Higher than the Big Trees

by Carmenlire

Summary

Alec loves his job. He’s been touring since he was sixteen. He’s stayed in dozens of countries over the years, learned enough of their languages to get a beer in his hand and a man in his bed. The road is as much his home as the townhouse on the Upper West Side. He’s as comfortable in cheap hotel rooms with scratchy linens and glaring lights as he is in his penthouse that overlooks Central Park with its silk sheets and the constant hum of the city.
that never sleeps.

Alec works hard and that hard work has paid off. He just finished his latest sold-out world tour and by all rights, he should be on top of the world. But the mental pressure of celebrity is getting to Alec and he doesn't trust his footing. He's stuck where most people would kill to be and he just wants to know what his next move should be.

Enter Magnus Bane. A history professor at Columbia University, Magnus is content with his friends, his classes, and the occasional warm body in his bed. But he's been feeling stagnant, looking for the next chapter in his life to begin. If only he knew what Alec would bring his way.

Notes

Hi everyone! I'm back with my first chaptered fic! This is based off the song "Into It" by Chase Atlantic. I'm very excited to share this with you all and hope you like it! Updates will hopefully happen every Monday, but don't hold me to it lol. Happy Reading :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Shit, Alec thinks as the sunlight pours over his face. *What the fuck happened last night?*

Blinking his eyes open against the offensive glare, Alec takes in the scene around him. He’s laying in bed, sheets half on the floor, and he can see a trail of clothes from the doorway right to where his hand is swaying next to the night stand. Said nightstand holds a few condom wrappers and a bottle of Jack.

Alec grimaces. *Well, that explains the hangover.*

With the stray thought that at least he was aware enough to use protection, he closes his eyes and wills the nausea to disappear before he falls limp into the mattress. Only, he sits up in the next instant and turns around as he registers that this isn’t his bedroom and he’s going to need to make that walk of shame before his apparently enthusiastic bed partner wakes up.

Sitting up makes his body ache. Between the pain in his ass and the effects of drinking three-quarters of a bottle of whiskey, Alec is in no mood to make the morning after anything but a desperate retreat. Luckily, the guy who fucked him into the mattress is still passed out-- based on the mirror and powder he sees on the opposite night stand, he won’t need to worry about staying quiet. A shame, as the guy has the body of a model and can apparently fuck like a porn star, if Alec’s body is any indication, but the industry isn’t for everybody and Alec has long since grown immune to its pitfalls and capriciousness.

With a whimper that he will deny until his dying breath, Alec pulls himself out of bed. Standing stock still for a moment, waiting to either make a mandatory dash to the bathroom or get his shit together, he reflects that he might just be getting too old for this shit. After a brief trip to the bathroom to relieve himself and see that Mr. Porn Star left a hell of a hickey on his neck, he goes about the painstaking chore of gathering his clothes. He makes it to the living room before he finds his phone on a pathetic five percent.

“God dammit,” Alec hisses under his breath. Thumbing through his notifications, he sees a few missed calls from Jace, a dozen text messages from names he can only vaguely assign faces, and an email from his manager and agent. Thanking Lydia’s tendency to be both an organizational freak and to the point, it only takes him half a dozen tries to read the paragraph-long email.

His morning dramatically improves as he sees that his biggest inspiration, Catarina Loss, has agreed to work in the studio with him. A veteran of the music business, she’s racked up a dozen Grammys and her next album promises to earn her a few more. The fact that an artist like Loss has deigned to show up to a couple of songwriting sessions with him is huge on both a personal and professional level. Alec takes a deep breath for the first time in what seems like days.

Deciding to take a positive attitude towards what has suddenly become a wonderful Wednesday--*he thinks?*-- Alec doesn’t even bother cursing when his phone’s battery dies. With a last look around the opulent apartment to make sure he hasn’t left anything, he shakes his head as he notices what must have been a ménage, passed out on the floor in front of the couch, all three of them without a stitch of clothing on.

*I am definitely getting too old for this.*

Alec exits the building and takes a few minutes to orient himself. Luckily, last night was a hometown show and he knows this corner block on the Upper East Side. Praying that he doesn’t run into
anyone he knows, Alec makes his way to the subway station. Fifteen minutes later and he’s in Soho, a few minutes’ walk from his penthouse.

He probably smells like alcohol and looks like he's been gangbanged by a rugby team. He needs coffee. Stat. Knowing that Jace, the inconsiderate ass, probably drank all the coffee at their place without buying more, Alec starts to walk in the opposite direction from his building to a coffee shop that he’s adored since he was first old enough to wander around the city by himself.

Uptown Java is a second home to Alec. From spending evenings there working on homework with Izzy and Jace to dropping by before early morning rehearsals, this cafe has always been a safe haven to him. A calm in the middle of the veritable hurricane that is his life. The proprietor, Luke, always has time to chat and even though his picture hangs behind the counter in what is dubiously called “The Wall of Fame,” he isn’t Alexander Lightwood, superstar singer. He’s just Alec, the kid who played clarinet in high school marching band, was obsessed with One Tree Hill, and worked his ass off to make class valedictorian.

He doesn’t have to put up a front at Uptown Java. Even though his face graces half the surfaces in New York City, he’s always anonymous here. Alec doesn’t know how the fuck Luke does it, but he decided years ago not to question it. He’s just thankful that there’s someplace in public where he can still sit down, enjoy a venti white chocolate hazelnut mocha with extra whip cream, and just breathe.

The bell above the door rings as Alec steps through and he can feel himself immediately relax, the tension that’s been riding him for months finally dissolving. Standing still for a moment, he takes it all in-- the bitter sweetness of the espresso, the sounds of slow morning chatter, and the irresistible boldness of the decor. Luke’s daughter, Jace’s girlfriend, and Alec’s reluctant close friend, Clary, regularly updates Uptown with her newest artwork.

Looking around, Alec’s heart sinks a little as he barely recognizes any of the pieces on the walls. There’s only half a dozen spread out across the coffee shop that he does know and those are some of Clary’s first pieces from when she started at the art academy.

“Well if it isn’t America’s singer/songwriter of the year!”

Pulled out of his thoughts by a voice he’d recognize anywhere, Alec’s grin is almost subconscious as he looks up to see Luke walking out from behind the counter.

“Well, if it isn’t the best barista on the planet,” Alec’s words ending muffled into Luke’s shoulder as they hug each other for the first time in almost a year.

Luke’s face is as open and happy as ever as he stands back, bracing his hands on Alec’s shoulders as he gives him a thorough once-over. “I was starting to worry all of that fame had gone to your head and you weren’t talking to the little people anymore.”

Looking down in mild embarrassment-- he can handle red carpets with the best of them but can’t take a teasing comment from the man that raised him like his own-- Alec shrugs and offers a lopsided smile. “You know damn well I’ll never be anything compared to you, Luke.”

With a shake of his head, Luke offers a small smile that let’s Alec know that he sees through the blasé act, but doesn’t call Alec on his bullshit. Yet.

“It’s been, what, ten months? Eleven? You have a lot to catch us up on, son.”

“Yeah, I can’t believe it’s been almost a year since I was in New York. I don’t think I’ve spent so much time away from home since I was first starting out and spent those fourteen months in L.A.”
“How many stops was it again? We have all of your postcards but lost track after Rome. I think that was the dozenth tour date?”

To the counter now, Alec makes a show of looking over the chalkboard menu, even though it hasn’t changed since they first opened, except for the weekly special. “One hundred and eighteen dates. I’m fucking exhausted,” Alec answers with a short laugh.

Luke is already making Alec’s drink, a sweet, syrupy concoction that’s been his go-to since he was fourteen and nursing his first heartbreak. Darren, Alec remembers distantly as he watches Luke put the final swirl of whip cream on top. That’s the one bad thing about this place. It’s his safe haven, but it also serves as a time capsule for all of his most authentic memories, from his teenage dramatics to the then-biggest moments of his career. While he stills recalls the name of his first real crush and the way his heart broke, Darren himself is nothing but the most hazy of pictures. He can’t even remember the color of his hair. *Time blurs all things. Thank Christ.*

Luke places the liquid dessert on the counter and glares at Alec as he makes to pay. “You know damn well you’re not paying for that drink. Put your wallet away and maybe I’ll let you buy me a beer tonight.”

Smiling at how some things will always be the same, Alec complies. He tears the paper off a straw. One of Uptown Java’s specialties was their penchant for crazy straws and Alec’s was a swirling eyesore of neon green and pink. He sticks the straw in the mountain of whip cream and his first sip is perfection. Sweet and light and it causes a painful lurching in his chest.

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But, here. Drinking coffee with one of the only people who truly *know* him, the low thrum of people surrounding him in one of his favorite places on Earth makes everything fade away. It reminds him of a simpler time. Not better. Alec knows that there’s a list of people that would happily kill to be in his place. But he can’t deny that for the first time in days, maybe since he first left for this last world tour, he feels at peace. Peace, that fickle bastard, has been in short supply lately. Alec wills himself to soak in the moment, knows it won’t last.

Realizing that he’s staring into space just drinking his coffee, and that Luke is just staring at him zoning out, makes Alec flush. Before he can gather his wits, though, Luke says something.

“So, I heard you had a boyfriend?”

“Yeah? And where’d you hear that?”

“The supermarket checkout aisle, smart guy. Or TMZ, if you’d rather. For damn sure not from you.”

Alec shrugs. “And who do they say I’m dating this time?”

“Well it was that model Tristan Vandevere. I think he worked the Gucci line during Paris Fashion Week last year.”

Scoffing, Alec just shakes his head. “Don’t worry, I’m not keeping anything big from you. I never dated Tristan.”

showed the two of you rather \textit{intimately} acquainted."

Grinning, Alec plays coy. “Hey, I just said we weren’t in a relationship. That doesn’t mean we didn’t share a hotel room for a few nights when we were both in the same city. The road gets lonely.”

“Oh yeah? And what’s that thing on your neck?”

“I had to celebrate coming home now, didn’t I? What better way than a couple of drinks and a friendly face?” Alec shrugs. “Or, if you prefer, I fell on an exceptionally effective vacuum.”

Luke looks for all the world like the classic dude bro congratulating his friend on a job well done. It would take someone who knew him extraordinarily well to catch the glint in his eye. The look of concern, of worry. Alec takes another drink and swallows hard, looking away and acting like he doesn’t notice.

“Is there anyone that’s caught your eye?”


Luke rolls his eyes. “Okay, dumbass, you know what I meant. Anyone you would consider for more than a drunken one night stand?”

Playing it off, he shrugs. “No. I’m too busy for a relationship. Plus, look at me. Anyone who was interested in me would be suspect. Do they want me or my connections? Me or my money?”

Alec looks away, fiddling with his cup in a rare public display of discontent. “And even if they did want me for me, why would they stay? What can I offer them besides the perks of being a celebrity? Intrusive fucking paparazzi? Rude, despicable followers on Twitter? As much as I love the way you see me, Luke, you’ve got to know that I’m not just Alec anymore. I’m not that kid with the perpetual zit on his chin and limbs that he never thought he’d fucking grow into. I’m Alec Lightwood, four-time grammy winner who just sold out a World Tour. I have too much baggage to fall in love.”

Luke looks at him, eyes sad, and Alec swallows hard, not knowing where all of that bitterness had erupted from. He was happy. He had everything he’d ever wanted on a fucking silver platter. It was his fault that he felt like this. This gnawing ache that made everything both sharp, yet dull. He just needed to work harder. \textit{As if that wasn’t the story of his life.}

Before Luke could have a chance to address any of whatever the fuck had just come out of his mouth, Alec stands from the couch they’d been sitting on.

“It was great seeing you Luke, but I’ve got to get back to my place. I’m sure I look rough as hell and I have an acoustic show this afternoon.” He takes a step back, and with it a breath. “I’ll text you about that beer, yeah?”


Cracking a smile, Alec turns around and heads for the door. His progress halts though when a man comes in, dressed in an outfit that was as fashionable as any he’d seen on the runway.

Stepping aside to let him in, Alec continues to check out the mystery stranger. Noting the painted nails and flawless eyeliner, he gives a brief thought to flirting but almost immediately dismisses it. He really does have an event in a few hours. Alec might be a lot of things, hell knows the press have called him everything but a man, but Alec always keeps his work commitments. \textit{Always.} A set of
broad shoulders and mouth-watering ass might warrant a second-- or third-- look but nothing is worth sacrificing his work reputation and fan approval, much less an anonymous hook-up in what would probably be a less-than-stellar men’s restroom.

With a small sigh of regret, Alec walks out of the coffee shop and onto the sidewalk. He slides his aviators on and begins the stroll to his apartment, already thinking of how he can make today’s performance special, more personal for the fans.

He doesn’t notice the speculative gaze that follows him down the block, doesn’t hear the wistful sigh the man lets out as he ogles him right back.
Chapter 2

Alec unlocks the door to his penthouse and is immediately confronted with a smirking Jace.

“So what happened last night, bro? I called you a few times after you left with that guy but you never called me back. I was getting ready to send out a search party.”

Alec looks at him with an eyebrow raised and says, “You know what happened. It’s called a one night stand. I know you’ve been with Clary awhile but your memory shouldn’t be that faded.”

Grinning, Jace shrugs. “Yeah, well, you have fun with your flavor of the hour and I’ll just keep going home to the love of my life every night.”

With that Jace and Alec go in for a bear hug. They both lean into it, breathing each other in, and relaxing as their best friend—no, brother—is by their side for the first time in almost a year. They’d met at the bar last night but their hug then had been too drunk and messy. This embrace makes Alec feel like he’s finally home.

“I missed you, you asshole,” Alec murmurs and Jace’s arms tighten around his waist.

Yeah, you too dick. Now tell me, do you even remember his name?”

Whose name?”

Stepping back, Jace points at Alec’s neck. “The vampire that left that thing on your neck. Or did you not even bother to learn it in the first place?”

Alec just laughs, unashamed. “I know he was a great lay. That’s all I need.”

“And they say romance is dead.”

If possible, Alec’s smile becomes even wider as he hears the clicking of heels after that deadpan comment. Turning to face the kitchen, he sees one of his favorite sights in the world—his sister, laughing, walking towards him with two mugs of tea. Waiting for her to set the drinks on the table, he takes her in. Izzy is wearing one of her more formal outfits but it still has her risqué touch: underneath the suit jacket she’s wearing nothing but a lace bralette. She looks stunning as usual and he can only imagine how many men sustained injuries walking past her this morning.

Giving her his trademarked Big Brother Hug, he lifts her off the ground, making her squeal with laughter as she demands to be put down. Complying after a minute, the two just stand there, smiling at each other.

“It’s good to see you, hermano. It’s been a few months.”

“Yeah. How’d the shoot in Belize go?”

“It was one of the more inventive ones. I didn’t just stand there making pouty faces at the camera for two days. The other models and I got to go into the city and meet some of the people. Plus, I got a few other gigs from it. So, not bad at all. I was sad you couldn’t stay longer though.”

“I wanted to stay longer, too, but I could only carve out four days between tour legs. But, I got to see you, so it was worth it.”

With a fond smile for her brother who had spent half of his brief break just traveling to and from
Belize to see her, she gestures for the three of them to take a seat before asking Alec, “How was the concert last night?”

The three of them sit down in the living room. Alec is in the chair closest the door, Izzy and Jace on the ragged couch they’d bought when they were seventeen. While they could buy a new couch that didn’t look like something a frat house had coughed up after rush weekend, it had been the first big purchase Alec had ever made and he was loathe to get rid of it. He knew he was too sentimental for his own good but until the couch actually broke, he just couldn’t see himself replacing it. Jace blustered and insulted the couch every day of his life, but he understood Alec’s reluctance and even shared a piece of it. Izzy, however, detested the couch and wasted no opportunity to tell them. But, even she had to admit that there was no better way to spend a lazy day then with a movie marathon on the run-down thing.

Taking a minute to settle in, Alec answered Izzy. “It was good. We sold the arena out and everyone went wild during the new material so that bodes well for the next album.”

Jace and Izzy trade guilty looks but Alec beats them to it before they can speak. “Don’t worry about not coming guys. You came to the opener last spring and you’re coming to the Good Morning America show next week, right? You’ve seen me perform a thousand times. It’s okay that you didn’t make it to this one.”

Jace nodded and added, “We wouldn’t miss it buddy. The chance to see you do your thing never gets old and I’m looking forward to seeing you deal with all those swooning teenagers.”

Izzy snickered. “Remember that time a boy actually passed out when Alec kissed his hand? I felt so bad for him!”

Groaning, Alec leaned back in his seat and looked up at the ceiling. “I paused the concert to make sure he was okay and so that he could get some medical attention but he turned it down flat because he didn’t want to miss a song. I let him backstage after and he gushed for fifteen minutes straight about how much he loved me. He was adorable but I just felt so bad that he’d gotten hurt over me.”

Reaching over to pat Alec’s shoulder, Izzy had nothing to say except, “Poor you. People literally faint in your presence. How awful that must be.”

Alec glared at her but didn’t say anything else.

After Jace and Izzy’s laughter dies down, the topic moves to their plans for the rest of the day.

“You guys still up for lunch?”

Alec nods sharply. “Yeah, just let me grab a shower. Meet back here in half an hour? I have that acoustic show later this afternoon and I want to make sure I get there early.”

Jace scoffs while Izzy grimaces.

“You’ve been in the business ten years and party like it’s 1999 every damn night but you’re still freakishly early to every show. You’re such a nerd. When are you gonna trash a hotel room or, God forbid, show up to a rehearsal or concert--” Jace gasped in mock horror”-- on time?”

Alec was getting ready to offer a scathing reply when Izzy jumped in.

“You see, you really need a shower. I didn’t want to say anything, what with it being your first day back in town, but you smell like sex and coffee and that is disgusting coming from my brother.” She wrinkled her nose just to make it clearer how gross the whole thing was for her.
Alec glared at both of them before standing up and making his way to his ensuite.

“First of all, Jace, it’s called professionalism. I respect my fans and when you respect someone that means you put in effort for them and always make sure you’re punctual.” Opening his bedroom door, he called back, “Oh, and Izzy? It’s impolite to call attention to that kind of shit. You’re just jealous I’m getting some.”

With that, Alec shuts the door just in time to hear Isabelle start cursing him.

After a long, hot shower using all of his favorite products Alec felt human again. He dresses in something a little more casual to fit the nature of the performance—ripped black skinny jeans, his beat-up pair of combat boots, and a plain gray hoodie. While Alec had a costume designer for tour that came up with elaborate, stylish outfits, never to be worn twice during the course of the tour, he preferred to use his own wardrobe for smaller shows and the extra events he attended throughout the year.

Moving back into the bathroom, he takes out his sparse makeup bag. While Izzy was the Queen of Contour in the family, Alec had always enjoyed being her guinea pig. It was another creative outlet and a way for brother and sister to bond. Once he’d gone on the road, management had tried to dissuade him from wearing cosmetics in favor of carrying out their ideal image of him as a masculine heartbreaker of young girls’ hearts. How unfortunate for them that Alec was gay as hell and had a penchant for highlighter.

Taking out a simple black eyeliner pencil, Alec makes quick work of lining then smudging his eyes. He debates on adding anything else but decides against it. The vibe for this show is relaxed and he wanted to show the fans today the side of him that most rarely get to see.

Alec liked experimenting with his look but day-to-day he’s a pretty low maintenance guy and he wants to set the tone for the acoustic show as early as possible and the best way to do that is with his appearance. The show today is more chill hang-out than arena performance. He wants everyone who comes to feel welcome and relaxed and like they’re ready to make a friend.

He had received a lot of backlash in the media when, towards the beginning of his career, a picture had surfaced of him in a full face of makeup including contour, bright lipstick, and false eyelashes. He hadn’t quite developed the thick skin he was now notorious for and the online comments had eviscerated him.

It was Izzy who had shown him several social media accounts that had stood up for him, letting him know that they supported him no matter what he wore. He had never forgotten what those fans had done for him. The fact of the matter was that his fans went absolutely batshit when he wore makeup or had painted nails and he enjoyed the ritual and result of it all. Why not do a bit of fan service, have fun, and maybe let some of them see that there’s more than one way to be a man? Alec had built a career out of respecting and loving his fans and a lot of his effort was in making sure that these kids knew they could always be themselves with him. Whether that meant waving Pride flags during his concerts or having the courage to be their most authentic selves, Alec always felt the responsibility to be a positive role model for people in the same way he wished he’d had someone when he was younger and just starting to figure shit out.

Though today he was only wearing eyeliner, Alec knows the fans will love it.

So he plays up to the fans a little bit, so what?
Alec leaves his bedroom and finds Izzy and Jace talking in the kitchen.

The three of them leave the apartment and go around the corner to one of their favorite restaurants. It's a little Italian place that makes everything homemade. Alec can never resist their lasagna and all three of them spend a couple of hours eating and talking. It's nice in the best way and Alec didn't realize how much he'd missed his siblings. The only thing that would make it even more perfect is if his mother and Max were here. Still, he'll see them soon. Catching up with Jace and Izzy brings back memories. They're his rock and he's hard-pressed to think of anything better than this moment.

Alec sits back in his chair with a satisfied sigh. The food was damned good and he thinks he could probably take a nap right now. But, he has a gig in a bit and needs to leave.

“Okay, I'm heading off to the venue now. I'll see you guys later.”

Izzy stands up and pushes her chair in, staring at Alec without saying anything. When Alec just looks at her she says smugly, “I’m going with you. It’s been awhile since I’ve seen you perform and I think the fans would love seeing the Lightwoods together, don’t you?”

Jace looks at Alec like he expects him to put up a fight. He should know that what Izzy wants, she gets, and Alec actually thinks it’s a good idea anyway. His fans love Izzy and she adores them right back. Alec just shrugs and turns to leave the apartment, Izzy on his heels.

Alec gets to the venue a little over an hour early. He likes having extra time because it gives him a chance to talk to the fans in line that have been waiting for hours to get a seat in the front row. Despite Izzy’s protests they took the subway, and when Alec rounds the corner and sees the line stretching almost two blocks he’s taken by surprise by the way his heart becomes both painfully light and dreadfully heavy.

He never gets used to it. People love Alec, love his music, and that is a hell of a double-edged sword for him. He feels immense responsibility and pressure to be the best performer, the best role model he can be to these fans, these kids and adults and everything in between that pay money and spend time on him. But at the same time he’s always buoyed by their never-ending support and unconditional love.

He has worked fucking hard to cultivate this relationship with his fans and its foundation is a mutual respect and admiration. Alec knows they have his back but will always hold him accountable and they know that Alec does everything he can for them to make every show, every Instagram video, every surprise as amazing as possible. Alec is very active online, constantly answering messages and replying to tweets, posting videos that show him behind the scenes, that offer glimpses of his real life off stage, and the fans appreciate the effort.

The fans also know of Alec’s tendencies to be early and it doesn’t take long before the entire street seems to fall silent as everyone turns around and takes in Alec Lightwood. No one has even noticed Izzy yet and Alec raises a perfect brow before smiling softly and walking to the people at the end of the line.

“Hey, what’s up?”

The two girls in front of him are obviously starstruck but they rally quickly, he’ll give them that. They’re teenagers wearing what looks to be handmade tie-dye shirts with the cover art from his latest album stenciled in.
“Just waiting for this guy to show up. I hear he can sing,” says the taller girl in a fit of bravado.

Alec just grins. “Oh yeah? Funny, I think I heard about him. I heard he’s got a surprise in store for everyone.”

The girls’ eyes bug out and Izzy snorts before elbowing him in the stomach. While he’s busy glaring she turns to the girls. “Don’t listen to him. He’s just trying to get a reaction. How are you guys doing today?”

The one who hasn’t spoken yet has a soft voice as she tells Izzy, “we’re super excited. We saved up for months to be able to come and we’re so happy we got to meet you.” She pauses for a minute, obviously internally debating something, before she turns to Alec and in a halting voice asks if they could get picture with him.

Alec readily agrees and he takes a few seconds to let the girls smooth down their hair and hands the phone to Izzy. He gives them a minute to make sure they’re satisfied with the picture and then throws them a soft smile and a “see you inside” before moving up the line to the next group.

The next hour flies by as he talks to every single person in line and takes pictures as requested. He’s always surprised, but overwhelmingly grateful, that everyone is quiet and waits their turn. He doesn’t know if it’s because they all know that he talks to everyone, or if it’s because he’s mentioned how anxious he can get in crowds, or if his fans are just more polite than others, but there are no riots or shouting or grabbing. Everyone is respectful and polite and it makes Alec’s heart sing.

When the doors open, everyone rushes inside. There’s only a hundred people in the small coffeeshop-- not Luke’s, because even if he loves his fans he’s not willing to compromise his safe haven-- and everyone has a centrally located seat. A few people wanted pictures with both him and Izzy, or just with Isabelle, and everyone notices her as she walks in behind Alec. There are people softly talking while his people finish getting everything set but everyone watches as Izzy takes a seat in the back and Alec makes his way to the small stage that had been hastily thrown together.

“Okay, I’ve talked to all of you just a few minutes ago but I want to make sure everyone is having a good day. How are all of you doing?”

There’s a rush of cheers and clapping and Alec grins as he slips effortlessly into his entertainer role.

“I’m glad to hear that,” he says as he fiddles with the mic. “If you guys are okay with it, I have some treats I’d like to bring out.”

As Alec had been talking, a few people came out from the back carrying trays of sweets or coolers of drinks.

“We have some baked goods because who doesn’t like a good pastry?” There’s a smattering of laughter as he continues. “We have something for everyone. There are vegan treats, some with peanuts and some without and we have something for people with other assorted allergies or sensitivities. Feel free to talk to the waitstaff about any questions or concerns. Their names are Karen and Daniel and they don’t bite. Promise.”

With everyone munching on their snacks, Alec moves into the real start of the event.

“If it’s alright with you, I thought we’d start with some guidelines. There are only three rules today. Number one, you have fun. If you’re not having fun, you tell me and we’ll see what we can do about it. Though, I have to say, if your issue is that I’m not funny enough, I don’t know what to tell you. This is about as good as it gets.”
Everyone cheers in what Alec supposes is reassurance that he’s not a comedic failure and he’s laughing as he says number two.

“The second rule is that everyone relaxes. Go ahead. Take a deep breathe. This isn’t a concert where you have to scream for two hours. This is you and me and us all together enjoying some music and conversation. And that brings us to number three. Rule number three might be the most important so listen up.

“Rule number three is that you be yourself. As long as you feel safe and included during this chat, then I’ll consider this a success. We’re going to play some tunes and talk about some stuff and we can only maintain this pleasant atmosphere if everyone feels unafraid. There are no stupid questions or awkwardness here—except if it’s coming from me.”

With a last round of laughter that Alec swears is part relief and part indulgence for his inane tactics, he starts the Q and A section.

The questions are all brilliant and fun. Someone asks Alec what his favorite historical period was and why and that devolves into a general group discussion about everyone’s favorite trivia facts. There’s another question that sparks a debate between the best type of recording equipment and Alec learns something from one of the fans that he makes a mental note of to research once he starts properly writing for the next album. The last question, however, makes Alec swallow hard and really think.

The question is asked by a teenaged boy that looks as All American Football as possible. When he raises his hand, Alec calls to him immediately.

Looking nervous, the boy opens his mouth. “Hi, Alec, my name is Patrick and I have kind of a serious question for you. This past year I’ve started to come to terms with the fact that I might be gay and I don’t know what to do. I just feel like all of these people have expectations of me and I don’t know how to meet them when they think I’m straight. How can I still be the quarterback and one hundred percent myself?”

Alec smiles softly and says, “Well, thank you Patrick for having the courage to ask me that. It takes a lot of guts and self-awareness to realize that things you’ve thought your whole life might not be true. I’m happy you felt safe enough to ask that here. I have to say though that as your journey of self discovery continues, you’ll start to realize that it isn’t either/or. You can be the high school football quarterback and a boyfriend to an amazing guy. It seems hard as hell, probably impossible, but it can be done. I was in marching band but I was also captain of the soccer team in high school and my senior year after we won the state championships I kissed my then-boyfriend in front of the whole school to celebrate. I was scared shitless but I knew that the people who loved me wouldn’t care and I had to decide not to care about the people who wouldn’t be able to reconcile the two pieces of me.

“Is there anyone else who wants to offer any advice?”

There are a few people that have experienced the same or similar issue and Alec gives them the floor. After everyone’s said their piece, Patrick says one last thing to Alec.

“Thanks, Alec, for being a great role model. I know you have to get that all the time but I really mean it when I say that you’re an inspiration to me. Your music has really helped me this year come to terms with everything and realize shit and plus, it just bangs hard as hell.”

Everyone laughs and with that cue Alec starts to sing a few songs. He has his old-ass guitar and he’s playing his most popular songs from all of his albums. Everyone cheers when he plays a few random songs that were never singles and it’s totally silent when he plays a handful of songs that have never been released. They’re not necessarily going to end up on the next album--some of them were
written years ago and just never made the cut onto whatever album he was recording at the time-- but there's one or two from the last album cycle that could conceivably work for Album 7.

When the last note rings through and everyone is clapping, Alec sits there with his guitar resting against his knee and takes a minute to soak it all in. When it starts to die down, Alec takes to the mic one last time to offer his thanks for everyone that came out and has supported him. He does have a surprise though.

“I told a few of you that there was a surprise coming your way tonight. Well, here’s the thing. I feel like we really got to know each other this afternoon and it just wouldn’t be fair of me to make you pay for friendship. So saying, if you guys check your bank accounts after the show, you’ll see that you’ve been refunded the price of admission for today’s event. I hope it was worth your money, but if not, at least it was free,” Alec ends with a little laugh.

The room erupts with his speech and Alec gives a last wave to everyone gaping at him before nodding to Izzy and making his way out the front door.

Izzy is beside him an instant later, shaking her head. “You act all cool and shit but you’re really just a drama queen, aren’t you?”

Alec grins as he throws his arm around her shoulders and they make their way to the subway station. “Being dramatic never killed anyone Isabelle. It’s not my fault that the music industry just happens to be a little more dramatic than most.”

Izzy rolls her eyes and laughs to herself. The streets are crowded as Alec plans his evening.

It’s time to blow off some steam.
Chapter 3

The bass rattles his bones and they’re not even in the club yet.

Climbing out of his Audi R8-- matte black, thank you very much-- Alec tosses the keys to the valet as he rounds the hood. He opens the passenger side door and helps Izzy out of her seat, making sure she doesn’t wobble in her heels. She’s more than capable of walking in those seven inch stilettos, but still. He’s there to make sure nothing unfortunate happens.

The sidewalk is busy, people waiting in line at the hottest spot downtown. Pandemonium. It’s one of Alec’s favorite haunts when he’s in town-- the liquor is top shelf, the music drowns everything else out, and the guys are hot. He’s just wrapping an arm around Izzy’s back when he hears a dozen rapid-fire clicks and is almost blinded from the flashes of a few cameras.

“Fucking paps,” he mutters and heads towards the VIP access line.

Izzy laughs and pats his shoulder, consolingly. “You know you’ve brought this on yourself. Forgetting that you’re a major celebrity, you pulled up in your two hundred thousand dollar car like you were a hotshot. They smell fame a mile away and an Audi with blacked out windows was sure to draw their attention.”

Alec grumbles but can’t argue. He loves that car to death and, yeah, he feels like a badass when he drives it.

They’re almost to the bouncer when an intrepid reporter shouts.

“Hey, Lightwood!”

Making sure Iz is the only one who sees him roll his eyes, Alec turns to the man and gives him a dazzling smile. Only a handful of people would know that it’s fake.

“Hey, what’s up man,” Alec asks as he shakes hands with the guy.

The reporter looks sly as he answers. “I should be asking you that, man. I hear you’re in a relationship.”

Alec raises a perfect brow. “Oh? And who am I dating?”

Looking like he’s going in for the kill, the man says with all of the confidence in the world, “Simon Lewis.”

Alec laughs like he hasn’t in days before throwing the journalist an easy smile. “Sorry to disappoint, but we’re just friends. There’s absolutely nothing romantic going on there.”

“That’s not what the pictures say.”

“Yes, I know how a picture is worth a thousand words, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to insist. Whatever Lewis and I are, it’s strictly platonic. You’re clearly misinterpreting whatever pictures you’ve seen.”

With that, Alec turns and goes back to Izzy, who was standing a few feet away.

She looks shocked and gleeful at the same time as she nudges his side. “Have something to tell me, big brother?”
Alec just gives her a look as the bouncer lets them through. “You know damn well that Simon and I are just friends. He’s never going to let this go, though. He’ll be insufferable.”

Laughing, Izzy says, “Oh yeah. He’s totally going to go above and beyond when you’re in public now. I can just see it. Serenading you over lunch meetings—”

“Getting even more touchy-feely whenever we’re together—”

“And social media,” They both say at the same time, shuddering.

“I’ll be sure to like any and all pictures and vague allusions he makes to dating you,” Izzy solemnly promises. “You know how people go wild when a close source gives them all the “evidence” they need that something is going on.”

Rolling his eyes again, Alec doesn’t say anything. Intrusive press are the price he pays— one of them at least— for being so successful. Luckily, for every asshat who thinks they’ve gotten the scoop on him, there’s another reporter who’s respectful and actually asks well-meaning questions.

They’re in the club proper now and Alec can’t even hear himself think, not with the music pounding and bass making his body vibrate. He follows Izzy’s lead and immediately makes his way to the bar. He orders four shots of tequila each for the two of them and they toast the first shot before finishing them all in less than a minute.

Izzy wanders off to do her own thing. She’ll no doubt be dancing until the early morning hours, attracting both guys and girls to her side.

Alec, for his part, wastes no time. He’s scanning the dance floor, looking for someone who looks like they could use a partner, when someone sidles up to him.

Glancing over, Alec sees an attractive enough man. He’s a few inches shorter than Alec and has electric blue hair, a septum piercing, and two sleeves. With a confidence no doubt born of alcohol, the man leans close and whispers in Alec’s ear, “Wanna dance?”

Without saying a word, Alec grabs the guy’s hand and turns towards the dancefloor. Once they’re in the throng of people, Alec faces the guy, grabs his hips, and pulls until there’s not an inch of space between them. They both grin as they follow the electric beat of the music, more grinding than dancing.

It’s Alec’s turn to lean in close as he brings their faces close, so close that their lips touch as they talk.

“Alec,” he says in a voice pitched to just be heard over the crowd.

“Jeremy,” his new friend replies.

They grin at each other, predatory, and let the music wash over them. Alec is working mostly on auto-pilot. It’s another club, another man, another song. He’s done this too many times to count and he knows the script.

It’s a little while later when they return to the bar. Alec orders another four shots and Jeremy matches him. Alec may make a bigger deal out of licking the salt from his hand than he needs to and he smirks when Jeremy’s eyes watch him with a feverish intensity. Alec licks his lips and when Jeremy’s eyes stay glued on his mouth, Alec feels satisfaction. Gotcha.

He leans in as if in slow motion before everything catches up and they’re kissing. It’s messy and there’s more than a little bite to it. Alec relishes the intensity. He growls and pulls Jeremy closer to
him and they shift until there’s leverage enough to grind on each other in earnest. Alec’s feeling dizzy, the liquor and heat getting to him and he distantly thinks that he hopes the restroom is clear. He’s done club hookups before and it’s always a bitch when there’s a line of people waiting.

Before he knows what’s happening, he’s getting roughly pulled back. He’s having trouble catching his breath and the room is spinning. Or no, someone is spinning him around. He looks up and sees an irate guy who looks to be in his mid-twenties.

The guy furiously yells, “What the fuck do you think you’re doing,” and Alec blames the liquor for what comes out his mouth.

“I was about to get my dick sucked if you don’t mind, asshole.”

By some miracle, he ducks the punch the guy throws at him and is saved by Jeremy. His sure hook-up from a minute ago is looking furious himself as he and Angry Dude have a hissed argument. Jeremy finally huffs and turns back to Alec as he wraps an arm around the guy Alec had been sure was three seconds away from drop-kicking him.

“What the fuck?”

Jeremy looks vaguely apologetic as he explains, “This is Kyle, my boyfriend. Sorry, man.”

Alec’s mind is blank as he repeats, “The fuck?”

Shrugging a shoulder, Jeremy just says, “I couldn’t help myself. You’re Alec Lightwood. Who wouldn’t try to get with you?”

Taking a second to process what just happened, Alec blinks owlishly at the couple. The only thing he can think of to say is, “Well, aren’t you a prince,” before turning and walking away.

Suddenly tired of the music and lights and crowd of people, Alec walks out of Pandemonium. He texts Izzy to let her know he’s going home early and that his driver will be waiting to take her home whenever she’s ready and breathes in the cool night air, sobering up a bit.

He looks around and takes in the line of people still waiting to get in. Thankfully, he’s in the shadows and no one can see him. He can only imagine the headache that would be right now. He takes his phone out and texts Dave, his driver, with the update and his eyes catch on the time.

12:37am.

Alec shakes his head and thinks, *I’m getting too old for this shit.*

He turns from the people and the noise and starts walking down the streets. His outfit is pretty simple— he hadn’t a lot of time to get ready once he’d gotten back from his afternoon gig— and he’s wearing the same ripped skinny jeans he’d worn earlier, black Doc Martens, and his favorite denim shirt. He’s glad he’s not wearing layers as the June night is a little too warm for his liking.

He’s walking aimlessly, enjoying his seldom anonymity and people watching even at this relatively late hour, when he sees a 24 hour diner. It looks relatively dead and Alec hasn’t eaten since the morning.

He’s seated with little fanfare and looks over the menu. When the waitress comes over, he orders a bacon cheeseburger, a double order of fries, and a vanilla milkshake. He’s suddenly starving.

Messing around on his phone, Alec feels eyes on him. *Shit,* he thinks, and lets out a little sigh. He’s
really not in the mood to talk to strangers, no matter if they’re fans. Is it too much to ask that he gets one goddamn hour to himself?

Looking up, Alec’s breath catches.

_Goddamn_, he thinks. _You might just be the hottest guy I’ve ever seen._

The man in question looks vaguely familiar, but Alec can’t place him. He’s wearing a maroon button up all the way to his throat with a few necklaces hanging around his neck. His hair is black and Alec has a distant thought that he’d love to run his fingers through it. His makeup is on point and from where he’s holding a pen, Alec can see his nail polish is the same shade of red as his shirt.

Alec abruptly comes back to himself and hopes to God he’s not drooling.

Alec offers a smile and a small nod in the stranger’s direction. He’d half expected the man to turn his gaze away as soon as Alec had looked up, as soon as he’d been caught staring. But, he doesn’t. He’s bold as you please, unrepentant at having been caught. He simply returns the smile and looks back down at his papers.

Alec’s thoughts break away as his food appears. It smells delicious and Alec tucks in with a gusto that would probably surprise most people. He loves a good burger.

He relaxes and enjoys his meal as he scrolls through his Twitter and Instagram. He responds to some fans, favoriting and retweeting whatever catches his eye.

He’s pulled away from his phone by a knock on his table. He looks up and sees the gorgeous stranger.

He tilts his head as he looks at Alec, taking his time and acting for all the world like he has nowhere better to be.

“I wouldn’t have pegged you as a vanilla milkshake kind of guy.”

Alec raises his eyebrows. “Oh? What would you expect?”

Magnus hums, narrowing his eyes a little in thought. He grins after a second and says, “Chocolate raspberry.”

Alec has to hand it to the guy, he didn’t see it coming. _Chocolate Raspberry_ is the name of his latest single that’s held steady on the charts at number one for the past nine weeks.

Alec’s laughing before he realizes and is holding out a hand for the mystery stranger to take. “As I guess you already know, I’m Alec.”

The man takes his hand and shakes it in a surprisingly professional manner. “Nice to meet you, Alec. I’m Magnus.”

Gesturing for him to take a seat, Alec is happy when Magnus sits down on the other side of his table.

“I take it you’re a fan?”

Magnus plays with his ear cuff and smiles down at the table a little. “Oh, I’ve heard a few of your songs. I might’ve caught your interview in Rolling Stone last month.”

Alec grimaces a little. “I hope you didn’t take it too seriously. You know that magazine likes to exaggerate beyond belief, right?”
Magnus grins and just offers, “Oh, it was certainly *illuminating*.”

Hoping he’s not blushing, Alec switches subjects.

“So, you’ve caught me at a disadvantage. What do you do, Magnus?”

“I’m a history professor at Columbia University. Well, actually, I’m the chair of the history department if we’re getting specific.”

Alec whistles. “Wow, that’s impressive. What were you doing when we acknowledged each other earlier? I just saw a pile of Blue Books.”

Magnus nods towards his briefcase. “Grading papers, I’m afraid. I promised my freshmen that I’d return their midterms tomorrow and I may have put it off until the last minute.” He laughs a little. “They’re terribly easy to please and they look at me like I’ve hung the moon. I don’t want to disappoint them too much so early in their college career.”

Alec perks up a little. “Oh, what was the exam on?”

Magnus raises a brow and looks at him consideringly. “This particular class is about Modern Europe from 1815 to the present. Their assignment was a three thousand word essay on World War I and it’s mitigating factors.”

Alec hums thoughtfully. “So, like, Europe’s abject militarization in the years leading up to the war and the countries’ intense nationalism?”

“You surprise me,” Magnus says with a slow smile. “Most of my students wouldn’t know the answer to that prompt without scouring their notes in a panic.”

Shrugging, Alec just replies, “I like to read.”

“Apparently so.”

They talk for a while after that. Alec enjoys himself more than he has in ages. Magnus is an engaging conversationalist. He’s witty, smart, and his voice is a lovely baritone that Alec could listen to for hours. Every time Magnus laughs, Alec feels a little warmer. He thinks he’s been low-key blushing since Magnus sat down and he hopes it isn’t noticeable.

Losing track of time, Magnus eventually looks at his watch with a pang of dismay.

“Well, shit, it’s almost three in the morning. I’ve got an 8am class and I just can’t be late again.”

Alec, surprised at how late it’s grown, absently asks, “freshmen and their lofty expectations?”

Magnus shudders. “No, darling, seniors who are perpetually sleep deprived and are surviving off caffeine at levels that would kill an elephant. If I’m late, you can just see them grow a little more dead inside. I try not to let that happen too often on my watch.”

He stands up and stretches. Alec does *not* watch his arms flex.

With a smile, Magnus grabs his briefcase and starts walking backwards. “This was fun. Have a lovely day tomorrow, Alexander.”

He winks, turns around, and walks out the door. Alec stays sitting and watches through the window as he hails a cab.
He doesn’t notice that Magnus used his full name, that he didn’t mind someone using a name he hasn’t responded to in years.

Taking a minute to check his phone and make sure Izzy got home safe, Alec stands up from the booth and takes out his wallet. He leaves a few hundred on the table for a tip before leaving.

_Magnus_, Alec repeats in his head.

While this certainly wasn’t the night he’d imagined for himself, Alec is beyond pleased with the way things turned out. He heads towards the subway station, thinking about his schedule for the upcoming week. He pointedly doesn’t acknowledge that he can’t seem to focus. He’s distracted, thinking of flawlessly-lined eyes and a warm laugh.

_Ah well_, he thinks. _It was a fun distraction for a night._
“Shit, shit, shit,” Magnus mutters as he hears his alarm going off through the fog of sleep.

He’s in bed, covers tucked up to his chin, head very firmly under the pillow that can’t quite muffle the chorus to Stir Fry. Magnus raises his head from underneath the pillows and it only takes him three tries to turn off his phone screen, a minor miracle considering he’s the polar opposite of a morning person.

He lays there for a minute, thinking over the past twenty-four hours. He’d had a run in with the Alec Lightwood.

Alexander.

Well, two actually, Magnus muses. While it had only been a second, they’d almost bumped into each other at Uptown Java yesterday morning.

Even if Magnus wasn’t an ardent fan of Lightwood’s and didn’t follow him on all major social media, he’d have known the singer was back in town by Luke’s countenance alone. Magnus has been frequenting the coffee shop in Soho for years and there’s always a little extra pep in Luke’s step when he hears from the man who might as well be his son. When Alec is in town, Luke is simply over the moon. It’s adorable.

Magnus has picked up all manner of little tidbits about the Lightwood siblings throughout the years and meeting the man in question had only piqued his interest further. Magnus knew Alec was a stunning specimen, but nothing had prepared him for seeing him in person. Even if Alexander had looked like he was recovering from a three day bender, nothing could mask the sheer beauty of the man. It was just as well that he’d walked out of Uptown Java yesterday without a second glance because Magnus had found himself tongue-tied in a way he never had before.

So imagine his surprise and delight when none other than Lightwood had ducked into a dingy diner last night, looking far too good in a denim button-up and ripped skinny jeans that showed off his lovely body to advantage.

Let’s be real, he could wear a paper sack and make it couture.

Magnus had been drinking far too many cups of coffee and grading papers that were frankly mediocre, despairing over the future of academia, when he’d glanced up and almost swallowed his tongue.

He’d played it cool and just offered a little smile when their eyes had met, but he couldn’t resist stopping by Alec’s table on his way out the door. It had surprised him that Alec could hold a conversation, if he was being honest. With any other person who possessed such good looks and seemed to revel in their playboy image, Magnus would have dismissed them as all fluff, no substance.

Maybe he’s a little judge-y, but he has the world experience to back it up.

But the two of them had sat in that little hole-in-the-wall diner for hours in a cracked vinyl booth— in an alarming shade of red— and talked about everything from Germany’s pop culture in the early twentieth century to how incredible of a show Brooklyn Nine Nine was and Magnus hadn’t been bored. He’d been on the edge of his seat, enthralled with the man sitting across from him who liked vanilla milkshakes and had a penchant for blushing.
While it had pained him a little to leave, it had been almost three in the morning and Magnus was apparently cursed to have Friday morning classes until he died of Early Worm Syndrome.

Magnus couldn’t find it in himself to regret last night-- this morning?-- though. It was six o’clock now and he’d managed a lousy two and a half hours of sleep, but now that the fog of the dreamless was receding, he was energized. Apparently, Alexander gave everyone a pep in their step.

Magnus stood up from bed, getting ready for the day. He showered using his signature sandalwood products and decided on one of his Victorian-inspired outfits. He might have gone a little dramatic on the makeup, but he’d never met a highlighter that didn’t suit him and he was partial to that shade of gold eyeliner.

Leaving the house with exactly eight minutes to spare, Magnus reflected wryly that he needed to meet celebrities more often-- maybe then he wouldn’t be perpetually running out of the house exactly two minutes behind schedule.

Having left his briefcase and jacket in his office, Magnus strolls along the path that leads to his class’ building, stopping to get a large macchiato, with an extra shot of espresso, on the way. While still early, especially by student’s standards, there are still a fair number of people outside. Some are rushing to class while others have already claimed their spots for the day, studying on blankets in the grass and under huge trees that will be a lifesaver once the heat hits in a few hours. There’s a girl riding a skateboard and the clacking of wheels over cement cracks accompanies the chirping of birds. It’s damn near idyllic and Magnus takes a sip of his coffee and let’s Columbia sink into his bones for the thousandth time since he first accepted his teaching position.

Magnus has been teaching full time for five years, with the last year doubling as professor and chair of the history department. Before that, he dabbled in student teaching while getting his undergrad and Ph.D. at Stanford and Oxford, respectively. He’s the youngest Chair in Columbia’s history and was insufferable about the promotion for weeks. He’s only twenty-nine but he’s decades older in terms of career projection. It’s a heady feeling that hasn’t dissipated, even after almost a year.

A few students greet him as they walk past and Magnus smiles, catching up with a few who he’ll see early next week in his senior-level seminar. Magnus’s reputation in the history department, in fact on campus in general, precedes him. It’s stellar. He takes great pride in being one of the most well-liked professors at Columbia and works hard to maintain his outstanding reputation. That means learning all of his students’ names, being a dynamic, attentive, and sharp professor, and always being willing to go the extra mile for students who need it-- and who put in the work to warrant it.

Magnus walks into class and it’s already buzzing. A few people throw out, “Hey, Professor Bane,” and he smiles and acknowledges them before setting his coffee down-- after one last sip-- and logging into the computer. He catches snippets of conversation, most of which revolve around their projected midterm grades, and Magnus laughs to himself and raises a brow as he overhears a wild tale about a keg, a boy, and a misplaced thong.

Some things never change.

Students continue to file in and exactly on time, Magnus begins class.

He walks over to the front of the room with the stack of midterms in hand.

He raises a brow, asking, “Wanting these are we?”
Everyone nods, some in resignation and some in anticipation.

Handing them back alphabetically, Magnus reviews the essays. “Overall, I was impressed with your midterms. As freshmen, you are just starting to acquaint yourselves with college-level work and, for the most part, were successful. I’ve written in a few of your blue books to come see me during my office hours. If you earned less than a seventy percent, I do want to urge you to drop by. We’ll discuss your exam in more detail and hopefully hammer out what went awry this round.

“For those wondering, there’s no curve. The highest grade was a ninety-four and the lowest-- well. No need to disclose the lowest score,” Magnus continues with a cheeky grin.

“While grading these, it looks like there was some confusion on France’s role leading up to the WWI. I want to briefly review that and answer any questions you all might have before we move on to the next section in the syllabus. Any questions?”

“Remember, if you got under a seventy percent on the midterm, come see me! My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays noon to three. If that doesn’t work out, email me and we’ll figure out a time together. Have a good weekend,” Magnus calls out to the students packing up and already leaving, no doubt tuning his voice out as soon as he called an end to class.

The class has a capacity of thirty and twenty-one showed up this morning. Not terrible for Friday at eight in the morning, Magnus reflects and swallows the last of his now-cold macchiato.

He throws the cup in the garbage, and turns around to see a handful of students lingering, obviously aiming to talk to him before he leaves. He meets with all of them, speaking for a few minutes about questions over the lecture or clarifying comments on the midterm. Once it’s just him in the classroom, he picks up the few exams from students who had skipped and walks down the hallway and out into the New York sunshine.

Campus is definitely more lively now that’s it’s approaching midmorning and Magnus glances at his watch.

Only two more classes, a few student sessions, and a department meeting to go and then he’s done until Monday morning. Thank God. Magnus loves his job with all his heart, but he's tired as shit. Those two hours of sleep are catching up to him. He needs more caffeine or he's definitely going to fall asleep, listening to one of the junior professors ramble on a tangent for forty-five minutes about a topic that literally no one else in the department cares about. It's exhausting on the best of days and Magnus doesn't have the patience he usually possesses in spades to deal with imbecilic colleagues.

Magnus sits down at a cozy table and grabs a menu, quickly scanning through it. While this place is usually too busy to catch a table during lunch hours, most students try their best to get off campus and forget that they're even in college once Thursday night rolls around. The campus’ lunch hot spot, Basil's Cafe, is deserted this afternoon. It's just him, a student that looks either on the brink of discovery or abject failure, and a mother with two kids who are enthusiastically painting their table with ketchup.

Magnus can see the waitress walking over in his peripheral when a man flings himself down in the chair opposite him, looking broody even at a distance in his all black ensemble. At least it's designer, Magnus thinks, equal parts amused and curious as what could have warranted such a reaction.
“College students are stupid. All of them. They’re in college and don’t even know how to conjugate gustar? How the hell did they even get accepted into Columbia. Idiotas,” one of Magnus’s reluctantly favorite people mutters. Magnus just lazily looks up, pleasant expression pasted onto his face.

“Beats me, dear. At least your students know that Barack Obama was the president last year and not during the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.”

Raphael throws him a commiserating look before they’re both laughing. Magnus truly loves teaching, but damn if some of his students just don’t know their ass from a hole in the ground.

“I take it your midterms didn’t go well?”

Raphael scowls. “No. They didn’t. They had to write a short story in Spanish and someone wrote the Spot the Dog story.” He looks at Magnus, unimpressed. “You know the one. ‘Spot likes to play. Spot likes the color red.’ I felt like a toddler and they still managed to have a grammatical mistake in almost every sentence.”

Magnus arches a brow. “Considering you’re the best Spanish linguist we have, things are dire indeed for our country’s future.”

“They’re freshmen but they look twelve. When did we get so old,” Raphael sighs.

“Darling, speak for yourself. I’m a youthful twenty-nine and still feel like I’m twenty.”

Raphael doesn’t deign to reply and the waitress comes over a minute later to take their orders. As she’s walking away, Raphael leans forward and gives Magnus a onceover. “What’s with you?”

Magnus just looks at him, expressionless. “Whatever do you mean?”

“You’re . . . glowing,” Raphael says in distaste.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“You’ve let me talk about how irritating my students can be with only minimal accusations about my teaching ability. You’re going easy on me and I want to know why.”

Magnus looks affronted, glaring at Raphael. “I’m sorry, just because I’m a good friend and let you rant suddenly means I’ve experienced a change of personality? Et tu, Brute?”

Raphael scoffs. “Oh, shut it. What is it? Did you get lucky last night?”

Magnus’s glare deepens. “No, I did not get lucky last night. I’m not the average teenage boy who’s only joy in life comes from sex.”

Raphael looks at him with narrowed eyes. “I’ve listened to you bemoan your life all week since you couldn’t go to Lightwood’s concert. You’ve been in a pit of despair and while it was disgusting to watch, this about-face is even more so.”

Magnus is quiet for a minute while he thinks. He could tell Raphael that he ran into Alec last night and the man wouldn’t tell a soul. But something about that diner interaction strikes Magnus as private and he’s not ready to let anyone else in about his midnight conversation.

He hums. “Well, I graded the freshmen’s exams and with the Obama exception, they all did moderately well. That must have boosted my spirits.”

They eat mostly in silence, with the occasional observation or update. Thankfully, there are no more interrogations and the two go their separate ways with a promise to meet up Monday, same time, same place.

Magnus makes it through his afternoon, only rolling his eyes-- discretely of course-- half a dozen times during his departmental meeting. He will never understand why the administration schedules meetings to cover what could be mentioned in an email. In the footnote of an email. It’s a waste of time and leaves everyone annoyed.

He goes back to his office, leaving the door open, and sits down behind his desk. He’s sipping a tumbler of water and thinking about taking a break to mess around on his phone for a bit when someone knocks on his door.

Looking up, he smiles as a student hovers in the doorway.

“Julia, hello. How are you?”

Julia shyly smiles and takes a few hesitant steps into his office. “I’m okay, Dr. Bane. I just had a few questions about the exam you handed back today?”

Magnus keeps the smile on his face and gestures for her to take a seat in one of the chairs facing him. Julia is an excellent student but she’s painfully shy. He wants to make her feel as comfortable as possible as they discuss the midterm-- she’d received a sixty-three percent and he knows she can do better.

They spend the next forty five minutes going over her paper and she asks dozens of questions, from lecture notes to grading clarifications and Magnus is a little taken aback by her enthusiasm and quickness of learning. Reflecting as Julia takes a minute to write down an explanation he’d just given, Magnus knows he shouldn’t be surprised. Because she’s so shy, she refuses to ask any questions during class and so she got a little behind in material. But she’s intelligent as hell and now they have a game plan.

They set up a standing appointment every Friday afternoon for the rest of the semester to go over any questions she might have from the week’s class and Julia looks happier than he’s ever seen her. She leaves his office all smiles, and Magnus sits back in his chair, congratulating himself on a job well done. He finishes his work day answering emails and going over his outline for next week before he calls it a day.

Throwing on his jacket and sliding a few folders in his briefcase, Magnus leaves campus. The sun is still shining and his walk home is uneventful, for the most part. A woman dressed in a smart suit with peep-toe Louboutins if he's not mistaken--and he never is-- catches his eye at a crosswalk and smiles, obviously sending an invitation that Magnus turns down with a little internal sigh. He walks past her and barely feels a tinge of regret. He just wasn't into her, open invitation notwithstanding. It’s been awhile since he’s been in a relationship and even longer since he had a one night stand. The promotion has wreaked havoc with his social life and he knows he needs to get back on that horse soon.

He misses sex. He misses the intimacy that comes not just from mutual orgasms, but by living with someone every day and learning their little quirks that make them so interesting and irresistible.
All of a sudden, an image of hazel eyes that glint with wicked wit and are set in a devilishly handsome face pops into his mind and he laughs a little, rueful. *Down boy*, he thinks. The chances of him ever meeting Alec again are rare. It had been a minor miracle that they’d ran into each other not once, but twice, yesterday. He’s not so lucky that a spontaneous meeting would happen a third time. Fate is not his friend and he doesn’t see that changing anytime soon.

He puts Alexander in a little compartment, shuts it up tight, and continues his walk home.
Chapter 5

It’s bright and early the following Monday and Alec has a full day. In the morning, he’s taping the preliminary footage for his Good Morning America slot that will air on Friday. In the afternoon, he has two meetings. One is with Out Magazine. He’s their cover for the next issue and he has a photo shoot and interview. The other is with the record execs to discuss the next phase of his career: Album 7, as yet untitled.

Alec hasn’t told anyone, but he’s wildly unsure about what direction he wants to go next. Where does one go after completing their third sold-out world tour? He’s been at the top for so long that he doesn't know what else he can do. He worries that he's reached his limit. He hasn't written a song in weeks and the little new material he has, the stuff he's written since his last album release, is no good.

He’s suffering from extreme writer’s block. Nothing feels fresh. Everything is generic, stale. Mediocre. Alec very much fears that his good luck has run out. He’s spent ten years in the limelight and that’s more than most artists ever have.

Truth be told, Alec is disenchanted with the whole scene. He can’t help but think about that guy from the club. Whatever-his-name-was had been only too eager to sleep with Alec, forget that he was apparently in a committed relationship. People can be shit, and Alec knows that better than most, but it doesn’t help him feel any less like a piece of meat. A commodity.

Everyone wants Alec Lightwood, superstar. They want the guy that can hook them up with floor seats to the Lakers or score them a table at the restaurant du jour without reservations. Alec is the guy who can whisk you away for a weekend trip to St. Thomas, first class all the way.

They want that Alec.

No one sticks around for the less glamorous man. The Alec that’s deathly afraid of spiders, has a hideous fondness for hole-riddled hoodies, and whose favorite movie is Pride and Prejudice. Only a handful of people know Alec under the surface. He likes it that way. He does. But half of that number is family and the other half might as well be. It’d be nice to meet someone new who cared about him, the person. Not him, the celebrity.

But, it is what it is, and Alec needs to stop moping and get ready for the day. He wakes up around six in the morning, goes for a run to the Black Panther soundtrack, and when he returns to the penthouse, Jace and Izzy are in the kitchen.

Jace wakes up every morning at the ass crack of dawn to open his gym and who the hell knows why Izzy is up so early. She is notoriously not a morning person.

She’s swallowed up by, it looks like, one of his hoodies. She’s staring at the coffee machine with a kind of singular focus that she usually reserves for the camera or a biology textbook. She doesn’t acknowledge him and he just grabs an apple from the bowl on the counter and heads to his room, throwing a nod to Jace as they pass each other.

He munches on the apple while scrolling through his phone. He answers a few tweets and posts an Insta pic of the three of them from over the weekend. They’re all at Uptown Java with the caption it’s good to be home.

Alec takes a shower and gets ready for the day. He dresses in a pair of olive green ankle pants with a lightweight navy sweater and a pair of light brown Oxfords. He throws on his sunglasses, grabs his
When he gets downstairs, he chats to the doorman for a few minutes. His name is Charles and he’s tall and lean like a greyhound. He’s at least eighty years old and has been working as a doorman since Alec moved in—probably since before Alec was even born. He’s a sweet man who loves crossword puzzles and sweet tea. He always remembers Alec’s birthday and brings him a pie his wife baked every Sunday when he’s in town.

After talking with Charles, he heads out to the sidewalk. There are only one or two paps hovering around his building and Alec ignores them and their cameras. He’s gotten good at ignoring journalists over the years and they’re usually just like pesky gnats. The town car is waiting for him and his driver, Dave, opens the back door with a grin.

“How are you doing this morning, Mr. Lightwood?”

Alec grins back and throws him a nod. “I’m doing just fine today, Dave. How about you? How’re the kids?”

“Well, little Elise won an award at the science fair over the weekend and Davy Jr.’s obsession this month is Simon’s latest album.”

Alec laughs a little. “Simon’s album has been a success. It’s holding steady in the Billboard Top 100 and Lewis is ecstatic. I could get Davy a shirt, if you think he’d like it?”

Dave’s smile widens. “You know damn well that Davy would love anything having to do with Simon. I’d appreciate it, man.”

Alec has one leg in the car and looks at Dave over the open door. “I’ll see what I can do. Tell Elise congratulations and that she’ll have to explain her experiment to me the next time I see her. The two of them will have to visit Izzy, Jace, and me soon and catch us up. I’m sure Elise would love to chat with Izzy about all things science.”

Dave laughs as Alec sits down. “Will do, Mr. Lightwood.”

The drive to the television station is only half an hour, a minor miracle in New York traffic. Alec spends that time answering emails and catching up on the news.

They pull up in front of the building and when Dave opens his door, he’s immediately bombarded with cameras and shouts. Most of the people are journalists, whom Alec largely ignores. There are a few fans waiting on the sidewalk by the front doors, though, and Alec goes over to each of them. He spends a few minutes talking to them and getting pictures taken.

A few fans have gifts for him, which he warmly accepts. It always surprises him how thoughtful his fans can be. One girl brought him a handmade rainbow bracelet that he immediately puts on his wrist and a couple of boys give him a little penguin plushy the size of his fist. It’s cute as hell and Alec gives everyone a hug for coming out and seeing him.

He heads inside and is ushered through the labyrinth of hallways by an eager and attentive assistant. Alec spends the next few hours talking to more people than he can keep up with. He spends some time working on publicity shots for advertising and gets a better idea of the itinerary for Friday.

By the time he leaves ABC’s headquarters, it’s lunchtime and he has barely enough time to scarf down a hot dog from a street vendor before it’s time to head to his record company’s headquarters in Lower Manhattan. It’s forty-five minutes of bumper to bumper traffic and Alec’s almost climbing out of the car before it comes to a complete stop. He’s never late for anything work-related and he strides
into Institute Records with three minutes to spare.

Lydia is just inside, waiting for him. She’s on her phone, typing in a flurry, and looks sharp in a five thousand dollar suit. She looks every inch the agent and Alec is grateful that she’s always on top of things.

Without looking up, she asks, “What did you have for lunch?”

Alec says, “A hot dog from the vendor on the corner of 4th and Braxton.”

Lydia suppresses a full body-shudder. “I don’t know how you eat those things, never mind that you seem to love them with all the fervor of a teenage boy at a baseball game.”

Alec laughs. “Hot dogs are classic. They’re about as All-American as you can get and they hit the spot on a busy day running around New York.”

Lydia hums but doesn’t offer any other reply. She taps on the screen one last time before sliding her phone into her briefcase and finally looking at him.

“So, do you know the game plan for this meeting?”

Alec raises a brow. “Artfully misdirect and willfully play dumb?”

Sighing, Lydia says, “As a last resort, yes. Are you telling me there’s still nothing new that you want to show the label?”

“No.”

Lydia looks at him, appraisingly. “Okay, then. Since that’s the case, we’ll follow your plan. Remember, the primary goals here are to set a due date for first demos and discuss the music video we’re doing for your last single from *An Arrow in the Dark*. We’ll try to extend the timeline until . . . August 1st? That will give us another month for you to produce more material. What do you think about that deadline?”

*An Arrow in the Dark* was his sixth album and had sold over a million copies within its first week of release. He only had one more single-- *Empty Hearts*-- to release from that album cycle and was excited to start filming for the music video. *Empty Hearts* was one of his favorite tracks from that record and he was looking forward to talking to different producers and directors to see what each of them would pitch for the video concept.

Alec thinks about it for a minute, before responding, “Yeah. That’ll do it. I should hopefully have at least one damn song by then. Besides, I think that’s the best we’re going to get with them.”

Alec loves Institute Records. He’s been with them since he first started and they’ve always been more than generous to him. However, he is under no illusions that he is anything but a cash cow to them. As soon as the well dries up, so to speak, he will have a pile of problems with them. He’d just better hope that this writer’s block eases up soon.

Alec and Lydia walk into the boardroom and are confronted with half a dozen executives in austere suits, all in varying shades of navy or black. The label president, Jia Penhallow, is in good spirits and the meeting lasts the standard three hours. Lydia is a shark, always preserving Alec’s interests, and Alec appreciates that she does her job thoroughly and unapologetically. By the end of the meeting, Alec has his demo extension and is set to review potential directors during the first week in July-- roughly three weeks from now. Lydia and he shake hands with everyone before leaving.
Alec takes a deep breath once they’re back on the street and Lydia does the same, unbuttoning the top buttons of her dress shirt and taking her suit jacket off, draping it over her arm.

“Well that was more successful than I was banking on,” Lydia says dryly.

“Yeah, I’m surprised they were so chill about everything.”

Lydia shrugs a little. “Maybe in a rare fit of conscious, they saw that you needed a break from working nonstop. Or, they realized that their number one guy on the roster was burning out and they decided to back off in an effort to help you get your mojo back.”

“Whatever it was, I’m just glad they gave me a reprieve. But, I need to get my ass in gear and start writing some songs worthy of the Lightwood name.”

Digging through her bag for sunglasses, Lydia squints at him. “What about those sessions you’ve planned with Catarina Loss? Do you think those will be fruitful?”

Alec looks down the block, watching as a woman talks rapid-fire into her cell phone and a kid skateboards past, narrowly missing running over an old man. His voice is pensive as he replies.

“I don’t know, Lyd. I think that having the opportunity to write with her will be a huge boon to my career. A definite milestone. I just hope to hell we can write, that I can write something that makes goddamn sense. You’re my agent and my friend so I’ll tell you that I’ve written half a dozen songs in the past few months and they’re all garbage. I don’t know what I want my next album to sound like. I don’t know anything. I might be a little more burnt out than even I thought. I need to get my head in the write space to write-- I just don’t even know what that looks like these days.”

Lydia takes a few steps until she’s at his side and wraps her arm around his waist. Sympathetic, but with a hint of steel in her tone, she says, “I’m sorry you’ve hit a rough patch, Alec, but hopefully you can take some time from this break and regroup. Take a weekend and fly to a place where no one knows your name--” She ignores his snort of disbelief, “-- or try something you’ve never done before. Maybe you just need a change of pace. You’ll get over this. You know you will. You just might have to get inventive and change things up. Creativity never deals well with static. You know that.”

Thinking over what Lydia’s just said, Alec nods along. “You might have a point, I suppose. Maybe I’ll rent a cabin in Tennessee for a few days. Or, I could take a cooking class. Try something new.”

Lydia smiles brightly. “There you go! Something different to jumpstart your brain.”

With a sigh, Alec takes his arm from around her shoulders and steps back, putting distance between them.

“Well, as riveting as this conversation and pep talk was, I need to head uptown. I have that interview with Out in an hour.”

Walking backwards a few steps, Lydia nods. “Alright, then. I’m starving anyway. I need dinner soon or I might just faint.”

She turns sharply on her heel and throws over her shoulder, “Have fun! Don’t say anything that will give me a headache tomorrow morning.”

Alec grins and calls out, “No promises,” before turning and heading in the opposite direction.

His job is never-ending, a constant merry-go-round of concerts, meetings, and interviews. He’s hit a
rocky patch right now, but damn if Alec doesn’t love his career, the constant flux, thrives off the hectic schedules. He looks wistfully at a pretzel stand as he strides past and ignores his stomach that’s started growling.

He has places to be and people to impress. Alec is thinking about answers to questions that will no doubt be asked this evening. Alec has been interviewed hundreds of times and they always ask the same questions. He knows his standard answers by rote. It never hurts to run through them again, though. He’s stuck in his head, walking on autopilot to the little cafe the interview is taking place at. He doesn’t notice the man on the other side of the street, walking quickly in the opposite direction.

Magnus doesn’t notice him either, too wrapped up in making it on time to his standing Monday night family dinner with his four favorite people in the entire world. Catarina will *kill* him if he’s late another week and he does so hate disappointing Madzie.

They're just two busy men among a million in New York City. Yet, they're both resolutely not thinking about the man they met a few nights ago and refuse to acknowledge just how often their thoughts stray to the handsome stranger that enthralled them late into the evening. They don't even notice the wistful sighs and pangs of yearning that escape them.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in one day? Three chapters in one week? We've hit some kind of record lol. However, I will be out of town for a couple of weeks so this is the last update until probably early June! Happy Reading!

Alec trudges his way to Uptown Java the next morning, bleary-eyed and annoyed. The interview and shoot with Out Magazine had gone really well. He’d been comfortable and the interviewer had been nice and had done his homework. He’d asked a few of the typical questions, like what was next and what song fans could expect to be the final single-- but there’d also been thoughtful questions about his sexuality and its impact on various parts of his life, notably his career. However, it had been more of a conversation in the way that the best interviews are. They’d talked about everything from favorite foods to how asinine the business can be.

The follow up photo shoot had gone well into the night. That, too, was fun, but Alec was exhausted. He hadn’t gotten back to his place until after four in the morning. It was almost nine now and Alec was in desperate need of caffeine and sugar.

His sleep had been restless. He’s tossed and turned for a few hours before throwing the covers back in irritation. His mind wouldn’t turn off but it was blank. He couldn’t catch any one thought. His head was a jumble and he’d left the apartment in a sour mood that only got worse when it started to rain.

Fuck his life, then.

Alec was dressed in sweats that hit just under his knee, a giant sweatshirt from his very first tour, and Nike slides.

Luckily, the rain has left the streets emptier than usual and Alec is left alone to brood.

His piss poor mood can be blamed on the weather, or his lack of sleep, or his stress. Maybe all three. Maybe something else entirely.

Alec reaches the coffee shop and swings the door open wide.


Shoulders slumped and looking at the floor, Alec makes his way to the front counter. He smiles a little at the girl he doesn’t recognize working the register.

She knows who he is, though.

“If it isn’t Alec Lightwood, the prodigal son returned. I was wondering when you were going to show up.” She grins and reaches inside the baked goods display for a chocolate croissant-- his favorite pastry at Uptown Java.

He smiles back at her, automatically. She has an infectious grin and if she’s working for Luke then she must be good people.
“Hey. Yeah, I guess that’s me. I don’t know your name, though?”

“Maia. I’m a marine biology major at Columbia and when Luke found out that I was looking for a summer job, he took me on. He’s the best.”

Looking over the menu, Alec murmurs distractedly, “He really is.”

Ordering a large espresso drink that’s guaranteed to give him a sugar high, he hands his card over to Maia. While she rings him out, he gives her a once over. She’s wearing a minidress paired with combat boots and an army jacket. Her gold jewelry is understated and perfectly accentuates her skin tone and outfit. Her makeup is natural, with an emphasis on her eyes. She’s cute as hell and he grins as he thinks of Izzy visiting soon.

She won’t know what hit her.

He doesn’t know if he’s talking about Izzy or Maia. He laughs a little to himself. Definitely both.

Alec hovers around the front of the store, waiting for Maia to make his drink. He fucks around on his phone and in those few minutes standing still, he can feel the weight of a sleepless night descend on him.

He decides he’ll go sit in one of the chairs by the window, sip his drink and people watch, then head back to his apartment in an hour, at the latest.

He hears Maia say, “Here you go, Alec,” and he’s stepping forward without looking up from his phone when he collides with a brick wall.

Oh. His mistake.

His phone clatters to the ground and Alec doesn’t even notice, caught in the gaze of dark brown eyes with a flawless winged eyeliner.

Magnus.

“Magnus,” Alec breathes and immediately wants to punch himself in the face.

It’s been almost a week since the two saw each other. There’s no way that Magnus probably even remembers his name and here he is mooning like a lovesick teenager.

Get it together, Lightwood.

Just to prove how much life is out to get him, he feels his face turn warm and can only imagine how noticeable his blush is. God damn his pale complexion.

Magnus takes a moment, giving Alec a once over, before smiling warmly at him. “Good morning, Alexander.”

Alec hasn’t answered to his full name in years. Not since everything went down with Robert. But, the way Magnus says it. . . Alec thinks he could listen to Magnus’s voice for hours. That little Alexander goes straight to his gut and he suppresses a shiver.

Alec finally tunes into Maia grinning at him-- at him acting like a fool in front of Magnus-- and takes the last few steps to the counter to grab his drink. He turns back around only to see Magnus standing where he left him, holding his phone in hand.

Alec’s face is definitely on fire now and he reaches out sheepishly and shoves the cell phone into his
pocket. He wracks his brain, trying to think of something to say, something interesting or witty. Something that will make Magnus stay.

What comes out is, “So, this weather, huh?”

Alec wants the ground to swallow him up.

Magnus laughs a little and tilts his head, considering Alec. He hums a little and then grimaces. “Indeed. This weather is shit and I’m sorry that the next time you’re seeing me is as, no doubt, the very picture of a drowned rat.”

It’s Alec’s turn to laugh and he checks Magnus out. Even though it’s pouring outside and he can hear the distant rumble of thunder, Magnus looks impeccable. His makeup is pristine, the few raindrop marks on his clothes already drying.

“You look great and you know it,” Alec says dryly.

Magnus's eyes light up and he grins. “Well, darling, one never knows when they’re going to meet a handsome man.”

Alec shakes his head and laughs it off. He takes a quick sip of his drink before meeting Magnus’s eyes again.

“What are you doing here?”

“Since it’s a dreary day, I thought I’d enjoy my morning off and come to Luke’s shop and catch up on my reading. I’ve been so busy at work that I’ve fallen behind in my reading goal this semester.”

“What’s your-- wait? You know Luke?”

Magnus raises a brow. “I do, indeed. I’ve been coming here for five years or so. One day Luke and I started chatting and the rest is history. I come here at least three times a week and consider Luke a good friend. Why?”

Alec laughs a little incredulously. “Luke is one of the closest people to me. He’s like family. He raised me like a son and I’ve been coming here since I was in high school. I used to bus tables here on the weekends.”

Magnus shakes his head, wonderingly. “I admit that when Luke told mentioned you or your family, I didn’t quite believe him. I thought he was exaggerating how close the two of you were, especially since we had never happened to run into each other here. He talks about you all the time and always perks up when he hears from you.” Mischievously, he continues, “Oh, Alexander, the things Luke has told me about you. Is it true that you broke your arm putting a puzzle together once?”

Alec closes his eyes and sighs. When he opens them, he faux glares at Magnus. “Luke obviously didn’t tell you the whole story or you wouldn’t be looking at me like that. Putting a puzzle together can be competitive and no one is more competitive than my siblings.”

Magnus’s eyes light up. “Ah, yes, the illustrious Isabelle and Jace. I’ve heard of them, too.”

Alec smiles a little. “Small world, huh?”

Magnus murmurs, “Apparently so,” and they stare at each other for a long moment.

Alec is the first to break the impromptu staring contest. He clears his throat and looks out over the
shop. There’s a decent crowd, with some of the larger tables taken up by studying students.

“So, uh, want to have a seat? I didn’t mean to make you stand so long.”

Magnus smiles softly at Alec. “It's no problem, Alexander. I was just waiting for my drink. It’s nice of you to keep me company, though.”

He reaches for the coffee cup that’s been sitting on the counter for a few minutes.

“If you have a moment, I’d love to join you.”

Alec looks down at his clothes— that he slept in-- and looks back at Magnus. “It’s not like I have anywhere to be in these clothes.”

Magnus looks him up and down, taking in the messy hair and rumpled clothes. “Yes, I didn’t want to say anything but you are looking rather disheveled. Adorably so, though, don't worry.”

Laughing as he feels his face heat up, Alec replies, “I didn’t get into bed until almost dawn-- photo shoot-- and then I couldn’t sleep. I finally gave up after a few hours and thought I’d come here to relax before heading back to my place.”

“Anything in particular troubling you?”

Alec doesn’t know why, but he wants to confide in Magnus. It’s crazy, they’ve only known each other for a week by the most generous of estimates. They spent a couple of hours together in the middle of the night at a diner with cracked vinyl seats and chipped tabletops. By all rights, the two of them should never have run into each other again.

But, here they are. Magnus and Alec meeting at Uptown Java where they apparently both know the proprietor. What are the chances, Alec thinks. Alec doesn’t know if it’s the connection to Luke or the crystalline memory of their last interaction, but Alec makes a conscious decision to trust Magnus. It feels right. He doesn’t know why, but he likes Magnus. It could prove to be the worst decision he’s ever made if Magnus is only out for his fifteen minutes of fame, but somehow, Alec doesn’t think that’s the case this time.

The two of them take a seat on a couch in front of the windows. Alec takes a bracing sip of his drink before turning and facing Magnus.

“I don’t know how much you know about me, but I just finished a tour.”

Magnus hums. “Yes, I did know that.”

Alec clears his throat. “I have a couple of months before my demos are due for my next album and. . . I have nothing.” Alec blows out a breath. “I’m experiencing the worst writer’s block of my career and when I do get something on the page, it’s shit. I’m stressed as hell about what my next step should be and I guess it’s fucking with my sleep now.”

Magnus doesn’t say anything for a minute, weighing his words. When he speaks, it’s measured as if he’s tasting the words as they come out, making sure that he’s getting the message he wants across.

“I can’t imagine how much pressure you must be facing, darling. I’m afraid I don’t have any great words of wisdom. I think the best piece of advice I can offer is to make sure that whatever your next step is, whatever direction you decide to go, make sure that it’s for you. Not for your execs, not even for your fans, but for you. If you don’t believe in what you’re doing anymore that will make the next two years extremely difficult, trying to sell a product you don’t even like. And, that will translate to
the fans and media if you lose your spark. I know we’re practically strangers, but I believe in you, Alexander. Everything I’ve heard from you has always been a hit and I hope that you can make it past this bump in the road.”

Alec takes a moment and breathes. He didn’t know how much he needed to hear those words. Jace and Izzy don’t know the strain he’s under. Lydia, while she means well, is an agent and knows the game has to be played as coldly and efficiently as possible. But here’s Magnus, telling him that it’s okay to take a step back and decide what he wants to do without rushing headlong down a road just to be productive.

Alec looks up and his eyes meet Magnus’s. There’s a warmth there that he can’t deny. He doesn’t want to. He thinks Magnus could be a great friend, if he let him.

He wants to let him in.

Still caught in his gaze, Alec says softly, “Thank you, Magnus. That was just what I needed to hear.”

Equally as soft, Magnus replies, “Of course, darling. I’m glad I could help, even a little.”

It’s Magnus who breaks off as he looks at his phone. He stands up a little abruptly and Alec can’t hide the way his shoulders slump in disappointment.

“I’m sorry, Alec, but I’ve got to go. A student just emailed me and asked if I could meet them in half an hour to go over some questions before their exam this afternoon.”

Alec forces a smile and waves away his apology. “No problem, duty calls. I hope you can help them as much as you helped me.”

Magnus pauses, stilling in his rush to leave. He looks at Alec, tilting his head a little as if trying to work out a puzzle.

“Feel free to decline, but would you like to trade numbers? I know I’m leaving in a mad dash but, I have to say, I’m glad I ran into you this morning. While I wouldn’t mind doing it again, what do you say we don’t leave it up to fate next time?”

Alec rebounds from his disappointment so fast that he’s dizzy. He fumbles for his phone and holds it out for Magnus to take. He’s uncharacteristically shy as he answers, “Yeah, I’d like that. Maybe we could meet up for coffee again or something?”

Magnus grins as he starts typing something in Alec’s phone. “Of course, darling, that sounds like a marvelous plan.”

He locks Alec’s phone before handing it back to him. He’s already walking towards the door as he calls back, “Get some sleep. I believe in you!”

Magnus opens the door and leaves the coffee shop in a whirlwind.

Sitting back in his seat, Alec marvels over his morning that had moved from incredibly shitty to damn near perfect.

His phone vibrates in the next instant and Alec looks down in reflex.

Don’t be a stranger, darling.

Alec grins and finishes his drink.
He ignores Maia’s stare as he walks out the door and heads toward his building. He makes it to his bedroom without seeing anyone and when he’s back in bed he takes his phone out and looks at the message again.

He saves Magnus’s number and falls asleep, dreamless and deep.
Chapter 7

The next few days are a whirlwind for Alec. He attends a few meetings for sponsors-- there’s an ad for a popular fragrance and several interviews lined up to document his career in this in-between moment before any publicity starts for his next album. There’s a rehearsal for Good Morning America this afternoon in preparation for tomorrow’s concert in Central Park and Alec can already see fans waiting outside for Friday’s performance.

He’ll be playing in the park to an estimated 20,000 people. After rehearsal, Alec drops into the crowd and talks to a few people in the audience, taking photos as asked.

Through it all, however, his phone is burning a hole into his pocket. Magnus and him have been texting constantly since Tuesday morning and Alec fears that he might have a bit of a crush on the man.

Magnus is still witty and sharp over text, an impressive feat. Alec thinks that he’s probably a lackluster texter himself but Magnus keep responding and was greatly appreciative of the picture he’d sent last night of a dog that looked like a literal teddy bear sitting next to an old man on a bench along the street.

Alec is learning so much about Magnus and he soaks every detail up like a sponge. There’s the fact that Magnus’s favorite ice cream flavor is mint chocolate chip-- a travesty but Alec will persevere-- and that he’s a hopeless cook but fantastic baker.

Alec has shared his love of One Direction and that his favorite comfort food is actually a burger, fries, and vanilla milkshake.

Both of them love traveling. Alec prefers mountains and cottages while Magnus adores warmer climes complete with beaches and boutiques. They both took French in high school and the brief conversation they’d attempted over text in the language had been a disaster with neither knowing what the other was trying to say and ultimately resorting to Google Translate.

Alec wants to ask Magnus to meet up again soon. For dinner, drinks, or something a little more out of the box. There are tickets to this speaker at the New York Public Library next week about fascism through the ages and he thinks both of them would enjoy it.

He hasn’t quite worked up the nerve, though.

As soon as Alec ducks into his hired car and Dave shuts the door after him, he’s digging his phone out of his pocket and looking for notifications.

There’s a handful of notifications from his social media platforms but he ignores those in favor of the text alert.

_Darling, I may be in the midst of a riot. Help._

Alec taps the attached video and sees the classroom Magnus must be teaching in right now. The students are divided into two teams and it looks like everyone is rowdy with a few students jumping up and down and shouting _The Tsar of Russia_ at the top of their lungs. There are boos and dramatic sighs as everyone turns at once to look at Magnus.

Over the tinny speakers Alec hears Magnus clear his throat.
“Well, it sounds like Miss Amelia answered first—” Magnus ignores the cries of disagreement, “—and that means the Blue Team has won exam review Jeopardy!”

While the entire class absolutely loses their shit, half in despair and the others in triumph, Alec laughs as the camera switches focus and he’s now looking at Magnus. He looks great even in a shitty phone recording, with his makeup crisp and outfit perfectly accentuating those broad shoulders that Alec can’t help but admire.

In the video, Magnus just shakes his head and winks at Alec before the video abruptly cuts off in the middle of his parting remarks to the class.

Alec sends Magnus must be rough to be such a popular professor and spends the rest of the drive to dinner on Twitter.

The car pulls up to Le Palme, a cozy bistro that the rich and famous frequent. It’s a hot spot because paparazzi are absolutely prohibited on the property and the staff are well seasoned to seeing celebrities.

That doesn’t mean no one is on the sidewalks however.

As his door opens, Alec steps out to a few photojournalists looking his way, immediately perking up when they see the illustrious Lightwood. Dave and he share a commiserating look before Alec’s attention is grabbed by someone calling his name.

In the next moment he’s engulfed in a bear hug. He’d know those sharp elbows anywhere and Alec only winces a little when Simon somehow manages to hit him in the shoulder hard enough to bruise.

“Hey man! What good timing. I just got here myself. I took the subway, you know, because not all of us like to make dramatic entrances literally everywhere we go, but anyhow it’s like we’re in sync!”

There’s a hardy pat on his back and Alec returns it, his smile bright and genuine for one of his few close friends.

“Simon, we’re best friends and we agreed to meet at six. This is me being on time and you by some miracle not being an hour late.”

The two of them step back and Alec hears a dozen flashes as the paps catch the moment. Alec winces for an entirely different reason when he remembers the rumor the journalist had thrown in his face last week. By the glint in Simon’s eyes, he’s well aware of the gossip surrounding them. He throws his arm around Alec as they walk up to the hostess stand and Alec can practically hear the paps salivating at the chance to report that Simon and Alec are getting dinner together.

Alec shakes his head and gives Simon a withering look that his friend just ignores and they’re seated out on the patio. The reporters give them space while watching them like hawks and the shade keeps the heat away as the next couple of hours are relaxing and catching up.

Alec has known Simon for a few years. Simon had been the opener on his tour—his last three tours—and the two had grown close on the road. Simon was a couple of years younger than him and had had some trouble in the beginning adjusting to being on tour, disconnected from family and friends, at least six months out of the year. He was a fabulous musician who played the guitar with heart and he had a strong following of all genders—he didn’t make a secret of the fact that he was pansexual and Alec suspects that’s half the reason the media are so keen to hook their names together.

As if two men have to be romantically involved just because they’re both attracted to the same sex. Alec rolls his eyes and looks up from where he’d just eaten the last of his starter salad to see Simon
all but throw his phone onto the table.

Alec raises a single brow. “What were you doing?”

Looking the very picture of guilty nonchalance Simon looks at him with wide eyed confusion. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Unimpressed, Alec replies, “Were you taking my picture, Simon?”

“Maybe I was. We’re friends, dude. That means that I get to capture the moment in case I get sentimental in my old age.”

“You’re twenty-four, Simon.”

“Exactly! What are the chances that I’ll remember the time I ate dinner with my friend at this fancy restaurant in the second week of June. I’m cataloguing the moment.”

Alec continues to stare at him, expressionless, as his phone lights up with a notification. He reaches to grab it and maintains eye contact until the last minute.

His eyes flick down to the screen and he sees an Instagram tagged notification. He taps on it, already sighing in acceptance.

There’s a photo of Alec in profile. His eyes look a million miles away and he’s holding his wineglass that’s halfway full with the house red. He’s wearing navy chinos rolled up to expose his ankles and a crisp white button down with the first few buttons undone, showing off a hint of chest hair and the sleeves are rolled up to his elbows. There’s a caption, *Always enjoy going out to dinner with my good friend, Alec. Isn’t he so handsome* with-- Alec counts them-- six blue heart emojis.

He sighs a little because it’s expected of him and likes the picture. He leaves a comment-- *not as much as I enjoy eating with you*-- and puts his phone face down on the table, knowing that it’s about to blow up with frenzied fans.

The two of them linger throughout the main course and into dessert. Simon is one of Alec’s favorite people. He’s weird and loud and can be awkward as hell but he’s loyal and funny and a really good person. Alec laughs more than he has since the tour ended and genuinely enjoys his evening.

The two of them walk out to the front of the restaurant together and grin at each other before moving in at the same time for a hard hug.

“You just play the grump, Alec. I know you love fucking over the press just as much as I do,” Simon whispers in his ear. Alec supposes the photos the paps are getting will show the two of them enjoying an intimate conversation and lingering touch.

“I’m an asshole. Of course I enjoy having fun at their expense,” Alec whispers back and a second later, the two of them are walking away in opposite directions wearing shit-eating grins.

Alec ignores the paparazzi and makes his way down the street. He takes out his phone and scrolls through the notifications that include texts from Izzy-- *you’re so evil big brother*-- and Jace-- *ew, Simon really bro? You could do so much better*-- and a million twitter mentions.

There’s a text from Magnus and Alec trips over the sidewalk in his haste to open it, his total focus on his phone.

*: Alexander, I didn’t know you were already in such a committed relationship.*
Underneath that is a photo of Simon and him pandering to the press. *They do move fast,* Alec thinks.

Alec would be worried, but Magnus only sends emojis or emoticons when he’s being dramatic and Alec rolls his eyes as he feels his cheek flush. He can’t help his thought that he wouldn’t mind at all if the press linked him and Magnus together.

Alec just replies, *ha ha you’re so funny. He’s just a friend and the reporters are always reaching.*

His walk home takes twice as long as it normally would since Alec stops every time he gets a text. He walks into the apartment building and almost runs into Jace and Clary as they’re coming out of the elevator, too focused on his phone.

Jace and Clary give him a look like they’re trying to figure him out-- Alec absolutely detests when people text and walk at the same time-- and he throws out a curt, “Have fun on date night,” before walking past them into the elevator, pressing the button for the penthouse and inserting his key.

Alec walks into the apartment, throws his keys on the foyer table and toes his shoes off. He goes straight to the couch and falls onto it, relaxing on his back and holding his phone up in a way he’ll probably regret later when it falls on his face.

He texts Magnus, too caught up in the conversation to see how late it’s getting. It’s not until he hears the key in the lock of the front door that he looks at the time. He blinks in surprise. He’s been on his phone for over two hours and his battery is struggling at fourteen percent.

Izzy strolls in dressed to kill and doesn’t notice him as she turns to the person whose hand she’s holding. A girl follows her through the door. They’re kissing like they don’t need air and stumble down the hallway. Alec hears her door slam and closes his eyes in pain. Izzy is loud as hell and he gets up from the couch without delay. He does not need to hear Izzy and her hookup for the night. Thank God that Jace is the one whose room is next to hers.

Alec goes through his bedtime routine and climbs into bed in just his underwear. He melts into the mattress before reaching across the sheets for his phone.

Magnus and him have been talking about his performance in the morning. Alec has to be at the studio in six hours but he’s loathe to end the conversation.

Magnus’s last text is *can’t wait to see you tomorrow, darling. Knock them dead.*

Alec can’t help the little smile that curves his mouth. He send a short reply, sleep already pulling at the edges of his consciousness.

*I have to be up in five hours. Goodnight Magnus. I can’t wait to hear what you think of the concert! Stay tuned. I might have a surprise for you tomorrow :)*

Alec’s alarm goes off in the darkness and he groans before turning it off. It’s damned early and Alec lays in bed for a few minutes, getting the energy to climb out of bed. He makes his way to the bathroom, blurry-eyed, and takes a shower that scalds his skin but wakes him up. He gets dressed in sweats and a tank, knowing that the costume department will have something for him to change into.

He pours a cup of coffee into a travel mug and is eternally grateful for espresso machines that have
timers.

Dave is already waiting for him and, knowing that Alec hates early mornings, doesn’t speak as he opens the door.

The coffee helps clear his head and Alec manages a short nod in thanks. He pulls his phone out and sees that Magnus responded to his last message.

A surprise, Alexander? I'm all ears. Good luck this morning.

Alec doesn’t respond and just stares out the window for the duration of the ride, watching New York wake up. He plays over the day’s plans, makes sure that he’s prepared and in the right head space.

Once Dave pulls up to the studio, it’s a whirlwind as Alec is ushered to his dressing room where he goes through hair, makeup, and dress changes.

There’s some promotional material he records, taking selfies with the news anchors and teasing his performance, and then he heads to Central Park. The fans are ready for him and there’s a dull roar as he walks out on stage. Alec waits for his cue from ABC before kicking off his summer concert in the park.

His first song is Chocolate Raspberry, his spring single, and the crowd sings along to every word. They’re perfect, knowing the lyrics and staying hype as fuck and Alec sings all of his singles so far released from the last album. There’s a commercial break and then Alec is playing Empty Hearts-- an unofficial announcement to his fans and the world at large on what his next single will be-- one of the slower songs, a bit of a ballad. He starts a cappella and the screams hit a fever pitch a second later. Alec hastily shoves his ear plug back in when the crowd catches sight of Simon walking towards him, guitar in hand.

Alec and Simon smile at each other in greeting before going back to the song, Alec singing and Simon playing acoustic guitar. Everyone is silent and it’s a sea of cell phones glinting in the sun.

Except for a teenage boy who is watching the performance with rapt attention. He hasn’t taken his phone out once-- he is clearly soaking in the moment. Alec nods at him and when the boy looks at him in shock, as if to ask are you looking at me, Alec grins and winks. The boy almost passes out but makes a remarkable recovery, a smile lighting up his face.

The song ends. Alec and Simon share a bro-hug before Simon is taking a bow with a shit-eating grin. The next song is the most popular song from Simon’s record that’s currently climbing the charts. Simon joins in singing and the crowd eats the duet up.

There’s another commercial break before Alec is once again up at the mic. He introduces the next song.

The crowd is wild as he takes a quick drink of water, eagerly anticipating what he’ll sing next.

He puts the plastic bottle down and walks back over to the center of the stage.

He leans into the microphone and just grins, encouraging the crowd to get even louder.

Once they start to die down after a minute or two, he clears his throat.

“How are we doing New York?”

It’s a wall of noise and Alec takes out his plugs to take it all in. It never gets old.
“This next song is one of my older ones from my first album. It’s about missed opportunities and second chances. I’d like to dedicate this song to someone I met recently. We ran into each other a few times purely by chance before deciding to exchange numbers. I think he could be a great friend. Here’s Carousel.”

The audience is losing their shit and Alec grins, only a little nervous. He’s notoriously private. He hasn’t been in a long term relationship since high school and is stubbornly tight-lipped about his life behind the scenes. It’s unprecedented that Alec would allude to someone, however innocent the relationship might be right now.

He knows he’ll catch heat for it later. Lydia will skin him alive for keeping something from her and Izzy will pry the details out of him. But Alec thinks of Magnus watching and knowing that Alec doesn’t see him as a random stranger he’d happened to run into around the city a time or two.

Alec doesn’t know if anything will come of their acquaintance. Anything romantic. Anything more. But he’s open to the possibility and he wants Magnus to know that.

He hopes Magnus is okay with his public declaration. Alec was careful to avoid names and not to divulge any real information. But, even if it’s strictly friends, Magnus will have to accept that the media will eventually find him if they continue to talk.

Alec hopes he can handle the scrutiny.

Alec shuts away thoughts of Magnus and the future, turning his focus entirely onto the song. His last note echos around the park and everyone cheers.

Alec nods and jogs to the edge of the stage where he shakes hands and greets the front rows. He’s quickly ushered to a chair next to one of the Good Morning America anchors and settles in, waiting to get the interview segment over.

Magnus walks into his loft, exhausted. His students had been particularly listless today and it took a lot of energy to teach with conviction when everyone looked like they would rather be watching paint dry than listen to him lecture. He’d had to speak with a few professors in the department about student complaints and he hadn’t had a chance to eat today with several meetings scheduled.

Plus, his thoughts had been preoccupied. He couldn’t help but think about Alec. They’d been talking nonstop since they’d exchanged numbers Tuesday. It had only been four days, but talking with Alec—even over text—was quickly becoming his favorite part of the day.

He was excited to watch Good Morning America tonight and had picked up some Chinese from his favorite spot around the corner to smash on while he watched it.

Heading towards the bedroom, Magnus changes into leggings and an ancient Oxford hoodie, thinking about what Alexander had said last night. Magnus had to admit, he was intrigued by the teasing of a surprise. He wondered what Lightwood could have up his sleeve.

Magnus plated up his food and filled a flas with a couple of fingers of whiskey before sitting down on the couch.

He’d recorded this morning’s GMA and presses play with alacrity.

Magnus fast forwards through all the parts that don’t have Alec while scarfin down dinner.
When he gets to the concert portion of the program he stops fast forwarding. Alec looked great in olive green pants with a printed camp shirt with—were those flamingos? Magnus shakes his head a little at Alec’s whimsy and watches the performance. He hums along to all the songs and can’t hide his surprise when Simon Lewis comes out to sing a couple of songs.

When Alec takes a drink of water, Magnus follows the line of his throat. Alec was stunning and Magnus couldn’t help but think what if.

Alec clears his throat when he gets up to the mic and Magnus leans forward, subconsciously.

“This next song is one of my older ones from my first album. It’s about missed opportunities and chance meetings. I’d like to dedicate this song to someone I met recently. We ran into each other a few times purely by chance before deciding to exchange numbers. I think he could be a great friend. Here’s Carousel.”

Magnus’s mouth hangs open in surprise. He grins, delighted. He couldn’t believe that Alec had been bold enough to mention him, however vaguely. Between the two of them, there was no doubt about the man he was talking about. Carousel was one of Magnus’s favorite songs ever from Alec’s discography and he was a little shocked if he was being honest.

Magnus would love to be friends with Alec but he didn’t think that Alec would want anything more than a casual acquaintance. He must have so many people pining for his attention and while Magnus knew he was amazing, he couldn’t deny that Alec was used to an entirely different social circle with entirely different expectations.

Magnus catches the shocked and gleeful looks from the audience and realizes just how much of Alec is constantly in the limelight.

If Magnus did want to be friends with Alec in earnest—or something more—he would have to deal with intrusive questions from fans and media alike. While the thought was distasteful—Magnus didn’t hide but he didn’t advertise—he knew that Alec was worth it.

Alec kept surprising him. From his intelligence to kindness to his cute quirks, Alec was special. Magnus would have to take the good with the bad.

Luckily, there was a lot of good to be had with Alec.

Magnus pauses the television and types out a quick message to Alec.

Darling, I’d love to be friends. I’d say we’re over halfway there.

Are those really flamingos?

He hits send and unpauses the tv, watching the interview between Alec and the co-host of the program. Alec looks confident and relaxed, totally at ease with the crowd eagerly hanging on his every word and the shark-eyed reporter who was obviously looking for a scoop.

Not for the first time, Magnus realizes how much of a chameleon Alec could be and finishes watching the show, waiting for Alec’s next text.
Alec Lightwood. Heartthrob to millions, artist extraordinaire, last year’s Paris Fashion Week surprise when he walked down the Armani runway in a truly delectable teal suit with suitably dramatic eye makeup. Lightwood’s been the talk of the town for over a decade now. He released his very first song a week before he turned sixteen and the rest, as they say, is history.

Lightwood’s illustrious career has spanned controversy and continents and just recently has earned him the title Entertainer of the Year just a few months ago-- for the third time. For those that don’t know, Alec writes all of his songs and can play a variety of instruments including the guitar, piano, drums, and the clarinet.

Alec has just wrapped up his latest world tour. 128 tour dates, over a million tickets sold, and an estimated 700 million dollars in revenue resulted in a sold-out tour for a triple platinum album that puts this superstar at the top of his game.

We don’t see him falling anytime soon.

Because I’m obsessive about making a good impression to my guests, I showed up to the little cafe we had agreed to meet up at half an hour early. It gives me time to review my notes and take a breath, opening my mind for first impressions-- both good and bad.

The cafe in question is cute. It’s full of bright colors-- splashes of crimson mixed with ribbons of turquoise gives the place a kitschy, bohemian air. The pastry display at the front of the shop is beautiful with fluffy scones and gigantic cupcakes covered with a mountain of frosting.

It’s turning towards evening and the golden light adds to the summer ambiance. I was just debating between a piece of raspberry swirl pound cake or triple chocolate muffin when the little bell above the door chimed and in walked the man of the hour.

Alec Lightwood is even more stunning in person, dear readers. He’s sporting a five o’clock shadow that makes his face a little more rugged and his patrician features look carved from marble. He’s wearing slim fit pants in an alluring olive green with the bottoms rolled up to show surprisingly delicate ankles for such a tall man.

His navy sweater is just right, offering a lovely contrast from the pants and working well with his coloring.

Lightwood slips his sunglasses off and tucks then into the neck of his sweater. His eyes sweep across the surprisingly empty eatery before landing on me. Immediately, I’m a little intimidated. Razor sharp hazel eyes that show a surprising intelligence and his giraffe-like height are a little overwhelming when you’re a foot shorter and not expecting such attention.

In the next moment, Alec smiles and it’s a warm, engaging thing that instantly makes everything more comfortable.

We chat for a few minutes before deciding to order. Alec orders a coffee drink that is at least ninety-five percent sugar-- a concoction with caramel, mocha and whipped cream. We both choose a few
pastries-- Alec goes for the dark chocolate scone-- and we settle in to our little table. He’s patient as I set my recorder up and seems content to happily munch on his baked good, giving the impression that he’s not bothered that I’m a little scattered today, of all days.

Then we begin.

Out: So, Alec, welcome back home. How does it feel?

Alec: (Laughs). Thanks, man. It feels great. I’m a New Yorker born and bred and while I love traveling nothing quite beats being home and taking that first subway ride after a while abroad.

O: You just wrapped up your latest sold-out tour. How did it compare to previous tours?

A: This tour was definitely the biggest on any scale, whether it was tickets sold, venue capacities, or effort. The crew was amazing every night, putting together sets and making sure that everything went off without a hitch. And the fans, well, they just continue to blow me away. Their enthusiasm is unmatched. While grueling-- it’s the longest tour I’ve ever done and covered the most distance-- it was indescribably brilliant. I had the time of my life and I hope everyone else feels the same.

O: World tour, check. What’s next for you, Lightwood?

A: That’s the million dollar question. I have a few months before I start recording my next album. I plan to take this summer and write most of the material for that record. Plus, I want to enjoy some time off. It’s been a year since I was last in New York and I want to get reacquainted with the city and with my family.

O: So, both work and play?

A: Yeah, I guess so. There’s always that push to think ahead in terms of my career-- what’s the next step, where can I go from here. I’ll definitely be working this summer. I have a few writing sessions lined up with artists I really admire and I’m excited to see what emerges from them. An Arrow in the Dark was a huge phase of that career, though, and coming off that album cycle kind of just leaves me with a desire to sleep for a century (laughs). I’m using this time to recharge and make my seventh album the best I can, the best I’ve ever done.

O: Can you tease anything from the next album?

A: I think this album might surprise the fans a little. I’ve been at this for over a decade. I want to stretch my legs and experiment a little. I don’t know what will make it on the record, but I need to change things up or I’ll get stale and that’s the worst thing for an artist to become.

O: So, you’re doing something different? We should prepare ourselves for something a little out of the box when we think of Alec Lightwood?

A: I guess that’s a takeaway. I just want the fans to go into things with an open mind. I’ve lived a lot in the past two years and those experiences will probably show up in my next album. I’m looking for new shit, man. I don’t want to put any parameters on my art-- who knows what’s going to come out.

O: Speaking of living a lot, you’ve been linked to several men, including Emmy-winning Actor Jason Desker. Can I ask if anything is going on there?

A: Sure, you can ask. Doesn’t mean I’ll answer. But, truthfully, there’s not much to say. Jason and I met up at an after-party and the next day rumors were swirling around about the two of us. I can tell you, 100 percent truth, that I am single and unattached. I’m not in a relationship and I haven’t been in one for years.
O: But what about all of the rumors?

A: They’re just that. Rumors. False gossip and idle speculation.

O: No one’s caught your eye, then?

A: No.

O: Okay, then. There’s the truth straight from your lips. Now, Alec, you’ve been out since almost the beginning of your career, which began when you were a junior in high school. What can you share about your own experiences coming out during such a turbulent time?

A: I’ve known I was gay since I was a little kid. Absolutely no doubt about it. It took me years to learn the name for what I felt and even longer to reconcile that part of me with everyone else’s expectations. When my family asked if there was anyone special I had me eye on, I’d shrug and deny anything, offering that school and sports were taking all of my focus. My siblings knew everything wasn’t what it seemed, but they let me have that shield to hide behind until I was ready to admit to the world that I wasn’t straight.

At the very start of my career, there was a lot of contention between a lot of parties on what my image should be. I kept quiet for months and was well into my senior year of high school when I decided to make my public move. I was the captain of the soccer team and had been going out with one of my teammates for a few months.

I was just fed up with it all. I had a hit song on the radio and the whole damn school knew about the two of us-- it was almost an open secret. The guy at the time was in the closet but ready to come out and I was standing in his way. So, the day we won the state tournament, I kissed him in front of a few thousand people out on the field. It was an incredible high and I don’t think either of us could believe what I’d just done.

Shit was a little crazy after that. The media took to the story like a house on fire and things at school and home were a little hectic for awhile. But I felt a lot of relief and everything was worth it in the end.

O: That’s quite a story.

A: (Laughs). Yeah. It was dramatic as hell and I caught a lot of heat for it, but I was just tired, you know? I was a month from graduation and planning to go on tour right after that and it was almost like, it was now or never. So, I chose now. The moment I did it was a cathartic release. All that weight just dropped from my shoulders. That isn’t to say that things were smooth sailing, because like I said there were a lot of parties that were unhappy with me and my irrevocable decision. My coming out wasn’t just for my own mental health or peace of mind-- it was a deliberate business decision that I knew would impact my career from the second I went through with it, but I haven’t regretted anything. If sharing the absolute terror and relief I felt helps anyone, then I have no problem talking about my story.

O: You have a lot of fans and are a role model to many of them, especially those in our community. Do you have any advice for them?

A: I’d say, just share your truth. That sounds like such after school special bullshit but it’s true. Even if you are straight or cis, you can still be going through things that are difficult to handle or acknowledge. Once you start living your best life, is when you start really living. There will be hate and ignorance and all that bad stuff but being free and unapologetic about it is a powerful balm to any insults or accusations that might get hurled your way. Remember, there’s nothing wrong with
what you feel. You’re valid and it’s going to be okay.

O: Wise words, Alec. Now that you’ve been out for almost a decade, can you share your ideal man? Give some of us some hope (laughs).

A: I don’t really have a type, man. I like intelligence and wit and kindness. I’m pretty basic that way. I can’t explain what catches my eye because it seems to change every time. I’ve been with guys who were vastly different, from a broker in the London Stock Exchange to a drummer in a Brazilian metal band. I don’t limit myself.

O: So no teasers on who we might next see you with?

A: Not really. All I can offer right now is that I’m looking for someone who sees beyond Alec Lightwood in all capital letters. I’m just a guy and when I do fall for someone it’s going to be real. Who knows when that will happen but I’m in no rush. I have a lot on my plate and things will happen when they’re meant to.

O: With that last statement, let’s end things with a fun tidbit. What’s the most embarrassing thing that’s ever happened on tour?

A: Embarrassing, huh? That’s certainly a different direction. There was that time in Dublin that I ripped my pants and my cartoon underwear showed for almost the entire concert and I didn’t know. But, I think I’d have to say that the most embarrassing thing that ever happened on stage was when I fell. It was an open arena and it was raining. Not too hard, but enough to make things slippery. I was in the middle of the dramatic chorus when I slipped like a cartoon on a banana peel. Everything was silent for a moment before I got my breath and stood up. My ass hurt like hell but I was only halfway through the set. I could feel my blush for the rest of the concert. It was awful.

O: And on that note, thank you Alec for agreeing to talk with Out Magazine.

We talked for a few more minutes, informally, before I had to leave for my next appointment. Alec was ushered by a photographer right after I left for the spread you can see in the following pages.

Lightwood is a powerhouse. He has the voice of a generation and a kind heart. He’s self-deprecating and one doesn’t get the impression that he’s just another stuck-up celebrity out of touch with the average person. By all accounts, his fans are rabid over him and it’s not hard to see why. He’s a professional at all costs and is always engaging with fans on social media. With over eighty million followers on Twitter and Instagram, it’s undeniable that Alec has built an admirable foundation of support.

Watching behind the scenes videos and fan blogs, it’s obvious that there’s a rapport between Alec and his fans that not every artist is fortunate enough to have-- or cares enough to curate. There’s respect and love from both sides.

Alec Lightwood isn’t just a pretty face. He works as hard as his discography and grueling schedule indicates. The day we had the interview, Alec had a meeting with his record company board and met with the people at ABC for his Good Morning America appearance. His day didn’t end until almost dawn, as the photoshoot took hours after our sparse dinner. But Lightwood didn’t complain. A trooper, he seemed genuinely interested in our conversation and from what the photographer and wardrobe team told me, he took direction well and had fun with the shoot-- even though he had been up for almost twenty four hours at that point.

Alec Lightwood is an enigmatic man. He guards his life zealously. Everyone sees him stumbling out of clubs with a different guy on his arm every week. Everyone has seen his interviews and fans catch
glimpses of the man behind the scenes, but that’s all they are. Brief looks into the private life of America’s favorite celebrity.

It makes one wonder about what lies beneath the surface. From our conversation, Alec had a wit and bluntness that’s admirable in the upper echelons of America’s darlings. He has a brother that owns an award-winning gym in Brooklyn with a mile-long waiting list and a sister that’s featured on countless magazine covers herself-- Isabelle Lightwood is set to appear in the Victoria’s Secret show in the fall and has racked up quite a following of her own.

This family is determined and, above all, generous. It’s been a pleasure watching Lightwood grow from the somewhat awkward teen to the self-assured man he is now, comfortable with his fame and the scrutiny of millions. This is the second time Lightwood has graced our Magazine’s cover and it’s always a delight. I, and the team at Out Magazine, wish Alec Lightwood all the luck on his next album. We can’t wait to hear it!

An Arrow in the dark, Lightwood’s sixth studio album and latest release, is out now and can be found online and in-store at a variety of merchants. See below for more details.

At the time of press, Chocolate Raspberry, his latest single, had sold over five million copies and was topping the charts at No. 1.

Word on the street has it that fans can expect another single to drop soon-- the acoustic and dark-toned Empty Hearts.
“Really, Magnus, tell me you aren’t drooling over your unrequited lover boy.”

Magnus looks up from the magazine he was reading, glaring at Ragnor.

“You know I wasn’t drooling, Fell. Just because I’m paying more attention to my reading material than you doesn’t mean I’m obsessed.”

With an inelegant snort that he’d deny until armageddon, Ragnor just drolly replies, “I do believe I see actual water marks on pretty boy’s face. Careful, dear, or you’ll ruin the article you’re pouring over.”

Magnus doesn’t deign to answer, just continues to read Alexander’s feature in this month’s Out Magazine. Alec and him have been texting nonstop since the Good Morning America special, and that was almost two weeks ago. They haven’t met again in person yet but Magnus is thinking of suggesting something soon-- there’s a lecturer at the New York Public Library in a few days on fascism in America and while Magnus finds the topic interesting and extremely timely, he wonders if Alec would be interested.

Something tells him that Alec can hold his own just fine.

Going back to his reading, Magnus has just finished the section on Alec’s music and smiles a little to himself. Alec was a clever bastard, he’d give him that. While Alec had confided all of his uncertainty and anxiety about his lack of progress on his next album, he sounded utterly confident and light about things to the interviewer. Talking about new directions and fresh material, a hint only to those who knew that Alec had absolutely no idea what he even expected from album seven.

Magnus hears Ragnor harrumph and steadfastly tunes him out. Ragnor had been on Magnus’s case for years about how much he liked Alec Lightwood. It was one of the reasons he hadn’t told anyone about the man in question.

It’d been two weeks since that fateful run-in at Uptown Java and everything felt so new. For heaven’s sake, they had only properly talked twice, after all.

Which isn’t to say that Magnus didn’t thoroughly enjoy texting with Alec. Alec was sarcastic and funny and Magnus was enjoying getting to know him a little at a time.

He sent pictures of the most adorable animals, too.

As Magnus reads on, his heart warms at Alec’s earnest advice to his fans. Magnus’s own coming out had been rather banal-- again, while he didn’t advertise, he didn’t hide either-- and Magnus knew he was fortunate that way. Reading Alec’s own coming out story-- no doubt the succinct version giving just enough detail to satisfy and leave the audience wanting to know more-- left him wondering what had really happened.

The third time Ragnor clinks his spoon against his tea cup just a touch too aggressively, Magnus looks up, brow raised.

“Yes?”

Ragnor scowls before taking a sip. “Oh, nothing, just thought that you would pay more attention to me than a piece of paper during our time together. But, no worries. I see that I am not as important as
Magnus rolls his eyes. “We’ve been meeting in your office every Tuesday afternoon for years, Ragnor. Half the time you’re grading papers and humming those Baroque operas you know I detest. Come off it.”

Ragnor grumbles but doesn’t disagree.

Finally, Ragnor sighs. “Alright, then. Tell me what’s new with Lightworm.”

“Lightwood, Ragnor. I know you know his name.”

Ragnor waves his hand, dismissively. “Whatever. So? Learn anything new?”

Raising his chin, Magnus offers, “His next album promises to be fresh and unexpected.”

“That’s all you have? Every artist has to tease their new material. It’s how they keep fans and the press on the edge of their seats. Anything with substance?”

“Nothing you would find interesting, dear friend.”

“Fair enough, Bane.”

A few moments of silence are spent with both of them drinking their tea before Ragnor speaks again.

“I don’t know why you’re so into him.”

Magnus focuses on his cup. “We’ve been over this a thousand times. Some things in life do not have to be understood by Ragnor Fell. Not everything revolves around you.”

A pause before Ragnor sighs, a reluctant smile coming across his face. “I suppose you’re right, friend. Are you coming home with me?”

Magnus thinks about it. Ragnor and Catarina’s house is always great. Spending time with his best friends, and their adorable daughter, never gets old. However, he’s just not up for it tonight.

Truthfully, he doesn’t want anything but the cold pasta leftovers in his fridge and a bath. He’d bought a new bath bomb from Lush over the weekend, something with berries and an absurd amount of glitter, and he just wants to relax.

This week is rather easy, with minimal meetings and no exams or assignments for his students. He wants to enjoy the calm while he can.

Sitting up a little, Magnus shakes his head. “No, I don’t think so. I just want to relax and maybe finish that biography on Marx I’ve been trying to get through for the past month.”

Ragnor shudders. “Better you than me. I’ll leave you to it.”

Ragnor leans forward and places his tea cup on his desk. He turns his computer off and reaches for his briefcase, a horribly beat up brown leather thing that looks more suited to a seventeenth century barrister, as he stands up.

In short order, Ragnor is ready to head home, with a stack of papers shoved in his briefcase and his hat on his head. Without hesitating, he makes his way to the door.

“Lock up behind you and for God’s sake don’t leave your cup on my desk. You know I hate cleaning up after you,” Ragnor says over his shoulder. A minute later he’s out the door and making
his way towards his townhouse on the Lower East Side.

Magnus sits in his chair for a minute, before laughing a little under his breath. Ragnor could be rude as seven devils, but that’s what over a decade of friendship got you.

The two of them had met their first day at Yale, as roommates. Ragnor had been a stuffy eighteen year old transplant from a little town just outside of London and Magnus had been a free spirit with keen intelligence on a full ride. Surprisingly, they had hit it off right away.

They bickered like an old married couple but both wouldn’t have it any other way.

That’s also how Catarina and Ragnor had met. English Lit 101. They’d sat next to each other by chance and the rest is history. They’d been married for seven years and had adopted Madzie, a beautiful five year old with boundless enthusiasm and energy.

It’d been surprising to both Magnus and Ragnor when they’d realized they were post taking up posts at Columbia. Neither had mentioned their applications or interviews because they didn’t want to make a big deal if they weren’t hired. Magnus was the chair of the history department and a tenured professor while Ragnor was tenured in the English department. His specialty was gothic novels of the nineteenth century but he was an encyclopedia about all things literary.

He loved to rub Magnus’s nose in it. When he did that, Magnus would just start reciting archaic trivia from his own repertoire and it could lead to an hours-long competition between the two that would only end when someone desperately intervened-- usually Cat.

Sitting in the silence of Ragnor’s office, Magnus drinks the last of his tea. It’s almost five o’clock and he might as well head home.

He has such riveting plans, after all.

He leaves his dirty cup right in the middle of Ragnor’s desk just to piss him off and heads to the door, taking out his phone on the way. There’s a message from Alec.

Magnus locks the door and pulls it shut, stepping into the hallway before opening Alec’s latest text.

_I was wondering, and feel free to decline since I know this is kinda last minute, but the NYPL has a guest lecturer Thursday and I was wondering if you wanted to go with me?_

Magnus’s face lights up and he responds, thumbs flying over the keyboard.

_Of course, Alexander, I’d love to accompany you. It’s the program on fascism, right?_

Magnus tucks his phone into his pocket before making his way down the hallway and into the sunlight. His commute home is only a twenty minute stroll and he takes in New York in June.

It’s a hubbub of activity. People are in everything from suits to crop tops and the heat is a little oppressive today. Magnus is glad he’d just chosen a dress shirt and that his sleeves are rolled up almost to the elbow.

The walk home is uneventful and Magnus opens his apartment door, thankful for the gust of air conditioning that hits him full blast. He sets his bag down and heads to the bedroom, stripping down to just his underwear. He goes to the kitchen next and takes out his container of pasta salad, eating it cold above the sink.

Finished, he places the Tupperware in the dishwasher and heads to the bathroom. He turns the water
on hot and throws in his bright blue and red bath bomb. While the tub fills, he heads to his living room, picking up the book from the end table. He only had about a hundred pages left and he’s eager to finish it and start something else.

Magnus makes a detour to his drink cart, pouring a glass of red and taking that with him to the bath. Stripping, he climbs in and a long sigh leaves him as he eases down into the water. He picks up his phone from where it’s laying on the edge, turning the screen on and sees that he’s missed a few texts.

*Great. And yeah, that’s the one. Want to meet there at 6? It’s starts at 6:30 but I want to make it there early so we can get seats.*

*You already knew about it?*

*I’m surrounded by idiots.*

Magnus opens the picture that’s attached to the last message and huffs out a laugh. There’s two people, whom he assumes are Jace and Izzy. They’re in a kitchen that looks like it’s been the site of a nuclear bomb detonation. There’s some type of batter all over the counters and at least a dozen bowls spread out across the space. Both of them are wearing sheepish smiles and are covered in...it looks like food coloring in a rainbow of colors.

It’s looks like an absolute mess.

Magnus responds, sinking a little further into the water and marveling at the sheer amount of glitter the bath bomb has unleashed.

