runs his fingernails over the glorious, broad expanse of his back, all muscle and black runes – Precision, Courage in Combat, Strength and others he doesn’t care to know – watches Alec roll his hips at the wall in response. He’s delicious, a slave to sensation, someone Magnus would surely delight in taking apart in several different ways. But Alec is reaching back for him, wanting his pleasure now, and he’s reminded that this Shadowhunter man is probably only afforded a brief window to get what he needs in a world that doesn’t want him to have it.

Pity, he thinks, but he feels compelled to oblige, to offer Alec this small moment in time where he doesn’t have to be anything but at peace with how he feels. So Magnus presses in, his clothed groin to Alec’s bare behind, and grinds, reaches around dry-palmed to start a rhythm on his cock. Alec hisses, braces himself against the door, arches his spine to press his ass back against him – disappearing inside his pleasure. Which Magnus would be onboard with, if his current partner wasn’t part of a society that abhors the very desires he hides. Desires he shouldn’t be afraid to have in the first place.

So he gets a fistful of Alec’s hair and rears his head back, holds him against his shoulder by the throat. He gives his thick neck a soft warning squeeze. Stay put.
He bites the outer edge of Alec’s ear, scraps his teeth along his cheek bone, tempers it with a nuzzle toward his mouth. Alec’s surprised gasp follows, melting into another moan when Magnus pumps the crown of his cock through the ring of his fingers, calls him, “Alec,” and then Alec’s mouth is searching for him, desperate for his kiss like he might starve without it.

Magnus grants it to him, thrills in the way he starts riding back against him, fondling his own chest, squeezing his pecs hard and pinching his nipples rough as he thrusts with abandon into Magnus’ dry fist. Like this, Magnus can’t find it in himself to think he’s anything but perfect. A wanton mess of instinct and urge. *A goddamned Shadowhunter.*

Alec breaks from Magnus’ mouth. His wet, raw lips stretch into a big, dirty smile.

Magnus grins at the sight of it, flying at the thought that the pleasure he offers is the reason. He embeds his nails in the Shadowhunter’s neck. “Alec.”

Alec gives a drawn sigh, watches him through the periphery of a heavy-lidded eye, fights to keep it open even as Magnus’ thrusts against the hungry pushback of his ass make him want to surrender to it. “Yes.”

“Alec.”

He moans, brokenly. “Yes.”

God, he loves it, the sound of his own name. Magnus should have known, the way the lot of them posture around like they’re all that matters. *Goddamned Shadowhunters.* He wants to keep giving Alec what he wants, because the sounds he’s making will be keeping Magnus’ and his hand company for at least a month. But he also doesn’t, so he murmurs his own name into Alec’s ear instead, just for kicks.

“*Magnus.*”

Alec has the *complete opposite* reaction to the one he was expecting, which was within the realm of frustration - and knowing most Shadowhunters are generally a bit fucked in the head, getting a little hot under the collar at his denied gratification didn’t seem too farfetched a concept. What actually transpires is a stutter of hips, followed by a tremor that intensifies as it works its way up, a hitched sigh, eyes falling closed, a tightening of muscles…*and Alec moaning his name back to him like it’s even better.*

Magnus thrusts against him a little harder, jerks him faster, digs his nails deeper, half out of his mind with the urge to exact some sort of deep-dwelling punishment and ruin this Shadowhunter with the best damn night of his life. *What am I doing?* He wonders. He’s so into this it’s crazy. “Yes.”

Alec reaches up to grip the hand on his throat, squeezes it, voice hoarse. “*Magnus.*”

*Sweet Lilith.* “Yes.”

“*Magnus.*”

“*Yes.*”

Alec’s body goes tight all over, rocking between his ministrations stiffly. “*F---uck. Magnus!*”

He’s there, right on the precipice, and Magnus wants to see him throw himself from it.

He doesn’t let up, even as Alec’s entire being seems to clench again and again in its desperate effort
to get there. And then Alec’s free hand encloses around Magnus’ fist where it jerks his cock, and he fucks their combined grip, fucks it, f**ks it like it’s them spread on a bed somewhere, unloading their tensions into each other’s bodies. And then he comes, loudly, deeply, gasping and growling as if he’s had his ribs torn through his chest, until he’s quivering with it. It’s such a wild, unabashed display of pleasure that Magnus is half-hard all over again. He can’t stop himself from grinding his cock against Alec’s firm ass in appreciation.

Alec, perhaps feeling a little vulnerable in his release, pulls on Magnus’ hands until he’s wrapped in his arms. He leans back against him as he catches his breath, chest rising and falling with the effort. Magnus is feeling generous enough to support him while he does. Alec licks his lips, forehead resting against his neck, and he heaves a big, tired sigh. Magnus can’t help staring at him, this Shadowhunter relaxing in a Downworlder’s embrace, like it’s no big deal. Who even are you?

Alec is fucking humming.

Magnus waves and snaps his fingers, cleaning everything up. “Well.”

The Shadowhunter snickers, twists and gathers Magnus close, and just meanders on in for a kiss, as if what has befallen Magnus’ oh so unexpected night is the usual run of the mill deal. Totally normal. Magnus has no idea how they’re here, stuck in the unexplainable fog of things that led to another thing, or what he’s going to do now. Whether there will be consequences or not. But Alec’s mouth is still hot, and his luscious body is still inviting despite the lack of urgency, and he can’t seem to push himself away. Being flesh to flesh with someone again feels too good.

Alec lifts his lips away – his hips press forward, and if his wide eyes mean anything, he almost certainly feels Magnus’ half hard dick considering the possibility of another round. “My god…could you go again?”

“Not even if I tried,” Magnus grins, “You’ve wrung me clean.”

Alec delights in this, dragging Magnus into another kiss. A final kiss, it seems, as his large, warm hands make departing pets across his back. He’s half smiling, lashes low, and they’re nose to nose as Magnus tucks his softened cock back inside his jeans for him. He gives Alec’s belt a hard tug – Alec grins – then he’s zipping and buckling him up. Alec’s sigh hits Magnus’ mouth, and Magnus kisses him again, dubbing it the last one. Fuck this Shadowhunter getting the last say.

Alec, the shit, grabs him around the ears and kisses him back, sliding his tongue inside between nips and bites. Magnus yanks himself away, knocks his hands off, and goes back in for his own, framing his thumbs under the lines of his jaw. They both fall back against the poor, abused door, and Magnus hitches a booted foot around Alec’s calf just as Alec grabs a handful of his ass. It’s fun, he realizes, to have this Shadowhunter pressed bodily against him, fighting childishly for the credit of a last kiss, as bizarre and unimaginable as the concept may be. It makes it hard to stop.

He eventually wrenches himself back – a firm hand planted to Alec’s chest, because no more – to which Alec makes a half-aborted grab and looks like he’s about to pout.

“Go on, Shadowhunter,” Magnus pants, laughingly, his breath stolen somewhere in Alec’s lungs. He puts another step between them, “Time to fly back to the flock.”

“Alright, alright,” Alec accepts it with a long suffering eye roll, collecting his shirt and jacket off the floor with one final smirk. He yanks the door open.

He pauses just before he steps out, a hand on the door’s edge. Alec smiles, and it’s a lot smug, and decidedly satisfied, visibly glad for the good time. What hangs Magnus on it is the way he doesn’t
look satisfied with himself (expected) or satisfied with Magnus (always guaranteed) but satisfied with what they had. Like the two of them together were a good match. Magnus doesn’t want to think too hard on that, even if his body quietly agrees. Tonight was all it was, all it ever will be. Alec knows it. He knows it. And they’re both so sure of that, he half expects there’ll be a parting handshake.

Alec doesn’t say goodbye, just smiles again, pats the door and steps out. Half naked, runes on display for all to see, his shirt and jacket balled up in one hand. Proudly debauched. He politely closes the door behind him.

Magnus collapses onto the leather sofa, carding his hands through his hair in a daze. His body still thumps warm and pleasant, and he lays his head back, soaking in the remnant sensations. A dangerous thing for a man so tired. When his eyes start to close of their own accord, he reluctantly hauls himself up with a haggard grunt; he grimaces. Catarina would be making an old man joke right about now.

His conjured portal takes him through to the foyer of his penthouse, quiet and dark. A finger snap turns the lights on low, and he peels his jacket from his shoulders, kicks his boots off into his bedroom and starts filling the bathtub.

He’s already had one glass of his usual red by the time it’s ready for him, and he gives an involuntary groan as he settles into the hot water. Magnus may be Brooklyn’s powerful High Warlock, but nothing quite compares to the magic of his big, indulgent bathtub and the relief it gives him after a particularly trying day. He lets his arms float and his eyes slide shut, feeling the loosening of muscles he didn’t know were tight, siphoning stress and infusing relaxation. Under those sensations, there’s the phantom touch of hands on his back, his nipples, his stomach, his balls---

Magnus jolts, eyes flying open, the bath’s water swaying side to side.

A goddamned Shadowhunter.

It tickles something deep and unseemly in him even now, the idea of a Shadowhunter touching him, desiring him, delighting in him, in the abominable concept of his own naked, willing body in the hands of a Downworlder man.

Magnus shivers deliciously at the thought. He’d been expecting the full horrific weight of his actions in the aftermath – getting drunk, scrubbing himself raw, berating himself for another poor life choice and promising never ever again.

Not…this. Not the continuous buzz of a relieved orgasm. Not the phantom sensation of big, warm hands exploring and pleasuring his eager flesh like they want to give as much as take. Not the devilish sigh on his lips from a naughty ruffling with a well matched lover. He knows it can’t happen again – Shadowhunters are a hard no for a reason – but boy, if he isn’t happy to invite the memory to stay as long as it wishes to.

If he weren’t so bonelessly tired, he’d take his half-hard cock in hand and replay the image of Alec rubbing his taut little ass against it, imagine the heat of being seated inside him; his gorgeous body, built by the angels and owned by the Clave.

He submerges himself before he can get any more ideas.
Life returns to its usual slow grind. He’s booked solid with appointments and meetings for much of the foreseeable future, but it doesn’t distract from his renewed vigor. Ever since his dalliance with the Shadowhunter, he’s been a hair-trigger away from needing to jerk himself off behind closed doors, at the most inconvenient of times. Now that he’s been treated to a well-overdue servicing, his body and mind have awakened in ways they haven’t been of late, wondering if there’s any more on the horizon. The constant renewed pressure in his balls is an absolute nightmare, and relief only lasts a few hours at best. He half wishes he could banish his libido off the face of the earth.

So when he sees the Shadowhunter again three days later, staring up at him from the Pandemonium’s bustling midnight crowd with the same intense look of silent invitation, he doesn’t really have a hope in hell of saying anything but yes, please.
Two

Chapter Summary

Alec goes looking for round two, and he and Magnus come to an agreement.

Chapter Notes

You know what they say: Sex sells.

Alec thinks life could be a lot easier. But he knows it could be infinitely harder, too. All things considered.

The life of a Shadowhunter man is a tough one; the life of a Lightwood is tougher still. The life of a Shadowhunter man with a liking for cock is more trying than both combined. His life is a constant reminder to be grateful for the small blessings he’s afforded, even if that somehow feels like he’s settling for second best. He hates settling, and he sure as hell hates second best. Both are the unspoken best case scenario for people like him. He hates that even more.

Though second best and best case scenarios and small blessings are definitely not words he would use to describe whatever luscious wet dream that overdressed Warlock had sauntered out of. Magnus.

He’s vaguely aware that New York’s High Warlock goes by the same name, but Alec and his parents have only ever dealt with others sent in his stead. Apparently, he’s a busy man and helping Shadowhunters isn’t all that high on his list of priorities, which makes him one of the Clave’s biggest pains in the ass. Alec has a picture in his head of a grouchy old man with a lizard’s tail – because that would surely be a hindrance worthy of grouchiness – holed up somewhere barking at dust motes, telling whoever knocks on his door to make themselves scarce, cursing the sun for shining, working all kinds of illegal jobs under the table. A paperwork nightmare. His parents had warned him to leave that stone unturned.

Besides, he can’t make any connection between the High Warlock he’s heard of and the Warlock he got off with. For all he knows, the guy could have been using the name for his own means. He’s prone to using false names himself from time to time. After all, it’s about sex, not networking. And even if Magnus is who he says he is, it doesn’t matter. It’s just sex. As long as he’s being safe, he doesn’t require a background check.

And after being made to say the name over and over again through absolutely no complaint of his own, he kind of hopes it is. It sounds lush and mysterious, much like the man he seems to be, and Alec’s only been murmuring it into his pillow, his shower stall, the crook of his arm in what miniscule time he’s had to touch himself since, pumping and coming and grinning like a boy with a dirty secret. Magnus.

“Alec.”
His eyes unglaze to see his mother’s nostrils flare on the laptop screen before him.

“By the angel, are you even listening?”

He shifts forward in his seat, folds his arms on the desk. “As much as you expect I am, I’m sure.”

She huffs bitterly. “*The issue with the Seelies* is of the utmost importance. The Council is growing restless with the lack of action. The Clave—”

He zones out again, punctuating his mother’s every pause with a bland *Yes Mother* because it costs less effort than fighting her. Like this, she’s simply a puppet relaying her master’s message, a parent believing her son is too incompetent to know which way is up – and that makes it impossible to connect with the fortified iron wall she is. He knows what he’s capable of, but he knows all too well what she’s *incapable* of, and it leaves him with no choice but to let his mind drift to where his rage is safely locked away from the remaining shreds of his sanity.

She sighs, pressing a knuckle between her brows hard, like *he’s* the one doing her head in. “We’re done here.”

Alec stretches his arms over his head. His shoulder pops.

“You would do well, Alec,” she says tightly, as if her patience is finally wearing thin, “to remember yourself. You are a Lightwood, you are my son, and the Clave depends on us to do its bidding. And no amount of *Yes Mother* is going to relieve you of that.”

“Yes Mother.”

Her jaw twitches. “Call me with an update when you’ve lost the attitude.”

His mother’s face disappears to a black screen – *Maryse has logged out*. Alec closes out of the video conference window and brings up the roster sheet he’d been working on before her call had interrupted his afternoon, shakes it off before the familiar heaviness can settle on him. His mother had logged out from him a long time ago.

The fine line between the things he can control and the things he can’t has always been determined by how far he’s willing to push. In the case of Maryse Lightwood, he’d pushed and shoved and thrown his weight behind it until the snapback left him obliterated. He’d learned slowly and painfully how much easier it was to let her be, to accept it was losing battle and simply stop fighting her. She couldn’t hurt him if he had no fucks to give.

In the case of being gay, that had been something he *could* control. He *could* wilfully ignore how nice Brady Whiteshore’s chest felt against his back as he’d help him with his bow. He *could* spend time with the many girls of Idris that flocked to his side upon each visit; hold their hands, meet their smiles, ignore the feeling of being outside his own skin when they’d inevitably try for a kiss. He *could* deny ever visualizing Hodge’s hard ridges and spar-sweaty body when his dick was throbbing in his hands. He *could* pretend he didn’t feel like a liar whenever Jace stared at him like he was the only thing in his entire tragic life he was proud of. After all, the Clave had a big book with a lot of rules. And Alec had never seen a chapter titled *boys can like boys and girls can like girls.*

But then his sister started running around with Downworlders, without a care as to who could find out, or a thought for the lies he would weave to protect her and the toll it would take, the punishments he’d receive in her place. Because there were chapters titled *Downworlders and Shadowhunters Don’t Mix.* Files and journals and library-loads of them, for all to see, to fear.

Instead she’d dated a werewolf boy for a while, frequently fooled around with the Night Children at
the numerous Downworlder raves she wasn’t supposed to attend. Then she started bedding Meliorn, the Seelie Queen’s lieutenant. Either the consequences didn’t exist, or she simply didn't care.

Even Jace fooled around with the other side. He was on a first-name basis with an entire harem of fey girls. The Clave would tighten the leash and their parents would spit venom, tell them to do better, be smarter, not to embarrass the family name. Which was the equivalent of a slap on the wrist in a book meant to condemn. And Alec was supposed to fear retribution for being gay?

So the night of his Parabatai ceremony – overwhelmed and near insane with the pressure-cooker intimacy of Jace in his head, heart, groin, blood – he’d snuck out and sucked a Seelie man off in the back alley of the Hardtail. Isabelle had been mortified, demanded he take better care of himself, protect himself, wait for the right time, wait for something meaningful, wait wait wait. But his siblings fed their impulses whenever they pleased. And after ignoring-pretending-denying the person he was, finally letting himself be was the closest thing to taking care of himself he’d ever had.

He remembers returning to the Institute afterwards – the floral taste of Seelie spunk in his mouth, the zing of racing blood in his veins, the warm after-pulse of sated arousal in his dick. The feeling of being changed in some irrevocable way. And different suddenly felt good. He’d felt terrified and emboldened and dark with the power of his own satisfaction, indulged after being told to starve for too long. In that moment, he was done being held to a standard no one else was measured for.

So he’d made a point of being phenomenal at his job. He’d built his reputation from the ground up, proven his dependability, his integrity, his competence, his dedication far beyond the Nephilim creed until no one, even in Idris, could vouch otherwise. He did the work no one wanted to do, which provided the knowledge and experience no one else possessed. He was identified as a respected, trusted leader by his peers, and eventually entrusted as his parents’ proxy – becoming the youngest Shadowhunter to ever run an Institute. And with that carefully crafted shield, he made sure his name could take the dent.

His extracurriculars make the rumour mill in Idris from time to time – as Isabelle’s do, as Jace’s do, as he expects they would because Shadowhunters could be gossipy bitches on an average day – but with his impressive, untarnished record glaring at them, the Clave doesn’t have a leg to stand on. As long as it stays that way, his private life isn’t their jurisdiction. And if one day the Clave wants to waste precious time stringing him up for the ways he gets his dick wet, then he’ll take the whole castle down with him. Raziel’s hypocrites be damned.

He processes the Institutes daily reports until the sun goes down, then gets a head start on tomorrow’s list of jobs just to satisfy his work ethic. By the time he’s stretching out of his seat and shutting his computer down, he’s ready to shed the last few days of his crazy workload and escape the confines of the Institute. His brain, and his dick, immediately think of the Pandemonium and the possibility of a certain Warlock being around. Even if he’s not, the Pandemonium is still a far superior – and sanitary – hunting ground for sexual partners. Unlike the Hardtail. He’s spent enough time sanitizing that bathroom out of his clothes to decide never again.

Naturally, that’s where Jace wants to go when he meets him outside his room. “Hardtail. You in?”

Alec’s already heading for the shower, shirt tugged over his head.

“I’m feeling the Pandemonium tonight.”

“Really? Again?”

“You’re gonna judge me?” Alec raises an eyebrow at him between glances in the mirror. “Are we really gonna open that can of worms?”
Jace smirks, slides his hands into his jacket pockets. “*Never*, brother. You know me. Haven’t seen you outside that pile of paperwork in a couple of days is all. Thought we could grab a beer.”

Alec turns the shower on and strips, calls out, “One.”

“Two,” Jace calls back, “plus shots.”

“Two, *no* shots.”

“Deal.”

“Where’s Izzy?”

“Seelie Realm, pumping Meliorn for intel. If you know what I me---”

“Yes, thank you. Ops Center, ten minutes.”

“Rodger that.”

He gives himself a moment or two under the hot water to breathe and relax, turns just enough for the water pressure to massage his left shoulder where it’s tight. He’d pulled something in his forearm between bow and sword the other evening – because a Ravener demon wasn’t going to wait politely for him to swap weapons – and it had healed by the time he’d gotten the Warlock’s balls in his hand. But sitting behind a computer for eight hours a day? He’s pretty sure he’ll still be feeling that when he’s forty. *If* he’s fortunate enough to survive until then.

With designs on getting laid tonight, he takes care to scrub the smell of his mother’s office chair from his body. Hand on his butt, he eyes the battered bottle of lube in the shower caddy for only a moment before he’s snapping the cap open. He wants to be ready if the opportunity arises because he’s walked into enough gay men who aren’t, and nothing makes him more frustrated and less in the mood than having to make conversation as someone jabs their fingers up his ass.

Perhaps he’ll bump into the Warlock. Perhaps he’ll even appreciate the gesture. Alec thinks of him while he presses his fingers inside – the heat and sensual smoothness of his unmarked skin, his groping hands, the way his body felt thrusting behind him, that voice – and ends up having to strap his junk down when he dresses, least word of his engorged cock waltzing around the Institute makes it back to his mother’s ears.

He and Jace settle at a Mundane bar on the Upper East Side and nurse their first beer out with the smokers, enjoying the excitement of the night’s first air. Jace eventually coerces him into a shot of tequila when he recruits the sassy college boy behind the bar to help his case, and Alec almost stays beyond his second beer for the naughty promises in those bright, blue eyes. But he’s after a bit of unbridled inhibition following a long, busy week, and sometimes his default angelic strength is too much for the average Mundie to handle. So he gulps down the dregs of his beer and pats Jace’s shoulder on the way out. Sassy college boy gets a wink for his trouble. He's definitely coming back when the mood strikes.

He gets a message from Isabelle as he arrives outside the Pandemonium, wanting to know where he is and if he wants company. *Looking for different company tonight Iz*, he texts back, ignores
whatever frustrated reply she buzzes back seconds later when the stocky club bouncer notes his neck rune and lets him through.

Most of the Downworld spectrum of the Pandemonium crowd give him a wide berth, acknowledging an enemy in their midst. Others he’s dallied with on previous occasions send over a smile, try to catch his eye again. He sees Travus, a werewolf of the New York pack dancing a little more purposely, muscled shoulders and thick neck stretched back for his eyes only. He isn’t a talker, but Alec doesn't need a conversation with his orgasms, and he’d been fun, thorough, and quick in a way that made him ideal for Alec's needs. He shoots Travus a smirk to hook him, should nothing better this evening take his fancy.

The club beat is so loud it thumps through him, and he feels the heat of a dozen pairs of eyes on his body, taking him apart like meat. He used to loathe it as a younger man, wary of his audience. Girls were always pumped full of expectations, of love and happily ever afters he couldn't provide. Boys liked to size him up for weakness, calculate how hard they’d have to hit to take him down. In the rare case that they desired him, the fire of his shame and the burn of theirs was too loud to cause anything but a terrified rage. It took him a while to unlearn his own wrongness and shed the weight of others’ expectations enough to think of himself, his body, as something that was allowed to desire and be desired in return. That he could have this at all.

He clocks those watching him to see if the interest goes both ways, but when he realizes his admirers are mostly women, he looks elsewhere. It’s when he checks the upstairs level that he sees a familiar face.

Magnus.

*God*, he looks good, though completely overdressed in what looks like a black straight-jacket inspired three-piece suit. If Alec manages to get his hands on him again, the numerous buttons and buckles are going to drive him mad. But if their last time together is a measure of the fun they can have, he'll willingly endure the impatience.

The Warlock is oblivious to his presence, sipping from a martini glass. His jewelry, shimmered lips and hints of glitter sparkle with the blue-green-pink laser lights. He looks bored but razor-edged, like his expectations for tonight haven’t quite met the reality he had in mind, and Alec takes that as his in. He watches Magnus down the rest of his martini and abandon the empty glass, then as he slides his hands sensually over the steel banister, looking out across the dancefloor. His gaze drifts unseeingly, his mind visibly miles away, and then they're finally staring at each other.

It must take a moment for Magnus to understand who he’s looking at, because when he does, Alec can almost see him shiver in remembrance. He has to palm his hardening dick right then at the fire that catches behind Magnus' eyes.

It’d be easy to go back to Travus, or find some other interested party – being aesthetically pleasing to the eye was one gift of the Lightwood genetics – but his dick knows how good it is with Magnus, and his head enjoys the challenge of him. He’s curious about all the other ways Magnus can sexually satisfy him, but perhaps more than that, he wants to see all the other ways he can satisfy Magnus.

His hook-ups often have a barrier, something non-committal and focused solely on getting off and getting out. Alec prefers it that way, relies on it to ensure his sexual transactions remain clean, because he can’t afford to get his dick and his heart crossed. But Magnus had been focused on him, had taken his own pleasure in Alec’s pleasure, and Alec had found he’d done the same. It had been a first that had left him disoriented and half eager to do it all again.

Gazing up at the Warlock now, he mouths the words *Fuck. Me.* as clear and precise as he can.
“We shouldn’t be doi---mmph.”

Alec smother the words with a kiss, Magnus’ hot, tightly muscled body moving against him like he can’t quite stop himself, even as he attempts to protest. Like this, Magnus is complicit in what they’re doing despite the hang ups he’s got, and Alec kisses him, presses him to their favourite lounge door. He crowds him in with his body, quivering from nape to tailbone when Magnus combs his fingers into his hair like he knows it’s his weakness, giving himself over to their kiss just as fiercely.

He kisses like he knows Alec’s rhythm, deep and languid, his breaths heavy and slow as if his very lungs are kissing him too. Alec holds tight to Magnus’ hips as they roll in tandem with his tongue, because Magnus kisses with his entire body, in a way that makes Alec want to throw him down on the nearest surface and hump until they both release in their pants. He wants to, but he’s been half hard with the thought of being fucked all day and he’s not about to settle for less, no matter how tempting the Warlock’s undulations feel now.

Magnus is hard too, had grown to full mast as soon as Alec had tongue-fucked his mouth under the club lights. Alec wants to get it inside him as soon as he can and this we shouldn’t nonsense is getting in the way.

Alec lets Magnus’ bottom lip go with a soft pop. “Yes, a Shadowhunter and a Downworlder dicking each other. Bad. Very, very bad.”

“Very, very,” Magnus murmurs dreamily, hips trying to rub Alec off through his pants. If this is the way Magnus puts up fights, he thinks, I’d be down for a battle.

Alec slides a hand up into Magnus’ hair, steals another of his fantastic kisses, moans as Magnus responds eagerly – the best kisser he’s ever known – and Magnus pulls him closer, snakes a hand up the back of his shirt and jacket, toying with the dimples above his ass. He’s pretty certain Magnus has given in, but as a person who likes his partners to consent, Alec wants him to make the next step forward himself. So he gives him some unquestionable incentive by taking Magnus’ hands and sliding them down the back of his own pants.

Magnus groans into his mouth at the feel of warm, naked flesh, squeezes him even closer. His lips unlatch long enough to comment. “Uhn, your ass---”

Alec gives a preening flex of his cheeks under that grip, smiles as Magnus snickers. He ruts forward into Magnus’ hips with another kiss, but Magnus rips himself away with a startled gasp, eyes wide with surprise. Alec can feel the Warlock’s warm fingers on his slick crease, stunned still with the discovery of his hasty shower preparation. Magnus looks so entirely mystified – and aroused – that Alec almost laughs. Lubed-and-ready Shadowhunters cruising nightclubs for sex clearly isn’t something the old Warlock is used to.

He stares upon him, rolls his hips out of invitation. He can feel his dick wetting at the slit, and has to bite his own lip when Magnus finally jumps onboard the program and purposely brushes a finger around his rim.

“What do you say, Warlock? Want inside?”

Magnus visibly trembles, fighting some conflict in his own head. “Who are you?”
“Someone who wants you to fuck him,” Alec murmurs into his ear. He breathes the scent of his collar, something smoky and sweet like ignited matches and spellwork curled around expensive cologne. He feels calm as soon as it hits his lungs. “I’ve thought about nothing else since that night.”

“You are, by far, the most dangerous Shadowhunter I’ve ever met,” Magnus leans against him, warm cheek to warm cheek. Alec kisses his jaw, nuzzles underneath to suck a spot on his neck and Magnus goes liquid in his arms just like he did the first time.

“Permission to proceed?”

The Warlock’s answer is immediate, “God yes.”

Alec slides right back into their kiss, hands going for Magnus’ belt. Now that he can, he’s shaky with the excitement of having him, balls heavy with the eagerness to press Magnus inside and ride until he sees stars. He pulls Magnus’ hard, smooth length free and steps back to dribble a line of spit onto it, strokes until Magnus is pumping freely into his hand. The he tugs the condom from his back pocket, holds it for Magnus to tear open with his teeth. Magnus ruts to the warmth of his hand as soon as he rolls it on, and Alec has to restrain himself before they get too carried away. There’s an endgame he’s after here, and it doesn’t involve another dirty hand job against the door.

He’s got his pants loose around his thighs and Magnus’ chest to his back, his cockhead pressing through the ring of his entrance when he’s suddenly manoeuvred down over the couch’s black leather arm, and then Magnus is pressing in with one slow, deep glide, drawing from him a heady, guttural moan. It’s an almost-painful stretch that ends in a warm half-pleasure he feels right behind the root of his own cock, and he’s so desperate for Magnus to stay there that he reaches back to grab his thighs to hold him still. They tremble in his palms.

“Fuck,” he gasps. “Magnus.”

Magnus removes his jacket and starts pulling on the collar of Alec’s, has it down to the crooks of his elbows by the time Alec can think to help. Once they’re both on the floor, Magnus’ warm, dry hands are going up the back of his shirt, massaging and gripping, and Alec groans, loudly, melting under his ministrations. He tries to urge Magnus onward but his hips are wedged between the couch and Magnus himself, and he realizes whatever happens between them here will be out of his control. His natural Shadowhunter instincts are yelling at him to get free, to out-maneouvre, dominate. But despite knowing he could fight Magnus off if he really needed to, the molten coil of arousal in his belly thrills at the idea of being fucked with no choice but to take it.

He tries to stand upright but Magnus holds him down by the nape, rubs a thumb there to soothe him. He tries to wriggle his hips but he grows distracted at the sensation of the couch leather on his cock. He reaches back to smack Magnus off him, move him, pull him in, something, but Magnus shoos him instead, leaning over until his mouth is at his ear. Alec can feel his cock rub a little deeper at that spot inside that renders him cross-eyed, and he can’t help the whimper that sounds in his throat.

“Have faith, Shadowhunter,” Magnus says. “Gonna make it count.”

He’s seated deeply, unmoving, and the spine-curling pleasure of his rubbing hands pairs with the pleasure inside so well, until they feel one and the same. Alec finally surrenders to it, goes lax with it, moans lowly as it warms him over from head to toe – so it’s a shock to his system when Magnus’ cock starts pulling out with a long, slow drag. Alec groans, knees shaking, tries to follow and fill himself again but he can’t move, and it’s just as it becomes unbearable that Magnus thrusts back in. Hard.

Alec can feel his own scream roaring in his neck, but nothing comes out.
He scrambles for purchase on the leather couch, gets his hands under him just as the next thrust hits. His entire body seizes with it, electric pleasure, then flows away until the next crash comes back in. He can’t move, won’t move, too terrified to disrupt their perfect alignment, and he waits for the next, gives himself over when it comes. Eyes closed, his every focus is on Magnus’s dick – the hot throbbing spark it creates inside, the way the ridge of its crown comes back to stroke his rim just before he slides back inside. He can feel his body take it like a wet glove, sheathing it, chasing it, opening back up for it. He’s used to his partners pumping away like feral dogs and patting themselves on the back for a job well done. He’s not used to his partners fucking him like they’re trying to memorize his innards.

*Raziel.* Magnus is savoring this just as much as he is.

He breathes again for the first time in what feels like an eternity, a chest-ragged gasp. “Magnus…”

Magnus’ hips begin to work faster, battering a steady rhythm against his prostate until all Alec can do is whine and hold on. When it becomes too much, Magnus stays deep, stirs himself in Alec’s body until *that’s* too much, then fucks again. His hands slide to hold his elbows, and Alec arches, ass jutting up for him. He reaches back, holds himself open as Magnus fucks inside, welcomes each piston of his hips with a hoarse grunt. It’s scratching his itch so precisely that he wants to buy the Warlock a goddamned gift basket.

“That’s me,” Magnus groans wondrously, slowing to grind against his hole. Alec enjoys the praise so much, he rewards him with a tightening of his sphincter. Magnus’ hips stutter. “Oh *shit.*”

He does it again just to hear him moan, gripping and releasing Magnus until it nearly brings him to his knees, until Magnus grabs his shoulders and starts fucking with abandon just to take back control. Alec feels himself coming apart at the seams, needs room to stretch out. He parts his stance and hunches down, opens himself up as much as he can and rides the rough tide he’s being dealt. He bites down on the seat leather to muffle his scream.

“You’re gonna make me come so hard,” Magnus gasps out.

Alec has enough brain function left to smile sloppily over his shoulder. Magnus is railing him so good that he's drunk with it, but he can’t help getting a tease in. “Was hoping to say the same for you, but…”

Magnus suddenly narrows his eyes, tightens his grip on him. “Oh really.”

Alec grunts, flinches at the force of the next few thrusts, particularly rough as they are. They ram his prostate so perfectly he has to squeeze his eyes shut, least Magnus see them rolling back into his head. The Warlock pumps harder, deliciously relentless, and Alec feels the pit of his belly fall open in need, his orgasm winding up to crest. God, he hasn’t even *touched* himself yet and he’s about to blow his load. Another first at Magnus’ hands.

“You said you’d make it count. I’m still---ah---ahh fuck. Ah, *fuck***---!”

“What was that? I can’t hear you.”

Alec forces his words out through the delirium of pending release. “I’m still waiting for your punch line, Warlock.”

Magnus huffs a breathless, disbelieving laugh, crosses Alec’s wrists over his lower back, and Alec is pretty sure he’s going to enjoy what comes next.

“Here’s your damned punch line, *Shadowhunter.*”
Magnus pulls out abruptly, completely, and Alec’s body readies for the next big thrust. He almost imagines the way it will take the floor from under his feet, the satisfaction he’ll feel when the weeks’ worth of stress inevitably drains out of his dick – a firm stroke to his ego as this reluctant Warlock and his world gets rocked by a Shadowhunter, yet again. He can feel the shit-eating grin on his own face as he waits.

When the only answer he gets is cool air on his heated behind, he turns back. Magnus delicately raises an eyebrow at him.

“You want more? Then beg.”

The grin promptly falls from his face. “What?”

“Beg for my cock, Shadowhunter. And use your manners.”

Alec chuckles through the trickle of panic slowly finding its way in. “Like hell.”

“Well, I guess you’re not getting off, then.” Magnus sounds rather pleased with himself, his naked chest heaving beneath his open waistcoat, black leather and silk on smooth brown skin. Alec feels his condom-sheathed dick slide wetly along the crevice of his ass, Magnus’ balls nestled between his cheeks. The Warlock gives an experimental thrust, testing it out. “I will though.”

Alec doesn’t get the chance to protest before Magnus is settling into his new position with a self-satisfied moan. And when he tries to shrug out of the tight hold Magnus has on him, he realizes with an even greater panic: Shit. I can’t. He tries to free his hands but Magnus’ grip is stronger than anticipated, and his muscles are half seized from being bent like a pretzel, and by opening his stance for more dick like the cock-drunk moron he is, he’s gone and made himself woefully unstable instead. Magnus, it seems, has him right where he wants him.

His stretched hole clamps down on nothing, and his body revolts at the emptiness, grieves his lost orgasm as it retreats.

Magnus moans again, riding Alec’s crack at his own pace, however he wants, enjoying himself with Alec’s body while he stands there half crouched, half hogtied, face flaming at the indignity. Except Alec is still getting off on it. His balls feel swollen, waiting to unload, and his rock hard dick is leaking, stuck between his own belly and the couch, unable to get the release it craves. Raziel, he’s frustrated. But with his history of self-imposed restrictions, Alec is practically the poster boy for patience. And testing Magnus’ will against his own sounds like a game far too intriguing to pass up.

“You feel so good,” Magnus leans down to whisper into his ear, and Alec can’t hold back his shiver. Magnus’ voice, his heat, his scent is setting all his senses aflame.

“You know I do,” Alec responds, mouth catching Magnus’ lower lip. They share breath as Alec nuzzles him, and he moans when Magnus finally gives him the kiss he wants. “And I know you want back in.”

“I’m immortal,” Magnus nips at him, kisses his cheek, neck, nape, shoulder, slow and savoring, just to prove he can afford to throw away the seconds that tick by. “I have no need to rush. Time is on my side, not yours.”

Magnus has him mashed awkwardly over the couch, but Alec presses his hips back invitingly as much as he can, gyrating. Magnus grunts, pleased as their bodies move together.

“Then have at it, Warlock,” Alec pants, light and wanting, “Ride me.”
Magnus bites his earlobe and it goes straight to Alec’s dick. “Oh I intend to.”

He can feel the head of the Warlock’s cock line up with his hole once again. *Already giving in,* he thinks smugly, and he moans in welcome when Magnus slides back inside. He gasps as Magnus draws out; glares over his shoulder when he doesn’t push back in. Magnus slides along his crease half a dozen times, drags the tip behind his balls, luxuriating in the tease. Alec clenches when it brushes around his entrance, grits his teeth when it moves away again.

Magnus smirks. *Bastard.* “Pretty funny punch line, I’d say.”

If he wasn’t so turned on by the guy, Alec would be swinging.

“I’ve had better,” he replies, feigning great indifference. It's an outright lie. It's already the best sex he's ever had, and they're nowhere close to done. But that's Alec's business.

“A shame,” Magnus sighs, thrusts in quick. Alec cries out in surprise. “Guess we don’t share the same sense of humor.”

“Some people just aren’t *funny,*” he growls, and Magnus pulls back out. “*Ugh!*”

“I’m sorry.” The Warlock sounds the exact opposite of sorry. “Are you not enjoying yourself? You know you can change that. Just say please.”

Magnus sounds like he’s got a royal flush, and with the way his balls are practically demanding he start begging, Alec knows he's coming up empty. But he wants to see Magnus unravel. He wants to see if he can push, drive him to the same sort of desperate he is. He’s having too much fun to have it all end before it needs to. He pants, cheek stuck against the couch, and he spits his next words out on a half-manic laugh. Alec Lightwood, defiant to the bone.

“*Make me.*”

Magnus thrusts back in – once, twice, three times and again, again, *again,* until Alec’s crooning a mindless, blissful cascade of *yes yes yes,* his orgasm revving back up, ready to fall over the edge----

And then he pulls back out. Alec *yells,* thrashing in his hold. He gives the couch cushion a frustrated head butt and tries to breathe.

“We can do this all night,” Magnus murmurs soothingly, stroking his member teasingly along Alec’s ass.

“Fuck----” Alec chokes at the next random thrust. Magnus’ dick hits deep, then draws back out. Singular with no follow up, stoking his fire and leaving him hanging. It’s both torturous *and* exquisite. He can feel himself growing delirious. He’s half in love with it. “---*you!*”

Magnus shifts them back just enough for Alec’s trapped erection to fall free. The sudden pressure release leaves him gasping and lightheaded, and he misses the sensation of leather so much, wants to come so badly that he thinks he might start weeping.

“Say please, and I’ll give you exactly what you’re after.”

He’s never been one to back down from a fight and he’s not about to start now. He’s thrumming with equal parts anger and lust, but there’s an amusement that isneedling at him. Even their first time together, Magnus brought out his inner brat in ways he wasn’t prepared for, and it’s difficult to hate the game now when it’s proving so entertaining.
“Never.”

Magnus sighs, as if he didn’t want it to come to this, and Alec thinks yes, give in! He’s trembling all over with the need to be fucked and filled, insides feeling swollen and tensed ready for his release, his belly fire waiting to explode and flood him with pleasure. He’s a fan of any kind of stimulation – Magnus’ hand job three days ago had been the best orgasm he’d had in weeks – but nothing quite meets the intensity of a decent pounding when he’s hungry for it. That Magnus has brought him this far with his prostate alone makes him quiver in anticipation. It’s not even over yet and he’s already mentally signing up for another round.

Magnus goes back to rubbing along his crease, and Alec tries to hold onto his building orgasm for the next pounding, intends to piggyback on it and chase it into oblivion as soon as he gets the chance. Fuck you, he thinks. You sexy, bastard Warlock. Fuck you.

“I want to come inside you so bad,” Magnus says, wistfully, his hips moving. His voice is soothing, hypnotic, and between that and the thought of Magnus blowing his load inside him, Alec is somewhere among the clouds. “Want you to draw it out of me with this perfect ass of yours. But you don’t seem to want that.” His hips pick up a rhythm, and his breath drops in his chest. “And I’m so close, Alec.”

Yes, he thinks. He wants him back inside, but the undertone of Magnus’ words makes him grow still. Magnus means to get off. Without him. And once he does, it’ll be just Alec and his hand. Tragic party of one. His aching prostate feels like a warning to quit dicking around and do what he wants.

“Hey I’m right here,” he says, looking over his shoulder. “Ready and willing.”

Magnus bites his lip, closes his eyes, head back and hips forward. His entire body moves against him in slow, purposeful thrusts. Languid, full thrusts Alec could be taking inside himself. He wants.

“Just like this.”

Alec squeezes his eyes shut. Please, he thinks. Just fuck me. “Magnus——”

The Warlock gives a broken moan. Alec can feel Magnus’ legs shaking against the backs of his thighs. Shit. “I’m gonna come.”

“Please!” Alec snaps, his need far greater than his pride. “Please.”

Magnus moans again. “Please——?”

“Please fuck me.”

Magnus’ cock catches between his cheeks and he groans, digging the tip downward along his crack, “With what.”

“Give me your dick or I’ll make your life a living hell,” Alec snarls. Magnus halts his movements. Please!

The Warlock leans down toward his ear. He sounds so smug that Alec would punch him if he didn’t want to kiss him dizzy. “Your wish is my command, Shadowhunter.”

He releases Alec’s wrists and the ache that shoots through his arms almost cripples him, but he doesn’t get any recovery time before Magnus is sliding back inside. His body opens up easily, almost with a sigh, and gripping the couch with his hot, numb hands, he thrusts back on Magnus to get him deeper. His loud, unashamed moan splits off into a cry as Magnus takes him by the hips and fucks
him like a jackhammer, his cock punching the breath out of him. He’s so close to coming he can almost taste it.

He reaches back and Magnus pulls him upright, loops his arms through his elbows and proceeds to take him apart one thrust at a time. Alec’s a garbled, incoherent mess but he’s beyond caring. He doesn’t even care that a Warlock made him beg for it. His balls are drawing up, his orgasm rising once again swift and sharp without hesitation, and it tumbles through him like a cliff slip, ragged and devastating and all-consuming. He’s gasping, taken by surprise as his come spurts hotly – abundantly – from his hardness. Without a single touch. *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

He can distantly hear himself yelling, can feel it rattling powerfully through his torso, and his entire body clenches as every wave hits, squeezing on Magnus’ shaft until he’s just as overcome in his pleasure. Magnus locks Alec to him as he ruts and ruts, stills and curls around him as his own orgasm hits, cock unloading with each pulse, and now Magnus is gasping *fuck, fuck, fuck.* Alec imagines what it’d be like to feel his seed for himself, to have Magnus’ hot, hard dick going off raw inside him – a filthy fantasy he’ll never allow to happen – and his own gives one more weak jerk, oozing the last bead of his climax.

“Fucking Christ,” Magnus pants. His soft voice is wrecked against his ear, chest heaving along Alec’s back. Magnus sounds just as taken apart as Alec feels, and hell if that's not stroking his ego. He can hardly think. He glances down at his milky load sprinkled across the black leather couch seats, and it may as well be his splattered brain. The post-coital, bone-sapping satisfaction arrives, staggering and intense, a petrol tank run dry. Every sexual daydream Alec has had since Magnus jerked him off three days ago pales in comparison to the real deal. Alec can’t even recall another moment where his own desires were fed so absolutely.

Alec is grateful when Magnus takes his weight, and he circles his ass back, moans at the feel of him still seated deep. He’s probably going to feel the imprint of Magnus’ cock for a week. Every chair he sits in will be a delicious reminder of the best he's ever had. Being fucked was one thing. Being challenged and finding reward was something else entirely. And he finds himself wanting more of it. *Warlocks,* he thinks, and he starts chuckling breathlessly. There’d always been an aversion there, something about their marks and not quite knowing what he'd be in for, he supposes. Werewolves and Seelies were relatively basic, lacking in mystery. Alec didn't touch Vampires because putting his bits anywhere near the dead seemed like a bad idea. But he'd met Warlocks with talons and scales and horns all over their bodies. The intrigue was there, but the gooey, slithery, spikey things to deal with made his *get in, get off, get out* rule a little trickier to achieve. Besides, Warlocks were naturally averse to him too. He'd never met one who liked a Shadowhunter enough to have a go. Some grudges were too old, too deep.

*Magnus,* he thinks now, chuckling again in his post-orgasm high. Magnus’ hands shift from his ribs to his hips, trying to still them. Alec's still rolling them mindlessly, it seems. “You’re killing me, Nephilim.”

“God, I hope not.” Alec sighs heavily, trying to slow down his breathing. He kisses Magnus on the cheek, his mouth, hisses into him as Magnus finally, carefully pulls out and banishes their sticky business with an electric finger snap. *Yep.* Definitely going to feel that for a week.

Alec backs him up against the door and kisses him deeper, rutting his naked, softened cock against the Warlock's, pants and belt around his knees somewhere. Magnus slides one hand into his hair and the other around his dick, simply petting and caressing, rolling and massaging their cocks together. It feels so good, has Alec pressing against him with more want, more hunger, even if there's no way in hell he's getting hard again anytime soon.
“We’ve gotta do that again,” Alec says, lips brushing lips as he speaks, trying to form words.

Magnus licks back into Alec's mouth and his hands go back up Alec's shirt, nails biting crescents in muscle with each new kiss. Then they're on the taut swells of his ass, biting in, pulling close, and Alec can't think all over again.

Magnus pulls away, gasping, and Alec's lips land at the corner of his mouth. Alec feels his nails bite harder. “Ugh, this ass.”

Alec bites softly at his jaw, his neck, butt flexing as his hips grind, “You like my ass?”

Magnus moans, “So many things I want to do with it.”

Alec shudders pleasantly at the thought.

“Just say when and where.” Their tongues touch, a sneaky, playful secret between them. “Me and my ass will be there. No strings.”

“No strings?”

“None.”

Magnus looks up into his eyes as the two of them trade breath, and there's a sliver of renewed arousal swimming in their warm, brown depths, a decision being made behind them that Alec himself made thirty thrusts back. God, they're really going to do this. It's probably his drained, sated balls talking, but he's never been so excited in his life.

“I'm going to hell anyway,” Magnus shrugs weakly, breathless, looking dazed and turned on in a way that makes Alec's belly feel hot. They share a dirty smirk, full of lusty promises. “May as well enjoy the ride, right?”

“Oh I plan to.” Alec punctuates it with another slow grind of his hips. “Ride you, I mean.”

And as Magnus' soft and dreamy chuckle shudders into a blissful moan, Alec knows he can't wait to get started.
Chapter Summary

Magnus and Alec explore their new agreement, and Magnus bumps into a familiar face.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for the impassioned feedback, folks! Here's a longer chapter, for reasons. Squint, and you may see plot.

The social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec, if you're that way inclined.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Message Received: Alec
Free tonight?

Reply Sent:
Yes. 9pm?

Message Received: Alec
Perfect. Where?

Magnus has his address typed out and his thumb hovering over the Send button within seconds, before his brain catches up to slap him upside the head. The Clave doesn’t know where he resides, and blindly throwing his address into the wind is an insult to the years of meticulous care he’s spent ensuring it stays that way. No one knows where Magnus Bane lives unless he wants them to.

He’s seen something trustworthy in his brief dalliances with Alec, but trusting and wanting to makes all the difference in whether or not he’ll be forced to relocate his apartment if it all goes south. He’d only recently been made to move to another corner of Brooklyn after a vampire clan in Istanbul caught wind of his whereabouts. Apparently, their clan leader, Zehra, still held a centuries-old grudge for an I'll call you that Magnus never quite got around to. He’ll be damned if he has to give up his new, incredible balcony view out of some misguided attempt to bang a Shadowhunter.

Instead, he sends an alternative solution. It’ll take a little more energy than the usual, but he’s never been one to put a price on peace of mind.

Reply Sent:
I’ll make a portal. Corner of 7th and Prospect. Think of me.

He paces the length of his living room, calmly, though his fingers feel tight around his mug of coffee. It’s the first time they’ll be together since they hashed out the finer points of their agreement, and while he wants to indulge freely in Alec, he doesn’t want it to come with any complications.

Message Received: Alec
Will your portal work better if I think of you with or without clothes?

His shoulders finally relax, and the nervous rolling in his belly calms to a pleasant simmer. He’s grinning as he types a message back.

_reply sent:
_definitely without.

_message received: Alec
_problem: your dick is the only thing I’ve seen naked.

Magnus snorts.

_reply sent:
_then think of my dick. We’ll remedy the rest tonight.

_message received: Alec
_quit talking about your dick. I can’t walk around with a hard on right now.

He can feel his grin beginning to burn the apples of his cheeks.

_reply sent:
_me and my cock will see you at 9pm.

_message received: Alec
_bastard. Dick portal, 9pm. See you then.

He tosses his phone onto the couch and leaves for his apothecary before his laughter can penetrate the walls.

Magnus spends the day mixing pastes and potions; an antibiotic for a Werewolf with a tick problem, a concoction for a Warlock child with extreme night terrors, and a fourth dose of forget-me-not elixir for a kind Mundane woman who is losing her husband to early-onset dementia. His magic won’t stop it, but it will give them more time, and he’s always been a sucker for the bleeding hearts of those dreadfully in love.

He sits with her for an hour when she arrives to pick it up, listening compassionately as she smiles through her pain and keeps her positivity intact. It takes a glass of whiskey to shake it off when she’s gone, and he distracts himself with thoughts of the night ahead, as not to think of the one he once loved and lost to the same, awful fate.

He paces out his afternoon carefully by tidying the apartment, meeting his bar manager to go through Pandemonium’s monthly reports and touching base with Dorothea to see how things are going in Greenpoint.

“Same as always,” she tells him with a bored sigh, “Though, update: Jocelyn and Lucian are talking about co-habitation again. I think it might actually happen this time.”

“Hmm. Worth a coffee date?”

He can practically hear her twirling her hair over the phone, “Like you ever need gossip to invite me
over for coffee."

It should quell the distant, black anticipation that grows inside him a little more every day, but it doesn’t. The rumors of Valentine’s return are becoming more prominent, and under her ever-present, blasé attitude, he can tell they’re both feeling the change in the air. The day her same as always turns into a he’s here, everything will surely change for the worst.

After a hot shower and an hour of changing the colors of his hair, nails and eyeliner, he creates the portal into place at 8:59 with a stronger flick of his wrists, tweaking the usual spell to tunnel toward him in place of a physical location. His stomach feels hot with nerves at the idea of Alec being in his apartment, of seeing him again after a long week of conflicting schedules and flirtatious build up, and he leaves the portal unattended briefly to give himself a last-minute look in the mirror. A rearrange of his spiky hair, adjusting his robe – shoulder or off shoulder? – and a flicker of his cat eyes to see how his metallic navy eyeliner pops.

It’s just sex, he berates himself, before he’s taking off his necklaces, rings and magically removing the half a can of hairspray from his locks. He’d rather Alec’s fingers be in it than not. His cock twinges deliciously at the thought.

They’d decided on a set of parameters in a series of late night text messages. Complete neutrality was the first decision made – Alec would stay out of Magnus’ business and Magnus would stay out of his. Being on opposing sides of a politically stalemate was bound to make things complicated where they didn’t need to be, and Magnus is under no allusions about the probability of a Shadowhunter betraying him. It is the Nephilim way after all, to prioritize themselves and their missions above all else. And as a Downworld leader, Magnus knows he’s just as likely to throw Alec under the bus for the sake of his own kind. A first name, a phone number, and the transaction of sexual pleasure is all they need, for as long as their no-strings arrangement lasts. The less info they have on each other, the less complex it all has to be. Even if Magnus is wildly curious about the life Alec leads.

Condoms are an ironclad must – he’s impervious to sexually transmitted diseases naturally, and he knows the thoroughness of his magical clean up abilities are enough to keep them both safe, but Alec had insisted on it, and Magnus is too unwilling to go near that level of intimacy with someone he doesn’t care for. Any kind of sex is on the table, and at any time of the day, as long as they are both available and it doesn’t interfere with their jobs. They’d also discovered their sexual compatibility is higher than they’d given previous thought to, and learning how versatile they’re both willing to be had led to a hot and heavy 3am sexting session that still gives Magnus dreamy shivers.

They had also mutually decided on exclusivity. He’s always preferred focusing his energy on one person at a time, casual or not, and the only time he’s ever had multiple lovers at once, they’d all existed within the same moment, in the same bedroom, and while it had been a rollicking mess of fun, it had left him feeling too disconnected from himself for his liking. Alec had easily agreed, which had both surprised and pleased him. As long as it lasts, it’s each other, and only each other. It’s one less thing to be concerned about.

As he waits, he mixes himself another cocktail and summons a tray of chocolate-dipped strawberries from the prep fridge at Dubois. The restaurant owner, Louis’ decadent French chocolate recipe still alludes him after four decades, and try as he might to charm it out of him, his old Mundane friend remains immune to his attempts. Relieving him of his strawberries often ends in exasperated voicemails, but Magnus figures it’s all part of the game. One day he’ll crack, and Magnus will be one chocolate recipe richer. It’s the little things that keep him amused on a daily basis.

He doesn’t realize how caught up he is in his dessert appreciation until he hears---

“Hi.”
Alec stands in the foyer, stark, towering and painfully handsome against the rich luxury of his apartment, watching the way Magnus’ teeth sink into his chosen fruit. Magnus observes the Shadowhunter’s eyes as they leave his mouth, and then as they trail sensually down the line of his exposed chest to the knot in the belt of his silk robe. He feels his pulse spike at the heat in Alec’s gaze. As if he knows Magnus is entirely naked beneath all the silk and is trying to physically restrain himself from doing something about it.

Magnus smirks. It’s clearly been a long week for them both.

“Hi,” he snaps the portal shut. “Would you like a drink?”

“Sure,” Alec is still taken by him in a way that deepens Magnus’ smile. He lifts a glass at Alec in question. “Scotch, neat.”

“A Scotch man,” Magnus pours him his drink. “You are full of surprises.”

“It’s my father’s drink of choice,” Alec says, giving a small shrug of great disinterest. His lips tick at the corners. “I like to drink it while I fuck men.”

Yowch, he thinks. Clearly no love for daddy dearest, then.

“Poetic,” Magnus approaches him, scotch outstretched, sultry smile on display. “And is he aware that you sully one of his favorite things with one of yours?”

Alec pauses for a moment, making no move to accept the offered glass. “He’s aware I fuck men, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“You’re—” Magnus barely refrains from balking. He hadn’t expected that at all, and his liking for a good scandal has him wanting to barrel inelegantly into the finer details. Like how. What. Where. Who. But mainly how. “You’re out? Did the Clave finally get with the times while I wasn’t paying attention?”

Alec stares back like he’s thoroughly enjoying having caught him off guard. He gently plucks the scotch out of Magnus’ grip and sips, eyes crinkling amusedly at the corners.

“It’s not a secret. It’s just no one’s business,” He lifts a finger from his glass and points at Magnus’ crotch, “Are you naked under there?”

“You’ll have to find out for yourself,” he replies, mind whirring. He watches Alec down the rest of his scotch in one go. “Another?”

Alec grins. “Please.”

Magnus meanders over to his drink station, throws back the rest of his cocktail along the way. He’s stuck on the fact that Alec isn’t hiding who he is from his own people and tries to think of another Shadowhunter who was brave enough to do the same. He’s coming up empty.

He glances over his shoulder and really takes him in. Alec is broad and built, body honed for combat. Light in stance so he’s clearly quick on his feet. His hands are clutched behind his back as if he’s standing at attention, but Magnus knows their roughness, their strength, their beauty, how good they feel on his skin. A smirk can always be easily dismissed as false courage, but he sees it – that calculation behind Alec’s eyes, the smugness in the sexy quirk of his mouth and there’s nothing false about it. This Shadowhunter isn’t confident like the others, as if the world was built to bend for him and his purpose. He’s confident in a darker, deeper way, like he has life by the balls and everybody knows it.
Magnus’ cock throbs, remembering Alec’s sure touch on his.

Alec’s head tilts, soft and curious. “What?”

“Nothing,” Magnus shakes himself again, turning his attention back to their drinks, “You’re just… surprising, for a Shadowhunter.”

Alec sounds much closer when he speaks again. “In good ways, I hope.”

Magnus hears the underlying tone in his voice; seductive, always seductive. He’d felt himself fall into a bluster of but but buts when they’d first met, too split in decision by rules, morals, history, what ifs. But Alec had tied all his frayed edges together with a you and me, here and now, nothing else matters until it made being with him feel like the simplest choice in the world. A dangerous thing, because the reasons not to were many.

He should be wary of Alec’s influence, how easily he agreed to all of this. But he’s not.

“Definitely good ways,” he answers, eyes closing. Alec’s body heat is suddenly at his back, his hands sliding down his sides. They move across his flanks, caressing and rubbing, the warmth of Alec’s palms coming through his silk robe. His fingers pause on Magnus’ hips, scratching back and forth. Searching for underwear lines.

“You are naked under there,” Alec’s breath is warm in his hair.

He’s about to hum a reply, but then Alec presses a hot, sensual, open-mouthed kiss to the side of his neck and all thought escapes him. He forgets the glass tumbler in his hand, and Alec catches it like a dart in the dark as it falls, easing it onto the drink station and pulling Magnus into the strength of his arms. He melts back, neck bared for Alec’s kiss, gripping him by the biceps like it’s the only thing that’ll keep him upright as he succumbs to the sensations – of Alec’s mouth, the warm cavern of his embrace, his teasing, searching hands as they inch toward his robe’s tie.

Alec’s growing hardness is pressing insistently behind him, and he cants his hips back to meet it, feeling daring. Many factors are required for him to let someone take him – factors he won’t find with this Shadowhunter – but the idea brings years of pleasurable experiences to the front of his mind and he can’t help the yearning. Their previous rendezvous was the first time he’d had sex in over a year. It’s been infinitely longer since he let someone in.

Alec yanks him around until they’re staring at each other – the shock of it brings Magnus upright – and he pulls smoothly on the tie of his robe until the knot slides loose. Alec’s eyes stay on his, in his, and Magnus gazes back, challenging him and his own resolve. Alec clearly takes pleasure in it, Magnus’ silent defiance, this act of unpacking him like a gift. But he makes no move to glance down, perfectly controlled even as the tie finally comes free.

He lifts his hands to remove the rest, but Magnus pushes him away. He’s no gift, and he’s not here for Alec to do with as he pleases. Because the only thing he enjoys more than giving the Shadowhunter what he wants is his reaction when he takes it away from him.

Alec relaxes into a casual stance, like he hasn’t just been propelled halfway across the room. Magnus’ fingers toy with his robe’s silk lapels. “How do you think tonight is going to go, Shadowhunter?”

Alec recognizes the fight in him, seems amused and willing enough to test it. The unpredictability of how he may react or what he’ll do next heats something in Magnus. There’s a delicious push-pull that has existed between them from the very start, shrouded in the possibility of danger. The kind that
gets his pulse racing and his blood pooling south. He’s almost relieved to find their chemistry hasn’t waned.

“I was thinking back to that promise I made. About riding you.”

“Oh?”

“You see,” Alec grins, boyish and adorable, and Magnus finds himself smiling at the sight. “I have this Stamina rune. Right about here,” he twirls a finger toward his abs, beneath the left side of his ribs, “Been dying to try it out in the bedroom. But I haven’t found anyone who can handle it.”

Magnus can feel his brain fall offline at the numerous filthy thoughts that calls to mind. He wants to have the same thing, far more than his need to dangle it over Alec’s head. But this Shadowhunter doesn’t know how truly stubborn he is. And he can still taste Alec’s breathless begging in his mouth, the power of wielding control and having him fall apart beneath it.

He slides his robe from his shoulders and lets it slip to the floor, but Alec’s eyes refuse to budge from his face. He can feel the frenzied scorch of the Shadowhunter’s gaze roaming from nape to ass to ankle when he turns to fix Alec’s drink, and he gently tilts his hips, his right buttock rounding as his stance shifts. His own cock fills and hardens between his legs, pleasure to be found in his own nakedness, in the sexiness of a good tease. He hears Alec’s breath drop.

Magnus holds Alec’s glass of scotch in his hand and raises it to his nose for a sniff, mind turning mischievously.

“I have an idea that you may be very interested in,” he offers, turning once again to face him. Alec’s eyes leap back up, trying not to get caught. Cute. “It’ll make your father very, very angry.”

Alec blinks, watches him saunter across the living room rug to the couch. He’s not even pretending to be good now, hungrily devouring every inch of Magnus’ naked body as he rests back, knees gently spreading with invitation.

“I’m listening.”

Magnus holds Alec’s scotch up, as if to the light. “Ever tried Scotch dirty?”

He then tips, slowly, slow enough that Alec knows what’s coming.

A stream of alcohol trickles down between his pecs, the grooves of his abs and Alec is suddenly on his knees before him, hands hot on Magnus’ bare thighs. Their eyes catch – the energy between them dark and tight in its headiness – and then Alec sucks the trail of scotch into his mouth, follows the line up with his tongue. Magnus sips from the glass while Alec kisses across his chest, pauses to suck on a nipple, and then their mouths latch, kissing deeply. Magnus feeds his mouthful of scotch between Alec’s lips, hand tight on his nape, legs spreading to the sound of Alec’s approving moan. He moans himself when Alec grinds between them, clothes on skin.

Alec pulls away, hand closing over the glass. “May I?”

“You may,” Magnus replies, licking the taste of Alec from his own lips.

Leaning back on his heels, Alec drinks and takes him in, hand smoothing over muscle and skin like he means to memorize it. Magnus watches as Alec scratches his fingers over his ribs, grips the flared muscle of his flank, then rubs his palm down Magnus’ abs, massaging. It adds pressure to the heat he feels inside, that swollen need to find and chase an orgasm, and Magnus rolls his hips, arching beneath that touch. The energy between them makes a performer of him, giving himself over to the
desire of feeling on display, undulating sensually beneath Alec’s hungry gaze like sex and sin itself. Alec seems close to tremble at what he sees, and Magnus reaches to touch himself before his very eyes, eager to break him down.

Alec watches him masturbate, enjoying the show as he sips his scotch. Magnus moans as he pushes his cock through the ring of his fingers, imagines it’s the Shadowhunter’s own exquisite tightness, and Alec reaches down to squeeze himself through his pants. He caresses Magnus with his eyes, as if the sight of him feeds something deep inside, and Magnus hardens even more at the thought.

He tightens on each catch of the crown, strokes himself like he’s stroking Alec, and Alec’s lids fall low like Magnus’ pleasure flows through him. That same energy between them is heightened, intense, and their breathing grows heavy in the evening quiet of the apartment. If the Shadowhunter doesn’t do something soon, he’s going to bring himself off.

Thankfully, Alec knocks Magnus’ fingers aside to take his cock in hand. He strokes leisurely, feeling its weight and size in a way he hasn’t had time to do before, and then he’s drizzling the rest of his scotch along Magnus’ length, leaning in to suck it from his hard flesh. Their eyes meet again as Alec lets his cock sit on his tongue, and then Magnus is holding his breath as the Shadowhunter closes his lips over the head.

As he tries not to fall to pieces at the wet, hot softness of Alec’s mouth around him for the first time, he’s no longer sure of who’s controlling who.

“Suck me,” he gasps, his body pulled taut, abs crunched, thighs locked, fingers tight in Alec’s hair, focused solely on being inside him this way. He can feel Alec’s tongue zero in on the thick vein beneath the head, rubbing perfect, practiced circles as he inches further along, wetting his way. By the time Magnus brushes the back of Alec’s throat, he’s gently rolling his hips to meet his mouth.

Alec sets in with purpose, pushing a knee up over his shoulder, and Magnus learns just how not in control he really is.

“Ah---fuck,” Magnus groans, his hips meeting and matching his pace. Alec’s eyes close like he’s the one getting off, his deep, blissed-out moan vibrating around his cock as he pumps him with his mouth.

Hand on Alec’s nape, Magnus thrusts into him carefully, sliding deeper with each drag. He’s stuck on the knife-edge of pleasure, riding the limbo between too much and not enough. He feels Alec’s tongue still working beneath him, throat slurping wet and obscene around him in a way that shouldn’t be hot but so, so is, and Alec has one hand kneading his ass while the other rolls his sack. It’s too much to take at once. It stokes the growing fire in Magnus’ belly until his insides feel like they’re on the brink of boiling point and his eyes are rolling back into his head.

“Stop,” he gasps, even as his hips revolt against the idea, “Stop. You’re gonna make me come.”

That seems to be the wrong thing to say, because Alec only braces Magnus’ thighs under his arms and increases his pace. He wants to debate how indulging his orgasm now means no riding for Alec, but every argument he halfheartedly invites into his head gets sucked into the pleasure of Alec’s talented throat. He tries to fight, but Alec threads his fingers through both of his hands and wedges them beneath Magnus on the couch and god help him, being denied only brings him closer to the edge. That’s supposed to be the Shadowhunter’s hotspot, not his.

The build up of his orgasm flows through his limbs until he’s squirming with it, to get away and give himself over to it in equal measure. Alec holds him tight, hands bound, thighs locked against his ribs. He can’t move, can’t breathe, feels himself being stripped of all sense. It’s just Alec’s mouth and
throat, relentless on his cock, that forms the center of his universe right now.

He’s going to blow his load before the night has even begun. So much for stamina.

“Seriously. I’m going to---’m gonna come.”

Alec opens his eyes to look upon him, and Magnus freezes at the naughtiness there. This goddamned Shadowhunter thinks he’s winning.

“This gets you nowhere,” he growls, even as he can’t help throwing his head back against the couch, so close on Alec’s hot little tongue.

He tries to conjure the thought of the grossest, most vile things to keep himself from the edge; Ravenor demons, the puss he cleaned out of a client’s infectious demon bite three weeks ago, his dismal attempt at cooking lasagne from scratch – how he messed that up, he’s still got no idea – but nothing breaks through the picture of Alec on his knees, hungrily worshiping his cock. Closing his eyes only gives him the memory of Alec’s perfect ass offered across the Pandemonium’s back office couch, spread and needy, taking Magnus’ brutal thrusts like a champ.

He can feel his orgasm about to crest, his chest heaving with it, “I’m gonna come. Fuck, I’m gonna c---”

When Alec pulls away entirely, Magnus’ immediate thought is of Alec exacting his revenge. Getting his own back for the way Magnus made him beg. He can see it, clear as day – Alec’s evil little smirk, telling Magnus to beg for his mouth, for his release, use your manners, Warlock – and he probably deserves it. But Alec’s ripping his belt from its loops instead, and then he’s pinning Magnus against the length of the couch and setting in on him with his hips, rutting hard and slow against him until Magnus can’t think to do anything but hold on. The delicious friction of soft clothes on his heated, swollen cock and the spine-melting shock of Alec’s mouth sucking at his neck has him humping and panting helplessly beneath him.

Magnus closes his eyes, fingers dug deep in Alec’s hair, holding the Shadowhunter to him as his orgasm roars forward. He’s choking on his pleasure, hoarse and surprised by the power of it, “I’m coming. Alec---oh my g---I’m---!

Alec wrings it out of him with his tightly muscled body, gasping and groaning as Magnus takes over, thighs clenched about his hips, hand tight on his nape as he fucks his orgasm out against the hard rod of Alec’s crotch. There’s a stretched moment of time when everything strung tight finally releases, and Magnus quivers in the pleasure of it until he’s too far beyond the precipice that there’s nothing to do but fall back to earth.

He doesn’t have time to question his longevity, nor the way his centuries of experience have failed him in his moment of need, because Alec gets an elbow under himself and looks upon him, breathless and amused. Magnus has just given him ample ammunition to shoot him where it hurts. The shame.

“That was---”

“Don’t say it.” Magnus covers his heated face. The horror.

“Hey,” Alec takes Magnus’ hand and shoves it right down the front of his pants - where it’s wet. “Right there with you.”

Magnus takes a moment to gather his scattered thoughts and what has happened here. Because he’s apparently just dry-humped a Shadowhunter on his couch like some awful frat-house movie, and
there’s semen all over his belly, and said Shadowhunter has put his hand down his pants where he’s currently playing with Alec’s hot, gooey spunk like he’s trying to identify what the hell it is.

He starts laughing. It bubbles up from the bottom of his chest unexpectedly, something hearty and full brought on by endorphins and ridiculousness and half-relief and Alec’s mischievous grin, because he sure as hell doesn’t care beyond the fact that he got an orgasm out of the deal. It reminds him of how simple this arrangement is – no strings, no expectations, no disappointments. Just orgasms and fun.

And now Alec is laughing with him, “How do you think I feel? I’m the one with the Stamina rune.”

“It’s not like you were using it—”

“I didn’t even have the chance!” Alec exclaims, slumping down against him, “I’ve had nothing but my hand all week. And you are some serious real-life porn. This was never going to end well.”

Magnus loses it completely, feeling his laughter shifting in his belly, against Alec’s belly, until they’re both jiggling against each other like a couple of orgasm flustered morons. Alec’s body is a welcome weight, and when Magnus has magically cleaned them both up, the way they’re still pressed together feels good, sexy, on the edge of becoming more all over again. Their laughter fades to matching smirks.

“I thought you were gunning for revenge. Unless me coming like a horny pubescent was the revenge you intended. In which case, you’ve succeeded.”

“Nah,” Alec smiles easily, rubs a knuckle along Magnus’ cheek. He chuckles again, “Sorry, post-orgasm brain mush. What are words, right?”

Magnus grins, “There are far better things to be doing with your mouth right now.”

Alec lowers himself until they’re less than a breath apart, then purposefully ruts against him once, twice, nice and slow like he’s testing the waters. Magnus can usually remain semi-hard after non-penetrative sex, and that ability doesn’t fail him now. He’d half expected Alec to get up and leave, but with something half-impressed and a lot dangerous lighting up Alec’s eyes, they’re clearly not done here. The fire of their exchange is still there between them, as it always tends to be. It’s only waiting for one of them to add more fuel.

Alec brushes his mouth over Magnus’ lips, light and teasing until they’re both breathing hard with the need to connect, and then they’re kissing, sucking lips and rolling hips and tonguing deep, barreling forward with renewed vigor. Alec kisses thoroughly, holding him still and taking his mouth and giving it all his attention like he’s after a five-star skill rating. Magnus melts beneath it, pulling at his shirt to coax it off him in their scrambled heap of limbs. They hit multiple snags in getting Alec naked, but when he stands to strip down, Magnus is treated to the reveal of his gorgeous, muscled body in its entirety for the first time – broad shoulders, tapered waist, the groves of his lightly-furred chest and abs trailing down to the hardening cock between his strong thighs– and he welcomes Alec’s weight again when he’s done, picking up where they left off.

Alec’s naked body feels amazing, hard and soft and abrasive all at once, offering a gamut of sensation that has Magnus clutching closer. Alec rocks sensually against him, thrusting hotly between his thighs, and he feels Alec’s hands in his hair, forcing his head back, baring Magnus’ throat for his kiss.

When he bites, Magnus cries out, humping against Alec’s gyrating hips. His cock grows heavier with need.
“One day I’m going to fuck you,” Alec pants into his reddened skin, soothes it with his tongue, “Just like this…held down…with you taking my dick deep because I make you.”

It’s not the first time this evening Magnus has thought about it, and the idea makes him shudder deliciously, even if there’s no way in Lilith’s Eternal Black Hell it’s going to happen. Letting someone into his body has always been a deeply intense experience reserved purely for those he loves. It also requires a level of trust that he won’t find in a Shadowhunter, even on a good day. He can’t deny the appeal, of Alec fucking inside him with his warrior’s body and that tantalizing curve in his erection that’ll surely madden him. The very idea makes him harden even more. But there’s no way he comes out of that unscathed. It’s especially tempting to think about now – now that he’s naked and turned on in Alec’s arms, so willing to do just about anything to reach their end goal.

“Tell me I can,” Alec groans helplessly as their cocks align.

Magnus gasps, his body responding to his ministrations, “Never say never.” Except, never.

Alec moans at his answer, bites Magnus’ lip, his chin, returning to his neck just to feel Magnus shake beneath him. When he lifts his head, his pupils are nearly blown, “Bedroom. Now.”

They’re off, pushing and pulling and kissing towards the side wing of the apartment where his bed waits. Alec shoves him down into the sheets and mounts him, kissing deep and grinding his ass over his engorged flesh and – Fuck, he’s done it again – he’s hot, slick, having prepared himself sometime prior to portalering over.

Magnus wrenches his mouth away, “Your time saving methods are impeccable.”

Alec pants a laugh, sitting up, “What about yours? Magic condom?”

Magnus summons said condom in a wisp of blue, and Alec sits back across Magnus’ thighs to sheath his straining erection, more than ready for the next round. He smiles, half smug and half trying to cover how affected he is. Being with Alec is far more satisfying than he bargained for; a lover that will surely prove difficult to succeed and even harder to forget. He’s undeniably handsome, and the way his mind ticks gets Magnus hotter under the collar than most can aim for. He only hopes Alec’s likability doesn’t threaten his objectivity down the line. Because this Shadowhunter is likable. Magnus would take it as a red flag if he weren’t so well versed in keeping his heart in check.

Even now, Alec’s obedience – so unlike him – has Magnus’ rapt attention.

“A Shadowhunter doing the bidding of a Downworlder. What alternative realm did I stumble into?”

Alec snaps the condom’s rubber ring at the root of Magnus’ cock, smirking when he visibly jumps. “Keep joking, Warlock. We’ll see who’s feeling okay when I fuck the come out of you.”

He tries not to shiver in anticipation, “You’re implying I won’t make you come first.”

“Maybe we should test these theories and see for ourselves.”

Oh yes. “Stele?”

“In my pants.”

“There’s a dirty joke somewhere in there but it’s too cliché for my tastes---” The Shadowhunter suddenly bears down on him, taking Magnus’ cock into the tight heat of his ass. Magnus grips Alec’s hips, hard, “---Shit.”
Alec gasps at his own pleasure, eyes half lidded, “**Hurry.**”

He tries to concentrate, using his mind’s eye to seek out Alec’s pants on the floor of his living room, sees the Stele in its angelic golden glow and **wills** it to him. It arrives against his palm just as Alec lifts and inches back down, taking him even deeper.

Magnus’ muscles melt against the bed as the pleasure washes over him. He watches Alec run his Stele along the **Stamina** rune on his abs, how it glows like fire licking beneath the surface, and then Alec is tossing it over the bed, seating himself with hands on Magnus’ chest. He rolls his hips back and forth, a rhythmic beat that starts slow and picks up pace the better it feels.

Magnus can feel the grind on his cock, of Alec’s tight walls massaging him. He’s torn between forcing him into the usual up-down of fucking, something that will pace out his pleasure, and guiding his hips into a deeper movement. The way he’s sitting snug inside Alec’s ass with no room for air is a constant pull toward orgasm. He’s not going to last long if this is how it’s going to be. The look on Alec’s face – flushed, but devious – tells him this is exactly how he wants it to be.

*Should have summoned a thicker condom*, he thinks.

He presses up into Alec’s heat in what non-existent room his heavy weight allows, and holds his hips, gripping. Pushing back when they move back, pulling forward when they roll forward, intensifying the friction. Alec’s head and hands fall back as he rocks, the upward curve of his cock jutting toward the ceiling. He chases his own pleasure, focused on Magnus inside him, and he grows more urgent in pace until Magnus’ jaw hurts from maintaining its hard clench.

Goddammit. He’s not going to last at all.

He reaches to stroke Alec off, but his hand is quickly knocked away, “No. I can come like this. God, your **dick** ---”

“You have got to let me drive,” Magnus pants through gritted teeth. He won’t admit defeat.

Alec’s eyes are glazed over, lost in the sensations of his body, and he places his hands back to Magnus’ chest to begin a deeper, harder grind that has Magnus squeezing his eyes shut to find his long lost sense of control, “Throw me off, Warlock, and you can drive all you want.”

He attempts to, but Alec is heavy and braced in a way he can’t easily topple, and the searing friction Alec is generating between them renders him shaky and stupid. Alec’s groan takes flight, soaring into something hoarse and strangled, his cock riding the grooves of Magnus’ abs. *Don’t come*, he thinks, straining not to release. *God, don’t come. Don’t come. Don’t come. Don’t come.*

Alec’s hot flesh locks down around him like a vice, and it takes everything he has to force his orgasm back. He’s moments away from losing the battle, but then Alec’s groaning turns into a cry, and his cock shoots. Hot jets of come land across Magnus’ chest and collar, Alec’s pace and power waning the more he unloads. Magnus looks to Alec’s **Stamina** rune for confirmation. Has the Shadowhunter’s big, sacred Angelic power failed him? He can’t help feeling smug.

Magnus tries to keep his eyes open, his cock straining for release, “Some rune you’ve got.”

Alec lifts his head, and Magnus sees the tired, bodily satedness of his orgasm give way to a renewed blaze of energy. His erection grows even **harder** against Magnus’ stomach.

*Fuck.*
Alec starts moving again, tentative up and down pumps of his hips until he’s answered whatever internal question he has, and then his eyes slide shut as he falls into a new rhythm. Magnus digs his painted nails into Alec’s hips.

“Shadowhunter,” he pants, “Give me a minute. Or this is about to be over for the night.”

Alec throws his head back, mouth slack, “Hold it. Ahh.”

Magnus doesn’t have a Stamina rune, or a spell equivalent for one. Healing spells require a channeling of energy into certain areas, and he’s transferred his energy to others who have been drained of theirs, and while he’s known those who have concocted magical elixirs for potency before, he’s never had the need of one. Clearly not until now.