*I had heard of it, darling. As a history professor that specializes in Europe-- and an alarmed citizen of this country-- I take note of most lectures in the city, especially on that topic. 6pm sounds wonderful.*

*I’m looking forward to seeing you again.*

*Oh, dear. What happened? It looks like an explosion.*

Magnus doesn’t notice time flying by. He doesn’t even open his book and it’s only a couple of hours later, when he’s shivering, that he realizes that the water has grown cold. He’s spent the entire evening texting Alec. He hastily stands up and drains the water. He drinks the last bit of wine left in his glass and turns the shower on, getting the worst of the glitter off.

Climbing out, he towels off and heads to his dresser, throwing on a pair of underwear and tying a crimson robe that hits mid-thigh.

He heads back to the bathroom, gathering up his empty glass and book with only a little sigh of regret. The book was a bitch to get through and he really had wanted to be done with it. He puts it back on the coffee table and places the glass in the sink.

It’s only eight but Magnus climbs into bed, wanting to continue the conversation with Alec. He turns on the tv to some reruns of a drama he enjoys and settles back.

If he’s being honest, he’s a little surprised that Alec had suggested they meet. Magnus is looking
forward to seeing Alec again-- he wasn’t lying about that-- but this beginning stage has been fun, too. Texting all the time like teenagers is something Magnus hasn’t experienced since he was a teen all those years ago. It feels good. Moving on to the next phase of this friendship-- Magnus is not thinking of the program Thursday as a date-- is sure to be great.

Alec seems like a genuine guy, he’s interesting, and his face certainly doesn’t hurt matters.

The two of them text for a few more hours before Magnus decides to call it a night, answering Alec’s text about the most underrated vegetable ever, brussel sprouts, with *I’m sure you’re right darling, but this conversation will have to wait until the morning. I’m beat. Goodnight, Alexander.*

He falls asleep with a smile on his face.

Alec is sitting in the studio with Simon and wants to pull his hair out. Nothing is working. It’s been over two weeks since his meeting with the record label execs and he doesn’t have one song. He doesn’t have a *piece* of a song. Music isn’t fitting with the pitiful amount of words he’s managed to scrawl on the page and the mounting frustration really isn’t helping his writer’s block.

This is the worst period of his career since he began all those years ago. He’s almost twenty seven and maybe it’s time to accept that he’s a failure.

Alec’s thoughts are turning increasingly fatalistic at his career and worth in general when Simon kicks him in the shin.

Alec climbs out of misery long enough to turn his glare from the blank page in front of him to Simon’s smiling face.

“What,” he says, scowling.

“Dude. You need to lighten up. Maybe the reason you can’t write anything worth a damn is because you’re stressing so much. Relax.”

Alec growls a little. “Sorry, Si, but I have to hand the studio something in six weeks and I don’t have one goddamn word that’s good. Excuse me for being a little uptight.”

“Well pull that stick out of your ass and breathe. Have you considered that maybe you’re working too hard? Sometimes things take time and you can’t rush them. Take a few days and don’t even try to write. Come back with fresh eyes and a clear mind.”

Alec closes his eyes and lets out a hard sigh. He lays his head on the table between them and focuses on his breathing. His blood pressure has to be through the roof and he needs to get a handle on himself before he explodes all over the fucking studio.

It could be a minute or fifteen later when he raises his head back up.

He looks at Simon who’s wearing a triumphant grin.

“Yeah, okay, maybe you’re right. Maybe I need to take a step back.”

“There you go, dude! Go for a walk in the park, catch a movie, go read a book. Do something mindless and let your brain rest. Once it’s recharged, I’m sure the words will just start flowing.”

With a sardonic upturn of his lips, Alec shrugs. “Let’s hope you’re right, Lewis, or I’m going to kick
Alec’s phone vibrates on the table and Alec can’t stop the smile that spreads across his face. He forgot that he’s friends with a child though, and Simon’s hand reaches out and snags the phone before Alec even processes that he’s moving.

He holds the phone up and waves it at Alec. “Oh? Who do we have here that’s making the eternally grumpy Alec Lightwood smile like a kid on Christmas?” He looks at the screen and his smile grows infinitely wider. Alec wants to smack it off his face. “Magnus? Who’s Magnus, Alexander?” Simon says in a bedroom voice that makes Alec’s skin crawl.

“He’s just a person.”

“And why is he calling you by your full name when no one else has that privilege?”

Alec shrugs, uncomfortably. “I don’t know. He just started doing it and it doesn’t sound... terrible coming from him.”

Simon’s eyes light up. “You’re smitten! I need you to tell me everything about him, right now.”

Alec raises a brow and lunges for his phone. There’s a few seconds of back and forth before Alec pockets the phone, victorious. He rolls his eyes.

“Yeah, I’ll get right on that. Bye, Simon. See you in a few days.”

Simon pouts as Alec gathers up his stuff, closing his songbook up and taking the last drink of his water before throwing it in the garbage.

“Alec, that’s not fair. I tell you about my dates and this is the first guy you’ve shown an interest in since I met you.”

“Life isn’t fair, Simon. I’m sorry I had to be the one to tell you, but that’s just how it is on this bitch of an Earth. See you later.”

Alec walks out of the room without a backwards glance, not giving Simon the satisfaction of seeing whatever facial expression he’d pasted onto his face.

It’s not until Alec reaches the sidewalk below that he realizes what he’s agreed to. A couple of days, maybe three, with absolutely no work. It’s an anathema to him. He’s always working. He might be a bit of a workaholic if he’s being completely honest with himself. On the few holidays he’s taken, they’ve always been a whirlwind, usually to see family. He’s allowed himself to take a break but plans were always brewing in the background.

Right now, it’s a lot of nothing and he’s not sure how to handle it.

He doesn’t get a chance to focus on that for too long, however, because his phone vibrates again and Alec sees another message from Magnus.

*Good morning, Alexander. I trust you slept well?*

*Brussel sprouts are criminally underrated. They might even be my favorite vegetable.*

Alec grins as he slips his sunglasses on.

He loves talking to Magnus and he’s looking forward to the lecture tomorrow evening. He was glad that Magnus had said yes and that he had already heard of it. It was another similarity between them.
Alec doesn’t get nervous on dates. He’s been with enough guys, and in the spotlight long enough, to be able to make small talk with anybody on anything for the duration of a meal. He doesn’t get flustered or on edge.

Alec can’t deny the butterflies that are pitching in his stomach like a ship in a storm, though. He *likes* Magnus. They’re friends now, and Alec is glad of that, but his brain has wandered to what more than friends could look like with him. They’d only talked properly twice but there’s something there and Alec can’t wait to see him tomorrow and know if his brain had been imagining things or if there really was a connection.

Alec’s brought out of his thoughts by a tentative, “Alec?”

He looks up and sees a teenager with a band t-shirt and cut-offs. He smiles. “Yeah?”

They rush out a breath. “Oh, wow, it really is you. I wasn’t sure, you know, because what are the chances that I would run into the Alec Lightwood right by my school. This is like some kind of miracle. My name is Andrea and I’m a huge fan of yours. I’ve been to, like, three of your concerts, and I own all of your albums. Even the live acoustic vinyl you released last year. It is such an honor to meet you. You’re like my idol and oh my gosh I’ll shut up now before I ramble on even more.” They pause for a breath and Alec grins, laughing a little.

“No worries, Andrea. It’s always nice to meet a fan. You said you went to school around here?”

Andrea beams and nods her head behind Alec. “Yeah, I’m a senior at the private academy down the block. I’m planning to go to NYU for ecology studies in August.”

They spend a few minutes talking before Andrea asks for a pic. Alec happily obliges and there’s a few more minutes of chatting before they rush off, almost late for debate team practice.

Alec continues on his way, ruefully thinking that there’s no such thing as anonymity when you’re a celebrity. He’s walking through the streets of New York and wondering how the hell he’s going to make it through the next few days when he remembers that he still hasn’t answered Magnus. He replies, and the conversation continues, talking about food that’s either underrated or gets too much credit.

Before he knows it, he’s in front of his apartment building. He greets Charles on his way in and the penthouse is blissfully silent. Izzy is away on a shoot for a few weeks in Tokyo and Jace is at his gym, no doubt kicking ass-- either in bootcamp or in paperwork.

Alec heads to his room and flops onto his bed. He thinks about his options.

Nothing really appeals, though. The only thing keeping him sane is his date-- his *meet-up*-- with Magnus tomorrow.

It isn’t a date.

They’re friends and Alec is thrilled with that. Magnus is witty, intelligent, and treats him like a regular guy. He doesn’t fawn or act obsequious. It’s refreshing. A little depressing, if he’s honest. It shouldn’t stand out that someone treats him as a person first, as his status second.

When Alec had asked Magnus to go with him last night, it had been a spur of the moment decision. Sure, he’d been thinking about it, but he’d just decided to go ahead and do it as he was finishing his dinner last night. He really wanted to see the lecture and it seemed like Magnus’s thing. The worst that could happen would be that he’d say no and it wasn’t like Alec had never been turned down
He’d been a little anxious about being turned down by Magnus, though. Thankfully, that hadn’t happened and he was looking forward to tomorrow.

But what to do until then.

It was just after noon and the whole day stretches out before Alec. He could visit Jace at the gym and get a work out in. But, he’d gone for a run this morning and really didn’t feel like it. He could go for a drive out of the city, but that didn’t appeal either. Finally, Alec decides to go to a local indie bookstore and browse, maybe get a cup of coffee and curl up with a good book.

Alec doesn’t get to read as much as he’d like but it's one of his favorite hobbies. Fiction, nonfiction, it didn’t really matter. There’s this little place around the corner, Bopper’s Books, and it’s an Aladdin’s cave of obscure titles impossible to find elsewhere in every genre imaginable. Alec has spent his fair share of hours in the dusty little shop, the smell of parchment and ink comforting.

He eats a slice of cold pizza standing in the kitchen before leaving.

The walk is only a few minutes and before long, Alec is walking into the bookstore. The staff is nice but know when to stay away and Alec is thankful as he’s left alone.

He spends an hour looking through the shop, choosing a couple of books. There’s a pirate historical romance and a YA sci-fi book that looks promising. He’s walking towards the counter when he sees a nonfiction book on environmentalism and picks it up, spontaneously. He pays with little fanfare and is soon walking back out into the June sunshine, heading towards Uptown Java.

To other people, today might be boring, but it’s probably one of his favorite ways to spend his time. Coffee and a good book. That’s really all he needs to be happy.

Alec spends the rest of his day at the coffee shop until closing, ignoring the outside world, absorbed in the pages of his book. Luke looks over a few times during the late afternoon and evening, marveling at how Alec could shut out the rest of the world.

But, then, he’s had a lot of practice. Luke and Clary leave him be, refilling his drink as they notice it disappearing. It’s 9pm and the shop is just closing when Alec lifts his head, finishing the romance.

Luke looks at him, eyebrows raised, and he just shrugs, offering a sheepish lopsided smile. “It was a good book. I couldn’t help myself from reading it all.”

“You’re one of the only people I know that can read a book in a single sitting without needing to stop for food or anything,” Luke says with a grin.

“You should try it sometime. It’s one of the best ways to waste an afternoon.”

They say goodbye, Luke refusing Alec's offer to help close, and Alec waves to Clary who’s clearing dishes in the back and walks out into the warm night air.

He’d been so into his book that he hadn’t even taken out his phone since he’d walked in six hours ago. He figures whoever’s trying to reach him can wait a few more minutes and heads back to the apartment, stopping and getting enough Chinese for two on his way home.

Walking into the apartment, he closes the door with his foot, calling out a “Hey, dick, come get dinner,” on his way to the kitchen counter where he lays down a few plastic bags full of steaming
food. Jace comes out of his bedroom in PJs with wet hair, having just gotten home from the gym.

The two of them plate up the food and head to the couch, where they turn the tv on and watch a few episodes of Gilmore Girls before calling it a day. Jace has the gym in the morning and Alec has. Well. Alec has nothing to do but he’s ready for this day to be over so he goes to bed, too.

In his bedroom, Alec takes off his jeans and pulls his shirt over his head, leaving him in just a pair of boxers. He climbs into bed and turns out the light, flicking his phone screen on.

There’s a message from Magnus from earlier this afternoon.

*Do you know what happens when college students show up to class with a clear bottle that isn’t water? I get to listen to a rambling mess of an answer to the simple question about when the Storming of the Bastille occurred. It was brilliant, but still. I’m so glad those days are behind me, darling.*

Alec laughs. Magnus’s job certainly isn’t boring, he’ll give him that.

*That sounds incredible. I didn’t know kids actually got drunk in class.*

*Night, Magnus. Talk to (see?) you tomorrow.*

Alec turns his phone screen off and rolls over, tucking the blanket under his arm.

He falls asleep with a smile on his face.
Chapter 10

Alec wakes up early the next morning, rolling out of bed with a faint groan. Half asleep, he throws on a pair of workout pants, laces up his Nikes, and heads to the kitchen. The sun is just beginning to peak over the horizon. Jace and Alec are up and ready to face the day.

Jace is just finishing the last of his protein shake and looks up when Alec enters the kitchen.

“Hey, bro, what are you doing up so early?”

Alec makes a beeline for the cupboard. Moving over to the sink, he fills his water bottle up.

Without looking up, he grunts out, “Thought I’d go for a run this morning.”

Jace’s eyes light up. “Why don’t you come to the gym with me? I can always spare a few hours to kick your ass.”

Alec opens his mouth to refuse— he’s in damned good shape but he doesn’t literally work out for a living— but abruptly closes it. He’s hanging out with Magnus tonight for the first time properly and a few hours sparring with Jace might ease the tension that’s begun creeping up his spine.

Nonchalantly, he shrugs. “Yeah, okay, man. Sounds good. When do you want to leave?”

Jace looks surprised for a moment— Alec usually takes more convincing— but he’s grinning the next second.

“If you’re ready, we can head in now. I have Raj opening this morning so I don’t have to be in until six.”

Alec goes to his bedroom and grabs his phone, keys, and headphones. He throws on a faded t-shirt and meets Jace in the entryway a few minutes later.

It’s a short distance from their building to Jace’s gym Fuel— a fifteen stroll or just a five minute jog. They’ve barely cleared the front door of their building before Jace is taking off, sprinting down the block. Alec shakes his head head but ups his pace, his long legs letting him catch up to Jace in seconds.

The two of them run through New York, feet pounding against pavement, wide smiles on their faces. It’s only 5:45 and the streets are deserted, only early morning vendors and eateries up at this time. It’s quiet, only their ragged breathing disturbing the calm, and Alec loves it. While he’s used to his solitary runs, and there’s a certain enjoyment in those, he can’t deny that running with Jace brings him back to a simpler time— they took track together in high school and it makes Alec think that those days aren’t a universe away.

They reach Fuel at the same time, with Alec slapping the front door a split second before Jace. The victory is a little hollow as both of them are panting, bending over at the waist trying to get their breath back.

The two of them have always been stubbornly competitive.

After a few minutes, they head in, walking right into Jace’s office.

It never fails to surprise Alec that Jace is a businessman. He turned his lifetime passion of being an
athlete-- with a minor stint at professional rugby-- into a competent business plan. There’s a mile long waiting list to join this exclusive gym. Alec’s relation to Jace might have a little to do with it, but there’s no denying that Jace has built a fantastic fitness center. He has half a dozen employees who teach a variety of classes and the reception area holds a display case with a few dozen awards that Fuel has racked up in a little over five years.

After ditching their stuff in Jace’s office, they head to the third floor where the sparring and weight area is located. Even though it’s so early, the before-work crowd isn’t inconsiderable and the two of them claim the last matted section.

While Jace stays to keep their spot, Alec heads over to the side of the room where various materials like tape, water, and towels are kept. He takes one of the spools of fighter’s tape and works on wrapping one of his hands while he walks back to Jace. He finishes wrapping his hands while Jace is engaged in conversation with a few of his members.

Jace is wearing his ever present cocky grin and stretches a little, bouncing on the balls of his feet as Alec tosses the tape to him. In just a minute the two of them are ready to start.

Alec focuses and when Jace throws the first swing, he’s ready. It’s several minutes of back and forth-- both of them landing lucky hits-- when Alec swipes a foot across the mat and brings Jace down, hard, on his back.

That doesn’t bring Alec instant victory, however, as Jace manages to hit him in the back of the knee, taking him down. They grapple for several minutes-- goddamn Jace is like an eel-- before Alec sees an opening when Jace lets his guard down for half a second.

It’s long enough, though, and Alec straddles Jace’s legs, gets a grip on his arm, and brings his forearm to Jace’s throat.

There’s a beat of silence before several loud cheers echo in the room.

Startled, Alec rolls over and springs to his feet only to see the staff and all of the patrons on this floor applauding his first round win.

Jace has the good grace to look sheepish, shrugging in a what can you do manner. Alec grins while swiping his sweaty hair away his face. Everyone only lingers for a minute before going back to what they were doing, leaving Jace and Alec to themselves.

Alec reaches a hand down to haul Jace up to his feet.

“Oh yeah,” he says, mockingly, “You really kicked my ass.”

Playfully shoving him, Jace shakes his head, ruefully. “I thought you’d gone soft while on tour. I should have known that wouldn’t be the case. How much can you even bench press these days, bro?”

Alec shrugs. “I don’t know. I don’t keep great track. I think I’m up to 180?”

“Damn, son, maybe I should hire you on after you get tired of that singing crap. You could teach some weight lifting classes.”

Alec laughs. “And have to deal with people all day? No thanks. That’s my idea of a nightmare.”

Jace stares at him blankly. “That’s literally your life. You talk to people every single day, strangers, and a lot of the time they’re intruding into personal moments. You handle that just fine. What the hell
would the difference be?"

Scowling, Alec replies, “You know damned well what the difference is. When fans talk to me-- or even the media-- it’s because my music is important to them. I’m always there for personal conversations, not to listen to Chad tell me about his latest beer-fueled score over the weekend.”

Jace snorts. “Alright, you got me there.” There’s a pause before Jace slyly asks, “So no one’s caught your eye? Chads off the list, but what about another guy?”

Alec just shakes his head, though his mind can’t help but flash to Magnus, the traitorous bastard. “No, Jace. I’m not like you. I didn’t meet the love of my life in high school and I’m not pining for a husband of my own. I’m just doing my own thing.”

Jace takes a step back, bringing his hands up in a surrendering gesture.

“Okay, buddy, I was just wondering if there was a chance that you would settle down this decade.”

Alec rolls his eyes. “I’m only twenty-six, Jace. I have plenty of time before I have to find The One. Besides, I’m having plenty of fun exploring my options.”

“Say no more, man. We all know just how much you like not being tied down.”

Alec laughs at Jace’s words but he can’t help but feel a little stung. It’s not Jace’s fault that he doesn’t know that Alec is feeling stifled, like he’s desperately hoping for the next chapter in his life to begin without having any real idea about what to expect in said chapter.

He also doesn’t know that Alec’s been prohibited from working for the next three days and that it might be affecting him a little more than he’d originally thought.

The first round of sparring helped Alec forget all the uncertainty that’s currently plaguing his life: his career and Magnus taking up all available thinking space.

With Jace’s innocuous words, though, Alec can’t help but focus on one of those areas. And it certainly isn’t work.

No, Alec’s thoughts are now filled with plans for tonight. It’s a completely innocent meet-up, most would say dreadfully boring. It’s a lecture at the New York Public Library about a political history topic: fascism.

There’s nothing sexy about that.

Alec hasn’t been so excited about someone new in ages. If he really tried, he might not be able to remember the last time, period. He’s only seen Magnus twice-- once in the middle of the night at a crappy hole-in-the-wall diner and the second time at Uptown Java when he definitely wasn’t dressed to impress.

This will be the third time they’re seeing each other in person, and even with the mountain of texts, something in Alec is decidedly nervous.

Which is utter bullshit but when has life ever obeyed his rules?

Alec doesn’t get nervous about dates. He’s carefully cultivated-- through absurd Lothario rumors and an utter refusal to care about what the press thinks-- a playboy reputation. He likes men, he likes having a good time, and as long as everyone involved consents, there’s nothing to kick up a fuss
about.

His career has enabled him the ability to converse with a range of people about a variety of topics and he’s comfortable in all manner of situations that would send most people heading for the hills. He’s seen-- or done-- it all and Alec two weeks ago wouldn’t have thought it possible that he’d be this wrapped up in a boy, especially when things are so damned platonic.

Alec’s starting to realize that with all of his escapades and one night stands, there’s a definitive line that he hasn’t dared to cross in years. Alec hasn’t thought twice about someone in ages. He’s weirdly excited to see Magnus again-- just the thought of those intelligent eyes and broad shoulders makes him wish the next twelve hours would fly by.

It also ensures that he’s not paying attention, giving Jace the perfect opportunity to knock him flat on his ass.

Alec’s wince is easily ignored as Jace crows about winning the second round. Ever magnanimous, though, he helps Alec back to his feet without hesitation.

“Bro, what the fuck was that? You were wide open and didn’t even see the punch coming.”

Straightening while making sure Jace didn’t bruise his kidney, Alec glares across the mat. “I was preoccupied.”

Brows hitching up almost to his hairline, Jace asks, incredulously, “Oh? And what distracted the great Lightwood from a 2:0 record?”

Stubbornly refusing to acknowledge his increasingly red cheeks, and it’s not just from exertion, Alec’s entire focus is on his hands as he makes sure his tape isn’t coming undone.

“None of your damn business, Wayland. Now, are you going to keep gossiping like my grandmother or are we gonna see who’s best two out of three?”

Jace’s attention shifts as fast as a blink and Alec throws the first punch, landing solidly on Jace’s shoulder. He’s thankful that Jace has always been easily misdirected when his arrogance is under question and then he lets everything else fall away except the need to make sure Jace doesn’t secure bragging rights for the next month.

Because he’s always been a glutton for punishment, Alec drags his already sore body to the second floor where the cardio equipment and regulation-size track is located and runs his usual five miles-- that tension has turned into nervous energy and he needs to burn it off.

By the time he stops the treadmill, he’s taken off his shirt, running in just his athletic leggings and tennis shoes. Breathing heavy, he uses his discarded shirt to mop his face, grimacing as sweat continues to roll down his back. He grabs his water bottle, taking a long drink, and turns around to see a trio of women staring at him.

Thankful for Jace’s excellent vetting practices-- anyone allowed membership here isn’t a crazed fan-- he just gives them a short nod, offering, “Ladies.”

The trio, who looks to be in their early twenties, fall into a fit of giggles and Alec smiles, just a little. He might be gay but it’s good to be appreciated, no matter how shallowly.
Alec makes his way back down to the first floor and leaves without talking to anyone else-- Jace is currently in his advanced yoga class and Alec won’t interrupt him-- and heads outside.

It’s almost nine now and the city is buzzing as people rush off to work or school or wherever the fuck. Alec’s still shirtless but he’s thankful that he’s in the city that never sleeps as no one bats an eye.

About halfway between Fuel and his apartment there’s a smoothie bar and Alec ducks into it as he passes, regretfully putting his gross shirt back on. There’s only a few people in front of him and the line moves fairly quickly.

Alec feels eyes on him and looks up, straight into the phone camera that’s glued onto him. The teenage boy looks abashed but doesn’t stop recording and Alec smirks, blatantly acknowledging that he’s being filmed.

He doesn’t pay any more attention to it, though, as he moves up in line and places an order for an obnoxiously healthy smoothie that would disgust both of his siblings.

He sips it as he leisurely strolls the rest of the way home. No one really pays him any mind and he makes it into his penthouse without talking to anyone else.

He heads straight to the shower, taking longer than usual as his three hour workout has left him feeling rather disgusting. When he walks out of his bathroom almost an hour later in just a towel tied at his hip-- he wants to stop by the kitchen and start brewing some coffee-- he shrieks and holds onto his towel in a death grip.

Simon is sitting on the kitchen counter, nonchalantly swinging his legs against the cupboards, eating Alec’s leftover Chinese from last night.

Alec sighs in resignation. That’d been damned good food and he was looking forward to leftovers.

“What the hell are you doing here, Simon. Wait-- how the fuck did you get in?”

With a mouthful of noodles, Simon gets out, “I was bored and figured I’d see how your forced break was going. Izzy gave me a key over the winter.”

Alec heads towards his Keurig and makes a cup of coffee, relaxing as the scent fills the kitchen.

“It’s going fine. I’m in one piece and I haven’t burned anything to the ground.”

Simon gives him a onceover, at first to make sure he’s not internally dying--too much at least-- before his gaze turns appreciative.

“Damn, dude, I didn’t know you’d been working out so much. You look like one of those Greek statues they have in the museums. You know, the homoerotic ones with the weird emphasis on veins?”

Alec takes a fortifying sip of his coffee before turning around with a pleading expression.

“Please shut up, Simon. It’s too early to deal with your weirdness.”

Simon jumps off the counter, throwing the styrofoam container in the trash before dusting his hands off in a dramatic fashion.

“So, friend, what do you want to do today? I thought we could have some bro-bonding time that
includes Netflix and PJs.”

Alec shakes his head, reluctant grin gracing his mouth. He doesn’t respond, just goes back to his bedroom, coffee in tow, and ignores Simon enthusiastically shouting, “Yes, I know you love me Alec!”

Alec changes into sweats and a ragged tank top with the arms cut out and checks his messages—nothing—before settling on the other end of the couch from Simon. Simon’s queued up the latest episode of Stranger Things and he hits play without delay.

It’s always surprising but while Simon usually loves to talk, when he’s watching tv he’s completely silent, total focus on the television. Alec, for his part, never likes talking, and they spend the rest of the morning into the afternoon watching most of season one, Simon’s legs over Alec’s where they meet in the middle of the couch.

It’s a little past four when Alec comes out of his Netflix daze and moves to get up.

“No,” Simon whines. “What are you doing? We’re only two episodes from the season finale.”

Alec kicks free of the blanket that he’d taken from the back of the couch a couple of hours ago and straightens, stretching his back, popping his neck from side to side.

“Sorry, Si, but I have plans tonight and I need to get ready.”

Simon immediately perks up. “Oh? What kind of plans?”

Already regretting opening his mouth, Alec says, “I’m hanging out with someone in a couple of hours.”

Simon practically salivates with this new knowledge.


“Just a friend. NYPL. Socio-historical lecture. Because you act like this.”

Simon leaps up from the couch, blanket falling mournfully to the ground.

“A friend? You have other friends,” Simon asks incredulously.

Starting for his bedroom, Alec throws over his shoulder, “Yes, Simon, as much as I know it hurts, you are not my only source of friendship. Heartbreaking, I know.”

“Who is this friend and why am I just now hearing about them?”

Bracing himself, Alec mutters, “Magnus.”

Simon shrieks loud enough to wake the dead and Alec studiously doesn’t look back, going straight for his closet.

There’s no escaping Simon now, though, as he follows Alec into the walk-in closet the size of a generous bedroom.

“Magnus? The guy who calls you Alexander in a way that doesn’t sound horrible? You have a date, dude!”

“No, I don’t. We are friends, Simon. I asked him to meet up with me for this program at the library
and that’s it. He’s a history professor and I thought he’d enjoy it as much as I would. That’s it. End of story.”

Simon’s digging through Alec’s clothes and only responds absentmindedly. “You know you have the hots for him. I’ve never seen you so excited to meet a guy, even if it was a friend for a boring ass lecture on something that normal people don’t even know exists. Either this Magnus guy is a huge nerd just like you or he accepted your invitation just to spend time with you.” Simon looks excitedly over his shoulder towards Alec, who’s pulled a forest green button down off the hook. “Or, he’s both, and the two of you will live happily ever after in nerd bliss.”

Alec looks up and their eyes meet in the mirror as he holds up the shirt against his torso.

“Shut up, Simon.”

Simon sighs, long and drawn out, but his attention moves to other things fast enough. He shakes his head firmly before reaching out and plucking the shirt out of Alec’s hands.

“Not this one,” he says. “Hold on a minute.”

Alec stands by the mirror, watching Simon paw through his wardrobe. After a few minutes, he brings an outfit back and Alec has to admit that he doesn’t hate it. It’s simple, just skinny jeans and a slouchy coral v-neck with a plain black blazer. Paired with his converse, it’s casual enough for a relaxed meet-up at a library but dressy enough to look like he didn't just roll out of bed.

Alec changes, not bothering to leave the closet-- Simon and him have seen each other in all matter of undress-- and when he turns back to the mirror, Alec likes what he sees.

Simon wolf whistles and while Alec rolls his eyes, he can’t deny that it’s a confidence booster. He’s meeting Magnus in-- he checks his watch-- an hour and those fucking butterflies are back.

Simon might be effusive, but he’s a good friend, and he throws and arm around Alec’s shoulders as they both look in the mirror.

“No need to be nervous, dude, it’s just hanging out. What, two hours of listening to some old guy talk about history and then the two of you exchange pleasantries and call it a night. There’s no pressure, here. You can’t even talk for most of the evening and if things end up clashing or not feeling right, you can dip out right after the program without consequences.

“But things will go okay. Anyone who can get away with calling you Alexander and makes you all dreamy-eyed has to have something to offer. Just go and have fun and don’t forget to text me so I know you didn’t actually meet with a serial killer or stalker fan.”

Alec shakes his head but bumps his hip against Simon’s and there’s a few minutes of companionable silence.

Eventually, Alec pulls away and straightens his lapels, giving himself a final once-over before turning around. Simon follows him out of his bedroom and flops down on the couch. Alec has no doubt that when he returns later that night, Simon will be in the exact same spot surrounded by empty takeout containers and smelling like regret.

Alec grabs his keys, wallet, and phone and heads out the door to meet Magnus.
Chapter 11

It takes forty minutes to get to the library and two subway changes. Alec is still woefully early, though, walking up to the front steps a quarter of an hour before they’d agreed to meet. He pulls out his phone to check his notifications and his phone is silent. There haven’t been any texts from Magnus today and Alec has the errant thought that Magnus might be avoiding him, that he might not show up this evening.

He’s glaring at his phone, already planning on just how embarrassing it will be to walk back to his place with Simon still hanging about, when a voice breaks through.

“Good evening, darling. Looks like we both like to be early,” a smooth voice says.

Alec looks up and sees Magnus. His breath stutters.

Magnus is wearing black trousers cuffed at the ankle with black ankle boots with a low heel. His shirt is a swirling mix of gold and red and there’s matching blond highlights running through his hair. His makeup is sharp and flawless. Alec’s brain short circuits a bit and there’s a beat of silence before he comes back online, a genuine smile lighting up his face.

“Magnus, hey. You’re looking well.” He fumbles a bit at the end, but Magnus’s smile doesn’t falter as he gives Alec a once-over.

Magnus waves a hand dismissively. “No need to flatter me. I’ve been running around all day like a chicken with its head cut off. My students were exceptionally needy today. Inconvenient that it was today of all days, but it’s good to know that they do care a bit more than their blank faces suggest most of the time.”

Alec lets out a breath as he processes Magnus’s words. There’s a pinch of relief knowing that Magnus was busy. He wasn’t actively ignoring Alec. Although in the next second that turns to sardonic self-chastisement. They’re barely friends and Alec is worried about Magnus losing interest? This isn’t high school and he needs to get a grip.

The two of them stare at each other for a long minute, a bubble of stillness as people bustle around them, heading home from work or out to dinner.

Alec shakes himself and nods towards the glass doors of the library.

“Ready to head inside?”

Magnus nods once and smiles, turning with a bit of flair, and holds the door open for Alec when they reach it.

Alec swoons a little at such a simple gesture and tries to ignore how such a little thing makes him warm.

The New York Public Library is buzzing. There are children in one area enthralled with story-time and teens sitting on their phones looking disillusioned and bored in the lobby. There are a number of adults standing at the checkout line and as they walk through the library towards the event room, Alec’s eyes catch on a book display.

Alec keeps up with a handful of writers, is passionate about a range of topics. The display looks to be about new nonfiction and as he looks over the book covers, his gaze lands on a name. Magnus,
who was keeping stride with him, falters imperceptibly as he, too, takes a closer look at the line of books.

Alec takes in the title as he picks it up.

*European Conquerors: The Rise of European Imperialism in the Seventeenth Century.*

It looks to be an anthology and Magnus’s name is the last one, in the place where the most well-known academics are always put, as a sort of literary coup de grace. Alec doesn’t know Magnus’s last name, but it’s not like his is a well-known first name.

Alec repeats it in his head. *Magnus Bane.* Looking over at the man in question, he’s fiddling with his ear cuff, studiously not returning Alec’s questioning gaze.

There’s a moment of silence as Alec reads the synopsis, glances through the book. Finally, he looks up to see Magnus’s eyes already on him.

His lips quirk up as he raises a brow. “I mean, obviously you’re a brilliant professor, but I didn’t know just how well-regarded you were in your field.”

Magnus shakes his head a little, smiles as he sees Alec tuck the copy under his arm. He starts speaking as they continue to make their way to the meeting room.

“And why would you, darling? We travel in very different circles. You might be well-read but I’ve chosen a career as an academic. I don’t dedicate my life to things that I’m not very good at.”

Alec huffs out a laugh, hums a little in agreement. It’s only a minute later that they’re entering the room. It’s one of the library’s bigger meeting rooms, with a projector hook-up on the ceiling and the screen already pulled down. It’s only about a third full, as they’re just under half an hour early, and Alec faces a bit of a conundrum.

It’s impossible to deny that if anyone saw him, this could turn into a circus within minutes. Alec has had to give up a lot of things for his career but he loves going to lectures and museums and movie theatres— he’s just gained a better strategy these past few years.

Seeming to pick up on Alec’s thoughts, Magnus falls back a step, following Alec as he makes his way to a row in the middle at the very end, opposite from the door, by the window. They sit down on the hard plastic chairs and there’s a moment of silence.

Alec is overtly aware of Magnus sitting right next to him, so close that their shoulders brush together. He smells his cologne— sandalwood— and is a little overwhelmed.

Alec can’t remember the last time a guy affected him like this.

He doesn’t have long to think about the repercussions of that, though, because Magnus turns in his chair, angling towards him, and gives him a less-than-subtle once-over.

“So, darling, tell me. How did such a famous celebrity become so interested in scholarly pursuits?”

Alec laughs a little. “It’s a pretty boring story, really. I started singing when I was sixteen and by the time I graduated high school, I was lined up to tour and record for the next few years. It seemed liked every moment was taken up with making sure I stayed relevant back in those days. College was out of the question, but I was class valedictorian. I was a giant nerd, really, and I figured just because I couldn’t get a degree didn’t mean that I couldn’t learn on my own time, about things I was really interested in. Reading, and documentaries, really became an escape from the crazy world I was not...
only catapulted into, but was kind of made the king?

“I could learn about Chinese emperors from thousands of years ago or how the brain works. I love history, though, because it’s just so vast, but I dabble in a lot of different areas. Plus, I like to read fiction. Honestly, you name it, I’ve probably read a book on it. I guess, reading is just a passion of mine. I always like to pop into bookstores in every country I tour and I’ve held a NYPL library card since I could walk. I make sure to keep it renewed and while it’s gotten harder the past few years, when I’m in the city for a while, I always visit. They have really excellent collections and their programming is always full of interesting events.”

Alec breaks off, realizing that he’s been talking nonstop. He looks over at Magnus, expecting to see glazed eyes and regret. However, Magnus is looking at him attentively, smiling just a bit.

Alec gets a little lost in those eyes, such a deep brown, and jolts a little when Magnus starts talking.

“I’m proud of you, Alexander,” he says warmly. “It couldn’t have been easy being so young and then thrust into such a world. It’s great to have that anchor that lets you take a step away every once in a while.”

Alec flushes a little, uncomfortable with the praise. He’s received every possible compliment in every combination, but just a few kind words from Magnus has heat building in his cheeks.

He clears his throat.

“Thanks, Magnus. I know it’s not as impressive as you-- a professor at Columbia for fuck’s sake-- but I enjoy it. Speaking of, what made you go into academia?”

Magnus barks out a laugh. “Well, I promise you I never intended to follow this path. In high school, I admit I was a bit of a dismal student. I aced my classes but it was purely because I didn’t have to work for it. School was easy and it left me with entirely too much time to get up to no good. I hung out with a bit of a bad crowd who thought school and homework was ‘lame’ and useless. I usually felt like a criminal working on my papers and assignments in secret.

“It was my senior year and by the grace of God, I had a teacher who took an interest in me. She had to be seventy-- she wore those tortoise shell glasses that hang from the neck-- and she told me that I had potential. Now being a snot-nosed teenager, I curled my lip at the motivational speech and dashed off to meet my friends. Yet, she didn’t give up. Slowly but surely, I started pulling away from those friends and staying after school with her. She would grade papers while I worked on homework and, eventually, college applications. She must have written one hell of a recommendation because I landed a spot at Yale and I haven’t looked back.”

Alec takes in what Magnus has just said, impressed.

“It had to be hard moving to a brand new city, right? Especially since you’d left your old friends behind even before graduation.”

Magnus hums, thinking. “I think it would have been harder if I wouldn’t have made such great friends right off the bat. My roommate freshman year was a transplant from London and while he’s insufferable, he’s also the best friend I could ever ask for-- just don’t tell him that. We both teach at Columbia and it’s been, my God, over ten years now that we’ve known each other.”

“Wait, where are you from,” Alec asks, backtracking a little as he realizes that he’d just assumed that Magnus had upended his life to move to university.

Magnus smirks. “New York born and bred, darling. I live in Brooklyn, now, and honestly can’t
imagine myself living anywhere else. I went to England for my doctorate and while lovely, there’s just something about this city that I don’t think I can escape-- or that I would even if I could.”

Alec’s just opening his mouth to ask a question-- the more he knows, the more he wants to know-- when a voice comes on over the speaker.

There’s a few seconds of feedback from the microphone before it’s clear.

“Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the New York Public Library. This evening we have Dr. Lorenzo Rey who’s here to talk about the history of fascism and its role in today’s political climate. Lorenzo is an adjunct professor at NYU and wrote his thesis on the topic.”

There’s a smattering of applause and Alec sinks down a little in his seat, trying his best to remain unobtrusive. He claps a few times but notices that Magnus doesn’t, that he just recrosses his legs and leans back in his seat. It’s a little incongruous that he’d be so rude, especially given everything Alec’s seen so far about the man, but he shrugs it off. Not everyone needs to applaud all of the time, after all.

Dr. Rey talks for an hour. His presentation is informative and Alec wishes he’d thought to bring a notebook to write down some of the more interesting tidbits. He has a tendency to speak directly from the slides-- breaking off only to share personal anecdotes that are probably meant to be funny and endearing, but all in all it’s not the worst lecture Alec’s ever been to.

The speaker opens the floor up for questions and Magnus’s hand immediately shoots up, along with a half a dozen others. If Alec didn’t know better, he’d think that this Dr. Rey was trying to ignore Magnus, as he calls on every other person before finally acknowledging him.

Magnus hasn’t gotten impatient or frustrated. He’s been calmly keeping his hand raised, waiting to be called on.

With an infinitesimal pause that Alec doubts anyone but the three of them notice, Magnus starts speaking. His question appears to have several parts and though Alec is obviously no slouch, he can hardly keep up with the esoteric language.

Magnus is the picture of earnest, appearing like the proverbial scholar just trying to gain answers to a topic of extreme interest. Alec detects the edges of a smirk curling on Magnus’s lips, though, and wonders what he’s missing.

Rey takes a few long minutes to answer, stumbling over his words a few times. At this point Alec isn’t paying too much attention to the content, trying to figure out the dynamics and hidden meanings between these two.

There’s a pause and Alec shakes his head a little, turning in to see that Dr. Rey is apparently finished with his response. Alec can’t be sure but it looks like he’s sweating.

Alec looks over at Magnus and sees nothing but professional calm, though he can’t deny that smug tilt of his head.

The program ends just a minute later and they stay sitting while everyone else floods out, some people walking up to the front of the room to speak to the presenter more directly. It had been a packed room-- over a hundred people-- and once there’s only a dozen or so people lingering, Alec stands up, Magnus following suit.

“So,” Alec starts. “What did you think of the lecture?”
Magnus hums, narrowing his eyes a little as he thinks. “There was a lot of good information. Overall, I’d say he did a competent job.”

They walk out of the room into the busy center of the library. There are people everywhere and Alec’s heart warms-- he loves libraries and it’s good to see one thriving.

He looks over at Magnus as they start walking towards the self checkout kiosk-- Alec still needs to get the book he’d picked up before the program.

“Competent? That’s more generous than I expected. I’m fairly sure I detected some tension between the two of you.”

Chuckling, Magnus responds, “What you detected, darling, was professional rivalry. That I’m winning. Really, it’s not even a rivalry. It’s just Rey oozing his envy all over the place.’”

Magnus breaks off and gives Alec a look as he realizes where they’re headed. His eyes dart down to the book that Alec’s been holding onto since they walked in the door.

“You don’t have to actually checkout that book, you know. I’m sure you have better things on your reading list than a dry anthology about imperial conquests several centuries ago.”

Alec just hums a little as he reaches for his wallet, taking out his library card. “No, this has just moved to the number one spot. I won’t guarantee that I’ll read it all-- but I’m definitely going to at least read your chapter.” He throws an open grin over to Magnus.

There’s no response. Magnus just fiddles with that ear cuff and smiles a little, seemingly to himself. Alec quickly scans the book and takes his receipt before facing his new friend completely.

It’s just shy of eight and the sun’s still up. They’ve been together a little over two hours but Alec’s not ready for the evening to end. Magnus is quickly becoming an endless fascinating puzzle to him-- the more he knows, the more he wants to know. Magnus’s intense focus during the lecture was endearing and... a little hot, if he’s being honest with himself.

Sue him, he’s always been attracted to the smart ones. There’s just something about intelligence-- as long as it’s balanced out with warmth and humor-- that never fails to make him a little hot under the collar.

Clearing his throat, Alec chastises himself and reiterates that they are just friends. Nothing more. Magnus is looking at him expectantly and Alec says the first thing that comes to mind.

“I don’t know what your schedule is like but if you don’t have a too early morning, we could get ice cream? I know this little mom and pop shop just a block or two over.”

Before Magnus can respond, Alec rushes out, “But, there’s no pressure obviously. We only agreed to the library part. Who knows, you might already have plans for the rest of the night.”

Magnus smiles at him and as they walk out of the library.

“I do have plans. It looks like there’s a little ice cream shop that I simply have to try,” he says with a grin.

Alec’s nerves settle a little and he nods, smiling back at this entrancing man before him. “Yeah, okay. Let’s go.”

They start walking down the block. The streets are busy and the two of them stay close, walking in
sync. Their hands brush together, once, and heat climbs up the back of Alec’s neck.

Neither one acknowledges it.

It’s only a few minutes later that Alec’s swinging open a cheery blue door, hears the faint tinkling of a bell chiming above their heads. Magnus nods once to thank Alec for holding the door open for him.

Alec’s studying him closely, gauging his reaction. The place only has four tables, all of them currently unoccupied. It’s really not trendy, just a hole-in-the-wall ice cream parlor that serves homemade ice cream— the best he’s ever had. The decor is eccentric with jarring patterns and clashing colors. It’s hideous but fun and their flavors match the ambiance.

Magnus looks around for a moment before turning to Alec, who’s just inside the door.

“Well, darling, I have to admit that even when you said mom and pop, I wasn’t expecting a place so hidden away. I’ve probably walked right past this place a dozen times and never given it a second thought. It’s cute, though.” He laughingly grimaces. “In a kitschy sort of way, of course.”

Alec laughs. “Their decorating is a bit of a train wreck, but I love it. It really fits the owners.”

The two of them walk up to the counter and look over the dozen flavors displayed below. Against the back wall there’s a menu with a few other treats— sundaes, blizzards, milkshakes, and some novelty desserts like frozen chocolate-covered bananas.

There are a few of the classics like vanilla and rocky road, but one reason Alec loves this place is because their offerings can be a little out of the box. There’s a lavender, pistachio rose, and even the ubiquitous chocolate and bacon. Alec shudders just thinking about trying that heinous flavor.

Magnus’s eyes are roving over the shop, looking at the ice cream and the menu, occasionally getting stuck at a newly seen piece of decor, when the door behind the counter swings open to reveal a graying man with two tattoo sleeves, a buzzcut, and a septum piercing.

The man laughs delightedly as he takes in his latest customers.

“If it isn’t Alec. Boy, it’s been too long since you showed your miserable face in these parts.”

Alec laughs as he walks closer to the counter, leaning over it to give the man a bear hug.

“Hey, Marv,” he says, pulling back. “I just got back from work and figured I’d stop by.”

He can feel Magnus’s eyes on his back but doesn’t pull his attention from Marv. There’s a minute of pleasantries before the bell above the front door chimes open and an elderly woman as round as she is tall walks in. She has to be eighty if she’s a day, but she has good bones— she doesn’t look over sixty-five. She breaks into a smile as she takes in the customer at the register.

“Alec,” she cries and toddles forward. Alec meets her halfway, bending down to return her hug. She only comes up to his chest.

“Anna,” Alec says warmly. “Long time, no see.”

Anna slaps at his arm, playfully, as she glares at him. “A bit more than a long time. It has to be a year since you last graced our place with that handsome face.”

Smiling, Alec just offers, “You know how work is. You put your head down to finish a project and
before you know it, it’s been months and you’re just catching up to real life.”

Both Anna and Marv laugh. “We know all about that, son. The first few years we owned this shop, we barely took enough time away to sleep.” He points a gnarled finger at Alec. “Just make sure you don’t run yourself ragged. You have to take time for the important things and fuck knows work isn’t that.”

Alec laughs a little and when he looks up, his eyes meet Magnus’s. Alec’s breath catches, just for a second. He doesn’t know what Magnus is thinking, but Alec can’t help but picture a life in the slower lane, even if it’s just for a moment. He won’t ever leave the industry, but it does sound idyllic, imagining coming home from either a long day at the studio or from getting his ass handed to him from corporate execs, and there’s a man waiting for him with a soft kiss and lingering touch.

A man that looks suspiciously like Magnus.

The moment, whatever the hell it was, is broken in a second as Anna turns to Magnus and takes him in. She goes in for a hug and, though obviously surprised, Magnus returns it, smiling at Alec above her head.

She pulls back and pinches his arm, lightly, obviously admiring his muscles.

“Well, I see you brought a fella around, dear. It’s about time. God knows Marv and me have been wondering when you’d settle down with a nice man.”

Alec chokes on nothing.

“Uh, no, Anna. This is Magnus. He’s just a friend.”

Anna walks over to Marv, behind the counter, and they share a look. She throws on an apron and washes her hands before turning back to them.

“Whatver you say, dear.”

She smiles as she says it, but then she winks at Magnus and Alec wishes the ground would swallow him up.

Magnus truly is a friend, and while Alec can’t help but think of what it could be like to have more, he doesn’t want to scare Magnus off before they’ve finished hanging out for the first damn time.

Magnus takes in stride, just raises a brow to Alec before laughing it off. Alec knows it’s stupid, but he feels a little disappointed at Magnus’s obvious brush-off.

He rallies instantaneously and clears his throat. He tilts his head to Magnus, towards the tubs of ice cream, a silent question.

Magnus nods and they walk up to the register. Alec orders a double scoop of cookies n’ cream in a cup while Magnus chooses clementine pomegranate in a cone.

Alec pays, brushing off Magnus’s offer, and sits down at the table nearest the door. It’s in front of the window, a perfect opportunity to people watch as the sun starts to dip in the sky.

There’s a few minutes of silence as they get settled and take the first few tastes of their ice cream.

Finally, Alec can’t take it anymore.

“So, what do you think?”
Magnus takes another lick of his cone, tongue slowly trailing up the side where some had started to melt down, and hums.

Alec feels death.

“It’s delicious, of course. I should have known that you’d be right. This is definitely my new favorite dessert stop.”

Alec blinks a few times, trying to break his focus on Magnus’s mouth.

He grins. “I’m glad you like it. This is one of a kind, that’s for sure.”

“You’ll get no disagreement from me. How did you even hear about this place, darling?”

“I was just strolling through the city one morning, looking for inspiration. I had planned to write all day-- this was during recording for my fourth album-- and I saw this bright blue door tucked into an alley. I was curious, so I checked it out. They’re open twenty-four hours a day, and I just set my songbook on a table and walked up to order. It was fun and I thought that even if I didn’t get anything done for the day, I could enjoy some ice cream. Turns out, Marv and Anna were both working that day and I ended up talking to them for a few hours. They’re a hoot.”

Magnus takes another obscene lick and laughs. “I got that impression, really just from the shop.” He pauses, sucks some ice cream that’s dripped onto his thumb into his mouth.

Alec’s blood rushes south and he starts reciting lyrics from his first album as a distraction.

“Excuse me if I’m wrong, but I get the impression that Marv and Anna don’t know that you’re famous.”

Alec huffs out a laugh, takes a breath. He’s comfortable answering this question.

“They don’t,” he says, bluntly. “I think they think I’m like a Wall Street broker or some shit. They just know I work a lot. Nothing else.”

Magnus studies Alec for a minute and Alec looks down at his ice cream a few seconds in, taking a few large spoonfuls as he waits for a response.

“It must be nice to be anonymous here,” Magnus says softly.

Alec’s gaze shoots up and his eyes bore into Magnus’s for a moment.

“Yeah,” he breathes. “I’m used to being recognized anywhere I go. I like to savor the moments when I can just be, when I’m just one man among a million. It sounds like bullshit I know, but these simple times keep me sane.”

Magnus gets it. It’s only a piece of the bigger puzzle, a little hint at his life, but Magnus understands that his life isn’t completely his own. It’s nice to know there are still people who see Alec as a person.

He’d been running out of hope.

Magnus seems uncharacteristically fidgety for a minute, his hand lingering in the air before returning to the table in a loose fist.

He smiles at Alec.
“Thank you for sharing this with me.”

Alec immediately nods. “Of course. I know we just met and that we’re new friends, but I hope that we can be friends long-term, Magnus. I like hanging out with you and hope we can do something again.”

Magnus finishes his cone and stands up to throw the last of it in the trash. When he comes back to the table, he’s smiling, softly.

He’s beautiful, Alec thinks.

“I like hanging out with you, too, Alexander. I want to be friends with you. I wouldn’t have given you my number if I didn’t see something worth pursuing.”

He’s probably grinning stupidly but Alec can’t find it in himself to give a fuck.

“Great. I’m glad we’re on the same page, Magnus.”

It’s quiet, both of them taking in the night, watching people rush by outside, as Alec finishes his own ice cream. This quiet is nice. It’s different than what he’s used to. Alec loves silence when he’s by himself but he’s found that when he’s with other people, there’s a constant need to fill the space. Not by him, but whoever’s he’s with always talks. They can’t just stand still for a moment and enjoy the peace. It’s by turns saddened and pissed him off. These days, it’s just annoying when someone won’t shut up.

He’s glad Magnus can enjoy the quiet, too.

Eventually, they stand up and head out the door, Alec leaving a hundred on the table after Magnus is outside.

He hurries to catch up to him and breathes in the cool air. There’s not quite as many people out now. It’s just Alec and Magnus standing still as people walk past them.

It’s a moment Alec savors, commits to memory. This is the first time he’s been with anyone new in a strictly platonic sense in longer than he cares to remember. It fills his chest with warmth to know that there’s potential here for a real connection, no matter what kind.

His thoughts break off as he hears Magnus clear his throat.

“So, darling, I was thinking we could meet for lunch one day next week. I don’t know what your schedule is like, but I’ll probably be living at the university next week, but I’d still like to make some time to see you again.”

Alec nods, probably more enthusiastically than strictly needed. “Yeah, that sounds great. What day works for you? I’m pretty flexible.”

Magnus’s eyes squint adorably as he thinks. “I have a standing lunch on Mondays and office hours all afternoon Tuesday. What about Wednesday? There’s this little diner on campus with the best burgers.”

“That sounds perfect. I do love a good burger, you know,” Alec says, delighted.

Magnus nods, dryly. “I had heard that, yes. What do you say to meeting there around 1:30? It’s summer, so campus is usually pretty dead. There shouldn’t be a lot of people there who could recognize you.”
Alec nods, gratefully. “That works. Thanks for thinking of that.”

“Of course, darling, goodness knows I don’t want to be responsible for a riot on Columbia’s grounds. Think of my reputation, after all,” he says with a joking grin.

“Right,” Alec rolls his eyes. “You’re just protecting yourself.”

There’s a beat of silence. This is usually the part where, if this was a date, Alec would lean in and kiss him. This isn’t a date, though, and Alec is at a loss. Thankfully, Magnus steps up.

“I had a wonderful time, Alec, but I need to be heading home. I have that dreaded 8 a.m. class in the morning and I need my beauty sleep if I’m to be presentable for my students. Goodnight, darling.”

Magnus takes a step backward, winking.

“See you, Wednesday.”

Alec nods, unspeaking, and Magnus turns around and heads down the street. He looks relaxed and confident and Alec notices a few heads turn as he passes a few people, street lights showing both men and women taking a second look.

Alec sympathizes.

Alec stands for a moment, letting the last few hours play over in his mind before he turns around and starts heading towards the subway station.

It’s been an exciting day but he’s ready to head home and crash.

He only hopes Simon is already asleep. He doesn’t want to be confronted with an endless string of questions, no matter how well-intentioned.

This thing-- this friendship-- with Magnus is so new and so are the feelings it’s dredging up. Alec wants to sit on tonight for a while. It feels so fragile. It’s just his, no one else's. He doesn’t think he wants anyone else to know about it yet.

It’s just him and Magnus for now, in a little bubble.

Alec smiles, content at the image.

He walks quietly down the block, minding his own business.

He doesn’t hear the flash of a camera down the block, doesn’t feel the eyes following him from the ice cream parlor.
Chapter 12

Magnus’s Friday goes as usual: he wakes up at an ungodly hour but his scowl soon transforms into a smile as he looks through his phone’s notifications. There’s a text message from Alec timestamped just before midnight.

*I had a really good time tonight, Magnus. I can’t wait for lunch next week.*

Magnus relaxes against his mountain of pillows, using the hand not holding his phone to rub the sleep from his eyes.

He takes a few minutes to respond, finally typing *I had a lovely time too, darling. Wednesday can’t get here fast enough.*

Unfortunately, he has a roomful of no doubt eager students waiting on him, so Magnus climbs out of bed and goes through his morning routine. After checking today’s weather, he dashes to his closet and pulls his Alexander McQueen raincoat from its hanger.

He leaves the house with ten minutes to spare and decides that’s enough time to swing by Starbucks. Thankfully, the line isn’t too horrendously long and it only takes a few minutes to order and grab his coffee. Magnus is just taking a sip of his venti iced americano when the passing newspaper stand stops him in his tracks.

He comes to a halt and inches closer, looking furtively in both directions. Thankfully, everyone else out this early has places to be and no one pays him any mind as he reaches out and picks up the magazine whose cover had caught his attention.

It’s a tabloid, one of the sleazy ones who make their money using morally questionable methods with photographers willing to do anything to hit pay-dirt. In bold letters the headline screams *America’s Favorite Superstar Out on the Town with Mystery Man.*

Magnus folds the magazine in half and hurriedly pays for it, walking just a little faster to campus, especially as rain starts peppering down. He’s very aware of his surroundings but thankfully doesn’t notice any paps in the bushes or anyone looking at him with more than casual interest.

He makes it to his office twenty minutes before his class is due to start and tosses his briefcase on the chair by the door before placing his coffee and magazine on his desk. He doesn’t even take the time to pull off his coat before he’s unfolding the paper and taking in the cover in more detail than he’d been able to on the street.

Underneath the huge headline is a picture of him and Alec from the previous night. It’s blurry as fuck, grainy to the point of being almost unrecognizable. It helps that this particular picture was taken just a little too far from a streetlamp, the darkness helping to disguise him. He’s walking away, head turned towards the ice cream shop and Alec is standing in the middle of the sidewalk watching him leave. Alec is far clearer, standing just under the light. Magnus can’t help but smile a little as he sees that Alec had lingered, just a minute, watching him walk away.

The smile drops from his face in the next minute as he thinks through the ramifications of this photo. Magnus isn’t an idiot. He knows that being a celebrity isn’t all it’s cracked up to be and the paparazzi are one of the biggest disadvantages to fame. He’s been a fan of Alec’s long enough to realize that Alec plays his celebrity up quite well- he knows how to give an interesting soundbite and keep everyone wanting more. However, he also guards his privacy intently and needs time to be
mundane-- last night was evidence of that. For God’s sake, the man had gone to one of the busiest libraries in the country and had done a remarkable job of fading into the background. He’s not a novice at this shit.

But Magnus is. Magnus has never had to worry that a date or the day-to-day minutiae of his life would fall under a microscope that the whole world loved to peer through.

It’s a little unsettling.

Magnus doesn’t hide but he also likes his personal life to be kept just that. Personal. There are one or two skeletons rattling around in his closet and he doesn’t want anyone to find them.

He’s spent quite a lot of energy laying them to rest, thank you very much.

Magnus simply can’t be flippant about this. He likes Alec and he hadn’t been lying when he’d said he had a good time.

The question is, how much is he willing to deal with for the sake of possibility? He’s barely friends with Alec-- is he willing to put himself out there, deal with the pressure and scrutiny that an association with America’s musical darling would bring?

It’s a lot to potentially handle.

If he’s being honest with himself though, Magnus had already made up his mind when he’d first given his number to Alec at Uptown Java. It’s just that this is a visceral reminder than he and Alec and whatever this thing is between them doesn't exist in a vacuum. It's a warning that things can-- and most likely will one day-- get very messy.

Magnus glances briefly at the clock and sees that he only has ten minutes before he needs to leave for class.

He spends that time reading the two page article, noting in relief that the press really doesn’t have anything on him except a blurry photograph of his back. Everything is supposition and innuendo. He’s just mentioned as Lightwood's flavor du jour-- Magnus scoffs. As if he’s anyone’s boytoy.

Grabbing his coffee, he’s just about to leave his office, leaving the trashy tabloid on his desk, when his phone rings. As he looks down at the display, he’s both surprised and not when Alexander pops up on the screen.

Lightwood must be a pro at damage control by now.

He debates on just not answering-- he has class in six minutes and his career always comes first-- but something tugs at him and before he knows it, he’s swiping right and accepting the call.

“Alexander,” he says warmly.

“How are you this morning?”

“Magnus, hey. How are you this morning?”

“Magnus raises a brow but can’t help but smile. Alec is trying to be blithe and breezy but he can detect the tense undertone in his voice. This definitely isn’t a social call.

“Oh, I’m fine darling. I’m actually just leaving my office now to head towards class. Can’t keep those eager minds waiting. On today’s syllabus, we’re discussing Napoleon. There’s so much written about him but I prefer a little mystery in a man, don’t you?” Magnus can’t resist teasing Alec, just a little. It’s a serious topic, but if he can laugh about it to anyone, it should be the person who got him
into this mess.

He hears Alec’s sharp intake of breath, can only imagine his wince.

“So you’ve seen that magazine article this morning?”

Magnus hums, holding his phone between cheek and shoulder as he opens the building’s door and starts walking up the stairs to the second floor.

“Yes, Alexander, I did see a little article about your latest conquest. It was rather vague, though.”

Alec blows out a breath. “I am so sorry, Magnus. I know that we’ve just become friends and that this is a lot to put on your shoulders for someone you barely know. So far, they only have your silhouette. If you wanted to put a stop to things, if this isn’t okay with you, I completely understand—”

“Alec.”

Alec’s voice comes to a halt and the silence on the line is a little jarring. Magnus has a split second to reconsider, but he’s already made up his mind. Really, it wasn’t even a question. Magnus stands just outside of the door to his class and sees that most of his students are already in their seats. He nods to someone as they duck into the room, taking the last empty chair.

He turns away from his students and instead looks at the blank wall in front of him while he answers.

“While I appreciate your consideration,” he starts, “I’ll have to stop you there. I’ll admit that those very thoughts were rolling around this morning as I read that article. I don’t like it, Alec. I’ll be honest about that. And, it’s true that we’ve really just started this friendship of ours. But I like you and I really want to see where this leads.

“I want to stay friends. We’ll just need to be a little more discreet, darling, because while I like being with you I also like my anonymity. I don’t need paps harassing me at work or those I love. I’ll be a little more honest with you and admit that there are things I’ve done, things in my past, that I don’t need coming to light.”

He can hear Alec on the other end like he’s about to interrupt.

“But,” he says. “I’m willing to continue things with the understanding that we don’t advertise to the world. We can still go out to lunch and whatever else strikes our fancy, but let’s use common sense, okay?”

Alec sighs and Magnus smiles a little, also relieved.

“I’m really happy that you said that, Magnus. I know that not everyone is willing to put up with the media, and I appreciate that you’re not cutting me out. This is new, but I really like talking with you and hanging out. I am more than fine with using a little more discretion in the future.”

Magnus is just opening his mouth to respond, but Alec isn’t quite finished.

“About what you said-- about your past. I want you to know, obviously, that you don’t have to tell me anything and I’ll do my damnedest to keep your name out of the press until you’re ready. There’s no pressure here, Magnus.”

Magnus swallows hard. Nothing that Alec said was revolutionary but it’s been a long time since someone sought to reassure him. It’s nice to know that Alec respects his decision and is just as keen
to continue their acquaintance.

“Thank you, darling. Don’t worry, I’m not quite done with you yet.”

Alec laughs and Magnus echoes it, feeling warmth flood his chest.

“So we’re good,” Alec asks tentatively.

“We’re good,” Magnus confirms.

Alec huffs out a breath. “Thank Christ,” he says fervently. “I was worried that you’d see that headline and those photos this morning and run as far away from me as you could get.” He laughs, bitterly. “It wouldn’t be the first time, after all.”

Magnus leans against the wall as he replies. “I’ll admit that I thought about it. I’m risking a lot, after all, if anyone finds out anymore details. But you know Alexander, I think you might just be worth the risk.”

“Thanks, Magnus. I only hope that you don’t regret those words.”

Magnus grins. “If you know one thing about me, darling, it should be that I like to play with fire. Now, I’ve got to go. My class should have started four minutes ago and I can feel my students getting antsy. I’ll see you next week Alec-- don’t be a stranger.”

“Alright Magnus, enjoy your class and teach them everything they need to know about Napoleon. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Oh and Alexander,” Magnus calls out before either one has the chance to end the call.

“Yes?”

“I like it when you call,” Magnus says and hangs up, pocketing his phone and pushing off of the wall.

There’s a smile on his face and some pep in his step as he turns on his heel and enters the classroom. He’s no fool. He knows that this decision has the potential to blow up in his face. But, he just can’t deny that magnetic pull he feels.

He wants to ride out this wave and sees where it takes him-- where it takes them.

Magnus pretends that he doesn’t see the curious stares of his students-- Dr. Bane never starts class late. He might crack jokes and bemoan early mornings, but he’s the consummate professional. It’s unheard of for him to cancel class or start any later than right on time. His students must be dying to know what’s going on.

Magnus smirks and unbuttons his raincoat, hanging it on the back of the chair in the front of the room. He rolls up his shirtsleeves as he starts his lecture, not needing notes or an outline as he begins speaking, picking up where they’d left off Wednesday seamlessly.

Magnus keeps a steady pace for the next seventy-five minutes, his voice and the scratch of pens against notebooks the only sounds heard in the room.

In the back of his mind, Magnus revels in the everyday academia and prays it all doesn't come crashing down on him.
Chapter 13

Magnus walks into Basil’s Cafe fifteen minutes before they’re supposed to meet. As expected, the little diner is deserted. There’s an elderly woman sitting in the corner reading the newspaper, but other than that it’s just the skeleton waitstaff. There’s only two people working in the front, a waitress and cashier, with the only other employee being the cook manning the grill.

Magnus breathes a little sigh of relief. It would be just his luck that he’d promise Alexander the place would be empty only for it to turn out to be the busiest day of the year.

He slides into a booth towards the back, facing the door, and places his briefcase beside him on the seat. The waitress knows him— he eats here at least twice a week and she’s a student— and she knows if he’s in a hurry or if he’d like time before she comes over. He’s given his space as he sits down and takes a minute to decompress. His freshmen this morning had been more interactive than usual but Wednesdays run late and he has a pile of work to finish before he can call it a day.

Magnus already knows what he’s going to order. He wasn’t joking about how delicious their burgers were and he’s starving. Since he has a little time before Alec’s expected to show up, he takes out the latest chapter of his manuscript, intent on editing a few pages while he waits.

He didn’t count on the unwelcome interruption.

Someone snatches the page he was working on out of his hand and Magnus’s head whips up, annoyed and ready to lambaste whoever had the audacity to do such a thing.

He should’ve known.

“Raphael,” he hisses as he makes a move to reclaim his paper. “What are you doing here?”

Raphael doesn’t even spare him a look, just keeps reading over the page he’s stolen. Magnus knows that he won’t receive an answer until Raphael is damn good and ready to give him one, so he sits with a glare pasted on his face, waiting to be acknowledged.

Finally, Raphael drops the paper back on the table, merely offering, “You have a typo on line seventeen.”

Magnus arches a brow but his eyes drop down to the page and he skims until he finds the error. He takes his pen and makes a notation before letting it drop down on top of the rest of the draft.

“And, again I ask, what are you doing here,” he repeats sardonically.

Raphael takes a moment to look at him like he’s an idiot before responding. “It is lunchtime, Magnus, and this is a well-known lunch spot. I wonder what possible motive I could have for stopping by?”

Magnus makes a play of looking affronted, but inside he can’t help the worry that’s descended on him. He’d told Alec that he wouldn’t be recognized during this lunch and here is one of his best friends who most definitely knows what Alec looks like.

Plus, Magnus knows Raphael. The little shit is almost guaranteed to make a comment that will either attempt to embarrass him or a dig at Alec just on principle. Magnus isn’t interested in finding out what kind of mood Raphael’s in today.
Magnus looks Raphael up and down. “Where, then, is your food *mon ami/?”

Raphael doesn’t answer right away, taking a minute to complete his own examination, looking Magnus over. “I just ordered it. They have to actually cook the food, you know. It doesn’t magically appear as soon as the words leave my mouth.”

“How unfortunate,” Magnus drolly replies.

A little smile graces his friend’s lips as he finally takes a seat on the other side of the booth.

“Why are you being so weird,” Raphael bluntly asks.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, I think you do,” is his response. “First of all, you’re always happy to see me, or at least a little less panicked than you are currently. What’s going on? Are you meeting your lover? Are they married and you’re worried I’ll judge you? Need I remind you that if I didn’t say anything about that Jamaican priest—”

“Hey,” Magnus cuts in, affronted. “You know very well that you’re making it sound much worse than it was—”

“Oh, and let’s not forget that time I caught you with your pants down, literally, in the museum—”

“Raphael,” Magnus hisses, leaning forward as he catches sight of Alec through the window, walking towards the door.

Raphael shuts up, looking at Magnus expectantly.

Magnus, for his part, feels his pulse trip as he keeps one eye on Raphael, the other on Alec as he reaches for the door.

Magnus only has a few seconds to avert disaster.

“I will explain everything later if you leave right now, no questions asked,” he furiously whispers.

Raphael leans back in his seat, looking like he’s settling in for a siege before asking, “Why?”

“I will explain everything later. Right now, I need you to leave without saying a word.”

While his expression is serious, Raphael’s eyes are dancing with glee at the prospect of catching onto whatever has Magnus in such a tizzy. He lays his arm on the table, fingers drumming against the top.

“I don’t know,” he muses. “It must be something big to rattle you like this. Let’s see—”

“Magnus?”

Magnus sighs a little, knowing that while lunch will probably be lovely, he’ll have hell to catch later. He tries to silence Raphael with a look, knowing it’s futile, before he turns to take in Alec.

Alec’s dressed casual, in jeans and a baseball tee. There’s a snapback over that lovely hair and he looks good enough to eat.

Magnus wants to kiss him. Just a little.

He pushes those thoughts from his head through sheer force of will and stands up smoothly, smiling
on his face.

“Alexander,” he greets. “Punctual as always.”

Alec returns the smile, giving Magnus an obvious onceover before his eyes catch on Raphael.

His presence must startle him, because Alec stutters a little before getting out, “I wasn’t expecting anyone but you--”

“Oh, he’s just leaving,” Magnus hastily cuts in.

He resolutely ignores Raphael’s pointed looks, instead watches Alec to make sure he’s not about to run away. While he’d set down the rules for discretion for his own sake, Magnus can’t forget that Alec’s taking a chance, too. While he’s definitely more accustomed to media intrusion, Alec likes to stay anonymous when he can. It’s expected that he’d be wary when confronted with a stranger--especially when Magnus had all but guaranteed privacy.

Alec looks uncertain for a moment, but that disappears a second later. Magnus only picks up on it because he’s studying him so closely, as Alec subtly steels himself before turning completely to Raphael, who’s still sitting in the booth.

He sticks out a hand. “I’m Alec. I don’t believe we’ve met.”

Raphael darts a quick glance to Magnus before facing Alec and shaking his hand.

“I’m Raphael. I’m one of Magnus’s best friends and resident foreign language expert at Columbia. Nice to meet you.”

Alec’s smile turns genuine as he learns that Raphael obviously isn’t interested in meeting Alec Lightwood.

Not wanting to give him any more time to ruin things, Magnus pointedly looks at Raphael. “I do believe your lunch is ready, friend.”

Luckily, at that moment the cashier yells out a number and Raphael nods once. “That’s my order. I’ll see you later, Magnus.” He turns to Alec, giving him a considering look. “It was nice meeting you Lightwood.”

Alec looks surprised for a second, blurting out, “You know who I am?”

Raphael snorts inelegantly and Magnus makes a note to tease him mercilessly about it later.

“Of course I know who you are. I’ve been friends with Magnus for years.”

Magnus closes his eyes, praying for death, before he opens them, only to find Alec looking at him. He has an expression on his face that Magnus can’t interpret.

“What does that mean?”

Raphael answers for him, a skeptical look on his face. “Like you don’t know,” he replies. “Magnus is a huge fan of yours. If I have to listen to him wax poetic about your solo in Vanilla Cheesecake one more time--”

“Chocolate Raspberry,” Magnus and Alec correct, simultaneously.

Raphael just shakes his head. “Whatever.”
His mouth opens for what no doubt would be another scintillating tidbit that Magnus would rather keep hidden, when he abruptly closes it.

He smiles before giving a little shrug. “Well, my food is getting cold and I have a class in half an hour. I’ll see you later, Magnus.”

Magnus doesn’t know how, but those words definitely sound like a threat.

Magnus just nods and Alec smiles at Raphael as he climbs out of the booth and heads to the counter to grab his bag. He doesn’t look their way as he leaves and this might be the first awkward silence Magnus has ever experienced with Alec.

There’s a pause before Alec clears his throat.

“So, are you hungry?”

Magnus laughs a little before sitting back down, gesturing for Alec to do the same. He answers as Alec slides into the place Raphael was just sitting.

“Oh, I’m starving. Today’s been busy as usual and it doesn’t show any signs of stopping.”

Alec snags a menu from where they’re stacked between the ketchup and napkins.

“What’s going on,” he asks, voice a little distracted as he starts leafing through the pages.

“Just the usual, really. Classes and grading. I have my evening class tonight and that’s always a hoot.”

Alec’s eyes flick up to meet Magnus’s as he quirks a smile. “A hoot?”

Magnus mock glares. “Yes, Alexander, a hoot. You know, a riot? An expression used to signify a good time?”

“Oh, I know what a hoot is,” Alec says with a grin. “I just haven’t heard anyone besides me and my great grandmother use it.”

“Aren’t you a funny one.”

Looking back at the list of burgers, Alec murmurs, “I do try.”

There’s a few moments of quiet as Alec peruses the rest of the menu before the waitress comes over.

“Hey, Dr. Bane.”

Magnus smiles. “Hello, Jasmine. How are you today?”

Jasmine shrugs, taking the pen out of her apron, turning the page over in her pad. “I’m doing okay. I have a huge paper due next week for Professor Fell, so I’m focusing on that right now.”

Nodding encouraging, he offers, “I’m sure you’ll do great as always, dear. Still looking to take my Southeast Asia class in the fall?”

Jasmine grins, looking enthusiastic as she replies, “Are you kidding me? I wouldn’t miss it. It’s going to be my senior year— I have to take at least one more class with you before I graduate. Now, what can I get you two?”
Magnus looks at Alec, questioningly, and Alec nods, confirming that he’s ready to order.

“I’ll have the mushroom and swiss burger with a side of fries and a sweet tea. Alec?”

Alec looks up at Jasmine with a smile. “Hi, can I get the double bacon cheeseburger and fries. I’ll get an iced tea, too.”

Jasmine writes down the orders quickly before looking back up at the two of them with a smile. “Thanks guys. These should be ready soon.” She gestures around the empty room. “It’s not like we’re busy or anything.” With that, she walks over to the counter to place the order.

Alec drums his fingers on the tabletop. “How was your weekend?”

Magnus lays his head in his palm, thinking about what he’d done. “Uneventful. I met friends for brunch on Sunday but other than that I just worked out and binge watched my latest show on Netflix. I wrote a little, too. But, that’s pretty much it. What about you, darling?”

Alec ignores the question, instead obviously looking over the short stack of paper clipped together on Magnus’s side of the table. He juts his chin in its direction. “What’s that? Whatever you’re writing?”

Magnus reaches over and grabs the paper, flashing the first page before putting it back in his briefcase. “It is,” he confirms. “This is the latest chapter of my work-in-progress.”

“You’re writing a book?”

Magnus grins. “No need to sound so incredulous, Alexander. You know how it is in the academic world: publish or perish. I’m pleased to report that I’m far from perishing. This will be my fourth complete book, disregarding any journals or anthologies I’ve contributed to.”

Alec whistles. “Damn, I’ll admit I’m impressed. I knew you were a big deal but you’re even better than I thought. How old are you?”

Magnus arches a brow. “I’ll be thirty in December.”

“All that hard work is definitely paying off.”

“You’re telling me. I freely admit that I work my ass off to keep on top of things. It’s exhausting but I do love it.”

“It’s easy to tell. What’s your book about?”

Magnus opens his mouth to answer but closes it as Jasmine comes back over with their drinks. She sets them down, tosses a couple of straws onto the table, and leaves without a word.

He picks back up.

“While I’m chair of the history department, my specialty is European imperialism. This latest book explores the consequences of their imperialist tendencies during WWI. I’m focusing on a handful of countries and their colonies in the few decades leading up to the war and following their projected paths during the war and into the aftermath. It’s actually fascinating because even most scholars don’t take into account how certain colonized lands and people-- take, for instance, the whole of India-- contributed to--

“Sorry,” Magnus breaks off, wincing a little. “I get a little carried away.”

Alec is looking at him with wide and attentive eyes, though, not with the dazed and confused
expression that Magnus was expecting.

“No worries,” he says. “It’s obvious that you’re passionate about the topic and I love learning about
this kind of stuff. Especially when I have such a knowledgeable teacher.”

Alec grins and Magnus is getting ready to finish his spiel-- he’ll give the high notes so he doesn’t
really bore Alec-- when their food arrives.

Jasmine sets down their plates, heaping with food, and it smells delicious. Magnus’s stomach growls
a little and he looks over to where Alec is holding back a laugh.

“Shut up,” he gets out, laughing. “I didn’t even have time for coffee this morning and I’ve had a full
slate. I’m a little hungry.”

Alec raises his hands, surrendering. “I didn’t say anything! I’m hungry, myself. I might just inhale
this burger.”

Magnus waits for Alec to take his first bite of food. While this was Magnus’s pick, he wanted to wait
and make sure that Alec likes the food. He watches as Alec picks up his burger, sees the admiring
look he gives it, before diving in and taking a frankly huge ass bite.

Mouth half full, Alec hums, swallowing before saying, “Holy shit, this is delicious.”

Magnus smiles as he starts in on his own plate. “This is a restaurant on a college campus. They
specialize in delicious. There’s too many busy students looking for greasy food to have anything
else. You should see this place at two in the morning. It's packed with wasted twenty two year olds.”

Alec laughs and the next few minutes are spent in silence as both of them eat.

Their plates are over halfway clean when the conversation picks back up.

“What’s been keeping you busy since we last spoke, darling?”

Alec takes a quick drink of his tea before replying. He shrugs.

“Nothing, really. Simon put me on a forced work vacation so I haven’t been allowed to go into the
studio since last week. He gave me shit about being too frustrated to get over the writer’s block and I
couldn’t see what it could hurt, so I’ve just been. . . relaxing. I’ve been working out and spending
some time with my family, spending more time than I should on Netflix.”

“Do you think the break is working?”

Alec shrugs again, this time looking a little less unsure. “It’s hard to say. I haven’t been hit with
sudden inspiration but I also don’t want to rip my songbook to shreds, so that’s probably progress.
Regardless, I have a writing session tomorrow with another artist so let’s hope something works
out.”

Magnus is intrigued. While he knows that Alec writes most of his songs, he never really thought
about him working with other musicians.

“Anyone I know,” he asks.

Alec looks like he’s about to tell him before he shuts his mouth. “I actually can’t tell you who it is,”
he says sheepishly. “I don’t know if they want their name out there and sessions are usually
confidential unless both writers agree to make it public.” He rushes to add on, “I’m not trying to be
secretive or keep things from you, it’s just that--”

“It’s okay, Alexander,” Magnus breaks in. “I completely understand. I have a friend who’s a performer and she’s constantly going on about the need to keep things quiet. No one wants to spoil their source material.”

Alec sighs, relaxes against the back of the booth in relief. “Yeah. You get it. Thanks for understanding, Magnus.”

“Of course, darling. Think nothing of it.”

They finish their lunch, talking about random topics. It strikes Magnus, not for the first time, that he’s comfortable with Alec. They’ve known each other less than a month but everything feels so natural. They can talk and joke and enjoy the quiet without it becoming awkward or unsettling.

They just seem to fit together and Magnus doesn’t think that it’s just his imagination.

Alec is in the middle of a story about his time in Greece-- they’ve both been there and love it-- when Jasmine comes over to clear the table.

“Do you guys want to see a dessert menu?”

Alec and Magnus look at each other for a second before Alec’s nodding. “Yes, please,” he says, turning up to address her.

It’s just a minute later that they’re both looking over the half a dozen options.

“Are you getting anything?”

Alec hums before setting the menu to the side. “I think I’m gonna go with a hot fudge sundae.”

He looks at Magnus, eyes laughing and smile curling on his lips. “I have a bit of a sweet tooth.”

Magnus raises a brow. “I never would’ve guessed,” Magnus says, teasing.

Alec huffs out a laugh. “What about you? Anything strike your fancy?”

Magnus smiles at the phrase, but answers nonetheless. “Their apple pie is usually amazing, so I think I’ll have a slice of that.”

The waitress comes over and takes their order, bringing their dessert within just a few minutes.

With the first bite of his ice cream, Alec moans, just a little. It sets Magnus on edge more than it should.

“Goddamn, this is amazing,” Alec breathes. “This has to be homemade hot fudge.”

“I couldn’t say but I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

Magnus eats his pie and the conversation picks back up, with both of them talking about their favorite travel spots.

He’s just swallowed his last bite of apple pie when Alec startles him. Seemingly without thinking, Alec reaches over and swipes his thumb across the corner of Magnus’s mouth. He immediately brings his thumb up, sucking the small bit of pie filling into his own mouth.
It takes a second, but when it registers what he’s just done, Alec flushes a little.

Magnus feels like his mind has just fallen offline. His own mouth is dry at the sight he just witnessed. Alec wasn’t even trying but Magnus feels heat lick up his spine, turning warm at just the thought. It’s crass, but he can’t help but imagine what Alec would look like, mouth swallowing *other* things.

Magnus needs to calm down.

“Sorry,” Alec says. “It’s just, you had something there--” he gestures towards Magnus’s mouth, eyes a little intense, “-- and it was just automatic. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable or anything.”

Magnus swallows harshly, reaches for his tea blindly and takes a deep drink. “No worries, darling. You didn’t make me uncomfortable at all.”

Alec smiles, relieved, before Jasmine is standing in front of them with the check. Alec reaches out but Magnus is faster, snagging the bill before reaching for his wallet.

“I can totally get that Magnus. It’s no problem.”

Magnus waves the offer away. “Don’t worry about it; I’ve got it. Besides, you paid for ice cream last week. It’s only fair that I get lunch.”

He hands his card to Jasmine. As she walks away, he fiddles with his ear cuff. “Maybe I’ll let you get the next meal.”

Alec smiles, just a little, and the two of them stare into each other’s eyes for a minute. It’s just the two of them-- the newspaper woman had long since left-- and it feels like they’re in their own little world.

Until the waitress comes back with the receipt.

Magnus clears his throat as he looks down and scrawls his signature on the restaurant's copy, leaving a generous tip for Jasmine.

Magnus and Alec give their thanks before standing up. They stroll over to the door, Alec reaching it first and holding it open for Magnus to step through.

They linger on the sidewalk for a minute before Alec turns to face him fully. He quirks a brow, grinning, before asking, “So, you’re a fan?”

All of a sudden, Magnus remembers the less-than-ideal start their lunch date had and he snorts even as he feels warmth climb up the back of his neck.

“As you know, Alexander, you’re very well known. It’s to be expected that I would know a few of your songs.”

“Yeah, but I believe your friend said you talk about me?”

“Fishing for compliments, darling?”

Alec shrugs. “I just didn’t know you were so into me.”

His eyes widen as he realizes what he just said. “Professionally! I didn’t realize you liked me so much as a singer. I knew you recognized me in that diner that night but I thought it was just idle knowledge.”

It’s Magnus’s turn to shrug. Suddenly, it doesn’t seem like a disastrous idea if Alec knows his
interest in his music is a little more than . . . casual.

“Okay, I’m a pretty big fan of your music,” Magnus admits. “I might own every album you’ve released.”

Alec’s smile grows wider before he’s laughing. He takes a step closer and Magnus is overtly aware of just how much space is between them.

"It’s good to know that you like my music. I do work hard, you know.”

“I know,” Magnus says, voice just above a whisper as he shuffles his feet just a little, closing the distance just a little more.

Magnus feels the tension, which is absurd, but here he is and here they are. Just a few feet away. He repeats that they’re just friends but he can’t deny, at least to himself, that he wants Alec to close that distance.

Alas, Alec clears his throat before stepping back and breaking whatever spell just came over them.

“Thanks for lunch, Magnus.” Alec’s smiling, looking open and happy.

Magnus returns that smile. “Thank you for accepting my invitation, Alexander. I had a great time as always.”

“Me too.”

There’s a pause as neither one makes a move to leave before Alec’s tilting his head towards the block past Magnus.

“Sorry, but I said I’d meet my sister at a store a few blocks over.”

He looks apologetic and Magnus waves the tone away.

“Of course, I have to get back to my office anyway. I have a few things I need to finish before my next class.”

Alec nods before smiling at Magnus. “I can’t wait to see you again. Have a great day, Magnus.”

“Right back at you, darling. I hope your writing session is productive tomorrow,” is Magnus’s reply and a moment later Alec is on his way.

He moves to walk past Magnus and their hands graze each other for a second that seems to last much longer.

It’s just a simple hand touch, not even the most intimate thing they’ve done today but Magnus can’t repress his shiver.

He’s hyper aware of where they just touched and it sends a little jolt through him. Alec continues on down the block, looking like he doesn’t even realize, and Magnus watches him walk away.

After a moment he turns back around and starts making his way towards his office, sighing a little.

He’s really enjoying his time with Alexander. He thinks it’s obvious that they could be great friends. They might be at that point already.

More fool him for wanting more.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

This is just a heads up that I've never written anything nsfw before so this fic will be my first time attempting it lol. Happy Reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alec wakes up Thursday morning before his alarm. His writing session with Catarina Loss isn’t until ten but he wakes up a few minutes before five, feeling groggy but strangely keyed up. Unfortunately, he knows from past experience that he won’t be able to go back to sleep.

He lays in bed for a few minutes before reaching for his phone on the nightstand. The harsh glare from the screen makes him mutter a curse but his eyes adjust soon enough. He sees a few emails from Lydia about shooting the music video for Empty Hearts in a couple of weeks and other commitments he needs to approve and there’s a text from Simon wishing him good luck today-- he hopes Alec doesn’t fanboy all over the place and embarrass himself.

Alec laughs a little but internally his thoughts echo the text. Catarina has been in the business for a decade, but her music stays as fresh as her debut album. He respects her as an artist-- holds her to the gold standard, a shortlist few can say-- and uses her as a propeller for his own growth. She’s won a dozen Grammys but her music doesn’t feel overproduced or like she’s just in it for the money. Alec hopes he can compare to her natural talent.

He owns every album she’s released and has mentioned her several times as one of his inspirations in interviews. But, it’s one thing to tell a journalist that Catarina Loss is a major influence-- it’s another to tell the woman herself and it’s completely out of this world that he’s even working with her for his next album.

Catarina also shuns the public eye-- her husband is a professor recluse and they have a young daughter. Other than that, she remains tight-lipped about her private life, only granting interviews to the major media a few times a year. Buzz in the scene has it that she’s working on her next album, though since she’s had a child she’s mostly stayed on the writing and producing side of the glass.

Alec’s eager to work with her, not only for the personal achievement, but because he hopes that a veteran of the business will be able to make something pop for him.

He hopes that Simon’s forced break has unclogged his brain because it really will be a blow to his ego and reputation if he still isn’t able to string a fucking phrase together today.

Lingering in bed for a few minutes, he doesn’t even think before he opens Magnus’s thread and sends a few texts that, if he were more awake, he might’ve thought twice about.

Wish me luck... I’m writing with one of my favorite artists of all time and I’m nervous as hell.

She’s so impressive and here I am, a has-been who hasn’t written one fucking word in months.

At the risk of being needy lol if you have any words of encouragement I could really use them.

You always cheer me up :)}
Alec tosses his phone onto the other side of the bed before scrubbing his hands over his face. He looks over and sees 4:36am in glaring red and climbs out of bed, resigned.

Jace isn’t even awake yet and with nothing better to do, Alec throws on some workout clothes, laces up his Nikes, and grabs his headphones and cell, determined to do at least one productive thing today.

He doesn’t bother trying to be quiet-- Jace will be up in twenty minutes and he snores loud enough to block everything else out. Izzy, for her part, sleeps like the dead and usually has her ambient noise machine on.

He heads down to the lobby, exchanging muted greetings with the night doorman, before putting his headphones in and setting up his music queue. He’s not in any particular mood, just needs the distraction, so he turns on Pandora to a bass thumping workout station.

He starts running, breaking into his stride within just a few minutes. The streets are deserted. It’s that quiet time between the late night partygoers and early morning merchants. It feels like the city is his and his alone.

Alec loves running. He loves feeling his lungs expand, the impact of his feet against pavement, the way his muscles strain. It clears his head and calms him down. When he’s on the road, he runs every single day, rain or shine. Even if he’s suffering from illness or a hangover, he always drags his ass out of bed and off the tour bus or out of the hotel room, even if it’s just for a single mile.

Sometimes, he thinks he’d go insane if it wasn’t for running.

He’s not like Jace, a gym rat that works out for hours everyday and can painstakingly lecture anyone about the difference between various forms of whatever the fuck. Alec spends his fair share of time in the gym-- in his position, it would be a liability if he didn’t-- but running is the form of exercise he always returns to, every time.

The paps always seem to be lurking in bushes and behind street lights, but even when Alec catches them filming him during his runs, it doesn’t bother him. He doesn’t let it. He tunes everything out-- the sound of a city napping, his overwhelming thoughts, the pressure that’s always pressing down on him.

As he runs block after block, Alec thinks about today. This session with Catarina is important. Not only because she’s a huge fucking deal, though. This is the first formal session for his next album-- untitled without one goddamn song. Without even a part of a song.

Something needs to happen today. Alec hopes to hell that Simon was right when he pushed him out of the studio last week. He doesn’t feel any different, hasn’t had an urge to pick up a pen in a burst of inspiration, but hopefully something shakes loose in the studio.

This is really the first step for the next phase of his career and if today is a crash and burn, he’ll be well and truly fucked. Alec knows better than most that a bad day can muck things up-- artist’s ego isn’t an exaggeration and as much as he might hate it, Alec has his fair share. He can be secretive and temperamental and a bad day in the studio or a mistake during a performance can do a number on his ego or writer’s block.

His reputation in the music industry is pristine. He’s racked up dozens of awards and more accolades and fans than he can believe. Sometimes, he wonders when it will all come crashing down.

Lately, he thinks he’s close to that ephemeral point.
As his breathing becomes a little more strained, as he feels his thighs start screaming a little, Alec pushes harder, picks up the pace with vicious thoughts and a determination to outrun his mood.

His thoughts turn towards Magnus and Alec can’t stop the dopey smile even as his thoughts turn even more tangled.

But a good tangle.

He thinks.

He’s known Magnus for just a month but everything is so easy with him. He’s endlessly fascinating and Alec could listen to him talk for hours.

He’s discovering he might have a bit of a competency kink because watching Magnus lecture-- his little diatribe about his book yesterday had both endeared him to Alec and made Alec want to rip off all his clothes.

Not really thoughts friends have about each other, but Alec’s never been one to lie to himself.

He really likes Magnus. This friendship seems real in a way he hasn’t had in years. Simon was the last person that Alec had let in and that was three years ago. It feels like a lifetime but Magnus has breathed new air into Alec. He’s not just a diversion or a good time. He’s not a passing fancy.

Alec won’t say anything, though. He might want more-- with every time they hang out Alec might want Magnus just a little more-- but he’s not stupid.

Alec is very aware that his life isn’t for everyone. He’s blessed beyond comprehension but there are drawbacks. The media are bloodthirsty bastards and anyone caught near him immediately becomes fodder for an enterprising journalist who wants a big payday and bragging rights.

Alec is notoriously private about the important things. The cameras might catch him with his hand down his hookup’s pants, but they didn’t see him at his sibling’s graduations, they don’t see him attend charity appearances where the hospital staffs sign confidentiality contracts or when he attends one of Clary’s art shows. Alec isn’t new to the life. He knows how to blend in and when that fails, he knows how to duck and swerve and distract.

Magnus doesn’t. When Alec had woken up Friday morning to Lydia’s call, asking who he’d been photographed with, Alec’s stomach had dropped.

He’d immediately started thinking that Magnus wouldn’t want to see him ever again. An accomplished Ivy League professor, stunning and capable, letting his life be scrutinized by millions of strangers? He’d be mad not to avoid Alec at all costs after he’d almost been revealed.

Alec had called, brain scrambling to come up with words that could convince Magnus to still give him a shot. To give them a shot.

Even if nothing went past friends, Alec didn’t want to lose Magnus’s friendship. It’s surreal how in such a short time someone could become so important.

Talking to Magnus never failed to make Alec smile. He trusted Magnus more than everyone else, except his inner circle.

Alec thinks Magnus could become part of that small circle soon.

He’d been over the moon, stunned, when Magnus had, with humor, reassured Alec that they were
still friends, albeit with a little more discretion. He’d jumped at the chance, agreeing to whatever terms Magnus threw out.

They were firmly in the friends category now and it was good. It was probably the only part of Alec’s life currently going well.

If he could just write a goddamn song now, he’d be set.

The sun starts peeking out over the skyline and Alec draws to a stop, hands at his hips as he sucks in a few deep breaths. He’s at the edge of Central Park and he takes out his phone, sees that he’s been running for over an hour. There’s still hardly anyone around, so Alec pulls his shirt off, using it to wipe his face. He feels like he’s dying in the best way and as he takes his phone out, he sees a message from Magnus.

Alexander, you know you’re not a has-been. You’re arguably the best artist this year.

This decade.

You’ll do amazing. Remember to relax and let the creative juices flow as they will. You can’t rush art, darling.

I believe in you and if you need to talk, I’m here. Good luck! I hope you write net year’s song of the year!!!

P.S. I’m glad I’m a help. You always cheer me up, too :)

Alec reads over the texts. He can imagine Magnus’s voice reading them, the sarcasm and drollness with the underlying edge of sincerity and concern. It makes warmth flow through him to know that Magnus really cares.

Alec’s been burned before but he just can’t help but think that Magnus is the real deal. When Magnus’s friend, Raoul, had told him that Magnus was a huge fan, Alec had briefly rethought everything. He’d been with people, sometimes knowingly but other times blindsided, when it turned out that they’d only wanted to get to know him for his status. It hurt and infuriated him and he’d worried a few moments in that diner that he’d made the wrong choice. But Magnus had been embarrassed at his friend’s snide remarks, had obviously wanted the ground to swallow him up, no matter that he’d remained cool and calm on the surface. Plus, while the words had been said with a bit of a bite, neither of them had acted like Magnus was a crazy fan.

Alec had calmed down and realized that Magnus was just a fan. Simple as that. He liked his music but wasn’t looking at Alec with dollar signs and cravings of fame in his eyes.

He’d let out a quiet breath and they’d had a wonderful lunch.

Alec had laughed and felt something. Magnus was interesting and witty and engaging. He was funny and smart and held endless depth.

He was also attractive as hell but Alec tried not to linger on that too much.

He fires off a thanks:) I’ll let you know how it goes. Have a great day in class before tucking his phone away and turning towards his building. He’s only a few blocks from his apartment and he’s craving a hot shower. He feels disgusting, a given considering he’s ran almost eight miles.

There’s a few more people out but Alec doesn’t pay them any mind as he continues thinking about Magnus. As far as Alec can tell, the man is flawless. That face could grace the cover of any
magazine and though he always dressed professionally, there’s no denying that Magnus was hiding a seriously fit body.

Alec had wanted to disappear into the ground when he’d reached over the diner table and swiped the dessert off the corner of Magnus’s mouth. It’d been automatic. Fuck knows he’d been staring at it long enough during the meal but when he’d looked up and seen just a dab of sugar filling clinging to that full bottom lip, he’d reached out on autopilot to swipe it up, popping it into his own mouth like some kind of asshat. It’d been sweet and as he’d watched Magnus’s eyes widen, he’d realized just how forward he’d just been.

As if that wasn’t a huge red flag that he wasn’t feeling totally platonically towards his new friend.

Luckily, Magnus had been a good sport about it all and things had moved on with a minimum of fuss.

As Alec walks into his building and up the elevator to the penthouse, he plays over those last few moments on the sidewalk.

He hadn’t wanted to leave but he’d promised Izzy that he’d meet her and there was no real reason to stay. He’d probably imagined it, but Alec swears there was tension in the air, pulling them closer. He’d wanted to duck down and close that last bit of space between them, see if Magnus tasted as sweet as he looked, but he’d pulled back at the last second before he did something that not only embarrassed him but ruined everything between them.

He couldn’t help himself, though, as he’d walked past Magnus on his way Uptown. He’d casually let his hand run against Magnus’s, needing that last touch. It was a small gesture but it’d sent electricity through him. He’d carefully hid his reaction, just kept walking on, but he couldn’t help but think that he wanted more.

Alec makes his way into the apartment, sees that Jace is long gone and Izzy is still in bed, and goes straight to his bathroom. He strips out of his clothes, kicking them into the corner as he reaches into the shower and turns the water on.

He steps in after a second or two and lets the water run over his body. Alec moves all the way under the spray, breathing deep, relaxing even as he remains tense. He can’t help but pick up his train of thought.

Alec is confident and comfortable with himself. He has to be to stay sane and whole in an industry that likes to tear its people down as soon as build them up. He knows that he could go out and find a guy without trouble or exertion anytime he wanted.

But it’s not any another guy that he wants. He wants Magnus. He wants his laugh and his intelligence and his quick wit.

He wants that full mouth, those broad shoulders, that fabulous ass.

He knows it’s unfathomable that Magnus is affecting him like this. He knows he likes it, though.

He knows that Magnus can’t feel the same.

Despite that fact echoing in his head, desire stirs low in his gut and Alec reaches for his rapidly filling cock, hand moving over himself once, twice, a dozen times. He moves his feet a little more apart as his breathing becomes ragged, pleasure roiling through him. The hand not around his cock moves to place against the shower wall, support as his knees go weak, little choking groans escaping him as his mind is filled with scenes of Magnus. He thinks about Magnus in the shower with him, water
running over them both. He thinks about slippery skin and wandering hands.

He thinks about dropping to his knees and sucking Magnus off. Alec loves giving blowjobs and it’s with that last image-- Magnus, wet and dazed, looking down at Alec with hooded eyes glowing with heat and satisfaction-- and a few last desperate strokes, that Alec comes hard, little groans and grunts leaving his mouth as the shower washes everything away.

He stands under the spray for a few minutes, breathing hard, eyes closed as he regains his equilibrium.

He feels a little fucked out, hopes that this little session helps him stay relaxed in the studio today.

On the heels of that though, Alec feels guilty. He can’t help but think that he shouldn’t have just jacked off to thoughts of Magnus.

Magnus, who doesn’t know how Alec feels. Magnus, who would probably be a little creeped out if he knew what Alec had just spent the past few minutes doing.

Alec resolves not to do it again, even if that was the best orgasm he’s had in months-- with or without another person.

Resolutely, Alec shakes off all thoughts of Magnus and reaches for the shampoo.

He spends the rest of his shower thinking strategy and trying desperately to come up with anything-- a phrase, a chord, a potential song title.

His brain feels a little muddled, though, and he doesn’t seem to find any great inspiration, his writer's block remaining stubborn and unyielding.

Alec turns the water off and reaches for a towel, desperately hoping that today will be productive and that he can get his goddamn feelings in check.

Alec scoffs at the idea of anyone not in the business willingly throwing themselves under its microscope. Alec respects Magnus’s decision to keep things quiet. He respects that all Magnus has signed up for is a simple-- but hopefully lasting-- friendship.

More fool him for wanting more.

Chapter End Notes

Check out my tumbrl because the every talented @kindaresilient made a FABULOUS edit for this fic and I'm so in love with it-- and you will be too!!! (She's also made a few others that will be used as they apply to the chapter!!)
Chapter 15

Hi everyone! So I have no idea if anyone's interested, but a few people have been live-tweeting/talking about this fic on twitter so if any of you have any inclination to do that, I'm keeping up with #httbt hashtag! Happy Reading :) 

Alec gets dressed, grabs his keys, and heads out of the apartment. He nods to Charles as the man holds the door open for him. As he turns out on the sidewalk, he’s pleased to see Dave waiting with the car door open.

He exchanges pleasantries before climbing in and makes his way downtown to the recording studio. Once there, he gets out, waving to Dave, and looks at his watch. They’d made good time and he has about twenty five minutes before he’s due to meet Loss.

He goes down the block to this coffee shop he always spends way too much time at when he’s in the writing stages of his albums and grabs a coffee. There’s not too much of a line and within a few minutes Alec’s heading back to the Institute Records building. He pretends that he doesn’t see the two girls across the street jumping up and down with a camera aimed in his direction as he turns towards the glass and steel front doors.

Strolling through the lobby, Alec feels comfortable-- there’s still fifteen minutes until they start and he considers being late to a professional meeting, especially if it’s for the first time, to be totally inconsiderate and unforgiving.

He’s a bit of a bastard but he has high standards and expects anyone he works with to share them.

Alec approaches the security area and swipes his key card with little fuss. He walks straight to the elevators, pressing the button for the thirty second floor, and steps inside with a dozen other people.

With the sixty seconds he’s in the elevator, Alec takes stock. He’s surprised to find that he’s no longer a nervous wreck. While the writer’s block is a fucking pain in his ass, he has to admit that he’s had writing sessions that didn’t produce anything before. When that’s happened in the past, he’s always been cavalier about it.

Maybe Simon was right and he did just need to chill the fuck out.

He’s one of the last ones off-- the best writing studios were on the higher floors and only the A List roster had access to them-- and as he’s walking out of the elevator, taking a quick sip of his drink, someone runs into him.

He looks down and sees a little girl in pigtails looking up at him with wide eyes.

“Hey sweetheart,” he says, smiling. “Be careful okay?”

“Madzie?”

Alec looks up and sees none other than Catarina Loss walking towards him.
While there’s a tinge of oh shit, there’s also the cool confidence that’s lasted him through many an introduction-- from presidents and heads of state to movie stars and pro athletes.

Fucking finally, he’s found his grip.

Alec smiles at Catarina, about to extend a hand, when he feels something tug on his shirt. He looks down at who he presumes is Madzie.

“Hey, what’s up?”

Madzie looks at him curiously. “You’re really tall.”

Alec laughs and bends until he has one knee on the ground.

“I am,” he agrees. “Is this better?”

Madzie nods and is opening her mouth to say something else when Catarina comes up from behind and places hands on her daughter’s shoulders.

“Alec,” she says warmly. “It’s nice to meet you.”

Alec shakes her hand as he rises back to standing. “It’s nice to meet you too, Ms. Loss.”

Catarina laughs, waving that off. “Oh, there’s no need to be so formal. Feel free to call me Cat, all of my friends and associates do.”

Alec nods. “Thank you, Cat.” He rubs the back of his neck. “I have something to confess and I should probably say it now before we get into the studio. I’m a huge fan of yours, have been since I was in high school, and I consider you one of my biggest inspirations. I just want to thank you for agreeing to write with me. It’s a huge honor.”

Cat looks bemused. “Thank you very much for the kind words, Alec. It’s always great to meet a fan.” She winks. “I appreciate you being upfront with that. I’ve worked with people in the past who just fawned over me the whole time and it’s embarrassing for us both. I have no problem with working with someone when there’s mutual admiration and respect, though.”

Alec looks confused and she chuckles. “Alec, you’re no slouch yourself. You’re one of the biggest names in the industry and I did my research-- I always do with prospective collaborators. You’re a professional and your music is amazing. I’m definitely not dreading this session, so let’s head in and get to work.”

Alec laughs and follows Cat and Madzie to the room. Once they’re seated, Cat gestures to her daughter.

“As I’m sure you’ve figured out, this is my kid. I’m very sorry to spring this on you, I know writing isn’t usually kid friendly, but her babysitter called in sick this morning and my husband had a meeting at work that he couldn’t get out of.” She rolls her eyes. “Maybe it’s me who should be begging your pardon.”

Alec just shakes his head, smiling. “Don’t worry. I don’t have a problem with kids. Plus, to tell you the truth, I’m suffering from writer’s block right now-- this whole day might be a waste.”

Cat waves one hand as she opens her bag with the other, pulling out a juice box and bag of crackers.

“There’s no need to worry about that, though it’s always good to know what your co-writer is
feeling. Lord knows that there have been periods I could hardly string two notes together, forget words or anything else. We’ll see what shakes loose today but I think two of the hottest musicians in the industry right now will be able to pull something off.”

Alec nods. It doesn’t make sense but Cat has put him more at ease than he’s felt in ages.

He settles back in his chair and they start their work day.

Madzie is admirably quiet. She sits in the corner and reads a book as big as herself for most of the morning.

Cat and Alec work for five or so hours. It’s a little surprising, but they get along extremely well—better than Alec could’ve hoped. While not a prerequisite, it was always an unexpected bonus when there was camaraderie or chemistry between writing partners. It helped make things flow.

This is no exception.

While the two of them don’t have anything concrete, Alec isn’t in an existential despair so he’ll take his wins where he can.

The two of them bounce ideas off each other, sometimes rapid fire—throwing words against the wall and seeing what sticks, humming melodies only to immediately scrap them.

They argue a few times, one of them liking a particular phrase when the other abhors it. They debate respectfully, if passionately, and by the time lunch rolls around they have a handful of lyrics that aren’t awful and a melody that seems to be just on the tip of their tongue.

Cat rolls her chair back, releasing a deep breath.

“Well, that’s certainly the most fun I’ve had during a writing session in a while.”

She nods at Madzie, standing at her side. “Ready for a lunch break?”

Alec nods, cracking his neck and rolling his shoulders. “Yeah, sounds good. We’ve definitely worked up an appetite.”

She gestures in their direction. “Madzie and I are going to go to this pizza joint around the block. Feel free to join us— they serve the best margherita pizza in the city.”

Alec thinks about it for a second, but ultimately declines. “No, thanks, I appreciate the offer but there’s this cafe I usually try to swing by when I’m near headquarters.”

Cat nods and throws a smile over her shoulder as she ushers Madzie to the door. Madzie looks back and waves at Alec.

Alec returns it and leans back in his chair blowing out a breath.

So far, so good. Not amazing—no miracles—but he hadn’t totally embarrassed himself. Songwriting is a process, a lot of times like trying to fit puzzle pieces together, and they have a solid start.

Alec startles a little as his phone vibrates. He pulls it out of his pocket to see Lydia’s face staring back at him.

He swipes and brings the phone up to his ear.

“Hey Lyd, what’s up?”
“Hey, Alec. I wanted to know how the songwriting session was going? We have under six weeks to get a single to the label. Tell me some good news, please.”

Alec hums, but he can’t really drag things out-- Lydia’s been stressed as hell about it, too.

“While I won’t say that we have a home run, we’ve at least left the plate. I have some bits and pieces that will hopefully come to something-- shit knows I’ve done more with far less.”

Alec hears Lydia cheering on the other end of the line. He grins, knowing just how she feels.

“That’s great, Alec! I’m relieved and proud and very happy that today wasn’t an unmitigated disaster.”

She ignores his defensive protests.

“Now that that is out of the way, I want to talk about your music video for Empty Hearts. We have filming slated for a few weeks from now and I need to iron out some details before we meet with production. First things first, do you have any idea who you want to be your love interest? We can go with an actor but I know you sometimes like to bring friends into videos. So, any ideas?”

“Actually, I was thinking Simon could tag on for the project.”

Lydia chuckles. “Simon, really? You’re really trying to kill me, aren’t you? Do you have any idea how much of a media frenzy that’s going to whip up? It'll be me, David to their Goliath.”

Alec laughs. “Yeah, but you love it.”

Sighing, she says, “I really do. You’re lucky you hired such a shark.”

“As if I had a choice?”

“Hardy har har, you idiot. Anyway, Simon as love interest, check. Any special reason why? I’m just curious.”

Even though she can’t see him, Alec shrugs. “Not really. We’re good friends and I don’t feel like trying to act like I’m yearning after a stranger I met seventeen minutes earlier in the makeup trailer. I want this video to have a relaxed vibe. It might be a sad song but I don’t want the production for the video to feel like that.”

He pointedly ignores the little voice inside his head snidely asking, or is it because you don’t want to pretend to be into someone you’re not?

“Okay, well that answers my next question about the tone for the video. I know it’s one of your slower songs from the album but sometimes you want to shake things up when we’re concepting the music video.”

Lydia mutters to herself for a minute before she come back onto the line. “Okay, that’s really all I had. We’ll definitely talk more when we meet up for pre-production and screen producers, but I wanted to at least know what direction we wanted to head in. Have a good afternoon-- write me a song.”

Alec barely gets out a goodbye before the call is disconnecting. He smiles a little to himself. Lydia always had at least a dozen balls in the air and he had no idea how she kept them all from hitting her- he was just grateful she was a pro and took care of things so that he didn’t have to worry about them.
He looks down at his watch and sees that their lunch break is just under half over. He debates on what he wants to do-- he could go to the cafe, but truthfully he’s not really that hungry. He could try to work for the next thirty five minutes, but, for once, he thinks it’s best if he takes advantage of this brief respite.

After a few minutes, he grabs his phone and heads out the door, to the elevator.

He’s just pressed the down button when his phone lights up with a text.

*Hey stranger. Pandemonium. Midnight tomorrow. You’re paying ;)*

Alec raises a brow as he reads the message. It’s from a socialite-- his daddy owns a yachting company-- and he’s a New York native, too. They regularly go out together when they’re both in town, though this is the first he’s hearing from him this time around.

They always have a good time together-- they both favor the same brand of tequila and the guy’s a beyond decent lay.

They’ve fucked a time or two-- Alec’s usually wasted when it happens, but even in his haze of alcohol he remembers enough to have gone back.

Alec doesn’t know why he hasn’t already accepted-- it’s a no brainer. Jordan equals a good time and Alec loves a fun night on the town.

But, he can’t deny that it just doesn’t feel right. Jordan might have the body of an Adonis but he also snorts his trust fund up his nose with alarming fervor.

Alec’s long since grown immune to casual drug addiction. It’s a fact of life in the upper echelons. Today, though, he just doesn’t want to be around it.

Then again, there’s no reason to say no. He can just go out and have a good time and try to forget about the man with warm brown eyes that his thoughts keep drifting off to.

He’s Alec Lightwood. He doesn’t pine and he’s notorious for not settling down.

Maybe it’s in his best interest to call up Jordan and set something up for a little earlier in the evening, too.

The elevator dings and Alec walks in, distracted. He haphazardly pushes the button for the ground floor and leans against the back wall.

He thinks it over for a moment or two but then he’s looking through his contacts and swiping right to call almost subconsciously.

He waits as it rings once, twice, and then a lovely baritone is on the other end.

“Alexander. I didn’t expect to hear from you today. What’s up?”

He clears his throat. “Hey. I’m on my lunch right now and just felt like calling you. Are you busy?”

Magnus hums and Alec hears the shuffle of papers in the background. “No, not to. You caught me right in the middle of my office hours and I’m just working on next spring’s syllabi.”

Alec perks up. “Oh? What are you teaching?”

“A little bit of this and a little bit of that but I have my senior seminar that I always head and then I
have a special topics course that will explore the link between religion and colonialism, and other than that I just have a regular freshman introductory class on ancient history.”

“Three classes? Is that a lot or a normal workload?”

“Oh, that’s pretty standard. I’ve had as little as one when I was focusing on my chair duties and as many as five when I was first hired. I’ve discovered that three is my happy place-- it keeps me busy but still leaves me enough time to attend to department responsibilities without wanting to sell my soul for a shot of caffeine.”

“Do you think you’ll ever give up teaching entirely and move to a purely administrative role?”

“No, I don’t think so,” Magnus says definitively. “I like teaching too much. While I enjoy my other work, I will always publish and I’ll always teach. I like being in front of a classroom too much to ever leave it behind. I’ll be ninety years old and an urban legend with my walker. Students will bemoan signing up for the cryptid’s class fearing that I’ll die halfway through my lecture on French sugar.”

Alec laughs. “I’m sure your students will love you just as much when you’re ninety as they do now. I really don’t think you have anything to worry about, Magnus.”

Magnus sighs. “From your lips to God’s ears, darling. What are you up to? How’s your writing session going?”

The elevator dings again and Alec walks into the lobby, pressing his phone closer to his ear as it’s much noisier down here.

“Better than expected, actually. While I don’t have a runaway hit yet, I’m not a complete embarrassment either so we’re fine.”

“And what about the artist? I know you were nervous about working with them?”

“It’s actually going much better than I thought it would. She’s really nice and I kind of blurted everything out as soon as I saw her? So I pretty much told her that she was my biggest idol ever and she was okay about it. I really like working with her. I think we could definitely make something happen.”

“That’s excellent! I’m glad that there was nothing to worry over. What are you doing now? Eating anything good?”

Alec heads for the open area by the front windows and watches as people rush by. Everyone’s always in a hurry in this city.

“Nah, I talked to my agent earlier and now I’m talking to you so that’s about it.”

“You should eat something. If you’re hungry and eat it might help with your creativity.”

Chuckling, Alec replies, “That’s good advice but I’m not actually hungry. I might get some coffee, but I think I’ll be okay.”

Magnus sniffs. “Well, then, don’t say I didn’t try to help.”

Alec doesn’t know why, but his mouth opens of its own accord and he’s asking, “So, uh, have any plans for the weekend?”
Magnus hums, thinking. “No, I don’t think so? I’m going out of town on business at the end of next week so I plan to relax this weekend in preparation. You?”

Alec bites his lip. “I don’t have anything planned, either. I got an offer for tomorrow night but I was thinking-- would you want to hang out? I know it’s short notice, but I’m free if you are- absolutely no pressure, though.”

His shoulders slump in relief, hearing the smile in Magnus’s voice as he answers. “As it happens, I was going to order shameful amounts of takeout and marathon the Twilight movies tomorrow night after work. Interested?”

Smiling, Alec asks, “Aren’t those supposed to be really terrible?”

“Oh, they’re awful! That’s half the fun. You get to make fun of some really angsty, bad teen movies, enjoy a surprisingly amazing soundtrack, and turn your brain off for a few hours.”

“Sounds great. So we’re doing this at your place?”

“If that’s alright?”

“Of course,” Alec hastily assures Magnus. “I just wanted to make sure we were on the same page.”

“Don’t worry. We are. I’ll text you my address later today.” Alec hears a faint knock. “I’m sorry, Alexander, but someone just stopped by my office-- I’ll talk to you later.”

“Bye, Magnus.”

Alec hangs up and stares out the window.

Well. That was something.

He was hanging out with Magnus tomorrow night watching shitty movies and eating pizza.

It sounded nice-- infinitely better than meeting Jordan. Alec unlocks his phone and replies to him, simply sending *Sorry, I’ve got plans. Catch you next time.*

Seeing that he only has a few minutes left, Alec heads back up to the studio. Walking into the room, he sees Catarina texting someone, Madzie drawing with a pack of crayons at the end of the table.

She looks up when he sits down. “Hey, Alec.”

“Hey Madzie. How was lunch?”

Without looking up from where she’s intensely drawing, she says, “Good! Mom spilled her drink, though.”

Cat rolls her eyes, faux glaring at her. “I do believe it was you that spilled your drink and then told the waitress it was me, no?”

Madzie very carefully doesn’t look away from her paper but the smirk playing on her lips betrays her.

Cat meets Alec’s eyes. “Kids love blaming their parents for things.”

Alec nods solemnly. “Younger siblings love blaming their big brother for things, too.”
The two of them laugh and ease back into writing. The whiteboard in front of them has words and phrases scrawled all over it.

What they’re missing is a melody. Each song is different, but for this one Alec is almost positive that they need the tune first. With that, the music and lyrical pattern will naturally follow.

Alec’s concentrating so hard on the board, trying to envision something, that he doesn’t hear it at first.

Once he does, though, he jerks upright.

He looks over and Madzie’s there, still coloring, but humming under her breath.

Catarina peels her eyes away from the bored and they share a look, her gaze snapping to Madzie.

“Dear, what’s that you’re humming?”

Madzie shrugs, shading in what Alec thinks is a giraffe. ‘I don’t know.’

“Can you hum a little louder,” Alec asks urgently.

Madzie does and Cat and Alec stare at each other.

*Got it.*

They both start humming the melody under the breath, Alec’s pencil tapping in time.

He thinks-- about the stress and Magnus and tomorrow night and his stupid, unexpected feelings and--

And the words flow.

Alec stands up and writes a phrase-- the first line.

Cat stands, too, and walks around the table, slowly, thinking and periodically looking back up at the board. Alec takes his time, tastes each word as it leaves his lips.

He’d be okay with a shit song at this point, just something to get the words flowing again, but it feels like this song could be more than just a break from the tension.

He wants to do it right.

Cat joins him at the white board and they spend the next few hours marking up the whiteboard. They argue over phrasing and timing and order. The discussion gets passionate and both of them give and take.

In the end, they have a rough cut of a song. It’s not perfect-- nowhere near ready to record-- but it’s *something*.

And it’s good, Alec can already tell from the bare bones.

There are places where the lyrics don’t quite work and he’ll come back later, fine tune and revise but holy shit, he’s written his first song in months and it feels even better than he thought it would.

Cat steps back, stretches. “Well, Lightwood, I think we did it.”
Alec nods, grinning. “I think we did Cat. This looks great-- I can’t wait to polish it a little.”

“As long as you take a break first.” She gives him a look. “I know how it is when writer’s block breaks down. You want to cry in relief and chain yourself to your songbook. That only leads in more writer’s block-- so take a break and come back in a few days with fresh eyes.”

“That’s exactly what I plan to do.”

Cat laughs as she starts gathering up her and Madzie’s things. “Any plans this weekend?”

Not wanting to make a big deal of it, he just says, “I have a movie night planned for tomorrow.”

“Oh? Do you know what movies?”

“The guy I’m hanging out with chose the Twilight series.”

“The shitty ones? I have a friend who watches those a few times a year. He says they’re so bad that they’re perfect for marathoning.”

Alec shrugs. “We’ll see. I’ve never seen them but I’ve heard... not great things.”

Holding Madzie’s backpack, Cat looks at Alec fully. “Well, I hope they’re either really, really bad or better than expected. Whichever one sounds like the best option to you.”

“Thanks,” he says drolly. “Do you have plans?”

“I have softball,” Madzie chimes in.

“You do? What position do you play?”

She shrugs and Cat looks at Alec. “They rotate through all of them. She doesn’t have a set position yet.”

Alec nods seriously. “Well that’s half the fun of playing a sport, deciding what you like and what you don’t.”

Madzie looks up at Alec, excited. “You play sports?”

Alec crouches down do that he’s more on eye level with her. “I did,” he confirms. “I played soccer when I was in school.”

“Cool!”

Grinning, he says, “I liked it.”

Cat smiles at them both before gently tugging on one of Madzie’s pigtails. “Well, me and girlie have to head home. My husband should be walking through the door at any minute and we’re supposed to go out for dinner.”

Alec smiles, holds out a hand. “Sounds good. Thanks again for writing with me-- I really like what we have.”

Cat shakes his hand, amused. “I had fun, Alec. If you ever find yourself needing another writing session, don’t hesitate to contact me.”