He eyes the Stamina rune on Alec’s abs, “Do you mind if we share?”

Alec comes back to himself long enough to see what Magnus intends, and then he’s nodding, frantically, “Take whatever you need. Just keep fucking me.”

He palms over the rune’s black marks, and when he prods at the Angelic energy beneath with his mind, he sees the golden veins of it throughout Alec’s body. He expects a natural resistance when his magic reaches in – a recoiling at a foreign, darker power getting too close for comfort – but it comes easily, almost running to embrace him as he siphons it into himself.

It hits him like an electric rush. Alec’s Angelic power against his Demonic magic is abrasive, almost painful, the space between fire and ice. But then it melts together inside him and he’s left feeling warm from ear to toe. It’s intimate in ways he hadn’t thought to prepare himself for, but his cock swells and Alec’s moaning like he’s going to come again, and any designs on regret quickly evaporate.

Alec’s circling hips finally bring him off, and he yells when he shoots hard into his condom, Alec’s inner muscles working him dry. He half wonders why the rune’s power didn’t work, but then Alec’s fucking down onto him in earnest, knees up, hands braced on Magnus’s chest, taking his cock in and out like they’ve only just begun and his erection holds, even harder than before, throbbing with the need for another release. All he can do is take care of the seed squelching inside the latex, because Alec’s not going to let him come up for air anytime soon.

The Shadowhunter rides him hard, as promised, his weight punching the breath out of him. Magnus digs his nails into the flesh of Alec’s ass and bucks up as he fucks down, “Holy---shit. Alec.”

Alec calls Magnus' name like someone has dived down to pull his orgasm through his throat and he comes again, hot on Magnus’ stomach. His body melts all over, enough that Magnus has to hold him upright, and then he’s pulling Magnus into a ferocious kiss, hands in his hair. “God, don’t stop. Don’t you stop.”

They keep going – kissing and groaning and fucking, growing sweater the more they exert themselves on each other. Magnus thrusts another orgasm up into Alec’s tight heat and fucks another load of seed out of him as Alec writhes on his elbows and knees, shouting into the comforter bitten between his teeth. The pleasure doesn’t cease, doesn’t let up, still as new and lively as their grinding on the couch. But every orgasm that passes pulls from an emptying well. Magnus comes again, nails embedded around the Shadowhunter’s strong neck, Alec’s legs wound about his waist, and the hot pleasure feels like it’s being torn through his gut, straight from his balls. He presses his fingertips deeper, and Alec’s glazed eyes, pulsing neck and his apparent liking for asphyxiation give way to his sixth orgasm. His coherency disappeared two orgasms ago after a babble of fuck me! fuck me! fuck me! that Magnus delivered well on.
He wipes Alec’s face down with the bed sheet, pulls him up from where he’s half dangled over the bed’s edge and spreads him out, collapsing down onto his chest. His cock is still hard, seated deep inside his Shadowhunter lover, but the power of the Stamina rune is almost gone and the rest isn’t enough for another round. Alec takes the pause to breathe and bring himself back down, brushing his hands down Magnus’ naked, wet body. They’re both positively dripping.

“You’re going to be very sore tomorrow,” Magnus pants, their bodies heaving together, starved for air, “And I’ll probably need to ice my balls.”

Alec chuckles tiredly, and his face is even more handsome with it’s healthy, well-fucked flush, “Worth it.”

He looks around at the numerous pools of come and drool and sweat staining the sheets, “I may need to burn my bed.”

“Worth it,” Alec repeats, hands kneading Magnus’ ass, “One more.”

“You’re like a lab rodent pressing the pleasure button instead of the food button,” Magnus says, feigning graveness, “You will die, Alec.”

“One more,” The Shadowhunter widens his thighs and pulls Magnus deeper into him, lids fluttering as his cock brushes his battered prostate, “Please.”

“Are you actually begging of your own will?’

“Please.”

“My, how the tables have turned—”

“Please Magnus,” Alec groans, hips squirming beneath him. He’s pinned on Magnus’ length, sheathing him like a warm glove, and it’s still as hot and wondrous as the first time. Magnus pumps his hips once, deep, if only to reward Alec for how amazing he feels. “Again.” He relents with another thrust. “Again.” And another. “Magnus…”

He doesn’t think he can come anymore, but Alec seems to be in grabbing distance of another orgasm and his soft, needy begging is undoing him. He fucks into Alec slowly, drawing his pleasure out as much as he can and relishes in the heat of his body, his kiss, in the feel of Alec’s hands in his hair, on his ass, biting into his back amidst the throes. When Alec finally comes again ten minutes later, he’s shaking so hard that Magnus has to hold him still, and his pulsing ass milks Magnus’ cock of its own release, knee-buckling in intensity.

Magnus flops onto his back, truly exhausted. He removes his condom – the fourth one he’s worn tonight – and is honest-to-god relieved when his erection finally recedes.

“I was beginning to fear I’d never be flaccid again.”

Alec laughs, wiping at the come on his chest. He’s positively filthy. They both are, smeared with seed and spit and wet with sweat, but Magnus takes it as a job well done, even if he feels the need to shower until the pipes run cold. It certainly doesn’t stop Alec from rolling between Magnus’ thighs and suckling his limp flesh into his mouth.

“No,” Magnus reaches down between his legs to flick Alec on the forehead, “No.”

“Relax.”
“You can’t possibly---”

“You have your ways of cleaning up,” Alec smirks dirtily, “I have mine.”

Not for the first time, Magnus wonders, *Who the hell are you?*

“You taste like…” Alec smacks his lips, pondering the taste of Magnus’ semen like he would a glass of aged wine. *Brimstone? Sulphur?* He’d heard those before from a lover who’d grown sour over his obvious dislike for clinginess. “Burnt caramel. Smokey, burnt caramel. Is that a Warlock thing?”

Magnus literally can’t hold his head up any longer. Tonight was on another level. “A Warlock thing?”

“Seelies taste like flowers. Werewolves taste---”

“Gamey?”

Alec barks a laugh. “Yes! You’ve been with a Werewolf?”

“You would be hard pressed to find someone I haven’t been with.”

“Except Shadowhunters.”

Magnus hums, “You would be the first.”

*Lucky me.* And how’s that working for you so far? Tipping any scales?”

Magnus laughs, “Any answer I give you after six orgasms is going to sound biased as hell.”

He can hear Alec grinning, “I don’t mind being humored.”

He takes him into his mouth again and Magnus shudders, over-sensitive and over-stimulated to the point of ticklishness. An inelegant giggle escapes him before he can think to stomp it down. Magnus Bane certainly doesn’t giggle, “I’m serious! No!”

The Shadowhunter releases him with a hearty laugh, sucks a hot little kiss onto Magnus’ belly before he’s flopping down beside him.

They lie together for several moments, spent, pleased and tired. Magnus casts a small blanket spell of cleanliness over their bodies. He’s far too drained to hit the shower again tonight, and it’ll be at least enough to get Alec home without feeling disgusting in his clothes.

“Handy.”

“Hmm.”

Alec looks at the wall clock. It’s just past 1am. “If I didn’t have anywhere to be, I’d stay for another round.”

Magnus scoffs, highly amused at Alec’s indifference. He’d seen the way the Shadowhunter had started drooling during orgasm number four – he’d almost panicked and stopped altogether before Alec had mindlessly spurred him on. He’s going to delight in dangling that over his head for as long as he can.

He turns his head to look at Alec across the sheets, “Says you, the brain-dead, cock-drunk whore.”
Alec laughs loudly, biceps rounding as he curls toward him. He purposefully brushes his knee against Magnus’ thigh, and Magnus smooths a hand onto his hip, now littered with purple bruises, “A bit rich coming from you. For a talker, you got speechless real quick.”

“Well, I’ve never been ridden like a horse before.”

“Well, I’ve never ridden a horse before.”

“Are you calling me a horse?”

Alec smirks, stares pointedly at Magnus’ soft length along his thigh, “Just parts of you.”

Magnus tries really hard not to grin, “Are you praising my size, Nephilim?”

“Almost as much as you praised my ass tonight.”

“Touché.”

Alec nudges himself into the cradle of Magnus’ thighs and nips his way up his torso, licking a nipple with the flat of his tongue. When he sinks his lips down onto Magnus’ mouth for a kiss, Magnus squeezes him with all the energy he has left, biceps and thighs curled around him. He gasps softly when Alec ruts against him, glares a warning because they cannot go again. It’s pleasant, and comfortable, and it’s indulging all the endorphins flying between them, but Magnus is sure that if Alec stayed any longer, his body would start fighting the stacked odds for round eight. And if he’s being honest with himself, he’d probably let it happen.

Magnus locks his arms around his waist, if only to hold him still, “So. One shared Stamina rune, two able bodies testing its resilience. You came first.”

“I did.”

“You also came six more times. Once more than me. I think that means I win.”

Alec grins widely, “Well by that definition, I win.”

Magnus laughs, and Alec ducks when he swats at him. “You must be the only Nephilim I’ve ever met that isn’t phased by failure! Surely you were dropped on your head as a small child?”

“Failure isn’t failure if you feel like you’re winning,” Alec smirks, running his lips along the soft parting of Magnus’ mouth, “I tend to win a lot with you.”

Magnus can feel himself flushing. With indignity or pleasure, he doesn’t quite know. “Fucking Shadowhunter.”

Alec sneers playfully, “Stupid Warlock.”

Magnus breathes into Alec’s next kiss, something hungry and hot that has their bodies rocking together of their own accord. Alec’s hands smooth along his forehead, fingers combing into his hair as his mouth works him, and Magnus’ hands wander along the muscled slopes of his back, the wings of his shoulder blades, down to the dimples above his ass. Alec’s body is impressive, and weighted naked on top of him is a delicious reality he’ll be replaying in his head often. He feels good, and his skin is soft, untouched save for his black runes, and those are softer still like shiny, healed scars beneath his touch. He’s going to have to get used to this. Such a chore, he thinks, dryly.

Alec lifts his mouth away, smiles once more, then disentangles himself from Magnus’ body. He
leaves for the living room where Magnus can hear him pulling his clothes on, buckling his belt and
toe-heeling into his boots with a few forceful scuffs. He appears again moments later, sliding his cell
phone into his pocket and retrieving his thrown Stele from the floor. He leans in, hand warm on
Magnus’ hip, nuzzles the dark patch of hair at the root of Magnus’ cock and kisses him there,
breathing his scent.

Something in Magnus’ stomach flutters, untwists to stretch its wings.

“‘til next time,” he prods a finger playfully into Magnus’ cheekbone.

Magnus smiles back, relaxed and heavy against the sheets. He snaps his fingers to reactivate Alec’s
custom portal, “‘til next time.”

Then he’s gone. Magnus hears the swirls of the portal bunch and squeeze as Alec passes
through, then snaps his fingers to close it.

He runs his hands over himself, taking stock of his sore muscles, the pulsing hickey on his neck, the
bruise shaped by Alec’s teeth next to his right nipple, the welts left by Alec’s blunt nails on his chest
and thighs. He feels like tenderized meat, soft and weighted and beaten, but it’s not unpleasant. After
a small healing spell to clear his marked skin, he falls asleep right where he is, naked as the day he
were born. Worth it indeed.

Weeks pass, primarily spent on work. Circle members have been sighted throughout New York by
Downworld factions across the board, which provokes greater unrest within the community. The
rumors of Valentine’s return are growing in clout, which means reinforcing wards he’s already
reinforced, protection spells and talismans are flying out his door and most of his call-outs are spent
trying to calm people down. So when he gets a moment to himself, he makes a point of taking full
advantage of it.

He sees Alec multiple times a week – on lunch breaks, following late night patrols, at the
Pandemonium, at his apartment. Quick fucks against walls, against trees, across furniture. Blow jobs
in dark alleys, in hallways, bathrooms. He even portals Alec over for a five minute hand job between
appointments when nothing else they want can be fit into their schedules. Magnus experiences Alec
when he’s hungry, when he’s fed, when he smells of demons and adrenaline, when he’s fresh and
warm from a shower, when his nose is cold from the night air. He fucks Alec when he’s loose and
limber, when he’s uptight and on edge. When he’s tired, when he’s bursting at the seams with
unbound energy. When he’s had a good day. When he’s had a bad one. Every day brings a different
tune, and all of it gets him off.

They have longer sessions across his bed on Friday nights, where they get to take their time
exploring and tasting and feeling. One evening in particular has him tying Alec down with slips of
silk and working his senses with feathers and toys and textures. Instead of the predicted path of the
night, Alec ends up half curled in a fetal position, bent like a pretzel, honest to god weeping because
he’s laughing so hard. Magnus discovers with great gusto that his Shadowhunter is ticklish,
indescribably it seems, under the right tools. That evening results in one of their sexiest yet.

He picks up little things about Alec the more they see each other. The way his tone shifts at mentions
of the Clave speaks of a deeper love-hate regard, and his explanation of his status as an out, gay
Shadowhunter tells Magnus not only does he simply not give a fuck, but he’s managed to navigate their rules by finding their loopholes. His Shadowhunter is conniving and clever, but mostly strategic, something great leaders are made of. He finds it rather impressive. And unbearably hotter than the fine package he comes in.

Alec reeks of eldest child resentment, like he’s been made to shoulder too much for too long from too little of age. They’d spent an afternoon having a rather rough bout of sex, to the point of Alec wanting real physical pain, and it had concerned Magnus enough to ask for clarification when they were done.

“Parents,” Alec had told him, unnaturally downcast, “Can’t live with them, could live without them.”

Magnus doesn’t need to know beyond that. As long as Alec’s rare dark moods aren’t a symptom of something much worse, he can navigate around them without affecting what they have.

He also learns Alec has a younger sister, someone old enough to send a text message. The way he sometimes checks his phone tends to be both fond and equally frustrated, edging on the same resentment he has for his parents. It’s possible he’s had to raise her himself, even more possible that he hasn’t been given the same freedoms. Magnus may not know Alec outside their sexual exploits, but with him, he delights in being free. More than once he’s seen Alec’s mood plummet on his way out, and it feels a little more than simply having to get back to work. Giving them both something hot to anticipate usually ends their moments together on a high note. And seeing Alec’s halfhearted smile slide into something genuinely excited is its own reward.

When he gets Alec completely naked and takes the time to really focus on his body, Magnus realizes there’s a very real, very current Parabatai rune above his left hipbone. He doesn’t know how he missed it, but his own burning curiosity shuts him down from inquiring further. Alec’s Parabatai, whoever they are, is a Pandora’s box. Opening it could lead to any number of bigger things. Bigger things that could disrupt what they have. They’ve made it two whole months without any complications. He doesn’t want to tempt fate.

“Raziel…you’re so hot,” Alec breathes amidst the throes one night, as Magnus fucks him on the living room’s rug.

“I’m not Raziel,” Magnus growls, bends to kiss him, hikes Alec’s legs higher around his ribs to thrust at a deeper angle, “And your…Angel has nothing…to do with…my hotness…”

Alec holds himself open and gives a needy groan, something low and ragged, biting down on his own lip. A Shadowhunter with a Demon kink, Magnus muses. Alec certainly wouldn’t be the first of Raziel’s soldiers to show an interest, and he’s had lovers who wanted that side of him; the bad boy, the taste of the dark side, the dirty graze at their own sainthood like he’s something ugly to stain themselves with. It’d been a big reason why he’d been so reluctant to being with Alec in the first place. He didn’t want to be the solution to some messed-up Shadowhunter’s self-punishment fantasy.

But the plains of Alec’s devastating face are alight with a need to consume him – demon and all – pleasure for pleasure’s sake. He constantly feels the need to remind Alec of what he is, the very thing he’s not supposed to want, but Alec always reacts against expectation. Like what Magnus is doesn’t matter. Like what Magnus is does matter. Like Magnus being a Downworlder can and can’t define him and Alec will take him in whatever way he chooses to be.

In all his hundreds of years, in all his thousands of lovers, he’s never been looked at this way.

It doesn’t mean anything. But it means everything.
“You’re seeing someone,” Catarina points out one day, in that all knowing tone of hers. It gets his hackles up enough to look up from his phone, where Alec has replied to his earlier tease. If he can swing the time tonight, Magnus plans to fuck him with his tongue. His Shadowhunter can come hands free on just about anything – Magnus’ fingers, his cock, the twelve-inch dildo sitting in his bedside drawer. His tongue, however, remains regrettably untested.

Alec’s reply had said: *I like how you spoil me.* And Catarina had caught him grinning stupidly at his screen.

“Seeing someone – no,” He denies, “Having regular, no-strings relations with the same person – yes.”

“Doesn’t look very no-strings from where I’m standing,” she mutters, fond and pitying.

“That doesn’t mean much coming from you. You always think I’m falling in love.”

She hollers frustratedly at the ceiling, “Because you *are* always falling in love!”

“You’re exaggerating. And I have a built-in failsafe,” he tells her conspiringly, tilting his phone, “I can’t fall in love with the unlovable.”

*Please* tell me you have not resorted to revisiting that Crocodile-skinned, cork-hat wearing monstrosity with the terrible habit of calling everyone ‘mate’.

“My dear, I have standards,” Magnus scowls. She gives him her patented bullshit look, and he tries to stifle his grimace, “…I have standards now.”

Regardless, Catarina’s observation – as uneducated as it is – is enough to have him rain-check his plans with Alec to prove a point, and he decides a few drinks at the Pandemonium are well overdue.

Catarina heads home after a couple of Budweisers, blaming a violent need to sleep before her next twenty hour shift at the hospital, and he catches up with a number of club acquaintances before they, too, call it a night.

He forfeits his usual upstairs viewing for his usual downstairs couch, slouched between a rather delectable man and a young woman who looks about as bored as he feels. She sighs as she lifts his drink to his lips for him, and he sips as he eyeballs the two Shadowhunters against the bar, proof in the sickly green smoke rising from them. He mentally notes the suits – definitely not the usual attire for Nephilim – and the sunglasses, which at best is bad style and at worst a poor attempt at being incognito. When he gets a clear view of the red, raised Circle runes on their necks, he’s rising from his seat.

His magic is already simmering under his skin as he approaches, ready to use at a second’s notice.

“Circle members aren’t welcome in my club.”

The shorter one opens his mouth, “No worries, Warlock---”

“Oh, you’re not hearing me,” Magnus growls, inching closer. His anger for them and what they stand for temporarily collapses the glamour across his eyes, and his magic fizzes in his palms, waiting
to leap out and skin them alive. The taller one must be smarter than he appears, because he’s already looking for a way out. “Leave, or I will tear your heads off and mount them on the wall.”

“The Accords—"

“---don’t apply to the likes of you. And you’re in my house.”

He raises a hand to snap his fingers, but they’re already scurrying for the exit. Pests. Magnus gives himself a moment to calm down. His pulse is racing; with imminent danger, with the spike of averted disaster, with questions and growing concerns for what this means. Circle members, clearly searching for something. He startles to see more green clouds in his club – more Nephilim in his midst, sweet fucking Lilith – four that he counts as they disappear through the VIP curtain. There seems to be a hunt in progress, right under his roof.

I need a fucking drink, he thinks, waving his bar manager down. He regrets coming here tonight, mourns the time he could have spent happy and ignorant in Alec’s arms. As if to comfort himself, he orders a double shot of scotch and thinks of Alec as he throws it back. He feels a little better, the burn in his throat coming with pleasant, sensory memories, and it’s enough to throw his boss face on and complete his usual checks.

There’s a light bulb in the northwest seating area that needs replacing, a spilled drink drying sticky across a booth, things he easily fixes with a bit of magic. Everyone is happy, safe, dancing to the throbbing house music---

He collides hard with someone who clearly isn’t watching where they’re going and turns to see if they’re okay. They’re wafting green smoke – Shadowhunter, goddamnit – but when he wills the cloud away, he sees she’s thin, tiny and pale, a meager teenage girl dressed for a night out. Hair the color of flames, wearing the face of someone who has just witnessed something beyond the limits of her reality.

“Sorry,” she mutters, soft and distracted, shaking her head at him like he’s the one who’s confusing. He can’t stop the swelling dread rising in his gut as he sees her stumble away through the bustling crowd. It’s not a coincidence that Circle members have scoped his nightclub tonight. Because that’s Jocelyn Fairchild’s daughter. Valentine’s daughter. Clarissa Fray.

Sweet fucking hell.

Chapter End Notes

I have a Tumblr if you feel like saying hi.
Four

Chapter Summary

Alec puts his foot down with Clary Fray, and she ruins everything anyway.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for the supportive and positive feedback, my special little horndogs. Reading your comments makes me smile.

The social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec, if you're that way inclined. You can also now follow me on Tumblr & Twitter if you feel like saying hi.

Things had been going so well.

The server upgrades had carried over without a hitch. The Clave's promised improvements to the security system had finally been implemented. The new shift roster hadn't caused any major arguments. Alec was miles ahead in his report checks, which meant less stress when the month came to a close. And Max, the youngest Lightwood, had somehow commandeered a Clave sanctioned portal from Dubai and snuck home for Isabelle’s birthday earlier in the week. Alec had sent him packing with a stern warning, but he couldn't deny it'd been a joy to have him home.

He’d even received a positive communication from Consul Dieudonné regarding his quarterly statistics. The New York Institute was riding the top end of the leader board for success rates in completed missions and lowest fatalities. The Council in Idris were practically sucking his dick. His parents are the downside, because they've always responded to his achievements with incessant nit-picking, as if proving he's part of the game is an open invitation to make sure he stays in it. Did you file the 1-83 yet? Voting slips on the Lockdown amendments are coming out next week, make sure you fill it out and return it asap. Have you vetted the new Ops room candidates? Have you pushed back Rushfall’s interview date? Did you get back to Marie Hightower like we said you would? She's a nice enough girl, and she's always liked you. If they’d been the only frustration of the week, it would have been manageable.

But then they’d met some moronic girl on a recon mission. There’d been talk of blood trading within the city, and their usual suspects – the Night Children – had nothing to do with it. The plan had been to interrupt a planned drop, interrogate those involved and regroup for the next phase. Except all of that had gone to shit when Clary fucking Fray had shown up. No interrogation and multiple dead suspects. Which meant no information, no regrouping, no mission, no post-op paperwork to throw in the done pile. Instead of solving one problem, now they had two.

Jace had also taken some unexplainable interest in said moronic girl, and his questionable decision to follow her home had led to her being laid up in the infirmary, poisoned by a Ravenor demon. Alec had nearly taken his head off when he’d found the iratze traced on her neck. When the rune hadn't killed her, Jace begged him not to report her to the Clave. His Parabatai had decided he wanted to play the white knight, had taken on the role of her protector, and since it was Alec’s job to protect
Jace, he’d reluctantly agreed. But an unmarked Nephilim girl was unprecedented, and Clary had already proven to be a magnet for disaster. Even worse, she was hellbent on ignoring the sound advice of those around her. An unapologetic bull in a china shop. She wasn’t listening, she wasn’t even pausing long enough to think, and it meant Alec, Jace and Isabelle were left scrambling to sweep the broken pieces she’d leave in her wake.

The only difference is that his siblings don’t care. They have nothing but a hand slap to worry about. Meanwhile, Alec is having nightmares about losing everything he’s ever worked for. His position. His future. His freedom. He hasn’t slept soundly in days.

So, with a chaotic week of failed missions, near-breaches of the Accords, multiple broken Clave laws under his roof, his mother furiously blowing up his inbox and three cancelled hook ups in his text thread to Magnus, he snaps and does what he should have done from the start.

He locks Clary in the basement holding cell.

“You can’t do this!”

She pounds uselessly at the glass wall, and he throws her a dirty glare as he confirms the code in the lock panel.

Jace sighs, “Alec, this is insane---”

“You’re welcome to join her,” he swipes his clearance card and draws a lock rune on the interface. Thank the Angel for those new security upgrades. Because he knows Jace – and even Isabelle, Clary’s biggest fan – will release her as soon as he looks the other way. Now his Stele is the only thing that can let her out, and if all goes to plan, that’s going away with him for the evening. “But you have three days of unfinished task lists to complete, so I’d suggest getting back to work.”

“You can’t just lock her up.”

“I just did,” Alec turns his glare on Jace, “And if you have even a modicum of common sense, you’ll realize that in there is the safest place for the little girl to be. For her sake and everybody else’s.”

Alec ignores the little girl’s vocal protests to being called a little girl.

Jace raises his eyebrows and lowers his voice, “What you’re doing is childish.”

Alec folds his arms, unimpressed. “Your definition of childish needs some serious work.”

“You’ve had a problem with her since the moment she got here---”

“Let’s recap then, since I’m being so unreasonable,” Alec nods coolly, starts counting off his fingers, “Her mother, an ex-Circle member, is missing. Her Mundane boyfriend not only got a full tour of the Institute which is against the law, but joined us on an unsanctioned mission to the Bone City, all because she batted her eyes at you. Which then got him kidnapped by Vampires. Which then took another unsanctioned mission and three Shadowhunters to clean up. She’s had Circle members and half of the Downworld on her tail, and I don’t doubt for a second that there are others on the way. Because let’s not forget the biggest concern here: She’s Valentine’s daughter. Me not handing her over to the Clave is the most insane thing I’ve done all week.”

“You know what the Clave will do to her,” Jace tries to reason, teeth bared at him. It had crossed Alec’s mind. But the only solid information he has on her – sharing genetics with the Clave’s greatest enemy – doesn’t leave him a lot of options to work with, “You know helping her is the right thing to do---”
“Helping her is not our call to make. And maybe she needs locking up. The only concrete thing we know about her is the fact that she's Valentine's daughter. Her being in the Institute could be exactly what he wants,” Alec seethes, trying not to throttle him where he stands, “I’m going to have paperwork coming out of my ass for the next six months for this, if I don’t get disbarred first. And all because you feel a connection.”

“You agreed to this!” Jace yells.

“Because you know I would do anything for you!” Alec explodes. He can hear the sick crawl of his own desperation edging into his voice, and his anger and anxiety vibrates inside him, trying to spill from its cage, “God, have you any idea what this will cost me?!”

Jace doesn’t get it, never has. He’s always poked and jested, giving him hell for his unmatched obedience and work ethic, as if keeping close to the Clave is simply one of Alec’s amusing side traits. He’s never thought to ask why; why Alec works hard, why Alec is obedient, why he’s the Clave’s perfect soldier. It’s not like he hasn’t seen Alec on the prowl for sexual partners. It’s not like he doesn’t know. He just doesn’t seem to care enough to understand the delicate knife’s edge Alec walks on a daily basis. Even Isabelle is painfully casual about his personal stakes, and she does care. Straight privilege at its finest, he thinks.

Jace takes a breath and visibly calms himself. “This isn’t about you, Alec.”

The words stun him like a slap. He half wonders if he even heard them correctly. Jace’s stern expression tells him he did, and it leaves him reeling.

He's right, of course. It shouldn’t be about him. Clary’s uncontrollable tendency to upend everything she touches absolutely terrifies him, because if he can’t get a handle on her, he’ll suffer the consequences of her actions. And those consequences will look like insubordination – an inability to lead, to do his job – but they’ll taste like your kind can’t be trusted. His perfect record carries the frown of his sexual preferences because he hasn’t let the mission fail. This past week has seen him fail the mission in multiple, miserable ways and it’s beginning to make him panic.

But Jace is also wrong. Clary’s case should have been handed to the Clave immediately. By law. Her connection to Valentine is dangerous and they have no definitive answers for their questions. The only reason he hasn’t had her escorted to Idris is because Jace had specifically asked him not to. Alec would do anything for his Parabatai. But he shouldn’t have done this.

Time to start doing my job, he thinks.

“You’re right,” Alec tells him. Jace visibly relaxes, gaze softening, “But right now I need to take a fucking knee, Parabatai. I need a night where that,” he points at Clary, “stays exactly where I put it.”

Jace’s eyes sharpen again, “Alec—”

“End of discussion.”

He walks out of the basement level, throwing Jace's grip off his arm, ignoring his livid protests. He’ll notify the Council first thing in the morning and leave this mess to them. Clary, her dodgy parents and her Mundane sensibilities aren’t his responsibility. The safety of the New York Institute and its Shadowhunters, is. He's not going to let some chaotic, halfwit redhead shift his focus anymore, and Jace has already called in one too many favors on her behalf. He's done.

When the elevator doors close, he lets himself sink with a heavy sigh. He tugs his phone from his pocket and types a message: Are you free?
He’s more than a little relieved when Magnus immediately texts back.

*Message Received: M*

*Give me half an hour. Where should I portal you from?*

*Reply Sent:*

*I need the walk. Address?*

Magnus’ reply takes a little longer this time. He’d sensed the Warlock’s initial desire to keep his residence a secret – was hard not to with his generous offers to portal them to each other whenever, wherever – but he hadn’t cared to push, because if their paths ever crossed on the job, Alec would have a responsibility to use that knowledge. His innate urge to peel apart a good mystery had tempted him once or twice to read his GPS records, but it felt wrong to pry when Magnus had the courtesy not to do the same. Now he wants out of the cloying air of the Institute, and if his observations from Magnus’ balcony are correct, he’s living somewhere in East Brooklyn. Half an hour is plenty of time to get there on foot.

When Magnus texts back his home address, the weight of his trust feels like a test. *Be good, don’t fuck it up.* Knowing where he lives means Alec has a doorstep to sit on, a place away from his life to take a breath when he can’t breathe. He’s grateful to Magnus for a lot of things; his impeccable word, his incredible body, his dirty mind, his insatiable desire to give to Alec as much as he takes. He never thought he’d be grateful to the Warlock for a doorstep.

He steels himself as the elevator stops.

*Game face,* he thinks. The doors open, and he steps back into the chaos of the Institute.

Having been stopped by a few colleagues and their reports on his way out, Alec’s trip to Brooklyn takes a little longer than planned. He’s still fuming at Jace, at Clary, at the calm down and think about this Isabelle had tried as he’d left because he’s pretty sure he’s the only one who is thinking about all of this. He’s angry enough that he has to resist the urge to throw his fist through a wall, and he’s inwardly growling to himself as he arrives on the penthouse floor of Magnus’ building. It must show on his face, because the Warlock opens his door to greet him and immediately winces.

“You look like you could use a drink. Or ten.”

Alec strides right into him, grabs him by the shirt, “Shut up and fuck me.”

Their mouths collide, feet shuffling together as they move. Magnus makes a tight, aborted sound in his throat when his back hits the foyer wall, and he melts forward against Alec, hands in his hair, the fierceness of their kiss slowing and deepening. Alec bites, grazes with his teeth, trying to devour and be devoured until he doesn’t have to think, but Magnus slows him down again, the hand at his waist and the ankle hooked over his calf rolling their hips together.

It’s not what he’s after tonight. He twists them until Magnus is pressing him to the wall, and then he turns in his arms, shoves his pants over his ass and lays his face against the embossed wallpaper, breathing hard. Waiting.

Magnus stills behind him, “Alec—”
“Please. Now.”

Magnus’ eventually delves his fingers at his taint, but it’s clinical. Detached. He retracts his hand, “You’re dry.”

“I don’t care—”

“I’m not fucking you dry, Alec.”

Alec growls, “Then snap your fingers, Warlock.”

“Hey,” Magnus’ firm reply gives him pause. This is not how he saw tonight going, “Getting mad at me isn’t going to do you any favors.”

The reprimand is laced with an authority he can’t stomach right now, and it throws his defenses up. I can’t fight you too, he thinks, pulling his pants back up, anger and rejection and the powerful need to run taking him over. He shoulders his way out of Magnus’ hold, lashing out the only way he knows will piss him off, “If you’re not up for it, I’ll go elsewhere.”


Alec can’t. “I didn’t come here to chat. Do you want me or not?”

“Yes. But first I need you to breathe,” Magnus says, taking Alec gently by the arms, “Breathe, Alec.”

He looks up then, sees the concern in Magnus’ dark, determined eyes and forces an exhale he hadn’t realized he was holding. He becomes aware that his lungs are burning, strained like a week-long clench, and he grips Magnus’ shoulders to hold himself upright. Jace, Isabelle, Clary. Magnus. They don’t understand, no one does. They don’t know what he’s up against, that he’s alone. Alone in his punishment, alone in his unhappiness. Alone in whatever fate the Clave will decide for him. He’s always been so careful. And he’d screwed it up anyway. How did he let this happen?

Alec really begins to panic. Every breath he takes seems to steal away more of his oxygen, “I c---I can’t---”

“Yes you can,” Magnus tells him gently, placing his palms to Alec’s chest, “Breathe. Focus on moving my hands.”

Magnus steps closer, digs his fingertips through his shirt hard enough that he feels it. He grabs Magnus’ wrists to push him off, to run, to find space, but Magnus hushes him, murmuring instructions. Breathe, he hears through the blinding pulse at his temples, focus on my hands. So he does, zeroes in on the pain of Magnus’ grip, which gives his chest back to him. Move my hands, the Warlock tells him, in and out. He does that too, and he comes to realize that he is breathing, that Magnus’ hands are moving with the expansion of his diaphragm. Everything is burning – his lungs, his heart, his throat – but he’s gaining ground with the air in his lungs again at least.

“That’s it,” Magnus smiles, “You’re doing great. In and out.”

He doesn’t know how long they stand there, but Magnus is still matching him breath for breath moments later, in through the nose, out through the mouth. Eventually he comes to realize that he’s just had some sort of breakdown in Magnus’ company, and he’s indescribably embarrassed. He’s clearly not fit company with today’s special brand of head space, and he’d naively thought if he could just get to Magnus, his body would be tempting enough to get the distraction he desperately needs. Now it’ll be a miracle if Magnus ever fucks him again.
He shifts to leave, because he’d rather dig himself a grave than take another look at the pity on the Warlock’s face. But Magnus pulls him closer, presses against him with his body. His warm, strong hands slide up along Alec’s neck, thumbs framing his jaw. Holding.

“Do you trust me, Shadowhunter?”

It’s not a question he was ready to answer. It’s not even a question he’s given much thought to. Having been trained his entire life to kill Demons, being naturally suspicious of anything with Demon blood is the inevitable side-effect of the Nephilim mentality. And trust is a big word to attach to the likes of a Warlock. Being the loners of the Shadow World, they’re more prone to disloyalty and betrayal, unlike the pack and sire instincts of the Werewolves and Vampires, or the sovereign hierarchy of the Seelies.

But Alec sinks into himself, acknowledges the discomfort of being compromised in front of the man – the Warlock, the Downworlder – he’s been fucking for the past two months, and knows that he’d rather be uncomfortable with Magnus than with someone else. It feels huge, like it should be more of a surprise but somehow it’s not. It just is, as if it’s been creeping in the background all along and he’s simply never laid eyes on it.

He’s even more surprised when he answers aloud, “Yes.”

Something shifts in the Warlock’s gaze, minute and undefined, and Alec finds himself hanging on it. He has no idea if Magnus is going to give him a lecture or laugh in his face. He knows the concept of a Shadowhunter trusting a Downworlder is practically unheard of.

Surprise blooms on Magnus’ face. “You actually mean that.”

“Yes.” He really does.

Everything goes very still, the moment weighted and quiet. But then Magnus is gazing up into him, no longer searching, and Alec’s pulse picks up at how warm it feels to be in his eyes.

Magnus takes his shaking, sweaty hands and leads him through the living room and into the night air of the balcony. It’s strangely warm for early autumn, and the skies are a clear, dark shroud, kissed by the glow of New York’s lights. He hears far away traffic echoing down the street, a car horn blaring, a cluster of teens disappearing around the opposite building, making the trek to a late night movie. But everything feels muted up here, like he’s removed from everything around him, overlooking the world. He takes a deep breath, the first one without effort in what feels like forever. It’s easier, plucking at the tensions he’s carried all week.

Magnus guides him to the balcony wall and steps back, “Strip.”

He wonders if he’s heard him right, because they’re outside, in view of anyone who makes the effort to look up. But Magnus goes back inside before he can ask. Do you trust me, Shadowhunter? Magnus had asked, and Alec didn’t know what to expect from that, what it’d entail. All he’d seen was an understanding on Magnus’ side, as if he knew what Alec needed and was curious to see if he trusted him to make it happen.

He’s not too worried. Being naked outside is low on his list of present concerns, and the stone balcony walls are high enough to conceal anything below the ribs. So he peels his jacket and shirt off, tossing them onto a nearby sun bed before working on his pants and boots. When he’s naked, he shivers as the warm night blankets his bare skin and takes another deep breath, releasing it. It’s easier still, less claustrophobic without his clothes. He’s still angry, still anxious, still embarrassed for being a mess in front of the Warlock. But he’s seeing the sky, the stars above him, the expanse of the wide-
open night allowing him all the space he wants, and it’s helping him relax in fragments. It’s the first time he’s felt close to okay since Clary dropped a grenade into his world.

Magnus returns, gloriously naked himself, and hands him a glass. Orange juice, “Drink.”

He does, sipping and then chugging the entire thing down because it tastes so good. Magnus smiles, twirls his fingers in a wisp of crystal blue, and the glass refills for him. Alec takes in the vision Magnus’ naked body makes, angles and slopes illuminated warmly by the living room’s soft lighting. His arousal flares at the sight of Magnus’ dick, hanging soft between his legs. Even when he’s not hard, he’s impressive. Alec subconsciously licks his lips.

Magnus moves to stand behind him, the heat of his body warming the air between them. His dick brushes the tops of Alec’s thigh, and Alec can feel himself clenching with want, too familiar with the pleasure of Magnus inside him. He puts his glass on the ledge before he can drop it.

The Warlock walks his fingers up Alec’s back, fingertips teasing softly, and then his palms are smoothly across his shoulders, massaging the muscles to his neck, thumbs kneading the tendons up into his hair. He unwinds bit by bit until he’s loose and pliant and leaning back into Magnus’ arms, eyes closed, flushed and breathless for entirely good reasons.

Magnus presses Alec’s hands to the balcony ledge, his length now hard and hot behind him, “Stay.”

Alec takes it like an order, focuses on the wall beneath his palms, the glass of juice in front of him. His eyes close again as he feels Magnus hands on his ass, prying his cheeks apart. A finger snap, and then he feels hot tingles brushing from balls to crack, rising up inside him until it’s in his belly. He gasps at the sensation, then moans into it, shudders as it draws back out. It leaves him cold, as if Magnus has wiped him out with a wet cloth, and he almost blushes. He’d been too desperate to escape that he’d left before he could shower.

“What was that?” he asks shakily, thighs taut.

“Preparation for this,” Magnus murmurs, his breath brushing along his ass cheek. He spreads Alec open with his thumbs, and then he feels Magnus’ hot breath right before his lips close on him with a deep kiss.

He gasps, knees jolting. Magnus kisses him, sucking and nibbling at the pucker of his hole, wetting and warming it with his mouth. Bolts of pleasure zip through his belly and pulse at the head of his dick as Magnus works the bundle of nerves, and he sinks into the sensations with a heavy groan. He can feel Magnus breathing into his crack, and his thumbs shift, parting him as wide as he can, trailing the tip of his tongue along his ribbed flesh before diving back in to feast.

Alec grips the ledge, bows forward, shudders as Magnus lowers to suckle his balls. He massages them deliciously with his mouth, lets them free with a dirty pop, then grips Alec’s length and directs it backward between his lips. Alec opens his stance further and moans at the sight beneath him, of Magnus using the angle to take him all the way in, breathing carefully as Alec’s dick swells and swabs his throat. The stretch of his neck is smooth and tawny, taking him in and out easily, until Alec is so hard and full that he has to pull away.

Sitting back on his haunches, Magnus sucks the crown wetly, licks from Alec’s perineum back up to his clenching hole with the flat of his tongue, and then they’re both groaning as he sets back in with a hunger that makes Alec wet at the slit. His brain, which had been enjoying the reprieve from his horrible week, short-circuits entirely when Magnus’ tongue presses inside him.

“Oh fuck,” Alec whimpers, reaches back to grip Magnus’ hair. The Warlock clearly approves, hands
holding him by the hips, encouraging him to grind back against his mouth. Bit by bit Magnus works him loose, adding a finger, then two alongside his tongue, until he’s fucking him with three so forcefully that Alec needs to brace himself against the balcony.

His entire being is wound tight, taking Magnus’ fingers like it’s his dick pounding away inside him. He’s so close, so close, that he grips the base of his length to hold himself back. The torrent of broken moaning flowing from his lips sounds desperate and pained to his own ears, because he’s needed this so terribly – the release, the escape, something that feels good and takes him out of his head – and now that it’s here, he wants to give himself to it completely.

Magnus’ talent for anticipating his thoughts has him suddenly rising to walk Alec backwards, guiding them both to one of the balcony’s sun beds. He sits, brings Alec down onto his lap. The fullness of his fingers disappears slowly, dragging a groan out of him, and then Magnus is pressing the head of his sheathed dick inside, filling him again, easing Alec onto him gently. By the time he’s as deep as he can go, Alec is strung tight, trembling against him.

He gasps, “Magnus.”

The Warlock’s strong embrace surrounds around him, holding their entwined hands to his chest, knees spreading Alec’s legs wide. He murmurs hotly into the back of Alec’s neck, “Take everything I give you. It’s all yours to have.”

Then he’s thrusting, a slow, deep grind that obliterates Alec’s thoughts. It rattles his body so powerfully that he can feel Magnus in his chest, and he’s so full that he doesn’t know whether he wants more or less. The slap of their skin, Magnus’ rough grunts along his ear and the breath punching out of him all sound into the night like its own heartbeat, the pulse of their fucking, wild and alive. Tilting his ass back forces Magnus at his prostate, enough that he could come without another touch, but he’s throbbing at the slit, wants the total destruction of a full-bodied orgasm and slips an arm free to take himself in hand.

Forward into his fist, back onto Magnus’ dick, Alec fucks. There’s no worry here, no anger, no frustration, no fear, panic. Just his lungs gasping happily for breath. His body thrumming under sensation. Magnus’ mouth caressing his shoulders, his arms holding him tight, keeping him together. He’s been trapped on the edge of a cliff all week; a walked path he cannot revisit behind him, and before him, the inevitable death of all he knows. Here, he forgets. Here, with Magnus inside him, around him, working his body to higher peaks every time they meet, he forgets. Here, nothing else matters. Here is the only freedom he truly has. It hits him deep down where it hurts, makes him desperate for it to never end.

He can’t even form words when he comes, gushing in wet strings through his fist onto the balcony’s stone floor. Magnus' cries are muffled and low in his hair, fucking through the clutch of Alec’s orgasm until he’s freefalling into his own. Alec can’t stop, wants to hold onto this feeling for as long as he can, and Magnus keeps thrusting through it until they both slow, joined and needy, soaking in the after pulse of their pleasure.

“Fuck,” Alec pants softly, simple whispers of exclamation as his head falls back onto Magnus’ shoulder, “Fuck. Fuck.”

Magnus is moaning into the sweat of his neck, a pained hummimg between gasps as he comes back down, dick undulating inside his heat while he catches his breath. He mouths a kiss along Alec’s shoulder, his neck, the side of his head, tongues teasingly along the plump of Alec’s bottom lip until he opens for him. Alec slides a hand back to grip his hair, driving his kiss deeper. Eventually his energy saps, leaving him slumped comfortably in Magnus’ arms.
The Warlock kisses him once more, a light smooch, and combs Alec’s hair off his forehead, “You good?”

He’s so good, he’s barely able to move, “Hmm.”

Magnus shifts him forward, enough to slide out and vanish the condom, then leans them both back to lie against the sun bed. Alec slots along his side, eyes closing as he nestles against his collar. A finger snap later, they’re covered in a warm blanket. He’s so close to falling asleep, knows he needs to get dressed and leave because he has a human disaster locked away who will probably need to use the bathroom sometime soon. But it’s hard to make himself when he’s so tired and Magnus is so warm.

“Rest,” Magnus tells him, fingers massaging his nape.

Alec murmurs, “I need to go.”

“If I knew where your bed was, I’d portal you straight to it. Just rest. I’ll wake you up in half an hour.”

Half an hour seems like a reasonable compromise, even as parts of his brain are telling him that he’s breaking his own rules. Get in, get off, get out has been his company line since he first began having sex, because the aftermath of carnal pleasure always leaves room for awkwardness, always taints the experience with unnecessary expectation. The sex he’s always had is safer that way, enjoyably simple for being nothing but itself. He’s never fallen asleep with one of his sexual partners before.

Magnus continues massaging, moves his fingers up into his hair until he’s practically purring, “Do you have panic attacks often?”

“Panic attacks?” He asks, too blurry and confused. Is that what it was?

“No. It’s a first.”

Magnus hums thoughtfully, “You don’t have to talk about it. But if I caused any part of that, I’d like to know.”

“No you,” Alec tells him, nestles his leg between the Warlock’s knees. His own mouth is sleep-sack against Magnus’ chest, “You’re the most uncomplicated thing in my life right now.”

Magnus gently tucks the blanket in around his shoulders and mouths a kiss along his hairline. It’s the last thing he feels before he slides into blissful unconsciousness.

When he wakes again, the night time is even quieter and darker above them. Magnus is breathing soft and deep into his hair, chest rising and falling slowly beneath his head, and when he lifts up, he finds him fast asleep. The only thing that strikes him more than Magnus’ handsome face – smooth and relaxed in a way he’s never seen – is the fact that he hasn’t returned to the Institute.

Shit.

He extricates himself from Magnus’ warm, heavy limbs as gently as he can and gets dressed, successfully hopping into his pants without taking the potted fern out with his foot and bending to tie his boots. He relaxes when he glimpses the time on his cell phone screen. He’s only lost a little over an hour, and he checks his boot knife, tightens the strap on his thigh sheath and runs his fingers
through his hair, struck again at the sight of Magnus slumbering before him. Being here, away from the world, away from responsibility and expectation and duty, he fights the urge to lay back down and stay.

I can’t, he thinks, regrettably, because there’s nowhere else he’d rather be than here. The realization startles him.

Two months ago, he was dick deep in a line of conquests, hooking, catching and tossing back to sea when all was done. Harmless and ineffectual. He doesn’t remember faces, never stayed long enough for names, just knows the dark corners and the want of a hot mouth, an ass to be buried in, a cock to ride against the brace of a wall. A moment to breathe and be himself away from the wrought iron chains of his life.

Now he has Magnus and their agreement, which has proven worth their combined weight in gold. It stuns him to know that if he were still fucking around, he’d have been walking home an hour ago, still furious, still wildly unhappy, just short an orgasm. He takes stock of himself now.

He’s calmer than he’s been all week. And if he’s a little more honest with himself, he’s calmer than he’s been in a very long time.

Magnus stirs awake on the sun bed, stretching an elbow out from beneath the blanket, squinting, “Alec?”

Shit. Why hasn’t he left yet?

“Hey, hi,” he stammers, jostling a wayward thumb over his shoulder, “I’m just leaving.”

“Okay,” Magnus sighs groggily, completely unfazed. He gathers the blanket around himself and sits up, scratching a hand through his messy hair, “I’ll walk you out.”

Magnus clearly doesn’t care, doesn’t see the tiny crisis warring within Alec’s head, and his blissful ignorance helps Alec pull himself together. He waits for the awkwardness to settle in as they wander together to the front door, but it doesn’t come. No doubts, no agendas, no expectations. Just two people seeing each other off after having sex. It lets rest another rising bit of panic, the paralyzing thought of ruining this for the both of them.

Alec lifts a hand halfheartedly for a wave – why he thought waving goodbye was a cool thing to do, he hasn’t got a clue – but Magnus smiles amicably, still dazed in the space between sleep and wakefulness.

Magnus’ voice stops him when he turns to leave, “Hey Alec?”

“Yeah.”

“Whatever it is you’ve got going on, trust that it’s temporary. Nothing lasts forever,” Magnus says carefully. He wraps the blanket closer around himself, and his mouth lifts at the corners, amused, “Except maybe me.”

Alec blinks, momentarily taken aback. Because Magnus is comforting him. And while it doesn’t help the mountain of problems that threaten to topple everything he’s built for himself, it doesn’t feel suffocating, or pitying, or disingenuous. His words aren’t a meaningless balm, an overused it’ll be okay. Just a reminder that Alec may not be in control of what’s happening, but he can control how much he lets it affect him. It’s not the magic fix he was looking for, but it’s everything he needs to hear in this moment and it makes him feel stronger for having heard it.
He steps back into the apartment, takes Magnus’ blanketed shoulders in his hands and kisses him, slow and soft. And when he pulls away, Magnus is looking up at him like he’s coming awake from a good dream.

“Bye.”

“Bye,” Magnus whispers back, and his smile makes Alec’s belly feel warm.

For the first time in his entire Shadowhunter life, he walks home feeling light as air.

In the morning, he makes himself a coffee and mentally goes down his list for the day. He’s got a few security checks to complete, multiple reports to fill out now that he’s decided to come clean, and a video call to schedule with the Consul regarding Clary Morgenstern. Not his usual run of the mill day. But Magnus’ advice is still sitting pretty in his head and it puts him at ease.

Upon his return last night, he’d let Clary out of the holding cell and she barged past him, furious and indignant, Jace rising from the floor to follow on her heels. He’d passed Isla on his way to his room, her ankles crossed on the desk, nursing a mug of coffee as she monitored the Institute’s security feeds, and he’d ordered her to lock the building down if Clary made an attempt to leave. Her promise to keep an eye on their problematic guest had obviously been passed on to her day shift replacement, Gregory, who runs down Isla’s early morning list of events for him now.

“Clary slept from approximately 1am to 5:49am…then joined Jace in his room around 5:53am.”

Alec rolls his eyes. He doesn’t need to know where that is going.

“Jace and Clary then traveled the East wing to the Ops Center around 6:01 am,” Gregory recites, tapping the paper pad with Isla’s loose scrawl across it, then lifts his eyes to the briefing area in the adjoining hall, “And they’re still here, sir.”

Alec looks over to see Jace, Isabelle, Clary and Hodge of all people gathered around the briefing table, animatedly discussing something as a group.

“Tell Isla thanks,” he pats Gregory on the shoulder and makes his way over, sipping his coffee. No one glances in his direction as he joins them, and he has to clear his throat for the commotion to stop, “Someone wanna fill me in?”

Clary and Jace are clearly still holding too much of a grudge to answer him. He has half a mind to pull rank and demand it, but Isabelle slinks between them before he can.

“Clary has a lead. The High Warlock of Brooklyn has something to do with her missing memories.”

Hodge motions toward the briefing screen, “Magnus Bane.”

Alec heart starts hammering at the name, and his eyes reluctantly catch the distorted black and white photo of a man dressed in Arabian cloth. Another black and white photo of the same man in a suit, drinking with an adoring crowd of flappers. Another black and white photo of the man again, dressed like something out of a Shakespearean play. He’s barely recognizable, and if Alec wasn’t so familiar with the face staring back at him, he wouldn’t have noticed.
But there’s no getting around it. That’s Magnus. *His* Magnus.

He’d purposefully ignored any hunches he’d had about him being Brooklyn’s High Warlock. He’d even vaguely hoped the man was an impostor, simply using the name to get by, because if it turned out he was fucking the High Warlock of Brooklyn, there’d be hell to pay. Being faced with the truth now, it’s as if the ground is falling out from beneath his feet. The one easy, painless thing he’s got going for him, and now it’s all over. He’s filled to the brim with a desperate need to find an enclosed space to scream in.

He’s been fucking the High Warlock of Brooklyn. *The High Warlock of Brooklyn.* A Warlock who happens to be connected to the current mess he’s trying to control. His heart feels like it drops into his gut, white hot panic replacing his calm oblivion. *You’re the most uncomplicated thing in my life right now,* he’d told Magnus, just last night, as he’d fallen asleep against him. As he’d realized just how much he needs what Magnus provides. How had he cursed himself so quickly?

His throat feels parched when he asks, “How?”

“Clary’s been dreaming bits and pieces,” Jace informs him, arms crossed sternly, “She dreamed of Magnus Bane last night. The Mundane said he’d heard Camille mention him when he was kidnapped.”

Alec pulls his eyes away from his obsessive devouring of the photos long enough to catch the absence of Clary’s Mundane boyfriend, “And where is he?”

“He threw a tantrum and left.”

Clary rolls her eyes at Jace, “Because you got in his face.”


Jesus Christ.

Isabelle points at the rave poster to the right of the screen, “Magnus will be at the Hardtail tonight. Hodge says we may have something he wants. We’re thinking we could draw him out.”

Alec flares, panicked at the very concept, “Absolutely not.”

Jace rounds the table and explodes, like he’s been waiting for another chance since he locked Clary up, “Alec, *come on!*”

“No way in hell,” he growls back, turning to point furiously at her, “You’re either a Mundane or an untrained Shadowhunter. Which means either way, you’re not going.”

“You can’t *do* this!” Clary shouts, tearfully, “This is my life!”

“No way in hell,” he growls back, turning to point furiously at her, “You’re either a Mundane or an untrained Shadowhunter. Which means either way, you’re not going.”

“You can’t *do* this!” Clary shouts, tearfully, “This is my life!”

“If you want me to respect your life, than maybe you should have respected the lives of the people you put in danger this week,” he counters, hoping the girl has enough sense to see the consequences of her actions, “You are not cleared for field work and you will not be cleared for field work until you complete your designated amount of training, as every other Shadowhunter in the history of the world has.” He starts hollering when she begins screaming in protest, “I don’t care who you are.
You are not permitted to take part in Shadowhunter missions. You are not permitted to use Institute resources. And when you are, it will be because the Clave has given you the permission. Do you understand me?"

She glares up into his face, “I don’t care about your stupid Clave or your stupid rules!”

“That’s exactly the problem,” he argues, “You expect us to drop our entire system to help you, when our entire system is designed to achieve maximum results with minimal casualties. You’ve had a rough week and you don’t know any better. I get it. Shit’s hit the fan. But had you trusted in us, your friend wouldn’t have been kidnapped by Vampires. The fact that he was is on you. Had you trusted in us, we’d be halfway to saving your mother right now. The fact that we’re not is also on you. You’re just too damn stubborn to see that.”

Clary huffs, tears welling in her eyes and he gets it. He gets being frustrated, more than most. But he knows he’s not being unreasonable. She would see that if she weren’t so goddamn pig-headed.

“As the acting Head of the Institute, I’ll organize an official meeting with the High Warlock. Like a professional. Like protocol dictates.”

That seems to deflate the situation entirely, enough for Jace to take a breath.

“Then you’ll take Clary with you.”

“She hasn’t got the clearance to accompany me on official business,” he says, raising a hand as the protests begin to blossom once again, “And maybe if she hadn’t royally fucked things up this week, I’d trust her enough to give her a shot. But that’s not the case. I will meet him, I will find out what I can, and no laws have to be broken to do it.”

He can see his Parabatai about to unload at him again and he narrows his eyes, as if to warn him just fucking stop. “If you had your head on straight, you’d know this way is easier and safer for all involved. Clary included. So help me, Jace, if you go against my direct order I won’t even hesitate to bench you. Parabatai or not, I’ve had enough. I mean it.”

He turns on Isabelle, who doesn’t have the excuse of a spontaneous crush behind her actions, “And you. Of all people, I expected you to be smarter than this.”

She folds her arms with a disinterested eye roll, but he knows she understands where he’s coming from. She’s just always run headlong into excitement, much like Jace. It’s one of the many reasons they like each other so much. It’s one of the many reasons his siblings drive him mad.

Jace looks furious, enough that Alec sees the desire in him to take a swing. He chooses to lower his voice quietly between them instead, “No Parabatai of mine would do this.”

Alec stifles the urge to throw a fist, ignores Jace’s intention of hitting him where it hurts. Because the anger and resentment rising in him isn’t about Clary anymore, and he’ll be damned if he lets Jace compromise his integrity in front of watchful eyes.

“We tried things your way. It’s time we start going by the book,” he says with finality. Alec looks to Hodge, who stands quietly to the side. As a former Circle member, he knows all too well what happens when rules are broken. “Anything to add?”

Hodge lifts his hands in surrender, “Not at all.”

“Didn’t fucking think so.”
With a final glare at the four of them, he takes his coffee up to his office and tries not to collapse under the weight of his own existence.

His head is bowed between his elbows and his hair is in his fists, trying not to lose his ever-loving mind when Jace bursts in moments later, bringing his fists down onto his desk with a solid *thunk*.

“You and I need to have a word, brother.”

“Not now---”

“Yes, now.”

He pulls himself back into his seat and squeezes the space between his eyes, *hard*, lets out a deep breath and grabs the folder of Isla’s nightly surveillance reports from his pile of work, “I will talk to you when you start listening.”

“When have I ever---”

Alec takes the bait as he usually does, because one of the biggest cons to growing up together is the way Jace knows how to wind him up, “Are you *fucking* serious---”

“Look! I’m not here to fight you. You made your position very fucking clear,” Jace stands tall, folding his arms over his chest, biceps bulging, “But this is bigger than Clary. Don’t make the mistake of thinking I’m completely naïve.”

“Alec throws the report down with a slap, “Fine. You wanna get into this? This is about you not listening. This is about you not backing my plays. This is about the fact that you don’t seem to care about how easily the Clave could tear this Institute away from our family if we so much as step out of line. This is about you not even taking my knowledge or authority into consideration. When did you stop trusting me?”

Jace fires back, though the heat that has hidden behind his words all week gives way to a desperation that sounds an awful lot like sorrow, “When did you stop trusting *me*?!”

He attempts to trace his anger back to where it all began, and it well and truly surpasses Clary’s unexpected entrance into their world. Jace has never taken the time to consider his actions or how they may affect others, and it only drives deeper just how alone Alec feels every single day, fighting to have what small life allowances he can manage. Jace doesn’t get it, and he’s never tried to understand. And it makes Alec realize that he doesn’t trust Jace not to accidentally throw him under a bus. The very thought breaks his heart.

“This,” Jace gestures between the two of them, “hasn’t been right for a long time. Well before Clary came along.”

Alec sags against the back of his seat, “I don’t disagree.”

“Why? Is it because of your---”

“My what,” Alec looks up into his eyes with a glare that could flay him alive. God, he’s been glaring
so much his brain is starting to throb with it, “My past feelings for you? Bring that shit up again and I will make you regret it.”

“Okay. Sorry,” he throws up his hands, like Alec’s overreaction is somehow unprompted.

“Not everything is about my former inclinations toward you, misguided as they fucking were, over as they fucking are,” He shakes his head, “God, you’re such an asshole. I know I’m an annoying buzzkill, but have you ever once thought to ask why?”

Jace shakes his head, tucks his hands into his pockets with a shrug, “No. I love you as you are. That’s all that matters to me.”

He’s so genuine about it that Alec almost caves, as he usually does. Whenever things get tough, Jace makes a heartfelt declaration and brings whatever craziness they’re facing right back down to the power of their bond, their friendship. But it never fixes the underlying issues that cause them in the first place. It’s only ever a bandaid. And Alec is so tired of picking his battles and losing the war anyway.

“Maybe my reasons matter to me,” he says. He sighs heavily, exhausted under the growing weight he carries. He just needs room to breathe, “I don’t care enough to ruin whatever play you’re making for the girl. Have at it, by all means. And I’m not unsympathetic to her situation. I’m just trying to keep everyone safe, her included. Positioning yourself as her bodyguard isn’t enough. This is far bigger than we can handle. And until you understand that, you and I have nothing else to talk about.”

Jace bites his lip, purses them as he nods, the fight and light going out of his eyes in a way that almost makes Alec backtrack. He’s relieved when Jace finally hangs his head in submission, “Okay.”

On his way out of the office, he pauses, “Are you going to report Clary to the Clave?”

“Yes,” he says without hesitation, noting the way Jace’s shoulders tense, “And if she’s everything she claims she is, she’ll have nothing to worry about. If we don’t do things their way, they’ll pull this case from under us. If we do, there’s a higher chance they’ll hand it directly to us, where she can help once she’s cleared for field work. Which would you rather have?”

Jace turns back to him, unhappy but accepting. Alec isn’t naïve enough to believe this is the end, but for now, he’ll take it, “Fine. But if she gets summoned to Idris, I’m going with her.”

“The Clave will be the one to decide that.”

Jace sighs through his clenched jaw.

“I know,” Alec picks up the report folder again. A dismissal he hopes Jace isn’t stupid enough to ignore, “It’s tough. Welcome to my world.”

Eventually Jace relents and leaves, stuck for anything to say between his frustration and sour mood, and Alec tries to keep his head above the mental breakdown he feels brewing on the horizon. He checks his cell phone and taps through into his text thread with Magnus. Doing so usually incites his excitement, his arousal, brings about a smile or a grin of anticipation for the next stolen moment they could throw their lust at each other again. But now…now he’s filled with stone-cold dread.

He runs his eyes desperately over their recent messages, trying to find something that doesn’t make him feel like his stomach has been ripped through his kneecaps. The desire is still there – various visions of Magnus in different states of undress, arousal, orgasm, so vivid in his mind that his hands can remember the warmth of his naked skin – but now it sends him back ten years to a time where
he’d make himself sick, yearning for things he didn’t think he would ever be able to have. He knew their arrangement would come to an end eventually, but now that it’s here, he’s nowhere near ready to let it go.

A lump forms in his throat as he types out what is sure to be one of their last messages.

*Reply Sent:*
*Can we meet today?*

His heart wobbles when Magnus replies moments later. He can practically see him still in bed, stretching and rolling his limbs into wakefulness as he squints at Alec’s text on his screen.

*Message Received: M*
*Definitely. I’m free before 1 and after 4.*

*Fuck,* he thinks miserably. Magnus is completely oblivious to the bombshell he’s had dropped on him, making plans to hook up as they normally do. It’s not like Alec has ever stopped by for a coffee and a chat. It’s not like he’s ever fucked the same person twice, least of all had an arrangement like this. How is he supposed to do this?

He rubs furiously at his prickling eyes and sends one last message.

*Reply Sent:*
*See you at 11.*

Pocketing his phone to avoid the inevitable carefree, flirtatious reply Magnus will send, he dives back into the mentality of his role as the acting Head of the Institute. Wiping at his wet eyes like the angry, hopeless tears aren’t really there. Filling out the reports he’ll submit to the Clave about Clary and her mother. He tries his damnedest to convince himself that he’s okay, but the lie burns bright in his mouth.

At 11am, he’s staring at Magnus’ apartment door, the epitome of objective resolve. He has a job to do after all, and he’s never been one to let his personal life encroach on his sense of duty. Even if it sucks.

With a heavy sigh, he rattles out a level, sturdy, no-nonsense knock and waits. The sound of Magnus’ boots nearing on the other side seizes his breath.

When the door opens, Magnus is devastating to look at. His smile is warm yet secretive, “Shadowhunter.”

Alec walks inside, hands clasped behind him as he settles into the center of the living room, deep enough into Magnus’ home as not to get thrown out so easily. He’s strapped to the nines in weapons, more than he usually carries when they meet, and he turns as Magnus closes the door behind him and approaches. He holds a hand up when he gets a little too close, and tries to ignore his sinking heart’s realization that he’s never going to kiss him again, either.

“I’m here on official business,” he says, and Magnus immediately picks up on the vibe he’s putting down, smile falling right off his face. Because *this* was one of the conditions to their agreement, and
Alec is about to cross the line.

“Oh?”

Alec nods, bracing himself. Now comes the hard part.

“As the acting Head of the New York Institute.”

Magnus’ mouth rises in a brief, disbelieving mockery of a laugh, and then his eyes are hardening.

“The---what?”

Alec steps forward and holds his hand out, offering his usual business handshake. The handshake he’s always had so much pride in, because it meant he was representing his people, in a position of authority that he's worked himself into the ground to earn.

Now, it just feels empty.

“Alec Lightwood,” he introduces himself, and Magnus’ eyes widen in further disbelief. It's clearly all downhill from here. "I have some questions about a girl you may know. Clary Fray?”
Chapter Summary

Magnus remembers he's been having sex with a Shadowhunter, and things get more complicated.

Chapter Notes

Oh my lord, you guys. The responses each chapter are getting more intense and I love it. Thank you so much for the spazzy, passionate, intelligent comments and feedback. Every single one makes my day.

Special shout out to RedOrchid, who took it upon herself to sit at my table and force her friendship on me these past two weeks. I hope you all have at least one friendship that starts out like this. Also, for those struggling with the cancellation news, I send you love and Malec. Chins up, my little horndogs.

You can also follow me on Tumblr & Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

Magnus can’t feel his own face to check, but he’s pretty sure his mouth is hanging open.

Alec had been at his door only last night, wild-eyed and panting like a madman running from an enemy. Magnus had seen him grumpy before – had fucked and sucked it right out of him on a few occasions – but he’d never seen his Shadowhunter so frayed to the nerve. He’d spent enough time with him to know it wasn’t a normal occurrence, so he’d done his best to focus Alec’s attention and give him back whatever control he’d lost on his way over. Hands over the lungs, the quickest, physical evidence of survival. The same way he used to comfort himself as an orphaned Warlock child on the streets of Batavia.

And he’d spent the rest of his night lavishing Alec with pleasure, giving him what he came for, because there was always an underlying need in his Shadowhunter’s eyes that reached into deeper, sadder parts of Magnus. The kind of need that would keep him up at night, wondering what sort of life Alec led to look so starved in spirit.

He sees it even now. Alec’s bold stance, squared shoulders and his plethora of holstered weapons, seen and glamoured, doesn’t fool him. Not with the way Alec won’t meet his eyes. Not with the way he appears to be honing every effort to keep his offered hand steady.

Acting Head of the New York Institute.

He’d given it some thought, because he didn’t like being blindsided and he was always curious enough to ponder. He’d assumed Alec was higher ranking, perhaps a security detail with the way he always surveyed his surroundings. Maybe a commanding officer of some kind, because he had the
kind of quiet, steadfast charisma that would have men and women follow him to their deaths. But the inner hierarchies of the local Institute have probably evolved since the last time he set foot inside one. For all he knew, Alec could have simply been an overqualified janitor.

But the *acting Head of the New York Institute*. It snaps together in his head like he’s had his finger on it for weeks and finally has the answer he suspected all along. He’d heard rumors of the Institute’s main authority, because the local Downworld has always liked to cast judgement on the latest failings of the Nephilim. But the tone had shifted in the last year from blithering sarcasm to vague disinterest. Which meant whoever was currently running the Institute wasn’t entirely screwing things up.

But that isn’t what stuns him the most. No.

The information that completely tilts his world is the fact that he’s been fucking Maryse and Robert Lightwood’s eldest child. *Alec Lightwood*.

This, he never would have guessed. Because he’s been familiar with the Lightwood’s special brand of righteousness for decades. How they view the Downworld. How they view anything that doesn’t fit the sacred Nephilim mold. How they lord their own necks above everyone else’s, even those of their own kind.

And yet, somehow it makes perfect sense. Alec may be likable – a trait most Lightwood’s don’t have – but his own rebellious navigation of the rules echoes the rebellion of his parents in their Circle days. He’s quick, clever, cunning, strategic, thoughts always working behind his eyes as he mentally files away anything of interest. Magnus has seen Alec absorb any vague titbits that come up between them, and he’s not stupid enough to assume a Shadowhunter wouldn’t try to use it to his own advantage. He’d known this, even as he’d given Alec his home address. Because in the end, Alec is smart, and his balcony’s view of downtown Brooklyn is too perfect for its own good. And if Alec wanted to try anything physically threatening, he knows he’s powerful enough to stop him in his tracks.

And he’d grown to trust him. His heart takes the punch with a wince.

Alec drops his hand and replaces it behind his back. He seems to space out as he waits for Magnus to react, stuck somewhere between whatever he’s here to do and whatever controlled his emotions last night. Magnus feels a lot of things – anger, because Alec has strong-armed them both into something they didn’t agree on; *sick*, because he’s now seeing fragments of Maryse Lightwood in her son’s beautiful face; self-loathing, because he allowed this to happen in the first place. But it all takes a backseat to the reluctant concern he feels for the Shadowhunter before him, quietly unraveling behind his new, stony facade.

He hears the catch in Alec’s throat when he opens his mouth to speak. “I know how this looks.”

“Do you.”

“I’m not here to corner you,” Alec finally looks him in the eye, “I’m not here to use our arrangement against you.”

“But you know who I am.”

The Shadowhunter has enough humility to look ashamed, “Yes.”

He can feel his anger rising. “For how long.”

“This morning. Definitively,” Alec grimaces, and Magnus is relieved to know he hasn’t been lied to
all this time, “But I had a hunch. It’s my job to know the local Downworld leaders, but we haven’t dealt with the High Warlock directly in years. I just didn’t want to think on it because we agreed to let things be, and I didn’t know if Magnus was a common name or not, and the Clave would have my ass if it---”

“You may stop there,” Magnus calmly tells him.

Alec sags heavily where he stands, face drawn down. Magnus aches to see it. His life and the lives of those in Downworld have always been made infinitely more trying by the Nephilim race, but he knows how the Clave make their own suffer first. He’s met enough Shadowhunters in his time to decide he doesn’t want them around, but he doesn’t hate them for their prejudice the way they hate him for simply being what he is. He knows, deep down beneath Alec’s usual sexy confidence, there’s a boy who has been locked away inside the archaic laws of his own people for far too long. He sees glimpses of it behind his eyes whenever they part, sees how it melts away entirely when they meet again. He’s not unsympathetic, and he’s always had a tendency to press the Alecs of the world inside the holes of his own heart.

But he’s had eyes and ears out for Jocelyn Fairchild and her daughter since he’d found Dorothea’s body outside their Greenpoint apartment, thrown to her death by whatever Circle member had stuck around long enough to leave his filthy scent on her. He’s spent days perusing his usual channels, trying to find answers beyond the dreaded He’s here. His fire messages to Lucian Graymark and Ragnor Fell are yet to be returned. And now that Alec is standing before him with a possible lead, his priorities shift away from his own wounded feelings.

“Is she safe?” he asks now. The Shadowhunter looks adorably confused, “Clary.”

“As safe as I can make her,” Alec straightens up, now that the focus has moved beyond the mess they’ve become, “She hasn’t exactly made it easy.”

Momentarily relieved at the news, he purses his lips, dangles a titbit to get a read on how much Alec really knows, “Fairchilds’ are notorious for being spirited.”

“That’s definitely not the word I’d use,” Alec sighs, tiredly. Then he looks to him again, sharp, and Magnus can see him file the information away; match it to pieces he already has, “And I said Fray.”

He’s almost annoyingly proud at how quick he is, “You know what you know, and I know what I know. Why don’t you ask me your questions and I’ll decide if I want to answer.”

He turns to his drink station to pour himself a whiskey, because it may be mid-morning but good god he’s going to need it to get through this, and he doesn’t plan on making it easy for him. He swings around, empty glass raised in offer, but Alec shakes his head, muttering a somber no thank you.

He drops three ice cubes into his tumbler and pours himself a generous amount, “I do have one question for you. It only seems fair that you answer, given that you’ve invited yourself into my home against the rules.”

Alec pauses – out of self-preservation or apology, he’s not certain. “Okay.”

Magnus turns, drink in hand, because he wants to see the lie on Alec’s face when he answers.

“Do you still trust me, Shadowhunter?”

The question hangs between them, smothering in its heaviness. Alec had been sincere last night, too shaken by his own circumstances to put up a front. But now the charade is over between them, and if Magnus were in Alec’s position, he would have devoured the reference file on him until he could no
longer see straight. He can only assume Alec is now intimately familiar with whatever crimes the Clave has levied against his name. And even worse, been swayed by them.

“Answer honestly.”

“Honestly?” Alec huffs a tight, unhappy laugh, “Honestly… I don’t know.”

He looks hollowed out, like the spark he’s been carrying is gone and he’s mourning its loss. He’s not lying, which is admirable, at least. Even if the answer stings. Magnus turns away, gestures absently to the sofa across from him as he sits, trying to hold onto his grace and not fixate on whatever Alec is going through.

“You may begin.”

Alec eventually takes a seat and hunches, elbows rested on his knees. Magnus distracts himself with the comical way his size almost dwarfs the furniture, because watching him gather his thoughts, lock his feelings away and slide into business mode makes Magnus want to reach for his hand instead.

Alec takes a deep breath, “What is the nature of your relationship to Clary Fray?”

Magnus sips his drink, welcomes the burn. The Shadowhunter is clearly adept at interrogation. The question goes straight to the core and leaves little room to worm out of. “She’s a client.”

Alec’s eyebrows furrow, “Present tense?”

Again, he’s quick. “Yes.” But that’s all Magnus gives him in return.

He brushes a finger over the metal of his ear cuff, thumbs the silver band around his index finger. Hell, he’s nervous. He’s worried for Clary, because it’s clear Alec isn’t a fan. He’s wary for himself, because he has no clue what Alec will do with him now that he’s under orders. He’s deflating at the knowledge that the deeper, binding connection simmering like sparkles beneath all the amazing sex they’ve been having is now walking the plank.

Alec narrows his eyes in thought, the way he sometimes does when they’re trying to one-up each other in the bedroom, right before he makes a bold move. Magnus stifles a shiver with another sip, betrayed by his own attraction.

“Are you responsible for her missing memories?”

Bold, just as predicted. No wiggle room. “Yes.”

“And who hired you to take her memories?”

Magnus thinks back to the night he met a younger Jocelyn Fairchild, terrified and trembling from the night’s rain, but determined to be the iron wall between her daughter and the rest of the world. He hadn’t liked her solution to keeping Clary safe, and it had required a dangerous use of magic on a child so small. But he was no parent, and he’d respected the healthy dose of fear in Jocelyn’s eyes and loathed Valentine Morgenstern and his Circle enough to agree to her terms.

“It was her mother's request,” he says simply.

Alec’s mask cracks, a hint of sympathy in the strange anger of his eyes. He clearly hadn’t known, “Why?”

He taps a finger against his whiskey glass thoughtfully, “Perhaps that’s an answer for Clary.”
Alec bites down on his molars, jaw flexing, deciding to navigate Magnus’ new blockade with a different approach, “Do you know the identity of Clary’s father?”

“The Clave’s home-brewed villain?” Magnus sips his whiskey again, enjoying the way Alec hangs on his every pause, the way it visibly riles him up. It gives him some semblance of control here at least, “Oh yes.”

“Then you’re aware her mother was also a member of the Circle.”

He suddenly doesn’t like where this is going, “Yes.”

“Then you can see why I may have concerns. I have an unmarked Shadowhunter girl with some pretty significant blank spots in her memory and parents who have active kill orders on their heads,” Alec says, full of intelligent, strategic authority in ways Magnus has never heard him before. If it wasn’t grazing his last nerve like sandpaper, he’s almost certain it would make him hard, “You know what that sounds like, right?”

It’s on the tip of his tongue to tell Alec of his own parents, but he’s never been the kind to drop bombs on people out of spite. Instead, he sees the way Alec is falsely packaging Clary’s situation and offers a cold, waning smile, “You speak so lowly of which you haven’t even tried to understand. You believe Clary is a red herring?”

Alec throws his hands up, frustrated, “I don’t know what she is. And if I don’t know what she is, I can’t protect my Institute.”

“Maybe she’s the one who needs your protection.”

“Maybe she is,” Alec actually shrugs, “But I don’t run on blind faith.”

Magnus laughs abruptly at the absurdity. Oh, the holes he could poke in that statement alone. Now he smirks, unfeeling, his fondness for Alec quickly draining, “And what exactly have you been fucking me on? A bed of stone, cold facts?”

Alec reddens, caught between indignation and embarrassment, and Magnus sighs, trying not to feel the throb of disappointment that wells within him. The two of them have always fooled around without regret or expectation – Magnus had even grown to like him – but that seems to be changing now that they really know who they’ve been in bed with.

Fucking a Shadowhunter was never going to end well. Magnus smiles to himself, pained at his own naivety. Even after all his centuries, all the love, lust and loss he’s endured, he’s still surprised by the reckless leaps of his own longing heart.

“You Shadowhunters are so quick to forget that we’re the ones he murders in droves,” Magnus continues quietly, bitterly, “Stopping Valentine is more a point of pride for you, another chance to be heroes. But we don’t have the luxury of pride, not while we’re being strung up and tortured for fun. Make no mistake, Nephilim - if Clary were an agent of Valentine, I wouldn’t be protecting her. I’d put her down myself.”

A cloying silence takes over the room, interrupted only by the gentle billow of the living room’s curtains, the daytime sounds of Brooklyn below. Alec spaces out once again, going back into his own thoughts as he processes what has been said. Magnus usually leaves Shadowhunters to their own deplorable ways, but he wants Alec to understand. He wants Alec to see how deeply ingrained his privilege is, how casual and careless his prejudice. He wants Alec to not be like all the others, because those that have proven their integrity in the past are so few and far between. He tosses the
rest of his whiskey back and reaches for the bottle, needing another, but Alec comes to some sort of decision and rises to his feet.

“Is there a way to restore Clary’s memory?”

Magnus puts his glass down and crosses his legs, relaxes further against the couch. A picture of uncaring, despite how much he truly does, “Of course.”

“Then I invite you to the Institute. Tonight,” Alec says, rolling his shoulders back. The Shadowhunter is obviously as tense as he is, though Magnus likes to think he’s better at hiding how he feels, “You can speak directly with Clary yourself.”

He scoffs, snagged somewhere between incredulous and disbelieving. He’d expected a “good day, you no-good demon”. Not this.

“You’re just going to let me walk into your Institute and speak with Clary?”

Alec stares into him as he always has, intense and intimate, and Magnus throws his walls up, pretending he doesn’t desperately want to be seen. Alec’s nervousness, anger, frustration has faded, replaced with a silent acknowledgement that things have been altered beyond their control. Now he just appears apologetic, softly unnerved by him. Dare Magnus even think it: sad.