The two of them share a last look, amicable, before Cat and Madzie leave.
Alec looks around the room and lets out a quiet breath.

Maybe it’s not quite time to tumble off that pedestal yet.

He heads home during rush hour, choosing to forgo his driver. He’s one among a million and the anonymity feels particularity pleasant this evening.

His phone vibrates in his pocket and he smiles as he sees the text message.

It’s Magnus’s address.

Alec grins and tucks his phone back into his pocket.

Things are definitely looking up.
Chapter 16

Alec stands in front of Magnus’s door and takes a breath before reaching out to knock.

He’s not nervous. Even though it’s the first time that he’s going to be visiting Magnus at his place, there’s no butterflies or lead in his stomach.

Remarkably, he feels relaxed. He’s hung out with Magnus before and it didn’t end in disaster.

Hopefully, he can keep up that streak.

Plus, it’s not as if this is a date. They’re friends, nothing more.

As Alec knocks, he takes in the corridor. Magnus lived in Brooklyn, on the top floor of one of the many buildings that had been renovated a few years ago. There’s exposed brickwork and intermittent light fixtures and it all seems to fit Magnus’s style, perfectly. It’s elegant but with character.

Magnus opens the door just a few seconds later, smiling.

“Good evening, Alexander.”

“Magnus, hi.”

Alec smiles back as he gives him a onceover. Magnus had apparently changed when he’d gotten home because he’s the most dressed down Alec’s ever seen him. He’s wearing a pair of yoga pants with a plain black singlet. His feet are bare, toes painted a dark emerald and adorned with a silver ring.

What the fuck.

Alec swallows as he sees Magnus’s arms. How were clothes able to hide so much?

He clears his throat and meets Magnus’s eyes for a beat before Magnus steps back and swings the door open wider, beckoning Alec in.

“Welcome. Did you have any trouble finding it?”

Alec steps over the threshold, immediately toeing off his Nikes.

“No,” he says distractedly. “Google Maps has yet to let me down.”

His gaze roves over what he can see of Magnus’s apartment. He sees more exposed brick, rich tapestries and colorful furniture. It’s a weird hybrid of old and new-- modern and ancient-- and Alec loves it.

From behind him, he hears, “Well, that makes one of us, darling. Once I was in Estonia trying to find this historically significant cathedral and the app just kept leading me in circles. A twenty minute stroll turned into a two hour fiasco. It was a mess.”

Alec turns around. “Maybe it was operator error,” he teases.

Magnus huffs, rolling his eyes. “Believe whatever you like. I’m usually an expert explorer, I have a sixth sense, but during that trip I got lost too many times to count. I was just running in circles. Plus, the Estonian language isn’t for the faint of heart-- I didn’t have a clue of what anything meant.”
“At least you have a story to tell now.”

“Like I need more of those,” Magnus says ruefully.

“Let’s move things out of my foyer.” He nods towards the living room and Alec follows him as he heads to the couch. There’s an infinitesimal pause, Alec only notices it because he’s neurotic, but Magnus chooses one end of the couch, the one closest to the french doors.

Alec has a minute to panic—couch or chair or other chair— but in the end his brain short circuits and he goes with the closest option.

The other end of the couch.

There’s an entire cushion between them and Magnus doesn’t look like he’s judging him too hard, so Alec relaxes against the surprisingly comfortable couch. It looks like it’s supposed to be a statement piece not to actually sit on, but as Alec leans against the back, it’s nice as hell.

Magnus looks smug. “Not as hard as it looks, huh?”

“I thought I was going to have to pretend like I wasn’t extremely uncomfortable for the entire night but this couch is actually a dream.”

Magnus nods a little as he settles against his armrest, bringing one leg up to tuck under the other. “I know exactly what you mean. When I first went furniture shopping, I wanted something comfortable but not shabby, you know? I walked by this couch a dozen times because it looked like something rich people have—useless and purely decorative. But, I hadn’t found anything yet and it was in my budget so on a whim I sat down and almost melted into it. I bought it on the spot. I’ve had it eight years and it looks the same as the day I bought it—definitely one of the best purchases I ever made.”

Alec mirrors Magnus’s position, runs a hand through his hair. “I know exactly what you mean. I bought the couch I have now when I moved out on my own. I won’t lie, it looks like shit, but it’s comfortable as hell and I know that I won’t ever get rid of it. It was the first big purchase I bought when the money came in from my first single. I’m emotionally attached to it.”

Magnus hums, looks at Alec with narrowed eyes. “I wouldn’t have expected that. You keep surprising me.”

“Alec blinks. “Good surprises, I hope?”

“Very good,” Magnus says softly.

There’s a moment as the two of them just look at each other. It’s not uncomfortable, just a pause in the conversation, but it strikes Alec.

He can’t remember the last person he could share the quiet with.

He clears his throat, raises one of his eyebrows. “What are these surprises?”

Magnus grins, reaching out one of his legs to gently poke at Alec’s. “You’re a superstar, darling. I’m sure you could buy a thousand couches and it wouldn’t dent your credit card. But, you keep the first couch you had for sentimental reasons. You tip lavishly—don’t think I didn’t notice how much you left Anna and Marv a few weeks ago. You’re not an asshole,” Magnus concludes bluntly.

Barking out a laugh, Alec says, “That’s good to know. I try not to be an asshole. I’ve been doing this since I was sixteen. I’ve seen a lot of people come and go and I just try to be good. Not the best, but
it doesn’t take a lot to say please or thank you or not to trash a hotel room.”

He breaks off, stares into nothing for a minute. When he looks back up at Magnus, he finds him already staring at him, eyes intense.

“I have an image. I actively cultivate that reputation as a playboy and rockstar. I don’t hide the fact that I like to have a good time. But, I also work my ass off. Some of my peers get into the industry and they see the signing bonuses and the easy hookups and they think that’s it. They don’t see the hundreds of hours that go into producing an album or how important it is to network professionally or that the life isn’t for everyone.

“So, yeah, I tip because it means nothing to me but a lot to them. That couch is comfy as hell and I’m sentimental. I’m glad you see beyond the surface, Magnus.

“I’m glad you care enough to want to,” he says, voice low.

Magnus studies Alec for a moment, eyes flitting across his face. Voice just above a whisper, he says, “Of course I do.”

He straightens, leaning forward almost imperceptibly. Alec catches himself swaying towards Magnus, just a little.

The air is tense with the promise of something and Alec's close enough to see Magnus's eyes dilate. Magnus jerks a little and leans back against the armrest.

Alec lets out a breath.

“So,” Magnus starts. “I have all four movies and a drawer full of take out menus. Are you hungry?”

“Starving.”

Magnus laughs. “Okay, that’s good. What are you in the mood for? I’m hungry, too.”

Alec thinks for a minute. “Is there a local place that’s your go-to? I’m not too familiar with Brooklyn but I’m sure there something you’re in the mood for?”

Alec can’t be sure, but he thinks Magnus’s eyes might drop down to his mouth for a millisecond. He shakes himself. As if.

“Twilight is a bit of a comfort watch for me-- the movies really are shit and I usually just order a pizza from this place down the block. It’s a family owned place and they know what they’re doing.”

Alec’s nodding before Magnus even finishes. “That sounds amazing. My brother dragged me to the gym for hours today. I really am starving.”

“Say no more, darling-- oh, is there anything you don’t like on your pizza?”

Alec shakes his head and Magnus stands up and heads to what Alec presumes is his bedroom. He comes back a minute later, phone to his ear. He doesn’t go back to the couch. Instead, he wanders around the living room aimlessly while he talks to whoever is on the line.

“Good evening Tony, it’s Magnus. . . Oh, I’m fine. How’s your family? . . . They do grow up so fast. . . I’m still teaching, summer classes right now. . . Yup, the usual but let’s double the bread and the brownies. Thanks man, I’ll see Mikey soon.”
He hangs up, looks over at Alec with an amused expression. “Tony likes to talk. You can’t just order pizza-- you have to observe the pleasantries. He and his wife have been making pizza for thirty years and it’s a local joint. They pretty much know everyone.”

He comes around the couch, settling back into his spot. He relaxes, sprawls out a little more.

“I usually get an extra large supreme with an order of cheesy bread and brownies for dessert. How does that sound?”

Alec’s stomach growls and Magnus laughs.

“I’ll take that as approval. Now, let me put the first movie in and we can pause it when the food is delivered?”

“Sounds great.”

A few minutes later, the starting credits start to play.

Alec usually likes to watch movies silently, especially the first time. He hates when people talk during movies, distracting him, detracting from the experience.

But-- it’s so bad.

They’re only about halfway through the first one, but Alec’s already looking forward to the rest of them. Edward looks like he’d literally rather die than look at Bella, Jacob is a little pathetic, and Bella herself looks like Alec feels-- there are really no good options, here.

Magnus and him make fun of the movie until there are tears in their eyes.

They’ve just gotten past the part where Edward scrabbles up a tree, shining like a disco ball, and Alec’s absolutely losing his shit.

“Oh my God,” he gasps. “What the fuck. What is wrong with him?”

Magnus’s mouth is open to reply when there’s a knock on the door. He stands up, chuckling. Over his shoulder, he calls out, “Why do you think they live in the Pacific Northwest, darling? The sun makes them sparkle and it just wouldn’t do for people to see that.”

Magnus opens the door, taking the boxes and sliding cash to the delivery boy.

“Thanks, Mikey.”

“No problem, Magnus. Enjoy your food--” he leans to the side, sees Alec half reclining on the couch. “And your date.”

The teenager leaves, chortling, pocketing the bills.

Magnus turns around, arms full and Alec rushes up to help him, grabbing the smaller boxes.

Magnus rolls his eyes. “Youths. They’re so precocious and they think they're so funny.” He sets the food down on the kitchen bar.

“I want to say that I was never such an asshat, but tragically, I know that I was probably worse.”

Alec nods and opens the pizza box, mouth watering at the smell of garlic and cheese and sauce.
“Oh, I know I was a bit of a nightmare. I was either really quiet and surly or over the top. I was a mess. Holy fuck, Magnus, this pizza looks amazing.”

Magnus grabs plates, handing one to Alec while he opens the box of cheesy bread.

“It really does. Tony’s outdone himself tonight.”

They two plate up and head back to the living room, collapsing against cushions and resuming the movie.

They both go back for seconds and pop in the second movie, polishing off the brownies during it.

As the credits start to roll, Alec slouches in his seat a little. Their plates are on the coffee table in front of them and they’re angled towards each other, knees barely touching.

Magnus climbs to his feet and stretches.

“Ready for number three?”

Alec groans. “I’m so full that all I’m ready for is a nap. I haven’t eaten that much in ages.”

Magnus disappears somewhere but Alec can still hear his voice.

“That’s what movie nights are for, Alexander. Eating too much unhealthy food and watching questionable movies.”

He comes back a moment later carrying a huge ass blanket.

“I was getting a little chilly, but I’d rather be cold with a blanket than fine without one, so.”

He sits down on the edge of the couch and looks over at Alec, he waves his blanket a little. “Want to share? I don’t know how you’re feeling but this blanket is definitely big enough for the two of us.”

Alec debates for a second before he’s scooting over to the middle cushion. “Whoever says no to additional coziness?”

Magnus grins and sits down next to Alec, their sides touching.

Alec is overtly aware of exactly where they’re touching.

Magnus settles the blanket over them both, smoothing it down.

He looks at Alec expectantly and Alec gives him a droll look. “Yes, you’re right, this is the best blanket I’ve ever had the good fortune to use.”

Magnus beams. “Told you so, darling.”

What Alec doesn't say is that the blanket smells like Magnus, sandalwood a subtle scent. It's nice. Beyond nice.

Magnus starts Eclipse and minute by minute, Alec can feel himself getting sleepier. He’s stuffed with amazing food, Magnus is a long line of warmth beside him, and the couch combined with the damned blanket is making him drowsy.

Magnus shuffles a little, moving imperceptibly closer, leaning into Alec a little more.
Alec turns away, muffling a yawn, and slides down the couch a little, leg settling more firmly against Magnus.

He closes his eyes, just for a minute, and the next thing he’s aware of is someone on top of him.

He moves, just a little, and discovers that he’s laying down. Opening his eyes, he immediately squints as sunlight comes pouring in through the french doors, hitting him right in the face.

He closes his eyes again and just takes a few minutes to breathe and get his bearings.

His eyes fly open as he remembers where he is. Who he’s with.

He looks down and gets a face full of hair, Magnus settled against his chest.

Alec has a brief thought of oh shit, but he can’t deny that this feels good.

Honestly, it’s been awhile since he woke up next to a guy and didn’t immediately look for the exit.

He moves, just a little, and Magnus hums, squeezing him from where he’s wrapped an arm around his middle.

Alec feels Magnus waking up and has a moment to panic-- will Magnus think this is too forward? Friends fall asleep together, right? This won’t turn into an awkward morning after-- forgetting that nothing even happened?

Magnus noses along his tshirt before he freezes. He looks up and meets Alec’s eyes.

There’s a moment of silence as they just look at each other. Magnus looks a little ridiculous, makeup smudged all to hell and back, his hair rumpled and Alec knows he doesn’t look any better.

“Well.” Magnus’s lips quirk up. “We didn’t get to the fourth movie.”

Alec laughs, surprised.

“No,” he agrees. “Your blanket was too comfortable. It lulled me right to sleep.”

Magnus sighs. “It is magic.”

He looks back up at Alec, solemnly. “Your hair’s a mess, Alexander.”

Alec snorts. “You should see your face, Magnus.”

Magnus jolts upright, eyes widening in horror. “I fell asleep with my makeup on! Oh, I bet I look like a raccoon that lost a fight with Sephora.”

In the next moment, he’s shrugging, nonchalantly. “It happens. It’s better that you see me like this now so that I know if this friendship can continue or if messy makeup is too much for you.”

Laughing, Alec sits up, pulls the blanket into his lap from where it was pooling on the floor.

“It’ll take more than smeared makeup to scare me off, don’t worry.”

Magnus smiles and there’s a few minutes of silence as they relax on the couch.

It’s weird, but Alec doesn’t feel need to make a mad dash to the door. He’s not feeling like a clock’s ticking menacingly. He doesn’t feel judged for not immediately making an excuse for why he needs
to leave.

There’s no pressure here and it feels damned good.

His thoughts break off as Magnus starts talking.

“I don’t know what you have planned today-- we had really just discussed last night-- but I know
this place that serves a mean belgian waffle. Feel like breakfast?”

Alec takes stock, grimaces. “I’d love to but I’d also really love to not look like I just rolled out of bed
if we go out.”

Magnus shrugs. “I have two bathrooms with extra supplies. Feel free to get ready here, if you’re
interested.”

Grinning, Alec says, “Alright, sounds like a plan. When do you want to leave?”

Magnus looks at the clock above the television. “How about forty five minutes?”

Alec nods and stands, cracking his back. “Meet you back here then.”

He starts walking but pauses, turning back. “Where’s your bathroom?”

Magnus laughs and points to the left of the entryway. “Down that corridor, there’s a bathroom that’s
the second door on the right. You should have everything you need but let me know if you don’t see
something.”

Alec nods and turns back. He finds the bathroom without a problem. It’s elegant, if eccentric. It’s
done in shades of burgundy and there’s an elephant toothbrush holder on the sink.

He finds toothpaste, towels, and a spare toothbrush. He takes a shower-- the water pressure is
amazing-- and gets out, wrapping a towel around his waist. He brushes his teeth and finger combs
his hair as best he can.

He doesn’t have any other clothes, so he has to wear yesterday’s. There’s a bedroom right next to the
bathroom and Alec gathers his clothes-- it’s a bitch to get dressed in a steamy bathroom.

He opens the door and almost walks into Magnus.

They both step back and Alec immediately remembers that he’s half naked, the flimsy towel
wrapped around his waist the only thing keeping him decent.

Magnus seems a little dazed, staring at Alec’s chest with a sort of mesmerized intensity.

“Magnus?”

Magnus jolts, turns up to smile at Alec.

“Alexander! I was just seeing if you needed anything.”

Magnus’s gaze keeps dropping to below Alec’s face and Alec feels heat climb up his neck. While it
was gratifying to be checked out, especially by Magnus, he was probably reading what he wanted
into things.

Alec shakes his head a little, clearing it and realizing that he hasn’t answered Magnus yet.
“I’m fine-- I was just going to get dressed in the guest room.”

Magnus nods a little too enthusiastically. “Okay then, help yourself. I’ll leave you to it. See you in a few.”

He turns on his heel and heads to the other side of the loft.

Alec watches him leave for a few seconds before going across the hall to the guest room. It only takes him a minute and then he’s opening the door and heading to the living room.

He debates what to do. Seeing that he has twenty minutes until they’re set to leave, he walks over to the end table, picks up his phone.

Finding that it had died sometime in the night he turns instead to the bookshelf on the wall. It looks to be a mix of knickknacks and books and Alec’s eyes snag on *European Conquerors*.

Alec still has his copy at home-- he’s been making slow but steady progress, saving Magnus’s chapter for last.

He stands by the wall and opens the book, easily finding his place. He gets absorbed and is startled when he hears a cough.

He looks over his shoulder and sees Magnus looking at him, brows raised.

Alec brings the book up, showing him the cover.

“I saw this on your shelf and thought I’d read while I waited for you.”

Magnus looks unguarded. “You’re actually reading that?”

Alec shakes his head, confused. “Yeah? I told you I would and I checked it out of the library. Plus, you wrote it. There’s no way that I’m not going to.”

Magnus’s face is the picture of surprise before his expression melts into one of fondness.

He clears his throat.

“Well. What do you think of it so far?”

Alec shrugs, looks down at the book.

“It’s dense but really interesting. I liked Gregor’s account of the Dutch East Indies-- I learned a lot. But I didn’t care too much about Lorsch’s chapter on Britain’s economic theory. I comprehended it but I couldn’t help but think that he supported colonialism in the end. He didn’t really write as a historian.”

Magnus rolls his eyes. “That’s because the old windbag devoutly believes in British superiority and thinks that the fact that they invaded half the world is a testament to its strength and vivacity. He mourns the loss of the Great British Empire like a baby mourns stolen candy.”

He walks over to the foyer, sliding his keys into his pocket.

He looks over his shoulder. “Have you read my chapter, yet?”

Alec shakes his head, tucking the book back into its place before snagging his phone from the table.
“No.” He grins. “I figured that I would save the best for last.”

Magnus rolls his eyes but Alec can tell that he’s pleased.

“Well, then, you’ll just have to keep me updated.”

Alec smiles. “I guess I will.”

The head out the door into a warm June morning.

The sun is shining and people are milling about.

Alec and Magnus head out to breakfast and enjoy crisp, fluffy Belgian waffles, Alec insisting on paying since Magnus picked up the takeout last night.

Neither can remember smiling so much during a mundane breakfast.

Both are already looking forward to the next time they can see each other.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Feel free to live tweet this on twitter using #htbt-- I keep up with the tag regularly. Song in this chapter is Angel by The Weeknd. Happy Reading :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec walks through the door of his apartment, sporting a dopey grin. He probably looks ridiculous but he can’t contain the contentment that’s lighting him up from the inside. It’s just past noon and he’s spent a few hours at this sunny little breakfast spot with Magnus. The Belgian waffles were perfect as promised and the company even better.

He’d left Magnus with a smile and some pep in his step. They hadn’t talked about anything deep or earth shattering. It had just been two people hanging out and getting to know each other. From favorite flowers to amusing anecdotes about students and fans, the two of them hadn’t even noticed when the place had cleared out. Closing at noon, The Waffle Iron staff had been cleaning the tables around them before the two had surfaced enough to realize that they were the assholes holding everyone up.

They’d left without delay, leaving an extra generous tip to compensate and then had lingered on the sidewalk for another twenty five minutes. It was like they just couldn’t leave each other.

It was ridiculous. Alec could admit in the privacy of his own mind that he was crushing. Hard. Magnus was interesting and funny and was attractive enough to grace any magazine cover. He was smart as hell and there was just something about him that kept drawing Alec in.

He can’t remember the last time he went out for breakfast and it didn’t turn into a business meeting. Most of his friends weren’t morning people, preferring to stay up until the wee hours of the morning and he didn’t want to spend one on one time with the others.

Magnus could ask him to go air freshener shopping, though, and he’d jump at the invitation.

Alec runs a hand through his hair and laughs a little to himself as he remembers one of Magnus’s stories about a Ragnor, a scalding pot of tea, and a bottle of hair dye.

“What’s got my brother not only doing the walk of shame but looking in remarkably good spirits about it? He must’ve been good.”

Alec looks up, smile still playing on his mouth. Isabelle is dressed in a simple pair of leggings and tank top, hair in a high ponytail.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m not doing the walk of shame. I’m coming back to my apartment, where I live, after going out for breakfast.”

“Oh, but that’s not true is it?” Jace walks out of his bedroom grinning like the cat that’s caught the canary. “A little birdie told me that you have a crush.”

Scowling, Alec flatly demands, “Who the hell told you that.”
Jace jumps over the back of the couch, landing sprawled across it. Wrestling a pillow into place he says, “That’s for me to know buddy.” He points an accusatory finger at Alec. “What you need to worry about is the fact that you didn’t tell me.”

“Or me,” Isabelle says, crossing her arms over her chest.

Rolling his eyes, Alec heads over to the couch, slapping Jace’s feet off of it. Settling into place, he grudgingly allows Jace to throw his legs over his.

“I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“Hermano, that’s not a denial,” Izzy says gleefully. She plops down in a chair, leaning forward. “Dish.”

Alec slumps against the couch, lets his head fall back until he’s staring at the ceiling. On the one hand, they know now—there’s no doubt in his mind that Simon spilled the beans at the first opportunity. Really, it’s just surprising that the two of them haven’t cornered him before now, demanding details.

On the other hand though, what is there to tell? He made a friend? He doesn’t really feel like airing his feelings all over the place, especially since nothing will come of it.

He’s pulled out of his thoughts when Jace nudges his leg with his toes. Turning to glare at him, Alec starts, “I suppose Simon told you that I made a friend?”

“You’re going to have to do better than that Alec,” Jace says pityingly. “Simon told us that Magnus called you Alexander and you didn’t eviscerate him on the spot.”

“On the contrary,” Izzy chimes in. “Apparently, you get a dopey look on your face-- a little like the one you had when you walked through the door.”

Jace waggles his eyebrows. “Did someone get lucky last night?”

Throwing him a deadpan look, Alec says, “I suppose a lot of people got lucky last night, Jace. However, I wasn’t one of them. If you must know I went over to Magnus’s where we watched a few movies and I ended up falling asleep on his couch.”

“What’s with the early afternoon stroll home, then?”

Sighing, Alec offers, “When we woke up, Magnus invited me out to breakfast, so we went.” Seeing both of his siblings eyes widen, he hastily concludes, “That’s it. There’s nothing else to report. I have a new friend, we fell asleep watching shitty teen movies and eating pizza, and we went out for breakfast this morning.”

Isabelle looks a little disappointed. “You’re telling me that it’s purely platonic? No kissing, no meaningful eye contact, nothing?”

Alec shifts in his seat, curses as he feels heat climb up the back of his neck. “We are just friends,” he says as firmly as he can.

Humming, Jace narrows his eyes, looking over Alec with sharp eyes. “Something’s not adding up.”

Alec steadfastly refuses to look over at either of them as Jace and Izzy lock eyes. He knows that they’re having a silent conversation, can feel them look at him, can see from his peripheral as they make ridiculous facial expressions.
“So, Alec,” Izzy begins innocuously. “You don’t feel anything for Magnus?”

“I like and respect him.”

“That’s it? You’ve felt more for your accountant,” Jace asks incredulously.

Alec is still for one, two, three beats before he sighs dramatically. “That’s all there can be.”

Izzy’s eyebrows shoot up, not having expected Alec to turn so forthcoming. “What do you mean ‘that’s all there can be?’ Do you want more?”

Alec looks up at her. He tries to smile but he thinks that it’s probably closer to a grimace. “I think I might.”

Isabelle’s smile takes over her face. She leans forward, slaps playfully at his knee. “Alec, that’s amazing! You like Magnus. That’s the first guy I’ve heard you talk about it years, maybe since high school.”

Alec shrugs. “Okay, yes, fine, I like Magnus a little bit more than a friend would. That doesn’t mean anything, though.”

“What are you talking about buddy? Why don’t you tell him?”

Alec looks at Jace, blank. “What’s there to tell. ‘Hey Magnus, I know I’m on the road ten months out of the year and that the paparazzi are goddamn bloodsuckers but would you like to go out with me sometime?’”

Rolling his eyes, Jace says, “No need to put a positive spin on things, Alec, damn. I’m sure this guy knows who you are right?” His eyes light up. “Don’t tell me that you’re pulling an Aladdin and he thinks you’re, like, a chimney sweep or something--”

“Magnus knows who I am.”

“Magnus, huh? That’s different.”

Alec can’t help the little smile that turns up his lips. “It suits him,” he murmurs.

Izzy echoes that smile, “Well, tell us more about him then. If he knows who you are and you’re still going moon-eyed over him then he must not be a crazy fan. So, give us some details!”

Drumming fingers on Jace’s leg, Alec thinks. He’s obviously not going to get into the deep stuff but he can bare the basics.

“He’s twenty nine and a professor at Columbia.”

Laughing, Jace says, “He sounds like your kind of guy. Does he wear spectacles and recite obscure facts?”

Scoffing, Alec responds, “No Jace, he’s twenty nine not ninety nine. He looks l-like a young professor from Columbia. Smart, athletic. Nice.”

Alec falters a little as he tries to describe Magnus in a way that does him justice without being effusive. He doesn’t need his siblings realizing just how much time he’s spent drooling over Magnus’s good looks and elegant demeanor.

Izzy shoots him a deadpan look. “Tell us what you really think Alec.”
Suddenly frustrated, Alec shoves Jace’s legs away and stands up. “I don’t know what you want from me. What good does it do? Even if I did feel something for Magnus, I can’t just give up my life. It’s a fact that I’m one of the most well known artists of this year-- hell, the decade. I can’t ask someone to share that burden.”

He glares at Izzy. “Don’t give me that look. I might be blessed more than most people can even comprehend but you know there are downsides to my kind of fame. I don’t want my lifestyle to ruin what we have. I’ve only known Magnus for a month but he’s become important to me. He’s not interested in me like that, anyway. He’s the chair of the history department. He’s written books. For fuck’s sake, he’s the keynote speaker at a conference this week. Why would he voluntarily get involved with a musician that the press love to use as sales fodder? I don’t want him to be constantly inundated with reports that I’m cheating on him with some guy I talked to in passing while out getting coffee. I don’t want fans to attack him on social media or tear apart our relationship. He’s made it clear that he likes his quiet life and it would be too selfish of me to impose my life on him like that.”

The room grows quiet save for Alec’s agitated breath. No one says anything after his outburst and Alec feels exposed. *Fuck.* There’s no way that Jace and Izzy don’t know just how wound up he is about everything, not when he'd just spewed everything.

There’s no way that they’re going to let this rest.

He’s surprised, then, when they both back off.

"Alright, Alec, if that’s how you feel then we’ll stop."

"You’ll stop," he asks warily.

Jace jumps in. “Yeah, man, we were just teasing but if it really means so much to you then we know when to shut up.”

He stands up and claps Alec on the shoulder. “You know we love messing around but it sounds like this Magnus means a lot to you. While we’re excited as shit that you’re finally showing interest in a guy, you’re right. We do know the toll that being a celebrity brings-- everything that you've gone through because of those bastards-- and we’ll respect your decision.”

Just as Alec lets out a breath, Jace continues. “We might think that it’s a stupid ass decision and you’re being too cynical and selling yourself short, but you’re a grown ass man. We can’t make you do anything. As long as this dude treats you right and isn’t in this just for your name, then it’s all good.”

“Yeah,” Isabelle agrees. “While I’m beyond annoyed and insulted that you didn’t tell us before now- you’ve known him for a month,” she repeats incredulously, “-- It’s good that you’re widening your circle, Alec. Magnus sounds good and if he makes you smile so much then we’ll reserve judgment.

“Which isn’t to say that we won’t break both his kneecaps if he turns out to be just another bottom feeder,” she remarks offhandedly, studying her nails, cool smile on her face. “It’s not like it would be the first time.”

Alec levels a stare at her. “Izzy, you’ve never broke anyone’s kneecaps.”

“Oh, I’m talking metaphorical kneecaps, big brother. It's all about what matters to some people. That could be body parts or it could be investments, club privileges, front row seats to Paris Fashion Week...” she trails off with a self-satisfied grin on her face and Alec just shakes his head, reluctantly...
amused and overwhelmingly fond. His siblings were intrusive as shit but they always meant well.

He stretches, raising arms over his head, and looks at the clock on the wall. Yawning as he sees that it’s almost two, he lets his arms fall back down, automatically reaching for his phone in his back pocket. He takes it out, cursing at the black screen as he remembers that it had died sometime in the night.

He looks up at Jace and Izzy’s expectant expressions. “I’m going to my room to shower and take a nap.”

Jace opens his mouth, no doubt a smartass comment on his tongue, but closes it with a resounding click. Izzy for her part just nods, standing as well.

“I’m going for a run and I might swing by Uptown Java on my way back. Anyone want anything?”

Alec shakes his head. He turns toward the corridor and walks into his room, closing the door as Jace recites his thirty syllable coffee order to a beleaguered looking Izzy.

Once alone in his bedroom, Alec closes his eyes and leans against the door. He focuses on his breathing. His mind plays back everything he said about Magnus and he can’t help but wince a little. A lot.

That’s the thing about his siblings. They know him better than anyone. He lets his guard down more than is probably wise around them. While he knows there will be merciless prying and teasing, he also knows that they have his back.

Telling them about Magnus was almost a given at this point and if he’s being honest with himself then he might’ve spilled the beans so eagerly because he wanted someone else to know. He was tired of feeling like effervescent bubbles were spilling in his stomach when he was with Magnus and then being filled with jaded pessimism whenever he wasn’t. That kind of back and forth was wreaking havoc on him.

He feels like a broken record in his own goddamn mind but he can’t help but wish Magnus saw him like that-- maybe if Magnus did feel something then taking the plunge wouldn’t be so bad.

Not if they’d have each other.

With a sigh, Alec trips out of his clothes and heads to the bathroom. He takes a short shower and less than twenty minutes later he’s stepping into a pair of plain black boxer briefs.

He plugs his phone in and sprawls out onto the bed, laying on his back. He stares at the ceiling, feels the pressure of a quiet room echoing around him.

He’s not in love with Magnus. That, he knows for a fact. But, he’s in this ephemeral stage of possibility. He knows enough about Magnus Bane to be intrigued, to want to come back.

Magnus is genuine. He’s a little intimidating and a lot amazing. Alec replays their first meeting in his head. He remembers a terrible opening line and dark red. He remembers letting his guard down for the first time in ages, waiting to be burned.

Pleasantly surprised when it turned out to be warmth instead that flooded through him.

He thinks about Magnus’s smile, his laugh, the way his eyes crinkle at the corners and the way his hands move gracefully through the air when he’s delivering a salient point.
Before he knows it, Alec is digging out his song book from his bag, returning to the bed, resting against the headboard, brows furrowed in concentration.

Angel.

The term slips through his consciousness without thought and Alec scribbles it down. It fits in a way. Magnus is ethereal and often seems more than a physical body can contain.

He’s a star that Alec could watch for ages.

I feel you’re closer every time I call you.

He thinks about the way Magnus can ease his anxiety, his rare insecurity, with a simple phone call, a single text message.

He thinks about the pressure of his life, the fact that he’s lived more than most and twice as fast.

But I know what I am and the life I live.

He thinks about how frankly wonderful Magnus seems, how every time they’re together or they talk at all he’s filled with contentment. Magnus slows him down while propelling him forward. He’s not Alec Lightwood. He’s Alec and that means more to him than he’ll ever be able to say. Magnus doesn’t take his shit but he gently encourages Alec to be his best, to keep swimming.

Even if it’s not him, Magnus deserves someone who cares, deeply and selflessly.

I hope you find somebody.

He can’t help but wish that person was him, though. Sometimes it felt like they were more than halfway there. They talked all the time, good morning texts and late night recaps of their day. Things moved seamlessly between them when they were together properly. Everything was so fucking easy.

But I know time will tell if we’re meant for this.

Hope against hope, Alec won’t snuff out the thought that maybe one day, eventually, Magnus might see him as more, might be willing to explore whatever this thing is between them.

Although he’ll look completely fucking pathetic if Magnus never sees him as more than a simple friend. A pal. Someone to rant about his day and occasionally eat junk with but nothing more.

The yearning in his chest doesn’t give a fuck about that though.

A dangerously empty life.

You always seem to bring me light.

The truth of the matter is that Magnus has breathed new life into Alec. He’s written a song for the first time in months, he looks forward to text messages, he thinks of Magnus with anticipation tinged with dread but it’s an adrenaline rush all the same.

Things don’t seem so dour. Fuck knows that they aren’t perfect but they’re not quite the shitshow Alec pictured them to be just a few short weeks ago.

And it’s all due to Magnus.

Alec knows it’s foolish and unwise and downright stupid to put all of that onto someone else. Alec works hard and his writer’s block was bound to come crashing down sooner or later. They’ve
known each other a month, maybe a little more? It’s too soon to throw all of his eggs into this particular basket.

As Alec shuts his book, tossing it onto his nightstand, he can’t find it in himself to care too much, however.

Not when it feels so damned good.

Alec drifts off, sleepily thinking that even if this ends in heartbreak, he won’t regret it.

He refuses to regret anything that happens with Magnus, not when he feels more now than he has in years.

His last thought is that Magnus will either be his saving grace or biggest regret.

Time will tell.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve made a spotify playlist titled Httbt. This has both songs that will be featured in this fic and music I listened to when writing chapters! I hope everyone enjoyed this chapter! Things are certainly heating up :)

Chapter 18

*Have a good flight! I hope you don’t get stuck next to an awful stranger ;)*

Magnus can’t help but smile down at his phone as he sees Alec’s send off message. He’s in line for airport security and trying to drown out the three children screaming behind him.

Magnus loves traveling but sometimes it’s hard to maintain his usual good humor when he has wailing drowning out the chatter around him.

Especially when he hasn’t had his morning coffee yet.

His flight was slated for seven in the morning, which means he’d arrived at the airport at a dastardly five o’clock.

He’d woken up in the middle of the night, disoriented and more than a little pissed off. Thank God today wasn’t anything important on the conference agenda; otherwise he’d be fucked. While Magnus had grown used to waking up early, this was just ridiculous. He doesn’t know what had persuaded him to book a flight so early— especially on a Monday— but he hates past him with a vengeance right now.

He has a brief moment to wonder why the hell Alec is up before the birds but there’s no time to respond as he steps up, handing over his driver’s license and boarding pass to a bored looking TSA agent. He’s waved on and takes off his shoes and belt, throwing his items into a bin and waiting his turn to go through the security screening.

A few minutes later, he’s sliding his belt back through its loopholes, stepping into his shoes and gathering his belongings, looking desperately for the nearest coffee kiosk.

Thankfully, there’s a Starbucks on the way to his gate and there are only a few people waiting in line. Rolling his carry on beside him, he gets in line and takes out his phone.

*Thank you, Alexander. So far it’s smooth sailing but I’m in desperate need of caffeine. Who the hell flies this early?*

He spends a few moments on Twitter, liking a tweet from Alec about progress in the studio before reaching for today’s issue of The New York Times. He glances over the headlines before it’s his turn to order.

He orders a venti americano, extra shot, and pays for the newspaper. He’s just grabbing his cup, paper tucked under his arm, when his phone vibrates.

*Early birds, Magnus. Some people like to get a jump start on the day.*

Magnus scoffs.

He takes a minute to tuck his phone back into his pocket and places The Times in his briefcase before heading to his gate, pleased to see that there are only a handful of people seated across the area. He sits down and takes a fortifying drink, easing into the strong bitterness of the espresso.

He debates on what to do. Checking his watch, Magnus sees that he has forty minutes before the plane starts boarding. He can fuck around on his phone, read a few depressing articles, or--
He could talk to Alec.

Even though it’s just past 5:30, Alec is obviously awake and coherent.

With a mental shrug, Magnus swipes across Alec’s contact, brings the phone up to his ear as it starts to ring. He’s just thinking that it will go to voicemail when Alec’s voice, strangely breathless, sounds in his ear.

"Magnus?"

“Good morning, Alexander. What on earth are you doing up so early? It’s not even light outside yet?”

He feels warmth trail through him as Alec chuckles. “Jace dragged me from bed at five to go work out with him at Fuel.”

Magnus hums. “Fuel? Is that why you sound like you just finished sprinting a marathon?”

“Sorry, Jace owns a gym called Fuel. He usually gets here around five and today he decided I needed to, I don’t know, release some tension or some shit. We just finished racing a few miles around the track when you called.”

“What else is on the slate this morning? I’m sure your brother didn’t bring you there just to run.”

Laughing, Alec says, “Oh, no, you’re right about that. We’ll probably spend a couple of hours sparring and end it with weights. He’s weirdly obsessed with what I can bench press right now. He says I should’ve gone soft while I was out on tour.”

Under his breath he mutters, “As if.”

Magnus can’t help but think of Alec, sweaty, hair disheveled, skin flushed. Fucking.

He really shouldn’t be so preoccupied with imagining how exertion would sharpen Alec’s already flawless features. His mind flashes to his brief, but ogling, glimpse of Alec straight out of the shower over the weekend and he shifts in the hard airport chair, suddenly far too warm in the chilly space.

“Magnus?”

Magnus clears his throat, realizing that it’s been a few seconds since Alec finished talking.

“Sorry, darling, I spaced out a little. Mornings just aren’t my thing. It sounds like you have a busy few hours ahead of you, though. I didn’t know you were so into working out.”

He can hear the smile in Alec’s voice as he says, “What did you expect, that all I did was take shots and dance? Tour is grueling and I need to keep my endurance and stamina up— concerts are really just two hour workouts and I need to keep in shape to deliver the best performance for my audience. Plus, I think exercise is a stress reliever. I regularly run to help keep my head clear and with a brother like Jace, there’s no way that I wouldn’t spend my fair share of time in the gym.”

“I’m not much for cardio but I drag myself to the gym a few times a week and practice yoga daily.”

Alec clears his throat. “Yoga?”

Magnus responds, a little distracted as he watches a mother walk with twin toddlers down the aisle, rushing to help one as it falls right on its butt and starts gearing up to cry. “Yes, I’ve maintained my yoga instructor certification for almost a decade now and it’s the first thing I do in the mornings. I
haven’t taught a class in a few years though.”

There’s a beat of silence before Alec’s offering, “Maybe we can workout together sometime. It might be fun to train with someone who isn’t such a gym rat.”

Magnus hears an indignant yell in the background and bites back a laugh. “That sounds fun, darling. Name the time and place.”

Moving on, he asks, “You played sports in high school, didn’t you?”

“Yeah,” Alec confirms. “I played soccer in the fall and baseball in the spring. How’d you know?”

Magnus takes a few sips of his drink, blowing over the lid to cool it down a little. “I read your article for Out Magazine earlier this month.”

“I didn’t know you read about me.” Surprise tinges Alec’s voice and Magnus can’t help but laugh. “Alec, we already established that not only are you a celebrity but I’m a fan of your music. I think it’s to be expected that I might’ve read the occasional article about you-- especially once we met.”

There’s a beat of silence before Magnus decides to add a little extra tidbit. “I follow you on social media, you know.”

It’s muted, but Magnus is almost certain that Alec squawks.

“What? Since when? I know I’m being ridiculous, but I feel like I should’ve known about this.”

Thinking Magnus, replies, “I’ve been into your music for awhile. A few years maybe? I just liked something of yours when I was in line at Starbucks, actually.”

Alec’s voice sounds far away as he asks, “What’s your Twitter handle?”

“Luckily, there aren’t too many people in the world named Magnus Bane so it’s just my name. Am I on speaker?”

Distractedly, Alec says, “Yeah, I had to get on Twitter and follow you. Is it the same for Instagram?”

Magnus hums in affirmation and there’s a few moments of silence as Alec does whatever he’s doing and Magnus relaxes against his seat and enjoys his coffee.

This is nice. It’s not an awkward silence, like they’re trying to fill it and it’s just not working. They don’t have anything to say and they’re both content to take a minute.

It’s rare that Magnus has found someone who’s okay with not filling every second of dead air. Rarer still is for it to feel okay, good, relaxing. Easy. It’s absurd, but there are no expectations with Alec. Magnus doesn’t have to be the life of the party, always ready with a quip and amusing story. It’s enough that he’s there on the other end of the line.

He might be tired and a little annoyed at everything, but Alec makes him smile, relieves tension that even the smoothest travelling unfurls.

Magnus likes being with Alec in the quiet.

Sounding pleased, Alec’s voice is clear in his ear as he asks, “What time is takeoff?”

“I have about twenty minutes until they call my zone.”
“Are you excited for the conference?”

“I am. It’s going to be a hectic four days but I’m looking forward to catching up with a few of my peers I only see at these sorts of things.” There’s a pause before he can’t help but sneer. “I’ll have to be careful to avoid one of them, though.”

“Don’t tell me you have another professional rivalry. I didn’t think academia was so cutthroat.”

Magnus hears the teasing tone and his own lips turn up. “You have no idea, Alec. Academia is just as mercenary as any other field—maybe even more so. But, no, this particular avoidance is for an ex-girlfriend. It’s the only time I’ve ever mixed business and pleasure and let me tell you, it is not worth it.”

“Oh?”

Alec’s voice sounds off but Magnus chalks it up to a weird connection. “It was during my Oxford days. Camille and I were both PhD candidates and we had a whirlwind fling for a few months. It burned out soon enough, though, and after the initial attraction, I realized what a nightmare she was. It petered out soon after but there’s always been, shall we say, a hint of animosity between us. We usually play it off as professional rivalry but there are a few people who know the truth.”

“That’s rough, Magnus. I hope that you can avoid her and still enjoy the trip.”

Magnus laughs. “Don’t worry, darling, I’m made of sterner stuff than that and I stopped feeling anything towards her years ago. It’s just an inconvenience at this point. I think we’re on a panel together tomorrow and she has the nasty habit of speaking over other guests. Honestly, I don’t know how she earned her tenure at Dartmouth.”

Magnus and Alec talk for a few more minutes about his schedule before he hears his zone being called out over the speaker.

“I’m sorry Alec, but I’ve got to go. We’re finally boarding.”

“Alright, have a safe flight, Magnus, and good luck this week. I know you said this was a fun trip but it’s also work and I hope your presentations go well.”

Magnus can’t help the little smile that comes over him, warmth lighting him up. It’s such a small thing, but that little gesture of encouragement and hint of familiarity means a lot.

“Thank you, Alexander. I return from the UK Thursday night but I’m afraid until then I might be a little behind on responding to messages, especially since there’s such a time difference.”

Alec laughs and Magnus can imagine him waving a hand in dismissal. “Don’t worry about it. I know how it is when you’re away and get caught up in work. Have fun and I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Goodbye, Alec.”

Magnus hangs up and tucks the phone into his back pocket. He gathers up his briefcase and carry on and makes his way to the plane.

He’s in business class and by some miracle, the seat next to him remains empty. It’s a seven hour flight to London and Magnus settles into his seat, reaching for his phone and earbuds, drowning out the safety information.
He laughs a little to himself, deciding to listen to one of Alec’s albums. He presses shuffle next to his name and leans back, eyes closing.

He doesn’t mind flying and usually has enough work so that the flights go quickly in any case but he’s not in the mood to work on any of that right now.

His head is a little crowded with other things. With Alec.

There’s just something about him that Magnus can’t put his finger on. He’s not a stuck up, vapid celebrity. He’s generous and funny and sometimes he’s just a little bit awkward. That usually happens when he lets his guard down, when he reveals information that contrasts with the suave playboy image he’s built up and Magnus loves it every time.

God Dammit, he’s adorable while still being hot enough to burn. There’s a man behind the reputation and Magnus is endlessly fascinated with him. They’ve only known each other weeks but it’s no exaggeration that Alec is the best part of his day. A text from him puts a smile on his face. The phone call just now distracted him from the damned early morning and the headaches that travelling always bring.

Hanging out with Alec-- Magnus firmly shuts down the part of his brain that wants to call those meetings *dates*-- is fun and comfortable and easy in a way that Magnus hasn’t experienced since college.

Magnus might be the life of the party, but he prefers to keep his real circle small. He has a handful of true friends and he likes it like that. Alec has wormed his way into things with an adeptness that has Magnus reeling.

Magnus might’ve liked Alec’s music and admired his stage persona, but he harbored no delusions that they were probably nothing more than a thin veneer on a spoiled child star. Alec had been in high school when he’d started his climb to fame and Magnus has seen enough celebrities, heard about them from Catarina, to know that most of them are lazy and selfish and debauched in a way that leaves a bad taste in most mouths.

But not Alec. This past month has let Magnus see that Alec is genuine in a way he couldn’t have guessed. Alec works hard to stay on top of things, he’s not infallible, and he’s kind. He's smart, can match Magnus wit for wit, and readily admits when he doesn't know something, listening intently as Magnus tells him or they look it up together.

He’s a real person and Magnus is a little surprised at that.

Distantly, he starts to think about the next stage. The stage that will never happen. As his thoughts turn, so does his mood.

Alec is the most interesting man Magnus has met in awhile. He likes the zoo and coffee that’s more sugar than caffeine. He loves his family to distraction and has a lovely sense of humor. He’s grounded and chivalrous.

He hasn’t told anyone, especially Raphael or Ragnor, but Magnus might be plagued lately with thoughts of *more*.

During the movie night Friday, Alec had been so damned comfortable against his side, a long line of warmth.

His commentary had been biting but hilarious and Magnus had had more fun than he'd had in ages. He’d gotten used to his friends refusing to watch the Twilight movies with him but having Alec over
had brought a new layer of enjoyment to his semi-regular viewing marathons.

He really hadn’t meant to fall asleep with him, let alone wake up on top of Alec. When he’d first been waking up, he was helpless to do anything but nuzzle into the warmth under him, the soft t-shirt smelling like Alec, an irresistible scent only faintly touched by cologne.

Then he’d come to himself and realized that it wasn’t his imagination or wishful thinking. He really was tangled with Alec on his couch. He’d frozen, waiting for Alec to slide out from under him or demand to know what he was doing.

Alexander had surprised him again when he’d gone with the flow, not questioning how they came to be pressed so close together.

Magnus had said the first thing that came to mind.

Well, not the first.

The first thing would have been how captivating Alec was in the mornings. His hair was a bird’s nest, stubble heavy on his jaw, sleep clinging to his lashes. He looked rumpled and soft and good enough to eat but Magnus had refrained from voicing any of those thoughts. Instead, he’d quipped something about looking less than impressive and Alec had given as good as he took as he remarked offhandedly about Magnus’s leftover makeup.

He’d cringed inside as he imagined how disheveled he must looked but he’d forced himself to let his shoulders fall back. It was just makeup and fuck knows that Magnus had looked much worse before. If he and Alec were truly friends it shouldn’t make a difference for them to see each other at less than their best.

He’d suggested breakfast, half expecting Alec to bolt at the first chance, remaining polite as always as he refused. To his surprise, Alec had readily agreed and the two of them had shared a lovely breakfast in the early July sunshine.

But not before Magnus had been treated to the sight of Alec’s beautifully sculpted chest, the dusting of hair over it sending his brain offline in the best way.

While he knew that Alec kept in shape, he couldn’t have predicted just how delicious the sight of him in nothing but a damp towel would be, that towel doing nothing to preserve his modesty.

Magnus had made a hasty yet dignified retreat, all the while thinking about just how much he wanted to get his hands on Alec.

When he’d come out of his bedroom and seen Alec reading against his bookcase, he’d felt warm and content.

He wanted Alec to feel comfortable in his space. He wanted him to feel welcome to explore or read or do anything else that struck his fancy.

It was purely wishful thinking if Magnus wanted for one of those things to be Alec pushing him against the nearest wall and kissing him senseless.

Magnus spent the rest of his weekend after Alec left catching up on work and errands. He’d made a trip to the dry cleaners, cleaned his loft and packed for his upcoming trip. A considerable chunk of Sunday had been spent grading papers and discussion posts, resulting in Magnus sending out a class wide email to his special topics class to clarify his expectations along with a reminder to all of his students about classes being cancelled this week.
He’d actually had a student respond to the email with *Thank u god!!!!!* at three in the morning. He’d huffed out a laugh in the Uber this morning as he’d seen it, rolling his eyes at their antics.

As the plane takes off and he feels the shudder as the wheels roll up and they begin their ascent to thirty five thousand feet, Magnus reflects that maybe it’s a good thing that he’ll be out of the country for almost a week.

He needs the perspective. He needs space away from Alec. While it’s true that he’ll have a great time over the next days, learning and teaching and catching up with friends he hasn’t seen in far too long, he’s also a little disappointed that Alec won’t be in the same city, that their messages will probably grow far and few between and phone calls will be nonexistent as his data is turned off for the duration of the trip.

He knows Alec only wants friendship and that there’s a million people who are lined up around Magnus for the shot of something more with Alec.

Magnus has a healthy ego and great confidence. He knows he’s a catch but he can’t help but worry that Alec sees him as nothing more than a friendly fan. Maybe the very fact that he’s admitted to enjoying Alec’s music for years and has followed him on social media for ages has automatically denigrated Magnus to a friendly face without the possibility for anything else.

He can’t blame Alec. Christ only knows what he’s had to put up with because of his celebrity. Magnus has heard horror stories through tabloids, through Cat, about the frankly terrifying number of people who are willing to use celebrities to reach their own ends.

Luckily Catarina had found Ragnor in college before she’d reached the level of fame she’s at now, but there have still been people over the years who had tried to befriend her only for it to turn out that they were only looking for an investor, bragging rights, or their own fifteen minutes in the spotlight.

Magnus thinks that it would be almost impossible for Alec not to be jaded, wary about new people.

No, Magnus knows that he’s solidly in the friend arena with Alec but that’s enough. Magnus thoroughly enjoys being Alec’s friend even if he wishes there was a possibility of a next step, a more intimate stage.

Magnus drifts off, his busy morning catching up to him, with Alec in his ears and in his mind.
Chapter 19

Heathrow is as busy as ever and Magnus dodges and weaves through the crowd on his way outside to the taxi stand. He can’t help but wonder why so many people think it’s okay to stop abruptly in the middle of a busy walkway, but it’s airports and he’s long since grown immune to it.

It’s the first week of July and it’s warm but not scorching. New York was growing miserable and Magnus thanks the planners of the conference for this brief respite.

He stands in line at the taxi queue for a few minutes, feeling remarkably alert. He’d only dozed for a little over an hour, using the remaining flight time to go over the week’s schedule and catch up on his latest pleasure read. It was a thriller and he’d been absolutely engrossed, not realizing how much time was passing until he’d felt the jostle of wheels on the tarmac.

He gets in the next cab with little fanfare, briefcase beside him and carry on in the trunk. He gives the address for the hotel and thinks, with little regret, that he’s missed the opening dinner. He was looking forward to catching up with his colleagues, but he was a little exhausted and relaxing in his hotel for the night, with a brief forage for dinner, sounded just right.

As the car speeds along, Magnus takes in one of his favorite cities. London has a special place in his heart. He’d gone to Oxford for his doctorate and while it was over an hour from the city, he’d come into town often enough, causing all sorts of havoc with Ragnor and Cat and all manner of other people. He’d been in the U.K. for four years and every time he visits the city, he feels a wave of nostalgia hit him.

He wonders what it would be like to see it with Alec next to him.

It’s a foolish thought, but Magnus has long since grown accustomed to thinking of Alexander with frightening regularity. He thinks it would be nice to visit with someone who’s been here before. It’d be fun, swapping stories and sharing experiences, new and old.

He keeps the idea open. Someday.

He can’t use his phone without data, so Magnus relaxes against the seat, glad that the driver isn’t in a chatty mood.

Soon enough, Magnus is dropped off at the hotel. He checks in without issue and makes his way up to his room. He’s thankful not to share with anyone. There was no one else going from Columbia and as the Chair of the History Department he’d been given preference.

Magnus takes a quick shower to rid himself of the plane feeling clinging to him and throws on a simple pair of jeans with a t-shirt. He powers up his cellphone for the first time since he left New York. As it boots up, he debates on what to have for dinner. He has a generous expense allowance for the duration of the conference and there are dozens of restaurants within walking distance.

He connects to the hotel’s wifi a few seconds later, setting his phone down absently.

His thinking is interrupted, though, as his phone starts vibrating. Not once or twice but at a constant rate, steadily buzzing for almost a full minute. Startled, Magnus grabs it before it can fall from the desk and swipes across the screen, unlocking it only to find dozens of notifications.

He sees a few messages from Alec. There’s a picture of him on the floor of what Magnus presumes is Fuel. He looks wiped out as he glares at the camera. The caption underneath says I survived but
barely:/ Kicked Jace’s ass a time or two, though.

The next message is another picture. This time it looks like it’s taken at a restaurant outside, the sun shining behind a grinning Isabelle with a handful of fries, half of which are stuffed in her mouth. She looks like a kid, mischievous and victorious. The accompanying text simply offers This is why I can’t have nice things:(

Magnus can feel the smile pulling his cheeks and he laughs a little. Poor Alexander. The last text messages are unexpected, though, confusing Magnus.

Shit, I’m sorry Magnus. I wasn’t thinking.

I should’ve known this would happen.

How are you feeling? Let me know you’re okay.

Magnus has no idea what Alec is referring to. He’d thought they left things great between the two of them this morning.

Deciding to come back to that message in a few minutes, he takes a look at his other notifications. His eyebrows climb up his forehead as he takes in the dozens of alerts from Twitter and Instagram.

He opens Twitter and sees that his follower count has risen by over a thousand people since yesterday. Baffled, he clicks on the notifications and scrolls through-- it must be a few hundred tweets. After a minute or two he finally reaches the reason and-- oh.

He stares down at the screen, seeing Alec Lightwood has followed you.

Magnus leans against the edge of the desk, thinking. Slowly, he scrolls up and sees where Alec has liked a few of his tweets-- one about teaching, another about how much he hates early mornings, a trivia fact he’d found out when researching his latest book.

Immediately following that are all manner of people-- fans-- speculating.

This is so random. Who’s Magnus??

Uhhh why would Alec follow a professor?? Is he going to school or something lmao

Ljldfskglj dude this guy is hot as fuck. Did Alec just thirst follow someone????

Well, this is certainly unexpected.

Shit.

Once again, Magnus is confronted with the fact that Alec isn’t just a regular guy. Everything he does gets put under a microscope by half the world. Still surprised, Magnus wonders. If a simple follow and minimal engagement had garnered such attention, what would happen if it came out that they were friends? Something else?

He goes over to Instagram and sees the same thing has happened. Alec followed him during their phone call this morning, only this time he didn’t just like a few pics. He left comments.

There’s a picture Magnus took last week. He’s in front of his open french doors, his One Handed Tree Pose in perfect form, if he does say so himself. Shirtless, in a pair of plain black boxer briefs, he’s a little revealing. He’d debated putting on actual clothes but he’d just woken up and was messing around one Sunday morning and hadn’t wanted to spare the effort.
The comment underneath wouldn’t be noticeable if made by anyone else. But it’s Alec and underneath his comment are a hundred more by strangers.

_Holy shit, you weren’t kidding about being a yoga instructor! Maybe you can teach me some moves sometime!_ 

Magnus skims through the other comments but leaves them be as he moves on to the next post that had captured Alec’s eye. He’d gone with Ragnor, Cat, and Madzie to a farm in Upstate New York one weekend during the spring. Madzie had been enthralled with everything from milking cows to feeding pigs. There’d been chickens walking across the yard and he’d snapped a picture of two chicks as they’d walked across the driveway. He’d just used the emoji for the caption but as he sees Alec’s comment, he can’t help but snort a laugh.

_Two chicks w/ cute butts_

Shaking his head, Magnus likes the comment before moving to the last picture. It’s from the middle of May and it’s just one of his empty classrooms before the start of the summer term. It’s a lecture hall with a few hundred seats for his introductory history course. The sunlight is spilling through the high windows and the mahogany wood paneling makes it look so delightfully academic and quaint, like a time gone by. His caption is _my happy place_ and he feels warm as he reads Alec’s comment.

_You definitely would have been my favorite professor if I’d gone to college :)_

There’s a smile on Magnus’s face even as he thinks about the consequences of Alec’s slip up. So, this was what his texts had meant. He’d followed Magnus on social media, liked a few posts, and now there were hundreds of fans speculating about him. About them.

They’d talked about this just a couple of weeks ago. Magnus liked his life just fine. He was well-known at Columbia, in academic circles, but other than that he was just another New Yorker going about his business.

No question, this friendship with Alec was tricky to navigate. With anyone else, Magnus wouldn’t think anything of posting a picture of the two of them hanging out. But rabid speculation wasn’t part of that equation.

Half sitting on the desk, Magnus stares at the floor, absently tapping his foot. Before he does anything else, he wants to decide how he feels about this latest development.

While he’s accepted that sooner or later, if they continue this, his life will probably be inundated by intrusive press, he’s not sure if now’s the time. There’s a part of him that wants a little more time to enjoy just being Magnus Bane without having his name attached to Alec’s. But there’s no denying that he likes being part of Alec’s life, having him as a part of his, and really-- isn’t he just prolonging the discovery? Maybe he’s overthinking this. It’s Twitter for Christ’s sake, not the nuclear disarmament codes.

Magnus decides with alacrity that he doesn’t care. This doesn’t have to mean anything. In fact, it’s a good thing. It’s the next step in this friendship of theirs. Friends follow each other. Friends like each other’s posts. Eventually, friends might post pics with other friends. It doesn’t have to mean anything. It shouldn't bring his world crashing down.

It’s not like he’s Alec’s boyfriend. Really, why would fans or paparazzi care so much about a friend of Alec’s, especially when it’s apparent that there’s nothing else there?

He ignores the niggling thought that this might be just as serious a step as he fears. Like, once this is
done that's it. No take backs, no avoidance.

He repeats *Alec is worth it* to shut that damning voice up.

He unlocks his phone and goes to Alec’s texts. He reads over the messages and pretends he doesn’t feel the butterflies. It’s stupid and juvenile but Alec’s concern, his worry that he’s messed up, is endearing.

*Don’t worry, darling, there’s nothing to apologize for. I’ve been following you for awhile now-- it’s only fair that you follow back :)*

*This doesn’t have to be a big deal. You’re always active on social media, this shouldn’t be anything out of the ordinary.*

*I’m fine, Alexander, but thank you for worrying. Are you okay with this?*

Magnus wonders if Alec’s regretting his spree. He’s probably not any more eager to have his name linked with Magnus. He’s a celebrity-- it must get tiring to have to police such small actions all the time.

*I’m used to it, don’t worry about me :)*

*How’s London?*

Like that, everything settles and the two of them talk for a little while. Magnus doesn’t realize how late it’s getting until he looks up from his phone and sees his room shrouded in darkness. His fingers have been flying over his phone for the past hour, talking with Alec about their shared love of London and how their days had gone, along with plans for tomorrow.

It’s almost nine in the evening and Magnus takes stock. His stomach growls and with a sigh he’s pushing up off the desk and making his way to his suitcase.

He digs out a black blazer to throw over his v-neck. He grabs his key card, wallet, and phone and then he’s off to find food.

As he walks down the streets, he breathes in the city air and his shoulders roll back. The next few days promise to be a whirlwind of learning and teaching and he’s looking forward to it. He manages a few conferences a year and each time he leaves exhausted but content. He never could have guessed it, but he really does love his career. It’s a surprisingly good fit and no matter how much Ragnor or Raphael grumbles, he knows they feel the same.

Happy place, indeed.

Magnus is buttoning his jacket and laughing along to something Dr. Brenitz has said when they round the corner and he runs into someone. He reaches a hand out automatically to steady the person before he sees who it is.

He immediately wishes that he’d let them fall.

“Dr. Belcourt,” Magnus greets coolly.

She lifts her head, regal as ever. “Dr. Bane.”

Looking over at his companion, she also addresses Brenitz, though her smile kicks up a few hundred
degrees. Brenitz, for his part, is helpless to do anything but smile and nod enthusiastically. The poor man is seventy if he’s a day and it’s obvious that he’s not use to such a beautiful woman paying attention to him.

Magnus tunes them out, well versed in Camille’s dance. While there was no doubt that she was brilliant, she also had no problem using her considerable skills to get what she wanted. Magnus had found out one day during their fling that she’d been sleeping with several other candidates. Some of them just for fun, but a few to spite Magnus and to get ahead in the program.

The woman was a vampire, sucking the life out of everything around her to further her own ambition.

The panel yesterday had gone remarkably well, considering. Camille had barely acknowledged him, leaving him to answer questions at his own pace and without challenge. The conference was half over and he was eager to see it through. He’s been practicing his keynote speech slated for tomorrow morning and all the way around, this had been a great opportunity.

If only Camille hadn’t decided to crawl out of her hole for it, then it would’ve been perfect.

Soon enough, Camille leaves them without a backwards glance, though she makes sure to give her hips a little extra sway as she walks away.

“Damned beautiful woman,” Bernitz mutters, gaze glued to her ass.

Magnus laughs along, inwardly shaking his head at how oblivious some men can be. “Trust me, friend, sometimes it’s better to look and not touch.”

The two of them continue on to their mid afternoon seminar on Aboriginal Narratives and Magnus doesn’t spare Camille another thought.

But he should’ve known he couldn’t escape her. At a pub around the corner from his hotel, Magnus leans back in his chair as his dinner is brought to the table. His mouth waters as he smells the food, not having time to eat lunch today, and he offers an absent thanks to the waiter. He’s smiling down at his phone as he continues his conversation with Alec. They were talking about the subway system in New York and its many problems and Magnus can’t help but huff out a laugh as Alec sends another complaint about teenagers who don’t know when to stop with the Axe body spray.

He doesn’t immediately notice when someone slides into the seat across from him, distracted as his thumbs fly over his keyboard to respond.

“Now, what could have you smiling like such a fool?”

Magnus barely pauses before finishing the message, hitting send and taking a subtle breath-- praying for patience-- before he looks up and sees Camille’s dark eyes looking at him with a tinge of amusement.

“Camille. What do you want?”

She doesn’t answer right away, instead taking a minute to relax against the chair, crossing her legs and rearranging her skirt so that it falls several inches above her knee. Her smile is calculated as she tilts her head, looking Magnus over with an intensity that could rival a spider’s.

“What do I want,” she asks, as if surprised at the question. “I’m just here to enjoy a meal with an old friend. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”
Magnus feels his own lips kick up, though his smile isn’t what anyone would call inviting. “Oh, I think you do. We don’t speak except when we have to and it’s been like that for over five years. It’s an arrangement that suits us both. So, what motive could you possibly have for coming to my dinner table, unannounced and uninvited?”

Camille deliberates for a minute, tapping blood red nails on the scarred wooden table. “I heard you’ve made a new friend.” Her smile is just a baring of teeth as she continues. “It looks like you’ve caught a big fish, darling. I wonder what he’d have to say if he knew about your past. He does have an image to think of, after all.”

Magnus stills as Camille’s words pour over him. There’s a part of him that wants to roll his eyes and shoo her away like the mangy dog she is but there’s another part, small yet persistent, that can’t help but absorb her words with startling impact.

Magnus has made one bare bones reference to his past to Alec, when they’d first discussed the implications of pursuing this thing between them, and he wasn’t lying when he said that he had one or two skeletons rattling around his closet. Only a handful of people know the truth and he’s worked hard to bury that past. Unfortunately, Camille was one of the lucky few.

Goddamnit.

He hasn’t known Camille damn near a decade without learning her quirks, though. He sees her restless shifting and darting eyes. She’s not as in control as she’d like him to believe and that gives him all the leverage he needs to relax against his seat, a king surveying a peasant.

“What the hell are you talking about, Camille,” he asks in a pleasant tone.

She bites her lip, playing coy, before tsking, delicately shaking her head. “You should know that the internet is never really private. Especially if you don’t even take the time to block someone. Anyone can see that there’s been quite the uptake in activity on your Twitter and Instagram this week and it doesn’t take a genius to figure out why.”

Magnus stares at her, incredulous. “Are you really telling me that you don’t have anything better to do than stalk me online? It’s been five fucking years since we were remotely friendly. What possible reason could you have for sinking so low?”

Camille stands up, smoothing down her dress. She looks at Magnus with guileless eyes but he sees the mercenary gleam in them.

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“You never know who or what could prove useful, Magnus. I keep my friends close but my adversaries closer and you’ve always straddled the line between the two. While it’s true that I wouldn’t spit on you if you were on fire, I like to check up on people who have potential. We were close once upon a time and you know that I like to keep my options open. Consider this fair warning.”

Raising an imperious brow, Magnus echoes, “Fair warning?”

Staring down at him impassively Camille looks like a viper, stunning but deadly. Magnus rolls his eyes internally at the imagery but can’t deny the strain of truth. Still, Magnus is almost thirty years old-- he’s not the young, naive twenty two year old student who first saw Camille and was bowled over by her intellect and looks. He’s older and wiser and a hell of a lot more powerful than most give him credit for. Camille doesn’t have any power over him-- hasn’t in ages-- but it’s amusing to see her try and flex her muscle all the same.
He can’t deny that he’s curious about what could persuade her to take such an interest in him after all this time, though. He knows that she doesn’t harbor any delusions of them getting back together. No, this isn’t a jealous ex come to make her lover rue the day. Something else is going on but Magnus doesn’t know what and, frankly, he doesn’t give a damn.

He just wants her out of his hair.

“I’m just letting you know that everything comes at a price, Magnus, and I think it’s time I got my payday. Bye, darling.”

Magnus watches her as she turns around on her Louboutin heel and walks out of the restaurant. Damn, but he can’t stand Camille and her cryptic ass. He shakes his head as he wonders how he was ever young or stupid enough to fall for her, no matter that their relationship had only been a few short months.

He turns to his dinner, banishing her from his mind. He can’t worry about Camille right now. He doesn’t want to on a good day, but especially not when he could be talking to Alec.

Between the two of them, there’s no contest.

The rest of Magnus’s evening is uneventful. His fish and chips are still hot, thankfully, and with Alec’s amusing texts to entertain him, dinner flies by. He leaves after another hour and returns to his room just as it’s getting dark.

He’s plugging his phone in and changing into sleepwear when it starts ringing. He walks over and sees Cat’s contact lighting up the screen. He swipes right and the phone unlocks to show Madzie’s smiling face.

“Magnus!”

“Sweetpea,” he says in the same excited tone. “How are you today?”

“Good,” she answers, smile wide enough to show a few missing teeth. “Mom took me to the park and I got to feed the ducks.”

“Sounds like a productive day,” Magnus says seriously.

The two of them chat for a few minutes. She asks where he is and what he’s doing and if he’s seen the queen. She reminds him about his souvenir habit-- Magnus rolls his eyes, like he would forget his tradition of picking something up for her every time he travels-- and he listens as she tells a rambling story about a kid at school, a bottle of glue, and a very distressed teacher.

It’s quiet for a few minutes and Magnus relaxes against the headboard, distantly thinking about getting up a little early and reviewing for tomorrow’s speech when Madzie perks up and yells into the phone, “I made a new friend!”

Magnus pulls his attention to her. “Oh? Did you meet someone at the park?”

“No, I met them when we went to the studio.”

Magnus raises his eyebrows, surprised. “You mean the studio in your house?”

Madzie shakes her head. “No, we went to a huge building for studio time. I ran into Alec, that’s his name, and did you know he plays soccer! He asked me what position I played in softball. I didn’t know so mom answered and he was very nice. Mom said I might see him again if he needs more
help.”

Magnus barely hears Madzie, focused on the first part of what she said. He shakes his head a little, as if to clear it, before asking, “Did you say Alec, sweetpea?”

Madzie is nodding enthusiastically when all of a sudden the phone is taken from her grasp. The picture is blurry a moment before it clears to show Catarina’s face where she’s standing next to Madzie.

“Sorry, Magnus,” Cat apologizes. “I gave her my phone half an hour ago to talk to you and got caught up on a business call. I didn’t expect to leave you two alone for so long. What’s this I hear about Alec?”

Cat switches her gaze off camera to Madzie, Magnus guesses, sending her a chastising look. “I thought we discussed this, honey. We don’t talk about people we see when mom’s working.”

Magnus hears Madzie mumble sorry through the speakers, but he hardly pays it attention. He looks at Cat, alert. “Dear, you worked with an Alec? Alec Lightwood?”

She moves towards the living room, sitting down and humming before answering him. “Alec Lightwood,” she confirms. He can just visualize the arch look she’s giving him. “You know the drill. You can’t tell anyone who I worked with because it could be a breach of confidentiality.”

Magnus bits his lip, debating. He could easily agree and ignore the arsenal of information he was just given. . . or he could dig for details. Really, it’s a no brainer.

“What did you think of him,” he asks, genuinely interested. Before he tells Cat anything, he wants to know her real opinion of Alexander. An outside opinion would probably be a good thing right about now because Magnus can admit that his objectivity has long since flown out the window.

Cat hums on the other end, obviously thinking. She draws it out for a few seconds and Magnus grows impatient. He’s just about to prompt her when she starts speaking, obviously measuring her words.

“I think that Lightwood’s reputation is well deserved. I know you love his music, and by extension his image, but in the industry he’s known to be a hard worker and a pleasure to work with. I have to agree with everyone else. He was kind to Madzie and didn’t have a problem when I brought her with me-- actually she took to him like a duck in water which you know surprised the hell out of me. He was on time and professional but there was a vein of warmth, too. He’s not a shark.”

She breaks off with a laugh. “Well, I’m sure he’s a right bastard when he needs to be but during our session he was in good spirits. He was really a dream to work with. I told him that if he needed anymore help with this album or in the future, I’d be available. And I meant it.”

Magnus swears he can almost hear Cat roll her eyes. “You know how often that happens. Overall, I’d say your little crush on him isn’t undeserved. There are certainly worse musicians and celebrities to stan.”

He tries to think of something to say that won’t reveal anything, settling lamely on, “Well, that’s good then.”

Catarina scoffs. “Where’s the enthusiasm? I thought you would care more that he’s earned my definitive seal of approval.”
Magnus laughs a little. “Sorry to disappoint, dear, but I’ve had a busy week and I suppose my mind is just preoccupied with other things. I’m glad to know that you like him and that he wasn’t a stuck up, spoiled celebrity.”

Cat hums, finally saying, “Whatever,” with a dramatic sigh.

The two of them talk for a few more minutes, with Magnus confirming his arrival home Friday morning, U.K. time.

Magnus doesn’t tell Catarina about Alec. For one, he can’t find an opening. There’s no easy way to say funny that you mention it but I’ve actually been texting Alec nonstop for five weeks. And I think I’m crushing on more than his music, by the way. I’m so relieved that one of my oldest friends likes him because that’s half the battle won if anything else were to happen.

No, he can’t find an opening and it doesn’t feel like the right time. Magnus thinks that maybe he should go to Alec with the information first. They’ll laugh about it, maybe over drinks or during another movie marathon or something else entirely.

The thought makes him feel warm.

As Magnus hangs up, he laughs to himself and stretches his arms over his head. What are the chances. He doesn’t believe in it but sometimes Magnus can’t help but think that there may be something to fate after all.

Before his thoughts turn too deep, he sets his alarm for the morning and turns the lights off, settling into bed. Tomorrow is the busiest day of the conference for him-- he has two workshops that he wants to sit in on during the afternoon. His keynote speech is slated for the mid morning slot to catch everyone who might duck out early for flights home. He has to pack tomorrow evening and he wants to do a little exploring and needs to pick up a souvenir for Madzie.

Magnus ignores the little voice that prods, and maybe Alec too?

Magnus goes to sleep, running over his speech as his thoughts grow bleary.

He doesn’t expect to be jostled out of a sound sleep half an hour before his alarm is set to go off by a phone vibrating off the nightstand, interrupting steamy dreams of a man that looks guiltily like Alec.

He really doesn't expect to see that it's Alexander's name flashing across the screen.
Chapter 20

Alec slips the cufflinks through his jacket, giving his sleeves a brief tug. Looking in the mirror, he likes what he sees.

It’s not an unusual sight-- fuck knows that Alec has an entire section dedicated to formal wear. Everything from tuxedos and more adventurous suits to slacks, blazers, and a dozen classic suits in black and similarly neutral colors.

His look today wouldn’t be amiss on Wall Street. His modern fit suit is hand tailored to perfection. His silk button down is in a snowy white, offering a beautiful contrast between the pitch black of the jacket and pants. His Tom Ford belt gleams subtly and his oxfords shine.

As Alec goes back into his walk in closet, he flips his collar up. He has a business meeting with one of his sponsors today, hence the extra effort, and truth be told he doesn’t really mind. There’s something to be said for his sweaters and jeans but Alec enjoys dressing up on occasion.

How fortunate for him that he picked a career where there’s always a gala or awards show or party.

His tie rack is teeming with bow ties and ties in a hundred different colors and patterns. Alec forgoes the more adventurous options-- there’s a light blue one with penguins on it that he usually wears at least once during the winter-- choosing instead a dark maroon tie.

He starts tying a Half Windsor Knot on autopilot as he moves out of his closet and back into his bedroom. His meeting is slated to start at nine and it’s half seven now.

With one last look in the mirror and a half-assed effort to tame his already messy hair, he grabs his phone, wallet, and keys and heads out into the penthouse. He takes the leather portfolio that has some reports and information his lawyer had put together with him.

He has the place to himself-- Jace is at work and Izzy wanted to spend the morning at Uptown Java, something about wanting to read one of her medical books.

As he walks to the elevator, he checks his phone. He sees a text message from Magnus and unconsciously starts to smile. It’s Wednesday morning and this will be the third day that Magnus is out of the country. While Alec had thought that things might fizzle out a little this week as the physical distance between them grew, he was pleasantly surprised to see that they talk just as much, if not more, than when they’re both in the same city.

While there are long periods between texts, they’ve kept up the same thread since yesterday afternoon. It’s something about the merits and pitfalls of public transportation and Alec chuckles in the elevator as he reads Magnus’s tale about accidentally shutting his jacket in a taxi door as he was being dropped off from a night out-- and not realizing until the driver started leaving.

Dave isn’t due to arrive for another half an hour and with that in mind, Alec walks a few blocks over to the closest Starbucks. The line is almost to the door and he messes around on his phone while he waits, unobtrusive.

It never fails to surprise him. Alec’s been in secluded boutiques and been mobbed but New York barely bats an eye most of the time. Oh, he still meets fans regularly wherever he goes, but he can also do normal things. He can stand in line at Starbucks and not worry that he’ll cause a scene.

As he thinks about how lucky he is to live in the city, he guiltily thinks about the internet snafu with
Magnus a couple of days ago.

He didn’t have an excuse. While it was early as shit— not even six in the morning yet— Alec had been awake, training with Jace. They’d just finished their five mile race, Alec winning, when he’d walked over to his bag. Taking a few gulps of water, he’d heard his phone start vibrating. It’d been far too early for anyone to be calling him and as he’d seen Magnus’s name come up on the screen, he’d been curious. He knew that Magnus was flying out today but he hadn’t thought it was so early.

Jace had sent him a quizzical look as he’d picked up the phone, swiping to accept the call. Alec had mouthed Magnus and Jace had raised his brows, smirking.

Rolling his eyes, he’d turned away and talked to Magnus as he waited to board his flight. They’d talked for almost forty minutes and it had been chill. There’d been a few silent stretches where neither one had anything to say and hadn’t thought of a new topic yet and it hadn’t felt awkward.

Really, it made Alec content. They were both just happy to relax on the line with each other. Halfway through the phone call, though, Alec had been a little stunned to realize that he wasn’t following Magnus on anything. Especially since Magnus followed him, apparently.

He’d thrown the phone on speaker and Jace had been all ears at being the first to know what Alec’s new friend sounded like. Thankfully, Magnus had realized he was on speaker pretty quick and there hadn’t been any potential blackmail on the phone call for Jace to commit to memory.

Alec had went to Twitter first, following and liking a few tweets. His profile picture looked like it was taken in an office, dark wood walls serving as the background. He had a few thousand followers and Alec liked the mix of trivia, mundane observations, and photos.

Instagram was the same, though Alec couldn’t resist commenting on a few posts. When Magnus had told him that he regularly practiced yoga and was actually a certified instructor, Alec had almost swallowed his tongue. It was one thing just to be told that, however, and quite something else to see Magnus doing a One Handed Tree Pose (he looked it up) in nothing but form fitting black boxer briefs.

It was obvious that Magnus kept in shape but seeing him post a few workout videos not only got Alec a little hot under the collar, but genuinely made him interested in working out together. While he liked to work out alone, he also enjoyed having a partner. Alec thinks that there could be a little friendly competition going on between them and it’d be fun to see just how evenly matched they were.

Alec orders and pays with little fanfare, still marveling at how stupid he’d been. Or, not even stupid— he’d just been oblivious for the first time in years.

Alec knows that his life is under a microscope, that the daily minutiae that is deeply uninteresting about everyone else is fascinating when it’s about him. He should’ve foreseen that his fans— smart as hell and twice as tenacious— would immediately noticed that he followed someone on not only one, but two platforms.

Alec might dedicate a lot of time to his fans but he’s also intensely private when it counts. He follows less than a thousand people and rarely adds to the number. His fans hadn’t wasted a minute.

After hanging up with Magnus, Alec had gone right back to working out with Jace who had mock scowled at him for taking so long. He’d just shrugged, a little helpless, and Jace had just shaken his head, clapping him on the back as they took their positions to spar a little.
When Jace had finally finished with him, he’d flopped down next to the mats and asked Jace to toss his phone over to him. Jace had gone over to their shit and in true brother fashion had unlocked his phone, scrolling through his notifications. He always acted like a kid, as if Alec wasn’t perfectly aware of what he signed up for when he asked Jace the favor but he just laid on the floor, catching his breath while Jace invaded his privacy.

After a minute or two Jace had handed the phone over, merely saying, “I never get used to how many notifications you have.”

Alec wasn’t in the mood to deal with it, so he’d just opened his messages, confirming lunch plans with Izzy and getting caught up on a few emails and calls.

He’d finally checked his phone in the early afternoon after lunch and had been surprised at the number of engagements. Even for him, it was high. When he’d tapped into the apps and seen the root of the damage, though, he’d wanted to kick himself.

He should’ve known.

He’d texted Magnus as soon as he put the pieces together, hoping that his few moments messing around on social media wouldn’t be the end of things between them. Alec’s very cognizant of the fact that his life isn’t for anyone and he’d promised Magnus discretion two weeks ago. This was the very definition of indiscreet.

He’d sweated it out, knowing that Magnus was still flying. He’d spent a couple of hours preoccupied, distracting himself with fine tuning the song he and Catarina had worked on. Thankfully, Magnus had understood and he’d ended up abandoning his song for almost an hour as he texted Magnus in a flurry.

Alec had taken the rest of the afternoon afterwards, messing around on his piano until the sun started fading and he was playing more by feel than sight. He’d finished the day cooking dinner for the three of them and Clary, retiring back to his bedroom by eight and falling asleep reading.

Alec’s pleased to realize that his writer’s block is officially over. All of those months of trying to string two sentences together, not finding the right chords or note runs and it seems to be a thing of the past. He’s not churning them out but he’s making steady progress. In addition to the collab with Cat and his song tentatively titled *Angel*, he has two or three others that are brewing in the back of his mind.

He’d really just been fucking around on his piano, a Steinway & Sons K-132. It had been one of his first large purchases and it’d been ages since he’d had time to play for fun, trying out chords and arrangements or playing some of his favorite pieces for pure, simple enjoyment.

The past few days had been quiet, especially without Magnus to potentially see. He’s spent that time writing half a dozen songs. While he wasn’t concentrating too much on the content-- really he was just writing whatever came to mind-- the tone was undeniable.

His last album had racked up the awards for being gritty, dark. He’d written about the price of fame, about one night stands and one city lovers and jaded ennui. There’d been one or two softer songs-- one he’d collaborated with another artist for, another that he’d written with Jace and Clary in mind-- but overall, An Arrow in the Dark had been cynical and cutting with an overlay of sensuality that the public had loved.

So far, this album looked to be forming as the total opposite. The songs were softer, sweeter, and Alec couldn’t help but notice that he was drawing on these burgeoning feelings inside him for source
material. He thought of how easy things were with Magnus, how much he was enjoying making a
ew friend and learning about an incredibly interesting man. Then there were those fucking
butterflies that wouldn’t leave him alone when they touched accidentally or he learned something
else entirely endearing about Magnus.

He’d say Magnus was his muse but their arrangement was too platonic for that. You couldn’t write
an entire album about a friend, after all. He refuses to look too closely at the fact that the only real
thing that’s changed to break his block is meeting Magnus. He doesn’t think he could handle it-- not
with everything else the man brings out in him.

As Alec walks back to the front of his building, he sees Dave pull up right on time. Dave gets out
and heads to the rear door of the Lincoln town car, nodding as Alec approaches.

“Right on time, Alec. That’s what I like to see.”

Mock affronted, Alec holds out one of his coffee cups as he asks, “When am I ever not on time?”

Dave doesn’t respond, just hums as he accepts the drink and takes an appreciative sniff.

“Vanilla latte, my favorite.”

“You’ve been my driver for almost eight years. I would hope I’d have your order memorized by
now,” he says, grinning.

Alec climbs into the back seat and spends a few minutes relaxing. The upcoming meeting wasn’t
anything intense but his lawyer, Underhill, wanted to pin some numbers down and Alec wanted to
brush up on the details before they walked into the boardroom.

He opens the portfolio, taking out a few handouts and skimming them as a refresher. He’d gone over
everything when it was first sent but it never hurts to review things one more time.

Alec had a healthy relationship with sponsors. There were those for his tours but also a handful of
companies that wanted his name and his face on their products. This morning’s meeting was to
discuss a renewal of his Nike contract and Alec was looking forward to it. While the company might
be sweating a little, Alec and Underhill had already talked things through and knew that they’d be
walking out of the room partners for another two years regardless of Nike's offer today.

Traffic is brutal as ever in the early morning rush hour and Alec almost spills his coffee twelve times,
taking ill-timed sips just when traffic slows to a stop. Still, Dave knows what he’s doing and they
make it to the corporate offices with ten minutes to spare.

He gets out, without assistance, and waves Dave off with a mutual confirmation to return at two.

As he walks towards the glass and steel doors, he sees a familiar figure walking towards him.

“Hey, Alec,” Underhill says as he nears. His five thousand dollar suit looks impeccable and he look
ready to do business.

“Morning, man. How’s Adrian,” Alec asks as the two move in for a handshake.

Underhill turns towards the doors, smiling and opening the one closest to him, gesturing for Alec to
go through first as he answers.

“Adrian’s great. We have a vacation planned for next month in Aspen. He’s already got a dozen
trails mapped out for us to try.”
“Yeah? Are you still going through with it?”

The two of them share a knowing look as the secretary calls for her boss.

Looking both giddy and unnerved, Underhill smiles. “Of course. I’ve had the ring for six damn months. I think it’s time that I actually used it.”

Alec claps him on the back just as one of Nike’s lawyers meets them in the reception area. There are a round of handshakes before they’re being guided to one of the conference rooms.

The room is utilitarian. Four walls of glass show a large conference table where six people are already sitting.

Underhill has shed his easy going demeanor. Instead, he looks serious, ready to do business and get Alec the best deal possible.

There are no pleasantries and as the three of them take their seats, Alec opens his notes up, face impassive.

He may not have gone to college, but he’s no slouch. He knows that Underhill has his best interests at heart-- has for four years now-- but you don’t get to be in Alec’s position without being screwed over a time or two, in both his personal and professional life. Alec spends not an inconsiderable time reading up on a variety of topics on a routine basis. Among those are music, business, and law. He may not be ready for his LSATS but he’s read through every piece of business that crosses him. The terms they’ve offered are a fair counterpoint to what Nike had initially given them and the next few hours promise to be lively if nothing else.

Underhill remains cool under pressure, no less intimidating for being one against six. While Underhill had his own firm with a range of junior partners, interns, and paralegals, he was always Alec's representative.

The room breaks after a few hours, reaching a bit of a stalemate. The opposing team offers it as an excuse for a quick bite to eat but when Alec’s and Underhill’s eyes meet, they know the truth.

They're going to the other partners to see if they can accept the new deal.

The two of them go to a close cafe where they each get a smoothie, drinking them as they walk around a park across the street. They return to the room when the thirty minutes are up.

Everyone sits down and it’s quiet for a minute before the partner in charge of this deal stands, buttoning his suit jacket, before reaching a hand out first to Alec and then Underhill.

“I’m pleased to say that the other partners agreed that the proffered terms are acceptable. We’ve reached an agreement and are pleased to announce that you’ll be partnered with our company for the next two years, continuing our contract without issue.”

As he hears the words, Alec stands and there’s a few minutes as he and Underhill shake everyone’s hands. Alec is given a Montblanc pen and scrawls his signature a dozen times on a contract as thick as a book.

Just a few minutes later, they’re leaving. They wait until they reach the sidewalk before looking at each other and laughing, half relief and half pure amusement.

“Our terms were hard and I have to say that I’m a little surprised that Nike accepted them. You’re getting eighteen percent more up front with a two percent rise in your kickbacks. They must really
Alec shrugs, playing coy. Though really, he’s surprised at their luck, too.

“You know how much buzz they got for signing an openly gay man to represent their company. Those commercials went viral as soon as they were released. I am proud of you, though! They definitely thought we were going to back down first.”

Underhill shakes his head. “If only they knew that we would have accepted what they offered last week.”

Laughing, Alec says, “Another win for us.”

He takes a step back and looks at his watch, sees Underhill do the same.

Underhill waves his briefcase a little, saying, “I’ve got to head back to the office and file these. Plus, I think I’m going to try to meet Adrian for a late lunch. I’ll talk to you later but you should be good for the next few weeks on everything from my end.”

Alec nods, taking out his phone. “Sounds great man. Thanks for today-- you crushed it.”

The two of them smile at each other before heading off in opposite directions. Looking down at his phone, Alec sees that they let out about forty minutes early and he calls Dave to let him know that he’s not needed.

Alec takes the opportunity to do a little shopping. He’s not the most avid shopper but once in a while when he has some free time, he likes to kill some by poking into stores. He usually just ends up buying stuff for everyone else but it’s a nice way to spend an afternoon every six months.

He ends up buying a necklace for Izzy and phone case for Jace who insists on never using one despite the fact that he’s had to replace his iphone at least twice this year alone.

It’s calming, really. Alec spends most of his time with people, though he gets his fair share of time solo. There’s just something about walking around a city alone-- even his hometown-- that makes him feel like just Alec, anonymous. A free agent.

He’s walking down the street, heading towards the subway station, when he sees a cameraman headed his way. Sighing internally, he resolutely keeps walking.

“Hey man, it’s TMZ. How are you doing today?”

Alec smiles but it’s his public smile. Which isn’t to say that he doesn’t genuinely enjoy some interviews and promo. But sometimes there are certain reporters, or companies, that he’s not a fan of and so he has to use his public persona a bit more.

“I’m good, man. What about you,” he responds easily.

“Can’t complain. What do you have there?” He aims his camera at the few bags in Alec’s hand. There’s one from a jeweler’s, another from a small boutique, and a last bag from an independent bookstore around the corner.

Shrugging, Alec says, “Nothing much, just doing a little shopping.”

“Who are you shopping for, Lightwood? Do you have a special someone that you’re buying gifts for?”
Alec looks at him drolly. “My sister.”

TMZ guy nods along, still looking like he’s going to get the scoop. “We heard you followed someone on Instagram this week. What about him?”

Inside, Alec seethes but he keeps the bland expression pasted on his face as he continues walking. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I think his name is Magnus? He’s a professor?”

Hoping the camera doesn’t pick up on his clenching jaw, Alec returns, “He’s a friend I met a few weeks ago.”

“Oh? Is that all there is or should we be worried that the music scene’s most eligible bachelor is finally taken?”

Alec smiles, though it feels more like a grimace. “No, I’m still single and unattached. There’s nothing going on there except friendship.” *No matter how much I might want that to change.*

The reporter looks at him like he’s digging for more information before turning to another topic. “What about your music? With your tour wrapping up, do you already have plans for your next album?”

Here, Alec can relax. The tension eases out of him at the familiar question. This, he knows. He grins a little but still remains facing forward as he approaches a crosswalk.

“I’m just in the studio seeing what we have. Every album has a different vibe and I’m having fun coming up with the concept for number seven.”

“Can you tease anything?”

Alec thinks for a minute. The words are on the tip of his tongue but he bites them back as he thinks about possible repercussions. In the end though, he decides to go for it. Even if he ends up completely scrapping what he has so far, this is where he’s at right now. Plus, it’s never too early to start building buzz.

“I think this album will be the best I’ve ever written.”

“Yeah? Why is that?”

“I’m experiencing something new for the first time in ages and I can’t help but write about what I’m going through. I think this album will explore a source bank I’ve never tapped into before.”

“What’s new with you?”

Alec declines to answer as the reporter asks a few more leading questions. After a minute, the TMZ guy backs off, throwing out a goodbye.

Alec returns it and continues on his way home.

He makes it back to his apartment twenty minutes later. The sun is starting to dip in the sky and the penthouse is washed in golden light. He sees Izzy on her phone in the living room. She looks up as he enters.

“Hey, hermano.”
“Hey, Iz.”

He tosses one of the bags at her and she stills for a moment before sitting up and opening it. When she takes out the necklace, she studies it for a few minutes. It’s a double tiered piece. The top is a choker but the second layer falls down, several inches longer. It’s gold with different colored stones every few centimeters. It’s colorful and unique and perfectly his sister.

Izzy must agree because she’s grinning. As Alec nears her, she leans over and hugs his middle.

“Thanks, Alec. I love it and can’t wait to show it off. You didn’t have to, though, you know that right?”

Alec just looks at her. “That’s half the fun of shopping for me. You know that. I saw this in the storefront and felt like spending money. It works out for both of us.”

Alec sits on the other end of the couch and the two of them relax in the quiet for a little while, both on their phones. It’s a companionable silence and one that Alec misses when he’s on the road.

After a while, though, Izzy looks up, excited. “You know what we should do?”

Alec doesn’t answer, remaining engrossed on a game on his phone.

Izzy kicks him and he groans before asking, “What.”

“We should go out tonight!”

Izzy must not look enthused with the idea because she glares at him. “What? It’s been a month since you last went out-- when’s the last time that happened?”

Alec opens his mouth to argue but abruptly closes it, realizing that she’s right. Alec might like to stay home with his book or piano but he also likes having a good time and usually goes out at least once a week. There are periods when he’s parties for days on end, passing out just to go out again a few hours later. Huh. This is different.

As he thinks, Alec just pictures Magnus. They’d only hung out a few times but any time spent with him was valuable and there was no contest between talking to Magnus or going out to the latest club.

A friend shouldn’t affect him like this. A friend shouldn’t change his patterns so thoroughly and so gently that Alec doesn’t even notice-- doesn’t even care.

Decision made, Alec looks over at Izzy and nods. “Alright, then. We’ll go out. Is everyone going?”

Rolling her eyes, Izzy stands up. “What do you think I was doing on my phone? Clary has an art class that runs late tonight but Jace can go.” She smiles as she starts walking toward her bedroom. “It’ll just be the three of us, like old times. Now I have to go get ready. We’ll head out at ten?”

She doesn’t wait for confirmation, just goes to her room, shutting the door with a resounding click.

Alec finishes the text he was writing to Magnus, relaxing against the couch as he presses send.

It had been ages since just the three of them went out. There was always a date or Clary or friends or it was for a special occasion. While Alec hadn’t planned on going out tonight, the idea doesn’t sound hideous. He’ll go, have a few drinks, dance with a few people.

Maybe this is what he needs. He needs to shake Magnus. Maybe if he meets someone else, he won’t be so hung up on Magnus’s eyes and his intelligence and his everything. He needs a distraction.
Maybe if he gets laid Magnus won’t get under his skin so damn much.

Alec stands up, stretching his back.

If Magnus is just his friend then by God Alec will get this thing out of his system one way or another. Something's gotta give and Alec is a master at distraction when he needs to be.

That thought in mind, he heads to his room.

He needs to get ready.
Chapter 21

Alec walks into Pandemonium bracketed by Izzy and Jace. Cameras flash as the bouncer raises the rope for them but Alec doesn’t give them the satisfaction of acknowledging them. He’s here on a mission. His single-minded focus is concentrated on finding a drink and a man.

He doesn’t know what switch had flipped but he’s over it. He’s over this pining, he’s over the goddamn butterflies that have started settling like lead weight in his stomach. Magnus doesn’t want him like that. Alec respects that. He respects Magnus and their friendship and he’ll be damned if he does anything to jeopardize this thing between them, especially with shit feelings that are more burden than pleasure— that have no chance of going anywhere.

He’s tired. His career seems to be on the right track but Magnus looms in his head and it’s too much.

He needs to drown it out. His go-to has always been an anonymous fuck and getting too drunk to function. He has high hopes that it’ll still work.

Izzy and Jace are in their own world. Jace leads them to the bar and by luck they’re the next group served. He orders three rounds of tequila for all of them and a few minutes later, they’re slamming them back in quick succession.

Jace grins his frat boy grin and then he’s off, probably to dance off rhythm for the rest of the night. Izzy must see something she likes because she gives him a quick peck on the cheek, already showing signs of feeling the tequila, and dashes off in her heels, ready to stake a claim for the night.

Alec, for his part, stays at the bar a little longer. He orders a vodka and cranberry, handing over his card and keeping the tab open for the rest of the night.

He’ll be back.

He takes his drink and turns around to face the rest of the room. The flashing lights make everything look like it’s happening in slow motion. Everyone looks like they’re having a great time and Alec can’t wait to join them.

This is what he knows. He should stick to this and not soft feelings and perpetual pining like a lovestruck teenager.

He leans against the bar, surveying the club like a king among his people. The liquor is already coursing through him, turning everything tangible. He feels the bass in his chest, the music in his lungs. It smells like sweat and liquor and perfume. The only way to appreciate such a tableau is wasted and it’s with that thought in mind that Alec takes another drink, throwing back half his glass with one swallow.

As his eyes trail across the room, he sees that Jace has somehow gotten himself into the middle of a group. He’s dancing wildly, all limbs, but the people look to be humoring him so Alec stays back. On the other side of the huge dancefloor is Izzy, arms wrapped around a man with jet black hair and a trailing tattoo. She looks engrossed and Alec averts his eyes as the two of them get even closer.

With a sigh, Alec finishes his drink. He carelessly places the glass on the bar with a thud and turns back to the floor, starts making his way into the throng of people.

For a Wednesday night, it’s packed and Alec touches a hundred people on his way to the middle. He needs to be surrounded. As the minutes tick by, the alcohol loosens him up. He dances with a dozen
strangers and loses himself in the beat.

He spends a few hours in a daze, going back every few songs for another drink. He dances with anyone who sidles up to him, doesn’t push them away when they grow handsy.

Unfortunately, even through the liquor-tinged haze, no one catches his eye. Everyone else is too blonde or not tall enough or doesn’t have the right look.

He doesn’t want any of them. The person he does want is an ocean away.

He’s just wearing ripped skinny jeans and grey baseball tee. He hadn’t wanted to spend much time getting ready for this unexpected night out. Magnus had gone to bed around six New York time and Alec had spent the remaining time until they left zoned out on his bed. His thoughts were a jumble and he’d used those couple of hours picking lazily at the threads.

He hadn’t figured anything out, which was infuriating, but at least he wasn’t worse off.

Sweat trickles down his back, making his shirt stick to overheated skin. It’s almost one in the morning and Alec is pissed off to realize that he may not go home with anyone tonight, after all. They’ve been here for hours and no one’s caught his interest.

Alec makes his way to the bar for the dozenth time, yells an order to the bartender and doesn’t realize that his voice is slurred. Izzy had let him know an hour ago that she was leaving. Jace, for his part, was still dancing the night away. He and a few other bros were fist pumping wildly off beat and Alec laughs every time he catches sight the group.

The bartender hands over the shot and Alec downs it a second later, relishing the burn, craving more. He orders another two and while he’s met with a raised brow and judgmental stare, Alec gets his liquor, throwing those back, too.

Everything is blurry. Alec likes it like that way. Nothing is clear just like his fucking life and it makes a weird sort of drunken sense. All Alec feels is the alcohol moving sluggishly through his veins, the music drowning his lungs. There’s barely any room to think of anything else.

Barely.

Suddenly, Alec’s plagued with an image of Magnus. He thinks of the man and his quick wit and enviable intelligence and amazing ass. He thinks of how Magnus makes him feel-- light and heavy and content but uneasy all the same.

He wants Magnus. He wants Magnus.

All at once, Alec’s tired of the scene. He has a headache and the pleasant dizziness that had been making him buzz is now threatening to turn into something else entirely unpleasant.

He needs to get out of here, out of the haze of hairspray and liquor and drunkenness.

He shoves his way outside, waving off the concerned look he sees Jace throw him.

He stumbles out of the club and makes it a few steps from the doors before he’s leaning against the brick wall, shoulders slumping and trying to swallow the nausea that’s building.

Alec doesn’t know how long he stays like that, drunk and pining. He probably looks miserable and pathetic but it wouldn’t be the first time so Alec shrugs the thought off.
It’s a few minutes later, though, when he’s struck by inspiration. There’s only one person that’s been able to make him feel better lately when he gets like this.

Magnus.

Alec thinks it’s a genius idea to call him. There’s no way that Magnus won’t be able to cheer him up, won’t make make everything better.

With that thought in mind, he pulls out his phone from his back pocket. It takes him a minute, frustration growing as he slaps his own ass a dozen times trying to get the damned thing out, but he at last has it in his hand.

It takes even longer to unlock it and find Magnus’s number to dial but he perseveres and is rewarded a minute later by a sleepy, “Alexander?”

“Magnus,” Alec breathes. “Hi,” he says, a little dopy. He’s too drunk to care.

He hears rustling on the other end of the line and can’t help but think of Magnus tangled in sheets—in his sheets, soft and rumpled.

“Oh, fuck,” he blurts out. “What time is it there? Did I wake you up?”

“Are you drunk, darling?”

Alec doesn’t know the right answer, so he settles for, “Maybe,” drawing out the last syllable for a beat too long.

He hears a yawn before Magnus responds. “It’s just after six here and my alarm was set to go off at 6:30. Don’t worry, Alec, you could’ve called at a much worse time. To what do I owe the pleasure of a drunk dial?”

“I missed you,” Alec says simply.

“Oh?” Magnus’s voice is unbearably soft, just above a whisper and Alec feels the single word wrap around him, filling him with warmth.

“Yup,” he says, popping the ‘p.’ “It’s been three days and I wanted to hear your voice.”

Laughing a little, Magnus says, “Well, aren’t you sweet when you’re drunk.”

Humming, Alec mumbles, “Not as sweet as you.”

“Oh, darling, you’re going to regret this in the morning.”

“Why would I regret telling the truth? Anyway, what are you up to? How’s the conference thingy? Are you kicking everyone’s ass with your professor skills?”

There’s a pause before Magnus speaks, sounding clearer. “The ‘conference thingy’ is going well, I’d like to think. I’ve learned a lot and I’ve had a lot of fun catching up with a few of my Oxford pals. Today’s going to be busy, though.”

Alec perks up. “What’s today?”

“I have the closing speech in a few hours and I want to practice one more time and then there are two last seminars that I want to sit in on after lunch before I have to rush to the airport tonight for my flight back. I’ll technically land just before midnight, New York time.”
Alec’s stuck on the first part of Magnus’s answer, though. He thinks about the times he’s helped Alec with his work anxieties and wants to return the favor.

“Don’t be dumb, Magnus. You’re like the smartest person in the whole world and I’m sure your speech is amazing. It definitely won’t be one of those boring, stuffy ones where everyone falls asleep. You’re a very interesting speaker and I could listen to you talk for hours. I’m sure everyone else feels the same. I believe in you!”

Magnus chuckles on the other end. “Thank you, darling, for that impromptu bit of cheerleading. I appreciate it. I’m not nervous for it-- I’ve done this type of thing dozens of times-- but it’s great to hear your support. It’s like I have my very own cheerleader,” he teases.

“I have the skirt and everything,” Alec says, seriously.

Magnus doesn’t respond to that, instead asking, “What have you been up to in my absence? If you’re not too drunk to tell me.”

Humming, Alec thinks for a long minute. Finally he just says, “Writing, mostly. It looks like my writer’s block is gone for a while, at least.”

“That’s fantastic, Alexander! I wonder what changed. You seemed so worried about it in Uptown Java a few weeks ago.”

“I don’t know,” he mumbles. Somehow, even in his drunkenness, you doesn’t seem like the right answer.

There’s a few moments of silence. Alec just stares down the street, watches a group of teenagers goof around, yelling loudly down the block. He’s a little startled when Magnus starts speaking.

“Alec, forgive me, but I want to tell you something and I don’t want to wait until there’s potential damage to control. I know that you’re drunk and I’ll probably have to tell you again, but I don’t want you hearing about this from anyone else.”

Alec concentrates as much as he’s able even though it feels like he’s spinning.

“Yeah? What is it?”

Magnus sighs. “Do you remember me mentioning Camille a few days ago?”

Well, doesn’t the reminder of Magnus’s ex-girlfriend make him feel like shit. “Yeah. No offense, but she kinda sounded like a bitch. Why?” The light bulb flashes. “Oh my God, are you two back together,” he gasps.

There’s a beat of stunned surprise before Magnus barks out a laugh. “Hell no, we aren’t getting back together. We haven’t been an item for six or seven years now. Good Lord, Alexander. If you weren’t drunk, I’d question your sanity.”

“Then what is it,” Alec asks, confused.

After a pause, Magnus hesitantly starts, “She ambushed me at dinner last night and insinuated that she knew the two of us were friends. She made some asinine statement about giving me a warning about the company I keep.” He clears his throat. “I won’t lie to you, Alec. There are a few things in my past that I’m not proud of and unfortunately Camille knows them all. I wouldn’t put it past her to go to the media with the information if she thinks the two of us are connected.”
It takes Alec a minute or two to parse the words together, his brain reacting in slow motion to the spill of words. When he finally understands what Magnus is saying, though, he's annoyed.

“So I was right,” he says flatly. “She’s a bitch and she’s essentially blackmailing you. To what? Stop hanging out with me?”

Oh.

“Damnit, Magnus. I’m sorry. I told you that your past is your business and I meant it. We all have things in our pasts that we aren’t proud of. I want you to know that nothing she says, nothing you’ve experienced, would make me abandon you or somehow change my opinion of you. I know you, Magnus, and I like what I’ve seen. But, we said we’d keep our friendship discreet and I understand if you want to pull back. I don’t want you to be uncomfortable.”

Magnus doesn’t say anything for a minute but then he releases a long breath. “Thank you, Alexander, for that vote of confidence. I’m not ready to tell you what those skeletons are but trust me when I say it wouldn’t go unnoticed.”

Clearing his throat, he continues, “I’m not afraid of Camille. She lost what little power she had over me years ago. At best she’s a persistent insect. But, I wanted to warn you that she might try to pull something. You’ve got your reputation to think of, after all.”

Alec shakes his head, forgetting that Magnus can’t see him. “Why don’t you let me worry about my reputation? Thank you for giving me a heads up, though. Thank you for trusting me with it.”

“Of course I trust you, darling. I’m not friends with people I don’t trust.”

Alec smiles, ignores the twinge of disappointment at having Magnus confirm that they’re nothing but friends. “Good. Because I trust you too, Magnus. I know we’ve only been friends for a month, but you mean a lot to me and I’m so glad we met.”

“Right back at you, Alec.”

Alec startles when a hand comes down on his shoulder, letting out a little yelp. He spins around and sees Jace’s weaving figure grinning. He hears the tinny, “Alexander?” from where he’d dropped his arm and brings the phone back up to his ear, glaring at Jace.

“Hey, Magnus, sorry. Jace just decided to scare the shit out of me. I gotta go now.”

Laughing warmly, Magnus says, “Don’t worry, I’m just glad you’re okay and aren’t being attacked in the dead of night. I’ll talk to you later, Alexander. Please drink a glass of water before you fall into bed.”

Alec smiles, touched in his intoxication that Magnus cares enough to ask him to drink water. He’s such a sappy drunk, fuck.

“Will do, Magnus. Kick ass and take names today. I hope you have a good flight tonight, too. I can’t wait to see you again when you get back to town.”

“Same here, darling. Bye.”

“Bye,” Alec echoes and then he’s staring at his phone, sad as the call disconnects.

In the next minute, Jace is slinging an arm over his shoulders and pulling him to his side.
“Magnus and Alec sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g,” he sings, horribly off tune, words slurring together.

Alec shrugs him off. “Fuck off Jace. There will be no kissing. We are goddamn friends. That’s it. There’s nothing else there. Christ,” he mutters, rubbing his hands over his face a little too hard.

“Woah, buddy. Okay, talk to me,” Jace says, holding up his hands in an appeasing gesture.

Alec’s shoulders slump. Suddenly he’s back to being pissed off and miserable, his momentary euphoria talking to Magnus disappearing. “There’s nothing to say Jace. Magnus and I are friends. Really good friends, but that’s it. He’s not interested in me like that and even if he was, he doesn’t want anything to do with the limelight. We’re supposed to be keeping our friendship discrete, though fuck knows I’m a disaster at that.”

Jace looks at him expectantly. “But?”

Alec looks over at Jace, heart in his eyes. “But I want more. I like him, Jace. I love talking to him. He’s smart and funny and kind. He cares about me-- not the famous celebrity but me, just plain Alec. When I’m with him, nothing else matters.”

He clings to Jace’s side as he continues. His voice is muffled against Jace’s shirt. “I want to be more than friends but I’m afraid that if I tell him, he’ll end everything.” He looks up at Jace, mournful. “I can’t lose his friendship, Jace, not when it means so much. I’d rather have that then nothing at all.”


They walk for a while, stumbling steps loud in the relative silence of New York. After a bit, Jace speaks again, voice careful.

“I know we’re both beyond wasted, but I don’t think things are as bad as you think, dude. Granted, I’ve never met the guy, but anyone that gets under your defenses like this has to be solid. Who’s to say that he’s not in the same boat? Maybe he wants more but he thinks you don’t.” Jace looks down at him, unimpressed. “I think you should talk to him instead of crying into your handkerchief like a dumbass.”

Alec glares at Jace. “No, you’re the dumbass. He’s straight.”

“How do you know that?”

“He mentioned an ex girlfriend,” Alec mutters.

Jace looks down for a minute before perking back up. “Maybe he’s bi or something. You never know, right?”

“No,” Alec says glumly. “I’m not that lucky.”

“Well, I don’t know what to tell you. It looks like a shit situation, bro. Maybe you just need to deal with the fact that there can’t be anything there and move on.”

“I tried that already.”

Jace looks surprised. “Really? What happened?”

“I was going to find someone to fuck tonight but it didn’t work. I didn’t want anyone else. I just want Magnus.”
“I’m sorry, buddy,” Jace says and pats Alec on top of the head clumsily.

A few minutes later, they reach the building and the night doorman waves them through, wincing as Jace and Alec run into the door twice before making it inside. They weave through the lobby and almost go down once but luckily Jace manages to keep them both upright. It takes them a considerable amount of time to make it to the elevator but they get there eventually.

The two of them all but collapse against the back wall. Alec’s head is spinning and it feels like he’s moving even though he doesn’t have the energy to do anything but breathe. He feels his pulse trip and his eyes close without him meaning to.

It takes them several minutes to realize they aren’t moving.

“Jace?”

“Hm?”

“Why aren’t we going up?”

“I don’t know, man. Maybe the elevator’s tired. We should all rest.”

That sounds like a solid plan and Alec is just about to start sliding down the wall to sit when he realizes.

“Jace.”

“Hm?”

“We didn’t push the button. You gotta push the button to go up, dumbass.”

“Hey,” Jace says, sounding almost asleep. “Who’re you calling a dumbass, dumbass? I don’t see you pushing any buttons.”

Alec doesn’t have a response for that but he heaves himself off the wall and makes two stumbling steps to the wall of buttons. Everything is blurry and he counts off each number as his finger passes it to make sure he pushes the right one.

It takes a few minutes but Alec counts all the way to sixty two and pushes the button with a bit more force than necessary.

Less than a minute later, the doors are opening and Jace and Alec tumble out. It takes a few tries but Alec finally gets his key in the lock and Jace falls against him, making Alec fall to the floor. He grunts and tries to get out from under Jace but after a few seconds he relaxes against the hardwood floor, tired.

He could probably fall asleep like this, honestly.

But then he remembers Magnus asking him to drink a glass of water and he mumbles a string of curse words as he struggles to his feet. He’s breathing hard, swaying, and almost goes back down again but he makes it to standing, looking down at a Jace who’s passed out, mouth open and already starting to drool.

Alec leaves him to it and makes his way to the kitchen. He fumbles with a glass, almost dropping it, but he gets to the sink without incident and fills the cup with tap water.

He drinks thirstily and refills it, drinking that down in a few gulps, too. Maybe Magnus knew what
he was talking about, after all.

He walks to his bedroom, running into the door jamb with a muttered, “ouch,” and collapses onto his
bed face down. He turns his head to the side and sighs.

His breaths grow even as the alcohol lulls him to sleep.

His last thought is *Magnus* as he relaxes against the sheets, fully clothed and desperate for escape.
Chapter 22

Alec wakes up in mild discomfort. He has a headache, flinching away from the sunlight streaming through his open windows. His head feels like it’s stuffed with cotton and frankly, he feels a little gross.

All things considered, though, he’s had worse. It’s been ages since he woke up clothed, in his own bed, after a night out drinking.

Maybe he’s getting too old for this shit.

In the next second though, he’s groaning, rolling over and pulling a pillow over his head as he remembers. He drunk dialed Magnus last night.

Shit. And that’s not all he did.

Alec remembers everything. He remembers no one comparing to Magnus, calling Magnus like an idiot, and subsequently spilling everything to Jace.

Thankfully, he hadn’t told Magnus everything. As he replays the phone call, Alec is at least relieved about that. He can’t deny that the clues were there, though, obvious hints that Alec was head over heels.

He wallows for a while in bed. He lays there, still in his jeans and shirt and shoes and thinks about possible fallout from last night. Thankfully, there is none. Alec can apologize for waking Magnus up and everything can continue as normal.

Alec’s brain catches on that thought. Does he want to continue as normal?

Everything in him wants more with Magnus. He’s not in deep-- he's not in love-- but there’s no denying that with every text message, every meeting, Alec can’t help but imagine if things were less platonic between them. With increasing frequency, Alec’s been thinking about what it would feel like to kiss Magnus, to be held in his strong arms.

Alec thinks that Magnus might be his calm in the storm.

But for the millionth time-- Alec is getting sick of his own goddamned brain-- he can’t help but reiterate that they’re friends. Alec might want more but if he wants to keep Magnus in his life at all, then he needs to get a lock on these feelings. Anything with Magnus is better than nothing, that much Alec knows.

With a sigh, Alec flings the pillow off of him and rolls over to his back. It lands somewhere on the floor and he scrubs his hands over his face, feeling the day old stubble. It doesn’t make him feel any more awake, but after a few more minutes of lying there, he reluctantly sits up, groaning at the effort.

He reaches for his phone and sees that it’s in the red. He plugs it in and spends a few minutes looking blearily through his notifications. He must have posted a selfie last night and as he clicks into Instagram, he barks out a laugh.

Jace had posted a picture, tagging him. The two of them are in the bar, obviously drunk off their asses, with arms slung over shoulders. The caption reads #bros4lyfe.

With a snort, Alec likes the picture. There’s also a text from Magnus and Alec’s shoulders slump in
relief. While he’d known that he hadn’t really done anything to piss Magnus off, except wake him up early, it’s still good to know that they’re good.

The text is from just over an hour ago. Good morning, Alexander. I don’t suspect you’re awake yet but I hope you made it home safely and don’t wake up with the world’s worst hangover. I’m on my way to the airport now and should be back in New York by midnight.

Alec responds, ignoring the way he has to fix a dozen typos and it takes twice as long to write such a simple message. Made it home fine, left Jace on the floor though. I’m annoyed at everything but don’t feel like death, so I’ll take it.

I drank water like you told me to-- I think that helped :)

Have a safe flight! I can’t wait to see you once we’re back in the same city.

He tosses the charging phone onto the bed and raises his arms above his head, stretching his back and trying to wake up a little more. He realizes that he doesn’t know the time, so he turns his phone over and sees that it’s almost eleven.

Alec shrugs. He’s slept far later than that before and he doesn’t have anything on his agenda today.

He heads to his ensuite and takes a blistering hot shower. He lingers far longer than he normally would, taking his time washing his hair, even going so far as to use this scented body wash that he only uses when he doesn’t plan to leave his apartment.

It’s cozy and comforting.

He turns the water off and wraps a towel around his waist. He steps over to the sink and wipes a hand across the mirror, trying to clear it of steam. It doesn’t do much good but he can make out his blurry shape. He runs a hand over his jaw, debating, but ultimately decides not to shave for the day.

Honestly, it’s just too much effort.

He brushes his teeth and a few minutes later he’s back in his bedroom. He throws on a pair of sweats and a muscle tank. Feet bare, he finally opens his door and steps out into the rest of the apartment. He walks a few feet before coming to a sudden stop at the threshold to the living room.

There Jace is in all his glory. He’s still on the floor, snoring fit to wake the dead, with his head pillowed on his arms. Alec laughs quietly, though he can’t help but wince at how much Jace is going to ache this morning.

Hardwood floors do not make great beds. He knows from experience.

Alec detours to the kitchen. He puts his glass from last night in the sink and grabs a clean one from the cupboard. He fills it with water and pads over to the entryway. He decides to play nice first.

“Jace,” he prompts, maybe just a hair too quiet.

When that doesn’t elicit any response, Alec grins and brings the glass up until it’s hovering a few feet above Jace’s head.

Slowly, he starts tilting the glass until a steady stream spills from the lip, splattering all over Jace’s face.

Surprisingly, it takes a second before Jace is jerking, sitting up and spluttering.
“What the fuck? Fucking hell.”

Jace’s hair is going in every direction, half of it plastered against the side of his head, the other half sticking out. He’s dripping, looking confused and angry and belligerent.

Alec starts laughing, cackling so hard that he’s gasping for breath. This isn’t the first time he’s woken Jace up like this and it never stops being funny as shit.

Once Jace gets his bearings a little and sees the maniacal gleam in Alec’s eyes, he groans, letting his head fall into his hands.

“Why? Why do you do this every goddamn time I pass out? Why must you add to my suffering?”

Alec shrugs. “Because it’s fun. Get up and take a shower. I’ll make breakfast.”

Jace sits there for a minute before climbing to his feet in slow motion. He stands rooted to the floor for a long moment before his brain gets in gear and he starts walking towards his bedroom.

Smiling, Alec goes to the kitchen and grabs a few paper towels before coming back and mopping up the water. That done, he washes his hands and opens the refrigerator, thinking about what he can make.

Alec likes to cook. He mainly stays to things he knows-- when he experiments, it usually ends in disaster-- but Alec finds the kitchen soothing. He doesn’t get to cook as much as he’d like, but he always makes an effort when he’s home.

The two of them-- and Isabelle when she’s available-- have a tradition for mornings after nights out. Alec makes a huge, greasy breakfast and they spend a few hours, or the whole day depending on schedules, lazing about the apartment.

Alec grabs eggs, milk, and a few other items from the fridge and pantry, dumping everything onto the counter. Next, he grabs a two skillets, placing them on the stove. He puts some butter or oil into them and turns the heat up.

He opens the package of bacon and lays the first layer in the skillet once it gets hot. While that’s cooking, he grabs his pancake mix and a bowl and mixes together a batch of batter. Once that’s ready, he starts pouring pancakes into another skillet.

He hums as he cooks, getting lost in the routine of it all. This is a simple meal and he lets his mind wander as he flips bacon and checks on the pancakes.

He doesn’t have much going on for the next few days. Next week starts production on his music video and he might see if he can reserve a studio at Institute Records and spend some time recording. It’s been months since he was last in the studio and he misses it. It’s one thing to write and mess around with musical composition. It’s another to actually put everything together in a clean package for the first time and playback the product.

With that thought in mind, Alec transfers the last of the bacon onto a paper towel covered plate and starts cracking eggs in yet another bowl, adding salt, pepper, and a dash of milk. Grabbing a whisk, he starts beating the eggs as he continues thinking about work.

He should probably talk to Lydia about possible events. He was invited to a movie premiere in a couple weeks and there’s always a laundry list of events he’s invited to as well. While it’s nice to sink into the background during breaks, Alec never forgets that he’s a public figure and to stay relevant, he needs to stay visible.
He pours the eggs into the still hot bacon skillet and lets them cook, breaking the mixture up as needed. Once the scrambled eggs are done, he turns everything off and lets it sit as he grabs silverware and plates.

Just as he’s about to yell for Jace, the man comes into the hallway, hair dripping but looking awake.

As Jace takes a deep breath and comes closer, he starts grinning.

“Pancakes, bacon, and eggs? You really outdid yourself, bro.”

“I was hungry and needed to sop up the alcohol,” Alec says dismissively.

The two of them plate up and settle on the couch. They turn on the television to reruns of an old drama they both watched when it aired and settle in.

They eat silently and Alec is comfortable. Jace is his oldest friend, his brother, and it's nice that the two of them can still enjoy a night out followed by a morning nursing their hangovers.

There are no leftovers, each of them going for seconds, and they set their plates on the coffee table, relaxing against the cushions.

Alec’s eyes start to grow heavy, a late night combined with heavy food making him sleepy. He looks over at the other end of the couch and sees Jace has already fallen asleep.

He grabs the blanket laying folded over the back of the couch and opens it, settling it over where their legs are in the middle. Alec slouches down, laying his head on the end pillow, and closes his eyes.

He wakes up a few hours later to the sound of a throat clearing. It takes a moment or two but Alec finally opens his eyes to see Isabelle standing over the two of them. Jace is still asleep, hugging his pillow to his chest. His legs are like deadweight over Alec’s, but honestly he’s too comfortable to move so he ignores it.

He glares up at Izzy. “What,” he asks, irritable at being woken up.

Isabelle raises a brow, looking over the two of them.

“Isn’t this cozy? Had I known, I would’ve came home earlier.”

It’s then that Alec sees Izzy is still dressed for a night out, though he can’t remember if she’s wearing the dress she went out in last night.

Mumbling, he asks, “What time is it?”

“It’s almost four,” she answers wryly.

“Why’d you wake me up?”

Izzy shrugs, plopping down on the edge of the coffee table until her knees bump against the couch. “I felt like it. Have you left the house all day?”

Alec wriggles into the couch, trying to get comfortable. “No,” he says. “I made breakfast and then me and Jace watched tv until we fell asleep. Are you just getting in?”

Isabelle sniffs. “Obviously not. I came back before you guys last night, slept, and left again before you two clowns woke up,” she says disdainfully. “Unlike the two of you, I’m a productive member
of society.”

Alec doesn’t deign to respond to that mocking barb, just rolls his eyes. He’s starting to get a little too warm though, his nap interrupted, and it’s not long before he gets tired of feeling Izzy’s eyes on him.

“What,” he asks, eyes closed.

“Oh, nothing,” Izzy says airily. She laughs. “Just thought I’d annoy you a little today. It’s my job after all.”

Alec can’t help but snort at that, lips turning up in fond amusement. Little sisters, man.

Opening his eyes, he looks over Isabelle. Her eyes are bright and appearance impeccable. No one would be able to tell that she’d been out most of the night.

Alec yawns before sitting up, taking more than his share of the blanket with him as he does. Jace barely stirs.

“What were you doing this morning?”

Izzy shrugs. “Nothing too exciting. I spent a little time at Uptown Java, reading that medical book on the doctor from the fifties.”

Raising a brow, Alec idly comments, “You’ve been spending a lot of time at Uptown lately.”

A flash of something comes over Izzy’s face before her expression is as bland as ever. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. We spent practically every moment we weren’t in school at Uptown growing up. The past couple of years have almost been as busy for you as they’ve been for me. Is it so weird that I would want to spend a little time at one of my favorite spots while I have a downswing?”

Narrowing his eyes, Alec studies Isabelle. Everything she said makes sense but it’s obvious that she’s hiding something, too. He can’t help but think that there’s another reason she’s frequenting the shop so much but fuck if he can figure it out. She doesn’t look worried or shady, so he lets it slide. She’s twenty four. She can handle her own shit and he trusts her to come to him if there was something nefarious going on. Though, by the faint smile he sees, Alec sincerely doubts her motivation is anything bad.

“Whatever you say.”

The two of them stare at each other for a minute before she asks, “How was last night? I know I ducked out early but you and Jace looked like you were just fine.”

Alec shrugs, stretches out his legs until they’re resting on the coffee table next to Izzy. “It was good.”

“Just good? You didn’t go home with anyone?”

Alec looks at her unimpressed. “I don’t sleep with someone every time I go out, thank you very much.”

Izzy scoffs. “Whatever you say, hermano.” Her eyes light up. “Or were you too preoccupied with Magnus to even look at another guy?”

Suddenly uncomfortable, Alec makes a show of rolling his eyes. “Magnus and I are just friends, Iz. You know that.”
She waves that away. “Yeah, yeah. That doesn’t change the fact that you told us you wanted more.”

Thankfully, she doesn’t linger on the topic. Instead, she stands up and lays a hand on his shoulder. She gives him a pitying look.

“You know, you’re going to have to confront these feelings sooner or later, Alec, instead of bottling everything up and hoping that they magically go away. You’re better than that and the both of you deserve better.”

She starts walking away, giving Alec a second to swallow the sudden lump in his throat. Clearing his throat, Alec asks, “Where are you going?”

Isabelle doesn’t turn around, keeps heading towards her bedroom. Over her shoulder, she replies, “I’m going to change. I’m meeting up with a friend this evening for dinner and a movie.”

“Anyone I know?”

In typical Isabelle fashion, she just says, “How would I know? It’s a small world, after all.”

With that infuriatingly cryptic response, she walks into her bedroom and shuts the door. Alec slouches against the couch, tilting his head up until he’s staring at the ceiling, unseeing.

He’s focused on Isabelle’s parting shot.

_You’re better than that and the both of you deserve better._

He’s replaying those words, when he’s startled out of his head.

“She’s right, you know.”

Alec lets his head fall to the side and sees Jace sleepily blinking at him.

"How much did you hear?”

Jace just gives him a look. “Everything, dipshit. How was I supposed to stay asleep when I had you two chattering away a foot away from me.”

It’s quiet for a moment. Jace is still waking up and Alec, for his part, doesn’t know what to say. Jace and Izzy are the only two who know how deep Alec’s feelings run. He doesn’t know how to diffuse the situation. He wishes he could retract his words. He wishes he could keep his mouth shut. He wishes he could make these fucking feelings disappear or at least shove them so deep inside of him that they’d never see the light of day again.

He ignores how that last wish feels wrong. False.

“Hey, buddy, talk to me,” Jace says softly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“How about the fact that you had a drunk meltdown last night? Yeah, I might have been shit faced but I remember everything. You said that his friendship meant everything. Are you telling me that was just you drunk and bullshitting?”

Alec doesn’t say anything.

“That’s what I thought. You’ve got it bad, bro, and it’s okay. I know you were insistent that there
was nothing going on between you two but-- Hey, Alec, look at me.”

Alec reluctantly meets Jace’s eyes.

“I know that it’s been years since you were in a serious relationship but I don’t think this situation is as hopeless as you’re painting it. Even if Magnus doesn’t feel anything romantic, you’ve built a solid friendship this summer from the sounds of it. Iz is right. You can’t bury this. You need to tell him.”

Alec scoffs. “Okay, say I tell him and he doesn’t like me like that. I’ve ruined everything and I wouldn’t blame him for pulling back. Christ knows I’ve done the same thing a dozen times,” he mutters.

Jace’s lips twist in a semblance of a smile. “Yeah, these feelings are new to you. You’ve never been on the reverse side of wanting more while your companion didn’t. I just think you need to talk to him before this breaks you and your friendship splinters anyway.”

Alec is silent as he thinks and Jace gives him space.

“I was really drunk last night,” he says finally.

“I know.”

Alec sighs. “You know what they say about drunk words.”

Jace hums. “I do. Drunk words are sober thoughts.” He pauses. “I know you told me and Iz that you wanted more but I didn’t realize just how much you’d been thinking about everything until it came spilling out of you last night. I have to admit I was surprised. This Magnus guy must really be something to make my brother, Most Eligible Bachelor Alec Lightwood, so sappy and sad.”

Alec smiles even as he softly confirms, “He is.”

The two of them sit there for a while, quiet, both lost in their own thoughts.

Eventually, Jace throws the blanket off, standing.

“I’m gonna get get ready and head over to Clary’s for the night.”

Alec just raises a brow. “For the night or for the week?”

Grinning, Jace answers, “Damn, you know me too well. Yeah, I probably won’t be around much this week.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec gets up, too. “I don’t know why you don’t just move in together already. You’ve been dating for five years.”

Jace shrugs. “I’ve been waiting for the right time.”

“You’ve been saying that for two years.”

Glaring, Jace says, “For your information, I’ve been looking up places the past few months and I think I found something but it isn’t available for another month or two. I’m thinking about broaching the subject in a couple of weeks.”

“Finally,” Alec mutters.

Jace half ass slaps Alec on the shoulder before leaving the living room, going to his own bedroom.
Alec picks up their plates from the coffee table and goes into the kitchen. His shoulders sag a little as he sees the mess from breakfast but since he’s the only goddamn adult in the place, he pushes up his metaphorical sleeves and gets to work.

Half an hour later, the kitchen is spotless and he goes to his room. He grabs one of the books laying on his bookcase before flopping onto his bed. Outside, he hears a door open before the clacking of heels. Izzy must be on her way to meet her friend.

Alec picks up his phone, unlocking it. He sees a text from Magnus about boarding his flight and an Instagram notification.

There’s a comment under the #bros4lyfe pic and Alec smiles as he reads it.

Yeah, this totally looks like a man drunk enough to call someone in the middle of the night, time zones be damned. Remember, Alexander, hydration is key.

Alec likes the comment before locking his phone again and sighing into the silence.

Goddamn, he has it bad. Just an innocuous comment from Magnus is officially enough to have those fucking butterflies fluttering away.

Shaking his head, Alec opens the book. He’s almost finished with *European Conquerors*. He has a few more chapters before it’s time for Magnus’s and Alec’s eager to finish it tonight.

He looks forward to discussing it with Magnus the next time they hangout.

Alec reads for the rest of the evening, making notes every so often. The room is shrouded in shadows when he gets to Magnus’s chapter and it feels like the worst kind of betrayal that he has to get up and turn his light on just as he’s ready to finally read what Magnus wrote.

He’s totally engrossed in the thirty pages, even though he has to break and look up an odd reference or fact up a few times. Magnus’s chapter is by far the best. Alec isn’t even being biased. It’s an obvious fact that Magnus’s is the most informative, eloquent, and interesting.

Alec finishes the book, sitting back with a sigh. He definitely learned a lot in general while reading this book. As he replays some of the more interesting bits, he distantly thinks of just how brilliant Magnus is. Not just a professor, not just head of the department. He’s an accomplished scholar and Alec is proud of him.

They’ve only known each other for a short while, but Alec enjoys supporting Magnus. He wants to support him in whatever his career demands. With that thought in mind, Alec resolves to go to the bookstore tomorrow and buy a copy of this book-- and maybe any other book Magnus has written. He knows how important sales are, after all.

As he gets out of bed, placing the book on his nightstand, Alec distantly wonders how good his chances are of getting his copy autographed.

Something tells him it won’t be too difficult.

Alec goes into the kitchen and makes a pot of tea. He has the penthouse to himself and it’s only around nine in the evening. He hasn’t done much all day and it’s nice. He doesn’t get too many days like this.

He pours a mug of piping hot tea, adding milk and sugar before taking it and a couple of cookies to his window seat that overlooks New York.
Up so high, everything seems so small, so insignificant. As he sips his tea and takes distracted bites of his cookie, Alec lets his mind calm down for the first time in ages.

Somehow here, reclined on a window seat on the sixty second floor of his apartment, he feels remarkably at peace.

As his thoughts land on Magnus, Alec lets himself smile.

Yeah, he wants to smooch Magnus. He wants to do a hell of a lot more than that. But he genuinely likes the man, and respects him. Friendship isn’t a death sentence though it might just be the best kind of purgatory.

Something’s gotta give and as Alec swallows the last of his tea and lets his head rest against the wall, he thinks that it just might be soon.
Chapter 23

Alec slows to a stop, breathing hard. He’s just finished his morning run and he’s ready to collapse with a coffee and maybe a muffin. Luckily, he’d planned his route with that in mind and he’s just a few streets over from Uptown Java.

He brings his shirt up to wipe his face and starts walking to the coffee shop like he has all the time in the world. Once or twice a week Alec likes to push himself on his runs and since he’d known he’d be swinging by, he’d ran ten miles this morning. He’s definitely feeling a runner's high even as his thighs are trembling like a newborn colt.

A few minutes later, he’s swinging the door to Uptown open, smiling as he hears the little bell chime. It’s almost eight and there’s half a dozen people in line ready to get their caffeine fix before work. Alec waits his turn and grins as he sees Luke and Maia working in tandem. Maia is moving with quick grace as she steams milk and drizzles syrup and pours coffee. Luke is expertly handling bills and complicated orders with an easy smile.

When Alec gets to the front of the line, Luke looks up distractedly only to bark out a delighted laugh. “Hey man,” he says cheerfully. “It’s been so long since I last saw you that I was about to send out a search party.”

“I’ve been busy,” Alec laughs. Shrugging, he continues, “I didn’t realize that it’d been a month since I saw you last.”

Seeing the guilt starting to furrow Alec’s brow, Luke just shakes his head, still smiling. “It’s fine, Alec. Goodness knows that I’ve gone months cooped up in the shop and before I know it, I can’t remember the last time I surfaced.”

He points a finger at Alec’s chest. “That doesn’t mean that I don’t remember a promise of a beer, though,” he says sternly.

Relieved that Luke isn’t genuinely upset, Alec laughs, raising his arms defensively. “Yeah, yeah. Why don’t we set a date right now?”

Narrowing his eyes, Luke offers, “Tuesday after next.”

“Alec, you’re not the only one who’s busy.”

Alec hands over his card and throws in a generous cash tip when Luke turns around. Luckily, it looks like there’s a few minutes break and Luke moves down the counter to start making Alec’s drink as Maia catches up on everyone else.

“So, what’s been keeping you so busy? Last time we talked you said in no uncertain terms that you didn’t have a boyfriend and I know you like to relax between album cycles. What’s up?”

Luke’s eyes don’t leave the espresso machine as he casually adds, “Could you be preoccupied with a certain professor?”

Alec blinks twice, heart stopping for a moment, before he releases a slow breath. Really, he
should’ve expected this.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know damn well what I’m talking about. I’d have to be living under a rock not to see that you’ve been getting cozy with someone. There was that shady ass picture in that tabloid a few weeks ago and then I see you on TMZ playing coy about a new friend?” Luke finally raises his eyes from where he’d been swirling whipped cream on the top of Alec’s drink. “What gives? I know you, Alec. Talk to me.”

Alec debates for a minute but ultimately capitulates. This is Luke, after all. The man was like a father to him and had seen him in every conceivable state. Alec knows he can go to Luke about anything. So, why not at least admit that there’s something going on?

He sighs. “Okay, you’re right. I made a new friend earlier this summer and I guess that I’ve been... preoccupied with him.”


Alec crosses his arms on the counter and leans forward. Luke stays at that end of the counter, jerking his head to the till to let Maia know they’re switching.

Biting his lip, Alec thinks about where to start, just how much he wants to divulge. He opens his mouth, just to close it.

Luke doesn’t say anything, let’s him have his space as he makes a drink for the next customer in line.

After a moment or two, Alec starts, “For starters, he’s a professor. Columbia.”


Alec laughs even as he feels heat climb up the back of his neck. “Shut up. Anyway, we met accidentally at this diner one night and then ran into each other again here a few days later. We’ve been talking pretty much nonstop since.”

Narrowing his eyes, Luke repeats, “You met him here?” His eyes widen. “Are you telling me that your Columbia professor is Magnus?”

“Yes?”

Luke’s still for a minute before he doubles over laughing. “Damn, Lightwood, what are the chances?”

Alec lets him yuk it up for a few moments. Eventually, he settles down, wiping tears from his eyes.

“Oh my God, I can’t believe two of my best customers are dating and I wasn’t the one to set them up.” Humming, Luke says, “Now that I think about it, though, you two really would be good together.”

“We aren’t dating,” Alec clarifies, tone alarmed. “We’re just friends,” he insists.

Granting no quarter, Luke prompts, “But you’d like to be more?”

His tone is light but there’s an undercurrent of knowing. Talking to someone that knows him so well is a double edged sword-- he doesn’t have to tiptoe around the truth, even if he might like the option.
“Yeah,” he says morosely.

Luke expertly makes some cappuccino foam art as he says, “That’s great, Alec! I know we talked about this last month but I was getting a little worried that you were never going to settle down. It’s nice to see you show legitimate interest in someone.”

Alec takes a sip from his crazy straw that’s a jarring blue and orange. “I can be interested in someone all I want-- that doesn’t mean that they feel the same.”

At that, Luke looks up. “What are you talking about? You’re one hell of a catch and if you’re even half as close as I think you might be, than I have a hunch it’s not just one sided.”

“We’ve talked about this before. My career doesn’t exactly lend itself to something serious.”

“You’re a handsome, talented man with a good heart. So, what? You’re on the road part of the year and people are sometimes overly interested in you. That’s no reason that you can’t fall in love someday.”

“My last tour was nine months and I got two weeks off between legs if I was lucky. The press are intrusive as hell-- they’ve been all over the Magnus thing, sniffing like hounds. Isn’t it selfish to ask someone to deal with that when they haven’t signed up for it?”

Luke sends him a pitying look. “I’m not saying that there might not be problems that you’d have to work through. I’m saying that relationships are give and take. Here’s a tip: you’re an idiot. Magnus is choosing to be friends with you. I know a lot of people have either bailed when the scrutiny became too much or that’s the only reason they were with you in the first place. But, I’ll vouch for Magnus. He’s good people and he must genuinely be interested in you.

“You think he hasn’t already thought about what just being your friend means? You’re not an accountant who stays in his office all day. You’re one of the biggest names in the world and even friends choose to deal with whatever attention comes their way. Magnus is anything but stupid. If he’s still your friend even though the press are--” Luke uses air quotes, “‘Sniffing like hounds’ then he’s choosing to stay in your life even with all your baggage.”

There’s a pause as Alec thinks about what Luke’s just said and Luke makes a frappuccino in the meantime. He passes the drink and straw to the waiting customer before turning back to Alec.

“I don’t know if Magnus is into you, Alec. But I can say that you shouldn’t let your insecurities or your own feelings about the media keep you from pursuing something if you want it. Is that the only thing holding you back?”

Alec nods without hesitation. “Yeah. I probably would’ve asked him out weeks ago if I didn’t have to worry about the press.”

Luke reaches over the counter, clapping Alec on the shoulder. “Then, I say go for it. After all of this, the worst that could happen is that he’d say no.” Snorting, Luke continues, “I know you’re a big shot and all, but even you’ve been turned down before.”

Alec smiles faintly. “And if I ruin our friendship?”

Luke shakes his head, though Alec can’t see his expression as he’s looking down, concentrating on drizzling caramel. “Don’t worry about that. You can’t let fear control you. From the sounds of things, you have a pretty good foundation. Even if he just wants things to stay the same, could you handle that?”
“Of course,” Alec says, even though he’s not so sure. It’s fine while he hasn’t put himself out there-- he’s dealing with a thousand hypothetical situations where the biggest issue is retaining his friendship with Magnus. But if he were to tell Magnus how he feels and Magnus didn’t feel the same? In the short term, Alec supposes he would be overwhelmed with relief that Magnus doesn’t disappear on the spot. But could he handle months and even years of wanting more when it’s one sided?

He has a sinking feeling that the answer is no.

Luke leaves him to brood and Alec finally heaves himself off the counter. He needs to think and maybe write and he really needs to get in touch with Lydia-- there’s always something that he could be doing. Even during his off time, Alec works hard and right now, he’s be grateful for a distraction.

Alec turns away from the counter. “See you later, Luke. Thanks for the pep talk,” he throws over his shoulder.


Alec makes his way to the front door, taking a quick sip of his drink. He’s reaching for the door when it opens and he almost runs into it. Some fancy footwork keeps his coffee from spilling everywhere and he reaches out automatically to steady the person, wrapping an arm around their back to support them both.

He’s too focused on making sure that his drink doesn’t end up everywhere that he doesn’t notice the other person. Until they speak.

“Alexander?”

Alec jerks his head up so fast that he almost gets whiplash.

He looks into warm brown eyes and can’t help the smile that that transforms his face.

“Magnus, hi,” he says breathlessly.

“Alexander, fancy meeting you here,” Magnus replies, teasing.

Alec brings his drink up, waves it a little. “You know me. I love drinks that are as much caffeine as they are sugar and Luke has my order down pat.”

Magnus hums but doesn’t offer anything further. The two descend into silence. It’s easy, companionable, and Alec doesn’t notice that his arm is still pretty much embracing Magnus even though they’ve both long since regained their equilibrium. He does notice that a runner's high has nothing on seeing Magnus, though.

The two of them are in their own little world until Magnus rakes his eyes over Alec, asking, “Did you workout this morning?”

That jars Alec into action. He hastily drops the arm wrapped around Magnus and steps back. He grimaces. “Yeah. I went for a run this morning and ended it here. Sorry I got so close-- I’m probably disgusting right now.”

He doesn’t say anything but Alec feels his eyes as Magnus runs them over his damp hair and the singlet he’d made out of an old tour shirt.

He sounds distracted as he says, “No need to apologize, darling. I didn’t mind at all.”
He snaps back to attention a minute later and Alec asks, “What are you doing here? I didn’t think that I’d see you for a few days. I figured you’d sleep all day. You got in what? Eight hours ago?”

It’s Magnus’s turn to wince as he looks at his watch. “Just over eight hours,” he confirms. “I’m still on London time though. I went to bed at one but woke up six. I tried to go back to sleep but finally realized it was a waste of time. I figured that if I’m up I should be productive so I threw something on and came here. I’m planning to spend the morning reading over my manuscript.” He pats the computer bag that Alec hadn’t noticed yet. “It’s something I’ve been putting off and it’s low risk enough that I can do it jet lagged.”

Curious, Alec asks, “How far are you?”

“I’m just over halfway. I’ve finished my threads about before WWI and now I’m working on India during the Great War. I have about three hundred pages now so this monster will end up being dreadfully long.”

“Holy shit. That’s so much work,” Alec exclaims.

Magnus laughs a little. “It’s a labor of love. I’ve been working on it for a little over a year-- the writing of it. Research has taken me the better part of five years and I still regularly spend days in the archives or occasionally fly to different libraries around the world. I squeezed in a few hours at the British Library and I’m so glad I did-- I ended up with some great first hand accounts that I didn’t even know existed--”

“But enough about that. I don’t want to bore you. How have you been?”

Ignoring the question, Alec asks, “Why aren’t you teaching today? If you’re back and everything, I’m surprised you’re not rushing to campus right now.”

Magnus smiles. “I told my students to take the entire week off. I knew I wouldn’t want to teach and they don’t know that I could’ve had class. It’s a win for everyone. I get to relax a little and catch up on everything I’ve missed and they get to sleep in or put off their assignments for another few days.”

There’s an imperceptible pause before Magnus ultimately adds, “Plus, I got to see you this morning, so I’d consider this little play at hooky well worth it.”

Alec returns Magnus’s smile and the two of them just stare into each other’s eyes for a minute before there’s a loud cough behind them. Alec spins around to see a disgruntled customer pointedly looking between them and the counter. Alec’s face doesn’t betray what he’s thinking as him and Magnus move over a few feet so the woman can order.

“Well,” Magnus says when it’s just the two of them again. “We were blocking the doorway.”

Alec just looks unimpressed. “Yeah and she was rude.”

The two of them shake their heads in amusement before Magnus repeats his question from earlier. “What have you been up to in my absence?”

Alec shrugs. “I hung out with my siblings, wrote a little, had a few business meetings.” Missed you like crazy. “Really, whatever I would’ve done had you still been in the city.”

He debates about what he’s going to say before finally admitting, “I missed you, though.”

Magnus’s expression softens. “I missed you, too. I know we talked every day but it definitely felt different. I was hoping I’d see you soon, though I didn’t quite think that it would be within twelve
hours of my arrival back into the country.”

Alec clears his throat before nodding towards the door. “Well, I should probably get going. I need a shower and want to work a little.” He gestures to Magnus’s laptop with his drink. “Plus, you’ve got things to do, too. I’ll see you later Magnus.”

He turns away, only to come to a stop as Magnus’s arm reaches out, wrapping a hand around his wrist. Alec’s total focus is on where they’re touching. Magnus’s hand is warm, gently calloused, and Alec realizes with a jolt that besides their brief, accidental embrace this morning, this is the first time they’ve really touched.

It’s innocuous and innocent but it fills Alec with fire.

“What are you doing for dinner?”

Alec freezes as he hears the question. Magnus pulled him back to ask him his dinner plans?

“I’ll probably just grab a pizza or something. What about you?”

Magnus sighs. “Probably the same, though goodness knows that I’d kill for something homemade right now. I’ve been eating takeout for a week but I’m too tired to actually cook.”

Alec thinks about the idea that’s sprung to mind but he can’t find any flaws. “I could-- I could cook? I’m usually the one that makes dinner for my siblings and I like it. I could make something if you wanted to come over?”

Magnus’s eyes light up. He doesn’t seem to realize it, but his thumb starts softly sweeping against Alec’s wrist.

“Are you sure,” he asks. “I don’t want to impose, especially when it’s such short notice--”

“Magnus, it’s fine,” Alec says firmly. “I wouldn’t have offered if I didn’t mean it. I definitely don’t mind cooking, especially if it’s for you.”

Magnus grins. “Great! What time should I come over?”

Alec hums as he thinks. He really doesn’t have anything structured going on. “How about six? I know that’s a little early but you are jet lagged and we can watch something after?”

“Sounds like a plan, darling.”

“Great,” Alec responds. “I’ll text you my address?”

Magnus nods and releases Alec. The two of them stand there, silent, neither turning away. Finally, Alec catches Luke’s expectant expression in his peripheral and though he ignores it, it jolts him into motion.

“I’ll see you tonight, Magnus.”

“I can’t wait, Alexander.”

They smile one last time at each other before Alec turns away again, this time uninterrupted.

He’s halfway down the block when he starts grinning. Holy shit. He’d just invited Magnus over to his place. He can’t remember the last time he’d given anyone his address. It was a big decision. He supposes that goes to show just how much Magnus has come to mean to him. He trusts Magnus. He
doesn’t give his address out all willy nilly, especially since he also has to worry about his siblings.

This was a big deal.

Reassuring himself that friends make dinner for their other friends all the time, Alec’s subconsciously singing one of his new songs under his breath. He feels good. It’s like just seeing Magnus after a week apart had recharged him. It’s absurd, but-- it’s how he feels.

He’s lost in his own head, thinking of what he wants to make, when his phone rings. He takes it out of his pocket absently, throwing his drink away as he passes a trash can.

It’s just after eight thirty and he sees Lydia’s name across his screen. Knowing that she doesn’t usually call him so early, Alec answers right away, curious.

“Hey, Lyd, what’s going on?”

“Hey, Alec. I have a huge favor to ask. It’s super short notice.”

Lydia sounds a little frazzled, which never happens, and Alec straightens a little, alert. “Lay it on me.”

Lydia blows out a breath. “What are the chances that you could get to the NYU hospital by ten? Sebastian was supposed to go there for a charity op but he cancelled this morning, citing illness.” Alec can feel Lydia roll her eyes from here. “I really don’t want to leave the kids hanging and you’re one of the only people on my roster who’s in New York right now.”

Alec picks up his pace a little as he listens. He’s nodding before she’s even finished speaking. “Yeah, of course. You know I’m down with this. You said the NYU hospital? Where is that again?”

“It’s off E. 34th Street. I can call Dave and have him ready by 9:30 and you should get there just on time. Is that good?”

“That works. I’m on my way home now and I’ll get ready and by waiting for him when he arrives. Don’t worry-- you know I won’t disappoint the kids.”

Lydia laughs. “And I’m thankful everyday that you’re not a giant asshole. Unlike some of my other clients,” he hears her mutter under her breath.

“Was that everything?”

“Yes, that was the only thing I had for this morning. We need to meet within the next few days and check in on progress and future plans but that can wait. If you get there on time, I’ll be much more lenient with you when we do meet.”

“No you won’t,” Alec says dryly.

Lydia laughs. “Okay, so I won’t go easy on you. But you will win major brownie points and a favor from me.”

“That’s what I like to hear.”

“Oh, hush you. I have a call on the other line, so I’m gonna go and seriously, Alec-- thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it.”

“It’s no problem. Bye.”
The two hang up and Alec strides down the street.

Sebastian was an asshole. Relatively new to the scene, he’d landed his first Top 40 hit a couple of years ago. While he stayed relevant on the charts, it was well known in the industry that he was a right bastard-- a drama queen who liked to steal credit from others and was proving increasingly unreliable.

Alec scoffs as he turns a corner. It takes a real shitbag to cancel on sick kids. Alec’s glad that he didn’t have any structured plans today, though he probably would have cancelled them to do this. Alec visits a New York hospital, usually the pediatric department, once a year minimum. NYU has a special place in his heart after the way they took care of Max and he’s donates monthly.

There’s a different doorman today and Alec just nods as he strides through and makes it up to his apartment without issue. Everyone must be out and Alec goes straight to the shower. He gets ready in record time, even for him, and grabs a bottle of water on his way out the door half an hour later.

Dave is waiting for him. There’s no time for pleasantries-- he has just under thirty minutes to get to the hospital and it’ll take every bit of that time in New York traffic-- but it’s an easy silence. Dave has been his driver for years and he’s seen Alec in every state. This is just business as usual.

He’s an excellent driver, navigating smoothly in and out of lanes. They come to a stop at the front doors of the pediatric wing at 9:57. Alec opens his own door and sees Lydia waiting for him with her ever present iPad.

She starts walking without looking up and he follows her through the automatic doors. They’re in the elevator before she acknowledges him.

“Good morning, Alec. Thanks again for doing this.”

He smiles easily. “Like I said, it’s no problem. You know I’m always free for this kind of thing.” He pauses a beat before continuing. “So Sebastian bailed?”

Lydia rolls her eyes. “I should’ve seen this coming, honestly. He’s getting even more erratic lately. It’s not just public appearances. Do you know that he’s been over forty five minutes late to his last two performances? The one before that? They found him five minutes before warm-ups drunk off his ass and belligerent.”

She leans closer, tone dropping to conspiratorial. “Between you and me? His contract is up next month and I don’t think Branwell and Co. will be renewing his term.”

Though it’s not surprising, Alec can’t keep his expression neutral. “You have to do what’s right for your company. You do know that no other management company will touch him with a ten foot pole though, right? And if he doesn’t have an agent he’s dead in the water. His career is over.”

Lydia shrugs, the shark gleam in her eyes obvious. “He dug his own grave. I might expect a lot from my people but I also give them free reign. There are only a handful of real rules I have and they’re basic. If he can’t handle showing up on time to concerts, then he’s not my problem as of August 17th.”

“Does he know he’s losing you?”

“I don’t think so. Sebastian might be a bastard but he wants this-- the money, the fame, everything. If he knew just how seriously he was damaging his reputation and prospects, I think he would’ve cleaned up his act even if it was only until negotiations concluded and he had a new contract with us signed. But, like I said. My company doesn’t have time for celebrities like him.”
She moves closer to Alec, straightening his shirt and flicking imaginary lint from the shoulder. “Now, you on the other hand are a dream client. You show up when you say you will, people love you, and you’re not bad to look at.”

Alec huffs out a laugh. “Thanks, Lyd. Good to know I’m not deadweight for you.”

Lydia snorts. “Please, Alec. You know that you’re my best client and that I’ll always be indebted to you.”

“Water under the bridge, Lydia.”

“We’ll agree to disagree,” she says as she always does every time the topic comes up. “I know, I know, it’s no big deal that you signed with your high school friend fresh out of college and gave her a shot even though all the other PR companies were circling you like sharks scenting fresh blood. No biggie. Anyone would do it.”

Alec doesn’t deign to answer. He just shakes his head, amused. They’ve gone over this a million times and Lydia will never accept that he didn’t just do it as a favor to a childhood friend. He’d been in the business for a few years and while he’d been steadily on the rise, his old agent hadn’t wanted him for anything but the heft percentage he gave her. He wanted an agent who knew him and really did have his best interests at heart, not just the bottom line his name could provide.

Lydia had been top of her class and keen to start her own management company. Alec hadn’t waited for her to ask him, instead offering to be her first client. His show of faith hadn’t been unfounded and now Lydia had a waiting list and was constantly expanding staff and headquarters. She was busy but she was thriving.

A win-win for everyone, then.

The elevator doors open and Alec walks out first. There are a few kids lined up in the corridor and he stops at the first on he sees, crouching down until he’s eye level.

“Hey there,” he says, grinning. “What’s your name?”

The kid look to be about eight and his right leg is in a cast.

“Danny,” he says, excited to have an adult show interest.

“Hey, Danny. I’m Alec.” He extends a hand and Danny eagerly shakes it with his own, proud at being offered such an adult gesture. Alec talks to the kid for a few minutes, learns how he broke his leg—bicycling accident—and his favorite movie—Captain America.

He moves onto the next patient. He spends close to forty minutes just in the corridor. Alec really enjoys these visits. They can be emotionally draining and exhausting but it’s worth it in spades to get to meet kids and lift their spirits, even if it’s just for a morning. It helps that he talks to everyone on the same level. He’s not a grown-up faking interest. He talks about everything from someone’s favorite book to answering questions about the solar system. Kids always have a million things to say; They just need someone to show that they genuinely care.

It’s the middle of the afternoon when Alec finally surfaces. He’s taken a hundred pictures, including some with the staff, and he’s ready for a nap. These public appearances are usually slated for two hours and Alec has spent double that in the hospital. The staff seem appreciative of him making an unexpected visit— he catches a few thinly veiled insults about Sebastian and studiously ignores them. He might not like the guy but professionals don’t shit talk to strangers, even if it is warranted.
Lydia stays in the vicinity the entire time. She does her own thing, knows when to let Alec have some space, but she’s there if Alec needs her. This is a great PR opportunity but Alec never advertises his visits to hospitals. That’s not to say they haven’t occasionally leaked-- staff, parents, or teenagers spilling the beans-- but Alec tries his damnedest not to get any undue credit for it. These visits aren’t for his image; they’re just to be a decent human being.

It’s a little after two when Lydia and Alec walk through the automatic doors and into the July heat. He’s immediately sweating and Lydia looks annoyed as she takes off her suit jacket and slings it over her arm.

“Well, I’d say that was a success.”

Alec hums as he slips his sunglasses on. “Yeah, it went pretty well. The kids seemed excited.”

Lydia laughs. “You really have a way with children, you know? You’re a good guy, Alec. I know Sebastian wouldn’t have been as fun today.”

Alec just shrugs. “I just do my best but yeah, I agree. Sebastian would’ve probably been a disaster.” He gives her a look. “I’m surprised you even booked him with a hospital appearance.”

Sighing, Lydia admits, “I thought it would help his image. Visiting sick kids? It’s a foolproof PR trick. Too bad he’s too much of a dick to follow through.”

Alec throws an arm over her shoulders as he sighs too. “You can’t save them all, Lyd. Sometimes people just want to sink their own boat.”

“Don’t I know it,” she glumly replies.

The two walk for a block or two until Lydia ducks out from Alec’s arm.

“I have to head back to the office and get some work done. Not all of us have nothing to do all day.”

“Hey,” Alec says, mock offended. “I’ll have you know I’ve written half a dozen songs in the past couple of weeks.”

Surprised, Lydia asks, “Really? I thought you were suffering from chronic writer’s block?”

Alec smiles. “Something must’ve broken through. I have two almost finished with music and everything and the others are over halfway written, I’d say. I’m going to try to sneak in some recording time next week.”

“Way to go, Alec. I’m glad that you seem to have gotten some inspiration.”

Alec smiles, nodding. “It’s a nice change of pace. This stuff might not make it onto the album, but at least we have something. Even if they were just warm-ups, these songs are good just for what they represent.”

“That Alec Lightwood has his mojo back?”

“Shut up,” Alec says as he grins.

“I can’t wait to hear these songs. Maybe I’ll visit the studio,” Lydia teases.

“Yeah, yeah. You know I don’t let anyone in the studio except techs when I’m recording.”

“Whatever, Lightwood. I’ll see you later, okay?”
Alec takes a step back as Lydia half turns in the opposite direction. “Sounds good. Later, Lyds.”

Alec walks across a crosswalk, head lost in thought. It’s mid afternoon now and Magnus is due to come over in a few hours. With that thought in mind, Alec moves out of the way as he takes his phone out. He texts Magnus his address, including the code for the Penthouse unit.

He thinks about what to make for dinner. He wants something simple that he can make even if he feels like he’s a moment away from self-combusting. Alec knows that Magnus is distracting— it would be too embarrassing if he burned his building down because he was trying a fancy recipe trying to impress him.

With that thought in mind, Alec changes his route.

He has some grocery shopping to do.
Chapter 24

Alec kicks the door shut with his foot as he makes his way into the apartment. Thankfully, Jace and Izzy are away so no one has to see Alec be an utter disaster. He’s decided to cook something simple, just spaghetti and meatballs-- a main staple of his repertoire.

Arms laden with bags, he curses when he feels his phone start vibrating in his back pocket. He hastily makes his way to the kitchen before dumping the bags on the counter and reaching for his phone.

His face lights up as he takes in the caller ID.

“Hey, mom.”

“Alec! How’s my favorite son doing?”

Alec laughs. “Favorite? I heard you say the same thing to Jace last week.”

“Well, that was last week,” Maryse says reasonably. “What’s new with you?”

“Nothing much,” Alec replies easily. “You know how it is. I’m just writing and enjoying the peace and quiet while I have it.”

“No one’s caught your eye lately?”

Narrowing his eyes, Alec warily says, “No. Why?”

“No reason, Alec. Honestly, there’s no need to go on the defensive. It’s just that you’re not getting any younger and I want to make sure you don’t miss out on anything before it’s too late.”

Alec rolls his eyes. “I’m twenty six mom. That’s not exactly decrepit.”

“You know what I mean! I worry about you, you know. You’re so busy flitting from city to city and focused on your career that it would be easy to wake up in twenty years and wish you’d spent a little less time in the studio and more living.”


Maryse huffs. “Believe me, dear, I know just how much you live. I’m not talking about that. I’m talking about a lasting partnership.”

“That’s hot.”

“Alec! Honestly. I’m just looking out for you.”

Relenting, Alec sighs. “I know you’re just doing what you think best, mom. I get that. However, you’re not considering how much my career means to me and how much I love it. I’ve sacrificed for it, sure, but it’s because I want to.”

He hears his mother getting ready to cut in and hastily continues, “Look. If or when I find someone for this ‘lasting partnership,’ I will be over the moon. But I’m not going to hold my breath for something that might not happen for years, if at all. I’m quite content in my life mom, I promise. I’m not wringing my hands every night over my lack of a boyfriend.”
He ignores the slight guilt he feels at omitting any mention of Magnus. While they weren’t even close to a relationship, he was the one solid development his love life had put together in ages. He didn’t want to get Maryse’s hopes up for something to happen when Alec was still moderately sure that Magnus wasn’t even interested in men.

With those thoughts in mind, he changes the topic. “So, what have you been up to?”

“The usual. I take care of the house and your brother and work on my writing when he gives me more than five minutes of peace.”

“And how is my little brother?”

“Oh, Max is doing fantastic. He’s been pestering me lately to get his driver’s license. His friends are always over and all in all, I’d say everything is going great. I’m busy but you know that’s the way I like it.”

Alec smiles softly. “That’s what I like to hear. How’s the latest novel going?”

“It’s going in fits and starts. My deadline isn’t until later in the fall but I’m starting to get a little frustrated. I was actually thinking Max and I might make a little visit to New York for a few weeks before school starts. Maybe it’ll shake something loose for me and it would give all of us an opportunity to spend a little time together.”

“That sounds great, mom,” he says genuinely. “Would you be staying in the townhouse?”

“Of course we would, Alec. Where else would we be staying?”

“Just making sure.”

Maryse sighs and he hears movement on the other side before Maryse apparently still and confides, “Your father got in touch recently.”

Instantly, Alec’s filled with annoyance and a persistent irritation. In a flat tone, he says, “Why the hell would he do that. He knows that he’s not to contact you and that he should direct any of his bullshit to me.”

He feels his mom’s shrug through the phone. “I don’t know, Alec. He said something about wanting to make amends. I told him that he’d lost his chance at that long ago and that I wasn’t interested. He got all huffy but didn’t push.”

“He probably needs more money and thinks you’re his biggest way to cash-in.”

Maryse hums. “Maybe. I wouldn’t put it past him.”

Even as Alec seethes, he worries about his mom. Robert was a bastard-- who the hell cheated on his wife of twenty years, forget what he’d done to the rest of them-- and it chapped his ass that he’d have the nerve to even talk to Maryse.

“Are you okay, mom,” he starts. “I can talk to him, make sure that he stays the hell away from you--”

“I’m fine, Alec. It didn't unnerve me or even piss me off. Every few years he tries to sidle his way back into my good graces but I’m a stronger woman than that. I have family and friends to lean on.”

Alec raises a brow. “So your visit isn’t in any way correlated to dad’s asshattery?”

Maryse laughs but it rings false. “Why, Alec, I don’t know what you’re talking about--”
“You know, funny thing that happened this morning,” he breaks in casually. “I went to Uptown and Luke and I made plans. However, he offered something almost two weeks from now.” He pauses before asking, “You’re telling me that had nothing to do with you?”

He starts grinning as he hears his mom sigh. “I might’ve already told him that we’d be flying in Sunday.”

“Is this finally going to be the time you guys get your shit together?”

“Alec! The gall. Luke and I are--”

“Just friends, yeah. That’s what you’ve been saying for years. You know you want more, though. I don’t know why you two don’t just admit you’re more than friends.”

“My relationship with Luke is none of your business, young man.”

Alec smiles at the young man statement. “You know I just have your best interests at heart,” he mocks.

Maryse sighs. “Oh very well, hint taken. I will stay out of your hair if you stay out of mine.”

The two of them laugh before Alec repeats, “So, you’re coming in Sunday?”

“Yes. Max and I should land around six in the evening. I think Max wants to go straight to your apartment and the four of you can go out to dinner or whatever. Luke’s insists on taking me out to dinner that night,” she admits sheepishly.

While Alec’s smile widens, he doesn’t say anything about it. “Alright, we’ll look for the kid around seven. We can eat dinner and then I can kick his ass on the PS4.”

“Sounds great, dear. Now, if you don’t mind, I have an appointment I need to get to. I just wanted to call and catch up a little and let you know my plans.”

“Sounds good. I’ll let Jace and Izzy know. Bye, mom. Love you.”

“Love you too, Alec. Bye!”

The call ends and Alec tosses his phone onto the couch before huffing out a laugh. His mom and Max usually visited a couple of times a year. After everything had gone to shit with Robert, Maryse had decided to move and now lived in Seattle. It sounded like Max was a well adjusted sixteen year old and Alec grins as he thinks about hanging out with his little brother. They haven’t seen him since he’d visited for spring break almost five months ago.

He shakes his head, however, as he thinks about Maryse and Luke. They’d been friends since high school and Maryse had actually been a partner at the coffee shop when Luke had first opened it when they were both fresh out of college. Through everything, they’ve remained fast friends though Alec and his siblings have long suspected that there’s more there that doesn’t meet the eye.

Alec goes back into the kitchen, discarding any thoughts about his mom and Luke. He has bigger fish to fry than a clandestine relationship.

Namely, making sure that he doesn’t give Magnus food poisoning.

He washes his hands and dries them. He starts on putting the groceries away. He has a little less than two hours until Magnus comes over. That gives him plenty of time to get ready and make dinner.
After he puts everything away, he grabs his phone and puts on one of his Spotify playlists on shuffle. This particular playlist runs the gambit from bass-thumping rap to soft, sappy shit and all of them are songs that Alec’s listened to a hundred times.

It’s soothing and he hums under his breath, occasionally singing along, as he starts chopping vegetables. With that done, Alec takes out everything he’ll need for dinner and lays it on the kitchen island. The preliminaries done, he straightens the apartment up, making sure that Jace’s gym clothes aren’t hanging about and that Izzy’s gross science books are put away. After that, he heads off to his bedroom. He’d been running around all day and he wants to grab a shower before Magnus comes over.

It’s quick and efficient and Alec’s turning off the shower fifteen minutes after he’d first stepped in. He wraps a towel around his waist and crosses the bathroom to the sink where he brushes his teeth and runs a comb through his hair. He dabs on some cologne before going back into his bedroom.

Since it’s a casual night in, Alec just throws on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He pads barefoot into the kitchen and sees that he’s got about half an hour until Magnus shows up.

In the meantime, he walks over to the drink cart Jace and Izzy insisted they set up when they’d first moved in and chooses one of his favorite bottles of red. Normally Alec can’t stand red wine, but this particular brand was sweet, fruity-- not bitter and disgusting.

He rummages through a drawer for his bottle opener and uncorks it, setting it on the counter to breathe.

Next, he turns to the stove and sets a skillet on one of the burners, pouring some olive oil into the pan and ratcheting up the heat.

After a minute, he takes out the hamburger and throws it into a mixing bowl, adding a few ingredients and mashing it into a mixture. He forms little balls and sets them into the skillet. Almost immediately, the kitchen starts to smell heavenly with garlic and Alec’s mouth waters.

He realizes that he hasn’t eaten all day and he hopes Magnus doesn’t mind when he inhales his entire plate later.

Cooking this dish is simple and frees up his mind to other things. Namely, Magnus. While this wasn’t so much a leap of faith as a show of Alec’s pre-existing trust in Magnus, it was still a little jarring to realize how excited he is for tonight. People outside of family and business rarely visit Alec’s apartment but Alec wants to show Magnus his place. He wants him to sink into his couch and enjoy his food and feel comfortable.

As he turns the browning meatballs over and puts on a pot of water to boil, Alec thinks of what could happen tonight. With a little smile, Alec figures they’ll eat some food that hopefully doesn’t taste horrible, catch up on the past week, and watch something on Netflix. All in all, a solid Friday night.

But he can’t help but wonder what if-- what if things didn't go according to plan? What if Alec just blurted out that he wanted more? What if he tentatively broached the subject with Magnus, finally getting his answer. He doesn't want to ruin tonight but Alec thinks that he has to do something soon before he drives himself-- and everyone around him-- crazy.

Thirty minutes go by quickly when he’s working in the kitchen and he’s startled by a doorbell ringing. He looks up at the nearest clock and sees that it’s just turning six.
He grabs a dishcloth and wipes his hands, slinging it over his shoulder on the way to the front door. He takes a deep breath before turning the handle and swinging the door open.

Magnus looks impeccable as always, even though he’s still in his clothes from this morning. They’re just black trousers and a henley but on Magnus it looks like haute couture.

Alec opens the door wider as he gestures inside with a smile. “Magnus, hey, come on in.”

Magnus steps over the threshold, smiling too as he takes in the penthouse unit.

“Alec, thank you for inviting me over. I hope I’m not imposing too much.”

Alec waves that away as he moves closer, until there’s just a couple of feet separating them. “Don’t be ridiculous. I invited you over. I wouldn’t have done that if I didn’t want to.”

Magnus pauses at the threshold to the rest of the apartment and takes off his shoes. Alec is about to let him know that he doesn’t have to when Magnus intercepts. “It’s not a problem, Alexander.” He gestures towards Alec’s own bare feet. “I wouldn’t want to be overdressed after all,” he teases and Alec can’t help the heat that climbs into his cheeks.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. Wanna see the rest of the place?”

Magnus nods and Alec takes him on a brief tour. It’s mostly an open concept. They walk into the living room and Alec says, “This is where we-- me, Izzy, and Jace-- spend most of our time.”

He points to the kitchen, where the island serves as the divider between the two spaces. “That’s the kitchen where we’ll be spending most of our time, at least early on tonight.”

Magnus hums, makes a show of sniffing the air. “Whatever it is, it smells delicious.”

A pleased smile graces Alec’s lips as he offers, “I’m just making spaghetti and meatballs. It’s not anything fancy.”

“Don’t be so modest, Alexander. Sometimes the simplest dishes are the yummiest. I, for one, can’t wait to eat.”

Alec hurries over to the stove and stirs the sauce, making sure that it doesn’t stick to the bottom of the skillet where it’s heating with the cooked-through meatballs.

He moves to the counter, reaching into the cupboard above to grab two deep wine glasses. He grabs the bottle of red, looking over his shoulder as he replies. “I’m starving. I hope it’s okay that it wasn’t ready as soon as you got here. I have most of it put together and simmering away. It should only be another fifteen minutes or so until it’s done and I figured we could catch up while I finish with this.”

Magnus smiles, settling into one of the bar stools on the other side of the island from where Alec’s working. “It’s no problem, I assure you. I always love watching people cook. Probably because I’m a disaster in the kitchen,” he admits.

Alec turns around, holding out one of the glasses for Magnus, asking, “You’re not a cook, then?”

Magnus swirls his glass a little, replying, “I’m afraid not. I can make one or two dishes for when I’m really craving home-cooking, but I rely entirely too much on takeout.”

He takes a sip of wine, humming in pleasure. He looks up at Alec with an appreciative gaze. “This is one of my favorite reds. What are the chances?”
Alec just shrugs, going back to the stove and pouring the noodles into the water that’s just reached boiling. He stirs them once then leaves them be, picking up his own wine glass and joining Magnus’s side of the kitchen island.

He doesn’t take a seat, instead leaning against the granite countertop, taking a drink from his own glass. “I usually despise all red wine, but I found this little vineyard in Napa Valley a few years ago and didn’t completely hate the red I tried. We usually keep a bottle or two around for special dinners that it’ll suit.”

Magnus is quiet for a moment before he smiles softly. He looks at Alec, head tilted. “So I’m a special dinner, then?”

Alec shifts, moving imperceptibly closer. Clearing his throat, he says, “Of course. You’re the first person I’ve invited over.”

Surprised, Magnus asks, “Ever?”

“Alec’s tongue darts out to wet his lips as he murmurs, “You pass every test. You’re a great friend, Magnus.”

Leaning forward, Magnus sets his glass on the counter, thumb rubbing across the base. Looking down, he asks, “And that’s what I am? A friend?”

Alec smiles, though he’s a little confused. He’d thought it obvious. “Of course. As long as that’s what you want.”

Magnus’s mouth quirks up, though he doesn’t say anything else. There’s a tense beat that confuses Alec even more but then he reaches out, wrapping a hand around Magnus’s arm. Magnus looks up quizzically and Alec jerks his chin to the rest of the apartment.

“Why don’t I show you around the rest of the place? By then, dinner should be ready.”

Magnus acquiesces and stands up. Taking their wine with them, Alec shows Magnus everything. They start in the living room and Magnus walks over the the piano against the wall nearest the window seat. He looks like he wants to touch it and Alec doesn’t wait for him to ask.

“Go ahead,” he says easily. “Can you play?”

Shaking his head, Magnus presses a few notes, trying it out. “No, not really. I took lessons when I was a child but nothing prodigal. I was a mediocre student.” He looks up. “I was much more interested in my books and playing. While I appreciate music a great deal, I have no ability myself.”

Alec takes a sip before offering, “Maybe I can teach you, sometime.” He grins. “That seems like a fair trade. You’ll show me a few yoga moves and I’ll teach you how to play Yankee Doodle on the piano.”

Magnus laughs, turning until he’s facing Alec completely. “Yes, that does seem like a fair trade, doesn’t it? Name the time and place, Lightwood.”
Alec just huffs out a laugh before heading towards the corridor. He gestures to each of the closed doors. “These are our bedrooms. I’m the third door on the right and Izzy and Jace are on the left.” They keep going until the hallway leads to a large open space. Floor to ceiling windows cover three of the walls, offering jaw-dropping views of the city so high up.

“Holy shit, Alexander.”

Grinning, Alec walks into the open space. “Yeah, that was my reaction, too. I knew I had to have this place just for this room.”

It mostly looks to be another living room, with furniture clumped together in a couple of seating arrangements. Magnus walks around as Alec talks.

“This is usually reserved for any parties or events I throw together. I’ve had a few meetings in this room. Mostly, though, it’s more of a lounge area if we want a change of pace from the real living room. Izzy reads in here a lot and Jace likes to watch Clary as she paints in here.” At Magnus’s confused look, Alec clarifies, “Clary and Jace have been going out for a few years now. They’ll probably be moving in together soon, actually.”

“Good for the two of them. Are you disappointed that he’ll be moving out?”

Alec sighs as he takes a seat on the couch, Magnus following suit. “Not really. While it’s the end of an era, this is a long time coming and he’s my brother. It’s not like he’ll fall off the face of the earth. All around, I think it’s a good move.”

“You’ve a good heart, Alec.”

Alec smiles, dismissing Magnus’s words. “Not really,” he shrugs. “I can’t keep him with me forever and even if I could, I wouldn’t want to. Jace has his own plan for his life and I’m just lucky that I’ve gotten to spend as much time with my siblings as I have.”

The two of them stand up and leave the room, heading back to the kitchen.

“So, it’s just the three of you, then?”

Magnus resumes his seat on the bar stool as Alec drains the pasta. Alec turns off the burners before lifting the skillet and replying, “I actually have a little brother, Max. He’s ten years younger than me and lives with my mom in Seattle.”

“That’s quite a distance.”

Alec sends him a look. “Tell me about it. They moved just after I signed my first big record deal. Shit went down with my dad and a lot of things happened. Long story short, my mom ended up divorcing my dad and got a job in the Pacific Northwest and has hardly looked back since.”

“I’m sure she misses you and your siblings.”

Stirring everything together in the pot, Alec says, “Oh, yeah. No doubt. I know that she wishes she could visit longer or more often. I think she’s pretty happy where she is though— it was definitely the right move at the time. My brother is about to graduate soon, though, and I wouldn’t be surprised if she ended up coming back to the city.”

Alec’s glad that Magnus hadn’t asked about the shit or any real details. Alec had just told him more than he’d told anyone that hadn’t been around at the time. While the press knows that there’s bad blood between Alec and his father, no one has a firm grasp on the details and Alec doesn’t want to
ruin this dinner with talk of it.

A few minutes later, Alec’s grabbing plates and dishing out the food.

“This smells amazing, Alexander. I’m ready to dig in,” he says as Alec sets a plate down in front of him.

Sitting next to Magnus on another bar stool, Alec grins. “I’ll admit that I think it does smell good. I only hope it tastes great, too.”

At the first bite, Magnus closes his eyes, humming a little. Alec pauses with his fork halfway to his mouth and can’t help but stare at the sight. Magnus certainly looks like he’s enjoying dinner.

In the next minute, Alec is shoveling his bite of food into his mouth so that Magnus doesn’t catch him staring like a creep.

“Oh my God, darling, this is the best spaghetti I’ve had in ages, maybe ever.”

Alec rolls his eyes. “Please, Magnus. It’s the most basic recipe available. I don’t even remember, but I probably just picked the first recipe I googled. You’re probably just hungry and anything would seem good right now.”

Magnus playfully shoves at Alec’s shoulder. “It might be simple, but it’s really hitting the spot. Let me compliment you without you getting all defensive. It’s a good thing, I promise.”

Alec settles down, muttering, “Fine. Thank you, Magnus. I’m glad you like it.”

Magnus smiles. “You’re welcome, Alec. Thank you for making it,” he says cheerfully.

The rest of dinner is spent chatting. Magnus talks a little more in depth about the conference and something funny that had happened to Raphael and Alec talks about how annoying his siblings are and his schedule for the next few weeks.

It’s easy and by the time the light’s started waning, casting shadows over the room, they’ve both cleared their plates.

Alec stands up and grabs both of them, carrying them over to the sink. Magnus leans forward, crossing his arms on the countertop.

“Need a hand, darling?”

“No, I’m good,” Alec says. “I’m just going to set these here for the night. I’ll put everything in the dishwasher tomorrow. Thanks, though.”

"Handy,” Magnus says, smiling a little.

“Extremely. I’m the only one who would do dishes in this house and I would go crazy if I was responsible for it all. Definitely glad that isn’t an issue.”

After setting the plates down, Alec reaches for the bottle of wine and refills both their glasses. After doing so, he stands near the fridge, hands grasping the edge of the counter as he leans back onto it, facing Magnus.

“Dessert?”

Magnus’s face lights up. “Dessert?”
Laughing, Alec nods. “I have chocolate cake to finish us off. Interested?”

Magnus stands up, bringing his glass over with him until they’re just a few feet apart. “You should know that I never pass up dessert, Alexander.”

“Good to know,” Alec says with a grin and he turns towards the refrigerator, opening the door.

He takes out the cake, placing it on the island. Alec’s rummaging through a drawer for some silverware when he hears Magnus move behind him.

“Alexander?”

“Yeah,” Alec asks absently, not looking up.

“I have a question.”

Bemused, Alec prompts, “What is it?” He looks up and sees that Magnus looks uncharacteristically unsure. “You can ask me anything, Magnus.”

Magnus clears his throat. “You said earlier tonight that we were friends as long as I wanted to be.”

Alec hums to confirm, not sure where this is going.

Magnus takes a deep breath, looks like he’s building up to something and Alec is honestly confused. What could be so bad that he’d be this nervous over a simple question? The worst that Alec would do is just say he wasn’t ready to share something. Especially with Magnus, he’d like to think that he’s not intimidating or anything.

Alec’s thoughts splinter as he acknowledges that the lead up was something to do with their friendship-- maybe Magnus just wanted to make sure they were on the same page?

Lost in his thoughts, Alec startles as Magnus steps closer. He sees him rubbing his thumb and forefinger together in little circles and has a brief second to be amused at the tell. He perks up, though, as Magnus opens his mouth to speak. His voice is soft. His eyes betray his nerves though there’s a little smile tilting his mouth.

“What if I don’t want to be just friends with you?”
Chapter 25

Alec freezes, mind going blank.

The room is totally silent and Magnus is leaning against the edge of the island. Though there’s still a hint of the nervousness lingering in his eyes, he straightens, looking for all the world like he’s challenging Alec.

Alec plays through the last few minutes and suddenly everything is crashing against him. Magnus-- Magnus just said he didn’t want to be friends with Alec.

He didn’t want to be just friends.

Alec would like to think that his deductive reasoning is at least average but he’s floundering. His mind has short circuited with that brief sentence and he probably looks like a deer caught in the headlights. While his mind is racing, his gaze runs over Magnus. He sees the small smile at the corner of his lips, the barely raised brow, the body that he’s been secretly drooling over for weeks.

Magnus doesn’t say anything, just looks right at Alec, direct and unapologetic. Thankfully, as Alec searches for something in the radio silence of his head, he doesn’t seem to grow more anxious. If anything, he relaxes against the counter, seemingly content to give Alec all the time he needs.

It’s another moment before Alec comes to the only conclusion he can when confronted with such a question. He thinks over the past weeks, the phone calls and teasing and weighted tension. There’s no denying that they’re friends but all of a sudden Alec realizes that maybe there is room for more.

He starts smiling, moving the few steps over to Magnus and closing that distance, both refusing to break eye contact. He doesn’t stop until he’s right in front of him. There’s only inches separating them and Alec brings his arms up until they’re resting on either side of Magnus, caging him in.

Magnus doesn’t seem to mind, sinking into the space. He tilts his head and Alec’s gaze falls down to his mouth. There’s no gloss today, nothing but Magnus and Alec swallows hard.

There’s a few seconds of silence before he’s murmuring, “You don’t want to be friends-- just friends?”

Magnus shakes his head, not saying anything.

“And here I thought we really had something,” Alec says, smile widening.

“Sometimes things change when you aren’t looking,” Magnus replies, faux sad.

Alec lets his expression grow serious, whispering, “And sometimes they were there all along.”

He ducks his head a little and hears Magnus’s breath catch. Blood rushes in his ears and Alec’s almost dizzy with it. God damn him, it’s happening. It’s like a magnet pulling the two of them together until there’s not an inch of space between them-- if Alec’s being honest with himself, it’s like they’ve been attracted to each other since the beginning. Always circling, orbiting around each other without ever getting too close to collide.

Alec can’t wait for the crash now.

He doesn’t make a move for a second, relishing the tension that’s vibrating between them like a
livewire. He savors this feeling of almost. This is the minute before everything will change and Alec’s steeped in the feeling of warmth coursing through him.

He shifts impossibly closer, leaning down torturously slow, veering off at the last minute so that his lips graze Magnus’s ear as he whispers, “Can I kiss you?”

Magnus’s voice, just a touch breathless already, murmurs, “I’d be insulted if you didn’t.” His hands slide up to anchor at Alec’s sides and he can’t repress his shiver.

Alec grins before he moves so that there’s a breath of space between them. There’s a last moment where their eyes meet, contact so intense it feels like electricity singing up his spine before Magnus’s tongue darts out, wetting his lips. Alec is helpless, entranced by the action before he’s letting his eyes fall shut and his lips finally meet Magnus’s.

It’s soft, achingly gentle. A bare meeting of the lips, a point of contact before they’re moving. Alec’s mouth opens on a silent gasp. They’re a string of kisses, each light and ephemeral and making Alec dizzy with the feeling of it all.

Magnus’s lips are soft, his goatee scratching softly as Alec’s chin and it’s all so much. The pressure is light, nothing too deep, but Alec can’t help the shudder that moves through him at finally feeling Magnus like he’s been dreaming of for so long.

They pull back scarce centimeters before they’re going back in. Alec feels surrounded by Magnus. His arms come up, one hand cupping Magnus’s face, thumb brushing over his cheek and the other landing at his side, inching his shirt up until he’s grazing bare skin.

Magnus inhales and they separate. Alec watches as Magnus’s lashes sweep open slowly. The deep brown is a thin ring around the iris and he looks just a little dazed.

Alec grins at the reaction, though he’s well aware that he probably looks no better. Magnus’s cologne is clouding his senses and all Alec wants to do is dive back in.

So he does.

This time instead of warmth it’s the bite of heat. Alec settles against Magnus more firmly, hums as they fit together. Their lips reconnect and Alec gives himself up to the feeling. Magnus gasps as Alec nips at his bottom lip, pulling it between his teeth and sucking gently.

It’s like they’re in their own little world as they kiss lazily for long moments, sinking into each other. It’s easy and slow and Alec can’t remember ever feeling like this.

Hookups move from zero to sixty in seconds. There’s no room for tenderness, never an invitation to slow things down. It’s always about getting off and moving on.

With Magnus, though, Alec’s content in this. Nothing high stakes, just two people finally satiating the need that’s been gnawing for ages. It’s like syrup moving through his veins. Alec tastes the bite of wine they’d been drinking earlier and everything spins brighter.

They pull back eventually, breathing heavy and Alec grins dopily. “Hey.”

Magnus huffs out a laugh, humming when Alec leans down until they’re foreheads are touching. “Hey, yourself.”

There’s a moment of quiet, just the two of them soaking in what just happened. Alec lets out a breath and wraps his arms around Magnus’s waist.
His eyes slip shut and he hums as one of Magnus’s hands reach up and starts carding through his hair.

His mind is gloriously blank. There’s no tension, no worry. With little reflection, Alec knows that he’s just had his best first kiss. No one else even compares. It’s a herculean task to even think of another person when he has Magnus like this.

Their bubble remains intact until a thought starts niggling at Alec. His eyes fly open and Magnus just watches him, lips quirking up at his sudden movement.

“**Yes, darling?**”

“I thought you were straight,” Alec says accusingly, disbelief evident in his tone.

Magnus just stares at him, blinking before he’s falling forward into Alec’s chest and laughing. Alec wraps his arms around Magnus to collect him on autopilot as he starts smiling himself. Magnus is laughing his ass off, great chuckles and gasping breaths. It takes him a moment but when he finally collects himself, he pushes playfully at Alec’s shoulder before sliding his palm down until it’s resting against Alec’s heart.

“You thought I was straight? And you still kissed me? That was awfully bold of you.”

Alec grumbles before replying, “That isn’t my fault. When you said you wanted to be more than just friends my brain turned off. I wasn’t thinking of anything but finally touching you.”

“Finally?”

Alec gives him a dry look. “Yes, finally.”

Magnus takes a step forward and Alec follows blindly until the small of his back gently runs into the counter behind him. He relaxes against it, settling as Magnus crowds into his space. He bites his lip as Magnus places a hand on the side of his neck, thumb sweeping over his pulsepoint.

“I’ve wanted you for ages but I didn’t think you saw me like that— saw us like that. I didn’t want to ruin our friendship so I didn’t do anything.”

Magnus doesn’t stop his hand as he says, “I thought the same. I thought you were content with our friendship.” He laughs. “Luke said something this afternoon that gave me a little hope that maybe you did feel what I felt.”

“What’d he say?”

Magnus hums, shifting until one of his thighs slip between Alec’s. This position is more intimate, brings them closer together and Alec barely restrains a muted whimper.

Magnus’s hand moves to his chin and he uses a finger to tilt Alec’s head up until their eyes meet. “He said that you’re a master at self restraint. That no matter how much you indulge in other vices, when it truly matters you pull yourself back.”

His voice is a whisper as he continues. “He said that sometimes you want something so badly you’re vibrating with the need but you hold back to spare others.”

He urges Alec’s head down, arching until their hips are flush before murmuring, “You never have to hold back with me, Alexander.”
Something snaps in him and Alec closes the distance and then they’re kissing again. It’s a little more insistent this time. Alec thought he was already overwhelmed but it’s nothing to the need, the sheer desire, that’s clawing at his gut right now.

Magnus stokes a fire in him that no one else ever has. Christ, they’ve only kissed once five minutes ago but he’s dizzy with the need for more. He wants Magnus.

He wants everything.

The two of them makeout lazily in the kitchen until the light disappears, casting them in shadows. It turns everything hushed, makes everywhere they’re touching stand out even more, phantom sensations lingering.

This time when they pull back they’re breathing harshly, panting. Alec can’t remember ever feeling like this. He’s wrapped up in Magnus to distraction. Nothing else matters.

Magnus’s hands are under Alec’s t-shirt, resting against the small of his back. Alec ducks down, noses along Magnus’s cheek before going further. He starts mouthing along his neck, lingering here and there, nibbling. He hums when Magnus tilts his head granting him better access and they stay like that for long minutes. Alec could do this until hell freezes over. Magnus’s scent is warm here and he breathes in, lets it seep into him, simultaneously easing him and bringing desire crashing through his gut.

It’s addicting. Magnus makes these little sounds, breathless edgings of a moan, muted gasps that leave Alec wanting nothing more than to drown in him. No one has ever captured his attention like this. He feels more leaving Magnus a hickey than he has during threesomes.

There’s no competition. Magnus outshines everyone. He’s brighter, more alluring than the goddamn sun.

Magnus has seduced him, utterly and effortlessly.

Eventually, Magnus brings Alec back up and their mouths meet again. It’s simmered back down to a lazy greeting. Even in an evening, Alec’s system is already drawn back in, again and again, to Magnus. Their lips rub together, warm and slick, and they kiss until Alec’s mouth grows numb.

He doesn’t know how long the two of them stand in the kitchen. He doesn’t know how long they would’ve kept standing but there’s a clang of metal against hardwood as the two of them shift down the counter and Alec’s hand brushes the silverware onto the floor.

They startle apart and Alec reaches out unthinkingly, swipes a thumb across Magnus’s bottom lip. Magnus closes his eyes and his breath fans over Alec’s palm.

“Dessert,” Alec murmurs in the deep twilight. It’s almost completely dark now, just enough light to see the gleam of Magnus’s eyes, the way he looks at Alec, drowsy and humming with contentment.

“I did tell you that I never turn down dessert,” he says, voice hoarse.

“I do seem to remember something like that.”

There’s a beat before Alec steps back, surprisingly unsteady. He regains his equilibrium quickly though his body itches for the heat of Magnus’s the second it’s separated. He clears his throat and walks to the far wall, turning on a few lights in the kitchen and living room to brighten things up. He has the half-formed thought that he needs to put a lid on the lust fogging his brain before he jumps Magnus.
Tonight-- for the foreseeable future-- this is enough. Magnus isn’t just another hookup and Alec refuses to do anything that might make Magnus question that. They were friends for so long and there’s no need to rush headlong into something when he’s not going anywhere.

They have time.

Alec turns around from the light switch to see Magnus watching him. A small, wondering smile is playing on his lips and it only grows wider as Alec nears.

“Who knew that the illustrious Alec Lightwood had so many moves,” he teases.

Alec huffs out a laugh. “I don’t have any moves,” he says. He goes back to the drawer and pulls out two forks and a knife, setting them where the previous set had been. He darts a look at Magnus as he opens the fridge and takes the cake out.

“It’s just that you’ve been on my mind and I might’ve been thinking about it.”

“Yeah?”

Rolling his eyes, Alec says, “Yeah.”

His expression grows a little more serious as he continues. “I really like you Magnus. As more than a friend. I’m so fucking relieved that it’s not one sided.”

Magnus smiles as Alec cuts the cake, setting the pieces on their plates.

His voice is soft as he says, “I really like you too, Alexander. While I was surprised at Luke’s gentle encouragement, I have to say that I was a little worried he was off the mark.”

Alec refills their glasses and they move to the living room, settling on opposite ends of the couch, their legs tangled in the middle. They both start in on the cake as they keep up with the conversation.

Alec shakes his head, laughing at himself. “He definitely wasn’t off the mark. I might’ve talked to him about you before you came to the coffee shop this morning,” he admits.

Magnus pauses for a beat before he’s chuckling. “Well, that would explain why he seemed so sure of himself.” He looks at Alec, amused. “What did you say about me, darling?”

Alec feels heat rush to his cheeks as he says, “I just told him that I’d been preoccupied lately with a new friend and that I-- that I wanted more but I knew he didn’t.”

Magnus’s expression softens as he continues. “Luke said I was being an idiot but--” he shrugs, “I had my reasons. For one, I thought you weren’t interested in guys.” Magnus snorts, but Alec manfully ignores it. “Secondly, my career is a big consideration for anyone who would be interested in me.”

Magnus reaches for his wine glass, takes a lingering sip. After a moment, he says, carefully. “While I will admit that I still have some concerns about being caught in the public eye, I’m not going into this with rose tinted glasses.”

He looks at Alec, direct, so that there’s no mistaking his words. “I will always be a professor and more interested in academia than celebrity. However, if we do pursue this thing between us, then there’s no denying that it’ll get out eventually. I’ll be okay with that when it happens. I’ll have to be, because Alexander? You’re worth it.”
Alec’s breath shudders as Magnus’s words wash over him. Even if everything does go to shit, he has this moment. This golden, ephemeral stillness in time when Magnus had total faith in him.

He can’t help but argue, “You say that now, but you’ve never been in the public eye. That shit the tabloid pulled after ice cream? That’s nothing once they know your name. I don’t want you to regret things between us when-- because there is no if, Magnus, they will find out eventually-- when your life is turned upside down.” His voice is soft as he ends, “It’s a lot to ask. I’m a lot to ask someone to deal with.”

Magnus watches him for a long moment before sitting up, moving until he’s straddling his legs and leaning over Alec, hands on either side of his face, tilting it up.

“It isn’t a lot to ask someone if they’re offering. I like you Alec. I want to see what happens with us, what could be. I won’t say that there might not be an adjustment period or that it might not be rough when they first put it together.” He leans forward until there’s scant inches separating them. “But the press will be an issue. Not us. Never us with this. I’m here, Alec. All you have to do is take me.”

Alec is still for a few moments before he slowly closes the distance and places a soft kiss on Magnus’s mouth. He pulls back a second later and looks into Magnus’s eyes before saying, voice hoarse, “Yeah. Okay, then. It looks like we’re doing this.”

Magnus doesn’t get a chance to smile before Alec’s adding, “But Magnus? I want you to know that if you ever grow uncomfortable or if it gets to be too much, then the door’s open. I don’t want to trap you. I don’t ever want you to feel like it’s too much but you can’t leave.”

Magnus just shakes his head, thumb running along Alec’s cheek. “You really do need to have a little faith in me, darling. I’m not going anywhere.”

Alec smiles and lets the words sink into him. While he hopes that’s the case, he has to be a realist. He’d rather never perform again then make Magnus miserable. However, he lets his worries slip away, at least for awhile, at least for tonight.

There’s no room for anything but the buzzing happiness that’s lighting him up right now.

“Should we set some ground rules,” he asks as Magnus settles against him, leaning over to the coffee table to grab his wine. Alec’s hands settles against Magnus’s thighs as he opens his mouth to respond and Alec is stuck in mild disbelief that he gets to have this. The casual intimacy, the accepted closeness.

An evening can change everything.

“I think we should,” Magnus says, grinning.

Alec echoes his smile before letting out a breath. “Okay, obviously the first thing is media. I take it that you don’t want to announce you’re my boyfriend?”

Magnus’s smile grows imperceptibly wider as he wraps his arms around Alec’s shoulders. He arches a brow. “And is that what I am? Your boyfriend?”

Alec falters for a moment, stammering, “I just-- I just thought? Because you know, we really like each other and--”

Magnus cuts him off, swooping down for a quick kiss. “It’s fine, Alexander. I just wasn’t expecting you to be so blunt with it. Of course, I’ll be your boyfriend-- if you’ll be mine,” he asks with a devilish grin.
Alec lets out a relieved breath, clearing his throat. His face is on fire. “I’m your boyfriend,” he says firmly.

“Okay, now that that’s settled, I have to say that I’m not ready to take our relationship public. It’s one thing to be your friend and for people to speculate about that, but it’s quite another for them to see us as an item. That would bring the heat up quite a few notches.”

Alec nods, understanding. An idea comes to mind and he decides what the hell.

“What if we admit that we’re friends? That way I can still mention when we hang out but no one knows that it’s more.”

Magnus thinks about it for a few minutes and Alec gives him his space, relaxing against the cushions. He has to admit that he likes Magnus’s weight over him.

Finally, Magnus slowly says, “I think that could work. I do have the habit of posting regularly and it’d be hard to keep you completely out of my social media presence. But just as friends?”

“Just friends,” Alec confirms.

Magnus thinks about it a minute longer before nodding. “That sounds like a plan. And to anyone who publicly asks, we’re not dating?”

“Right.”

“Alright, darling. I’m in.”

Alec grins, nodding, too. “Great,” he murmurs and the two of them lapse into silence, enjoying just being together.

Tonight’s been a whirlwind and Alec’s glad for a brief respite to catch his breath and enjoy having Magnus so close.

“What if we posted something now?”

Alec breaks out of his reverie to see Magnus staring at him expectantly.

“Yeah?”

“We’ve been commenting on each other’s posts. It wouldn’t be a great leap if you alluded to someone.”

“Magnus,” Alec says slowly, “Are you trying to fuck with the press?”

Magnus shakes his head though his eyes are laughing. “Of course not. I’m just saying that if you post something ambiguous, eventually they’ll get tired of always being shot down. And if not, then at least we have some fun.”

Alec huffs out a laugh but agrees. “Alright then. Let me get my phone.”

There’s a bit of shuffling as Alec angles his hips up, reaching for his phone in his back pocket. He takes it out and thinks a moment before straightening and reaching over to the coffee table where their wine glasses are sitting. He pushes them a little closer together before snapping a pic. He and Magnus hover over the screen, choosing a filter together along with the caption \textit{Friday nights in are the best}, adding the wine glass emoji.
He doesn’t tag Magnus, though the man in question immediately opens the app on his phone and likes the picture, commenting *Doesn’t that look cozy.*

Alec rolls his eyes, though he likes it. The two of them set their phones down before Alec asks, “Want to watch something?”

“Magnus leans down until he’s resting on top of Alec, head over heart. Humming, he replies, “Sounds good. We can put on a movie?”

Alec makes a noise in confirmation and turns the television, opening Netflix. He puts on one of the new releases that looks cute and the two of them settle in to watch.

They half watch the movie, getting distracted a few times with lingering kissing jags. Magnus tastes like the dark chocolate of the cake and Alec can’t get enough. He honestly doesn’t give a shit about the movie right now, not when he has Magnus on top of him, surrounding him.

When the movie reaches the halfway point, things settle down, both of them getting drowsy. Magnus is probably exhausted, still jet lagged, and Alec feels like he could fall asleep right now. One hand is on Magnus’s back, the other in his hair, playing with the strands distractedly. Magnus, for his part, is mostly asleep, humming a little once in awhile as Alec continues his ministrations.

When the movie credits start to roll, Alec shifts underneath Magnus and can’t contain his chuckle as Magnus just rubs his face into Alec’s shirt more in an attempt to not get up.

“C’mon, Magnus, wake up.”

Magnus grumbles but eventually sits up, yawning. He looks a little out of it and Alec sympathizes—time zones are a bitch to regulate. With that thought in mind, Alec thinks of an idea.

“Feel free to say no, Magnus, but you seem too tired to go across town. You could sleep here if you wanted?” Magnus just blinks and Alec’s words are rushing out to fill the silence. “You can sleep in my bed and I’ll sleep out here. I promise this isn’t me, like, trying to get in your pants. You just look really tired,” he concludes sheepishly.

Magnus shakes his head a little before he’s smiling. He stands up and Alec is set to remind him where his bedroom is when he extends an arm. Alec sends him a confused look.

“I’ve no doubt that your bed is big enough for us both, Alexander. I’m not going to make you sleep on the couch when I’m selfish and exhausted enough to take you up on your offer. Let’s go, darling.”

Alec thinks of protesting, but the steel in Magnus’s eyes stops him.

He gets up, taking Magnus’s hand and leads him to his bedroom.

Magnus barely looks around, just stands in the middle of Alec’s room as Alec grabs a set of makeshift sleep clothes. He points Magnus towards his ensuite bathroom and watches, amused and fond, as he shuffles into the bathroom with the bundle of clothes.

When the door closes, Alec changes into sweats and messes around on his phone for a few minutes, plugging it into the charger.

Magnus comes out a few minutes later looking adorably rumpled and Alec’s heart turns over. He has a second to worry that he’s already in too deep, that he shouldn’t be so affected by seeing Magnus in a pair of his sweatpants, in his t-shirt-- but that part is largely drowned out by other thoughts.
Alec looks at the bed. “I usually sleep on this side, if that’s okay?”

Magnus just nods and goes to the other side, pulling the covers down. They each settle into bed and Alec is acutely aware of just how much space is between them.

“Goodnight, boyfriend,” Magnus sleepily says.

Alec grins in the darkness, turning over on his side. He can barely make out Magnus’s shape under the covers.

“Goodnight, boyfriend,” Alec echoes.

The two of them fall asleep seconds later, warm and content. Alec’s last thought is that he’s the luckiest man in the world right now.
Sunlight streams through his curtains and Alec frowns, burying his head in his blanket to block out the offending light.

Only, it’s not a blanket under him. It takes Alec a moment, his brain hazy as sleep clings stubbornly. He doesn’t remember immediately. In the next minute though, he starts smiling as he replays yesterday-- last night-- and the only word to describe what he feels is euphoric.

Magnus had let him know in no uncertain terms what he wanted and Alec had felt the pressure that’d been tapping against his chest lighten with every step he took across that kitchen, silverware and cake and everything else forgotten except Magnus’s teasing comment, the tilt of his head, the white noise surrounding his mind.

They’d kissed and talked and fallen asleep together. It’s the best night's sleep that Alec can remember. In his profession, it’s easy to be chronically sleep deprived and Alec is no exception. Though he does try to recuperate when he’s home, it’s easy to forego sleep at the prospect of a party, an event, when his muse whirls around him like a dervish.

Last night, however, they’d fallen asleep relatively early. Alec doesn’t know what time it is but judging by the sunlight, it has to be well into the morning.

He feels refreshed. Cobwebs have a tendency to cling obstinately to him-- at least until he gets his morning coffee-- and while Alec doesn’t exactly wake up ready to conquer the world, he feels light.

He’s content. The sun washes through the windows and he’s in bed with-- with his boyfriend.

At that thought, Alec’s smile widens. The arm looped around Magnus tightens imperceptibly. He doesn’t notice the action, ignores the little voice in his head that whispers mine.

They’ve been friends for a couple of months and Alec is comfortable with him. Alec relaxes against Magnus, gently so as not to wake him up, and takes a deep breath, exhaling softly.

In the quiet of the morning, he thinks about where he’s at.

It’s a good place from where he’s standing. He has half a dozen songs written for his next album. He’d have to be an idiot not to notice a theme-- he’d been pouring his feelings into his music and his muse lately looks an awfully lot like Magnus.

There are songs about yearning and a song about the industry and its superficial grasp on him. There’s a few songs that are rather blatant about his affection, these burgeoning feelings, and Alec winces a little as he thinks about Magnus eventually finding out.

There’d be no denying that album seven is shaping up to be an ode to his friend-turned-boyfriend.

He can admit that it’s a little ridiculous.

It’s only been a couple of months and Alec’s already writing songs? It’s not unheard of for musicians, artists in general, to take their inspiration from wherever it may come. He’s known others who have written songs about one night stands-- hell, he’s been one of them-- or have catered to doomed relationships just for the source material.

That’s not what this is. Writing has always been an outlet for Alec. He takes whatever shit is going
on in his real life and transcribes it onto a page, where he fine-tunes it until he can make sense out of it, until it’s in its most salient form, easily digestible by the public. He performs it with his heart, reliving whatever had caused the outpouring of words and has a damned good time doing so.

Magnus is more than his career, has been from the start. While the two are indelibly intertwined, Magnus is important. Not more important than his career, though, not yet. Distantly, Alec thinks that might not be the case forever.

This thing between them is so new and nothing ever stands in the way between Alec and his career. He’s been in this business for ten years and has given it everything he has. There’s no way a new relationship would come between him and his lifeblood.

He’s seen plenty of fellow artists kill their careers for a fling that flamed out long before the repercussions could be felt.

But.

As Alec lays in bed with the man who’s captured his attention, his thrall, he feels at peace. More at home than he’s been in a long time. Longer than he cares to think about.

The road is as much home as this penthouse. He’s learned to be comfortable everywhere, anywhere.

He’s at the height of his career. Alec’s well aware of that. He also knows that his last tour-- while bigger than he could’ve ever imagined-- was also taxing as hell. He met people and sold records and performed his goddamn soul out every night but it felt like there was something missing.

It’s cliche as fuck, but it felt like he’d thrown a puzzle piece out along the road and he was hopeless to find it. His life is chaos incarnate and he’d inwardly shrugged even as feelings had begun to wrap themselves around him like vines.

He was tired. Lonelier than he’d like to admit. Fame had long since lost whatever appeal it had and he’d become disenchanted with the whole scene.

Enter Magnus.

Alec huffs out a laugh as the cliches just keep on coming. Magnus had breathed new life into him. He’d been interesting, intriguing. All these weeks later and Alec is still fascinated with the man. The more he gets to know him, the more he wants to know.

Everything is so fresh and so fragile. Yet, it’s so easy, too. Magnus lets him breathe. He cares about Alec, not the man whose name hangs in lights. He’s accomplished in his own right-- he’s damned impressive, really-- and oftentimes, it’s Alec who’s left hanging on his every word.

He knows that it’s foolish, almost guaranteed to end, but Alec can’t help but hope for possibility.

The possibility that this is the start of something. The very beginning.

He’s jerked out of his thoughts as Magnus shifts. Alec had given a brief thought to carefully easing out of their position, but for fuck’s sake Magnus had fallen asleep on him like this a few weeks ago when they were just friends. Plus, he’s comfortable as hell.

Alec stays still as Magnus moves, eyes slipping shut as one of Magnus’s hands come to his head, fingers combing carefully through messy locks. He hums a little in appreciation, in a subtle bid for Magnus to continue.
He’s always been a sucker for someone playing with his hair.

The two of them lay like that for a while, enjoying the quiet, the ease between them. It’s surprising--a little stunning actually--but Alec doesn’t feel self-conscious. He’s not worried about appearances.

He doesn’t feel weird, obviously enjoying this time with Magnus. He doesn’t feel like he needs to immediately get up, put distance between them.

It’s nice.

Alec’s on the cusp of falling asleep again when Magnus suddenly says, “I’m bi.”

Alec raises up onto an elbow, his arm still around Magnus’s middle. “What,” he asks, bemused.

Magnus’s hand drops down until he’s cupping Alec’s cheek, thumb sweeping over day old stubble. “You said last night that you were under the impression I was straight. I’m not. I’m bisexual,” he says matter of factly. Grinning, he adds, “You know, just in case you were still harboring any doubts.”

Alec hums, kissing Magnus’s palm before murmuring, “If you were straight, this would be one hell of an identity crisis.”

Magnus laughs before urging Alec down. Alec complies, leaning until he’s hovering over Magnus.

There’s a beat or two of silence before Alec comes down the last few inches, brushes his nose against Magnus’s.

“Good morning,” he says softly.

“Morning, darling.”

The two kiss. It’s soft, unhurried. Their lips are dry and it grounds Alec.

After a moment, it turns a little more heated, a hair urgent. Magnus’s mouth opens on a sharp inhale and Alec deepens the kiss, groaning just a little at the slick glide of their tongues. He’s the one left gasping as Magnus surges up, flipping them until it’s Alec who’s pinned down.

He loses himself for long, lazy minutes. The two of them keep kissing and it’s warm, familiar. They’ve only done this last night but everything in Alec lights up at the contact, at the heady feeling of having Magnus so intimately close.

Magnus’s hands slide to Alec’s wrists, firmly grasping, pushing down and Alec’s helpless to contain the whimper that leaves his lips.

Magnus pulls back and Alec arches up instinctively, wanting that contact. When he doesn’t connect with Magnus, he reluctantly opens his eyes only to see Magnus biting a grin back.

Magnus presses down a bit harder, thumb sweeping over the pulse on Alec’s wrists and the same wrecked sound is wrenched from him.

“Do you like that, Alexander,” Magnus asks innocuously.

Glaring, Alec replies, “You know damned well I like it, Magnus.”

He doesn’t want to dwell on Magnus accidentally finding out one of his biggest turn-ons. To regain the upper hand, he flips them over again--
Right onto the floor.

At the last minute, Alec manages to turn so that he gets the brunt of the impact, though they both groan as they land. Wrapped up in the sheets that are pulled halfway off the bed, there’s a beat of silence as they both comprehend what just happened.

Finally, Magnus raises up onto his hands, looming over Alec with an amused smile. “That was graceful.”

Alec barks out a laugh as he shifts, letting Magnus settle a little more firmly, a little more comfortably, on top of him.

“You are dating the Alec Lightwood,” he teases. “I am known for my smoothness.”

Magnus’s brow arches as he shakes his head a little. “Oh, really? I hadn’t heard.”

He drops down to his elbows. Alec’s head tilts up, waiting for a kiss, but Magnus swerves at the last minute, starts nibbling on the column of his throat and Alec relaxes against the floor, not caring, not feeling, how uncomfortable it is or how the impact was still stinging just a few seconds ago.

His hands go around Magnus’s waist, resting against his lower back, pulling him down just a little more.

Fuck, he’s in so deep. It doesn’t seem like they just started doing this a few hours ago. In the haze of morning lust dragging through him, Alec just keeps thinking that it’s so easy and it feels so good. It feels like they’ve been doing this for ages.

He doesn’t hear his door open, just catches the idle comment.

“Well, well, what do we have here?”

Alec snaps back as he turns to look at his door. He sees Isabelle leaning against the doorjamb looking like the cat that’s caught the canary.

“What do you want?”

Lifting an imperious brow, Izzy sniffs. “Here I am, a concerned sister who just heard what sounded like an elephant crash to the floor, so what do I do? I check on my big brother to make sure he didn’t injure himself. And what do I see,” she ponders gleefully.

Alec groans as he sits up, hands hovering over Magnus to keep them both steady.

He sighs. “Iz, this is Magnus.”

Nodding his head at the man in question, he gestures towards the door. “Magnus, this is my little sister, Isabelle.”

Magnus smiles, gives a little wave that does not make Alec think about how adorable he is. “It’s a pleasure, dear, though I didn’t quite anticipate meeting any of Alexander’s family like this.”

Izzy looks delighted. “Oh, Alexander has told you about us, then?”

Looking a little confused with a quick glance at Alec, Magnus replies, “Of course. He’s told me all about the three of you.”

“That’s funny. He’s barely told us anything about you. Really, just your name.”
Alec breaks in. “That’s because if you knew anything else you would’ve stalked him on Facebook to within an inch of your life. I was protecting you both.”

Magnus and Isabelle laugh before Izzy straightens. “I’ll let you two get back to . . . whatever you were up to,” she says knowingly. “I was just making sure you hadn’t rolled out of bed and concussed yourself on the nightstand.”

She turns to Magnus. “It was great meeting you, Magnus. While Alec hadn’t told us much, it’s obvious that you two are close. It’s nice to finally see the man that’s captured my brother’s interest.”

She takes a step back, looking proud of herself. Alec just glares at her halfheartedly.

“I’m going to get ready. I have a shoot this afternoon.”

Alec and Magnus both say bye and as Isabelle shuts the door behind her, there’s a moment of silence.

“I like her,” Magnus says.

“Yeah, she’s the best,” Alec agrees. “Even if she does make me want to tear my hair out on a regular basis.”

Magnus laughs as he moves to get up, extending a hand down to help Alec off the floor. They struggle with the sheets for a minute before finally untangling themselves.

Alec pulls Magnus closer until they’re standing just inches apart. “How’d you sleep,” he murmurs.

Wrapping his arms around Alec’s neck, Magnus sways closer until he’s leaning against him. “Like a dream,” he says. “Between the jet lag and your bed I slept better than I have in days. What about you?”

“You make a pretty good pillow,” he says, grinning softly.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

He clears his throat. While they seem to be on the same page, Alec needs to be sure. “So last night, huh?”

“What about last night?”

“You-- we-- you still feel the same today, right,” Alec blurts out.

He immediately wants to take the words back. They’re too vulnerable, too insecure. This morning has been pretty damn perfect and Alec just needs to know that they’re both still okay with this, that they both feel the same.

He needs to know that they’re both in this, together, to see what happens next.

That stammering question just exposed his private worry. Last night was all well and good and this morning was a dream. But what if Magnus woke up this morning with doubts? What if Alec was pushing too hard too fast and Magnus just wasn’t sure how to slow him down, how to ease out of what he’d gotten himself into?

Alec’s a lot for most people, he’s well aware. He has a tendency to carry a chip on his shoulder, his
work schedule is a nightmare, he can be single minded once he sets a goal, once something catches his eye.

He doesn’t want Magnus to have second thoughts. Not about him, not about this.

Magnus must see the mounting anxiety swirling in his eyes because he tightens his arms, pulling Alec closer, nosing along his cheek before pulling back with a soft, reassuring smile.

“Alexander,” he says warmly, intent. “Last night I told you that I didn’t want to be just friends with you. I want more and thankfully you do, too. I slept in your bed and woke up very much into you. Nothing’s changed. As long as you still want to pursue this thing between us, then I am all in.”

“Of course I still want you,” Alec says. “I wasn’t exaggerating when I said that I liked you. If anything, that was an understatement.”

Alec takes a deep breath, aware that he’s just airing all of his shit this morning. Magnus makes him want to be honest. Alec knows-- perhaps, foolishly, hopes-- that he’s safe with Magnus.

“I’ve never felt this way before,” he continues, voice just above a whisper. In a nervous gesture, his thumb slips under Magnus’s sweatshirt, grazing against bare skin. He’s not aware of it but it does calm him down.

“You’re the first person that I’ve been seriously interested in for years. I like you. You’re smart and funny and beautiful. I’m beyond relieved that you like me, that you want to see where this goes. I just need to be sure that you’re sure, Magnus. I couldn’t take it if you were just humoring me, if you weren’t as invested as I am. I know it’s early, but I’m in this. If you are.”

Magnus’s voice is just as honest as he answers. “I like you, too. I’d have to be living under a rock not to have known who you are but you’re so much more than a singer, than a celebrity, Alexander. I like you for you. I like the man who cares about his family and his fans and has an adorable habit of reading dense textbooks for fun. I want to keep getting to know you. I’m in this, darling,” he says firmly.

Alec takes a moment to just breathe.

“Good.”

Raising a brow, Magnus repeats, “Good?”

“Yes.” Alec grins. “I’m glad we’re on the same page. It’s important to me that we are, you know. Beyond the normal shit, in the future it’ll be easy for others, including the media, to twist things. I want to set a precedent now. I trust you and we need to talk about things, make sure that we don’t fall into miscommunication traps.”

“Have you been reading a self help book, Alexander,” Magnus teases, though his eyes are serious.

Alec huffs out a laugh, though he shakes his head. “No, but I’ve seen a lot of good relationships die because people in the industry fell into traps. We talk shit through. That’s rule number one.”

Smiling, Magnus asks, “Are there many rules to this thing between us?”

Alec makes a play at thinking, though his grin betrays him. He leans down, nose bumping against Magnus’s gently.

“No,” he says. “Just this. Just that we talk. I don’t know what’ll happen between us, but whatever it
is, it won’t be because we let a petty disagreement or issue ruin things.”

Magnus hums, kisses Alec on the cheek, then on the mouth. “Agreed,” he whispers. “I trust you too, Alec, and I want you to know that I’m aware of how important it is that you return that trust. I won’t do anything to make you question that.”

“Good,” Alec says.

Magnus smiles, repeating the word before the two of them come together and share a kiss. It’s soft and they sway side to side, standing in the middle of Alec’s room.

Alec settles, content and at ease and it’s long minutes before Magnus pulls back.

Giving Alec an apologetic look, he says, “I should get going. I have a lot to do before work on Monday and most of tomorrow will be spent with friends.”

“It’s okay,” Alec murmurs. “I understand.”

With a last lingering touch, Alec steps back, dropping his arms and taking a look around his room.

“Do you have everything?”

Magnus just gives him a look. “Since I wasn’t planning on spending the night, I just have my clothes from yesterday. Just let me change and then I’ll be out of your hair.”

Shaking his head, Alec snags Magnus’s hand. “That’s okay. I can get a bag for your clothes and you can wear what you have back home. As long as you’re fine with that.”

“I’ll have you know that I’ve walked through New York in yoga pants before, Alec,” Magnus says dryly.

“You never know,” Alec teases. “You always look so put together. It’s hard to imagine that you let yourself be seen so relaxed.”

“Aren’t you a charmer.”

Magnus laughs as Alec goes to his closet and grabs a bag.

“I’ll just grab them next time I’m at your place,” Alec says easily.

Magnus smiles but doesn’t say anything, throwing yesterday’s clothes into the bag.

“Walk me out, darling?”

Smiling, Alec reaches for Magnus’s hand, interlacing their fingers as he leads them out of his bedroom into the rest of the apartment. Magnus slips into his shoes as Alec reaches for the door, swinging it open.

Magnus steps over the threshold, still holding Alec’s hand.

“You’re going to have to let me go, Alexander, if I’m to leave.”

Alec leans into the outside corridor, pecks Magnus’s cheek.

“What do you think about dinner tonight,” he murmurs.
“Are you asking me out on a date, darling?”

Rolling his eyes Alec replies, “That’s what it sounds like.”

Magnus grins, biting his lip. Looking coy, he says, “We just ate dinner together last night. I spent the night. If you keep going at this pace, you’ll get tired of me.”

“Somehow I don’t think so,” Alec whispers. He kisses Magnus’s jaw, pulling him closer with the hand he’s still holding until they’re flush together.

“What about it,” he prompts. “I understand if you need to focus entirely on work or if you already have plans but I figured that you’d have to eat sometime.”

“I think I could be persuaded,” Magnus says.

Grinning, Alec ducks down, kissing Magnus’s neck. He sees the mark he left last night and pays special attention to it. Magnus gasps, arching into Alec and pulls back with a glare.

“You know how to fight dirty, don’t you darling?”

Alec smiles wolfishly. “Only when it’s warranted.”

“Fine.” Magnus sighs theatrically. “Consider me convinced. What time should I meet you?”

“Oh no,” Alec shakes his head. “This is a proper date. I’m picking you up.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I’m picking you up and taking you to a restaurant that accepts reservations.”

“So, Olive Garden?”

Alec sniffs. “I guess you’ll just have to wait and see.”

There’s a beat before they’re both laughing.

“Their breadsticks are to die for,” Alec says seriously.

“You don’t have to tell me, Alexander. That used to be a regular restaurant splurge in college.”

Alec just shakes his head, smiling softly, as Magnus takes a step back.

“See you later, Alexander. I can’t wait for tonight.”

“Bye, Magnus. Same here.”

Alec watches as Magnus makes his way to the elevator, stays watching until the doors shut and Magnus is out of sight.

He sighs, leaning against the door jamb and staring into nothing.

“You’ve got it bad, hermano.”

Groaning, Alec’s head falls onto the jamb with a dull thud.

Without turning, he asks, “How long were you standing there like a creep?”
Izzy laughs. Alec turns around in time to see her fall onto the couch in a graceful heap. “Long enough to hear you say that it’s impossible for you to get tired of him.”

Alec heads into the kitchen, pushing up his shirtsleeves. He has a hell of a mess to clean up this morning.

He gets to work, rinsing dishes and putting them in the dishwasher. Isabelle watches him work for a few minutes and the apartment is quiet, an easy silence between them.

“I’m happy for you, Alec.”

Alec pauses from where he’d started filling the sink with water to wipe down the counters. He looks up and sees Izzy’s steady stare on him.

“I really like him, Iz.”

“I know. It was just a few days ago that you were bemoaning that you didn’t have a chance, that everything was one sided.” She raises a brow. “Apparently, you were wrong.”

“He’s not straight,” Alec admits.

She looks unimpressed, “No shit,” she retorts. “What happened last night?”

Alec shrugs, taking the dishcloth out of the water and wringing it out. “I made dinner and Magnus came over. I showed him around the place and we ate. I was getting dessert out when he told me that he wanted more.”

Leaning over the back of the couch, Izzy’s eyes are trained on him. “I bet you almost passed out.”

Giving her a heated glare, Alec admits, “I might have short circuited.” Over Isabelle’s snort of laughter, he continues. “Once my brain came back online, though, I made a move. I kissed him.”

“And?”

“And it was great. We kissed and talked things through and then watched a movie.”

“And Magnus slept over last night?”

“Yeah, but not like that. He was jet lagged from London and so he crashed in my bed.”

“I seem to have interrupted something this morning,” Izzy prods.

Wiping down the counters, Alec says, “We kissed a little this morning, too, and then he left.”

“But you have dinner plans?”

Alec smiles dopily down at the island. He doesn’t realize that he’s been cleaning the same spot for the past few minutes but Isabelle does. “Yeah,” he says, smiling softly.

“Like I said, I’m happy for you, Alec. I know that I only met him this morning for two minutes, but Magnus seems like a good guy. Genuine. Easy on the eyes, too,” she teases.

Alec keeps smiling, staying silent.

With a sigh, Izzy stands up and walks over to the kitchen, placing a hand on Alec’s shoulder. “I’m glad that he returned your feelings. I know you were spazzing out about it,”
“I was not,” Alec protests defensively.

Rolling her eyes, Isabelle doesn’t deign to answer. “Whatever. I’m heading out, now. Don’t wait up.”

Under his breath, Alec says, “When do I ever.”

“I heard that,” Isabelle calls out over her shoulder. She pulls converse on and opens the door.

She turns, reaching for the door knob. Before she pulls the door shut, she says, “You really like being cryptic, don’t you?”

Alec looks at her quizzically. “What are you talking about?”

“Your post last night of the two wine glasses. You should see some of the comments.” Shaking her head, she says, “You’re really not subtle.”

With that, Izzy pulls the door shut, leaving him alone in the apartment.

Alec blinks before finishing cleaning the kitchen. Internally, he shrugs. His fans were good but they weren’t that good. They didn’t have enough to really piece anything together yet and the way they were going, Alec and Magnus weren’t going to give them anything concrete anytime soon.

He dismisses Isabelle’s parting shot before tossing the cloth into the sink. He dries his hand on a towel before going back to his bedroom for his phone.

Pulling it from the charger, he unlocks it. He ignores all of the notifications, instead calling one of his favorite restaurants in the city.

He has reservations to make.
Walking into his loft, Magnus tosses his keys into the bowl he keeps in the foyer for just that purpose. He’s smiling-- has been since he left Alec’s place less than an hour ago.

Toeing off his shoes, he makes his way into his apartment. It’s still early and he goes directly to his french doors where the sunlight is streaming through the windows.

It’s a beautiful day. He feels light. Happy.

He hadn’t been anticipating seeing Alec for a few days, at least. He’d climbed out of bed yesterday at a dastardly early hour and thrown on the closest outfit, intent on going to Uptown, drinking his weight in coffee, and catching up on his work.

What a coincidence that he’d run into Alec. They’d only talked for a few minutes but it’d filled Magnus with warmth, an almost giddy feeling rising in his chest. God, he was so gone over this boy.

He really hadn’t been angling for a dinner invitation but Alec had extended one anyway and Magnus was helpless to resist. He’d spent the better part of the day at Uptown, working and trying to ignore the looks Luke had been casting his way.

Finally, when getting a refill, he’d asked Luke why he was looking at Magnus like he was trying to smuggle the Mona Lisa out of the Louvre.

“We’ve been friends for what, three years,” Luke had asked.

Lips quirking, Magnus had agreed. “That sounds about right.”

“You don’t strike me as particularly shy, Bane.”

“That’s because I’m not.”

“Or cowardly.”

Growing more confused by the second, Magnus had replied, “I try not to be.” Tilting his head, his voice had been dry as he’d slowly asked, “What’s this about, Luke?”


Blinking at the change in subject, Magnus’s shoulders had come down instinctively at the safe topic. “I know that he’s kind and intelligent and has a work ethic that most would envy.” Smiling, he adds, “His ass isn’t half bad either.”

Barking out a laugh, Luke nodded to himself like his answer was what he’d been wanting. “So you’re good friends, then?”

Magnus couldn’t stop his wistful look. “I think we’re getting to be great friends, actually.”

More perceptive than Magnus would like, Luke had asked, “But you want to be more?”

Considering, Magnus had stared at him for a minute. He couldn’t forget that Luke was extremely close to Alexander, like family. Was Luke about to warn him off?

“Why,” he’d asked warily.
Shaking his head, Luke muttered under his breath what sounded like, “Dumbasses, the both of you.”

Looking up from the espresso machine, he’d taken one hand, pointing a finger in Magnus’s direction. “All I’m going to say is that if you want something, you should go for it. It’s what you do best and at the rate things are going, you’ll both be dead before one of you gets your shit together.”

Nonplussed, Magnus asked, “What are you talking about?”

Sighing like the weight of the world was on his shoulders, Luke said, “So you’re friends with Alec, right? And you’re getting to know him. But it’s still early yet, Magnus. There’s a lot you don’t know, things that can only come from time and continued familiarity. But I’ll tell you one thing.”

He leans closer and Magnus echoes the action, feels ridiculous as he does so.

“Alec is a good man but he’s an expert at denying himself. The media likes to paint him as a playboy with more fluff than sense in his head. They’re dead wrong.” Before Magnus can agree, Luke continues. “He’s hyper-aware of his reputation and knows better than anyone that it’s as much curse as blessing. He’d never do anything to push that onto someone else.”

“Okay,” Magnus drawls out, trying to piece the obvious hidden meaning behind Luke’s words together.

Looking impatient, Luke says, “All I’ll say is that if you like Alec-- in any way-- you should tell him because he’ll never tell you first. He wouldn’t want to put you in an awkward position. That boy has the tragic and extremely annoying habit of backing away just when things mean the most.”

Unable to ignore Luke’s pointed emphasis, Magnus finally starts getting the picture. Hope blooms in his chest as his mind reels.

Luke knows Alec. Is he saying that Magnus’s feelings aren’t unrequited?

Thoughts preoccupied, he’d absently offered his thanks as Luke had handed him his drink. He’d walked over to his table, sitting down heavily and taking a sip.

The rest of the afternoon had passed in a blur. He hadn’t gotten any more work done, too busy thinking over the past few weeks. He could see where things may have meant more than either of them had said, could feel hope cling stubbornly.

He’d left Uptown Java resolved. Luke was right. He was Magnus Bane and he’d never hesitated a day in his life, not when he wanted something. He’d let Alec into his head and forgotten just who he was. After a quick stop home to drop his bag and freshen up, he’d left again shortly. Following his phone’s GPS he’d gone over to Alec’s, making a note to catalog anything that seemed more than just friends.

Magnus couldn’t deny that it felt good to know that he was the only one Alec had ever invited over, the only person he’d trusted enough to give his address to, to let in to his private sanctuary. It was a heady feeling.

He could listen to Alec talk for hours, about the piano or obscure German philosophers or how to make spaghetti. The man was endlessly interesting and his celebrity was the least of it.

He couldn’t help himself from asking a leading question, affecting a casual tone even as his heart had thudded almost painfully in anticipation.

*And that’s what I am? A friend?*
Alec’s startled look had been adorable and Magnus’s heart had turned over, that damned hope igniting further when he’d heard his answer.

*As long as that’s what you want.*

He couldn’t help but read more into that careful response.

Later in the evening, when he’d finally just said an internal *fuck it*, he’d been sure. He was no longer afraid that Alec would see him as just another fan, a leech onto his fame. They were friends and that foundation grounded Magnus.

Alec’s reaction to his not-so-innocent question had been enthralling. The rush of heat to his cheeks, his stunned expression, the way those beautiful eyes had darkened when he’d registered the connotations.

Magnus had felt a wave of overwhelming heat lick up his spine as Alec had strolled over to him, bringing arms up to surround Magnus with his strength and scent and feel.

He’d been breathless before they’d even kissed and what a kiss it had been.

No doubt about it, yesterday had been eventful. Magnus’s smile widens as he realizes that it’s already seared onto his memory. Whatever happens with Alec, its beginning was perfect.

Turning away from his balcony, Magnus pulls out his phone, notes absently that it’s almost dead. As he unlocks it, he sees dozens of notifications.

Shaking his head a little, he’s surprised at himself all over again that he’d suggested they try to fuck with the press. In the back of his head, he knows that they don’t stand a chance but he thinks that he’s finally accepting that it’s okay. He’ll shoulder whatever happens as long as he has Alec to guide him.

His follower count on Twitter has increased by another hundred and he taps on *create tweet* without pause.

*I think my new favorite food is spaghetti.*

He hits send, wry twist to his mouth.

He’s almost thirty but he’s had this account for years. It’s an eclectic mix of mini history lectures, obscure observations, and whatever else catches his eye. A random declaration of food isn’t out of the normal for him, though he wonders if Alec will see it-- and what he’ll have to say about it.

Moving over to Instagram, he sees that his follow count has almost doubled in the past week.

He goes to Alec’s profile and sees that there are several hundred comments on the wine glass picture from last night. Tapping on the post, he scrolls through a few, brows raising higher at each comment.

*Omg who do you think he’s with??!!*

*I bet he’s with his new “friend”........*

*Dude he has to be so into this guy. Alec Lightwood doesn’t stay in for just anyone*

*This looks so domestic. Do yall think he has a secret bf??*

There are a few spare mentions of him, but mostly people seems to be speculating in general. He has
a handful of notifications from Twitter after just a couple of minutes. When he reopens the app, he
sees that there are already a dozen likes on his spaghetti tweet with a few comments. He can’t help
but notice that all of the usernames-- he rolls his eyes, except one-- has a reference to Alec.

_Fkjfhgksjdf I bet he drank WINE with that spaghetti._

_Tbh any food would be my favorite if I was with Alec._

_No one cares._

That last comment is from Raphael and Magnus knows that his friend isn’t stupid. They hadn’t met
since Raphael had seen them together at Columbia’s diner-- between work and Magnus going to
London, there’d been no time.

Tomorrow was going to be interesting, to say the least. Undoubtedly, Raphael had already told Cat
and Ragnor what he’d seen on campus. With a sigh, Magnus knows that he’ll be walking into an
inquisition at family dinner tomorrow.

He locks his phone and goes into the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of water. Drinking half of it right
then and there, he heads to his bedroom, plugging his phone into his charger.

That done, he strips, throwing his clothes into the hamper before padding into his bathroom.

He takes a quick shower, throwing on a clean pair of sweats and crashing onto the couch half an
hour later. He spends the rest of the day working. He grades discussion posts and enters grades
online, catching up on his emails, too.

It’s hours later, early in the afternoon, when he stands up, stretching his back with arms overhead.

He retrieves his phone and sees a text from Alec.

_My driver will pick you up at seven. You don’t have any allergies, right?_

With a smile he knows is too fond, Magnus replies, _Seven sounds perfect. Will you be in the car, too,
darling?_

_And no, I’m not allergic to anything._

He doesn’t even have time to put his phone down when it lights up with another text.

_I’ll meet you there. There was an issue with my schedule and I’m working with my team to smooth
things out._

_I can’t wait to see you tonight._

Biting his lip, trying to keep the smile from becoming a grin, Magnus just texts, _I hope everything
works out. I’m excited, too._

Looking at the nearest clock, he sees that he has a few hours before it’s time for dinner. He throws
on a pair of tennis shoes, deciding to go for a run.

The next hour flies by. He has a route he follows in the city that’s a mix of sidewalks and park paths
and as his shoes slap against pavement, Magnus’s mind is distracted. He wonders about tonight--
where is Alec taking him. He puts together and promptly discards a dozen outfits as the city blurs
together.
When he finishes his run, he comes to a stop in front of his apartment building, breathing harshly with hands at his hips.

After a few minutes, he heads inside, taking the elevator to his loft. He goes directly to his balcony, grabbing the yoga mat he keeps by the door. He spends the next little while emptying his mind, going through poses on autopilot as he relaxes and cools down.

Finishing his workout for the day, Magnus feels clear, free in a way he hadn’t managed since before the UK-- traveling was hell on his workouts.

He hops into the shower, taking his time and using all of his favorite products. He brushes his teeth, padding into his closet wrapped in just a towel. Going through his clothes, he gives each article a considering look. He finally decides on an outfit that could work anywhere except Burger King and moves to his vanity where he applies makeup and styles his hair.

When he finishes, he moves to his floor length mirror, gives himself a thorough onceover. He looks good. Sharp, elegant.

He’s ready for this date, can feel the thrum of anticipation wind its way through him. As far as first dates go, this one is almost guaranteed to go well and that takes a lot of the pressure off. He’s not worried about making small talk or gauging interest. Really, it feels like any other time he’s seen Alec except for the knowledge that they’re both ready for this next stage, for more.

He puts his watch on, seeing that he has just a few minutes until he’s due to be picked up. He’s wondering how he’s supposed to know that the car is here when his cell rings.

“Hello,” he asks, picking it up.

“Good evening. Is this Mr. Bane?”

“It is,” Magnus says, curious.

“Hello, Mr. Bane. This is Dave, Alec’s driver. I hope you don’t mind, but he gave me your number. I wanted to let you know that I’m downstairs.”

“I’ll be right down,” Magnus says. They say goodbye, hanging up and Magnus raises a brow, thinks to himself, We’re not in Kansas anymore.

With a last minute to make sure he has his wallet, keys, and phone, Magnus leaves his apartment. He sees a car pulled in front and as he walks outside, sees who is presumably Dave standing near the back door.

“Mr. Bane?”

Smiling warmly, he says, “Magnus is just fine. Dave right?”

Dave smiles as he opens the door, gesturing Magnus inside. “That’s right. Are you ready for your date tonight?”

Chuckling, Magnus replies, “More than ready.”

He climbs into the backseat of the late model Lincoln town car and can’t help but marvel at the ride. Rationally, he knew that Alec had money-- he’d be a fucking fool not to-- but it’s quite another thing to experience a uniformed driver picking him up in a hundred thousand dollar car.
It’s a smooth ride and only takes twenty or so minutes before they’re pulling up to a restaurant that Magnus has never been to. Dave shifts into park, comes around and opens the door for Magnus.

Magnus gets out, shooting an appreciative look to the driver. “Thank you, Dave.”

Dave tilts his head, grinning. “Sure thing, Magnus. Alec is probably already inside but just in case he isn’t here yet, I’m to tell you that the reservation is under Lightwood.”

With a murmured thanks, Magnus nods and turns toward the front doors where a doorman is standing at attention. As he starts walking, the doorman smoothly opens the door, carefully expressionless.

Going through the doors, Magnus takes in the interior. The light is muted and the decor is dusted in dark wood and gold accents. It’s timeless, sophisticated, and while Magnus is well-traveled, he can’t help but feel the slightest bit out of place, a touch gauche. He heads to the maitre d, who looks up with a warm smile at his approach.

“Good evening, sir. Do you have a reservation with us?”

Returning that smile, Magnus answers, “Yes, I believe it’s under Lightwood?”

Like a magic word, the man straightens, eyes widening. His smile-- already friendly-- turns up a notch as he looks at Magnus, a little stunned.

“Of course, sir. Follow me, please.”

Magnus follows the host to a table in the corner. There’s already a bottle of wine breathing on the table as he’s guided to his chair. He takes a seat and a second later, a waiter is heading over to his table.

He’s given a menu and as he scans it over, he sees that it’s contemporary American fare.

The waiter pours a glass of the wine and with a smile, leaves him to his own devices. He has barely enough time to finish reading the appetizers when from his periphery he sees a figure walking towards him.

“Sorry I’m late,” Alec says, hurried. “Traffic from Manhattan was obnoxiously busy.”

“It is New York City on a Saturday night, Alexander,” Magnus teases.

Alec just rolls his eyes before giving Magnus a warm, slightly stunned look. He clears his throat. “You look great.”

Smiling, Magnus replies, “No need to sound so surprised. You sound like I regularly look like a vagabond roaming the countryside.”

Magnus works to muffle his laugh as he watches Alec’s face grow slightly panicked. That laughter turns to liquid affection when Alec reaches out, seemingly on autopilot, covering Magnus’s hand in a supposed gesture of reassurance. “Of course not. I didn’t mean anything like that. You-- you always looks amazing, but tonight-- wow,” Alec breathes, coming to an abrupt end.

Magnus flips his hand, interlacing their fingers. “Wow yourself, darling.”

Alec’s wearing a crisp, snowy white button down with an open throat, paired simply with black slacks. His hair is going every which way and he looks good enough to eat.
The two of them are gazing at each other, surroundings disappearing into the background, when their attention is snagged by a clearing throat.

Both of them snap their heads up and see the waiter standing at their table, menu in hand. Alec takes the proffered menu with his free hand, not letting go of Magnus.

“Gentlemen,” the waiter starts.

“Hey, Jeff, how’s it going man?”

Breaking his perfect posture, the waiter grins. To Magnus’s amused surprise, Alec and Jeff share a fist bump.

“Hey, Mr. Lightwood. I’m good. Graduated from high school a few months ago and I’m taking classes at Tri-C while I work here.”

Settling back, Alec asks, “Major?”

“English Lit,” Jeff says, looking excited.

“Well, I’m happy for you, man, you’ve always loved obscure seventeenth century novels.” With a look at Magnus, Alec introduces them. “Jeff, I’d like you to meet Magnus. My boyfriend,” he adds, smile softening at the designation.

Jeff looks happy and holds out a hand for, presumably, Magnus to fist bump. Which he does with alacrity. “Nice to meet you, Jeff.”

Alec looks between the two of them, grinning and looking more at ease than Magnus thinks he’s ever seen him. “I’ve known Jeff since he was a snot-nosed middle schooler. His brother and I went to high school together and when Joey-- the brother-- told me that he was opening a restaurant, I invested in it. I come in here every few months, whenever I’m in town and it just keeps getting better. The food is to die for.”

Shaking his head, Jeff looks pleased at Alec’s effusive praise. “We do the best we can,” he says modestly.

“Well, I can’t wait to eat, then,” Magnus says.

Jeff goes over the specials before leaving them to look at the menu. Magnus tries to concentrate on the entrees but he’s too aware of eyes on him.

“Alexander, I’m not on the menu,” Magnus says cheekily, not looking up.

“Too bad,” Alec says, unrepentant at getting caught staring. “You look good enough to eat.”

Lips quirking, Magnus shoots him a look. “Funny, I thought the same thing about you earlier.”

Their looks are more heated this time around and Magnus is hopelessly caught in Alec’s gaze. He can’t help but wonder at how easy things are between them. He’s never been such good friends with a date before. He doesn’t know if that’s the reason why they’re so comfortable with each other, but whatever it is, he’s glad for it.

He can admit privately that he’s never felt like this before. It’s an enthralling mix of interest and desire, all of it overlaid with warmth-- it’s almost too sweet but Magnus can’t get enough.

He doesn’t know how, but the two of them manage to cobble together an order, without seeming to
look at the menu for more than a few seconds at a time-- their eyes keep returning to each other-- and once that’s done and the menus are taken away, Alec’s hand returns to Magnus’s.

Distantly, Magnus realizes that they fit together. Alec’s hand is warm in his, a familiar weight already, and the two of them talk about everything and nothing. They pass a couple of hours at the table in the corner. It’s a leisurely meal and by the time dessert rolls around, Magnus is full, feeling light and sated with a combination of good food, excellent wine, and perfect company.

After ordering dessert-- a perfectly American banana split-- Magnus settles back in his seat. His eyes take in Alec sitting across from him. He’s beautiful, Magnus thinks, taking in the way the candlelight dances across sharp cheekbones, a full mouth, the way it casts shadows over a face that looks like it could be carved from marble.