“Like I said, I don’t run on blind faith,” Alec confesses, “I think maybe I trust you after all.”

The statement quietly wallops him, has him unable to do much more than sit there in a paralyzed heap of bones and bruised pride. His walls fissure, no match for Alec’s gentle sincerity, and it opens the space between them, glorious and hopeful and frightening. His Shadowhunter visibly swallows, gaze dropping away, and Magnus watches him leave as tentatively as he arrived, closing the apartment door behind him without another word.

He’s still sitting there half an hour later with his bottle of whiskey down to its last dregs, half buzzed and full of chaos when his phone vibrates in his pocket.

Message Received: Alec
I’m sorry

Magnus slides off the couch and onto the floor, blinking furiously at his phone screen. He can’t fault Alec for using his address, not when he knew the risks in giving it to him. He can’t fault Alec for trying to do his job, not when he has the lives of hundreds in his hands. He can’t fault Alec for ruining what they had, not when the odds were stacked against them from the very beginning. He can’t even fault Alec for being the active Head of the Institute, not when he’s the best New York has had in decades.

But can he blame Alec for the woeful, black pit currently burrowing through his chest? Even when he’d unknowingly snuck Alec the keys to a lock he never signed up for?

Magnus stares at the two-word text message for moments upon moments, until he can’t bear the sight of it and tosses his phone to the rug, dragging his knees to his chest. He’d known this wasn’t going to end well, had even prepared an escape plan for when it finally went down the toilet, because he’d spent the last several decades with his heart in a box and he’s well versed in leaving it there. But somewhere in the naughty daytime meet ups, the sexy nights in, the warmth of the Shadowhunter’s charms, the good to be felt in his embrace –

Strangely, impossibly, he’d begun to hope.
After a hot shower and a quick re-evaluation of his recent life decisions, Magnus spends his afternoon with a Mundane couple, magically baby-proofing their home for their Warlock toddler. Their precious little pea had recently grown in her Warlock mark – the cutest little squirrel tail he’s ever seen – and while it had been a shock, Marika and Colby had endured enough in trying to adopt as a lesbian couple that they weren’t about to give her up. So they’d tracked Magnus down through word of mouth, committed to making it work, and he’d been all too glad to oblige. Josie’s healthy, happy smile and playful, swishing tail undoes him enough to give the Becker family a hefty discount. Because he’s always believed that good people deserve good things.

Back at home and no longer distracted with work, he paces the living room in thought, tapping his fingers against his summoned coffee cup. Then he stares out over the city and its pink ombre sky, sipping on more whiskey. Then he flips idly through an old Caleo magazine, sprawled across the couch, wallowing in a piece of chocolate ganache fudge he conjures from Dubois. He’s both determined and then not determined to take Alec up on his invitation to the Institute, until he thinks of Josie showing him her unicorn collection, which reminds him of a young Clary showing him her crayon drawings. She’d gifted one to him not long after her third birthday, a rainbow scribble with a distorted smiley face that he’d framed and hung in his apothecary. His eyes catch it on the wall as he paces the carpet outside the door, and his conscience won’t let him procrastinate any longer.

He anoints his palms with cedarwood and carefully draws a floor pentagram with Adamas powder, then ignites his magic and casts the spell to create a door between worlds. Valak streams through the pentagram’s lines in stifling, smoky clouds until he’s towering above him, and Magnus’ demon eyes burn as Valak snickers about finally receiving payment for services rendered. But Magnus doesn’t owe him a thing, knows Valak would have spent the last eighteen years sucking on Clary’s memories like candy canes. So he wraps an anointed hand around the demon’s throat instead, coaxes the glowing white light of Clary’s memories from his ragged, sharp mouth with careful, caressing wisps of his fingers. When he’s done, he tosses Valak and all of his over-dramatic hissing right back through the portal, snapping it closed behind him.

A cleansing spell removes any demonic debris, a quick binding spell seals it, and then he’s wincing as he siphons it into his own temple for safe keeping. It makes his head feel overstuffed, and he’s broken out into enough of a sweat to warrant changing his shirt, but it feels a little like he’s finally reached the last chapter of a long book. Relieved that he got so far without any major problems and anticipating a satisfying end.

After a brief clean up, he switches his shirt out for something simple and black – like my mood, he muses pitifully – and slides a blazer over top, checks his make up and hair in the mirror and creates the portal that will take him to the New York Institute. He sighs heavily, with flexing hands and bouncing heels and stomach butterflies, and walks on through to meet whatever awkwardness will find him next.

The blaring noise of pulsing sirens hits him first, muted within the doors of the Institute before him.
“Guess they know I’m here,” he mutters, just as the doors burst open, spewing forth the full, skull-rattling power of the Institute’s alarm system. Half a dozen Shadowhunters quickly surround him, seraph blades raised.

“State your name and purpose, Downworlder!” one of them yells, like some awful, outdated military drill.

He’s not sure what to do besides lifting his hands above his head in surrender. So he does exactly that, rolling his eyes derisively, “Magnus Bane, and I’m here for the cocktail party—–”

“Stop! Stop!” he hears someone rushing down the hall inside, and then Alec’s tall, spry body is leaping out onto the Institute’s front steps, bellowing at his soldiers, “Stand down!”

They’re quick to comply, though it’s with great reluctance and confusion. Alec jogs down to meet him, cautiously eyeing Magnus’ raised hands like he may have a complaint from the Warlock council to deal with later. As if the Clave cares for Downworld complaints, Magnus thinks, dropping them to his sides. “He’s a guest,” Alec pants, finally arriving in front of him.

He clearly ran a stretch to get here, and his face is lit up in disbelief like he hadn’t really expected Magnus to come. But he did, and the relief in Alec’s gaze makes him both glad and indignant. He’s not here because they’ve been having incredible sex together for the last two months. The very thought is preposterous, undermining his own professionalism. He’s here for Clary.

He’s 99.9% here for Clary.

Alec taps his phone screen and brings it to his ear, “…Isla, you can shut it off now.”

A moment later, the sirens cease. Magnus palms the side of his head with a wince. Clary’s bundle of memories are giving him enough of a headache as it is.

“I’m sorry---it’s protocol. The wards – your wards—–“

“I know,” Magnus replies. Even after all these years, his wards are as strong as ever. He’d put a lot of work into them back in the day, and he’s quite honestly impressed with how well they’ve held, “It’s nice to know they’re still up to standard.”

“Frankly, they’re ahead of their time,” Alec smiles, light and boyish. Magnus tries not to let his heart swoop at the sight of it, “Your wards make the New York Institute one of the most fortified on the continent. The last three Warlocks you’ve sent on jobs here couldn’t figure out how you’d done it.”

“What can I say,” Magnus waves a hand theatrically, “I’m not the High Warlock of Brooklyn for nothing.”

Alec’s smile grows deeper, and Magnus can feel the beginnings of his own tickling at the corners of his lips, ready to spill over and meet it. But then he remembers how twisted up he’s been since their earlier conversation and he boards it up, shuts it away.

Alec’s smile falls, and he clears his throat, stepping aside to welcome Magnus inside, “Come in.”

He escorts him through the group of Shadowhunters and into the Institute, one of his large hands hovering warmly over his back, not touching, but close enough that Magnus feels it down to his toes.

He takes it all in as they walk. The New York Institute is just as beautiful as he remembers, with its
tall, arching ceilings, the perfectly preserved stone gilding, the stained glass and the widespread fresco along the upper walls, telling the history of Jonathan Shadowhunter, the first of the Nephilim. The building itself is nearly as old as he is, and he almost turns to ask Alec who wears their age better – him or the Institute – before he stops himself. Being in Alec’s company has always been easy. Now, it’s infinitely more complicated.

While Magnus deals with the curious, cautious, callous staring of those around him, Alec gets stopped by two people requiring his sign off, and an incoming phone call briefly diverts him over to a young woman with a buzz cut, sitting in front of a large wall of screens. Magnus watches him work; how he’s calm and certain in his answers, polite and respectable in his people skills, how he nods and offers small smiles to those he passes, and it begins to expand the picture he’s painted of him so far. The Shadowhunters around him are confident in themselves and their skills, but clearly look to him for whatever last nudge his leadership provides. Out of focus, the room is almost harmonious in its chaos. Being in this environment day in and day out would drive him mad, yet Alec seems bred for it, handling it with poise. To say he’s impressed is an understatement.

Alec jogs back over and directs him to the elevator, hand returning to his back, “Sorry about that.”

“No need for apologies,” Magnus shakes it off, tries not to lean into Alec’s arm when his hovering palm makes contact.

“Things have gotten crazy since Clary arrived,” Alec says, punching the button for the third floor. The metal doors slide shut, “I’m only a proxy, so everyone naturally expects me to screw up.”

Magnus glances at the changing floor number above their heads. “You seem to be handling it well.”

“Yeah? Well, it’s not like I have a choice,” Alec mutters, more than a little bitter, “I’ve made such a point of being who I am that I have to be perfect. The moment I screw up is the moment the Clave strip me of everything. And it won’t be because of Clary. It’ll be because I’m gay.”

Magnus sniffs, rocks on his heels. Lilith, this is uncomfortable, “Must be tough.”

He can almost, almost feel Alec’s quiet derision. It’s enough to raise his hackles, “I wouldn’t expect you to understand.”

He looks at the Shadowhunter sharply, and he gets a confused furrowing of brows in return.

“What exactly wouldn’t I understand, Alec?” Magnus replies, staring into his eyes unflinchingly. Because he’s tired, his head is throbbing, and this Shadowhunter’s tunnel vision is wearing his patience thin, “Having to answer to the Clave for simply being who I am? Being held accountable by the Clave when they have no idea what it’s like to be me? Having my freedom and basic rights held over my head like a threat every time I step out of line?”

Alec flushes hotly, “It’s not the same thing.”

“It’s exactly the same thing,” Magnus says, his tone edging on a growl, “You’re not the only one paying a steep price for their freedom. Put yourself in my shoes next time you read your precious history books. Maybe you’ll see that you and I aren’t so different.”

He’s saved from further argument when the elevator stops and opens to a tiled corridor lined with intricate wood panel walls. While they walk, he breathes in the old smell of them as he tries to calm his anger, centuries-old memories of London and Paris springing to mind. Alec eventually guides him into a room with a crackling fireplace, with more old wood paneling and Victorian furniture. Magnus slides a hand across the rough woven fabric and slick, varnished wood of a chair, marveling
at the sensation of stepping back through the ages. Despite being immortal and gifted with infinite
time, he’s always thought it to be as delicate and swift as hourglass sand. Seeing things that
somehow remain the same is a welcome surprise. Because for him, nothing ever remains for long.

Alec hits a button on the desk phone and makes a call, pretending not to watch him quietly peruse as
he mutters into the mouthpiece. The tension between them is wound tight, somewhere between an
apology and a physical altercation. Magnus’ heart thumps in his chest with it, split between anger
and sorrow, because every attempt to speak to each other only seems to drive them further down a
hole, and he’s certain they can no longer climb out of it.

They spend the next few hours together, caged awkwardly in the same room as they try not to let
their personal issues interfere with providing Clary the information she needs. Magnus gives her a
consolidated version of her origins – of Jocelyn, her marriage to Valentine, how she came to run
away with the Mortal Cup. He pauses throughout his explanations to look Alec in the eye, because
he needs to know more than anyone that Jocelyn saved them all, that Clary is an innocent needing
protection. That Valentine has probably only recently learned of Clary’s existence, so she couldn’t
possibly be the Circle spy the Clave will believe she is.

Alec appears satisfied when all the hard questions are answered. There’s no silent apology for
jumping to the wrong conclusions, because in his mind, he was following protocol. While Magnus
rules with an ‘innocent until proven guilty’ mentality, he can’t really argue with Alec’s logic beyond
that.

Alec also takes notes, which then has him mincing his words. He’s made a strong case for Clary’s
innocence, and while he wants to believe it’ll be taken on board, he really doesn’t know enough
about the Shadowhunter to make a judgement call on his work priorities. Alec doesn’t comment on
his stilted answers, simply writes as he pleases, glancing furtively. Magnus feels like he’s being
psychoanalyzed.

Clary is quietly furious when they’re all done, having learned the full extent in which she’s been lied
to her entire life, and Magnus can see her typical Fairchild determination brewing a plan behind her
eyes. He’s almost afraid to ask.

He does anyway. “What are you thinking, biscuit?”

She purses her lips, glare ablaze as she stares at the fireplace. He half expects her to start throwing
things in her unbridled, teenage fury, but she takes a deep breath and seems to put away whatever fit
she’s barely holding beneath the surface. She looks to Alec, then to Magnus, which prompts them
both to share an anticipatory side glance.

“I’m thinking that I’m smarter than most people give me credit for. Including, apparently, even my
own mother,” she says carefully, low and mad, “And I’d like the chance to prove that I’m an asset,
not a liability.”

She turns to Alec, gaze hard as steel, “Write that in your goddamn Clave report.”

Alec reads her thoughtfully, and Magnus can see him coming to his own conclusion. The hostility
between them is palpable, but it’s tempered by the delicate moment of blind trust they’re offering
each other. Clary is essentially handing herself over to Alec, to the Clave, choosing to trust him with
her mission to save her mother, while Alec is choosing to trust that Clary will fall in line.

Eventually Alec nods, switches the screen off on his tablet, “I’ll do my best to make sure they know
you’re here for the cause.”
Clary offers a reluctant *thank you*, then she thanks Magnus minutes later, blinking away startled tears once her returned memories settle into their empty slots. With a lot to unpack from the night’s revelations, she decides to call it a day and heads back to her room, to which Magnus considers a small mercy. He’s positively exhausted.

Alec places his tablet on the desk and moves to meet him at the door, “I’ll walk you out.”

He’s on the verge of refusing, because the High Warlock of Brooklyn certainly doesn’t need a chaperone, but Alec’s hand is once again hovering over his back and he plans to milk the almost-contact as much as he can before they’re forced to go their separate ways.

The elevator ride down seems to take its time, content to torture them in their silence. Alec is almost vibrating with a quiet urgency, some need to salvage their rapport. Magnus feels it, wants to meet him halfway, but how can they? They were fucking on borrowed time. They never should have started this to begin with.

Alec accompanies him through the Institute’s late shift and out into the open night air, and then they’re trying to look each other in the eye without it being weird. Magnus is still angry, still disappointed, still sad and still hopeful, and it all convenes as a confusing, numbing weight on his heart until he doesn’t know what to feel at all.

He offers the handshake he refused this morning, and Alec’s hand clasps it, strong and dry and warm. The mood is solemn, thick with woeful acceptance as they hold each other’s grip. Alec is never going to fight for him, and he’s not in a position to do the same. It was only sex, after all. This is as close to an amicable parting as the two of them are ever going to get.

Best not to look a gift horse in the mouth, he tells himself, even as he struggles deeply with it. Even as it all feels wrong.

With great regret, Magnus takes a breath and lets him go. He offers an empty, polite smile, “Goodbye, Mr. Lightwood.”

Alec’s gaze is wild with muted panic, as if he finally realizes it’s over. Don’t make this harder than it is, Magnus almost pleads, hoping for a clean break, but then Alec takes stock of the security camera fortress of the Institute behind him, shoves Magnus beneath the shade of the nearest tree, pulls him in by the lapels and *kisses* him.

The insistent press of Alec’s mouth brings his insides to life like fireflies, wakes him up from the daze he’s been in since Alec had introduced himself as someone he truly couldn’t have. And he slides right back into the passion they create together, easy and familiar, clings to Alec with his hands in his hair, in his clothes, trying to take whatever he can. Alec pulls him in at the hips, holds Magnus bodily against him until they’re swaying for stability. And then they kiss, and kiss, and kiss, jaws working, lips growing hot from breath and raw from teeth and wet from tongue, until they’re so curved around each other that they feel like one person. Until their awful day and all of its complications simply fades into the background.

Their mouths part breathlessly, nuzzled together, and Magnus feels Alec’s pulse racing beneath the hand he has on his neck. He’s hard, Alec’s hard, hips and bellies and chests melded together, but neither of them makes a move to do more.

Something is shifting between them, untouchable and undefinable, and it knocks Magnus’ heartbeat askew. He’s beginning to think dangerous things; that he would gladly stand here in the tight, desperate circle of Alec’s arms, squeezed of sense and full of desire, for as long as Alec would have him. That this is so much more than either of them wants to admit. That it will, inevitably, lead to a paved path he’s all too familiar with.
“Give me a week,” Alec closes his eyes, resting his forehead down against his, breathing the moment into his lungs, “A week. We can make it work. This doesn’t have to change things.”

“A week,” Magnus readily agrees, breathless and high. He’ll regret it all later, but right now – pressed against Alec’s body like it means something, like he means something – Magnus is willing to say yes.

Alec kisses him again, fast and urgent even as he untangles them from each other, holding his head between his palms while he tongues deep and thorough enough that Magnus feels it like a kiss in his cock. Then he’s pulling away entirely, walking confidently out of the tree’s privacy with a live-wire edge to his steps. And when he glances back over his shoulder, the moon catches the contentment of his smile.

Magnus is still running his fingertips over his throbbing lips when his Shadowhunter slides back inside the Institute’s doors. He’s still touching them when he portals through into the comfort of his apartment. He’s thumbing them as he brings himself off, dancing to his own pleasure beneath the sway of his bathtub water.

He’ll regret it all later. But right now, it doesn’t matter.

A little while later, he’s dressed in his silk pajamas - more than ready to fall into bed, when someone knocks at the door.

Usually he’d ignore it, because some of his clients lose all sense of time and diplomacy when they’re frantic enough. But when the brutal, unstable pattern of knocking rattles the beams in the front wall of his apartment, he checks the peephole to get a look. His heartbeat kicks up a notch at the man on the other side.

“Jesus Christ,” he blurs, quickly yanking the door open.

Lucian Graymark tumbles over the threshold like a dead weight, weak and bloodied and filthy, falling onto his side with a pained grunt.

Magnus observes the deep slashes through his skin and clothes. Claw marks, “What on earth have you done now?”

“Hi,” Luke breathes laboriously, peeling one eye open enough to look up at him. Then he promptly passes out cold on Magnus’ foyer floor.
Six

Chapter Summary

Everything implodes again, and Alec struggles to be good enough.

Chapter Notes

It seems as my characters struggle, I struggle, so sorry about the longer wait, friends. As always, thank you so much for the wonderful comments, feedback and support. It's the best gift a writer can get. I hope you enjoy this chapter.

Extra special shout out to RedOrchid, who picked this chapter apart where it failed and cheerleaded where it didn't and reminded me of the story I'm trying to tell. This one is for you, doll.

You can also follow me on Tumblr & Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

4:30 am, Alec drags himself out of bed and into the shower.

It’s his morning routine to reacquaint himself with the world under the hot shower spray, to lull himself from his slumber into a man capable of piecing together a daily agenda. It’s usually after he’s done rinsing shampoo suds over his head that he finally thinks of his first tasks, which is always his security checklist and staff rosters, alongside the important mission of acquiring a tall cup of coffee. But not today.

Today, his first thought is of Magnus.

It’s not the usual thoughts that entertain him, either. Like how Magnus’ Adam’s apple feels against his tongue. Or how his silky hair feels between his fingers and the way Magnus hums softly into his kiss when he plays with it. Or how the baby smooth skin behind his ears is so sensitive, he quivers when Alec brushes his thumbs there. Or how his body writhes sensually when Alec bites his brown nipples, and the muscles pointing to his dick, and the curve where thigh and ass meet. Or the way Magnus moans against his ear as he comes, deep and pleased and fulfilled. How it sounds like praise. How it makes Alec feel like he’s Magnus’ favourite thing in the world.

Instead, he remembers the harrowing disappointment in his eyes. The shock of anger in his voice. The blunt reminder of their differences and how readily Magnus used them to build his walls. He remembers the hot fusion of their mouths and the needy press of their bodies, not for lust but for release of self. He thinks of how Magnus always leaves an imprint on him; something warm, solid and strong that promises to catch him when he stumbles. He thinks of how he wants to fall into it, have it envelope him and squeeze him into a man who actually knows what he’s doing, because living for so long in survival mode has robbed him of how to be. More than that, he thinks of how his entire being felt swollen beyond its bounds with crippling relief when Magnus agreed to give him
another chance. No, not relief. That’s a lie.

_Happiness._ Because the thought of being with Magnus makes him _happy._

He’s grown to like Magnus in a way Isabelle would probably poke fun at him about. The kind of _like_ like that provokes juvenile sing-songs and interrogation. He’d long convinced himself that being with Magnus meant freedom away from the pressures of his life. And it had been the truth, once. But now Alec knows how it feels to be understood, and he knows how it feels to be comforted, without hesitation or expectation. He knows what he stands to lose if he screws up again, and it’s not just his freedom.

His slumps against the shower wall, breath whooshing out of him, blinking through water-heavy lashes. It had taken every effort to pull himself away from Magnus last night, his all-consuming kiss and his fierce embrace. Even now, Alec’s drenched body aches to be with him, and yet the flutter beneath his ribs overpowers the throb in his dick. He realizes, with great surprise, that he’s _yearning._

He takes himself in hand and strokes slowly, trying to ease the pull with the only thing available to him – sensation and imagination, phantom memories of Magnus caressing his abs and admiring the swells of his ass, of his soft mouth on Alec’s jaw, his cheek, whispering things to urge him on. _I want you to come, Alec,_ he would breathe, teasing and full of his own desire. _Want to feel you coming on me._

Alec shivers and moans, hand working himself in quick tugs. He pictures Magnus on top of him, naked and hot and greedy, hands clutching at his nape and thigh. His body is a wave of movement as he drives between Alec’s thighs again and again, eyes boring into him, as deep and desperate as his dick on his prostate. _Come on me,_ Magnus would moan, his face awash in agony, and their bodies would join a little harder, rutting like two moving parts of a whole, thirsting for that finish line where they float together. Then Magnus would bury himself to the hilt, head thrown in euphoria, hips stuttering, neck vein rising, and Alec would come and Magnus would cry out. Smiling. _Fuck, I feel you. I feel you. Alec._

And that’s all it takes. The thought of his smile. He comes in a rush, gasping, head thunking into the wall, trembling in his thighs and in his heart. His hips work through the deepest grips of his orgasm as his chest heaves, length pulsing, skin flushed hot, groaning Magnus’ name beneath the shower head like he’s starved because _fuck,_ it’s not enough. When did it stop being enough? _Magnus. Magnus._

Here in this moment – alone, where his feelings can’t get him in trouble – he’s never wanted anything more.

Alec doesn’t get to his security checklist and staff rosters _or_ his coffee until well after noon.

His priorities immediately shift when Clary’s returned memories reveal the location of the long lost Mortal Cup. Aside from hiding her Shadowhunter lineage and living among the Mundanes, Jocelyn Fairchild happened to be a rather talented artist, one who had painted a set of Tarot cards. Cards that had landed Clary very much grounded when she’d snuck them to school to show her friends as a child. When he’s done almost _herniating_ over the idea that 10 year old Clary Fray could have lost the Cup to a bunch of elementary rug rats, he tasks Jace and Isabelle with retrieving it from what’s left of
the Fairchild residence. Clary, to her credit, doesn’t even fight him when he demands she remain behind. She also agrees not to cause any strife during their video conference with the Inquisitor and the Consul. So with their temporary truce upheld, all he’s left to focus on is whether or not he’ll still have his job when it’s over.

His palms stay clasped and clammy behind his back as the meeting ticks by, his stomach a rolling, nauseous mess of knots as Clary runs down the list of events that landed her at the Institute a week ago. He’s submitted reports for everything that’s happened since she arrived, including a slightly watered-down version of their mission to the Dumort – because it’s one thing for the Clave to learn that news of the Cup is turning the Downworld inside out, but it would be another thing entirely if they knew the Accords were being threatened in the process.

Inquisitor Imogen Herondale and Consul Malachi Dieudonné go over his written Statement of Events from their night at the Bone City; their severe, weathered faces nodding as they see he’s had it verified by Brother Enoch like the overachieving proxy he is. They also go over the information he’d filed about Magnus’ impromptu interview last night, something he’d stayed up late to complete just so the room for inevitable doubt would be as minimal as possible. But both the Inquisitor and the Consul are relics beyond their expiration dates, which makes their views archaic more often than not. And with their lack of impartiality, he’s going to have an impossible time trying to convince them to give Clary a chance, no matter how much work he’s put in.

Clary stares at him when the discussion turns to his recommendations of her placement, and he glances at her long enough to catch the shock and gratitude twisting the knobs of her waterworks. Because his siblings may think he’s a grump, and Clary may be the biggest pain in the ass, but he believes she’ll thrive and learn better in New York where she can be close to home, surrounded by the people she’s growing to trust. If she remembers to obey orders.

Plus, it’s kind of entertaining to watch her visibly struggle to reconcile every bad thing she’s said about him. Watching the way her teary eyes crinkle and glisten with her wide, thankful smile isn’t exactly the worst, either. It’s only a shame their truce couldn’t come sooner. Maybe then they’d have a better chance.

The Inquisitor clears her throat, “Mr Lightwood.”

He straightens where he stands, like their authority alone has zapped him to attention, “Yes, Madam Inquisitor.”

Consul Malachi reprimands him with a tired look, “As I was saying, based on your impeccable reports and attractive record of success, Mr Lightwood, I agree to your recommendations under the terms of a one-month trial.”

Alec can barely hear over the pounding blood in his ears. He blurts inelegantly, “What?”

“‘We’ll set up a later date to meet her in person,’” Malachi continues, flicking closed whatever file he has open on the desk in his Idris office. Alec waits for confirmation with bated breath, because he’s not entirely sure he’s heard right, “But until then, Clarissa is to stay at the New York Institute under your guidance. If anything unseemly disrupts this trial, she will be transferred to Idris immediately. Though I suspect you won’t let that happen, Mr Lightwood. Not with your sterling record.”

He clocks Malachi’s thinly veiled threat, but he’s got nothing else to say besides a dumbfounded, “Yes, Consul.”

The remainder of the meeting passes quickly, and when the call finally drops out, he falls into his chair with enough force that it glides slowly across the floor and bumps the window ledge behind
him. Clary's staying. **He's** staying. It leaves him so stunned that he doesn’t even register as she waves a hand in front of his face.

“I can't believe you did that,” She tells him. Remarkably, it's without the accompaniment of an eye roll, "I...admit that while I haven't had it easy this past week, I haven't exactly made things easy for you either. I thought you’d be glad to get rid of me.”

He shrugs, “You’re not wrong. But objectively, it was the right thing to do.”

Clary tilts her head, and when she finally catches his eye, she puts sincere emphasis on her next set of words, “For what it's worth – thank you.”

“Yeah okay,” he mutters, his mouth ticking at the corner. It's the faintest hint of a smile but it's enough to make Clary outright beam, and Alec purposefully ignores the way it penetrates his big brother heart.

Once he’s pulled himself back into boss mode, he beckons her to the library and sets her up with the heaviest, thickest tome in the Institute – the Shadowhunter’s Codex. Her huffiness only lasts until he decides to keep her company, stretching out onto the sun-warmed sofa with a volume on the Accords. He has a million things to do elsewhere, but with the white-knuckled death grip of their tentative truce now gone and the Consul’s temporary blessing, he feels inclined to help her do her best. So he kicks his boots up, which prompts her to settle in and do what he’s suggesting.

He brushes up on the parameters of the Clave’s peace treaty and its jurisdiction documents, because it never hurts to exercise his knowledge. But he soon grows distracted with thoughts of Magnus, which inevitably replays the tension of yesterday, his confidence slighted once again. Their arrangement has only survived this long because they’ve respected the mystery of each other’s personal lives. With that anonymity gone and Magnus’ wariness of him still fresh in his mind, Alec knows he’s got to do better about respecting who Magnus is, if he has any hope in hell of keeping him around.

So he shifts his focus and tries to read from as close to a Downworlder’s perspective as he can, as Magnus had all but dared him to. And the more he reads, the more uncomfortable he gets.

The Clave controlling the Downworld like they control him isn’t exactly news, because the Clave isn’t all that fond of anyone. But the language used begins to grate. Alec may be gay, but he’s a person. Magnus may be a Warlock, but he too is a person. Yet Magnus’ kind are referenced with a tone that implies they need saving - and even more apparent, that they need saving from themselves.

He starts seeing a pattern he’s never looked too hard at before. The much proclaimed heroism, the underlying current of passive aggression. The Accords have always been a code of conduct for him, a manual for the fair protection and treatment of Mundanes and Downworlders. Except now that he dares to look closer, it looks a lot like the disenfranchisement of an entire race, and it's not an attractive idea to confront. It leaves him feeling out of sorts, picking apart every insinuation he’s ever made, conscious or otherwise. He likes to think he’s grown over the years, but he’s mortified that he can still identify the Clave’s outdated intolerance in his own thoughts. That even now, they still feel justified.

He tries to argue with himself, because Magnus is the exception. He knows Camille Belcourt, the Vampire behind the kidnapping of Clary’s Mundane friend, has had an Arrest and Interrogate Order on her head for at least a decade of unpunished crimes. Her lieutenant, the Vampire who had handed him back safe and sound, was responsible for taking him in the first place. All week, his staff have been dealing with volatile Werewolves intent on the Cup, and Seelies crossing into regions they shouldn’t be entering. With the prominent return of Valentine’s Circle, the Downworld is more out
of control than usual. So who will keep the order if his people don’t?

His mood isn’t any better when Jace and Isabelle return from Clary’s home empty handed. Even worse, Isabelle finds an arson report involving Clary’s Greenpoint home in the NYPD’s database signed off by a Detective Luke Garroway, Clary’s adoptive father. A Werewolf. And as if that’s not enough, a quick search through the Clave’s system reveals he’s also Valentine’s former Parabatai.

With the bullet points of Luke Garroway’s life displayed on the monitor for all to see – or rather, Lucian Graymark the Shadowhunter, turned Circle member, turned Downworlder – Alec’s rising panic threatens to overwhelm him. Just last night, Magnus had talked about Luke with Clary in an attempt to repair her shattered trust, describing him as a man who had taken her to her first day of school and put bandaids on her scrapes and chaperoned at her high school prom. The look in Magnus’ eyes had been one of pride and admiration. And Alec trusted him to know what he spoke of.

But now he’s facing the idea that a member of New York’s current, problematic wolf pack and Valentine’s former Parabatai are one in the same, and the fact that he used to read Clary bedtime stories simply isn’t enough to remove him as a person of interest.

He sends Isabelle and Jace out to Luke’s last known residence, but they come back with no information. He asks Clary if she has anything they can use to track him, but she has nothing. He even sends Jace and Isabelle to stake-out the Jade Wolf, but no one matching Luke’s description surfaces. If I had the Mortal Cup, Alec thinks, I’d drop off the grid, too. The thought doesn’t do him any favors.

With his day fumbling to a close, he shoots targets on the Institute's roof well into the early hours, because it’s always helped return his equilibrium. But he struggles to pull his wandering head, heart and gut back together, too jarred by his conflicting emotions. His trust in Magnus is the only thing that keeps him from completely spinning out, but with a lack of affirming evidence, that trust is very much blind. And blind trust bothers him to no end. He wants Magnus’ reassurance, but after everything he’s faced today, his confidence and competence is in the dumps. The idea of reaching out is far less confronting than the reality of actually doing it, and he worries that if he forces himself, he won’t look at Magnus the right way, or he’ll say the wrong thing, and he’ll be back to where he began.

Alone.

He spends the next couple of days with his head in his work, attempting and failing to find some sort of clarity. Not texting Magnus helps, though he’s simultaneously relieved and worried that Magnus isn’t texting him back. He avoids the Institute library like the plague, even as he itches to re-read the entire room with the broken lenses of his Clave-tinted glasses. He starts noticing the way others talk about Downworlders, how his first nurtured instinct is to agree, then how he has to reprimand
himself into objectivity. That he has to constantly keep doing it.

Things only get worse when Raphael Santiago turns up after sundown, Clary’s Mundane friend dead in his arms.

Alec doesn’t even know what his first response should be, so he has the medic team bring the body to the mortuary. Raj, his Head of Security, hands him a pair of Adamas wristcuffs while he eyeballs Raphael with intent, and Alec puts them in his pocket, too uncomfortable to use them but not forgiving enough to refuse them entirely. He also calls Jace, who is currently with Clary and Isabelle in the training hall, and fills him in as he escorts Raphael through the Institute. He doesn’t envy his Parabatai of the news he’ll have to break.

In the mortuary, Raphael carefully adjusts Simon’s jacket to cover what he can of his mauled neck. For Clary's benefit or to avoid confronting his own complicity, Alec's not sure, but the gesture isn't lost on him. He dismisses the security and medic teams back to their posts and leans his hips back against the wall bench. Where does he even start?

“What the hell happened,” he demands, watching Raphael slowly take to the perimeter of the room.

“Camille dosed him,” the Vampire replies, quiet and soft spoken, eyes dark and unwavering, “Another day or two and he would have returned to normal. But the blood, it lures you in. I'd even sent him on his way a couple of nights ago. I thought that would be it. And now...”

Raphael glances to Simon's lifeless body, then hangs his head, folding his arms. If Alec squints, he actually looks apologetic.

He puts two and two together, heaving a weary sigh. It's not good news, “He's in transition.”

Raphael nods, “Whether he rises...I figured that should be up to his friends.”

Alec squeezes at the bridge of his nose. A dead Mundane is the responsibility of the local law enforcement. A dead Mundane in transition is the responsibility of his Sire. By rights, Simon’s body shouldn’t even be under his roof. That’s his first mistake. His second mistake was reading up on the Accords, because the universe seems hellbent on shoving Downworlders in his line of sight and now he no longer knows how to deal with them. He's also only two days into a month-long trial that depends entirely on Clary's stability of mind, and her best friend being murdered is going to rip her entire world from under her feet all over again.

He can’t help but think he’s being tested.

“And this was Camille's doing?” He asks, and Raphael nods his confirmation, gaze hardening. “Where is she now?”

The Vampire stares at the far wall, avoiding his penetrating stare, “I don't know.”

“You don't know?” Alec’s rising voice begins to hit the surfaces around them, “She's just murdered a Mundane. She's in breach of the Accords---”

“That’s why I brought him here,” Raphael glares, “I don’t want the entire body of my people held accountable for something she acted on alone. We don’t judge you all for the actions of Valentine Morgenstern. Perhaps, Shadowhunter, you could offer the same courtesy.”

Alec huffs, heavy with sarcasm, “Right, you don’t judge us---”

“We may judge you for your ignorance, Shadowhunter, but not for Valentine’s crimes,” Raphael
sneers, expression darkening, “Even if the Clave helped breed him in the first place.”

Alec rises to his full height, body reared. He’s tried to pull himself up on his muddied, nurtured thinking a lot in the past few days, but he’s not about to have a Vampire tell him his own people are indirectly responsible for Valentine’s monstrosities.

“You wanna talk complicity?” Alec bites back, “Camille Belcourt has had an arrest warrant on her head for the better part of the last decade, and your people have allowed her to exist comfortably while she’s killed god knows how many Mundanes, right under your noses. At what point are you complicit in this?”

“Maybe if you Nephilim and your justice system weren’t so quick to write us off, we’d be more cooperative,” Raphael’s fangs protrude amidst his anger, and Alec’s hand hovers over the seraph blade in his thigh holster, “I never meant for this to happen.”

“But it did,” Alec presses, “So who takes responsibility? Camille has three counts of unlawful activity against this Mundane alone. And she's committed a felony under Mundane law. You were in breach of the Accords when you kidnapped him. Do I arrest you?”

Raphael's nostrils flare, “Are you threatening me?”

“No,” Alec says, “But I do want to know how you plan on cleaning this mess up.”

The Vampire scoffs, “You said it yourself. The Accords have been breached. That means this is your jurisdiction now.”

Alec snaps his hand away from his holster, hyper aware of how aggressive he may be coming across, “Let's say it's not. Say I give you the chance to make it right before the Clave gets involved. What would you do?”

He sees the look on Raphael's face, a wary hover between surprise and suspicion, and he wonders if he's said the wrong thing.

“You're serious,” Raphael hesitates, but only briefly before he takes a moment to think. When he speaks again, it's with great care, “If Simon rises, I’ll take him in, make sure he gets what he needs. As for Camille - the Vampires rule as a single body, so there'd be an open forum. We'd discuss her crimes as a people and sentence accordingly.”

Alec shakes his head, “That's not good enough.”

“Says you,” Raphael fires back, “You Shadowhunters are so quick to condemn, regardless of circumstance.”

“Regardless of circumstance, Camille Belcourt is responsible for the kidnapping, death and unlawful turning of a Mundane. That's punishable by death.”

“That's the Clave's idea of justice, not ours,” The Vampire replies.

“And your idea of justice is?”

“The right to a fair trial, at least. Equality for all. Regardless of circumstance,” Raphael smiles grimly, “’Tis best to judge those unworthy with humility, than to judge one worthy, without.”

Alec believes in equal treatment for all, but it's not until he thinks of Camille's crimes that he sees the erosion of that belief. Does he think she deserves a fair trial? Yes, but only if that trial ends in a
punishment he deems fitting. And that's where he realizes he's gone wrong.

He never imagined he’d be here, struggling deeply with his own view of Downworlders and their inclinations. Stressfully, he thinks perhaps he always will. And maybe that's the point. It's probably best that he's struggling with this, because at least it means he's trying. To not struggle at all would mean a different problem altogether, and that’s not the type of leader he wants to be.

For the first time in days, he doesn't feel like a complete failure.

“I'll give you 48 hours. To put her on trial and sentence her,” Alec tells him, watching Raphael's furrowed brow, “If I don't hear word that you’ve taken care of it, I will report it to the Clave and they'll take over however they see fit, and there won't be a thing I can do to stop them.”

Raphael looks like he’s waiting for the punchline, “You would do that?”

Alec nods once, confirming before he thinks to change his mind, “I know the kind of monster Camille is. But I also know the kind of person I want to be. So take the opportunity before I completely lose my nerve.”

A slow-growing smirk lifts one corner of Raphael’s lips, ever so slightly, “Well I'll be damned.”

Eventually he steps forward to offer a hand into the space between. Everything around them seems to hold its breath in wait, as Alec deliberates meeting him halfway. But it's not an empty gesture, it’s a beginning of something, an acknowledgement of sorts. Alec's not quite sure what, but when he does finally reach out and clasp the Vampire's hand, something that’s been missing in the last few days finally slides into place. Right now, his choice feels like the right one.

But the world tilts off center once again when Clary stumbles into the room, Jace and Isabelle trailing her. She comes to a standstill, her eyes landing on the table. Alec doesn’t look directly at her – can’t – as her wiry frame begins to sway, then heave, and heave, and heave, broken, agonized sobs clawing out of her. Jace brings her against him, if only to stop her collapsing to her knees on the floor.

Alec searches the Vampire’s face for remorse, wanting him to see the devastation of his clan’s indirect actions, to feel its gravity. But he only sees in him a blank resignation, underlain with the faraway heaviness of personal grief.

It’s then that Alec realizes. Raphael was probably murdered once, too.

He spends an hour trying to justify the Institute’s possession of Simon’s corpse in yet another report, blaming it on his Sire’s outstanding arrest warrants. Then he checks back in on Clary in the mortuary, her fresh tears streaking over dry tracks, a worrying catatonia setting in that’s causing Jace to look a little unhinged. Then he has to deal with the surprise arrival of his parents, who have decided tonight of all nights to drop by. Because as if Alec hasn’t been through enough already, now they’re being audited. He watches them take over his office space, sitting in his chair, pacing his rug and staring at his fireplace as they discuss the mysterious Clave Envoy on the way, and he’s reminded in the most dreadful way how expendable he is. That he’s only a seat warmer. That this isn’t his Institute, and it probably never will be.

When he finally rolls into bed for the night, he tosses and turns in his sheets for an hour, trying to
shut his brain off enough to get comfortable. But it’s harder than anticipated. His mind drifts again to Magnus, and how he hasn’t seen or heard from him in days, how all he’s had of him is the questionably amusing dream he’d had the night before. He thinks of their kiss and their one-week plan to see if their arrangement can accommodate the complexities of their positions, and he worries that he’s running out of time to prove himself. The last few days have worked against him in too many ways to track, and if that’s the biggest proof he has that this can’t work, he’ll have his work cut out for him.

But he’s still yearning.

He grabs his phone from his bedside table and brings up Magnus’ messages. The last thing in their text thread is the hasty apology he sent for inviting himself into his home on official business, and he really doesn’t want that to be the thing that reminds Magnus of why they can’t work. So, he sends another message.

_Reply Sent:_

*Hey you. Up to much?*

As soon as it’s sent, he immediately regrets it, falling into the trap of overthinking things. _Up to much?_ What a tool. After three days of radio silence, he probably should have asked how he’s doing. And three days of radio silence was too long, too much. He should have reached out sooner. But what if Magnus didn’t want to reach out because he’d given up? What if Magnus thinks he’s given up? _Oh god oh god oh god._

He’s about to send another apology when a new message notification shows up on his screen. It’s embarrassing how quickly he taps into it.

_Message Received: MB*

*Hey you. Just lying in bed. Yourself?*

His immediate thought is to apologize and let him sleep. But Magnus indeed asked what he’s doing, so it’s not the _good night, get lost_ he was expecting. He reads Magnus’ _hey you_ over and over, trying to imagine the inviting fondness of his voice. But it’s hard to recall, having not heard it in days.

_Reply Sent:_

*Same here. Can’t turn the brain off. Can I call you?*

He worries that Magnus will assume he means for sex, because he’s never called him for anything else before. But he wonders if that’s the safest option. Magnus may not want him to call for any other reason. If Isabelle were watching right now, she’d tell him to stop obsessing and do whatever feels right. As long as he’s not offending him, Alec thinks Magnus would be onboard for anything. And he really wants to hear his voice.

His phone starts vibrating, and it just about cracks his cheekbone when he drops it onto his face in surprise. _Incoming Call: MB._

He takes a moment to calm down, then accepts the call, bringing the phone to his ear. He rubs his cheek with a wince and whispers, “Hi.”

“Hi,” Magnus whispers back, and Alec wonders if he’s caught him at a bad time. _Stop it_, he tells himself. _He called you._

“Why are you whispering?”

“I’m whispering because you’re whispering. Why are you whispering?”
“Because my parents are home,” Alec chuckles quietly. It’s not that he’s worried about being overheard, he’s just being respectful of the many others currently asleep in the Institute’s residential wing, “I don’t know. It’s late. Kind of seems like a reason to whisper.”

Magnus huffs a quiet laugh on the other end of the line, “I don’t mind. Makes it sound like we’re the only two people on the planet.”

“It does,” Alec enjoys the thought, probably a little more than he should. He smiles to himself, “Hi.”

“You said that already.”

“I know,” Alec’s smile stretches wider. It’s good to hear his voice again, all flirty curiosity and patient warmth. He’s missed it, “Hi.”

He can hear the way Magnus’ grin shapes his next word, and it makes Alec’s chest feel full. Happiness, “Hi.”

Alec licks his lips, “Guess what.”

“What.”

“I dreamt about you last night.”

“Did you, now?” Magnus inquires cheekily, the sound of bed sheets shuffling in the background, “And what was I doing?”

“You and I were riding giant bananas like they were horses.”

Magnus’ laughter bursts out of him, trailing into a giggle that makes Alec’s insides positively sing, “Banana horses. Now I’ve heard it all. Was I wearing ass-less chaps at least?”

Alec shakes his head, his grin on the verge of splitting, “I couldn't tell. But you were wearing a purple sparkly cowboy hat.”

Magnus hums in approval, “What did we do on these banana horses? Anything sexy?”

In his dream, Alec hadn't known which way to go and kept turning back, as if he'd taken a wrong turn somewhere. Though he'd felt he was in the right place. Magnus had suggested they keep moving forward, hand shielding his eyes as he looked to the horizon. Sun's that way, Magnus had said, and together, they'd ridden off into the sunset.

“Sounds terribly romantic.”

“Really wasn’t,” Alec replies, though he wouldn’t have minded if it were, “Your banana horse kept stopping to take shits.” Magnus is suddenly gone, lost to loud, stomach-clenching guffaws. Alec joins in, a little more hushed, “Like every couple of steps, I swear. Too much natural protein, maybe.”

They laugh together for several moments, but it’s less about Magnus’ defecating banana horse and more about the lush, wonderful, joyousness of Magnus laughing unabashedly in his ear. It brings back to mind the various stolen moments they’ve shared over the last two months. The stretched pauses between orgasm and reality, where they know they have to let go but want to hold on. The lingering kisses, the trailing of hands and fingers on sensitized skin. The grinning into each other’s necks and faces and mouths like the fun to be found in one another is their own private little in-joke.
“Video call me,” Alec whispers, “I want to see your face.”

I need to see your face, he thinks.

Magnus murmurs an affirmative and ends the call. Alec quickly fixes his scruffy hair in the few seconds it takes for him to call back, and then Magnus is filling his phone screen, head and naked, muscled shoulders lying back against his rich, red silk pillows. Just the sight gives him sensory overload, because he knows the taste of Magnus’ golden, flushed skin and how those sheets smell of sandalwood and sex when they’re together, how warm they get from the friction of their bodies.

But nothing quite demands his attention the way Magnus’ face does.

Alec can feel his smile in the apples of his cheeks, “Hi.”

Magnus scratches at his furred chin, blinking up at his phone. He looks tired but relaxed, moments away from cosying up for sleep. Alec takes in his smiling face and sleepy eyes, the way his amusement crinkles them into happy half-moons, “Hi.”

“Sorry I’ve been MIA the last few days,” he finally apologizes, because he doesn’t want Magnus to think he hasn’t been thinking of him. Frankly, he hasn’t stopped thinking of him, even when the idea of reaching out was too overwhelming, “I had some things come up.”

“No, it’s fine. I’ve been a little tied up myself, actually,” Magnus shrugs, snuggling his shoulders back against the bed, “High Warlock and all.”

He’s bare of makeup and scruffy in a way Alec hasn’t seen before, lines of exhaustion around his eyes, and he wonders what Magnus has been doing with himself to look so weathered. Still, Alec finds he’s unbearably attracted to him. Maybe more so for getting to see him this way, stripped back and laid bare. Maybe more so for having been separated from him.

He’s tried to figure out how to be better these past few days; worthy, of Magnus’ attention, respect, time. He’s got a lot still left to work on, but Alec knows Magnus has always considered his honesty refreshing. And Alec, himself, is always surprised by how honest Magnus makes him want to be.

“You’re face makes me happy,” he tells Magnus now, too charmed and dreamy with want to feel shame. He confesses, “I wish you were here with me.”

Magnus’ smile slides into something softer, and it makes his stomach tumble pleasantly. He whispers back, quietly intense in a way that has Alec’s free hand dipping beneath the waistband of his boxer briefs, “I wish I was there with you, too.”

He feels a little mischievous as his fingers slide down his hardening length to grip under the crown of his dick. He starts to stroke in slow, long pulls, thumbing over his slit the same way his eyes caress the slope of Magnus’ nose, the arch of his brows, the bow in his lip, and in adjusting his hips beneath the sheets, he gives himself away.

“Alec Lightwood,” Magnus whispers, his gaze sharpened in barely contained amusement, “are you touching yourself?”

“Yes. I think you should, too.”

Magnus smirks, “I’ve been jacking myself since you first answered the phone. You need to catch up.”

The breath shudders from Alec’s chest, eyes trying to fall closed, “Yeah?”
“Yeah.”

“How do you suggest I do that?”

“You could imagine you’re fucking me.”

“I always imagine I’m fucking you.”

“No,” Magnus repeats with a tantalizing bite of his own lip, “Imagine you’re inside me.”

Alec’s conscious enough to keep any noise to a minimum, but a moan still gusts past his lips, light as air, catching in the middle as the idea floods his dick with want. He stares at Magnus’ devious little smile, catches the sensual flex of his right bicep and matches the tempo with his hips, pushing his hardness through the tight ring of his fingers.

Taking their cues from each other’s movements, they fall into a synced rhythm. Alec looks up at his phone screen, watching Magnus’ pleasure tweak at his face in the faintest of ways. He listens to Magnus’ breathing; how it pauses, how it releases, how it pitches higher and then deeper between strokes, and he watches Magnus rock softly against his sheets, imagining it’s momentum caused by the force of his own hips. He pumps himself into the rough friction of his hand, envisioning he’s inside the heat of Magnus’ body, and the euphoria of it isn’t any less for pretending.

Alec swallows hard, “I want to be inside you so bad.”

“I know,” Magnus squeezes his eyes shut briefly, lost in the motion of his own hand, “I’ve been thinking about letting you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” he visibly shivers, his soft mouth parted, “Maybe one day, we can.”

Alec strokes himself a little harder, a little faster, and Magnus matches his speed, keeping them as close to aligned as possible. Alec aches to touch him, to be against him, but he can’t exactly leave the Institute with his parents in town. So they move together, breath together, almost tantric, simulating what they’d have if they were together. And somehow it’s enough. Hearing Magnus groan like he can’t quite keep it to himself pulls his own breath from him. Watching the desire drift across his beautiful face in swelling, luscious waves sends pulses through his own body. Magnus’ gaze feels like a tangible caress on his insides, even without a physical connection.

This thing between them - whatever it is - it’s enough. When did this start being enough?

Alec feels his semen climbing, readying for release as they work themselves higher and higher together. Magnus gasps, moaning as something in him comes apart, and Alec doesn’t know what it is until he sees a flash of slit pupils. A Warlock mark?

He abruptly closes his eyes, but Alec has seen enough to want a better glimpse.

“No, show me. Show me;” he pleads. Magnus fights it, as if mentally trying to force them to recede. Alec keeps fucking through his own fist, coaxing him to open his eyes again, but they’re clearly something Magnus doesn’t want to reveal. “Please let me see.”

Magnus is still stroking himself to the beat of Alec’s panting, eyes closed. Though his begging must do the trick, because the next thing Alec knows, he’s met with agonized, honey-gold cat’s eyes. And they penetrate deeper and sharper than his usual glamoured gaze, seeking connection but expecting recoil, hopeful and sad in a way that clutches Alec’s heart and demands to be held.
They’re devastating. They’re beautiful. Alec has never wanted him more.

That’s all it takes. Magnus’ cat’s eyes. And then he’s coming.

His spine lengthens along the bed, hips jerking, wet ropes of come splashing on his hand, in his underwear. He watches Magnus as his body clenches amidst the waves, seizes his breath from him, and then he can feel himself smiling as his orgasm drops from its peak and falls to gentle throbbing. Magnus rolls his head back along his pillows, slit pupils peering between pleasure-heavy lids, and Alec witnesses him coming in a way he hasn’t experienced before. So often they both get lost behind closed eyes, in breathless kisses, riding their pleasure out in their own heads. But here, he gets to see just how exposed Magnus is, how intensely it affects him, and Alec fucks the remainder of his orgasm through his own fist just to share in it.

They lay separately, together, catching their breath and staring up into their phones at each other. Something has transpired here, something far more intimate than either of them were probably looking for, and Alec doesn’t know what to say. All he does know is that Magnus looks seconds from making a choice to close himself back off, and he doesn’t want him to go.

So, he exerts a string of purposefully awkward grunts as he attempts to clean himself off with the one hand, tongue peeking from the corner of his lips, if only to lessen the tension. Then he rolls onto his side, tucking his loose, sated body down into the comfort of his bed, phone held in front of his face. Magnus follows suit, cocooning himself in his red sheets, smooshing the side of his tired, beautiful face into the pillows.

He smiles, hoping to see Magnus smile back. And when he does, Alec knows he’s done well.

Loose lipped and heavy eyed, he whispers, “I’m falling asleep.”

“Me too,” is Magnus’ groggy reply, his breathing deep and relaxed.

“I wish I was there with you.”

Magnus peels his sleepy eyes open, smiling carefully like he means to confess, “I wish you were here with me, too.”

Here in this moment – not alone, where his feelings seem to be met halfway, against all odds – Alec thinks throwing caution to the wind may not be such a bad idea.
Seven

Chapter Summary

Magnus ties up some loose ends, and tries to deal with his feelings.

Chapter Notes

Time and time again, thank you guys so much for the wonderful comments, feedback and support. Seeing your reactions in the comments or on twitter makes me all gushy. I'm so glad you're enjoying this story as much as I'm enjoying writing it. This chapter was written while listening to Imagine Dragon's "Dream" and Amber Run's "I found", but mostly Ólafur Arnalds' "This Place is a Shelter", of which did a lot of heavy lifting in the writing of Magnus' emotions.

In case you didn't see, I wrote a little one-shot for surpassing 10k hits, called "Casual Win" that fits within this story, around chapter 3. It's all porn and doesn't contain any necessary plot you need to know. It's just for funsies.

Also, for those wanting to know, we're essentially at the halfway point. Make of that what you will!

As always, you can also follow me on Tumblr & Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec. The tag has great vibes and is growing bigger every time I post. Love it!

9:30am, Magnus rolls from his left side to his right. Tucking the covers over his bare shoulders, he snuggles back into his pillows, hovering in the morning quiet of his bedroom.

He'd spent the better part of the last few days grinding herbs, swapping out bloodied water for clean, replacing the cold compress on Lucian's forehead in an effort to help him fight off the infection in his blood. Alpha bites tended to be a wild mix of hormones, adrenaline and a far deadlier version of the demonic virus that forces a Werewolf's very first transition. So, after releasing him of his pain, Magnus had pulled out all the stops to ensure Lucian made it through. Which meant graciously forfeiting his home, his plans and his own need for sleep.

Lucian had woken up on his own after 48 hours, and following another deep round of sleep, he'd perked up enough to drag himself off to his own apartment with promises to update him on his progress. After sending the entire, destroyed contents of his guest room to landfill, Magnus had smudged the room with sage to drive the air of near-death out of the pores of his home. Once that was done, he'd enjoyed only a few minutes of his steaming hot bubble bath before he'd fallen asleep, exhausted, right there in the tub.

Since Lucian had collapsed on his doorstep, he hadn't really had a moment to think of Alec or their
kiss or what it all meant. Which is why he'd been perfectly happy to call him when requested. And he'd been perfectly endeared by Alec’s charming disposition. And he’d been perfectly ready to let things progress to a sexual situation, because being with Alec had kept his appetites so well fed in the last couple of months that four days without had left him with the urge to jump back in as soon as possible.

But then things had gotten intimate. Being with Alec was always a little intimate, because you didn't have that level of incredible in the bedroom without some greater chemistry driving it. But this was different, and Magnus’ body had felt it in the most naked of ways, to the point where he’d lost the careful grip on his control. This thing between them – attraction, companionship, two lost souls just trying to make things feel okay – whatever it is, had tugged at his core and brought his careful, fail-proof glamour down in front of Alec’s eyes, enough to give him a glimpse of the demon inside.

And now there’s no more denying it. He knows that he’s been having sex with someone he has real feelings for, he’s just not entirely sure what level of panic he’s due to fall into. So he’s trying not to think about it, which is proving next to impossible, because he still has the enticing sound of Alec’s night-time whisper stuck in his head. And he has Alec’s genuine confession of happiness making him wish for things. And he’s thinking of all the horrific reactions his demon eyes have received over the centuries, how each one has drilled a little further into his soul how very different he is, how unwanted he is, and how Alec Lightwood, of all people, had looked into the depths of them and made him feel like a man.

He looks at the other side of his bed with one barely peeled eye and imagines what the Shadowhunter would look like sleeping beside him, beautiful and gloriously naked in the morning sunshine, face soft and relaxed like it’s familiar to be there. And he closes his eye again, sighing heavily, ignoring the painful sliver of hope the idea provokes.

He spends his day tidying up his apartment, sipping coffee between fire messages and phone calls to reschedule the appointments Lucian’s visit put on hold. And it would be like any other day. Except now he keeps seeing Alec.

Lounging on the couch with a glass of scotch. Wandering around the living room admiring all the art and history adorning the walls. Touching his slender fingers to the spines of Magnus’ old spell books. Leaning ankles-crossed against the brick pillar, his usual playful smirk on display. Standing lonesome on the balcony, staring out across Brooklyn. Just a few of the ways he’s taken up space in Magnus’ home since they met. And now that Magnus is on the road to some sort of delayed emotional breakdown, the desire to have Alec taking up space in his home is stifling.

He makes it through the day with sheer force of will, until Alec messages him.

Message Received: A. Lightwood
I’m on lockdown at the Institute until this Clave Envoy finishes auditing us. But I’m thinking of you.

Then he’s about as useful as toasted bread in a swimming pool, trying and failing to stay afloat. His resolve doesn't last, and he exchanges a few texts of banter and small talk just to feel connected, but then he’s closer to drowning than he started. Alec and his handsome face and his stupidly sculpted Shadowhunter body and his wonderfully warm, young soul and the way it wraps around him is halfway across New York right now, thinking of him. Wanting to be with him. Waiting to be with
him. And Magnus, against better judgement, is all of those things too.

So when Raphael barges through into his apartment after sundown, he just about twirls his beloved Vampire friend around the living room out of gratitude.

That is, until, Magnus gets a closer look at him.

“I need your help,” Raphael mutters, flustered and agitated, “Scratch that, I need your permission.”

“I’ve already made my feelings on plaid very clear,” Magnus says carefully, taking Raphael’s chin between his fingers, “Anything without green tones. They’ll only make you look like a walking corpse.”

Raphael yanks himself out of his grip, “Camille’s back in New York.”

*Camille*? He thinks grimly, mood plummeting. *Not quite the distraction I was after.* He wanders toward his drink station, because it’s safe to assume that he’s definitely going to require a glass for this. News of Camille has never brought about glad tidings. “And she didn’t waltz back into my life unannounced? I’m offended.”

“She killed and turned a Mundane, Magnus. And we have physical evidence to formally sentence her.”

He winces, feeling it deep like a pin prick he can’t reach to soothe away. He’s always heard vague murmurings of her savage inclinations, but there had never been proof, and he’d naively clung to that fact because he knew her intimately. And a woman that had made him love so strongly surely couldn’t be capable of such things. But now he feels that resounding guilt – in full force mockery of him – for having willfully turned a blind eye out of a need to protect his own reaching heart. And at what expense? The innocent life of some stranger he’s never met?

He suddenly feels very old. “It wouldn’t be her first.”

“Except now the New York Institute has taken a personal interest,” Raphael grouses, gesturing wildly with his hands, “And now I’m trying to stop our clan from bearing the brunt. Alec Lightwood gave me 48 hours to sentence her by our own laws and track her down, but if I don’t find her, the Clave will go after her themselves.”

He attempts to process all that Raphael has said but it falls through the sieve of his emotions. It's only hearing Alec's name that brings everything back into sharp focus. *Alec Lightwood.* His Shadowhunter. Deferring to Downworld law, against his own rulebook. It makes Magnus ache a little more to realize he's been making moves to walk the talk, just like he’d challenged him to. The unbearable fondness that saturates him almost knocks him from his feet. Stranger still, to feel it in a moment as terrible as this.

He murmurs to himself, his smile soft and struck, “Trying on different shoes, I see.”

Raphael shakes his head like he’s been smacked upside the skull, “What? Magnus, I’m serious. My entire clan could be brought in for questioning. And you know what Clave interrogation really looks like.”

“Okay, okay. But what does the Institute want with a fledgling? They’ve never cared before.”

“The fledgling is best friends with Valentine’s daughter,” Raphael answers. And, well, that settles that.
Clary’s best friend. Something clenches in Magnus’ chest, hard, because he’d been in Clary’s company enough over the years to see her excited about movie dates and sleepovers with said best friend. Even a tiny little girl crush, however brief. “Oh god, not Simon---”

Raphael nods, and Magnus feels the breath leave him. He’s always preached that it isn’t just action, but inaction that carries consequence, and now he’s facing down the barrel of his own in one of the worst ways imaginable. His years of ignorance have cost Clary Fairchild – a girl who has been through quite enough – one of the few people she still has left.

“Where is he now? Is he okay?”

“I have him set up at the DuMort, but he’s grieving,” Raphael sighs, sounding heavy and tight in a way he hasn’t for many years. Magnus knows he’s drawing his own personal parallels with Camille’s latest victim, and he reaches out to squeeze his shoulder in support, “I just---needed a break.”

Magnus turns back to pour himself that drink, because he really needs one now. “And this illustrious, handsome Head of the Institute is letting you do things your way? That’s an interesting opportunity not often afforded to the likes of us.”

“I know,” Raphael moves to sit on the couch, drawing his hands down his face tiredly, and Magnus ruffles his hair gently as he wanders past. Alec. Camille. Simon. Clary. It’s all a bit much to take in, so he spares himself a moment to breathe Brooklyn’s air through the open French doors. Magnus knows Raphael better than anyone, and he’s aware of what he’s here to ask. Permission, to pursue Camille on criminal grounds. Something that will likely end in her death.

“Karma has been snapping at her heels for a long while now,” Magnus pauses to take a sip of his whiskey. On the rocks; his heartache drink. He tries to lead his beloved friend – the closest thing he has to his own child – by suggesting the inevitable himself. Maybe it will hurt less this way. “Perhaps it’s time nature take its course.”

“She’s Camille,” Raphael presses. “Your Camille.”

“Oh, my dear boy,” Magnus turns to cup Raphael’s chin in his palm, caressing a thumb affectionately on his cheek. He smiles upon him, “I love that you care so much for my withered heart. But you do not need my permission to take her to task for her indiscretions. Not when she endangers your life.”

Raphael looks so young and boyish like this, unsure of his way forward. Exactly the way Magnus had found him decades earlier. His heart cracks to see it again. “I didn’t want to hurt you---”

“You could never,” Magnus assures him, letting him go with another brush of his thumb. “Like I said, her karma is due. I’ll sleep better knowing she can’t hurt anyone else.”

Raphael reaches inside his jacket pocket and pulls a silver necklace with a sapphire ring dangling from its chain. He reluctantly places it in Magnus’ open palm when it holds his hand out for it, recognizing the jewelry as one of Camille’s many pieces. His eyes catch the sharp darts of light catching on an inscription inside the band, and he looks closer. It’s Russian: My heart, like no other. Love, Andrei.

Magnus represses the faint pain hammering at his insides even as it comes now, over a century later. He knows why that name rings a bell. Andrei. The Mundane she’d cheated on him with. The Mundane she’d dallied with for three weeks, when they should have been celebrating their six month anniversary. A Mundane she hadn’t even cared for, one she had abandoned like a dead skin when
she was through. One who had still somehow been more important than the devotion Magnus had to offer.

He’d forgiven Camille a long time ago, because it wasn’t by the fault of anyone that they simply saw companionship differently. But he’s never forgotten the lesson. *You’re a terrible romantic,* she would always say, even as she’d slide inside the circle of his arms, her ruby red lips grinning around sharp white teeth. *That heart of yours will be your undoing, and you’ll have no one to blame but yourself.*

He lets himself slump to sit on the coffee table, gaze shuttered, mind drifting reluctantly to Alec. The reminder this ring brings – *now,* after all these years – feels like the gravest of warnings.

“Magnus,” Raphael touches his hand lightly, and he shakes himself out of his dismal thoughts.

He smiles, and it feels both brave and false, “What has the Clan decided?”

“They don’t want to be held accountable for her actions,” Raphael says tentatively, “They want to make an example of her.”

Magnus nods. He’d suspected they would. Fear of the Clave makes people desperate, after all. “And you?”

Raphael takes a moment to gather his argument, but Magnus doesn’t need it. He sees his answer clear as day in the guilty, brief drawdown of his gaze. They mean to hand her over to the Clave, where she will be held, starved and eventually put to death following an official trial for her crimes. Already he begins to accept her fate, even as it weighs heavily on him. Clave punishment isn’t exactly a new concept. She knew what she was in for. The fact that this is the will of her own people is one of the only things keeping his mind from completely breaking apart.

“Keeping her locked in the DuMort isn’t an option. Not with the amount of outstanding warrants on her head. And I have to consider Simon’s rehabilitation,” Raphael offers Magnus a grim twist of a smile, his big dark eyes full of concern for him, “And the New York Institute is willing to meet halfway, for once. There’s an opportunity here to turn this situation into a bridge. And I want to prove our word means something.”

Magnus smiles, winks at him through the pain, “My little diplomat.”

Raphael clasps his hand tight when he reaches for him, offering him whatever condolence he can. After a moment, Magnus draws away to place his glass down, and then he’s gripping the ring, concentrating on its imprint and the owner to which it’s tethered. He sees a faint shape in his mind’s eye, and then the ring reaches out to meet it, stretching, stretching, stretching. *There.*

He sees her face, pale and beautiful and more vivid than the blurry memories that have found him over the last century. She looks quiet, unsettled, alone as she stares at the 17th century Vouet painting on the wall like she no longer views it as an answer to a question. Like all the things around her don’t entertain quite like they used to. It’s the version of Camille he always held on for, the one who lived beneath the blood-red vignette she presented to the world. The one who needed something he was willing to offer but never asked for. The one he wished had claimed him instead of the jaded, flighty mask of a lover he desperately pulled himself apart for.

He comes back to himself now, opening his eyes, ignoring the sting of lost love pulsing faint within him. He gives the ring back to Raphael, wanting it as far away from him as possible.

“She’s hiding out in her pied-a-terre, on the Upper East Side,” Magnus confirms, and gets up to pull
on a jacket. Raphael frowns, opening his mouth to speak, but Magnus cuts him off with a raised finger, swiping a pouch of silver flakes from one of his supply cabinets, “She won’t be there for long. I need to move.”

“No,” Raphael watches him, dazed, as Magnus creates a portal with a circular wave of his arms. He stands to grab at him, “I can do this. Let me take care of it.”

Magnus shakes his head, “This is my mess—”

“The hell it is—”

“—And I’m in the mood for closure,” Magnus squeezes at Raphael’s fingers on his bicep, imploring him to let him have this, “Do you trust me to do what needs to be done?”

Raphael looks beside himself, “I don’t want you to have to.”

Magnus presses a kiss to his cheek and steps through the portal without another word. Camille has been an unpredictable variant in his life since the moment they first lay eyes on each other, boasting a keen ability to use even his strengths to tie him in knots. He never knows how he’s going to react despite his wiser intentions, so he closes the portal behind him before Raphael can follow. If Magnus can’t get through to her, no one can. And he doesn’t need anyone to see all the ways she’ll make a mess of him.

Camille’s pied-a-terre is warded with some other Warlock’s half-baked idea of Purgatic, one of the more complex demonic languages in existence. He’s impressed enough that she found someone who could rival his own abilities – if he were younger, dumber and having an off day – but also bothered that she hadn’t come to him instead, even if his answer would have been the dramatic slamming of the door in her face. Any of the powerful people she’s enraged over her few centuries could have walked in with a good hour of forceful nudging. Magnus’ wards would have thrown them into another dimension entirely.

He can feel the resistance as he walks beyond their threshold, heavy like silicon – a sign that she had attempted, at least, to ward the apartment against all manner of creatures, even Warlocks – but he wanders inside as easily as he would the Institute, yanking the elevator cage aside. One of her few subjugates stands in the foyer, turns toward him at the noise, and Magnus drops him to the floor with a finger snap, out like a light. He deals to another as he makes his way down the tiled hall, and another he finds in the living area, noting the luxury of their clothing, the puncture marks inside their wrists disappearing like tracks beneath their long sleeves.

By the time he reaches the library, he can feel Camille standing silently behind him, her cold dark aura the smell of rotting cherries. He remembers how much sweeter it used to be, how it would make his mouth water when he nuzzled behind her ears, between her soft breasts. It’s apparent that a century hasn’t aged her well.

He sighs, inwardly bracing himself, “I’m surprised you didn’t have this place warded against me.”

“You know I never would have found a Warlock powerful enough to keep you out,” her silky, bell-like voice comes, filtered through a fanged smirk, “Besides, your seething dislike of me has done the job quite well.”
“Seething dislike’ is a strong assumption. One that would imply I care.”

She draws closer behind him, unphased by his pettiness, “And yet, here you are.”

He finally turns around to take her in, her petite frame gloved in blood red cloth, bare arms soft and pale, her stark cheekbones and eyelids shimmering. She smiles the same way she always has. Only now, he sees her usual edge for what it really is; the sharpness of razor blades.

“I must have known I’d see you today,” she muses, pointing a long black nail at her glittering makeup, “I had an unexplained desire to be sparkly.”

“I see that,” he murmurs, because this, here, hurts less somehow. It reminds him of the days she used to dress up for him – or disrobe for him – coyly seeking approval. If only to entertain his more alpha instincts, because Camille Belcourt never needed approval from anyone, “You look well, Camille.”

“And you’re nervous,” she inches closer, her dark eyes zeroed in on his collar, “I could hear your pulse as soon as you left the elevator.” She meets his gaze with a grin, delighting in his discomfort, “I’d thought one of my subjugates had brought me a bunny.”

She laughs an inelegant snicker, haughty and amused, and he wants to shut her up so badly that he blurts, “The Clave is looking for you.”

Her jaw snaps closed, but she brushes it off with a grand eye roll, turning toward her drink station, “Oh darling, when are they not. The Angel’s children never have anything better to do. I suppose that makes me front page news.”

He watches as she pours herself a glass of red wine, “You know why they’re after you.”

She shrugs, takes a sip, “It’s hard to tell exactly what for with a list such as mine.”

God, he wants to throttle her. Does she really not care? Did she ever care? Or has she always been this keen of a predator and he was simply too love-blind to see it? Or even worse, perhaps his memories are beginning to fail, and he’s fondly rebuilt her in the image of something she never was.

“I can hear you judging me,” she says with another pronounced eye roll, “You miserable old man--- Why are you still so surprised? I’m a Vampire, Magnus. I am not the fantasy you place on your pedestal. I have never been anything but what I am. Even in my weak Mundane life, I took what I wanted. You have simply always been too full of your own ideals to see me for me.”

His chest throbs. “I don’t believe that.”

“You have not changed one bit,” Camille shakes her head – pityingly – as if he’s just proved her point, “The rehabilitation speech is a little beyond its due. You can’t save me. And I don’t need to be saved.”

There really is no getting through to her, not like this. Maybe he never has. The disappointment, the frustration, doesn’t change what he’s here to do, even as he wrestles with the thought that he probably would have let her go – told her to run and never come back – had she shown the barest hint of remorse.

He mourns the woman she could have been, had she not folded into the box she’d made for herself so long ago. Stubborn ‘til the very end. So he tugs the pouch of silver flakes from his jacket pocket and pours them into his hand, then tosses them at her with the incantation in his mind. Decipula. The flakes vibrate in the air, then explode into their intended form – a silver cage, one that traps Camille where she stands. One good look at her new situation has her jaw knotting shut, tense and furious.
“Are you listening now, love?”

“Magnus,” she warns, “Let me out.”

He takes a step back, readying for whatever fury she’ll possibly unleash on him.

“You’ve been sentenced by your own clan in accordance with the covenant of your people, of which you are bound,” Magnus drops his recitation, heart racing. He’s not ready for this at all, “Of which you have always been bound. You’ve operated on your own terms for too long, Camille. You’ve taken things you had no right to take. You’re a danger to the Mundanes, and you risk the safety and integrity of your own clan---”

“I am not responsible for those lackeys,” she growls, “Withering, mewling rats denying their most basic urges---”

“You must be held accountable!” Magnus snaps, “Do you really believe you’re exempt of punishment? For the lives you’ve taken and destroyed? And for what, amusement’s sake?”

Something inside him begins to unravel, having remained rusted and coiled tight for too long. She’s a monster. His Camille is a monster. Even now he reaches for an explanation, some excuse that might pardon the destruction she’s levied upon multiple innocents. He weighs it against his own grey past – the lives he’s taken in self defense, the one he’d taken in anger as a young boy. Would she be forgiven of her crimes if she haunted herself with them, the way he does? Would she be forgiven of her crimes if she dedicated herself to a life of public service, the way he tries to as the High Warlock?

“Do you really feel nothing?” he asks, and he can’t keep how pathetically desperate he is from his own voice.

Camille looks up from where she’s testing the cage with her hand, unable to get any further than a few inches close before the telltale heat of the silver begins to warm her palm. She observes him carefully, mulling the question over like she’s actually considering the possibility.

“When we first met, you were mysterious. Cunning. Indifferent to the feeble world around us,” her mind seems to drift back in time, and whatever she sees there makes her smile, “You would undress me with your eyes in front of company, and laugh when they blushed. You liked to shock the prim and proper, shake them from their tall trees. You delighted in it, and I delighted in you.”

Magnus almost smiles at the memories, at kissing boys and fumbling beneath skirts, amused at the staunch propriety of such boring people. Elitist bureaucratic swine. She seems to be thinking the same thing, because then he does smile, and she shares in it. Their own private little joke. He can’t help the familiarity that comes, that feeling of returning to something he once called home.

“My perfect demon prince,” Camille’s smile is wistful now, but it soon twists with a great disappointment that slugs him in the gut, “But then you forced me to know you. And I saw you for what you really are – a sad, broken little boy looking to be loved. Looking to be good. How amusing to know we both held on for things that never were.”

Her words cut deep, right alongside his greatest insecurities, the ones buried and given such a wide berth that they’re easily denied. Even now, he revolts against her observations, because it’s one thing for him to recognize them, but another for someone else to see and judge him by them.

“Even now you deny it!” she laughs, cruelly, “All you’ve ever wanted is to be loved. To matter. And you love and love and keep loving in the hopes that someone won’t let you down. It’s insanity. It’s beneath you.”
And yet you’re so frightened by it, he thinks. Because Camille has always run from love like it might set her on fire, as if being vulnerable might fundamentally change her into something she doesn’t want to be.

Magnus finds the concept of vulnerability equally terrifying as it is alluring. He’s endured decades where he shut himself off, because facing the depths of his own unresolved pain would enable someone to see, and he’d known too many who preferred to attack. In other instances, he’d been strong enough to unpack his baggage, enough to let someone close. Some had cradled what little half-truths he offered, others hadn’t wanted to know. But it gave him a taste of what it could be like to have someone in his corner, despite his many hang-ups.

He had been vulnerable with Camille, had wished her to be vulnerable with him, because he would have protected her for eternity or at least done his best to try. But his vulnerability had only been a weakness, a character flaw that had driven her away. He hasn’t let his guard down in over a century because of it, and he’s tired. He wants to be vulnerable, because it would be far less exhausting than walking through life with a bullet-proof vest and hoping the bruise won’t be too deep when someone inevitably shoots.

“You torture yourself with it,” she continues, impassioned, like she might get through to him, “You think that if you just find the right person, all your pain will go away. You are infinite, Magnus, like me. Love is temporary. Love is the lie that Mundanes tell themselves to make their pointless lives worth living. You and I have no need of it.”

I do, a voice inside whispers, like a pin dropping in the silence, and he scrambles to press it back into the shadows. She reads his crestfallen face and must see his internal struggle, because she slinks as close to him as the cage bars will allow, tentatively reaching a hand through a gap.

“You were devoted to me once,” she says, her tone trying to stir him, “And I loved your devotion. I accepted it. If you could only accept me as I am, we could have what we used to.”

“You mean to bargain,” he mutters disbelievingly, quietly crushed by her swift change in manner, forced by the circumstances that trap her, “but you have nothing I want.”

“You know that's a lie,” she replies, “Because you and I will be all that's left at the end of all things. I'm your safety net. Without me, you will truly be alone.”

He used to daydream about the life they would share in fifty years, one hundred years, a millennia; the lives of two immortals clinging to the company of each other as the world lived and died and lived again. So what she says strikes a nerve now, because he has his fair share of immortal friends to keep him company, but no one to truly share himself with.

The thought of Alec finds him, a hopeful light in the dark. And he wants, but he knows how fragile and temporary his Shadowhunter really is in the greater scope of the universe. If all the stars were to align – if he were lucky enough – he could have Alec for a solid fifty years, maybe sixty, before he’d be ripped from him by a natural mortal death. It would be a miracle ending for a Shadowhunter, but would cost Magnus another crucial piece of his soul.

For the second time today, he can't stop thinking of Alec. Of his smile, of how natural it feels to be in his arms, how Alec looks at him like he belongs there. How Alec's laughter cascades across his features, how his beautiful hands are always strong, careful, affectionate on Magnus' body. How he kisses like he's already planning on another. How Alec squeezes him right before they part ways. How, behind the flirting and sexy confidence, there is a thoughtful man who cares and worries and tries his best, and makes Magnus wish for things he can't dare to ask for.
He staggers where he stands, caught under the weight of his yearning. He wasn't supposed to grow this attached. He wasn't supposed to want him this much. The thought of losing him is overwhelming and he can't even think about what that means.

“Let me out, Magnus,” Camille says calmly, luring him in, “Let me out, and I'll stay with you.”

Magnus sways closer to the cage, heartbroken, “You've committed the unspeakable. Even if I wanted you, you can't stay with me. You saw to that when you killed and turned Simon Lewis.”

Her expression darkens as he takes a final step back, and he grieves her – the woman she's too scared to be, the woman she won't get the chance to be, the woman who dismantles him every time they meet because she knows him in a way he wants to be known, despite how she brandishes it like a weapon.

“I love you,” he tells her with a sick, sad smile, his words strangled in the sudden tightness of his throat. If she’s to be sent to her death, he wants her to know someone cared enough to say it, “I know you, and I love you. I'm so sorry.”

Her eyes light up with alarm, and he squeezes his own shut, wants to remember her proud and strong. He ignores the sliver of panic in her voice as she calls his name, feels it slice him open on the inside as he waves a portal between them. With it, he engulfs Camille's cage and sends it off to the Guard in Idris. To where she'll be tried and punished and eventually put out of her misery, never to be again.

It's done. And he is done.

He's relieved to see Raphael is gone when he returns to his penthouse, because his hands are shaking as he pours himself a whiskey and the way he stumbles to his bedroom would be of concern to any company hanging around.

He sits down at the end of his bed, full-body throbbing as the pressure of his despair tries to unhinge him. He beats a fist at his chest, tries to rub away the pain inside, throat suppressing and swallowing around the barest hint of a sob trying to crawl its way out. He grieves for himself – for the loves that were revoked, for the loves he chased but never received, for another love lost. He grieves especially for Alec, for the possibility of love just beyond the horizon, one that will inevitably end and leave him alone all over again.

He swipes a thumb under each eye, careful enough to keep his eyeliner intact, quick enough to deny the existence of the tears threatening to fall. He's so tired of having to remain unbreakable. But he's infinite, as Camille said. He will outlive even love itself.

So he slides his bullet-proof vest back on, threadbare from overuse and infinitely heavier than before.

And it hurts. It hurts.

He wakes the next morning to a heated slap across his cheek. The tight seams of his expensive clothes claw at his sprawled limbs, having fallen asleep in them, and he grimaces at the sour taste of stale whiskey on his breath, the crustiness of his eyes before he sees the fire message whizzing about unreceived in front of him. He yanks it out of the air with a flick, blinking as the words sharpen, and
his pulse picks up as he reads. It’s been a few days since he’d tried to contact him, but finally he has some good news.

*I may have a way to help Jocelyn Fairchild. Come visit!*
Ragnor

Which is how he finds himself traipsing along the outskirts of West Sussex later that morning, his black woolen Dolce and Gabbana coat barricading him against the country wind. He creates a door through Ragnor’s wards with a twist of his wrist, because he’s not in the mood to entertain any pranks his friend may have in store.

There clearly isn’t much to do around these parts, because when he nears the manor, Ragnor is trudging down the garden path, perhaps to confront whoever messed with his wards like the sour old man he is. Magnus would delight in winding him up if he weren’t currently so empty inside.

“Oh. It’s you,” Ragnor grumbles, catching sight of him, “Just barge on in, why don’t you?”

Magnus is unkempt and still in yesterday’s clothes, purely because he knew he wouldn’t be judged. But he must look a real state, because as Ragnor gets closer, he takes one look at him and halts in his tracks altogether.

There’s a moment where the silence speaks for them, filling all the gaps with vague answers, and then Ragnor is stepping forward, reaching for him.

“Oh dearest,” he breathes, tugging Magnus forward until he’s tottering into his chest.

There, cheek pressed to Ragnor’s shoulder, where he smells of old books and crackling fire and dried lavender, he closes his eyes to the awkward pat of his friend’s hands on his back. A comfort made all the more meaningful by how decidedly unphysical his affection usually is. Magnus clings to him, fingers digging into the back of Ragnor’s frock coat, and he lets out a deep breath that he’s been holding at bay for what feels like an age.

Ragnor stands back to wrap an arm around his shoulders, his usually severe face now softened in kindness, “Come.”

Out of the wind and in front of the fireplace of the manor’s drawing room, he’s set up with a hot cup of tea; sweetened with honey, the way Ragnor always makes it for him. By the time Ragnor is seated in the chair beside him, the chill in his bones is beginning to lift. Ragnor waits for him to speak, because he’s never been a man who fills silence with meaningless drivel. But Magnus isn’t ready to talk yet, too buried beneath his grief. Sleeping had helped. Being awake only reminds him of everything he’d rather not think about.

“I don’t suppose you’ve heard about Camille?” Ragnor decides to ask outright, and Magnus looks over, sharply. News travels fast, but not that fast. Off his look, Ragnor explains further, “The Warlock Council is currently in a bit of a tizzy, it seems. They received an urgent fire message from Idris. Apparently a Warlock portalled her directly into one of their holding cells. They thought I might know something about it.”

Magnus stares into the fireplace, swallowing hard.

Ragnor absorbs his silence carefully, and clearly makes his own connections between the news and his unexplained sadness. Magnus is just glad he doesn’t have to explain it, because he’s not sure he’d get through it without breaking down. He can feel Ragnor waiting patiently, comfortable whether he
chooses to speak or not. He knows the deal, after all. His history with Camille, all the ups and downs, the more questionable details.

“Is there anything I can do?”

Magnus sniffs, the tip of his nose cold, “Distract me.”

So he does, hoisting himself out of his seat and explaining his findings on Jocelyn. It seems she had seen this coming, because Ragnor clues him in on an emergency potion he’d made for her many years ago, in the event she was ever captured – a modification on a Pulchra Morte spell, designed to lock her in an impenetrable coma. Magnus listens intently as he describes the intricacies of the spell, and most importantly that it’s powered by active magic, which means it can be traced by the magic’s owner – Ragnor himself – and even summoned directly to him. He’s so damn smug about it that Magnus can’t help but be in brighter spirits.

Ragnor demonstrates the viability of his theory by casting a minor tracking spell on a squeaky old world globe sitting on his table, which sends a little green dot of light moving across the globe’s surface. Sure enough, it singles out the Ukraine on the map, more specifically Chernobyl, and Magnus looks to him, shocked and admiring, “Son of a bitch.”

Together, they spend the rest of the afternoon writing and rewriting a variant on a classic summoning spell, designing it to work like a magnet seeking its other half. They test smaller versions of it by spelling their tea cups, a pair of bookends, the leather chair and loveseat as they both sit on them, and determine how much power the spell will require to pull someone of Jocelyn’s weight through dimensions as quickly as possible. They don’t want Valentine chasing or stopping her before she can be transported to safety. Magnus even recharges the wards on the manor, because once they have Jocelyn, they’re going to want to prevent any attempts Valentine may make in tracking her new whereabouts. Because more than likely, he’s going to be pissed.

Magnus checks his phone as Ragnor starts building the portal they plan to summon Jocelyn through, and he toys with the idea of calling Alec to inform him of their plan. He even justifies it by convincing himself that Clary will want to know. But he knows it’s smarter not to get ahead of what they’re attempting here, and he’s far too heartsick to follow through, even if he wants to hear his Shadowhunter’s voice. The Shadowhunter’s voice. Alec isn’t his. He was stupid to think he could be.

No longer distracted from it, the familiar heaviness returns, so overwhelming that he wants to share the burden of it with another. He hasn’t yet confessed his circumstances to Catarina, because she loves him too much to remain neutral of opinion, especially when it comes to his wayward heart. Ragnor tends to be more logical, objective. Perhaps he can help.

“It’s not just Camille,” he confesses aloud, sliding his phone back into his pocket. He sees Ragnor pause to look over from the corner of his eye, “I’m seeing someone.”

Again, Ragnor takes a moment to absorb the information and what it could mean, based on all the evidence he’s seen so far. Magnus appreciates that about him, that he’s careful with his words when it matters.

“Is it not going well?” he asks, and Magnus can almost feel Ragnor further dissect him, “Or is it going too well?”

Magnus moves to plonk himself down in the leather seat, “We have an arrangement. A ‘no strings’ affair. It worked well for a while; it still works well.”
“But you've grown attached,” Ragnor surmises correctly.

Magnus nods, almost ashamed, “And Camille reopened some old wounds. I suppose she didn't want to go down without a fight. She did her best to rip me apart.”

Ragnor sighs and moves to join him, toeing books out of the way before taking a seat, “She’s always been a fickle wee thing. I suppose she told you never to love anything? Never to wish for anything? ‘Don't smile your face will wrinkle’?”

Magnus would be laughing if her exact words weren’t so fresh in his mind.

“She has never wanted you to be happy, Magnus. Don't let her ruin you again.”

Magnus takes a deep breath. “It's different this time.”

Ragnor leans back into his chair, waiting for him to go on and explain why. Magnus himself can't find the words, because Alec is unexplainable. What they have is more than simple attraction, more than sexual gratification; and yet, they don’t really know each other. They've been scrambling for purchase for days, trying to make sense of the reality now that they’ve been forced to abandon the mystery. Magnus doesn't know all the details yet, has so many unanswered questions, doesn't know what he can and can't bet on. And he’s still yearning for more. It's a recipe for disaster, and his best case scenario doesn't look any better.

“He’s mortal,” Magnus admits, picking at the polish on his thumb nail, “Even if by some miracle it works out, I’ll lose him.”

“That's never stopped you before,” Ragnor replies, kindly.

Magnus thinks of how whole he feels when Alec holds him in his eyes, how taken Alec seems at the very sight of him. And he aches with the need to have it, always, “I’ve never felt this way before.”

Ragnor knows the gravity of such a confession, and he gives him a moment to dwell, “He must be something special.”

He’s seen the way the Shadowhunters at the Institute respect Alec, the way the local Downworld has grudgingly accepted his authority for months now, even before they’d met. He’s seen the genuinity of Alec’s apologies, how he strives to make things right, his willingness to step outside of his Clave box and be better. And he feels so torn, because Alec is special. Not just for Magnus, but among his own peers. Magnus wants to take a chance, but he fears the destruction. After all, the brighter the flame, the more devastating the burn.

He watches Ragnor sip on his third cup of tea, and makes the only choice he can. He’s always relied on his old friend’s logic to talk him out of things, and that’s exactly what he needs now. Alec Lightwood is simply not for him.

“He’s a Shadowhunter.”

Ragnor abruptly chokes on his drink, quickly placing his cup and saucer aside while he coughs, pounding at his chest, “Good grief. You're shaking the sheets with one of Raziel's children?”

Magnus gives him a dead panned look. “Then you see my predicament. He and I can never be.”

“Why?” Ragnor reaches into his pocket for his handkerchief, blots at his dripping chin, “The Nephilim have ventured outside their own kind before.”
“There have been exceptions in the past, yes, but this is different. I want what he cannot give me.”

“Did you let him answer that himself?”

“I don't need to ask. A Shadowhunter would never consider a Downworlder any more than a simple dalliance.”

“Did he say that?” Ragnar roughly bats his handkerchief at the droplets of split tea on his vest, “Did he say he didn't want you?”

“He doesn't need to. There's no way—”

“You always do this,” Ragnar gripes, “Put words in other's mouths to convince yourself of your own argument.”

Magnus feels his mouth fall open indignantly, “I do not—”

“The fear of a broken heart has ruled you for too long, Magnus,” Ragnar says, yanking the damp silk scarf out of his collar and throwing it onto the table with great frustration, “Don't let it stop you from trying. That’s cowardice. And you are no coward.”

_I just don’t think I can do it again_, he thinks, forlornly.

Ragnar catches whatever disappointment he wears on his face and gives a grave sigh, “Our passing years threaten habit upon us, my dear friend. And if you do not open yourself to new views and new ways and new experiences, you risk becoming like me. A squinty-eyed toad of a man with naught but old grudges to keep him warm at night.”

Magnus shifts in his seat, his mood plummeting further by the second, “That’s a tad over-dramatic, don’t you think?”

“Let’s not pretend you don’t speak fluent over-dramatics, dear,” Ragnar lifts an eyebrow, “I’m just saying, there is only one thing that will eat you alive even more than another failed love, and that is a what if:“

Ragnar kicks him gently in the ankle, and Magnus manages a teary half smile, his emotions beginning to press behind his eyes. His dry, prickly, horned friend pats the arm of his chair like he’s patting himself on the back, smile smug, “And you were so sure I’d be the voice of reason.”

Magnus carefully presses a finger to the corner of his eye, where it’s wet, “Reasonably, you should have talked me out of feeling this way.”

Ragnar pulls himself out of his seat, removing his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, “I will never talk you out of something your big, beautiful heart so desperately wants. Unlike Camille and her questionable motivations, I want to see you happy. Now do shut up about your Nephilim boytoy and help me, will you? I’m the brains here. You’re the brawn.”

They spend the next few minutes completing the portal they plan to bring Jocelyn through. Then Ragnar casts the spell to recall his magic, hand gripped tight in Magnus’, and Magnus hijacks it with his own magic, powering the spell’s foundation with as much of his own strength as he can; even tapping into his deeper reserves, the ones that make his feet feel hot and his demon eyes tingle. After six hours of research, trial and error, Jocelyn Fairchild comes through the portal gateway, floating in the liquid orb of Ragnar’s green magic. Perfectly safe and sound. Magnus tells her so as soon as the portal is closed, and the tension in her unconscious body visibly releases.
Ragnor uses the Book of the White to work on waking her up. Magnus was impressed that he’d kept the secret of Jocelyn’s potion from him all these years, especially considering how much of a giant gossip he tends to be – *Safer for her if no one knew about it*, Ragnor had explained – but learning the White book is in Ragnor’s possession is something else altogether.

“Well, who the bloody-hell else would have it? Honestly?” Ragnor asks, blithely, “Camille?”

He supposes not.

When she’s finally awake and being checked over, Magnus sends a quick fire message to Lucian, because if anyone should know about what they’ve done here, it should be him. Jocelyn is miraculously unharmed and eager to get to Clary, so Magnus takes a quiet moment to thank his friend for his council. It didn’t fix everything, but it managed to pull him out of the firepit. At least for a little while.

“Do you know what you’re going to do?” Ragnor asks, hands supportive on Magnus’ shoulders. But he’s even further away from a decision than he was when he first arrived. Ragnor generously pulls him into a parting hug, “Just follow your heart. It’s young enough for the both of us. Let it do as it pleases.”

Lucian rises from the couch when they portal into Magnus’ living room, his big, heavy heart shining in his disbelieving eyes as he spots Jocelyn. He crosses the space in just a few long strides before he’s wrapping her in his brawny arms and twirling her around, and Magnus steps out of the way to give them room to reunite. He tries not to watch as they clutch each other like they’d never thought they’d see each other again, foreheads pressed together, Lucian’s big hands smoothing over her hair as he murmurs to her. Because the pair are so terribly in love and devastated by their separation, but happy enough to be close one again that he aches with the shattered pieces of his own heart. He knows they’ve never given themselves the chance to be, too locked in their roles of lifelong friends, too afraid to have what they wanted in case it didn’t work and Clary lost out.

But he sees it coming together before his very eyes, unable to be denied. Maybe they’ll finally take the leap. Someone may as well.

The last of New York’s afternoon sun is shining when they arrive outside the Institute, and despite sending Alec a text message, both he and Lucian trigger the building’s obnoxious alarm system and security detail. The Shadowhunters that meet them only get more intense when they clock the reddened Circle rune on Jocelyn’s neck, but a blond male with an undercut appears from the formation with a seraph blade raised, patient enough not to kill them where they stand. Because two Downworlders and what looks like a Circle member isn’t good however you try to spin it.

But Magnus’ introduction of Jocelyn causes quite the fuss, especially when Clary rushes down the
steps and throws herself at her mother in a flood of tears. An exasperated Alec follows soon after, but he skids to a stop as he lays eyes on Magnus.

More and more people seem to converge outside, including what looks like Alec’s parents. Magnus hasn’t seen Maryse or Robert Lightwood in decades, but he recognizes them by the same sour expressions. He wasn’t ready to be confronted by the entire Lightwood family, and he tries not to think about what their presence means, or how Alec might treat him now that they’re in perfect view. Because there is a very real chance Alec could let him down, either out of pressure or self-preservation, and he’s not ready to be given another reason to end this.

So he keeps it professional, even as his heart begins to race.

“Alec, this is Luke Garroway, Clary’s step father,” he introduces the two, nodding at the little smile on the Werewolf’s face at the term he uses, “And the new Alpha of the New York Pack. Lucian, this is Alec Lightwood, acting Head of the Institute.”

“Robert and Maryse’s boy,” Lucian offers his hand, and Magnus is pleased to see how readily Alec shakes it, “You were a lot smaller the last time I saw you.”

“It’s good to finally meet you, Luke. I’ve heard honorable things,” Alec replies, then turns his attention back to Magnus, “Should I ask how this all happened?”

Magnus sighs tiredly, trying not to glance at Alec’s parents, “It’s a long story.”

Alec reaches out to shake his hand too, and he smiles carefully, giving a painfully endearing one-shouldered shrug. His next set of words sound like a promise, “I have the time.”

Alec is clearly nervous, gazing at him like he hadn't planned on exposing Magnus to all of his baggage at once. But hopeful, like the fact that he's a Lightwood, that he's Maryse Lightwood's eldest child, that he's a member of Clave authority might not make him run a mile after all. Here, Magnus had believed the other shoe would drop. In front of his proud Shadowhunter family, Magnus had believed Alec would shut down, make distance between them. Instead, Alec's warm, large hands are surrounding his, holding on like he expects Magnus to run, and wants to do everything in his power to prevent that from happening.

And he's so utterly disarmed by the raw want he sees there in his Shadowhunter's eyes. Not the kind he's used to, where the world seems to bear down on them until all they have is each other's desire to wrap themselves in. The kind where the world waits with held breath to see what comes next. To see if two hearts can take a small, scary leap into something scarier. To see if they both yearn enough to attempt hope.

And Magnus realizes he's in love. Because the notion of leaping feels infinitely less scary than the thought of letting Alec go.

So he squeezes Alec's hand a little tighter, meets Alec's beautifully soft smile with one of his own. He breathes, slow and steady, until the current of his heart rushes closer and closer to the edge. Maybe this time, the pain will be worth it.

He leaps.
Chapter Summary

Alec’s position is tested, and Valentine makes a move.

Chapter Notes

Here’s what you’ve all been waiting for. As always, thank you for the comments and support! Trigger warnings this chapter apply for those affected by graphic depictions of violence associated with Shadowhunters doing shadowhunting things with shadowhunting weapons. Trigger warnings also apply for those affected by BAMF High Warlocks and Alec Lightwood levels of softness. You have been warned.

This chapter was written while listening to Fink's "This Is The Thing" and Justice's "Phantom Pt. II (Boys Noize Remix)" and BTS's "The Truth Untold".

As always, you can also follow me on Tumblr & Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

Alec remembers a time when he would watch his father hunch across his office desk, brows drawn in concentration, doing paperwork. It would always be the thing that took precedence whenever Alec had something to show him. Whether it was Isabelle running amuck, or how he’d nailed a new skill during training, or finally hitting a bullseye, Robert Lightwood was always too busy doing paperwork.

Picking his signature weapon for the first time was one of his proudest moments. The smooth slopes of the bow and the brutal sharpness of its arrowheads had always called to him in some way, like yin and yang, and holding them in his hands made him feel as strong as his mother was always telling him to be. He’d taken it to show his father, only to be shut down with a distracted Alec, not now. His parents were always needed by other people, and Alec’s little-boy mind assumed that if his father was too busy for something as important as his first bullseye or his signature weapon, paperwork had to be pretty special. So Alec wanted to be someone who did paperwork.

Years later, he’d been made to attend his first Clave assembly where various leaders from around the world convened to talk about their Institutes, their policies and systems. One in particular, Arvid Cragwell of the Stockholm Institute, spoke about his personal policy of bringing in local Downworlders as advisors on special cases. His arguments for doing so were various and good, but it had been unheard of at the time, and many thought Arvid was mad for trying. Because Downworlders couldn’t be trusted or reasoned with.

Alec had watched, heart racing, as Arvid had boldly thrown the book at his peers - the Clave-sanctioned book that said Downworlders were allies - and pledged to walk the talk where Shadowhunters had long failed to do so. He’d caused quite the stir, went on to be called things like radical and unstable, but his passion on behalf of a race his own widely condemned had struck a
chord in Alec. Arvid was a misfit going against the grain, and for someone trying desperately to hide his own differences, Alec thought him brave, kindred. Then he wanted to be the Head of an Institute. Someone who had the power to set a new tone for an entire community.

It took all of six months to remember that being different didn’t make you brave; it made you a target. The Clave cracked down on naysayers, Arvid was replaced, and Alec let his dreams of running an Institute die. Because given the choice of being an official Clave leader or his own authentic person, he was going to choose himself.

So naturally, he’s blindsided when Lydia Branwell tells Consul Dieudonné that she’s recommending him as the new Head of the New York Institute. Alec is even more astounded when Malachi agrees, as if Alec’s promotion has been the subject of previous discussions and he’s simply pleased to have confirmed it.

Raziel. He’d thought this was an audit.

Alec’s insides are a nauseous, indecipherable mess of stunned, terrified and stand-on-the-moon elated as Lydia announces the news to the entire Ops Center. It doesn’t feel real through the numb fog of his shock, even less real as he watches the full population of the Institute erupt into noise. Enthusiastic noise. Cheering. He catches Isla just shy of her station, headset dangling around her neck, wolf-whistling over the roaring applause. Isabelle jumps up and down in her heels, cherry red lips grinning from ear to ear, while Jace wears a hint of a smirk, quiet and proud. Even Clary is applauding with everybody else. Applause for him. Sure, there’s a handful of his peers who aren’t happy about it - Raj, Duncan, Alice, Tanner, Willow - but they’re the same insubordinates he’s always having to chase up. The vast majority appear to be in favor. He wishes like hell he could enjoy it, but his mind is still reeling from his meeting with the Consul. The one where he’d been granted congratulations one moment, then passively threatened in the next.

Your exceptional work has carried you this far, despite your...colored personal reputation, Malachi had told him, one of the boldest backhanded compliments he’s ever received. The first from a high-ranking member of the Clave. But the time for boyhood conquests is over. It’s time to be a man. Don’t do anything that may affect the integrity of your position. You’re one of the Clave’s leaders now, you need to carry yourself as one.

It’s Malachi’s usual company line; but for him, the warning is more profound. The Clave is too passive to confront him outright, so while they’d prefer he wasn’t gay, they’re not going to say it. But under the simple guise of boyhood immaturity, they will warn him to stop fucking around.

Alec would be laughing if he didn’t feel like he’d been sucker punched. The Idris gossip mill clearly hasn’t caught up, because he hasn’t chased nightclub tail since he met Magnus. Though to anyone observing, Alec Lightwood is still going out to get his dick wet on the regular, and if he doesn’t stop, he’ll land himself on the Consul’s shitlist. It tries to push him back into a corner, one he’d spent so much of his adolescence talking himself out of. And it’s quietly devastating. Except this time, he has no intention of doing what’s expected.

He’s had two months to entertain the idea of parting ways with Magnus, all half-hearted attempts at convincing himself that he’s not invested, that he can walk away at any time. But he can’t bear the thought of it now. It should scare him, how much he’s come to depend on Magnus’ presence in his life. Except that it doesn’t. Magnus makes him happy; allows him to be happy. And choosing that happiness is the easiest decision he’s ever made.

He’s pulled into various congratulatory gestures; fistbumps, shoulder jabs, handshakes. Jace hugs him, hands rubbing warm and familial across his back. Isabelle plants a kiss on his cheek, then wipes her lipstick off his face with a laugh. Clary is still tired and grief-stricken after her last few days, but
she manages a joke about how she’s *really* going to have to listen to him now, and Alec actually laughs.

Then everyone is returning to their posts like it never happened, the work day ticking onward. Lydia shakes his hand again, wishes him luck with a congenial smile, because now that her job is done, she’s Idris-bound. *She’s all yours, Lightwood. Do us proud.* Alec can’t help taking in the sight of the Institute, his *home*, light and warm with pride. Because she’s kept him and his family safe his entire life - unyielding in the face of battle, a haven for those seeking shelter - and he plans to ensure she does it for many generations to come.

His parents offer their congratulations. It’s the most proud he’s ever seen them, yet they still manage to look unhappy about it. He’s not entirely sure why, because he may be officially replacing their authority, but they haven’t touched the Institute in months. He can only assume they’re feeling the weight of whatever the Clave is pulling them permanently to Idris for. He sees it now with his adult eyes, that his parents have been fighting an unknown battle for some time.

“Now that you’re in command, you might want to think about solidifying the family name,” his mother tells him in the elevator, glancing up at him once the doors close, “You’re of age, and there’s an entire flock of young women from strong Shadowhunter families just *waiting* for you in Idris.” She chuckles like she can’t quite believe it, “My son. The Clave’s most coveted bachelor.”

Marriage. His mother wants him to marry. A *woman*. The sick helplessness that's been twisting him up since his conversation with the Consul changes direction, wrenching pain. She’s been on him about girls for years, despite how openly he lives. The fact that *two* people now have taken what should be a wonderful, unexpected achievement and used it to push their own agenda doesn’t hurt any less for how predictable it is. More than that, he’s *furious*. It comes on like waves, one after another, beating at him with his years of self-doubt, years of self-loathing, years of being made to feel terrified of himself inside a box designed to make him miserable.

And he *snaps*. Unfortunately, his mother bears witness as he punches - *dents* - the elevator’s metal wall. He regrets it as soon as the pain shoots through his fist, and he hears her startled shock, sees her hands fly to her mouth. But the longer she stares, the more her stubbornness subsides and realization slowly begins to dawn. Because he’s never *ever* been violent. And she’s never seen the ways he busts his own ass in order to cope when things get tough. His bone-deep sadness is rolling off him like smoke wisps, and she’s finally close enough to see how much she wrecks him.

His mother *hears* him when he tells her: *Enough*. She finally gets it when he looks at her and *begs*, his spirit ragged and worn: *Enough. Please.*

When the doors slide open, he leaves her in the elevator and shuts his office behind him. A line drawn in the sand, because he is who he is and he won’t be made to feel sorry about it. He makes a quick call to maintenance and lodges a repair for the elevator wall, because that’s something he *does* feel sorry for.

The day doesn’t get any easier when Jace drops into a seat a few hours later, kicking his boots up on the edge of Alec’s desk. Alec nudges them off as he paces, scrolling through the extensive Institute evaluation Lydia had left behind for him.
“I heard you're transferring Raj,” His Parabatai smirks, “As soon as you were made official Head, I knew his days were numbered.”

Raj has been undermining him for months, and his pile of incomplete reports and his refusal to log the whereabouts of his team after 6pm hadn’t passed Lydia’s review, just as he knew they wouldn’t. But he hasn’t been able to do a thing about it with his parents and their control sitting miles away from the Institute. Now that Alec’s officially in charge, he’s cleaning house. He can’t afford to have a Head of Security who doesn’t do what he’s asked.

“So, the Head of Security position is up for grabs?”

“Already been filled, actually,” because Alec is nothing if not efficient, and he’s had his eye on candidates for months. A dream plan for a dream Institute, if he ever got the chance. Jace grins like he's about to leap out of his seat, and Alec braces himself to let him down, “Noah Underhill. He's due to transfer in on Wednesday.”

The smile slides off Jace's face, quick as it came, “Underhill?”

“Underhill,” he confirms, recalling his impressive work file. 10 years experience serving on the frontlines in Baton Rouge. He even led an entire team for three full days when their mission leader was killed on duty. That’s the kind of incentive he wants, and Noah was ecstatic to be offered the job, “Mom has been ignoring his transfer request for months. So, I accepted an hour ago.”

Jace lets his hand fall to his knee with a frustrated slap, “You couldn’t have hired, I don’t know, me?”

Alec makes it as simple as he can, “You're not qualified.”

“I'm n--- How am I not qualified?” Jace prods a finger at his own chest, “I know this place inside and out. I know you.”

“And Underhill will learn,” Alec says, “Look, I'm sorry you're disappointed---”

“I'm not disappointed,” Jace rises out of his seat, “I'm fucking pissed. This has been our plan since we were kids.”

“Fantasy plans,” Alec starts fuming, because he doesn’t need Jace throwing a fit about his own self-importance right now. Not after the day he’s had, “The reality I have to deal with is very different.”

Jace coughs an unhappy laugh, “See - the way I see it, you’re still mad at me.”

“Oh, so not promoting you means I’m punishing you?”

“I don’t know,” Jace shrugs, “Are you?”

“I wouldn’t withhold a promotion from you for being an asshole, Jace,” Alec glares, tosses the tablet he’s holding onto his pile of paperwork for later. He’s clearly not getting to it any time soon, “You want the truth? The truth is, I need someone who can follow orders. I need someone who accounts for the safety of others in every decision he makes. I don’t need someone who always agrees, but I do need someone who actually considers my opinion before he challenges me. I need someone who will do what I need done, when I ask, because wasting time fighting me could cost someone their life.”

He sighs, hurting as he even thinks it. The truth he’s about to admit isn’t one he’s fond of, and he wishes like hell that it weren’t the truth at all, “I can’t depend on you, Jace.”
A shadow falls across his Parabatai’s eyes, raw and dark with shame. Alec knows he’s gutted him, because Jace thinks in his silence, as if he’s searching his memory for the ways he’s let him down. His Parabatai has always been a person who bites first and barks later in the face of personal criticism. Except when he’s dealing with those he loves; then, his instinct is to build a list of the reasons he’s unworthy. Alec hates it, because he’s invested a lot of time over the years, trying to get Jace over his barriers, trying to convince him of his place in their family. The last thing he wants to do is upset him, but he wants him to understand. The cycle of unresolved tension between them will only keep growing if they don’t talk it out.

“I am always looking over my shoulder with you,” He tells him as gently as he can, prompted by the fresh hurt flooding Jace’s eyes, “You’re my Parabatai, but I never know if you’re going to have my back or not, and I can’t afford to wonder anymore. You and I will work it out in our own time, but not while the lives of others are in my hands. I need a second in command.”

Jace’s voice cracks, “I can be your second in command.”

“Only when it suits you,” Alec sighs again, “As your Parabatai, I can deal with that. But as your commanding officer, it’s not enough.”

He watches Jace hang there looking so terribly lost, as if he hopes to leave and protect himself but wants to stay and work things out. It breaks Alec’s heart to see it, but he can’t back down this time. Not if backing down could potentially bring harm to those in his care. For the greater good, he thinks. Sometimes the greater good fucking blows.

“Did you at least consider me?” Jace asks.

Alec’s smile is faint, heavy with the burden of his own sadness. Because it may cost him at times, but he’ll never not put those he loves above himself.

“I always do.”

He sees the bob of Jace’s throat right before he leaves, the slump in his shoulders as he walks out. Alec drops his head into his hands when he’s gone, feeling awful. He’s not sure how long he wallows, but he’s soon pulling his phone out of his pocket to check for messages from Magnus. He hasn’t heard from him since yesterday morning and he itches to bridge that gap, to reach out and have Magnus reach back, because that’s always enough to calm whatever new storm roars inside of him.

“On your phone again,” his sister comments from the doorway, and he glances up to see her leaning against the frame, a big mug of coffee in her hands, “You’re texting a lot these days.”

Alec doesn’t say anything, because anything would sound like a blatant lie. So he slides his phone back into his pocket, “What can I do for you?”

“That bad, huh?” Isabelle takes the seat Jace had previously occupied, crossing her legs, “You’ve only been in power for a few hours and you already seem over it.”

He’s not, but he’s definitely over the events of the day.

“Mom and dad are quiet. They’re heading back to Idris tonight,” she keenly observes him for a response, “And Jace put himself on Ichor duty. I had to look three times to check I wasn’t seeing things. What happened?”

Alec smiles grimly, “People get upset when I make my own plans. It’s the strangest thing.”
Isabelle has always been scarily observant, so she knows when he is and isn’t in the mood to talk about his problems. Sometimes she prefers to push, so he’s relieved when she gets up without another word, ready to grant him clemency and leave him to his thoughts. She steps around to his side of the desk, places the giant, chipped mug of steaming, fresh coffee in front of him, pointedly turns it until he can see what he knows is on the other side. It’s the mug she bought him for his 16th birthday: World’s Best Big Brother. He smiles at it, regretful and glum, and tries not to let his wretched day get the better of him.

She plants a kiss on top of his head and rubs his shoulder before she, too, makes to leave.

He points at the coffee, “You didn’t make this, did you?”

“Ha ha,” She throws him a mock-glare before disappearing into the hall, pulling his office door closed as she goes, “Dare you to find out.”

Evidently, Isabelle is responsible for making his coffee. He loves her so much that he drinks it down anyway.

With half his family no longer speaking to him, he assumes the rest of the day will be a quiet one. He’s proven wrong when his phone buzzes in his pocket around 5pm, and he’s gotten so used to not seeing Magnus’ name on his screen today that his heart bounces when it’s actually there.

Message Received: MB
Heads up, I’m on my way - with Jocelyn Fairchild. She’s alive and well.

Jocelyn Fairchild is her Clave file made flesh - a tough woman with a quiet, distrustful disposition, difficult to interrogate when the time comes. She’s carrying twenty years worth of secrets, something that has made her paranoid enough to question who to share them with. Alec is more pleased than he cares to admit when both Clary and Magnus vouch for him; even more so when Clary tells the room he’s the new official Institute Head, which has Magnus sending him little congratulatory smiles that make him blush with pride.

Even then, getting information out of Jocelyn is like pulling teeth. Yes, she was once married to Valentine. Yes, she was a former Circle member. No, she’s not aligned with them anymore. She does, however, offer a warning that Valentine has a tendency toward obsession, and that he may come for her or for Clary, with force. And while she may be reluctant to say it, Luke Garroway - Clary’s adoptive father and the New York Pack’s latest Alpha - isn’t.

“We believe Valentine has active Circle members in the Clave,” he says gravely, and his words get backed up by subdued, knowing looks from both Jocelyn and Magnus.

“That’s a bold claim,” Alec replies, “A very dangerous one.”

“Clary seems to think you can be trusted. And I trust my daughter,” Luke answers him, unwaveringly, “You can bet whatever the Clave is saying internally is getting relayed to Valentine. He was my Parabatai once. Trust me when I say he always has a contingency plan.”

Alec raps his knuckles against his desk in thought, “So you’re suggesting that I defy the Clave?”
“He’s suggesting you be careful with your words,” Magnus offers, tentatively, “You wouldn’t want certain information getting into the wrong hands.”

The thought is terrifying enough to render him speechless. And as someone who has been challenged repeatedly of late, Alec knows a test when he sees one. So he chooses not to ask the whereabouts of the Mortal Cup. Jocelyn has successfully kept it hidden for the last two decades. If the Clave indeed has Circle members, he figures it’s safer where it is.

He gets Jocelyn set up with her own room and offers Luke visitation hours to see her and Clary. He even allows him to return later to stay overnight with them, which has more than a few heads turning. Alec is forced to say goodbye to Magnus first, because Luke insists on thanking him for his efforts in keeping Clary safe for the past 2 weeks. He and Magnus shake hands again - all they can manage with watchful eyes - and he tries to convey how much he’d rather do anything but; how, if he had the opportunity, he’d gladly kiss Magnus until there was no breath left in him. Hell, he’d drag Magnus into a kiss right here in front of a full Institute, watchful eyes be damned. But he figures he’s had enough drama for his first day in office. There will be other opportunities to make a statement.

His parents leave for Idris not long after. He only sees them off to be professional. They both act like dogs retreating with their tails between their legs and they offer little else besides parting gestures. His mother seems to want to say something, though she visibly struggles to get there. She looks sorry, which is new. But he’s carried the weight of others’ opinions all day, and he’d rather go out on a high note.

As fate would have it, that’s clearly too much to ask.

It’s after 10pm when the Institute’s alarms go off again. He rushes down to the Ops Center while swiping through the security feed on his tablet, assuming perhaps that it’s just Luke returning for the night. But he can’t see anything out of order and Isla’s observation deck doesn’t provide any other clues.

“I don’t know,” Alec starts typing out a message to Magnus, pulse racing, “But it’s already past the wards.”

He doesn’t get a chance to hit send before four hulking great masses - Forsaken - barrel into the Ops Center from the west halls, running at the staff minding the data hub. Everyone is caught in their
disbelief, which gets several Shadowhunters attacked before they can even arm themselves, and he’s pulling his seraph blade free from his thigh holster and leaping down onto the main floor without another thought, yelling commands at those around him. He cuts an arm at the bicep, spins onto his knee to slice through a thigh, stands to run his sword through an abdomen and hacks at a neck, but they barely flinch, stronger and more resilient than Forsaken are meant to be. He can only assume this is what Valentine’s ‘tendency toward obsession’ looks like. Shit.

Isabelle jumps down from the bridge with her whip, lashing at the nearest of them. Several of the Ops staff are now armed and begin to rain down on their intruders, but they only seem to be multiplying. Five more come through from the hallway, and Isla starts yelling over the noise that more are travelling the residential wing. Where Jocelyn and Clary are.

“Call back all active teams,” Alec tells Isla, “Warn everyone over the PA. Izzy!” She looks over after dragging another Forsaken to the ground, “They’re headed for Jocelyn and Clary!”

Isabelle takes off like a shot, while Isla addresses the building over the PA system, records it, then loops the playback. Attention all residents: the Institute has been breached. Forsaken are inside the building in west and east sectors. Please follow standard emergency protocol until official orders are made. Alec’s adrenaline is spiking, panic rising. Today of all days.

He takes his phone out again and calls Magnus, then drops it onto the nearest surface, bracing against the next Forsaken that rushes him. It slams him hard, catching him in the jaw with its forearm. He retaliates by burying his sword up beneath its ribs.

“Alec,” Magnus’ voice crackles from the table, “I can hear the Institute from my balcony. What’s going on over there?”

“Forsaken attack,” Alec grunts, ripping his seraph dagger from his other thigh holster and stabbing at its neck with quick-fire jab, jab, jabs, “They’ve breached the wards!”

He hooks himself inside the Forsaken’s stance, grabs it by the nape and throws it forward over his shoulder with as much force as he can, skull severing from its neck. Tossing its gruesome head aside, he retrieves his weapons from the body.

He sprints up to Isla’s deck to drive back the Forsaken running toward her, because he needs her to be his eyes and ears on the Institute. He takes blows to the stomach as he aims for the head, blade thunking as it hits bone, slowed by the deadened meat of its neck. It takes him two more powerful hacks to decapitate it. He’s panting and can feel bruises forming at his ribs by the time it hits the ground, and he uses his Stele to activate his Strength and Speed runes. He’s going to need them.

Alec beheads the next Forsaken to come his way by taking its knees out first. With his Angelic strength burning through him, he only needs one hard swing to get it done.

He overhears Isla making a quick call to the infirmary - whether it’s preemptive or she’s seen someone needing medical attention, he doesn’t know - and she updates him on the camera feeds, “I’m seeing no other entry breaches, sir. But there are more coming through the perimeter.”

“We need to lock them out of the tunnels,” he says, “Have you got eyes on Clary?”

“Yes, her and Jocelyn are in her room. Jace is---” the taps of her keyboard pause on a worrying gasp, “---oh god.”

Alec cries out as sudden, phantom pain lances up his forearms, sharp as glass shards dragging through flesh. He barely has time to recover - feels his very soul screaming Jace’s name - before
shooting agony rips through his left flank. He can feel his Parabatai rune sizzling with urgency, warning him that something is horribly wrong, and all he can think about is the last time he saw him. Walking out of his office, devastated. Because Alec thought *today of all days* was a good day to hash out long held resentments. *Jace. Oh god, Jace.*

*More* Forsaken come from the hall. One gets hauled backward into a headlock - by Luke Garroway of all people - its neck wrenched and broken with a sharp jerk. His eyes are glowing green when he glances over, “There’s more outside. My pack is on the way.”

“We need to keep them out,” Alec gasps, clawing at his own side, gritting his teeth. He calls to Isla, “Do you see Jace?”

“No, I don’t,” she replies, frantically searching the cameras, “He went out the window in the northeast tower. But I can’t see him anywhere.”

“And Clary?”

Luke is more alert at her name, even as he helps the other Shadowhunters take down another Forsaken.

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“Safe. Isabelle is with them now. No other Forsaken in the east wing as far as I can tell.”

*Need to get to Jace*, he thinks, just as a portal rips open in the middle of the Ops Center. *Magnus* charges through, fierce and coiled with electric red power that he throws on the nearest of their attackers. His hands wave about unnervingly smooth, then jerk tight like he’s knotting rope, and the Forsaken in his line of sight literally *falls to pieces*, limbs crashing separately to the floor. He throws another Forsaken at the wall with a simple motion, snaps its neck with a crunch of his fist. Then he’s hurling fiery magic at three others, paralyzing them where they stand for the Shadowhunters to finish off. He grabs another before it can reach Alec, *growling* at it, his demon eyes and magic blazing as he crushes its skull between his hands. Alec had known Magnus was powerful, but seeing firsthand the brutality of just how much is something else altogether.

Luke destroys the last two with the help of the Operation staff and Magnus reaches Alec where he’s hunched against the table, struggling to stand.

Magnus’ hands are impossibly gentle on his body, face, hair. Nothing at all like the violence he’s just seen him unleash. Alec almost sighs at how good it feels to be touched by him again, “Alec? Where are you hurt?”

“It’s my Parabatai,” he winces, the pain beginning to ebb, “He’s outside. I need to get to him.”

With the Ops Center under control and the security team clearing the building, he, his staff, Magnus and Luke take the basement to the tunnels. Magnus utterly obliterates the one Forsaken they find before it even has the chance to trudge toward them, and outside they’re met with the chaos of Shadowhunters filtering in from active patrol and what looks like an army of *thirty* more Forsaken headed for the Institute’s main doors.

Alec sheaths his seraph blade and deglamors his bow and quiver, nocking arrow after arrow as he takes down those nearest the Institute; perfect headshots that crumple them to the ground. Luke’s Werewolf pack arrives, fangs and claws bared, and Magnus uses his magic to drag Forsaken out of their herd formation, enabling them to be picked off more easily. The pain Alec feels through his Parabatai bond is soon entirely gone, and he lifts his shirt to ensure his rune is still there. It *is*, which gives him enough focus to kill another handful of Forsaken, and he feels a bone-deep relief when he sees him - *Jace* - emerge from the eastern perimeter, joining the fight at a powerful sprint.
Together with his Parabatai, his Shadowhunters and their Downworld allies, they take down the remaining creatures. He gets his people to run the perimeter for signs of any more, while Luke has his pack check the bodies of the fallen. Magnus finishes off one more when it tries to rise, and there’s a tense pause as they half expect the army to jump back to life. These aren’t run-of-the-mill Forsaken, after all. But eventually, thankfully, they’re in the clear.

The first thing he does is grab his Parabatai in a brutal hug, chests colliding, “God, Jace—”

“I’m fine,” Jace mutters against his collar, hands patting at his back, “I’m okay.”

He pulls away to reassure himself with his own eyes, hands fumbling at Jace’s wrists, his side. He gets his Stele ready, even without any telltale signs of injury, “What happened?”

“Got tackled out a window. Landed badly,” Jace nods his head toward the Institute. He grasps at Alec’s roaming hands, “I’m okay. Nothing an Iratze couldn’t fix. You know me.”

Alec can’t help chuckling, more relieved than he can ever remember being, and he brings Jace back into his arms. He’s still heartsore over their earlier falling out, and he readily apologizes now. Not too long ago, he didn’t think he’d get the chance, “I’m sorry about before. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“Hey,” Jace steps back, slugs Alec in the shoulder, “Already forgotten.”

“Okay,” Alec smiles, and playfully, lightly, slaps Jace’s cheek. They’ve still got more talking to do, but for now all is forgiven.

Everyone hovers post-battle. Alec offers medical aid to a handful of wolves who are injured, and they grudgingly accept, if only to remain with their Alpha for a little longer. He learns of two fatalities in his own camp while getting everyone accounted for - Melody Hightower and Bryce Townsend, both killed in the residential wing - and it makes him so angry that he surges ahead into the new work left behind in the aftermath.

Once they’re introduced, Magnus chooses to stay and help Isabelle perform a midnight autopsy on one of the Forsaken bodies. Their findings confirm what Alec suspected during the fight, because seraph blades should pass through demonic entities like butter: Valentine has somehow managed to build an army of Forsaken with angelic blood, which evidently got them through the wards. The concept is reason enough for panic.

Magnus takes a vile of blood with him when he leaves, offering to build a spell resistant to it, and Alec sees him off with another lame handshake, texts him a more elaborate thank you when he’s gone. He would much rather go and spend the night with him, but all they can do is make plans to catch up once the Institute has recovered.

Luke and his wolves help the security team round up bodies for incineration, and when Alec finally lifts his head up long enough to see all the work being done, he demands everyone leave. His people can take care of the rest over the coming hours, and their Downworlder comrades have helped more than he’s comfortable with. He feels undeserving of Luke’s humility - a stark contrast to the tyranny of his predecessor - and it’s obvious his pack isn’t overly fond of the new alliance. Alec can’t really blame them. His own people haven’t exactly given Downworlders a reason to be friends.
He makes a point of shaking hands and personally thanking each member of Luke’s pack on their way out, which seems to surprise them as much as it does his peers. But he’s the Head of the Institute now, and if he intends to trample their ridiculous age-old prejudices, he figures gratitude is a good place to start. It works for some; Jace, Isabelle, Clary, Isla and a few others follow his lead, which leads to a fragile acceptance between parties. Luke offers Alec a loaded smile, slaps him on the shoulder amiably before heading to Jocelyn’s room for the night. It makes him feel like he got at least one thing right today.

Things gradually return to normal over the next couple of days. Once the Clave is fully debriefed on the attack, he’s congratulated on his competency and asked to draft a response plan for other Institutes, should Valentine choose to target them next. It’s hard to take the praise with two extended Shadowhunter families grieving the deaths of their loved ones under his roof. He takes comfort in the knowledge that Jocelyn and Clary are safe, the Mortal Cup is still hidden, and whatever Valentine was trying to do, failed. He holds onto that as he leads the funeral procession, and tries not to focus on how many more of them he’ll have to perform in his future. Heavy is the head that wears the crown.

He texts Magnus first thing Wednesday in the hopes of seeing him later that evening, because it’s been over a week since their kiss beneath the large oak and he’s tired of not being with him and touching him the way he so freely gets to when they’re alone together.

*Reply Sent:*  
*Please tell me you’re available tonight?*

*Message Received:* MB  
*Yes. YES. Come over when you’re free.*

And because he can’t seem to keep his feelings in check when it comes to Magnus, he types out an *I can’t wait to see you* and puts his head down for the rest of the day, hoping the hours will pass quickly. He manages a late lunch after orientation with Underhill runs longer than anticipated, and when he looks at his phone again, he spends a good ten minutes smiling at Magnus’ reply: *Ditto, pretty boy. Ditto.*

He checks in with Underhill as the day rolls to a close, enquiring to see how his first afternoon on the job went. He’s impressed to learn the guy has already built a rapport with his staff and various other connected hubs around the Ops Center. He’s also happy to hear that Jace has graciously introduced himself and offered to do any work Underhill needs done. After a shower and a shave, he stops by to see Isla as she logs into the system for her night shift, just to let her know he can be reached by phone if the place happens to burn down in his absence. She takes one look at his damp hair, fresh skin and tired eyes and practically *shoos* him out of the building. He’s all too willing to oblige.

Something in his chest swoops when he finally lays eyes on Magnus again, skin shiny and sweet
smelling beneath his silk robe like he’s just gotten out of a bath. He didn’t think it’d be possible to miss someone this much. But now that he’s here, and they’re alone, he gets to focus on what he wants. Now, he just gets to be a man who has felt every hour they’ve spent apart. And he has.

“Hi.”

“Hi,” Magnus answers, soft and overcome, because finally, finally, they’re together again.

Alec steps over the threshold and pushes the door closed behind him, and then he’s pressing Magnus to the nearest wall, the crash of their bodies rendering them of breath. Their mouths collide halfway, open and hot, tongues meeting with the same coiling desperation of their rolling hips, and Alec wraps him in his arms and holds him, squeezing out the spaces left between them until they don’t exist anymore. Magnus embraces him just as tight, like he’s suffered the distance as Alec has, but it still doesn’t fulfil the yearning. They’re still not close enough. Alec doesn’t think he’ll ever be close enough.

Magnus’ fingers slide through his hair, a wild groan of pent up tension trembling through his lips. And Alec kisses him in every way he couldn’t. Furiously. Desperately. Teasingly. Thoroughly. Deep and soft and slow, until Magnus is grinding and gasping into him, both of them hard and eager for each other. Alec melts as he reacquaints himself with the weight and touch of Magnus’ body, how good it feels to be enveloped and held still. Here, the world doesn’t scream at him, doesn’t demand anything of him. Here, held and caressed beneath his Warlock’s generous affections, it’s the quietest place he knows.

_His_ Warlock. Because Magnus feels like his. Alec realizes that he wants him to be.

Alec pins him to the wall with his hips, rubs at the arms Magnus has looped about his shoulders; runs his fingers over his cheeks, down his jaw and throat because he _can’t stop touching_. He tugs at Magnus’ robe until it falls open, and his hands hungrily devour all the warm, damp skin inside, remembering where it’s soft and where it swells with muscle. Where he’s previously kissed and sucked and bitten.

Magnus is shivering with all the sensation by the time he’s done exploring, his wet lips panting against Alec’s mouth, “God, Alec---”

“I know,” he whispers back, because he feels it too. All the rules in the world can’t stop this rabbid need they share, “I know.”

Magnus kisses him hard, shoving Alec’s jacket from his shoulders. Their hands work blindly to divest him of his clothes, belt and boots thudding on the foyer carpet. Alec makes to kneel, begins to mouth his way down Magnus’ sculpted torso because he has grand plans to make up for lost time, wants to pleasure his Warlock until he’s a quivering, pliant mess.

But Magnus drags him back up, “No, skip it.”

Alec blinks, “Skip it?”

“Yes,” Magnus kisses him again, brings Alec’s hands around to grab his ass. And yeah, he can totally get onboard with this, too.

Alec presses Magnus’ shoulders to the wall and starts a slow grind that has them both moaning, flesh on flesh. Magnus’ pert buttocks flex in his palms with every undulation, and he uses his hold to control the friction of their cocks until it’s just perfect. But then his entire world narrows down to his fingers as they brush the crease of Magnus’ ass. He’s... _wet?_
Alec unlatches his mouth enough to search his eyes - and they search him right back, waiting cautiously for a reaction.

“I didn’t want to wait anymore,” Magnus murmurs between them, bright eyed, thumb sliding back and forth on Alec’s cheek. He looks as though he’s expecting Alec to refuse. As if Alec isn’t completely powerless to Magnus’ every whim.

So much of their arrangement has revolved around Magnus putting his dick inside him, and now that he’s offering himself up, Alec’s a little nervous. Magnus has waited for reasons he’s not privy to, so whether he likes it or not, something is to be expected of him. He just doesn’t know what. God, he doesn’t want to screw this up.

He swallows hard, “What do you need?”

“You,” Magnus tells him, and it’s so dreadfully honest that it makes Alec throb. Magnus frames his jaw in his hands, “Just you.”

He lets the words sink in, heart thumping in his chest as their mouths gravitate toward each other. He touches Magnus’ rim, circles it with the pad of his finger until he’s drowsy with want. It’s hot and slick when he presses inside, and Alec easily fills him with two fingers, then a third, his dick growing harder at the thought of Magnus stretching himself to take him. That he decided well in advance that this was going to happen tonight at all. Alec really doesn’t want him to regret it.

“I’m ready,” Magnus pants against his mouth. A flick of his wrist, and Alec feels latex sheath his hardness, “Ready?”

Alec nods, though he’s not sure he is. He’s fantasized about this since the moment he first saw Magnus walking through the crowd at the Pandemonium. He’s filled those fantasies with their many nights together, tried to form a picture of what it could be like based on what they’ve had, what Magnus might enjoy. But he realizes that’s the magic of Magnus. He’s never expected Alec to be anything but himself. Because somehow, impossibly, Alec being himself is enough for him. He’s never been enough for anyone before.

Magnus turns in his arms and reaches back to guide him, and then Alec’s sliding inside his heat, slow and careful, taking his time to savor it. The tight grip of Magnus’ body is insane, and Alec sinks the rest of the way when Magnus’ hands find his hips to draw him in. Alec hugs him close, nipping softly at his smooth, muscled shoulder, his nape, mouth watering at the taste and smell of his skin after so long apart. His Warlock - his powerful, devastating Warlock - softens back against him, content to be held like this, and Alec takes a moment to catch his breath. It’s a little overwhelming to finally be inside him. It seems overwhelming for them both, because Magnus’ entire being is vibrating with the faintest of tremors.

He groans with his first thrust, gives a few shallow pumps before he thrusts again. He braces a hand against the wall and starts to fuck in earnest, an off-kilter tempo to keep Magnus guessing, because the sharp surprise in his little gasps are exciting and he wants to be so much more than enough. Magnus holds the forearm Alec has wrapped over his chest, and grinding back with his ass, spine arched, they both groan at how deep their bodies meet. They roll like waves, rushing together, clutching at each other as they part. Bliss. Being inside Magnus is a bliss all his fantasies couldn’t prepare him for. And yet, something within him scratches at a need to be closer still.

Alec squeezes handfuls of Magnus’ ass and watches himself fuck inside. Deep, long strokes that have Magnus keening and grappling for purchase on the wall. Alec can feel him swelling, prostate thickening like a target to aim for, so he grips him by the hips and pounds at it, the sound of their skin meeting a delicious staccato rhythm.
Magnus presses his forehead to the wall, hands encircling Alec’s wrists. His moaning is an endless, wanton stream that sets Alec on fire, back muscles rigid as he takes what is given to him. Alec doesn’t know who is fucking who, because Magnus is riding him in a way that has his eyes almost rolling back into his skull.

He mouths along his neck, bites gently as Magnus rests his head back on his shoulder, awash in pleasure, “God, you feel amazing.”

He wraps Magnus in his arms to enjoy just how much, thrusting a little harder, drawing a tantalizing whimper. Magnus’ body moves sinuous against him, so eager to receive more that Alec can already feel their orgasms approaching.

“Oh my god your cock,” Magnus gasps, low and hoarse and full of awe, and Alec burns with praise, “You’re so fucking deep.”

“Wanna see you,” he breathes, turning Magnus’ jaw for a kiss. He wants the chance to lay him down and kiss him, watch his pleasure careen across his gorgeous face before it’s all over, “Let’s move to the bed.”

“No, like this,” Magnus’ fingers digging into Alec’s hand, hips frantic as they roll back, “Just like this.”

It takes a significant amount of willpower, but Alec reluctantly pulls out and walks Magnus off toward the bedroom, kissing at the tension in his shoulders as they go. He doesn’t know why, but Magnus doesn’t feel quite here with him. He thinks back to the last time they’d had sex, how his tumultuous head space had threatened to derail their night and how easily Magnus had taken care of him, how he could read him enough to know what to do. He wants to do the same for him, but he doesn’t know what he’s up against.

Alec tugs him around until they’re facing each other, but Magnus won’t look at him. He’s seen him shut down this way before, during their late night video call when he made efforts to keep his Warlock mark hidden. As if Alec would run at the very sight of it. Like having cool eyes is somehow a dealbreaker.

Alec holds Magnus’ handsome face in his hands, thumbs stroking the softness of his cheeks.

“It’s so strange to me,” he murmurs, watching Magnus’ fingers slide over his, “that you can be this fucking beautiful and still not know it.”

It takes a moment, but Magnus finally opens his eyes, black slit pupils and molten gold lit up. Like if he must bear his most naked self, he’ll do it with his head held high - a heartbreaking challenge for Alec to accept him as he is, or leave.

Alec had seen them during their video call, hazy through the cell phone lens of a dark bedroom and a bedside lamp. Though up close and unfiltered, he sees the way they shimmer like dragon scales, like plated armor, but warm and lively and vulnerable as they take him in and wait to be judged. They’re majestic, primitive in a way that makes Alec’s blood race. His dick pulses against Magnus’ belly just staring at them. How can he not know?

He brings Magnus’ mouth to his, kisses him as deep as the hooks his Warlock has planted in him. He’s being offered an out here, a tentative one that promises Magnus pain should he choose to take it. Eighteen year old Alec would have taken it. Because the cost of choosing his own happiness had always been too high, and parting ways would have been the easier choice. The cost of not choosing Magnus now is so much higher.
Alec sits on the bed’s edge, guiding him down to straddle his lap, and he kisses up the length of his neck while he slides his cock home, whimpering against Magnus’ throat when the hot friction of his body envelops him. He presses as deep as he can go, watches his Warlock’s mouth part on a surprised, blissful moan, and they clutch at each other, too afraid to disrupt the peace they’ve found again.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he promises him, and Magnus’ legs tighten on either side of his hips, fingers digging into his back.

Alec strokes his hands over his thighs, his ass, up the breadth of his back, lips tasting his neck and collarbones, overwhelmed with a need to make Magnus his and terrified that he can’t. Quiet and profound, an unexpected I love you hovers unspoken on his tongue. He watches Magnus move on him, chasing whatever it is he needs Alec to provide, and Alec feels a startling realization take shape in how willing he is to offer it. But now isn’t the time for confessions, not with Magnus on the precipice of something Alec doesn’t understand.

He braces Magnus to his chest and rolls them down onto the bed, arranging his legs about his ribs. Then he starts to fuck, holding Magnus in place as he thrusts, driving their bodies into a winding, hard rhythm that rocks the bed frame.

I love you, he tests the thought, drinking in the sights and sounds of Magnus’ pleasure, his flushed cheeks and breathless chest and demon eyes impossibly full of things Alec hopes are for him. Euphoria floods his veins as he thinks it again: I love you. Again. I love you. And again. Holy fuck, I love you.

Magnus throws his head back against the sheets, crying out, “I’m---gonna come.”

“I’m right there with you,” he pants. He digs his knees into the mattress and tightens his hold, “Look at me. Don’t stop looking at me.”

Alec lifts Magnus back onto his lap until they’re eye to eye, then they’re fucking in the center of the bed. Encircled in each other’s arms, sharing breath as they ride to the finish line together. And for one bright, shining moment, Alec doesn’t need to chase the yearning to be closer - because it’s here in Magnus’ beautiful, glittering eyes, in the wild beating of his heart, in the new rawness of just how badly they want each other. He’s not alone here, and it fills him with love. It fills him with too much for his own skin to contain.

Alec grips him by the nape, his orgasm climbing, “Magnus... Magnus... ”

“I know,” Magnus gasps, looking as desperate to hold onto this moment as he is, “I know.”

Magnus shatters apart first, come erupting between them as he works himself with a fist, involuntary tremors running through him while he holds Alec like a safety net. Alec cries out as the hot, rhythmic clutch of Magnus’ ass brings him off, and he hugs him tight to his chest as he unloads, intense wave after wave after wave. They fall back across the bed, bodies undulating to the slower pulse of ebbing climax, tired but desperate to remain close.

Magnus combs a hand through Alec’s hair, palm coming to rest on his cheek while they catch their breath. And Alec strokes back, thumbs brushing the buzz of Magnus hair. He touches his lips to Magnus’ eyelids when they return to his usual deep brown, because he never wants him to question whether he’s accepted. Magnus squeezes him tighter, and Alec nuzzles the slope of his nose, parts his mouth for a kiss. He swallows Magnus’ sharp intake of breath when he carefully pulls out, and then they’re rolling onto their sides, limbs tangled.
Once Magnus has them cleaned up, they lie that way for some time, wrecked and recuperating, gazing at each other without a word. Which is just as well, because the only words Alec has are an *I love you*, and he wants to spend time with it before dropping that particular bomb on anyone else.

Smoothing his hands up and down Magnus’ back, he drags his fingertips softly along his spine, utterly fascinated and painfully fond of the way his Warlock grows sleepy beneath his touch.

Nothing like the big, powerful Warlock he’d seen destroy Forsaken with little to no effort only days ago. He smiles to realize he loves them both.

“When do you have to be back at the Institute?” Magnus murmurs, seconds from sleep.

Alec runs a finger down the bridge of his nose, the bow in his lip, “Not ‘till tomorrow.”

Magnus’ sleepiness hinders any sort of reaction he may have, but Alec doesn’t need one to know he’s welcome. Because he knows when he’s being tested, and tonight was another one in a long line of them. He doesn’t know what Magnus was trying to confirm. But he knows he’s passed with flying colors. The open, unguarded peace on his Warlock’s face and his soft grip on Alec’s hand is all the evidence he needs.

He doesn’t want to pull away, so he wraps what he can of the blanket over them. Once it’s tucked over Magnus’ feet, he settles in for sleep. The gentle lull of Magnus’ breath draws him under.

*I love you*, he thinks again. And nothing in his entire, miserable life has ever felt this right.

The Consul can do what he likes. But he’ll have to pry Magnus from his cold, dead hands.
Nine

Chapter Summary

Alec suggests an alternative arrangement, and Magnus learns the depths one can fall in the right conditions.

Chapter Notes

I didn't plan for this chapter. I mean, I did, but I didn't have it outlined like the rest. Which is how I ended up with almost 10k words of Malec doing whatever they wanted. So, you're welcome? As always, thank you for the comments and support! This chapter is very much a love letter to the Malec I carry around in my heart - even if they were the ones that controlled its narrative.

This chapter was written while listening to Caroline Pennell's "Patient", SZA's "Love Galore" and Fink's "Trouble's What You're In."

As always, you can also follow me on Tumblr and Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

The brush and vibration of words mumbled against his hair pulls him into the blissful fog between sleep and wakefulness. He doesn’t know what they say, only that their cadence makes him warm all over, gives him a sudden influx of pleasant goosebumps, drawing a moan from him in answer.

The tickle of a kiss soon follows, travels over his skin in blurry, vague figments of sensation. He rolls inside the warmth of his sheets to seek more of it, feels the gust of bedroom air down his body, the muted touch of hands on his thighs, stronger as they spread him. He dozes under the blanket’s snugness, distantly aware of a wet, all consuming warmth engulfing his cock right down to the root. He’s too far under the haze to focus, but it feels both familiar and amazing - like a revisited fantasy, a fond daydream, comforts of his mind conjured up for pleasure’s sake.

He sighs as he stretches out, legs wide, arms curled beneath his pillows, body sinking into the mattress as more of himself comes online. He feels the expansion of his ribs with every deep breath, and he rubs blindly at the crustiness itching the corners of his eyes, the tickling in his nose, the dried saliva at his mouth. He hadn’t slept well last night, too aware of another body taking up space in his bed where there usually wasn’t. The few moments where he had found rest were cut short by Alec’s wandering hands, as if he too realized he was next to another body and wanted to trace its shape in the dark. And under the dreamy spell of those ministrations, they’d made love again. And later, again.

He remembers last night like a fever dream. Endless touch. Stolen breath. Indescribable pleasure. The melody of his heart’s song made harmony. Alec’s presence in his life has been pulling at him for weeks, but it’s been almost a century since he’s experienced the wonderfully overwhelming ache of a two-way connection, of emotions explored physically. It’s been even longer since he’d felt safe
enough to let his soul take the reins of his body and let it speak for him.

While he’d let him inside his body, Alec had demanded entry to his heart. And under the sultry sway of his passion, Magnus had been powerless to deny him. Where his love had began with its scary leap into the unknown, it had become corporeal amidst the frenzy of the Institute attack, shaking at him until Alec was safe in his hands again. Following a week of missed opportunities, finally reuniting had made it too easy to be swept away in his own feelings. But in Alec’s expert care of them, his love had only grown heavier, ever more tangible than the simple knowledge of it. Now, it didn’t feel entirely hopeless. Now, it held promise.

A strong pang of arousal laps through his core, and when he reaches a hand down to relieve it, his fingers meet hair. His eyes pop open, head lifting, and he almost panics at the bobbing mass beneath the blanket. That is, until his brain connects his dreamy lust to the very real pleasure throbbing in his cock, and then he’s very much awake.

He tosses the blankets back to see Alec’s dark, bed-tousled hair and broad, runed shoulders moving between his thighs, and he groans as the sight enlightens him to the full impact of his body’s arousal, the pleasure of Alec’s talented, welcome mouth.

Alec looks up with his beautiful hazel eyes, lips sliding from Magnus’ hard length, and he flashes one of his devastating, mischievous grins, “Good morning.”

Magnus sighs. Alec’s handsome morning face is too unfair. He slurs groggily, without thinking, though he can’t tell if he’s actually forming words or groaning a string of gibberish instead, “You’re perfect even in the mornings? Goddamn you.”

“What?” Alec laughs. Clearly gibberish then, “Someone needs another five minutes to wake up.” Clasping Magnus’ thighs with his big warm hands, he wedges his shoulders beneath them, “Lie back and enjoy.”

Magnus’ head hits the pillow again, a garbled groan spilling from his open lips. Alec’s amused chuckle vibrates through his cock, and then he’s helplessly moaning and rolling his hips into it. Oh fuck.

Alec sets back in with a steady pace; taking him in on an inhale, sliding off as he exhales, pausing every few pumps to use his mouth elsewhere. Alec’s rubbing tongue massages the head, delves at the sensitive slit over and over until Magnus’ knees buckle. Then he licks along his taint from rim to balls, sucks the sack between his lips and moans on it, until Magnus is moaning with it. Then he begins the amazing cycle all over again – out of order, just to screw with the pattern his sleep-addled brain tries to make. It’s maddening.

Fists bunched in his pillow, Magnus watches Alec’s sopping mouth suck his cock, and the noise of his throat opening around him is both obscene and loud in the bedroom’s silence. Alec growls around him, pleased when Magnus digs a hand into his hair, working him faster like he’s hungry for it, as if he’s getting off on it. Magnus sees him reach beneath himself and his own arousal surges beyond control when he realizes he is getting off on it.

“Fuck that’s hot,” he moans, undulating his hips gently to the rhythm of Alec’s mouth. His Shadowhunter groans, bracing an forearm on the mattress, not restricting but encouraging his movements as his hand pumps heedlessly between his own legs, “Are you gonna come with my cock in your mouth?”

Alec pulls off with a ragged gasp, “Yes. Want you to come inside me.”
Magnus shivers as Alec swallows him down again, writhing mindlessly on his shoulders, “Oh god. Love your fucking mouth.”

His Shadowhunter moans at the praise but doesn’t let up, all but forcing the orgasm from him. Magnus yells as he starts to shoot inside Alec’s throat, and then he’s left whimpering and grappling on the sheets, body arching helplessly when Alec slides back just enough to suck his spendings straight from his slit. The sharp pull in his cock is so intense, the ceiling above echoes with his surprise. He collapses, thighs twitching around Alec’s ears, overly sensitive and pulsing on Alec’s tongue.

Alec pulls away to rest his cheek on his hip, and Magnus strokes his hand through Alec’s hair, watches his wet, gasping mouth and bliss-closed eyes as his fist brings him off in thick, hot jets against the bedspread. When he’s able to pull himself up, he crawls the length of Magnus’ body and sinks back down into his open arms with a satisfied sigh.

“Let’s try this again,” Alec smiles, panting, “Good morning.”

Magnus laughs breathlessly, “Good morning.”

“I hope that was okay.”

“Definitely not complaining,” he shudders as Alec bends to kiss his neck, gathers his big, beautiful Shadowhunter into his arms, “All this time you could have been staying over and doing that. I feel cheated.”

Alec chuckles against Magnus’ skin, resting in his embrace as their breathing softens, evens out. His weight is almost suffocating but Magnus is all too happy to be smothered by it.

Minutes pass in a blissful haze of endorphins, strong enough that he can’t even find it in himself to be mad at the early hour. He massages his fingers through Alec’s hair, on his scalp, notes how his Shadowhunter grows heavier on top of him, the way his breath comes easier when Magnus presses his lips to his head. His heart is a searing white glow, warm and powerful and contagious in its spread, and he wonders idly if Alec can feel it; heating him through where he lays his cheek, surrounding him protectively as his love naturally wants to.

He asks, if only to prepare himself. He’s not ready for Alec to leave. After last night, he’s not sure if he’ll ever be, “When do you need to go?”

“Soon,” Alec murmurs, lips moving on his chest, “Can we get breakfast? I kinda need to talk to you.”

Magnus is suddenly very nervous as to what it could be about, but he smiles all the same, pressing into Alec’s lips when they kiss him on his way out of bed.

Once they’re dressed, they get situated in the living room with steaming coffee and Belgium waffles conjured all the way from Maison Dandoy, Magnus’ favourite cafe in Brussels. They eat together between appreciative moans and small talk, and Magnus tries desperately not to obsess on whatever it is Alec is thinking about. Once their plates are empty and their bellies full, Alec takes a sip of his coffee and sighs. Magnus doesn’t think it’s too much of a stretch to assume it sounds content.
“Don’t keep me in suspense,” he smiles, hoping his growing panic isn’t completely paralysing his face. Alec clears his throat politely, fist to mouth, then smiles softly, eyes warm. *Surely* what’s coming isn’t a bad thing.

“So, I know we agreed on a week, to see if this could work,” he reaches back to scratch behind his ear, “Am I alone in thinking we’re a little beyond a no-strings hook up?”

Desire floods him, bright and heedy in its warmth. Because *yes*, they’re so far beyond the rules of their casual sexual relationship. And while he’s suspected the nature of Alec’s feelings for some time, he’s glad to hear it confirmed.

“No, you’re not alone,” he assures him, and they smile at each other, gentle and easy. The room feels sunnier for it.

“Okay, good,” Alec nods to himself, something secretly relieved in his eyes, “In that case, I have a proposition for you.”

Magnus takes a sip of his coffee and waves him on, the tension in his shoulders relaxing. He can only assume the hard part is over, “Lay it on me.”

Alec blows a breath and gets right into it.

“When the Consul was promoting me a few days ago, he brought up my private life,” he speaks almost as if to test Magnus’ resilience for whatever comes next, “I have a reputation in the Clave for being promiscuous. And generally when a Clave leader takes office, they settle down; marriage and kids, that sort of thing. Makes them appear more politically viable. Whatever. *The point is*, while he didn’t exactly *say* the words, he strongly implied that my promiscuity could destroy the integrity of my new rank. And that I need to stop.”

Magnus isn’t sure if he likes where this is going. And while he doesn’t want to panic, his heart is threatening to fall somewhere around his stomach anyway. He’s heard of the Clave pulling rank on all manner of things, but he’s never heard of the Consul demanding someone's chastity before. He can only assume it’s a play to control Alec’s status as an out gay man. The *gall*.

“But you’ve only been with me. Because we agreed—”

“I know. But to anyone watching, every time I leave the Institute to meet you, it looks like I’m still running around fucking the male population of New York,” Alec sighs, clearly frustrated. This surprises Magnus. “You’ve never struck me as the type to care what others think.”

“I don’t,” Alec says, another sigh on his lips. His knee bounces, and Magnus sees one of his thumbs tapping the top of his clasped hands. He’s *nervous*. Whatever the Consul said and however he said it has affected Alec deeper than he wants to admit. Magnus can only imagine how awful it must be, “So much has changed for me since I met you, but all anyone else sees is the same old Alec Lightwood. I look good on paper, but the hearsay isn’t going to do my position any favors. Not with the things I want to accomplish.”

“I have it on good authority that you look good everywhere,” Magnus smiles, hoping to loosen the frown from Alec’s face.

It works, because the corner of Alec’s mouth lifts; a little smug, confidence boosted once again. He squares his shoulders, “Anyway. That’s where you come in.”

He doesn’t know if it’s the sound of Alec’s flawed logic or his own anxiety waiting to pounce, but
“I’ve spent my entire life navigating loopholes in the Clave’s rules, so I can do what the Consul is asking me to do. But I intend to do it my way,” Alec shifts to the edge of the couch, elbows on his knees. The seriousness on his face gives Magnus heart palpitations, “I know it’s a lot to ask of you, and I know you have your own reputation to keep, so I’m only throwing it out there. But. Would you be willing to...continue this arrangement in a more official capacity? Y’know, publicly?”

Magnus isn’t sure how his face is reacting, but Alec barrels on as if he’s realizing how terrible the idea is.

“It would mean people knowing exactly where I’m spending my down time,” Alec explains, “It would mean having the Clave know your movements and having to face my family. My parents.”

“Just so I’m clear,” Magnus’ words come tentatively, because he’s not at all sure of what’s being said, “you’re asking me to...what, exactly?”

“I’m asking you to help clean up my public persona by playing the part of my committed boyfriend,” Alec offers carefully, as if on eggshells, “I mean, you’d be doing me a huge favor, I realize that. But I also really want to keep seeing you. And I’d do my best to make it worth your while.”

“You do remember I’m a Downworlder, right? How is publicly proclaiming a relationship with me going to improve your image?”

Alec shakes his head like it’s no big deal, “Fucking Downworlders is way more common among our kind than you’d think. Appearing in a committed relationship with one will set a different narrative. One that aligns with my goals.”

“Which are?”

“Destroying dumbass prejudices, for one.”

His desire ramps up all over again, because Alec is serious. His gaze is intense, the same intensity he’d shown as he’d looked each member of Lucian’s pack directly in the eyes and thanked them for their help following the attack at the Institute three days ago. His Shadowhunter was already so different to the rest of them when they’d first met; an enigmatic young man under a seductive skin, fulfilling his own wants and needs with a hunger than spoke of greater despair. But now, he sees the long burning need to fix the world behind his eyes, and Magnus can’t help falling under its allure, no matter how futile the idea is.

“And if I say no?” Magnus asks, because he’s both curious and worried that this is an all or nothing situation, “Are you done with me?”

“I wouldn’t give you up for anything,” Alec’s reply is as vehement as it is immediate, and Magnus feels as if his chest is growing a size, “I’d just have to be more careful.”

Magnus rises to his feet to stand in the morning sun, trying to give himself time to gather his thoughts, to calm the wild sway of his emotions. Alec’s suggested amendment to their arrangement is tempting, and Alec’s intentions are honorable. But Magnus has had more than enough of pretending. He can no longer pretend he’s not attached, that he doesn’t care. He can’t pretend he doesn’t want something more when his entire being stretches across the city every time they’re apart. After their passionate night together and Alec’s more-than-tender affections, he’s almost certain they’re on the same page. But Magnus has always worn rose-tinted glasses, and years of false hopes and disappointments threaten to blacken their lenses.
Ragnar had told him to follow his heart’s lead. It’s always been easier said than done, but Magnus has never run from a challenge.

Here goes nothing.

“I’ll agree to your terms. On one condition.”

He hears his Shadowhunter stand behind him, and he sounds unwavering when he speaks, “Name it, Magnus. Anything.”

He takes a quiet, deep breath in.

“I’ll only play the part of your doting committed partner if it’s real,” he turns to face him, sees Alec standing there with his open stance and vulnerable eyes, “I fake a great many things, Alec, but I won’t fake this. It would be a disservice to the very real feelings I now have for you.”

It takes him a minute, but then Alec comes out of his absorption of Magnus’ words with a tiny smile. It’s only the faintest quirk of lips, but the way his gaze melts and his chest seems to cave shows the weight in which he feels them. Approves of them. Accepts and agrees with them. Relates to them.

I know you feel what I feel, Magnus thinks, and Alec’s quietly beaming face and pinkening cheeks – because his Shadowhunter is honest to god blushing – tells him that yes, indeed he does. God, he does. He almost can’t believe it. Impossibly, Magnus’ heart grows another size.

“I know we’ve never said it, but I’m saying it now: I like you, Alexander,” he confesses, addressing him by his full name. Alec had once told him that no one ever uses it unless he’s being reprimanded, or addressed by Clave superiors. Unless it’s serious. Magnus thinks he’s never been more serious in his life than right now, “And I want you to have all of me. Because I want all of you.”

Alec swoops in like he can no longer hold himself back, hands going about his waist, and he steals the breath from him with a kiss that threatens to tip them both over. They grab hold of each other in the morning sun, pressing as close as their bodies will allow. Magnus breathes him in as Alec breathes him in, and they trade the unspoken with their mouths.

Magnus’ heart feels too big for his skin to contain, especially as Alec’s arms gather him to his chest like he means to keep him cozy and protected there forever. He’s so in love with this man that his insides are soaring with it. The truth is there on his tongue, so close to spilling over. I love you, Alec. God, I love you. He sucks his own lip into his mouth when they part, tastes the story of their first morning together, and wishes they could return to bed. Make love again.

His Shadowhunter breathes, soft and pleadingly, as if to imprint the words on him, “You have me. I promise.”

Alec touches his forehead to his, and Magnus doesn’t think he’s ever coming back down to earth again, “What do you say, Shadowhunter? Want to do this?”

“Yes,” Alec laughs, light and happy, squeezing him in a hug and swaying them both like he can’t quite help himself. His back tightens beneath Magnus’ hands, belly shaking against him, his entire body all but vibrating out of giddiness, “Yes. In case it wasn’t completely obvious: I like you, too.”

Magnus hides his splitting grin in Alec’s collar and tries to make the most of the morning they have left together. Right here in Alec’s warm, strong embrace, where he doesn’t have to pretend that it isn’t his favourite place to be.
The next few days are busy ones, passed in a blur of work, responsibility and text messages. Alec tells his sister he has a boyfriend, which leads to an interrogation that he admits was highly stressful, but actually sounds rather adorable and completely fitting of the young woman Magnus had met and worked beside only days before. In turn, Magnus tells Raphael, who grudgingly offers his blessing only after he’s answered the what, why, how, oh my god of it all. He also tells Catarina, which has her stampeding his apartment after work one evening with a bottle of merlot in one hand and a stern warning to leave nothing out.

She’s completely scandalized at the idea that he’s been sleeping with a Shadowhunter for almost two and a half months. Even more so by the fact that Ragnor encouraged it instead of immediately having him committed to a psych ward.

“My god, you’re in love with him,” she states in awe, watching him closely as he reads Alec’s latest text message. Magnus smiles distractedly as he sends a reply and pockets his phone, “A Shadowhunter.”

“What can I say? I’m a trendsetter.”

“So what was it?” she asks, propping her elbow on the back of the couch, “I’m curious as hell. What won you over?”