Without thinking, he slides a foot forward until it nudges gently into Alec’s. Alec’s mouth tilts, though he moves, hooking a foot behind Magnus’s ankle.

There have been a handful of silent stretches during this dinner but none of them have felt foreign, strained, like one of them was trying desperately to latch onto a topic. It feels more like an established relationship than a first date.

Magnus has had a question on the tip of his tongue all evening, but it’s only now that he thinks to voice it. “Alec?”

“Yeah?”

Taking another look around, Magnus sees that every table is full. The place is doing great business-- but no one is giving them a second look.

“Not that I’m complaining, but isn’t this a little bold for a couple who’s trying to stay under the radar?”

Alec chuckles before leaning forward. In the meantime, his thumb is sweeping over Magnus’s knuckles. “Jeff and his brother have a strict no-camera policy. Plus, most of these people are wealthy or famous. They don’t want anyone to bother them and they pay the same courtesy to everyone else.”

Nodding, Magnus looks at the dining room with new eyes. Now that he’s looking for it, he can see the signs of wealth-- the flash of a Rolex, suits that probably cost more than Magnus’s rent, a handbag that is definitely from next year’s spring line.

“Interesting,” Magnus says slowly.

Smiling, Alec agrees. “Yeah, interesting. When Joey first had the idea for this place, I was venting about how I was stopped wherever I went. I couldn’t get a burger without the paps tailing me. So, he had the idea to turn this place into a celebrity-friendly establishment.”

Magnus narrows his eyes. “How did he get the clientele for that? I can’t imagine that people in the one percent would flock to a newcomer’s place when he had no reputation or even experience.”

With his free hand, Alec rubs the back of his neck. “Since I was a silent partner, I had a vested interest in the success of the business. I might have put the word out. Joey used to make dinner for the team after games and I knew he could cook. With a little bit of financial help, I knew he’d make it. I just spread the word.”

“Yeah,” Magnus says softly. “You were just looking out after your investment.”
Before Alec can respond, Jeff is placing dessert in the middle of the table, laying down spoons. “Enjoy gentlemen,” he says formally.

Alec and Magnus wait a minute before laughing at the snooty accent. “I hope you don’t mind Jeff. I’ve known him and his family so long that he’s a little more relaxed when he waits on my table.” Magnus shakes his head. “I don’t mind at all. I like that people don’t cower before you. It speaks well of your character that people-- especially those that know you-- aren’t intimidated or hesitant.”

The two grab their spoons before diving in. It’s good, though that’s mostly because it’s hard to mess up such a simple, traditional dessert. The two of them eat in silence for a minute, enjoying the ice cream and hum of the restaurant before Magnus looks up, gaze zeroing in on the bit of hot fudge smeared on Alec’s mouth.

He debates for a minute, but ultimately Magnus reaches out, thumb sweeping over Alec’s full bottom lip, wiping away the chocolate. Meeting Alec’s eyes, he pops his thumb into his mouth, licking it clean.

Though his expression doesn’t change, he’s smirking internally when Alec looks to stop breathing for a minute, eyes glued to where Magnus’s thumb is still in his mouth.

“Christ,” Alec mutters.

“Something wrong, Alexander?”

Alec glares at him. “You’re a menace.”

“I’m sorry,” Magnus says innocently. “Did you want to walk around with chocolate all over your face?”

Alec tries to maintain his glare but his lips tilt and he’s smothering a laugh behind his hand. “You could have just let me know,” he says dryly.

Grinning, Magnus replies, “And what’s the fun in that?”

The two of them finish dessert and Alec’s signing the check when Magnus realizes he still has something to tell him.

“Alexander?”

Alec doesn’t look up from where he’s presumably calculating the tip. “Yes?”

“How’d that song with Catarina turn out?”

Absently, Alec starts, “Pretty well, actually, I’m recording next week--”

His head snaps up as he looks at Magnus incredulously. “How did you know that? That’s confidential information.”

Arching a brow, Magnus answers, “A little birdie told me.” When Alec’s expression doesn’t change, Magnus adds, “Didn’t I tell you? I’m Madzie’s godfather.”

Alec splutters, getting out, “What?”

“Small world, huh?” Magnus grins. “I’ve known Cat and her husband Ragnor since college-- Ragnor is actually a professor with me at Columbia.”
Falling silent, Magnus gives Alec a moment to process.

“Small world, indeed,” he murmurs a few minutes later. Shaking his head, Alec continues, “What are the chances that the one artist I’ve collaborated with so far is your best friend?” It’s then that Alec covers his face with his hand. From behind his palm, Magnus hears, “Oh God, I ranted to you about how much I loved her and how much she intimidated me.”

Magnus laughs, endeared at Alec’s embarrassment. “Don’t worry, darling, I won’t tell her just how nervous you were about meeting for the first time. Plus, your session went well, right? Nothing to worry about.”

Dropping his hand, Alec looks at him for a moment. “What are the chances,” he repeats.

Magnus doesn’t have an answer, any possible response he could think of vanishing when Alec brings their joined hands up and kisses the back of Magnus’s fingers.

_Goddamnit_, he thinks absently. _I’m falling for you._

The topics move on to discussing other friends as they stand and make their way to the exit.

As they walk through the front door, Alec says, “I was thinking we could walk for a little bit? The park is just a few blocks away and it’s a nice evening. If you’d rather not, though, Dave can be here in a few minutes—”

Magnus gives Alec’s hand one last squeeze before releasing him as they get to the sidewalk. “A walk sounds perfect, Alexander.”

The two of them start walking at a meandering pace. Close, but not too close. Magnus immediately misses Alec’s hand, feels the phantom sensation of where they’d been joined just seconds before.

They talk about inanities as they stroll down the block. Magnus is looking ahead, giving an impassioned diatribe on Dippin’ Dots of all things, when his voice cuts off as he’s whisked into an opening between storefronts.

“Alec, what on earth—_oomph._”

His voice cuts out for the second time as he lands solidly against the brick wall of the alley, immediately surrounded by Alec and being kissed to within an inch of his life.

Everything disappears except for the feeling of Alec’s hands on his waist, the feel of having him so close more intoxicating than the wine they’d drank with dinner.

Magnus loses track, has no idea how many times they break apart for a desperate breath before diving back in. He doesn’t care that the brick is no doubt ruining his silk blend shirt, not when the contrast between the wall behind him and the long line of Alec at his front is so delicious.

His head tilts back, noise escaping him as Alec bites down on the column of his throat. Fuck, right over the mark he’d left last night and Magnus’s hips buck up when he freezes.

Even with his eyes closed, he sees a flash, hears the distinct sound that can only be the shutter of a camera.

He wrenches away. He barely registers Alec’s dazed and confused look before his head is turning to the side where he sees a teenager lowering her phone. Alec follows his stare and freezes, too.
There’s no denying what they’ve been doing. Their breathing is labored, Alec still has one hand wrapped around Magnus, and the back of Alec’s shirt is untucked.

Magnus has no idea what to do. His brain is blank. He can almost hear the chirping of crickets as he tries desperately to grasp onto a thought. Between being so close to Alec just a moment ago and the sudden jarring of the camera, he literally can’t think.

Alec doesn’t look better, though after a moment he shakes his head, frowning. The girl, for her part, looks startled herself.

“Hey,” Alec says easily.

Magnus looks at him, a touch incredulous. Hey?

“Oh,” the girl replies, sounding unsure.

Alec clears his throat, taking a step back and running a hand through his hair. “What’s your name?”

“Carla.”

“Hi, Carla,” Alec says, warm smile on his face. “As you undoubtedly know, I’m Alec. This—” he tilts his head towards Magnus, “Is Magnus. I know the answer is probably pretty obvious, but did you just take a picture of us?”

Carla swallows. “Yeah?”

“What are the chances that I could get you to not post that picture and not to tell anyone about what you saw?”

Narrowing her eyes, Carla replies, “Pretty good, actually.”

Magnus’s brows raise and a quick looks at Alec finds that he looks just as surprised at the easy agreement.

“Really,” Alec asks.

She shrugs. “Really. I was walking when I saw you duck in here and I couldn’t stop from getting a pic. But, like, you’re a person? If you ask me not to do something, I won’t do it. After thinking about it,” she continues sheepishly, “I probably shouldn’t have even come over here in the first place. You’re a celebrity but you deserve your privacy.”

Alec’s shoulders slump in relief. “Thanks, Carla. We really appreciate that. What do you want in return?”

Carla bites her lip before shaking her head. “You don’t have to bribe me not to say anything. I know that you have no reason to trust me but I’m not, like, a crazy fan. I’m not going to blab to the first person I see. Promise.”

This time Alec’s eyes warm with his smile, turning it genuine. “Thank you. It means a lot. That doesn’t mean that I’m not willing to make it worth your while though,” he laughs. “So what can I do for you?”

She hums, narrowing her eyes. “Can I get a photo with you? And an answer to any three questions?”

Alec narrows his eyes right back, giving her a considering look before muttering, “Done.”
“Is Magnus your boyfriend?”

“Yeah,” Alec says easily, shooting him a smile. Magnus can’t help but return it, foolishly.

“Was he who you were talking about at you GMA concert?”

Alec nods. “He was,” he confirms.

Taking a minute to consider, Carla asks her last question. “Will you ever perform Carousel acoustically again?”


Looking satisfied, Carla hands Magnus her phone. Alec walks over to her, throwing an arm over her shoulders as Magnus takes the picture, getting a few takes so that she has options. When that’s done, Alec turns, leaning down to give her a hug. From where Magnus is standing, it looks like he whispers something to her, though at this distance, he can’t hear it.

A minute later, they’re breaking apart and Magnus hands Carla her phone back. “I took a few,” he says, smiling at the girl.

Carla grins. “Thanks, Magnus. Sorry, again, for interrupting. I promise I won’t say anything.” With a last look at both of them, she turns around and walks away without a backwards glance.

Alec and Magnus gravitate to each other, stepping until they’re leaning against each other. Alec wraps an arm around his shoulders as Magnus’s goes around his middle.

“What are the chances she was telling the truth?”

Alec hums. “I’d say fifty-fifty. I think she has good intentions, but it might be too juicy for her to keep to herself.” He looks over at Magnus, gives him a considering look. “Are you going to be okay if she does spill the beans?”

Magnus barely thinks about it. He’s tired of the weight of expectation dragging at his heels. *Qué sera, sera.*

He knows what he signed up for and, after all, if he wanted to go out with Alec then he wanted to enjoy it. He didn’t want to be constantly looking over his shoulder for a wayward camera.

“Yeah,” he says. “I think we’ll be okay.”

“Good,” Alec says, voice unimaginably warm.

He takes Magnus’s hands, pulling him out of the alley. It’s dusk now, sun setting, and after just a minute, they enter the park, strolling along meandering paths. In the dark, it’s hard to see anyone and the two of them enjoy the relative anonymity.

Magnus debates but ultimately reaches out and grabs Alec’s hand. Alec shoots him a look, soft smile on his face as he intertwines their fingers.

Biting his lip, Magnus looks away, grinning. So, they’re not subtle. He doesn’t care, can’t, not when it feels so good to hold his boyfriend’s hand.

They continue on the path, taking a pretty damn romantic walk. Magnus can’t help but think that this is the best first date that he’s ever been on. He hopes, quietly yet fervently, that it’s just the first of
many.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone! I know it's been almost a month since I last updated. I've struggled with this chapter a lot and then I had real life obligations and flufftober and work is demanding a lot of me! But! We made it! Thank you all for being so patient and I hope you enjoy this chapter <3

Magnus jogs up the front steps of Cat and Ragnor’s townhouse. He doesn’t have a chance to knock before the door is being laboriously swung open by Madzie.

Magnus drops down to one knee once he reaches the door and extends his bouquet of flowers to his goddaughter. “You’re not supposed to open the door,” he reminds her dryly.

Ignoring that, Madzie leaps forward, taking the outstretched flowers and, to Magnus’s amusement, positively burying her face in them, inhaling dramatically and sneezing half a dozen times immediately afterward.

Absently, she says, “I saw you through the window and knew who it was before I opened the door.”

Magnus grins, straightening up and ruffling her hair just enough to have her sending him an irritated glare. He looks up as the door swings open wider and sees Raphael’s unimpressed face.

“You’re late,” he says, turning and walking down the hallway toward the kitchen without another word.

Rolling his eyes, Magnus steps inside and toes off his shoes. Madzie skips down the hallway, still carrying the flowers, and Magnus follows her into the open kitchen where everyone else has congregated.

They’ve had these Sunday dinners since college. Before, it was just Cat, Ragnor, and Magnus either at the dining hall or a cheap place off campus. They’d go to de-stress or complain and generally spend a few hours together outside of the constant chaos that was college. When Cat’s fame had grown and she’d been discovered and subsequently started touring, it had just been Ragnor and Magnus. They’d both missed her like hell and it helped to have a few hours together distracting each other every week.

Then, they started at Columbia and Magnus met Raphael and brought them into their group. It’s a standing rule that as long as you’re in town, you’re expected to show up. It’s usually at Catarina and Ragnor’s place but Magnus and Raphael occasionally hosted Sundays. Sometimes if it was a special occasion, they’d all go out for an earlier brunch.

All in all, this is Magnus’s family and sometimes he lives for these Sunday dinners.

As he walks into the kitchen, he sees Raphael reading a newspaper at the table while Ragnor cooks, standing over the stove. Cat is busy sneakily eating cubes of cheese.

Ragnor sends her a look as Magnus rounds the corner. “Dinner will be ready in a mere half an hour,” he says dryly.
“Yeah,” Cat says. “That’s a whole thirty minutes from now.”

Looking long suffering, Ragnor just shakes his head, though Magnus sees his lips curl into a smile. Ragnor only ever smiles when he’s with his family, it seems-- or if he’s discussing the dead writers he loves so much.

Madzie clamors up to the chair next to Raphael and he hovers a hand over her back to make sure she doesn’t fall.

“What are we having,” Magnus asks, taking a few steps toward the kitchen island.

“Pot roast with macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes, and green beans. I’ve even got biscuits baking in the oven,” Ragnor answers absently.

Immediately, Magnus is on the defensive. “That’s one of my favorite comfort food meals,” he says warily.

Cat looks up from the stove and sends him a look that’s cheerful yet there’s steel in her eyes. “Well, we always want you comfortable in our home, Magnus.”

“Yeah, all the better to lull me into a false sense of complacency with,” he mutters.

Luckily, the next thirty minutes go by quickly and they’re plating up food and sitting down at the table without delay.

They all spend the first half of dinner catching up. Magnus had been out of town and there’s a lot that he’s missed. Too soon, though, the conversation lulls conspicuously. Magnus looks up from his dessert-- tres leches cake-- to see four pairs of eyes on him.

Absently, Magnus thinks Madzie is looking at him just because everyone else has focused their attention onto him, always wanting to play along with what the grown-ups are doing.

He’d preen a little if he didn’t know what everyone was waiting for so dramatically.

Swallowing the damned delicious cake, he asks wryly, “Can I help any of you?”

Cat sniffs. “I would have thought you’d tell me, your best friend, that you’d met your long term celebrity crush, but I suppose I’m just not included in your inner circle.”

Ragnor pats her knee. “Don’t worry dear, I had no idea that Magnus was even talking to anyone. He’s been annoyingly nonchalant about the whole thing which is as infuriating as it is surprising. I didn't think he had it in him.”

“Are you kidding me,” Raphael says, taking a quick sip of his dessert coffee. “We got lunch a few weeks ago and he was positively glowing. I asked him what was wrong and he played dumb. *Then,*” Raphael says, with a look as close to gleeful as he’s ever seen, “I went to Basil’s Cafe for lunch one afternoon the week before he went to London.”

Magnus closes his eyes and prays for death.

Nodding in Magnus’s direction, Raphael continues, “Magnus was acting weird, even for him, and he tried to bribe me to leave. Of course I didn’t and what did I see but Magnus welcoming a lunch date to the table. One Alec Lightwood.”

“You know Alec,” Madzie asks, almost standing up in her chair in excitement.
Magnus relaxes as he smiles over the table at her. “I do indeed, sweet pea. Alec and I met a couple of months ago.”

“That’s so awesome! Did you know that he used to play soccer?”

"I think I heard that somewhere,” he laughs.

“So, just how close are the two of you?”

Magnus’s focus switches to Ragnor who looks equal parts interested and bored out of his mind.

He clears his throat before sending them all a warning look. “Whatever is said at this table goes no further. Understood?”

Everyone nods, Madzie most solemn of all before Cat interjects. “Look who you’re talking to, Magnus. We’re family here and, besides, you all know just how important confidentiality is from being around me. Yours-- and Alec’s-- secrets are safe with us. Now spill.”

“Well, in that case,” Magnus says sardonically. He can’t help the way his face morphs into a smile, though, at the thought of just how eventful the past few days have been. “Alexander and I are in a relationship as of Friday evening. Before that, we’d been friends.”

“You’re telling me that you were all twitchy and glaringly happy because you were just friends,” Raphael asks incredulously. He grimaces. “Now that you’re romantically involved, it’ll be even worse.”

Ragnor is mostly silent, just observing the scene as Cat and Raphael ask for a million details-- when they met, how things progressed, and finally what changed.

“Honestly, I’d been thinking about more with him for awhile but I didn’t think he’d be interested in that. We were both so blind,” he says, mostly to himself.

“Why wouldn’t you think that Alec wanted more though? Not only are you a catch but-- oh my God,” she exclaims, pointing an accusatory finger at Magnus. “You’re the one he marathoned Twilight with! I told you that Alec was obviously pining after someone and you didn’t let on a damn thing. You really are insufferable,” she mutters.

“I didn’t want to get my hopes up,” Magnus says defensively.

Catarina rolls her eyes and Raphael considers him for a minute before declaring, “You’re gone over him.” He doesn’t give Magnus a moment to interject before he’s adding, “No, it’s true. I knew when I saw the two of you at lunch that day that there was something going on. I just thought it was purely friendship, though. I’ll admit that Twitter gave me a minute-- you two were so obviously flirting-- but now I can see that it’s more. You really like him, Bane.”


It’s silent for a minute as everyone takes in the words. Magnus looks up to see his friends staring at him but there’s something different in their expressions that he can’t quite place.

“What,” he asks warily. “Aren’t you going to tell me that I’m being foolish? That’s it’s too fast? That I’m in over my head?”

Ragnor finally breaks his silence as he reaches for his mug of tea. “Why,” he asks idly. “It seems like you already know all of that and yet you’re going forward, full steam ahead. You don’t need us to
feed into your insecurities and doubt. You need us to be realistic.”

Taking a bracing sip of his cardamom tea, Ragnor continues. “You’ve seen Cat and I since college. We’ve dealt with all the trappings of fame and made it out the other side stronger for it. I won’t say that the press and her commitments don’t sometimes wear on us but the thing that you must keep in mind, friend, is that it’s all worth it. There is nothing that I wouldn’t put up with for her, especially because I know that singing and writing and the industry is in her blood. It’s her dream and I would never think of coming between the two of them.

“What you have you think of is just how much you’re willing to put up with for Lightwood and what the two of you might have. I know it’s early days yet, but fame is as inconsiderate a beast as I’ve ever seen.”

Magnus’s face is down turned, focused on his mostly empty plate. Without looking up he starts, “I know that it’s been ages since I was in a relationship but I’ve never felt like this before. We’ve known each other two months? Maybe a little more? It feels like so much longer, though. They always say never meet your celebrity crushes but Alec has far surpassed any expectations that I may have had. He’s kind and funny and can be adorably reserved. He doesn’t act like a celebrity. He acts like-- like Alexander.”

His gaze flips up as Cat lays a hand across his. “Then, it seems as though you’ve made your decision. I want you to know that we all support you and are here for you, no matter what comes of it-- but, Magnus.” She breaks off waiting for him to meet her eyes before speaking again. “I meant what I said on the phone earlier this week. I liked him. He didn’t strike me as particularly vain or like so many of the other self-centered assholes the industry likes to churn out. If he makes you this happy-- and from what I’ve seen, you make him incredibly happy in return-- then we like him already.

"Now,” she continues briskly, sitting back in her seat. “This is probably obvious but I want to make sure that everyone is on the same page. You two are officially together but you’re keeping it under wraps for now?”

Magnus nods in confirmation. “We don’t particularly want to deal with the media and want to try and keep them at bay for as long as we can. We’re enjoying this time when it’s just us and our families that have an inkling.”

“As long as you know that you can’t keep it covered up forever or even as long as you’re probably hoping,” Ragnor warns cryptically.

Magnus nods again, this time resolute. “We know. We’ve talked about it. We definitely aren’t ashamed of each other or our relationship and we’ve both decided, together, that this is worth it. Not to say that I might be severely unprepared for it when it does eventually leak, but at least we’re in this together.”

Cat smiles. “Well, then, that’s all that matters.”

She claps her hands together and starts to rise from her seat, Raphael following to help clean and pack away the kitchen. Ragnor relaxes with his tea, having cooked, and Magnus is set to lend a helping hand when Madzie taps him on the shoulder, having come around the table when he wasn’t looking.

“Yes, sweet pea?”

“Are you really Alec’s boyfriend? And he’s yours?”
Smiling, Magnus nods, reaching out to tuck a piece of hair behind her ear. “We are,” he says. “Are you okay with that?”

He asks mostly in jest but Madzie nods seriously. “I really liked Alec and you deserve the best, Uncle Magnus. Does this mean I get to see him again?”

“I think we could probably arrange something,” Magnus laughs, inordinately relieved that his goddaughter approves.

The rest of the evening is spent in true Sunday Family Dinner fashion. Everyone except Ragnor helps clean the kitchen and Magnus has a large Tupperware container full of leftovers to look forward to for the rest of the week.

They settle down in the living room, playing a few games—including Magnus’s personal favorite, Candy Land.

Magnus might sneakily take a picture of his victory and Raphael’s losing face. He sends it to Alec with the caption, The Lollipop Woods were harrowing but never fear, darling, I pulled through in the end to become King Kandy.

Madzie heads upstairs to her room after a few hours, wanting to read her book in peace and that allows the adults to relax in the living room.

Talk alternates between politics, work woes, and the general twists and turns that are expected when one has been friends with everyone in the room for several years.

Magnus thinks that he’s being covert but that illusion comes crashing down when Ragnor moves to sit down next to him, sighing dramatically all the while.

“It was bad enough when you droned on and on about lover boy when you didn’t even know him. Somehow, it’s even more annoying now. Put your phone away and join in with the rest of the class, Magnus,” Ragnor says, long suffering.

Wanting to just send one last text before joining in the debate between whether or not avocado is an acceptable food, Magnus isn’t fast enough.

“‘I’m going into the studio tomorrow. I think I’ll have some inspiration from this weekend to help me with my mojo, smiley face.’” Ragnor reads Alec's last text aloud, tone disgusted. “Good God, friend, please don’t make me read any more of this drivel. The boy is obviously flirting with you.”

“It’s my phone, you ass,” Magnus mutters. “That was meant for my eyes and my eyes only.”

“Then don’t text in our house,” Ragnor replies, sniffing.

Sighing, Magnus presses send just a few seconds later and pockets his phone, doing his best to ignore his friends’ amused yet smirking faces, complete with raised brows.

The next hour or so reminds Magnus of just why he loves his friends so much and prioritizes these dinners. They can be insufferable but they’re his family and by the time he leaves—just as it’s turning dark—his sides are aching from how much he’s laughed.

He gets back to his place just after the sun sets and tosses his keys into the dish in his foyer before walking toward his french doors, raising his hands above his head to stretch.

Quickly backtracking, Magnus goes to his drink cart and pours a glass of red, gently swirling the
glass before taking a welcome sip, sighing in satisfaction.

He throws open the french doors, glass in hand, and goes to stand by the edge, looking out over Brooklyn and a city he loves so much. Leaning against the low brick wall, Magnus drinks his glass of wine as something settles in him. It’s a warm evening, the hottest month of the year just a few days away, and there’s no denying that it’s been an eventful summer.

It’s hard to believe just how much things can change in a couple of months.

Magnus has his classes and his students and academia is still his oxygen. He has his family and support system.

He has Alec.

The past few days have been like a whirlwind. He’s spent so much time worrying about the conference and then preoccupied with Alec that this is the first time that it feels like he takes a deep breath-- that he can relax in his own company-- in ages.

A small smile tilts his mouth at the corners as he processes everything that’s happened recently.

He’ll spend a few more hours catching up on work before calling it a night. He’ll probably text Alec tonight sometime, though really there’s no rush.

He’s not going anywhere. Magnus should probably shut everything else out except the grading that needs completed before he sees his classes early this week.

The stars are twinkling in the darkened sky when Magnus finally sighs, heading back inside. He goes directly to his study, placing his glass on top of his drink cart as he passes it, and shuts himself away.

He works steadily and doesn’t realize how much time has passed until he’s entered the last grade into the Blackboard Learn grade book. He straightens from the computer, wincing as his back twinges in discomfort.

He stands, stretching, before reaching for his cell. Unlocking it, he sees a couple of messages from Alec and one from Catarina.

He bypasses Alec’s and opens his thread with Cat, a surprised smile blossoming as he reads her text.

_I really am happy for you, Magnus. Alec seems like a good guy. I can’t wait to hear about things going forward! Keep me posted!_

He huffs out a laugh before sending a reply.

_Don’t worry dear, there’s no way that I can keep anything from you, especially now that everything’s out in the open._

Magnus places his leftover Tupperware in the fridge and grabs a glass of water before heading toward his bedroom where he quickly undressing, sliding on a pair of pajama pants. Next, he goes to the bathroom, taking off his makeup and finishing his nightly routine.

It’s just a few minutes later that he’s climbing into bed. He hates himself a little for the thought but after this weekend, his bed seems just a bit too big for just him. He and Alec had ended up walking for over an hour last night after their date. Magnus had been the one to a time-- or two-- pull Alec behind a tree and kiss that irresistible mouth. They'd half-assed tried to end the date half a dozen
times, each one coming back together to talk for a few more minutes, to steal one more kiss.

Magnus might have had to apply cover-up this morning in preparation for the Sunday family dinner.

Under the covers, Magnus unlocks his phone and continues the conversation that he’s having with Alec. It’s something about favorite cartoons from their childhood and Magnus laughs at Alec’s mini diatribe about his favorite show.

He types a quick *goodnight* before plugging his phone in to charge and placing it on the nightstand.

This week will be busy as hell as Magnus continues to pave his way through a week’s worth of accumulated work. His students will probably be listless and will no doubt curse him at the pop quiz he’s giving almost all of his classes to see just how much of the reading they did in his absence.

All in all, it will be business as usual except that he’s hoping to carve out some time to see Alec. Next date is on him and Magnus wants to knock his socks off.

Magnus falls asleep a few moments later, wondering hazily if Alec likes giraffes.
“Shit, dude, that break must have done you a world of good.” Simon waggles his brows. “Or maybe someone is to blame?”

Alec rolls his eyes, studiously looking down at his songbook. It’s bright and early Monday morning and he’s in the studio with Simon set to lay down vocals-- the first for Album Seven. He’d walked into their recording lab with a triple espresso and a chai tea latte. Simon had all but swooned as Alec handed him his drink, exclaiming, “I knew you loved me!”

Alec had rolled his eyes then, too, though it didn’t take a genius to see that it was all for show. Alec couldn’t help his smile, the way his attention couldn’t help but slip back to this weekend. He’d spent most of yesterday with his siblings. They’d taken Max out to eat and to see a movie that Jace wouldn’t shut up about and Izzy had pulled them into a bookstore where they’d spent over an hour skimming through titles while Iz racked up a pile of books to buy.

It’d been a good time and Alec had dealt with their good-natured teasing with grace. He’d only glared mildly as Izzy asked how his date with Magnus had gone and Jace had made obnoxious kissing sounds with the ridiculous facial expressions to match. Max had been a little slow to the uptake but by the time they’d ordered at the restaurant, he’d been grinning and Alec had sighed, just a little, for the innocent baby he’d once been.

Max had wanted details with a glint in his eye and Alec had told him what he’d told everyone else-- Magnus was a professor, he really liked him, he made Alec smile.

What he didn’t say was that the depth of his feelings were a little terrifying, even to him. Alec had always suspected that he had the tendency to fall fast. He’d just never had the opportunity to prove his suspicions.

Now that he’s with Magnus, every date and every text and every goddamn smile pulls Alec in just a little more. They’ve just become official, for Christ’s sake, and Alec already fears that he’s falling.

It’s scary but it’s also exhilarating and Alec just hopes that Magnus is on the same page as him.

He’s looking over one of his songs-- one that he’d written last night after everyone had retreated to their own rooms-- when his eyes stick to a phrase.

It’s innocuous. It could mean a million things and that’s why it’s perfect. It’s simple but complex and Alec knows that he’s just found the title for his next record.

Feel Something.

Looking up at Simon, he knows he’s grinning like a lunatic but he can’t help himself. Album titles
are big. They set the tone for the entire damn album. It’s a clue to the concept, what the artist is trying to achieve and if they fall flat then it’s an unmitigated disaster.

If they’re successful, though, if everything comes together around that title to provide the listener with a whole experience-- then it’s a home run.

“What’s up, man? You look like you just found the nuclear disarmament codes.”

Leaning back in his chair, Alec says, “I know what this album is.” He rolls his eyes, “Finally.”

Leaning forward, Simon’s head tilts as he thinks. “First of all, your point of view is skewed. You haven’t recorded a single song for this record and you already have a concept. That’s amazing and you know damn well that titles are usually one of the last things that come together when recording an album. Second of all, what is it?”

Simon seems almost as excited as Alec is and it makes Alec laugh. Simon might be a pain in his ass most of the time but there’s no denying that he’s a hard worker, an exceptional artist, and an all around great friend.

“Feel Something,” Alec says. “I know that it’s simple and can be open to a lot of interpretations but-”

“Alec, bro, that’s perfect,” Simon interrupts. “The listener won’t necessarily know what you’re feeling-- what they’re supposed to feel-- until they start listening to the album and it’s obvious for anyone who knows you that you’re feeling something because of a special someone!”

Leaning forward, Simon’s voice lowers as though there’s anyone around to hear in the small room. “Is this record about Magnus? Like I know that it’s early days yet but it’s so freaking obvious that he means a lot to you and I’ve caught some of those lines in your book. You’ve got it bad.”

Alec thinks about deflecting, about denying, but really-- what would be the point? Simon’s not stupid and it’s apparent that he’s been struck with inspiration lately.

“Yeah,” Alec admits quietly. “Almost every song I’ve written so far is connected to Magnus in some way. I couldn’t hide it even if I wanted to.”

Simon punches him gently in the arm, grinning. “I’m so happy for you, Alec. Seriously. While I haven’t met the guy yet, anyone can see that he makes you happy.” Simon wraggles his brows. “So, does he know that his boyfriend is pretty much writing him a dozen love songs?”

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“Shut up, Simon,” Alec repeats, exasperated.

Falling back in his chair, Simon moans pitifully. “I’m so lonely,” he says, dramatic as ever. “The tour was great and all but you know how hard it is to so find someone on the road. I’ve had all summer back in the city but I haven’t met anyone.”

Alec looks up, considers Simon for a moment. Simon liked to act unaffected, liked to lay his feelings out dramatically so that people didn’t take them too seriously. The truth, though, was that Simon felt a lot, deeply, and him going so far as to joke about having a relationship was probably a closer look
at his feelings than either of them were comfortable with.

Thinking, Alec wonders if there’s anyone he could set Simon up with. Even if it didn’t end in happily ever after, maybe Simon was in a rut– he was known to spend the first few months off tour catching up on work and the latest video game.

Alec discards an actress in town for a movie and the usual guys that he suggests to friends when they bemoan their single status. None of them seem quite right for Simon and Alec doesn’t want to set something up for his best friend that he doesn’t think will work from the start.

Narrowing his eyes, he feels like there’s something poking at the corner of his brain but he just can’t find it. He settles for clapping Simon on the shoulder before standing. “You could go out and meet people,” he offers.

Simon snorts. “Yeah? First of all, that’s rich coming from you, Mr. Scowl. Secondly, what do you think I do all day,” he asks indignantly. “Eat Doritos and cry into my xbox controller? I go to museums and coffee shops and mini golfing. I don’t think the love of my life likes putt putt,” Simon adds, gloomy.

Eyes skimming over his song book, settling on the few songs he wants to lay vocals down for today, Alec absently replies, “If they love you then they could probably be persuaded for a game once a year. It’s all about compromises, Simon.”

Simon doesn’t say anything else and they both look up as the door swings open. They’re on one of the recording floors. The recording suites have the sound booth and control room, with a small area set aside with a couch and table for mid-session alterations.

The two of them had gotten there a little early and as the door opens, Alec’s eyes flick up to the clock, seeing that it’s right on the hour.

In walks Meliorn, one of the best recording producers that Alec’s ever worked with. He’s lucky that Meliorn was in the country this month, let alone that he had time for Alec. Every song that Meliorn has produced for Alec has gone platinum-- at least-- and it’s no secret that he’s a genius behind the controls.

Meliorn strolls in, closing the door behind him with one hand. The other is holding a steaming cup of something strongly herbal.

“Ready,” he asks, ever professional. Alec doesn’t think that he’s ever seen Meliorn smile. He just assumes it’s a character quirk at this point. After the first time they worked together, Alec wondered that Meliorn would ever work for him again-- he’d been deadpan and so dry Alec really couldn’t tell if he was joking. That added to his stoic expression had made Alec wonder why he’d even accepted the job in the first place.

He’d been surprised as hell when Meliorn had agreed to work with him, then, on his next album-- and the one after that all the way to where they are now. Finally, Alec had just shrugged and figured that after five years, Meliorn might have the personality of an owl but their professional relationship was sound.

“Let’s do this,” Alec says.

Simon’s recording a song with him today-- one of the only ones that isn’t explicitly about Magnus-- but Alec also wants to record at least rough vocals for half a dozen other songs. Alec routinely writes at least three times the number of songs that will land on his album and records two thirds of those.
He likes to have options and it’s not unusual for him to revisit a song for future albums.

The first song, though, that Alec’s going to record is *Angel*. It’s something that’s been gnawing at him since he first wrote it a few weeks ago. He’s been antsy to get into the studio and record it. He wants to see if it will sound how he envisions, if he can capture the feeling.

As a slower song, it works for a nice warm up too, so early in the morning.

Alec likes these first recording sessions. Towards the end of the production timeline, when everyone is scrambling to meet deadlines and Alec routinely doesn’t sleep for a week getting everything just right, it’s a mad dash to the finish line. The first few sessions, however, are much more laid back. Alec can take his time, can get a feel for a song, before diving straight in.

He goes to the sound booth, and steps up the the mic. While Meliorn adjusts the controls, Alec lays his book open to the song and places it on the stand in front of him. He’s got the rhythm and knows the general tone and he skims through the lyrics, getting a final feel for tempo.

“Do you need a metronome or anything else or are we just doing raw vocals this first time?”

Alec doesn’t look up from where he’s still studying his song, not even flinching as Meliorn’s voice comes through the speakers.

“I’m good. Let’s run this through one take, mistakes and all. Then we can play it back and adjust.”

“Ready when you are, then.”

Alec takes a deep breath, sliding his headphones on and holding the plastic absently as he first starts, tapping his foot to keep the beat as he sings.

It’s a longer song and as he moves through the verses, Alec lets himself drift. He loses himself in the words. This was the first song that he let himself write about Magnus and it’s rife with emotion-- that first nebulous rush of feeling that he’s never felt with anyone else.

During pauses, he steps back, gathers himself before pouring everything into the next verse, another chorus. As he steps closer to the mic, overwhelmed, he closes his eyes, wrenching out that emotion for the mic-- for whoever wants to listen.

As he ends the song, breathing hard, he steps back from the mic and thinks distantly that he may ask the Institute if they could bring in a choir for background vocals.

His mind is already on the dozen mistakes he made and how he might want to steer the final product when he hears Simon whoop at the controls.

Pressing down the mic button, Simon’s voice fills the sound booth, making Alec wince at the sheer volume and enthusiasm.

“Dude, Alec! That was so fucking good. If this is any indication for Album Seven then you’re totally going to win at least a dozen Grammys next year!”

Alec smiles even as he shakes his head a little. It wouldn’t do to get too cocky yet. Producing an album swings the pendulum between brilliance and disaster at least a hundred times between start and finish.

Stepping out of the booth, Alec makes his way to the control panel and reaches for the playback button. There are a few seconds of silence and he grabs a bottle of water tucked in the fridge next to
the couch as he waits for the song to start.

As his voice pours into the room, he stills in the middle of the room, bottle halfway to his lips, mouth parted in surprise.

Damn, he does sound good.

He hasn’t recorded anything for over a year. While he hadn’t been worried about recording—once he had a song written and arranged, recording was never an issue even if it could be tedious as hell—he had figured that his voice would be a little rough. He’d figured that this morning, trying out a few songs, would give him a chance to take stock of his voice and just how much work he would need to put in.

Apparently, he doesn’t need to worry too much about that.

He listens to the entire song, making note of one area that sounds a little too hoarse and the few spots where he sounds a little flat.

Overall, not bad.

As the song winds down, he takes a long drink of water and walks the few steps over to where Meliorn is sitting looking as expressionless as ever.

He looks up as Alec approaches.

“Not bad,” he says, which is as ringing an endorsement as Alec’s ever heard from the man.

“I was thinking we could get a local choir to come in and do background vocals, especially for the outro. Maybe we could get Ollie in here, too, for some violin work.”

Alec’s been in the industry for a decade and has certainly amassed a contact list. He’s always willing to give new talent a try, but Alec can admit that he’s a little set in his ways. He has a violinist he almost always uses when a piece demands it and he has a preferred choir among the dozen that The Institute has on retainer.

He has writing partners that he just works better with along with a few dozen other contacts that are all experts in their medium from mixing to background female vocals to synthesizers. It’s one reason that he takes great pains to keep his professional reputation pristine— he doesn’t want to jeopardize the relationships he’s built.

Alec and Meliorn talk about the song for almost an hour, throwing suggestions back and forth and talking direction, tone, vibe. They’re ephemeral words and it’s an involved conversation in this first stage. Simon plays on his phone in the meanwhile, throwing in a suggestion or two.

When that wraps up and Alec writes down some notes in the margins, it’s time for him and Simon to record their song.

Alec usually has one or two tracks that feature other artists on his album. Collaborations can be fun but also pull in an audience that wouldn’t normally listen to his stuff— though when working with Simon, they’re pretty similar.

This is a song that Alec co wrote with Simon one afternoon when they were stuck in a writing room and slowly losing their minds last year, before the tour. Alec had been on top of his game and venues for his world tour were already selling out, with people being particularly excited that Simon would be the opener once again.
They’d started talking about the industry and Simon was just venting about how a date had gone terrible the night before-- apparently the person had not only been extremely boring for longer than two minutes but they’d only been into his career, asking questions about his next single and just how much money he’d be making with the upcoming tour.

Alec, for his part, had been annoyed at an errant paparazzi who’d asked him personal questions, about Robert of all things, while he was picking up a few things at an outside kiosk. It had infuriated him that the journalist had the nerve to ask such questions about something that happened so long ago while Alec was buying apples. He’d been a lot pissed off but he couldn’t deny that with every encounter like that-- and they happened daily, it seemed-- that he withdrew a little more into himself, a little more into his group that he’d established early on.

The song, titled *The Way I Am*, is a little more stadium appropriate. There are guitars and forceful vocals and Alec already knows that this is going to be a favorite tour track next year.

Following Simon into the sound booth, Alec goes straight to the mic while Simon grabs his guitar from where it’s resting on its stand.

“One run through, just letting everything go,” Simon asks in confirmation, throwing the strap over his head and settling the guitar against him.

Alec nods. “Sounds good. We can lay instrumental tracks later-- we’ve already discussed a combo of electric and acoustic guitars with keys, too-- but I wanna get a feel for this since it’s more upbeat than the last one.”

“Romantic ballads aren’t supposed to be rock anthems,” Simon teases.

Alec just rolls his eyes, holding up a hand for Meliorn to start rolling.

Simon starts with the guitar, serving as an intro. Alec can already feel the energy flowing as he steps up to the mic and starts.

*All I wanna do is just hold somebody. But no one ever wants to get to know somebody.*

Alec sings the first verse with Simon joining the chorus before Alec pulls back, giving Simon the second verse.

He and Simon get into the song and with the guitar propelling them forward it’s more fun than Alec remembers having in ages. The responsibility and future projections fall from his mind as he loses himself in a song that’s basically a catchy *fuck you* to everyone who sees him as an artist before person.

It’s cathartic in its own way.

The song finishes with both Simon and Alec sporting wide smiles and when Simon holds his hand up for a high five Alec doesn’t think twice before returning it.

It was a rough take but Alec knows that this will be a fantastic song. They both look through the glass to Meliorn, who’s adjusting the controls. Without looking up, he says, “By the time this is finished, it will be single potential.”

Alec and Simon high five again before leaving the sound booth. The three of them talk production and vision and by the time that starts to wrap up, Alec hears Simon’s stomach growl, obnoxiously loud in the small room.
“Hungry,” Alec asks dryly.

Simon just scoffs. “I’m always hungry.”

Laughing, Alec just shakes his head as he checks his phone. It’s a little past noon and truth be told, Alec could go for some lunch and some time to stretch his legs. They had a good start but sometimes it’s even more important to know when to take a step back, when to take a break.

“We can break for lunch and be back here in an hour?” Alec looks at Simon and Meliorn who both nods, though with vastly different levels of enthusiasm.

Simon looks at Alec with wide eyes and Alec sighs, nodding, though he can’t hide his smile. Simon loves going to Uptown for lunch but for some bizarre reason, he only goes with Alec. When Alec had asked why Simon didn’t just go on his own, Simon had just woefully responded that he didn’t want to intrude on Alec’s turf.

“We’re going to a coffee shop for lunch. You’re more than welcome to join us,” Alec says to Meliorn as they all stand up.

With an inscrutable look, Meliorn just replies, “No, thank you,” before leaving the room the next instant.

Meliorn has never agreed to go out with them for a meal and Alec thinks that if he ever did agree, then he would just drop dead of shock.

Uptown is only a ten minute subway ride away so Alec and Simon leave The Institute without delay, making small talk all the while. Simon rants about the latest tv show that he’s watching on Hulu and he gets into a hot debate with Alec about the best documentary on Netflix.

Before they know it, they’re walking into the shop. It’s a cloudy day and Alec’s glad that he’s wearing a Henley as they walk into the air-conditioned shop. He doesn’t see Luke working the front so he must be baking in the back— or as Alec remembers his mother is in town, Luke may have just taken a personal day.

It looks to be a slow day. A brief glimpse shows that just half a dozen tables are taken and there’s no line. Walking up to the register with Simon following, Alec is just looking at the specials menu done in Clary’s chalk art when he hears someone call his name.

“Alec!”

He doesn’t have time to look around before a small body is launching itself at his legs. Looking down, he smiles as he sees a mop of curly hair.

When she pulls back, Alec crouches down so that they’re at eye level. “Hey there, Madzie. Fancy running into you here.”

“Hi,” Madzie says, grinning.

Simon clears his throat ridiculously loud and Madzie giggles as they both look up at Simon who looks confused as he smiles.

Nodding to his companion, Alec introduces them. “Simon, this is Madzie. She’s Catarina Loss’s daughter and I met her during my songwriting session. Madzie, this is Simon. He’s one of my best friends and we work together sometimes.”
Madzie immediately shoves a hand out towards Simon. “Nice to meet you,” she says, formally.

Simon can’t help his unexpected laugh before he sobers up, shaking Madzie’s hand gently. “Nice to meet you, Madzie.”

From where he’s still bent down, Alec’s gaze sweeps across the room. Simon and Madzie are talking a mile a minute about some action figure and Alec’s just set to ask her where her parents are when his breath catches.

From across the room, he meets Magnus’s bemused stare.

Clearing his throat, he straightens, taking a step in his boyfriend’s direction without thinking before he comes back online. He looks over to Simon and Madzie and is already dreading his friend’s reaction to his next words.

“Madzie, you’re here with Magnus?”

She nods enthusiastically, jumping up and down a little. Resignedly, Alec thinks that Simon looks like he’s about to burst.

“I don’t have school today but mom and dad had meeting so Uncle Magnus and Raphael are taking turns watching me today.”

Simon turns ever so slightly to Alec, eyes comically wide. “Is that so?”

Sighing, Alec lets Madzie take his hand and pull him over to where the professors are sitting. He can’t help the silly little grin that lights up his face, though, as he maintains eye contact with Magnus the entire walk across the room.


“Um, hi. Hello,” Simon joins in, waving a little in a gesture that’s painfully familiar. “I’m Simon, one of Alec’s friends. Are you the Magnus that I’ve heard so much about?”

Magnus’s expression turns delighted as he throws a quick glance Alec’s way. “I didn’t know that you talked about me to others, darling.” He shifts, turning his complete attention to Simon. “I hope you’ve only heard good things about me, Sherman.”

“Simon,” he corrects, quickly brushing that aside to start embarrassing Alec further. “I actually helped Alec get ready for your first date-- at the library? He was so nervous but I’m a champ at calming people down--”

“Or giving them ulcers,” Alec mutters before elbowing Simon in the side. Rubbing at the spot, Simon catches Alec’s glare before grimacing sheepishly. “Sorry,” he mutters.

Magnus waves the apology away, though he does lean back in his seat, waving toward his companion. “This is one of my best friends, Raphael, though we are also faculty at Columbia University.” Turning towards Raphael, he says, “This is Alexander, whom you’ve already met and his charming friend, Simon.”

Raphael nods at Alec before his gaze shifts to Simon, who does the hand wave thing again. Alec
thinks that he sees Raphael’s lips twitch though he remains stubbornly stoic. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Simon.”

“What are you doing here,” Alec asks Magnus, reaching a hand out to sweep his thumb over his neck.

Magnus leans into the gesture infinitesimally, smiling up at Alec. “Catarina and Ragnor are busy for the day and Raphael and I decided to treat ourselves, and Madzie, to lunch here. It’s not too far from campus and she likes their hot chocolate. What about you two?”

“We’re recording today and just stopped for a lunch break. Simon loves it here, so we figured we’d grab something quick before running back into the studio.”

Magnus’s hand reaches out and snags Alec’s as his hand drops. Alec can’t help the little thrill that comes when Magnus interlaces their hands. “I’d recommend the BLT,” Magnus says.

“Noted,” Alec replies dryly.

The two of them get lost in their own world for a moment, not noticing the look Raphael and Simon share, before being startled out of their reverie by Madzie.

“Can I get a sugar cookie,” she asks, looking at all of the adults with guileless eyes.

Magnus looks at her. “You already had a hot chocolate and I’ll be dealing with you on a sugar rush this afternoon, already.”

“Please.” She draws out the word until it’s half a dozen syllables, giving Magnus her best pleading look. Alec bites back his smile as he watches Magnus and Madzie enter a staring contest.

Sighing, Magnus finally acquiesces. “Oh, alright. Grab one for me, too, and it’s a deal.”

Madzie’s hand flies up to the air as she does a victory dance that makes everyone laugh.

“You can come up to the counter with us, Madzie,” Alec says, waving away Magnus as he reaches for his wallet.

“I think I can afford a couple of cookies,” he says dryly. Simon and Madzie are already at the counter, bending down to see the pastry selections in the glass case.

Magnus narrows his eyes at Alec before sighing in defeat. “If you insist. I just don’t want you to think that I’m only after you for your ability to procure sweets.” His voice lowers as he continues, “There are a few other reasons I like you around.”

Alec’s mouth goes dry at the look Magnus gives him and he’s just opening his mouth for a reply when he catches Raphael’s disgusted expression and ends up laughing instead.

Magnus follows his gaze and chuckles a little. “You look like you swallowed something unpleasant, friend.” He raises a brow. “But then again, when don’t you?”

Raphael just glares and Alec asks if they want anything else before joining the others at the counter. As he turns away, he catches the start of bickering between Magnus and Raphael and grins, shaking his head.

Walking up to the register, he decides on the BLT with a side of house-made chips. Uptown Joe’s special sauce was to die for and Alec reflects a little ruefully that he might be hungrier than he
thought.

“Have we decided?”

Madzie looks at him before pointing to the sugar cookie display. “I can’t pick between a butterfly or a ladybug,” she says, so close to the glass that it’s fogging up with her breath.

Alec thinks for a minute before finally offering, “We could get one of each and give Magnus the one you like less?”

Nodding enthusiastically, Madzie agrees and when Simon finishes ordering, Alec steps up with his and Madzie’s orders before he can get his wallet out.

The truth is that Alec doesn’t mind paying when he’s not expected to or when it’s for a friend. He only resents paying when the person or group acts like it’s a given that he’d take the check, like he’s their personal debit card.

Simon and Madzie go back to the table Magnus and Raphael are at, pulling up a couple of chairs as Alec hands over his card to Maia.

“You look cozy over there,” she says, smiling.

“It’s nice to eat with friends every once in a while,” Alec answers, arching a brow at her insouciant tone.

Maia echoes the gesture as she gets the pastries. “Are you sure it’s not because your boyfriend is part of that group?”

Alec’s head snaps up as he meets Maia’s smug gaze. “What,” he asks dumbly.

Rolling her eyes, Maia grabs a tray to place everything on. “I have eyes and I have Twitter. I’d hope that you don’t hold hands with just anyone or enjoy quiet evenings with glasses of wine.”

Alec can feel heat climb up the back of his neck as Maia just grins at him knowingly. “Whatever,” he mutters and ignores it when she laughs.

“Don’t worry,” she says, moving to the drinks now that the food is done. “Discretion is the number one rule here. I like you and your family enough not to spill the beans. Though I have to say, if you are trying to keep things on the down low than you’re doing a shit job at it.”

It’s Alec’s turn to roll his eyes though he can’t deny Maia’s words. For a couple that’s trying to stay out of the spotlight, Alec can recognize that they’re making mistake after negligent mistake. He can’t find it in himself to care, though. It feels too good to hold Magnus’s hand and he honestly doesn’t think that he’s capable of dialing back the way he knows he looks at Magnus.

Maia finishes the drinks-- another frozen hot chocolate for Madzie because he couldn’t resist those eyes-- and a couple of iced coffees for him and Simon.

With everything ready, Simon hands Madzie the cookies and her drink while he takes the tray with the sandwiches and sides. Alec is picking up the drinks when Maia’s voice reaches out.

“Tell Izzy I said hi.”

He looks up but Maia’s just grinning, something happy in her expression.

“We’ll see,” he replies and turns back to the table, acting like he doesn’t hear Maia’s snort in his
wake.

He’s not an idiot and he can put two and two together. It’s obvious from Maia’s little aside that Izzy must be spending an inordinate amount of Uptown and she’s not just studying.

*Good for them both,* Alec thinks.

By the time he gets back to the table, Simon’s already halfway through his own tuna melt. Alec sits in the empty chair next to Magnus. The next twenty minutes are full of Alec scarfing down his own lunch while enjoying the conversation around him. It’s hilarious and endearing to see Raphael and Magnus bicker like only the oldest of good friends can and it’s soothing to see that he and Simon can fit seamlessly into the little makeshift group.

Glancing down at his watch, Alec sighs before gathering up his trash and piling it on the tray.

Simon looks up from where he was trying to mop up a spill, Raphael handing him a napkin in aid expressionlessly. “Time to go boss?”

“I’m not your boss,” Alec replies beleaguered. “But yeah. Meliorn’s going to be back at the studio in twenty minutes and we need to be back on time. I still want to get a demo for—”

Alec breaks off as he sees Magnus’s curious expression. “For the other song,” he finishes lamely.

“Don’t tell me that that’s an artist’s temperament I hear, Alexander.”

Glaring halfheartedly at Magnus, Alec just replies, “You’ll hear everything when it’s time.”

Magnus grins before leaning in and kissing Alec in full view of the coffee shop, not that Alec cares. It’s a chaste kiss, they’re in public after all, but it makes Alec’s head dizzy with the want for more.

They break apart a scant moment later, grinning at each other before Simon throws a napkin at Alec’s face.

“We’re down to seventeen minutes until we need to be in the sound booth and I know how weird you are about being on time everywhere,” Simon says, defensively.

Well, he can’t argue with that. Alec throws Magnus a pouting look before leaning close to steal another kiss. “I’ll see you later,” he asks in the space between them.

“Are you free tomorrow?”

“I am.”

Magnus smooths Alec’s shirt as he looks up at him warmly. “What do you say to a date, then? I do believe it’s my turn to plan things.”

“Sounds great. Can you tell me what to expect?”

Magnus makes a show of thinking about it before finally shaking his head. “No, I don’t think so,” he replies, humming. “It’s a surprise.”

“Lucky for you, I love surprises,” Alec murmurs.

“Oh, is that so?”

“Yeah,” Alec breathes.
“Fourteen minutes,” Simon says loudly.

“Jesus Christ,” Alec mutters and Magnus bursts out laughing, pulling him close for one searing kiss before letting him go.

“Go do your job, darling. I’ll be a text away when you’re finished.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Alec and Simon leave seconds later, saying goodbye to Raphael and hugging Madzie before leaving Uptown in a rush.

They might have to run from the subway station, Simon complaining the entire time, but they make it back to the studio just before Meliorn.

Alec slips into the recording booth and after a few minutes, he’s singing the last song for the day. It’s slower, pace much closer to Angel, and it’s the title track of his album.

Feel Something isn’t a song that he ever thought he’d write from personal experience. He wrote it while Magnus was in London and he was wrestling with the feelings and what they could mean.

*I don't care if it hurts.*
*I'll pay my weight in blood.*
*To feel my nerves wake up.*

He’d come to the conclusion that this new thing with Magnus could be the best thing that ever happened to him- it sure as hell felt like it-- or it could end in ruin.

As he sings, Alec reflects that the two aren’t necessarily opposite.

*Let me feel these high and lows.*
*Before the doors to my heart close.*
*Make me feel something.*

Alec had felt calloused, jaded, for so long. He’d started fearing that the industry had calcified him. While he still feels unbearably old in an industry that likes to chew up its artists as much as see them succeed, Magnus has breathed fresh air into him. He makes him *feel something* and that’s officially become the calling of this album. He wants the listener to know that things don’t stay gray forever.

He wants a reminder of what it felt like to possibly, just maybe, be falling in love for the first time.

Alec loses himself in the song, singing the chorus with gusto, feeling his vocal cords tighten to stand out in stark relief. It’s a song that demands everything from him and Alec gives no less.

Alec refuses to regret Magnus, come what may. He feels so much that sometimes it feels like it’s pouring out of him, like Magnus can see every word he wants to say. It’s a rush like no other and Alec promises himself that he’ll enjoy the ride, no matter where he ends up.

As he finishes the song, something settles in Alec. With every word he writes and note he sings, it becomes apparent that Alec is falling, deeper and just a little faster than the day before.

He’s not afraid and doesn’t know if that’s foolish or not. He supposes that only time will tell.
Chapter 30

Alexander, what do you say to meeting on campus and I can whisk you away for our date from there?

The text comes through as Alec finishes his morning run and he can’t help the immediate grin that overtakes his face. It’s early and Alec has to admit that he loves starting his day talking to Magnus.

Sounds great! Just send me the address. I assume we’re meeting at your office?

I can’t wait for this mysterious date tonight :)

“What-- or who-- has Alec Lightwood smiling down at his phone?”

Alec looks up, that smile turning into an instant scowl at the intrepid reporter. He distantly hears the rapid shutter of a camera a few yards away and sighs internally. Damn.

“I was reading tweets from a few fans,” Alec says, the lie falling from his mouth smoothly.

Close to his apartment, Alec starts walking down the block. He sees the doorman and they share a subtly annoyed look. They’re old hat at intrusive press and it’s nice to have someone to commiserate with, however quietly.

The pap tries to engage him in conversation but Alec’s just not in the mood. Not when he has Magnus in his head. It’s less than a minute until Charles is holding the door open for him and Alec ducks into his building with a cheery wave at the pap.

He strides over to the elevator and once he hits the penthouse button and slides his key in, Alec leans against the wall, taking out his phone to see a new message from Magnus with the address.

Just like that, Alec’s back to grinning wide enough to hurt. He can’t help but feel like this is a step--seeing where Magnus works, being invited into another sphere of his life.

Distantly, Alec thinks about what it would be like to show Magnus around a studio. It’s ridiculous, but he wonders what Magnus would think of his tour bus. Would he hate being on the road or get a kick at the adventure wrapped mundanity?

Alec goes through the rest of his morning routine thinking about Magnus and how it seems like their lives are meshing effortlessly. Alec likes Magnus’s friends and Magnus hadn’t ran away from Simon yesterday.

It bodes well for the future. Their potential future.

Alec scoffs to himself. Forget that he shouldn’t even be thinking about their future. They’ve only been on one official date and he’s already thinking about what it would be like to bring Magnus out on the road with him for a week-- or longer.

He’s just biting into a banana when he freezes at the sudden realization that he hasn’t even thought about another man since he met Magnus. He hazily remembers an old hookup of convenience texting him last month and he had summarily shut him down.

Huh.

As Alec thinks back over the summer, he can’t remember being genuinely interested in another guy
since his first night back in town, before he ran into Magnus that first time. He knows that it’s too soon to be having those thoughts but now that he’s realized it, Alec knows that he’s content.

He doesn’t have the urge to go out for a one night stand. Just the thought leaves him hollow. It’d be hilarious if it wasn’t so ground shaking.

Alec Lightwood, king of staying unattached, loves being off the market. It’s only been a week but there’s comfort in it, a security that he had never considered.

Continuing to eat his breakfast, Alec decides to leave it at that for now. It’s too soon for anything else, anything more. For now, it’s enough that Alec doesn’t feel stifled in this new relationship.

He really likes Magnus and that’s all that matters.

Alec goes through the morning playing back the demos, making notes at his piano for any mistakes or ideas for alteration. It’s a quiet morning, Jace and Izzy both out of the apartment, and he’s glad to have the place to himself.

He’s also happy that he doesn’t have anything heavier on his slate today, not when the thought of seeing Magnus this afternoon is all he can think about.

They’ve been texting all morning and Alec pauses where he’s in the middle of practicing the piano for Angel-- he thinks the song could really pop as a stripped version on tour-- when he sees a reply from Magnus. Talking about favorite foods, and Alec decides to cut to the chase.

*Care to give me a hint about what we’ll be doing tonight? I need to plan accordingly.*

Magnus responds less than a minute later with an infuriatingly blase answer.

*No, I don’t think so. It wouldn’t be a surprise if I told you as soon as you asked, now would it, darling?*

Alec groans, though his mouth tilts up at the brusque reply.

For the millionth time in as many minutes, Alec rolls his eyes at his own behaviour. Christ, but he’s already whipped and he just hopes that no one else picks up on it because he’d never hear the end of it from Jace or Simon.

He’s set to meet Magnus at four and once it’s time, Alec heads to his bedroom where he spends twenty minutes trying to pick an outfit. Magnus still hasn’t given him an answer and Alec has no idea what to wear-- formal or comfortable, outdoor or indoor.

He takes a picture of his closet-- roughly the size of some New York apartments-- with a frowny face and *How am I supposed to decide what to wear when I don’t know where you’re taking me?*

Alec shoves the phone back in his sweats and mulls over two outfits. He’s torn between slacks and a button down with an open throat or chinos with one of his Tombolo shirts.

He’s weighing the pros and cons of letting Magnus see one of his favorite shirts-- covered with flamingos and other exotic birds-- when his phone buzzes. Alec hurriedly takes it out of his pocket, and scowls.

*All I’ll say is we’ll be outside for the majority of the evening :)*

Okay, he can admit that he’s intrigued. Most of Alec’s dates are dinner and a party afterward. No
thrills and definitely not exposing the two of them to the elements.

At least that gives him something to go on, though. Alec nixes the idea of formal wear. It’s late July and New York is downright miserable in the summer. Wearing a button down would make him melt.

Decision made, he quickly changes into the pants, rolling them to expose his ankles and throws on his flamingo shirt. He slides his feet into plain Nikes— they could be walking for miles, who knows—and snags his sunglasses.

With one last cursory look in the mirror, Ale shrugs. This is as good as it’s gonna get and he gets a little laugh at his shirt. He loves the punch of character and hopes that Magnus can appreciate it, too.

Campus isn’t terribly far, so Alec sets out to walk, pausing at the doors to his apartment to slide his sunglasses on.

It’s a beautiful day, sunny with giant puffy clouds overhead and overall not a bad day for an outdoor date. Alec takes his time and relishes the fact that no one stops him or stares at him a touch too long. He’ll never understand it but some days Alec can’t go anywhere without a mob collecting behind him but other times, it’s like he’s well and truly anonymous.

Once he reaches the edges of campus, Alec takes out his phone and enters the building information into Google Maps. It looks like Bowman Hall-- where the history department is located-- is almost all the way across campus, because of course it is.

Alec’s thankful that it’s a Tuesday during the summer because if it was during the regular school year, then there would be no way that he would be able to walk without interruption. As it is, Alec catches one or two heads snap up to him, incredulous.

He doesn’t stay in one place long enough for anyone to say anything and makes a concerted effort to stare straight ahead or down at his phone. He reaches Bowman Hall, a several story building made of stone with floor to ceiling windows along one section, and reaches for the door handle as a trio is walking out.

Holding the door open for them curiously, he throws them a smile. They ignore him and it sounds like they’re arguing passionately about robotics of all things so Alec waits until they’ve all passed before swinging around and entering the building.

It takes him a few minutes to find the third floor-- there are a billion staircases that only go up one floor at a time-- but he finds the history department offices with five minutes to spare.

Shoving his phone into his pocket, he walks into the main area and sees a letter board that lists the faculty and their office numbers. His eyes scan down the names until he sees Dr. Bane and he doesn’t try to repress the shiver that travels up his spine.

His boyfriend is smart as fuck Alec thinks proudly.

He goes down one of two corridors and slowly passes each door. As he rounds the corner, he passes a man and they share perfunctory nods without speaking.

Magnus’s office is the furthest from the main area, and as Alec walks up to the open door, he smiles at the sight. He leans against the door jamb for a minute, just watching Magnus in his natural habitat.

To his delight, Magnus is wearing a pair of black framed glasses that are slipping down his nose as he reads over something. He’s holding a red pen and spins it around his fingers before bringing it to his mouth to chew on absently. A second later, Magnus is writing something on the page he’s
reading, eyes narrowed.

Alec’s mouth goes dry at the sight and he clears his throat, shifting.

Who knew that professors really did it for him, apparently.

Magnus looks up from his desk at the noise, expression immediately easing. “Alexander,” he greets warmly.

Taking a step into the surprisingly small office, Alec smiles. “Hey there. Did I catch you at a bad time?”

Magnus waves that away as he stands and motions Alec closer. “Of course not, we agreed to meet at four and I do love punctuality in a partner. Did you find the building okay?”

“It was a breeze finding Bowman but it took me longer than it should have to find your actual office.”

Laughing, Magnus winces. “I should have given you directions once you got here. This building was built in the 1890s and they just kept adding to it as they needed more space. It’s a mash of eight buildings rolled into one. There are some seniors that don’t know their way around this place.”

Alec steps closer until he’s behind Magnus’s desk. He leans against it, one foot still on the floor, and pulls Magnus in between his splayed thighs. Magnus goes willingly, wrapping his arms around Alec’s shoulders and ducking in for a quick kiss.

“I’ll always find you,” Alec murmurs, gaze fixed on Magnus’s mouth.

Magnus grins as he leans forward, kissing along Alec’s jaw. “My knight in shining armor,” he replies before Alec brings him back up, pulling him in for a scorching kiss.

This isn’t the first time they’ve done this but it just keeps getting better. That’s never been the case for Alec before and he wants to sink into the feeling. Usually after the first time-- the first kiss, the first fuck-- Alec’s over it. No one’s been interesting enough to return to for seconds unless it was sheer convenience and boredom.

With Magnus though, Alec just wants to dive deeper. Kissing Magnus makes heat sear through him while there’s an undertone of comfort and increasing familiarity. He can’t explain it and as Magnus slips his tongue in his mouth, Alec decides handily to stop thinking all together.

Alec’s hands fall to Magnus’s hips and he urges Magnus even closer, both of them gasping as they find a fit together that makes heat build. Alec loses himself in a kissing jag while desire taps insistently at his spine.

One of Magnus’s hands shift to Alec’s neck, thumb pressing down, and Alec’s helpless to contain the low moan that escapes him. Magnus presses down just a touch harder at the noise, tilting Alec’s head to deepen the kiss and Alec gasps even as his hips buck, pressing him more firmly against Magnus.

Magnus doesn’t seem to have an issue with that as he groans against Alec’s mouth, hand sliding from his shoulders down to his thigh, stroking roughly before lifting it so that Alec gets the hint, hitching it around Magnus’s hip.

From there, it devolves quickly into lazy grinding as Alec settles against the desk, Magnus surrounding him. It’s been days since he first tasted Magnus and already Alec knows that he won’t
ever get enough.

Minutes pass in the quiet of Magnus’s office. Alec never thought that he’d find himself making out on top of a professor’s desk but here he is and he has the definite thought that he didn’t know what he was missing.

It’s hot and intense and as Alec tastes the lingering hints of tea on Magnus’s tongue-- something dark with a hint of spice-- he feels almost drunk on it.

He doesn’t hear the footsteps coming closer. They’d neglected to close Magnus’s door and anyone walking past would get quite an eyeful.

Alec’s just started distractedly pulling Magnus’s shirt out from where it’s tucked into his dress pants-- Magnus’s hands buried in his hair-- when they break apart for breath, breathing harshly.

Alec’s gaze immediately drops to Magnus’s mouth, delightfully red and swollen, when he feels Magnus’s focus shift.

“Professor Bane?”

It takes a heartbeat for Alec to register the new voice and what it must mean. He turns around to face the door and sees a student hovering at the doorway, looking uncertain. Magnus shakes his head a little as though to clear it before hastily stepping away from Alec. Alec, for his part, slides off the desk and moves to stand near the window, out of the way.

“Julia? What brings you to my office on a Tuesday?”

Shifting, Julia resettles her bag over her shoulder before saying, “I missed class this morning and just wanted to get a copy of the notes.” She looks between Magnus and him, biting her lip. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

Magnus waves that away as he looks down at his desk. His hands hover in the air, moving over the desk as if he’s looking for something and Alec has a feeling that Magnus is more affected by their kiss than he’s trying to let on. It takes him another moment to find the folder he needs and he opens it quickly, taking out a few paper clipped pages and handing them to Julia.

“Here you go, dear. This morning’s notes along with the assignment due Friday.”

Julia takes the packet, scanning over the pages before looking up questioningly. “Do I need to bring this back to you or is it a copy?”

“I have a file kept on my computer so don’t worry about returning it to me. Is there anything else you needed?”

“No, this is it,” Julia says as she waves the notes. “Thanks Dr. Bane. I’ll see you Friday.”

“Goodbye Julia. Make sure to make note of any questions you have for our tutoring session in the afternoon.”

Julia salutes, grinning, as she turns to leave the office, giving Alec one last considering look.

Alec smiles at her even as he grimaces. He knows that look and he just hopes to hell that she didn’t have the time to take a photo-- or god forbid a video-- of what she walked in on.

It’s silent for a minute after the student leaves and Alec waits for Magnus to make the next move.
This is his space and Alec doesn’t want to make the wrong move.

After a second, Magnus rolls back his shoulders, clearing his throat as he throws Alec an amused glance. “Well, I certainly wasn’t expecting that.”

“The student? Or the groping?”

Laughing, Magnus takes the few steps over to Alec, wrapping his arms around his waist. “Either,” he says dryly. He smooths down Alec’s shirt, smile growing just a bit wider as he takes in the design. “Cute shirt.”

Alec smiles, pleased. “It’s one of my favorites.”

“Really?”

“Well,” Magnus says, letting his hands wander over Alec’s chest, “I think it suits you. And it’s altogether too perfect for what I had planned.”

“Oh? Do I finally get to know where you’re taking me,” Alec asks.

Releasing a long suffering sigh, Magnus says, “We, dear Alexander, are going to the zoo.”

“Apart,” Alec repeats, delighted.

“Well,” Magnus says slowly. “At first I was going to invite you back to my place to finish Twilight.” Magnus looks at Alec from under his lashes as he smiles faintly. “However, after what just happened, I think I’ll invite you back to my place and we can just see what happens.”

Alec’s breath catches at the invitation and he leans forward, nosing along Magnus’s cheek. “You don’t think you’ll be too tired after a day at the zoo to-- to watch Twilight,” he murmurs, ducking down to kiss the side of Magnus’s neck.

“Apart feels Magnus laugh, hears it change to a low groan as he leaves an open-mouthed kiss over his pulse point, laving at the steady beat before biting down just enough to sting before soothing it with his tongue. He repeats the process a few times before moving back to admire his handiwork.

Magnus’s pupils are blown wide and his bottom lip is red from where he’d been worrying it with his teeth. The look he sends Alec makes him wish they weren’t still in Magnus’s office but with a sigh, Alec steps back, grinning at the look of betrayal that flashes over his boyfriend’s face.

“Ready for our date?”

Magnus glares at him for a long beat before he groans loudly, letting his head fall back so that he can stare at the ceiling. After a beat Magnus straightens, smoothing his shirt down and tucking it back in
from where Alec had pulled it.

He sends Alec a dry look. “You’re a menace.”

Unrepentant, Alec shrugs, running his hands through his hair to give it at least a semblance of order. “It’s not my fault you’re so damn irresistible.”

Magnus shakes his head before reaching over the desk and opening the top drawer, snagging his keys and phone. “Ready,” he asks, turning to the door.

“After you.”

It’s appallingly obvious what they’ve been doing. Hurriedly setting their clothes to rights couldn’t mask the redness of Magnus’s lips or the way his eyes were just a hint brighter than usually. Alec was sure that he looked just as debauched if not worse.

He doesn’t really give a damn.

It’s a beautiful sunny day and his boyfriend is taking him on a date. There are worse things than looking like they were just caught in flagrante delicto.

Which, Alec thinks wryly, isn’t far from the truth.

“How were classes,” he asks as Magnus guides him down a flight of stairs.

“They were fine,” Magnus answers. They take the steps together, walking side by side. “I’m almost certain that a student showed up to class with vodka in their water bottle but I was too far away to tell and they didn’t cause a scene, so,” he shrugs.

Alec turns to look at him as they start on the next flight down. “A student was just drinking liquor?”

Magnus’s lips quirk as he sends Alec a pitying glance. “Oh, darling, no need to act so scandalized. That’s downright tame compared to some of the things I’ve seen. At least they had the common sense to put it in a colorful reusable water bottle and not the paper bag it comes in.”

“People are really that stupid,” Alec asks, incredulous.

“Alec, these are college kids and they think of me as their woefully out of touch professor who couldn’t find his ass from a hole in the ground. I may be more well-liked and respected than other professors on campus but I’m very much the them to their us. I’ve had students try-- and dare I say, sometimes succeed-- at much worse. Hell knows the antics I got up to in college,” Magnus adds thoughtfully, wry quirk to his mouth.

Alec laughs as they hit the front doors to the building. “Which zoo are we going to?”

They walk down a winding path that trails between buildings. They don’t hold hands or touch in anyway but Alec’s hyper aware of Magnus’s presence next to him. Alec shoves his hands in his pockets to keep from reaching out and when Magnus’s shoulder bumps into his for a brief second, he ducks his head, smiling at Magnus who returns it with an innocent look.

“There’s a zoo that’s within walking distance. That’s why I asked you to meet me. I thought I could show you around campus and it would save some time if I left straight from work.”

“Eager to see me,” Alec teases, nudging his shoulder to Magnus’s.

One of Magnus’s hands reaches up as he fiddles with his ear cuff. “It’s not my fault that you’re so
damn irresistible,” he says, repeating Alec’s words from earlier.

Alec laughs and as they walk across campus, he listens attentively as Magnus describes the buildings and special places they pass. Magnus falls naturally into a bit of a lecture tone and Alec can’t help but think that he’d be a model student if he had Magnus as his professor.

They reach the gates of the zoo after a little walk and before Alec can reach for his wallet, Magnus is already handing the cashier his card. He send Alec a droll, satisfied smirk. “It’s my turn to treat you darling, put that thing away.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec acquiesces and Magnus grabs two maps, holding one out for him to take.

They start at the beginning with the elephants and quickly lose themselves in the meandering afternoon. There are tigers and monkeys and an arctic exhibit and when they get to the giraffes, Alec about dies of excitement.

Magnus watches fondly as he goes right up the the barrier, hastily taking out his phone to capture a picture-- or twelve.

“I didn’t know that you were so into giraffes, Alexander.”

“They’re my favorite animal,” Alec responds distractedly, watching as the giraffe reaches up the tree to tear some leaves from it.

He almost doesn’t notice as Magnus comes closer, leaning against his side companionably. Alec relaxes into the touch, turning his head to see Magnus staring resolutely in front of him at the exhibit with a faint smile on his face.

“What is your favorite animal,” Alec asks, curious.

Humming as he thinks about it, Magnus takes his phone out, unlocking the camera. “Probably snow leopards, though I do have a weakness for penguins,” he admits.

He sends Alec a look. “What do you say to a pic? A photo to commemorate the occasion?”

Grinning, Alec replies, “My boyfriend taking me to the zoo? Bet your ass we’re getting a picture.”

Magnus laughs, head falling back and Alec loses his breath for just a millisecond. He’s just so beautiful, Alec thinks, and it feels like something shifts.

“Alright, let’s do this then.”

They turn so that the giraffe is at their back and Magnus raises his arm, playing with the angles to get the photo just right. They take a few and luckily the giraffe perfectly framed in the background.

“Send those to me,” Alec says as Magnus pockets his phone once again.

Agreeing, they move on to the next exhibit. They spend a couple of hours at the zoo until their feet start hurting and it’s closing time, the sun low in the sky.

Exiting the gates, Alec ruminates that this is one of the best dates that he’s ever had. Wryly, he acknowledges that any date with Magnus is his favorite.

He’s just set to ask where the ice cream is at, when Magnus grabs his hand and pulls him in one direction, looking back with laughter in his eyes. “Ready for dessert,” he asks and Alec grins as he interlaces their fingers.
“Lead the way.”

It’s just a few minutes away and they’re stopping at the corner of an intersection where there’s a hot dog stand and a food truck that seems to specialize in sweets. Slowing to a stop, Magnus gives Alec time to look at the menu before saying, “They have anything you could want but I think their twist cone is the best I’ve ever had.”

“Then that’s what I’ll get,” Alec says easily. He lets Magnus order as he looks around. The after-work crowd is just starting to thin and it’s more couples out, heading to dinner now. In his periphery he sees the someone hastily lower their phone and sighs. Damn.

Magnus moves back until he’s standing next to Alec and Alec leans close to whisper in his ear, “I think someone just took our picture. Are you okay with that?”

Magnus is still for a moment, obviously thinking, before he relaxes against Alec’s side. He tilts his face up to meet his eyes and Alec internally releases a sigh of relief at the good humor in Magnus’s gaze.

“I think that we’ve been a little too blatant not to expect someone to see something. I’m okay with it,” he says firmly. “You?”

Shrugging, Alec replies, “Cameras don’t really phase me anymore unless I’m with someone who doesn’t like the public eye. I’m used to it. I just want to make sure you’re fine.”

“I’m more than fine,” Magnus says and his fingers brush Alec’s as the food truck employee calls out their order.

They both step forward and grab their cones, piled high with vanilla and chocolate soft serve. The first lick is the best and Alec gives Magnus an impressed look. It’s a classic, simple dessert but there’s just something really good about it. It’s creamy and sweet and Alec has to admit that Magnus knows his ice cream.

“Yum,” he says as he takes another lick, trying to keep the ice cream from dripping over his hand.

They start walking, enjoying their ice cream and it takes a while for Alec to realize that he recognizes their surroundings.

“You live close,” he asks, taking the first bite of his cone.

Magnus takes another swipe of his dessert before replying. “I’m just around the corner,” he confirms. He looks over at Alec with a hint of a smirk gracing his features. “Want to come up for some coffee?”

“I love coffee,” Alec says seriously and they both laugh as the turn the corner and Magnus takes his keys out.

Opening the door for him, Magnus follows Alec through the lobby toward the elevator where they don’t have to wait for entering.

In the suddenly small space, Alec is even more aware of Magnus than he’d been earlier this evening. He looks over and sees smudged eyeliner and hair a little messier than usual. There’s a smudge of ice cream along his low lip and Alec reaches out, swiping it up before making eye contact with Magnus and popping his thumb into his mouth, sucking the minuscule bit of chocolate away.

“Thank you,” Magnus murmurs, eyes glued to Alec’s mouth.
“Thank you for a really nice date. I had a great time,” Alec whispers into the air between them.

“I’m glad,” Magnus says softly. “I thought you might like an informal night out and I know that I prefer low maintenance evenings after a long work day.”

The two of them move closer together until there’s barely an inch of space between them. “I really like being with you,” Alec admits.

Magnus’s lips tilt at the corners as he says, “I really like being with you too, Alexander.”

He’s just set to close that last bit of distance when the elevator dings and the doors open. There’s a moment of breathless stillness in the elevator before they both break into laughter, shaking their heads at their behavior.

“We really need to settle down,” Alec says.

Looking over his shoulder as he inserts the key into the lock, Magnus grins. “Now what’s the fun in that?”

“I’ll show you fun,” Alec murmurs and Magnus turns as Alec moves forward, leaning against his front door as Alec comes to stand in front of him. There’s a beat, an electric pause before Alec leans down even as Magnus rushes up, mouths meeting in a searing kiss that’s hot as soon as it starts.

Magnus’s back hits the door with a thud as he pulls Alec closer, widening his stance so that Alec can settle more firmly against him.

Alec breaks away from Magnus’s mouth with a muttered curse as he starts mouthing along his neck instead. He licks over the place he’d left an almost imperceptible hickey earlier and he’s rewarded as Magnus releases a moan right into his ear, tugging on the short hair along his nape.

“Please, Alexander,” Magnus breathes and Alec pulls back to see that Magnus’s cheeks are already flushed, color riding high.

“Maybe we should move this inside,” Alec says, raising a brow. The last thing they need is one of Magnus’s neighbors seeing them like this.

Nodding, Magnus fumbles with the door knob, cursing under his breath before it opens and they all but fall into the loft.

Alec immediately resumes kisses Magnus, kicking the door closed haphazardly behind him. Magnus buries a hand in Alec’s hair while the other starts unbuttoning Alec’s shirt, messily slipping a button at a time until it’s hanging open. Magnus pulls back, letting his gaze fall to Alec’s chest with hungry eyes.

He lays a hand over Alec’s heart, dragging it down slowly down until Alec’s stomach tightens at the touch. “Christ,” he says dazedly.

Eager to return the favor, Alec shrugs out of his shirt before getting to work on Magnus’s, unbuttoning the row easily if not quite fast enough to suit him.

He wishes distantly that he had magic so that they could just instantly lose their clothes, though he can’t deny the anticipation that’s thrumming through him at every inch of newly exposed skin. He pushes Magnus’s shirt off his shoulders, letting it fall to the floor and he takes in Magnus, losing his goddamn breath at the set of abs that he’s mildly jealous of.
“Nice,” is all he says and Magnus barks out a laugh before Alec’s back to kissing him. It’s just as intense even if the pace has slowed down a little. The frenzy has, at least temporarily, left them and Alec indulges in slow, deep kisses as he follows wherever Magnus is leading him. They kick off their shoes somewhere along the hallway, and Alec laughs a little as they trip over one of Magnus’s shoes.

He has enough wherewithal to know that they’ve just passed a doorway but then Magnus rests his hand against the placket of his jeans and Alec gasps, bucking into the hold. They break for much needed air as Magnus runs a thumb over his length and Alec bites his lip to keep some embarrassing sound down.

“Oh no,” Magnus says, turning so that he’s pushing Alec further into the room. “I want to hear you, darling.”

The back of Alec’s knees hit Magnus’s bed and he tumbles back, Magnus following him much more gracefully until he’s leaning over Alec, looking like a tiger about to pounce.

“This okay,” he asks, fingers trailing over Alec, playing along his waistband. The light touch makes him dizzy and he just wants more.

“Definitely,” Alec says, and tries to ignore just how breathless he is already. Magnus has barely even touched him and he already feels like a teenager, too close to coming at the mere thought of Magnus on him.

Magnus takes his time, leaning down to kiss along Alec’s neck, biting before soothing, moving further down to nibble along his collarbones.

Alec’s tense in anticipation and when he feels Magnus unbuttoning his jeans— and taking his damn time doing so— he reaches for him, pulling Magnus back until their lips can reconnect. The kissing now is slower and Alec hums as he feels Magnus’s tongue along the seam of his lips, opening without thought.

It’s a lot. Alec can’t quite remember the last time he felt so immersed in pleasure. His hookups were always more perfunctory than feeling— in the back of his head he was always thinking about how quickly he could make his escape after things concluded— but as he lets his legs fall open so that Magnus can have easier access, he feels like he’s totally at Magnus’s mercy and he loves it.

Magnus keeps kissing him as he finally undoes the final button and Alec hopes are desperately dashed as Magnus doesn’t immediately wrap a hand around him. Instead, he pulls back, urging Alec to shove his jeans down, out of the way.

Which he does with alacrity.

Once he’s just in his plain black pair of boxer-briefs, he pulls his knees up, giving Magnus more room to work with.

Magnus doesn’t do anything at first, just stares his fill and Alec knows what he must be seeing. He feels a little fucked out already, heat pooling in his cheeks, that flush sweeping down to his chest. His hair must be a bird’s nest from the way Magnus was handling him earlier and his cock is an obscene length tenting the front of his underwear.

Magnus finally moves but it isn’t where Alec wants him most. No, instead he trails a hand along Alec’s thigh, over his chest, nails scratching softly at his stomach.

“Aren’t you a vision,” he murmurs and Alec feels coveted.
He lets himself drift as Magnus touches his fill, those lingering sensations enough to ground him while still sweeping him higher, closer.

When those touches stop, Alec opens his eyes, frustrated, and glowing with hunger. Magnus hushes him as he leans over him, reaching for the nightstand.

When he takes out the small bottle of lube, Alec can feel himself relax against the golden sheets. *Finally.*

Magnus must read his expression easily, for he laughs as he clicks the bottle open, pouring a generous amount into his hand. “I need you naked, darling. We’ll talk about your tragic lack of patience later.”

Alec huffs out a laugh as he discards his underwear. He reaches a hand down but Magnus intercepts him, chiding. “I’ll be taking care of that, thank you very much.”

Alec’s retort disappears as Magnus wraps a hand around him, firm and warm and altogether too goddamn good.

His hips buck up, already begging for more, and Magnus gives it to him in slow, sure strokes that make Alec feel the fire licking up his spine. Magnus takes a few minutes, leisurely getting him off and watching the show before he leans over Alec, kissing him as he continues.

Alec moans into his mouth as Magnus rotates his wrist, squeezing more firmly for a beat or two before returning to his regular rhythm. Alec feels completely surrounded by Magnus and as he feels his orgasm growing steadily closer, he’s helpless to keep the small noises from escaping. Magnus’s hand moves to the head of his cock, paying it special attention and Alec swears as he thrusts into Magnus’s hand, seeking that heat.

“Tell me what you like, Alexander.”

Magnus whispers into Alec’s ear and he almost comes from the combination of Magnus’s voice so close and the hand wrapped around his cock.

“Slow,” Alec gasps. “Harder.”

Magnus heeds his direction and as Alec grinds into Magnus’s hand, relishing the warmth, the friction, Alec groans, long and low.

He’s still missing something, though, but goddamn if he knows what. He reaches a hand up tugging at his own hair and pulls Magnus to him for a messy kiss that’s more tongue than anything else.

It isn’t until Magnus carefully, lightly scratches a nail down the vein running along the underside of his cock that Alec sees fucking stars, coming with a hoarse cry. Magnus rides him out until he’s too sensitive and shies away.

Still breathing harshly, Alec briefly contemplates never moving again before he opens his eyes and sees Magnus watching him, pupils blown and lips bitten red.

“C’mere,” he murmurs and Magnus moves until he’s straddling Alec as Alec reaches for his pants, unbuttoning them expertly with one hand while reaching for the lube in the other. Magnus shoves his pants down until his cock is freed, hard and leaking at just getting Alec off.

He doesn’t waste a moment before reaching for Magnus, wrapping a hand around him and he shivers as he feels the hot length, as Magnus shudders and buries his head into Alec’s neck.
He varies his tempo until he reaches a rhythm that elicits these deliciously choked off groans and whimpering from Magnus.

“Yes, fuck, Jesus Christ Alexander,” Magnus mumbles and bites down, hard, on Alec’s neck as he comes, spilling over Alec’s fingers.

It’s a few moments before Magnus raises up to his elbows, gaze roaming over Alec’s face with a grin. “Well, that was certainly fun.”

“It was,” Alec agrees and steadies a hand against Magnus’s waist as he straightens up. With his other, come still dripping over knuckles, he brings it up to his mouth and waits until he sees that he has Magnus’s undivided attention before delicately swiping at the mess with his tongue. He’s pretty sure that he can physically pinpoint the second Magnus’s brain goes offline as he licks his hand clean.

“Fuck me,” Magnus says dazedly, eyes scorching hot.

“Not yet,” Alec says easily and laughs as Magnus shoves at his shoulder.

“We should probably clean up,” Magnus says with a sigh and Alec hums in agreement.

Magnus doesn’t climb off of Alec right away, though. Instead, he brings Alec up until he’s sitting, raising his head up for a deep kiss.

It spins out for long moments, the heat banked for now. When Magnus pulls back, they’re both breathless and sporting smiles that light up their faces.

Magnus clamors off Alec and Alec follows, taking in Magnus’s bedroom while his boyfriend heads to his dresser.

The bed is covered in rumpled gold sheets and the room itself is huge with rich brocade and exposed brick. All in all, it looks like how he would imagine Magnus’s bedroom to be and something flutters in his stomach at the thought that he has an idea of what Magnus’s preferences are.

Magnus pushed the drawer closed, turning around with two pairs of clothes in his arms. “I thought you might not want to put your jeans back on so I have an extra pair of sweats. Unless, of course, you weren’t figuring on staying?”

Alec takes in Magnus’s expression as he slowly says, “I didn’t come up here just to get my mind blown, Magnus. I believe I was promised a continuation of the Twilight movies.” He raises a brow. “Unless you’re not a man of your word?”

Magnus laughs, pulling Alec close to place a lingering kiss against his lips. “Of course not, darling. Let’s change and then we can start-- Eclipse was it?”

Alec shrugs-- he honestly has no idea-- and takes the clothes Magnus gives him, heading to the bathroom where he washes his hands and changes into the surprisingly well-fitting clothes.

They’re on the couch soon enough and Magnus slides the dvd into the player as Alec takes out his phone, scrolling through notifications.

He opens Instagram, choosing a photo that Magnus had taken of him eating his ice cream earlier with the caption *The company was sweeter.*

He posts it a minute later and as Magnus settles against his side, pulling down the blanket from the
back of the couch and throwing it over them, Alec sears this moment into his memory. This is the first time he’s ever lingered after a hookup-- the first time he’s ever wanted too-- and he feels so much that he absently wonders how a body can hold it all.

Magnus takes out his phone and Alec sees that he’s opened Twitter. It’s quiet as the opening credits begin to play before Magnus’s voice breaks through.

“You’re hot news today, darling. And apparently, so am I.”

Alec looks over, raising a brow in question as he sees Magnus holding his phone up so that he can see a picture someone must have taken of them at the zoo. Alec throws a quick glance at Magnus before taking the phone, scrolling through the trending tag and seeing a dozen photos of him walking on Columbia’s campus solo along with pictures of the two of them at the zoo.

He has a brief moment to thank that TMZ hadn’t picked up on yet before he scrolls through the tweets and sees the accompanying hashtag. “Malec,” he asks, looking up to see if Magnus knows what’s going on.

Smiling softly, Magnus moves imperceptibly closer. “I think that’s our ship name. Magnus and Alec-- malec.”

Alec rolls his eyes, though he can’t help but smile at the insinuation. He likes his name linked with Magnus’s.

He sees a few fans speculating and looks up again. “What do you want to do?”

Magnus hums, narrowing his eyes as he thinks before looking at Alec. “I say go for it.”

Grinning, Alec likes a few tweets.

*Omg, isn’t that Magnus guy a professor? What if that’s why Alec’s on campus??*

*They look so cute watching the lions together!!!! It’s what he deserves!! #malec*

*I bet Alec lost his shit at the giraffes ksdjfgkdflg but look how Alec’s looking at Magnus instead of the exhibits:) when will your fave ever!*

Magnus watches as he likes the tweets before turning to watch the movie. The room is dim as the tv plays and when Magnus softly asks, “Want to spend the night? It’s getting late,” Alec doesn’t even think of refusing.
“Morning, Alexander.”

Alec opens his eyes, wincing as the early morning sunlight filters through Magnus’s sheer curtains. Turning his head away, he sees Magnus already watching him, propped up on one elbow.

“Morning,” Alec rasps. “What time is it?”

Magnus doesn’t move for a second, doesn’t stop trailing a finger over Alec’s stomach and chest in a lazy pattern. Finally with a small smile Magnus sighs, sitting up to peer over him to see the clock on the nightstand.

“It’s just before seven. Why? Places to be? Or eager to escape my clutches?”

Sinking deeper into the bed-- Alec’s going to have to ask where Magnus bought the damn thing because it feels like a fucking cloud-- Alec hums. “I’m shooting a music video later but I can spare a few minutes.”

“Yes,” Magnus asks, leaning down to start kissing Alec-- behind his ear, leaving a path down his neck before Alec feels the graze of teeth.

“Yes,” Alec echoes, breathless, and urges Magnus closer, bringing his head up to kiss him properly.

It’s different than last night. Everything is slower and Alec can’t help but feel like it’s all more in a way he can’t pin down. He’s overwhelmingly aware of Magnus leaning over him, shifting until he’s between Alec’s thighs. He just wants to surrender, wants to let Magnus carry him wherever he wants. Alec’s content in the morning silence in a way he couldn’t have predicted.

He’s struck by the thought that it just keeps getting better. He’s not growing bored of Magnus. If anything he’s falling deeper, every kiss and touch and shared breath between them making Alec crave more.

The more he gets, the more he wants.

Alec hums as Magnus’s hands go to his wrists, thumbs brushing softly over his pulse. It makes the fire burn just a little hotter, fans the embers that have been banked since last night.

Things turn a little more heated and it’s Magnus who moans low when Alec widens his legs and hitches a leg over his hip, bringing him that much closer.

Everything seems slow and sure and Alec wants to ignore everything else, could stay here for ages with Magnus pinning him down and kissing him like it’s his top priority. Alec feels content in the warm sunshine, in Magnus’s bed, and it’s a feeling that he doesn’t want to let go.

Too bad for him then that work is calling his name.

Magnus pulls back, sweeping a hand down Alec’s arm to land at his side. He leans over Alec, breath harsh in the quiet stillness of the morning and it takes everything Alec has not to pull him back down and say fuck it to his schedule.

“I have to go,” Alec says, biting his lip to keep from immediately reneging his words.
“Oh,” Magnus murmurs, bending over Alec to nibble at a collarbone, kissing a trail over Alec’s chest.

Humming, Alec doesn’t say anything, just relaxes against the sheets, running a hand through Magnus’s hair. He feels himself slipping but before that can happen, a phone goes off, startling both of them by blasting a popular song at full volume.

Magnus curses and straightens, leaning over his side of the bed, and reaching for the phone charging on his side’s nightstand. Alec steadies him with a hand at his waist and Magnus fumbles, swiping a few times before successfully turning it off. The immediate silence is jarring and Alec doesn’t get a chance to say anything before Magnus sighs heavily.

Straddling Alec, Magnus leans over him with his hands on either side of Alec’s head, effectively caging him in.

“Good morning, darling.”

“Morning, babe,” Alec replies unthinking.

Magnus’s mouth quirks into an amused yet fond smile. “Babe?”

Alec raises his brows, “I guess.”

“You guess,” Magnus teases.

Shrugging, Alec can’t help the goofy ass grin he just knows has overtaken his face. “It just came out, honestly.”

Narrowing his eyes, Magnus stares down at Alec for a moment before his expression eases into something playfully beleaguered. “Well, then I guess that I can handle being called babe by the Alexander Lightwood.”

“Alec to most people,” he can’t help but say.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Do you not like me calling you Alexander?” Magnus all but purrs his name, seems to linger on every syllable until it sounds downright filthy and Alec can’t help but take Magnus’s chin in his grasp pulling him down for a lingering kiss.

“I love it,” he breathes into the space between them and Alec sees Magnus’s eyes light up before he’s pulling him back down.

Alec flips them, swallowing Magnus’s gasp and the minutes spin out as he loses himself kissing Magnus. In the back of his head he knows that he needs to leave the loft, leave Magnus, or he’s in real danger of being late to the studio.

Alec’s never been late professionally. He’s always on time for most things, but when it concerns his career, Alec has never shirked his duty. Appearances are everything and Alec’s earned a reputation as a reliable artist stubbornly and deliberately. He can’t stand people who waste his time, who play into the industry hype about temperamental, unpredictable musicians.

For the first time in over ten years, Alec wants to ignore his responsibilities, wishes that he could give in to the low grade lust that running through him.

It makes him feel a little unsteady, like he’s lost his mooring. His career has always been his rock, the most important thing in his life. It still is but Alec can’t deny that Magnus’s pull on him is inexorable.
There’s a first time for everything, Alec reflects wryly and smiles against Magnus’s mouth before pulling back.

He takes in Magnus’s flushed cheeks and red lips and almost gives back in before taking a sharp breath to clear his head.

“I have to go,” Alec says, breathing hard.

Magnus looks like he’s going to argue before he sighs again, wrapping his arms around Alec’s neck, fingers slowly sweeping against his nape. “That was my alarm for work,” he says. “I have a class to teach in--” he steals a quick glance at the clock, “-- less than an hour.”

“I should let you get ready then,” Alec says, leaning down to leave Magnus a smacking kiss before rolling off him and onto his feet.

Running a hand through his hair, Alec reaches for his own phone on his side of the bed.

He tries not to think about how soon it is to have a side of Magnus’s bed.

He sees the regular notifications and ignores the text from Jace that reads Get it bro!!!!!!

Magnus climbs out of bed and Alec wraps his arms around his waist as he tucks his phone into a pocket.

“It looks like my fans are still speculating.”

Resting his hands over Alec’s chest, Magnus asks, “And what do they have to say about us?”

“They’re like little detectives. I’ve seen one or two theorize about a few of my past tweets and look up yours from the same day. They’re definitely putting two and two together and arriving at four.”

“Well, then,” Magnus says easily. “It’s a good thing that we’re both comfortable with our acquaintance coming to light.”

Grinning, Alec says, “ Acquaintances? Is that all we are?”

“I don’t want to be presumptuous,” Magnus says demurely.

“When the press gets wind of this-- if they haven’t already-- they’ll label you as everything from my secret husband to gold-digging opportunist. I hope you know what you’re getting yourself into,” Alec teases, though he can’t help the thread of worry lurking underneath his tone.

Magnus picks up on the tone, of course, and relaxes into Alec. His expression is soft, open, when he looks back up at Alec and meets his eyes.

“I’m in this, Alec. Relationships take effort and it just happens that being with you involves dealing with overzealous press. I’m made of sterner stuff than you might think.”

“Oh? You’ve dealt with paparazzi hiding in your bushes? Trailing your every move?”

Magnus looks down for a split second before he raises his head to meet Alec’s gaze. “You never know,” he says airily. “I could be hiding a scandal or two in my past that would give you a run for your money.”

“Yeah?” Alec grins, shaking his head. “Well then, I’m glad you’re old hat at dodging asshole paps.”
Alec takes in the way Magnus ducks his head, playing coy again. He takes in the way the light softens his boyfriend’s face, making him looked carved from the warmest gold. Something clutches at his chest and Alec sinks into it. “Maybe you can even teach me a thing or two.”

“You’d be surprised, darling, at just how much I could teach you.”

“Consider me a willing student, then,” Alec laughs. He knows that there are a million and one things that he doesn’t know about Magnus. For all intents and purposes, they’re still at the beginning stage of this relationship.

Alec’s looking forward to learning more about Magnus. Distantly, he thinks that he could have decades and it still wouldn’t be enough time to know everything about the man standing in front of him.

Alec catches sight of the clock again and swears. “I really have to go now or I’ll be late.”

Magnus pulls him in for a searing kiss that’s over as soon as it begins. “Go then, darling. I’d hate to keep you from work.”

Alec takes a step back. “You have no idea how hard it is to leave, right now.”

“Oh, I think I have an idea,” Magnus says dryly. He waves a hand towards the door. “Now, shoo, or you won’t be the only one who’s late today.”

Smiling, Alec leaves the bedroom, just in time to hear Magnus mutter under his breath, “He’s lucky he’s so cute.”

Once in the proper living area, Alec snags his keys before leaving Magnus’s loft. He knows that he’s sporting a dopey grin but he can’t help himself. He feels good, recharged. Alec has to admit that he slept better last night than he has in ages. He doesn’t know if it was Magnus’s bed or Magnus himself but he feels like he could take on the world.

Alec’s good mood lasts through the morning. He has barely enough time to run home and shower before he’s leaving again. Luckily, Dave was waiting for him and they pull up to location with just a few minutes to spare.

Alec waves at his driver before jogging the few steps to the front door of the studio they’ll be using today. It’s a popular photography and film agency that specializes in indie content. Alec’s worked with them a few times before and knows that they do excellent work and care about more than the frankly obscene check they’ll be cashing by the end of the day.

Simon’s already waiting for him in the space they’ve rented for the day. He looks up from his phone at Alec’s approach.

“Hey, man. I was about to call the National Guard. I expected to be the one running behind schedule, not you.”

“I was on time,” Alec says defensively.


“Was traffic especially terrible this morning,” Simon asks idly before his head snaps up and a look of
undisguised glee comes over his face. “No, wait. Am I witnessing a walk of shame?”

Alec just looks at Simon, unimpressed.

Simon lights up.

“How are things going, dude? Tell me they’re amazing.”

Alec does his best to maintain his expressionless facade but he can feel the cracks forming as he ducks his head to hide his smile. “They’re going pretty well,” he mutters.

He’s startled as Simon bounds to his feet, slapping the back of his hand against Alec’s shoulder. “You can’t just say that! I need details. What did you guys do last night.” He breaks off with a waggle of his eyebrows. “Unless that’s a conversation best had when there’s no chance of someone overhearing.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec gives in though it isn’t much of an effort at all to talk about Magnus. “I met him at his office last night and he took me to the zoo and then to get ice cream. We went back to his place and watched a movie and I ended up spending the night since it was so late.”

“That’s all?”

“That’s all I’m telling you,” Alec retorts.

Simon laughs, clapping him on the shoulder. “I’m happy for you, man. You deserve someone who makes you happy and judging from the way you look right now, Magnus is that guy.”

Alec smiles, this time genuinely. “Thanks, Si. That’s enough about me, though. Have you met anyone lately? I was thinking and I have a friend from school that recently moved back to the city. We had drinks a while ago and he told me that--”

“Actually, er-- that won’t be necessary. At least right now,” Simon cuts in.

Raising a brow, Alec’s intrigued. Simon usually doesn’t keep this kind of thing to himself. “Who’s the lucky person? Do I know them?” Alec thinks for a minute before groaning. “Oh, man. Tell me that it isn’t that dick of a sound tech from tour. You can do so much better, Simon.”

Simon shakes his head, looking affronted. “No, of course not! As if I’d be into Raj after the pasta fiasco. No, I’ve kinda been talking to someone for a few days. I know it’s early, but I’m okay to just see where this leads right now.”

“Who is it,” Alec asks, interest piqued.

Simon clears his throat. “I guess that you actually do know them? It’s-- Raphael? Magnus’s coworker?”

Alec flashes to Raphael who seems entirely too calm for Simon’s usual exuberance. “They say opposites attract,” Alec allows.

“That’s the beauty of it,” Simon cries. “He seems so stern and disapproving but he actually has a really great sense of humor and can talk about anything. Plus, he can wear a suit like no one I’ve ever seen before.”

Alec considers Simon as his friend sighs over Raphael. Simon is a constant surprise. “Have you seen him since we ran into them at lunch?”
Alec knows that he isn’t imagining the faint blush that crawls into Simon’s cheeks. “We went on a date last night.”

“Oh? Where?”

“He took me mini-golfing and then a taco truck. He doesn’t like chicken quesadillas but I’ve decided to forgive him since he took me not only put-putting but to the best place in the city for it.”

“Shipwrecked?”

“Shipwrecked,” Simon confirms.

Alec nods, impressed. Shipwrecked was Simon’s favorite venue for mini golfing and he’d held every birthday party at the place since he was fourteen.

“Was he a sore loser?”

Simon leans forward like he’s about to tell Alec that he wants to steal the Declaration of Independence. Alec is suitably weirded out, especially when Simon looks to his left and right to make sure no one is near. “He won.”

“And you still had dinner after?”

“Yeah! It was great. He was totally cute when he was playing, too. He really took the game seriously but we talked about everything from music to travel to whether sloths think in slow motion, too. I had a really good time.”

Alec takes in Simon’s grin, the way it seems like he can barely contain his enthusiasm. “I’m happy for you, man. If Magnus is friends with him then he must be a good person.”

The two of them look up as the door opens and someone pops their head in. “Sorry, gentlemen. My production team were running a little behind schedule. Are we ready to begin?”

The rest of the day— the next twelve hours— is busy as hell. Simon and Alec are herded into wardrobe and makeup for Alec’s music video, Empty Hearts. It’s his last single from his latest album, the last statement for that era. It’s a little bittersweet— it always is— but this time around, Alec feels excited more than anything else. He’s looking forward to the next era— Feel Something— and can’t wait to start recording in earnest.

They’ve only one day to shoot this video since Alec had a simple vision and had selected a company and director who shared his point of view. Empty hearts was one of the slower songs on the album and spoke about missed connections and if there was life off the road.

There were two story lines for the video. One was just Alec singing in front of a microphone in black and white, guitar in hand. The other story line involved Simon as his potential, star-crossed romantic lead.

Truthfully, Alec didn’t feel like faking anything with an actor, though he’s done that plenty of times before. Things were easy with Simon and that sense of camaraderie would translate well in the video. They filmed half a dozen scenes— most of them separately— and at the end of the day Simon and Alec are exhausted but Alec knows this video will be good. It’s nostalgic and sad but there’s that hopeful ending— now that Alec thinks about it— that will serve as a great transition into his next album’s vibe.

“Wanna get dinner,” Simon asks as they walk out of the studio into the dark. They’d spent the entire
day in the studio, working on take after take. They’re both exhausted and hungry and Alec’s sorely tempted but alas.

“Sorry, man, but I’m meeting Luke for a drink tonight. Another time?”

“Sounds good, man. I’ll just go home and probably crash as soon as I walk through the door.”

“Yeah? Are you sure you won’t stay up until midnight talking to Raphael,” Alec teases.

Simon scoffs but turns away from Alec to hide his expression. “Like you’re one to talk,” he mutters.

Laughing, Alec turns away from Simon as they head in different directions.

It’s not too much of a commute to Uptown Java and Alec enjoys the quiet. Even for a Wednesday evening, the streets are pretty empty. When he rounds the corner and comes up to the coffee shop, he walks in without hesitation, pausing at the front door for a spare moment to flip the open sign to closed.

“Hey man,” Luke drawls from where he’s counting down the register. “I wasn’t sure if you’d make it.”

Raising a brow, Alec walks up the the counter, leaning over it with his chin in his hand. “And why’s that?”

“Oh, you know. Maybe a certain professor distracted you.”

Alec grins, looking down at the bar and worrying a small chip in the wood. “So you’ve heard about that, huh?”

“Alec. We just talked about your feelings for the man last week. I’m expecting one hell of a Christmas present for being the one who finally got you two together.”

“Awfully full of yourself tonight, aren’t you,” Alec asks, laughing.

Luke raises a brow. “I don’t see you disagreeing with me.”

Shaking his head, Alec just admits, “So you helped a little. I think Magnus and I deserve just as much credit.”

With a pitying look, Luke just replies, “Whatever you have to tell yourself, kid.”

While Luke finishes with the day’s receipts, Alec goes to the back. Washing his hands in the sink, he grabs a rag and starts cleaning off tables, flipping the chairs onto the tables as he works through the cafe. The radio is playing a Top 40 station and Alec gets lost in a rhythm he used to know in his sleep.

It’s nice. It’s been ages— months at least— since Alec did any real work in the cafe. In high school, he worked here after school every day and through the summers. For the first few years after graduation, Alec would come back and pick up shifts whenever Luke needed him. It helped ground him, helped make him feel like a regular nineteen or twenty year old, no matter that he was selling out arenas and flying all over the world for events and concerts.

Like everything seems to these days, it fills Alec with a sense of that stupid sentimentality that he usually works his damnedest to keep down.

“Remember that one day when a cute guy smiled at you and you dropped an entire tray of coffee on
the floor,” Luke asks. Finished with the day’s work, he reaches under the counter and pulls out a half-full bottle of Jameson and two squat glasses.

Alec laughs as the memory bubbles up after all these years. “Of course I do. I was so embarrassed that I hid in the back until he and his friends left. Izzy and Jace didn’t let me live it down for weeks. It was mortifying.”

Pouring a generous amount of whiskey into both glasses, Luke rounds the counter, taking them to the two comfortable chairs in front of the window. Finishing the last table, Alec joins him, accepting the glass with a sigh.

“Yeah, but you got over it,” Luke says easily, in that philosophical tone that he has a penchant to use when the liquor is out. “Funny how things change, isn’t it?”

Alec takes a sip of the whiskey, sighing at the smooth burn. “Couldn’t agree more. I was what, fifteen? I thought that was the end of the world. If only I could have known that I would deal with much more embarrassing stories-- and publicly too.”

“Yeah,” Luke sighs. “You and your siblings know how to get into your share of scrapes.”

Chuckling, Alec shakes his head in amusement. “And you’re always there to bail us out or keep us from sinking into the ground.”

“That’s my job just as much as running this place,” Luke says, gesturing to the cozy, successful coffee shop. “Usually, it was more important. Still is, as a matter of fact.”

“Yeah, you were more of a father to me than Robert ever was, that’s for damn sure.” Alec has long considered Luke his real father. Luke was with him through every big thing that happened-- from first crush to first Grammy.

Robert is nothing to him and hasn’t been since Alec first became famous.


A little too easily.

Dread starts to simmer low in Alec’s gut at the too-smooth words. Robert usually pops up every few years and as Alec thinks, he’s annoyed that it is about time for his father to show his face again.

“What he’d do this time,” Alec asks flatly.

“He came here, last night. Just as we were closing.”

“And,” Alec prompts, voice even.

“He’s blackmailing you? That’s rich considering the media storm that happened when he left us for another woman.” Alec’s voice is scathing as he listens to Luke.

Shrugging, Luke takes a long drink from his glass. “It’s sad to say, but this isn’t anything unexpected. He’s grasping at straws but he must be particularly desperate.”

The two of them are quiet for a moment before, both thinking while finishing their whiskey.
“Do you have an address,” Alec asks, expressionless.

Luke reaches into his pocket and hands over a folded piece of paper. “I thought you might ask. It looks like he’s staying at the Four Seasons in Midtown. That’s where I’m supposed to make the drop.”

“How much?”

“He suggested-- subtly, of course-- that a few million would hold him off.”

Alec shakes his head, disgusted. “Of course he did. And how long did he give you to get the money?”

Laughing softly, Luke takes a sip of whiskey. “He was generous. I have until Friday.”

Scoffing, Alec gets up and takes Luke’s glass with his to the counter for a refill.

He’s calm, no doubt about it. Luke was right about one thing-- Robert was a snake that only slithered out from under his rock when he needed cash. While it stuck in his craw that he’d gone to Luke of all people, Alec knew that Luke could handle himself.


“Not yet. I figured you’d want to have your fun before I told her. Plus, she only visits a couple of times a year. I didn’t want to dampen her trip.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Alec says, returning to his seat with their second glasses.

Accepting his with a nod of thanks, Luke says, “I don’t doubt it.”

The two of them enjoy a few hours in the July evening, people watching through the window and getting caught up on everything they’ve missed in the past several months.

Alec relaxes into the chair and enjoys Luke’s company. He knows that he should put in more of an effort but things are always so hectic. The truth is, Alec needed this time. It’s another check off his list of things that makes him feel human, like he’s finally back home.

Too bad that he was back in New York for almost two months before they could do this.

The two of them talk about relationships-- teasing each other, with Alec asking Luke when he’s going to make an honest woman out of his mother-- and the business and plans for the future.

He can just be with Luke. He can be Alec, the dorky kid that liked planetariums and Pokemon. That shared history is everything to Alec and he’s grateful that Uptown Java will always be a second home.

But all the while that Alec laughs and debates and confides in Luke, his mind is whirling.

Robert’s forgotten his lesson. Nobody touches Alec’s family, not even the devil himself.

It looks like Alec needs to refresh his memory.
Hi everyone! This is just a gentle reminder that I track the tag #httbt on twitter if you wanna talk about the fic and that I have a playlist on spotify titled HttBT that includes songs that will be used in this story or that I use for mood music while writing. Happy reading :)
Alec’s mouth curves faintly. “Yeah.”

“How much does he want?”

The two of them grab their things as they make their way down to the first floor and Jace’s office. Alec doesn’t say anything until he closes the door to Jace’s office.

Sitting on the couch heavily, Alec tilts his head back until he’s staring at the ceiling. “Luke said that he suggested a few million would be enough to keep him out of his hair.”

Jace scoffs. “Why the hell would he go to Luke of all people for that kind of cash? Luke owns a coffee shop. He’s not exactly rolling in it. Why not just go straight to the source?”

“He had some bullshit story about going to the press and insinuating that Luke and mom were together and painting himself the victim. I honestly don’t even think that he thinks it will work. He just needed a reason to approach us.”


Alec drops his head and stares at Jace expressionless. “Robert knew the minute he went to Luke that he’d be hearing from me. The bastard probably hopes that I’ve mellowed out since the last time we saw each other.”

“Then he doesn’t know you very well,” Jace chuckles but it’s without humor.

“When did he ever,” Alec replies and he hopes to fuck that Jace doesn’t catch the maudlin note in his voice.

His hopes go unanswered and Alec lets his eyes fall closed as Jace collapses next to him on the couch. “Hey, man. Don’t let him affect you like this. Every time he shows his face, he fucks with your head. It’s been ten years. Tell me we aren’t spiraling.”

Alec speaks without opening his eyes. “He’s a bastard. We’ve known that he’s a bastard for over a decade. This is just the way things go—”

“Yeah,” Jace interrupts. “Every few years, your dad comes to town needing money. He either goes straight to you or to one of us with convoluted stories. You rush to the rescue and do whatever the hell it is that you do to make him back off until next time. Then you get drunk and go back to being that angry sixteen year old. But you know what, Alec? You showed him. Every time that you go out on stage or cash a royalty check, you’re telling him to fuck off. That should be enough.”

Alec laughs hollowly, opening his eyes to finally look at Jace. “Then why isn’t it?”

Sighing, Jace moves closer, throwing an arm around his shoulders. They both wince at the closeness after spending a few hours beating the shit out of each other.

“Because you’re you and that means you’re constantly berating yourself for things that have nothing to do with you. Izzy and Maryse and Luke can take care of themselves. I know for damn sure that I don’t need you fighting my battles. But you’re Alec and have to keep the wolf from the door regardless. Plus, he really did a number on you-- on all of us-- but especially you. I’m not saying that you have to forgive him or forget. I’m just saying that this cycle is unhealthy as shit and I hate picking you up off the floor every time Robert the asstrumpet comes to town looking for a good time and a handout.”

Alec can’t help the huff of laughter that escapes him. They’re quiet for a minute before Alec
murmurs, “He really is an asstrumpet, huh?”

“He’s the worst,” Jace says solemnly.

Alec sighs loudly before standing up and running an exasperated hand through his hair. “You’re right. I need to get my shit together.” He doesn’t look back at Jace as he continues, “I’ll work on it after I talk to him.”

“Alec—”

“No, Jace,” Alec cuts in firmly. His voice is acerbic as he says, “I won’t get drunk off my ass and cry about how daddy didn’t love me, about how he wouldn’t accept me. You’re right. It’s time I got over it and truth be told I am, mostly.” He laughs but it’s dark. “I am just so tired of this shit. Things are going well with my music and Magnus and of course the shoe had to drop.”

Things are quiet for a minute before Jace’s voice breaks the uneasy silence. “Are you going to tell Magnus?”

Alec laughs shortly. “Tell him what?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Alec. Aren’t you dating him? People who are in a relationship together usually tell each other about shit that’s going on. Especially when it’s probably going to make them an asshole for a day or two.”

“I’ve been told that I’m always an asshole,” Alec says thoughtfully.

“Yeah, but there’s something a little extra that happens when your dad’s in town.” Jace stands, clapping Alec on the shoulder. “Tell Magnus before you snap and say something you regret. He deserves to know and if you really see this working out, then you need to tell him. I know you’re new to this but that’s what relationships are: both of you dumping your shit and hoping to god the other doesn’t run away screaming.”

“Aren’t you a romantic,” Alec mutters under his breath.

Jace points at him with a glare. “I’ve been with Clary since high school. I must be doing something right.”

Alec snorts but doesn’t resist when Jace pulls him in for a hug. He wrinkles his nose but returns the embrace as Jace says in a low voice, “I’m here for you, bro. If you need to talk or just someone to hang out with tonight, just call me. Don’t do anything stupid.”

“Okay,” Alec agrees easily. “I won’t do anything that you would do.”

The two of them break away, laughing. Alec stares at the wall of awards on Jace’s wall, eyes unseeing. Jace gives him his space and after a moment or two, Alec says, “He really is an asshole.”

“Yeah, but he’s no match for you. Go do your thing Lightwood-- preferably after you shower.” Jace grimaces and Alec rolls his eyes, glaring at Jace before leaving the office without a backwards glance.

He nods to the receptionist on his way out and starts walking towards his apartment, preoccupied.

If Alec’s entering battle, it’s best to prepare.
“Thank you so much for helping me out. I don’t like to advertise it but I can be a little forgetful,” Alec says with an easy grin and relaxes a little as the maid giggles, stepping back from where she’d just entered her master key into the hotel suite door.

“It’s no problem, Mr. Lightwood. I’m just glad I could help.”

Alec slips her a hundred dollar bill and autographs her clipboard. That’s always the first rule of business on the road-- make friends with the staff wherever you’re staying. Luckily, Becca hadn’t questioned him too thoroughly-- or at all-- before letting him in. She’d recognized him immediately and had been more than helpful.

A hundred dollars and his signature is a small price to pay to gain entry into the Manhattan Suite of the Four Seasons.

Alec sneers as he takes in the decor and the million dollar view through the bank of windows. He doesn’t know how the hell Robert is affording this place but it can’t be ethical. Alec walks into the living area and sees the mini bar across the room has been well-used, dirty glasses and half-empty bottles of liquor covering its once pristine surface.

He helps himself, picking up a clean tumbler and pouring a splash of scotch into the glass. Taking it with him, Alec wanders throughout the rest of the hotel room. When he comes to the threshold of the bedroom, he can’t contain his disgust.

There’s a woman that looks younger than Isabelle wrapped haphazardly in the sheets. She blinks awake when Alec clears his throat.

“Who are you,” She demands, sitting up and pulling the sheets closer to her.

“I suggest you leave,” Alec says coolly and turns his back when she throws the sheets off of her, reaching for her clothes.

“I can’t leave,” she says with a huff. Alec hears shuffling and it’s just a few seconds later that the woman grudgingly says, “You can turn around.”

Alec does so, scowling. “Why can’t you leave? Surely you don’t think that this was more than a night or week?”

Rolling her eyes, she tosses her hair back. “I’m not an idiot. I was given an extra fee if I stayed while he was out and texted him whenever someone stopped by. I presume that someone is you.”

Alec raises a brow, amused. “Why don’t you just take your money and leave. It’s not like he’s going to come looking for you.”

The woman narrows her gaze at him, considering. Finally, she shrugs. “He was a jerk anyway.” She comes closer, intent on leaving and Alec moves back to let her through when she pauses in front of him, running a black painted nail down his chest. “Before I leave, can I interest you in anything?”

Alec gives her a dry look. “I’m good, thanks.”

With a sigh, she steps past him throwing out, “You can’t blame a girl for trying,” over her shoulder and Alec hears the soft snick of the front door closing just seconds later.

Shaking his head, Alec turns away from the bedroom and goes back to the living room. It’s the early afternoon and the sun is shining over New York. Alec sits down in the chair by the windows. He takes a small sip of his scotch and settles in to wait.
He’d dressed his best. His outfit costs a week’s stay in this suite and Alec knows that Robert will be blinded by dollar signs when he walks in. The family has always been well-off. Old money. Alec couldn’t remember the number of times he’d been asked are you one of the New York Lightwoods during his childhood. The Lightwoods were a long line of lawyers that charged exorbitant rates and Alec had always assumed he’d go into law too, right up until he’d become an overnight sensation in high school.