Being presented the question leaves him stumped. He can’t quite put a finger on what it is that made him fall, because the reasons were many. Alec’s boyish sexiness. His intelligence. His eagerness and ability to match Magnus toe-to-toe. The joy he finds in the simplest things. His laugh. His cunning. His respect for boundaries. His willingness to give as a lover. The fullness in which he gives himself over when he takes.

Then later, it was the cracks that hooked him. The ones that broke Alec’s perfect Nephilim mould and showed his frustrations, his upsets. The ones that allowed Magnus a glimpse of his resilience under pressure. The strength of his beliefs. The goodness of his intentions. The beauty to be found in his quiet heart, very much waiting for someone to take notice of him.

He can’t pinpoint an exact reason for why he fell in love, but he can remember the moment it happened, however little he knew it at the time. Lying under Brooklyn’s stars, holding Alec’s sleeping body to his chest, watching the tension Alec had worn that night disappear from his face as the safety of Magnus’ embrace pulled him under. He remembers watching over him for the longest time, unwilling to move out of a need to allow him rest, mulling over all the hidden troubles that had provoked Alec’s panic attack. He remembers the realization that Alec, in his worst moment, had needed him. Not his cock, not his snark, not the food and drink he conjured, the carefree vacation from Alec’s soldier life that he provided. Just him. And Magnus hadn’t really stood a chance against it.

Fittingly, him is the only answer he has for Catarina now.

Later, he sends a fire message to Ragnor. It only seems fair to update him after benefiting from his wise counsel.

I followed your advice, to the happiest of success.
Thank you, my dear friend.

MB

A reply comes in the hours that follow, while Alec is drowsily running his blunt nails along Magnus’ thigh beneath the sheets. It lights up the midnight dark of Magnus’ bedroom so unexpectedly, his Shadowhunter jolts in his sleepiness where he lies spooned behind him.

Only took you 300 years!
You’ve made a proud friend of me.
Forever your cheerleader,
Ragnar

The tears that prick his eyes don’t hurt like they used to. Not with Alec, his lover - his love - breathing softly at his nape.

Their first date is an attempt at starting off nice and easy; a simple evening at the Hunter’s Moon. They share a basket of deep fried calamari rings and potato wedges as they trade amusing stories. Magnus offers the tale of how he once bullshitted his way into the captaincy of a rogue pirate ship, then artfully shaped the Neanderthal crewmen into gentlemen and sent them on to lives of honest work and true love, purely to prove Ragnar it could be done. Proudly so, it has his Shadowhunter reared back in his chair with a hand covering his face, trying not to blast the other bar patrons with his laughter.

Alec admits he has to dig deep for a story of equal entertainment, which is ultimately the story of how he, his sister and his Parabatai accidentally got drunk for the first time at a Seelie café and spent the rest of the evening seeing sounds and hearing colors. The adventure had apparently ended on a high note, with Maryse Lightwood grounding them all for six months when all three of them were caught streaking naked through the Institute. Magnus almost snorts his martini through his nose as he fixates on the mental image of Alec, New York’s newest Shadow World leader, running and screaming naked in front of his peers.

In hearing the story, he learns Alec’s confidence is tied up primarily in where he believes he excels – in his work and in the bedroom – and while he’s possessed with the desire to build Alec’s confidence in all areas, he can’t help being charmed by the vulnerability his handsome, sexy Shadowhunter displays in admitting he’s ‘actually pretty boring’. Magnus smiles a secret I love you, bringing their entwined hands to his lips for a kiss, and Alec blushes gratefully when he assures him he’s anything but.

They play a game of billiards, vaguely aware of the bar’s patrons curiously keeping tabs on them. Magnus feigns upset at Alec’s first string of sunk balls, trying for a good-natured hustle. Alec adorably takes the guilt-trip as bait, which allows him the chance to sink a handful of his own – that is until Alec leans against the wall to watch him, innocently sipping his beer with a hand tucked inside the waist of his jeans, just resting where Magnus knows his flat belly gives way to the root of his cock. It’s enough for his mind to waver in its seat, enough that he fails his next shot. Alec wins the round, sinking the rest of his balls with a smirk.

Magnus is gaping in disbelief as Alec slides a hand around to the small of his back, pulling him in for a kiss, “You just hustled me.”

“Yes,” Alec grins, and Magnus grows hard right there, pressed against his Shadowhunter’s hip, “I did.”
Their regular bedroom competitiveness takes exciting shape in the following rounds, especially with the winner’s terms being that of any dare fulfilled. Magnus wins two rounds and earnestly goes for a third, because he’s nothing if not competitive. Unfortunately, Alec wins the rest, which is how Magnus ends up standing in his bedroom doorway, dressed in bland, black Shadowhunter-style clothes and wielding a plastic sword he found among the party costumes at the back of his closet.

“Oh god,” Alec grimaces from the bed, apparently regretting everything, “I hate it so much.”

“State your name and clan, Downworlder!” Magnus bellows into the room, brandishing said sword above his head with all the gusto he can muster, and Alec rolls across the bed with the kind of unrestrained, full-bellied laughter he’d been missing at the bar, “BY THE ANGEL!”

“We don’t sound like that!” Alec shrieks mid-fit, “Please take it off!”

“I kinda like it,” he cocks his hip out, flipping and catching the sword, “I get why your kind are so into yourselves. The ego alone is intoxicating. Raaaah! Do as I say, heathen!”

The rest of the night snowballs into shenanigans. Alec almost takes an eye out trying on Magnus’ eyeliner, and the perfect coat of cobalt blue polish on his nails ends up brutalized and smeared on Magnus’ naked ass when he fucks Alec on the closet floor. It’s when they’re laying naked, sweaty and curled together in the mess of Magnus’ costume pile that Alec gets around to asking what dare he would have made him complete, had he won.

“Something naughty,” Magnus smirks, “Like wearing a butt plug at work in front of all your Shadowhunter friends without them knowing.”

“I probably would have enjoyed that way too much,” Alec laughs with him, fingers reaching out to fix Magnus’ hair, “You would have had to relieve me.”

Magnus groans at the lost opportunity, loathing the subpar billiard performance that cost him, “Safe to say I have a new fantasy at the top of my list.”

Alec begins gently tracing his features, grinning, “I’ll do one of yours if you do one of mine.”

“Deal,” Magnus chuckles, stroking a knuckle down the length of Alec’s soft cock. His Shadowhunter twitches from it, then leans down to smooch at his bare shoulder, mouth curved in a smile, “Name your terms, pretty boy.”

Alec stretches onto his back with a deep, pleased sigh, though Magnus can see a hint of hesitancy in the way he side-eyes him. Whatever it is, Magnus is intrigued.

“I’ve never barebacked,” Alec confesses, closing his eyes. A visible shiver runs through him, “I’ve never blown my load in someone’s bare ass. I don’t know how it feels to have someone come inside me. I think about it when I jerk off and I always come so fucking hard. And it’s always been some faceless guy I don’t know. But ever since we met, it’s been you.”

He turns to look at him, and the intensity Magnus sees in his eyes makes him quiver with want.

“If you’d be willing,” Alec offers his fantasy on a polite, silver platter for Magnus to take or refuse as he pleases. Though denying him already feels unfathomable, “I’d love to have you fuck me bare. I want to feel you come inside me, without barriers.”

Magnus’ entire body is immediately at a yes, because anything that allows him to get closer to Alec is something he wants to pursue. He groans as his cock begins to fill and lengthen again, and Alec smirks, shifts over to kiss him.
“Got another round in you?”

Magnus shakes his head, too exhausted. The Institute’s wards haven’t been right since the Forsaken attack, so he’d spent the majority of his day stripping and replacing them with new custom upgrades, “Not tonight, boyfriend of mine. And if I’m going to come inside your ass, I’m going to wine and dine it first. I’m nothing if not a gentleman.”

Alec barks a laugh, rolling Magnus on top of him, “Not gonna say no to that.”

“I’m thinking Paris? City of---” Love. He still can’t bring himself to say it, even as Alec begins to rut his hips beneath him. “---first time barebacking?”

His Shadowhunter laughs again, and the vibration shudders Magnus apart in the best of ways. Turns out he does have another round in him, after all. He has all the energy in the world for Alec Lightwood.

I love you. I love you. I love you.

They make a plan for visiting Paris the following weekend. Further discussion on the subject of condomless sex and what to expect has them both abstaining from sex, masturbation and ejaculation of any kind until then. Alec is initially into the idea because he knows he’s going to get what he wants, but he grows increasingly resistant to abstaining as the days begin to pass. Magnus spends a good deal of time trying to keep Alec otherwise occupied, because every touch, every kiss they share threatens to grow into more. They read a lot of books. They do a lot of talking from separate couches. They eat a lot of popcorn while watching a lot of Orange Is The New Black.

Magnus even ends up having to stuff a pillow between them every night Alec chooses to stay over, because their hips have minds of their own. He’d learned that the hard way when he’d woken up to Alec grinding his perfect little ass against him. And that had been Tuesday. He’d almost given in, rutting between his cheeks like a man in heat, but then he’d thought about how much better it was going to be if they stuck to the plan, made some argument about this being for the sake of fulfilling Alec’s fantasy, and he’d thrown himself, gasping and yelling, into an ice-cold shower.

By the time Saturday rolls around, it’s surprisingly easier to take their time. Alec leaves a four-page instruction sheet with Isla and nods off work early, and then they portal through to Magnus’ Paris apartment, a spacious fifth floor with an impressive 180 degree view of the Seine river. Alec steps out of one of its many windows and walks the 13 metre long balcony, whistling at the broad sight of the pink sunset.

“You sure like your balconies.”

“Must be the feline in me,” Magnus smirks, “I love a high view.”

They settle in before dressing for their dinner reservations at L’Ambroisie. Alec has been wearing more formal fitting jackets and pants with his new position, but nothing like the navy-black trim-fit tuxedo he wears when he walks out of the bedroom. His hips appear more narrow, his shoulders wider. He even looks taller. Magnus almost, almost forgets how to make words happen.

“Good fucking god.”

Alec lifts the back of his jacket and gives him a view of his ass; pert and absolutely spankable in the glove-like fit of his pants, “Ready to be wined and dined, Mister Bane.”
"Did you wait all week to use that line?"

Alec winks, snickering at himself as he adjusts his cufflinks, "You bet I did."

Magnus grins when he should be laughing. His heart pulses where his cock usually would. His customary witty quip gets swallowed and digested in the overwhelming fondness warming his belly. *I fucking love you, Alec Lightwood.*

They portal to Sainte-Catherine Park and walk the six blocks to the restaurant like regular Mundanes, strolling the streets and enjoying the sights and smells. Alec gently swings their joined hands between them as they walk, his other hand casually in his pocket, looking the most relaxed Magnus has ever seen him. Magnus tells him he’s beautiful because he’s unable *not* to, and Alec blushes, returns the praise in his own flirtatious way, dreadfully unfamiliar in receiving compliments. He moves their joined hands behind his back, forcing Magnus to half-embrace him, and Magnus melts under the soft kiss Alec drops on his waiting mouth. Blissfully happy.

At L’Ambroisie, he takes great delight in watching Alec experience new food and Michelin Star service for the first time. His wild curiosity and enjoyment of the finer things Magnus can offer is worth all of the cold showers, all of the late-night book reading, all of the dick-pinching and hand slapping. The dining room’s refinement has them chatting quietly as they enjoy their meals - rich Poulet Bresse with tender truffle ravioli - and the quiet, knowing little smiles they share as they moan between bites of chocolate tart feels more like foreplay than anything they’ve ever done before.

After dinner, Magnus portals them both to see the Eiffel Tower, because his Shadowhunter has only ever seen photos. Then they portal to the *Louvre* to view a handful of the galleries larger halls, where the people are less frequent. Antonio Canova’s marble statue of Cupid and Psyche catches Alec’s eye like Magnus believed it would, and Alec drags him into the large room to observe it. He dutifully reads the plaque’s information, then his eyes excitedly travel Cupid’s wings, his bow and quiver, how his body is curved over his lover, how she is stretched back to receive his kiss. Magnus can see that it resonates with him.

“Do you know the tale of Cupid and Psyche?” Magnus asks. Alec shakes his head, so he readies himself for the story, “Psyche was the youngest daughter of a King and Queen, and largely worshipped as a goddess for her kindness and beauty. Venus, Cupid’s mother, didn’t much appreciate being upstaged, so she ordered her son - the God of Love - to make Psyche attract the lowliest of humans; murderers, rapists, people that would cause her harm or worse. He agreed, because he’d been made to judge her before he knew her.”

Alec’s gaze now seems a little more careful as he takes the statue in; as if he, too, has judged it before knowing its true nature.

“But when he met her, he fell in love,” Magnus smiles, “After she was abandoned by her family, Cupid visited her every night in the shadows where they made love. Psyche’s natural curiosity led her to seek his face, and when he realized his identity had been learned against his will, he felt betrayed and ran. She went in search of him, but Venus punished her with many terrible trials, one of which led her to the Underworld. There, Psyche was tasked with retrieving a flask that she wasn’t allowed to open. But her curiosity got the better of her again, and when she opened it, the vapors dropped her into a deathly sleep. Fearing her dead, Cupid rushed to her and touched her with the tip of his arrow. The gods saw his devotion and granted her immortality so they could be together. Because of the ordeals she endured in finding her happiness, she was named Goddess of the Soul.”

Alec quietly clears his throat, voice almost hoarse when he responds, “So she was treated like garbage for no reason.”
“Quite,” is Magnus’ reply, “Such is the way of the world sometimes.”

“He loved her, but he did nothing for her,” Alec breathes hollowly. Magnus senses the story has resonated a little more than anticipated, because it doesn’t sound like Alec is talking about the statue anymore, “and she went through so much.”

“Hey, there is no perfect story,” Magnus squeezes their entwined fingers, “The tales of Gods and Goddesses are representative of greater things. Eros - Cupid - the God of Love represents the unconditional heart. Psyche, Goddess of the Soul, represents the ordeals the soul must go through to find happiness. They’re concepts, not people.”

Alec visibly shakes it off, “Well, it hit me.”

“Art does that. It’s gloriously open to interpretation,” Magnus chuckles, but he sees the struggle on his Shadowhunter’s face. He can only assume Alec had seen the wings, the weapon and the unfair prejudice and automatically put himself in Cupid’s role. Magnus wonders if perhaps Alec has placed him in the role of his great, mistreated lover.

“You’re not Cupid, darling. You’re a good man,” Magnus tells him, pulling him close. Alec glances at him, tentative and uncertain, and that simply won’t do, “And your bow and quiver is also much, much bigger.”

That does the trick, because Alec’s amusement breaks him into a much coveted grin.

Magnus nudges him with his elbow and starts pulling him away, “Besides, Psyche wasn’t great either. She didn’t fall in love with him; she fell in love with his cock. And no cock is worth all that sacrifice.”

Alec’s roarous laughter echoes through the hall, enough that a couple of people turn to scowl, and they quickly, quietly chuckle their way out before portalling back to the apartment. They have to bend their knees to squeeze themselves into the spa bath together, but Magnus can’t find a reason to be upset with Alec’s wet, warm body in his arms. They spend an hour lazily washing each other between sips of champagne and mouthfuls of chocolate-dipped strawberries, chatting and flirting and laughing outrageously as they trade stories of their worst sexual encounters.

The mood grows ever more serious when they talk about their first experiences. Magnus can scarcely remember the first woman he slept with, nor the first man. Only that he was young, selfish, and profoundly unhappy. He’d heard of men using sex as just another emotionless vice to deal with their personal plights, and he’d naively thought himself a true man for having accomplished the same.

Alec’s first experiences hurt to listen to, if only because of how similar they sound in their disconnect. Repressed and deeply unhappy, Alec had sought out sexual encounters with strangers in a bid to have power over his own life. The Seelie man he’d sucked off in an alleyway. The Mundane man he’d fucking, because he didn’t trust anyone in his own world not to screw him over. The other Mundane man he’d let fuck him, because he knew he could overpower him if things took a bad turn. The Mundanes he’d practised on until he’d established a seamless exit routine. The Downworlders that made him feel both powerful and dirty in his sexuality. How sex had only ever been a means to get off, so he could carry on with his life and not have to think about what was missing.

Magnus tries to make up for all of it as he rolls Alec across the bed, kissing the length of his body from head to toe. He pushes him onto his belly and presses his mouth between his cheeks, licking and sucking his rim wet and loose until his Shadowhunter is grinding helplessly against his face. Alec manoeuvres him around so that he’s positioned much the same, and then they set in on each other with mouths and fingers, finally letting their bodies do as they desire.
Magnus attempts to breathe through the pleasure of Alec’s tongue fucking him, lifting his erection between his lips. Alec groans when he hits the back of Magnus’ throat, and Magnus moans around his cock when Alec retaliates with a wet, curling finger inside him. They match each other, sensation for sensation in a dirty little game to wind each other up, until they’re both squirming in each other’s holds and their orgasms are in reach.

He rolls off, mindful of where his limbs land, then climbs over Alec’s panting body for a kiss. Alec’s thighs part for his hips, and Magnus holds him by the back of the head, brings his mouth up to him and he works to replace the many awful kisses his Shadowhunter has endured in his pursuit of self. The unenthusiastic ones. The ones with too much tongue, too much spit. The ones he didn’t feel in his knees. The ones he didn’t feel in his cock. Magnus kisses him for all the kisses he never received when he wanted them. For the ones he deserved. For the ones he didn’t think he was allowed. And he kisses him like it’s Alec’s first, as if he’s someone who is loved and desired and not simply a receptacle for someone else’s pleasure. *I love you. I love you. I love you, Alec Lightwood.*

Alec wrenches his mouth away, breathless and still, holding Magnus’ hips away from him, “Shit. Give me a minute.”

“Are you close?”

“Very.”

“How close?”

“Thinking-of-the-Consul-in-the-shower close,” Alec blurs, screwing his eyes shut, “It’s been a long week. And you looking like my personal jerk-off fantasy and kissing me like that is not helping.”

Magnus grins, “Where’d all that natural stamina go, Shadowhunter?”

“Please don’t tease me. I will seriously come all over you.”

Magnus laughs.

“Don’t laugh either!”

There’s only one thing for it, then. He’d had plans for Alec’s little fantasy evening, and while they’re not exactly happening the order he intended, it doesn’t mean they can’t. So he shifts up, snaps his fingers for a little extra help, and then murmurs deviously into Alec’s ear.

“You might want to do yourself a favour and stop thinking of the Consul. Right now.”

With that, he sits back on Alec’s hips - and in the process, takes his Shadowhunter’s hard, naked cock into his body in one, smooth slide. Alec rears off the bed in shock, eyes blown wide, and Magnus shoves him back to the mattress, hands settling over his chest.

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“Relax,” Magnus soothes him, spreading his knees as he adjusts. Alec’s cock is pressed against his prostate, and the pressure is a pleasure he feels the need to chase, “I’m giving this to you. I want you to take it.”

He brings Alec’s big, beautiful hands up to his mouth, kissing each palm. And then he’s sliding them down his own naked body, luxuriating in the feel of them, before setting them on his gently rolling hips. Alec’s gaze is soul-baring, stunned, awed and blazing with unabashed want as Magnus starts to ride him, working back and forth between tight swivels of his hips.

It feels perfectly natural to have this, to have Alec buried deep inside of him, thick and curved and
made to fit. He feels a rush of adrenaline, cascading through him like a waterfall as the core of him, the core of Alec, join and join and join again like lock and key, key and lock, made whole with every gentle thrust they make toward each other. The sensation alone of receiving him, of taking Alec’s body into his own is so much more intense with nothing between them, intense enough that he can feel Alec thicken, just as his eyes slide closed once again.

“Magnus,” Alec gasps, head falling back against the sheets, neck straining, “I’m---”

“Hold on to me,” Magnus pants, slowing his undulations, “Gonna fuck it out of you nice and slow.”

Alec’s fingers are almost painful on his hips, but Magnus ignores them in favor of Alec’s throbbing length, how it gives way to a steady pulse. He breathes deep, drawing his own pleasure up through his lungs as Alec comes beneath him, and he holds on as his Shadowhunter follows his own instinctual need to fuck and unload as deeply as he can. Alec’s orgasm is a long, hot balm on his insides, easing each new slide of his cock, and he greedily welcomes him up into his arms when he sits up for a kiss.

His beautiful Shadowhunter breathes against his neck in wet, ragged gasps, shaking when his orgasm finally subsides. The strength in Alec’s arms when he wraps them around him is toe-curling in its pleasure, and Magnus snuggles into it, full of burning love for everything he is.

“How’s it feel?” He brushes his hands through Alec’s hair, palm settling on his nape.

“Feels amazing,” Alec groans, nuzzling kisses on his neck, shoulder, collar. He shudders as Magnus clenches around him, “You always feel amazing, but this...”

Magnus draws him into a lazy kiss, “Still want me to fuck you?”

He can see how Alec quickly calculates how it’s going to work, how he hasn’t entirely ruined their evening with his short fuse, “Yeah. Yes. Definitely.”

Magnus guides him down to the mattress with another kiss, carefully lifting enough for Alec’s spent length to slide free. Then he’s holding Alec's knees toward his chest, pressing a finger - then two - inside him, easing the way with a pulse of magic than has Alec arching his back.

Magnus runs his tongue along the slick underside of his lover’s softened cock, and he thrills to the sound of Alec’s filthy moan when he shares the taste between their lips. He plants his fists on either side of Alec’s ribs, lining up, stealing another kiss because he can’t seem to get enough. And then he’s groaning, long and low, as his own erection presses inside his Shadowhunter’s tight, silken heat - just as Alec’s come begins to trickle free.

“Oh fuck,” he gasps, confused on which sensation to focus on. He presses all the way in, and more of Alec’s seed spills down his taint, “Your come is dripping out of me.”

Alec's fingers reach to feel it, sliding through the mess. He moans into Magnus’ next kiss, “So fucking hot.”

“Stick them inside me,” Magnus whispers, then growls and fucks back onto them when Alec obliges, two fingers deep, “Yes.”

Magnus begins to thrust, loving the way Alec drives him deeper into himself. His Shadowhunter is gasping between lazy smiles, eyes closed to the new experience of feeling him inside without a layer separating them. Magnus has fucked plenty without protection before, but Alec still feels new and exciting. He can only imagine how Alec feels, having it for the first time.
“Your dick feels so fucking good,” Alec groans now, “Harder.”

“You’ll feel it better if I go slow.”

“You’ve already given me everything,” His handsome Shadowhunter stares up at him, dreamy and amorous, “I want you to fuck me as hard as you want to.” He nips at Magnus’ mouth, gaze hungry, “As hard as you need to.”

Magnus groans, “You keep talking like that and I’m not gonna last.”

“Good,” Alec grins.

He thrusts a little harder, and Alec’s grunts, pleased, “You want my come that bad, Shadowhunter?”

“Fuck yeah I do.”

Magnus can feel Alec’s fingers slide deeper, searching, and his own eyes slide closed when Alec finds what he’s looking for. He can’t help the moan that shudders out of him, “I’ll give you what you want. Whatever you want. God Alec, I’m so close.”

“That’s it, fuck me,” Alec groans, leaning up for a kiss. Their mouths brush several times, knocked out of sync by their fucking, until Magnus shifts to connect them, “Give me your come.”

Magnus fucks harder, rocking in the cradle of Alec’s hips, encouraged by his thrusting fingers. His orgasm rushes forward, “Ah fuck.”

“Oh god yeah, come in me.”

“Alec...”

“Come in me,” Alec demands, “Please.”

It drives him to the peak where it dangles him over the edge. He’s suddenly hit all at once - by Alec’s long fingers inside him, the tight, hot clutch of his ass on his throbbing cock, the travelling lips at his throat, the molten glow of connection in his chest - and then he’s released, his orgasm punching out from his belly, hips surging forward, “Alec! Ohhh.”

“Oh my g--- I feel you,” Alec cries out, fingers digging into Magnus’ hips as if to hold him deep, “Fuck. Magnus.”

Magnus fucks him freely, his seed shooting into wet heat in place of latex. His body fights to rend him empty of it, to give Alec everything he’s clutching him for, and he trembles, pushes, presses as deep as he can go until the rush stops and his primal urges return the reins. Magnus’ length pulses, offering the last dregs of his orgasm, and he leans down to kiss Alec’s damp chest. Alec works his cock with his sphincter until his elbows give out, and then they’re just a messy, come-filled pile of sweaty bodies trying to catch their breath.

Alec pants from underneath him, legs locking about his waist while he softly bites the expanse of Magnus’ neck. Magnus kisses him, deep and tender as he carefully pulls out, and sits back on his haunches to get a view of Alec’s slick cleft, pressing a thumb against the rim of his hole until his come oozes free. He groans and files away the image. My Shadowhunter, full of my seed. Hell.

His Shadowhunter starts giggling, and his smile is wide and satisfied as he gushes, “That was wild.”

“Was it everything you wanted?” Magnus asks, because it was so far beyond his own expectation.
He only hopes it was everything Alec was looking for.

“Even better,” Alec’s smile softens, his lovely, hazel, bottle-glass eyes crinkling at the corners, “You’re my favourite person in the whole world, Magnus Bane.”

Magnus sinks down onto Alec’s body - sweaty skin on sweaty skin - and kisses him in a way that all but shouts it from the rooftops: *I didn’t think I could love you more. But I do.*

The next month passes in little slices of heaven. Alec stays over almost nightly, save for a few instances where he’s needed late at home. Magnus shifts his sleeping schedule to accommodate him, because the moments they get first thing in the morning are among his favourite. The first week of forcing himself up early had been a *nightmare*, and copious amounts of black coffee and grumbling to Catarina had been the only way to survive it. But as he adapted, he’d had no choice but to accept the benefits - the rise in his own productivity, happier clients, a regular tai chi practice, a calmer mind. He’s always stubbornly forced others to his schedule, because putting himself first had been his longest running habit. But seeing Alec’s dedication to those dependant on him invites Magnus to take notice of the great many people who wait for him to get his act together on a daily basis, and it makes him want to do better.

The best benefit of all: having a gorgeous, half-naked Shadowhunter man taking up space in his kitchen. Being offered dreamy morning kisses between the plating up of perfectly scrambled eggs and delicious french toast. Magnus hasn’t felt this spoiled in years.

They also spend their free evenings trying different restaurants around New York, or travelling to different pockets of the earth when time allows. They portal after midnight to eat fresh Belgium waffles in Brussels’ morning sun. They pack a picnic and watch the sunrise over the citadel in Cairo. They gorge themselves on street food in Mumbai. They shiver and laugh through drinks at London’s Ice Bar. Magnus takes Alec to Tokyo, where the cherry blossoms are beginning to show, and they wander the night markets, have dinner at the Skytree and spend the evening making love on the numerous surfaces of their terrace suite at the Palace Hotel. Alec looks so rested and relaxed when they portal home in the morning that he almost wants to steal him away for good. The Omamori talisman Alec gifts him - and that he chose something that would protect him - has Magnus falling ever deeper in love.

The difference in his demeanor when Alec returns after a hectic day at the Institute is staggering. Magnus makes the mistake of pointing it out.

“Yeah, well, I don’t get the luxury of freelance work, Magnus,” Alec sneers, “You don’t understand.”

“Excuse you. Don’t take your shitty day out on me,” he says, clocking Alec’s anger with surprise, “I understand perfectly well how hard you work. I’m not saying you shouldn’t. I am saying you’ll run yourself into the ground if you don’t find a balance.”

“Maybe I wouldn’t be so goddamn tired all the time if you weren’t taking me out every night,” Alec snaps. Magnus doesn’t even have the opportunity to be upset, because the real issue comes to light soon enough, “And I’ve run myself into the ground my entire life. That’s just the way it is for the gay shadowhunter guy.”
Magnus takes a moment to calm down and prevent himself from freaking out, because this isn’t about Alec being mad at him, or not wanting him. Alec is simply up against battles that he doesn’t get to see. So when his Shadowhunter shrugs him off and walks back out with a frustrated *I don’t need this today*, Magnus lets him go. They’ve been so in each other’s faces for weeks now, moving on pure impulse, that some space is probably smart. His only worry is what space might create between them.

He spends the evening alone doing a stocktake of his spell supplies, then takes to the couch with a book, a blanket and a summoned cup of the best hot chocolate in New York. His heart hurts as he thinks about Alec being elsewhere, and as he thinks of their blissful time in Japan only the night before. But he’s stubborn enough to wait him out. Because there are few things he won’t put up with, and being unfairly stonewalled is one of them.

After a few hours of unsuccessfully entertaining himself, he puts the book back on its shelf, sends his empty cup away and goes to drag himself to bed. His heart leaps when there’s a tentative knock at the front door.

His Shadowhunter stands on the other side looking heavy, and remorseful, and not at all like he enjoyed their few hours apart.

He can relate.

“I’m sorry,” Alec says.

“For?”

At the very least, his Shadowhunter has the decency to look ashamed, “Being mad at you, when you’re the only person I’m not actually mad at.”

Magnus feels awful - not for making Alec work his way back into his good graces, but for whatever it is at home that’s got his back up. “I forgive you.”

The way Alec instantly appears less afraid is nothing short of heartbreaking, “Can I please get a hug?”

He doesn’t think twice before he’s pulling Alec inside the apartment and standing up on his toes, arms winding around Alec’s neck. The relief that comes from the desperate strength of Alec’s returned embrace is mighty, and it has his hands gentling up and down the ridges of his shoulder blades in soothing strokes. Whatever is going on at the Institute is hurting him, and Magnus’ instinct is to cast a spell, to heal, to fix. But there is no magic for these kinds of things.

Instead, he whispers, “Talk to me.”

Alec spends several long moments just breathing, just holding on, squeezing him like a lifeline until his comfort seeps in enough to soften him. Magnus thinks mournfully: *What have they done to you, my love?*

“I’m just tired,” Alec murmurs by way of an explanation, but something makes him relent, “and I announced some new policies today, and it didn’t go well. Seven people requested transfers.”

Magnus squeezes him a little harder, wonders if the news of their relationship is finally beginning to cause negative press, “*Good.* If they won’t back you up, you don’t need them in your Institute.”

Alec’s answer is miserable, “You don’t even know what the policies are.”
“I don’t need to,” he declares, without hesitation, “You earned your position. There’s a reason you were promoted and they weren’t. You know what you’re doing.”

Alec shudders against him, arms and hands shifting on Magnus’ back as if to press him ever closer, and his mouth kisses at Magnus’ neck, the soft skin behind his ear, his temple in the fierceness of gratitude. His voice is soft like morning silence, and overwhelmed with emotion when he says the same three words Magnus has been keeping to himself for a whole month.

“I love you.”

Magnus’ entire being stills, his focus narrowed down to the sound of Alec’s words. He hears the ease in which his Shadowhunter shapes them, learned and practised and precise as a man familiar with using them, despite what is so clearly an unexpected choice to share them tonight. Magnus’ heart, and its slow dance of pure, unadulterated happiness, lifts in response.

He doesn’t think he sounds nearly as eloquent. His words gust out of him like wind on autumn leaves, and snag in his throat like vines grown over the course of a wait too long.

“I love you.”

Alec lifts his head to look him in the eye. His gaze is naked with the faintest disbelief, as if he’d only hoped and not believed. Magnus wonders if Alec sees the same in his own eyes; if his hope and disbelief even after all his centuries of love and loss and routine heartbreak is blindingly obvious. If perhaps the power of just how deep Alec has become embedded in him is written on his face.

His Shadowhunter smiles his devastating smile, “Yeah?”

And Magnus presses his forehead up against his, nuzzling closer with his own, “Yeah.”

The kiss they lean into then is soft and reverent, blissfully unaware of time, content to be still as they breathe each other in. Three months ago, Magnus didn’t want the complications of being near him. Now, he refuses to imagine a life without him.

He only hopes time will be generous.
Ten

Chapter Summary

Alec cleans house, gains a few allies, and pushes his agenda for a better future.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late chapter, fam. The muse is fickle and does as she pleases. BUT WE MADE IT.

This chapter is brought to you by excessive watching of Korean dramas, obscene procrastination, sleepless nights, a large ingesting of herbal tea, a pile of laundry that refuses to fold itself and the entire "King Of Everything" album by Jinjer on repeat, particularly the track "I Speak Astronomy."

As always, you can also follow me on Tumblr and Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing to yourselves in your own realms - or rage screaming at me - the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

Four more Shadowhunters request transfers over the course of the following week. It makes a total of eleven people opting out of his Institute. Except now, he’s glad to see them go.

Alec’s new no-tolerance policy for discrimination within the Institute had been met with mixed reactions. There were many who had applauded the move, either because they’d been residents of the New York Institute long enough to watch Alec grow up, or they were part of the newer generation, which was generally more susceptible to thinking beyond the prejudices of their ancestors. There were others who were quite happy with the way things were, and thought he was trying to suppress their freedoms. And there were those who were barely tolerating him as a leader and were ready to make that one foot out the door into two. Especially following his announcement that all Shadowhunters were to undergo compulsory training focused on conflict resolution. Training that would include speakers from the local Downworld - a plan that had been developed during his new weekly cabinet meetings with Luke, Raphael, Magnus and Meliorn. Alec had spent a good hour trying to calm everyone down after that one.

Talking with Magnus had reaffirmed what he already knew beneath the harrowing disappointment - that he needs to surround himself with people who want to work towards the same future he hopes to build. And anyone who believes preserving their prejudices is more important than trying to overcome them is best cut loose before he starts making big moves. It was the same sentiment echoed by the Head of the Vancouver Institute, Madison Graylaw, who had surprised him with a congratulatory phone call weeks ago and remained a regular contact ever since.

“Your’e going to have people that disagree,” she’d advised him, speaking from eight years of experience in her seat, “Disagreements mean you’re making progress.”

And he knows. It just sucks. He’d expected to face opposition, because the outdated views of his
people are both generations old and nurtured early enough to make it harder to question later. But having to face eleven of his peers as they flatly refused to see beyond their own scope was daunting. Bulldozing his way through the criticism isn’t going to work this time.

He looks up when Underhill raps his knuckles on the door, “Do you have a moment, sir?”

“Sure,” he sighs, tossing his fresh stack of transfer papers on the desk. *Good riddance,* Magnus had said. *Your big dreams don’t need tiny minds.* The thought, and the memory of Magnus running his fingers through his hair as he’d said it, immediately makes him feel better. He gets to have that now, whenever he wants. He gets to tell Magnus he loves him whenever he wants. He gets to hear it back. No amount of angry Shadowhunters can pull him down from those clouds yet.

Underhill tilts his head in query, squinting at him in thought. He must be smiling like a lunatic again. It’s becoming a bit of a problem.

“Anyway. I wanted to give you this,” Underhill hands him a printed sheet, and Alec tries to remain calm as his eyes pick up two words. Words he’s all too familiar with seeing lately.

*Transfer Request.* He glares.

“No,” His Head of Security laughs, reaching over to tap a finger at the name listed, “External request, sir. *Incoming* transfer.”

Then Alec’s heartbeat goes through the roof. Because not only is someone interested in relocating to his Institute instead of wanting to escape it, but the Shadowhunter filing the request is---

“Hawkstorm? *Samael Hawkstorm?*” Alec has to physically work at closing his jaw because *holy fuck what,* “What does he want with my Institute?”

“He wants to transfer here, sir,” Underhill replies, clearly taken aback by his outburst, “He wants to work for you.”

“*Samael Hawkstorm.*”

Underhill raises an eyebrow, “It’s all listed on the form, sir.”

*Samael Hawkstorm in my Institute,* he panics, suddenly filled to the ears with the overwhelming nostalgia of childhood hero worship and admiration. *Samael Fucking Hawkstorm.* The guy who had only been seventeen when he’d led Alicante’s battalion against the demon scourge of ‘99. The Samael Hawkstorm who killed his first Greater Demon at 15, then went on to kill enough of them that he now teaches seminars. Alec had seen him once at an assembly and was so starstruck that he couldn’t speak. The guy had single-handedly solved the Romanian possession cases back in 2007, the same possession cases that, left to worsen, would have likely led to the closest thing to an Apocalypse their kind has ever seen. He was the Shadowhunter *Jace* wanted to be when he grew up.

Underhill is staring at him like he’s worried for Alec’s mentality, “I...didn’t mean to cause some sort of existential crisis.”

“No,” Alec snaps out of it, “Just processing. Or trying to. Am I speaking or thinking right now?”

“Speaking, sir.”

“Okay,” he flushes, scratching the back of his head as he skim-reads the transfer request, as if to make sure it’s not a prank, “He’s the guy my generation looked up to, y’know? Just trying not to
freak out.”

Underhill seems vaguely amused as he watches him plonk down onto the edge of his desk, knees weak.

Alec sighs, “I just---why---? ”

“You’ll have to ask him yourself,” Underhill smiles, “But surely it shouldn’t be too surprising that people like you, sir.”

Alec deadpans, “I have eleven people transferring out of my Institute. Your argument is a little loose.”

“Eh,” Underhill shrugs, completely unphased as always. The Institute is often home to a lot of high-tension situations, but the way he calms and settles people is one of his greatest unsung talents. Alec really lucked out in hiring him, “So a handful of people don’t like it. You have a lot more that are willing to stay. And Sam is probably not the only one who will want to jump onboard. Just give it time. I, for one, am very grateful to be here.”

“Grateful? Why?”

Underhill shrugs again, but this time it speaks of something important that he’d rather brush off, “You’re different, sir.”

Alec folds his arms, a defensive response to a word many others have used to insult him. But his Head of Security is a kind man, so he chooses to listen where he’d normally shut down.

“You live by a set of values that too many of us have forgotten about,” Underhill continues, prompted by Alec’s waiting silence, “And in doing that, you’ve made it a little easier for me to be who I am. I’m not the only Shadowhunter out there who chooses to live his personal life quietly. It’s just the way it’s always been. And I know it hasn’t been fair to you. But you’ve inspired people, sir. You’ve inspired me. And I have no doubt you’re going to inspire others with what you’re trying to do here. So when I say that I’m here and I’m happy, that’s in no small part because of you.”

Alec’s hands fall to grip the desk edge beneath him. Underhill’s sexual inclinations aren’t surprising, because he’d picked that up in his first week. He’d seen the man politely pat Chelsea Stonemare’s shoulder whenever she eagerly presented him with something he needed. He’s seen the way he handles a seraph dagger, which is - if Alec is being honest - borderline sinful. And whenever Alec proudly proclaims his relationship with Magnus to the entire Institute with a bit of flirting or touching or the occasional gentle kiss goodbye, there’s always some deep, faraway wistfulness in Underhill’s watchful eyes.

What is surprising is the word Underhill uses - inspired - like Alec’s long-winded roadmap to keeping his own sanity has meant something positive to someone else. He’s only been trying to survive. Selfishly, he’s only been hoping to acquire some semblance of happiness for himself. He certainly doesn’t think he’s an inspiration.

“So yeah, it’s gonna take a minute, because our people are stubborn in our ways. But they’re adjusting, sir. Trust me,” Underhill nods, encouragingly, ”What you’re doing here has meaning. Just keep your head up and do what you’ve always done. Be you.”

Underhill doesn’t stick around after that, content to have said his piece and leave.

“Hey,” Alec calls out, and Underhill turns back as he reaches the doorway, “I know it goes without saying...but I’m grateful to have you here, too.”
His Head of Security bows his head and smiles, and his usual gravelly timbre is softly pleased when he responds, “Thank you, sir.”

*Samael Fucking Hawkstorm.*

He’s still obsessing over it when he crosses paths with Jace at the elevator, and his excitement bubbles over when he relays the information to him. He hadn’t expected a huge reaction, but the almost complete lack of acknowledgement on Jace’s face brings his mood right down.

“How are you not yelling about this?” Alec inquires, confused and frustrated, “You were an even bigger fan than *I* was.”

Jace shrugs, “I don’t know, man,” then he flashes a dark, deeply satisfied smirk, “I’m Jace Wayland. Why worship another when I can worship myself, right?”

*God, you’re a dick,* Alec thinks, and he slaps him upside the head for it. Something in Jace’s eyes flashes dangerously, but he soon slides into another smirk when Alec’s grin grows across his face. Alec ends up laughing when Jace playfully shoulder barges him at the elevator wall in retaliation.

Things have been good between them for a while now. Stronger. Jace has been supportive like he hasn’t been in years, as if Alec is the eye of his universe, and it has seen him fall in line and work hard to be a help, instead of a rogue hindrance. His Parabatai is finally allowing him to breathe easy, and the relief is almost overwhelming. There are still many conversations they’ve both been too busy to have, but Alec can’t help but feel he has his best friend back.

Later that night, he tells Magnus the news of Samael Hawkstorm as they lay together in bed. But the reception isn’t any better. Which is annoying, because he wants someone, *anyone,* to be excited with him.

“You have no idea how cool this guy is,” he explains, closing his eyes as Magnus heaves a tired sigh against him, “He’s a total badass. He once killed a Ravenor demon with his bare hands.”

Magnus sighs again, lips an inch away from his mouth, “Darling, I am happy you’re so excited but can you *please* get excited about my fingers in your ass?”

“Yes, sorry. All yours,” he shifts his hips against Magnus’ hand. He pauses. *Just one more,* “It wasn’t your average-sized Ravenor demon, either---”

Magnus removes his fingers from him, and he clenches hard against the emptiness, “Alec---”

“I’m sorry,” he apologizes, hands sliding around Magnus’ warm, naked hips when he rolls on top of him, “Can I just---”

“One more weird little fun fact and then you’re all mine,” his boyfriend sighs *again,* but Alec can see
he’s amused. It’s probably more than he deserves, given the circumstances.

“I’m being a bit much, aren’t I?”

“A little,” Magnus smiles, “But it’s adorable. Now out with it so I can have your full attention.”

Permission acquired, Alec boldly gushes for the final time, brimming with giddy awe, “He wants to work at my Institute, Magnus. Of all the Institute’s in the world, he picked mine.”

Magnus leans down, and Alec feels his smiling lips rest upon his own. He gathers Magnus to him with his thighs when he presses inside him, hot and bare, in one smooth, slow glide, and he arches as Magnus bottoms out. His body almost sighs at the sensation of being so completely full of happiness and love and Magnus’ dick, and it spills from his lips in a long, guttural groan.

“Mr. Hawkstorm clearly has good taste,” Magnus’ eyes fall shut, and when they reopen, they’re blazing with gold, demonic and beautiful and intense with the pleasure of Alec wrapped around him. His hips shift back, then snap forward, and Alec grunts, runs his hands up all of the warm skin across his back, “Now. Focus on me.”

“Okay,” Alec grins, “Have I ever told you about the High Warlock of Brooklyn?”

“Once or twice,” Magnus begins a slow, steady rhythm that has Alec’s mind going fuzzy, and he nuzzles a smirk against the caress Alec brushes across his cheek, “But I don’t mind hearing about him again.”

Alec relaxes against the pillows, gasping as Magnus changes angle. What was I saying? “Mmm he’s...he’s...”

“So many words for your childhood hero,” Magnus hooks Alec’s legs with the crooks of his elbows and plants his fists into the mattress, deliciously rolling his hips into him, “None for me?”

“Fuck,” Alec grabs hold of him as his thrusting gains speed and power, fingertips pressing into ridges of muscle. His eyes blow open when Magnus’ dick starts grazing his prostate, and he flushes hot with euphoria, orgasm already rising. It’s been a long day, and he hasn’t stopped wanting Magnus since the tease of their goodbye kiss that morning, “Fuck, Magnus.”

His Warlock grunts and pounds a little harder between his thighs, “Go on.”

Alec moans, body luxuriating wildly in the deep, rattling punches of Magnus inside him, “He’s---ah---fuck. Ah---”

Magnus leans down to suck at a nipple, eliciting a sharp cry when he gently bites the hard nub between his teeth. Then he runs his mouth along the large Deflect rune on Alec’s neck, bites that too when Alec grips him by the hair.

Magnus sounds awfully smug between his own breathlessness, murmuring into his ear, “I’m listening.”

Alec knows he’s not going to last long, because he can already feel his own erection drooling helplessly between their mashed bodies. Samael Hawkstorm is but a mere figment in the blurry background of his thoughts, because everything else - his head, his heart, his gut, his groin, even the clammy backs of his knees rubbing along Magnus’ arms - is lost in the friction, in the heat of his pleasure, in the overwhelming, ever growing magic of his heart’s expansion every moment he realizes Magnus is not only a man that knows him but loves him.
Everything inside him yells Magnus’ name from the highest of peaks, unashamed and unrelenting. He’s never had a lover like Magnus, all-consuming and passionate. He’s never met anyone that makes him so unafraid to feel so much. Never in a million years did he believe he’d have someone like Magnus all to himself; a man seemingly plucked straight from his dreams, the fantasies of a future he didn’t think he could have.

Samael Hawkstorm may be a childhood hero, but Magnus is the love Alec imagined while listening to childhood fairytales. Magnus is the love Alec secretly yearned for in all the wrong places. Magnus is the love he mourned when he chose to pursue career and public service over the sad pangs in his heart.

Magnus has always been what he hoped for most.

“Fuck I love you,” is all he can manage as his orgasm builds, builds, builds and crests, and his throat grows tight, eyes wetting at the corners, “I love you so much.”

Magnus drops Alec’s legs and abandons all finesse as he lays over him, hips desperately jutting forward, twitching and pulsing and gasping against his mouth as their bodies give way to carnal instinct. Alec cups Magnus’ handsome face with a palm, holds the other over his throat, and he undulates beneath him as if to coax Magnus’ come into himself.

“Alec, god…”

He feels the heat of Magnus’ release blooming within himself, and just the thought of being allowed this, of getting to have this whenever they make love - that he gets to make love with a man like Magnus at all - has his own orgasm erupting hotly between them. Magnus’ breath gusts across his lips, hands framing Alec’s face, almost whimpering as Alec’s body seizes and bears down in its throes, and then they’re kissing and clutching each other, rocking together like they aren’t quite ready for it to be over.

Their breath is heavy in each other’s mouths as the high tapers off into contentment, as it always does. Alec can feel Magnus’ moan hit the back of his own throat when their tongues rub, feels Magnus’ pulse like a butterfly against his palm when their lips finally part. Alec takes to sliding his hands along the strong expanse of his back as they catch their breath, and Alec can feel himself smiling. His boyfriend really is like a giant cat sometimes.

Magnus tongues Alec’s lower lip, sucks it with his plush mouth, then kisses him again. He smiles tiredly, echoing a variation of words Alec has used before, “In all the dimensions of the universe, you are my favourite person.”

Alec’s stomach flutters. Magnus definitely said it better. Magnus always says things better.

“Still no words for me?” His Warlock chuckles, body pleasantly heavy above him.

“I never have words for you,” Alec tells him, soft and sincere, gently stroking a knuckle at the edge of Magnus’ melting gaze, his cheeks warming in a way that tells Alec he’s clearly said the right thing.

And as he watches Magnus fall asleep - his beautiful, shimmery cats eyes drooping further and further to a close, lulled by the slow, gentle rhythm of Alec’s chest beneath him - he knows he’s never said anything more accurate.

There are no words for this.
The next week is an intensely busy one, passing by in a trickle of departing Shadowhunters, all now with new places to transfer to. A couple of them don’t get accepted to their chosen places of residence and decide to return to their families in Idris. Either way, the Institute’s portal has never worked so hard.

But as Shadowhunters file out of his Institute, Samael Hawkstorm transfers in, and Alec finds himself too elated to dwell on those choosing to leave. Underhill had vaguely explained that he and Hawkstorm have been friends for many years, so he’s standing with Alec when their new recruit finally touches ground in New York.

The man who steps through the Institute’s portal is ten years older than the last time Alec saw him, but no less handsome. Tall, broad, donned in toe-scuffed leather boots, soft, worn jeans and a bomber jacket. Cropped beard, pale green eyes, dark hair streaked by sun and wide travels, tied in a bun. He carries a tattered duffel bag casually over his shoulder like he’s never stayed anywhere long enough to set it down, and there’s a goddamn Fireproof rune sitting on the tan skin inside his v-neck shirt. Alec can only imagine the scenarios needed to use such a mark. So badass.

“Mr. Lightwood,” he grins a perfect set of white teeth, words lilting softly at the corners with his Romanian accent. Then he drops his duffel onto the ground and steps forward to shake Alec’s hand, like a man who has shaken many and never tired of it. Strong but casual, warm but respectful. Good eye contact. Alec’s insides liquify, “Thank you for taking me in.”

Alec feels utterly numb, but somehow manages to function on auto-pilot like a professional, “It’s an honor to have you, sir.”

“Call me Hawkstorm, please,” he says, smile widening, “Or Sam. And the honor is all mine, I promise you. Noah has been keeping me informed of all your fine work, so I’m very excited to get my hands dirty. I’m here for your mission, sir. In whatever way you need me.”

Alec can’t think to do anything but thank him, overwhelmed by his conviction. He called me sir.

“Speaking of,” Hawkstorm turns, trading Alec’s hand for Underhill’s. The two of them kiss each other on the cheeks, left to right as is Romanian custom, before settling in front of each other. The smile they share is secretive, highly-charged, and almost inappropriate for public consumption, and Alec doesn’t know what’s happening. Until he does. “Salut, iubirea mea.”

He’s not familiar with the words being said, but the look on each of their faces speaks a thousand.

“Hey you,” Underhill replies with a warm smile, while they stand there like the only two people in the world, exchanging the heat of proximity like it’s... foreplay.

Alec is still gaping ten minutes later as they trail behind Hawkstorm’s enthusiastic observational tour of the Institute, and Underhill’s ever deepening smirk tells him everything he needs to know.
The week also sees further tensions flare as Alec’s compulsory training sessions take place over four consecutive evenings. Luke and his second in command, Maia Roberts hold strong as they educate New York’s Shadowhunters how to better de-escalate high risk situations when dealing with Werewolves. A select few watch with interest, genuinely eager to expand their knowledge and approachability. The group seated around Hawkstorm spend more time ogling him than listening to their guests. Too many sniff and grunt and roll their eyes, thinking themselves above it all. At least five Shadowhunters refuse to attend altogether, and Alec has the ink on their transfer papers dry before he even sits down in the front row to join the training session himself. He’s vaguely worried he won’t have anyone left when the week rolls to a close, but he’s pissed off and determined to make it happen. If he has to burn his Institute to the ground in order to start anew, so be it.

Some throw him looks of disgruntlement. Others are surprised he’s taking part. A few acknowledge him leading by example, and drop the attitude enough to listen to what Luke and Maia have to say. Alec asks them questions about hypothetical scenarios, if only to further his own view of how to navigate Werewolf relations. Hawkstorm, Underhill and Jace all ask questions too, in what is probably more so out of solidarity, but Alec watches, silently pleased, when others get curious enough to follow suit. The mood is tense, but everyone shakes Luke’s and Maia’s hands on the way out. Luke provokes a bit of scorn - it seems he can be forgiven for being a Downworlder, but as a former Circle member, not so much. Impressively, it does little to deter Luke’s positivity.

“That went reasonably well,” Alec says nervously, approaching them once it’s all over, “right?”

“Not bad at all,” Luke smiles, slow and confident as he shakes his hand, “I expected a lot worse.”

“I wouldn’t hold your breath,” Maia adds, noting some of the grudging looks they receive as the hall empties, “What you’re trying to achieve here is admirable, but your Shadowhunters are stubborn as hell.”

“You’re not wrong,” Alec replies, and they share a dry smile - an understanding - as they shake hands too, “But I can assure you, they’ll never be as stubborn me.”

Meliorn of the Seelie Court was hard enough to get on board with his Queen’s reluctance to be involved. But despite believing the training might fall on deaf ears, he was more put off by the idea of not giving it a fair chance. The session he holds the following night is met with even less enthusiasm, purely because the questionable, mysterious nature of Seelies is always more likely to create walls instead of bridges. Shadowhunters don’t like what they can’t trust.

To his credit, Meliorn toughs it out, talking at length about Seelie customs and the ways Shadowhunters can successfully navigate them without offending anyone. Isabelle proudly stands beside him, punctuating his lecture with questions and elaborations. When it’s over, Underhill and Hawkstorm follow Seelie custom by exchanging shallow parting bows with Meliorn, which prompts the rest of the Institute’s residents to do the same. Regardless of the grumbling, the fact that they’re doing it at all is nothing short of a miracle. Underhill smirks at his handy work, butts the side of his fist on Alec’s arm as he leaves to return to his post. Alec knows he’s been a little too focused on those revolting against his orders, but he hasn’t missed the people gathering in his corner. Eternally grateful doesn’t even begin to cover how he feels.
Alec also spends much of the week liaising with the Heads of the Los Angeles, Chicago and Vancouver Institutes - even the Bucharest Institute, under Hawkstorm’s advice - and having heard of the training he is holding, they send representatives to sit in on the final two sessions. Their presence, and an increasingly relaxed audience, sees a few Shadowhunters arriving for the next session with paper and pen.

Impassioned, Raphael Santiago explains the Night Children’s inclusive judiciary system. The Vampire raises an eyebrow in Alec’s direction, as if to say You walked right into that one, Shadowhunter, and Alec is helpless to keep his ensuing eye roll from tugging at the corners of his lips. He also notices many who are surprised by what they hear, as if they never imagined the Vampires were so tight-knit.

“Clan is family,” Raphael says, like it’s the simplest concept in the world. Now that he’s more open-minded, Alec sees how simple it really is, “They are our friends, our teachers, our lovers, our support network. They’re all we have when our Mundane lives are stolen from us. I’m not asking you to treat us like family, only that you acknowledge that we are - and respect that we are. Because it makes all the difference in how you interact with us.”

Raphael then glances back across the hall, briefly pinning Alec with his eyes as he addresses the audience.

“Yes, your leader earned my respect by doing exactly that. It’s not something I’m likely to forget,” he acknowledges Alec again - this time, with a quietly grateful nod.

Simon, who accompanies him, shares his experiences in adapting to Clan life. He also gives some sage advice on how one might deal with a fledgling.

“Just treat us like we’re human,” he addresses the full hall with a shrug. He smiles bravely, as if everything he’s been through is only water rolling off his back. Now that he’s no longer one of the many things driving Alec up the wall, it’s not so irritating, “I was an accounting student before I was murdered. I had a life before this. I had a big future all planned out. Not getting to have that anymore is traumatic, to say the least.”

Then he gestures at the residents filling the rows of seating, “You Shadowhunters were born for this. You know what you’re doing. I wasn’t born for this. If you can wrap your head around that way of thinking - and remember that we’re just...really inconvenienced human beings - trust me, it goes a long way.”

Alec observes the new lack of reluctance in his Shadowhunters as they file out later. Shaking hands with Downworlders is almost second nature now. Things are looking up.

Magnus brings the training schedule to an exciting close with an abundance of display magic that renders gasps and laughs and happy murmurs, employing the kind of charm that has Alec palming his face, if only to hide his grin. But Magnus pulls no punches when it comes to detailing the horrendous history between Shadowhunters and Warlocks and the injustices he’s seen on both sides.
He speaks with the sort of gravitas that could make an army stand silent, clearly trying to shake up his captive audience; to wake them up to better possibilities and the delicate, slippery slope that could send them all back a hundred years if everyone involved isn’t careful.

By the time he opens the floor to questions, the hall is quiet and dreadfully solemn, thoughts dwelling on all that has been discussed. Alec sees regret, and embarrassment, and the fury of injustice on the faces of his peers. They’re not just listening anymore. They’re connecting.

Except for David Meadowlark. Alec has been wondering for the last two weeks how long it would take him to crack.

Meadowlark drops his hand as Magnus graciously gives him the room, “Which one of you takes it up the ass? You or Lightwood?”

The room falls even quieter, pregnant with tense, held breath. No one laughs, or snickers, since most of Meadowlark’s friends have already been transferred out of the Institute. Alec can only assume the guy has played nice in order to get his five seconds of spotlight at the worst possible moment.

Magnus throws the man a look of great disdain, “Why? Looking to improve your bedroom fantasies?”

“Out,” Jace grabs Meadowlark by the collar with a growl, and hauls him from his seat. He pushes him at Underhill, who is all too ready to escort him outside.

Alec can feel his face burning with rage, but Magnus takes the room back into his hands effortlessly.

“You dismissed friend is a prime example of all I’ve spoken about this evening,” Magnus sighs an old, tired sigh, and he sends Alec a tender look across the heads of his peers, something calming and apologetic, “Evolution is always going to skip a few people - case in point. But the rest of you have no excuses. You all have the means to create a better world between our people. Don’t leave it to your children, or their children to do what your great grandparents should have done.”

Magnus somehow finishes on a high note. Smiling and shaking hands with everyone, he’s the epitome of personable, asking each Shadowhunter for their name, then using it to thank them for coming. It leaves more than a few people starry-eyed. Some even apologize to him on David’s behalf, which surpasses any expectations Alec had.

When Magnus’ hand finally slides against his, he feels like he can breathe again.

“Are you okay?” Magnus asks, voice low and concerned.

“I’m fine. He’s already been dealt to,” Alec clenches his jaw, pushing his emotions down, “I just wish I wasn’t the Head of the Institute right now. It’d be easier to kick his ass.”

“I know,” Magnus speaks quietly into the space between them, sweeping a hand across Alec’s cheek, “Go do what you need to do. I’ll run you a nice, hot bath and break out the Merlot, and then we can discuss your Mr Hawkstorm and his insanely handsome face when you’re done. Okay?”

Alec smiles wanly, “Okay.”

“Okay,” Magnus smiles back, and plants a soft kiss on his mouth, “I love you.”

Those three words are all it takes for the chaos inside him to collapse away, and he walks to his office with his head held high. Because fuck David Meadowlark.
When Meadowlark hands over his transfer request papers fifteen minutes later, Alec tears them - slowly and deliberately - in half.

His insubordinate’s smug smirk gives way to a scowl, “You can’t keep me here.”

“Oh I don’t want you here,” Alec calmly replies, dangling a signed and sanctioned dismissal form between them like he couldn't care less.

Meadowlark grabs the form out of the air and reads, his pinched face growing a deep red. The profound gravity of being given his position has had Alec working harder than he ever has, especially with his own mother’s preference for dealing with problems only as they arise. Alec has always been the type that prefers to prevent them instead. He’s beginning to learn that cleaning house is an ongoing work in progress.

“Wrangel Island? Who approved this?”

“The Consul. Three days ago, actually. The only reason you’re still here is because I believed our training seminars might do you some good.”

Meadowlark blanches, and his tone does such a one-eighty that Alec almost laughs at him, ”What?”

“Your records are rather colorful,” Alec sits on the edge of his desk, arm casually slung around his middle as he holds an open folder to read, “Seventeen warnings for incomplete reports. Three counts of harassment filed by two of my female staff. Multiple unfiled charges for evidence tampering and when I expanded my search, I found two Mundane drunk and disorderly charges on file at the NYPD. Now, I’m entitled to dismiss you for any number of these things, but that one is a breach of the Accords, David,” He smiles, saltily, “See, unlike you, my work is thorough. And unlike my mother, I don’t look the other way.”

The expression on Meadowlark’s paling face is priceless. Perhaps being the Head of the Institute right now is the more satisfying choice after all.

“If you’re not out of my Institute within the hour, I will send you directly to the Gard. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes sir,” Meadowlark croaks, head lowering.

Alec smiles tightly, as smug as he feels justified, “‘The Law is hard, but it is the Law’. I suggest you remember that before someone else - someone with nothing better to do - teaches you just how hard the law can get. Take your belongings and report to Underhill. Dismissed.”

The anger returns when Meadowlark is finally gone, simmering and poisonous in his chest, too close to home to nudge away. It lifts only when he gets that hot, steaming bath, glass of wine and Magnus’ slippery, wet, naked body chuckling against him.

“You’re so hot when you send people to Wrangel Island,” Magnus gushes dreamily between slow, luscious kisses, and Alec forgets why he was even mad in the first place.
He spends days debriefing with the Institutes who had staff sitting in on his training evenings. He’d been expecting resistance. Trying to open the perspectives of people who were stubbornly against it was always going to be an ongoing sequence of uphill battles. Alec believed that if he just kept chipping away, something - someday - would have to give. So it comes as a surprise when the feedback he receives is positive. The Head of the Chicago Institute wants to personally sit in on any future training weeks before deciding anything, but the Heads of the Los Angeles, Vancouver and Bucharest Institutes have already spread the word to their own contacts.

Seven Institutes want to meet him about how to provide the same training in their areas. To say he’s stunned is an understatement.

He’s in the middle of a passionate discussion about it with Underhill, Hawkstorm and Isabelle when Magnus drops by to interrupt their casual meeting with a suggestion of lunch. Masses of summoned food later, they brief Magnus on the news and discuss the possibilities between bites of apricot chicken paninis and creamy stuffed bell peppers. Alec smiles and blushes when Magnus winks and silently reaches over to give his knee a proud squeeze.

Magnus is just done magically snapping all the empty food wrappers away when the Institute’s wards system starts blaring overhead.

Magnus blinks up at the ceiling, “Well, I know that’s not me.”

Alec heaves a tired sigh, gets the usual phone call from Isla and hangs up. Hawkstorm looks over Underhill’s shoulder as he swipes through the security feeds on his phone.

“They’re still malfunctioning?” Magnus asks, appearing as confused as Alec is frustrated, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because it’s not you,” Alec smiles unhappily, “Your wards are solid. We’ve had a lot of security updates recently so all bets are on a bug. Except we can’t find one. One of these days, it’ll actually be something to worry about and none of us will be prepared.”

Magnus purses his lips, “Ever since the Forsaken attack?”

“Mm,” Alec sees him look aside, deep in thought, “What’re you thinking?”

“Does your lab still have the bodies on ice?” Magnus directs his question to Isabelle.

She shakes her head, “That’s what we originally thought, so we had them incinerated weeks ago. We even water-blasted the tunnels to make sure there wasn’t any blood residue or bodily fluids lying around.”

When Magnus falls back into his thoughts, pressing a thumb to his lips, Alec holds a hand out to pause Isabelle’s brewing questions. What Magnus suggests next gives the room pause.

“Has Jocelyn been tested?”

The answering silence is heavy with what he’s implying.

“She’s the only other variable the Institute’s had since the attack,” Magnus muses, “Correct?”
“Yeah,” Alec breathes, glancing wildly to Isabelle, “Iz---”

His sister is already striding out of the room, calling over her shoulder, “On it.”

Hawkstorm glances between the group, “What are we thinking with this?”

“Jocelyn Fairchild was Valentine’s captive not too long ago,” Underhill translates the worry in Alec’s eyes for him, “He could have done anything to her while she was unconscious.”

Alec shares a knowing look with Magnus, adding, “And she wouldn’t even know it.”

The afternoon stretches on as Jocelyn sits, fully compliant, in the lab as they await her blood results. She seems more worried at the possibility than anyone, and it becomes clear when she slowly, reluctantly begins to explain why.

Clary’s world crumbles all over again as she hears the untold story of the big brother she had and never met, Jonathan Christopher. Through teary eyes, Jocelyn confessed how she'd treasured him, how she had been pregnant with Clary when he was killed in the fire that claimed the Fairchild manor, and how Valentine had experimented on him in utero - with Demon blood. Alec, Magnus, Isabelle and Jace all helplessly observe the Fairchild women fall to pieces as they cry and shake and grieve the full horror of their family history, and Alec feels uneasy, throat tight, deeply grateful that his own flawed family hasn’t experienced anything close to that type of evil. Now that they’ve peeled off another layer of Valentine’s cruelty, there’s a very real panic among them. Shadowhunters with Demon blood. Alec is already thinking of what that could mean for Clary and Jocelyn, should the results prove positive. The Clave would never allow such an abomination to live.

This is something Alec doesn’t know how to fix.

Clary bravely offers her own blood for testing, just in case, and Jace moves to comfort her, pulling her against his chest. His faraway gaze is worrying, and Alec can only imagine that he’s revisiting the sadness of his own traumatic childhood.

Three hours later, Jocelyn and Clary are elsewhere having a seriously overdue heart-to-heart, and Alec, Magnus, Jace and Underhill are in his office, awaiting Isabelle’s findings with growing dread.

“Both sets of erythrocytes and leukocytes are showing human and Nephilim properties, though Clary’s are a little more condensed. I’d like to do some further tests to see why but all in all, Jocelyn and Clary are clean,” Isabelle smiles, and the room collectively breathes a sigh of relief. It’s good news, though the mystery of the malfunctioning security system remains unsolved, “Which brings us back to square one.”

“I can perform a spell,” Magnus folds his arms, “If there’s any demonic essence remaining in the Institute, I’ll find it. Just say the word.”

“What kind of spell are we talking here?” Jace asks from where he leans against the bookcase.

“Just a variation on a tracking spell,” Magnus explains, “I only need a little pure Demon blood to work with. Give me a few hours to get my hands on some. I can come back tonight and perform the spell then.”

Alec raises an eyebrow, “Do I even want to know where you’ll be getting pure Demon blood?”

Magnus smiles sweetly, gently chucking Alec beneath the chin, “Probably not.”
When Magnus returns a few hours later, he looks a little worn around the eyes, and Alec can smell touches of sulfur and smoke wafting from his clothes as they greet each other with a kiss. He’s seen Magnus’ tired easiness and ruggedness only a few times, enough to know its the effect of heavy duty magic use. To others, he’ll look like he needs a nap. To Alec, he only seems more powerful.

Magnus grimaces, “I know. I stink.”

“Everything turn out okay?”

“Yes,” Magnus twirls the glass tube elegantly between his fingers, “I am one vial of pure Demon blood richer. Like taking candy from a baby.”

Alec steps closer once again, murmuring quietly into Magnus’ ear as not to be overheard, “You’re so hot when you’re doing Warlock things.”

Magnus shivers, delighted, sighing when they part again. He gazes into Alec’s eyes with a lazy sort of hunger that Alec feels all the way down to his toes, “Let’s get this over with so we can go home for the night, hmm?”

Alec grins and presses at him with another kiss, “Best idea I’ve heard all day.”

Because Luke and Simon are visiting - trying to comfort what Valentine has left of their beloved Fairchild women - Alec has Isabelle escort them both outside the perimeter so the results of Magnus’ spell remain accurate. He sets his boyfriend up in his office, where he summons a copper bowl of gathered ingredients from his apartment, and he watches the muscle memory and knowledge in which Magnus works. Hundreds of years of wisdom standing before him. If Alec wasn’t nervous about what his spell might find, he’d be trying to cop a feel left, right and center.

“Okay,” Magnus announces with a clap of his hands, several minutes later, “Ready?”

“Alec tries to roll the tension out of his shoulders, “As I’ll ever be.”

Then Magnus is snapping his fingers. Alec watches, utterly fascinated, as he carefully uses his magic to siphon the potion out of the bowl and into his hands. There, he shapes it into a floating ball with smooth flicks and twirls of his fingers. Magnus closes his eyes and breathes, heavy and deep, as he forces his magic into it, like it’s up against some hidden resistance. He recites an incantation - quaeerite et invenietis - in a voice that is low and purposeful in such a way that Alec’s belly tingles with it, and then the ball erupts into wisps of fiery orange magic. Wisps of fiery orange magic that begin to slowly stream out of the room in tendrils.

“What’s happening?”

“Now we follow,” Magnus tells him.

They all but stalk the magic out of Alec’s office and down the hall, losing it through walls and furniture. Alec’s not sure what it is they’re looking for, but Magnus seems tense as he observes his spell, frown deepening as it turns and dips and circles back almost entirely to where they came from.

“Is that normal?”

The tension on Magnus’ face increases, “No. I think it’s found something. Or someone.”
Panic begins to creep in. “Someone?”

Magnus gestures at the spell as it floats and shifts, almost at a walking pace, “Inanimate objects don’t move.”

Before he has a chance to think, Magnus’ spell darts down through the floor - as if pouncing - and then they’re both running for the stairwell at a sprint.

Alec activates his Agility rune and takes the flight of stairs down in one leap, heart pounding, “It’s heading for the residential wing.”

Barging his way through the exit and into the hall, he can hear Magnus trailing him as they try to catch a glimpse of the spell’s whereabouts, shunting their way through bedroom doors and yelling back and forth at each other when the rooms they check are clear.

Raziel, Alec’s heart thunders against his ribs harder and harder with each second that passes, with each room that comes up empty, pulse rushing as they near Isabelle’s bedroom. The very insinuation of what that could mean has Alec palming the handle of his Seraph blade against his thigh.

Alec dives into her room - empty - and darts back out with gritted teeth.

Magnus clears Clary’s room, and both her and her mother lift their heads when they try Jocelyn’s. Nothing.

“Fuck!” Alec yells.

He bursts into his own bedroom at the end of the hall, then across into Jace’s---

Where he finds his Parabatai lying prone on the floor.

Seizing.

Engulfed in Magnus’ fiery magic.

“No! Jace!” Alec’s voice booms against the walls as he collapses to his knees beside him, “Magnus! Help me!”

He vaguely hears footsteps skidding and clambering behind him, feels a hand land on his shoulder. But all he sees is his brother. Eye whites visible between his fluttering lashes. Teeth biting his lip so hard it’s washing his chin with blood. Contorted with pain in a way he’s never, ever seen before. And he can’t do anything to make it stop.

He’s dying, his heart screams. My Parabatai is dying!

Then the magic dissipates into thin air, wrapped up and waved away by Magnus’ sheer force of will. Jace falls still, limbs sprawled and loose against the floor. Alec ignores the gathering crowd at the door and checks him for a pulse, peels his eyes open, brings his head into his lap to tap at his face, voice strangled and high in his throat as he helplessly calls Jace's name but hears no reply. Breathing, but unconscious. Pulse strong, but way too fast. Skin blanched of color, but hot to the touch.

Alec looks over at Magnus where he kneels panting beside them, pale-faced and mortified. He holds his hands in the air as if to keep himself away.

“Magnus,” Alec breathes, feeling his own dawning horror grow in his chest, “What have you done?”
Eleven

Chapter Summary

Facing an impossible situation, Magnus and Alec find themselves at odds.

Chapter Notes

It's been awhile hasn't it, fam? I wrote a little Underhill/Hawkstorm BLP oneshot, Lasă-mă să stau, and I fell in love with it so hard that it took me a bit of effort to find my way back to Magnus and Alec's story. If you haven't read it, give it a go. I'm super proud of it.

This chapter is brought to you by songs like Jesse Marchant's "7 & the Fall", Jens Kuross' "Spiraling" and Death Cab For Cutie's "Doors Unlocked and Open". It's also brought to you by procrastination, re-outlining, deleting a bunch of shit I wrote and then starting again until it wasn't lame, and wonderful LGBTQ characters that are meant to be together.

As always, you can also follow me on Tumblr and Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing or rage screaming at me, the social media tag for this fic is #BLPMalec.

He’d done as he was asked. His magic is centuries old, as is his control of it, but he’d still tested that spell in his own apartment until it was ironclad because throwing around demonic magic within an Institute of a hundred Shadowhunters wasn’t a task he was going to take lightly. And he’d fucked it up anyway.

No, he thinks, resolutely. I didn’t.

The spell had worked exactly as designed. Magnus’ magic hasn’t led him astray since he was a young, hormonal teen punching above his weight, trying to shed the influence of his demon father and prove himself his own man, a man not to be trifled with. He hadn’t slipped tonight, yet every Shadowhunter face he’s seen in the few hours since has been suspicious of him in some way or another. He hadn’t fucked up, but he’s being regarded like he’s just another dangerous Downworlder, even after an entire month of being a regular, welcome presence inside the Institute’s walls. Old resentments begin an ugly simmer in his belly, bubbling with each pinched face that passes him by.

He wants to believe he’s simply being paranoid, that his inner emotional turmoil and his powerful penchant for self-sabotage has always delighted in twisting what he sees. But Shadowhunters don’t have a great track record of giving his kind the benefit of the doubt, and they still have such a way to go. It’s only the thought of Alec that keeps him there, alone and distraught in the quiet hallway of the Institute’s infirmary wing.

He presses a hand over his heart as he waits, trying to soothe the hard, dreadful thump of its beat.
through his shirt. Alec, Isabelle and the Institute’s team of medics are still with Jace on the other side of the closed infirmary door, and he has no idea what the prognosis is. The spell he’d performed was designed to identify and disarm anything demonic, so that Alec and his team could find it, destroy it and remove it. That he had almost killed Jace had initially numbed him. That he had almost killed Alec by association had terrified him.

Except he...hadn’t?

While Alec’s Parabatai was writhing and foaming at the mouth across the floorboards, paralyzed in agony, Alec had remained of sound enough mind to roll him into a recovery position. Magnus’ chest had reeled - beyond panic - at the frightful prospect that he’d harmed them both, and while the guilt of hurting Jace had been strong, the gush of relief that Alec had miraculously been spared in the process far surpassed it. The niggling question of why has been sitting against his temple for an hour now, like a ragged worm slowly inching its way into his raw emotions. Parabatai were supposed to be linked, emotionally, physically. Alec had told him enough stories to prove the tenacity of their bond. Magnus had seen with his own eyes how Alec had almost collapsed in pain from Jace’s injuries during the attack on the Institute. So why wasn’t it working now?

It’s a little after midnight when Alec and Isabelle finally step out into the hall, closing the infirmary door quietly behind them. Isabelle gives her brother a hug goodnight and leaves for the residential wing with a tired smile in Magnus’ direction. Alec hovers, his face drawn and exhausted, his strong, broad shoulders a tense line. Magnus’ hands itch to reach out and rub them, relieve him.

“What are you still doing here?” Alec asks. As if he’d really expected Magnus to leave.

After spending the last few hours stewing in the tension created by his own presence, Alec’s standoffish attitude stings.

“I wanted to wait for news,” he frowns, “How’s he doing?”

“He’s okay,” Alec is clearly relieved, but struggling behind his tight, unhappy sigh, “He’s sleeping now. Unharmed against all odds, considering.”

Magnus isn’t sure if he hears accusation in his tone, but he clocks something he isn’t fond of. Paired with his own unhinged emotions, he can’t quite help but react, “Right. No thanks to me.”

Alec pauses and blinks at him, his face a careful blank slate. It gives nothing away, which is almost as good as a confirmation, “I didn’t say that.”

Magnus’ smile is grim, “You didn’t need to.”

“Yeah, well, I have a lot on my plate right now. I’m allowed to be a bit of a mess,” Alec says, voice edged like a dulled razor. He’s pissed, and not hiding it well, even as he attempts to soften his words, “But it’s not directed at you, I promise.”

It should be a comfort, but Magnus has spent the last three hours being backed into a corner by numerous wary looks and glares, and it makes it difficult not to feel like he’s being shoveled with the blame. His growing anger has him near frayed, and it pulls at his insides in sharp pangs, just lying in wait for someone to unleash them on.

“Look, why don’t you go home,” Alec tells him, scrubbing a hand over his face, “I need to file an incident report and debrief a bunch of witnesses----”

Magnus huffs an upset breath of a laugh, “I wasn’t aware I’d committed a crime.”
“You didn’t, but people talk, Magnus. I need to get everyone on the same page to prevent anyone running off with crazy accusations.”

Hindsight will surely tell him he’s overreacting, because he knows better than anyone that Alec has a vested, personal interest in improving the peace between their races. But Magnus is wound up and heartsore, too close to old, familiar feelings from days long gone to keep his objectivity. And while Alec is in fix-it mode, trying to keep all his variables together, he’s not offering Magnus the reassurance he’d hoped to have and it stubbornly closes him back up.

“Like your no-good Downworlder boyfriend attacking one of your soldiers under your own roof?”

“Magnus, stop,” Alec frowns, gaze stern and full of authority, “I’m trying to protect you here.”

“I did nothing to warrant protection.”

“Let’s just hit the goddamn pause button, okay? We both need to cool off before we say things we don’t mean.”

“Why?” Magnus’ response is whip-quick, and his words feel like purged bile; good to get out, even as they make him feel worse, “What horrible, regrettable thoughts might you accidentally say to me?”

“Don’t push me right now,” Alec growls, making to leave, “We both need a moment. Go home. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

“Are you at least going to test him?” Magnus throws at Alec’s retreating back, which immediate stops him where he stands.

Alec turns, “Who?”

“Jace. Are you going to test him, like you did Jocelyn and Clary?” Magnus repeats, but Alec gives him a strange, side-eyed look, like the very concept is a preposterous one, “Surely your Parabatai’s dignity doesn’t come before the safety of the hundred other Shadowhunters at your command?”

Alec rounds on him, enunciating his words like Magnus is hard of hearing, “I have no reason to test Jace.”

“My spell is reason enough,” he challenges, “It didn’t pick him out of the crowd for fun, Alec.”

“Are—” Alec quickly lowers the rising volume of his voice, “What are you accusing him of, exactly? Having ichor on his boots? Sulfur in his hair—?”

“It was a blood spell, Alec. Blood seeks blood—”

“Then what, Magnus? Are you accusing him of being possessed? Or worse, a demon? Do you really think I wouldn’t know if my Parabatai was demonic? There’s no way. No way.”

Magnus bites down on his molars, speaking through gritted teeth, “I’m not accusing him of anything. But my magic doesn’t lie.”

“Neither does my bond,” Alec argues, and whatever patience he’d stitched together is now gone, “A bond you know nothing about. Go home, Magnus. I’m not doing this with you.”

Magnus juts his chin, “Fine.”

And Alec sneers, “Fine.”
Then he watches his Shadowhunter walk away, bristling with restrained fury, fury now at him, and Magnus has no other choice but to leave. Every step towards the Institute’s entryway, and each step beyond it, only fuels his own indignant rage. It’s when he’s standing alone in his dark, lonely apartment where his jaded anger swiftly detours into surging pain. He hasn’t felt so let down by a person in years. A lover, no less. He’d always expected the differences between them to come back up, because he and Alec were never going to cruise through their love without being aware of the opposing sides they come from. But now that it has, it aches.

He tries to sleep, but his bed feels empty and cold, and his chest feels tight and sore. He envisions Alec sneaking in and sliding beneath the sheets, if only to be here with him, an act of solidarity despite the divide. He imagines kicking Alec back out, if only to satisfy his own damaged feelings. Then he imagines Alec gently begging for forgiveness, and pulling him back into his warmth where everything is okay again. And that hurts too much to think about. Despite his pride, he’d rather Alec be lying beside him than not at all.

But Alec doesn’t come, and Magnus can’t prevent the obsessive need to prepare himself for the worst. As if after everything, this is finally the other shoe dropping.

Even when Alec is too overrun with work to stay the night, he always makes a point of coming over for breakfast and exchanging warm, morning affections. Kissing Magnus awake if he hasn’t already gotten out of bed. Asking about his plans for the day as they sip coffee in the balcony’s morning sun. Blowing him against the kitchen cupboards. Groping him whenever he’s close enough to fondle. Holding Magnus to him like he means to absorb all his boyfriend moments for the day in one fell swoop, because sometimes they won’t see each other until the evening and the mornings are all they have to get them through the day.

Today, he has to adjust his morning routine entirely, because Alec doesn’t make an appearance. Magnus isn’t sure if he really expected him show up or not, but he feels dreadfully bitter as he drags himself to the shower regardless.

He tidies up, checks his planner for appointments, sits down for a coffee and summons a breakfast sandwich from the cafe over on the next block. Everything inside him burns with the need to go to Alec, but his ego feels too bruised to do anything about it. It seems like a grudging play of karma that his day is wide open, so he checks in with his club manager, makes an appointment for a massage and spends the majority of his time doing inventory. That lands him over in the West Village purchasing komodo scales and crows feet from one of his more shadier Warlock contacts. The small trip distracts Magnus just enough to feel like his regular self again.

He receives a text message from Alec mid afternoon, asking if he has some time tonight to meet. He’s relieved to have heard from him, and the fond nostalgia of their earlier, casual relationship brushes him like a warm breeze. But it’s quickly followed by the sadness of facing what seems to be their relationship having taken ten steps back overnight. He agrees, missing him terribly, which only makes him frustrated, and he spends the remainder of the afternoon rearranging his living room as if it might rearrange his own heart. He returns it all to normal an hour later, because there’s far too many happy memories of Alec lounging and laughing and napping on his furniture to shift. And he doesn’t want to shift them.

He’s nervous, but he’s soothed by Alec’s choice to use his key to let himself into the apartment later
that night, because it means they aren’t so far gone that they can’t regain their lost ground. The million and one thoughts Magnus has had throughout the day fly entirely out of the window when he finally lays eyes on him again.

Alec looks very much like a man trying to mask how tired and upset he is, and it breaks Magnus’ resolve in half before he has the chance to brace himself. It’s been too long since they were blissfully unaware of the pitfalls their differences still have the power to dig - and here, now, feeling the space between their bodies like a painful throb, Magnus wants nothing more than to close the gap. He feels his heart stretch out to reach him, wanting to fix and heal and comfort, even as other, older, jaded parts of him keep Magnus where he stands.

“I’m not looking for a fight,” Alec tells him, hoarse and soft, eyes filled with love, “I just needed to see you.”

“As opposed to last night, or this morning. Where you didn’t,” is Magnus’ immediate, petty reaction.

He almost winces. Even as he revolts against the words he spills, he’s too paralyzed in his need to bite before bitten. He’s never fared well beneath pain, especially not when it’s dealt by someone he loves dearly. And no amount of age, or wisdom, or telling himself to take a breather and sit the hell down can penetrate his own thick skull when he’s in the wrong mood.

So he understands now why Alec had told him to leave the night before, because nothing would have gotten through to him in the state he was in. Now, at the very least, he has enough sense to know that he doesn’t want to be left alone again. It’s been lurking in the back of his mind lately, the scary realization that he isn’t just in love with Alec Lightwood, but he loves him more powerfully and more completely than he’s ever loved anyone or anything in his long life. The swollen, battered heart he’s currently carrying around with him is undeniable testimony.

His own pride has seen too many of his previous loves slip through his fingers over the most trivial things, and Alec, god, Alec, means too much to him to let it happen now. Magnus doesn’t want to lose him, he’s just afraid that he might. Because having a disagreement is one thing, but having to deal with serious, crippling character flaws is another. Eight hundred years on, and Magnus is yet to meet a person that hasn’t grown tired or run the other way. And despite Magnus’ belief in him, he realizes he’s still waiting for Alec to do the same. Old habits die hard.

Alec finally responds to his barbed tone with a wistful, knowing smile, “Jace used to do the same thing. Back when he’d finally settled into our family and didn’t know how long the happiness would last. He’d poke me with verbal sticks to see if I’d leave him.”

Simple mention of Jace’s name floods him with guilt, then indignation, because he’s traumatized to have hurt Alec’s beloved Parabatai and angry that even he, himself, feels like he’s done something to be accused of. His centuries of knowledge, strength and control are enough to absolve him of any wrongdoing, but it doesn’t erase his own checkered past or lessen the martyr complex he’s willingly suffered ever since. It’s all just a little too close to home.

He flees toward his drink station.

“I’m sorry about last night,” Alec continues behind him, “I shouldn’t have spoken to you the way I did.”

Magnus pours himself a whiskey and swallows a big mouthful. He welcomes the burn, “I wasn’t exactly an innocent party myself. I attacked your Parabatai after all.”

“You didn’t attack anyone. It was an accident. You didn’t mean to.”
“Is that what you told your staff?” Magnus asks, then finishes his glass with another gulp and places it down. When he looks over again, Alec’s handsome face is softened, offering what little comfort he can, “Your Downworlder boyfriend didn’t go rogue after all, he just----missed?”

Alec takes a pause, calmly de-escalating the mood like he’s done it a hundred times before, “I told them our High Warlock did his job exactly as I requested of him, and that we’ll be looking into what happened.”

Magnus feels smaller and smaller by the second.

“Lucky me. Problem solved, I guess.”

“What do you want me to say, Magnus?” Alec asks, ever a man of patience. Magnus kind of wants to throttle him and duke it out instead because he’s hurt, and angry, and wants to bleed his wounds a little before Alec tries to bandage them up, “That centuries of tension between our people are magically gone after a few seminars? I wish it were that easy. But I’m trying here. And a lot of my Shadowhunters are trying too. I may not have had the time last night to be there for you the way I wanted, but don’t ever think I’m not on your side.”

Magnus knows this, because the Alec he knows and loves is the type of man that kisses him in front of his colleagues without a care. The Alec he knows and loves is the type of man that trashes unseemly suggestions from the Consul himself in favor of loving Magnus even more. The Alec he knows and loves is the type of man who makes it his personal mission to make the world a better place. The Alec he knows and loves cares, strives, owns his mistakes, and does his best when Magnus only ever expects the worst. And he’s never, not once, given Magnus a reason to doubt him.

Hindsight. Just as he’d predicted.

“Look,” Alec speaks softly as he approaches, taking him gently by the shoulders so they can’t look anywhere but at each other. Alec’s open gaze hides nothing, and the way it grips Magnus makes him feel so naked that he has to fight to keep his eyes from sinking to the ground, “You can poke at me and shut down all you like. You can even keep making jokes about how difficult and ‘unsavory’ you are, because I don’t mind making you feel better. Or you can save us both the time and let me in. Don’t push me away. Being away from you is the last place I would ever want to be.”

His sincerity, and the quiet, tired loneliness in his eyes unlocks the unease in Magnus’ chest, and he releases a breath he hadn’t known he was holding. The fight drains out of him, and he sags beneath Alec’s palms. Alec squeezes this shoulders encouragingly. It feels almost heavenly on the tight bands of muscle.

Still, he can’t help grumbling, “You seemed fine being away from me last night.”

A giant, relieved grin starts to bloom across Alec’s beautiful face, which only makes him impossibly more devastating to look at, “Last night was awful. I couldn’t sleep without you.”

“My bed was too big without you in it. And my feet were cold.”

Alec’s grin only widens, “I missed hearing your sleepy sighs.”

“I missed your stupid snoring in my ear.”

“And I missed you touching my butt,” Alec chuckles, and Magnus can’t help but smile, “You just...hold it while you sleep and I really, really like it.”

Their time apart has felt like an awful, lonely lifetime and Magnus is all too willing to forget it. So it’s
a bone deep relief when the lighter moment draws them closer, and the two of them seem to sigh at
the proximity, hands stroking and grooming as they get reacquainted. But eventually they fall serious
again, hands encircling each other, foreheads rested together. They still have some mending to do.

“I really needed you last night,” Magnus finds himself confessing, and his words almost choke him
with their honesty. He’s suddenly back in that hallway - and back a hundred years, two hundred
years, eight hundred years - waiting for reassurances that never came from people he wanted to feel
safe with, and it rips at old scars just enough that his eyes begin to blur.

“I know. I needed you too,” Alec whispers back, and Magnus realizes that the only thing that kept
him away was unavoidable duty. Not him, not their argument, not the fact that he’d inadvertently
caused harm to Alec’s Parabatai. Just duty. He forgets sometimes, that outside of how important Alec
is to him, Alec is also important to a hundred other Shadowhunters under his authority. It makes him
both indescribably proud and green with envy.

He also forgets sometimes that this love he has is a two way street. That Alec needs him and wants
him and loves him back just as much as Magnus does. That for every night he suffers while Alec
isn’t near, Alec suffers with him.

“I won’t let you down again,” his Shadowhunter promises, appearing to be spooked at the idea that
he had. And Magnus melts.

He’s been let down too many times throughout his life to admit comfortably - countless
disappointments piled on heartbreaks - but Alec’s intense reading of him gently shakes him to the
core. As if letting Magnus down goes against everything he stands for. As if he's definitely going to
beat himself up about it until he believes he’s redeemed himself. Because that’s just the kind of man
his Shadowhunter is.

Something beautiful and safe and Alec slots into the dark recesses of Magnus’ heart, and it changes
the way the shadows fall, how heavy they feel. Beneath Alec’s loving gaze, a centuries-old weight
finally falls away from him. Gone. For good. It feels substantial, and he’s overcome.

He attempts to compress his sudden rising emotions into something that isn’t going to overwhelm
them both, and he clutches Alec’s hands, “I’m sorry I lashed out. I was being unreasonable.”

“You were hurt. And scared. I understand, Magnus.”

He’s a little shaky as he goes on, because it’s not easy to admit he’s been found undesirable, or worth
disappointing. But Alec’s compassion makes it easier to open up, “I have a long, long history of
putting my faith in the wrong people. Turns out that’s still the first place I jump when things go bad.”

Alec nuzzles him, his mournful sigh brushing Magnus’ lips, “If you jumped, it was because I pushed
you.”

“And you’ve made it all better,” he reassures him, blinking away the sudden wetness in his eyes. He
chuckles softly, “You know, for a guy with no relationship experience, you’re really great at
apologies.”

“It’s easy because it’s you,” Alec answers simply, and the gravity of what that means isn’t lost on
him. He hears it loud and clear, lets it settle him. It's easy because you're everything to me.

“I love you,” Magnus tells him now. You’re everything I’ve always needed.

“Not that it’s a competition or anything,” Alec loops an arm around his shoulders and gently brings
him close, his smile warm and impossibly fond, “But I love you more.”
Magnus gets a noseful of Alec’s scent - leather, citrus soap and charred, runed skin - and breathes it into his lungs as if it’s the only breath that’s ever really mattered. He presses himself harder into Alec’s embrace and releases the last 24 hours from his body, sighing and calming and settling back into his natural rhythm, where everything is okay again.

He murmurs against his Shadowhunter’s shoulder, perfectly content not to move, “You do look tired though.”

“I had to use a rune this morning. I wasn’t lying when I said I couldn't sleep without you last night.”

“I didn't fare much better.”

Alec hums a weary, affirmative response and snuggles deeper into the curve of Magnus’ neck, arms looped tight around him. Magnus doesn’t want to ruin the moment, because being with Alec like this immediately quiets the unrulier parts of him that like to sabotage his own happiness. But a good chunk of their argument was around trust - and Alec’s apparent lack of it when facing criticism about Jace. Magnus’ spell hadn’t been wrong, which meant something was wrong with his Parabatai. But as far as Alec’s concerned, there’s nothing wrong with his Parabatai, and everything wrong with Magnus’ magic. So, where to compromise?

He knows he risks pushing them out of their happy reprieve and back to square one. But Alec has just spent the last several minutes asking for Magnus to have faith in him. And he does, more now than ever. He just hopes it goes both ways.

“Darling,” he says carefully, “What about Jace?”

He feels Alec sigh quietly against him, ribs and chest expanding within his embrace. He waits for the mood to take a turn.

“We’ll figure it out together. As a team,” Alec replies, pulling back just enough to get his mouth on Magnus’ temple, “I trust you. And I trust your magic. It’s just...that’s my Parabatai, you know? You’re not the only one who gets defensive.”

“I noticed,” Magnus smiles, relieved, “For the record, I would never question what you have with Jace. I’ve known Parabatai before. I have some understanding of how deep it goes.”

Alec smiles and gathers him into another hug, “Thank you.”

Magnus lays his head again on Alec’s shoulder, passing him his body weight, knowing without a doubt that Alec will hold him up. And he’s at home again. Close once again. It’s more than enough for now.

And later, when they both fall into bed and slide into sleep with tangled limbs and Alec’s big warm feet on his toes, Magnus feels undeniably safe and unshakably secure, knowing his place in Alec’s heart. Last night, he’d thought the end was coming. Now, he’s even more convinced that together, they’ll get through anything.

They’d grown even closer over the course of the night as they’d talked and opened up further, to the point where Magnus was so wrapped up in their connection that the world could have ended outside
the apartment and he wouldn’t have cared. Over breakfast, Alec seems just as eager as Magnus to keep close, though it’s out of desire, not the fear of what distance might create for them. So with Magnus’ day void of appointments, and Alec’s growing stack of paperwork, and the unanswered question of the tracking spell still hanging over them, Magnus accompanies him to the Institute. Any leftover wariness he had about showing his face after almost killing one of their own dissipates as Alec walks him through the Ops Center.

Those who greet him regularly still greet him. Those who smile and ask how he is are still asking. People are still nodding to him in recognition between reports and database searches. Whatever catastrophe he thought he’d caused doesn’t seem to exist, at all. Alec takes his hand as they wait for the elevator, proudly holding it for all to see, looking at him as if to say: *Told you.*

When Jace arrives in Alec’s office a little later, there’s a tense few seconds where Magnus waits for a reprimand that doesn’t come. He apologizes for the effects of the spell, because he hasn’t yet had the chance, but Jace waves it off, no harm done, and the issue is buried for good. He’s more relieved than he imagined he’d be. The bond between Parabatai isn’t one he could get between even if he tried, but he can’t guarantee *his* relationship with Alec won’t suffer if he and Jace aren’t on good terms.

Jace then asks for a blood test.

Over their usual breakfast routine, Alec had confessed that his Parabatai seemed to be having some sort of minor identity crisis, believing that Magnus might have found something in him he’s always observed in himself. A darkness, Alec had said, one Jace had apparently always felt, especially as a young boy. Alec’s explanation had thrown up flags for Magnus, because he’s experienced the same kind of darkness in various moments throughout his own life - the helpless grip of depression, of not having a way out, of not knowing what to do with it. So his sympathy toward Jace is high, even after learning that Jace had accidentally broken Hodge Starkweather’s arm in training yesterday, then traipsed around the Institute in a gloomy black cloud for the remainder of the afternoon.

Magnus knows all too well what it’s like to have guilt gnawing at his heels.

Jace’s remorse over Hodge’s injury apparently hasn’t cleared any overnight, and the lifelong, fish-out-of-water mentality Alec had told Magnus about seems to be weighing particularly heavy on him.

“At least then I’ll know, right?” Jace tells Alec with a put-upon casualness that masks everything except the nervous bob of his adam’s apple, “Magnus’ spell can’t have been wrong. Warlocks your age don’t exactly mess up.”

“Right,” Magnus answers him, scrutinizing him for a reaction.

He doesn’t know him well enough to read, so he’s not sure what to think. But he respects Jace’s choice, respects even more how he’s shelving his famous ego long enough to do what needs to be done. He also appreciates that Jace has taken what would be a topic of contention between Magnus and Alec and nullified it entirely. Magnus just can’t help the niggly, scratchy feeling of *why* this has all happened to begin with. At least with this blood test, they can start ruling out possibilities. He can’t help feeling the eagerness of putting his own questions to rest.

Alec offers to go with him, but Jace shrugs it off, flashing a wavering grin, “You’ve got better things to do, boss. Isabelle will take care of me. You can hold my hand later when we get the results.”

“Deal,” Alec promises, his smile supportive.

They barely get a moment to talk before Clary is bombarding them next, hinting hopefully at a
mission. Alec shuts her down, and Magnus notes with amusement that he’s not all that happy about denying Clary’s requests anymore. It seems the youngest Fairchild has worn Alec down into something resembling friendship.

When they learn it involves going outside the Institute to chase up a possible lead she’s put together on the Mortal Cup - like it will tempt Alec to say yes - he is even quicker to say no, glancing toward Magnus. They both know the location of the Cup, and they know where it’s staying. In Jocelyn Fairchild’s head, away from Valentine and any traitors lurking unseen in the Clave. Certainly away from nosy, enthusiastic little redheads.

Once she’s flounced off with a frustrated growl, Magnus sits opposite him, smirking indulgently, “You actually look sorry about that.”

“Yes,” Alec’s eyes rest regretfully on the closed door, “She’s been begging to go out into the field. The Consul cleared her for active duty a few weeks back, but I haven’t told her yet. I don’t want her outside. Not with Valentine loose.”

His troubled expression only deepens, and Magnus waits patiently for him to elaborate.

“Do you ever feel like you’ve missed something?” Alec asks cautiously.

“Yes,” Magnus answers. He’s been feeling that way on and off since Alec first informed him of his failing wards a little over a month ago, “Is this about Valentine?”

Alec nods, frowning, “I’ve gone over the Forsaken attack multiple times. I know that night like the back of my hand.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“We won,” Alec says, tossing his tablet onto his pile of untouched paperwork. Then he shrugs, scratching his head, clearly ready to brush it to the background again like he’s simply overthinking things, “I don’t know. We weren’t nearly prepared enough. He came for Clary and Jocelyn. And we won, with minimal casualties. I just…can’t shake the feeling that he let us.”

Before he can provide council, Underhill and Hawkstorm knock and enter the room, both offering friendly greetings to Magnus. They update Alec on separate issues - security checks and a demonology seminar Hawkstorm is to host for the Institute later in the week - and Magnus observes the easy familiarity between the two men, the way they catch each other’s smiling eyes, the way they stand almost curved toward each other, chest to chest, with a generous opening for Alec’s presence between them. He’s always enjoyed seeing love in its quieter, subtler moments, and now is no different.

But he’s also eager to return to Alec’s line of conversation, because it feels like the beginning of their combined missing somethings. His Shadowhunter is in dreadful need of a sounding board, and to Magnus, Underhill’s strategist education and Hawkstorm’s extensive experience with the Shadow World’s more ruthless creatures makes them ideal candidates.

When it looks like they’re ready to leave, Magnus takes the opening, “Alexander, perhaps your knowledgeable colleagues might be able to shed some light on your concerns?”

Both Shadowhunters look from him to Alec, willing to help in any way they can. Magnus had left it vague enough for Alec to take it or leave it, but he’s clearly in agreement about picking the brains of their present company. He rises from his chair and gestures them all to the lounge seating in the middle of the room, and there’s a pause while he gathers his thoughts, meticulously cherry picking
which information to lay out. The epitome of a leader with a head full of filters. Magnus finds his diplomacy terribly attractive.

“I know you both weren’t here at the time, but have you read the reports on the Forsaken attack?”

“Yes sir,” his Head of Security nods. Hawkstorm echoes the sentiment.

“What do you think?” Alec asks, “What’s your general opinion of what went down?”

Underhill seems to understand his ability to break down scenarios is being called upon, and he takes a moment to refresh himself with what he knows of that night. When he looks to Alec again, he seems reluctant.

“Your reports list Jocelyn and Clary Fairchild as the assumed target,” Underhill says, “And we have the security breach - Forsaken with Angel blood. The problem I have is in how Valentine was trying to achieve his objective.”

Alec nods, “Alright. How so?”

Underhill turns to Hawkstorm, who shifts forward on the sofa and adds his two cents. It's quickly apparent that they’ve discussed it before, “Forsaken are brutes - they get pushed in a direction and destroy everything in their path, until someone takes them down. If Valentine sent Forsaken to retrieve Jocelyn and Clary, he would have had a hard time getting them back alive, let alone unharmed.”

Alec takes a moment to let it sink in, “So why send an entire army of Forsaken into the Institute?”

“Either he was super pissed and wanted everyone dead,” Hawkstorm shares a wary look with Underhill, “Or it was a distraction.”

The quiet that settles over their gathered group pulses with suspense. A distraction. It goes against everything they’d suspected, yet now that it’s been said aloud, it makes perfect sense. A worrying amount of sense.

“What if the idea wasn’t to take something out,” Alec suggests, and his expression morphs as some greater horror appears to dawn on him, “...but to bring something in.”

He’s out of his seat before anyone can blink, snatching his tablet off his desk without another word. Underhill and Hawkstorm stand to attention, and the rousing panic on Alec’s face has Magnus getting up to offer assistance, should he need it.

Alec swipes through a succession of files on his screen before he’s flipping the tablet around, and three faces stare out at them. A surveillance shot of Luke Garroway outside the Jade Wolf. An old photo of Jocelyn Fairchild from twenty years ago. And a mugshot of Hodge Starkweather.

“Former Circle members,” Alec breathes, “Three in our vicinity.”

“Valentine had Lucian turned and left for dead,” Magnus refutes, “He’s far from a loyalist.”

“And Jocelyn’s been hiding from him,” Alec agrees without argument, swiping both of their images from the screen. It leaves Hodge, “He’s the only one Valentine hasn’t attacked in some way. And he’s been locked inside the Institute for eighteen years. There’s gotta be something there.”

Hawkstorm runs a hand through his long hair, “Well, holy shit.”
“If there is, we’ll find it,” Underhill promises.

“Check the feeds from that night,” Alec orders him, “Find Hodge in the cameras and track his whereabouts. I want to know if anything got near him.” He turns to Hawkstorm, handing him his Stele, “Put him in the holding cell for questioning. I have a spare few hours and I’m in the mood for answers.”

“Yes sir,” Hawkstorm replies, and the two of them file out, almost vibrating with urgency.

Alec is almost shaking by the time Magnus reaches for his hands - out of panic or anger or both, he’s not sure. But he tries to soothe him, thumbs caressing the protruding veins in Alec’s wrists, and he plants a kiss to Alec’s hair when he leans forward against him, defeated forehead to supportive shoulder.

His Shadowhunter sighs, “I just...need a minute.”

“As long as you want, my love,” he murmurs, pressing a prolonged kiss to Alec’s temple, comforting him the only way he can.

They remain there for several minutes, with Alec’s fingers flexing nervously in his grip, his breath fanning rhythmically in warm bursts through Magnus’ shirt. Hodge Starkweather has been at the New York Institute as long as Alec has - as a trainer, a mentor, a family friend. Magnus can’t even begin to imagine what he’s struggling with right now, with possibilities such as these on the table.

“If it’s Hodge...”

“Let’s not worry until it’s confirmed,” Magnus says, “You’re making the right choices for now. Concentrate on your process. Worry about the rest when you know for sure.”

Alec mumbles a halfhearted agreement, then rises to his full height with great effort, as if caught beneath an impossible weight. He’s halfway out the door when Magnus catches him, hands gently framing his jaw to pull him in. Then he’s kissing him, soft and plush and caressing, transferring whatever strength Alec needs through the language of his moving mouth. And Alec sinks into his arms and breathes him in, taking his kiss like he knows what Magnus is trying to do and wants to savor it.

When they part again, Magnus is breathless and woozy; craving more, as he always does. Instead, he holds Alec’s face between his palms, thumbs smoothing affectionately, and looks him dead in the eye.

“The Alec Lightwood I know and love, he knows what he’s doing. You’ve got this.”

The smile on Alec’s face is small and slow coming. But it’s genuine, “Will you be okay hanging around?”

“I’ll be fine,” Magnus smiles, “I tend to entertain myself quite well. Go. I’ll pay your sister a visit.”

Alec presses in with a series of quick smooches that have Magnus smiling helplessly against his lips, and then he’s striding out of the room like a calm, confident Shadowhunter leader once again, tossing him a smile before he disappears through the doorway. But as Magnus listens to his foot falls growing distant, the smile slides from his face.
He crosses paths with Jace on his way to Isabelle’s lab, scratching irritably at what Magnus assumes is the puncture site from his blood test.

“All done?”

Jace glances up from his arm, “Yeah. Now I just have to try not go insane while I wait. Where’s Alec?”

“Holding cell,” Magnus tells him. Alec would probably want to keep his current situation confidential, but he’s interested to see Jace’s reaction. He doesn’t know Alec’s Parabatai well, but his gut is telling him something is off. The wards, the spell, the blood test. Hodge. Hodge’s broken arm. Jace. None of it is adding up, “Hodge is being interrogated.”

“Hodge?” Jace frowns, confused, “Why?”

Magnus shrugs, “You’ll have to ask Alec.”

He watches Jace jog to the elevator, sees the way Jace offers him a grim smile as the doors close him in, and that unnerved, niggling sensation returns in full force.

On a whim, Magnus detours toward the residential wing, shouldering through into the stairway. It takes him a few minutes of leaping steps to get to the right floor, but when he’s there, he makes his way to where he remembers Alec’s bedroom is. He pushes at the door just enough to see inside, recognizes the bedspread, the bookshelf bursting with books, the military meticulousness, and turns to the opposite door across the hall. Jace’s room.

He knocks lightly, waiting for any sound on the other side, then quietly lets himself in. He looks around for small possessions, checks the bedside drawers, but they’re full of journals, papers, condoms. His eyes eventually catch a copper dish atop the nearest dresser, and his carefully sifting fingers touch odd buttons from clothing, pins, keys, a hair comb, a ticket stub. Then a pocket knife, worn at the edges from age and overuse, engraved on the side with the words for your safety, because you’re stupid. A gift Alec had once told him about; one that he’d given to Jace on his fifteenth birthday.

He slips it into his jacket pocket and closes the bedroom door behind him as he leaves.

Alec has dedicated an exorbitant amount of his life to providing love, comfort and comradery to his Parabatai, and Jace’s self-disparaging mood in the past two days has done a number on him. Isabelle, the third in their little Lightwood triangle, seems to be affected two-fold; by Alec’s unhappiness and Jace’s attitude. So when Magnus arrives, she seems immediately relieved to have the distraction of his company as she works.

He spends the next couple of hours chatting, handing her things, asking her questions, because coming across one of the smartest forensic pathologists around isn’t a regular occurrence and he likes the way she lights up when she explains things. He tells her what he knows about what’s going on, eager to see where she stands on the matter. She’s clearly worried about Alec, about Jace, about what it could mean for their family and their Institute if Hodge is found implicated in the Forsaken
attack after all. But more than that, she’s angry, and stunned, just as Alec was. If Hodge is involved with Valentine, a lot of people are going to get hurt.

When the blood test plates have developed just enough to view, Isabelle begins to go through her usual checks. But she soon quickly abandons her clipboard altogether, growing very still. Magnus waits patiently, dread rolling in his stomach as the seconds tick by, because she’s not moving. And when she finally leans back in her seat, there’s a scary, dawning shock taking over her unusually pale face. Adrenaline floods him with the sharpness of a blade.

“Sweetheart?” Magnus tentatively asks.

Isabelle’s eyes fill with tears Magnus can’t quite understand, a myriad of emotions flowing through them, but then she’s leaning forward over the microscope once again, taking her pen in hand, determinately marking things down as she looks for them. Demon blood, he thinks, something inside him finally clicking into place at the realization. He and Isabelle read each other’s grave faces, and nothing else needs to be said.

“Alec felt Jace being stabbed during the attack,” Magnus suggests, “Could Jace have been infected?”

Isabelle shakes her head, her sigh shuddering past her cherry red lips, “His cells are mutated, not infected. Which tells me this happened in utero.”

“In---” His mind begins to spin, as if a floodgate has opened and all of his missing somethings are suddenly crashing through at once. In utero. The last time he heard that term was---

“I might be able to learn more if I run a DNA test, but it will take me another few hours.”

“Do it,” he says, and when Isabelle glances up at him as if to ask why, he gives her a quick excuse, “If Valentine has been infecting random Shadowhunter babies, it’s probably in the Clave’s best interest to know as much as possible.”

Isabelle gets straight back to work, fired up with the kind of purpose only Valentine seems to provoke in the Clave’s soldiers. Magnus doesn’t need to know the details. He’s almost certain he now knows what’s going on. He just needs to confirm it for himself.

“I’ll let Alec know you have the results,” he murmurs, leaving the lab without another glance. Isabelle’s affirmative answer gets lost behind him.

The ends of his jacket sweep as he moves down the corridor with his own purpose, his heartbeat thudding so hard it feels like a convulsion. He pauses when he reaches somewhere quiet and void of Shadowhunters milling about, and takes Jace’s knife from his pocket. He squeezes it in his hand until the metal bites into his palm, then closes his eyes, breathing in, sending out all the panicked, errant thoughts from his head so he can focus.

The familiar pulling sensation comes, like he’s gliding across a great distance, but it soon fades into nothingness. He frowns and tries again, feels the pull, then the vast nothing of a trail gone cold. He sucks in another breath and tries one more time, pushing against the strange blur in search of something. In his mind’s eye, he’s in front of a murky white sheet, something like plasma blocking him from where he needs to go. He touches it, and he feels faint, floaty, drugged. Numb.

He opens his eyes, his pulse thrashing in his neck. He peers down at the pocket knife in his hand, at the engraving Alec had made for Jace. The evidence of a real connection, a friendship, a brotherhood.

And yet. It’s not connecting to the man currently keeping Alec company in the Institute’s basement.
What if the idea wasn’t to take something out, Alec had suggested earlier. But to bring something in.

Wherever Alec’s Parabatai is, it’s not here. And someone else, someone with Demon blood is wearing his face. They’ve been wearing his face since the Forsaken attack.

He knows what that DNA test will say.

“No,” His breath trembles out of him, and the gripping fear sends his feet down the hallway; walking, running, sprinting for the basement.

For Alec. Where he stands unknowingly in the company of Jonathan Morgenstern.
Alec’s world tilts.

He’d held out hope that he’d been wrong about Hodge, but hope means nothing in the face of a confession. Subterfuge. A rat in their midst. Alec initially fights it where Hodge will not, serving his Shadowhunter mentor excuses to claim. Excuses like he must have threatened you and he threatened your family and he threatened us, followed by he’s controlling you against your will and you didn’t have a choice. God, Hodge, tell me you didn’t have a choice.

But no. Hodge Starkweather, beneath the years of familial friendship and wise advice, is apparently a man who had been left to stew in his resentments long enough that a simple promise of freedom from Valentine was enough to bring him onside. Hodge has paid for that promised freedom by sending years of Clave intel directly to their greatest enemy, and more recent intel on Clary and Jocelyn. He claims to be a spy, and he claims to have had a hand in the Forsaken attack, but when Alec presses him for the motive - that Valentine was after Jocelyn and Clary - Hodge simply agrees with the observation despite how, according to Underhill and Hawkstorm, the motive doesn’t match the scope of the attack. Alec had already been having a hard enough time trying to wrap his head around Valentine’s failed attempt on the Institute. The additional knowledge that Valentine also failed with the advantage of insider information doesn’t make a whole lot of sense.

On top of his conveniently packaged confession, Hodge drops another bombshell; that while he’d been completely abandoned by the Clave and imprisoned for the rest of his life in the New York Institute, other former Circle members had been shown greater leniency. Former Circle members like Alec’s parents. And that makes even less sense, because his mother’s punishment for her crimes
against the Clave had been the running of the biggest Institute in North America. Hardly the same as Hodge’s life sentence.

He imagines it’s only a tactic to distract him from his obvious confusion, but whether he likes it or not, it does slots in nicely with his strict upbringing and the bitterness he’s always felt toward his parents. They’d always been so afraid of him messing up, often to the point of paranoia. To the point where Alec had wasted a great deal of time hiding who he was, as not to rock the family boat. Now, it seems, he knows the reason why. And he’s pissed beyond measure.

He doesn’t know how to deal with any of this, and he doesn’t know which blow is more devastating. That he’s surrounded by traitors, that he’s surrounded by traitorous hypocrites, or that he’d been made to shoulder the blame for their trashed family name. The knowledge, the burden of having such a large hole to dig himself and his Institute out of, is paralyzing.

For the next couple of hours, his barely repressed anger has him falling apart inside. Underhill takes over for him and questions Hodge on the logistics, trying to close the Institute’s multiple security breaches. Hodge’s answers don’t come easy, but when they do, he sounds like a man reciting a user manual. Alec eventually slams his hand at the two-way intercom, done with hearing anything else, and he makes his way out to the main entry with Jace and Underhill in tow.

When they reach the elevator, Underhill turns to him, “Seventy percent of what he’s told us sounds like—”

“Bullshit?” Alec surmises.

Underhill nods, “But Sam and I will work on the other thirty percent, see what we can find.”

He thanks him as he leaves, his knees moments away from giving out. Jace catches and leans him against the wall when he slumps, a hand solid on Alec’s chest. His rising panic is beginning to seize his ability to breathe, and his immediate thought is of Magnus. How he’d once helped to calm him down when things had become too much. Breathe, his Warlock had told him, In and out. Focus on my hands.

He presses both hands over his chest now and breathes into them, just as he remembers.

“Are you alright?” Jace asks, eyes intense as he watches.

Alec takes a deep breath, feels himself let it out and tries to keep his mind on task, “I’m fine.”

“You don’t really believe what he said about Maryse and Robert, right? He’s gotta be lying.”

Alec searches his Parabatai’s gaze. He looks hardened, closed off despite his words, and the way he’s claiming their parents by their names now is evidence enough, “Your mind already seems made up.”

The corners of Jace’s eyes twitch, a sheet of confusion glazing over them. But then his hand tightens against Alec’s shirt, “None of that matters. You’re the only thing that matters to me. Tell me what you need and I’ll do it.”

He presses his head into Jace’s shoulder and breathes, attempting to pull himself together. Jace’s hand lands on his nape, but he forgoes his usual gentleness in favor of squeezing hard enough to bruise. That slight pinch in Alec’s neck muscle gives him something else to concentrate on besides the sound of his world foundations cracking through the middle.

“We’re going to get through this, brother,” Jace tells him, “You and me against the world, right?”
No, he thinks, they won’t be the only ones that’ll have to deal with this. His thoughts suddenly drift
to his sister, off in her lab working to answer their many questions. What will Isabelle think about all
of this? Would she even believe it? Would she start to match every one of their parents’ harsh
critiques over the years to their now obvious efforts to remain out of the firing line, as he is? As the
very fabric of all he knows begins to unravel, he thinks again of Magnus, because Magnus would
have the words he needs to hear. Magnus knows how to build him up when he falls down.

Almost as if his own desire has conjured him out of thin air, Magnus leaps out of the elevator doors,
boots skidding on the cement floor. He looks wild and frantic in a way that makes Alec completely
forget about everything else, and he shrugs out of Jace’s hands to meet him halfway. He’s confused,
but relieved and luxuriating beneath the flustered caresses his boyfriend is suddenly brushing over
him.

Magnus takes him all in with short, panicky movements of his eyes, as if checking for injury, “Are
you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Alec swallows, refusing to glance at Hodge on the other side of the glass, “If fine
describes the shitshow down here. What’s wrong with you? Are you okay?”

There’s a very real fear in Magnus’ dark eyes, something that begins a crawling sensation up the
length of Alec’s spine. Magnus glances toward Jace, growing tense, lowering his voice with great
urgency, “I need to talk to you.”

Jace must overhear, because he scuffs his boots on the floor aimlessly behind them before he
interrupts.

“Isabelle has my results, huh?” Jace half laughs, grinning to cover whatever horrible truth he’s
beginning to cave under. He nods to himself, hanging his head unhappily, “And I’m guessing they’re
not good?”

Magnus’ only reply is to slide his hands into Alec’s, gripping tight. The idea that something bad has
been found in Jace’s bloodwork terrifies Alec, even as it sends his brain into overdrive trying to
figure out what, and how. He immediately begins to obsess over the solutions, ways to keep it quiet
and away from Clave ears. Because it doesn’t matter what the results say. He’s not about to give his
Parabatai over to be the Clave’s lab rat, if they’re so generous as to let him live at all. He’d sooner
bury the blood results before he lets that happen.

Jace walks past the both of them, hands nervously sifting through his hair. Alec means to follow,
because there’s no way he’s letting Jace go through this alone, but Magnus tugs on his arm to hold
him back.

“Can it wait?” he asks, searching his Warlock’s worried eyes, “I need to be there for him right now.”

“Alec—–”

“I need to be there for him right now. Later,” he gives Magnus a quick kiss, trying to soothe his
words, “I promise.”

Magnus concedes, but he sticks close to Alec’s side as they take the elevator to the main floor. His
fingers squeeze at Alec’s hand hard enough to pop his knuckles, but Alec feels like today is trying to
drown him, so he squeezes back just as tight, looking to Magnus’ handsome, solemn face for
answers.

“Raziel, I’m nervous,” Jace laughs, tugging at his t-shirt collar as he watches the floor numbers
change. Then he directs his next question at Magnus with an anxious, self-deprecating amusement that chips a jagged piece out of Alec’s heart. “Think you could accept me as one of your own if it all turns sour?”

Magnus flashes him a very brief, very tight smile that goes nowhere near his eyes, and Alec’s concern ratchets up a few extra notches.

“There’s nothing wrong with a bit of Demon blood,” Magnus offers with a casualness that belies his discomfort, “It’s what you do with it that counts.”

Jace nods, thinking to himself, “Yeah, thank you. I’ll do my best to remember that.”

Magnus’ mouth twitches at the corner, a strange sort of tension rolling through him, “I’m sure you will.”

There’s clearly another bad thing waiting on the horizon to add to the large pile of bad things he’s been dealing with for the past few hours, and he’s not sure how he plans to get through it. He leans into Magnus heavily, seeking comfort, and Magnus crowds against his side to rest his chin on Alec’s shoulder. The feel of his boyfriend’s body on his immediately works free the tight grip of frustration he’s carrying inside himself, and he finally begins to breathe a little easier. By the time they’re leaving the elevator, he feels strong enough to slide his game face back on.

*Keeping* it on turns out to be harder than expected, because Isabelle looks like she’s spent the last twenty minutes crying on her own. She confirms the bad news - blood cells with Demonic mutations, brought on by exposure to Demon blood in utero - and Jace retreating into himself, eyes welling up, mumbling morosely about how he always knew something was wrong with him. And with Magnus standing in the corner of Isabelle’s white lab like a big ominous cloud, Alec doesn’t know who of the three to comfort first. Isabelle hugs Jace, telling him with fierce, sisterly pride that nothing has changed, that she still loves him, and Jace winds his arms around her, panting into her shoulder with awful, hitched breaths. Alec moves to pull them both against him, and they immediately arrange themselves around him, seeking solace where Alec offers it, as he always does for those he loves.

“There is nothing wrong with you,” Alec mutters into Jace’s ear, feels his Parabatai’s fingers dig a little deeper into his back at the words. His face is pressed hard and unyielding into Alec’s chest, “You’re still our brother. You’re still mine, Parabatai.”

When he gazes over at Magnus helplessly, something unsettling shivers to life in the bottom of his stomach. His boyfriend doesn’t look sympathetic in the slightest, only deeply unnerved. Like watching the three of them comfort each other is some brand new horror he’s been made to watch.

Another two hours later, Isabelle’s series of other tests reveal the shocking origin of Jace’s Demon blood. That his DNA aligns with Clary and Jocelyn. A biological brother. A biological son, experimented on in the womb, presumed dead as an infant. Blood kin to be claimed. Jonathan Morgenstern. Valentine’s and Jocelyn’s firstborn. Valentine.

Chaos erupts. All of Alec’s reassurances go entirely out the window as Jace loses his everloving
mind, grabbing at his own hair, trembling with revulsion, thrashing out in fits of violence, swiping anything he sees through his teary eyes away from him like it’s one more thing he can’t trust. Alec grabs him in a hold, trying to protect him and the gathering group in the lab from any more trouble. He’s terrified, because Jace has never been so carelessly enraged before, and he’s all but vibrating with pain, bright waves of anger and sadness coming off him. It cuts Alec deep.

Isabelle protects the Fairchild women, hand outstretched and protective against Jace’s anger. Clary cries, trying to calm and reassure Jace even as Isabelle holds her back with an arm. Isabelle feeds him the same thing she did before, that nothing has to change. Jocelyn, his revealed mother, is staring at him like she’s seen a ghost.

“That woman,” Jace shrieks, his voice wet and shaken and furious. He points at Jocelyn accusingly, even as Alec yanks him back into his arms, “That woman. She’s not my mother. You are not my mother!”

Alec has to re-grip on his Parabatai’s senseless, writhing body. He’s never seen him this beside himself before, ever, “Jace, calm down.”

Jace continues to wail brokenly at Jocelyn, “I don’t need you. You abandoned me.”

Jocelyn grows more shaken and speechless the longer it carries on, so Clary speaks for her, “She thought you were dead!”

“How could you not know! How could you not look! You abandoned me!”

Alec adjusts his hold when Jace finally sinks toward the floor, tiredly sobbing into his neck. He nods everyone out of the room - glares at Clary when she tries to stay - and gathers Jace into his arms the way he used to hold Max when he was an irritable baby. All he can think about, all he can focus on, is the distress his Parabatai is in, and how much of a wall he needs to be between Jace and the world to make everything feel safe again. On the floor of Isabelle’s lab, slumped against the cupboard doors, Alec rocks Jace gently, trying to soothe him with soft shushes.

“I love you,” Alec whispers to him, speaking it like a promise. His own eyes grow wet at the corners, a lump forming in his throat. None of this is fair. He can protect Jace from Demons, he can even protect him from the Clave. But he can’t protect him from years of his own pain swelling back to the surface, “I’m right here with you. I’m not going anywhere.”

“You’re all I have, Alec,” Jace sobs into the wet patch he’s made on Alec’s shirt, ”You’re all I have.”

Alec shudders at the admission, aching with it. It’s not even remotely true, but it’s still a different shade of the same heartaches Jace has shared with him in the past. All he can do is hold him a little tighter and pray to the Angel that he can protect his Parabatai from himself.

Eventually, he takes Jace to his room and sits with him while he rests, trying not to feel Jace’s tired, tearful sighs like a seraph blade to the chest. Minutes pass before his breathing finally evens out, but Alec is ready to settle in and keep watch for the entire night in case he’s needed. When his phone
starts vibrating in his jeans, Alec pulls it from his pocket to see multiple unread messages.

From Clary. *Tell him I’m ready whenever he is.*  
From Isabelle. *What do you need, big brother?*  
From Underhill. *Following up on a lead. I think we have something.*

The most recent is from Magnus. *I’m outside. I need to talk to you. Now.*

With a quick glance at Jace, he quietly makes his way out, bringing the bedroom door closed behind him. Magnus is pacing the corridor when he emerges, fingers fidgeting, appearing even more at his wits end than before. The relief that spreads across Magnus’ face when he sees him is almost too much. *What the hell is going on?*

“Are you seriously okay?” Alec asks, “You look worse than Jocelyn. What’s wrong?”

Magnus slides a look toward Jace’s bedroom door, “Come home with me.”

“I can’t leave him. You saw how he was.”

“Yes,” Magnus says rather sullenly, surprisingly unimpressed, “quite the performer, it seems.”

“What---?”

“Just---please, Alec,” Magnus pleads softly, keeping his voice down. He tugs at Alec’s jacket, “I’ll explain at home. Trust me, I would never pull you away from your Parabatai.”

He pauses, torn, because he wants to be here when Jace wakes up. But he’s never seen Magnus so distraught, and he’d only just made reassurances last night to be there when he needed him. Whatever it is that has Magnus up in arms has been on the backburner for hours now, and it seems his urgency hasn’t lessened any.

“Alright. Just give me a----”

Magnus abruptly opens a portal right there in the hallway and shoves him through. Alec narrowly avoids barreling shin-first into his boyfriend’s living room coffee table, before Magnus is following with much more finesse, snapping the portal closed behind him. He doesn’t get the chance to ask what the *fuck* is going on, because Magnus is stepping right into Alec’s space and pulling him into a crushing hug.

Alec frowns at how rigid he feels, and immediately returns the embrace. “We’re not fighting again, are we?”

“No, I’m just glad you’re okay,” Magnus murmurs into his shoulder. His relief is palpable, “I need to tell you something and I need you to hear me out before you get defensive.”

Alec rubs a hand over Magnus’ back to relax him, the intricate embroidery on his coat tickling his palm. He doesn’t like the sound of that, “You’re on my side, right?”

Magnus’ lips find his neck, and the soft smooch he lays there almost warms him on a cellular level, “Always, Alexander.”

It’s another few, long moments before Magnus sees fit to let him go, and Alec stares into his eyes, not at all a fan of the concern he sees there. Magnus looks worried, but he looks more worried for Alec. And that really doesn’t bode well.
“Perhaps it’ll be best if you see it for yourself,” Magnus says.

Then he’s sliding Jace’s pocket knife into Alec’s palm. The one Alec had gotten engraved for Jace’s fifteenth birthday. He doesn’t know why Magnus has it, or why he’s now closing Alec’s fingers around it, but Magnus’ black nails and his adornment of rings shine against his hands, and his mind drifts to earlier that morning, where he’d lain quietly against Magnus’ chest, dozing in and out of dream and reality as his Warlock had traced loving patterns over his runes. Perhaps it’s the sudden unexplainable dread burrowing a pit in his stomach that has him reaching for comfort, thinking of the wonderful when Magnus is looking at him like he means to bear bad news.

Magnus is very grave when he speaks again, “I need you to track Jace.”

He swallows. Jace? “Why?”

“Trust me. Track your Parabatai.”

His words give Alec pause, but he does trust him, undoubtedly so, and he’s not about to test Magnus’ belief of that with something so ineffectual. So he grips the pocket knife and thinks of Jace, waiting for the usual golden glow to heat his hands. Not only doesn’t it come, but his mind feels like he’s hit a giant wall. As if everything that makes Jace who he is has disappeared somewhere beyond it.

Magnus must see the question in his eyes, because he stops Alec from trying again, “Use your bond.”

He holds the pocket knife at his side, the fingers of his other hand beneath his shirt at his left hip, over his Parabatai rune. His eyes sink closed as the bond engulfs him like perfectly warmed water, and he sighs into it as he always does, feeling the little holes and cracks and dents that usually blemish his soul fill and smooth out. He turns his mind to Jace again, tunnelling into the white light of their shared bond in search of the other end. But the further he searches, the more he seems to be on a one way road with no end in sight. It feels exhausting, and helpless, and he doesn’t know how long he searches but when he opens his eyes again, he sways violently on his feet, overcome with dizziness.

Magnus grabs onto him, holding him up as he regains his bearings.

Alec’s tongue is suddenly bone dry in his mouth, and his head feels blurry, “Something’s wrong.”

“My god, you’re slurring like you’re three sheets to the wind,” he hears Magnus muttering through his concern, right before he snaps his fingers at him, ice blue magic sparkling from the tips. The air around Alec’s head surges like a charge, a pulse of pressure pushing inward then pulling back like a rubber band. He instantly feels clearer, as if whatever it was has been scooped out of his head and tossed away.

He gives himself a shake, “What was that?”

“Nothing good,” his Warlock love confesses, worryingly, “I felt the same thing earlier. When I tried to track him.”

“Why are you trying to track Jace?”

Magnus seems to brace them both, hands once again secure on Alec’s arms, “Because I don’t believe he’s in the Institute.”

Fear spikes through him, deeper and stronger than his confusion can justify. His body seems to
understand what’s going on to a certain extent, even if his head doesn’t.

“I’m not sure I follow.”

“Jonathan Morgenstern is in your Institute, we have proof that he is,” Magnus tells him, “and I think Jace, your Parabatai, is missing. I believe he’s been missing since the Forsaken attack.”

As soon as the words register, Alec pulls his arms out of Magnus’ clutch, putting distance between them. He feels sick at the insinuation, “That’s insane. That’s insane, Magnus.”

“Just think about it,” Magnus is pleading again, “My demon tracking spell almost killed him. But you didn’t feel anything. I saw you when he was injured during the attack. You looked like you’d been ripped in half. Have you felt anything through the bond since? Do you feel anything now?”

He’s immediately indignant, because the accusation that he can’t feel his own Parabatai raises his hackles. Because of course he can, and he grows very still as he concentrates on how the bond feels just to prove the point. It’s the same sensation as always - a very slight, resting presence, as if Jace is reading quietly in the next room over. But if he probes a little beneath that, it feels muted. Not quite all there. It’s enough to know he’s still connected, but his inability to reach through starts a slowly-dawning panic inside him.

“Alec, think. If your Jace has been Jonathan his entire life, then why have the wards only been triggered for the last two months?”

“Those wards are over a hundred years old.”

Magnus narrows his eyes, “We’ve been through this. The wards are solid. My magic is not the issue here.”

“There’s gotta be an explanation,” Alec replies, his voice hitching at the end. Because he would know. He would know, dammit, “He can’t be gone. Because if he is, he’s---”

Been gone almost two months. And no one noticed.

The full gravity of the idea floors him. Two months? Two months and Alec didn’t know? Didn’t catch on, once? Who the hell has he been working with? Training with? Laughing with? He’d just spent the last hour cradling some stranger in his arms, a stranger wearing his brother’s face. And it had felt real. Devastatingly real.

“No,” Alec shudders, “No. He knew things. He can’t possibly---”

“Alec,” Magnus implores, with great sympathy. It’s like an anvil on his chest, “I know it’s impossible to believe. But I’m telling you - your Parabatai is out there. And he needs our help.”


He goes over all the little instances between them over the last couple of months. The joking around. The new, dangerous ferocity to Jace’s sparring that put him on edge. The brief lulls in conversation when he had to think about something Alec had referenced. The way Jace had seemingly lived to serve him recently, trying to get closer. God, he’d thought they were simply on a better track after months of antagonism. He’d thought Jace was making amends.

He tries to think of the last conversation he and Jace would have had, and he almost chokes. Alec had told him he couldn’t trust him, couldn’t count on him. That Jace was his.
“Oh god,” the horror slowly creeps in, deep and biting and nauseating, intent on eating him alive. He almost doubles over, stomach rolling, his head full of Jace's hurt, saddened eyes, “Oh god no.”

“Easy, darling. I know,” Magnus offers gently, moving closer with palms raised, “Let’s try again. There’s some kind of block on him. I’ll try to help you push through it so we can reach him.”

Magnus places his warm, soft hands on Alec’s hips, the right sliding beneath his shirt to press over his Parabatai rune. Alec’s body instantly responds to the touch, calming and warming to the sudden proximity between them, because no matter how horrific the situation, it’s still the man he loves sliding into his space like it’s home. He relaxes against Magnus, a hand clasping his fingers. The other goes up around his nape, fingertips gently scraping the buzz of Magnus’ hair.

“Breathe with me,” his Warlock murmurs, inhaling and exhaling with him until he’s calm enough to continue, and then his dark eyes suddenly shimmer to gold, his pupils elongating. Even in their natural demonic state, Magnus’ eyes appear impossibly gentle, “We’ll find him. Everything is going to be okay.”

Alec slows his breathing to match until the air is so warm and charged between them that he almost has to fight the urge to fall forward. Then he feels a brush of something he could only describe as light seeping through his skin, something loving and pure that begins to coil around his insides, rendering them into blooming flowers. And it shouldn’t shock him to realize what it is, but it does. It’s Magnus. Of course it’s Magnus.

Magnus’ magic, soul, whatever it is that encompasses him, builds in him a contentment so dangerous that he nearly forgets the direness of what they’re trying to do. His Parabatai may be lost somewhere, and it’s been such an awful day that all he wants to do is curl into his lover’s arms and be with the peace he finds there. It’s tempting as all hell. Instead, he lets it prop him up and strengthen him, just enough that his determination can override his panic.

Alec leans the few inches between them to place a kiss to Magnus’ mouth, angling Magnus’ jaw toward him. He savors it because it seems like a lifetime since their last, feels Magnus’ essence inside him heating like a ray of sun, and the flowers in his belly spread wider as if hungry to receive it. Magnus sways closer, hands tightening on him, allowing himself a moment to breath into their kiss before he’s sighing against his lips.

Magnus parts from him with reluctance, softly groaning like it pains him to separate. Clearly he’s feeling it too, “Focus, Shadowhunter.”


Alec concentrates again on the pocket knife, sinking back into his bond. He barrels forward through the white glade of nothingness in search of Jace, the sensation of Magnus at his back, and together they push forward for the other end. It whistles past them like wind now, their combined power flying through the mass, until they reach the wall he’d felt before. They rush headlong into it, the viscous wall that means to resist them. And then they’re pushing and pushing and pushing until it finally gives, and Alec falls through. There’s a white hot pause where everything floats, right before it hits him with searing force.

Pain. Unimaginable, excruciating pain.

He immediately hears someone screaming; loud, horrified, anguish burning through his throat as the pain envelops him. His skin feels raw, burned and flayed open like it’s been ripped from his very bones, and his bones ache all over, bruised and broken and exposed. Beyond that is a longing so agonizing that he recognizes it right away. Jace. Jace, whose soul feels hoarse from screaming out
for him. Jace, who isn’t scared or helpless but much, much worse. Jace, who holds on by the thinnest of threads, with the hope that the next act of violence will kill him.

_Jace!

Alec hears screaming again, and yelling, feels the moment his body is wrenched free. Magnus’ voice sounds far away, though terrified and hot in his ear, _begging._

And then the dark consumes him.

He wakes on Magnus’ lounger, surrounded by ampoules, bottles and jars of herbs and potions. Magnus is beside him, frantically grinding something with his mortar and pestle, sniffing and grunting through what sounds like tears. Alec flexes his hands and feet as he takes stock of his body, and the movements of his boots must catch Magnus’ eyes because his Warlock is suddenly very much in his face, shaky and desperate, hands lovingly cradling his face. The mortar and pestle roll abandoned onto the rug, spilling powder.

“Darling?” Magnus asks. And there _are_ tears, glistening in the corners of his worried eyes, “Alec?”

“What the hell happened?” The words require some effort, his throat burning. The rest of him feels fine, only groggy.

Magnus pauses to press his face into Alec’s chest; a soft, relieved sigh heaving through his shoulders before he’s wiping roughly at a stray tear falling across his cheek, appearing to gather himself, “You had some sort of seizure. Collapsed right into my arms. I thought I lost you for a moment there.”

He means to reassure Magnus that he’s fine, because his boyfriend looks haunted, and Alec never, ever wants to see him look that way again. But the memories begin to filter in of what they’ve learned. An imposter in his Institute. His Parabatai gone. His Parabatai, near death, waiting for the end to come.

He bolts upright, struggling against Magnus’ immediate hold.

“Wait. _Wait_—”

“I need to find Jace.”

“Jonathan has been a dozen steps ahead of us for months now. _We need a plan._”

It makes him feel marginally better that Magnus is as furious about this as he is, even if being told to stop and think goes against every instinct he has right now. The Parabatai in him wants to save Jace by any and all means necessary, to find him and bring him home before it’s too late. But the leader in him has to think about his Institute and the staff inside it. Jonathan Morgenstern - Valentine’s son - being under his roof is the biggest security breach they’ve ever had, and he’s currently unaware than he’s been made. His head wants to neutralize the immediate threat and use the opportunity for information to his advantage. But it’s a hard battle to win when his heart just wants his brother back.
Magnus must see his internal argument, because he uses the silence to prompt him, “The Forsaken attack was a setup to get Jonathan inside the Institute. This is far graver than we imagined.”

“I have to get to Jace,” Alec’s throat tightens, remembering his Parabatai’s agony, “He’s barely holding on.”

“Then we better deal with Jonathan quickly,” Magnus tells him, certainty and determination in his eyes.

At the Institute, Alec makes a concentrated effort not to kill Jonathan where he sleeps, shaking him awake under the ruse that Hodge has made an offer of more information. He suspects Hodge’s gaping confession was a poorly slapped together cover job for Jonathan’s presence in the Institute, so he tries to use the threat of Hodge revealing more information to bait him. He’s also gentle, feigning concern, because everything Jonathan has done since he snuck in has been in an almost obsessive effort to be close to him. Whatever he’s here for, he’s made Alec his focus. So he uses that, and himself, to manipulate Jonathan down to the basement level.

Alec feels the revulsion in nauseous waves as he plays along, brushing elbows with Jonathan as they walk. Just looking at him boils the bile in his gut. This *imposter*, swanning around in his Institute wearing his Parabatai’s face, living his Parabatai’s life without a care while Jace suffers unspeakable torment. The only thing that overpowers his anger at Jonathan is his anger at himself.

When they reach the holding cell, Alec punches in the code, then swipes his Stele over the scanner pad until it unlocks. He shoves the door open and steps back, motioning Jonathan in first with a friendly tap on the back—then immediately closes him inside with Hodge, the door’s locks sliding automatically into place. Alec draws a large *Fortitude* rune on the door just for an added kick.

When Alec moves in front of the holding cell’s front viewing panel, Jonathan is looking to him like Alec is simply playing a prank, hands raised in confused amusement. Hodge is immediately on his feet in the corner of the cell, looking between them nervously as he waits for a next move.

Jonathan opens his mouth and actually has the balls to chuckle, “Alec, buddy? What’s going on?”

“Think real hard, Jonathan,” Alec sneers, “I’m sure it’ll come to you.”

Jonathan’s face drops, but just when Alec think he’s got him, he gets a peculiar look on his face. Like Alec has hurt his feelings. “I’m not Jonathan. I will never be Jonathan. I’m Jace---”

“You make the mistake of insulting my intelligence,” Alec all but spits at the glass, “You’ve had your fun at my Parabatai’s expense. Now you can sit there and rot until I care enough to deal with you.”

Jonathan hangs his head, scuffing his boot on the floor. Like he has for the last two months. That alone should have been enough reason to suspect something, because Jace’s natural tendency to fidget has always been in his hands. Steles, daggers, pens, pencils, knives or forks. Whatever he can pick up, he’ll flip or twist or twirl in his fingers. How Alec missed the most simplest of signs, he can’t understand. The shame is almost crippling.
Jonathan suddenly snickers to himself, “I would never insult your intelligence, oh beloved Parabatai.” He looks up, and his eyes glint with mayhem, “Just your ability to distinguish friend from foe. A big, fat blindspot in a guy who wants to accomplish so much.”

Jonathan looks beyond Alec’s shoulder as Magnus walks in, placing himself at Alec’s side. His small nod tells him that Underhill is very much informed of what’s going on and is taking measures to lock down the Institute.

Jonathan gestures flippantly at Magnus, “Present company included.”

Alec ignores the dig, “Why are you here, Jonathan?”

“Why not?” he shrugs, “I wasn’t going to pass up the chance to meet the whore that abandoned me, or the sister I never knew I had. Jocelyn doesn’t like me. I guess all those notions about maternal instincts rings true after all. But Clary...Clary shows promise.”

Alec glances at Hodge, who seems to watch with great trepidation. As if he and Jonathan aren’t actually in cahoots after all. “And replacing Jace was the way to go about it?”

“Well, the opening was right there,” Jonathan smirks, “You and your Parabatai were so at odds that I was able to slip in right under your nose. So at odds that I was able to get close to you and improve on your relationship. You made it all so easy.”

Magnus slides his fingers around Alec’s wrist, pressing with warning before Alec can let his anger get the better of him. He immediately calms, gathering strength from the simple touch, grateful to be kept in line. Jonathan has effortlessly manipulated them all for so long, and bets are he’ll continue to do so to get whatever it is he wants. He can already tell Jonathan isn’t going to share anything of importance, but Alec still can’t afford to lose his head or give him any ground.

“I guess it makes sense,” Alec surmises casually, “If I were Valentine, I’d swap you out for Jace, too.”

Jonathan laughs forcefully, looking to Hodge like they’re all in on the joke, “Oh, we’re very interchangeable. You’d know that better than anyone.”

Alec tries to ignore the sting as he looks to Hodge again, noting how truly uncomfortable he appears to be. “So I’m supposed to just believe you’re here on a holiday?”

“Well, it’s not like I don’t fucking deserve one.”

Alec hears the thinly veiled bitterness in his voice, “Meanwhile Valentine is off with my Parabatai why?”

Jonathan shrugs again, his dark grin curving into his cheeks, “Playing hopscotch. Who knows.”

Alec smothers his fury, turning back to Hodge, “And you let this happen. There aren’t enough dungeons in the world to make you pay for what you’ve done.”

“Don’t take your anger out on him, brother,” Jonathan smirks, “It’s not his fault you were perfectly content to have me around. I’ll even admit it was fun for me, too. How’s that?”

“I’m talking to you,” Alec growls at Hodge, “Have you got nothing to say? You were his mentor. My mentor. You watched us grow up. How could you do this?”

“Easily,” Jonathan interrupts again, even as Hodge opens his mouth to speak, “There’s nothing a
man wouldn’t do to save his own neck. We all betray our own in the end.”

Alec glances between the two, recognizing Jonathan’s subtle efforts to both waste his time and hold his attention. A distraction from the real issue at hand. He can almost feel Magnus’ focus beside him, honed in on the exact same thing. Alec’s almost certain that he wasn’t prepared to be locked up or found out like this, that he’s going by the seat of his pants as much as Alec is. So, Alec plays a hunch.

“Nothing you’ve said has added up,” He purposefully directs the conversation back to Hodge, moving toward his side of the cell, “I believe you want your freedom, and I believe you’re doing as you’re told in order to get it. But I don’t believe you’d willingly throw me or my family into harm’s way. That’s not the Hodge I know.”

“What part don’t you understand?” Jonathan sighs pityingly, almost maneuvering himself between them. Alec glances toward Magnus, who watches the exchange with equal interest, “There’s really not that much to it---”

“Hodge,” Alec tries again, pointedly ignoring Jonathan’s presence altogether, “I know you. I know you. I can vouch for you, I can talk to the Consul---”

Jonathan laughs. Hodge appears to be even more spooked by the idea of the Consul getting involved, but the look he gives Alec is enough to know he’s onto something. He’s chipping away at him, piece by piece. Just a little more.

Alec loads as much sincerity into his voice as he can, “Hodge, tell me what you know. Tell me where Jace is. Please. He’s running out of time.”

Jonathan abruptly shifts and slams a fist against the thick glass wall, all amusement falling off his face quicker than a blink, “Who’s to say your Parabatai isn’t dead already?”

Alec ignores him, because he knows his bond is still intact. His heart starts racing, “Hodge, please. He’d do it for you. You know he would.”

Jonathan fills the tense pause between them with sarcasm after sarcasm, pestering them both. Alec doesn’t know if he’s simply being moody at the lack of attention or desperate to hide something. But with the way Hodge is staring back at him, Alec is leaning toward the latter.

“I don’t know anything about Jace,” Hodge suddenly admits, his voice quiet and low, cautious. Jonathan starts laughing again, manically, but that seems to get Hodge’s back up. His eyes harden, almost determined, “But there are Circle members hiding in your Institute.”

Alec’s stomach drops.

“At least a handful in every major---”

Jonathan swings a hard left hook at Hodge’s jaw, hard enough that Alec hears something crack. He and Magnus both rush toward the glass, “Hodge!”

Hodge seems to shiver as he catches himself against the concrete cell wall. The look he gives Alec is mixed. It’s an apology, a sad smile, and absolution from his off-color deeds. His eyes fall closed in pain as he works his jaw with a hand. Something is definitely broken.

But he continues anyway, his resolve now found, “---in every major Institute around the wor---”

Jonathan grabs Hodge by the hair and slams his head into the concrete wall. Blood spills across
Hodge’s face as he slides to the floor, chest panting.

Alec yells as Jonathan steps closer, ready for another shot, and Hodge looks up at him listlessly, blinking through the blood, mouth gaping for breath. He’s dazed, and his nose is broken, and he won’t last much longer if Jonathan insists on using the same deadly force.

Jonathan sneers down at him, “You’re done, Starkweather.”

Magnus shoots, with great effort, a bolt of magic through the cell to hold Jonathan in place. The unique wards on the room mean he shouldn’t even be able to, but from what Alec has seen of Magnus’ power level - and the fact they’re his wards in the first place - he’s not surprised that he manages to get through. Jonathan peers over his shoulder at Magnus, eyes like black onyx, and he’s emitting some surge of power that even Alec can feel from where he stands. Magnus presses forward against it, jaw clenched, but it can only hold him for so long.

“Hodge. Hodge,” Alec breathes, hands against the glass, “I’m sorry---”

“The Clave…” Hodge rasps through a thick gurgle of blood, “The Clave is compro---”

Alec shouts as Jonathan shoves out of Magnus’ hold and sets in on Hodge’s body, and he watches helplessly, eyes wet, as Jonathan all but pulverizes him against the dirty cement floor. Horrifyingly, he even continues once it’s clear Hodge is dead, rendering his body a broken, mashed mess of blood and tissue, as if doing so entertains him.

Jonathan slams his bloody hands on the glass, grinning through blood splattered teeth, eyes as black as hell itself. He still wears Jace’s face, and Alec doesn’t think he’ll ever get the sight out of his head.

“Time’s up, Parabatai.”

The basement lights start to flicker as the strange power he emits lances outward, and Jonathan runs at the holding cell door faster than a wink, blowing it wide open with a thunderous smash. Magnus immediately swarms him with thick, red magic when Jonathan takes a run at them, using his momentum to throw him down the corridor and against the wall as hard as he can. It's hard enough to temporarily knock him down a peg and buy them some time, and Alec unglamours his bow and quiver, nocks an arrow and shoots, only for Jonathan to wrench himself out of Magnus’ magic and slump to a crouch. He’s pissed, and panting, and then he’s off toward the stairs in a flash.

Alec doesn’t know if locking down the Institute was a good idea now. On the one hand, Jonathan won’t get out. On the other, he could slaughter everyone inside trying to get out.

He calls Underhill, “He’s on the run. I need guards on Clary and Jocelyn. Shut down the residential and common room wings, and get everyone else locked down in the main hall. I want to bottleneck him to the Ops Center.”

Underhill simply clicks off with a yes sir.

Magnus forms a portal with a violent swing of his arm, and they both step through into the Institute’s Ops Center. They emerge in the middle of Shadowhunters trickling down toward the main hall, and they both walk against the grain to place themselves near the only entry point Jonathan will have. Isabelle arrives, her Adamas whip uncurling and lengthening from her wrist, and Hawkstorm drops down from the security platform, tugging his battle axes from the glamoured holster on his back.

Isabelle watches the stairwell corridor, keen and ready to fight, “What do we have?”

“Jonathan Morgenstern,” Alec tells her, and she throws him a look of confusion, “He killed Hodge
and he’s trying to escape. It’s not Jace. I’ll explain later.”

“What do you mean it’s not Jace?” Isabelle asks, a thousand different emotions crossing her face as she attempts to make sense of the words. He mouths at her, later.

Magnus yanks at his coat lapels like the admission he’s about to make bothers him, “He’s powerful.”

“You’re powerful,” Alec nocks another arrow, “Can you hold him?”

Magnus takes a deep breath in, and his eyes change from dark brown to gold, “More or less.”

Alec wants to interrogate Jonathan, but he’s already broken through the usual holding methods and he’s proving far too dangerous. Trying to keep him locked up has been a vain attempt. He just wants whatever option will get Jace back alive.

Magnus must see the thoughts in his eyes, “We’ll find another way, Alec. You don’t want something this powerful in your Institute. And you definitely don’t want him locked up in Idris or roaming the city.”

He can’t help but agree. They all raise their weapons as they feel an incoming thundering of footsteps. Alec pulls his arrow into place, “Alright. Take him down by any means necessary.”

“Are you sure?” Isabelle asks, because while Hawkstorm is willing to follow his orders, Isabelle has been through the emotional ringer with the thing posing as their brother and doesn’t quite understand what they’re dealing with.

Alec does.

“You didn’t see it, Iz,” he tells her, trying not to think of the bloody mess in the basement, “I don’t want him anywhere near anybody.”

The second Jonathan emerges from the stairwell, Isabelle snaps her whip at his ankles and sends him careening across the floor. He gets his feet back under himself and makes a sprint for it, dodging Alec’s arrows and Hawkstorm’s axes with demonic speed. He disappears down the main hallway toward the Atrium where Underhill has shut down all the corridor entrances in order to protect the Institute’s residents, and with nowhere to go, Magnus hits Jonathan hard enough to send him rolling across the large mosaic floor. Then he holds him there with a tense squeeze of his hand, forcing him to yield.

Alec feels a pang in his chest, his conscience making itself known at the worst possible time. When Underhill arrives with his broadsword, it makes their little hunting party a solid five against one. He reminds himself that this thing murdered Hodge before his very eyes, and that he’s been walking around in Jace’s shoes while Jace has been left at the mercy of their greatest enemy. But this thing is still wearing his Parabatai’s face, and it seizes the parts of Alec that belong to Jace.

Jonathan climbs to his feet with a bloody grin like he hasn’t even broken a sweat, staggering through Magnus’ power like the two of them are simply arm wrestling for dominance. His expression twists Jace’s face into something ugly and unrecognizable, and it’s all Alec needs to nock another arrow.

“You’re above average, Warlock,” Jonathan sneers at Magnus, teeth gritted as he pushes inch by inch through his magical tether, “But you’re still nothing compared to me.”

It all happens so fast, the mad lunge Jonathan makes in Magnus’ direction, before Jonathan grunts, loud and surprised, as one of Hawkstorm’s axes embeds itself in his sternum with a squelching thunk. Alec feels the cold blade of the axe as if it were planted in his own chest, because a part of his
brain is watching what looks like Jace sliding to his knees in the middle of the Atrium - shocked and mortally wounded - and expects to be crippled by the same pain. But his Parabatai rune doesn’t budge, and his heart is already elsewhere.

Jonathan yanks the axe out of his own body with a strangled cry, letting it clang onto the floor. His hands shake as they go to the wound left behind, fingers sliding in his own blood like he’s never seen it before. And he looks up at Alec in a way that grips him - as if he’s a bottomless pit of resentments, but also sad, and disbelieving, like he’d actually believed he’d belonged among them. Like perhaps he was happy here for a time. Demented and delusional.

“To be loved is to be the one destroyed,” he mumbles to himself dazedly, coughing an awful laugh as blood fills his mouth and overflows. Then he’s grinning, eyes glinting with a madness Alec can’t describe, “Bastard was right. Does this mean you love me after all, Parabatai?”

Alec lets his arrow free. It lands between Jonathan’s eyes, and the force throws him off his haunches, onto his back. The silence that follows his last garbled breath is chilling.

Alec releases a shaky sigh, swallowing hard at the sight of Jace’s dead body. Isabelle is trembling beside him, just as distraught by the picture before them. It’s all a little too real for them to handle.

Moments pass before Underhill asks for orders.

“Burn the body,” Alec says, physically and emotionally drained. His day seems to hit him all at once, and he buckles beneath it, blinking his tears back, “And I need a clean up crew in the basement. Whatever’s left of Hodge, cremate him. Send his ashes to the City of Bones.”

It isn't long after that he has the remainder of the Institute brought into the main hall, and when he addresses everyone, the only excuse he offers is news of a security breach. With everyone centralized in the main hall and unable to slip out, Magnus stands at his side and casts a simple unveiling spell, which immediately exposes the Circle members in their midst. Several of Alec’s staff drop to their knees, clutching at the burning Circle runes revealed on their necks. Shockingly, two of them are security staff on Underhill’s team, and Underhill, Hawkstorm and the remainder of the security unit gather them roughly into the growing group of traitors, cuffing their wrists.

Twelve Circle members in total. Twelve of Valentine’s loyal that have living and breathing under his roof. It devastates him, but he’s been so beaten down today that he’s hardly surprised by how much worse it's become. God knows how many Circle members are sitting in other Institutes. He doesn’t want to think about how many are hiding within the Clave.

He offers no other explanations to his Institute, namely because he’s too speechless in his anger to find the words. So he, Magnus and his security team accompany their new prisoners to the holding cell, where they’ll stay indefinitely. There’s no way of knowing who to trust within the Clave, so sending them to the Gard in Idris isn’t an option. And if Valentine is hanging around waiting for word of what’s going on, Alec wants to give his side as much of an advantage as he can. They have to wait while a small group of Shadowhunters remove Hodge’s remains and hose down the room, and Alec tries not to suffocate himself with the guilt of being partly responsible.
Once their Circle members are locked up, Alec asks Magnus to destroy the room’s two-way intercom, because he has no intention of talking to them, and he has no intention of allowing them the opportunity to talk their way into the minds of his staff. He then scraps the entire basement security roster and runs Underhill through his newly decided protocol.

“No one comes down here,” he orders him, and Underhill nods, knowing what’s at stake, “This is now a zero access point. Switch all rosters to paper. I want physical proof of staff whereabouts at all times. I want a list of all personnel with clearance level 3 and above. Lock down the Institute and shut off the cellular network. I don’t want anyone calling or going in or out until I address the staff.”

“Consider it done, sir,” Underhill replies without objection. Noah is smart, one of the smartest he has on his team. He clearly knows what’s going down.

Hodge hadn’t managed to get all the words out, but Alec had understood the message all the same.

*The Clave is compromised.*
He’d known the day would eventually come. He just wasn’t prepared for today to be the day.

Magnus stands silently at Alec’s side, wishing he had a stiff drink to sip on. Following a frantic phone call Isabelle had made about her missing brother, Maryse and Robert Lightwood had taken it upon themselves to visit. And Alec, who had finally learned the truth of his parents’ former involvement in Valentine’s Circle, promptly lost the last, frayed bit of his mind over having them anywhere near him. Which is why Magnus currently has the privilege of bearing witness to his first Lightwood family fight.

Not exactly the way be wanted to be formally introduced to his boyfriend’s parents.

It’s unnervingly loud in the office they all stand in, enough that the shouting crawls up the back of Magnus’ neck. Isabelle is yelling at Alec for his dismissal of her feelings, while Robert fails miserably at peacekeeping between Alec and his mother. The jabs being thrown are like hot pokers, searing and burning where they land, and Magnus does his best to sink into the background as much as possible because his presence only seems to be deepening the line between Maryse’s scowling eyebrows. To her utmost credit, she exhausts an impossible measure of politeness when she asks him to leave the room, but Alec seethes about how Magnus has more of a right to be here than she does, which not only shuts her down but tumbles the Lightwood family into yet another furious round of traded insults. It’d be half comical if they weren’t all so thoroughly hurt.

Alec himself is shaking, hands trembling at his sides between wild, accusatory gestures. Magnus’
will to remain by his side wins out over his will to save himself from the drama, because it’s more than a little obvious that his boyfriend is beginning to unhinge beneath the incredible stress of the last few days. And despite the awkwardness of being in the company of Alec’s parents as his boyfriend for the first time, there’s no where else he’d rather be than here with him, offering Alec the unspoken support he clearly needs.

“You punished us our entire lives for the smallest mistakes—–”

Robert sighs as Alec takes the next swing, and Maryse sets her hands on her hips, as if she’s finally had enough, “Alec, we wanted you to do better than—–”

“---Being gay already made me feel like the biggest mistake alive,” Alec’s voice cracks, an awful shudder running through his chest. It prompts Magnus to step closer, “You made it worse. And all just so you could hide the fact that you helped organize the Uprising. You’re both hypocrites.”

While Magnus does his best to tune out, if only to offer what privacy he can, it becomes quickly apparent that it’s a lot more than the heaviness of the last few days being discussed. It’s a lifetime of resentment, of caged anger and self-hatred and shame bubbling to the surface. Years of weight on Alec’s shoulders just begging to lift off. All things he’s yet to let go of, despite spending years in the attempt. Magnus knows all too well what it feels like, and he envies the opportunity Alec has now to gain the closure he desires. He’s never had his own. Those that have contributed to his inner identity conflicts are either long gone, or are too deep in their denial to offer any solace. The only advantage he’s had is that of time.

Magnus smoothes a hand gently down the back of Alec’s shirt, letting him know he’s there if he needs him, and Alec presses back against his open palm, seeking strength. Magnus rubs him briefly, an I know and an I’m here and a breathe rolled into one.

“Trust me, it’ll be a mistake I will spend the rest of my life trying to make up for,” Maryse growls at him, “I’m well aware of my past. But we weren’t allowed to talk about it—–”

Alec nods, lips pursed unhappily, “Clave over family, right? Again? If that’s the excuse you’re going to use to justify yourself, you can leave my Institute right now. ‘Cause I don’t want to hear it.”

Maryse seems to rock at his words, like she's hearing her son’s authority and realizing she won’t be able to strong-arm him this time. There’s a tense standoff where her jaw visibly tightens and Alec’s chin lifts ever so gently in retort, stern and proud, as they both restrain whatever they’d planned to say next. They’re so alike it’s uncanny.