Robert was still at the helm of Lightwood LLP and his salary afforded him entry into the coveted one percent club. He was a far cry from Alec’s level of wealth, though. Plus, Alec thinks sardonically, it appears that Robert’s tastes have only grown more expensive with age.

He hears the keycard in the door a second before it opens and takes a breath to steady himself.

It won’t do to get emotional.

Robert strolls into the living room, tossing his card on the coffee table before turning to where Alec is sitting. He immediately stops when he catches sight of Alec, eyes darting to the bedroom.

“Don’t worry. She’s long gone,” Alec says, relaxed.

Alec watches Robert squirm for a bare moment before his shoulders come back and he stares impassively at him.

“I see Luke couldn’t help but run to you to fix his problem.”

Alec takes a drink, relishing the burn of alcohol as it warms him. “Luke just thought that I would want to know when my dad was back in town. I happen to think it’s rather considerate of him.”

“Unless you came with what I asked for, I suggest you leave,” Robert blusters.

Alec smiles but it’s sharp. It’s a courtroom smile if ever there was one and Alec can’t help but think that he learned from the best.

“You’re not getting one goddamn cent from me,” he says pleasantly.

“I’ll make the press a nightmare for Maryse and Luke. Are you really willing to let that happen?” Robert’s tone is smug, smarmy, and it lashes through Alec, filling him anger and disgust and a dozen other emotions besides.

Alec throws back the rest of his drink, setting it down on the end table with a dull thud before standing to his full height. He sees the imperceptible way that his father flinches back and feels grim satisfaction.

“You’ll do no such thing, Robert. You knew how this was going to go before you even contacted Luke.” Alec takes a step closer, towering over him. “Stay away from my family. You don’t get to touch mom or Luke or Jace or Izzy or Max. None of them. We’re all well rid of you and I won’t have you coming back and interfering in anything, dredging up old memories that are better off as dead as you are to us. Stay. Away.”

Robert balks before steeling his spine, taking a step until he’s standing toe to toe with Alec. “And what are you going to do if I don’t?”

Alec leans down. He doesn’t say anything for a few seconds and as he meets his father’s gaze, he’s struck by stale disappointment and bitter resentment. “Don’t test me,” he says softly. “Family is everything to me and you messed with them. If you don’t go back to whatever fucking rock you
crawled out from, I’ll see to it that you regret it.”

Robert’s eyes widen before he tries to smile cajolingly. “Family is everything, huh? What about me? What are you doing for me?”

“You stopped being family the day you left us for someone else, the day you left mom-- your wife of eighteen years-- for your goddamn secretary. You’re nothing to me. You’re less than the dirt on the bottom of my goddamn shoe.”

Robert steps back, turning away from Alec, and he watches his back impassively as he takes a steadying breath before he whirls back around to confront Alec.

“You think you’re such hot shit, don’t you? You’re Alec Lightwood, household name. You think anyone would give a shit about you if you couldn’t sing? If you couldn’t pay for their meals or extravagant presents or weekends in Cabo? You’re nothing without your money. It’s the only good goddamn thing about you.”

Alec grins, feral, even as his insides freeze. Fuck Robert and his ability to hit the nail on the head every goddamn time.

“That might be,” Alec says evenly. “But that doesn’t mean you’re getting any.”

“I earned that money,” Robert says savagely, pointing an angry finger in Alec’s direction.

Alec chuckles humorlessly. “Oh? And how did you do that? You almost ruined my career before it even started. Don’t you dare talk to me about what you deserve because otherwise you’d be in a goddamn penitentiary right now.”

Alec watches his father’s face pales and smiles. It doesn’t come close to reaching his eyes.

“That’s right. I stay up to date on my enemies and you’re fucking vermin. A little birdie told me that you’ve been embezzling from the firm.” Alec affects a shocked tone. “Not only that, but it looks like you’ve been making backroom deals for a couple of years now to make sure your clients get off scot free.”

Alec turns away from a shaking Robert, taking the few steps over to the windows overlooking Central Park. Absently, he continues, “A view like this is expensive. What’s this room cost? Five thousand a night? Ten? How much was your companion I met earlier? Twenty grand an evening? There are only so many billable hours in a day. Your hands are red as hell and it wouldn’t take much to plant a whisper in the DA’s ear.”

“You bastard,” Robert whispers furiously.

Alec smiles humorlessly. “Maybe,” he allows. He turns his head and looks at Robert, his father. Alec has plenty of good memories of his dad before his life blew up and became a living thing. He looks at his father now and sees a sad, pale imitation of a man, so much weaker than he remembers from his childhood.

It fills him with some regret and a lot of bitterness that tastes just a bit like hate.

“Stay away from me and my family. I told you last time that you wouldn’t get a fucking dollar from me and I meant it. Leave me alone.”

Robert still looks shaken but his eyes grow calculating. “You gave me money once, you know. I didn’t think that it was out of the question to see if you were amenable to another transaction.”
Alec’s mouth twists into a sneer as he turns back to the window, unseeing. “You stole the profits of my first single. Thousands and thousands of dollars that you absconded with. I never said anything, though. I was in high school and just wanted you out of my hair. And then you came back around a couple of years later and asked for more. ‘Just a cool mil,’ you said. And I had listened to mom cry herself to sleep for months at night while she pasted on a smile during the day.”

He looks back at Robert and feels choking resentment. “I gave you a million dollars to get the fuck away from us. I made it clear that it was a one time deal and you agreed and yet like a goddamn snake, you slithered back a few years later, again, with your hand held out, begging for more. You’re pathetic and I made it clear I was done. You’ve gotten everything you’re going to get from me. This is your last warning, Robert. Stay the goddamn hell away from my family or your house of cards will come crumbling down. Consider that a promise.”

Alec voice is quiet as he trails off, gaze searing into Robert’s, making sure that he gets the message. Alec could deal with him all goddamn day but the man had the audacity, the unmitigated fucking gall, to bother his family and Alec will not tolerate that.

He steps closer, voice dropping to a low murmur. “If I ever see you again-- if I even hear that you’re in the same neighborhood as any of us-- I will come after you with everything I have and I won’t stop until you’re behind bars, broke and broken. Do not test me.”

He waits until he sees Robert shakily nod before turning towards the door. His hand is on the knob when Robert speaks behind him, tremble just barely detectable in his voice.

“I meant what I said, you know. One of these days, your luck’s going to run out and everyone will see that you’re just an angry, selfish bastard. They’ll leave you because why the hell would anyone want to stay? When the lights go out and the arena empties, who are you? And why the fuck should anyone care?”

Alec stills, soaking in the words. His mouth curves faintly and his eyes flash but he doesn’t turn back, doesn’t look at Robert as he says, “That’s always been the difference between us. You need people to like you. I just need everyone to stay the fuck out of my way.”

Alec opens the door and steps into the hallway without a backwards glance, closing the door behind him with a quiet click.

He steadies himself, staring at the ground for long minutes. He hears the shatter of a glass against the wall, through the door, but it doesn’t do much to lessen the vise that’s gripping his chest.

He needs a drink.

Alec comes out of his bedroom and makes a beeline to his kitchen, pulling down his bottle of whiskey-- classic Jack Daniels. He pours a couple of fingers and throws it back, relishing the burn.

It makes him feel something besides blinding, seething rage. It feels a little like his chest is caving in and Alec is so goddamn tired that he doesn’t know what to do with himself. He always does this to himself. He always feels like this after a round or two with Robert and he hates himself, just a little, for the way seeing his father turns him back into that uncertain, insecure sixteen year old who had just tasted what the world could offer.

He pours another glass-- and another-- and then one more for good measure. The lights grow dark in his penthouse and he sits in his living room and stares outside at the billion glittering lights as far as
the eye can see.

He’s in the middle of New York and feels abandoned on a one man island. He’s one of a million and feels unreachable.

Everything is fuzzy at the edges at the edges and Alec’s thoughts are running in a torturous cycle. He can’t help but repeat Robert’s words. Alec’s known for years-- since he was a fucking teenager-- that people are fickle and selfish as hell. That everyone looks out for themselves and tough shit to anyone else.

It life. It’s the industry. It’s the way things have always been and Alec’s not fool enough to change that, to think that he has the power to be the exception.

Alec sits and stares over the New York Skyline and curses his father for the thousandth time.

He’s startled out of his reverie by his cell vibrating. He clumsily picks it up and glares at the screen, growing confused as he sees the doorman’s line pop up.

“Charles,” Alec answers. “What’s up?”

“Good evening, Mr. Lightwood. There’s a Magnus Bane here to see you.”

“Magnus,” Alec repeats, confusion growing brighter. What the hell? Hastily, he thinks but he knows that the two of them didn’t have any plans to meet up this evening. Alec would never have agreed to meet with Magnus, knowing that he’d be dealing with his father.

“Magnus Bane,” Charles confirms. “I know that I let him through a couple of weeks ago but he’s not on your regular guest list so I have to get confirmation before I can let him up. Should he be permitted entry?”

Alec thinks for a moment but it’s hard, the liquor making it too fucking hard to think. “Put him on the phone, Charles.”

There’s a few seconds of static before Magnus’s voice rings clear through the phone. “Alexander?”

“Magnus,” Alec says and tries to ignore the way his voice seems to reach out. “What are you doing here?”

Clearing his throat, Magnus explains, “Jace texted me. I have no idea how he got my number, but his message said that you shouldn’t be alone tonight. I finished revisions on my book earlier than planned and thought I would stop by. I hope that’s all right?”

The line falls silence as Magnus gives Alec time to think. On the one hand, Alec knows that he’s going to be shit company for the rest of the evening. Usually, Jace finds him after a few hours spent wallowing in the bottom of his bottle and pours him into bed.

Jace doesn’t mind if he’s snappish or an asshole. It just bounces off him without sticking.

On the other hand, now that he knows Magnus is so close, Alec is hit with a wave of longing. He wants to be near Magnus, feels like just being with him right now would help this fucking mood that’s hanging over him, coating him like goddamn oil.

Still, he’s got enough wherewithal to know that Magnus doesn’t need to see him like this. It’s too soon for Alec to be airing his dirty laundry.
“I think you should go,” Alec says, staring unseeing outside his window.

Magnus is quiet for a moment before asking, “Are you okay, Alexander?”

“I’m fine,” Alec mumbles before laughing caustically. “I’m always fine. I’m Alec fucking Lightwood.”

Alec hears Magnus hum thoughtfully through the line and it grates in his ears. Before he quite knows what he’s doing, he’s making his way back to the kitchen, phone in one hand and empty glass in the other. He doesn’t say anything and Magnus doesn’t either and in the silence, he pours another glass.

He feels off balance. He feels unsteady and unlike this morning when it was new and exciting and alluring, this just makes Alec feel sick.

He’s sick of this shit. He’s sick of Robert and his own goddamn insecurities and the way the Industry can’t ever leave him in peace. He takes a sip of his drink, not even feeling the burn now, and sneers.

The Industry doesn’t give without getting something in return. It’s given Alec more than he ever dreamed possible but it’s times like this that he wonders if it hasn’t reaped a piece of his soul in payment.

He’s on top of the world but is that all there is? Concerts and signings and records. He knows that it’s most than most people dream of but right now it’s leaving him hollow.

His thoughts fracture as Magnus’s voice comes back over the line.

“Alec, I’ll leave if you really want me to but I’d like to come up there and make sure everything’s okay. I think that maybe Jace texted me for a reason.”

“Jace needs to mind his own business,” Alec says grudgingly.

Magnus’s voice is reluctantly amused as he responds, “Be that as it may, I don’t think I can leave in good conscience without seeing you first. Can I come up?”

Alec tries to detect if there’s any hidden meaning in Magnus’s words but he’s tired. He’s too tired to think and suddenly it’s too much.

If Magnus wants to see him then by God, he’ll see him.

“Give Charles the phone.”

“Mr. Lightwood?”

“Put Magnus on the regular visitors list, please, Charles. From this point on, he has full access to my unit, no questions asked.”

“Heard, Mr. Lightwood. I’ll let him through right away.”

Alec hangs up and tosses his phone onto the counter where it lands with a clatter.

His head’s a mess and even though he’s drank his fair share tonight, he can’t turn it off. He doesn’t know what the hell Magnus wants but Alec hopes he finds it and leaves before things get too messy, even though there’s a part of Alec that knows they’ve already passed that point.

It’s just a few minutes later that there’s a knock on his door. He stands, a little unsteady, and makes his way through the living room, opening the door without looking at who it is.
He sees Magnus standing on the other side and tries to ignore the way his heart lurches. There are too many feelings. Magnus makes him happy, always, and it’s no different now. Distantly, Alec thinks that he’ll always be happy to see Magnus, no matter the situation.

The two of them are silent for a long moment before Magnus takes a small step forward, crossing the threshold and reaching out to cup Alec’s face, thumb slowly sweeping over his cheek. Alec closes his eyes, suddenly unbearably weary, and nuzzles into his palm.

“Good evening, darling.”

“Hey,” Alec replies, voice hoarse.

“What’s wrong,” Magnus asks after a minute.

Alec can’t help his scoff, opening his eyes and taking a step back so that Magnus’s hand falls between them. “Nothing’s wrong. Obviously.”

He turns back, towards the kitchen, leaving Magnus in the entryway. He ignores the sounds of Magnus following him and reaches for his glass, taking a bracing swallow. He can feel the tension that’s seeped into him, making his spine rigid, but damned if he can do anything about it.

He doesn’t look up from his glass, doesn’t look up as he hears Magnus rummaging through his kitchen. He does look up, though, when a second glass is placed next to the almost empty bottle of Jack. He looks up at Magnus, who’s watching him with a raised brow.

“What,” he asks dumbly.

Magnus nudges the glass closer. “It looks like we’re drinking. While I’d like to know the occasion, I’m not that picky. Go ahead, darling. Pour me a glass.”

Alec studies him for a minute before shrugging. His hands are clumsy, feel too heavy, but Magnus doesn’t comment, just watches, expressionless.

“Toast?”

Alec thinks for a moment before straightening and lifting his glass. Magnus echoes the motion and Alec says, “To luck running out,” he says, and drains his glass.

Magnus doesn’t say anything, just takes a small sip of his drink.

Alec sets his glass on the granite counter top with a dull thud that echoes in the silence. Magnus doesn’t say anything and the quiet stretches out. Alec feels like his nerves are about to snap.

“Why are you here,” he asks suddenly.

Magnus looks up, startled. “Pardon?”

“Why are you here,” Alec asks again, this time impatient. “What do you want from me? I’ve got to tell you, Cabo this time of year is a dead bore. Or are you more of a Europe kind of guy? Yeah, I can just see you walking down the Champs-Élysées now.”

Magnus looks adorably confused and Alec hates himself for the thought. “Alec, what--”

“What do you see when you look at me? Because if it’s first class privilege and weekend getaways then you can leave.”
Magnus stills. His face doesn’t betray his emotions but Alec knows that his own are painted all over his face and he can’t find it in himself to care. He doesn’t care if Magnus sees the insecurity in his eyes or hears the tremor in his voice. All he needs is for Magnus to stay-- for him, for Alec-- or to get the fuck out and leave him in peace.

His thoughts are a mess and he doesn’t know which way is up, though he can’t deny that hope is clinging stubbornly to his heart.

Magnus slowly lowers his glass, looking at Alec with dawning realization and a flash of hurt. “What’s brought this on,” he asks quietly.

Alec laughs but it cracks around the edges. “What do you mean, what’s brought this on? That’s my life, Magnus. I’m generous and I like to have a good time and people find that attractive. They like the cash, they like the private jet, they like the perks. They like Alec Lightwood, six time Grammy winner. And why the fuck wouldn’t they? He’s got it all.”

Magnus comes around the island until he’s standing next to Alec, close enough to touch. His eyes run over Alec, cataloging blank eyes and flushed cheeks. When Jace had texted him earlier in the evening, he’d been uncertain at first. A feeling had been nagging at the back of his mind, though, and he couldn’t help but come over to Alec’s and make sure that he was alright.

*Magnus, this is Jace. Alec’s brother. I know this is coming from left field but you should stop by his place tonight. I have a feeling he might need you.*

*P.S. Alec’s always an ass but he’s probably in fine form tonight. Something tells me that you won’t let him push you away.*

As soon as he’d spoken to Alec on the phone, he’d known that something was going on. Alec’s voice was loose and just a touch hoarse. When he’d come up to his apartment, everything had fallen into place as he’d smelled the liquor radiating from Alec.

With Jace’s message in mind, Magnus tries to keep his cool. Obviously, something had happened today. Magnus just needs to bide his time and wait for Alec to trip up.

Magnus doesn’t touch Alec, hopes that his mere presence is enough to help, if even a little. He doesn’t know why Alec is spouting these things, but he resolves to get to the bottom of it.

He catches Alec’s eye and makes sure he has his attention. “I happen to like plain Alec just fine,” he says softly.

He hears a quick, indrawn breath before Alec drops his head, looking at the floor. “Now that’s a damned fool thing to say.”


“Because,” Alec starts, looking up to meet his gaze. “Nobody ever stays for just Alec. So why should they start now?”

Magnus hears the words but it takes a second for them to register. When they do, his heart breaks, just a bit.

He wraps an arm around Alec’s shoulders, leaning down until he can rest his forehead against Alec’s. Their breathing syncs in the silence of the apartment and Magnus clamps down on the urge to kick somebody’s ass.
“It seems to me like everyone else was the fool for letting you slip through their fingers. You, Alexander. I’m not talking about the artist or the man who picks up the bill. I’m talking about Alec, the guy who loves giraffes and obscure Irish literature. That’s the guy I happen to be head over heels for.”

Alec’s gaze whips up at the whispered confession. “Yeah?”

Alec’s voice is just as quiet as his own and Magnus closes his eyes as he feels Alec nose along his jaw.

“I’m head over heels for you too, you know,” Alec says, voice hoarse.

Magnus opens his eyes at that and sees Alec looking at him remarkably steady.

“I love your intelligence and wit and kindness. I couldn’t stand it if I was more invested than you.”

Magnus smiles, equal parts sad and hopeful. “If there’s one thing that you don’t have to worry about, it’s being too into me,” he teases. “In case it wasn’t embarrassingly obvious, I really like you Alexander. I don’t let just anyone watch my collector edition Twilight dvds, you know.”

Alec smiles and Magnus’s heart warms at the sight. He looks over Alec and sees messy hair and drooping eyes. He takes a moment to consider before stepping back and holding out a hand.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m tired as hell. What do you say we go to bed?”

Alec considers him for a moment before slowly nodding and standing up. Before Magnus can turn around, though, Alec’s crowding into his space. He wraps his arms around his neck and buries his head in his neck and Magnus is powerless to do anything but return that hold with everything he has. He rubs a hand down Alec’s back, soothing, and it’s a while before Alec steps back and clears his throat.

“Lead the way,” he says, and Magnus is relieved to hear a new lightness in his tone.

The two of them go to Alec’s bedroom. Alec gives Magnus a pair of sweats to change into and the two of them get out of their day clothes. While Alec finishes changing, Magnus heads back to the kitchen, pouring a glass of water from the tap. Before he goes back to the bedroom, though, he takes his phone out.

_I’m spending the night. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of him._

He doesn’t have time to lock his phone before he has an incoming message.

_Break his heart and I break you :)_

With a huff of laughter, Magnus shuts his phone off without deigning to answer.

When he gets back to the bedroom, Alec’s already in bed but isn’t sleeping.

“Here, drink this,” he says and holds out the glass of water.

Alec doesn’t protest and drains the glass with a few efficient swallows.

“Thanks,” he murmurs.

Magnus climbs into the other side of the bed and lays down. He bites down his smile as he feels Alec shuffle slowly closer until he lays his head over his chest, laying a careful arm over his middle.
He feels Alec all but melt against him and doesn’t try to keep the surge of happiness down. He’s never felt so comfortable, so safe and warm and, well, happy.

He gently plays with Alec’s hair, smoothing it back, running careful hands through the soft strands. He hears Alec hum, content, and thinks he falls asleep just a few seconds later. He’s startled, then, when Alec speaks.

“I’m sorry I was an ass tonight.”

Magnus’s hand stills for a split second before he resumes. “Thank you for the apology, darling, but you don’t need to apologize if this is something that’s worrying you. I don’t want you to have any doubts about me or about us. You can always talk to me, Alec.”

He feels Alec sigh, hears him suck in a breath before hesitantly saying, “I saw my dad today.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah,” Alec says and he sounds unimaginably tired. “We don’t talk much, haven’t since I was a teenager. Every few years he comes around looking for a handout. He’s like a fucking missile with the way he can target all of my insecurities. He said a few things this afternoon that fucked with me. I’m sorry I took it out on you.”

“Thank you for telling me. Thank you for trusting me with that. What did he say?”

Alec laughs but it’s empty. “The same things he always says-- I’m nothing without my career, that no one would want me if I didn’t have my money or influence. That one day the trips to Cabo and exclusive invitations won’t be enough. Nothing new.”

Magnus’s heart aches at Alec’s matter-of-fact tone.

“Your dad’s the ass, then. You’re so much more than what you can buy. I’d actually go so far as to say that the other things don’t matter. Sure, they might be nice perks, but it’s the person behind the wallet that holds my interest. Not the wallet itself.”

“Yeah, well my dad and I obviously don’t have the best relationship.”

“Obviously.”

Alec rubs his cheek against Magnus’s chest and Magnus can’t help smiling up at the ceiling as he lets the feeling of Alec sink into him.

“He didn’t like it when I came out,” Alec says suddenly.

“Yeah,” Alec confirms. “It was my senior year, close to graduation. I had a boyfriend at the time-- secret of course-- but everyone at school knew. I had released my first song the summer before and was set to leave for tour the day after graduation. I’d been thinking about it for awhile but we won the state soccer championship and I just decided to ride that wave. I kissed him in front of the entire field.

“My dad was furious. He didn’t see it coming-- he used to tease my all the time about Lydia, my current manager. We were best friends in high school and dad thought we were a match made in heaven. He said a lot of things in those few weeks between the championship game and graduation,
including that no son of his was—was *that*. The son of a bitch couldn’t even say the words.

“He told me that I had ruined my life with a stupid decision. He told me that my label would tear up the contracts and that my fans would desert me. Less than a year later, he was the one who abandoned the family when he ran off with his long-time mistress who was a year older than me.”

“I’m so sorry, darling.” Magnus knows the words are futile, that they aren’t nearly enough, but Alec squeezes him closer with murmured thanks.

“He comes around every few years wanting money. I was stupid enough to give it to him the first time-- I was barely nineteen-- and now he won’t stop. Every time he comes to town, it fucks with me. I’m a lot better than I used to be when I was younger, but. Still.”

“He’s still your dad,” Magnus says knowingly.

“Yeah,” Alec sighs. “As much as I hate it, he’s still my father.” Alec tilts his face up to see Magnus. “Thanks for listening to all of that. I know it’s a lot.”

Magnus pulls Alec closer, sweeping a thumb over a bare shoulder. “It’s a lot, but it’s you. I want to know you, Alec. More than your favorite animal or impressionist painter. That necessarily involves baring the parts of yourself that you might not want to.”

Alec props himself up on one elbow so that he can lean over Magnus. His mouth quirks in a faint grin. “I did hear somewhere that relationships take effort.” He clears his throat. “That might have been an understatement.”

Magnus echoes Alec’s smile, runs a thumb over a brow and down a cheek. “Relationships take a lot of effort?”

Laughing, Alec leans down and gives Magnus a chaste kiss before settling back down over his chest. “I’m all for effort,” he says sleepily.

Magnus’s chest rumbles with a quiet laugh and he closes his eyes, content to fall asleep.

He’s almost under when he hears Alec mumble absently, “I’m here for you, too, babe. I want to know everything about you, your past, your present. Hopefully I’ll be there for your future...”

Alec trails off and Magnus almost immediately hears muted snoring. They’ve only slept together a few times, but Magnus is already embarrassingly enamored over the adorable little snores. They don’t help much, though.

No, Magnus consciously works to unfreeze from Alec’s words, can’t help but wonder how Alec would react if he knew the can of worms he wanted to open with Magnus’s past.

Taking deep breaths, Magnus relaxes against Alec’s bed and falls asleep through sheer force of will.

The morning’s always brighter and he hopes he can make it another day without his world imploding.

Always just one more day.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Song for this chapter: Acquainted by The Weeknd

“Alec, if you don’t put that phone down then I swear I’ll pour this glass of wine over your head.”

Alec tears his eyes away from the screen where Magnus has just sent him a picture of him playing Candy Land with Madzie. It’s too adorable for words and Alec can’t help the instant grin that lights up his face.

He turns his screen off, though, looking up to find his mother already watching him, an easy smile on her face.

“What?”

Maryse reaches for her glass, taking a small sip before bringing it down gently onto the table. Leaning back in her seat, she doesn’t answer him right away. No, instead she looks at him, a slow careful once over that has Alec straightening in his own chair almost without thought.

“It’s nice to see you so happy,” she says softly.

Alec’s gaze immediately falls to the table, smoothing over the pristine white linen tablecloth with a thumb. “I’m always happy,” he says halfheartedly.

Maryse shakes her head thoughtfully. “I think that you’ve gotten very good at pretending to be happy. I think that most of the time you’re content enough. But, there’s something about you this trip. There’s a light in your eye that I’ve never seen before and at the risk of becoming unbearably sentimental, it makes me happy to see my oldest son with a new weightlessness on his shoulders.” She pauses a minute before that smile becomes a tiny grin. “What’s his name?”

Without meaning to, Alec feels his shoulders drop. Tension eases away at the mere thought of who could be responsible for such a change in him. Especially since yesterday, when he’d woken up curled around Magnus, Alec has been on cloud nine.

Magnus had listened as Alec spilled some of his dirtiest laundry and hadn’t run for the hills. He’d let Magnus in and it hadn’t blown up in his face. Alec had woken up yesterday with a minor headache, regret dripping through his veins. He remembered everything with crystal clarity and he’d winced as he replayed over his taunting words, his desperate plea.

Magnus had stirred and kissed the top of his head before lying back down.

“Morning, darling,” he’d said.

It had been early enough so that they could linger in bed a while so they had. They’d talked in hushed whispers and quiet voices about the night before and weekend plans and half a dozen light topics that had nothing to do with anything.

Magnus had left for work after a lingering kiss and Alec had stayed in bed, dozing for another hour
before waking up.

Yesterday had been a bit of a wash as he’d stayed in his apartment all day, watching Netflix and nursing his headache. He’d done a bit of laundry and tidied up a bit and made plans to see his mother for lunch the next day. He’d even written a song-- or at least part of one. He had the melody and a few lines but he had stalled. It was missing something, but he didn’t know what yet.

All around, it had been just what he needed after the shit day Thursday had been. He’d met his mother at her favorite place in the city, Le Jade Loup, an upscale French restaurant with homey charm.

Alec shakes his head a little to clear it, realizing that he’d grown distracted. Maryse watches him patiently, though, and he clears his throat.

“Magnus. My boyfriend’s name is Magnus Bane.”

Just the words bring Alec peace. It’s such a simple sentence but as Alec’s discovering, it means so much.

Maryse reaches out, wrapping a hand around Alec’s arm and squeezing reassuringly. “That’s so great, Alec. Now, tell me a little more about him.”

Most of the appetizers and their entrees are spent talking about Magnus. Alec shares far more than he planned-- for fuck’s sake, Maryse doesn’t have to know that his favorite color is purple-- but Alec finds that he can’t stop gushing. Once the waiter takes the remains of their main courses away, they both sit back and Alec tries not to squirm as his mother studies him silently.

“I’ve been waiting for this day, you know,” she says, nodding in thanks as the waiter refills her wine glass.

“Waiting for what, mother?”

Taking a lingering drink of her pinot, Maryse doesn’t answer him immediately. After a few seconds, though, she lowers her glass and folds her hands across her middle.

“I may be your mother but I don’t live under a rock” she says dryly. “I see the headlines when I’m checking out at the grocery store. You’re infamous for not settling down, dear. Something is different about Magnus. As a mother, all I care about is that he makes you happy. I’d started to worry that you would never find someone, that you’d lose yourself in temporary men. It’s good to know that the worry was in vain.”

Maryse laughs a little as she plays with the stem of her wine glass. “Do you know how I know that this is more?”

Alec makes a noncommittal noise, shifting in his seat.

His mother looks at him, amused and fond with an undertone of relief. “This is the first guy you’ve told me about. That’s how I know this is real.”

Alec looks away, a faint smiling curving the edges of his mouth. “Whatever,” he mutters.

Maryse laughs and the two of them enjoy dessert-- an almond fudge cake for Alec and crème brûlée for Maryse.

Alec is just scraping the last bite of cake into his mouth when Maryse asks, “How is your father
He almost chokes on the dessert and looks up to see his mother staring at him with a raised brow. He swallows painfully and reaches for his water.

“What,” he asks, voice rough.

“Don’t play dumb with me, dear. Even if the bastard hadn’t tried to get in touch with me, Luke came home Wednesday a little drunk and a lot tight-lipped. The only thing he would say is that ‘It was taken care of.’ Spill.”

Alec narrows his eyes. “When did he contact you?”

Maryse waves away the question. “It was a couple of days before you met with Luke. It doesn’t matter. What matters is how you’re doing.”

“You don’t need to worry about me. I made sure that dad knows to stay away from you, from all of us. It doesn’t matter how I did it.”

Their table is quiet, both of them thinking. Alec’s gaze diverts to a young girl throwing a macaroon at her brother across the room and he smiles, just a little, before startling as Maryse lays a hand over his.

“Thank you,” she says, voice sincere. “I hate that you have to do that-- that even if you didn’t, you would regardless-- and that every time you see him, it hurts you.”

“Mom, no--”

“Hush, Alec. You’ve done more for this family than you should have ever needed to and I’m sorry for it, even if I am grateful. I could have dealt with Robert on my own-- any of us could-- but you remain our knight in shining armor. Thank you.”

“You never need to thank me, mom,” Alec says, voice gruff. “I’m more than happy to do it.”

“Still,” she says and smiles just a bit. “Does Magnus know,” she asks, voice curious and takes the last bite of her own dessert.

“Yeah,” Alec murmurs, pausing to take a drink of his own merlot. “I ended up telling him most of it that night. I was a bit of an asshole, to be honest.”

Maryse nods along as Alec speaks. “Because your father did his level best to get under your skin.”

Alec spares a second to nod before continuing. “Anyway, I was a little drunk and Magnus caught the brunt of it all. He was-- he was amazing. Better than I expected and infinitely more patient than I deserved. We ended up--”

Alec breaks off as his phone starts vibrating with a phone call. Turning it over, he peers at the screen and sees Magnus’s name flash.

“Speak of the devil,” he murmurs and throws his mom an apologetic look as he answers.

“Hey, babe.”

“Alexander,” Magnus greets warmly. “How are you doing this lovely afternoon?”

Alec smiles, can’t stop himself from relaxing against his chair. “I’m doing great, actually. I’m just
Magnus hums and Alec can hear him rummaging in the background. “What a coincidence. I’m also doing great. I’m babysitting Madzie this afternoon and I’m currently looking for my Scrabble game. I know it’s in here somewhere,” he mutters.

In the next moment, though, his voice brightens. “That’s not why I called, though. Actually, I have a bit of a favor to ask and feel free to say no. I want to make it clear that what I’m about to say absolutely is not a test or any sort of requirement.”

Alec huffs out a laugh, shaking his head. “Well, you’ve certainly got me all ears. What’s this favor you need but that I absolutely don’t have to do?”

Alec hears Magnus clear his throat, and looks at his mom, mirroring her curious look.

“As it turns out, tomorrow is Sunday.”

“Yes, I am aware that Sunday usually follows Saturday,” Alec replies drolly, charmed despite himself.

Magnus sighs dramatically. “For me, Sundays are usually reserved for Family Dinner. It’s usually Catarina, Ragnor—my best friend and Cat’s husband, and Raphael. Madzie will, of course, also be there. Cat extended the invitation to you this morning when I picked up Madzie and I wanted to know if you’d like to come. I promise that there is no right or wrong answer, especially since it’s such late notice—”

“Magnus,” Alec interrupts. He tries to ignore just how soft his voice is when he answers, “Of course, I’ll be there. I wouldn’t miss it.”

“Really,” Magnus asks, surprised.

“Really,” Alec says, rolling his eyes. “Like I would turn down meeting the family.”

Alec ignores the way Maryse’s eyebrows almost fly off her face at his words.

“That’s excellent, then,” Magnus says and Alec knows that he’s not imagining just how pleased Magnus sounds.

“What time is it?”

“If you can come over around four, then that would be perfect. I’ll text you the address.”

“Sounds great,” Alec says warmly. “Is there anything I need to know?”

“What do you mean, darling,” Magnus asks, voice distracted. Alec hears Madzie yell in the background as it sounds like an entire pile of Jenga bricks fall to the ground.

“Any subjects off limits? Anything in particular I should avoid?”

“No. Just be yourself and by the end of the evening, they’ll adore you as much I do.”

At that, Alec laughs out loud. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you, Alexander. I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon, then.”

“No need to thank me. I’m more than happy to do it.”
The two exchange goodbyes and Alec hangs up, meeting Maryse’s questioning gaze.

“That was Magnus. He wanted to know if I could come to a Family Dinner tomorrow at his friends’ place.”

Maryse arches a brow. “And you didn’t break up with him on the spot?”

“Of course not,” Alec says, offended at the very notion.

“Relax, dear. I was only teasing. Are you excited?”

Alec rolls his shoulders back. “I think? I mean, I’ve already met everyone except his best friend. It’s just a big step, right?”

Maryse regards him for a moment before leaning forward. “It is a big step,” she allows. “Meeting the family is a bit of a declaration, I’m sure you know. It says, ‘Hey. I like this person and want to show them off a little. I think they might be here awhile.’ Are you comfortable with that?”

Alec still, thinking for a moment even if the answer is so obvious as to be redundant. “Yeah,” he says with a shy grin, ducking his head to hide just how happy he is at the notion of Magnus making that type of declaration, however implicitly. “Yeah, I think I am.”

“Well, then, when do I get to meet him?”

Rolling his eyes, Ale reaches for his water and takes a bracing sip. “How long are you in town?”

“I leave a week from tomorrow, actually.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

The two of them linger for a few minutes chatting while Alec picks up the bill. They walk outside onto the busy sidewalk and Maryse steps forward, hugging him tightly.

“Thank you, dear. I had a wonderful lunch and a lovely time catching up.”

Alec returns her embrace, patting her gently on the back. “Same here;” he says before stepping back and sliding on his sunglasses. “Are you headed back to Luke’s?”

Mulling it over, Maryse finally nods. “I think I’ll spend a few hours at the coffee shop and catch up on my work a little.”

“Sounds good,” Alec says. “See you later, mom.”

“Bye, Alec. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Alec turns away and starts walking down the street, mind preoccupied.

Tomorrow promises to be eventful if nothing else, he muses, and starts thinking about hostess gifts.

Alec knocks on the door, double checking that he has the right address. Before he can unlock his phone, though, the door is swinging open to reveal a grinning Magnus.
“Hello, darling. You found the place okay?”

Alec steps into the townhouse, sliding an arm around Magnus’s waist and pulling him close. “I did,” he confirms.

Laying a hand on Alec’s arm, Magnus leans closer. “Thanks for coming,” he murmurs. “I hope you like pot roast.”

“It’s my favorite,” Alec whispers and lets his eyes fall shut as Magnus closes the last bit of distance to kiss him.

It’s warm, a string of chaste kisses in greeting and Alec sinks into the feeling wrapping around him. He steadfastly ignores the voice in the back of his mind that whispers, home.

Magnus pulls back after a minute and watches as Alec’s mouth tilts into a smile, even before his eyes open.

“Hey,” Alec says and Magnus can’t contain his soft laugh.

“Hey, yourself.” He’s just getting ready to steer Alec towards the kitchen where everyone has gathered when he hears footsteps.

“Alec!”

Magnus watches as Alec drops down to one knee, opening his arms wide as Madzie flies into him.

“Hey, Madzie. How’s it going?”

Madzie and Alec talk for a few minutes in the foyer, but Magnus doesn’t say anything, content to hang back. He follows the two of them as Madzie takes Alec’s hand, guiding him to join the others.

Cat looks up as they pass through the doorway.

“Hello, Alec,” she says warmly. “It’s nice seeing you again.”

“Likewise,” Alec says with a smile and holds out the hand not in Madzie’s as Cat turns away from the stove.

He’s holding a potted plant that’s a riot of color and Cat accepts it with a smile. “Thanks, Alec. While you didn’t have to bring anything, it’s greatly appreciated.”

Cat heads to the dining table, setting the arrangement down in the middle and Alec turns to Ragnor and Raphael, holding out a hand to Ragnor.

“Hi, I’m Alec,” he says with an abashed grin and Magnus’s heart absolutely does not melt at the gesture.

Ragnor studies him for a moment without moving before extending his own hand to shake. “Yes, I gathered,” he says drolly.

Magnus rolls his eyes from where he’s standing behind Alec as Ragnor continues, “Even if I didn’t know you were coming over this evening, Magnus hasn’t shut up about you in literal years--”

“Ragnor, dearest cabbage, I do believe that it’s you who needs to shut up--”
Ragnar ignores him entirely, entire focus on Alec. “I must admit that when Magnus first told us about you, I thought that he had finally lost whatever fragile grip he’d had on his sanity. But, here you are. In the flesh. What are the chances,” he murmurs and pauses, as if he’s waiting for an answer.

Alec raises a brow. “Pretty good, actually,” he says dryly, “Considering we both frequent Uptown Java. It’s actually a wonder that we didn’t meet sooner.”

“Is that so,” Ragnar says thoughtfully. He changes the topic without warning. “What’s your opinion on Austen?”

“Jane,” Alec asks, trying to keep up. Magnus thinks about sparing Alec, but Ragnar has very odd tests for suitors and he knows well enough not to interfere. Ragnar won’t stop until he’s gotten his answer, in any case.

Ragnar raises one impeccable brow. “Do you know another?”

Clearing his throat, Alec looks confused as he says, “I know it’s a cliche but Pride and Prejudice is my favorite novel by her. I’m definitely a Darcy guy,” he says with a small laugh.

“Is that so,” Ragnar repeats, expression inscrutable.

Whatever else he was about to say is lost as Raphael cuts in, sending Ragnar a narrow look. “It’s good to see you, Alec.”

“Is it?”

Raphael actually smiles. “I wouldn’t say something I didn’t mean. Madzie and Catarina seem to like you well enough and the very fact that you’re here speaks well for you.”

“Simon doesn’t have anything to do with it,” Alec asks and Magnus can’t contain his curiosity.

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

Alec and Raphael seem to be in the midst of a staring contest when Cat interrupts.

“Enough of that,” she says. “Dinner is ready and I, for one, am starving.”

Everyone washes their hands and in just a few moments, they’re sitting at the table. Alec sits between him and Madzie and Magnus is a little surprised and a lot relieved as they pass a pleasant meal.

He learns that Alec is well versed on virtually any topic as the group moves seamlessly between a discussion on a recent article in The Times to a debate on the best destination for a weekend getaway.

Magnus doesn’t say much, content to stay in the background. He watches as Alec passionately argues for his favorite Upstate town for vacation before leaning down as Madzie pulls on his arm to get his attention. Magnus doesn’t know what they’re discussing but by their earnest expressions, it must be something important.

He’s distracted as he watches them, as he sees the way Alec fits into this group— his family. Magnus knows that it’s too soon but he’s struck by a thought that might as well be a shout, commanding all of his attention. It rings in his head with crystal clarity.
I’m falling in love with you.

The thought isn’t scary. It’s not threatening, doesn’t make his heart freeze in his chest. Instead, it feels like he takes a deep breath, lungs expanding and easy with the knowledge. He watches the way Alec throws his head back-- eyes crinkling at the corners-- laughing at whatever Madzie just said as she looks too pleased with herself and feels something settle within him.

Everyone enjoys dinner and Alec and Madzie move to the living room with Ragnor and Raphael, all set to play a game of Pictionary. Alec looks comfortable and Magnus hangs back with Catarina, both of them staying at the table with fond expressions on their face as they watch everyone else for a few minutes.

“Help me with dessert,” Cat asks, and Magnus nods readily.

Magnus takes out the cake from the refrigerator while Cat starts the coffee. It’s quiet and Magnus can’t remember the last time contentment sang in his chest so completely.

“He fits,” Catarina says and Magnus focuses on cutting the cake to hide the smile that’s splitting his face in two.

“It does look that way,” he murmurs, shaking his head a little in wonder. “I’m glad I’m not the only one who thinks so.”

“No, he does. He’s won Ragnor over at any rate and you know how difficult that is. Your boy’s a wonder.”

Magnus laughs softly. “I was a little worried,” he confesses. “He’s the first person I’ve brought around in ages and if he didn’t mesh well with you all then I don’t know what I would have done. I really like him, Cat.” Magnus’s voice ends barely above a whisper and Catarina shifts her attention from the coffee machine to study him with a too-sharp gaze.

“Does he know?”

Something uneasy shifts just under Magnus’s skin and he ignores her look as he asks, “Know what, dear?”

“Don’t play stupid, Magnus. It doesn’t become you. Have you told him?”

Magnus lifts a piece of cake onto a plate before he stills, breathing deep and steadfastly refusing to look up at her. “No.”

He hears Cat move closer before she places a hand on his back. “Have you thought about telling him, at least?”

At that, Magnus looks up, scoffing. “Of course I’ve thought about it. Especially after Camille gave that cryptic warning in London. I can’t do it yet, Cat.” His expression turns wry. “I keep telling myself just a few more days.”

Cat laughs softly but it’s tinged in warning. “Time always runs out before you’re ready though, friend, doesn’t it?”

Magnus can feel the tension seeping into his spine. He taps his thumb against the counter top as he stares into nothing.

“I’m not ready for it to end.” He finally says. His voice is mocking, filled with self-deprecation, and
“And why do you think things would end if you told Alec?” Cat’s voice is gentle but firm as she asks the question that’s been buzzing in the back of Magnus’s head for days now.

He turns and gives her a look that’s just a little angry. “And why should I think he’d stay after learning something like that? Who would want to be in a relationship with someone who comes from that?”

“You aren’t your father, Magnus.”

He laughs shortly, glaring at her as he hears everyone break into laughter in the living room, Madzie yelling happily.

“Maybe not,” he allows. “But is it fair to ask Alec to deal with that? Especially with his career? When it gets out, it’ll be bad, Cat. I know I should tell him-- that every day that I don’t is a chance that he hears it from someone else-- but I’m not ready.”

“I won’t rush you, Magnus. That isn’t what this is. I’ll leave the topic alone but before I do, I want to say just one thing.”

She moves closer and Magnus leans into her automatically. “From what I’ve seen, Alec is a genuine guy. He’s kind and anyone who can put a smile like that on your face must be worth something. Give him a chance, dear, and I think he might just surprise you.”

Magnus takes a moment to soak in her words before turning to give her an incredulous look. “That’s incredibly high praise coming from you.”


She moves back to the coffee machine, switching out mugs. Without thinking, Magnus says, “Put about a cup of sugar into Alec’s, dear.” His voice is reluctantly fond as he continues, “He likes his coffee sweet enough to give him a dozen cavities.”

He’s preoccupied with his thoughts, with what one of his oldest friends just told him, and doesn’t catch the amused look Cat sends him as she dumps a heaping spoonful of sugar into a mug.

Magnus finishes cutting the cake and plating it up before he grabs a fork and a plate and heads to the living room.

Alec is sitting at one end of the couch and Magnus heads directly over to him, sitting on the arm of the couch and leaning into Alec. Alec mirrors his action and looks up at him with a warm smile. His attention snags on the cake.

“Hey,” he says. “Do I get a piece?”

Magnus considers him for a moment, narrowing his eyes in thought. He shakes his head before giving Alec an arch look.

“If you want cake, it’s in the kitchen. This is mine,” Magnus says and promptly takes a bite. He might hum a little in satisfaction, smiling as Alec playfully glares at him.

“Please,” Alec asks, drawing out the syllable, adorably pleading.

Magnus doesn’t pretend to be made of stronger stuff. He rolls his eyes, huffing out a put upon sigh.
“Fine, I guess you can have some. One bite,” he warns.

He cuts off a small bite and holds out his fork for Alec to take. Alec’s mouth closes around it and his eyes widen as he pulls back. “Damn,” he says once he’s swallowed. “That’s amazing.”

“Thank you,” Ragnor says with a raised brow, shooting a disgusted look at Magnus.

Magnus just sticks out his tongue.

They spend another hour at Cat and Ragnor’s before Magnus nudges Alec shoulder. Everyone else is preoccupied with watching a movie.

“Ready to go,” Magnus murmurs and Alec nods, smoothing a hand down his thigh.

“Whenever you are,” he replies and Magnus stands, stretching out his back.

“Alec and I are going to head on out,” he says and Madzie pops up to give them both a hug.

Alec nods at the adults, smiling. “Thanks for having me.”

Cat waves it away. “Thank you for coming,” she says. “It was nice to meet you in a less professional environment.”

Ragnor nods, smiling subtly. “You’re welcome here anytime, Alec.”

Raphael nods shortly. “Later, Lightwood.”

Magnus waves at the room before taking Alec’s hand and guiding him to the foyer.

“I don’t know if you have plans after this but you could come over if you want?”

Magnus looks up at Alec’s words, stepping forward and wrapping his arms around his middle. “Yeah,” he breathes.

“Yeah. You could even spend the night if you want.”

“I wouldn’t want to be an imposition,” Magnus whispers, grinning as he kisses along Alec’s jaw.

“Trust me,” Alec says. “I want you.”

Magnus leans back just far enough to look at Alec’s face. “Well, then. How can I argue with that?”

Magnus gasps as Alec nips at his pulse, soothing the small sting with tongue before moving on. He lets everything else fall away. The only thing he can focus on is Alec, leaning over him and leaving a trail of kisses down his neck, nibbling across a collarbone.

At his urging, Magnus leans up and hastily discards his shirt, relaxing into Alec’s bed with a soft sigh of contentment.

Alec hums, moving down his chest, sweeping a hand down his thigh. Magnus’s hands go to Alec’s hair, sifting through the dark strands. He feels pleasure dripping through his veins and everything feels slow. He’s achingly aware of just where Alec is, breath catching as Alec dips his tongue in his
He feels Alec trail a finger over the waistband of his jeans and looks down to see Alec already looking at him, maddening little smile on his face.

“May I?”

“Please,” Magnus breathes, ignoring just how wrecked he already sounds.

It’s a bit of an awkward fumble-- Magnus’s jeans looked damn good but they were damned tight. It’s a bit of a joint effort and when Alec finally frees his pants from his ankle, he’s laughing quietly.

He leans back over Magnus, looking down at him with eyes glinting in amusement.

“That was exhausting,” he says, grinning.

Magnus wraps his arms around Alec’s neck, pulling him closer. “Poor darling. Are you too tired to continue,” he asks, mock sympathy dripping from his voice.

”Not a chance,” Alec murmurs and ducks down, kissing Magnus for all he’s worth.

Magnus loses track of time as the kiss spins out, growing steadily deeper. He widens the space between his thighs and Alec settles against him with a low groan. Dragging his hands down Alec’s back, Magnus slips them under his shirt, nails digging into Alec’s hips just a little.

Alec’s hips jerk against his as he gasps. Magnus sweeps his hands up, bunching Alec’s shirt as he goes along.

Pulling back just enough to catch his breath, Alec pulls his shirt over his head, throwing it somewhere to the left before diving back in.

Free to explore, Magnus lets his hands wander over Alec’s back, shivering as he feels Alec’s mouth against his ear.

“Can I suck you off,” he asks, voice low and hoarse. Magnus grows harder at the words, shuddering as he nods jerkily.

“You can do whatever you like, darling.”

Alec settles back on his haunches and Magnus sees the grin that’s turned touch a hint wicked. Alec hooks his fingers in the waistband of Magnus’s underwear, tugging them down an inch. Magnus’s brain feels slow to respond but he gets with the program soon enough, lifting his ass so that Alec can pull them the rest of the way off.

They go in the same general direction of Alec’s shirt and as Magnus lays back down, he feels Alec’s eyes on him.

Grinning, he lets his legs fall apart a little more and swears he can feel the heat of Alec’s gaze warm him.

Alec doesn’t say anything as he looks his fill, stroking slow, sure hands down Magnus’s thighs. Close, but not close enough to where Magnus wants him.

He leans forward, kissing a knee, biting the soft skin of his inner thigh. Magnus bites his lip as Alec trails a path of lingering touches and slow kisses towards his aching cock.
“Please, Alec,” he breathes and contains a whimper when he feels Alec’s breath against him.

“What do you need,” Alec asks, and skips over his cock, moving instead to the sensitive skin just above it.

Words are becoming increasingly difficult but Magnus is willing to do anything if it means getting Alec’s mouth around him.

“You,” he says. “I need you, Alexander. I need your mouth.”

Alec doesn’t move for a long minute and a frustrated noise escapes Magnus. He wrenches his gaze from the ceiling to Alec and what he sees makes him lose his breath.

Alec is looking at him, eyes glowing with hunger. Color runs high across his cheeks and he looks the picture of debauched.

“Then let me,” he murmurs, nipping at the jut of a hip bone. He doesn’t give Magnus a moment to protest before he’s moving on, closing his mouth over him without preamble.

Immediately, Magnus buries his hands in Alec’s hair, nails scratching softly at his scalp before pulling instinctively at the wet heat that envelopes him.

“Fuck, Alexander. Yes.”

The words leave Magnus on a sigh as Alec pulls off, running his tongue along his cock, paying special attention to the vein running along it. His hands go to Magnus’s hips, pressing them down into the mattress, grip firm. Distantly, Magnus hopes he’ll have bruises in the morning and shudders at the thought.

Alec closes his mouth over the head of his cock, sucking lazily and Magnus’s back arches. Alec’s grip on him is sure, though, pinning him down and Magnus moans as Alec moves over him, swallowing more each time he moves down until Magnus feels the back of Alec’s throat.

Alec doesn’t stop there, though. No, Alec relaxes his throat and it’s just a few moments later that Alec’s taking all of him.

It’s long minutes of Alec mouthing over Magnus’s cock, a lazy tempo that has pleasure crawling through Magnus. Magnus grows increasingly incoherent as Alec sucks him off, pleasure building at the base of his spine. He surrenders to the overwhelming heat. He surrenders to Alec and the tidal wave of feeling that washes over him. Hazily, he thinks what a way to go. He’s swept along, knowing-- hoping-- that Alec will always be his anchor.

Alec moans around his cock and Magnus is helpless to stop himself from thrusting into Alec’s mouth. He doesn’t expect Alec to let him but to his surprise, Alec’s grip on him eases.

Immediately contrite, Magnus is just gathering his last remaining brain cells for an apology when Alec pulls back.

His breathing is harsh and his lips are deliciously swollen. “It’s okay,” he says, voice shot to hell. “I want you to fuck my mouth, babe.”

At the words, said in a gravelly voice, Magnus closes his eyes, trying desperately to get himself in order.

He doesn’t have a chance as Alec leans over him again mouth open, waiting expectantly for
Magnus’s cock.

Biting his lip, Magnus shudders as he takes himself in hand. He strokes himself once, twice, and watches Alec’s eyes grow hazy in lust.

He guides himself to Alec’s mouth, one hand around his cock and the other in Alec’s hair, keeping him still.

Slowly, he pushes in, thrusting inch by inch into Alec’s waiting mouth. Alec immediately seals his lips over Magnus and the suction-- the incredible heat-- has Magnus seeing stars.

Alec lets his eyes fall shut and as he moans around Magnus’s cock again, Magnus feels himself reach the precipice. Alec’s mouth is a goddamn dream and the way Alec’s reacting-- the sounds falling from his mouth as if he’s the one getting off-- is too much for Magnus.

The thing that pushes him over the edge is the slick sounds of Alec working his own cock, mouth still wrapped around Magnus with singular focus. Magnus’s breath is wrenched from him as he screws his eyes shut, thrusting one more time into Alec’s willing mouth and coming down his throat.

Alec doesn’t pull off. Instead, he swallows it all, eagerly. Magnus’s breath is harsh as he regains his equilibrium. He’s just getting ready to rouse himself when Alec groans long and low before slouching over Magnus.

“Alexander,” Magnus asks, voice hushed. “Did you just--”

“Just come from sucking you off? Yeah,” Alec says, voice already drowsing. He absently kisses Magnus’s neck, worrying the flesh between his teeth.

Magnus lets his head fall to the side, giving Alec better access.

“Christ,” Magnus says, dazedly.

Alec hums, preoccupied. Magnus lets him go for a few minutes, sinking into the quiet aftermath. It’s nice, he thinks. He feels peaceful, joy quietly thrumming through him.

Alec eventually pushes himself up to his elbows with a groan, wrinkling his nose as he shifts.

“I’m going to go clean up and change,” he says with an amused grin. Alec climbs off him and Magnus sits up with a sigh. “I need to change too,” he says and catches the pair of sweats that Alec tosses him.

The two of them are back in bed quickly, Magnus wrapped around Alec, warm and content.

Alec sighs quietly in the silence of his bedroom. Magnus is a comforting weight over him and he feels more relaxed than he can remember being in ages.

Something is niggling the back of his mind insistently, though, and Alec knows the feeling well enough to know that he can’t sleep it away.

Alec carefully maneuvers out of Magnus’s grip, slowly moving out of the bed. It takes long minutes and herculean patience but Alec escapes without waking his boyfriend.

He pads over to his desk where his song book is and grabs a pen, quietly walking out to his balcony that overlooks the city.
It’s a cool night for midsummer and Alec loses himself in lyrics. The song that he’d been working on earlier in the week comes to him easily now and he doesn’t hear the door open. He startles as arms wrap around his neck and slams his songbook closed as Magnus leans over him.

“Come to bed, Alexander.”

Magnus’s voice is sleepy and a lot bemused. Turning his head, Alec sees Magnus regarding him with fond patience.

“I hope I didn’t wake you,” he says, voice muted in the night.

“Don’t be ridiculous, darling.” Turning away to muffle a yawn, Magnus looks back at him with bleary eyes. “I just turned over and you weren’t in bed.” he glances at the song book laying in Alec’s lap. “Did your muse strike?”

“Yeah,” Alec says, standing. He walks forward, guiding Magnus as he steps back into his bedroom. “But I think I’ve exhausted it for the night.”

Magnus grins as he slips back in between the sheets, Alec following. It takes less than a minute for Alec to fall asleep, surrounded by Magnus.

Alec barely feels the feather-light touch in the morning as Magnus kisses his forehead.

“Bye, darling,” Magnus says and Alec has just enough wherewithal to reach a hand out and snag Magnus’s wrist.

“Where are you going,” he asks, voice slurring with sleep.

Magnus’s voice is amused as he replies, “I need to go home and get ready for work. I have classes to teach and young minds to sculpt.”

Alec pouts, eyes still closed, and sinks deeper into the covers. “Miss you.”

He hears Magnus chuckle and smiles as he feels another kiss land against his hair. “I’ll miss you too, Alexander. Have a good day.”

Alec makes some noise of acknowledgement but falls back asleep before Magnus reaches the front door. He dozes for another hour before his ringtone wakes him up.

He lets it go to voicemail, thinking that he’ll catch whoever it is when it isn’t daybreak, but when his phone starts ringing almost immediately after it stops, Alec reluctantly peels his eyes open.

Reaching out a hand, he grabs his phone and stares blurrily at the screen before swiping to answer. “Lydia,” Alec greets sleepily. “You can tell me whatever it is after--”

“Alec. Have you seen the news?”

Something twists in Alec’s stomach at her tone. This isn’t Lydia, his best friend since high school. This is Lydia, his manager.

“What news, Lyd?”

“It’s everywhere, Alec. Why didn’t you warn me,” Lydia demands. “I could have started damage
“Warn you about what?” Alec is a lot confused and growing more irritated by the second. His stomach drops, though, as he hears Lydia’s next words.

Lydia’s reply is grim. “It looks like your boy has one hell of a skeleton in his closet.”

Alec sucks in a breath. “I’ll call you back,” he says hastily and hangs up on Lydia’s objection.

Alec goes straight to the internet, typing in his own name. The half second it takes for the page to load feels like an eternity.

When he sees the first headline, he clicks it without reading.

When the article appears, Alec feels the breath wrench from his chest.

*Like Father, Like Son: The Apple Didn’t Fall Far from the Scheming Tree*
*Byline: Victor Aldertree*

*Magnus Bane, son of notorious Asmodeus Bane, who is currently serving thirty seven years in state prison for defrauding his clients and shareholders of over one billion dollars in assets, caught out on the town with music’s darling, Alec Lightwood. Is it love, though, or has Magnus just found a different way to make his fortune?*
Like Father, Like Son: The Apple Didn’t Fall Far from the Scheming Tree

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Magnus Bane, son of notorious Asmodeus Bane, who is currently serving thirty seven years in state prison for defrauding his clients and shareholders of over one billion dollars in assets, has been spotted out on the town with music’s darling, Alec Lightwood.

Is it love, though, or has Magnus just found a different way to make his fortune?

Dear reader, we at Idris News love good gossip and when a source close to Bane came forward to tell us about the hottest tip in town, we couldn’t resist.

It appears that Magnus Bane, professor at Columbia University, has been hiding an unsavory past.

An insider reveals all. To protect her privacy, she asked that we not reveal her name.

Let’s start the story with one Magnus Bane. Born and raised in Manhattan-- on the upper West Side- - Magnus is the son to notorious swindler Asmodeus Bane.

Bane, who is infamous for his unbelievably successful ponzi scheme that stretched over twenty years.

Asmodeus Bane was a wall street broker from 1980 to his long tumble from his gold-plated pedestal in 2004. Considered far and wide to be a charismatic man, Bane Sr. was a shark on Wall Street, known for having a bloodhound’s nose, always sniffing out the Next Big Thing.

Most accredited his success to sheer luck and hard work.

No one knew that he was swindling coworkers and clients alike out of savings accounts, retirement plans, and talking up potential investments that would become a long string of proverbial gold mines in the Old West.

No one knows for certain just how much money Asmodeus Bane absconded with when all is said and done. Working for twenty years afforded him connections and a sharpened sense of when the chips were about to fall. There were dozens of accomplices and just as many scapegoats as Bane kept his nose clean even as those closest to him were caught and indicted.

Bernie Madoff who? Some estimates have Bane’s scheming amounting to over one billion dollars, most of which has never been recovered.

In 2000, the FDIC launched an investigation with the White Collar division of the FBI. After four years, they accumulated enough evidence to formally arrest Asmodeus Bane of over one hundred counts of fraud and embezzlement. After his lengthy trial-- which was a media circus in and of itself-- Bane was sentenced to 53 years in New York’s State Penitentiary.

Due to good behaviour, that sentence has been reduced to thirty seven years with the possibility of parole after ten more years.

Which brings us to his son, Magnus.

Magnus Bane, now an esteemed faculty member of Columbia University, wasn’t always so sparkling clean.
No, our source reveals that Bane Jr. has quite the sordid juvenile record.

Literally.

Magnus Bane was arrested half a dozen times for petty crime between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, when his record was officially sealed. Our intrepid reporters were able to find the dirty details, though.

After Asmodeus's incarceration, Bane became part of the foster system where he bounced from home to home in the city. His mother died just a few years after giving birth and growing up, Magnus looked up to Asmodeus as only a son can look up to his father.

By all reports, Magnus was a model student-- at least on paper. That didn’t stop him from regularly skipping class or getting up to no good.

Looking at Bane’s record reveals charges for petty larceny, vandalism, and underage possession. And that’s the mere tip of the iceberg.

Things certainly don’t look good for Magnus, do they?

Still, something changed and Magnus took his SATS, graduated summa cum laude and headed for greener pastures-- Yale as a matter of fact, where he completed his undergraduate degree in three years before moving on to his doctoral thesis, spending part of that time in London.

Magnus Bane will be thirty in just a few months and things have never looked better for him-- he’s the Chair of the History Department at an Ivy League Institution, he’s been published dozens of times and is regularly invited to speak at conferences, both domestic and abroad.

We’ve even heard that he’s been busy working on a new book with an anticipated Summer 2019 release.

But that’s not all. Magnus Bane has been spotted out on the town with Alec Lightwood, the hottest musician in the world right now who just wrapped up a sold out world tour in May.

By most estimates, Lightwood is worth an astonishing 300 million dollars.

That begs the question to any reporter worth their salt: What does Bane see in Alec?

It’s easy to see what could have captured Lightwood’s attention. Magnus is handsome (have you seen his Insta??), successful, and we’re sure charming as hell.

We bet he gets it from his father.

But does Magnus see Alec’s million watt smile and rugged good looks or does he see dollar signs flashing?

Does he see a man who would do anything for his fans or his next meal ticket?

Alec is talented-- he can sing, act, and is well-known for his philanthropic endeavors. Idris News has long since waited with bated breath for the biggest name in the music scene to find his perfect match.

We just didn’t want to see it happen like this.

Our inside source claims that things went cold between them when she refused to keep paying for Bane’s tuition in London. Apparently, the professor was in dire straights and like a good girlfriend, our source had wanted to help-- until it became too much.
As you can see from our photos, it looks like Magnus and Alec have been getting cozy for quite a while. Those pictures at the zoo are #couplegoals and don’t get us started on the two of them enjoying a romantic walk throughout the city.

Is Magnus in love? Are we witnessing a real life fairy tale or has Bane just duped Lightwood into becoming his naïve sugar daddy in a move that would make his father proud?

It seems like a dream come true for an earnest professor to meet a polished celebrity. We just wonder if fate had a helping hand and if Alec isn’t being played for a fool.

Shame on you Magnus for breaking our golden boy’s heart. We’ve seen Alec through many a scandal dating back to his pre-album days and we’ve got to say that we aren’t impressed.

Or maybe we are. It certainly takes a certain je ne sais quoi to pull off such a trick. Time will tell what’s truth or lie with Alec and Magnus and who wouldn’t miss a seat to potentially one of the biggest scandals this year.

Whatever the case, the staff at Idris can’t wait to see what happens next.

Magnus looks up from the glossy magazine at the knock on his door. He sends Ragnor a wan smile.

“I take it you’ve seen the news.”

Ragnor looks at the magazine like others would a vulture. “If you’re asking if I’ve read that piece of trash then, unfortunately, the answer is yes.” He’s quiet a moment, studying Magnus before asking in a gentle voice, “How are you doing?”

Magnus laughs and it’s a bitter, angry noise. “How do you think I’m doing. I woke up next to Alec feeling great enough to take on the world. I didn’t think I’d actually have to, though,” he says, shaking his head.

Ragnor’s gaze sharpens at the mention of Alec. “And have you talked to lover boy since the story broke?”

Shaking his head, Magnus sits back in his chair. He looks through his office window and everything seems the same. There are students milling about like zombies so early on a Monday morning and there’s the kid that’s always flying a kite in a dinosaur onesie.

On any other morning, it’d be more of the same.

Too bad that Magnus’s world has imploded.

“I left his place less than two hours ago,” Magnus says, gaze unseeing. “I only found out when I came to campus. I was passing the Student Center when their magazine stand caught my eye. I certainly didn’t expect to see myself on a cover.”

He chuckles humorlessly. “I haven’t been in a magazine since I was fifteen.”

“Is your career at risk?”

Magnus shoots him a look. “I have tenure so they can’t fire me, if that’s what you’re asking. Forget that I haven’t even done anything. No, I think I’d go so far as to say that I’ve just become the most sought after guest at conferences for the next little while. What is it they say? All publicity is good publicity?”
Ragnor is quiet and the silence starts grating on his nerves. He can’t believe how fast things went to shit, after all.

“Goddamnit,” Magnus mutters, staring up at the ceiling. “It’s bad enough that my past has come back to bite me in the ass. I always knew it would if I continued this thing with Alexander. What I can’t stand is that I wasn’t the one to tell him.”

Magnus looks at Ragnor, beseeching. “Alec had to find out that my dad’s a fucking con from someone else. From the press? From his PR team? It doesn’t matter-- all that matters is that I’ve probably ruined everything. Sometimes I hate my father so much I can taste it,” Magnus bitterly whispers and clenches his fist where it’s resting on the arm of his chair.

Taking a seat in front of Magnus’s desk, Ragnor takes his time thinking before looking up at Magnus. “What makes you so sure that you’ve ruined anything, friend? Surely if Alec is as great as you’ve been screeching about all this time then he won’t cast judgement so cavalierly?”

“What is there to judge? My dad is quite literally the worst crook Wall Street has ever seen. For Christ’s sake, his nickname is ‘The King of Wall Street.’ How does someone get that reputation,” Magnus demands before answering his own question. “They get it by being a cheat, by swindling hundreds and hundreds of people out of their money. Shit, he took savings from the elderly and college funds from middle-aged couples. He was a greedy bastard and he got what was coming to him.”

“That doesn’t mean that you should pay for what he did,” Ragnor says quietly. “Your dad was a bastard. That shouldn’t reflect on you. If Alec is the man you say he is then he will see that, friend.”

“Yeah? And what if he doesn’t,” Magnus asks morosely.

“Then he doesn’t deserve you,” Ragnar snaps back impatiently. Magnus looks up to see Ragnar looking at him with fire in his eyes. “You’re a good man Magnus and I can’t stand that you let your father weigh you down like this.”

Magnus shoots him a dry look. “I think I’m incredibly well-adjusted for the shitstorm that was my adolescence.”

“Be that as it may, you’ve castigated yourself enough. I’ve never seen you look at anyone the way you looked at Alec yesterday. From what I’ve seen, Lightwood seems like a decent enough man and anyone with eyes could see the way he’s smitten with you. I’m choosing-- shocking, I know-- to give the boy the benefit of the doubt.”

Thinking over Ragnar’s surprisingly impassioned speech, Magnus reaches for the phone on his desk on autopilot when it starts ringing.

“Bane,” he says, voice clipped.

“Dr. Bane, this is Elle Donovan from Celebrity Magazine--”

“No comment,” Magnus says coldly and hangs up without another word.

“The little parasites have already latched on to you,” Ragnar says easily.

Blowing out a breath, Magnus glares at the phone. “Goddamn rodents.”

“It looks like everything is out in the open now, at least. No matter how it was revealed, at least it’s no longer hanging over you and your relationship with Alec like a proverbial thundercloud.”
“You’re right,” Magnus drawls sarcastically. “Now instead of worrying about Alec’s reaction to learning about my past-- in which I envisioned that we would talk about things and, assuming he didn’t run as far away from me as he could get, we would sit down and formulate a plan to deal with the press-- I get to jump right to the inevitable break-up as well as deal with the fucking media frenzy at the same goddamn time.”

Ragnor raises a brow before standing and straightening his jacket. “I can see that you’re in no mood to listen to reason,” he sniffs. “I’ll leave you to your sulk and trust that you’ll deal with things without too much time spent crying into your damn hanky.”

“Like I have a choice,” Magnus mutters.

Ragnor ignores him. Making his way to the door of Magnus’s office, he spares a glance back.

“I know that this isn’t what you wanted and I know that you’ve been running from your past since the day you stepped foot onto Yale. I know that you had a bit of a misspent youth that’s easily forgiven. Alec makes you happy and I’d hate for you to end things before you even see what your boyfriend is thinking.

“As loathe as I am to admit it, there is rarely a silver lining that can’t be found. Talk to Alec and go from there. It doesn’t do anyone any good to decide the future before it’s even had a chance to play out. Talk to him,” Ragnor repeats and Magnus nods once.

“Thank you, Cabbage,” Magnus says softly.

Ragnor doesn’t say anything, just sends him one last piercing look before leaving Magnus’s office.

Sighing heavily, Magnus scrubs his hands over his face, makeup be damned. Looking at his clock, Magnus laughs a little incredulously that it’s still shy of eight in the morning.

He has class in half an hour and Magnus doesn’t even need to think about it before he’s opening an email and cancelling his classes for the day.

Just the thought of teaching to a room full of twenty year olds with such a white elephant hanging about ominously seems repulsive.

Standing, he picks up his bag-- that he hadn’t even had a chance to unpack-- and calls it a day, leaving his office and locking up.

He heads back to his apartment, hoping to fuck that he doesn’t run into anyone.

Magnus looks up from where he’d buried himself in work. The last of his revisions are due by the middle of August and he still has hundreds of pages to edit and review in the next two weeks.

Seeing that it’s late afternoon-- Magnus has successfully distracted himself for hours-- he stands, working out the kinks in his back from where he’s been bent pouring over his manuscript.

Looking through the peephole to ensure it’s not a particularly perseverent journalist, Magnus opens his door to see Cat and Madzie waiting in the hallway.

“Good afternoon. What are you two doing here,” he asks with an arched brow.

Rolling her eyes, Catarina moves past him as Madzie skips to the living room. “What do you think
we’re doing here? The shit has hit the fan and what kind of friend would I be if I didn’t check in?”

“No, ‘I told you so?’”

Shaking her head fondly, Cat goes to sit down in the living room as Madzie goes to her cabinet and takes out some crayons and a coloring book, settling down in front of Cat to draw on the coffee table.

“I’m better than that,” Cat says dryly.

Magnus just sighs before sitting down in a chair. “You did warn me, though,” he admits.

Leaning forward, Cat rests a hand on Magnus’s knee. “Yeah, but even I thought you had more time.” She raises a brow. “You know who went to Aldertree, don’t you?”

“I’d have to be a fu-- fool not to,” Magnus scoffs, clearing his throat as he glances at Madzie.

Smile reaching her eyes, Catarina just shakes her head. “All this time and she just can’t help herself.”

"She did warn me in London. I probably should have seen this coming. Maybe I’m losing my touch,” Magnus mutters under his breath.

“Or,” Catarina draws out. “You’ve been a little preoccupied lately. It happens to the best of us,” she teases.

Magnus laughs a little. “Still,” he allows. “I feel like I should have known-- had a feeling, something-- that my world was about to implode.”

Cat shrugs as she leans down to pick up a crayon that fell to the floor. “The only thing you can do now is move forward. Deal with whatever happens and know that you aren’t alone. You have us, of course, but don’t forget that you have Alec.”

“Do I?”

Glaring, Catarina replies, “Yes, you stupid man. You do. Until Alec explicitly ends things, he’s in your corner. From what I’ve seen, I hardly think that an opportunistic viper is going to make him tuck tail and run. He’s made of sterner stuff than that and you do both yourself and him a disservice thinking otherwise.”

“But I didn’t tell him, Cat,” Magnus implores. "He found out from someone else and you can’t tell me that doesn’t cast things in a dark light.”

“Please, Magnus. Like we don’t all have things in our past that we’d rather not see the light of day. Like Alec Lightwood doesn’t understand that.”

“Cat,” Magnus says, tone soaked in self-deprecation. “We literally talked about this a few days ago--about his reputation and insecurity surrounding his career. He’s been used in the past and was rather jaded. I talked him down and we reached an understanding. I said that I didn’t want his money, that I was far more concerned with the person behind the wallet.”

“Well, there we go, then,” Cat exclaims. “He knows your intentions and that you aren’t just another bottomfeeder.”

“Don’t you see, Catarina? I said all of that only for my past to blow up at the worst imaginable time and you must know that any sane person would have an unpleasant case of whiplash.”
Cat sends Magnus an arch look. “Not if that person was as smitten as your boy is over you.”

Magnus opens his mouth to retort but Cat beats him to it. “On the surface? Yeah, Magnus, it looks bad. I won’t lie about that. But that isn’t taking into consideration that you two have been friends for months and Alec should know better. He should at least talk to you before making any rash judgments.”

“I just don’t want to talk to him-- to have that conversation-- and have it be the end.”

“Sometimes you have to do things you don’t want to do and sometimes people surprise you, even if you thought you had it all figured out,” Cat counters.

“What’s wrong?”

Magnus looks up from where he’d been brooding to see Madzie at his side. He smiles, smoothing a hand over her hair. “Some people found out some things about me that I’d rather they hadn’t. I’m a little afraid of what the consequences will be.”

Madzie hums a little as she thinks before her gaze snaps back to Magnus. “You’re always telling me that I have to be brave even when I don’t want to. Like, when I fell off my bike and didn’t want to get back on. You told me that I had to face my fears and I did! And now I love riding my bike in the park with Cindy.”

“Are you saying that I have to take my own advice?”

Madzie nods solemnly and Magnus smiles. It’s small, and a little defeated, but it’s there nonetheless.

With that, Catarina stands up, helping Madzie clean up her crayons. As she does so, the shifts so that she can see Magnus.

“When are you going to talk to him? You really can’t let this fester,” she warns.

Magnus opens his mouth to respond just as his phone vibrates. He looks over on autopilot and freezes when he sees the text message.

“Speak of the devil,” he murmurs and stares down at his phone, dread settling in his stomach like lead.

_Magnus, when are you free? We need to talk._
Chapter 35

Alec reads the article three times through and feels anger licking up his spine.

Goddamnit.

His phone rings again and Alec swipes to accept the call just as Lydia’s number pops up.

“What?”

“Don’t ‘what’ me, Alec. You have half an hour to get to my office so that we can start damage control or I’ll come get you and drag you here myself.”

“Understood,” Alec replies curtly and hangs up before tossing his phone onto his bed and scrubbing his hands over his face.

He gets ready in record time, making sure that he throws something on that looks sharply confident. Choosing a lightweight linen suit in a charming shade of burgundy, he leaves the throat open of his crisp white Oxford and leaves his bedroom.

He’s surprised to see that the coffee pot is already full and looks up when he hears the clearing of a throat.

“You’re up early,” he says to Izzy, raising an expectant brow.

Coming into the kitchen, Isabelle shrugs and heads directly to the fridge, pulling out a takeout container. “I have plans this morning and thought you might appreciate a little fortification.”

Alec looks at her sharply. “You know?”

Isabelle is quiet as she dumps out her leftovers onto a plate and takes it to the microwave. It’s only once she’s set the timer that she turns around and looks at Alec. He can’t help but feel a little exposed, nerves raw as his sister studies him.

“How could I not? It’s all over the internet. I even got a special Google Alert about it.”

“Shit,” Alec curses and runs a hand through his hair on impulse before desperately wishing that he hadn’t disheveled things too badly. He looks over at Isabelle but something in him stills as he sees her acting particularly nonchalant.

“You knew,” he accuses and can’t believe his eyes when Izzy shrugs again before rolling her own eyes.

“Of course I knew,” she says. “You think I wouldn’t check out the first guy my brother falls for? I’ve known since I saw the two of you on the floor.”

Alec considers her words carefully before asking, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Laughing quietly, Isabelle opens the microwave as it starts to beep, taking out her pasta. She sends him a look. “Can you stand there and honestly tell me that you wanted to know? You might have fallen for Magnus but that didn’t turn you into a dumbass. You were perfectly capable of having your private investigator do a little research.”

She takes a fork from a drawer and grabs a quick bite before continuing, “You deliberately decided
not to do a little digging and I commend you for that. I don’t know if I’d have made the same choice if I was in your position.”

She points her fork at him. “When I saw that you weren’t going to protect yourself, I decided to step up. I checked Magnus out and I had to admit I was surprised. But does it change anything? No. Magnus isn’t his father and you should know more than most not to cast those particular sins. I see the way Magnus looks at you and for God’s sake, the man’s a tenured professor. I find it hard to believe that he’d con you, considering his reputation.”

The kitchen is quiet for a minute before Alec unfreezes and pulls out a mug, pouring a cup of coffee and dumping a few spoonfuls of sugar into it. He can feel the tension in his shoulders and his thoughts are a maelstrom-- though one in particular stands out.

“It’s my fault.”

He hears Isabelle still for a second before she walks over to him and lays a hand on his shoulder. “It was bound to get out eventually, hermano. Magnus is a grown man. He knew that dating you would necessarily place him in the spotlight. Don’t give yourself too much credit or take away his.”

Alec takes a bracing sip of the scalding coffee before he turns to look at her. “Obviously, he wasn’t ready. He hasn’t told me anything about his past and made it plain that he didn’t want to yet. Fuck,” he sighs and runs another distracted hand through his hair.

Isabelle lands a considering look on him and he meets her eyes steadily. “You’re not angry,” she asks carefully. “I’d think most people in your place would be feeling a mix of betrayed and furious. I don’t even think I could particularly blame you for it considering the amount of shit you’ve dealt with from other people.”

Alec’s reply is thoughtful as he replies, “I can’t deny that my first reaction was hurt-- you know that’s one of my biggest insecurities. But there’s just something about him, Iz,” Alec continues with a half-desperate, half-hopeful look in her direction.

“I’ve known him for months. I read that goddamn article from start to finish three times and I find that I can’t blame him for not telling me. He said that there were things in his past that were better off left alone and I respected his decision-- still do. I just hate that the goddamn media sniffed it out like fucking bloodhounds.”

“Talk to him, Alec,” Isabelle says urgently. “This must be one hell of a shock and he might need you.”

Alec considers Izzy’s words before shaking his head. “He probably doesn’t want to even look at me right now. I told him this would happen but we were both fucking fools. I thought we had more time before everything blew up in my face,” he says with bitter self-deprecation. “Plus, Lydia’s court-martialed me to her office and I’m--” he looks at his watch, “Shit, I’m running late. I’ll talk to him later.”

Izzy opens her mouth before biting her tongue. “Just don’t let this fester. I’d hate for this to come between you.”

Alec doesn’t say anything, just nods once before downing the rest of his coffee and starting toward the door.

He pushes down the thought that it already has, that the fucking paps have ruined things just when they were getting started.
Pushing himself off the elevator wall, Alec slips his sunglasses on and mutters a curse as he sees the crowd of photographers standing out on the sidewalk. Through the row of windows, he sees Charles acting unaffected even as he stubbornly keeps them at bay as best he can.

“Showtime,” he murmurs and smooths his suit jacket down as Charles reaches for the door and the paps leap forward, cameras flashing and calling out questions.

“Hey, Alec! Tell us a little bit about Magnus? Is it true that he’s just using you?”

“How does it feel to be officially off the market-- or have things fallen apart between you and Bane already?”

“Alec, our sources say you were planning on proposing soon. Did you know Magnus was playing you from the start and do you plan to return the ring?”

Jesus Christ, Alec thinks but he smiles easily while sending up a silent prayer when he sees Dave already waiting at the curb, door open.

“Sorry guys but I have a meeting I can’t reschedule.” He makes his way through the journalists at an insistent pace, glad that he’d snagged his sunglasses on his way out.

He just hopes no one catches his clenched jaw.

“Everyone at Glitz Magazine is sorry to hear that you got played, Alec,” A pap says with faux sympathy dripping from his tone. “Want to give us the inside scoop?”

“There’s nothing to tell,” Alec says coolly.

“Really,” someone else asks, shoving their microphone in his face. “Then it’s not true that you’re in a relationship with the heir to Asmodeus Bane’s ill-gained fortune?”

“No comment.”

At Alec’s reply, camera shutters sound with alarming force and he rolls his eyes from behind his sunglasses.

He sees Dave watching him with a raised brow and shakes his head minutely. He doesn’t need help getting through the pack of vipers.

It’s a few seconds later that feel like hours before he’s climbing into the back of the town car. He doesn’t relax until Dave shuts the car door and then he sliding his glasses off and blowing out a breath.

Dave slides behind the wheel and starts pulling away from the curb. Alec stares stubbornly ahead and ignores the flashes that shine through the darkened car windows.

“Wanna talk about it, boss?”

“I don’t think so, Dave.” He meets his driver’s eyes in the rear-view mirror. “I take it Lydia called you?”

Dave nods as he makes a turn on red. “She did. You had eight more minutes before she was going to come over herself.”
Laughing softly, Alec murmurs, “Well, then, what luck that I made it.”

The rest of the car ride is silent and Dave pulls smoothly up to the renovated townhouse that houses Lydia’s agency. Alec has just placed his hand on the handle when he hears Dave speak up.

“For what it’s worth, boss, I like Magnus. I don’t think that a trashy article should condemn him. When I picked him up for your date, he was polite as all get out and seemed excited to see you. What do I know, though,” Dave trails off and turns to give Alec a pointed look.

“Note taken,” Alec says dryly and quickly exits the car, not wanting to linger and attract any paparazzi.

Alec opens the door and gives a tight lipped smile to the receptionist. He doesn’t have a chance to say anything, however, before she’s pointing upstairs where Lydia’s office is located.

He raises a brow. “How many times has she come down here?”

“Seven.”

Wincing, Alec nods in acknowledgement before turning towards the stairs. He’s on the landing when he hears the clack of heels coming toward him. Looking up, he sees Lydia standing at the top of the stairs with a serious look on her face.

Swallowing a sigh, Alec trudges up the rest of the flight until he’s standing next to one of his best friends and the best agent he’s ever had.

He’s expecting verbal whiplash and his eyebrows shoot up when instead of starting in on him, Lydia steps forward and pulls him into a hug.

“How are you doing, Alec?”

Alec returns her hug but steps back after a minute, shooting Lydia an incredulous glance.

“How am I doing,” he repeats. “I thought you were about to flay me alive not ask after my well-being.”

Sniffing, Lydia replies, “I might be your manager but I’m also your friend and it can’t have been easy to find out that your boyfriend was a fucking snake. I wanted to see how you were holding up.”

“Lydia,” Alec starts slowly. “I’m doing just fine. I’m not mad at Magnus. I was just stunned when I saw the magazine article.”

At that, Lydia’s expression changes from caring friend to ruthless agent. “We need to talk,” she says crisply and turns on her heel, walking straight to her office.

Alec follows and sits down in front of Lydia’s desk. He watches as Lydia closes the door and takes a bracing breath before going around her desk to sit in her late model, customized Aeron chair that’d been a gift from him last Christmas.

“Alec, we needed to start damage control hours ago. Have you seen the news,” she demands. “Everyone is calling you a fucking idiot for letting yourself be played by Magnus. When are you planning on ending things-- if you haven’t already,” she asks brusquely, turning toward her computer and skimming through whatever’s on the screen.

“I’m not breaking up with him.”
At Alec’s response, steady and brooking no argument, Lydia looks up from her computer and narrows her eyes. “What do you mean, you aren’t breaking up with him? It’s obvious that Bane had an ulterior motive for dating you. While I know it’s hard, you need to nip this shit in the bud before everyone loses their sympathy and you really do become a goddamn idiot.”

Alec’s eyes flash. “I’m not ending things with Magnus, Lydia. Let’s be clear on that. I don’t blame Magnus and if he turns out to be a mistake-- if I’m wrong-- then I’ll eat crow until the goddamn apocalypse. Until that day, I’m standing by him.”

Lydia leans closer, voice taking on a kind of urgency that Alec hasn’t heard since he was caught with that European prince a few years back.

“Alec, I don’t think you understand. Everyone is rueing the day that you’re finally on the other end of the stick. You’ve earned a reputation as a devil-may-care playboy and people are saying that you’re finally getting what you deserve. I’ve had calls from dozens of print and news companies wanting to know what’s going on. People are even going so far as to say that you’ve known since the beginning and the two of you have planned your own con. It’s ridiculous bullshit but since when have the press ever concerned themselves with being practical or even right?”

Alec echoes her movement, leaning close and making sure that he’s looking her dead in the eye when he replies, “I don’t give a flying fuck what they’re saying Lydia. While I didn’t know exactly what Magnus was hiding, I knew enough. I’m not abandoning him to those damned vultures and I’m not holding this against him.”

“Are you really willing to risk your reputation over a goddamn man, Alec? Do you know what people are going to say, if they haven’t started already? They’re going to say that you’ve lost your touch, that you’re another stupid celebrity thinking with his fucking dick instead of his head. Is that what you want? To become the laughingstock of the entire world? Because that’s where you’re heading if you don’t end things.”

“Listen to me carefully, Lydia,” Alec says, voice even. “I like Magnus a lot and even that feels too tame. I’m not giving up on him-- on us-- because a sleazy trash rag wrote an unpleasant article about him. That’s just not going to happen so I suggest that you get the idea out of your head right now. What I need is for my agent to work with me to minimize the damage.”

Lydia doesn’t say anything for a minute, just sits back in her chair and studies him with a sharp gaze before finally sighing.

“You know that I can’t force you to break up with him, Alec. I can strongly advise but I can’t make you do anything that you don’t want to.”

Shaking her head, Lydia turns back to her computer for a few seconds before swiveling her chair around to the printer. She turns back to Alec when her document finishes printing and slides the pages over to him.

“Damage control, step one--”

“Make a public appearance,” they say together and Lydia grins at him. It’s not soft or even pleasant. It’s sharp and in control and eases something in Alec as he sees his friend rising to the occasion to do what she does best.

“Make a public appearance,” Lydia repeats. “Now, there’s a festival in Paris tomorrow and we could squeeze you into their lineup if you fly out this afternoon. I can have you on a plane in two hours,” Lydia mutters.
“No,” Alec says, firmly. “I’m not going anywhere until I talk to Magnus.”

Seeing that Lydia’s about to protest, Alec sends her a pointed look that she recognizes as meaning that he’s officially dug in his heels. “I need to talk to Magnus and I can’t wait days to do it.” He sighs. “Even if I don’t know if he even wants to talk to me.”

“Why wouldn’t he want to talk to you,” Lydia asks, confused.

Alec sends her an incredulous look. “What do you mean, why wouldn’t he want to talk to me? His entire past has been revealed to the world and it’s because he’s with me.”

“You have to know this isn’t your fault. You couldn’t have protected him, Alec. It was bound to get out sooner or later and there’s nothing you could have done to prevent it.”

“Then, I’m going to do the only thing I can now that it’s happened,” Alec replies resolutely. “I’m going to be there for him as long as he wants.”

“You’ve really fallen for him, haven’t you,” Lydia asks, voice traitorously soft.

“Yeah,” Alec admits. “I don’t know if it’ll turn out to be the dumbest fucking thing I’ve ever done, but I refuse to regret whatever happens. I’m in this, Lydia. Now tell me what we need to do.”

Lydia nods and points to the pages she’d just printed. The two of them spend hours in her office, pouring over press release drafts and hammering over a schedule. They throw ideas out and debate their merits, their end goal always stopping the gossip in its tracks and protecting Magnus’s-- and Alec’s-- image.

Lydia is on the phone as often as she’s talking to him and it’s late afternoon by the time Alec looks at his cell. He tamp down on the disappointment he feels when he sees that Magnus hasn’t tried to get in touch and shoves his phone back in his pocket.

If Magnus wants space then Alec figures the least he could do is respect that.

Lydia’s just booked his travel to London in a few days and landed him a spot on a few NYC morning radio shows when she abruptly stops her running monologue.

“You should text him.”

Alec sends her an incredulous look. “I don’t think that’s for the best.”

“Why not,” she scoffs. “You’re obviously worried. Plus, this is a shit storm that even we’re caught in. I’m sure Magnus is feeling far worse. You should talk to him.”

“I thought you didn’t like him,” Alec asks with raised brows.

Sighing in her seat, Lydia just gives him a look. “I liked him before this morning and you’re faith in him does him a credit. You’re my friend, Alec-- one of my best friends. I just don’t want to see you get hurt.”

Alec smiles, reaching over to lay a hand over hers. “I appreciate the concern but I’m a big boy,” he says bemusedly. “I can take care of myself.”

Rolling her eyes, Lydia pulls her hand out from under his and goes back to typing the few revisions they’d agreed on.

“Are you sure you don’t want to accept any appearances right now? You know that time is of the
essence.”

“I’m sure. I’m not even sure about the damned press releases. I want to talk to Magnus before we send anything to news outlets, okay? ”

“Then why don’t you text him,” Lydia asks between clenched teeth.

Rolling his eyes, Alec takes his phone out. He debates what to type but there’s no point in dawdling any further and things have come to a head-- he needs to talk to Magnus and see where they stand but he also needs to look out for his career and tamp down on the looming scandal.

_Magnus, when are you free? We need to talk._

He hits send and stares at his phone as if he can will a timely answer. He feels his pulse pickup as he gets a text notification less than a minute after he’d first hit send and takes a deep breath, ignoring Lydia’s steady stare as she watches him from behind her desk.

Opening his thread with Magnus he swallows hard at the reply, feels just the tiniest bit of tension seep from his shoulders.

_I’ll be home for the rest of the day. You’re more than welcome whenever, Alexander._

Alec’s standing before he even knows what he’s doing. Shrugging into his jacket, he spares a look at Lydia. “I’m heading over to Magnus’s now. I’ll let you know how everything goes.”

“See that you do,” Lydia replies dryly. “I want a reply within the hour-- don’t make me hunt you down.”

Laughing a little breathlessly, Alec nods before he turns toward the door.

“Alec.”

Looking back, he raises a brow as he sees Lydia studying him with a small smile. “Relax,” she orders. “You’re not going into battle and if Magnus is the one to end things then he wasn’t the right one for you anyway. You need someone who can handle the spotlight. Not someone who cowers away from it.”

Alec wants to protest but finds that he can’t. As much as it pains him to say it, he knows that Lydia is right. Alec signed up for this life and he needs someone who can stand by him, who can brave the press and photographers and relentless scrutiny without shrinking away.

Magnus might not be that person.

But Alec sure as hell hopes he is.

Alec knocks on the door to Magnus’s apartment and takes a breath. He leans against the door jamb and stares at the floor absently, waiting for Magnus to answer.

The door opens less than a minute later and Alec looks up to see that Magnus’s face is a blank slate. He can see the cracks, though.

The two of them consider each other for a minute, without saying anything. Alec studies Magnus, sees the nearly imperceptible slump of his shoulders and the tension in his jaw. He takes in the way
Magnus’s eyes don’t quite meet his and something in him slides into place.

If he’d had any doubt about Magnus’s intentions, they’re easily erased now. Without thinking, Alec pushes off from the side of the door and takes the few steps over to Magnus, wrapping him in his arms for a hug that’s just a hair too tight.

Magnus is rigid in his arms for a few long seconds before he relaxes, bringing his arms up to wrap around his waist. They don’t say anything and Alec finds that the silence speaks louder than most words he could offer.

They hold on to each other and Alec breathes in the scent of sandalwood that’s already so damned familiar.

Magnus is the one to pull away but he doesn’t go far. He pulls back enough to see Alec’s face as he asks, “What was that for?”

“You looked like you could use a hug. And to be honest, so could I.”

Magnus smiles. It’s barely there and easily gone but Alec counts it as a victory nonetheless. Magnus takes a step back before asking over his shoulder, “Would you like a drink?”

Alec raises a brow. “Do I need one?”

“I guess that depends on how long you’re planning on staying.” Magnus laughs but it’s an ugly thing-- brittle and just a little broken.

“Hey,” Alec says softly. “Look at me, babe.”

At the name, Magnus’s sends a sharp look to Alec, looking like he doesn’t know how to react.

“I’m here because I want to be, Magnus. Now let’s talk.”

Magnus eases out a breath before picking up his half-empty glass. “If you insist.”

Alec sits down first, choosing one end of the couch. He’s a little confused-- apprehensive-- when Magnus chooses the chair across from him.

“I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry.”

They look at each other, mouths parted in surprise as they both apologize at the same time. Magnus looks at him bewildered. “Why on earth are you apologizing, Alexander?”

Shrugging uncomfortably, Alec says, “If you weren’t with me then the press never would have revealed your past. I’m sorry that happened and that they officially know about us. I’m sorry that you had that taken from you and that I’m partly to blame.”

Frowning, Magnus is shaking his head before Alec even finishes. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry about, darling. I knew what being with you meant and I chose to take that chance. I’m sorry for not telling you before you had to hear it from someone else. I can’t imagine that was pleasant and honestly, I’m just glad you’re here at all.”

Alec listens to Magnus’s words and something eases in him as he realizes that Magnus isn’t angry at him. He can’t ignore the rest of what he’d said, though.
“Magnus, you told me that you had a past and that you weren’t ready to tell me. I respect that-- still do. You don’t need to tell me anything that you don’t want to.”

Magnus throws him a dry look. “You probably know quite a bit at this point.”

“Still,” Alec insists. “I don’t want you to feel like you need to tell me any more details.”

“I think we passed that point when Idris News published that article. That’d be a bit like closing the gate after the horse has escaped, wouldn’t it?”

It’s quiet for a minute and Alec doesn’t know what to say, how to let Magnus know that he doesn’t think less of him now that he’s found out a little of his past.

“If you want to leave, you’re more than welcome to. No questions asked, darling.”

Alec’s gaze snaps up as he meets Magnus’s. “What,” he asks dumbly.

Waving a negligent hand, Magnus gestures toward the front door. “Even if you aren’t angry at me-- which I don’t even begin to comprehend-- there’s little doubt that you don’t want to be with me anymore. So please, feel free to leave. No hard feelings.”

“No hard feelings-- Magnus,” Alec asks in a strangled voice. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

Magnus takes his time answering and Alec hopes to God that he’s not imagining the emotion swimming in his eyes. “I’m a liability for you now, Alec. It’s well known-- I know-- that your career always, always comes first. I refuse to be something that holds you back. You can’t very well be with someone with such a sordid past.”

“You never--could never-- hold me back. I like you, Magnus, and a story in a trashy magazine won’t change that.”

“Your father is one of the worst criminals in the United States, Alexander.” Magnus’s voice is quiet as he continues, “That’s too much.”

“It’s not too much for me,” Alec argues. “For fuck’s sake, you know what a nightmare my dad is and you still listened, you were still there for me. Give me the same chance. Or have you already figured everything out?”

“I haven’t figured anything out, Alexander,” Magnus snaps. “I woke up this morning on top of the goddamn world and here I am less than twelve hours later telling you things that I’d really rather wouldn’t. I’m flying by the seat of my fucking pants right now.”

“Then let’s talk this through.”

“Let’s,” Magnus says bitterly. “What do you want to know? Yes, I loved my father and as much as it pains me, I still do frighteningly often. No, I had no idea that he was a swindler to rival Madoff-- that he was a right bastard that neither wants nor needs anyone’s forgiveness. Yes, I had to deal with the goddamn media circus his trial turned into when I was in high school and yeah, I bounced around the foster care system until I went to college.”

He laughs but it’s derisive. “Yeah, I have a bit of a record-- the cops busted me a time or twelve for spray painting the school or for drinking up on the ridge. Yeah, maybe I’ve worked my fucking ass off to be better than that-- to leave that version of me with its daddy issues and blistering anger away. Is that enough talking? Or do you want to hear about how life was a fucking nightmare before I left the city and my records were sealed? About how I heard the whispers behind my back every
goddamn day about how the apple didn’t fall far from the tree, that I was ruined.”

Alec takes in Magnus’s scathing words, his anger and hears the strain of bitterness etched into his impassioned speech. Before he quite knows what he’s doing, he finds himself kneeling in front of Magnus, resting hesitant hands on his thighs.

Magnus watches him with barely concealed dread and regret already simmering at his outburst.

“Listen to me,” Alec says quietly, stubbornly keeping eye contact. “I don’t care who your father is. I care who you are. Yeah, I want to know the boy you were but really? I just want to know the man in front of me.”

He smiles a little, lips barely turning up. “I happen to like him quite a lot,” he confesses. “I love his intelligence and kindness and wit and sense of humor. I like that he’s built a life for himself that seems damned satisfying. I’m proud of him and I’m thankful that he likes me. So, your dad’s in jail. Unfortunate but not the end of the world. Want to know a secret?”

Magnus nods mutely.

Leaning closer, Alec murmurs, “I’m head over heels for you, babe. I don’t think there’s much you could do—much you could tell me at this point— that would change that.”

“Darling,” Magnus says, voice cracking. “You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into. Our relationship was always going to be fodder for the press. But add my history? It’s just turned into a media frenzy.”

“Then we’ll deal with it,” Alec says firmly. His eyes search Magnus before he quietly adds, “Together.”

“And what if it ends up being too much? What if I’m too much for you?”

Humming, Alec thinks for a second. “And what if I’m too much for you? I’d be the first one to admit that this life— the life I’ve chosen for myself— isn’t the easiest. Are you sure you want to put yourself through that, even considering your past?”

“Of course, Alexander. I decided months ago that you were worth it.”

“Then trust me when I say that you’re worth any possible media shit storm that comes our way.”

Seeing Magnus’s uncertainty, Alec reaches a hand up, placing careful fingers under his chin. “There’s nothing ugly about you, Magnus. You’ve got me,” he says quietly. “As long as you want me.”

Magnus studies Alec. He feels like his boyfriend is peering into his goddamn soul and takes a shaky breath.

This is it.

He’s laid himself bare. He’s done everything he can to make Magnus see that Alec is in this, all the way.

He wonders if it’s enough.

If he’s enough.

Magnus lifts a hand, sweeping a gentle thumb over Alec’s cheek.
“I want you, Alexander. You’ve got me as long as you want me.”

Alec smiles, using the hand still under Magnus’s chin to tilt his head. He leans forward and kisses him. It starts slow with an undercurrent of wonder and a shuddering sense of familiarity that Alec finds himself craving.

They kiss for long minutes, losing themselves in it. Magnus widens his knees, letting Alec fall closer. It turns hungry and heated and Alec gasps into Magnus’s mouth and a particularly sharp nip of teeth.

“I want you, Alexander,” Magnus breathes, kissing down his throat, and Alec pulls back, breathing harsh in the stillness of the room.

“You can have me.”

Magnus’s eyes, hazy with lust, sharpen at his words. “Darling?”

Alec’s mouth tilts up in a grin. “I’m all yours,” he says and feels giddy as the words leave his lips.

He’s confused as Magnus stands up, takes a step away from him. Looking up, he sees Magnus watching him with glowing eyes that makes Alec’s breath catch in his throat.

They’re full of everything he’s ever wanted.

“Magnus?”

Holding out a hand, Magnus smiles, tilting his head toward the hallway.

“I think it’s time we moved things to my bedroom, darling. Don’t you?”

Alec feels lightheaded as he stands, taking Magnus’s outstretched hand.

Magnus pulls him closer until Alec bumps against his chest, their hand still intertwined.

He doesn’t think-- can’t-- not when Magnus makes him so goddamn dizzy with lust and want and--

And.

He lets his boyfriend guide him to the bedroom and surrenders to Magnus.

Always Magnus.
They stumble through the open doorway, laughing against each other’s lips. Breaking apart for a minute, they stare at each other with a sort of wonder that makes the breath stutter in Alec’s chest.

*Christ*, Alec thinks dizzily. He can’t believe that he gets to have this, that Magnus is giving himself to him just as Alec’s offered himself.

He can’t focus on anything but the feel of Magnus under his hands, against his chest. He breathes in Magnus’s cologne and shudders. Nipping at Magnus’s bottom lip, Alec kisses him and it’s lush and slow and it feels like drowning.

Alec never wants to come up for air.

He doesn’t know where he’s going but soon enough their momentum stops as Alec must back them against the wall. Magnus doesn’t protest, instead taking the opportunity to pull Alec even closer.

Crowding further into Magnus’s space, Alec brings a hand down and splays it against his thigh, hitching it around his hip. Magnus doesn’t need encouragement as he leans against the wall, letting Alec press him into the exposed brick.

A thready moan escapes him and Alec swallows the sound for his own. He feels delirious, he feels like he’s about to combust at any moment but he can’t stop.

He doesn’t want to stop.

Magnus buries a hand in his hair, turning his head and shifting the angle of the kiss to something deeper, something filthy that makes Alec’s head swim with lust.

He’s never felt like this before, that he knows without a doubt. No one’s ever burrowed their way into his heart, into his head like this. Magnus makes him feel invincible.

He feels on top of the goddamn world and never wants to come back down, not if it means sacrificing the man in front of him and everything he represents.

Tonight he’s not Alec Lightwood, celebrity known by millions across the world. No, this evening in the privacy of this loft, he’s just a man on the precipice of falling. The fall looks dangerous but it beckons him closer by the goddamn second. From where he’s standing, it looks damn near inevitable and Alec has no intention or wherewithal of standing back.

Tonight, he’s just Alec and all he wants is Magnus.

As his hand moves from Magnus’s thigh to his ass, pulling him until they’re flush together, Alec hums as Magnus trails a hand from his shoulder to his front, slowly unbuttoning his shirt. He feels cool air against his chest as Magnus steadily moves lower before breaking their kiss.

His eyes sweep low to admire the view and he grins a little before meeting Alec’s eyes. “Nice.”

“Thank you,” Alec replies dryly, laughing a little.

Before Magnus can urge him closer, Alec’s reaching for the hem of Magnus’s shirt. His fingers slip under the fabric, teasing the skin there and Alec watches, fascinated, as his boyfriend shivers.

He doesn’t have to ask before Magnus is straightening from the wall, allowing Alec to sweep the
shirt up and over his head. Alec sees the miles of skin before him and his brain short circuits.

He doesn’t know where to taste first.

Luckily, Magnus doesn’t let him debate for too long before he’s wrapping his arms around Alec’s shoulders and they’re back to lazily making out against the wall. Alec has the distant thought that they should probably move to the bed just a few feet away but he can’t find it in him to pull away, not when he knows that he’d miss Magnus’s heat as soon as they broke apart.

He’s so lost in the kissing jag, in the feeling of Magnus’s fingers pressing into his back, that he doesn’t realize they’re moving at first.

Magnus takes a step forward and Alec moves on autopilot. They repeat the clumsy dance for half a dozen steps before Alec’s knees hit the edge of the bed and he falls onto the mattress.

It’s unforgivably cold after being so close to Magnus and Alec opens his eyes to see that Magnus hasn’t followed him yet. No, instead his boyfriend is standing in front of him. His mouth is red and he’s breathing harshly in the quiet of the bedroom. His hair’s a bit of a wreck and his eyes are blown wide with lust and something else that Alec can’t quite decipher.

He’s just set to say something when Magnus beats him to it, leaning over him and straddling his hips.

Alec looks up and meets those beautiful brown eyes that he loves so much. He sucks in a breath as Magnus runs a finger over his bottom lip, his eyes focused on the movement, his breath shuddering out as Alec’s tongue darts out on instinct, as he closes his mouth around the digit for a slow suck before releasing it with a last kiss.

“Gorgeous,” Magnus whispers.

Alec smiles at the compliment, at the way it echoes his thoughts from earlier. Bringing both hands up to cup Magnus’s face, he brings him down for a lingering kiss that starts off slow before the heat returns with a flash. He gasps into Magnus’s mouth and Magnus takes the invitation, slipping his tongue in Alec’s mouth.

The glide of their tongues sets every nerve ending firing and Alec’s overwhelmed in the best goddamn way.

He can’t remember the last time anyone took such time with him-- the last time he wanted them to. Magnus seems content for the moment to kiss him, to kiss down his throat and nibble across a collar bone. There’s no fumbling with zippers, no frenzied prep.

For all that Alec’s done this a hundred times, he’s never done this. He’s never felt like this.

Alec sinks into the feelings that wrap around him. He feels heavy, full of everything that Magnus brings out in him and like he’s floating, light as a feather and incandescent.

A harsh moan is torn from his throat as Magnus kisses over his neck before biting down on his pulse point. As he laves his tongue over the spot to ease the sting, Alec turns his head to grant more access.

When Magnus’s hands go to his wrists, holding him down, Alec’s hips buck up and he shudders as Magnus’s attention doesn’t waver. He flexes his arms to test the hold and moans again as he finds Magnus’s grip unrelenting. He’d been half hard as soon as Magnus had held out a hand to him in the living room and now all of his blood rushes south as he goes lax, surrendering. Closing his eyes, Alec leaves Magnus to it.
His neck feels raw by the time Magnus pulls back minutes later, mouth bruised. Alec watches him as Magnus stares down at the marks he’s made, smug satisfaction gleaming in his gaze.

Releasing one of Alec’s hands, Magnus brings it up until without warning, he presses down on one of the newly-formed spots.

Some noise escapes Alec, desperate and breathless.

Magnus grins down at him, something wicked lingering in his eyes, in the turn of his mouth. He studies Alec and Alec can just imagine what he looks like.

Magnus straightens and takes a deep breath, running a hand through his hair. It should be absurd, should look like a shameless display as his arm flexes but it looks like he’s trying to regain his equilibrium.

Resting his hands against Magnus’s sides, Alec gives him a moment before something occurs to him.

“Something wrong,” he asks, sweeping his thumbs across Magnus’s exposed hip bones. He smiles a little, reassuring and Magnus shakes his head almost before Alec’s finished talking.

He leans down to leave a quick kiss against Alec’s mouth before rising again and putting some distance between them. His eyes search his and he lays a hand against Alec’s heart, fingers wide.

“Are you sure,” he asks softly. “Do you want this? I need to hear the words, darling.”

Alec runs a hand through Magnus’s hair before bringing him down for a lingering kiss. When they break apart, Alec feels unsteady, unmoored.

It’s probably embarrassing, probably says something awful but no one’s ever asked him that before. He doesn’t know if no one’s ever cared enough to or if they just assumed but there’s never been room for second guessing, for a way out.

Alec’s more than willing to end things if he’s not feeling it but no one’s ever asked before, no one’s ever put his comfort first and his heart surges in his chest as he considers Magnus.

“I want to,” he says simply. “I want you and I want this. Do you?”

“Now what kind of question is that,” Magnus asks softly. “Of course I want this. Of course I want you.”

“Good.”

Laughing, Magnus repeats, “Good, huh?”

Nodding his head, Alec replies, “Great,” in an emphatic tone and is rewarded as Magnus laughs again, as he smiles down at Alec with his eyes crinkling at the corners in joy.

“And what do you want with me, Alexander?”

Magnus’s voice is just above a whisper, teasing lilt to his tone and as he shifts imperceptibly, Alec’s breath catches. He feels Magnus against him, already hard and he feels desire flare in his gut.

“What if I said I wanted you to fuck me,” Alec breathes, rolling his hips up in a teasing invitation.

He watches as Magnus’s eyes darken, as he bites down on his lip hard enough to almost draw blood.
“Then I’d say that you’re wearing far too many clothes, darling.”

Alec shudders as he feels Magnus trail a single finger over the waistband of his slacks, slipping the fly open tortuously slow. Lifting his hips, he lets Magnus pull his pants down until he can toss them over the bed onto the floor.

Left in just his underwear, Alec feels unaccountably exposed. This is nothing new-- it’s not even anything new with Magnus-- but as he feels Magnus’s eyes run over him, lingering on his chest, down his abs to his cock, Alec feels revealed, vulnerable in a way he hasn’t since he was a damn virgin.

Magnus’s gaze is covetous, possessive, and Alec soaks it up, shivering.

“My turn,” he mutters hoarsely and his hands go to Magnus’s waist, expertly opening the placket of his jeans and tugging down until Magnus rolls off of him with a huff of laughter.

Landing on his back, Magnus wrestles with his jeans and carelessly lets them fall to the side of the bed.

Alec’s on him in the next beat and as he presses Magnus firmly into the bed, a groan escapes him as his boyfriend makes room for him in between his thighs, wrapping long legs around his waist.

Their cocks align and Alec’s hips jerk helplessly against Magnus as he brings his mouth down to place a searing kiss on his lips.

“Fuck,” he gasps and moves down to mindlessly mouth along his boyfriend’s neck.

As he listens to the sounds escaping Magnus, Alec buries his face in the juncture between his neck and shoulder, where Magnus’s scent is the warmest. His head feels like it’s swimming, dizzy with lust and overwhelming affection, all of his senses focused on the man under him.

They spend long minutes grinding lazily, cocks moving together, and Alec feels like he’s losing his goddamn mind. A surprised yelp leaves him when Magnus flips them so that he’s now the one on top and Alec hums, content, as he lets his hands wander over the planes of Magnus’s back, slipping a hand under the waistband of his underwear to rest against his ass.

Suddenly impatient, Alec kicks off his own underwear and Magnus follows suit with a breathless hum.

There’s some rearranging but just a moment later, Alec lets his eyes focus on Magnus and can’t stop the flood of want that comes over him.

Magnus’s cock is a hard line resting against his stomach. His eyes are blown, his hair disheveled and on his knees in between Alec’s splayed legs, he looks like a fucking vision.

He looks like everything Alec’s ever wanted.

Magnus, for his part, seems caught up studying Alec. He sweeps a hand along his inner thigh, leaving goosebumps in his wake and Alec feels his cock jump at the attention, leaking precome. He watches as Magnus shakes his head, just a little to clear it, before leaning over the side of the bed to the nightstand and taking out a bottle of lube.

In the next moment, he’s taking his rings off and Alec bites his lip to keep his whimper in. A moment later, Magnus is wrapping a hand around his cock, grip firm, and Alec’s back arches at the pleasure that sparks up his spine. It feels like his mind’s melting and Magnus seems content enough to watch
Alec lose all semblance of control as he moves his hand down Alec’s cock, twisting at the head, pressure on just the right side of too much.

Alec loves being watched and he is definitely more than willing to revisit this little scene of theirs but right now he wants Magnus. Reaching out, Alec squeezes some lube into his own hand before urging Magnus closer.

Going without protest, Magnus grins, feral, as their cocks slide together, hips bucking. Alec wraps a hand around both of them, and they share the same breath before it turns into a low groan at the slick friction.

Hazily, Alec knows that he could come just like this. Precome adds to the mess between them, making everything that much smoother and Alec closes his eyes as he lets the sensations wash over him.

He blinks them open furiously however as he feels Magnus pull back.

“What,” he asks, confused and just a hint desperate. He can feel his impending orgasm simmer away and groans a little as Magnus smirks at him, breathing labored.

“As much fun as that is,” Magnus murmurs. “I believe I have a request to fulfill.”

Reaching for the lube, Magnus slicks one finger and Alec feels his brain shut down. Reaching between them, Magnus trails a fingertip over the crack of his ass and Alec bites back a moan as he feels him slip between his cheeks.

“This okay,” Magnus asks, voice low as his gaze is trained on Alec.

Releasing a shuddering exhale, Alec breathes, “More than,” and tenses as Magnus rubs firmly over his entrance before sliding one finger in.

Magnus thrusts that first finger in a few times, getting Alec used to the sensation and Alec lets his legs fall wider apart as his fingers come up and tighten around his pillow. Magnus’s eyes are focused between his legs and when there’s a second pause as he slicks up a second finger, Alec bites down as he feels the more persistent intrusion.

God, he loves this, Alec thinks in a daze. Magnus works him open with careful movements, scissoring his fingers, letting them catch on his rim. His world burns just a little brighter and Alec can’t stop his hips from moving. Magnus’s fingers hit a little deeper and Alec clenches down, trying at once to stop Magnus while pulling him in further.

Magnus lingers for a few moments. He takes his time, fingerling Alec with deft surety and Alec swears as he shifts angles, finding his prostate. He’d almost think it was accidental but as his eyes blink open he sees Magnus watching him with wicked eyes.

“Fuck, add another babe,” Alec whispers hoarsely and his hips jerk as Magnus complies, working three fingers into his ass. His pace quickens. Instead of leisurely blowing Alec’s mind, it feels like his patience snaps and he starts fucking Alec in earnest.

Greedily taking everything Magnus can give him, Alec isn’t even aware of the noises spilling from his throat. Twisting his wrist, Magnus works Alec open. Bless those fingers, Alec thinks a little hysterically. He feels heat simmering in his gut and he can’t keep his hips still, is physically incapable of not shifting his hips, trying to keep the pressure constant.

When Magnus stops, when he pulls back leaving Alec bereft, he can’t stop the wounded noise from
escaping. Opening his eyes, Alec glares at Magnus who just watches him with an amused smile.

Alec’s smirks a little as he sees just how hard Magnus is working on his unaffected front. His cock is achingly hard, dripping precome and his lips are bitten red.

“Ready for me to fuck you, darling?”

Alec’s breath catches at the question and he plants his feet on the bed, widening the space between his thighs. “Please,” he breathes. It’s the only thing he can think to say and Magnus rewards him with a warm smile, eyes shining with something that makes Alec’s chest constrict before he slicks up his cock, eyes almost closing as he places lingering touches along the shaft.

Leaning over Alec, Magnus kisses him once, twice, three times before reaching a hand down to guide himself to Alec’s entrance. Alec feels the blunt head of his cock against him and shudders. Pressing in, Magnus doesn’t stop until his hips are flushed against Alec. The breath is wrenched from him but fuck, he loves the feeling of being full, filled with Magnus’s cock inside him. As Magnus gives him a moment to adjust, Alec presses dull fingertips into his back, sweeps a hand up to rest between his shoulders.

He feels the tension in Magnus, the effort it’s taking to stay still and Alec hums as he wraps his legs around Magnus’s waist, heel pressing against the small of his back. He squeezes down on Magnus’s cock and as heat snaps in his gut he hears Magnus groan.

Withdrawing until he almost pulls completely out, Magnus thrusts back in and Alec lets out a strangled noise at the slow glide. Building a torturously slow rhythm, Alec rolls his hips up to meet Magnus.

At each drag of Magnus’s cock inside him, Alec feels pleasure spark down his spine. Heat flares higher as desire courses through his veins sluggishly.

He’s surrounded by Magnus and Alec can’t think of anywhere else he’d rather be.

He never could’ve predicted that the man he’d met in a diner one night when he was feeling so low and jaded and burnt out would come to mean so much to him-- would come to mean everything.

Magnus is a warm weight over him, pressing him down until all Alec can think about is his boyfriend. Alec’s never let anyone in so completely. He’s never met anyone that he wanted to let in like Magnus. His boyfriend’s maneuvered through ironclad defenses like the most accomplished soldier.

Alec’s never felt like this before. God, he just wants to lose himself in Magnus and as he pulls him down, burying a hand in sweat-damp hair, he turns his head until they’re sharing the same breath before closing that last bit of distance.

Kissing Magnus feels like coming home. It makes blood rush in his ears, feels like syrupy satisfaction as he moans against his lips, the kiss turning slow and deep and filthy enough to make his toes curl against the sheets.

There’s too much tongue and too much feeling and Alec urges him closer as he feels his orgasm barreling closer.

They’re so close that Alec doesn’t know where one begins and the other ends and he still feels too far away. Breaking apart with a gasp, Alec’s head tips up as Magnus reaches for his thigh and shifts the angle enough for him to hit Alec’s prostate.
Everything spirals brighter and Magnus stares down at Alec, greedily taking in the changing expressions on his face with blown pupils that reflect the low light of the bedroom. His thrusts lose tempo as he gets closer and all Alec can do is hang on as Magnus stays locked on the angle that makes everything sharp enough to burst.

“So close,” he mutters hoarsely and Magnus makes some sound of acknowledgement, lost in his own growing pleasure.

His cock is red, leaking in a constant stream, and Alec reaches down with one hand to wrap around it and feels fireworks flare as he works himself in tandem with Magnus.

Leaning down, Magnus buries his face on the other side of Alec’s neck and nips at unblemished skin. He closes his mouth and sucks hard before biting down. Alec keens and with one last twist around the head of his cock, he’s coming, hitting Magnus’s stomach with sticky strands of white.

Moaning through it, everything in Alec tenses as his feelings coalesce. Clenching down smugly, he hears Magnus groan lowly as he fucks him through it, thrusts sloppy and breathing harsh, full of choked off groans and muted whimpers.

“Shit, keep going,” Alec says, fucked out, aftershocks shivering up his spine. Now that satisfaction is dripping through him in a warm rush, he focuses on Magnus and what he sees makes his breath catch.

Magnus is stunning. There’s a flush across his cheekbones and Alec watches as a bead of sweat trails down his jaw. Bringing him close, Alec licks it away, humming at the taste. Magnus gasps as his hips snap down and it’s so much but fuck if it isn’t so good.

Bringing Magnus’s lips to his, they’re less than a breath apart when Alec murmurs, “Wanna feel you come, babe. I want to feel you come in me.”

Magnus’s breath shudders out and with an erratic last few thrusts, he stills deep in Alec. Groaning through it, he tenses and Alec can’t keep quiet when he feels warmth rush into him.

Sweeping soothing hands over his back, it takes a few minutes before Magnus slips out of Alec. Almost immediately, Alec feels come start to leak out of his ass and he winces even as he hums a little.

It’s quiet in the bedroom and Alec’s happy in the stillness. He likes being so close to Magnus and he feels so much that he half wonders how a heart supposed to contain it all.

When Magnus starts kissing over his chest, Alec laughs a little and runs his fingers slowly through his hair. The two of them lay like that for awhile, content in the afterglow and Alec knows they need to get cleaned up but he’s too comfortable to move.

Rising up to his elbows, Magnus cages Alec in. Alec looks up and when he meets Magnus’s eyes, he can feel his smile light up his face.

“Hi,” he whispers softly and closes his eyes as Magnus kisses his cheek before moving on to his jaw and nose and finally his mouth.

“Hi,” Magnus echoes breathlessly.

Shifting again, Alec grimaces. He throws a dry look to Magnus. “I think we need to clean up.”

Humming a little, Magnus looks thoughtful though Alec sees the wicked edge of his smile. “I think a
shower’s in order. Don’t you, darling?”

“Good idea, babe,” Alec agrees dryly.

Part of him just wants to melt into the sheets but he has no desire to wake up to this mess so with a beleaguered sigh, Alec takes Magnus’s outstretched hand and follows him.

They take a few steps toward the ensuite before Alec pulls Magnus back to him. He collides gently against his chest. Wrapping an arm low around his middle, Alec brings their intertwined hands up to his mouth, kissing the back of Magnus’s.