“We’re done here,” Alec says, and Magnus can see the way he stuffs his anger back inside. His closure will have to wait for another day, “I have work to do and I have to find my Parabatai. So if you don’t mind.”

“Jace is my son,” Maryse replies between gritted teeth, angry tears suddenly forming in her eyes, “We came to help.”

“You only way you can help right now is by staying out of my sight.”

The dismissal is as loud as a booming threat. Maryse takes a long, hard look at her eldest - in this instance, a commanding officer with jurisdiction she can no longer touch - and walks out with her head held high. Robert hovers, but when Alec pointedly turns away, cutting off any bridge of communication they may have, he sighs and follows her. Isabelle remains where she stands, hands clenched into fists.
“Are you going to talk to me now?” She asks, “Or are you going to stay on this self-righteous path of yours?”

“Stop telling me how I should feel,” Alec snaps at her, sliding her a glare. He’s told Magnus before that his sister is his greatest confidant, but even her understanding of Alec’s lived experiences are that of an outsider, “You don’t get it, Iz. You can try, but you haven’t lived in my shoes.”

Isabelle’s chin begins to wobble, eyes shining, “You’re not the only one who has ever been made to feel like a failure, Alec—”

“That’s—” Alec sighs miserably, because he’s clearly angry, but he’d never want Isabelle to feel bad, “It’s not the same thing.”

“Explain it to me then! I want to understand!”

Alec replies, hoarse with the effort to tamp his emotions down, “I know you mean well, Iz. But the difference between you and me is that you’ve always been punished for making bad choices. I was always punished for being me...and being me has never been a choice.”

The crack in his Shadowhunter’s voice is full of anguish. It may as well be a knife in the gut for how awful Magnus feels to hear it.

“You really believe Mom and Dad hate you that much?” Isabelle asks, not unkindly.

Alec’s jaw screws tight, and his eyes well up like his sister’s. Twin hurts for two big, kind hearts. Magnus can barely stand it. “No, I don’t believe they hate me. But the damage is already done. And I don’t see them trying to fix it.”

Isabelle nods her head resignedly at her brother, a great sorrow behind her eyes, and she storms past Magnus without another glance as she, too, leaves the room. Magnus can hear her hitched breaths echoing halfway down of the hallway. Alec does too, if his painful wince is any indication.

Alec sits on the top of the couch’s back and reaches up to rub his eyes. His Shadowhunter is tired, emotionally and physically, and it’s been well over 48 hours since either of them laid eyes on a bed. If Alec is to surge ahead into whatever battle awaits, he’s going to need to sleep sometime soon. Magnus has had the opportunity to substitute with copious amounts of coffee and magic potions, but he can’t bring himself to think of what might occur if Alec runs at their enemy in his current state of exhaustion.

The entire building has been working nonstop in shifts since Jonathan’s death. Apparently the death of any Shadowhunter - whether they were part Demon or not - accrued a five-part investigation and a long list of questions that had to be answered before anyone could move on. The unearthing of almost a dozen Circle members in their ranks was a different catastrophe altogether, especially with the embargo Alec had placed on the Institute and its staff. Preventing information from coming in and going out was a slow, meticulous process, but one Alec and his remaining staff were deadly serious about. Alec wants his Institute to appear to operate as normal, without anyone on Valentine’s side realizing they’d been made. It means he and the residents of the New York Institute can be one step ahead of him. It means they have time to form a plan.

For Alec, Underhill and a handful of others, their focus has been on finding leads regarding Jace’s whereabouts. Isla had managed to patch the Institute’s surveillance program into public feeds across the city in order to scan the entire New York area for signs of activity, while Underhill is following up on a hunch, believing Valentine might be over water after attempting an interrogation on their prisoners. Magnus figures they’ve got at least a couple of hours until Alec is required to be
anywhere, and he has his own avenues to pursue in the meantime. It seems like an opportune time to get Alec the rest he needs.

He moves closer to run his hands along Alec’s broad, slumped shoulders, taking the moment to rub and massage, fingers pressing into muscle. When his hands slide up into the back of Alec’s hair, his Shadowhunter tips his head up, eyes closed, soaking in the pleasure of his touch as much as he can in his unhappiness.

“You look like you could do with a rest, love,” Magnus murmurs, leaning forward to kiss the space between Alec’s brows.

“I can’t,” Alec sighs, quiet and forlorn, “I can’t rest while Jace is...I’ve been resting for months while he---”

“Don’t do that to yourself,” he gently replies, taking Alec’s handsome face between his hands, thumbs stroking gently over the apples of his cheeks. Alec, his Alec, is so crestfallen he can barely bring himself to hear the words, “You’re not to blame here. We’re going to make this right, okay?”

Alec gazes back at him with his beautiful, hazel eyes, luminous in the morning’s pouring sunlight, and he looks so lost that Magnus feels his pain like a fissure in his own chest, “How, Magnus? How could I possibly make this right?”

Magnus thumbs across his cheeks again, over the outer edges of his eyebrows, over the soft bow in his upper lip, offering his affection freely in the hopes it will give his Shadowhunter at least a little of the calm and strength he needs.

“You’re going to save him,” Magnus tells him, simply and with surety, “You’re going to bring him home, patch him up, and when he tells you you’re not to blame, you’re going to believe it. But first, you need to sleep.”

“Magus, I can’t---”

“You can and you will. You’re too tired to be of use to anyone, least of all Jace,” he continues before Alec can object, “Let me take the reins for a bit. The least I can do is get you everything you need to get your Parabatai back, but it will take me a few hours. You’ll be rested and ready to go by the time I’m done.”

“You can do that?”

Magnus smiles, lovingly tapping Alec’s nose, “Oh, darling. There is a very tiny list of the things I can’t do.”

Alec slides his hands up to grip the ends of Magnus’ jacket, head lowering to watch himself do so. It’s another long moment of silence before he realizes his Shadowhunter love is actually struggling on the verge of tears - of exhaustion and anger and guilt and gratitude - and is hiding himself until he can control it.

He already knows the answer, but he still asks all the same, “Do you trust me, Shadowhunter?”

Alec’s hands tighten on his jacket, a ripple of emotion moving through his shoulders. He mumbles helplessly - some days I feel like you’re the only one I can trust - and Magnus’ heart breaks.

“Will you let me take care of you?”

It’s yet another moment before Alec sniffs, face still hidden, and his answer quickly breaks Magnus’
heart all over again.

“Yes.”

He gently pries Alec’s fingers loose and moves to pluck the phone from the office desk, presses what he remembers of Underhill’s extension line with one hand, holding Alec’s with the other. His Shadowhunter clutches at him, refusing to detach, and it both warms and wounds Magnus to be needed so desperately.

“Underhill.”

“Hi, it’s Magnus. I’m taking your boss for a nap,” He says, squeezing Alec’s grip, “Think you can hold down the fort while he’s out?”

“Yes, I can do that,” Underhill replies. He actually sounds beyond relieved, as if he too were worried for Alec’s mental state, “Thank you, Magnus.”

“Thank you, Noah.”

Once he’s ended the call, he slides back into the waiting circle of Alec’s arms and meets him with a soft kiss, “Come on, Shadowhunter. Let’s get you to bed, hmm?”

Alec leans his face tiredly into Magnus’ palm, “Will you stay with me until I’m asleep?”

“As if I would ever overlook the chance to snuggle up with you. What kind of insipid trash heathen do you take me for?”

It does the bare minimum, but it’s enough to lift the corner of Alec’s lips into something resembling a smile.

It slips away just as quickly, “I don’t deserve you.”

“Quite the contrary, my love,” Magnus murmurs fondly, kissing him again, “I find you very deserving. Come on.”

Alec is quiet as Magnus leads him out of the office. He’s even more withdrawn when they ride the elevator down to the second floor, as if his energy is shifting away from the multiple demands of the Institute and honing in on the feel of Magnus’ hand in his. He leans on Magnus’ back, rests his head on his shoulder, and Magnus turns to press another kiss to Alec’s hair, squeezing his hand, breathing him in as they wait for the elevator doors to open.

When they get to Alec’s bedroom, Magnus summons a do not disturb sign onto the door’s handle and gently ushers him in, closing them both inside. Their hands separate long enough for Magnus to remove his jacket and shoes, and Alec strips himself down to his shirt and boxer briefs before he’s crawling between the sheets. He graciously, eagerly holds the blankets open while Magnus slides in beside him. And then they’re in each other’s space, Alec curling around him with arms and legs, his face hidden in Magnus’ silk shirt as he breathes.

Now that they’re alone, and he’s safe, the emotions Alec has been holding back seem to sneak past his carefully constructed walls without permission, and he unleashes them reluctantly against Magnus’ chest in surprised, ragged sobs. Magnus gets his hands up under Alec’s shirt to rub his warm, bare back, trying to soothe what he can and comfort what he cannot. Alec’s tumultuous agony spills into him, wrenching and awful, and he closes his eyes against the helplessness of Alec’s sorrow, unable to do anything but hold him tighter and wait it out.
He whispers and murmurs small assurances. *I’ve got you. I love you. Everything will be okay.* And when Alec begins to close back up, exhausted and breathless against his collar, Magnus tips Alec’s head back to kiss him, slow and attentive. Top lip. Bottom lip. Again and again until the seam of Alec’s mouth sighs and softens to meet him halfway.

Alec clutches him closer as their kiss deepens, his wet face dampening Magnus’ cheeks, breath hot and shallow in his mouth. Magnus keeps rubbing his hands over the slopes of his body, petting and calming, because the pained grunts and half-choked sighs coming out of Alec gut him and leave holes. Once they’re thoroughly entangled and all the space between them is gone, his Shadowhunter finally begins to settle, loosening beneath Magnus’ caresses. He burrows closer, as if to crawl inside the layer of Magnus’ clothes, and his glassy eyes gaze openly at him while his breathing deepens and slows. He’s tired, but he’s still so wide awake.

Alec’s foot absent-mindedly brushes back and forth on the sheets below, something Magnus has noticed he usually does to self-soothe when he’s stressed. He’ll never get to sleep if he stays inside his own head, which is why Magnus snakes a hand between them to cup the front of Alec’s boxer briefs, stroking the flaccid shape of his cock through the material. Alec doesn’t move or respond, but his breathing is suddenly very quiet.

“Do you want me to?” Magnus asks, his voice barely above a whisper in the abrupt charge of the room, “It’ll help you sleep.”

Alec whispers back, “I don’t really know if I can right now.”

“Let me worry about that,” he assures him, inching closer, “Just kiss me.”

Alec does, because he’s never denied him before, and Magnus rubs the length of him through the material, fingers seeking the crown, and then back further to the balls nestled below. He massages them gently, kneading with his palm, diving in to suck at Alec’s lip when he gasps, warmed by the way Alec’s body undulates in seek of his touch, even now. Magnus rubs and strokes, warming Alec’s underwear with friction, kissing him deep and languidly until both of them are breathless and distracted in each other. And it’s enough to have Alec growing hard under the coaxing of Magnus’ hand, thickening and lengthening.

“That’s it, darling,” Magnus encourages. He pulls Alec’s knee to rest alongside his hip, opening him up. And when he slips his fingers past Alec’s waistband to grip his naked, growing flesh, his Shadowhunter groans deliciously into his mouth, “That’s it. I’ve got you.”

Magnus reaches under to rub the back of his thigh, the lightly furred crease of his ass, listening as Alec’s breathing grows heavier, heedier, his mouth parting as he lets the sensations overwhelm him. Magnus strokes the puckered muscle at the core of him, where he has so often buried himself in their constant passion for each other; tickles his nails along Alec’s perineum until his thighs are twitching from it. And then he’s pulling Alec in for another kiss, free arm winding around his neck as he begins to pump the wet head of his cock with the other.

Magnus strokes him off slowly between thorough kisses, squeezing precome from the slit to slick the way, and Alec is back to making noises in his mouth, though instead of gauging holes in him, now they light fires. They clutch each other as they fall into the rhythm of their usual give and take - except it’s Magnus who takes now, trying to pull the orgasm from Alec’s throbbing body as if to drain away the pain and stress and sadness right along with it. And when Alec finally gives him his release, it’s with a full-bodied tremble, mouth wrenching away from Magnus’ lips on a shattered gasp as Magnus whispers his love softly in his ear. His fingers dig deep into the muscle of Magnus’ back, hips moving through the last of his strokes until there’s nothing left of his bones. And Magnus holds him through it, lavishing kisses beneath his jaw, along his neck, until he’s pliant and heavy in
Magnus cleans him up with a quick spell and wraps him in his arms, feeling the way Alec slumps deeper into his embrace as they catch their breath between soft kisses. Kisses of love, kisses of gratitude. Kisses of comfort, of the appreciation for a stolen moment amidst the chaos. Alec’s eyes are heavy when Magnus begins to untangle himself from him, and they’re barely slits by the time he’s sitting on the bed beside him. So Magnus tucks the blankets around his boyfriend’s shoulders, sweeping the hair off his forehead, thumbs and fingers light as he gets lost tracing the softening lines of Alec’s face.

Alec pulls him close again, weakly tugging on his sleeve until Magnus is leaning over him. He murmurs sleepily, “What about you.”

Magnus can feel his half-hard arousal in his trousers, though it’s already flagging with Alec’s inability to keep his eyes open. But he smiles, because Alec is relaxed for the first time in far too long, and he’s content just to see him like this, “You get a pass tonight, Shadowhunter. The sexiest thing you can do for me right now is get some of that powerful Nephilim beauty sleep. Don’t you worry about me.”

“I owe you an orgasm.”

Magnus chuckles, “You owe me nothing.”

Alec confesses with his last bit of energy, “I owe you everything, Magnus.”

He sees the broader meaning of Alec’s words behind the sleepy blink of his eyes. Something secret and devastatingly heartfelt, as if alluding to some bigger universe where Magnus has provided him everything he’s ever wanted, needed or hoped for. It’s a powerful notion, one that catches Magnus so entirely off guard that it forces a blush onto his cheeks.

Alec has always been forthcoming with how he feels, delightfully blunt in a way that disarms and endears. And Magnus knows the ways in which he loves his Shadowhunter, the ways he tries to provide and protect. But to hear Alec acknowledge it like this - to hear him say it like Magnus’ love hasn’t just provided, but saved him in some measure - shrouds him like a cozy, warm blanket. He’s not surprised at all to feel his love for Alec deepen now. He’s only surprised by how much deeper it reaches. He hadn’t believed it were possible.

Alec slurs, “Don’t make me sleep too long.”

“A few hours max, I promise,” Magnus murmurs, lips moving against Alec’s cheek. He lightly brushes his hand over Alec’s eyes, encouraging the heaviness of his lids, “Rest, darling.”

His Shadowhunter sighs, his voice a low, groggy rumble, “Love you.”

Even now, following the impossible swell of his heart, Magnus finds himself overwhelmed to hear it, “And I love you.”

When Alec finally drifts off, Magnus leans over him to kiss lightly at his mouth, cementing his slumber with a small spell of rest, healing and rejuvenation. It’ll be enough to keep him asleep for a couple of hours, and enough to recharge him like he’s slept a week. It takes an immeasurable amount of willpower to get up, because all Magnus wants to do is stay and watch over him, to remain in the exquisite, perfect stillness of their love. But there are things he must do, things that will help make Alec’s world a little less bleak. And that’s all the motivation he needs to leave.
Having gone over the particulars with Underhill, Magnus opens a portal inside the Institute - one that soon has his favorite horned friend, Ragnor Fell, stepping on through. His fire message had clearly been a little on the frantic side, fear for Alec driving him, and it had been enough that his Warlock friend hadn’t hesitated to join in assisting him. Ragnor briefly takes in the grand ceilings, monitors and Shadowhunters of the New York Institute before his eyes settle on Magnus himself, relieved to be met with his welcome smile.

Once they’re set up in the library, Magnus takes Ragnor through the process of trying to track Jace using the pocket knife, showing him the strange block that prevents him from getting a grasp. Surely you’ve dabbled in enough psychedelics over the years to know he’s drugged up to the eyeballs, Ragnor surmises, which he had suspected but hoped wouldn’t be the case. It explains why Alec hasn’t felt the bond or any of the pain his Parabatai has been experiencing in his captor’s hands, as well as the dizziness of the block itself. It gives Magnus enough pause to think about what they’re getting themselves into here, because there’s a very real possibility that rehabilitating Jace might not be as easy as an Iratze and a hug. He worries deeply about what that will mean for Alec.

They try a variation similar to the spell they used to rescue Jocelyn, attempting to piggyback off the pocket knife and the symbol of Alec’s Parabatai bond it represents. The idea is to track him and leave a magical marker, something they can use to pull him to them, but it becomes apparent rather quickly that Valentine learned from last time and has taken measures to prevent it from happening again. Magnus had predicted it would be the case, but he hadn’t seen the harm in trying.

He does, however, feel the warding magic faintly rebuffing him through the tracking spell and growls as he recognizes the signature of the Warlock responsible, “Rufus, that son of a bitch.”

“Not to fret, dearest,” Ragnor calmly answers, perhaps sensing his greater frustration. Not only is one of Magnus’ Warlocks helping the enemy, but the process of retrieving Jace is becoming less easy than anticipated, “We’ll work around that unroyal disappointment.”

Magnus checks his pocket watch with a sigh of annoyance, “Yeah, well, we need to work fast because if I have no solutions to offer my boyfriend when he wakes up, I will have a very sad boyfriend. And I’d like to avoid having my heart ripped in two again, if possible.”

His feet itch in his boots as they often do when his frustrations mount, fingertips rubbing anxiously; a tick, a greater urge sitting in the faraway shadows of his mind. It’d be so easy to tap into the deepest wells of his power, the power sitting below the surface of his own born gifts. Power he’s inherited. It would be so incredibly simple to wield it and solve the problem at hand, save Alec’s Parabatai and take the weight from his lover’s shoulders. Just a pinch, and he’d be closer to saving the day. But that’s always been a dangerous, tempting horizon line, one he vowed a long time ago never to cross again.

Ragnor observes him silently as he always does and gently shakes his head in warning, having guessed his train of thought.

Magnus sucks in a breath, lets it out long and slow, “I know. It would just make all of this easier.”

“Meanwhile I’m simply here for the aesthetic,” Ragnor replies dryly, paired with a dramatic rolling of his eyes, “Do try to have a little faith, dearest. We’re far from out of options.”

“I know. I just---”
“You just want to be the Knight in shining armor for your Nephilim boy. I understand,” Ragnor smirks, then makes a display of shuddering in repulsion, “You’re so terribly sappy I may just throw up all over those incredible boots of yours.”

“And you’re so terribly over-dramatic, you unfeeling walrus,” Magnus mock grumbles, “I don’t know why I bothered calling on you.”

Ragnor heaves a great, put-upon sigh, “Because you knew you might possibly do something stupid, and no one else follows you into inevitable stupidity quite like I do.”

Magnus can’t help the smile that crosses his face, “If stupidity is to be had, then I shall enjoy every boorish complaint you make about this day for the next century.”

“We could also simplify this whole debacle by tracking Rufus’ power signature,” Ragnor suggests, lips curving into the smuggest of smirks when Magnus’ mouth pops open. He points to himself, then Magnus with great theatrics, “Brains, brawn. The real reason why you called upon me.”

“So modest, you are.”

Ragnor barks a laugh, “My dear pot, have you met kettle?”

They spend some time shifting furniture and building a working circle in the middle of the room for Magnus to use. When it’s ready, he stands within it for several minutes, eyes closed, clearing his mind and body of thought and emotion until the entire center of his universe is the air he breathes. In, and out.

“Let me know when you need me,” Ragnor quietly tells him, voice coasting through Magnus’ head without causing distraction.

Magnus seeks out the rusty, eroded texture of Rufus’ power signature until he can feel it pulsing softly at his third eye, feels the surface of it and how it’s wrapped around cold, wet metal. A ship, he thinks, just as Underhill had guessed. He lets his own power surge, attempting to pull back the curtain of where Rufus’ wards are sitting, how far away they may be. They’re close, within the city - a cargo ship resting on the surface of the East river.

He fumes. Right under their goddamned noses.

“Magnus.”

“I’ve got it,” he tells his friend, frustration growing, “I’m going to locate Jace.”

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

He brushes the warning off, probing at Rufus’ wards with Jace’s pocket knife against his palm, seeking for a matching signature through the impressive wall Rufus has built around him. Proof that even a novice with a bit of power and a healthy fear for his own life can pull out all the stops when it matters. He can feel a faint pulse of angelic energy answering the call of his magic, then others, at least two dozen he can count. Circle members. He renews his concentration on the pocket knife to thin the herd, to find Jace, but the distance and Rufus’ wards - several thin barriers built on top of each other like a maze, days of work for a Warlock of Rufus’ level - is making it harder than anticipated.

Ragnor warns, “Magnus.”

“Give me a minute.”
He pulls from the lowest foundation of his power - the loudest, most violent of his magic - and pushes, feels Rufus’ wards begin to thin beneath the pressure. Then he sees Jace, because he has Alec’s fingerprints all over his soul and Magnus would recognize Alec anywhere. Jace is a strong shot of gold in a sea of muddied white, weakened but burning bright like the purest of angels. Just a little more of his own power, a small scoop of his father’s available magic would enable him to rend a hole through the distance and pluck Jace right off the boat and back into the safety of the Institute. He remembers the deep, awful pangs of watching Alec tear himself to shreds with his own guilt and grief, and his mind has already made the choice to dip its toes into the pool when a pair of hands snatch him by the elbows to shake him loose.

Magnus is breathing like he’s run a marathon when his eyes snap open to Ragnor’s stern, panicked expression, heartbeat wild in his ears, his throat, his wrists.

“It’s alright. I’m alright,” he pants.

“Did you find the Wayland boy?”

“Yes. He’s on a cargo ship in the East river.”

Ragnor sighs, his panic falling away. He gently drags Magnus out of their built circle by the sleeve, side-eyeing him warily, “Then it seems our work here is done. Your Shadowhunter and his abundance of soldiers can take it from here. Perhaps there are other, less invasive ways for you to be of aid.”

He’s right, Magnus knows he is. It just doesn’t prevent the overwhelming need to fix all of Alec’s problems in one fell swoop. Not when he has the power to do it.

“I know your big, bleeding heart is in the right place. But you know where that road leads, my friend,” Ragnor advises, a fond but frightening edge to his tone that works to pull Magnus back, “That’s not a thread worth pulling, no matter how dire the situation.”

Following a couple of summoned cups of english tea to soothe the nerves and a quick catch up on Alec’s office balcony, Magnus bids goodbye to Ragnor with plans to have a group dinner in the near future. The way Ragnor speaks of it sounds suspiciously like he and Catarina have tried to trade information about Magnus’ current lovelife, and with little else to go on besides he runs the New York Institute and it’s serious, it seems past time for them all to finally meet.

Before he steps through the portal home, Ragnor holds Magnus’ shoulders and smiles upon him, “Present situation aside, it’s good to see you happy, dearest. I feel a smidge less dusty around the edges just looking at you.”

Magnus informs Underhill immediately of his findings; of the ship, its location, the amount of Circle members Alec and his team will have to fight their way through. It’s enough information to give Underhill an idea of what to prepare in Alec’s absence, and they part ways with a friendly clap on the arm. Meanwhile, Alec is due to be out for another hour, so he passes the time by tracking down Isabelle to see how she is. He updates her, answering her questions to the best of his ability. Where is he? Is Valentine with him? Is Jace okay? He doesn’t know how to answer the latter, so he attempts to change the subject. He’s sure it doesn’t go unnoticed.
Isabelle is still bruised from her earlier conversation with her brother, but she’s come to a level of acceptance in the hours since. Magnus believes she’s smart, and thoughtful, and open-minded enough to realize she doesn’t have all the answers. Her sadness seems only to come from the knowledge that she’s stuck on the other side of a wall looking in, separated from Alec for the first time in her life when she’d always believed she was right there with him.

“Does he ever talk about it?” she asks him, while they sit on the end of her bed, “About me not understanding him?”

“Sometimes. But not about you specifically, only in a general sense,” he replies gently.

He wants to help, to soothe the rocky waves his Shadowhunter love is paddling through. And he likes to think he and Isabelle have become close enough to friends that a conversation like this wouldn’t be amiss. If he can lessen the tension between the two - Alec and Isabelle, who hold each other so dear - he wants at least to try. Alec needs people in his corner right now.

“He has his resentments. When you have your sense of value controlled by others for so long, having to dig your way out of it tends to make one hold a grudge,” Magnus tells her, flashing a wane smile, “I myself am able to relate.”

Isabelle looks devastated. For Alec and for Magnus, for the kind of world that has hurt them both for no justifiable reason. But she also looks determined. Determined to do whatever she can to change it. It has Magnus regarding her fondly. Lightwoods, he thinks with an inner smirk. Who on earth would have thought.

Magnus offers his reassurance, “He loves you. He loves his family very much. Alec just needs time, and support.”

She gives him a watery smile, and reaches over to clasp Magnus’ fingers, “I’m really glad he has you.”

“I’m glad to have him,” he smiles now, and the reminder produces a dreadfully pleasant warmth in the deepest parts of him. Nothing he’s ever said before has felt truer.

Isabelle accompanies Magnus to the Institute’s kitchen to show him where the best coffee is stowed, and soon he’s gently waking Alec up with a mug to sip on while they make their way to the Ops Center.

Underhill briefs Alec on the intel Magnus has acquired and the team he has on standby for the mission to rescue Jace, until Alec is visibly struggling to hold back his gratitude for the work they’ve done on his behalf. The vulnerability in Alec’s eyes when he looks to Magnus speaks a thousand reverent words of overwhelming love and thanks and pride, and for the second time today, Magnus finds himself blushing.

Clary is adamant in her offering of help, but with Valentine in the mix, that’s exactly the kind of thing to change a rescue into a trap. Understanding how tough the situation is on her new Shadowhunter family, she concedes defeat with little-to-no fuss when Alec denies her permission to join them. Underhill has positioned Hawkstorm as Alec’s second in command for the mission, while Isabelle joins the group to volunteer her assistance, sneaking in at her brother’s side to grasp his
hand. The soft, apologetic smile they share tells Magnus everything between them is okay once more.

With the plan in place and everyone ready, Magnus creates a portal directly through the wards Rufus has built, and once Alec and Hawkstorm have exchanged confirmation nods, Hawkstorm and the rest of the team file through onto the ship’s upper deck. The clang of Seraph blades immediately reaches back through, a confrontation with Valentine’s Circle members having quickly broken out. Magnus snaps it shut and forms another with a quick motion of his hands. One that will lead them directly to the lower level of the ship, where Jace is.

He steps through before the Lightwoods, ready to pave the way forward through whatever resistance lies in wait for them. A Circle member immediately takes a run at him, brandishing a Seraph sword and a guttural battle cry. He dispatches him fast, encircling him in a magical lock that catches him off his feet and sends him crashing to the floor with a satisfying oof. Another flick of his wrist sends the Shadowhunter aside, sliding to hit the wall. He does the same with several others, binding them and piling them up for Alec’s team to deal with later.

Unable to get a visual on Jace, he reaches out with his essence in search of the same blazing golden aura he’d felt earlier. When the left side of the ship’s orlop level lights up in the distance, he shouts - there! - and points Alec and Isabelle in that direction before they both take off at a sprint.

He follows at a walking pace, clearing a path for them by dealing to a handful of other Shadowhunters who mean to stop them. When he spots Rufus, burly, haggard and nervous as he steps into Magnus’ line of sight, he growls and unleashes on him, seeing red. Rufus tries to put up a fight, lobbing blasts and building barriers. But Magnus is so furious with him - with how his siding with Valentine will reflect on the rest of the Warlock community, with how one of his own has been a party to Alec’s pain - that he tears every barrier down as if it were paper and sends each blast right back tenfold. And when Rufus is too shaken and worn out to do anything but beg for leniency, Magnus binds Rufus’ magic, binds him until he’s a speechless, brainless, petrified mess, and sends him to the lower prisons of the Spiral Labyrinth for judgement.

Alec’s panicked voice cuts through the subsiding angry haze he drifts in, and he turns to see Alec and Isabelle knelt on the floor, hands and Steles hovering over something he can’t quite see. But he finally sees when he steps closer - a body, barely breathing, camouflaged in the shadows of the ship by the dark sheen of old and new blood staining his skin and clothes. Jace.

“Magnus,” Alec cries, “Magnus, help him.”

He quickly joins them, immediately scanning Alec’s Parabatai over to observe the extent of damage. It’s...horrible, far worse than Alec will be prepared to hear. So horrible that they need to get him home now, because Magnus isn’t certain Jace will make it much longer.

He opens another portal and waves it over them, sending them all to the linoleum floor of the Institute’s infirmary.

“Isabelle, lights,” he says.

She gets to her feet and rushes toward the wall, and then she’s slapping both hands over her mouth on an awful, sharp gasp as the room brightens under the fluorescents. Magnus knows how bad it looks, tries not to fixate on how pale and still with shock Alec is at the sight of his Parabatai’s deformed body.

Magnus speaks gently between the two of them, “Alec, help me get him on a bed. Isabelle, call the medic team. Now.”
She wastes a small moment trying not to shake where she stands, but then she’s barreling frantically out of the infirmary in search of help. Alec is too stunned to respond and takes a little more prompting to help move him. Though by the time they have Jace lying prone on a bed, Alec is actively assisting however he can, pulling an IV pole forward and switching on monitors for when the medic team arrives.

Magnus gets to work. On the surface, Jace’s skin has been cut, slashed, bruised and ripped from his body in places. But beneath that, his bones are lined with fresh scars, so many that a number of them overlap. Multiple breaks forced to heal by Iratzes, only to be broken all over again. His muscles are weak, bruised, torn and malnourished. His lungs have blood in them, and a few of his organs are failing. Evidence that he’s stopped breathing on more than one occasion, which is a far graver symptom of a bigger problem. He probes at Jace’s brain and cerebral system, testing its reflexes. And his own chest tightens as he struggles with what he finds. More so what he doesn’t.

No, he thinks, desperately. Because the Alec he knows and loves won’t survive this.

He urges Alec to apply more Iratzes to keep him busy and fix some of the external trauma, and he feels how far Alec’s healing rune works, made ever more powerful by their Parabatai bond. The way it begins to visibly knit together the surface injuries on Jace’s skin seems to ease some of Alec’s panic. Magnus fights his own while pulling from the foundations of his power, concentrating every ounce he has on repairing the damage to Jace’s brain, finding the dead spots and flooding them with energy until they begin to mend.

It’s slow, intensive, unnatural work to bring something too far gone back from the brink, like swimming laboriously against a current, and it begins to drain him before he’s halfway done. The room fills with the Institute’s medic team as they move around them in preparation to take over, but there’s nothing any of them will be able to do for Jace if Magnus or a Silent Brother doesn’t fix him soon. Calling the Silent City for assistance will burn away time they don’t have, and Magnus isn’t prepared to break Alec’s heart with the news that his Parabatai is too close to brain dead to be saved. So he makes the choice to dig a little deeper. He scratches at the absolute bottom of the barrel until the surface cracks, and he draws the barest amount of his father’s power through. It feels thick and healthy and energizing in his veins, dangerous in its dreamy euphoria as he converts it, wields it. But it makes quick work of healing the lifeless corners of Jace’s brain, heals the barest scrapings on his stem, and rejuvenates his failing organs with another hard push. It’d be a bigger relief for everyone to pull a little more and finish the job himself, but there’s an entire room of people waiting to do their jobs and the temptation to keep going is a line he quickly needs to step back from. Jace is out of the woods. And Alec doesn’t need to know how close he got to losing him. That’s all that matters.

Magnus pushes his father’s power back down and seals it away, staggers away from the bed as his exhaustion suddenly hits. The medic team quickly slide into place around Alec’s Parabatai, assessing and wiping his bloody body clean to fit him with electrodes and an intravenous line. Alec stands on the other side, his shaking hands leaving smears of Jace’s blood on his pale face. It takes more effort than he’d like to get to him, but when he does, Magnus eases Alec’s hands down and holds them tight.

“He’s going to be okay,” Magnus breathes, and Alec trusts what he’s saying enough that he slumps right into his arms out of crippling relief.

It’d been a guess before, all false confidence and positive thinking and a powerful need to comfort Alec’s rattled emotions. But now he’s certain, and instead of reprimanding himself for blurring a deeply personal line, he chooses to focus on the good to come out of it. Jace will be okay. Which means Alec will okay. And that’s all Magnus cares about.
Following a debrief from Hawkstorm and his returned team, they spend the night watching over Jace in the infirmary, curled together on a sofa Magnus summons from home. Alec spends most of it circling between guilt-ridden rantings, childhood reminiscing, and grateful, relieved tears before he finally slips into a tired, restless sleep in the crook of Magnus’ neck. It’s in the early hours where Magnus begins to doze, cheek against Alec’s hair, until he’s woken by the rustling of people entering the room.

He peers over to where the bedside lamp gently illuminates the room and sees Maryse and Robert hovering, her hands gentle on Jace’s face, in his hair for stretched, silent moments, comforting him in his unconsciousness. Another moment passes before Robert is pulling his Stele from his jacket and reactivating Jace’s Iratze, rubbing a hand awkwardly along Jace’s wrist, comforting him in his own way. Maryse swipes a stray tear from her own cheek, and when she leans down to press a parting kiss to Jace’s forehead, Magnus hears her breathing catch and looks away to give them privacy.

But then she’s gazing across the room at him, where Magnus rests against the sofa arm with her big, beautiful son cradled against his chest, and he finds himself holding his breath in wait of a reaction. Because there’s a formal introduction, a confrontation, a line-drawing in the sand that hasn’t happened yet. So it’s a surprise when she quietly approaches and leans down to smooth Alec’s unruly locks, strokes her knuckles along his cheek, and kisses his temple with all the reverence of a worried, proud, loving mother, encroaching on Magnus’ personal space as she does so, like she’s not entirely uncomfortable in doing so.

When she straightens up, she looks to Magnus and seems stuck on what to offer him. He sees, clear as day, that she’s battling with something inside herself, something old and trapping. But she also appears to have softened toward him and his presence in the lives of her children, having begun the process of accepting it in her own time. Considering how proud and set in her ways he’s always known the Lightwood matriarch to be, it’s an astonishing, unexpected improvement.

“Thank you,” she whispers into the dark, chin rising, even as her eyes grow soft with appreciation, “for saving my boys.”

She turns and leaves in a hurry, and Robert gives him a silent, grateful nod as he follows, both leaving him with much to mull over. Boys, Maryse had said, because even she’d recognized the gravity of what had been at stake, what she stood to lose. It heartens him to learn how deeply she cares beneath the misunderstandings. It heartens him to know that she’s trying.

The last couple of days have been a horrible test of endurance, for both himself and Alec. And the question of their relationship in the eyes of Alec’s parents would have put a strain on things eventually. That it seems to have passed without event feels like a much needed win. Another obstacle they’ve overcome, together. It puts him at enough ease that he tightens his arms around his Shadowhunter love and settles in for a little more sleep. Tomorrow will surely find other ways to test them. But for now, they’re here. And they’re okay.

And Magnus sleeps, drifting off to the sound of Alec's soft, contented sigh.
Fourteen

Chapter Summary

Alec and Magnus try to turn the tables on Valentine, only to learn of a bigger endgame in play.

Chapter Notes

HI. YES I STILL EXIST. WE HAVE AN UPDATE.

A million apologies for taking so long on this. Life has really put me through the ringer in the past few months and struggling for words and time and creativity was a thing that happened. But it's HERE and I'm GETTING IT DONE.

Also, I posted another little BLP tie-in story back in January in case you missed it - "Safe Haven", which details the events of Jace's absence from Best Laid Plans for the last several chapters. You don't have to read it, but it does provide some deeper information on Jace's relationship with Alec and Valentine being a terrible no good bad guy who does awful things. If you so choose, please please heed the fic tags and trigger warnings. Love yourself, fam.

Musical muses this chapter include Astrid S's "Hurts So Good", Dirk Ehlert's "Left and Lost" and Prequell's "Part I" & "Part V".

As always, you can follow me on Twitter if you feel like saying hi. And if you feel like flailing or rage screaming at me, the social media tag for this fic, as always, is #BLPMalec. ENJOY.

“I’ll admit, I’m very surprised to see you, Alec,” Madison Graylaw says, gesturing for both he and Magnus to sit in the lounge seats spread invitingly at the centre of her office. She offers the same big, friendly smile she always does when they video call, “Though I’m certainly not unhappy by it. It’s nice to finally meet you in person. Same goes for you, Mr Bane. I’ve heard many tales.”

“Oh, all the outrageous ones, I hope,” Magnus replies with his usual sassy flourish, and it lifts Alec’s hard set mouth into a warm smile.

“We here at the Vancouver Institute tend to enjoy the odd rebel every now and then,” she chuckles, and Alec enjoys the mischievous, amused glint to her eyes as she glances between them, “To say you both have many fans here would be an understatement. Now please, sit. Let’s chat.”

“I’m afraid we’re on a bit of a tight schedule,” Alec admits, waiting politely for her to take her seat first. He glances to Magnus once they’re situated and they share a quiet look, the same one they’ve been sharing for the past week. A silent ready when you are, “We didn’t mean to barge in on you
like this but I don’t have a lot of time to explain.”

Madison, the Head of the Vancouver Institute, has been someone Alec has called somewhat of a friend in recent months, ever since she’d reached out to congratulate him on his promotion. She apparently feels the same, because she immediately gives him her full attention, “Then I’m all ears.”

Magnus stands at the edge of the room like he means to remain separate, and when Alec slides him that look again, he breathes deep and curls his fingers in the air, gently motioning toward Madison with a spark of ice blue magic.

She does a double-take at Magnus in her periphery, then proceeds to swing her attention warily between the two of them, “What’s wrong?”

Alec glances past her wavy dark hair at her neck for a telltale sign of a Circle rune - evidence that she may be in league with Valentine - but Magnus’ quick unveiling spell finds nothing. Ever since Jonathan Morgenstern’s joyride in his Institute, Alec has been worried about where his trust has been focused; with friend or foe. He’s relieved to confirm that she remains of the friend variety. Thank the Angel.

Madison tracks Alec’s gaze to herself and awkwardly tries to see what he’s seeing, “What are you---?”

“A pass with flying colors, Alexander,” Magnus happily observes.

Alec smiles at Madison, somewhat apologetically, “We had to be sure.”

She clocks the both of them with great confusion, “Sure of what?”

“That you could be trusted,” he confirms, and he shifts forward in his seat as Magnus finally moves to join them, “What we’re about to tell you can’t leave this room. It’s a matter of life or death.”

They haven’t got the time to spare, but flushing out as many Circle members in the Institutes he can reach is probably one of the most important missions he’s ever had. Madison seems to understand there’s a gravity to the situation, enough that she straightens in her seat, ready to hang onto his every word. And by the time he’s done explaining - that the Clave has been compromised by Valentine at the ground level, and they don’t know how far up it reaches - she’s quiet, pale and just as disturbed as they are.

“By the Angel,” she mumbles, pressing a hand over her chest like it physically aches, “Are you sure of this? Of course you’re sure of this. You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t.”

Alec answers as quickly and clearly as he can, “Magnus, myself and a few others from my team have spent the week visiting as many Institutes as we can. All of them had at least half a dozen Circle members. People who were permanent, long term residents. Some even with a level six clearance. One was even running an Institute.”

Madison shakes her head in a terrified kind of disbelief, “I can’t believe this is happening.”

“We don’t have enough time, so we’re trying to hit as many international Institutes in major cities as we can in the hopes that they can convene with others in their countries. I’m here right now because you’ve been a trusted ally,” he further explains, taking a deep breath, “And I need you to step in. My team can’t do this alone.”

She looks over again, and Alec sees the anxiety there, but also the determination that grows in her eyes. That same particular brand of determined that Valentine provokes from those who loathe him.
She doesn’t hesitate.

“Whatever you need.”

And he breathes for the first time in what feels like a week.

Under their advisement, Madison summons her full security team to her office; and with her permission, Alec and Magnus run through the purging system they’ve established. Mercifully, none of Madison’s security team are found to be hidden Circle members, so Alec and Magnus brief them on the situation and distribute them throughout the Institute with orders to lock it down and gather all residents into the building’s main hall.

There, Magnus holds a palmful of powder for each of the security team to dip their thumbs into, and once they’ve each sucked it into their mouths and activated the embedded unveiling spell, they start to spread throughout the room to arrest the Circle members they can suddenly see hiding in plain sight. Alec watches Madison’s face drop further as several members of her Institute are secured with handcuffs. Nine, they find. Nine friends, nine coworkers, nine comrades now revealed to be traitors. Nine less Circle members in position for whatever long game Valentine has in play.

“I know it’s hard,” he tells her quietly, as they watch the entire body of the Vancouver Institute shuffle nervously before them, “But this is our new reality.”

“Purging Institutes,” she half laughs, though it’s not amused in the slightest.

Alec nods, “And there are others in your country that need help. I need to know you can spearhead this.”

Madison speaks through her teeth with a sparkling, lively type of anger, pulling at her jacket lapels with a hard snap, “Consider it done.”

As she steps forward to address her Institute, Magnus falls into line beside Alec, and they both experience the same disbelief, the same outrage, the same grief that has overcome each Institute they’ve visited in the past three days. Alec unleashes a heavy, bone-deep sigh as it drills home again just how bad things are, and Magnus’ fingers find his between them, giving them a comforting squeeze.

Before they set off for their next destination, Alec runs Madison through their protocol until she’s got it memorized - which includes the gagging and complete lockdown of their captive traitors, the shutting down of inward and outward inter-Clave communication for all residents, and the exclusion of any visitation reports related to the job they’re trying to accomplish.

“As far as we’re both concerned, Magnus and I were never here,” he tells her, “Idris can’t know what we’re doing. There’s no guarantee the information will be safe. If Valentine has his claws in the Council, I want to blindside him so hard that we’ll have his ass on the execution plate before he even knows he’s been caught.”

“Good plan,” Madison nods, “Where are you off to next?”
He looks to Magnus with a sigh that feels far more overwhelmed than it sounds, “Auckland, Melbourne and London, and if everything goes smoothly hopefully we’ll reach Jakarta and Tokyo before the end of the day.”

She frowns, concerned, “That’s a big undertaking.”

“It is, but there’s a lot at stake. The faster we get this under control, the better.”

She nods again, “If I can secure four Institutes a day, we can get Canada controlled by the end of the week.”

Magnus gently interjects, handing Madison the ingredient list for the revelare powder they used earlier and encouraging her to contact her local High Warlock, Ivy Vale. Magnus hasn’t just been a supportive hand to hold in the past several days, but he’s rallied his network of Warlock contacts to help their nearest Institutes with their purging needs. Alec had been reluctant to take advantage of his boyfriend’s generosity, but Magnus was quick to assure him that dismantling the Circle and the spread of Valentine’s influence was in the Downworld’s best interests just as much as the Clave’s.

Madison takes Magnus’ advice gratefully, though she’s clearly still in a state of shock at how substantially her life has been uprooted in the space of an hour, no matter how gracefully she’s accepted it. Alec knows all too well how it feels.

She feigns a confident smile, but Alec can see her thoughts are already half a world away on the difficult road ahead. She pulls her phone from her jacket pocket when it starts beeping. “I’ll send you a fire message when it’s done.”

Alec shakes her hand, “Good luck.”

“Same to you,” she replies, also shaking Magnus’ hand, “And if there’s anything else you need, let me know. I’ll send staff to help.”

With that, she bids them a heartfelt, appreciative goodbye, and Magnus creates a portal for them to leave. But soon Madison is moving to stop them.

“Hey Alec?”

He turns to see her holding her phone up for him to read. A Clave-wide email. He finds a new notification waiting on his own phone, then gives a quick sweep of the email on the screen Madison has in front of him. The Honoring, the Clave’s annual mourning ceremony for those lost in the Uprising 18 years ago. It’s not for another four months, but the official email states a change of date - next Saturday, at noon. Signed and sealed by the Consul himself.

The ceremony is considered sacred, held two days after the anniversary of the Uprising each year. Changing the date is unheard of, and it makes the back of his neck prickle.

“What do you think?” she asks, and he feels her eyes drifting across his face for a sign.

Nothing good, is exactly what he thinks. He brushes it off, because Malachi has been pushing all sorts of changes in the past several months that his surprise really shouldn’t be so surprising. Madison looks about as convinced as he sounds, but with the morning she’s had and the intense week Alec is having, taking the option of easy logic feels like the only way to keep some semblance of sanity. Alec will deal with it later, once he’s got the Circle problem under control.

They say their goodbyes again, though they’re all now visibly tense beneath their tired smiles. Then Alec and Magnus finally step through their waiting portal and into the busy, central city streets of
Auckland. His eyes adjust to the dimming evening sky; the complete opposite of Vancouver’s morning sunshine.

He sighs, rolling a growing kink out of his shoulder, “I really hope portal-lag isn’t a thing.”

Magnus doesn’t say anything, and Alec watches him carefully for signs of exhaustion.

With Valentine on the run and Jace safe and recovering at home, purging Valentine’s influence from Institutes across the globe has been the focus. It’s a large-scale job, one that had required the splitting up of his team to cover more ground. Underhill and Isabelle were currently moving throughout the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions, and Hawkstorm and Clary were working their way through Europe with Judah Hawkstorm’s assistance. Alec had been reluctant to let her go, but with Sam and his father keeping an eye on her, he felt assured enough to allow it. Hawkstorm had recruited his uncles, Mihai and Ioan, to tackle Russia, which left Alec and Magnus trying to cover as much as they could within the greater Pacific and Atlantic areas.

His parents had insisted on helping, but he’d sent them packing back to Idris with a strong suggestion to keep an ear to the ground. Being former Circle members still left them morally ambiguous to many in their motherland, and Alec figured it could provide an advantage to exploit the Circle’s plans if the opportunity came up. With them gone, he’d left Isla in charge of the Institute. She’d been worried about the responsibility, but Alec knows she’s capable. Her thorough daily debriefs and keen ability to see issues before they arise is proof enough that she’s the next best person to step in.

But while Magnus hasn’t complained once, Alec has observed his boyfriend’s dwindling tank of energy. He’s seen Magnus pull off all sorts of heavy duty magic without so much as a blink, but in healing Jace, Magnus had needed time and rest to recover. Time and rest Alec isn’t certain he’s getting with their current string of long, laborious days, despite his constant reassurances.

He asks now, as he often has over the past week, “Scale of one to ten?”

Magnus simply smiles and squeezes his shoulder, “A solid seven. If we push, we could also hit Seoul and Beijing before bedtime.”

“Magnus—”

“I’m fine, Alexander. I promise,” he repeats, looking him directly in the eye until he knows Alec feels sure of him. Then he’s staring over at the large, looming Auckland Institute beyond the smattering of nightlife pedestrians before them, “Like you said: this needs to be done. The faster we get it done, the better.”

And with that, they make the short trek to the next Institute on their list.

When they finally arrive back in New York around midnight, Alec does his usual check-ins with Isla, Underhill and Hawkstorm. He gets Clary to run him through her day while he’s checking emails and skim reading reports, just to see how she’s faring out in the field. Hawkstorm has given a sound assessment of her work with him so far, assuring Alec that she’s listening and following the instructions he’s giving her. To his utter disbelief, she claims to have portalled herself and
Hawkstorm home with a new rune she's created. Once she's shown him the truth of that claim, all of Isabelle's prior tests on her bloodwork make sense - Jace, it seems, wasn't the only one dosed with pure Angel blood as a child. He's glad to finally see her so excited about being a Shadowhunter, but his wariness overpowers her happiness. Because he now has two living, breathing super targets under his roof. And if Valentine is capable of experimenting on his prized daughter, then that makes him capable of anything.

When everyone is debriefed and settled in for the night, he adds today’s tallies to his ever growing list.

Vancouver. Nine.

Auckland. Two.

Melbourne. Eleven.

London. Fourteen.

Tokyo. Eleven.

Seoul. Eight.

Beijing. Thirteen.

The list of unearthed Circle members only seems to be growing. 137 in over two dozen cities around the world. 284 Shadowhunters arrested and purged from active duty in the last three days alone. It brings a strange kind of horror, one that emboldens as much as it devastates, because they may have found almost three hundred Circle members, but that’s three hundred Circle members Valentine no longer has access to. He tries not to let it get on top of him, because people are looking to his leadership now more than ever and it isn’t the time for breakdowns.

It’s another half hour before he’s free to check in with Magnus, who sits in the library sending off fire messages to more of his international Warlock contacts. They may have completed their list today, but there are others who are yet to take up efforts.

Alec raps his knuckles on the door frame and smiles when Magnus lifts his head, “Hey you.”

His Warlock returns the smile and it’s genuine, no matter how tired, “Hey you.”

“I’m just going to check on Jace. Give me a few minutes and we’ll head to bed.”

Magnus leans back in his seat with a big, dramatic stretch, spine popping. Alec has the distant urge to nibble on the sliver of brown skin that suddenly appears when the hem of his shirt slips free of his pants, “Best idea I’ve heard all day.”

“I won’t be long,” he promises, and pushing away from the door, he heads for Jace’s room.

When he gets there, Jace is asleep, propped up on a pile of pillows with a book lying spread on his chest, appearing soft and restful beside the lit bedside lamp. Alec gently pulls the book from Jace’s hands and sets it aside, careful not to jostle his Parabatai.

Days ago, when Jace had finally recovered enough to wake up, he’d told Alec everything about the last two months. About how he’d learned he’d been raised by Valentine despite being the orphaned child of unknown parents. About being Jonathan Morgenstern’s Angel-blooded equivalent among Valentine’s many experiments. He’d told Alec about the systematic beatings. About the way
Valentine seemed to pluck at the old wounds he’d given him as a young boy, like he’d buried padlocks inside his skin and finally had the keys to unlock them. It had been an alarming assessment, one that later had Underhill encouraging Alec to seek help from the Silent Brothers. Because to him, it sounded a lot like operant conditioning.

They’d eventually learned that while Valentine had made an attempt to recondition Jace, he’d soon given up in favor of the strange, new power Jace had exhibited. The power of his pure Angel blood, Jace had confessed; power Valentine had wanted to weaponize before he’d fled the intrusion of Alec’s rescue mission. Alec had then assigned Jace with the only task that currently mattered - absolute bed rest while all his healing settled and his mental health got the attention it needed. Because that was something that couldn’t be rushed, and throwing Jace back into the field and outside the sanctuary of the Institute - especially knowing Valentine’s plans for him - is the last thing Alec wants.

He sweeps Jace’s hair from where it catches at his eyebrow and leans down to kiss his forehead gently, then he’s pulling the extra blanket from the end of the bed and laying it over him, tucking it about his shoulders. He takes a moment to concentrate on the warmth of their unhampered bond, no longer lost and silent, and a tight ball of sadness in his chest makes it difficult for him to swallow. He still hasn’t been able to shake his guilt, and despite the strong assurances from both Jace and those around him, he’s not sure he will anytime soon. But the need to get Magnus to bed distracts him long enough to let himself off the hook for the night.

He switches off the lamp, and once he’s sure Jace will be okay for the evening, he leaves.

Tucked away in his own room, he and Magnus take turns in the ensuite washing up. By the time he’s done brushing his teeth, Magnus is already curled away on his side of the bed asleep, having dressed in one of Alec’s t-shirts. So he turns off all the lights and quietly gets in behind him, doing his best not to stir him.

There’s a calm, stretched moment as his body relaxes into the familiar comfort of having Magnus near, of not having the stress of his own presence required in ten different places at once. The need to touch, to soothe, to physically connect with Magnus is a visceral tug at his soul as always, and he reaches out ever so carefully, stroking a light hand over the curve of Magnus’ shoulder, taking in the attractive shape his boyfriend makes amongst the shadows of his Institute bedroom.

It starts off as aimless circling, a means to touch his Warlock after so much time spent not being able to. But then his finger is moving with greater purpose along the wing of Magnus’ shoulder blade, tracing the shape of a rune as if to give him all his power. Strength. And then another. Endurance. And another. Protection. And another. Promise.

Then he’s tracing another, in slow, reverent slides. Love. And he likes the way his chest warms pleasantly as he does so, because he’s still learning the unending joys of being sappy with the man he loves. He finds it hard to reconcile the person he used to be with the man he is now; the man who tried his best to remain untouchable, who had an exit strategy for everything - before he found someone who not only made him want to stay, but made him want to try.
It quietly blows his mind to think about how he’s changed in the last few months. How much he enjoys the man he’s become. Because he’s now a man who is comfortable with the uncomfortable. A man no longer made afraid of moral dilemmas or being imperfect or feeling things the way he used to be. If anything, he welcomes the challenge of questioning his own choices, of looking for room to improve. Of being open to receiving love where he’s always so desperately needed it, and being fulfilled by it, instead of pretending he’s better off without. What he’d once perceived as weaknesses have only made him a better Shadowhunter, leader, brother and lover. And it’s all because he’d met Magnus Bane.

Magnus sauntering into his life had been the bold, electric spark that had encouraged that change. Falling in love with Magnus had been an unexpected but wonderful bonus, a long-lacking nourishment to the soul. He’s hard pressed to think of anything he’d trade it for.

Magnus twitches beneath his touch now, aware. His voice is low and quiet, adorably groggy when he murmurs between sleep-slackened lips, “What rune is that.”

Caught, Alec smooths down his shirt, presses his mouth there in a kiss, “Nothing. Go to sleep.”

Magnus shifts and twists so he can slide his arms around him, and then he’s snuggled in against Alec’s neck, body sagging with the deepest, most relaxed of sighs when Alec squeezes him close. It doesn’t take his Warlock much longer to fall back to sleep, and Alec isn’t far behind, not now that his favourite thing in the whole world has slotted back to where it belongs - here, resting lovingly, trustingly against his heart.

He listens to the sound of Magnus’ breathing as he drifts, and the comforting weight of his Warlock’s warm body tangled with his pulls him into peaceful oblivion.

He’s woken a handful of hours later by the vibration of his phone alarm on the bedside table, and he blindly reaches over to switch it off before it can wake the man stretched out beside him. A futile effort, it seems, when Magnus rolls in the sheets, groaning inelegantly into the corner of Alec’s pillow.

Alec slides a hand out until it connects with Magnus’ hip, “Me, shower. You, snooze.”

Magnus slurs a string of morning gibberish that Alec is sure is supposed to mean something, then blindly makes a failed grab for his arm when Alec rolls out of bed. He mumbles again into the pillow with a grumpiness Alec can’t help but adore.

He takes his boyfriend’s searching hand and leans in, kisses the buzz of hair above Magnus’ ear, “What?”

“We’ve got ten minutes,” Magnus repeats, shifts his face just enough to be heard, “Drag me with you.”

Alec hefts Magnus to his feet and guides him into the bathroom, where they proceed to stumble and grunt their way out of their bed clothes. Magnus looks halfway to falling back to sleep against the tiled wall when Alec’s done getting the water temperature perfect, but with a bit of effort, they both
make it under the shower spray where they give themselves a quick wash and shampoo.

As Magnus’ special shampoo blend of sandalwood and myrrh gently wakes them up, Alec feels himself grow warm and heedy at the sight of Magnus’ wonderful, naked body - all wet, tawny skin and muscular slopes - and the lazy, heated appreciation mirrored in his Warlock’s eyes sends all his blood rushing south. He reaches for Magnus’ hips, gathers him in until they’re pressed tight from chest to thigh, then helps Magnus rinse the suds from his hair with careful combs of his fingers. He hears Magnus’ breathing deepen alongside his own, watches as Magnus’ irises bloom to gold, his pupils growing to slits as they gaze up into him, piercing him. It knocks his heartbeat up several urgent notches until he’s hard and breathless and tingling with the need to lean those few torturous inches between their mouths.

He waits it out just a little longer. They’re pressed for time, and Alec can hardly remember when they last had a moment to themselves. But there’s a bone-deep pleasure building quietly between them that swells him on the inside in all the best ways, and he likes the way it looks in Magnus’ eyes.

Magnus’ gaze swings down to Alec’s lips and back again, blazing with the same hunger Alec feels hardening them both against each other, and he really doesn’t have a choice then but to dive into his waiting kiss. Magnus gasps beneath his mouth as he’s pressed to the cool tiles, and he falls into a moan when Alec works his kisses down to the warm juncture of his neck.

Alec slides his hands up along the soft underside of Magnus’ arms, bracing them both back on the wall until they’re wet and slippery and squirming deliciously to the tune of each other’s bodies. He catches another of Magnus’ pleased gasps between his lips, tugs his hips closer as he slides his tongue inside to taste the next one, and Magnus’ arms encircle his shoulders, an ankle hooking behind his right calf, his body opening under the force of him with welcome invitation.

Alec groans as their hips grind, pulsing along one another, “It feels like it’s been forever.”

“I know,” Magnus pants against his lips.

“Five minute hand jobs used to be our thing. Think we should see if we’ve still got it?”

“Yes,” Magnus tips his chin up, encouraging the soft bites and kisses Alec now sprinkles down the length of his neck. His lips fall open on a dreamy sigh, “Definitely. Yes.”

So they take each other in hand, kissing deeply until it feels as if there’s nothing left in their lungs but the scent and breath of each other. They push and pull, heaving and undulating their heat-misted bodies along the shocking, stark cold of the wall tiles, forgetting everything beyond the urgent need to relieve each other, to be relieved themselves. And when Alec comes between the writhing press of their bellies, he’s groaning helplessly into Magnus’ mouth, drinking in the demanding lust he sees in his boyfriend’s shimmering cat eyes. When Magnus comes, it’s hot and pulsing, and his body curls deeper into the circle of Alec’s arms, fingernails leaving marks in his back.

Once the rushing euphoria passes, they quickly rinse themselves off as their mouths trade shower water kisses. It’s another moment before they’re vaguely reminded of time getting away on them, and the toll of a day they haven’t even lived yet feels heavy.

“We’re going to be late,” Magnus breathes, carding his fingers through Alec’s wet hair. They are going to be late for the busy day awaiting them, but Magnus seems perfectly content to be pinned beneath Alec’s body weight, as content as Alec feels to be pressed to him.

He kisses Magnus unhurriedly, like the clock isn’t ticking. Then he’s hugging him, swaying him, nuzzling him, “So we’ll be late. I need five more minutes with you. Just like this.”
Magnus leans further into the nooks and crannies of Alec’s hug, arms going around him as far as they can reach. And Alec squeezes him tighter in return, just to luxuriate in the feel of being held.

“It’s a good thing you’re the boss then huh,” Magnus murmurs. Alec feels the happy curves of Magnus’ smile against his neck, and he too smiles, pressing it into Magnus’ shoulder.

They stay there a little longer than five minutes, but Alec regrets nothing. Lucky he’s the boss, indeed.

In the bedroom they dress in silence, happy to bask in the glow of freshened skin, orgasms and lingering embraces. Once Alec has his boots on and his shirt buttoned, Magnus meanders over to fold down and smooth out his collar. Alec can’t help the smile that takes over his face, nor the small burden lifting from his shoulders, because Magnus looks the most relaxed he’s been in days and his hands are a lovely weight as they rub down his chest.

He kisses him just because he can, but Magnus soon slips himself free when Alec’s hands stray a little too low. He silently chastises him with a stare that isn’t at all convincing. “I know you’d take great delight in me walking around your Institute with an erection, but I would rather not.”

Alec’s chuckle soon tapers off into a sigh, “Remember when we used to have the time to even joke about erections? Everything is so complicated now.”

“Hey,” Magnus says, his warm and adoring touch on Alec's face, “We’ll find our way back. We always do. We just...happen to have the fate of the Shadow World in our hands right now. It should be the priority.”

“But I miss you,” Alec laments, “I miss us.”

Magnus gives him a look of great sympathy, made ever so sadder by how much he, himself, seems to be in agreement. Because Alec sees now that Magnus misses him just as much as he misses Magnus - because of course he does - and the fact that he’s been so caught up in the mission that he hadn’t noticed how patiently his boyfriend has also been waiting for the blessing of time, hurts. Magnus leans forward to hug him, and Alec immediately gathers him close, arms wrapping him tight.

“So do I,” Magnus murmurs, his hands rubbing Alec's back, swaying them gently like it might soothe the new guilt he knows Alec is now carrying. Always knowing how he thinks. Always knowing what he needs. Always being there with open arms when Alec forgets to take care of himself. It’s another luxury to being with Magnus that he hadn’t given much thought to, beyond the simple joy of having it. Most unexpected is the onset of tears he feels in his throat, and it makes him tighten his hug to something more fierce. Grateful. Protective.

Then Magnus is pulling away just enough to look him in the eyes, and the look he gives him is such a deep, sensual promise of later that it trips Alec’s insides.

“But for now, hold onto it. Let it fester a little,” Magnus says, sliding a fingertip along the outer edge of Alec’s ear. His smile grows beautifully mischievous when Alec can barely contain his shiver,
“Then, the next time we have more than five minutes to enjoy ourselves...give it all to me.”

His next breath is wobbly as it leaves him, and he entertains the thought of locking his bedroom door and pushing their schedule back an hour. *He is the boss after all,* “I don't suppose you're powerful enough to stop time?”

Magnus smiles serenely, “No, but I have no need. Time always stops for me when I’m with you.”

The blush hits Alec’s cheeks immediately, *ferociously,* and it renders him to the point of speechless, confused gesticulations. He doesn’t know whether to laugh, cry or peel Magnus back out of his clothes. He kind of wants to do all three.

Magnus sees his silent struggle and laughs delightedly, following it up with one of his sexy little smirks; and that really doesn’t help matters, *“Fester, Shadowhunter.”*

“Oh, I’m festering. Festering like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Come on,” Magnus gives Alec’s chest a firm pat and disengages from their shared embrace before they waste the entire day away, “I’m on a delicate knife-edge with your parents as is and I’d rather not keep them waiting. I also have the heart of the *littlest* Lightwood to win over.”

“You’ll be fine. Max is gonna love you,” Alec smiles, straightening the silken fold of Magnus’ deep blue cravat and watching adoringly as Magnus nervously frets with his own cufflinks, “Even if it turns out he’s not a fan - which, for the record, I do *not* see happening - he’s going to love you because *I* love you.”

Magnus fixes his anxious, hopeful eyes on him, and Alec melts beneath the instinct to protect him.

“And I *think* you know this, but I just want you to be sure. I do love you. A *lot,*” he adds, and the goofy half-smile on his own face downgrades to something much softer, “More than I know how to say.”

Magnus’ answering smile is so beautiful and brilliant that Alec’s heart thumps to see it, “So, the odds are in my favor?”

“Definitely,” he grins, and they both sneak their way into another kiss that threatens to make them later than they already are.

Magnus is still wearing that smile during their morning brief in the Ops Center, and Alec pats him affectionately on the behind as they officially begin their day.

He has seen many Institutes in the last week, but nothing so far has compared to the beauty of Mumbai’s Institute. Every archway is ornately carved, with tall walls of pristine marble and gold-painted frescoes of Desi Shadowhunter heroes long past. Despite his handful of visits since Max took up tutelage here, he’s always taken aback by it and always finds something new he hasn’t yet discovered. Magnus clearly feels similarly in awe, as he turns slowly at Alec’s side to take it all in.
They’re greeted by the new Head of the Institute, Saanvi, who was promoted on Alec’s advice merely four days ago when Isabelle and Underhill ousted the former Head as a Circle member - the only Circle member they’ve found so far to be running an Institute. Alec has met her many times during his visits, and her vast experience as Mumbai’s former Head of Security meant she was a natural choice to take the helm. She opens her arms and embraces him now, quietly asking how he is and offering her gratitude for the tough position he’s put himself in. Then she’s directing them both to where Max is completing self-directed study in the library. As Alec suspected he would be, Magnus is struck once again by the beauty and monstrous size of the Institute’s library - one of the largest in the Nephilim world - and Alec has to stifle a laugh when he all but starts drooling at some of the rarest, most ancient volumes in existence lining the walls.

With Saanvi leaving them to it, Alec and Magnus greet his parents, who sit helping Max with his book work - a means to disguise their organized rendezvous, to exchange information without tipping anyone off back in Idris. For all anyone is aware, the Lightwoods are simply visiting their youngest.

They all listen carefully as Max gives Alec a small summary of his most recent life happenings. His little brother doesn’t seem surprised by Magnus’ presence, which Alec attributes to his parents probably filling him in. He wishes they hadn’t bothered, because Max isn’t giving Magnus a second glance, which tells him that whatever cliff-notes version they gave him wasn’t bad per se, but clearly wasn’t framed the way Alec wanted it to be.

Max offers a simple Hi in Magnus’ direction only after Alec prods him to be polite, and he decides to get this over with as quickly as possible so he doesn’t have to look at his parents anymore. Because he can’t, not without wanting to overturn the very furniture they sit on.

He soon wishes he hadn’t pushed, because once they’ve found some privacy, his parents talk about the Consul’s new date for this year’s Honoring; a concern Alec hasn’t yet had a chance to think about. His parents’ shared glance tells him it’s already been discussed, and that neither of them are happy about it.

“I heard,” Alec nods grimly, “How did he even get it past the Council?”

Maryse sighs, jaw tight, lowering her voice further as a student walks by, “Executive order. And that’s not all. In moving the date forward, he's completely cut most of the organization.”

Alec can feel himself growing angrier by the second, because the planning aspect each year is an established part of the grieving process. Craftsmen, musicians, landscapers, caterers, and those that have lost their loved ones all come together to make the Honoring what it is. Malachi’s change of date means hundreds of people will be prevented from making their own meaningful contributions.

“What’s the sudden rush?”

“That’s just it,” Maryse tells them, and Alec can see a strange concern in her eyes, “Malachi uses any chance he can to host a ceremony. It gets him re-elected. We don't know why he's doing this, and we can't get close enough to find out.”

His parents inform him that some of their old Circle contacts - those that had been punished and released back into society under probationary restrictions - aren't speaking with them. Almost as if they've been locked out of their own network. They also tell him that the guest list for the Honoring has been expanded to include the Council's Downworld liaisons and leadership teams, and most key Clave representatives from around the globe. Even security has been increased for the ceremony. Apparently, the entire Alicante Gard and soldiers from outer regions will be heavily present, and weaponized. It's so beyond overkill that it makes Alec both speechless and deeply suspicious. He’s
Magnus stands to his right, close enough that his arm remains pressed to his. He’s deep in thought, eyes flicking back and forth between the far off wall and his parents as they explain what they know. Alec finds himself so engrossed in his reactions - the pinch between his brows, the grim set of his mouth, the way he smooths his thumb across his lower lip - that it makes everything spilling out of his parents mouths sound like a grave warning.

“Every outer cabinet member supporting the Death Knell amendment has also been invited,” Maryse adds, “They’re to be seated on the dais.”

Magnus frowns, “What’s the Death Knell amendment? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“It’s new Clave legislation that strips criminals like Valentine of their right to a trial,” Robert carefully explains, “It means anyone performing a terrorist act against the Clave goes straight to the execution plate. It’ll cause more harm than good, but the amendment is gaining a following. Everyone we know who plans to vote it into action will get front seats at the Honoring.”

Alec clocks the way Magnus reverts back into his thoughts, like he’s piecing crucial information together, “What are you thinking?”

He observes his Warlock as he looks back and forth between his parents. Pondering.

“Downworld leadership. Prominent Clave members with power and influence. Generations of angry, grieving families still wanting change. All vocal proponents against Valentine, gathered in one place - essentially at gunpoint,” He says, a vivid swarm of a dawning something in his eyes; fear, disbelief, anger, urgency. And Alec’s own vague awareness finally begins to make sense, “I don’t know about you, but that sounds like an assassination list to me.”

The three of them stare at each other in shocked silence, as if Magnus has torn off a bandaid somewhere and the pain hasn’t yet registered.


Magnus confirms, “A coup d'état.”

His theory must hit close to home for his parents, because as two people who once followed Valentine down his psychotic rabbit hole, they share a heavy, terrifying, knowing look between them that can’t be ignored or denied.

“He used to joke about running the Clave,” Maryse breathes, shuddering as the memories pluck at her, “By the Angel. He’s trying to take Idris.”

Robert tugs his phone from his jacket, “We have to warn them.”

“We have to be sure,” Alec snaps a hand around his father’s, “Find out what you can. Fire message me, or grab a burner phone and contact us through Magnus’ number. No one can know we’re onto him.”

Magnus summons one of his own business cards - a handsome matte black card with gold foiling - and hands it over to Maryse. She gives it a quick once over and slides it into her handbag, “The Honoring is in nine days. We need a plan.”

“Give me a day,” he tells her, “Do what you can on your end. I’ll talk with my contacts.”
Robert turns his gaze behind him to where Max sits across the room, pretending that he hasn’t been trying to read their lips, “What should we do about Max?”

Alec thinks of home; the current disarray of his Institute, housing two of Valentine’s most wanted with their brand new super powers. If Valentine is going to attack another Institute in the near future, it will be his, “He'll be safer here.”

“You forget who you're dating,” Maryse glances in Magnus’ direction briefly, and Alec tries not to be insulted by what it might mean, “Magnus’ wards have kept the New York Institute safe for generations. The only wards stronger than his are those around Idris. Max will be safest with you.”

It’s a compliment, one that says and means a lot more than the issue of Max’s safety. His mother looks vaguely uncomfortable about it, like she’s tasting new flavors for the first time, but she’s making an effort. For now, Magnus has been accepted as a part of his life. It’s clearly conditional, trial basis only, but he sees the surprise and pride in his boyfriend’s eyes and decides to accept it gracefully for what it is.

When they say their goodbyes, Alec hugs his mother a little harder. Her answering squeeze and her acceptance of Magnus’ parting handshake is not lost on him.

Back in New York, Magnus makes a trip to his apartment to check in on his own responsibilities, and Alec helps Max settle into his old room. He’s not sure how much Max has heard of their current Valentine situation; whether he’s scared or angry, or simply weirded out by Alec having a boyfriend. But his small, bland responses to Alec’s questions make him frustrated enough to sit him down for a talk.

He tries to catch Max’s eyes, “You gonna tell me what the problem is?”

“Are you gonna put me on Ichor duty if I don’t?” Max asks, giving him his usual sass.

“I could. Since I’m the Head of the Institute. But I’d prefer it if we talked it out.”

He watches Max weigh his options, as if putting them on a scale to see how annoying each is going to be. The way his little brother’s mind works never ceases to amuse him, and it certainly doesn’t fail now. Though once it’s clear he’s made the decision to talk, he looks stern in his seriousness. Whatever it is, it’s a big deal to him, so Alec makes every effort to listen carefully.

“Why’d you have to get a Warlock boyfriend?”

The question stuns him. It’s not an accusation, or a confused plea as to why, but it sounds an awful lot like it is. For the first time, Alec stops to wonder what his very public, very rebellious relationship with Magnus means for his little brother. The hidden consequences beyond himself that he never gets to see. He quickly envisions scenarios of other kids in Max’s age group; those that don’t understand Alec or his decisions, those with traditional parents, those inundated by biased grapevine gossip, all making fun of Max for the way his big brother lives his life. It’s a little more than heartbreaking to think about.
“Is me having a Warlock boyfriend causing problems for you?” He asks, and Max turns his eyes to the floor, “Has someone said something to you? Are people giving you a hard time?”

Max shrugs, “It’s nothing I can’t handle. Magnus is kinda the Cardi B of the Downworld, so...it’s not that bad.”

“What’s a Cardi B?”

Max rolls his eyes, “Oh my god you’re so lame.”

“Hey, I am not lame. And I will let Magnus decide whether that observation of yours is correct,” Alec rolls his eyes back, “Anyway. Continue.”

“I dunno,” Max shrugs again, growing unsure again, “I just want to know why him.”

Alec sighs deeply. He’s had plenty of time to think about it over the last few months, though most of that is either too inappropriate for children to hear or too confusing to understand, so it doesn’t bear repeating. He also senses the hint of protectiveness in Max’s tone - that piece of his brother that believes protection should go both ways - and Alec falls in love with the kid all over again. Max, it seems, is after a little more than a good reason to throw back in people’s faces. He’s after reassurance that Alec hasn’t gotten himself into a situation that he might eventually have to fix.

“They say that you don’t really have a choice when it comes to love,” Alec tells him, ruffling Max’s hair, then smoothing it back out, “And I think that’s the way for some people. But not for me. I had a lot of reasons not to choose Magnus, just like he probably had a lot of reasons not to choose me.”

“So why did you?” His brother asks.

“Because all the reasons to choose him were important, and all the reasons not to choose him, weren’t.”

Max seems more invested in what he has to say now, “Like what?”

“Like...he’s got a big heart. The biggest you might ever meet,” Alec smiles, his chest warming at the thought, “He’s funny, and clever, and kind. He helps me grow and see the world in different ways. He even helps me see myself in different ways. He encourages me to be the best person I can be. And that’s a really good thing to have.”

“Is that why you chose him? Because he makes you a better person?”

“No,” Alec shakes his head, “I chose him because he’s hot.”

Max - being still of an age where attraction seems foreign and gross - immediately makes a show of gagging and hacking playfully, then giggling when Alec pokes his sides until he squirms.

“Serious talk. Serious,” Alec laughs too, dropping his torture methods enough for Max to settle, “You know how I can be a bit grumpy sometimes?”

Max mutters a sarcastic Only sometimes? beneath his breath, just enough for Alec to hear and retaliate with more prodding.

“Well, Magnus makes me very happy, which makes me a lot less grumpy. He knows how to make me feel better when I’m having a bad day, and he knows how to make me laugh, even when laughing is the last thing I want to do,” Alec says, smiling at his brother because it looks like he understands now, “I chose him because when everything feels like it’s falling apart around me -
when things get too much for me to handle - he’s the person that makes me feel safe again.”

His little brother finally nods, satisfied. Something somewhere in the mess of Alec’s gushy boyfriend explanation has answered whatever real question he had. His next shrug has a bit of a bounce to it, and Alec is pleased, “Okay then.”

He smiles, “‘Okay then?’”

Max hops off the bed and goes for the mundane comics on his book shelf, “I just hope you know what you’re getting yourself into.”

Alec can’t help but laugh. This kid, “I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into. Take it from someone who knows - having Magnus Bane in your corner is one of the coolest things you’re ever going to get.”

His brother glances up from his comic, looking him directly in the eyes, “I trust you.”

Alec nods his thanks, appreciating the words more than he can voice, and he stands to whip Max off his feet and into his arms for a hug. His little brother squirms and fusses at the affection, especially after what he probably deems to be a serious man-to-man chat.

“I’m glad you’re home, buddy,” Alec murmurs into his brother’s soft hair, plants a kiss on his head and squeezes him tight, “I’ve missed you.”

Max relents, and his little arms finally curl around Alec’s neck, “I missed you too.”

He’s not sure how long they stay there like that, but Alec doesn’t let him go, Max doesn’t fight him on it, and catching up on all the overdue hugs just seems like the right thing to do. His phone starts vibrating in his pants, so he juggles Max in his arms to reach a hand down to retrieve it.

It’s only another email, one of many he’s received today from the Clave and the many Institutes he’s helped in the last week. He’s already deciding to shove it back into his pocket when his eyes land on the subject line. His belly twists in a sudden, frightening knot as he taps through to read it, and then he understands the full gravity of what he’s seeing.

He doesn’t read the whole thing, just the words that matter. Distinguished guest. Annual Honoring Ceremony. You are formally invited. Alec Lightwood.

Perhaps sensing his tension, Max lifts his head from his shoulder, “Alec?”

“Yeah buddy,” he croaks, quickly putting his phone away.

He pats and rubs Max’s back, attempting to keep himself calm, ignoring the angry, terrified thumping of his heart, desperately trying not to choke on the lie of his next words.

I’m good. Everything is okay.
Fifteen

Chapter Summary

Magnus, Alec and their allies combine forces to save Idris.

Chapter Notes

It's taken a year and 3-ish months, but the time has finally come.

I don't quite know what to say here. This is kind of a big deal for me, in regards to personal accomplishments and for how unexpectedly you all grew to love this story. If you'd told me back in chapter one that this fic would be what it's become, I would have laughed and curled myself into a little anxiety ball. That it did is insane. That it's been so enjoyed and laughed with and cried with and snuggled up with is amazing to me.

So thank you for your time. Thank you for your comments. Thank you for the encouragement and support. You've all been so incredible. Also thank you for loving my Alec, and my Magnus, and the sexy, wonderful journey they share. And thank you for giving Hawkhill a space at your faves table!

This final chapter was brought to you by a lot of chocolate, a lot of blood orange tea, and musical muses such as: RIAYA's "Hunter", Sabrina Claudio’s "Stand Still", 2WEI's "Gangsta's Paradise", Colossal Music's "Sentenced To Death" and Calum Scott's "You Are The Reason".

Trigger Warnings this chapter include mentions of PTSD, abuse-related trauma, miscellaneous battle gore and violent descriptors.

<3
#BLPMalec.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next few days feel as long as they do stressful.

Alec speaks with his international contacts to see if he can derive a pattern on who is getting invited to the Honoring without setting tongues wagging back in Idris. Most are surviving sons and daughters, and nieces and nephews of those lost in the Uprising 18 years ago. A large chunk are related to council members or prominent politicians in Alicante, those who are attempting to reforge the law in ways that might make Valentine's life a little less easy to live. All are considered targets. Every single person on Alec’s scribbled attendance list is someone Valentine would deem worthy enough to take out. But without any solid proof, it's all just hearsay. Too vague to act on.

Magnus hears bits and pieces when they both stop long enough to have a conversation. From anyone suspicious enough, the Honoring is indeed being set up as a trap for Valentine's renouncers. Maryse and Robert are too stonewalled by their own contacts to find much in their digging, but then they
catch a lead on a young officer who has been suspended from his post in the Gard. His intel tells them that no one in the Gard knows the plan, and every officer is being expected to follow orders or take a leave of absence. Several more have been fired while others have stopped turning up to work altogether, only to be replaced by Shadowhunters who have suddenly transferred in from the outside. When their informant helps identify one of the latest recruits, Maryse confirms them as someone she herself recruited into Valentine’s ranks years earlier. That’s as close to a confirmation as they’re going to get.

When Alec’s not tied up with phone calls, he works on getting Jace back in the game, though it seems like a losing battle. Jace is adamant he’s ready for field work, but Magnus sees the change in him; the dark circles beneath his eyes, the gauntness still haunting his face, the way he frequently spaces out, drifting to the point of needing a physical shake. His new, violent knee-jerk response to being touched is an entirely different problem altogether, and Alec isn’t quite sure how to help. Luckily for him, Magnus does.

The Silent Brothers are usually summoned in situations like these, where illnesses are of the mind and spirit. But the administration process of getting their help would tip off someone back in Idris, and Alec isn’t willing to advertise Jace's health to anyone keeping tabs for the enemy. So it’s almost comical how shocked he is when Magnus not only offers to reach out to his own Silent Brother contact, but assures him that Jace’s examination will be kept between the four of them.

The diagnosis that follows isn’t a good one. In the confines of his office, Brother Zachariah informs Alec that his Parabatai is suffering a combination of symptoms he deems too perilous for duty. Anxiety. Insomnia. Dissociation. Hallucinations. Seizures so minor they’re barely more than a pause, but seizures nonetheless. Nephilim medical terms are vague and ancient at best, but Magnus understands what they amount to. Post-traumatic stress. Borderline psychosis, brought on by prolonged exposure. He knows from previous conversations that Jace has always suffered some unchecked form of trauma since childhood, but Brother Zachariah’s assessment frames him as someone sitting at the edge of the storm, dangerously close to being whipped off his feet.

*His body is healed, but his spirit requires time and great patience to recover,* Zachariah tells them, tentatively. Alec already knows before he asks, but Zachariah’s answer is a lot firmer and graver than even Magnus had expected.

When Alec is finished getting the last of the day’s affairs in order, Magnus has his arms full of tired, quiet Nephilim. Alec is struggling, both with things Magnus is privy to and things he is not, and he doesn’t know how to comfort him in the short term except to offer a warm, solid body to rest with.

The next morning, Alec gathers his most trusted people into his office, as well as those in a position to shed greater light on the situation at hand. Magnus stands among Jace, Isabelle, Underhill, Hawkstorm, Isla - even Clary, Jocelyn and Luke - as Alec reluctantly confirms the dreaded news with a heaviness only true leaders can bear.

“The Clave has been compromised at the highest level,” he tells them all, taking a moment to trail his eyes across each of their faces. His gaze feels intense, razor sharp with stifled rage and burning determination, “We have reason to believe that the Consul is working on Valentine’s behalf, and that
this year’s Honoring ceremony is the target of a planned attack. Valentine means to take Idris by
taking down his biggest opponents. That includes the majority of the Council, along with various
prominent Clave members and Downworld leadership. Everyone who has been invited is a target.”

Alec then looks to Magnus, eyes softening in some unspoken apology, “Myself included.”

The room seems to sit still on the words, as if suspended in the awful limbo between shock and
outrage. A sick rush of panic swoops inside him from chest to stomach, but he doesn’t get the chance
to react because Hawkstorm reacts for him, staggering forward with a full, bodily tremor. His eyes
are bright with a mess of emotion, too many tangled together to put words to, but they match the
same overwhelming paralysis Magnus feels in knowing the man he loves now wears a target on his
back.

Hawkstorm confirms his suspicions, “Noah got an invite too.”

Everyone turns their eyes to Underhill, who stands against the bookcase, pale faced and mouth
moving like he doesn’t quite know what to say, until he does.

“Both of my parents were killed in the Uprising,” Underhill informs them quietly, “No one wants
Valentine dead more than me.”

Alec nods from where he sits on the edge of his desk, and he folds his arms across his chest with a
casualness that almost stuns, as if Magnus’ world hasn’t completely toppled from its axis, “Then I
guess my solo mission just became a team effort.”

Hawkstorm’s hand goes to his thigh holster reflexively, fingers on the leather binding of his sword
hilt, “I’m going with you.”

“It’s invite only,” Underhill tells him, “An event like this, you could get arrested—–”

"You're my family," Hawkstorm proclaims through gritted teeth, and the words sound like they’re
tearing up through his throat, battered and desperate, “If you’re to honor your parents, then I’ll honor
them as mine. Nu voi fi despărțit de tine.”

Underhill’s expression twists minutely, both stubborn and painfully fond at the words his lover has
spoken for his ears only. As an immortal with a dozen languages in his arsenal, Magnus hears them
anyway. *I won’t be separated from you.* He looks to Alec as multiple voices erupt at once, heatedly
and Hawkstorm continue their lover’s quarrel. A room of people who love each other - who would
 gladly die to protect each other - all yelling out of fear, dressed as anger. Magnus wants to shout too,
because he may care for everyone in this room, but his deepest, most compelling concern is Alec’s
safety - and he can’t ensure it if he’s not walking into this battle beside him.

“Enough! Everybody quiet!” Alec suddenly bellows, angrier than Magnus has ever seen him,
“Underhill and Hawkstorm will come with me. Jace, Clary, Jocelyn - Valentine wants you the most,
therefore you’re all benched.” He points at Clary and Jace when they both make moves to protest, “If
I have to think about your safety, you'll risk mine. You're out. By the authority of me. Got it? This is
not your place to make a statement. It’s not your fight.”

As expected, the news hasn’t gone over well, and after a confirmation of further plans to be made
and promises of secrecy, everyone exits the meeting sombre. Isla lightly pats Alec’s arm on her way
out, which does little to comfort either of them, while Luke agrees to consult with Alec as the plan
develops in the coming days. His boyfriend senses an opportunity for greater insight into their
common enemy, and as Valentine’s former Parabatai, Luke’s willingness to help speaks of long held
resentments and a desire for vengeance that has haunted him far beyond its means. Alec and Underhill and Jocelyn and Jace aren’t the only ones who want their lives back.

Once the room is clear, Alec collapses into his seat with a heavy sigh, looking as if his shoulders bear another hundred pound weight. It’s probably not the most favorable time to confront him, but Magnus is too scared and too furious. At Valentine. At the Consul. At Alec for keeping it to himself when they’d both made promises to communicate the tougher things.

He asks, as calmly as he can manage, "How long have you known."

Alec lays his head on the back of his chair, stares blankly across the room. He breathes for a pause, giving himself a moment’s rest before providing an answer, "Since Max came home."

*Four days.* Four days Alec has been dealing with this alone. His anger quickly shifts to agony, and old, faraway insecurities; the deep, dark ones that tell him he’s not enough somehow. But his Shadowhunter must see it quietly taking hold of him, because his quick assessment of Magnus’ face has him attempting an explanation.

"I was going to, a hundred times. I just...couldn't bring myself to say the words," Alec swivels slowly in his chair until they’re facing each other, though he appears smaller and more vulnerable in his exhausted slump. A far cry from his usual commanding build, "I couldn't find the guts to admit that a man I thought believed in me, promoted me...suddenly wants me dead."

Alec huffs a laugh seemingly at himself, and Magnus finally gets a better look at him after four days of *I'm fine* and *just tired* and a stubbornness that never let up, until now. His Shadowhunter isn’t just angry, or afraid for his life. He’s *heartbroken*, and that’s a far more painful realization for Magnus to come to terms with.

"Do you know what Valentine told Jace?" Alec asks rhetorically, betrayal and bitterness poisoning his tone, "He told him that being here with our family was part of his plan, and that becoming my Parabatai went against that. So he had to improvise. I think Valentine had something to do with me being promoted. And I think that’s why Jonathan was here - to ensure that when the time was right, Valentine would have an entire Institute at his disposal."

Magnus has known of Valentine's trickery; seen the consequences of his evil up close, so the idea doesn't surprise him as much as it’s clearly blindsided his boyfriend. But knowing that Alec has been silently questioning his own purpose in the wake of it is staggering.

"I think I've been his pawn."

The sad disbelief on his Shadowhunter's face is awful to watch, and deepening further by the second. As if saying the words has made it fact. He's not sure if touching him is what Alec needs right now, so Magnus moves to perch on the edge of his desk beside him, just to be closer.

He hands him the simplest of questions, "How long have we known each other?"

Alec takes another moment to answer, his eyes trailing down the front of Magnus' embroidered shirt as he thinks.

"Almost five months."

"Right. And it may not sound long, but you and I have been through a lot in that time," he says, ever so gently, "And as someone who has had quite the front row seat to all the things you do, I can say with all certainty that you are no pawn.”
It’s the sincerest truth he can offer, and anybody who knows Alec personally can attest to it. But the visible tentativeness Alec displays in believing him now is a sure sign he’s going to need a little more than kind words. Magnus takes a deep breath. The thought of Valentine and the Consul and their twisted ideologies burning a hole in Alec’s confidence should make him livid. But he finds himself smiling instead; smugly and conceited, like a man holding a royal flush. His boyfriend looks adorably confused the longer it sits.

“Perhaps Valentine didn’t see you coming. Perhaps he tried to get you under control. But he doesn’t know you,” Magnus tells him now, with a soft shake of his head, “Because if he did, he would have known from the start how intelligent you are, and how cunning you are, and how impossible you are to shift when you have your goals set. I’ve seen you take your own beliefs down to rubble, just to see if they’re right. I’ve seen you force Downworlders and Shadowhunters to look each other in the eye and shake hands. I’ve seen you build this Institute into an example for others, and I’ve seen the ripple effects.” He welcomes Alec’s searching gaze, intense with the need of reassurance. “I was with you last week, and I saw how those Institutes looked to you for guidance. I heard the way your name was spoken. And I don’t doubt for a second that they wouldn’t follow you into a fight. You. Alexander Gideon Lightwood. Valentine may have tried to use you, but he now wants you dead. And not because you’re some sort of pawn, but because you’re his biggest threat. If indeed he promoted you, it was his greatest mistake. And he’ll learn soon enough just how much he underestimated you.”

Magnus watches Alec blink away his sudden sheen of tears, distracting himself with an awkward, unnecessary shuffle of papers on his desk, the clearing of his throat. He allows it, because Alec may enjoy dropping compliments that trip Magnus further head-over-heels on a daily basis, but he’s still learning how to accept them when they come his way.

“Magnus!”

Alec stops what he’s doing, long enough to gaze up into his eyes.

Magnus smiles again; and though he always tells him from the heart, he pulls his next words from his very soul, “I love you.”

Alec’s mouth twists into a stifled half smile, too close to tears and too overwhelmed with gratitude to let it free, lest it open any floodgates, “I love you, too.”

Magnus gives him a moment to steady himself - refrains from touching him in case he sets Alec’s emotions off - then turns the conversation elsewhere.

"You’re not thinking of doing anything foolish, are you? Like asking me to stay behind while you trudge headfirst into danger?"

Alec chuckles now as he scrubs a hand down his face, amused despite the circumstances, "Never. If the roles were reversed, there's no way you'd stop me."

“Good,” Magnus nods, “Because I’m going with you.”

“I said I wouldn’t stop you---”

“Then we’re agreed. I’m going---”

“---but the only Downworlders permitted to attend are---”

“The ones Valentine intends to murder. I know.”
“I can’t take you through officially. They’d throw you in the Gard for trespassing,” Alec explains, carefully.

Magnus knows how stubborn his boyfriend can be, but that’s merely one of the many ways they’re evenly matched, “Then I’ll have to pull Idris’ wards down myself.”

He thinks of his Demonic father - of whom was once one of the most powerful celestial beings, born of Heaven before he was exiled and reforged in Hell. His father’s Angelic signature might be enough to get him through, but there’s no guarantee the wards won’t immediately disclose his presence. If he wields enough of his power, however, he’ll be able to rip the wards down and replace them with his own. Wards that won’t refuse to bend to his will.

“I could take them down completely,” he adds, “If I replace them with my own, no one will know I’m there.”

“Idris’ wards are the most aggressive in the world,” Alec frowns, “Your own Spiral Labyrinth powers them. I know you’re powerful, but no Warlock is powerful enough to pull that off.”

“I am. Trust me.”

They face off against each other once more, both unwilling to back down. Two men in love, just trying to ensure each other’s safety. To his surprise, Alec relents, though he looks even more determined than before.

"Fine. Think you can portal a bunch of Shadowhunters into Alicante while you're at it?"

Magnus shrugs, "Child's play. What do you have in mind?"

And Alec sits up in his seat then, calling them both to attention, “I think maybe you’re right. Maybe I do have allies. And maybe they will follow me into battle.”

He plants himself at Alec’s side for the next couple of days, joining him as he video calls the most trustworthy of his Institute contacts to officially warn them of Valentine’s plan. Alec states his intention to smuggle a small army into Idris in order to disarm the enemies Valentine will have present at the Honoring ceremony, and on Hawkstorm’s urging, he asks that they send any volunteers to the Bucharest Institute - the closest Institute to Idris they’re connected with - where Judah Hawkstorm will accommodate everyone before the mission. Alec also suggests that they quietly warn those of their residents who are invited, and offers a contact number for those who may wish to help while in attendance. It’s the second time in two weeks that Magnus has had to watch these Shadowhunters learn of an awful plot to harm them and theirs. As much as he doesn’t like Nephilim in general, it hasn’t been an easy thing to witness.

Fearing that Valentine may have an alternative plan to come for Jace, or Clary and Jocelyn, Luke offers the New York wolf pack as extra Institute security in Alec’s absence, which sees a number of local werewolves brought in for vetting and briefing. With a solid plan in place and a group of Shadowhunters from other Institutes due to join them in Romania, Alec takes an hour to walk the building and answer any questions his team have before they need to leave. Magnus takes the spare
time to check in with Jace, only to find him punching away at a bag in the training room. It’s clear he’s not happy about being separated from Alec, nor the decision to exclude him from the mission.

Magnus watches his boyfriend’s Parabatai from afar, noting the exceptional physical recovery he’s made since his time as Valentine’s prisoner. He’s much stronger, and fast, hitting the punching bag with a force that seems to rattle the beams. A stark contrast to the emaciated young man Magnus pulled back from the brink of death over a week ago.

Jace glances over his shoulder at him before returning to the bag with several hard punches. He’s definitely not in the mood to talk.

Magnus tries anyway, speaking into the space between them, “It’s good to see you’re feeling better.”

He feels far more awkward than he sounds, though he doesn’t want it to get the better of him. He didn’t know the boy pretending to be Jace all that well, and he finds he knows the real Jace even less. The timing hasn’t been fortuitous enough to allow them the opportunity, and now more than ever - on the eve of battle, one where Alec is a target - it feels important enough to attempt.

Jace stops hitting the bag long enough to offer Magnus what he assumes is supposed to be a smile, but comes as more of a grimace instead.

“I know it’s not ideal,” he continues, “Staying here while your Parabatai goes into battle without you---”

Jace whips around, sweaty and breathless and a little manic, if Magnus peers closer, “Look, I appreciate all you’ve done to help me, I really do. And I’m glad Alec has someone like you in his corner. But let’s not do this right now, okay? I have other things on my mind.”

“I understand,” he holds up a placating hand, until Jace is calm enough to let him continue, “I only wanted to check in and see how you were---”

“Well I’m pissed, Magnus. If it wasn’t completely obvious.”

“Oh I’m well aware, Nephilim. You have a face like thunder that is hard to miss.”

Jace gestures wildly with a hand, “Then what do you want from me?”

Magnus has known Parabatai before, and he’s seen too many loved ones at each other’s throats in the last two days not to understand where the boy is coming from. So he gathers patience from his many sympathies and carefully speaks his piece. “I know it won’t help your frustrations, but Alec will return safely, as will the rest of your friends. And that’s not just a promise from an optimistic Warlock boyfriend. It’s a guarantee. I just wanted you to know that. For whatever it’s worth.”

He offers a half smile, because it’s probably as much as the boy can handle right now, and makes to leave before the situation can get worse.

“Hey, Magnus.”

He turns around to see Jace working his jaw, as if suddenly lost on what to say. For a brief moment, Magnus worries he’s drifted off into one of his seizures. But then Jace gently shakes himself, clearing away whatever thoughts he’d had.

“You be careful too,” he says. Gruff, though sincere.

When Magnus gives him a true smile, Jace finally meets it with one that is a little less awkward and a
lot less angry, and Magnus leaves before either of them can ruin the positive step they’ve made.

When the time comes to portal through to the Bucharest Institute, Magnus watches Alec and Jace hug out their goodbyes as brothers, best friends, Parabatai. Fiercely and protectively, as if to leave enough of themselves on each other to keep them both safe while they’re apart. Isabelle hugs Clary and Isla, who will remain behind as a liaison for any attendees who wish to get in contact with Alec before the ceremony. Magnus drops a small velvet bag into Luke’s hand, with the simple instruction to throw and run, should Valentine arrive to cause a fuss. Even Simon makes an appearance, hoping that the ‘force’ will be with them. The Shadowhunters around them are notably blank-faced in response, so Magnus gives him a wink to let him know he understands the reference.

Jocelyn tugs him aside briefly enough to slip him a tarot card - a mammoth sized thing, hand painted. Pretty, but essentially useless to him. “Uh...thanks?”

“You should hide this,” she urges, “If there is even the possibility that Valentine is headed our way, it can’t be here. Warlocks have access to pockets of other dimensions, right?”

He takes another, longer look at the card in his hand, and finally realizes what she’s talking about. In his hands is The Mortal Cup, hidden in Jocelyn’s artwork. A clever idea, one that has kept it out of enemy hands - also the Clave’s hands - for nearly two decades. That Jocelyn is choosing Magnus to keep it safe now is too big of a responsibility to take lightly.

“Are you sure?”

As a woman who has learned his temperament over their many years of Warlock-client friendship, Jocelyn Fairchild gives him a deadpan look that leaves him far too amused for his own good. Like mother, like daughter, “You can hand it back when this is all over, if it’s too much for you.”

“Well, it’s a bit like being handed a child, isn’t it---”

“Oh huh.”

“A very dangerous child, with a herd of child-eating burklop demons trying to make it into their Friday night stew.”

Jocelyn rolls her eyes, “Oh huh.”

With a magic snap, Magnus pours the essence of the card into a small dimensional rift that he pries open with his fingers, and seals it shut until it’s gone and everybody is none the wiser. Jocelyn shakes his hand, as does Luke, and then he’s joining Alec, Isabelle, Underhill, Hawkstorm and the team of fifteen other Shadowhunters that are going with them. Another snap, and Magnus opens a portal to the Bucharest Institute, where Hawkstorm’s father awaits their arrival.

Alec and Jace part with a bump of fists before their team starts filing through, and Magnus takes Alec’s outstretched hand as they step in.

On the other side of the portal stands a dark, stone cathedral that stretches into the evening sky, made
of several towers merged together by one large building. As they all follow what must be Hawkstorm leading the way to the main entrance, Alec squeezes Magnus’ hand in his, perhaps nervous about how much more real the situation has finally become. With the intention to distract him, Magnus pulls their joined hands to the small of his back, nudging into Alec’s side as they walk.

“First time in Romania?”

His Shadowhunter nods.

“Beautiful place, beautiful people,” he continues as they climb the steps to the entrance, “We must come back and do a tour of the Seven Wonders. When the timing is more convenient, of course.”


They come to a standstill when they arrive inside. The noise feels like a wall, voices compacted together, overpowering in the front lobby. Shadowhunters, too many to count, too many to walk through without needing to consistently apologize, all filling the foyer and congesting in the main hallway. He and Alec manage to get a few more steps inside before they see the adjoining common rooms brimming with more. Maybe a hundred, maybe two, all chatting and converging toward Mihai Hawkstorm, one of Samael’s uncles, who stands on the coffee table trying to organize what seems to be bedrooms for everyone. They watch as Hawkstorm politely moves through the crowd to grab his uncle into a big, burly hug, full of laughter and relief.

“Hey Lightwood!” Mihai calls overhead, “Do you want to take control of this?”

When Alec turns to Magnus - wide-eyed and gaping like a fish - he laughingly, gently urges him forward with a few supportive words. Magnus sees as Mihai encourages Alec to take his place on the coffee table; as Alec stares, stunned, at the enormous international crowd that has gathered for his mission, far exceeding any expectations they’d had. And he watches with a pride that threatens to undo his perfectly crafted, centuries-old reputation as his Shadowhunter love addresses his people; powerfully, from the heart of the true leader he is. When the crowd erupts into boisterous, passionate cheering and applause, Magnus applauds too, smiling so big his face goes numb.

Alec’s eyes find him through all the noise, and he too smiles, laughing at himself and this unexpected turn of events. Alexander Gideon Lightwood, Valentine’s biggest threat, has an army.

The next few hours see more Shadowhunters arrive from Mumbai and Australia, bringing the estimated total of their forces to a little over three hundred strong. Alec, Underhill and the Hawkstorm men help brief them on tomorrow’s mission in the Institute’s large ceremonies hall. The plan, thankfully, is a simple one, made all the more manageable by what will be Magnus’ contributions. He’ll be tasked with getting them all inside, then revealing any Circle members in attendance at the Honoring. The rest will be a matter of a snatch and grab - they’re to take down anyone with a Circle rune, and make them stay down. Alec’s priority is the protection of the attendees. And if that requires deadly force, he tells them: so be it.

Once the briefing is over and everyone departs for their own evenings, Alec also fields a phone call from Isla, who is to update the plan information for several Institute Heads who will be present for
tomorrow's ceremony. Magnus feels so emboldened by how tight Alec has organized everything that he's almost excited.

Tomorrow, Valentine and his Circle will be no more.

When they're finally done, he and Alec bid their good evenings. Judah Hawkstorm and his brothers, Mihai, Ioan and their wives have an air of overwhelmed excitement about them. The Bucharest Institute has never seen this many people, and there's an urgency in them to make sure everyone is accommodated comfortably. Alec feels bad for dropping them in the deep end, but they all brush it off like it's harmless. It's a very important cause, they tell him. We're just glad to have the opportunity to help.

Isabelle is too hyped for sleep and takes Mihai's offer of a tour through the Institute's historical weapons forgery, while Underhill and Hawkstorm have plans on a walk through the Institute's secluded night garden. Magnus catches the unusual nervousness in Noah's demeanor and suspects something else is afoot, so he speaks for both himself and Alec and wishes them a goodnight before dragging him off to their assigned bedroom.

Once they're finally locked away from the intensity, they share a startled, wide-eyed look that quickly dissolves them both into laughter.

Alec waves a hand about before putting it to his forehead. A handsome picture of disbelief, "Oh my God?"

"I don't think God has anything to do with this," Magnus plonks down onto the edge of the bed, "This is all you. Do you believe me now?"

Alec nods, smiling softly. He's clearly overwhelmed but in the loveliest way, and Magnus finds it a rather fetching look on him, "Kinda hard not to, huh."

"I am so proud of you, Alexander," he tells him, and his Shadowhunter's smile is quickly accompanied by rosy cheeks, "So proud that I think I'd like to say it to you again. While you're naked."

"Is that so."

"Hmm mmm."

Alec chuckles, and Magnus sits back to watch as he quietly disarms himself, unglamoring his bow and quiver to set it aside, removing his thigh holster, unsheathing two, three hidden blades from his person as well as the knife he keeps in his right boot. Then Alec is sliding his jacket off, adding to the pile of things he no longer wears, and Magnus interrupts him before he can miss out on a golden viewing opportunity.

"Slower," he requests, demon eyes already ablaze with arousal. It's been far too long since they had the time to make it count, and he intends to use it well.

His Shadowhunter lifts a foot to brace on the nearby chair and makes a show of unlacing his boots, one at a time, dragging each lace through each eyelet until Magnus reaches over to slap at him. Then he strips his socks off, twirling them over his head with a grin until they sail into the corner of the room somewhere. Alec's unabashed whoops has Magnus laughing again. He can already sense there's going to be a lot of that tonight. And it feels good, being able to laugh again.

Then Alec moves to the more excitable items of clothing. He goes for his belt, teasing it apart, descending his pants fly only to abandon it in favor of his shirt, leaving Magnus to grudgingly follow
with his eyes. He lifts the hem of his shirt to flash a hipbone, then the other, then folds the waistband of his boxer briefs down, displaying with a grand wave of his hand the muscled lines leading down into his underwear, just because he knows how much Magnus likes to nibble them.

Magnus snorts, "You're about to cross a line, Alexander."

"I guess you only like a tease when you're the one with the upper hand huh," Alec shrugs, "It's cool, I understand. We can't all be as resilient as me."

"If begging for my cock is what you call resilient, then you've been wholly misinformed."

Alec peels his t-shirt over his head then, and Magnus grows distracted in the sensual roll of his revealed body. Abs contracting, broad chest expanding, everything Magnus wants to press himself against right now. When Alec tosses his shirt onto the pile, he flexes through his shoulders in such a way that a needy moan very uncharacteristic of him slips free of Magnus' lips. He clamps a hand to his mouth like he might still have time to shove it back in, but Alec gives a triumphant cackle. The clear winner of this round.

He tries to drop his jeans, but detangling fitted denim from long, strong limbs is no easy affair and Magnus finds himself squirming with restrained glee at the absurdity of his Shadowhunter lover hopping on one foot, struggling to remove his pants. Alec may be going for the laughs here, but Magnus’ chest is swollen to the brim with affection all the same, and there’s no part of this that doesn’t leave him deeper in love.

When Alec strips his boxers down to his ankles and straightens, hands on his hips, Magnus’ chuckle tapers into an appreciative sigh.

Alec smirks, "Proud yet?"

"Very. So proud."

He takes in the sight of his naked lover - tall, broad, lean and deliciously engorged, with exquisite lines for his mouth to follow - and beckons him closer until Alec is standing between his spread knees. There, he places a kiss to his flat belly, nuzzles into the smell of him, following the sprinkling of body hair with his lips. When he’s kissed as far up as he can reach, they share a smile, and Alec frames his face in his warm hands, thumbs stroking his cheeks lovingly.

He’s abruptly yanked to his feet and into his arms for a kiss he can’t help but melt into. Alec widens his stance just enough that his firm hold on Magnus brings him into contact with everything at once, and Magnus moans into his mouth at the lively, solid weight of him, wanting to be under it. In his efforts to get there, he attempts to unbutton his shirt between the tight seal of their embracing bodies, but Alec’s hands soon take over.

“Me,” Alec says, in way of a request, and gets to work peeling Magnus’ clothes from him.

He’s been naked a thousand times in his lifetime, but as he looks into the warmth of Alec’s gaze, unwaveringly - as his clothing is removed by hands that love him the way these hands do - he almost aches at how profoundly naked he feels now. And when Alec rises once again to his feet, the kiss he pulls Magnus into strips the rest of his soul bare. It feels wondrous and enlightening for how safe he feels. Safer than he ever remembers being.

Once they’re done tumbling carefully onto the noisy spring mattress, he hooks his legs over his Shadowhunter’s thighs and wraps him in his arms to drag him closer. Alec takes the invitation to press him down into the sheets, and he leans up onto his elbows above, framing Magnus’ head for all
the kisses he plans to plant on him. Magnus takes to smoothing his hands along the muscled slope of his boyfriend’s back, down to the dip in his spine and up again, and they share a smile as they get acquainted in their nakedness again.

“I’m nervous,” Alec confesses, bashfully now.


“It’s just...been a while since we had the time…” he trails off, “There’s so much to make up for.”

“We don’t have to do it all tonight.”

“I get that, but you know me. Go big or go home, right?”

Magnus laughs again, only for Alec to join in. It does delightful things to their connected bodies.

“What do you want to do? Want me to fire up my Stamina rune?”

“God, no. I’m too tired for that.”

“How about...I blow you.”

Magnus happily groans his assent, though he immediately misses the press of Alec’s body as he shifts down the bed. His pouting earns him an unexpected raspberry, one Alec blows onto his stomach without warning, and it almost sends Magnus out of his skin. He catches the mischievousness in his Shadowhunter eyes and he quickly braces himself for the next one when Alec’s grinning mouth descends again.

He blows another raspberry at the root of Magnus’ cock, and Magnus has to be careful not to take his ears off with his knees. He barks a laugh, yelling when Alec attacks his cock next, and scrambles to soundproof the room with his magic. The bed’s shrieking springs are bad enough, but he’d really rather not have to worry about broadcasting their strange choice in bedroom activities to the three hundred Shadowhunters beyond the door.

“Okay, okay! What are you even doing!?”

“Playing the flute?” Alec blows again and Magnus erupts into giggles, slapping at his shoulders.

“Stop! My god. Get back up here.”

Alec follows Magnus’ motioning hands and crawls up on his knees, moving until he’s sitting on Magnus’ chest, straddling his shoulders.

His Shadowhunter is all too smug, and very eager for what comes next. “Gonna show me how it’s done, are you?”

“Shhh,” Magnus smirks, “Just shut your mouth for once.”

Magnus shimmies further down, enough that his lips bump the head of Alec’s erection, and then he takes it into his mouth for a languorous suck. He teases his tongue along the slit, tastes the salt of his precome. Alec is always half leaking before they ever get to anything heavy, as if he’s too aroused to contain himself. It thrills Magnus to no end.

“You’re so wet. This all for me?”

“Always. Now shhh, open your mouth.”
Magnus snickers, but makes good on his request, taking Alec back onto his tongue. He sucks the taste of him until there’s nothing left, then lifts his head to take him deeper, spreading his hands up across Alec’s ribs. His Shadowhunter sighs into the sensations, and brings Magnus’ massaging fingers to his lips for a suck before placing them at his nipples, encouraging his to play. Magnus takes him as deep as he can and holds, groaning on the length in his throat when Alec shoves his hands into his hair and tugs gently, thumbs moving to rub his earlobes.

He pulls off, swallowing, and just to get his own back, he blows a raspberry right onto Alec’s cock as loudly and as violently as possible. His Shadowhunter’s roarous laughter hits all four walls of their temporary bedroom. *Thank Lilith for soundproofing spells.*

Alec shifts further down his body for a kiss, one they both struggle to accomplish between their snorting and chuckling. But they eventually find their groove again, and Magnus sighs as Alec lifts his legs about his waist to start a slow, sensual grind. He rests back against the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Alec attentively sucks his nipples, and he rolls sensuously in the pillows, heavy lidded and panting while Ale

Just as he thinks Alec is going to take him into his mouth, he finds himself bent in half instead. Alec’s strong, warm hands hold him exposed and vulnerable to whatever mercy he deems befitting, and Magnus eagerly awaits his next move.

But the look on Alec’s face suddenly does not bode well for him, and Magnus is growling a warning between his teeth when he sees him descending further down, “Don’t you dare---!”

The raspberry Alec blows on his balls has him kicking and howling, and Alec has to fight his legs back toward his chest before he dives back in. His next attack, however, is that of his mouth and tongue on his hole, and it has Magnus groaning and submitting back into the sheets like liquid. *This* he can get onboard with.

Alec works him over thoroughly, nice and slow, kissing and sucking and coaxing the muscle soft with his tongue. Magnus squirms along the bed with how sloppy and wet he’s getting, moaning at the sight his Shadowhunter makes between his legs - groaning, spitting and eating him out like a man famished. It’s been nearly two weeks since they had enough time to do anything more than a quick blowjob. *Famished* wouldn’t be a weak assumption to make.

When Alec is three fingers deep, Magnus has had enough. Latching his legs back around his waist, Magnus takes a few deep breaths and relaxes himself as Alec slowly feeds his cock inside him. A few shallow pumps of his hips later, his Shadowhunter spreads back out onto his elbows, hands going through Magnus’ hair.

As he bottoms out, Magnus grunts, smiling lazily to himself, “You feel perfect. Missed this.”

Alec groans an agreement, gently stirring himself in him, “You feel perfect. We fit good.”

He kisses beneath his jaw, mouth moving along his neck in all the ways that leave him fuzzy brained. Magnus melts beneath the ministrations, tilting to give him better access, and he rolls his hips on the hard, hot length impaling him until Alec is groaning softly against him.

“You remember that time on the couch?” He pants.

Alec snorts, “Which couch?”

“The loft couch,” Magnus laughs, “First time we tried out your Stamina rune.”
“How could I forget.”

It’s a memory that returns to Magnus every so often, not because of how insane that night had been, but for how early and how quickly he’d fallen under Alec’s spell. Enough that he’d contemplated ditching his careful set of rules to accommodate him. Enough that he’d wanted to skip the tough stuff, like building trust and feeling vulnerable, just to let him in completely. He doesn’t regret taking the longer route to get here, because what they have is beyond his wildest dreams. But he knows that if he takes a good hard look at himself, he’ll see the thinly spun tethers that have always held him back from those he’s loved. A fear of the unknown, keeping him just shy of the edge. A safety net.

And he wants it gone. He wants to give Alec everything he’s got.

“You had me spread out on the couch like this,” he murmurs, shivering when Alec’s hips rut forward, “and you said one day - when I allowed it - you’d hold me down. Make me take it.”

Alec goes a little slack-jawed at whatever fantasy that triggers inside his head.

“Here’s your chance, Shadowhunter,” Magnus nuzzles up against Alec’s mouth, teasing him into a kiss, “Fuck me. Make me take it.”

“That’s what you want?”

“That’s what I want,” Magnus nods, hands stroking Alec’s flanks. He feels a little crazy in his heediness, and can only imagine how he must look, “You’re not the only one who’s been festering here.”

He stares up at his gorgeous, powerful Shadowhunter man with sensual invitation; waiting, waiting, waiting to be taken, and he gasps softly at the first, full thrust of Alec’s thick cock inside him.

"Feel good?"

Magnus nods, hands moving to Alec’s back, "More."

Alec thrusts again - a little harder, a little faster - and Magnus groans.

"More?"

Such a stupid question, "Quit teasing me, Shadowhunter."

Alec’s next thrust comes with more force, "How about now?" And again, right into Magnus' prostate, "Or now?"

Magnus drifts into the warming sensation, eyes closing, "Right there. Hard."

The next punch of Alec's hips feels so deep, his eyes pop back open, and he finds himself moaning through a clenched jaw as a rhythm begins to form. Every so often, Alec will pause to circle his hips just the way he likes, massaging his sphincter so deliciously that Magnus feels the familiar hot flush of an anal orgasm entering the realm of possibility.

"I hope you know I'm aiming for a twofer," Alec chuckles breathlessly, and Magnus pulls him down for a messy kiss.

"I love it when you set goals."

Alec starts moving again, determined not to fail, which has Magnus growing delirious with how badly he wants to consume him. Alec Lightwood, for as long as he’d known him, has always given
his best, and it's intensely overwhelming to have that level of concentration focused solely on his pleasure. It feels deeply selfish but impossible to refuse, because Alec's hunger to please him only makes Magnus hungrier to indulge him.

Alec moves inside him in long, deep rolls that mash his prostate into butter, so deep and precise that Magnus feels like he's choking on his own breath. And when he slows to a stir, Magnus distantly hears himself whining, but he's too high on pleasure and too pleased with Alec's thorough enjoyment of him to be embarrassed by such things. It continues like that, over and over again, until the pleasant, tingly heat takes over with a roar, and he orgasms inside so intensely that Alec can't move through the tight grip of his ass.

"Yes," he hears his Shadowhunter encouraging him, feels his grinning mouth on his neck, "Come on me."

He feels half suspended out of his body, euphoric and floaty and alive, as if he’s made of a thousand butterflies. Then he crashes back down with a guttural cry, trembling in Alec's arms as the waves throb. His fingers scratch and scratch in the back of Alec’s damp hair, trying to find purchase, something to anchor him.

His Shadowhunter laughs, light and panting, "Are you okay?"

He nods, "K-keep going. Just...hold me."

He shivers into the tight, binding embrace Alec wraps him in, chin knocking on his shoulder, and succumbs to the next slow build of pleasure as he tries to catch his breath, "Fuuuck."

"God I love you," Alec murmurs into his ear, kissing the side of his head.

"Was I loud?"

"The loudest," Alec laughs again, "I love it when you're loud."

"That sounds like a challenge."

"Challenge accepted."

When he has enough brain power back online, Magnus uses his thighs to lock their bodies tight and pushes back onto Alec's cock with each thrust, wild and frantic. He follows the instructions in his Shadowhunter's face like gospel, thrusting against him until he sees the little flutter in his eyelids, the way he bears his teeth when the pleasure is at its most potent. Alec shifts to his knees, pummeling him hard enough that Magnus' toes curl, and Magnus rides back just as fierce until Alec is groaning and swearing and neither of them remember who is fucking who.

"I'm gonna come," Alec warns, face flush with exertion, and Magnus starts roughly jerking himself off, already halfway to joining him again.

"Wait for me. Wait for me."

Their bodies rock and slap in a quick, brutal frenzy, and when Magnus urges him, Alec holds him down by the shoulders and pounds out four, five, six more deep thrusts before he's crying out his own release. Magnus comes upon feeling his lover's throbbing cock unloading inside him, his spendings dripping across his belly, and his Shadowhunter tiredly matches the pulsing grip of Magnus’ body around him, fucking him with everything he has left until it subsides. Magnus falls back against the sheets, pliant and dizzy and tingling from head to toe, wetting his lips, and Alec tumbles back onto his elbows above him. Their sweaty, jittery, breathless bodies move against each
other of their own accord, and Magnus wraps him up again, keeping him close as they attempt to catch their breath.

He laughs, wildly, carelessly, too full of endorphins to do much else but enjoy another favourite moment with the man he loves and the incredible love they make. When Alec joins in, his half hard cock jolts inside him, and that sends Magnus into another fit of laughter all over again.

"I can’t believe you’re real sometimes,” Alec sighs, smiling, hands combing through Magnus’ sweaty hair. He plants a big kiss on his forehead, “I can’t believe you’re mine.”

Magnus gathers him to his chest, snuggling into the heat and smell of Alec’s neck. He closes his eyes and exhales deeply, exhausted in the best possible way.

And he murmurs for the first time in his entire immortal life, "I can't believe I found you."

When the sun comes up, they lie twined together beneath the covers for as long as they can get away with, cuddling away the chill of Bucharest’s morning air. Then they’re up getting showered and dressed like it’s just another day at the office. As they’re about to leave for the dining hall, they slide into each other’s arms one last time; curled together, breathing each other in, savoring the last of their time alone before the mission takes it from them.

After Alec spends the morning giving a final briefing to their gathered Shadowhunters, Judah leads Alec, Magnus, Underhill and his son through to his Institute’s atrium, where a beautifully ornate ceiling opens up to the sky in jagged, broken shards of stone. They’re told it’s the result of a large battle with flying Oriax demons some thirty years earlier, and Idris’ apparent lack of funds in the aftermath. Alec seems deeply unnerved by the knowledge that four generations of Hawkstorms have protected this Institute against all manner of foes, only to be abandoned by their motherland in times of need. Never one to depend on the Clave for anything, Magnus sees instead what they’ve made of the destruction.

The entire atrium is edged in raised garden beds full of flowers and herbs and even vegetables, and there’s wooden seating laid out beneath a large weeping willow. It’s clearly a beloved place that has seen many gatherings and celebrations. Even the portal that sits at the center has been lovingly framed with a trellis overrun by roses in bloom. Someone around here has a talented green thumb.

Upon closer look and to his utmost amazement, Magnus realizes the Bucharest Institute’s portal is one of the originals, built by one of his old Shadowhunter acquaintances, Henry Branwell, after Magnus himself had helped translate the required magic into physics. He’s hit with a wave of fond memories; of bitter coffee and dry scones and hours of absurd chitchat; and immediately offers to give the portal a new bill of health. Judah is far too polite a man to accept, but he lays down a quick history lesson and gets to work, leaving Alec, Underhill and the Hawkstorm men gaping at him in awe.

Once the portal is as shiny and new as the day it was made, Judah twists the dials to unlock its doors, and then it’s time to say goodbye. Magnus fidgets with the zipper on Alec’s jacket, trying to straighten it again his chest. Watching as his lover leaves for imminent danger goes against every
natural protective instinct he possesses, and he’s finding it hard not to whisk Alec away to some remote, luxurious island with a lot of good wine instead.

He reaches to cradle Alec’s handsome face between his hands, brings him close until they’re resting against each other, forehead to forehead, “I’m fairly certain I won’t breathe again until I see you’re safe and sound.”

Alec’s handsome face does its usual thing, where his cheekbones soften around the edges, and his eyes grow impossibly warm, and his mouth twists like it’s trying to hold in the most blinding of smiles, “Then that makes two of us.”

Magnus presses a kiss to his lips, “Please be careful.”

“Always,” Alec sighs, replying with a longer, warmer kiss he seems to have trouble pulling away from, “I love you.”

“And I love you.”

When they finally part, Magnus watches as Judah embraces Underhill tight, then moves to hold his son, where they speak quietly and affectionately into each other’s ears. Then Magnus and Judah are stepping back to watch them disappear through the portal, one by one.

“I’ll be right behind you,” Magnus promises.

Alec flashes him a smile that doesn’t entirely reach his eyes, though Magnus tries to match it. And then he’s gone, and Judah locks the portal back up, and all he has left is the atrium’s silence and a heavy, nervous heart to keep him company.

“They’ll be okay, Mr. Bane,” Judah tells him gently, “Moartea nu vine când o chemi, ci te ia când nu te temi. It’s on old proverb from around these parts.”

“‘Deaths foreseen come not’,” he recites back

Judah sounds happily surprised, “You speak Romanian?”

“One of the many languages I speak. When you’ve lived as long as I have...” he offers the Hawkstorm patriarch a wane smile in place of a long-winded explanation. He suddenly doesn’t feel like talking, “well...y’know.”

“It’s a good thing to worry, Mr. Bane,” Judah pats his shoulder comfortably as they make to leave, “It keeps us mortal men alive.”

 Attempting a breach of Idris’ wards is one of the highest criminal offenses one can acquire. The horrific Demon Scourge of 98’ had been the result of wards simply beyond their optimal fitness, yet the Councillor responsible for outsourcing the work to those at the Spiral Labyrinth had been stripped of his runes and exiled for failing to prevent it. Magnus only knew this part of recent Nephilim history because of the 90-day worldwide cease of Warlock services that had ensued as a
result. Because Idris had wanted to hold the Grand Warlock Chancellor responsible for his part in the mess, and the Warlocks weren’t above cutting the Shadowhunters off to protest the point.

So he’s well aware of what the Shadowhunters will do to him if anyone finds out he’s purposely tampered with the security of their entire motherland.

He concentrates on the border wards, familiarises himself with their texture, their taste, how to grab them with his magic in order to tear them down. He lifts the lid entirely from his inner chest of inherited power - his father’s power, infinite and effortless - and allows it to overflow his own magical tanks. He snaps his fingers, calls his magic to his hands for wielding, and then he’s ripping the entire perimeter of Idris’ wards apart in one fell swoop, before throwing his own in their place. He pauses, breath held in wait as he listens for signs that his work has been detected. But there are no sirens blaring, and the demon towers of Alicante aren’t lighting up like glow sticks in the far, far horizon. He’s done it.

He takes a moment to fortify them, because if his magic is going to be responsible for keeping Idris demon-free, he’s going to ensure they stand the test of time. When he steps across the border into Idris, he feels the smallest amount of push back before his new wards accept him, and it’s only his urgency to get to Alec that keeps him from dwelling on the awestruck expressions of the Shadowhunters watching him.

He opens multiple portals ahead, and watches as their gathered army splits off to disappear into them. Then he’s opening another for the Hawkstorms, and another for Isabelle and himself. He takes her hand and lets her tug him through, and when they arrive on the other side, it’s inside into the expansive, mountain oak fortress of the Lightwood’s Idris estate.

They have twenty minutes to find public transport to the city center, so Magnus magically switches out his clothing for something a little less colorful, while Isabelle restocks on their family’s weapons collection, hiding as many as she can inside her outfit. When he’s done marking a fake rune onto the right side of his neck with a sharpie, he turns to Isabelle with a preening brush of his lapels.

“How do I look? Like an Shadowhunter?”

“Better than,” She grins, then clocks the mark on his neck with a grin that grows a little wider, “Nice rune, Romeo.”

He’d merely drawn it from the memory of Alec’s finger tracing along his back a little more than a week ago, so for all he knows, he could very well be wearing the angelic sigil for penis, “I’ll admit I’m going off a very vague, very questionable reference. Did I get it wrong?”

She takes the pen and fixes a couple of his lines, but then she hands it back, “Nope.”

He lifts his summoned hand mirror again to get a look, “Is it something entirely irrelevant? Like a...genitals rune? Please tell me I didn’t just put a genitals rune on my neck.”

“Love, Magnus,” she laughs at him delightedly, like he’s the silliest thing she’s ever met. But then her smile softens beautifully, not unlike Alec’s does, “It’s the Love rune.”

She takes to sliding another blade into her ankle strap, if only to give him the privacy to blush in peace. He hadn’t known. And now that he does, he wants more than anything to have Alec in arms reach. He tries not to think of his Shadowhunter love, gallivanting about at the Consul’s will, walking into his own possible death. Wondering where Magnus might be.

When Isabelle is done, he sends all his borrowed supplies back to where they came from and snaps
His fingers at her, “Chop chop, Lightwood. Let’s get a move on.”

He’s surprised to learn Alicante has a subway system, which turns out to be more of a moving, underground bomb shelter than anything resembling the sophistication of the New York City subway. But it helps them blend in with the growing crowds of Nephilim travellers bound for the Accords Hall.

They quickly run into several of their allies upon entering the city center, and many more as they happen upon the Accords Hall and see the layout of the ceremony with their own eyes. Magnus points out the armed officers lining the barricades that run the entire perimeter of the square, and sends anyone not on crowd control to get as close to them as they can without causing any suspicion. If Valentine or the Consul makes any major orders, they’ll be the biggest threat.

His heart nearly leaps out of his chest when he sees Alec up ahead, eyes scanning the faces he passes. Impatiently, Magnus sends a spark of magic his way, just enough to tap him on the shoulder, and Alec whips around, searching, until he spots Magnus and his wiggling, waving fingers. The crowd is too thick to push through, and Alec makes a frustrated gesture with his hands that tells him his phone was confiscated upon arrival, so it's up to their desperate attempts at lip reading to communicate.

Magnus sees Underhill with him, but no Hawkstorm, and tries to mouth his name is question. He has to add a hand gesture of fabulous hair to get the point across, but when he does, the answer is still grim.

Alec mouths, as clearly as he can. Arrested.

He passes on the information to Isabelle, who fondles her adamas snake bracelet nervously in response, and he turns back to see him talking in Underhill's ear and pointing someone unseen to the right. When Alec looks his way again, he's anxious as the crowd starts moving ahead of him.

I have to go, he mouths. He's about to be seated. He holds up his hand and shakes it. Fifth row.

Magnus, frantic, shares another look with his Shadowhunter, something anxious and terrified and full of love that threatens to overwhelm him. He forms the words with his lips. I love you.

And Alec smiles his beautiful smile. I love you more.

Then he’s suddenly moved out of Magnus line of sight. He panics a little, unable to find him again, and by the time he's done directing a few more of their allies toward the Gard standing on their left, he's lost on where to look. He sees Madison Graylaw and a handful of other Institute Heads he recognizes being seated in the back rows, closer to the standing audience where Magnus, Isabelle and the majority of Idris’ citizens are. Madison, like the other leaders seated around her, is being vigilant, inconspicuously trying to get a picture of what they’re in for, and she too looks relieved when she lays eyes on him.

His stomach rolls nervously as the ceremony starts. Several key speakers of high stature take to the outdoor stage set in front of the Accords Hall, talking about the atrocities of the Uprising 18 years
ago. But Magnus isn’t interested, nor is he ready to forgive, and he passes the next hour of droning political statements trying to maneuver he and Isabelle closer to the front.

Isabelle quietly points out her parents in the third row when they catch a glimpse of Maryse turning her head to the side. Robert sits beside her, unmoving. Other faces, those Magnus has never met, are glancing curiously toward the armed guards surrounding the area. Some even frown, though whether it’s out of suspicion or distaste for heavy weaponry at a mourning ceremony, Magnus doesn’t know. This attack, for what it’s worth, isn’t as subtle as the Consul would probably like to believe.

Naturally, that’s when he sees the Consul himself, rising from his seat on the dais with a heavy security detail standing nearby. He brings himself to the microphone and looks out into the audience, full of his own dry authority.

“And now, in the interest of bringing some much needed hope as we remember those we lost, I’d like to do something a little out of the ordinary,” the Consul pronounces, and the air in which he speaks his Magnus frozen where he stands.

“We have many outstanding leaders in our large, global community, but none quite as ambitious as one of our most recent promotees,” Malachi continues, and then he turns a purposeful eye to the crowd on the left, “the newly appointed Head of the New York Institute, Alexander Lightwood. Why don’t you come and say a few words, son.”

Time stops.

He vaguely sees the audience look around in curiosity. He even sees people from their team, startled and shocked, as Alec - his Alec - stands from his seat at Malachi’s beckoning. Underhill rises with him, speaking into his ear, looking for all like he’s planning on following him or dragging him back down. Alec gently presses him away, offering words back, and then he’s moving into the middle aisle. Magnus watches him - wide eyed and utterly helpless - as he walks like he’s prepared to drop to the ground. Like he’s expecting someone to shoot him dead in front of the entire Clave.

Maryse and Robert are on the edge of their seats, hands poised at their mouths, watching their son walk directly in the middle of the Consul’s promised chaos with no way to stop it. When Alec gets up onto the stage, he nods politely to Malachi before taking his intended position before the microphone. He seems to take in the large audience of three thousand before him, eyes once again scanning faces, trying to find someone, anyone he recognizes. And Magnus feels like he’s been shot in the heart for how alone he looks, how openly he searches for a familiar face, if only to keep him calm. This was not part of the plan.

Magnus finally gets his feet moving and shoulders his way none too gently to the front of the standing crowd, pulling Isabelle with him, hoping to be there for Alec in any way he can. On the stage, Alec spots his parents, and the microphone broadcasts his quiet, relieved sigh over the concert speakers.

His Shadowhunter visibly gathers himself, takes another breath, then bends his head down to reach the mic.

“We are here today to honor those we lost, both Shadowhunter and Downworlder alike,” Alec speaks slowly, getting a taste for his words as he cracks his knuckles anxiously in front of him, “They were all here that day for the same reason: for peace. For equality. They hoped that one day the world as we know it would be a safe and dignified place where all of us could exist together, with integrity and respect.”

The audience listens silently; relaxed, save for those they know who understand why Alec is up there
in the first place. Somewhere in this vicinity is Valentine Morgenstern, ready to drop the hammer. Bringing Alec on stage was a distraction. A *checkmate*.

Magnus scrambles for Isabelle’s wrist, *he knows we’re here*, and Isabelle peruses the crowd in frantic search of the enemy.

“But their message disappeared that day,” Alec continues to speak ahead of them, growing bolder, angrier the longer he goes on, “It got lost to the narrative of a deranged *psychopath* who believed himself better than our oaths. And because of him - and because of our complicity - we have wasted 18 years mourning the dead when we should have been finishing their work. It’s not enough to have a signed piece of paper. It’s not enough to call ourselves allies. Downworlders are a part of our community. They help us in times of need. They are our neighbours, our acquaintances, our friends...our---”

Alec finally sees him, *sees* Magnus at the crowded end of the aisle, observing his every glance, his every tick, cataloging them obsessively if only to share the burden of his fear. And he smiles a grateful smile so full of the unspoken that Magnus has to take a deep breath.

“---our lovers,” Alec’s voice cracks, and he takes a pause to politely clear his throat. Then he’s back on the microphone, more determined than ever. He looks down the aisle at Magnus, as if to share his strength, and he pushes on, “*We must do better.* So today, I honor the dead by being loud. Today, I honor the dead by saying *get off your asses and do your jobs.* Today, I honor the dead by pledging my life’s work to a united future. Today, I honor the dead by saying *fuck Valentine, fuck the Circle,* and may the Angel have mercy on their souls.”

The audience trembles to the tune of grumbled agreements and scandalized murmurs, whispers of *that Lightwood boy* and *how dare he speak his name* permeating the square. But Alec appears unfazed, standing tall and proud, wonderfully arrogant in the face of judgement. Magnus couldn’t be prouder, but he catches the look in the Consul’s eyes, the tick at his mouth, sinister and furious behind the false smile he wears for the crowd. That's when he sees it.

The air shivers around the Consul, faint enough that no one bearing the man a glance will notice, but the longer Magnus stares, the more apparent it becomes. He squints and reaches out as he would with a glamour, sensing something beneath the surface, all the more intrigued by how stubborn it feels. Not magic, but Angelic power. A rune. He presses harder against it with his mind’s eye, pulls a hint of his father’s magic to nudge him through, and then he realizes with a nauseous sway of dread that he’s staring into the glamored face of Valentine Morgenstern himself.

Hidden in plain sight. Not three steps and a sword’s swing from the man he loves.

As if sensing a burning gaze, Valentine curiously turns his attention toward the crowd, toward Magnus. And then he freezes as they lock eyes.

Magnus gives a shuddering breath; strong, vibrant magic tickling warmly in his veins, like an adrenaline burst waiting to be unleashed. His father’s alluring power, called upon without thought, filling him. Dangerous in how ten foot tall and bulletproof it makes him feel.

Valentine smirks, as if his plan for greater division will work regardless of who wins today, and then he’s bellowing loudly and clearly across the silent crowd, voice booming throughout the square in warning as he points, *directly at him*.

*“Downworlder!”*

Magnus panics as everyone surrounding him turns his way, then as Valentine and his security detail
turn toward Alec, and he steps into the aisle - secret mission be damned - and reaches forward with his magic; his father's magic; as fast and as easy and as deadly as a blade in the dark - and lops Valentine's head from his shoulders with the wide swipe of his hand.

The crowd gasps collectively as his head drops to the stage, then as his body follows alongside it. Alec stares down at it, then looks to Magnus across the space between them, wide-eyed.

“Magnus!” He yells, “Spell! Now!”

He answers by casting his unveiling spell over the square with a finger snap - as effortless as breathing with his father’s power. Every Circle rune in the vicinity, hidden or glamored, lights up like a bright blue target. Impossible to ignore.

That’s when the screaming starts.

Chaos breaks out. Alec’s team of Shadowhunters engage with the perimeter of armed Circle members. The majority of the gathered crowd start fleeing in all directions while those assigned crowd control try to placate and direct them to safety. More Shadowhunters move their way toward the many commotions around them, prepared to help but too confused about who to help. Valentine’s security detail unsheath their weapons and lunge for Alec, but Magnus reaches out again to yank them all off the stage into a dazed, crumpled pile of bodies. He catches a glimpse of his Shadowhunter, unharmed, leaping from the stage to slice a man’s throat in the front row, before he runs distractedly into Underhill.

“Portals,” Noah pants, grabbing him by the shoulders, “We need portals. Me and the team will direct civilians into them. We have to clear the area.”

“Guard them,” Magnus pushes away from him, calling over his shoulder as he heads for the square’s main entrances, “Don’t let any of the Circle escape!”

He gets to work creating two portals at both entryways, then casts another spell, dropping anyone wearing a Circle rune screaming to their knees. It gives their side enough time to get the upper hand, but others of their enemies are back on their feet, staggering away with the means to flee. Now that their leader is dead.

Magnus starts clearing out Circle members hiding in the congestion, tossing out magic left, right and center. Ripping their weapons from them, breaking their kneecaps, taking them all down one by one. Then he starts on the perimeter, aiding any of Alec's army with their assailants; melting bullets inside their guns, choking them in their helmets, cutting them all down until they're overpowered and restrained. He swings his forearm into the throat of a man who takes a run at him, then slugs another in the face with a hard punch, whisking both fallen bodies away across the concrete for a nearby Shadowhunter to arrest. He stops as a bullet ricochets off the ground in front of him, and he sees an armed Circle member coming at him, gun raised. He throws a bolt of magic at his kneecaps, enough that he falls to a skid, gun clattering free. The man recovers quickly, flipping up onto his feet to take a swipe at him with a blade. It catches Magnus’ jacket, and he peers down at the slit in the material. Big enough to poke his hand through. His Valentino jacket.

With the majority of the Gard overpowered and the crowd of civilians thinning, Magnus could take his sweet time to knock him down several pegs. But with Alec and the others still needing help and Circles members running free, he sends a spell right into the man’s black helmet and lights it up like a lamp, which drops him screaming and gagging back to the ground.

He whips a few more fleeing Circle members onto their backs, confiscates several more weapons, punches another man until his knuckles ache. He sees Isabelle wrangling a man to the ground, and
Hawkstorm leaping into a fight with his battle axes brandished, having broken out of prison somehow. Magnus keeps pushing forward, dragging a group of Circle members away from Alec’s parents, crushing their skulls with the clench of his fist. He pulls another Circle member off a female Shadowhunter and throws him, so hard that he’s impaled on another man’s weapon. He drags and throws and casts his magic, over and over in his growing anger as adrenaline and power course through him. Thoughts of Alec’s safety - their team's safety, Valentine and his hatred, Shadowhunters and their prejudice - plague him on repeat, fueling every blast he throws and every bone he breaks, until it’s just Alec. Alec. The man he loves, somewhere in this insanity, using his life to save others. Stubbornly missing from his sight. Not knowing whether he's alive or dead.

His father's power continues to flood him like a fine wine, like ambrosia, warm and delicious and too seductive to put down, and he pushes on, pushes, pushes, until---

"Magnus!"

Someone gives him a rough shake, bringing him back to the present. Large hands, warm hands. Hands that love him. He sees Alec - his proud, beautiful Shadowhunter love - standing in front of him, looking relieved and shaken and amazed and handsome, despite the blood smears on his jaw and the dirt in his hair.

Magnus shakes his head, trying to clear it. "We did it,” Alec tells him, “It’s over.”

“It’s over?” he blinks up at him, then glances around the square.

He sees Shadowhunters restraining Circle members, while others are being handcuffed. Others are unconscious. Many are dead; some in pieces, blood pooled and splattered on the concrete. Other Shadowhunters are demanding explanations as they stand barricaded behind the stoic bodies of brave volunteers, faces Magnus recognizes from their Bucharest team. Surviving Council members and diplomats are beginning to convene on the stage, gesturing wildly at the mess; at Valentine’s severed head and body lying at their feet, free of his glamor.

He shakes his head again, “What happened?”

“You happened,” Alec replies, hands sliding warmly onto Magnus’ face, “You were amazing. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“Yes?”

His Shadowhunter chuckles, “Yes.”

He looks around at the destruction, the blood, the bodies, the sprawled corpse of a man at his feet. He violently revolts. He doesn’t know how he caused this, much less remembers it.

He takes stock of himself and how he feels. Energized, a little woozy, a bit like he used to a few centuries ago as a younger Warlock after gorging himself on too much borrowed power. It’s a familiar feeling, tied to awful memories he’s too afraid to revisit. Times spent under the influence of him, his Demon father. He remembers now, as he feels his father’s magic running gleefully through his system unchecked. He’s gone overboard, used far too much. He scrambles to separate it from his own magic, guilty and ashamed, and sends it back down to where it came. Into its box for locking away.

His next look up into his Shadowhunter's eyes is much clearer, “Are you hurt?”
“Not a scratch.”

“The others? Isabelle?”

“All fine. Everybody is safe,” Alec assures him, “Valentine is dead. The Circle is done. It’s over, Magnus.”

Alec goes to grab him into a hug, sees the badly drawn Love rune on Magnus’ neck and chokes another laugh, tears wetting his eyes, before he’s dragging him tight against him with a deep, relieved sigh. Magnus cards his fingers through his Shadowhunter’s hair and breathes him in, battle sweaty and coppery with blood but alive and holding him like nothing else matters. He tries to focus on that, on the good. Instead of the sick, viscous terror of his own actions, sliding around his stomach.

He and Alec spend the following hours in Idris’ Council chambers, and with corroborative statements from several of Alec’s fellow Institute Heads, they explain everything they’ve done leading up to - and including - Valentine’s demise.

With the Circle members in their ranks exposed, the Council has been cut down to a third of its size. And with Consul Malachi unaccounted for, those remaining are at a loss on what to do. Naturally, their first instinct is to punish any viable crimes, which includes Magnus’ unexplained presence in the city. Alec and his colleagues verify how instrumental he’s been in their mission to take down the Circle, and paired with his apparent heroism at the Honoring, it’s enough to have his infractions reduced to nothing more than extreme frowning. Though once he leaves Idris, he’ll be banned from the Shadowhunter motherland indefinitely. He agrees without fuss. Downworlders were banned before. It’s hardly a punishment.

Alec is made to rehash the events of the last few months, including Clary, Jocelyn and Jonathan Morgenstern in his Institute. His leadership and every decision he’s made since coming into his position gets picked apart and scrutinized. What’s left of the Council isn’t impressed with his lack of transparency, but they grudgingly accept its role in today’s successful mission. Alec’s colleagues - veteran leaders and favored Institute Heads - vouch for his competence and diligence, and with their help, he too gets away with barely more than a wrist slap.

When their meeting is adjourned, Magnus watches Alec speak privately with the Council as the room empties. Madison Graylaw and others he’s met in Alec’s company shake his hand and give him their best on the way out, and then he’s sliding his fingers through Alecs as they finally get to leave.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah. They want me back tomorrow for further questioning,” Alec smiles tiredly, “but for now, we get to go home.”

Home, as it turns out, isn’t ready for them to call it a day.

The New York Institute quickly detours from its work into celebration, and Magnus watches proudly as Alec is welcomed back with great gusto, being pulled into hugs and handshakes with his friends,
family and peers. Magnus himself is congratulated and thanked, because news of his carnage has already been distributed through the Idris gossip train. He avoids the accolades in favor of informing Luke and Jocelyn the full details of Valentine’s death and the Circle’s collapse, and he tries to be content with their relief. Today has been a good day for the Nephilim. Tomorrow will be a better day for the Downworld. His growing anxiety over his role in the day’s events is of no importance.

So he tries to celebrate with his friends. He allows himself to get swept up in Alec’s happiness. He concentrates on the nightmare finally being over. And he doesn’t think about anything else.

When Alec returns home from another long day in Idris, it’s with a faint smile and bad news. His Shadowhunter love, and all his competence and organization and charismatic leadership qualities, is being summoned to Idris on a more permanent basis to help rebuild the Council, select a new Consul and amend certain legislation around the Accords. His work in recent months has put him on the map with people vying for political power, and with multiple endorsements from Nephilim leaders around the world, Alexander Gideon Lightwood has become something of a poster boy for change. It’s a good thing.

Except for the part where Magnus is banned from Idris, and Valentine’s total breach of their security has meant a crack down on anyone entering or leaving the country. Which means he and Alec will be navigating the awful terrain of a long-distance relationship for the next few months.

“We can call and email and skype,” Alec assures him, “Idris’ cellular network is solid, so that won’t be an issue. And we’ll get the weekends together, and maybe the odd day in between if I bribe someone.”

“This is just…” Magnus sinks onto his couch, defeated, “…such a huge change.”

“I know. And I don’t want to leave you,” Alec moves to sit beside him and takes his hand. It’s terrible news for the part of him that was ready for the nonsense to be over. But he observes a lively sort of urgency in his boyfriend; a bounce, despite the scenario staring them in the face. And Alec smiles at him like he knows he’s going to let him down, “But I want to do this. It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help reshape the Clave for the better. To change its course. I meant what I said on that stage. The work our people started 18 years ago needs doing. And I intend to get it done.”

He’s so frustratingly earnest about it that Magnus has no choice but to give his assent. He smiles at his Shadowhunter, so proud of him but so miserable at the idea of being separated. But who is he to be selfish here, when the greater good is in question?

“Well that’s that,” he says with as much bravery as he can conjure, “You’ve got to go now. You’re the only man I trust to do it.”

Alec smiles a little more - a little less guilty - and Magnus manages to get a full grin when he roasts him for being too anal in his work, too perfect. This is all your fault, Mr. Lightwood. It’s better to be grateful for what is, than upset for what isn’t.
That attitude lasts three full days before Magnus starts moping.

Alec keeps his promises and calls when he says he will. He texts and emails and even fire messages throughout the day when he has a spare moment, or when the Council breaks for a short recess. He skypes in the evenings for hours at a time - as he makes himself dinner and answers emails and crawls into bed. And it’s manageable. It’s far better than nothing. But they don’t make up for the empty bed. And they don’t make up for the absence of his knee-melting kisses and breath-stealing hugs. And they don’t replace the feeling of Alec’s legs tangled with his on the couch, in the bathtub, under the sheets, and they don’t make up for his beautiful smiles, close enough to touch with his fingers.

And it certainly doesn’t make up for the bad coffee. It doesn’t matter whether he’s summoning it from the cafe down the street or the Double Tall all the way in Japan. It doesn’t even have to be Alec-brewed. It all tastes bland without him.

Catarina encourages him to return to the chaotic swing of the self-employed, so he checks in with his regular clients and meets with his manager at the Pandemonium. He fills his days with work and errands to make the week pass quickly, and when Alec arrives in New York after a long morning meeting, they spend the next 36 hours tucked away in Magnus’ bed.

But then Monday rolls in, and he’s up at 4am sending his boyfriend through a portal with a hug and a passionate, drawn-out kiss that doesn’t want to end. Alec gives him every last moment he can - down to the minute - before he says goodbye. And Magnus has to start another week without him again.

He spends the next two weeks dodging a summons to the Spiral Labyrinth, while he jumps at the chance to help the Institute after Luke intercepts a report of a dead pregnant Mundane found gutted in an alleyway - baby missing. His expertise comes in handy, especially when the person responsible turns out to be an old Warlock acquaintance, Iris Rouse. He spends a lot of time answering questions and finding treatment for a handful of traumatized women needing an exorbitant amount of therapy. It also lands him the responsibility of finding a new home for a little Warlock girl found in Iris’ care.

Madzie keeps him occupied for a few days while he attempts to build her trust. She doesn’t say much in the way of words, but she’s an easy sell when it comes to magic, and he watches her eagerly join in on his evening video calls with Alec after he charms her with a compliment on her gills. Catarina regularly stops by to check on her, and Magnus watches a wonderful bond develop between the two - which soon answers the question of where Madzie will go. With a promise to bring Alec for a visit, Magnus sees her off. And then he has to find something else to keep him busy.

Before he knows it, a month has passed. The Council shows no signs of giving his boyfriend back, but Magnus is in enough of a routine now to take the edge off. He still wakes up hoping for a snuggle. He still goes to bed alone five nights a week. He’s still missing something from his daily caffeine fix. But there’s not much else to do but ride the miserable wave.

They discuss whether or not it makes the sex better, which has them turning that hypothesis into a month-long experiment in foreplay. It makes every text, every phone call, every skype session something to look forward to instead of a reminder of how much they miss each other. And suddenly the distance is fun.
Magnus has Ragnor and Catarina over for dinner, where they officially meet the man he loves. Alec soaks up their old tales of him like a greedy little sponge, laughing and murmuring agreements where necessary. And he asks questions about their own lives, genuinely interested in knowing the people Magnus calls his longest, dearest friends. When he gets up to use the bathroom halfway through their post-dinner cocktails, Catarina gives Magnus a look that says something to the sophistication of guuuurl, while Ragnor chooses to keep mum on the matter, smiling oddly behind his glass.

When the night calls for them to part ways, Catarina invites Alec to visit her and Madzie, while Ragnor summons from home an old photo of Magnus from the late 1600s, one he hands to Alec before Magnus can snatch it away. Alec presses it to his chest and holds it out of reach when he all but tries to climb him for it, lest it be that awful photo of him in lederhosen, but Ragnor tut tuts at him. Every soldier should carry with him a photo of the one he loves, Ragnor decrees, and Alec thanks him profusely, blushing on three glasses of red wine and the joy of new friends.

“I love him for you,” Catarina murmurs in Magnus’ ear as they hug their goodbyes.

Ragnor, however, has always been a man of few words. Especially when it matters most. So when he squeezes Magnus’ shoulder, and gives him a sneaky little wink on his way inside his waiting portal, Magnus takes it for the glowing approval it is.

The sex that night is amazing.

When they’re three months in, things take another turn.

Alec is tired and miserable. Magnus is lonely and miserable. And the Council, which has been deadlocked on the same piece of legislation for two weeks, wants to hold a last minute summons, which has Alec stuck in the Council’s chambers on a Saturday evening when he should be in New York. With Magnus. Getting ready for a dinner date.

After a five minute argument over the phone - because that’s all the time Alec has before he’s pulled back into his meeting - Magnus gets ready to go alone. He’s fuming, and he’s not at all in the mood to go out, but Underhill and Hawkstorm were to be their fellow company tonight and he can’t cancel on them. Not when they seemed so excited to invite him.

They have dinner at the Reserve Cut, a lovely little upperclass steakhouse on Broad street. The chat is easy enough, but Magnus feels the need to apologize for Alec’s absence when the conversation goes in a direction that clearly needs a third Shadowhunter present. Noah and Samael shrug it off, disappointed but not inconvenienced. They invited them out for a reason, and Alec’s absence doesn’t delay the inevitable.

“We’re getting married,” Underhill confesses, his smile turning boyishly charmed when he and Hawkstorm meet eyes.

Magnus almost chokes on his half chewed mouthful of shredded meat taco and rises from his seat to give them each a congratulatory hug, “You’re getting married! How? Who?”

Hawkstorm nervously combs his hand through his loose hair and blushes, which does lovely things
for his green eyes, “Noah proposed in Bucharest, the night before the Honoring mission.”

Magnus sneaks a sly smirk at the man in question. He knew something had been up that night.

They tell him they’ve been keeping it to themselves since, waiting for the Clave to get its administration services stable enough to file the paperwork required for a marriage. Valentine’s organization had been more aggressive than any of them had imagined, and many of his loyalists had worked in Idris’ communication and administration sectors. Terrifying, but strategically perfect. Now that it’s business as usual, they’re finally able to make it happen.

They plan to have the ceremony next weekend at the Bucharest Institute, in the building’s atrium where the sun shines - a reminder of fond memories they share. Noah plans to ask Alec to be his suggene, as Sam’s family and his friends at the New York Institute are the closest thing he has to family, and Magnus tries not to feel bruised at the mention of his lover’s name. He’s certain Alec will be honored to have the responsibility. Even if he’s not here to hear about it.

Hawkstorm’s family will be helping prepare their Institute for the nuptials, but he and Underhill are also hoping for Magnus’ assistance. When they both start providing evidence for how unqualified they are in organizing anything more than a steakhouse dinner, Magnus silences them amiably with a hand, agreeing happily to their request. He watches them laugh together and listen to each other and lock eyes during their dinner conversations - two wonderful men who have been a great support to Alec in the last few months - and he’s happy for them. He’s even more invested in their happiness after he gets to hear a cliff notes version of their long, arduous love story, which also brings him greater perspective on his own. When he gets home that night, he calls Alec to apologize, and they spend the next four hours talking about their days, the upcoming wedding, and all the amazing things they’re going to do when Alec is back for good.

He spends the next week portalling in and out of Bucharest, helping Hawkstorm’s family organize wedding preparations. On the day, he dresses the atrium’s weeping willow in thousands of fairy lights and gold ribbon, and he cloaks the tables with gold runners and fine centerpieces, and he portals in marigolds from Idris to sweeten the atrium’s air. The same scents of the summers Noah and Sam spent together growing up. The Clave still don’t know about his claim on Idris’ wards, so he walks in and takes what he needs from Brocelind Forest as he pleases. Personal ban be damned.

His anxiety grows when he dresses for the ceremony, and as he portals into the Bucharest Institute for the wedding, because he has a text chain of promises telling him Alec will be here but there’s still no sign of him. They’re five minutes out when Alec Lightwood portals in from New York, a mouth-watering vision in a classic black suit, shirt and tie with a gold tie clip, and Magnus is too overwhelmed at how good he looks and how much he’s missed him to be mad. And he’s weak for the lovely apologies Alec holds in his eyes.

Once Noah and Sam’s romantic first dance is open for others to join, Magnus and Alec come together, curving into each other. Magnus can’t stop touching him, trailing the backs of his fingers over his cheek, around the curve of his ear, up into the hair at his nape, bringing him close until they’re dancing cheek to cheek.

He’d never intended to fall for Alec, and he knows Alec never intended to fall for him. But in his mind, that's what makes it the best. That they were going about their lives, on their own paths, stuck in their own narrow views of the world, until they found each other. A raw, uninhibited connection built of forces beyond their imagining. There was no reason for fate to turn them toward each other. Yet it had. And Magnus knows why.

This. The feeling of home.
“Are you mad?” His Shadowhunter asks.

“Maybe tomorrow,” he confesses, “But right now I’m just glad you’re here.”

And they spend the night in happy celebration, making up for lost time.

With his bar manager in the middle of finals week and an abundance of spare time, Magnus decides to personally cover her shifts at the Pandemonium. He has fun getting back into the swing of bar work, because making drinks and entertaining party people are his favourite pastimes. And though the shifts are brutal and they cut into time he’d usually spend video chatting with Alec, it feels good to be busy and even better to do something nice for a good friend.

By the time he gets to his final shift of the week, he’s ready for the adventure to be over. But the Friday night crowd is soon bustling, and everyone is having a good time. There’s a pair of young women looking for a fun evening at the end of his bar, so he pulls out all the stops as he makes their cosmopolitans, and he slides them over with a happy salute that immediately charms them.

He’s in the middle of taking another drink order when he spots a tall, dark, very handsome Shadowhunter strolling through the door crowd. And his heart leaps like it’s never leapt before.

“Evie,” he calls to a girl bringing in empty glasses from upstairs, “Cover me?”

She immediately slides in to pick up where he left off, and Magnus maneuvers himself under the bar flap and into the crowd.

Almost nine months ago, he’d followed Alec through the same dancing, swarming club goers. It only seems fitting that Magnus finds himself here once again, trailing him through the busy crowd. And if he thinks about it, there’s really only one way for him to say hello.

“Hunting for something, Nephilim?”

Alec immediately turns, eagerly following what he recognizes as Magnus’ voice. When they meet eyes, the smile that spreads across his Shadowhunter’s face is warm and bright like summer sun, and Magnus basks in it, as if being exposed to it has cured him of his winter blues.

“Not anymore,” Alec answers, and he almost takes Magnus off his feet when he swoops in for a crushing hug.

Magnus finds himself chuckling, both at the happy, growly noises Alec makes into his collar and as a way to brush off the emotional little ball of tears he feels gathering in his throat. He breathes Alec in desperately, almost possessively, and he sighs as his usual warm cologne and leather smell fills him with a calm he hadn’t known was missing.

“I’ve missed you so much,” Alec murmurs against his ear, squeezing him even closer. *This much.*

Magnus sinks further into his Shadowhunter’s embrace, “I’ve missed you too. You’re early. What are you even doing here?”
When Alec pulls himself away, his smile is relieved, excited. He takes Magnus’ hands in his, and Magnus hopes with everything he has that it’s good news.

“The Clave is officially back on its feet,” Alec proclaims proudly, “I’m back to work at the Institute first thing tomorrow.”

“You’re home?”

Alec’s smile turns quieter, full of lovely promises that Magnus can’t wait to cash in on, “I’m home.”

It’s suddenly his turn to swoop in for a hug, and he does so fiercely, pressing his Shadowhunter to him until they’re flush from chest to thigh. He sighs a little deeper now, knowing there will be no more goodbyes or sleepless nights alone, and then he’s shoving back just enough to get his eyes on Alec’s face because oh how he’s missed the view.

His Shadowhunter looks younger than he has in months; softer, like the hard, long hours and mindless Council drivel no longer bear him down. He marvels at it, this face he loves, watching as it grows warmer and happier beneath his scrutiny. The mere sight of it relights an old glow in his chest that has him reaching a hand up to palm softly at his cheek, brush affectionately at his hair. He finds himself laughing when Alec reaches back to do the same. Like he, too, can’t get enough of what’s before him.

When they kiss, it’s so much more than a homecoming. It’s the overwhelming sense of belonging he’s chased his entire life, and he burrows further into Alec’s arms - his kiss - until he’s flying with it.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen your back office, Mr Bane,” Alec tells him, his freshly smooched mouth curling at the corners with grand plans on mischief, “I think I need to get reacquainted with that couch of yours.”

Magnus’ mind quickly revisits every little moment they’ve shared in the very office Alec speaks of - their first dalliance, their first time, the many heated, five-minute scrambles between work and commitments - and he smirks indulgently beneath the nostalgia. He thrills to the feel of Alec’s hard, warrior’s body pressing on him and takes the moment to appreciate how good it is, how much he’s missed it.

“Mmm, depends. How are you feeling tonight, Shadowhunter?” he muses, “Impressionable? Or contumacious?”

Alec’s grin is blinding, and he bites his lip thoughtfully while he considers a response. When he has one, he squeezes him around the waist, and Magnus feels the word with the roll of his hips, “Voracious.”

“Enough to beg, I wonder?”

Alec smooches at him - neck, jaw, chin and mouth - moaning like he might lose his mind if they don't get on with it, "I'll do anything you want. Just gimmie.”

Magnus proceeds backwards with a grin, tugging his Shadowhunter along with him, “Well then, by all means.”

Then they’re rushing through the crowded dance floor. Aroused, excited and full of glorious laughter.

Eager to begin their next chapter. Together.
Chapter End Notes

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