Words come to him, feel trapped in his throat.

*It’s too soon*, he thinks dizzily. He swallows them back and grins at Magnus who seems content enough to study him in the early evening light.

Throwing an arm around his neck, Magnus brings them closer. Smiling warmly at Alec, he kisses him. It’s slow and deep and seems to say a thousand words.

Pulling back, Magnus tilts his head to the side. “Shower?”

Nodding, Alec takes a step forward, guiding Magnus back. Magnus laughs and seems happy enough to follow wherever Alec leads him.

The shower is warm and lasts much too long but neither one is complaining. They change the sheets and collapse back into bed. The light wanes as they huddle together under the covers, talking about anything and everything. Sharing the same breath, they share confidences and it’s completely dark by the time Magnus’s stomach growls in the quiet room.

Chuckling, Alec ducks forward to kiss Magnus. “We missed dinner, didn’t we?”

“Yeah, but it was totally worth it,” Magnus says, relaxing against Alec.

Magnus lays his head against Alec’s chest, trailing a finger in random patterns. Intercepting his wandering hand, Alec interlaces their fingers, playing with them distractedly.

“What do you want, babe?”

Humming a little, Magnus turns his head to kiss Alec’s heart. “I would literally eat anything right now. I’m starving, Alexander.”

Alec lips quirk up but he silently agrees. “Pizza,” he suggests, tone hopeful.

Acquiescing, Magnus pulls back and they both sit up. Looking at the clock, he sees that it’s late evening and Alec can hardly believe that it’s still Monday. So much has happened the last twenty four hours that he can barely wrap his mind around it.

Alec throws his legs around until he can place his feet on the floor and bends over, reaching for his pants. Magnus slides over and starts kissing along his shoulders, hands reaching around to wander over his chest.

It takes longer than it should for Alec to find his goddamn phone and when he unlocks it to order a pizza, he swears as he sees the missed calls and texts from Lydia.

Pausing in his ministrations, Magnus asks, “Something wrong?”
Alec debates for half a second before clearing his notifications. He doesn’t want to deal with Lydia, not when it feels like he and Magnus are stuck in their own world.

Clearing his throat, Alec replies, “Nothing that can’t wait till morning.”

Looking over his shoulder, his heart catches in his chest at Magnus looking adorably rumpled and happy.

They order the pizza and Alec turns his phone off, not wanting anything to interrupt his time with Magnus.

They spend the rest of the night watching terrible reality tv and eating dinner and talking. For all that Alec’s relentlessly teased about being a man of few words, he feels like he could talk to Magnus forever and not run out of things to say.

They make love again, the room dark and shadowed now and Alec falls asleep with Magnus wrapped around him.

His last thought before sleep strikes is that he wants to end every day just like this, surrounded by Magnus and so happy that he doesn't know what to do with it all.
Chapter 37

Alec wakes up with the sun in his eyes. Scrunching his face, he turns his head, burying it in his pillow.

He feels an arm thrown around his waist, a comforting weight, and a warm wall at his back. Humming a little, Alec can’t stop the smile from coming over his face. He’s glad that there’s no one around to see him because he can just imagine his expression right now.

Last night comes flooding back and with it, a dozen little aches. Carefully, Alec turns around, making sure not to jostle Magnus’s arm too much. With the sun at his back, he can see his boyfriend in the morning light and he smiles a little at the sight.

Magnus’s hair is a bird’s nest, his brow furrowed in sleep. He looks unimaginably soft and Alec’s heart aches at the man in front of him. Remembering last night, Alec spends long minutes reconciling the past few months that have led to this.

He’s known Magnus for such a short time but he means so much. Alec can’t imagine never running into him at the diner, never knowing his laugh or the adorable way he gets lost in a lecture or how he looks with sunlight streaming through sheer curtains.

This has never been Alec’s to have-- he’s never allowed himself to fall for someone so quickly, so completely. Or maybe, Alec thinks as he feels the sun warm his back, he’d just never found someone he wanted to know so well.

Half of him can’t believe what he’d done last night. He’s never ignored Lydia’s calls, especially when there was a looming scandal. He knows that there’ll be hell to pay later on but at the time, Alec couldn’t imagine letting anyone else into the bubble of warmth he’d found himself in. The outside world could wait just a few more hours, he’d reckoned.

Now that he’s not so preoccupied, now that his thoughts aren’t completely focused on Magnus, Alec is surprised yet relieved to find that he feels the same.

There’s still the tiniest part of him that wonders how this all plays out. He’s only known Magnus for a few months, really a blink of an eye, and there’s always a chance that this will end badly, that he’ll wish he hadn’t thrown caution to the wind so cavalierly.

But for the most part, Alec’s content. More than content, really. He’s happy. He feels peace wash over him in a calming wave and he doesn’t think he’s ever felt so still. His life is heavier than most assume, always so harried. He’s always rushing onto the next great thing, the next phase of his career, and there’s never room to just be. But in this moment, wrapped in sheets that smell like Magnus and a storm brewing outside the loft, Alec feels light enough to float.

He recalls the words that almost spilled from him last night and his mouth tilts upward. He knows it’s too soon. But by God, he thinks, if this isn’t love then he doesn’t know what is.

There’s time for that later, he decides. If Alec has his way about it, then there will be ages and ages for him to work up the courage and timing to tell Magnus how he feels. All in due time.

Shuffling forward, Alec throws a leg over Magnus’s and sighs a little, relaxing. He doesn’t know what time it is but he wants to soak this up for as long as he’s allowed before the outside world comes knocking and Alec has to leave. He hasn’t told Magnus about his plans and he doesn’t want to deal with it, in any case, not yet.
Just a few more minutes, he thinks, and feels sleep start dragging him back down before lips touch his forehead in the softest of kisses.

Magnus’s arm tightens around his waist as he rasps, “Were you watching me sleep, Alexander?”

His tone is amused, voice hoarse from sleep and Alec grins. “And if I was?”

“Then, I’d tell you to take a picture,” Magnus laughs. “It’ll last longer.”

Drawing back, Alec raises his head to meet Magnus’s sleepy gaze. “That wouldn’t be weird at all,” Alec replies dryly. “Not only watching you sleep but taking a picture, too? You’d be filing a restraining order before I could press the shutter.”

Laughing again, Magnus just says, “As long as it’s you, darling, I wouldn’t mind.”

Alec feels warmth fill his veins at the response but before he can say anything else, Magnus closes the distance between them. Their lips meet in a chaste kiss. It’s a lovely way to start the day and Alec hopes that this is far from the last time he’ll ever wake to this. Already, he’s addicted to it, to the way it makes his heart hurt just a little at the raw affection.

“Morning,” he murmurs when they pull apart.

“Good morning, my darling.”

The two of them stare at each other for a long moment. Distantly, Alec’s glad that there’s nothing uncomfortable about the quiet. There’s no place he’d rather be than right here next to Magnus and as his eyes study his boyfriend, Alec knows Magnus feels the same.

It’s nice. Different and something that he’s still getting used to, but Alec’s trusted his gut as long as he can remember and he can’t help but think that this is just the beginning.

Wryly, he realizes that he’s thought that about every first he’s shared with Magnus but it still rings true and he wonders if he’ll always feel like this, like there’s so much potential just waiting to be tapped.

Sweeping his hand down Alec’s back, Magnus asks, “How’d you sleep?”

His eyes have fallen shut and his voice is languid. He looks comfortable and at ease in a way that Alec finds irresistible.

“Like a damned baby,” Alec replies. “I wonder why,” he teases and shivers a little as Magnus’s hand drops down to the curve of his ass.

Humming, Magnus innocently offers, “Maybe it was the sheets. They’re Egyptian cotton, you know.”

Alec snorts. “Or maybe it was who I was with,” he says softly.

At that, Magnus’s eyes open and Alec’s breath catches as they catch the light. Turning golden, they’re full of everything he’s ever wanted.

He brings a hand up, sweeping his thumb over the corner of Magnus's eyes. “Beautiful,” he whispers.

Kissing Magnus feels at once like comfort and lightning. It doesn’t get old and Alec lets himself sink into the feeling, into the heat that licks up his spine as Magnus’s mouth opens for him.
They kiss lazily, content at the slow pace that’s like honey dripping through his veins. They’d fallen asleep after the last round of sex last night and hadn’t felt the need to throw on clothes. Moving closer, Alec feels Magnus against him in all the right places and hums into the kiss.

Break apart for air, the two of them grin at each other. Rolling onto his back, Magnus hides a yawn behind his hand.

“Looks like someone tired you out last night,” Alec says cheekily and Magnus mockingly glares at him.

“You’re lucky you’re so cute.”

Raising onto one elbow, Alec arches a brow as he asks, “Oh?”

Narrowing his eyes, Magnus runs a hand over Alec’s chest, down his arm. “I take my beauty sleep very seriously, I’ll have you know. It takes one hell of a temptation to make me sacrifice it.”

Alec lets himself be pulled down as Magnus murmurs against his lips, “You’re worth it though, darling.”

The next kiss has a bite to it that has Alec moaning as Magnus arches into him. He’s just getting into it when Magnus abruptly pulls back and slides out from under him until he’s sitting up, throwing his legs over the bed to set his feet on the floor.

Falling onto the bed, Alec groans and buries his head in Magnus’s pillow. Smelling the shampoo they’d used last night only slightly mollifies him.

The sheets pool around Magnus’s waist as he stretches his arms over head. Turning his head, Alec watches as the light plays over taut muscles, over the long line of Magnus’s back.

Jesus Christ, he thinks dizzily. How lucky he is to be able to witness such a sight.

“Why’d you stop,” Alec asks and tries to ignore the whining note in his voice. Alec loved morning sex-- even if he didn’t get much of it-- and things had been looking very promising before Magnus pulled back.

Looking over his shoulder, Magnus’s eyes are laughing as he replies, “You might be cute enough to ruin my sleep schedule but I refuse to let you mess with my morning routine.”

Intrigued, Alec reaches a hand out and runs it over Magnus’s back, fascinated as he feels muscles flex under him. “And what’s your morning routine?”

Standing, Magnus bends over and grabs the pair of underwear he’d discarded last night. Stepping into them, he looks at Alec and says, “I spend half an hour every morning practicing yoga on my balcony when the weather permits.”

Sparing a quick glance at the clock, Magnus continues, “Luckily, we woke up before my alarm and I don’t have to be on campus for a few hours. I have a feeling you’re going to add time to my routine,” he finishes dryly.

“Hey,” Alec exclaims. “Don’t blame me if I’m just too irresistible.” Throwing a hand over his eyes, he dramatically says, “I could do yoga if I had you for a teacher.”

He feels the bed dip before Magnus straddles him, pulling his arm away from his face. He peers down at Alec with a contemplative expression. “I do believe that I offered to show you some moves
Sweeping his hands over Magnus’s thighs, Alec looks up at him. “Seriously? I’m probably really terrible at it,” he admits.

Magnus leans over until he can cage Alec in. Looking down, he grins a little and Alec’s briefly terrified.

“I’m sure I can show you the basics,” Magnus says, voice low. His eyes wander over Alec, lingering on his chest, sweeping over his abs. “I do love a willing student.”

“Consider me all yours, then,” Alec replies, breathless.

Like the magic words have been uttered, Magnus is suddenly standing beside the bed, tilting his head towards the living room. “I’ll meet you on the balcony,” he says as he takes a step towards the door.

His gaze runs over Alec as he takes another step. “I do hope you put something on though, darling, or this lesson might be over before it starts.”

With that, he turns and leaves without a backwards glance. Heaving out a sigh, Alec turns boneless against the sheets as he stares up at the ceiling and wonders what he’s just gotten himself into.

Reaching for the phone he’d tossed on the nightstand last night, he sees the usual notifications and a text message from both Luke and Jace that makes him laugh even as he rolls his eyes.

Izzy told me you were going to fight for your man. Good luck bro!!

Alec, I hope you know better than to pay attention the media. Let me know if you need anything.

Not wanting to throw a bigger wrench into Magnus’s routine, Alec scrubs his hands over his face, tossing his phone onto the sheets and heads to the bathroom quickly, slipping into a pair of sweats Magnus had given him yesterday.

He comes out into the living room and looks toward the French doors only to freeze. Magnus had already started and Alec couldn’t name the position to save his life but it was definitely filling his head with all sorts of inappropriate thoughts.

Maybe this won’t be so bad, he thinks.

Padding out, it’s remarkably warm for so early in the morning. The humidity isn’t quite as suffocating as it will be later on and it’s actually quite pleasant.

Magnus hears him approach and straightens as he regards Alec critically.

“What,” Alec asks defensively.

“Just wondering what you’re capable of,” Magnus replies absently before he moves closer.

The next hour is one of the best and worst of Alec’s life. Magnus shows him several positions that make his muscles scream in protest and he can’t help but roll his eyes every time Magnus just chirpily replies, “I’m only showing you beginner’s yoga, Alexander.”

Sweat is pouring down his back and he’s breathless while Magnus makes minute adjustments to his posture, looking cool as a cucumber. He has a second mat that he rolls out next to Alec’s and they go through a dozen poses at a snail’s pace that still seems a little too fast to Alec.
“This is Downward-Facing Dog,” Magnus says, voice a little muffled as he’s not looking at Alec.

“I know,” Alec says curtly, and hopes that Magnus doesn’t see just how much his arms are shaking.

He hears Magnus straighten and then there are hands on him, smoothing over his back to straighten it out.

Magnus cops a feel, and Alec huffs out a laugh as he surreptitiously adjusts his stance. “Not helping, babe.”

“Well, you can’t blame a man, Alexander. Not when he’s so close to a body like yours.”

Alec barks out a laugh and tries to ignore how winded he sounds when he replies, “Are you kidding me? I feel like a newborn deer and you look like you just rolled off the cover of a Yogi Magazine.”

Sighing, Magnus urges Alec to standing with an expression that Alec refuses to classify as pitying. “I’ve been practicing yoga most of my life, Alexander. I’ve been teaching it for ten years. You’re incredibly fit but yoga works muscles that most people don’t even know they have. For a beginner, you’re not the worst student I’ve ever had,” he ends with a grin, throwing a wink to Alec when he looks up, offended.

They move into tree pose, facing each other and Alec keeps balance with gritted teeth. “How did you get into yoga, anyway,” he asks, hoping a distraction will keep him from crying at holding the position for however long Magnus demands.

He sees Magnus’s expression fall before he clears his throat. Alec does his best to look encouraging as he feels sweat drip down the side of his face.

Taking a deep breath, Magnus cautiously explains, “As you know, my mother died when I was very young. I barely remember her. However, she was a yogi and after she passed, my father—Asmodeus taught me. It was his way of remembering her and it was a bonding experience for us. We went to a class every Saturday morning and as I grew older, I learned to enjoy yoga as more than just a way to remember my mother. I like the way it clears my head and makes me slow down and it’s a hell of an exercise.”

Magnus finishes rather abruptly and looks at Alec as though he’s concerned about his reaction. Dropping from the tree pose, Alec steps closer and takes Magnus’s face in his hands, kissing him gently on the mouth.

“Thank you for trusting me with that,” he says softly. “Thank you for sharing.”

Magnus’s gaze warms and he kisses the corner of Alec’s mouth. “Thank you for being someone that I wanted to tell. I’ve never shared that with anyone else, you know.”

After that, their focus is shot to hell and they spend a while messing around. Magnus shows Alec some more advanced moves and Alec learns a few more poses that are barely concealed excuses for Magnus to feel him up.

He’s on the ground, Magnus on his knees between his legs to ostensibly correct his form, both of them laughing, when they hear insistent knocking on the front door.

Curious, they look at each other before dread washes over Alec. Paparazzi.

Magnus must have the same thoughts because his face falls, eyes closing and shoulders slumping, defeat washing over him.
“Fuck,” Alec swears. Sitting up, he wraps a hand around Magnus’s neck. “I’m sorry,” he whispers.

Opening his eyes, Magnus shakes his head. “It’s not your fault, Alexander. This was bound to happen sooner or later.”

“Still,” Alec insists. “They have no right to intrude on your privacy like this.”

They both stand and make their way to the door. Alec makes it there first, ready to unleash hell, when he looks through the peephole only to do a double take.

“Shit.”

He ignores Magnus’s curious expression as he unlocks the door and throws it open, only to immediately get out of the way when Lydia storms in.

“I don’t care what the hell you’ve been doing but I can’t believe you had the audacity to ignore me,” she fumes, turning on her heel when she gets to the edge of the foyer.

Alec rubs a hand along the back of his neck, skin flushing. “Sorry,” he mutters.

Lydia just looks at him incredulous. “Sorry? That’s all you have to say? We spend all day yesterday planning damage control and we agree that you’ll call me in an hour to tell me to go forward with the press releases and then you don’t? And then you reject my goddamn phone calls? What the hell, Alec?”

Wincing, Alec clears his throat as he glances at Magnus. “Before we get into that, why don’t I make introductions. Lydia, this is Magnus, my boyfriend,” he offers with a stupid, little grin. He nods in Lydia’s direction. “Magnus, this is my manager, Lydia.”

Looking remarkably composed for being caught in his underwear, Magnus extends a hand and smiles. “Good morning, my dear.”

Lydia, for her part, looks unsure as she slowly reaches out to shake Magnus’s hand. “Good morning.”

Taking a step back, she studies them both and Alec suddenly wishes that he’d looked in the mirror this morning. He can only imagine what he looks like.

“I suppose a congratulations are in order,” she says dryly.

Clearing his throat, Alec just says, “As you can see, we worked things out.”

“Yes, I see that.”

Lydia’s focus shifts to Magnus and Alec will give his boyfriend points-- he looks patently unconcerned when Alec knows for a fact that men have been known to shrivel under her sharp gaze.

“So, you’re the boyfriend.”

Arching a brow, Magnus looks bemusedly at Alec as he replies, “Yes, I suppose I am.”

Lydia crosses her arms over her chest before she relents with a sigh, gaze warming. “It’s nice to meet you, Magnus.” She nods at Alec. “This one couldn’t get anything done yesterday, he was so focused on you. Anyone who can make Alec lose focus must be a hell of a man.”

At that, Magnus smiles, ducking his head. “The feeling is mutual, dear, I assure you.”
“Yes, I can see that,” she drawls.

Clapping her hands together once, Lydia points a stern finger in Alec’s direction. “Don’t think that this gets you off the hook.” Her voice softens as she replies, “But I am glad that everything worked out.”

Turning to Magnus, Lydia says, “I can’t wait to get to know you better but I’m afraid that this isn’t a social call.”

“Yeah, we figured,” Alec says and takes the slap on his shoulder with grace.

“I’ve had calls from dozens of news outlets and everyone wants to be the first to get an exclusive. I need to know how you want to play this.”

Humming, Alec shares a look with Magnus, hooking an arm around his waist to pull him closer.

“What do you want to do, babe,” he asks. “Lydia and I drafted a few press releases but I refused to release anything until I’d talked to you.”

“What do the drafts say?”

Lydia opens her bag and pulls out a folder, holding a sheaf of papers out to Magnus.

Magnus takes them and reads through the few pages, frowning in thought. Finally, he nods.

“These work,” he says slowly. “They confirm our relationship without giving undue details away.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to force you to do anything. I am completely okay with whatever you want to do.”

Magnus sends a chastising look in Alec’s direction. “I think it’s a bit too late to keep tight-lipped, don’t you? A bit like closing the barn door too late and all that.”

His gaze drops to Alec’s mouth as he murmurs, “I told you last night that you’ve got me and I meant it. I think it’s time we dealt with things, darling.”

“Together,” Alec says softly.

“Together,” Magnus echoes.

With a last searing look, Alec turns to address Lydia. “Let’s go with draft one. That gives the least detail away, just confirms that Magnus and I are in a relationship and have been friends for a little while. How does that sound?”

“Sounds great. Would have sounded even better last night, but what can you do,” Lydia mutters as she unlocks her cell phone.

Laughing, Alec just shakes his head before a thought occurs to him. “Do I have permission to post?”

Lydia looks up with an arched brow. “Since when have you needed my permission for that? Don’t think I didn’t notice your cryptic tweets the past few weeks.”

Alec shrugs. “Just wanted to stay on your good side.”

Lydia chuckles a little as her thumbs fly over the screen. “Whatever,” she says under her breath.
“Anything else I need to know? You interrupted a nice morning.”

Rolling her eyes, Lydia absently replies, “Just don’t forget that you have a flight at 10pm tonight and we’re good, Lightwood.”

He feels Magnus tense beside him and grimaces. “Then, I guess I’ll see you this afternoon?”

Nodding, Lydia spends a few last seconds composing an email before she looks up with a bright smile. “We have that meeting with Institute and they’re expecting good news. Tell me we have good news, Alec.”

Resolutely not looking at Magnus, Alec just says, “We have great news and I’m hoping by the time I see you that it’ll change into amazing news.”

“Great.”

Nodding once, Lydia pats them both on the shoulder and leaves without another word, leaving the loft quiet in her wake.

“How did she even find me,” Magnus asks as he looks at the closed door.

“She has her ways,” is all Alec can say and Magnus doesn’t push.

“I’m sorry she just barged in here,” he says after a few seconds.

Blowing out a breath, Magnus moves until he’s standing in front of Alec. “At least I’ve finally met the woman that keeps everything running smoothly.”

Laughing a little, Alec wraps his arms around Magnus’s waist. “I’d be lost without her,” he says gravely.

Magnus lays his hands on Alec’s chest, nails scratching softly at the hair there before he catches Alec’s eyes. “So, you’re going somewhere tonight?”

Wincing, Alec nods. “I was going to tell you last night but, well, things happened and it didn’t seem appropriate. I planned to let you know before I left this morning,” he admits.

Humming, Magnus looks thoughtful. “How long will you be gone?”

“A week or so. I’m hitting a few other countries, too.”

“And it’s all going to be press about us?”

Hedging, Alec debates but finally admits, “I might be releasing new music pretty soon.”

Magnus’s eyes widen before he grins, hugging Alec tightly for a moment. When he pulls back, his eyes are shining.

“That’s wonderful, Alexander! I’m happy to hear that you’re not plagued by writer’s block anymore.”

Smiling wide enough to hurt, Alec says, “I don’t know what happened, but my sessions have been really productive the past few weeks. I have a meeting with my label this afternoon for a progress report and I’m hoping to have a single ready to premiere.”

“I’m so proud of you, Alec,” Magnus says softly. “I know when we first met that you were really
worried about your career, but it looks like everything’s resolved itself?”

“Yeah,” Alec agrees lowly. “Something must have just changed.”

He’s not quite ready to tell Magnus exactly what’s changed– he’s still worried about coming across as too strong and surely telling one’s very recent boyfriend that he’s the reason for the career change would be startling, to say the least-- and so he just smiles and pulls Magnus in for a kiss that starts deep and makes desire curl low in his gut.

They break apart a moment later, both smiling too much for the kiss to continue and Alec rests his head against Magnus’s forehead, focusing on his breathing.

“What time do you have work soon,” he asks, voice just above a whisper.

Magnus’s tone is apologetic as he replies, “Unfortunately, my darling, I do. But I do believe I have time for a shower.”

Alec opens his eyes to see Magnus looking at him, invitation in his eyes.

“As long as you don’t blame me when you have to sprint to campus.”

Laughing, Magnus pulls him in for a smacking kiss on the mouth. “Something tells me that it’d be worth it.”

Magnus takes his hand and leads him to the bathroom. They’re stripping out of their clothes when a thought occurs to Alec.

“Are you sure you’re okay to teach, babe?” His voice is cautious as he continues, “I don’t want to overstep, but the press have almost certainly found out where you work. You might be walking into a minefield at Columbia.”

He sees Magnus grimace before he admits, “I might have taken yesterday off. I saw a magazine cover as I was walking to my office-- that’s how I found out-- and an intrepid reporter called my office line in the morning. I decided to cancel classes and lick my wounds here all day before you showed up.”

Alec opens his mouth but before he can, he’s silenced with a warning look. “Everyone’s entitled to an off day, darling.” Magnus takes a bracing breath. “However, I thought a lot yesterday and I can’t hide forever-- I don’t want to hide forever.”

He gestures between the two of them. “This, us, isn’t going away and I would much prefer to face the music than keep hiding.”

“Is your position okay?”

Waving that away, Magnus turns toward the shower to turn the water on. “I’m the Chair of the History Department, Alexander, not to mention tenured. I’ll be just fine. Book sales next year might even be better than imagined,” he says under his breath, rueful.

Deciding that the water’s warm enough, he steps into the shower and Alec follows in the next second. Magnus is standing under the spray, head tilted up, when Alec wraps arms around him from behind.

He kisses the side of Magnus’s neck before moving his mouth to his ear. His voice is a hoarse murmur as he says, “I just want to make sure that you know what you’re getting yourself into,
Magnus. This life isn’t easy and I can’t shield you from it, not as much as I’d like. I don’t want this to blow up in your face.”

Turning in Alec’s hold, Magnus wraps an arm around his shoulder as the other hand goes to his cheek, sweeping over the stubble that’s grown through the night.

“This is our moment, Alexander. This is when we face the wolves at the door. You make me happy and nothing will change that– least of all some damned reporters who just want their next meal ticket. I’m older than I was that first time and I’m stronger. They won’t get the best of us, darling. I won’t let them.”

Alec listens intently at Magnus’s response and takes a shuddering breath. The press have always been the boogeyman in this relationship of theirs. Alec doesn’t know if he’ll ever stop feeling guilt for bringing them to Magnus’s door but he can’t keep clinging onto them. Smiling, Alec feels something in him crack open before the tension leaves him.

He needs to trust Magnus—trust in this thing they’re building, brick by brick, and trust in the man who’s never been anything but everything.

“Oh, then,” he says, voice sure. “We’re doing this.”

Magnus nods once. “We’re doing this,” he echoes and the words barely leave him before Alec’s kissing him to within an inch of his life.

Something about this kiss feels deeper, more intense. It’s finally sinking in that Magnus isn’t running in the other direction. Last night wasn’t a fluke, a last ditch effort.

It was the beginning that Alec was hoping for and all he can do now is surrender to the feelings that seem to sweep over him.

Their shower runs absurdly long and it’s almost an hour later before they’re dressing— with Alec throwing on the clothes he’d arrived at Magnus’s in last night.

In the kitchen, they’re enjoying a cup of coffee when Magnus looks at him, something teasing in his gaze.

“What,” Alec asks, amused and fond and a dozen other emotions besides, all of them light enough to float.

“You did ask Lydia about posting on social media, didn’t you?”

Realizing where Magnus is going with this, Alec grins.

He can’t help himself from searching his boyfriend’s eyes though and he realizes when he sees nothing but calm certainly in that beautiful gaze.

“I did,” he says slowly and reaches for his phone that hovering in the red.

Magnus watches him, eyes shining, and brings his mug up to his mouth for a quick sip. Without warning, Alec brings the camera up and snaps a picture.

Laughingly protesting, Magnus reaches for Alec. The two of them look at the picture and Alec feels something settle into place at the sight of Magnus looking at him over his coffee with laughing eyes.

“On our terms,” he murmurs and Magnus nods before kissing Alec’s temple.
“Let’s do this.”

With that last agreement, Alec debates for a second on a caption before he’s posting the picture to Instagram and Twitter.

Magnus and him finish their coffee as they read through his notifications. Laughing, he sees that Izzy and, surprisingly, Raphael are among the first to like it, both deciding to leave comments that Alec and Magnus read with raised brows.

Those are definitely going to add gasoline onto an already roaring fire.

*It’s about time, Alec! I’m so happy for the two of you!*

*Dios mio, it’s about time you two got your head out of your asses and let the public know.*

They read through comments and while there are some negative ones-- which Alec tries to hide from Magnus to no avail-- most are, perhaps surprisingly, overwhelmingly positive.

“Oh, look at this one,” Magnus says idly. “Bagell warns you that I’m just a dastardly professor using you to gain early access to your next album.”

Alec laughs as Magnus turns to him with an arch look. “That is a huge advantage, isn’t it,” he marvels in faux surprise, hope in his tone.

Shaking his head, Alec just says, “Not a chance, babe. Artistic temperament and all that-- no one listens to my albums early except the production team and my label.”

“Not even Jace or Isabelle?”

“Especially Izzy or Jace,” Alec says dryly. “I like things to be a surprise.”

“We’ll see about that,” Magnus says in a low voice and Alec already knows that he’ll be letting him listen to Feel Something before its official release.

No reason to tell him that, though, Alec figures and pulls his boyfriend close for a lingering kiss. “Nice try,” he whispers into the space between their mouths.

“I do try,” Magnus replies demurely and Alec laughs a little as they trade chaste kisses.

Before long, it’s time for Magnus to head to campus and Alec has a full slate.

They stand from the counter, but neither one is quite ready to move away.

“So, I won’t see you for a little while?”

Alec studies Magnus’s face for a silent moment before softly replying, “I’m afraid not, babe. Lydia was lucky enough to score some spots on a few popular radio and talk shows and I’m doing a few small gigs. I need to be visible right now, as much as I just want to stay here with you.”

Magnus’s mouth quirks up. “You charmer, you,” he murmurs and sighs, resting his head against Alec’s neck, nosing along the marks he’d made the night before.

“It’s just a week and then I’ll be back in the city and all yours,” Alec says. There’s a part of him that hates to leave Magnus but it’s been a couple months since his tour ended and he’s started feeling the familiar itch between his shoulders.
Alec loves performing and doesn’t think anything could make him stop. While he’ll be leaving behind more than he ever has before, he can’t deny that he’s excited to do press and perform. It’s his lifeblood and he can only hope that this small taste of Alec’s career— a test run before a real tour—doesn’t make Magnus run for the hills.

Thoughts fracturing as Magnus pulls back, Alec’s relieved to see his boyfriend looking only a little disappointed. “What are the chances I’ll get a phone call sometime during this very busy week of yours?”

“I’d say pretty good,” Alec replies with a grin and the world’s fondness in his eyes.

The two of them relax in the quiet of Magnus’s apartment. Alec imprints this moment onto his memory and lets himself take a deep breath.

Sooner than he’d like, the two of them are leaving the loft. Thankfully, the press haven’t found Magnus’s apartment yet and they head their separate ways with a grin and a lingering gaze that’s warm as honey.

Alec walks towards his recording studio and takes out his phone. He opens Instagram and walks distractedly through the constant thrum of people, gaze glued to the picture he’d posted of Magnus with a simple caption that felt like the shot of a starting gun.

Together.
Magnus takes a bracing breath as he rounds the corner. Columbia comes into view and he scans the edge of campus warily, looking for any eager paparazzi lurking in the bushes.

The first time he’d dealt with them, he’d been a snot-nosed teenager, equal parts terrified and furious at the intrusion into his privacy. His father-- Asmodeus-- had taken care of him as best he could, however, even when in prison and Magnus still sent a Christmas card to his bodyguard at the time, the man who’d kept paps from getting too close until he’d graduated and fled New York altogether for several years.

He’s older and wiser now, Magnus thinks. He was made of sterner stuff than he’d known back then. Plus, he’s well aware that this was the last real barrier between him and Alec. If this thing between them is going to work-- if they have a real shot at this-- then Magnus needs to come to terms, finally, with just what it means to be Alec Lightwood’s boyfriend.

_Out of the frying pan_, he thinks wryly and strides across the street, checking his watch.

His class is due to start in a little over half an hour and Magnus is just set to step onto campus when he hears the shutter of a camera a few feet away. He doesn’t startle. No, instead he stares straight ahead as though he doesn’t know what’s going on and wonders distantly if the paps will follow him onto Columbia's grounds.

“Hey, Magnus! Mr. Bane!”

Magnus debates for half a second before raising cool eyes to the reporter. “That’s Dr. Bane,” he offers with an arch smile.

Looking both surprised and exalted that Magnus had actually acknowledged him, the man holding the camera bounds forward, far too close to Magnus.

Magnus switches his gaze from the man-- who looked to be in his early twenties and in desperate need of a haircut-- to the closest entrance to campus. He can see a few students standing at attention in the grass.

They’re carefully not looking at the scene unfolding but Magnus knows he has their attention.

“Dr. Bane, then, okay. Sorry, man. Want to give me the inside scoop to your relationship with Alec Lightwood?”

“No comment.”

“Come on, Magnus. It’s front page news and all anyone can talk about. A professor is the one who finally snagged the hottest bachelor in the industry.” He throws Magnus a cajoling smile, one that says _hey we’re friends, right?_

Magnus scoffs internally. _Vultures_, he thinks viciously. _They’re all goddamned vultures._

He doesn’t respond and he’s less than a dozen steps from campus.

It’s a little surprising but Magnus isn’t feeling the edge of panic. He knows that it would undoubtedly be worse if he were surrounded, if there were a dozen paps circling him and cameras were flashing in his face. He still remembers some of those very scenes from high school and they make his heart
lurch.

Journalists don’t care about their very unwilling victims. They’re leeches, trying to grab all the information and notoriety they can—bleeding their target dry—before moving onto the next poor bastard.

At seventeen, Magnus had been furious and overwhelmed. Now, he’s just tired. He’s tired of the sensationalism. He’s tired at the thought of dealing with this for the foreseeable future until something else happens that causes a scandal grand enough for him to be left moderately alone with Alexander.

It’s with the thought of his boyfriend—his fucking boyfriend—that Magnus finds solace. He’s doing this for Alec—for them—and that gives him some much needed strength. The pap dogging his heels is an annoyance at best.

After last night, Magnus needs to trust in Alec, in this thing they’re building.

God, he thinks, a little dizzy with the wave of overwhelming happiness that washes over him. He’d been so terrified and worried about Alec’s reaction. He’d thought they’d had more time—that he’d had more time before everything would come crashing down and that news report had shaken him, badly.

He knew how it looked and he could almost see their relationship go up in smoke with every damning word he’d read.

But Alexander, that lovely, amazing man, hadn’t been turned off. There had been no disgust or reprisals or biting accusations. Alec had been everything Magnus could have dreamed of and while he’d admitted more than he’d meant to in an angry rush of words meant to shock Alec as much as let him in, his boyfriend hadn’t been cowed.

No, Alec had accepted him and supported him and for that, Magnus will never stop thanking fate or whatever the fuck is responsible for bringing such a wonderful man into his life.

And after the conversation? Magnus shivers a little, though his thoughts are interrupted at the persistent reporter.

“You and Alec are together, right? I saw that Instagram post this morning and it certainly looked cozy.” His voice is smug, like he holds all the cards, and Magnus wants to wipe that smarmy smile right off his face.

He doesn’t deign to answer, though, and he’s just about to step onto campus when he spots a few paps standing several yards away. They don’t come any closer but their long-range lenses make it obvious they’re getting footage of him.

Jesus.

A little surprisingly, the journalist doesn’t try to follow him onto the grounds and Magnus is a little too relieved when he says, almost apologetically, “Columbia is private property. I’m not allowed to step onto campus or I—and every other reporter who tries—will be arrested for trespassing. The dean issued the warning to all local press yesterday afternoon.”

Magnus smiles a little but doesn’t say anything and he’s just passed the brick entryway when the reporter calls out.

He can’t quite help himself and Magnus turns back to look over his shoulder with a raised brow,
expectant.

“I don’t know if you’re just an opportunistic bastard or if there really is something between you and Lightwood. Whatever the case, I guess we’ll find out soon enough.”

Lowering his camera, the man steps closer, just toeing the sidewalk between the street and campus. For a bare second his expression looks earnest as he continues, “Alec Lightwood’s my favorite artist and I hope to hell that you’re sincere. If you are, watch out. Not all reporters are as chill as me. If you’re not, don’t worry. You’ll be found out sooner or later and this business isn’t known for anything so much as it is at chewing people up and spitting them back out, more broke and lonely and bitter than before. See you around, Dr. Bane.”

With that, the journalist turns away and Magnus watches him leave for half a dozen steps before he releases a heavy sigh.

Well, shit. He doesn’t know what the hell that just was but he can respect— barely— any pap who seems to care about Alec at all. Magnus wonders what the world really thinks and even as he knows it’s desperate naïveté, he hopes that most people are either overwhelmingly apathetic or that they genuinely hope for the best.

He makes his way to his office without delay and places his briefcase on the desk. Taking out a sheaf of papers, Magnus wonders dryly that at least he’d gotten all caught up on his grading and planning yesterday, in the uninterrupted privacy of his loft as he’d waited for Alec’s reaction.

Taking a few moments to straighten up his office from where’d left in a hurry the morning before, Magnus presses the button for his voicemail absently as he sees the blinking red announcement.

He regrets it almost immediately.

He has twenty seven missed calls, all but one from reporters. They’re by turns earnest and snide and Magnus erases one after another as soon as he hears their voice.

The one call that isn’t a pain in his ass if from his editor at the University Press. They want an update on how his revisions are going for his book and he resolves to call them back in a few hours, after he’s finished his first class.

With that decided, he grabs his folder with today’s lecture on it and makes his way down to the classroom. He has his freshmen this morning and as he walks into Lowery Hall, he wonders what the next hour and fifteen minutes have in store for him.

Entering the room with a minute to spare, it goes dead silent as soon as the students catch sight of him.

He pretends that he doesn’t notice and goes to the front of the class. Rolling up his sleeves, he’s just opened his mouth to pick up where they’d left off when a hand goes up.

“Yes?”

The kid has a high grade in the class even if he’s usually on his phone during the entirety of Magnus’s lectures.

“Is it true that you’re dating Alec Lightwood?”

Magnus sighs internally as everyone promptly looks up at the question. The kid has the good grace to look a little chagrined but he doesn’t take his question back. No, instead he stares at Magnus, a
little defiance in his eyes.

Surveying the room, Magnus sees that today’s class will be woefully off track and he’s already planning how to catch them all back up as he sighs loudly and leans against the table next to the podium.

Half sitting, he wraps his hands around the edge of the table, crossing his legs at the ankle.

“Now where did you hear that,” he asks wryly and watches as everyone rolls their eyes. Some try to be discreet but some are blatant, laughing at Magnus’s last minute attempt at deflection.

“It’s all over, Professor Bane. Magazines, the internet, it’s literally everywhere.”

Magnus might detect a hint of apology in Greg’s voice but it has nothing to do with anything so he ignores it.

Nodding slowly, Magnus lets the silence of the room draw out before he admits, “I am dating Alec, Mr. Pritchard. We’ve been together for a little while, though we were friends first.” He scans the room. “Is that all?”

Another hand goes up, this time by Julia who’s wearing one hell of a poker face. “Can you tell us how you met?”

Laughing a little, Magnus nods imperceptibly to her. She’d kept her secret and Magnus is both surprised and grateful. She hadn’t told anyone about walking in on the two of them in his office and he knows that it had to have been burning at the tip of her tongue to keep that particular secret.

Humming thoughtfully, Magnus crosses his arms over his chest and grins at the room. “I was grading everyone’s midterms at this diner across town when I ran into him.” He raises a brow. “We started talking about how difficult it must be to know France’s timeline during WWI and, as they say, the rest is history.”

A few students laugh and the mood in the room shifts from something uneasy and hesitant to warm curiosity. Magnus finds that he can’t begrudge his students their desperate desire to know. It’s apparently the hottest news in town and they have a first hand source standing right in front of them.

He answers a few more questions and thankfully none of them are too personal. They want to know how long he’s known Alec and if he’s even more handsome in person and if he can hook everyone up with tickets to his next concert or an autographed album. It’s almost pedestrian, their interest, and it settles something in Magnus to know that not everything has to change just because he’s dating Alec.

Thankfully, he resumes his lecture after another fifteen minutes or so and everyone pays the same amount of attention that they would have before his personal life blew up. The back row still does a piss poor job of concealing their snores and the front row still faithfully scribbles down every word that comes out of his mouth.

His students are still his students and that means the world to Magnus. While it would have been an adjustment, Magnus would have changed his approach to teaching if necessary—shut down inquiries about his personal life and become a little sterner in his classroom demeanor or even shifted his focus more onto his administrative role in the department, if things had come down to that.

It’s nice to see that he can still teach and that academia is still the safe haven it’s always been for him.

The rest of class moves forward at its regular pace and Magnus waves everyone off at the conclusion
of the lecture with a quick, “Remember, there’s a quiz on Thursday about the readings! And your final is rapidly approaching-- I suggest you start studying now, if you haven't already.”

No one acknowledges him and he huffs out a laugh at the predictability of sleep-deprived eighteen year olds.

Gathering up his outline, Magnus grabs his phone from his pocket and sees that his notifications bar is fit to bursting.

He’s gained several thousand followers across both Instagram and Twitter but his attention snags on a text message from Raphael that confirms their weekly lunch date at Basil’s Cafe.

Smiling, Magnus slides his phone back into his pocket and leaves the room.

He hears the whispers that follow in his wake and feels the stares of both students and faculty as they land on his back. Strangely, he doesn’t feel cornered or put on the spot. While it is overwhelmingly obvious that they’re watching him, there’s also a sense of comfort.

Magnus has been a mainstay at Columbia for years and he’s cultivated a careful reputation as an excellent professor and colleague. There’s nothing malicious in the attention, just awareness. It doesn’t set his teeth on edge and that’s all he can ask for.

Back in his office, Magnus settles down in his chair with a sigh. It’s almost noon and he picks up his phone and calls his editor.

She picks up on the third ring. “Magnus,” she greets warmly. “How are things over there?”

Her tone is noticeably oblivious and Magnus rolls his eyes. “Don’t tell me you haven’t heard,” he replies dryly.

With a little laugh, Dot merely offers, “I didn’t want to make you feel worse if you were having a time over the reveal.” There’s half a beat of silence before she says, “How are you doing?”

“I’m doing great. I’m in a relationship, the press haven’t been nearly as annoying as they could have been-- at least so far-- and my book is coming along quite nicely.”

“Is that so? You’ve finished the revisions, then?”

"I have,” Magnus confirms. “The ending is still a little rough but I’m throwing all of my focus onto the last third of the book next month. I expect I’ll have a finished final draft by the end of September.”

Dot’s voice is preoccupied as she responds, “With publication set for early spring, that works nicely. Send the latest draft via courier and I’ll have a look at it sometime next week. Is there anything else that I need to be aware of?”

“No,” Magnus says, eyes narrowed as he thinks back. “Everything is going very smoothly-- much better than it usually is at this stage when everything’s a dumpster fire and I seriously consider throwing my manuscript into the ocean and never thinking about it again. I’ll send it over to your office and you can tell me what you think, though.”

The two of them talk for a little while longer about shared acquaintances and life in general before wrapping things up.

“I’m happy for you, Magnus,” Dot says softly. “I hope Lightwood is the man you deserve.”
She sighs dramatically, “If only I hadn’t taken this job at UCLA. We might have gone the distance.”

Laughing, Magnus shakes his head as he leans back in his chair. “You and I were nothing but convenience in the city and you know it, dear. We would have killed each other if we’d kept at it. We’re too alike for our own good and our careers were too important to pay attention to anything else back then.”

“You’re right, of course. That doesn’t mean that I don’t have extraordinarily fond memories of our relationship a few years ago, though.” Magnus hears a distant knock before Dot rushes out, “I’ll talk to you later, Magnus. Send me any notes that accompany your draft and I’ll look things over soon.”

“Goodbye, Dorothea.”

The two of them hang up and Magnus sighs and takes a few minutes to stare up at his nondescript ceiling.

He and Dot had been like two ships passing in the night. They’d shared the same port a time or two but it had never been anything serious-- had never had the potential for anything more than a relationship of convenience. They’d both been running around New York back then, ready to take on the world, and neither had had the time-- or wanted to carve out the time-- to seriously make a go of whatever potential simmered between them.

Their relationship had slowly fizzled as they poured almost all of their energy into their careers and when Dot had accepted a position at the University of Southern California Press, Magnus had sent her an unforgivably extravagant bottle of wine as both congratulations and a send-off. Their working relationship had never deteriorated no matter their personal affiliation and at this point, the two of them were like a well oiled machine.

Magnus spends the next hour reading a few chapters in a book he’s peer reviewing for someone at Texas A&M before gathering his things and heading towards Basil’s Cafe to meet Raphael.

Campus is a little busier now that it’s August and the fall semester is set to start in just a few short weeks. Magnus only has two more weeks of summer classes left and as always, he’s struck with just how quickly time marches forward.

So much has happened this summer that Magnus doesn’t feel like he’s caught his breath in ages. It’s invigorating, though, exhilarating. His life is a bit of a whirlwind at the moment and now, at this point in things, Magnus feels on top of the world.

His career is moving along smoothly and he’s got a man across town that he’s head over heels for and he’s weathered his own personal hell. So far, so good and Magnus just hopes that he can keep his optimism afloat through anything else that’s thrown his way.

Basil’s isn’t quite so empty this afternoon but luckily Raphael had snagged a table in the corner, a little while ago it seems, if the papers spread out across its surface is any indication.

He doesn’t look up at Magnus’s approach, but merely offers, “Final projects are a pain in my ass,” as he writes something down in bright green pen.

Sliding into the booth, Magnus replies, “I know how you feel. My students have their finals in less than two weeks but they still stare at me, as vacant as ever. And then we only have a week until the whole thing starts over again.”

“Yeah, but we love it. God knows why but we do,” Raphael mutters and then tosses his pen to the side, next to the napkin dispenser, as he finally looks up at Magnus.
His look is remarkably disinterested on the surface but Magnus can feel the intensity. Sending his friend an arch look, he remain silent and finally Raphael speaks.

“How are you doing?” His voice is gruff but Magnus detects the edge of concern.

“I’m fine,” he says lightly and as he says the words, he scans the restaurant. Several tables are staring at him out of the corner of their eye and he watches impassively as a few phones hastily drop from where they were recording him.

Raphael sees the movement too and he scowls. “No one ever minds their damned business,” he grumbles before peering at Magnus, this time not hiding his intensity.

“Are you really alright? We can go somewhere else if you’d rather.”

Still feeling the focus of half a dozen camera lenses, Magnus just shakes his head, resolute. “I fear that wherever we go, I’d cause a spectacle. We might as well stay.”

With a fierce frown, Raphael mutters a curse under his breath.

Magnus can’t help but laugh, just a little, as he relaxes against the booth. “Oh, Raphael. Who would have thought we’d end up here.”

“Anyone with half a brain cell would put that together after the way you and Lightwood have been circling each other.”

Glaring halfheartedly, Magnus absently says, “Oh, hush you. You know what I mean.”

His gaze refocuses as it lands on one of his closest friends. He grins slowly. “Say,” he drawls. “I seem to remember Alexander mentioning something about you and Simon. What’s that about?”

His voice is innocent but Raphael, of course, sees right past it.

“Shut up,” is his only response, muttered under his breath and Magnus laughs, loud and bright.

“You and Simon,” Magnus muses. His eyes run over his friend, bemused. “He’s not who I would have picked for you but I suppose that it does make a kind of sense.”

“Whatever.” Raphael rolls his eyes but before he can say anything else, their waitress comes over.

They pass a lovely, uneventful hour in the middle of campus and Magnus lets himself relax.

The waitress has just taken their plates when a serious looks comes over Raphael-- which is saying something, considering his friend always looks perpetually dead.

“Really,” Raphael asks. “How are you doing?”

Magnus frowns a little as he thinks, gaze focused on his nearly empty cup of coffee.

“You know,” he says slowly. “I’m really doing okay.”

His gaze flips up to meet Raphael’s as he continues. “Yesterday was rough,” he admits. “I didn’t expect it to hit the news and I left campus in a hurry yesterday morning. I spent the day at home licking my wounds, though Cat and Ragnor both tried to talk some sense into me.

“Alec came over last night,” he quietly confides, looking around to make sure there isn’t anyone too close to overhear. “We talked things through and, well.’
He can’t contain his little smile at the memory of last night-- and this morning. “We’re good,” he says quietly. “Really good.”

He looks up, expecting to see Raphael’s face twisted into a sneer of disgust. He’s surprised then, when his friend is studying him with a warm expression.

“I’m happy for you, Magnus. If Lightwood makes you happy-- and if you can deal with everything surrounding that-- then I support you.”

“Thank you,” Magnus says, wry twist to his mouth. “Does that mean you’ll tell me all about you and Simon?”

“Not a chance,” Raphael replies flatly and Magnus laughs, something in him easing at the easy response.

The two of them leave soon enough and Magnus has just reached the door when he’s stopped by someone calling out his name.

Looking over into the restaurant, an older woman approaches him, hair dyed an unflattering shade of blonde.

“Magnus Bane?”

“Who wants to know,” he asks warily.

Sticking out a hand, she replies, “I’m a journalist for the New York Times. I wanted to know if--”

“Not interested.”

Magnus’s voice is cold, forbidding, and he shares a look with Raphael before they both turn away from the reporter and leave the cafe without a backwards glance.

“Shit,” Magnus mutters.

“I guess that’s the price for happiness,” Raphael says cryptically and they’re silent for a moment before Magnus blows out a breath.

“I suppose you’re right, Raphael. I suppose you’re right.”

All in all, it hasn’t been as bad as it could have been and Magnus is thankful for that. Still, he wonders when the story will die down, when he and Alexander will become old news.

There’s a piece of him that wonders if his life will ever return to its previous quiet or if he hasn’t just signed away his privacy for as long as his name stays linked with Alec’s.

He and Raphael head in opposite directions and Magnus spends the afternoon responding to emails and completing the regular mundane tasks that keep his history department running smoothly, including a few interviews for an open position as an adjunct professor and a meeting with a student he’s mentoring through their doctoral thesis.

He takes a break in the late afternoon and checks his phone, relaxing as he sees a few texts from Alec.

_Recorded a few songs this morning and couldn’t help but think of you. Of last night._

_I miss you._
I hope you’re having a good day, babe :)

I’m about to walk into a meeting with my label. Wish me luck on the next three hours of demos and complaints and questions that they should already know the answer to, considering they work at a recording company

I know you can take care of yourself but call me if you need me-- if something happens with the paps.

Smiling at Alec’s rambling messages, Magnus replies quickly.

Good luck, darling, and try not to yell at anyone

I can’t wait to hear the demos…… :) 

Let me know when you land in London?

Switching over to social media, he’s a little overwhelmed at the mentions. He can’t read all of them, but he scrolls through his feed, liking a few tweets before switching over to his notifications.

He’d read some of the comments on the picture Alec had posted that morning and they’d both been surprised at the overwhelming positive response. Now that Magnus is in his own account though, the reaction is much more mixed. As he reads through a few tweets that mention him– he and Alec are trending– he isn’t sure how to feel.

OMG that is such a cute picture!! Alec is a lucky man!!

Look at him, you can just tell he’s just using Alec for his money. He probably can’t even name a song by him

He looks like a gold digger tbh. I hope Alec’s smart enough to get away from him before he ruins everything

I thought more of Alec. I don’t even know what he could see in this Magnus guy wtf

I’m so happy for Alec and Magnus! I thought something was going on but I can’t believe they actually confirmed it! And that caption dfkghsdkfjg I’m dead!!!

Alec does love to make a statement dkfjghsdjfj just catch me crying until the end of forever at the fact that he’s officially taken:((((

Magnus actually snorts a little at that last comment. He doesn’t interact with any of them but his mind is spinning.

He’d known that there would be a lot of backlash. Magnus isn’t stupid. He knows that to fans, no one is ever good enough for their favorite celebrity and when one added Magnus’s past? It was a recipe for disaster and vitriol.

There are some comments that make him wince and others that annoy the shit out of him. Some do make him smile though, and relax at both the fans' enthusiasm and creativity.

Everyone has an opinion and everyone believes themselves entitled to air it, no matter that the person they’re talking about might see it. No, Magnus thinks that most of the people hope that he reads their nasty comments.

Well, Magnus refuses to feel bad about being with Alec, not when he makes him so happy and not
when they’ve reached a new understanding.

Last night had been everything that Magnus could have wanted. Alec had been so damned understanding and so hot and Magnus doesn’t remember sex ever feeling like that.

He’d been overwhelmed in the best goddamn way. Alec had been all around him, all he could think of, and he’d been glad that there hadn’t been any awkwardness this morning.

It still feels new. Alec was like a breath of fresh air and Magnus can’t help but think that he never wants to lose this feeling. He’d had a damned good life before Alec crashed into it but Alec brings something new to it.

Magnus doesn’t quite know how but Alec’s burrowed his way into Magnus’s chest in a way he half fears is irrevocable. Permanent. Most of his to bite his lip to keep his grin under wraps, though.

Losing himself in his meandering thoughts-- all of which center on Alec and last night and this new stage of their relationship-- he startles in the late afternoon sunshine when he focuses on the clock and sees that his senior seminar is set to start in ten minutes.

Thankfully, the class is just on the first floor of Bowman and as he grabs his notes, Magnus shakes his head ruefully to himself.

Alexander was proving to be one hell of a distraction.

He makes it to class right on time and sees that everyone’s on their phones, waiting on him.

“Good evening,” he greets and receives the usual lackluster response back.

This class was composed of ten seniors set for graduation at the end of the semester. They spent the entire term crafting a sort of miniature thesis. They were each responsible for a fifty page paper due the week of finals and they’re at the point now of peer reviewing and final revisions.

Magnus sympathizes.

The next three hours go by quickly as everyone works on their own papers and edits their classmate’s and come to Magnus for any questions. At this point, with only two weeks to go, Magnus is mostly taking a background role for revisions, answering questions about citing specialized primary sources, discussing ways to conclude a twenty thousand word historiographical essay, and generally making sure none of his students set themselves on fire in their frustration and sheer stress.

To his surprise, no one mentions the headlines and his place in them. It’s no different than any of their previous sessions and for that, Magnus is exceedingly thankful.

As a student comes over to him, asking about how she can incorporate a small piece of contradictory evidence to her thesis without undoing all of her previous research, something eases in Magnus.

He’ll always have this, he thinks. His life has been academia for so long and he couldn’t imagine it any other way. This is his lifeblood. He might have found something in Alec, but he can’t even contemplate losing this-- his students and research and place in the academic world.

It’s good to know that he doesn’t have to choose.

He gets to have it all and for that, Magnus is overwhelmingly grateful.
“So, you’ll be here tomorrow morning?” Alec’s voice is distracted as he accepts the glass of water from the stewardess with a nod.

“I land at 10:15 and by the time I find the driver and make it to Rosewood, it should be around 11:30. Does that work?”

Taking a quick sip, Alec relaxes back in his chair. “Sounds great, Underhill. I have the BBC Live Lounge in the morning but I should be back to the hotel a little after noon once I finish the interviews that Lydia’s scheduled. Think you can be ready by two?”

Underhill’s voice is dry as he responds, “I’m ready now, Alec. He won’t know what hit him by the time we’re done.”

Alec’s tone is grim as he all he offers is, “Good.”

Hanging up, Alec thinks through his itinerary as he’s thirty thousand feet in the air. While he wasn’t quite obnoxious enough to own his own jet, he had the habit of chartering for transatlantic flights— it was one of very few true splurges he indulged in and while Alec still regularly flew commercial in The States, everything was just so much more convenient when he flew private.

The stewardess is attentive but she’s worked for him before and knows that Alec doesn’t expect hovering care— she’s in the cockpit talking with the pilots and he’s left to his own devices.

The next six hours are full of opportunities, he thinks wryly. He could write a little, surf the web for a bit, or sleep. All sound like excellent wastes of his time but instead, Alec reaches for his phone.

He has a few demos to play through and as Alec put his earphones in, he selects the first one. He always listens through recordings at least a dozen times before releasing it to the label. Feel Something, the title track of the album, is just what he wants and the meeting yesterday at Institute Records had gone amazingly well, considering the last time he’d seen Jia he’d been experiencing the worst writer’s block of his career.

They’d agreed to a midnight release next week and as Alec does the math, he figures that he’ll be back in New York by then. They’ll be recording the music video for the single soon and while it’s not common to release two singles so close together, Alec finds that he’s excited for this next album and the new phase it will usher in.

Truthfully, he’s excited for Magnus’s reaction.

The past few days— months— run through Alec’s head and he finds himself smiling, stupidly and sappily. It’s been a good summer and while he still has a private reservation or two, he’s looking forward to the rest of the year and whatever it may bring. His birthday is next month and Alec remembers talking with Magnus about traveling— he wonders if he could persuade Magnus to join
him on a trip soon or if he’s moving too fast, after all.

Alec knows from personal experience that Italy’s beautiful in the fall. He bets it would be even better with Magnus at his side.

He puts his wandering thoughts on the back burner and focuses on the music. This was the latest incarnation of Feel Something and as Alec listens to the whole thing through-- several times-- he knows that he’s got it. He’d recorded this a few hours ago, spending the last of his day in New York at the studio, fixing the few critiques he and Meliorn had agreed would take the single to the next level.

It’s a little after ten now and Alec will land in London at eight in the morning and go directly to the BBC’s headquarters. He’ll perform a few songs-- including a cover and an original-- and then have an interview later on in the morning.

His afternoon is free, though, at his insistence. While London was almost a second home at this point-- what with all the business he’s done here over the years-- there was a more practical reason that Alec had been willing to spend a few days here that had nothing to do with his career.

Hence, Underhill.

But that’s all for tomorrow and Alec needs to catch what sleep he can if he has any hope of being useful tomorrow. He catches up on his email for a few more minutes, making sure that everything is up to date, and then he’s heading to the bedroom in the back of the plane and crashing.

To his surprise, he falls asleep almost immediately. It’s been quite the day on both his personal and professional fronts and Alec is exhausted but it’s the good kind of tired-- it reminds him of being on tour and he misses that energy more than he’d even anticipated.

He can’t remember the last time he was in New York for three months straight and while it’s been great, it’s also been an adjustment. Alec was used to moving, being constantly on the go.

His last thought before sleep claims him is that he hopes Magnus can deal with a grueling tour schedule but even in his sleepy haze, Alec figures that they’ll be just fine.

Alec sleeps most of the flight, catching four or so hours before the stewardess is waking him up and informing him that they’ll be descending shortly. Alec makes quick work of changing out of the sweats he’d boarded the plane in and into his outfit for the day. It’s nothing dramatic but it does make a statement.

It’s been awhile since Alec’s had to don this particular type of armor but it’s effortless and gratifying in being so.

Olive green chinos rolled up to expose his ankles paired with a white short sleeved shirt with navy pop dots. It’s elegant yet casual enough for a radio appearance and when paired with a Ferragamo belt and shoes, his look is coolly composed.

Alec’s played this game since before he was old enough to understand its rules. It wouldn’t do to appear too casual or half-assed. That would mean he’s suffering a terrible break-up and generally in despair. Looking too put together though-- say a suit or structured blazer-- that means he’s trying too hard to look unaffected, that he’s hiding his inner turmoil or whatever the shit, and takes him right back to square one.

This look is nothing out of the ordinary for Alec, even if he’s dressed it up a little more than he usually would. That’s the image Alec needs to portray as soon as the vultures get sight of him--
wholly unaffected, as confident as ever, not a care in the world. Because Alec can’t forget that even if he doesn’t give a shit about what they have to say— he’s also responsible for the media’s opinion of Magnus, no matter how obliquely.

How Alec plays this week will be the difference between the media circling above them, smelling blood in the water, or deciding that there’s nothing overly interesting in Alec’s relationship with a man who so happens to have a little skeleton in his closet.

Landing goes smoothly even as his thoughts are preoccupied and Alec grabs his bag from the seat next to him as the attendants open the door.

He’d landed at a small, private airport north of the city— Heathrow would have been a nightmare to get through— and a town car is waiting for him as he steps onto the tarmac. Alec sees the half dozen reporters standing a football field away, just that side of the private property line and smiles a little, just to himself.

He knows that smile will be splashed on the internet in a few minutes and he hopes the photographers choke on their payday.

The truth is, Alec doesn’t care. It’s just another day to him. He’s weathered far worse storms than a boyfriend whose dad was a raging asshole— and he’s done it, more often than not, alone. With his siblings in New York more often than not and Alec across the globe, he’s dealt with paps who would rather tear him apart alive than give up their inside scoop. Having Magnus to fall back on, knowing that he’s doing this for them, is all the strength Alec needs to ignore the media when otherwise he might’ve been filled with impotent rage and bitter resentment.

Alec refuses to give reporters the satisfaction of ruining what he’s found and for the first time, maybe ever, Alec feels confident. He may know how to play the game, but he still catches himself caught up sometimes over just how little privacy he has, how little regard the rest of the world has for him.

The driver takes his bag and Alec ducks into the back seat. It’s a smooth ride into the City and Alec spends that time on his phone. It’s unforgivably early in New York but Alec sends Magnus a text wishing him a good morning and letting him know that he’s landed safely before switching over to his email and seeing the updated itinerary Lydia had sent over in the dead of night.

Shaking his head at the hours she keeps, Alec sees that everything looks in order for the next week and refreshes his memory for what to expect today. He spends the rest of the commute online, getting caught up on the latest news about him and Magnus and their scandalous relationship.

When the car pulls up to the building, Alec can see the crowd of photographers through the blacked out windows of the town car. Luckily, it’s a sunny morning and Alec doesn’t feel like too much of a douche as he slides his aviators on and smooths down his shirt. He doesn’t wait for the driver to open his door and instead gets out himself.

Out of the frying pan, he thinks and his expression is blank as he makes his way to the front door where an assistant is holding it open and looking only mildly out of her depth. However, what should have been a few second stroll turns into a minefield as the reporters inch into his breathing space.

The flash of cameras is blinding even through his sunglasses and Alec narrows his eyes at the door, each step slow for how the crowd is inundating around him.

“Hey, Alec!” A microphone is shoved in his face but Alec barely spares the reporter a glance. That doesn’t stop the man, though, from asking, “Is it true that you’re in a relationship with Magnus Bane,
heir to Asmodeus Bane’s ill-gotten fortune?”

“No comment.”

It’s the standard response in the industry but that doesn’t stop the paps from coming even closer, as though Alec had just given them a million dollar soundbite.

Alec knows no comment is only worth a few thousand, in this case.

“Alec, how does it feel to be tied down? How can it be true that the most sought after bachelor in the music industry is spoken for?”

Another reporter laughs and it grates in his ear. “Tell us that we haven’t seen the last of Party Boy Lightwood. We at The Sun were heartbroken to find that someone had grabbed you up without anyone noticing. Tell us you’re smart enough to dodge an obvious gold digger.”

“Yo, Lightwood-- Brett from the Daily Mail. We heard that you’re whisking Bane away on a honeymoon next week to celebrate your private wedding ceremony. Can you confirm?”

Alec rolls his eyes internally but just repeats, “No comment,” in a cool tone.

But like sharks scenting blood-- even if everyone present is well aware that the accusation was nothing more than a play to get a reaction-- the reporters become just a little more frenetic. Gritting his teeth, Alec shoves his way through the paps and thinks that maybe he should have brought his bodyguard along. It’s been awhile since Alec’s been embroiled in the news so intensely and having security definitely helps keep things running smoothly.

Still, Alec’s made of sterner stuff and while photographers yell in his ear, trying to get his attention, and phones are shoved in his face for a soundbite worthy of a headline, Alec makes it to the front doors of BBC radio relatively unscathed.

The assistant holds the door open wide and as soon as Alec crosses the threshold, she’s turning on her heel to follow him while two security guards from the building keep the paps out and muscle the doors closed.

Alec hears the shutter of dozens of cameras even through the closed doors. The windows do nothing to temper the flash as everyone tries to get a photo of him through the glass.

Alec pauses at reception and the assistant takes over.

“Good morning, Mr. Lightwood. My name is Lacey and I’ll be your assistant today while you’re here at BBC Radio.”

Raising a brow at the calm, confident tone, Alec just offers a smile and replies, “It’s nice to meet you, Lacey. You can call me Alec.”

The two of them shake hands and Alec’s a little surprised to see that Lacey has a professional, steady grip. “How long have you been here,” he asks and tries to readjust his first impression of her.

From her reaction to the jungle outside, he’d thought that she’d be a nervous intern but while she had looked shaken as Alec fought his way through the wolves, here in the confines of the station, she seems ready for anything.

Smiling brightly, Lacey replies, “Three months but I have to admit that I’ve never dealt with a crowd the size of yours.”
“You get used to it,” is all Alec says and Lacey looks at him like he’s lost his mind before shaking her head a little and refocusing the conversation.

“You’re here for the next few hours and I’m your point woman. I’m the one that can get you coffee or whatever else you require and I’ll be the one to lead you through your schedule with us. We’re starting with the Live Lounge performance and you’ll have a few minutes for makeup and hair before we get you to the stage set-up.”

Alec goes along with whatever she says and doesn’t tell her that he’s performed or interviewed here so many times over the past ten years that he probably knows the building just as well as she does. He lets the hair and makeup team fiddle with him a little, making sure that he won’t look washed out under the performing lights, and then he goes to the recording room.

It’s not really a stage, just a dimly room with just enough space for a performer and their instruments. Cameras and TVs line one wall and as Alec shakes hands with the team and goes through a round of introductions, he settles in his spot in front of the piano. He puts his headphones on and rests his hands on the keys, taking a grounding breath.

He was only using the piano for the first song-- he’d use the stage band for his own music-- but part of the fun of the Live Lounge was covering artists with stripped versions of their own songs.

Alec warms up for a few minutes and then the cameras are rolling. He’s practiced this particular song for a few months and had brushed up on it yesterday after heading home from the studio.

As he’s given the cue to start from the producer, Alec eases into Coming Down by Halsey. Badlands had been one of his favorite albums the year it had been released and he’s held this song in reserve for a few years just for such an occasion.

The piano is a soft undertone and Alec leans into the notes. He hasn’t performed since May-- since Good Morning America all those weeks ago-- and it feels good to be back. He hasn’t taken so much time off since he was in high school and even if it’s a stripped version in front of half a dozen cameras and no fans, it’s still fun.

There’s no pressure here. It’s Alec and his passion in its purest form. Singing a song he loves in the silence of a dim room. Letting his eyes close, Alec ignores the people gathered, the staff that ensure everything runs smoothly and focuses on the piano and the notes.

The four minutes go by faster than Alec anticipated and there’s a short commercial break before Alec hears the intro music in his headphones. He hears the introduction for his next song-- one of the ones he’d recorded a couple of weeks ago that has almost a guaranteed spot on his next album-- and he counts off the beat with the drummer accompanying him.

This song is a little more lively and he’s breathing hard by the end of it.

There are a few more songs he performs, mostly old favorites with his latest singles mixed in, and then he’s moving back from the piano. Pulling the mic pack from his waistband, Alec hands that and his headphones to a member of the sound team and then Lacey is ushering him to the radio department.

Alec waits outside of the recording room, watching as Nick Grimshaw goes through a spiel of some sort before being ushered in. He’s known the radio host for several years and the two have a good relationship-- they’ve even gotten drinks while Alec’s been in the city. Grimmy never pushes when he senses a sensitive topic and he’s one of a handful of media personnel that Alec actually likes. He’s talked to the man off record several times before and Grimshaw has yet to expose any of his
confidences. All around, he's a pretty good guy in Alec's opinion.

He sits in his assigned chair across from Grimmy and gets hooked up with headphones. He asks Lacey for a cup of coffee and she returns almost startlingly fast. He’s a little surprised that it’s a great cup and it’s only then that he realizes that he hasn’t had any coffee this morning and it’s going on mid morning.

Just a few minutes later, Grimmy’s introducing him and Alec grins andrelaxes into his seat, sipping on his coffee.

“Our next guest is a music industry legend-- and he knows it. He wrapped up his last tour in May and has spent the summer laying low in his hometown. Until this week, at least.” The host’s tone is scandalous as he continues, “Rumor has it that the most elusive playboy in New York has finally let himself be caught-- and by a professor, of all things. I’m sure everyone is very excited to hear that we’re spending the morning with Alec Lightwood. Alec, man, it’s been a little while, hasn’t it?”

Laughing, Alec leans into his mic. “It has,” he confirms. “I almost want to say it’s been over a year since I was last at BBC Radio 1 headquarters.”

“Too long,” Grimmy says sadly.

“Way too long. But I’m in London for a few days and thought it only right that I stop by.”

“Well, Alec, we appreciate that.” Nick takes a quick drink of his own coffee before going on. “How have things been with you lately? Catch us up on what the Alec Lightwood’s been up to the past few months.”

Nick raises a brow which Alec returns as he answers. His first interview being with Nick is definitely not a coincidence by Lydia and he resolves to send his manager a nice gift-- something with gold--once he gets back to The States. Nick knew how to play the game and he was feeling Alec out. Alec would appease him-- after just a little bit more ducking and weaving.

“I wrapped up a world tour earlier this summer.”

“Yes,” Grimmy says dryly. “I heard. I also saw your GMA performance and saw a few fans post about a supposed private concert.”

Shrugging, Alec replies, “I like to do a few smaller events for fans during the year, Nick. You know that. My Good Morning America performance was fun, though. It was nice to perform in Central Park.”

“I would imagine. I noticed something, though, when I was watching it this week.”

Interest piqued, Alec just prompts, “Oh?”

“You were performing fan favorite Carousel when you did something a little unusual for you-- you dedicated a song.”

All of a sudden, Alec realizes what Nick’s building up to and he winces a little. He barely remembers the performance and had totally forgotten that he’d mentioned Magnus at all. Though now that he thinks about it, he definitely should since the move had been brazen even for him.

Still, there’s a game to be played. “A dedication,” Alec asks, frowning as he makes a show of thinking. “That doesn’t seem like me. I never dedicate songs. It’s almost always unbearably sappy and I wouldn’t put my fans through that.”
“Yeah, you’ve only dedicated one or two songs before but that’s what made this stand out. You dedicated that song to someone you met recently.” Grimmy sends Alec an arch look. “Apparently, you thought they could be a great friend.”

He emphasizes the end of the sentence and Alec rolls his eyes. “Friends are important to a healthy life, you know,” he says demurely.

“Well, Alec, you know everyone here in the studio-- and the world, I’m sure-- is dying to know. Who’s the friend you made a few months ago and do you still talk to him?”

Alec laughs a little, leaning close to the mic. “Well since you asked so nice Grimmy, I do still talk to him. His name is Magnus.”

Nick’s eyes light up, like he wasn’t sure Alec was going to give him the story after all, and Alec smiles and takes a drink of coffee.

“Magnus, you say?” He pauses for a beat before returning, “Is there anything to the story that you want to share, Alec?”

“Let’s see,” Alec starts. “What do you want to know?”

Nick glares at him, joking, and Alec smothers a laugh that’s probably caught on tape.

“Lightwood, what do you think I-- and everyone listening raptly right now-- want to know? Anything, everything.” Grimmy sweeps a regal hand in front of him. “The floor is yours, man.”

Humming thoughtfully, Alec finally says, “Well, it looks like you know Magnus and I were friends.”

Jumping on the reply, Nick asks, “Were?”

“You’re right, Grimmy. One’s boyfriend should also be a friend. That’s only healthy.”

“So, it’s true then? The illustrious Alec Lightwood is taken?”

Alec pauses dramatically before sighing in equal fashion. “I am,” he confirms. “I’m in a relationship with Magnus Bane.”

“You’ve heard it from the man himself, folks!” Grimmy tsks, shaking his head morosely. “I know a lot of men will be crying into their pillows tonight at the news that you’re off the market, Alec. So you know I have to ask-- what’s the story there?”

“It’s a pretty boring story,” Alec says, almost apologetically. “We met in a diner one night.”

“You do like a good burger,” Grimm says sagely.

Alec laughs. “You know me too well. But yeah, I was at this diner in New York and it was pretty late. I had just ordered my food when I looked up and saw him.”

“Oh? Was it love at first sight,” Nick prods.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Alec says, a little uncertainly. “There was just something about him, though. We talked for a few minutes that night and things were kinda left there. I didn't think I’d ever see him again.”

“But?”
“It turns out we go to the same coffee shop. I ran into him there a few days later and we talked a little more and ended up exchanging numbers. I’m telling you, it’s all pretty conventional. We talked and met up a few times and things just grew and changed until we realized that there was more than just friendship there. We talked and-- yeah, man,” Alec ends, grinning. “He’s my boyfriend.”

“I’m happy for you, Alec, but you know I have to ask-- are you concerned about his history?”

No matter that Nick’s a friend, Alec’s tone cools at the suggestion, even if he knows that Nick’s just doing his job. “No, I’m not concerned about anything having to do with Magnus.”

Grimmy winces. “You have to know how that looks, though, right? This guy comes out of nowhere and you start dating only for it to be revealed his dad is a is one of the most well-known conmen in the entire world? And Magnus apparently has a juvie record? That doesn’t look good for anyone involved.”

Alec laughs but it’s caustic. “Are you telling me that you’ve never done something you regretted, Grimmy? Fu-- goodness knows that I’ve gotten into a scrape or two that involved a lawyer. And we can’t help who our fathers are.”

Alec doesn’t say anything else on the topic and Grimmy is kind enough to stay away from the topic of Robert. Instead, the host says, “I just want to make that sure you know what you’re getting yourself into. You’re Alec Lightwood, for God’s sake. You can’t just date anyone, even if we’d all like to think we have a certain level of autonomy that extends to who we want to be with.”

“I’m choosing Magnus,” Alec says firmly. “We’ve talked about things and we’re together. I don’t care what anyone else has to say about my relationship, especially when they don’t know us.”

Raising a brow, Grimmy replies, “That sounds pretty strong, Alec. Can I take that to mean that you and Magnus are in this for the long haul, naysayers be damned?”

Smiling, Alec just says, “That is what it sounds like, doesn’t it?”

Thankfully, Nick takes the cue and with a huff of amusement and a silent nod in support of Alec, the show goes to commercial.

Taking his headphones off, Alec follows suit and the two of them enjoy a few minutes conversation off the air.

“Hey man, I hope you’re good. You know that I had to ask.”

Shaking his head, Alec waves him off. “We both know how the game’s played, Grimmy. This was nothing out of the ordinary for the two of us.”

“Well, that’s not quite true, is it? I never thought that I’d see the day you settled down with someone. This Magnus guy must be special, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Alec confirms. “Between you and me, I’m pretty gone over him.”

Nodding seriously, Grimmy just says, “I’m happy for you, Alec. You deserve this and I hope to hell that it works out for you two.”

They fistbump while Alec says thanks and they’re back on air just a few seconds later.

The conversation moves onto his career and Alec talks about his plans for the next album for a little bit, bantering with Nick, before there’s another commercial break.
Carefully, he stands up and stretches, draining the rest of his coffee and requesting another. Lacey jumps to attention and Alec spends the next little while playing a few radio games and talking about other, less personal subjects.

When the show finally ends, it’s after noon and Alec feels his red eye catching up with him. Shaking his head to clear it, he thanks everyone and follows Lacey as she leads him to the front of the building where his car is waiting.

There aren’t as many reporters this time and Alec makes it to the car with a fraction of the attention his arrival to the station had garnered.

The ride to the hotel is uneventful and Alec scrolls through Twitter and responds to a text from Jace before going over to the New York Times and spending the rest of the drive reading a few depressing as hell articles.

Pulling up to the hotel's front entrance, the doorman moves smoothly to attention and Alec nods to him as he steps into The Rosewood. It was his favorite hotel to stay in when he was in London and most celebrities liked the privacy the hotel afforded.

Walking over to the reception desk, Alec’s greeted warmly and checks in without issue. The driver had taken his bag to the hotel earlier and as Alec checks his watch, he sees that Underhill should have arrived a little while ago. Getting his keys, Alec heads to the elevator and up to his room.

He has a suite for the duration of his stay and as he inserts his card, he hears the television on low volume. Underhill is sitting on the couch, sleeves rolled up and jacket thrown over the dining table chair. He’s watching a football game and looking through his phone.

“What’s up,” Alec asks, kicking the door closed and throwing his key onto the entryway table.

Looking up, Underhill shrugs. “I’m just wasting time until you get here. Cutting it a little close, aren’t you?”

“You know me,” Alec says dryly. “I love to live dangerously.”

Underhill snorts but doesn’t say anything. He also doesn’t move his feet and Alec swipes at them half assed as he moves around them to take the other half of the couch.

“He should be here in half an hour.”

“We’re ready,” Underhill says confidently. “I’ve got my paperwork and legalese all ready.”

“Legalese,” Alec asks, giving his lawyer an arch look.

Underhill just shrugs and they watch the rest of the quarter before turning the TV off. Standing, Alec moves to the liquor cart and pours a glass of whiskey for Underhill, handing it over before pouring a second for himself.

Underhill flips through a folder, skimming the contents for a few minutes before sighing and coming to his feet. He rolls his sleeves down and shrugs into his suit jacket. They set the suite to rights and Alec takes out his phone. Magnus must be up for he’s answered Alec’s good morning text sent so many hours ago and Alec can’t help his smile as he types up a reply.

“Focus, boss. The bastard should be here any minute.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec shoves his phone into his pants pocket and it’s at just that minute that the
room’s phone rings. Alec picks it up on the third ring.

“Lightwood,” he says brusquely.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Lightwood. There’s a . . . Victor Aldertree here and he insists that he has an invitation to your unit. What should I tell him, sir?”

Alec hears the disapproval in the concierge’s tone but bites back his laugh. It was almost unheard of for any media to ever be allowed on the grounds, though for purposes like the one Alec had set up were the only exception.

“I have an appointment scheduled with him for an interview,” Alec confirms. “Send him up-- with an escort. Between you and me, he’ll only be here twenty minutes or so and then he’ll need escorted off the property.”

“Very good, sir.”

Hanging up, Alec leans back in his chair and sends Underhill an amused look. “Ready?”

“More than,” Underhill says grimly. “I can’t believe that he really thinks you’re going to give him an exclusive interview after the shit he’s pulled.”

“He’s a reporter, Underhill. He probably can’t see past the million dollar story that’s landed in his lap.”

A knock sounds on the hotel door and Underhill stands to answer. Alec, for his part, crosses one leg over another and settles in for his meeting, taking a leisurely sip of his whiskey.

Underhill swings the door open and Aldertree appears, looking pompously pressed in a subtly patterned blazer.

He walks right into the suite without hesitation and Alec nods to the bellman behind him as Underhill slips him a tip.

Switching his gaze to the bloodthirsty little reporter in front of him, Alec inclines his head. “Mr. Aldertree.”

“Alec.” The two of them shake hands and Alec barely buries his ire at being greeted so casually. Aldertree, the smug bastard, takes a seat at the table opposite Alec and Underhill seats himself between them.

Alec tilts his head to his friend. “This is Underhill. My lawyer.”

At that, Aldertree looks a little startled, though he waves it off just a moment later.

What a fool, Alec thinks. Aldertree thought Underhill was just here to prevent Alec from incriminating himself in anything too embarrassing.

Alec watches as Aldertree takes out his phone and opens his recording app, starting the audio. Alec lets him get situated, taking out his little pen and notebook, relaxing in his chair as if he has all the time in the world.

Finally, Aldertree says, “Alright, gentlemen, should we get started?”

Alec pauses for a few beats and studies Aldertree. The journalist was a thorn in his side and he’s looking forward to the next several minutes.
“Ready whenever you are, Mr. Aldertree.”

Aldertree dives right in and goes straight for the throat. “When did you start dating Magnus Bane and did you know from the start that he was ill gotten goods?”

Alec’s temper spikes but he doesn’t need the look Underhill throws him to keep his control. His expression doesn’t change from its bland pleasantness as he reaches over and grabs the reporter’s phone from the table before Aldertree even knows what’s happening.

Ignoring Aldertree’s squawks of distress, Alec presses the red button to stop recording and then deletes the file.

He looks up to meet Aldertree’s incredulous face. “You’re not here for an exclusive, Aldertree. Quite the contrary.”

Underhill flips open the folder in front of him, perusing its contents that Alec knows he’s already memorized, letting Alec have a few minutes.

Leaning over the table oh so slightly, Alec’s voice is soft as he asks, “You got quite the story didn’t you? You found out that I was dating someone. I don’t know who your inside source is but it doesn’t matter-- you took whatever they had to say and you ran with it. You ran all the way to the fucking bank with a story on me.”

Settling back in his chair, Alec throws back a swallow of whiskey, setting the glass back down on the table with a hard thud in the otherwise still room.

“Now normally,” Alec continues conversationally, “I’d let you scamper off with your tidy little check and you’d just be another annoying reporter on my shit list. But this isn’t normal, Aldertree. You brought someone else into this.”

Aldertree looks admirably unfazed by Alec’s little rambling speech, though Alec sees the way his eyes widen imperceptibly at the mention of his boyfriend.

“That’s right. You can sling all the shit you want at my name. It’ll take more than some goddamn two bit reporter to bring me down. You had the nerve to go after my boyfriend though, Aldertree, and that I won’t tolerate. You don’t mess with what’s mine and you can imagine how Magnus felt when he read his past in a fucking tabloid.”

“I’m a journalist,” Aldertree says firmly. “It’s my duty to report the news, especially when people are keeping secrets.”

Tsking, Alec reaches for his glass and tips it toward his guest. “Ah, but you don’t get it, Aldertree? Some things are off limits-- especially when you have the means and the spite to make sure they stay that way.”

Aldertree raises his head and casts a defiant look at Alec, scornful. “What are you going to do, then? The story’s already out. Everyone knows that your boyfriend is just using you for your money and that when he’s done with you, he’ll walk away without a backwards glance.”

Now it’s the reporter’s turn to look pityingly at Alec. “You’re too fucking stupid to realize that you’re just another arrogant celebrity falling into a trap laid by someone smarter than you. Don’t blame me for sounding the alarm-- you should be thanking me.”

relationship— that we were obviously keeping out of the press— to the world? You’re right,” Alec
says, marveling. “There really is so much to thank you for, you snide little bastard.”

Nodding towards Underhill, Alec continues, “You fucked up, though. Didn’t you?”

“How,” Aldertree asks, crossing his arms in front of him. Alec sees the flash of panic in his eyes and
his mouth tilts up, just a little.

“You’re a reporter but you’re still bound by the law. You’re not infallible. I read your article, you
see. I read it a few times. That’s when I realized that you weren’t just a bottom feeding son of a
bitch— you went above and beyond to get your scoop and I promise, that’ll be your downfall.”

Alec leans close, makes sure that he has Aldertree’s undivided attention as he slowly says, “I’ve
consulted with my lawyer and it turns out that it’s a felony to break into sealed records. I don’t know
who you bribed, but you broke the law when you looked at Magnus’s juvie record. That’s grounds
for immediate prosecution and I’d go a step further and say it’d mean your job at Idris News.”

“You can’t do that,” Aldertree accuses. “That’s illegal.”

At that, Underhill looks up from the folder. “I’m sorry, what’s illegal? Telling someone that they’ve
broken the law? We’ve done nothing but inform you of something you already knew.”

“What do you want,” Aldertree gets out through gritted teeth.

“What do we want? That’s a bit like trying to close the barn door after the horse has escaped, isn’t it?
But for sake of argument, I’ll tell you anyway.”

Smiling, Alec relaxes in his seat and considers the man in front of him. “I want to ruin you. I want to
make you pay for hurting someone that I care very much about. No one is content with just me
anymore,” Alec says drolly. “They’re going after those closest to me and that is something I will
never tolerate.”

Alec’s expression is pleasant as he softly asks, “Do you want to know something, Aldertree? I get
what I want. I suppose that your editor is reading an anonymous letter as we speak that tells just how
you managed to piece together such an interesting story. Oh, and I lied about not knowing who you
bribed— he’s sitting in an interrogation room right now explaining why he hacked police records in
The States and I’d imagine he’s singing like a bird right about now about just who asked him to do
it.”

Alec watches as the realizations batter Aldertree and feels blazing satisfaction at the way he seems to
deflate.

“You chose the wrong story, Aldertree. And now you’ll pay the price. By the time I’m finished with
you, you won’t be able to get a media job in Siberia.”

“You bastard,” Aldertree whispers furiously.

Alec shrugs negligently. “Don’t blame me for your own fuck-ups. Now get out. I don’t ever want to
hear your name again.”

“This isn’t the last you’ll hear from me,” the reporter blusters.

Underhill stands, buttoning his jacket. “Is that a threat, Mr. Aldertree,” he asks coolly and Alec
watches as Aldertree gnashes his teeth.
“Of course not,” the man gets out and sends them both a withering glance before he’s striding to the door and wrenching it open. The same bellman appears and Alec watches, amused, as Aldertree is ushered away by the hotel staff.

The door swings shut and Underhill blows out a breath. “What a bitch.”

Barking out a laugh, Alec stands and walks the few feet to the couch, collapsing on it with a groan. “It certainly wasn’t a hardship. Did you see his face when he realized I’d put the pieces together?”

“Priceless,” Underhill agrees and slouches in his chair, pouring a second glass of whiskey and throwing half of it back in one bracing swallow.

The two of them relax in the quiet of the room before Alec sighs heavily. “I have interviews this afternoon and a dinner with a few of the London executives from the label.”

“Woe is you,” Underhill mutters and just raises a brow at the narrow-eyed glance Alec throws him.

Looking at his watch, Underhill hums. “My flight’s scheduled for later this evening. I think I’ll do a little sightseeing before I have the driver take me to the airport.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to stay a few days? It seems a little excessive that you’d come all the way here just for a single meeting, without even taking advantage of a little vacation.”

“What can I say,” Underhill shrugs. “Adrian couldn’t get out of work on such short notice and I miss him.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Alec waves his friend’s answer away and they both laugh as Alec stands and they shake hands, leaning in for a quick hug. “Go ahead and get out of here. I know you like to visit the National Gallery when you’re in town and go to that pub. I’ll see you back in New York.”

“Sounds good, boss.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec heads to the bedroom while Underhill gathers his papers. His friend leaves just a few minutes later and Alec sighs in the quiet now that he’s alone.

He has an hour until he needs to go downstairs and meet his driver for the next round of interviews and Alec spends that time texting Magnus. It’s nothing serious and Alec laughs out loud as they argue about who Peyton should have ended up with on One Tree Hill. Alec spares a few minutes to change into another outfit-- something a little more formal that will work well for wherever the label takes him tonight, and then he’s off again.

He’s definitely feeling the effects of his overnight flight and being on the go since he landed but he reasons that he only has a few hours left before he can crash for a solid eight hours-- ten if he’s lucky.

His room phone rings-- downstairs notifying him that his driver’s arrived-- and Alec runs a hand through his hair as he grabs his room key and wallet, shoving them into his pocket.

Alec walks out of his room, ready to face the lions.

Eager, even.

Because, as the elevator moves swiftly down to the lobby, Alec sits comfortable in the knowledge
that he’s at the top of his game. His career has recovered quite nicely from the crisis earlier in the
summer and he has a man back in The States that he’s crazy about.

Everything has worked out quite nicely-- better than he could’ve ever expected-- and Alec’s been
playing this game so long that sometimes he wonders if he didn’t invent it.

This is the life he’s chosen for himself and he loves it-- thorns and all. As Alec runs through the news
outlets and magazines that he’ll be talking to this afternoon, he smiles a little.

This life isn’t for everyone but it’s the only one Alec wants. The truth is, he’s always loved it, always
enjoyed playing the game and thumbing his nose at anyone who said that he wouldn’t make it.

Magnus landed in his life unexpectedly but he fits in a way that surprises Alec. It’s unforgivably
early, but Alec likes the space Magnus takes up in his life. Alec never thought something like this
was meant for him but he knows he’d fight to keep it with everything he has.

Yeah, Alec thinks as he slides his sunglasses on and approaches the car with the driver holding the
rear door open for him.

He wouldn’t change a thing.
Chapter 40

Alec listens as the phone rings once, twice, three times. He’s just set to hang up when he hears the call pick up.

“Alexander?” Magnus’s voice is curious, warm, and to Alec’s relief, alert.

“Hey, babe,” he says, smile widening. “I hope I didn’t catch you at a bad time.”

“There’s no bad time where you’re concerned, darling. As a matter of fact, I was just reading through a draft of an article set for publication in the fall.”

With a glance at the clock, Alec asks, “You’re working? It’s what, almost midnight there?”

“11:30,” Magnus confirms.

“I had no idea you kept such late hours,” Alec teases. “Shouldn’t you be in bed--”

“What, in my cap and nightgown reading through a treatise from a hundred years ago with the light from a single candle? I’m sorry to spoil your delusion, Alexander, but a professor’s work is never done. This week’s been a little hectic and I need to get this to the journal by the middle of next week. This was the only pocket of time I had between now and then.”

Alec laughs a little. “Publish or perish?”

“Academia is mercenary,” is all Magnus says, in a prim tone before chuckling. Alec hears movement on the other end of the line as Magnus shifts in his chair before asking, “Now, what’s got you calling a doddering professor so late?”

Wedging the phone between his ear and shoulder, Alec reaches for his toiletry kit and shoves it in his suitcase. Zipping up the suitcase, he smiles a little as he replies, “I don’t know, really. I’m heading to the airport and I realized I hadn’t talked to you since Monday morning. Thought I’d call and see how things are in New York.”

“Well, I’m glad you called even if it’s been less than two days since we last spoke. What, texting wasn’t enough to tide you over?”

Magnus’s voice is light, teasing, but Alec’s response is mostly serious as he says, “I just wanted to hear your voice, I guess. I’m glad you weren’t asleep yet.”

“Me too, darling,” Magnus replies softly.

There’s a break as both Alec and Magnus remain silent for a minute, letting the line between them hum gently.

Finally, Magnus speaks again. “You said you’re on the way to the airport? Can I assume that means you’ll be back in New York soon?”

“You bet your ass it does,” Alec says, eliciting a laugh from Magnus. He swings his carry-on over his shoulder and starts wheeling his suitcase towards the door as there’s a knock on his door. Telling Magnus to hold on for a minute, he opens it to see a doorman waiting in the hallway with news that his car’s arrived. Handing over his suitcase, Alec lets the man go while he does one last sweep of his room, picking up the conversation.
“My flight’s in a couple of hours and if all goes well, I should land in New York a little before ten tonight.”

“How exciting,” Magnus says. “Would you want to do anything Thursday? I have class and office hours but I’m free after three?”

Groaning a little, Alec heads to the door, satisfied that he’s gathered all of his belongings. “Are you kidding,” he asks. “I wish I could see you right now, let alone wait until tomorrow afternoon.”

Magnus makes a little noise of sympathy and Alec hears typing on the other end of the line. “I definitely wouldn’t turn you away right now. I’d rather be with you than working on this article any day.”

“If only my flight didn’t land so late,” Alec sighs. “But, I guess I can make it another day before I see you.”

“I’m sure you’ll survive,” Magnus replies dryly. “How was Tokyo anyway?”

Walking into the elevator as it opens, Alec pushes the button for the lobby and leans against the back wall. “It was amazing as always. I never get used to how different performing is here, though. It’s like a case of whiplash every time, I swear.”

“How it Japan different?”

“In The States and most other places, fans go crazy during concerts. They yell and scream and jump and just generally go crazy. Over here, though, fans are always quiet during my performance. It was a trip the first time I came to Japan, let me tell you.”

“Yes, I’d imagine that would be quite an adjustment compared to what you were used to.”

“It’s nice, though. They’re quiet because they want to make sure they hear everything and they want to be respectful. Gigs over here are always a little more relaxed, even when I’m playing arenas.”

“I’m glad you had a good time. How’s the rest of your trip doing?”

“Can’t complain,” Alec says easily. “The media have been a mix of friend and foe, so it’s the same old there. What about you,” Alec asks, concerned. “How are things on your end?”

Humming, Magnus takes a moment to think and Alec sweats a little as he enters the lobby. He’s having flashes of mobs and asshole paps and Magnus running as far away from Alec as possible.

“Yes, I’d imagine that would be quite an adjustment compared to what you were used to.”

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“Really, it hasn’t been as difficult as I’d feared,” he finally says. Alec’s shoulders slump with relief as he continues, “There’ve been a few journalists who have tried to get the inside scoop but all around, things aren’t too bad. Columbia is mostly unscathed and they haven’t shown up at my door yet, so all things considered, I think we’re doing a-okay.”

“Thank Christ,” Alec says, heartfelt.

Magnus startles out a laugh at Alec’s vehemence. “It looks like our worries about the media have been largely blown out of proportion.” Magnus’s voice is sardonic as he adds, “Maybe we should thank that bastard reporter for blowing the story up after all.”

Scowling, Alec walks out to where his car is waiting, driver standing near the open back door. With a quick nod, Alec ducks into the back seat and settles as he grimly says, “Don’t worry, Aldertree’s getting his just desserts.”
There’s a pause on the line and Alec can almost picture the look on Magnus’s face, the curious tilt of his head as he runs over Alec’s words.

“If I didn’t know better,” Magnus says lightly, “I’d be scared for poor Aldertree.”

Alec snorts. “Let’s just say he won’t be lambasting any other unsuspecting people.”

“What did you do, Alec?”

Alec searches Magnus’s tone for anything that betrays his annoyance or condemnation, thankfully finding nothing but amused exasperation. The truth is, Alec can be a little heavy handed when it comes to protecting those closest to him and while Jace and Izzy are mostly used to it, Magnus might be put off by the lengths he’s willing to go to punish people who get too close.

Still, Alec’s not sorry and his boyfriend has a right to know what’s going on.

“I don’t know why you said it like that,” he remarks idly. “I just had a meeting with him in London. He fucked up and I thought it only appropriate that he deal with the consequences.”

“And what were these consequences?”

“Well, I can’t be sure but I think I heard that the poor bastard lost his job. Word is Scotland Yard is pressing charges, too. Terrible thing, really.”

“Really,” Magnus echoes dryly and Alec raises a brow as he waits to hear the rest of Magnus’s thoughts.

It’s quiet for a few seconds before Magnus quietly breaks the silence. “Thank you, darling. While I never would’ve asked you to do something so... extra on my behalf, the gesture is appreciated.”

“Yeah, yeah, you can take care of yourself and you’re stronger than anything a press parasite can throw at you. That doesn’t mean that I’m not here for you, that I won’t back you up and try to keep you unscathed from the hell I’ve decided to throw myself into. I may have asked for this life but I won’t forget that you haven’t.”

“I think you’re forgetting a pertinent fact in that I didn’t fall into things with my eyes closed. Still, Aldertree was a nuisance and I can’t say I’m sorry to hear that things have blown up in his face.”

“He knew the risks when he published the article. It is what it is.”

Alec doesn’t try to keep the cold edge from his tone, though thankfully Magnus doesn’t comment on it.

Watching as the city goes by his window, Alec switches gears. “So, you’re revising an article? I thought you were writing a book.”

“Yes, and I’m also the chair of the department with a few classes to teach. What can I say? I like to keep busy.”

“And I thought my schedule was fit to bursting.”

“Of course,” Magnus says and Alec can hear the smile in his voice, “That doesn’t mean that I wouldn’t take a break if I had you here to distract me.”

Grinning a little, Alec replies, “Oh? You want to play it like that?”
“I imagine you’d make hooky worth it, Alexander.”

There’s heat there but also overwhelming warmth and Alec wishes he didn’t have an eighteen hour flight ahead of him, that instead he could teleport and be at Magnus’s side in an instant.

“Damn it,” he says gruffly before his voice turns soft. “I can’t wait to see you. The past week’s felt twice as long without you.”

“You charmer, you,” Magnus replies. “I’m sure the next hours will go by in the blink of an eye. Just a little while longer, darling, and then if you don’t have any plans, we can spend the weekend together.”

“With dinner on Thursday, right?”

“Of course-- I’m just as eager to see you, I assure you, Alec. I can’t wait until the weekend.”

The car pulls up to the winding lane that will lead to the departure terminal and Alec sighs a little. “Well then, let’s hope this flight goes by quickly.” Looking down at his watch, Alec grimaces a little as he sees the time. “I’m sorry I kept you so long. Do you have to finish your work before you can call it a night?”

Humming, Magnus says, “You know, I think I might just go to bed, after all. I can squeeze in some time editing tomorrow before my first class. My day’s ending on a high note and I don’t want to ruin things by spending the next few hours working.”

“I’m a high note, huh?” It’s a throwaway phrase but Alec can’t deny the butterflies in his stomach at the reply.

“Of course, darling. You should know by now that I love talking to you.”

Smiling, Alec just says, “Well, I hope you know that talking to you is the best part of my day, too. I’m looking forward to doing it in person soon enough.”

“Have a safe flight, Alexander. Let me know when you land in New York.”

“Will do, babe. Have a good night, okay? And I hope you have a good day tomorrow.”

Magnus’s voice is warm as he replies, “Always, darling.”

They hang up in the next moment and then the driver’s opening his door. Alec collects his things and goes through expedited security, relaxing in the first class lounge until it’s time for his flight. Luckily, nobody bothers him and Alec eats a late lunch as he works on his laptop. There’s a few endorsement deals that Lydia’s emailed over and he gets caught up on work, going over his schedule as he waits for his flight to be called.

His single is due to drop Friday at midnight and Alec’s excited. They’re filming the music video for it a few days after and it’s a hundred tiny details that Alec needs to keep up with as his career propels forward to another era.

Everything goes smoothly and luckily, his flight to LAX is is uneventful. He passes the time trying to catch a few hours nap or reading a book. He even catches a movie that had come out last year, a fun teen rom-com.

His layover in LAX is only an hour and Alec feels exhaustion ride him hard as he makes the trek to his gate. He’s still running on Tokyo time and while it’s the early morning in L.A., it feels like the
middle of the night for him. The past week’s been grueling as he’s performed and interviewed and
generally worked like a dervish to complete damage control on both his relationship and his career
and he’s looking forward to making it to his apartment and passing out for twelve hours.

He’s just ordered a red eye when something catches the corner of his eye. Sighing, he takes his time
adding a few spoonfuls of sugar to the caffeinated nightmare in his hand before turning and almost
walking into a reporter.

“Hey man, Kyle from TMZ. It’s great to see you.”

“Likewise,” Alec says dryly. He readjusts his bag on his shoulder before continuing onto his gate.
His flight takes off in half an hour and he’ll should make it just as his group’s boarding.

“It’s been awhile since we’ve seen you on the West Coast. Does this mean you’re moving out this
way?”

“I’m on my way back to New York.” With an internal sigh, Alec wishes that pap would just get to
the point so he could continue on his way. He just wants to go home and he knows he’s looked
better-- for his flight, he’s just wearing a pair of sweats and a singlet. Definitely not his finest outfit.

“Back to Magnus?”

Alec raises a brow at the presumptuous question, though he smiles a little at the thought. “If you
want to phrase it like that, I guess so,” he agrees easily.

“So things are good between the two of you? No lover’s spats or fits of jealousy?”

“No,” Alec says wryly. “It’s going well, man.”

“Good for you, Alec, we’re happy to hear that. Word on the street is that you’re dropping new
music. Can you tease that a little?”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Alec murmurs and takes sip of his coffee.

“Whatever you say, man. Have a good flight, yeah?”

He holds out a hand for Alec to fistbump, which he does without hesitation. “Thanks, you have a
good day too.”

Kyle leaves him alone, off to his next story and Alec continues on his way. Thankfully, he’s right
and the flight’s just started boarding as he walks up to the attendant stand. He sees a few people gasp
and point at him but he walks right onto the flight without a scene and settles into his seat without
issue.

He fucks around on his phone for awhile and reads a few articles that have cropped up about him in
the past day or so. Thankfully, they’re recycling the same information and it has a positive slant,
which is a nice surprise.

He likes a tweet from Simon about a gig he’s doing in Greenwich at the start of the week and a post
from Izzy taken at Uptown where she’s sitting in a chair with Maia in her lap, both of them grinning
into the camera with a caption, You brighten my day more than coffee. There’s even emojis tacked
on at the end.

Soon enough, he’s turning his phone onto airplane mode and settling in for the next 5 hours. Sliding
his earphones on, he starts a playlist and reads through the latest issue of a music magazine he’d
picked up in the Narita Airport.

He reads it cover to cover but he’s a little restless, no matter that he’s mostly been up for the past thirty hours. He doesn’t have the concentration for a book and he’s tired of working, so Alec reaches for his songbook and wastes a little while making up silly songs. Most of them will never see the light of day, but Alec sees potential in one of them, a little upbeat song about time differences and missing someone.

They touch down in New York and Alec can’t stop yawning. It’s a little after ten in the at night and it seems absurd that it’s still Wednesday. He feels like it’s been at least a week since he left Tokyo.

Debarkation takes only a few minutes and then Alec’s heading off the plane, entering an empty gate. He rearranges the beanie on his head before shoving up the sleeves of the hoodie he’d thrown on halfway through his flight from L.A. Dave should be waiting for him outside and Alec feels like a zombie as he makes his way to baggage claim. He doesn’t always bother with it-- sometimes he has it couriered back to his apartment-- but he’s he figured what the hell, and resolves to spend the next twenty minutes standing with a couple hundred people waiting for the carousel to start.

While he waits, Alec takes his phone out and sees a few texts from Magnus.

There’s a picture of a desk covered with piles of paper with a dozen crying faces and then Magnus is sending a text that says, Can’t wait to see you soon :)

There might be a few heart emojis that make Alec melt, even if he knows that he should be above such things and his sleep deprivation makes it at least twice as difficult to send a message confirming he’s landed.

Officially back in New York.

Can’t wait to see you tomorrow (even if I wish it wasn’t so late so we could do something tonight)

It seems like he’s barely hit send when a reply’s coming through and it takes a few tries to understand the text but eventually it lands and Alec whips his head up, looking around and probably looking insane with it.

Be careful what you wish for, darling.

Running a hand over his jaw, Alec’s turned away from the carousel when everything in him seems to settle.

Magnus is leaning against a pillar a few dozen feet away. His arms are crossed over his chest and his ankles are crossed. He studies Alec with a raised brow, a little smile resting on the corner of his mouth.

Without thinking, Alec’s already crossing the empty space between them. He’s just an arm’s length away when he asks, “What are you doing here?” He knows that his voice betrays him, emotion heavy in the hoarse tones but he can’t help it. He’s surprised and exhausted and his defenses are obliterated.

Something tells him Magnus doesn’t mind, though.

Straightening from his pillar, Magnus closes the last little distance between them. One arm wraps low around Alec’s waist while the other hand cups his cheek, rough with two day stubble.

“I wanted to surprise you. I take it I was successful?”
“Yeah,” Alec murmurs, shifting closer until he can brush his nose against his boyfriend’s. “I was expecting Dave.”

Magnus shrugs a little. “It’s been over a week since I saw you and when you told me that tomorrow felt like an eternity when we’d be back in the same city, I texted him. He’s waiting outside.”

Alec smiles as he wraps his arms around Magnus’s shoulders, and buries his face in his neck. “I’m so glad to see you even if it is late.”

Alec makes a little noise, happy, as Magnus sweeps a thumb over the nape of his neck, slowly swaying them side to side as they wait for the carousel to start.

“I don’t think I can do anything tonight,” Alec says apologetically after a moment, his voice muffled. “I’m pretty beat, babe.”

“I didn’t think you’d be up to dancing till dawn, darling. If it’s alright with you, however, I thought maybe I could come back to your place and we could spend the night together-- just sleeping of course. I just want to be with you.”

Pulling back from the comfort of Magnus takes herculean strength but Alec manages it, though he grumbles as his hands shift down to rest at Magnus’s back. “Really,” he asks. “You came all the way here to pick me up at the airport just so we could sleep together?”

“And if I did,” Magnus asks, tone imperious though Alec thinks he detects a hint of defensiveness lurking underneath the surface.

“Then, I’d say thank you and I wish every arrival back to the city could be just as perfect.”

Magnus’s eyes light up and Alec leans down a little, kissing him in front of God knows who. For once, he doesn’t care-- and that’s becoming a trend concerning Magnus that Alec just can’t bring himself to worry about. At this point, everyone knows they’re together. Who cares if they share a little PDA in a mostly empty airport.

Besides, everyone was tired from that flight and are far more concerned with getting their luggage and escaping than what someone’s doing in a corner.

Pulling back after a moment, Alec opens his eyes to see Magnus already watching him with a calm, relaxed gaze.

It should be absurd how everything in Alec reaches toward Magnus. For fuck’s sake, they haven’t even said those three little words yet.

Telling himself to be happy in the here and now, Alec leans into the moment. His total focus is on Magnus which is why he jumps, startled, when the carousel starts and luggage starts moving on the conveyor.

Magnus laughs a little, wrapping a hand around his waist and starts toward the crowd of people who have jumped to attention.

“Do you just have the one suitcase?”

Alec makes an affirmative noise, nodding. “Yeah, as soon as we get it, we can head outside to the car.”

It takes a little bit and Alec’s started distantly wondering if his luggage isn’t lost after all when he
sees the black suitcase with rainbow ribbon on the handle.

Most people have left—surprisingly, he hasn’t seen any one glance his way—and Alec doesn’t have a problem grabbing it just as it passes where they’re standing.

Magnus takes in the plain suitcase with decorative little ribbon and sends Alec a look. “Subtle,” he says and Alec laughs a little.

“Couldn’t resist,” he says easily.

Alec has one arm around Magnus’s shoulders, holding him close as they start toward the exit while he wheels his luggage next to him with the other. The August humidity is still oppressive even if it is so late and Alec disentangles from Magnus as he sees Dave step out of the car.

“Well, aren’t you a sight for sore eyes,” his driver says with a laugh and reaches for his suitcase, lifting it into the trunk before turning and taking his carry-on, too.

Rolling his eyes, Alec hides a yawn behind his hand as he glares. “Yeah, yeah. That flight kicked my ass but forty five minutes is all that stands between me and sleep on a horizontal surface.”

“Forty five minutes, eh? I’ll see if I can take it down to forty for you, Mr. Lightwood.”

Grinning good naturedly, Alec just says, “Take your time, Dave. I’m looking forward to relaxing in the back. I’m in no rush, especially since you brought my boyfriend with you.”

Dave chuckles as they make their way to the front. “He texted and asked if he could tag along. I wasn’t sure how you’d feel but I figured it couldn’t hurt anything. Not with how hot you two have been in the news this week.”

Alec just hums as he ducks into the car, Magnus following. Dave starts the car a moment later and Alec feels like he’s melting as he relaxes against Magnus. His boyfriend doesn’t seem to mind, though, as he leans in the corner, sweeping a hand through Alec’s hair.

“Fuck, that feels so good, babe,” Alec mutters against Magnus’s chest. All of a sudden, Alec’s exhaustion is overwhelming and he cuddles against his side. He hears Magnus laugh on a breath and feels him kiss the top of his head as if from a distance.

“Go ahead and sleep a little, darling. I’m not going anywhere.”

The next thing Alec knows, he’s being shaken awake.

“Wake up, Alexander,” Magnus whispers. “We’re here.”

“No,” he returns petulantly. “You’re comfy and I’m tired.”

“Compliments will get you everywhere, darling but I don’t think Dave relishes the thought of sitting out here all night.”

Alec rouses just to glare halfheartedly at Magnus. He shouldn’t have bothered though because Magnus is already halfway out of the car, completely unfazed by Alec’s ire.

By the time he’s out of the car, Magnus already has his suitcase and two bags with Davy calling out a cheery goodbye before leaving for them in front of Alec’s building. Alec makes an attempt to get his things back, but Magnus just tsks at him, finally relenting enough to give him his carry on shoulder bag.
“You’re dead on your feet, dear, and it’s not even eleven yet. I think I can take care of rolling a suitcase to and from an elevator.”

Alec just smiles at him in appreciation and as they start toward the door, Charles smiles at the two of them.

“Mr. Lightwood, Mr. Bane,” he greets warmly.

“Good evening, Charles,” Magnus returns. “How’s your night been?”

“All around rather quiet,” Charles says with a tinge of surprise. “Are you two in for the night, then?”

“Yeah,” Alec says hoarsely, shaking his head a little to wake up a bit more. “No parties for us tonight, Charles.”

“Very good then, sir. I hope you two have a good evening indoors, then.”

With a nod, Magnus and Alec make their way to the penthouse. Magnus leaves Alec’s things near the bedroom door.

Alec stares at the space for a moment, blinking. It was always good to be back, no matter if it had been a week or a year since he’d last been in his room. Running a hand through his hair, Alec looks over at Magnus.

“I’m going to grab a quick shower. Feel free to help yourself to whatever you want.”

Magnus sets his own overnight bag on the bed before he opens it and starts rummaging. “No worries, darling. I’m just going to get ready for bed myself. Is it alright if I join you in the bathroom? I need to wash my face and brush my teeth.”

“Of course,” Alec says, mouth tilting up at the corner. “As long as we’re clear that any attempt at hanky panky would be useless. I’d definitely fall asleep before things even got interesting.”

Magnus laughs a little. “I don’t think either one of us is up to any hanky panky tonight, Alexander.”

Alec grins but doesn’t say anything else, just heads to his ensuite with Magnus following close behind. Turning the water on, Alec strips with little fanfare and almost groans at his first step into the shower. It’s a wall of warmth and Alec feels both like he’s floating and sinking into the ground.

International flights were always brutal but Asia was just so damned far away that they always left him a little useless afterwards.

Alec mechanically washes his hair and the rest of his body, hazily aware of Magnus at the sink going through his own nighttime routine. It’s all painfully domestic, he reflects and the thought doesn’t send him into a panic. Instead, it’s like something settles in him and he feels nothing but steady.

He’s turning off the water a few minutes later and opens the glass door, reaching for a towel to wrap around his waist. He sees the appreciative look Magnus casts in the mirror and just returns an arch look back.

“No hanky panky,” he says seriously and he bites back a grin as he sees Magnus almost choke on his toothpaste as he laughs.

Alec’s bathroom has a double vanity and as he brushes his own teeth next to Magnus, he distantly thinks that he could get used to this. It’s nothing he’s ever really done before-- and truthfully, not
something he ever thought he’d experience-- but it’s nice to just exist with another person, to go about your own routine while they complete theirs right next to you.

It’s soothing, reassuring.

Unfortunately, sleep drags at Alec and he barely manages to pull on a pair of underwear before he’s collapsing into bed, face first with a groan.

He feels Magnus slip in beside him and he’s clumsy as he crawls beneath the sheets, shifting until he can rest his head on Magnus’s shoulder. His thoughts are bleary as he kisses the bare skin beneath his lips, murmuring. “Night, babe. I’m so glad you surprised me,” in a voice that sounds far away.

He barely hears Magnus reply before he’s sinking under, lulled by his boyfriend’s warmth and the end of a grueling press tour.
Alec watches from where he’s sprawled out on the bed as Magnus shrugs into a button up. His hair’s still damp from the shower and Alec had found an easy contentment watching his boyfriend apply makeup with practiced hands through the open bathroom door a few minutes ago.

“You could’ve waited for me to shower this morning,” he says, stretching his arms over his head.

Magnus just throws him a look as he buttons the front. Alec watches silk covers bare skin and can’t help his disappointment.

He doesn’t get to do anything, though, before Magnus is dryly replying, “Forgetting that you took a shower last night, if I’d done that, I’d be running late and while I might be persuaded by your smile, I don’t think my department would take that as an excuse to be tardy. Plus you were so tired last night-- and so relaxed after this morning-- that you needed every minute of sleep you could get.”

Alec can’t think of a reply to that so he just glares. “Whatever,” he mutters under his breath.

Chuckling, Magnus walks from where he’d been standing in front of the mirror to the bed. Leaning over Alec, Magnus cages him in with arms on either side of his head.

“Walk me out?” Magnus’s voice is low as he smiles down at Alec.

One of Alec’s hands searches under his boyfriend’s shirt until he can lay it low on his back, the other pushing back Magnus’s hair from where it’s falling into his eyes.

“It’ll cost you,” Alec murmurs, eyes trained on Magnus’s mouth.

Magnus hums a little, as though in thought, before he rolls his eyes, giving up. “You’re lucky you’re so cute, you know.”

Alec’s face is serious even as he shivers at the memory of the wonderful way Magnus had woken him up an hour ago. “That gets you a cup of coffee.”

“Just coffee?”

Biting his lip to keep his laughter from spilling out at the umbrage in Magnus’s tone.

“Hey,” he says defensively. “That espresso machine is what dreams are made of.”

Magnus studies him before he rolls his eyes, giving up. “You’re lucky you’re so cute, you know.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Alec breathes. “Kiss me.”

Magnus closes the last bit of distance, laying a lingering kiss on Alec’s mouth. Arching into it, Alec pulls him down until, with a huff of laughter that’s easily swallowed, Magnus lands on top of him.
Letting out a pleased sound, Alec widens the space between his legs for Magnus to settle against him and he quickly loses track of time as the morning sun shines through his curtains.

However, Magnus pulls away before he’s ready, breathing hard. “While I’d love nothing more than to stay here with you all day, darling, I really do have a morning faculty meeting I need to get to.”

Sighing dramatically, Alec sweeps a hand from Magnus’s shoulder’s to just above his ass. “Coffee?”

“Wouldn’t mind if I do,” Magnus agrees before he’s pushing off the bed.

Alec’s smile is dopey as he takes Magnus’s hand and climbs to his feet. Still holding hands, Magnus follows Alec as they make their way to the kitchen. Thankfully, no one else seems to be around and Alec washes his hands as Magnus leans against the counter next to the coffee machine.

“What are you up to today,” Magnus asks, rolling his sleeves up his forearms as Alec grabs one of the dozen to-go cups he’s accumulated in the past decade from the overhead cabinet.

It’s a tall tumbler in the colors of the bi pride flag. When Magnus looks at it, a little questioningly, Alec just saying, “It’s Simon’s-- he must’ve left it here one day.”

“And he won’t mind that you’re giving it away?”

Alec laughs a little as he sets it under the drip. “It serves him right for leaving it here. He probably doesn’t even know it’s gone.”

As the coffee starts percolating, Alec reaches a hand out, sweeping a thumb over Magnus’s jaw. “I have a meeting with the label this morning but other than that I don’t have anything going on,” Alec says, getting back to Magnus’s question.

Turning his head, Magnus kisses Alec’s wrist. Alec doesn’t melt at the gesture by sheer force of will.

“Don’t tell me that Isabelle didn’t let you know about our plans.”

Startling, Alec’s head whips over towards the hallway where his mother’s standing with a little smile on her face as she watches the two of them.

“Mom,” Alec’s asks, voice strangled. “What are you doing here?”

Maryse just sends him an arch look. “I was in the back room reading while waiting for your sister to finish getting ready. I heard voices so I thought I’d pop in here and see what was going on.”

Her gaze sweeps over to Magnus as she steps forward, holding a hand out to shake, which Magnus does with alacrity.

“I’m Maryse, Alec’s mom,” Maryse greets warmly. "You must be Magnus?"

With a sidelong look at him, Magnus replies, “Don’t tell me that Alec’s mentioned me?”

“Oh, maybe a time or two,” Maryse says with a sly look in Alec’s direction.

“It’s always nice to be thought of-- and it’s a pleasure to meet you, Maryse.”

Alec watches as the two of them meet, talking easily. Seeing Magnus and his mom together is weird but welcome. He’s never brought a man to meet his parents before-- not even his high school boyfriend-- and to see two of his favorite people warming up to each other makes something light in Alec’s chest.
It’s realization.

Shaking his head a little, Alec dials back into the conversation to hear Maryse say, “I’m only in town until Alec’s birthday but--”

“Wait, what? I thought you were flying back to Seattle Sunday,” Alec interrupts.

Shrugging, Maryse replies, “Max’s first semester is entirely online and I don’t have anything pressing that needs me back in Seattle, so I thought I’d extend our trip a little longer. Why? Anxious to get me out of your hair?”

Alec rolls his eyes. “You know that’s not it, mom. I’m happy you’ll be here for my birthday. I can’t even remember the last time I saw you on the actual day.”

“You were twenty-two,” Maryse offers immediately. She smiles at him as she leans on the bar that separates the living room from the kitchen. “It’s been five years since I’ve seen my favorite son on his birthday.”

Alec merely looks at her. “I heard you tell Jace last week that he was your favorite.”

“And this is a different week, isn’t it?”

Shifting in place, Magnus looks between Alec and Maryse. “Your birthday’s coming up?”

Alec doesn’t answer right away, instead pulling Magnus’s mug from the coffee machine and reaching for the fridge. Pulling out the almond milk, he says, “In a few weeks.”

Handing the carton to Magnus along with the tumbler, Magnus pours some milk into his coffee as he asks, “Weren’t you going to tell me? These are things people in relationships know about each other, darling.”

It’s Alec’s turn to shrug as he says, “I didn’t think it was a big deal,” he says under his breath.

“Well, I beg to differ. I need to plan what I’m getting you, after all.”

Alec’s expression is mystified. “You don’t have to get me anything, you know. Just spending time with you is enough.”

Magnus just scoffs. “Sure I might not have to get you anything, but are you going to ruin my fun if I want to?”

“Of course not,” Alec says, frowning. “As long as you know I’m not expecting anything.”

Magnus just waves that away as he blows across his coffee before taking a sip. “Noted, Alexander.”

Setting the milk down on the counter-- which Alec picks up and places back in the fridge-- Magnus screws the top of the lid closed before turning back to Maryse.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Maryse, but I need to be getting to work.”

Rounding the counter, Maryse pulls Magnus in for a quick hug before pulling back and resting her hands on his arms. “It was lovely meeting the man my son can’t shut up about,” she says dryly, with a wink in Alec’s direction.

Alec wants to sink into the ground but Magnus’s surprise that Maryse would hug him followed by his warm laugh makes it worth it. Barely.
“As I was saying,” she continues briskly. “I’m only in town for another few weeks but I have pictures of Alec that you might be interested to see—”

“Well, students won’t learn by themselves,” Alec cuts in hastily. “Don’t want to be late for work, babe, do you?”

Magnus makes a show of considering as he slowly says, “You know what darling, I’m sure they won’t miss me for just a little while longer—”

“No,” Alec says firmly.

Magnus laughs before lifting his cup in a goodbye to both Maryse and Alec. “Very well, darling. Dinner tomorrow?”

“I’ll be there with bells on,” Alec confirms.

Magnus goes to walk past Alec but he stops him with a hand on his side.

“I’ll walk you out,” Alec says easily and follows Magnus to the front door.

Opening it, Alec leans against the doorjamb as Magnus steps in the hallway. He pulls him close, though, before he can make it to the elevator.

“No kiss?”

Smiling, Magnus merely offers, “I didn’t think you’d want to be so demonstrative in front of your mother.”

“You can kiss me whenever you want,” Alec says wryly.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Alec repeats before giving Magnus a peck on the mouth and stepping back.

He laughs at Magnus’s frustrated expression. “You weren’t going to kiss me at all,” he point out.

“Yeah, but now that I know I can kiss you whenever I want, nothing’s stopping me.”

Without warning, Magnus pulls Alec close by his t-shirt and plants a searing kiss on his mouth that has Alec forgetting his damn name before abruptly pulling back.

“Talk to you later, darling,” Magnus says with a wink before turning towards the elevator.

Rolling his eyes, Alec shuts the door and makes his way back into the kitchen to make his own cup of coffee to see his mother cutting a slice of shortcake she must’ve brought over this morning.

“Aren’t you here exceptionally early?”

“Careful, Alexander, or I’ll start thinking you don’t want me around.”

“You know that’s the furthest thing from the truth, mom.”

Maryse laughs lightly but doesn’t say anything else.

Alec watches as his coffee drips into a black mug that says better gay than grumpy in rainbow colors that had been a frankly obnoxious gift from Simon a few months ago.
“You haven’t let me call you by your full name since you started middle school.”

“So,” Alec asks, pulling his mug from under the drip and taking out the sugar, dumping a few spoonfuls into the cup.

“So,” Maryse says dramatically. “You must really like him.”

Scoffing, the only thing Alec can think to say is, “You knew that already.”

“Yeah, but it’s different seeing it compared to just listening as you gush about him. I like him. Magnus. He seems like a good man.”

“He’s the best,” Alec says simply and scowls as his mother slaps at his shoulder absently.

The two of them enjoy a few minutes of companionable silence as Maryse cuts another piece of cake for Alec. He’s just taken his last bite when Isabelle appears from her room.

“Ready, mom?”

“All set, dear.” Swiping her hands, Maryse drinks the last of the coffee she’d brewed before he’d come into the kitchen.

“What are you two doing today?”

“Shopping,” Izzy says brightly. “We’re spending some quality time together, starting with breakfast and you’re invited to join us later.”

Alec narrows his eyes at her, thinking, before shrugging. “Sure. I have a meeting this morning with Institute but I’m free in the afternoon? I’ll text you when I’m finished and you can let me know where you want to meet up.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Isabelle agrees and then the two of them are out the door in a flurry of movement that makes Alec’s head spin.

Alec drains the last of his coffee before setting the mug in the sink and heading back to his bedroom to get ready for the day.

Settling into one of the empty seats in the glass-walled conference room at Institute Records, Alec doesn’t even flinch as someone throws themselves into the chair next to him.

“Hey, man.”

“Simon. How are you?”

Simon grins as he leans back in his seat. “I’m great! I’ve been working on a few songs in my free time and I’m thinking that I might even have enough material by the end of summer to put together an EP. What about you? How is Magnus?”

Simon asks the last question with an exaggerated waggle of his eyebrows and Alec’s reply is droll as he replies, “My music’s going well, too. I think I’m going to start recording in earnest by the beginning of the month and my boyfriend is doing just fine. What about you-- How’s Raphael?”

Taking a quick sip from his coffee, Simon grins into his cup. “Raphael’s doing just fine, too. I know we shouldn’t work-- he has a tendency to be a little grumpy, not unlike someone else I know-- but
his humor is so dry and holy shit, have you seen the man in a suit? I need to ask him who his tailor is because if I could look half as good as him--”

“Simon,” Alec says slowly. “Please stop talking.”

Simon glares at him halfheartedly for a moment before his face lights up again. “Hey, we should totally go on a date sometime!”

Alec just stares at him, brow arched.

Rolling his eyes, Simon just clarifies, “A double date, asshat. Me and Raphael, you and Magnus. That would be so much fun because we’re best buds and Raphael and Magnus have known each other for, like, ever!”

Simon looks like a particularly enthusiastic puppy as he says, “Are you guys free tomorrow?”

Sighing heavily, Alec knows that he isn’t going to get out of this, much as it pains him. “Are you sure Raphael’s free tomorrow? You don’t want to set something up only to have to reschedule.”

“Tomorrow is date night,” Simon confides. “We hang out most of the week, but Fridays are when Raphael puts off grading and any other work for the whole evening and we spend it together. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind inviting you and Magnus along.”

Scowling, Alec tries in a last ditch effort, “What if we have completely different ideas on a fun date?”


“Whatever.”

Taking out his phone, Alec sends a quick text to Magnus as Simon crows in his ear.

*Change of plans for tomorrow night. How do you feel about a double date with Simon and Raphael?*

*Feel free to say no.*

*Really.*

His phone lights up before Alec can even put it back in his pocket.

*What a wonderful idea, Alexander! I can’t wait to tell Raphael that we’ll be joining him on his date. This will give me enough material for weeks, at least.*

*And it’s just a bonus that my boyfriend will be spending time with one of my best friends :)*

From where he’s reading over his shoulder, Simon gasps dramatically. “Awe,” he says, drawing out the one syllable until it’s easily a dozen. “Magnus is so cute!”

Alec looks up and Simon backtracks, offering in a weak voice, “Hot? You know what,” he says hastily, “I’ll leave complimenting your boyfriend to you.”

“Thank you,” Alec says dryly before asking, “Mind if I make the arrangements?”

Alec just shrugs. “There’s this place outside of the city that I’ve been meaning to take Magnus. I don’t get to go to often but the food’s excellent and the estate’s pretty beautiful. Should be good for a group, too.”

“Sounds great,” Simon agrees easily enough and then the executives for the label are filing in, Jia and Lydia at the front.

The meeting begins and the next few hours are a humdrum of discussion as Alec gets briefed on the timeline for his seventh album. He’s set to start recording in just a couple of weeks-- he has a few songs demoed but the next couple of months will have him spending upwards of ten, fourteen, even eighteen hours in the studio as he works with producers and mixers and the dozens of other people who work to create the perfect record.

As that moves along, his album is slated to be released in the spring and that brings Simon into the meeting as the two have agreed to tour together again, with another act or two working as openers. As everyone discusses timelines and figures and deadlines, Alec listens intently, butting in when he needs clarification or when something doesn’t strike right.

His next tour will be his biggest yet. It looks like the next album cycle will last at least two years, with half a dozen legs tentatively scheduled. He’ll be hitting five continents on a whirlwind thirteenth month tour. That doesn’t take into consideration other press obligations or second and third tour cycles for this album.

It’ll be grueling but it’s nothing Alec hasn’t done before and as they talk expenses and premium packages and aesthetics, Alec’s mind is a whirlwind. They spend almost an hour on Simon, reviewing his proposed track list and expected new material and how it will complement Alec’s set.

By the time everything is done and Alec has a much better idea on how the next year and a half of his career will roll out, he’s exhausted, head swimming with figures and concerns and the hundreds of details that go into a tour this size.

Lydia stops by for a few minutes of small talk before her phone rings and she’s out of the conference room like a dervish, off to bail a client-- who Alec has a sneaking suspicion is Sebastian-- out of jail.

Alec and Simon watch her for a minute after she’s left before Simon asks, “His contract has to be up soon, right?”

“Yeah but not soon enough for Lydia, that’s for damned sure.”

The two of them sigh at one of their peers spiraling down, tanking his own career, before Simon blinks and turns his focus onto Alec.

“Have you talked to Magnus about this tour yet? Or your album in general?”

“No,” Alec says, a little confused at the change of subject. “Why?”

Simon rolls his eyes. “Why, the man asks,” he mutters under his breath.

He slaps Alec halfheartedly on the shoulder. Alec doesn’t get a chance to react before he’s saying, “Maybe because you’ll be gone most of the year and your boyfriend deserves a heads up?”

Something curdles in Alec’s stomach at Simon’s words but he just scowls. “My tour isn’t slated to start until June. That’s almost ten months away.”

“Yeah, but Magnus might know that touring is a necessity but that doesn’t mean he’s fully prepared.
for what a long distance relationship relationship means. Time zones that mean you can’t talk on the phone? Months where you’re on different continents? It’s a lot for a relationship-- and know that this will be your first time, too.”

Simon’s expression is serious, voice knowing as he says, “I’m just saying don’t go into things cocky. Relationships take effort and you both have to be willing to put in the work when you’re not in the same city.”

Alec’s quiet for a minute before he swallows. He looks up and meets Simon’s eyes, smiling a little. “Thanks, Si. I appreciate the warning and I’ll talk to Magnus about it soon.”

Face brightening, Simon claps him on the back as the leave the room, heading towards the elevator.

“I don’t mean to be a negative Nancy, but you’ve never dealt with a long distance relationship on top of a huge tour. I have and let me tell you, it’s not for the faint of heart. I’ve got to say, though, that you and Magnus seem pretty solid. I don’t imagine anything could tear the two of you apart. If Aldertree didn’t do the job-- and don’t think I’m not waiting to hear the full story on that-- then I’d say you two have a pretty good chance of going the distance.”

“Simon, it’s only been a few months. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves, okay?”

Alec doesn’t know why he bothered trying to appeal to Simon’s common sense as his friend just half-assed salutes and replies with, “Aye, aye captain!”

His sigh is beleaguered, long suffering, but he’s laughing in the next minute, Simon joining him.

The two of them walk out of Institute Records onto the teeming sidewalk. Putting his sunglasses on Simon says, “Well, my brain is fried but I’ve got lunch plans with Raphael so I need to get going. See you tomorrow, dude, right?”

“I’ll text you the time and address,” Alec agrees and then they’re fist-bumping before going their separate ways.

Ducking into a smoothie shop, Alec grabs a green juice as he texts his sister that he’s officially free for the rest of the day. Isabelle’s sent him their location-- a Sak’s a few blocks away-- and he sighs as he tells her he’ll meet the two of them in twenty.

Alec’s mind spins with plans and timelines as he meets up with his mom and Isabelle. He spends the afternoon shopping and dealing with their good-natured ribbing, all the while his thoughts are preoccupied with Magnus and his career, the two most important things in his life.

To his credit, Alec’s only mildly terrified as the two of them merge their importance, Magnus coming to mean more and more to him with every day that passes.

Alec pulls up to Magnus’s apartment building, nabbing a spot right in front of the entrance. He’d told Magnus that he’d pick him up at six sharp and as he locks his car and makes his way toward the door, Alec’s a little surprised to see Magnus step onto the sidewalk.

“Hey, you.”

“Hey, yourself.” Magnus returns his grin as he walks over to him. Laying his hands on Alec’s chest, Magnus tilts his face up for a kiss. Alec obliges with a smile before pulling back, wrapping his arms low on Magnus’s waist.
“Don’t you look amazing,” Alec says, voice low.

Magnus is dressed to impress in a red and black blazer, black button up underneath. His makeup is suitably dark with sharp eyeliner and his hair is swept high off his forehead in a look that has Alec’s mouth going dry.

Tone nonchalant, though there’s an unmistakable gleam in his eye, Magnus merely offers, “Oh, do you like this? I picked it up last week when I went shopping with Cat.”

“You look great,” Alec says, and there’s nothing facetious about his tone. His boyfriend genuinely looks wonderful-- as always-- and Alec’s duty bound to let him know.

At the sincerity in Alec’s voice, Magnus’s expression loses some of its levity. “Thank you, darling,” he says softly before reaching for Alec’s chin and bringing him in for another kiss, this one lingering for two heartbeats, then three.

Still holding hands, Magnus pulls back and gives Alec a slow, appreciative once-over. “You do clean up well, Alexander.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec just mutters, “Whatever,” but he can’t help the smile that lights up his face.

Pulling Magnus to him, they walk over to the passenger side of his car and Alec hides a grin as Magnus’s eyes widen.

“This is yours?”

“Yup,” Alec says, popping the ‘p.’

“Well, aren’t I in for a treat tonight?”

“Yeah, yeah, just get in the car.”

Magnus huffs out a laugh as Alec opens the door and ushers him inside his Audi R8. It’s been a few months since Alec’s driven his favorite car and he’s excited to get out of New York’s traffic and have a little fun.

Rounding the hood, Alec slips into the driver’s seat and starts the car. Checking his rearview mirror, he pulls out and joins the hectic stream of rush hour traffic. Shifting gears, Alec looks over to see Magnus looking over the dash with something approaching awe.

“Like it,” Alec asks and doesn’t care that his tone is just the teeniest bit smug.

Running a careful finger over the black interior, Magnus absently replies, “I’m not a car guy but even I have to admit this is a nice ass car.”

Alec barks out a laugh, punching the gas as he passes someone. “Feel free to touch whatever,” he says easily and Magnus looks up to meet his eyes for a second, expression warm and curious.

“What are the chances I get to drive this car?”

Alec winces goodnaturedly. “Not gonna happen.”

Magnus pouts and lightly pokes him in the shoulder. “What if I asked really nicely.”

“Still no,” Alec laughs. “I don’t let anyone drive this car and trust me, if I can handle Isabelle and Jace on my ass trying to test it out, I think I can deal with you.”
“I like a challenge,” Magnus says and Alec just snorts, shaking his head, before flipping the hand on the armrest that’s between them, an invitation that Magnus takes right away.

It’s a little while to get out of New York on a busy Friday evening and they enjoy the silence as music plays on the radio. With the windows down to enjoy the late summer air, it’s damned close to perfect in Alec’s estimation.

Once they leave the city and get on the highway, Alec lets loose a little, steadily accelerating until he’s hovering a couple dozen miles over the speed limit, zipping along in the fast lane. He has to take his hand out of Magnus’s to shift gears, which seems the worst sort of betrayal, but the appreciative look his boyfriend casts his way doesn’t go unnoticed.

“Where are you taking me, anyway?”

Magnus’s question breaks the quiet. Alec reaches for Magnus’s hand again, intertwining their fingers before bringing it up to his mouth for a quick kiss along the knuckles.

“Alicante. It’s a mix between everything, really. You can get everything from cheese fries to coq au vin. It’s at this bed and breakfast north of the city. We should be there in about twenty five minutes.”

Nodding, Magnus sweeps his thumb over Alec’s as he replies, “I can’t wait. I didn’t have a chance to eat lunch this afternoon and I’m starving.”

“Let’s hope it’s good then,” Alec says easily.

They pull into the winding drive of the hotel. Reaching the parking lot, Alec sees Simon’s car already there.

“Huh,” he says as he turns off the ignition. “Simon’s usually at least fifteen minutes late to everything.”

“Not with Raphael,” Magnus says, voice sure. “Raphael can’t abide tardiness. They were probably fifteen minutes early.”

Magnus takes his hand as they start toward the door. He looks behind him as Alec strides across the parking lot.

“How do you know they’ve arrived, anyway?”

Alec doesn’t break pace as he jerks his head toward a car in the corner. “See that van?”

From his peripheral, he sees Magnus look over at the van that was at least thirty years old, covered in spray painted logos and looking rather the worse for wear.

“Yes,” he asks warily.

“That’s Simon’s. He’s had it since he was in high school. He refuses to get rid of it, even though he could easily get something else these days.”

“How… charming,” Magnus offers after a beat of stunned silence before he snorts. When Alec looks at him, question in his eyes, Magnus just says, “I’m sure Raphael loved that.”

Alec’s own mouth tilts up as he pictures the serious man sitting in the passenger seat of a van that Alec knows from painful past experience has absolutely no shocks to speak of.

Holding the door for Magnus to walk through, Alec sees Simon and Raphael talking near the hostess
“Have you been waiting long,” Alec asks.

“Nope,” Simon responds brightly. “We just got here and had just told the hostess your name. She’s making sure the table’s ready now.”

Simon’s attention shifts to Magnus in the next beat and, if possible, his grin increases tenfold. “Hey, Magnus. It's great to see you again!”

Magnus shakes Simon’s hand, smiling warmly. “It’s nice to see you again, too, Simon. Especially now that I know one of my best friends is dating one of Alec's.”

Alec, for his part, is greeting Raphael when he hears Simon exclaim, “Hey!”

He looks over to see Simon staring at him accusingly. “Yeah?”

“I’m one of your best friends? Who’s above me? Who’s even in the realm of best friend when you talk to three people besides me on a regular basis, all of whom are related to you?”

“Well, there’s Lydia,” Alec muses. “My doorman, the post office guy I see every other month... The list goes on and on.”

Simon doesn’t say anything to that, just looks crestfallen for two painful seconds before he’s back to looking bright enough to eclipse the sun.

The hostess returns and they’re taken to their table. Alec and Magnus sit across from each other with Alec next to Simon.

What follows is a few hours of surprising good company. Dinner is delicious with Alec ordering calamari for the table and a Delmonico steak while everyone else tries one of the specials.

While he’s only hung out with Raphael on a handful of occasions, Alec’s pleased to see that Magnus’s friend—Simon’s boyfriend—has an incredibly dry sense of humor and his long suffering glances whenever Simon or Magnus goes off on a tangent or say something particularly dramatic has Alec in stitches.

Seeing Magnus interact with Raphael is always amusing and it’s interesting to see two people who obviously care and know each other interact. It’s even more interesting to see Simon with Raphael. Alec can’t remember the last time he saw Simon so gone over someone, from the smiles he tries to hide whenever Raphael says something gruffly caring to the way he insists on sharing a milkshake.

Raphael, for his part, glares with little heat. He ends up giving in to Simon’s prodding, sharing the strawberry milkshake with a put-upon expression, though Alec sees the faint flush that sweeps up his neck as Simon compliments him.

Alec knows that he isn’t any better. Magnus slyly hooks a foot around his ankle under the table as their appetizers are set down and when their dishes are swept away for dessert, Alec reaches for Magnus’s hand on the table.

Alec can’t quite remember the last time he enjoyed an evening more. It’s relaxing, having a good meal with friends, and distantly Alec’s happy that he’d decided to join Simon and Raphael on a double date that hadn’t ended in disaster.

The couples say goodbye and Magnus and Alec linger outside as Simon and Raphael climb into his
death van. They chug past them a few minutes later, Simon enthusiastically waving and blowing his horn while Raphael sits in the passenger seat with a scowl on his face.

Alec’s focus shifts to Magnus as he leans against his car. He widens his stance as Magnus steps closer, pressing against him. The sun’s starting to set and the sky is a riotous mix of pink and orange and purple.

“Thanks for agreeing to this.”

Confused, Alec says, “Why are you thanking me? I’m the one who asked.”

Sighing, Magnus wraps his arms around Alec’s neck, playing with his hair. “Raphael’s a dear friend and it was nice meeting Simon. I’ve never enjoyed a date with another couple as much as I did tonight’s.”

“It was fun, wasn’t it?”

“It was,” Magnus agrees. “Did you hear Simon call Raphael his ‘grumpy little snookums?’”

Alec barely holds his laughter back as he says, “I did. I also saw the way Raphael tried to glare but couldn’t help smiling.”

“They appear to work well together.”

“Simon’s into him,” Alec says confidently. “I’ve never seen him like this. He’s always bubbly but this was a whole other level.”

“Yes,” Magnus says slowly, leaning a little more into Alec. “It’s a little harder to tell with Raphael but he was very much enjoying himself.”

“So, tonight was a success?”

“I’d say so,” Magnus agrees.

They fall quiet, enjoying the sounds of summer. The breeze cools and as Magnus shivers, Alec pulls him closer.

Shadows deepen as they kiss in Alicante’s parking lot. It’s freeing, being able to share this in public. Even if it’s in front of a quaint bed and breakfast, Alec doesn’t have to worry about a flash from behind the hedge or a particularly aggressive reporter.

Sometimes getting out of the city, even for the evening, is the best way to clear his head and let him just be a regular person enjoying a quiet moment.

It’s almost dark by the time they climb back into the car. Magnus cranks the radio up on a top 40 station and the two of them spend most of the ride singing along, joined hands resting on Magnus’s thigh.

All of a sudden, though, Alec turns down the radio as he remembers something he’s been meaning to tell Magnus.

“Did I mention that I finished your book?”

“Which one, darling,” Magnus asks absently as he watches the landscape outside. Before Alec can answer, though, Magnus is continuing, “The anthology?”
“European Conquerors, yeah,” he confirms. “I finished it on my flight home Wednesday.”

Alec smiles a little as the hand not in his automatically goes up to readjust the ear cuff. It’d taken him a little while but Alec now realizes that’s one of Magnus’s biggest tells and that his boyfriend only does it when he’s trying to hide how much he’s invested in the conversation.

“And,” Magnus prompts when Alec doesn’t immediately say anything.

“It was good. Your essay on the Dutch East India Company and its effects on Indonesian agriculture was illuminating. I hardly know anything about Indonesia but I learned a lot.”

“I can’t believe you really read that entire thing. It’s dense as hell, Alexander,” Magnus says, bemused.

Alec shrugs, slowing down for an upcoming curve. “Why,” he asks. ‘I told you I would. It took me little longer than I might’ve liked, but I always planned on finishing it.’

Magnus doesn’t say anything but when Alec turns to glance at him, he sees Magnus staring out his window, smiling.

They’re just a few miles from the highway when Alec has an idea. It’s surprising but probably shouldn’t be and Alec grins as he decides *fuck it*. Slowing to a stop on the deserted country highway, Alec throws the car in park.

“Darling, if you’re planning on killing me and dumping my body in the woods, I’ve got to tell you Simon and Raphael might have something to say about it.”

Alec just sends a deadpan look over to his boyfriend. “If you want to be a comedian instead of getting behind the wheel, just say the word.”

Straightening in his seat, Magnus smiles in disbelief. “Seriously?”

“Why not,” Alec says, raising a brow. “Unless you don’t want to.”

“Of course I want to, Alexander. Get the hell out of my seat.”

Laughing, Alec opens his door and the two switch places. Settling into the driver’s seat, Magnus takes a few minutes to get acquainted with the controls before starting the ignition, the low growl of the engine muted but still powerful.

They’re taking off in the next instant.

Magnus is an effortless driver, punching through curves and accelerating on straightaways. Flipping on his turn signal, Magnus merges onto the highway’s entry ramp a few miles ahead and Alec watches as the scenery goes by on their way to the city.

It’s fully dark now, the console lights the only illumination in the car. Alec looks over at Magnus barely visible and when his boyfriend looks over, grinning, Alec can’t stop his laugh from spilling out.

He feels light, happy in this moment as Magnus expertly drives his car. It’s attractive as hell, all that restrained strength, the sharp profile, that laser focus on the road ahead.

When Magnus downshifts before reaching for Alec’s hand, Alec squeezes it. They share a smile before Magnus turns his attention forward.
Alec loses himself in watching Magnus and doesn’t even notice that they’ve pulled in front of Magnus’s building until Magnus pulls his hand from his, shifting to park.

Magnus has just started to say, “Thank you, Alexander—” when Alec reaches over, laying a hand on his neck and hauling him close for a searing kiss.

Words cut off, Magnus immediately opens up to him. One kiss tapers off into another before gentling and when Alec ends the kiss, breathing heavy, he doesn’t open his eyes immediately.

No, he wants to remember this, wants to sear this moment onto his memory. The way the moonlight spills shadows over them, the faint but intoxicating scent of Magnus’s cologne, the way his boyfriend still tastes faintly of the chocolate cake they’d shared for dessert.

Pulling away from Magnus’s warmth, Alec opens his eyes to see Magnus studying him. He’s just getting ready to say something, anything, when he remembers that he’d stashed something in the glove box.

“Oh,” he exclaims, reaching for the compartment. Magnus doesn’t say anything as Alec opens it up, taking out a slender box and handing it to him.

He accepts with a confused smile. “What’s this, darling?”

Shrugging, Alec’s equal parts confident and self-conscious as he explains, “I went shopping with Izzy and mom yesterday and saw this. It made me think of you, so I figured why the hell not.”

Magnus’s lips turn up into a smile as he dryly echoes, “Why the hell not, indeed.”

The box is black velvet with a bold blue ribbon tied around it. Magnus carefully undoes the bow before cracking the lid open only for his breath to catch.

Nestled in the fabric is a silver necklace with an onyx pendant on its chain. It’s simple, elegant, and when Alec had scene it in a storefront as he’d been walking past, it had immediately caught his attention, reminding him of Magnus’s style.

“It’s beautiful, Alexander. Thank you.” Magnus’s voice is soft, pleased, as he studies the piece of jewelry under the low lights of the car before looking up and meeting Alec’s eyes with a little grin. “Put it on me?”

Alec doesn’t need asking twice and as he reaches for the necklace, he picks it up, working the clasp and bringing it up to Magnus’s neck.

He leans close, putting the necklace on, smoothing it over warm skin and letting the pendant lay on the bare skin exposed by the open v of Magnus’s shirt.

“Perfect,” he whispers.

Magnus doesn’t say anything for a minute, just watches Alec in the low light before kissing him lightly. “You didn’t have to but I love it nonetheless,” he says when he pulls back.

Alec shrugs. “Like I said, it made me think of you and I like buying you things. Sue me.”

“Oh no, Alexander,” Magnus says lowly. “I have better plans for you.”

Heat licks up Alec’s spine at the words, invitation heavy in the tone.

Turning the car off, Magnus abruptly opens the door, climbing out. Alec follows but doesn’t take
more than a step onto the sidewalk before Magnus is reaching his side.

Taking his hands, Magnus takes a step backwards, toward the building’s entrance, head cocked to the side as a slow smile spreads across his face.

“Stay the night?” From his voice, he already knows the answer and Alec would’ve teased him if he wasn’t ready to be upstairs an hour ago.

“Lead the way,” he breathes, following Magnus inside with a grin.
Chapter 42

The blinking cursor seems to be taunting him and Magnus doesn’t know how much more he can take before he throws the whole damned laptop off his balcony.

Dot had sent over his latest draft-- always so full of red pen-- but Magnus was ignoring the technicalities for the moment. September was officially in full swing and the next few weeks were dedicated to finishing the last hundred or so pages that would tie everything together. Magnus could pontificate all he wanted about how imperialism had fucked up so many colonies during WWI until he was blue in the face but none of it meant anything if he couldn’t also discuss the long ranging effects on the lands and people that were still being felt today in the twenty first century.

All things considered, his book was coming along swimmingly. Maybe the smoothest it’s ever gone, Magnus reflects with a wry grimace. But still, writing was never easy and he was wading through a mountain of information and condensing it for the everyday reader who didn’t have an academic interest in the topic, who probably just held an idle curiosity when they picked up his book from the history section of their local bookstore.

Deciding to take a break, Magnus stands, rolling his shoulders as he grabs the glass of wine he’d been enjoying while staring at a paragraph discussing the similarities between Zimbabwe and India that seemed unaccountably wordy.

He leaves his office, draining the rest of the wine with a sigh. He’d left his phone on the kitchen counter and as he picks it up, he smiles at the text that’s waiting for him.

Hope you’re having a good evening, babe. I miss you:(

Setting his glass down, Magnus takes a minute to reply to Alec. He feels warmth in his veins and it’s a familiar sensation, even if it does seem absurd.

I figured that if I wasn’t going to be seeing your pretty face, I’d get some work done. My book is becoming a pain in my ass, Alexander.

I miss you too-- How’s recording coming along?

Tucking his phone into his pocket, Magnus goes to refill his glass with the pinot he’d had with dinner, thinking about the past few weeks as he does.

Both he and Alec were busy as hell and a little stressed with it. The fall semester had started and with it, Magnus’s workload had increased immeasurably. Summers were notoriously slow and so the fall was always completely ridiculous. Magnus was only teaching two classes this semester-- an intro to modern Europe and a senior thesis course that he taught each semester-- but as students flocked back to campus, the department was inundated with stressed freshmen and panicked seniors. He had a handful of students he was mentoring this year during their Masters or Doctoral programs and there were two new professors who needed shown around and settled in.

Add his writing-- the book and a lengthy article he was a contributing author on-- and Magnus was in his element, albeit a little more aware of just how much was on his plate than he’d been before.

He blames Alec for that.

Before, Magnus had been able to lose himself in academia and its rigors. He’d loved every second of it even if he did want to tear his hair out and dreamed of nothing so fondly as running away and
opening a bar on some far flung Caribbean island.

He still loves it but he's only managed to see Alec once in almost a week, so busy that it felt like he was running around like his ass was on fire. Alec’s schedule didn't help anything either, as he’s also inordinately busy.

Magnus is faintly concerned that Alec hasn’t left the studio in days. Every time they talk, Alec is just leaving the recording booth or getting ready to lay down another set of vocals. The past few weeks, he’s been at the studio all hours, working late into the night. They’d spent a few nights together last week and Alec was a dervish, writing and listening to demos and running a hand through his already disheveled hair.

With a small smile, Magnus wonders that it’s a good thing Alec’s birthday is next weekend. They could both use a day or two to forget about work.

Ah, but who is he kidding. Magnus shakes his head a little, exasperated with himself. He loves this, too. They check in when they have a free moment and they’d grabbed a harried lunch off campus late yesterday afternoon. It’d been twenty minutes of them inhaling burgers and catching up before Magnus had ran off to meet with his strategic planning committee and Alec had hurried off to a photoshoot.

They’d both leaned in for a quick kiss, only for it to devolve into something entirely inappropriate and edging on desperate before they remembered themselves.

It’s nice, this. Magnus has never been in a relationship that was so easy before, even when both parties were consumed with other responsibilities. He’s had partners who’d broken things off because when Magnus was under deadline, when work consumed him and he lost himself in the daily tasks that accumulated so fast in his position, they couldn’t handle it and resentment swelled. They always wanted Magnus to pick them, to cast aside his work and that was something that Magnus would never do. The very thought was abhorrent.

With Alec, however, there’s mutual understanding and exasperated amusement. They steal little pockets of time when they can and sometimes it’s enough just to collapse into bed together and sleep wrapped around each other before dashing out of bed the next morning to face another day.

Magnus is just set to head back to his study and finish his self-imposed goal-- another thousand words before he can call it a night-- when his phone’s vibrating. It’s after nine, too late for anyone to be calling, really, but when he takes out his phone an instant grin lights up his face.

He answers with a quick swipe before bringing the phone up to his ear.

“Alexander,” he greets warmly, resolutely putting off work for a few more minutes. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I just missed your voice, is all,” Alec says gruffly as something plays in the background. Magnus can’t help but wonder if it’s something from his upcoming album, curiosity killing him while he tries not to ask.

“You just saw me yesterday,” he teases lightly as he settles into one of the chairs in the living room, turning his wine glass absently as he loses himself in a few minutes with Alec.

“Yeah, well, that’s not today, is it?”

Laughing a little Magnus just shakes his head, amused at them both.
The sun sets as they talk, shadows dancing at the edge of the room. Magnus doesn’t notice the time going by until he hears someone yell in Alec’s background.

His lips turn up, tired now that he’s had a little while to decompress with Alec. “Duty calls?”

Alec sighs heavily and Magnus can just imagine his boyfriend running a hand through his hair, annoyed. “Yeah, we want to finish this song before we call it a night. I’ll see you soon?”

Raising a brow as he thinks over his schedule, Magnus offers, “I’m free tomorrow night after eight? I have class until then but we could grab a late dinner?”

“Sounds great, babe-- You could spend the night at mine after?”

“You read my mind, darling. I’ll see you then,” Magnus agrees and then they’re ending the call with last minute goodbyes.

As he hangs up, Magnus plays over the last few minutes. There’d been an odd pause on Alec’s side of things before they’d ended the call and he briefly wonders what it was about before dismissing it.

Maybe he’d ask Alec about it later, he thinks with a shrug.

Looking down at his watch, Magnus groans and tilts his head up to stare at the ceiling. At the rate he’s going, he won’t be in bed until dawn.

Sighing, Magnus stands and resolutely heads back to his study.

His book won’t write itself, after all.

The September sunshine spills through his office window as Magnus grades quizzes from his Intro class. His windows are open and he can hear the sound of students milling about on campus, even from the fourth floor. It’s perfectly mundane and as Magnus marks yet another question wrong on this particular quiz, he’s perfectly content.

The radio is playing low from his laptop and the rest of his afternoon rolls out as he plans to finish grading sixty multiple choice quizzes and entering them into Blackboard before going downstairs for his senior seminar.

His attention fractures, though, as he hears Alec’s name from the radio DJ.

“Hey everybody, welcome to the top of the hour. This is Deluca from Q92 and we have a special treat in store for our listeners this afternoon. Everyone’s seen Alec Lightwood’s Instagram recently—he’s been posting pictures and teasers from the studio and rumors have been circulating that he’s going to drop his next album soon without notice. While we can’t attest to that, we do have exclusive access to the next best thing. Here’s Lightwood’s brand new single, Feel Something, reportedly the title track for Album number seven.”

Deluca laughs before offering one last teaser. “I, for one, can’t help but think that Alec must be getting some inspiration from that new boyfriend of his, the professor.”

Abandoning his work, Magnus’s total focus is on the music that’s started and he listens with rapt attention. It’s a little different to Alec’s usual stuff but he’s immediately enamored over the muted tones, the thoughtful, almost meandering tempo before he’s swept up in the chorus.
The words wrap around him and he bites his lip, thoughts racing. His own heart aches at the emotion in Alec’s voice and it feels like he’s pleading, full of hope.

It’s strikingly similar to how Magnus has felt the past few months.

The song ends and Magnus turns the radio off, instead opening Spotify and searching for Alec’s profile. The single is already available and so Magnus selects it impatiently before clicking on the repeat button.

He listens to the song a handful of times, losing himself in the lyrics and music and what he hopes to God is the intention behind it before running a hand through his hair and blowing out a heavy breath.

He doesn’t know what it means-- if it means anything at all. Deciding to ask Alec about it tonight, Magnus puts all the questions out of his head as he turns back to the pile of quizzes that need handed back tomorrow.

He keeps the song playing in the background, relaxing in his chair and smiling faintly as he draws a red line over another wrong answer.

The smile is wiped from his face a couple of hours later as he picks up his mail from the department secretary and sees a letter from Otisville.

He can’t help the dread that starts gnawing in the pit of his stomach as he carelessly tosses the rest of the bundle onto his desk, holding the thin letter from Upstate New York with tense hands.

Sitting heavily into his chair, Magnus debates for several minutes before sighing and reaching for his letter opener. Sliding the single page out of its envelope, Magnus unfolds the piece of paper and starts reading against his better judgement.

_My darling son,_

_It has been a while, hasn’t it? You didn’t come to my parole hearing a few months ago and I have to admit, I was disappointed. I had hoped to lay eyes on you again, for the first time in years._

_How are you doing, Magnus? You don’t write, you don’t call. You certainly don’t visit. I sometimes feel like I don’t have a son at all but then I am swamped in memories of your childhood, before everything went so terribly wrong._

_I listen avidly for any news from the outside. You’re a professor now, I hear, and an excellent one at that._

_I’ve read all your books. They’re quite good even if I wasn’t overly interested in the topics discussed._

_But your life is so much more than just your job, is it not?_ 

_I’ve heard through the grapevine that you’re in a relationship now. But not with just anyone, isn’t that right? You managed to snag one Alec Lightwood and for that I couldn’t be more proud._

_I’m impressed, Magnus, even if I am a little surprised. I didn’t think you had it in you but here you are, following in the old man’s footsteps._

_I couldn’t be more proud._

_Tell me, what are your plans? If I may, I’d like to offer a few tips, tricks of the trade I learned along
the way that might help you.

Above all, it’s imperative that you act demure. Don’t always make the first move. It’s important that you not rush him-- or at least make Lightwood think that he’s in charge of the pace. That way, before he quite knows what’s hit him, you’ll have maneuvered him exactly where you want him.

However, I’d advise you to say I love you first, if you haven’t already. Emotions are weakness son, so pitifully human, and people fall for soft words and sentiment faster than you’d believe possible.

I can only imagine that you have grand plans for marriage and so I must add this final point: Marry him as soon as you can and do not-- absolutely do not-- sign any sort of prenup or legally binding document. While I’m sure Alec’s a nice enough boy, this is not a love match, after all, and you certainly have nothing to prove.

A year should be sufficient before filing for divorce. I have a few lawyers you can call when the time comes and they’ll squeeze Lightwood for every penny he’s worth.

The truth is, I’m hurt that you didn’t come to me with your plans. I am an expert, after all, and your father. I only hope that now that I’ve bridged the distance between us, you will not hesitate to reach out as well.

I’ve missed you, my darling boy. I’ve been an outsider looking into your life for far too long.

I look forward to your call-- or letter, or perhaps even a visit.

Otisville is only two hours from the city, after all.

Love,

Asmodeus

P.S. I’m sure you’ll be pleased to know that my sentence was commuted. I will be released in eight years, not the thirty plus I was originally saddled with. I’m very much looking forward to seeing the outside world again, and most importantly, my only son.

Magnus feels resentment and overwhelming bitterness rise in his throat at his father’s words, so cool and cold. Really, he wonders, what could he have expected. Asmodeus could smell an opportunity a mile away and he did so love keeping a thumb on the pulse of the outside world.

It’s just like his father to assume that Magnus couldn’t possibly have feelings for Alec, that he was just playing the long game.

And don’t get him started on the postscript. He’s angry at the panel who allowed Asmodeus’s sentence to be shortened. He’s angry at his father for slithering back into his life with a letter that’s as insidious as it is unwanted.

He’s angry at himself for wishing, even for a moment, that he could have his father back, that they could go back to the way things were before his world fell apart over a decade ago.

Angrily refolding the letter, Magnus shoves it back into the envelope before grabbing his folder for his evening class and dashing out the door.

He doesn’t have time for this, for his father’s vile nonsense.

He’s built quite a nice life without his help or presence and he has no plans to backtrack now.
Magnus lets himself be pulled into Alec’s apartment with a laugh. He finds himself pinned against the hastily shut door and looks up at Alec with amused eyes.

He feels better than he has since he read that damned letter earlier in the day, Alec warm and distracting and just what he needed to mostly throw off this bad mood that had clung to him since he checked his mail all those hours ago.

Dinner had been lovely as always with the two of them enjoying a leisurely meal in a Chinese restaurant that Magnus had been dying to try for months but whose wait list was a mile long.

He has to admit that Alec does have some lovely tricks up his sleeve.

Relaxing against the door, Magnus merely raises an expectant brow as Alec studies him without saying anything. He’s just set to ask if there’s something on his face when Alec speaks.

“What’s wrong,” his boyfriend asks, apropos of nothing.

Magnus’s tone is arch as he replies and he tries to ignore the undercurrent of defensiveness that clings to the words. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Alec dryly explains, “That you were your usual charming self during dinner and I’d go so far as to say we both had a good time. However, I could tell something’s wrong and now I’m asking you about it.”

Breath catching as Alec brings a hand up and sweeps a thumb over his jaw, Magnus lets his eyes close as he feels Alec lean in before nosing along his cheek.

“I’d like to think that I’m getting to know you pretty well. I know when something is bothering you.”

Magnus sighs before opening his eyes just to see Alec considering him with a steady gaze, patient and open.

Swallowing hard against the words that don’t quite want to escape, he manages to smile just a little.

“And I thought that I was hiding it so well,” he mutters to himself before resting his hands on Alec’s back, bringing him a little closer.

Alec huffs out a laugh. “It took me until the appetizer was almost gone to realize,” he admits. “But once I did, it was pretty obvious that something was going on in that brain of yours.”

He doesn’t say anything else, lets Magnus take his time to fill the expectant silence and he has a moment to wonder if Alec wouldn’t have made a great soldier, ducking and weaving and lambasting through the most stalwart of defenses.

He’s grateful for Alec’s patience, even if he’s well aware that he’s not getting out of this without telling Alec the shit he had to deal with today.

“Well, I had nine students fail a quiz that was multiple choice and open book today,” he offers, smiling a little as Alec rolls his eyes.

“That does suck,” Alec agrees. “But that’s not all.”

“I put a dollar in a vending machine on campus this morning and it did that stupid thing vending machines do where you almost get your snack before it stops turning and it's some sort of sugar
purgatory where you can just glare through the glass as though you can will your snack to fall down.”

Alec laughs but still shakes his head. “That’s still not it,” he insists softly.

Magnus glares at Alec with little heat as he finally relents. His hands sweep under Alec’s shirt to land on warm skin and it grounds him for a brief moment before he’s sighing and straightening from the door. Taking Alec’s hand in his, he doesn’t say anything as he guides them to the balcony that runs the length of Alec’s apartment. The two of them settle outside in the warm evening air and look out over the city, settling on a couch.

Magnus lays an arm over Alec’s shoulders and his boyfriend doesn’t hesitate before crowding a little closer and resting a hand on Magnus’s thigh.

It helps being outside, out of the silence that was growing a little oppressive. The background hum of a city that never sleeps helps ease some of his doubt.

He’s mostly over it, is mostly secure that Alec won’t run for the hills, that this won’t be the final straw and he’ll decide that Magnus really is too much effort.

But still, the unease is there, niggling just enough to ache.

Taking a breath, Magnus says, “I had a letter waiting for me in my mailbox this afternoon from Otisville Prison Upstate. From my father,” he tacks on at the end so that there’s no confusion about just why he’s in such a mood.

Alec doesn’t say anything for a minute and Magnus feels the thumb sweeping over his thigh like lead.

“And what did he have to say,” Alec asks.

Magnus looks up and tries to decipher Alec’s expression to no avail. There’s no judgement, no condemnation. Alec’s just studying him with warm curiosity, acting for all the world as though he has no worries.

Magnus laughs caustically. “He said a great many things, most of which I’m loathe to repeat. However, if I want this thing between us to work, I should probably be up front.”

Alec arches a brow before turning to look in front of him, over the landscape. It helps, not to be the total focus of Alec’s intense attention.

“He told me that I ought to snap you up so fast that it would make your head spin.” Shaking his head, he continues, “He told me not to do anything that would interfere in taking at least half your fortune and he assured me that he could connect me with a fabulous divorce lawyer after I put in my due time.”

“How long is our supposed marriage to last,” ALece asks idly.

Magnus scoffs. “A year.”

Looking over at Alec, Magnus is a little surprised to see him smiling as though amused.

“Darling?”

Laughing a little, Alec just offers a half assed shrug. “What?”
“You’re not upset,” he asks hesitantly.

It’s Alec’s turn to scoff as he nudges Magnus with his shoulder. “Of course I’m not upset. Why the hell would I be when we’ve established that your dad isn’t the best guy around. This seems pretty in keeping with his character, if we’re being honest.”

“Still,” Magnus can’t help but prod, unsure at the easy acceptance he reads in Alec’s eyes, in his posture. “I’d think most people would be angry, maybe a little hurt, at the idea that I’m nothing but a gold digger.”

Alec shrugs again. “I’d hope that we’ve established that I’m not most people by now and in any case, what your father says has nothing to do with you. You told me and it’s obviously bothering you. I hope you’re not feeling guilty or whatever the shit.”

Magnus opens his mouth but nothing comes out. Alec just watches him, amusement glinting in his eyes at the way he’d managed to confound him.

Finally, he gets out, “That’s-- that’s it. That’s all you have to say.”

Alec makes a show of thinking before nodding slowly. “Yup, seems about it. What else is there to say?”

Swallowing hard, Magnus offers, “And if I told you that the letter also mentioned that his sentence was commuted over the summer and instead of getting out in 2041, he’ll be released in 2025?”

Humming, Alec just says, “Then I’d say that we’ll deal with Asmodeus’s release whenever it happens. No use worrying about it until it slaps us in the face.”

Magnus laughs incredulously. “Yeah? I didn’t take you for the devil may care sort.”

“I’m not usually,” Alec replies dryly. “But we have, what? Eight years until his release now? That’s a long way away and it seems like an awful lot of effort to worry about something we have no control over.”

Alec pauses for a minute before continuing, “Whatever happens, whenever it happens, we’ll deal with it. Together.”

Magnus’s lips quirk up in an approximation of a smile as he plays over Alec’s words. “Together,” he repeats, question in his tone.

“Yes,” Alec says quietly. “We can deal with whatever happens when the time comes.”

Magnus knows that his voice is overwhelmingly fond, that it’s betraying his emotions as he softly replies, “Whatever you say, darling.”

The two of them relax in the fading light for awhile afterward. Magnus focuses on deep breathing, relaxing his tense shoulders. All around, that’d gone much better than he’d anticipated and he wonders that Alec seems so relaxed.

The two of them open a bottle of wine and bring it out to the balcony as twilight deepens. Magnus has just poured his second glass and is taking a sip with a quiet, contented sigh when Alec breaks the easy silence that’s fallen over them.

“We should go somewhere.”
Lowering his glass, Magnus looks over to see Alec studying him with something indefinable in his eyes.

“Did you have somewhere in mind, darling?”

“Maybe,” the blasted man says cryptically and Magnus grins as he relaxes into Alec’s side.

“Okay, then,” Magnus agrees. “Let’s go somewhere.”

It’s Alec’s turn to look surprised as he asks, “Really? Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Magnus confirms. “We’ll have to look at our schedules but I love travelling and I can’t think of anything I’d enjoy more than travelling with you.”

“How’s this semester looking for you?”

Thinking, after a moment Magnus offers, “I have fall break this time next month? I have about a week off. We could make something happen then?”

“Sounds great,” Alec agrees with a private smile. He takes a sip of wine before turning his head and nosing along Magnus’s hair, ducking to place a kiss under his ear.

Magnus sinks into the warmth that envelopes him at Alec’s easy affection, lets it settle into his chest and chase away the lingering shadows from earlier.

He starts thinking about plans and where they might go, what they might do. It all seems terribly romantic, if he’s being honest with himself.

A few days away from everything is just what he needs. Distantly, he thinks wryly that he certainly has incentive to finish his book’s deadline now.

As his thoughts switch to another route, Magnus bites back the question that lands on the tip of his tongue. He doesn’t want to put Alec on the defensive, after all, and Magnus has always prided himself on being an adept hand at picking up on context clues.

The answer is staring him right in the face, he reflects with a grin, looking down as he takes another lingering sip of wine.

Settling back, Magnus lets everything fall away except this quiet evening with Alec, the two of them taking a few minutes from their hectic, busy lives to enjoy each other.

It’s enough for now. It’s more than enough.
“So, what does Alec Lightwood do on his birthday,” Magnus asks as they round the corner. It’s a warm day, no matter that it is mid September, and Magnus is glad that he’d taken the time to swing by his place and change before heading to Alec’s.

He has a moment to wonder when they became one of those couples-- walking in sync, Alec’s arm is around his shoulders while he pulls Alec closer with an arm around his waist.

It’s all so delightfully domestic that he almost doesn’t know what to do with himself.

“What do you mean?”

Rolling his eyes at his boyfriend’s dry, confused tone, Magnus scoffs. “Come on,” he says, nudging Alec’s hip with his own. “Everyone knows that Alec Lightwood enjoys the hell out of a good party. I can only imagine the ante when it’s for your own birthday. So, what are we doing? Did you rent out a club for the evening? Are we flying to some devastatingly expensive resort for the weekend? I’m game for anything, darling.”

Alec laughs and out of the corner of his eye, Magnus sees the way his eyes crinkle at the corners in amusement. “Well, you’re in for a treat if you’re expecting-- what? Hundred dollar bills raining from the ceiling and a thousand of my closest friends?”

Magnus’s voice is prim as he merely offers, “You do have a reputation, Alexander, and I’d hate for you to deprive yourself on my account.”

It’s Alec’s turn to scoff. “I’m not depriving myself of anything when I’m with you.” He shrugs a little before pulling Magnus closer and placing a quick kiss on his hair. His voice is quiet, contemplative, when he continues, “The truth is, I’m excited to have my birthday in New York. I can’t remember the last time I was in town for it.”

“So, does that mean you’re finally going to tell me how we’re celebrating? You’ve had me on tenterhooks since your cryptic text a few days ago. Dress for fun. That’s all you sent. Do you know how many different types of fun there are? Too many to enumerate right now, that’s for sure, but let me assure you that you would have been more helpful had you just given me the weather forecast-- which I could look up on my own.”

Humming a little, Alec looks over at him and Magnus feels the heat in his gaze as he’s treated to a thorough onceover. “I’d say you did pretty good,” Alec says, voice low. His eyes linger on the long, silver necklace resting against bare skin. “I like that shirt.”

“This old thing,” Magnus asks with a little smirk.

Alec just glares. “You know you’re irresistible no matter what you wear, but you look particularly good tonight.”

“Thank you, darling.” Magnus’s voice is soft, though still teasing, as he replies.

He’s not wearing anything particularly alluring, though he’d chosen to forgo buttoning up the black and white patterned shirt in the spirit of the evening. His black jeans, tucks into ankle boots, were one of his favorite pairs-- he knows his ass looks fantastic in them and he’s very much looking forward to Alec peeling him out of them at the end of the night.
As they their way through Manhattan, Magnus pretends he doesn’t see the avid reporters across the street. They aren’t bothering them per se, but they’re conspicuous enough all the same.

He’s careful not to make direct eye contact with any of the vultures but Alec still follows his gaze only for his expression to darken once he sees what’s grabbed Magnus’s attention. “Ignore them,” he growls and while a part of Magnus is still annoyed and the tiniest bit apprehensive at this very public outing of theirs, most of him curls into the warmth in Alec’s voice, the cavalier disregard for any onlookers attractive, if-- in Magnus’s opinion-- a bit unrealistic.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Magnus replies easily, blatantly lying. He’s not quite sure what’s going on. He’s not nervous; he’s not afraid. He’s just aware of the half dozen photographers and he’s not used to feeling like a fly under a magnifying glass.

He can admit to himself that it’ll take a little getting used to, the idea that he’s not just Magnus Bane anymore but Magnus Bane, boyfriend to famous Alec Lightwood.

Alec turns to him with a raised brow and doesn’t say anything for a moment as he considers him. “Second thoughts,” he asks quietly and his expression makes it clear that there’s no wrong answer.

Which Magnus appreciates but today is Alec’s birthday and what are a couple of flies on the wall when he has a beautiful, interesting, wonderful man to entertain for an evening.

He stops them on the sidewalk and turns until he’s standing in front of Alec. They get a few dirty looks at interrupting the evening stream of foot traffic but Magnus easily blocks those stares out.

Smoothing his hands over Alec’s chest, Magnus leans close. “No second thoughts here. I just don’t know how you’re so relaxed about your constant move being followed and recorded.”

Hands easing under the hem of his shirt, Alec hooks his fingers on Magnus’s belt loops and urges him closer. He shrugs. “You just get used to it. If I noticed every time a pap was looking my way, I would’ve gone insane years ago. Are you sure you’re okay? We can hail a taxi right here, right now and not have to deal with anyone. Whatever makes you comfortable, babe.”

Shaking his head a little, Magnus tilts his head up and lays a kiss on Alec’s jaw. “I’m fine,” he repeats before leaning back to meet his boyfriend’s warm eyes. “I guess this just means that you’ll have to keep me around for a little while, let me get used to things.”

“I can’t think of anything I’d love more,” Alec murmurs before kissing him. It’s nothing too heated but it is a declaration of sorts. Wryly, Alec reflects that he can almost hear the shutter of cameras across the street as the reporters desperately try to capture every millisecond of action.

With the way Magnus relaxes into him, Alec lets himself sink into the hope that’s been flaring up the past couple of months that they can really do this-- Magnus won’t run screaming at intrusive press and watchful stares.

Pulling away, Alec links their hands and walks past Magnus, whirling around to take a few backward steps.

Grinning, he tugs on their laced hands, and Magnus follows with a laugh. “Come on,” he says. “We don’t want to be late.”
The two of them continue on their evening stroll and Magnus’s curiosity is piqued. It’s only when they round the last corner a few blocks down that he finally realizes where they’re headed.

As Alec slows to a stop in front of the door to Uptown Java, Magnus raises a brow. “We’re spending your birthday at Luke’s coffee shop?”

“Yup,” Alec replies with a smile. “Nothing in public, just friends and games and way too much wine.”

Laughing, Magnus urges him on. “Lead the way then, darling.”

While the sign was turned over to close, the door swings open easily as Alec pulls it. Ushering Magnus inside, Alec follows and he’s filled with something light and happy as he sees what Luke’s done to the place.

There are streamers all around and bunches of balloons. There are a few board games already set up at tables around the place and the counter is covered in a couple dozen bottles of alcohol. Food runs along one side of the shop and Alec belatedly remembers that he hasn’t eaten since breakfast.

What really gets him, though, is everyone waiting for their arrival. Jace, Max, and Izzy are front and center and he sees his mom helping Luke with last minute arrangements on the far side of the room.

Simon is holding an obnoxiously large balloon and Raphael stands next to him looking put upon, though Alec is fairly sure that it’s mostly for show. Catarina and Ragnor are talking to an enthusiastic Madzie. Getting refills, Clary and Maia are chatting at the makeshift bar and it’s just what Alec wanted-- something lowkey with only those closest around.

Alec’s done the birthdays where he didn’t know anyone except Iz and Jace. He’s celebrated with drunk strangers and he’s celebrated in foreign locales that were exciting and new and everything he’d wanted at the time.

Now, though, he wants this. An evening with friends and family and Magnus.

He looks over at his boyfriend, wondering at what he’s thinking. He wonders if Magnus really was just joking earlier of if he’s disappointed that Alec doesn’t have more thrilling plans.

To his relief, Magnus is grinning as he shares a look with Raphael before glancing at Alec. “While I must admit that I’m surprised, darling, I’m very much looking forward to kicking your ass at Jenga.”

Alec merely raises an unimpressed brow. “You think you can beat me at Jenga?” He snorts. “You wish.”

Part of Alec just said that to see the competitive gleam light in Magnus’s eyes and he’s not disappointed. Before they can head to one of the tables, though, Alec’s attention is caught on his siblings.

“Happy birthday, hermano!” Isabelle closes the distance between them and envelopes Alec in a bone crushing hug.

Wrapping his arms around Izzy, Alec sways them side to side a few times before leaning back until Isabelle’s feet come off the ground. At her squeal-- which reminds him of when they were so much younger-- he laughs before putting her back down.

Stepping back, Alec goodnaturedly accepts as his sister put a birthday crown on his head, complete with pink feathers and fake plastic diamonds.
He just sighs as she throws a sash over his head to complete the look.

There’s a round of happy birthday wishes from everyone and then they’re splitting into groups. Magnus and Alec take a detour to the bar and while Alec chooses a glass of moscato to start the evening, Magnus makes his own Old Fashioned.

Maryse and Luke join Catarina and Ragnor at one of the tables and play cards while Madzie persuades Simon and Raphael to play Chutes and Ladders. Clary and Maia, already tipsy, are playing a half-assed game of Twister in the corner in between shots.

Everyone else gathers around the Jenga table. Alec grins a little as he helps set up the tower of bricks. He catches Jace’s eye and laughs outright as his brother just glares at him menacingly.

Looking up from where he’s straightening the tower, Magnus quirks a brow at everyone’s expression. “Am I missing something?”

Jace doesn’t let up on his glare as he simply replies, “Alec is the reigning champ of Jenga in the Lightwood house. It’s been years since anyone was able to beat him.”

“He’s a cheat, too,” Max tacks on gleefully. He doesn’t seem to notice Alec’s eye roll. “When I was little he always helped me by suggesting which brick I should pull. I was too dumb to know he was sabotaging me.”

“All’s fair in love and board games, Max. I was teaching you valuable life lessons.” Alec’s voice is prim and he wishes his siblings would just shut up and start the game. His strategy’s always foolproof and he’s looking forward to beating Magnus at his own game.

Izzy snorts. “Please. Alec’s child’s play compared to Jace.”

She turns to Magnus, leans in confidentially. “Don’t trust anyone at this table. Alec’s a little more blatant about his cheating but Jace has a habit of “accidentally” knocking into the table whenever it’s not his turn and Max picks the hardest bricks so that if he succeeds then the person after him almost always goes down.”

Magnus laughs. “What about you, dear? Don’t say that you’re the only straitlaced one in the bunch.”

Isabelle grins but it’s sharp. “Oh no,” she reassures Magnus. “You think I’d win as often as I do if I didn’t cheat with these people? But I can’t tell you how or you’d see me coming from a mile away.”

Shaking his head a little, Magnus just returns, “Well, at least I have an idea of what I’m getting myself into.”

“Alright, enough talking,” Alec finally cuts in, taking a quick sip of moscato. “Time to play.”

He goes first and picks a brick from the bottom layer. They go round the circle, each tapping out a brick before placing it on top of the increasingly unstable tower. Alec watches as Magnus easily chooses bricks on the outer edges-- it mirrors Alec’s own approach and he grins into his wine glass.

The first game last almost half an hour. There’s a fair bit of ribbing and trash talk and when Jace breathes too hard during his turn, Magnus merely turns to him and asks politely, “Jackson, if you please, when it’s my turn, breathe through your nose or not at all.”

Everyone cracks up and Alec actually has tears in his eyes at Jace’s affronted expression. Alec gets up for another glass of wine halfway through and brings back another drink for Magnus. When Isabelle glares at him and pointedly looks at her own empty margarita glass, he just shrugs.
“Boyfriend perks,” he explains. Sitting down, he hands the drink over to Magnus, who leans in for a quick kiss and murmured thanks.

Izzy rolls her eyes but stands up without a word. She just so happens to knock her chair into the table though, during Jace’s turn no less, and as the pile of haphazard bricks come crashing down Jace looks up at her, wounded.

“You did that on purpose,” he accuses.

Isabelle just flips her hair over her shoulder and smiles. “Prove it.”

The group laughs as Jace’s shoulders slump in defeat.

The next few hours fly by and Alec gets progressively tipsier. He plays Candyland with Madzie and loses embarrassingly fast. She gives him a hug in commiseration but he hears her at the food table a few minutes later telling Simon and Clary about how bad he’d lost.

He’s smiling, shaking his head a little as he hears her shamelessly exaggerate, when someone plops down next to him on the couch. He looks over and sees Magnus as he leans into him.

“How are you enjoying your birthday, Alexander?”

Humming a little, Alec looks around the coffee shop before he shifts, resting his head on top of Magnus’s. “I’m having a great time,” he says honestly. “What about you?”

“Well,” Magnus starts, laying a hand on Alec’s thigh and sweeping his thumb in broad strokes over his jeans. “I’ve had some pizza and quite a few drinks. I beat Simon at Uno four times before he gave up and Ragnor barely beat me at Scrabble a few minutes ago. And I’m here with you,” he tacks on at the end. “I’d say I’m having a pretty great time, too.”

“Good,” Alec says. His eyes slipping shut as Magnus’s warmth seeps into him. He’s lost track of how much wine he’s had tonight but he feels buzzed, a little floaty. He feels good, really good.

“Are you falling asleep on me, Alexander?” Magnus’s voice is teasing yet quiet. Alec makes some noise of confirmation and he feels more than hears Magnus laugh.

“I’m wine drunk,” he replies. “I always get a little sleepy when I’ve had a bottle of wine.”

“Well in that case, just try not to snore. We are in public, after all.”

“Hey,” Alec says defensively, rubbing his cheek against Magnus’s hair. “I don’t snore.”

He hears Magnus mutter under his breath something about his hair but it’s drowned out as everyone else starts cheering obnoxiously. Blinking open his eyes, Alec sees everyone much closer than they’d been before. He doesn’t get a chance to ask what the hell is going on before the door to the kitchen is being swung open and Luke enters the room holding a giant cake.

Grinning, Alec straightens up and both he and Magnus stand as Luke carefully makes his way to the table nearest them.

Everyone starts singing a hilariously off tune rendition of Happy Birthday and Alec smiles as the cake is set down in front of him with twenty seven blazing candles in a rainbow of colors.

As the song ends Alec closes his eyes and sinks into the moment. He’s twenty seven and for the first time in longer than he’d care to admit, he feels good. He has everything he always wanted-- and
some things he didn’t even know he wanted-- and as he scrambles to think of a wish, Alec feels everyone’s eyes on him, waiting.

With a deep breath, Alec decides on his wish and leans towards the cake, blowing out the candles. He manages to blow every single one out on the first breath and when he opens his eyes, the first face he sees is Magnus.

Magnus is clapping and smiling with everyone else and as Alec thinks over his wish, he’s filled with a desperate need for it to come true.

*Only time will tell,* he wonders wryly.

Everyone gets their cake and ice cream and retreats to smaller groups. The room is filled with the pleasant din of half a dozen simultaneous conversations and as Alec heads up to the counter for yet another glass of wine, Jace and Izzy join him.

“He fits in, doesn’t he?”

Alec upends the last of the bottle into his glass and looks over at Jace, confused. “Who?”

Jace just rolls his eyes as he reaches for three shot glasses and a bottle of tequila. “Who, he asks. The dumbass,” Jace mutters under his breath before punching him in the shoulder.

Alec doesn’t get to say anything before his brother’s clarifying, “Magnus, obviously, you idiot.”

Looking out at the rest of the room, Alec sees Magnus playing checkers with Maryse. The two of them are the picture of concentration, though he watches as Magnus must make some quip and his mother throws back her head in laughter.

“Yeah,” he says softly. “He does, doesn’t he?”

Isabelle’s voice breaks into his reverie. “So things are good between you two? You certainly were cozy on that couch before the cake came out.”

Alec glares with little heat at her, though even he can admit it’s half-assed. “Yeah, we’re good. Better than good,” he adds with a little smile.

“Just how serious are things between you?”

“Why,” Alec asks with a raised brow.

“Just wondering,” is Jace’s stellar response and Izzy snorts into her margarita.

Eyeing his siblings, Alec slowly says, “It’s as serious as it can be for where we’re at. We’re going on a trip next month.”

The words are barely out of his mouth when Isabelle is screeching. “Oh my gosh, Alec, that’s awesome! Where are you going?”

Lowing his voice a little, Alec leans towards Jace and Izzy. “It’s a surprise, but I’ve booked a long weekend in Florence.”

Jace blinks. “Holy shit, bro, that’s nice as hell.”

Alec just shrugs. “I love the city but I’ve never been there with anyone before. I thought it’d be nice to take Magnus and enjoy a few days away from everything.”
“So, you’re pretty serious then if you’re whisking him away for vacations abroad.”

Alec can’t help the dopey little grin from spreading across his face, though he does duck and try to hide his expression to no avail.

“I don’t know what was worse,” Jace jokes. “Having to deal with you before you got your shit together or having to witness the way you turn sappy as fuck whenever we talk about Magnus.”

“Don’t listen to him, Alec. You deserve this and I love seeing you happy and the two of you happy together.”

“It’s going pretty well,” Alec allows. “We’ve dealt with some shit but everything’s looking pretty damn perfect right now.”

“I’m happy for you, Alec. Let’s make a toast!”

Jace straightens from where he was pouring the three shots of tequila and passes one each to Isabelle and Alec.

Alec takes his with a grimace and privately reflects that tequila is the worst liquor for shots. But, alas, he just never goddamn learns and he reaches for a lime and the salt with grim determination.

“To Alec,” Jace starts. “Happy birthday to the best brother ever. Let’s hope the next year is as eventful as the last.”

Carefully clinking the shot glasses, Isabelle echoes the toast before they’re all throwing back Jose Cuervo Silver.

Alec wants to die immediately but he resolutely clamps down on the lime wedge and sucks on it until his eyes stop watering.

Isabelle just grins at him, looking unaffected. “You never could take tequila, could you?”

“Yes,” Alec rasps. “And you both know that, you dicks.”

Jace and Izzy laugh and before he quite knows what’s happened, the trio has taken another shot.

They leave Alec alone at the bar after that and Alec watches with a thoughtful look as Iz heads straight over to where Maia’s been talking to Catarina. He sees the way Maia lights up as Isabelle wraps her arms around her neck and leans down for a quick kiss.

“They do make a cute couple,” Magnus comments idly. He’d come over when Alec was, presumably, in the throws of a tequila blackout.

“Yeah,” he agrees absently. “I’ve never seen her so happy with anyone else.”

Looking over, Alec’s eyes trail the flush over Magnus’s cheeks, the way his mouth curves into a lazy smile.

“Having a good time,” he asks softly.

“The best,” Magnus confirms. He straightens the birthday crown on Alec’s head before asking, “Ready to open your presents?”

Lighting up, Alec nods. “Let’s go,” he exclaims and takes Magnus’s hand over to one of the larger sitting areas.
Everyone gathers round as Alec starts with the first of a dozen presents.

Madzie had shoved hers into his hands as soon as he’d sat down and as Alec tears the paper away to reveal a pair of mittens and a drawing of him with the rest of her family. He studies the drawing, done in crayon, and his heart feels fit to bursting. When he holds up the mittens, though, his expression morphs into something curious.

“It’s September, Madz. I love them but why the mittens?”

Matter of factly, she just replies, “You’re always holding Magnus’s hand so I thought you were always cold. These are to keep you warm.”

Everyone laughs and Alec feels color sweep up his neck. He looks over to Magnus just to see him relaxed and laughing with everyone else. He shrugs helplessly and Alec returns it with a silly little grin before turning back to Madzie. “Thank you,” he says sincerely. “I love it.”

He opens a watch from Isabelle that he’d been eyeing on one of their shopping trips and Jace’s present is just a gift card to Smoothie King— the same thing he’s gotten since they were sixteen.

Finally, he reaches the last present and he recognizes the wrapping paper immediately from where they’d walked over together. He glances over to Magnus just to see his boyfriend fiddling with that damned ear cuff and Alec has no idea what to expect.

He’s far more careful with unwrapping this gift, delicately tearing the paper and undoing the ribbon. When he finally reveals a book, he’s happy but it’s not until he turns it over to read the front cover that the breath rushes out from him.

“Holy shit, Magnus,” he breathes as he oh so carefully opens the cover to see the title page.

“Well, you did mention that it’s your favorite book. I believe your words were, I read my copy cover to cover until the pages literally fell out.” He shrugs a little, a cautious smile working its way over his face as he sees Alec light up as he continues studying it. “You could buy anything you wanted but I thought this would be something you might not think of.”

Alec reads the title page for the dozenth time, still not quite believing Magnus’s present.

“Well, what is it,” Jace demands. “Not all of us are sitting right next to you.”

Max snorts. “Or could read even if they were.”

Everyone laughs and Alec looks up. “It’s a first edition copy of Pride and Prejudice.”

“Oh my goodness,” Maryse exclaims before turning to Magnus. “How thoughtful of you. I remember when Alec first read that book. He immediately went out and bought the movie and watched it so many times the dvd stopped working. How on earth did you find it?”

Magnus shrugs but before he can say anything Ragnor chimes in from where he’d been enjoying a glass of scotch. “He’s always been a pain in the ass when he gets a bee in his bonnet.”

That doesn’t clear anything up at all and Alec looks over at his boyfriend who sighs heavily. He catches Magnus glare at Ragnor and Ragnor just smiles breezily at him in return.

“Ragnor, as you know, is the chair of the English department at Columbia. His personal library is a goldmine and he has dozens of first print editions in his collection. Pride and Prejudice was included in that.”
While Magnus had sounded like he was chewing glass at the explanation, Ragnor’s is much more droll as he adds, “Operative word, was. Magnus begged me for weeks for that book. We came to an agreement just a few days ago.”

Magnus scoffs. “You would’ve given it to me regardless but you do so enjoy making me sing for my supper, don’t you? Your price was ridiculous,” Magnus seethes.

Amused, Alec looks between them and asks, “What was the price?”

“That’s something you don’t need to worry about, darling. Just enjoy your present and leave me to my friends who’d like to fleece me for everything I have.”

Raphael just rolls his eyes with Catarina and Alec laughs before letting it go. He pulls Magnus in for a quick kiss before he’s smiling too much and leans back. He opens his eyes just to see Magnus already watching him, gaze happy and warm.

“Thank you,” he whispers in the space between their lips. “I love it.”

I love you.

Alec bites back the words but barely. It’s not the time nor the place for that sort of declaration. He doesn’t know how much longer he’ll be able to hold them back but he figures when the moment’s right, he’ll know it.

The rest of the night passes in a bit of a blur. Towards the end, when Clary’s taken a drunk and stumbling Jace back to her place and Maia and Izzy are safely in a cab, Alec finds himself on his back, Magnus looming over him, as they play what could only very loosely be called a game of Twister.

Cat, Ragnor, and Madzie had left a few hours ago and Alec laughs up at a beaming Magnus.

“Kiss me,” he demands and Magnus whispers something too low for him to hear before acquiescing.

Slowly but surely, everyone else leaves after that and Alec thanks Luke profusely for calling a cab for him and Magnus.

Luke just waves him off. “If I let you two stumble your way home, I’d never hear the end of it from your mother. Drink water when you get home and let me know you made it back safely. I’ll see you in the morning for brunch.”

He jerks his chin towards the front door. “Now get out of here and leave your mother and me to clean up.”

Alec pulls Luke in for a hearty hug and they slap each other on the back just a hair too hard.


Luke tightens his grip before standing back and ruffling his hair in a move Alec remembers with fond exasperation. “And you’re the best kid I could’ve asked for but you’re shifaced right now and keeping me from getting ready for the morning rush. Out of here, you two.”

Alec and Magnus obey-- after saying their goodbyes to Maryse-- and they manage to get themselves in the taxi and all the way up to his apartment with a minimum of fuss.

Closing the door behind him with a sigh, Alec leans against it as he looks down at his shoes, morosely wondering how the hell he was going to get them off.
While the party had been lowkey, he’d had a lot of wine-- not to mention those fucking shots Jace had insisted on-- and he’s more than a little buzzed.

Without warning, his head’s being tipped up and he smiles guileless at Magnus. If he were a little more sober, he’d probably notice that Magnus wasn’t quite as steady on his feet as he’d like everyone to believe.

“Happy birthday, Alexander.” Magnus’s voice is low and in the next moment, they’re kissing. It’s messy and drunk and everything Alec wants right now. His back hits the door with a thud that he barely hears and he moans as Magnus buries a hand in his hair and latches onto his neck, the dull ache the only thing he can focus on. His hands go under Magnus’s shirt to land against his hips, fingers digging in when a particularly sharp bite has him keening.

He’s just reached down for Magnus’s fly when his boyfriend pulls back unexpectedly. Left gasping and confused, Alec’s eyes fly open just to see Magnus watching him with heated eyes that almost seem to glow gold in the low light of the foyer.

“What’s going on,” he asks hoarsely. “Why’d you stop?”

“My darling Alexander. Did I forget to mention? Your birthday present might have a part two.”

Eyes blown wide, Alec’s gaze dips down to Magnus’s jeans. He licks his lips unconsciously. “Oh?”

Magnus laughs and it’s an inelegant snort that he’d deny ever making when sober. “Yeah, oh.”

He steps back and Alec’s focus is seared onto the way Magnus unbuttons the rest of his shirt, pulling it off his shoulders gracefully just to let it fall onto the floor. He takes another few steps backward, until he’s in the living room. He looks up at Alec and meets his eyes with a smirk.

“Are you coming or not?”

“Oh, fuck yes,” Alec breathes and Magnus’s laughter rings out in the empty apartment as they stumble to the bedroom.
Taking a picture from the window of the private jet, Alec leans back in his seat as he starts fiddling with filters.

Their flight took off less than an hour ago and as Magnus reads a journal— one of seven he’d brought along to Alec’s amusement— Alec posts the picture to Instagram.

It’s obviously taken from a plane with a view overlooking the sunset above the clouds. It’s a pretty cool picture even if it is pedestrian. The caption is unforgivably sentimental but Alec shrugs. He’s entitled, he thinks with a little laugh.

Leaving his phone in his cup holder, Alec leans down and digs out the book he’d thrown into his bag right before leaving. It’s a thriller and from the synopsis, he knows that he’s in for a treat.

Before he can do more than reread the back page, though, the flight attendant is coming over and asking for drinks.

“Just water for me, thanks.” Alec smiles at Selina as she hands him a glass of ice water. She’s flown with him before and is exceedingly good at her job.

Magnus looks up from his journal, raising a brow as he asks, “What are the chances I could get a martini?”

Selina raises a brow right back as she offers, “Vodka or gin?”

Chuckling, Magnus asks for vodka and she returns just a moment later with his glass.

Settling back in his seat, Magnus nudges him with his shoulder. When Alec looks over, Magnus’s eyes are dancing over the rim of his martini as he takes a lingering sip.

“I’ve got to admit, this is nice,” he says. “No security lines, no crying babies or crowded rows of travelers. Be careful, darling, or I’ll get used to this.”

Linking their hands, Alec brings them to rest on his thigh as he sends his boyfriend a droll look. “Traveling is a nightmare under the best of circumstances. Flying internationally? I can’t remember the last time I flew commercial.”

It’s quiet for a moment before Magnus speaks again. “Thanks for taking me on this trip, Alexander. Knowing that I had a few days alone with you after midterms is what kept me sane.”

“It’s as much for me as you,” Alec says with a little grin. “I love travelling but I’m usually by myself or with the crew during tour. Plus, I’ve been working on my album so much that I could use a break, too.”

Magnus laughs. “Well, you certainly weren’t too busy to plan this trip. I’m still afraid that I don’t
quite know what I’ve gotten myself into.”

“I was shocked that you let me have carte blanche.”

Leaning into his side, Magnus burrows deeper as Alec lifts an arm to wrap around his shoulders. “You seemed excited at the prospect of planning everything. I was pleasantly surprised when you chose Florence, though. I’ve always enjoyed Italy but I’ve never been to Tuscany.”

“I thought it might be nice to go someplace neither of us had been yet. You know, getting to explore the same city for the first time together? That sounds pretty damn nice.”

Magnus’s voice is soft as he lifts their joined hands up to his lips for a quick kiss across Alec’s knuckles. “You know what? It really does, darling.”

The two of them spend the next couple of hours reading and listening to music through their respective headphones. Magnus scours the latest issue of The Public Historian and Alec has to gently yet insistently pull the magazine away from him halfway through the flight.

Magnus glares at him with little heat and Alec just laughs as he urges him to stand up.

“C’mon,” he says. “We’re landing early in the morning, Florence time, and we need to sleep now if we want to beat jet lag.”

Sighing heavily, Magnus stands and follows Alec to the back room. “I was in the middle of a particularly engrossing article about Australian Aboriginal picture archives.”

“It’ll still be there tomorrow,” Alec says easily as he closes the door that separates the bed from the rest of the cabin.

Their bags are on luggage racks and while Alec just falls into bed, Magnus changes out of his day clothes into a tank and sweatpants. They’d left right after Magnus’s last class this afternoon and Magnus moans a little as he slides in between the sheets.

“God, this feels good.”

Moving over until he can kiss the back of Magnus’s neck, until he can throw an arm around his waist and pull him closer, Alec just replies, “You did have a busy day. Get some sleep while you can, babe.”

It seems like no time at all before the stewardess is knocking on the door, calling out that they’ll start their descent in thirty minutes.

Alec groans a little. He hears Magnus laugh and when he opens his eyes a few minutes later it’s to see Magnus studying him with warm eyes.

“Time to get up, Alexander. We do want to hit the ground running, after all.”

They’re back in their seats twenty five minutes later, seat belts fastened, dressed and ready for the day. Their landing is uneventful and as they disembark, Alec throws an arm over Magnus’s shoulders.

“What about our luggage,” Magnus asks as they walk through the gate and right towards the taxi lane.

“Someone from the hotel will pick them up and send them over,” Alec explains and the two of them
wait in line for the next cab.

Magnus sends Alec an arch look but doesn’t say anything else and then the two of them are climbing into the back of a taxi.

They’re taken to the city center and dropped off near the Duomo. Paying the driver, Alec is the last one out and as they gain their bearings on the sidewalk-- not too busy since it’s so early-- Alec takes a moment to just breathe.

He really does love Italy and he’s looking forward to the next few days where his biggest worry will be where to eat dinner or how much gelato is too much gelato.

While Magnus had put everything into his hands, he’d told Magnus almost two weeks ago where he was booking, just in case his boyfriend had a secret, passionate hatred for the city and to give them both a chance to decide on absolute musts for the trip.

When Alec traveled, he like to wander around and get lost. He usually only had one or two things he wanted to see or do and everything else was just a matter of getting a feel for the city. By contrast, Magnus liked to sightsee and check things off a list. There were a few museums and sights that Magnus had put on their list in between aimless wandering and Alec was excited. This trip was a representation of the both of them-- likes and dislikes, everything a perfect mix.

He thinks that he heard once that if you were serious about someone, then a good test was travelling with them. Alec can’t help but think that so far-- and yeah, they did just land but still-- that everything was going smoothly and held the promise of continuing to do so.

Friday goes by quickly. They grab breakfast at a little crêperie called La Milkeria. Magnus goes for a savory option while Alec enthusiastically dives into his nutella and strawberry crepes. It’s a great start to the day and the spend the morning walking around the near the Duomo. They stop wherever their eye catches and take an embarrassing number of pictures. They linger at street vendors and wander around an outside market where Alec picks up a few souvenirs for his family and Magnus does the same for his.

They stop and have lunch, lingering over glasses of wine and a charcuterie board. Magnus, the frustrating man, tries to pay and Alec just scowls as he grabs for the receipt.

“I don’t know why you insist on paying for shit,” he says as he reaches for his wallet. “I invited you on this trip. I pay.”

Magnus just stares at him, unimpressed. “I’m perfectly capable of paying for my own wine, Alexander. I wouldn't want you to think I was only after your money after all,” he teases and Alec rolls his eyes even as his mouth tilts up.

“I’d have to be a fucking idiot to think that,” he scoffs and tosses a few euro onto the table as they stand up.

Walking towards the river, it’s much more of a slow stroll. They linger on the river side for awhile, people watching and taking in the scenery.

“It’s beautiful here,” Magnus says as they watch a rowing team go by below.

“I love Italy but I think Florence might just be my favorite city after today.”

Crossing the river, Alec and Magnus pop into shops and stop by a gelateria. They take a selfie with their cups and miniature spoons and this time, it’s Magnus who posts the picture.
There are a line of emojis after the scant words and Alec rolls his eyes as he likes the picture on his own phone.

“You’re such a nerd,” he mutters under his breath with a grin and Magnus takes a bite of gelato before replying, “You know you l-like it.”

Magnus’s voice falters a little on the latter half of the sentence and Alec frowns a little, though he doesn’t wait a second before sighing and nudging Magnus’s foot with his own.

“Unfortunately, I do,” he teases and watches as Magnus’s face eases into amusement.

In the late afternoon, Alec starts leading them towards their hotel. Arms linked, they stroll along the river and Alec can’t remember ever feeling so relaxed.

They come to the entrance of the hotel and Magnus pauses, a little incredulous. “We’re staying here?”

Tilting his head a little, Alec starts toward where the doorman is waiting. “Yup,” he says. He looks back with laughter in his gaze. “That’s alright, isn’t it?”

“Is it alright-- my God, Alexander, this place looks amazing.”

“They had good reviews on Google,” is all Alec says and Magnus glares at him before shaking his head.

Making their way to the reception desk, it’s only a few minutes before they’re being shown to their room.

Looking around the suite, Alec nods, pleased. “Not bad,” he says absently and reaches for a bottle of water in the mini fridge.

Magnus snorts. “It’s taken a little while,” he says as he takes the bottle Alec holds out with his free hand, “But I do believe I’m finally seeing Alec Lightwood, celebrity.”

“What do you mean?”

Opening the doors to the balcony to let in the cool breeze, Magnus leans against the railing as he takes a drink of water. “This is a five star hotel and even my credit card might wince a little at the nightly rate but to you, it’s acceptable.”

He grins over at Alec, winking. “You’re a travel snob, darling.”

Shaking his head, Alec protests. “Just because it looks nice and I said so doesn’t make me a travel snob,” he says defensively. “I like a nice hotel-- especially when I’m trying to impress someone.”

The last bit is said low as he joins Magnus on the balcony, ducking close to lay a kiss below his ear. “I can’t let it be said that I did anything by half measures, now can I?”

Magnus doesn’t take the bait, instead looking at Alec with pity. “Darling, the summer I graduated from Yale, Ragnor, Catarina, and I toured Continental Europe on a shoestring budget. We stayed in hostels-- and for the last week, we managed to sleep in hotel lobbies when our savings ran out. You don’t have to impress me. If you’d taken me to a hostel this afternoon where we would’ve had to sleep in the same room as twelve other strangers, I’d be just as happy and excited as I am now. I’m
just looking forward to spending time with you somewhere new. That’s it, that’s all.”

“Aren’t you a sweet talker,” Alec whispers before he leans in and kisses Magnus. When they break apart a little while later, the sun’s almost set.

Alec yawns and it turns into a laugh when Magnus pokes him in the side. “Is that jet lag I’m seeing?”
He glares. “Shut up,” he says, hiding another yawn behind his hand. “We’ve been on the go all day and I got three hours of sleep last night.”

“And who’s fault is that?”

“Yours,” Alec says, mockingly scowling. “You act like it wasn’t appallingly obvious what you were doing on your side of the bed.”

Magnus sniffs, turning away to watch the water. “I’m sure I have no idea what you mean.”

Alec’s voice is wry as he merely says, “Babe, not only was your cell phone flashlight on but I could hear the pages turn as you finished reading that journal.”

Grumbling a little, Magnus just throws up exasperated hands. “I told you it was a fascinating article and I knew we wouldn’t have time today. It’s not my fault you’re a light sleeper.”

“I’m not a light sleeper,” Alec laughs. “I’m over here trying to cuddle my boyfriend and he won’t stop muttering about Australian photography. I think anyone would have trouble falling asleep to that.”

Magnus shrugs before he finally relaxes, smiling. He moves closer to Alec and sweeps a hand through his hair so that it’s off his face before tilting his head.

The kiss is soft with a hint of bite towards the end and when Magnus pulls away, Alec chases his lips. When they break apart the second time, Magnus sweeps a thumb over Alec’s cheek. “Sorry that I kept you up, darling,” he says, eyes amused. “I’m sure you’ll sleep good tonight, though.”

Alec huffs out a laugh. “I’m sure you’re right,” he agrees.

The two of them head back inside and get ready for dinner. They’d seen a little ristorante during the day that they’d agreed to go back to for dinner and as they turn the corner of the hotel, he hears the shutter of a camera as a flash goes off in the night.

Rolling his eyes, Alec keeps his gaze forward, though he doesn’t hasten his pace. To his relief, Magnus does the same and it’s only a minute before the reporter seems to have gotten all he needs and they’re left alone.

The restaurant is small and intimate and they pass a few hours at a little table in front of a window. They drink a little too much wine and enjoy food that just can’t be found in the States. It’s the perfect ending to a wonderful day and as they take their time walking back to the hotel, Magnus pulls him just into a small side street and kisses him until he can’t think straight.

He doesn’t know how long they spend there, kissing while people walk by on the main street just a few feet away but when they finally pull apart, it takes everything Alec has not to dive back in.

Magnus’s expression is warm and open, eyes shining in the low light and mouth bruised and red. He’s damn near irresistible.
When Alec takes his hand a minute later and all but drags him in the direction of their hotel, Magnus’s laughter rings out in the narrow street.

Later, when the moonlight drips over their balcony and his ears are filled with Magnus’s gasps, with the way he says Alexander like it’s both a curse and a prayer, Alec kisses that laughter off his lips and sinks into the feeling squeezing his chest.

Alec wakes slowly, the sun shining into his eyes. Jerking his head away from where they’d left the curtains open, he lifts up onto his elbows and rubs his eyes blearily.

He has no idea what time is is but Magnus is still sleeping soundly under him. Shifting carefully so as not to disturb him, Alec rests on one elbow as he watches Magnus in the morning light.

His eyes trace the steady way his chest rises, the way his hair falls over his forehead. Magnus hadn’t taken his makeup off last night and there’s glitter trailing over his cheek, black smudges under his eyes.

Alec’s breath catches and his heart cracks open for what feels like the hundredth time since he met Magnus all those months ago.

Words come to him, unbidden, and Alec leans forward to plant a soft, barely there kiss on Magnus’s jaw before climbing out of bed.

He rummages around his bag for his songbook and then curses under his breath as he realizes he’s not even wearing underwear. Pulling on a pair of sweats with Magnus’s shirt, he slowly opens the balcony door and breathes a sigh of relief when it doesn’t make a sound.

Settling into a chair that offers a hell of a view-- they’re on the fifth floor and he can see the morning traffic below him and the gold tinted river right there-- Alec opens the book and starts writing.

He pours everything out. He remembers the first time he saw Magnus and the first time they properly talked. Everything from the terrible night where he’d felt like nothing more than a goddamn commodity to just last week when Magnus had surprised him at the studio with food just when he’d been about to tear his fucking hair out in frustration over a recording snag.

It could be ten minutes or an hour later when something breaks his focus. Looking up, Alec sees Magnus watching him with a barely there smile. He still looks mostly asleep and everything rushes through Alec-- the words he’s just written, the way they barely scratch the surface of what he feels for Magnus, the sight that he realizes with a shuddering sigh that he could wake up to for the rest of his life.

Before he quite knows what’s going on he’s tossed his book to the ground and is standing. He strides over to the bed and Magnus doesn’t move, just tilts his head to keep his eyes locked on Alec’s.

Alec climbs onto the bed, crawling up until he’s straddling Magnus and Magnus still doesn’t move. His smile grows imperceptibly as Alec cages him in, as he leans down and catches his mouth in a searing kiss that does nothing to dampen the desire that’s lighting him up from the inside.

His hands go to Magnus’s face and he rests his forehead against his boyfriend’s and works like hell to get his breathing under control. Magnus’s doesn’t say anything, just wraps his hands around Alec’s wrists and breathes in sync.

When Alec pulls back and opens his eyes, he takes another moment and sears it onto his memory.
Magnus studies him, brow arched expectantly.

Alec opens his mouth. He takes a deep, grounding breath. His thumbs stroke over Magnus’s cheeks and he smiles.

It’s small at first but then it grows until he feels his own cheeks aching.

“I love you,” he says hoarsely. “I am so goddamn in love with you.”

He watches the way Magnus’s eyes widen, hears the sharp intake of breath.

It’s funny, Alec has a second to think. He’s never said these words before. They’ve never weighed on his tongue like honeyed gold before. He’s never, ever felt this exhilarating, terrifying mix of love and lust and hope swirling around him fast enough to make him dizzy.

It doesn’t feel strange, though. It’s a good fear because it means that it matters. This matters-- they matter.

He’s waited so long to say them, has fought to keep them in when they wanted to fall from his mouth so desperately. He’s bit them back when Magnus made his head spin with want, when he’d done nothing more than text him a silly picture of an adorable animal.

They feel right. Now that Alec’s said them, now that they’re out there, most of him breathes a sigh of relief.

For better or worse, this is the last piece of him. He’s given everything to Magnus and now that his heart is out there, waiting, Alec finds that he’s not as worried as he always thought he’d be.

For better or worse, he thinks.

He doesn’t have long to think it, though, because almost immediately Magnus is grinning, the corners of his eyes crinkling with delight and happiness and-- dare Alec say it-- love.

Magnus blinks furiously and Alec watches as he closes his eyes and takes a shuddering breath. When he opens them a moment later, they’re full of everything Alec’s always dreamed of.

“I love you too, Alexander.”

The words are simple and said on a whisper and Alec shuts his eyes to savor them.

He feels them wind around his heart before settling. He feels Magnus pull him closer and place the most gentle of kisses on his forehead, his cheeks, the bridge of his nose.

Opening his eyes, he meets Magnus’s gaze and it’s silent in the room as they study each other, sharing the same breath.

And then Alec’s laughing and falling forward to nose along Magnus’s throat. “God,” he says. “I don’t know why I waited so long to say that.”

Humming a little, Magnus sweeps a hand down his back. Alec shivers a little as Magnus’s lips touch his ear. “I could say the same.”

“How long have you known,” Alec asks idly as he settles on top of Magnus, a leg thrown over his.

Magnus doesn’t stop his slow touches and Alec crowds infinitesimally closer. “Honestly? Probably whenever you came over to Catarina and Ragnor’s for Sunday Dinner a couple of months ago. You
just fit and I realized that the thought didn’t make me want to run for the hills. I liked that you fit in with my family.”

Raising up a little, Alec just gives Magnus an incredulous look. “That’s what Jace and Izzy said at my birthday party last month-- that you fit. I really liked it, too.”

Reaching for his hand, Magnus laces their fingers together. “We fit together pretty well, wouldn’t you say?”

“Perfectly,” Alec murmurs and smiles before resettling over Magnus.

“What about you,” his boyfriend asks. “When did you know?”

“It’s cliche,” Alec tries to deflect but Magnus doesn’t take that for an answer, instead poking him in the side until he jerks away, scowling.

“Fine,” he mutters. He doesn’t move from where he’s laying on Magnus and the words get caught against his throat. “It was the first time we slept together. That shit with your dad happened and I realized that I believed you and that everyone else could go to hell.” He laughs shortly. “I figured if I was willing to choose you over my career then you meant a lot to me, more than I even realized. And then after-- after we slept together that night, the words were on the tip of my tongue.”

His voice is quiet, as he adds, “You were perfect, everything I could’ve wished for.”

Magnus doesn’t say anything for a minute but then he’s kissing the top of Alec’s head. “I love you so much, darling. I’m glad you finally said something. I’m glad you feel the same.”

Scoffing, Alec just replies, “Of course I feel the same. I never stood a chance, babe.”

The two of them fall quiet after that, dozing in the morning sunshine. A little while later, Magnus wakes Alec up with a kiss and Alec urges him onto his back as the sun warms them.

“I’m going to make you feel so good, baby,” he whispers hoarsely against the hollow of Magnus’s throat. “Let me love you, okay?”

He feels Magnus nod shakily before he sighs, fingers coming up to curl in Alec’s hair. Alec kisses a path down Magnus’s front, mapping a trail of adoration for just the two of them to see.

His efforts are stalled a few minutes later, though, as a knock sounds loudly in the room.

“Housekeeping,” the maid calls out and both Alec and Magnus freeze at the voice.

They look at each other, askance and a little panicked before they both start laughing. It’s nothing delicate, all gasping breaths and deep chuckles.

“Answer her, Alexander,” Magnus pleads as he wipes his eyes.

Rolling his eyes, Alec doesn’t immediately reply only for his eyes to widen as they hear a key in the lock. Clearing his throat hurriedly, Alec all but shouts, “Busy!”

There’s a pause on the other side of the door before they hear the key being taken out. “So sorry,” she replies. “I’ll be back this evening or I can put the do not disturb card on your door?”

Magnus actually fucking giggles at Alec’s exasperated expression but nonetheless replies, “The do not disturb sign works just fine, thank you!”
They hear a rustle at the door—presumably the maid hanging the sign up—before there’s silence.

Alec sighs and all but collapses on top of Magnus, hiding his face against Magnus’s hip. “Oh my God,” he whines. “That could’ve been so bad.”

“At least you’re still wearing pants,” Magnus points out reasonably. “She would’ve seen me in all my glory if she’d walked in without warning.”

Humming a little, Alec starts mouthing against Magnus’s hipbone. “At least we’ll be left alone for the rest of the day,” he murmurs and Magnus’s easy agreement is choked off as he takes Magnus in his mouth without warning.

“Give a guy some warning, Alexander,” Magnus wheezes and Alec just hums again as he works him over.

A little while later, sated and happier than he can ever remember being, Alec uses all his residual strength to lean over Magnus and kiss him.

Later that night, when they’ve finally left the bed and gotten ready for the evening—after an exceptionally long shower—Alec looks up as Magnus comes out of the bathroom, having just finished putting his makeup on.

“God, I love you,” he blurts out, grinning as he takes in his boyfriend.

Magnus had definitely dressed to impress for an evening out and Alec can’t think of anything he’d like more than to show him off.

Magnus laughs at his reaction but as he walks over and wraps his arms around Alec’s neck, he treats him to a slow once over in return. “Love you too, darling. Though I do hope you’re not just saying that because of my looks.”

His voice is teasing and Alec rolls his eyes. “Trust me, babe, if I’m not only willing but excited to listen to one of your diatribes on medieval Southeast Asian pottery, then you have nothing to worry about.”

His voice lowers a little as he continues, “I fell in love with you because you’re wise and you’re generous and you’re brave. You’re incredible,” he says, ducking a little to catch Magnus’s eyes when he tries to look away, abashed. “When you walk into a room, there’s a spark in you that lights everyone and everything up. I’m just lucky that you let a little of your light warm me up.”

“God, Alec, you can’t just say things like that.” Magnus’s voice is raw, awed and disbelieving.

Shrugging, Alec just asks, “Why not? It’s how I feel and you deserve to know how I feel-- how you make me feel.”

“I never expected this,” Magnus says, studying Alec. “I never expected you. But how lucky I am that we ended up in the same shitty diner one night.”

Alec laughs, shaking his head as he leans close for a quick, smacking kiss. “Who knows? Maybe it’s fate. I guess we’ll have to just wait and see.”

“I guess we will,” Magnus says warmly in a voice that’s almost too low to hear.
With that, they leave their room and head towards the lobby, both of them looking forward the rest of the night.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Songs mentioned in this chapter:

- Black Magic by Jaymes Young
- Crazy in Love by Beyonce
- I've Never Loved This Hard This Fast Before by Tami Tamaki (track 8)
- Better Man by 5sos
- Life of the Party by All Time Low
- The Way I Am by Charlie Puth
- Worship by MAX
- I Like Me Better by Lauv
- Wanna Be Missed by Hayley Kiyoko

Sitting at the desk in front of the room, Magnus studies his students. The room is silent save for a cough here or there, the scuffle of shoes, the jittery click of a pen in the top corner.

His mouth turns up as he hears the first flipping of the page. Taking an idle glance at the clock, he raises a brow. The final for this class was a Blue Book exam and it’s only been five minutes-- either someone really knew their shit or they were bullshitting so hard that he’d need a second red pen when it came time to grade.

Leaning back in his chair, Magnus’s focus turns back to his phone. Alec had been infuriatingly tight-lipped the past couple of weeks about work. Magnus knows that his boyfriend is getting closer and closer to finishing the album but no matter how much he pries-- or what he offers in exchange for a sneak peak-- Alec refuses to let Magnus listen to it.

He’s got to admit that he’s curious. After hearing the single back in September, he’d never said anything to Alec. It seems silly, especially after Florence, but he didn’t want to jinx anything. He didn’t want to be presumptuous only to have Alec give him that blank eyed stare that infuriates him, always accompanied by a slow blink that lets the recipient know exactly how foolish Alec thinks they are.

So, he’d kept his mouth shut but he can’t help but hope. It’s a little heady, the possibility that Alec’s written a song-- several songs, even-- about him. About them.

They’re chatting about plans for tonight and Magnus worries his bottom lip as he reads over Alec’s latest text.

_I was thinking we could go out for dinner? I have reservations at Momofuku Ko tonight_

Magnus stares down at his phone, mildly appalled.

_Darling, that place is expensive as hell. It’s a Tuesday night, no need to be so extravagant._

_Didn’t you say you wanted to try it? What, I can’t do something nice for my boyfriend?_

Fingers flying over his screen, Magnus replies, _That was idle conversation, Alexander! Plus, don’t_
you need reservations at least a month in advance?

He doesn’t even have to wait a minute for Alec’s response.

I might have made them the day after you mentioned wanting to try it.

Rolling his eyes, Magnus’s exasperation is sorely tempered with fondness.

You’re too good to me, Alec

…….. So you're okay with going there for dinner?

Huffing out a laugh that has half his students glancing up at him before turning back to their exams, Magnus grins as he types, As long as you’re okay going dutch.

He actually laughs out loud as he reads Alec’s short reply a few seconds later.

Not a chance in hell, babe.

Shaking his head, Magnus pockets his phone as he looks up at the few dozen students furiously writing in their Blue Books.

Life has settled into a routine that’s mostly what it was before. It’s just that now he has Alec to come home to more often than not.

He still wakes up early and sometimes he lets Alec persuade him to join him at Fuel for an early morning workout. Magnus comes to work and loves what he does and sometimes Alec joins him for lunch.

His day ends and he goes back to the loft where he’ll spend a couple of hours grading or planning or writing-- though not his book, Thank Christ, that’s off to the printer now-- before he meets Alec for a date.

Most nights they spend together and while they alternate between places, it’s usually Alec who comes over to the loft lately.

Magnus doesn’t quite understand it-- Alec’s penthouse is what dreams are made of-- but it’s nice to see Alec so comfortable in his space, among his things.

As his thoughts turn unforgivably sappy, Magnus figures he’s entitled.

It’s his birthday, after all.

Not that he’s told Alec that, of course. Magnus doesn’t know why he hasn’t told his boyfriend that his birthday was coming up, but it had just never seemed the right time.

In any case, he’s not too fond of the day anyway. For the past decade, it’s been little more than a reminder of a childhood he’d tried his damnedest to forget. Until his father was sent to jail, his birthday had always been a big, blowout affair. He’d always had birthday parties and cake and almost too many presents to handle.

His father always took the day off and he let Magnus skip school and they’d spend the day together doing whatever Magnus wanted. When he was very little, there had been mini-golfing and arcades and the zoo. As he’d gotten older, Asmodeus had taken him to the movies, to get his first piercing, and on his sixteenth birthday-- just a few months before his life imploded-- he’d been surprised with a trip to the dealer. Asmodeus had gifted him a brand new Mercedes SUV.
Damn but he’d loved that car, until it had been repossessed at any rate.

No, Magnus reflects. After everything had happened and his father had been sentenced, Magnus had spent a few years flat out not acknowledging his birthday. His foster families hadn’t cared, that was for damned sure, and Magnus hadn’t been close enough with anyone to celebrate.

For a few years, there hadn’t been anything to celebrate, not to him.

But then he’d gone to Yale and had been surprised as hell when Ragnor and Cat had casually left him presents one morning. He still doesn’t know how they figured it out but it had touched him far more than a paperback and an eight dollar bottle of wine should have. They had never made a thing out of it and for that, Magnus was exceedingly grateful.

Still, that doesn’t help matters much now. Magnus feels a little guilty for keeping something so innocuous from Alec, especially after he’d gone to such lengths for his birthday in September, but with a little shrug, Magnus idly thinks about taking Alec out for ice cream after dinner tonight and telling him.

Breaking out of his thoughts, Magnus smiles at the student standing in front of the desk. He’s expecting a question but doesn’t say anything when the student merely tosses their exam on the desk between them and turns to leave without a word.

Amused, Magnus looks at the clock and sees that it’s only been half an hour. This exam block was three hours and this class in particular was an upperclass elective on the History of Modern India. Magnus had created the exam and by his estimate, it should take at least an hour and a half.

There are three sections: term identification where there are twenty definitions and students must choose ten to discuss—people, places, events that were significant to the semester’s content. Then there are the mini-essays where students pick three out of five significant eras and explain why they were so impactful. Finally, they have to pick one out of two essay topics and write an analytical essay that should be comprehensive of the entire semester’s lectures.

The fact that it took this student half an hour makes Magnus wary to say the least.

Shrugging a little, Magnus takes out a few papers from his senior seminar class and starts grading. He’s here for the next two and a half hours so he might as well get some work done. Winter graduation was Saturday and he needs to have grades in for all seniors by Thursday at noon. He has a dozen thirty to forty page theses to grade, in addition to any exams from his other classes. The next few days are going to be round the clock grading and Magnus wryly thinks that finals week isn’t just for the students.

The time goes by quickly and Magnus manages to grade three of the term papers as students slowly turn in their Blue Books and leave, eager to study for their next exam or just collapse in their dorms and relish the end of another semester.

Looking up, Magnus sees that there’s just one student left and she’s on her second Blue Book. Knowing that she has a propensity to take her time and write for ages on each question, Magnus focuses back on grading, marking something in the margin to look up later.

The student takes almost the entire three hours to finish her exam and Magnus sympathizes as he puts his papers in his briefcase to return to later. Shaking out her hand, she places the exam on top of the pile.

“How’d it go,” Magnus asks, capping his pen.
Shrugging a little, Jasmine smiles. “I hope it went well but I guess I’ll just have to wait and see when you enter the grade in Blackboard.”

“Was this your last exam or are you finally free?”

Laughing, Jasmine tosses her hair back as she adjusts her backpack. “You were my last final. I’ve officially done everything I need to for graduation. Now all that’s left is to walk across that stage this weekend.”

Smiling warmly, Magnus reaches for the stack of exams. “I hope Saturday is everything you’ve been hoping for-- graduation is a big deal and you’ve worked hard to get here. What are your plans?”

“I’ve actually been accepted to Cambridge’s graduate program for literature.”

Raising a brow, Magnus offers, “I’m sure Ragnor was thrilled to hear that.”

“Yeah,” Jasmine laughs. “He wrote one of my letters of recommendation. I’m not sure what he said but when I had my interview, they mentioned how effusive Dr. Fell had been.”

“Well, rest assured that Ragnor would only write what he believed. If you’re as good a student in his classes as you are in mine, then that praise was definitely deserved. Congratulations dear and best wishes for the future.”

Grinning, Jasmine gives a silly little salute. “Thanks, Dr. Bane. You’re one of my favorite professors here and I’m glad that I got to take this last class with you before I graduated.”

“Thank you, Jasmine. If you ever need another reference or letter please don’t hesitate to reach out,” he offers and sits back as she turns and exits the room, leaving Magnus alone with his thoughts.

She’d been a great student and a joy to have in class over the past few years. It’s always bittersweet when a student that’s earned Magnus’s respect and fondness leaves for greener pastures but there’s always another one waiting to take their place. Magnus has known and liked dozens of students over the years and some still occasionally email him, updating him on their life and career.

Filing the exams away, Magnus stands. Reaching for his coat, he shrugs it on before swinging his bag on his shoulder. The next exam block is in half an hour and as he exits the room, he sees half a dozen students loitering in the silent hallway, eagerly reviewing notes in a last ditch effort.

It’s cold outside, snow just beginning to lightly fall. He feels his phone vibrate in his pocket and sidesteps away from the main path as he reaches for it. He reads Alec’s confirmation of the time for dinner and sees that he has a few hours before they’re to meet at his place.

Walking across campus, the sky is a murky steel gray. Winter has come and with it perennial twilight even though it’s only four in the afternoon.

He finds Ragnor in his office and as he takes off his coat and hangs it up, Magnus sees the cupcake sitting on the desk in front of his usual chair. Arching a brow, Magnus slowly nears the desk.

Ragnor doesn’t look up as he waves a hand between the cupcake and where he’s standing. “It was buy one get one free and you know I like a good deal.”

“I know you’re appallingly thrifty if that’s what you mean,” Magnus retorts as he sits.

Picking the cupcake up, Magnus starts peeling the wax paper away. “Thank you, dear.”
Ruffling the magazine he’s seemingly engrossed in, Ragnor just mutters, “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Magnus laughs a little, shaking his head as he takes the first bite of the dessert, smiling as he realizes it’s his favorite-- orange cranberry.

Neither one mentions the plastic umbrella in the middle of it, declaring *Happy 30th Birthday* in colorful, cheerful script. Magnus can just picture it now, his best friend’s long suffering sigh that had accompanied the purchase.

The two of them chat for a little while, talking about syllabi for next semester and plans for the holidays. It’s hard to believe that it’s already December, yet another term under their belts.

Eventually, afternoon gives way to early evening and they leave campus, each going their separate ways. Burying his nose a little deeper into his scarf, Magnus rounds the corner and grins as he looks up and sees a figure walking towards him that he’d recognize anywhere.

Alec places a quick kiss on his forehead and Magnus hears him mutter under his breath, “It’s the only place not covered.”

Unlooping his scarf in the elevator, Magnus pulls him close. He places a kiss under his jaw before moving to his mouth. “Hello, darling,” he murmurs as they pull apart.

“Hey, you,” Alec replies easily and follows him into the loft.

Magnus changes while Alec falls onto the couch, immediately taking out his phone.

“Important business,” he calls out as he walks toward the bedroom.

“Not really,” is Alec’s answer and Magnus enters his closet, running a hand over a dozen blazers, trying to decide on what to wear tonight. He glances over at the end of the closet where a few of Alec’s things are hung. It makes him smile every time he sees the few outfits hanging next to his own clothes and he grins as he looks back at his section, refocusing.

“Is there a dress code,” he yells and hopes Alec can hear him from the living room. He hears a muffled no but he still decides to dress up a little, opting for a crimson button up that he leaves mostly undone, tucking them into black slim cut pants.

Heading towards his vanity, Magnus grabs a makeup wipe, taking off the bit of eyeliner he’d put on that morning. He works on his eyeshadow-- a shimmery gold-- and relines his eyes, opting for something a little more dramatic than he’d worn to work. Dusting highlighter over his cheeks, his hands hover over his jewelry, considering a dozen choices before reaching for the necklace Alec had bought him a few months ago. The pendant rests against his chest, perfectly framed.

Biting his lip, thinking, Magnus reaches for another piece that he hasn’t worn for awhile, slipping it in as he looks at the open door.

Ready, he gives himself a final once over before stepping into a pair of chelsea boots.

When he walks into the living room, Alec’s frowning, rolling his eyes.

“Everything okay?”

Eyes darting up to meet his, Alec hastily shoves his phone into his back pocket, lifting his hips to do so. “Yeah,” he answers. “Just my label being a pain in my ass.”
“So nothing new,” Magnus laughs quietly.

“Nope,” Alec replies, standing up. His eyes darken as he sees Magnus’s outfit.

Magnus stays where he is as Alec comes closer, as he wraps arms around his middle before ducking close and nosing along his throat. “I like this outfit,” Alec whispers.

“Thank you, darling.”

Smile widening, Magnus steadies them both as Alec pulls back to look at his face. “Ready for dinner?”

Nodding, they throw their coats back on and this time it’s Alec who’s leading them downstairs to where a car’s waiting.

Settling in the backseat, Magnus looks out his window as they pull away from the curb, letting his hand rest on Alec’s thigh.

“Have you been to Momofuku Ko before?”

“No,” Alec answers, letting his leg lean against Magnus’s a little more. “I didn’t even know about it until you mentioned seeing a review in the New Yorker.”

Turning his head to look at his boyfriend, Magnus smiles. “Well, then, thank you for making reservations. I hope you like it.”

“It’s, like, fifteen courses, babe. I’m sure I’ll love it. If not we’ll just swing by McDonald’s on the way home.”

Magnus is already looking away when Alec finishes his sentence. Watching the street outside, he does his best not to react. Alec had just just called the loft home. The word wraps around Magnus, warm and happy, and he bites back a grin. It’s silent in the car and Magnus resolutely doesn’t acknowledge Alec’s slip and Alec doesn’t say anything either.

There’s a tension to the silence, like Alec’s waiting for a reprimand, a sharp rebuttal, but Magnus is damned if he’ll give him one.

He does sweep his hand over Alec’s thigh, though, and breathes a little easier when Alec flips his hand over to that he can interlace their fingers.

They stay like that until they get to the restaurant. It’s a small place, only enough seating for a dozen people, and they’re shown to their seats right away.

The next few hours are easy and Magnus enjoys himself immensely. Each course is fantastic with fresh, inventive ingredients and the drinks just keep on coming. He’s pleasantly buzzed by the end of the meal.

The light is low in the restaurant and as he looks over at Alec, his heart squeezes a little painfully in his chest. He’s thirty years old and sharing a wonderful meal-- a lovely night-- with someone he loves.

It’s more than he had last year and more than he figured he’d have this year.

He’s so focused on Alec-- on the way his boyfriend grins over at him before he takes a long drink of wine, the way his hair is a little messy so that his fingers itch to bury themselves in the dark locks, at
how thoughtful Alec was to treat him to a dinner he’d wanted to try for ages-- that he doesn’t immediately notice the waiter standing at his side.

When he does, Magnus looks up only to do a double take.

Confusion gives way almost immediately to understanding as a small cake with a lone candle is placed in front of him.

The waiter acknowledges Magnus’s thanks and leaves without another word, leaving Alec and Magnus alone.

Magnus’s gaze is torn between the cake and Alec who’s smiling softly over at him.

“How did you know,” he asks, clearing his throat.

Shrugging, Alec merely offers, “When you found out about my birthday but didn’t tell me yours, I asked Cat. I didn’t want to accidentally miss it. I figured that since you didn’t tell me, you might not want a big deal made so I thought dinner would be a good compromise between too much and at least doing something.”

Reaching over the table, Magnus cups Alec’s cheek, bringing him close for a lingering kiss. “Thank you, Alexander.”

“Happy birthday, Magnus,” is the equally quiet reply and Magnus leans back in his seat as he looks at the cute little cake.

He closes his eyes and for the first time in over ten years, he makes a wish.

When he opens them a few seconds later, it’s to see Alec hastily lowering his phone.

Laughing, Magnus chastises him. “Really,” he asks wryly.

Unrepentant, Alec just says, “It’s your birthday. I’m entitled.”

“You’re entitled--” Magnus starts, mockingly indignant and he feels Alec’s foot nudge his own.

“Eat your cake, babe.”

The first bite is delicious and Magnus hums a little. It’s dark chocolate with a raspberry coulis and he eats almost half before he gives in to Alec’s pleading looks.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he says brightly. “Did you want a taste, darling?”

He feels heat slink up his spine at the look Alec gives him. “Yeah,” he hears him say and then Alec’s reaching over the table and pulling him close. He kisses him, licking into his mouth, sucking the chocolate off his goddamn tongue.

Magnus might make a noise, he’s not entirely sure, and he brings his free hand up to rest against Alec’s chest, stroking upward until he can curl his fingers into the hair at his nape, pulling him imperceptibly closer.

Alec takes his time, not in any rush to pull away and when he does Magnus whines faintly in protest.

He’s sufficiently distracted and he doesn’t react right away when Alec grabs the spoon from his limp hand and takes a frankly appallingly large bite from his cake.
“This is so good,” Alec mutters and Magnus just stares at him.

“Alexander.”

Alec hums a little as he reaches over and Magnus gives up, pushing the plate towards his boyfriend.

“Don’t you think it’s time we asked for the check.”

With a grin that’s a little too cheeky, Alec looks up from his dessert. “Why,” he asks idly. “Have you got something to do?”

Magnus just sends him an arch look and Alec laughs before getting the waiter’s attention.

Once the bill’s paid, they walk out, holding hands. Alec pulls him close to his side, arm over his shoulders, and Magnus turns his head so that he can kiss the sliver of his wrist that’s exposed to the chilly air.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get you a present,” Alec says, apropos of nothing. “Everything’s been so hectic that--”

Magnus stops him, raising a finger until it hovers over his mouth. “Please, don’t worry about getting me a present. This dinner was more than enough. You’re more than enough on a daily basis, darling.”

“Still,” Alec says, apologetic. “Nothing seemed quite right and I’ve just been so busy--”

Stopping by the car, Magnus pulls him close, cutting him off with a kiss that lingers far too long in the street. When he pulls back, Magnus is pleased to see that Alec doesn’t look capable of arguing with him any longer.

The drive home goes by quickly. Magnus is a little preoccupied as Alec leans into him, spending the ride paying special attention to his neck until Magnus can’t see straight, leaning against his side, head tilted up so that moonlight spills over his face.

The two of them make it to the loft eventually and Alec leads them to the bedroom. Magnus relaxes into red sheets as Alec takes his time undressing him. The whisper of clothing being removed the only sound in the room.

Alec kisses down his chest as he unbuttons the rest of his shirt and when he stops suddenly, it takes Magnus a moment to figure out what must’ve grabbed his attention.

“Like it,” he asks with a lazy grin, widening the space between his legs to make more room for his boyfriend.

“Fuck,” Alec breathes and then Magnus feels Alec continue his path, kissing down his stomach, nibbling across a jutting hipbone before he closes gentle teeth over the piercing at his navel, giving it a slight tug.

Magnus groans, fisting a hand in Alec’s hair, urging him closer, as he lets his hips roll up to where Alec’s stupidly close but still too far away.

Unbuckling his belt, Alec helps Magnus tug off his pants along with his underwear and then Magnus is naked with Alec still fully clothed over him.

He feels the scratch of stubble over the sensitive skin of his inner thigh and he shivers a little as Alec
bites down on the muscle there.

He pulls away for a moment and Magnus hears a drawer sliding open before Alec tosses lube and a condom on the bed.

Alec leans close and Magnus wraps a leg over his as they kiss. It’s strange to be so exposed while Alec hasn’t taken anything off but it feels so damned good. When Alec pulls back and urges him to his stomach, Magnus can’t stop the little grin comes over his face.

Wiggling his hips a little, finally getting some friction, Magnus’s breath catches as he hears Alec finally taking his clothes off.

And then there’s a long line of heat over him, pressing Magnus into the mattress. Closing his mouth on the juncture between his neck and shoulder, Alec lets his hands wander down to his ass. Magnus has no idea when Alec managed to coat his fingers with the lube but a slick finger eases inside and Magnus’s hips arch up to Alec as his boyfriend starts opening him with slow, incredibly thorough fingers.

A broken moan spills out of Magnus as Alec pulls his three fingers out, what seems like ages later. Everything’s gone a little hazy at the edges and Magnus rolls his hips up, trying to encourage Alec to keep going as he feels his building orgasm creep out of reach.

“C’mon, darling. You know it’s not fun to tease,” he mutters into his pillow, sagging into the bed when Alec, the sadist, does nothing but laugh.

Magnus tenses up a moment later, though, when he feels Alec’s breath ghost over the small of his back. “But it’s so much fun to tease you,” he replies with a quick nip on his ass.

Alec spreads him, exposing him to cool air and Magnus groans, something low and utterly desperate. “Oh God, Alec.”

He feels the rough pad of a thumb over his hole before Alec’s asking, “This okay?”

“More than,” Magnus gasps, answering almost before Alec’s finished talking. “Please.”

Without wasting any more time, Alec licks across the tight ring of muscle and Magnus swears he goes half blind at the first stroke of his tongue. Alec doesn’t seem in any particular hurry as he eats Magnus out and if Magnus had it in him to care, he’d probably try to tamp down on the noises that wrench out of him as Alec works his tongue into his ass, as he hears the little hungry sounds that escape his boyfriend as he closes his mouth over Magnus’s hole and sucks, as Magnus hears what must be the sounds of Alec working his own cock over, hips rolling into his fist.

Almost without warning, Magnus tips over the edge, hot and sudden. Alec licks him through it, easing up until Magnus collapses into the bed, feeling remarkably like jelly.

Alec kisses a trail up his back, nudging his legs wider apart, and Magnus feels the blunt head of his cock over his sensitive hole. A full body shudder wracks Magnus and his hips jerk up. He moans at the pressure and Alec’s teeth close over his shoulder as he guides himself in, working into Magnus inch by inch.

Sparks shoot up his spine and Magnus gasps a little as he squeezes around Alec’s cock, enjoying the feeling of being so fucking full.

Urging him onto his knees, Alec grips his hips as he pulls back slowly, almost until he’s out, before thrusting back in, in one smooth stroke.
Bracing his hands on the mattress, Magnus meets Alec’s thrusts and before he quite knows it, his second orgasm is hovering at the edges.

Alec drapes himself over his back and Magnus hears his sharp breaths in his ear as Alec hoarsely mutters, “So good, you’re so good. Shit, babe, it’s like you were made for me. Made to take my cock, made to love me.”


Alec reaches around, wrapping a hand around his cock, moving over him in perfect counterpoint to his thrusts. Magnus comes for a second time as his rhythm falters and then he feels Alec tense against him before he’s groaning long and low in his ear as he comes too.

It takes them awhile to get their breath and distantly Magnus wonders if he’ll ever be able to stand again.

Eventually, though, they do get out of bed. Taking a quick shower before climbing into pajamas and settling on the couch, Magnus turns the tv on to an old movie as they relax in the living room.

Alec’s a comforting weight on top of him and Magnus runs absent fingers through his hair as they watch tv. All around, this is one of the best birthdays he can remember and he knows he owes it all to Alec.

Alec takes out his phone before Magnus hears him scoff.

Stilling his fingers, he asks, “Something wrong?”

“Isabelle just texted me that she’s staying over at Maia’s tonight. Honestly,” Alec continues, “Jace has moved in with Clary and now Isabelle all but told me she’d be moving in with Maia soon.”

“What,” Magnus asks. “Maia and Isabelle are moving in together?”

Lifting up from him a little, Alec leans over him so that he can look at him properly. “Yeah? She told me last week that they’ve been looking up apartments together.”

Magnus’s mind goes into overtime as he considers what Alec’s just told him. He can’t quiet the thought that persists, though, knocking on his head a little too insistently.

“So,” he starts. “It’s just you now? That penthouse must feel pretty empty these days,” he teases.

Alec laughs a little, relaxing until he can brush his nose against Magnus’s throat. “Yeah, you could say that. We’ve lived together so long that it’s definitely going to be an adjustment not to have them there any longer. But they’re both happy and I’m happy for them. It’s definitely for the best.”

It’s quiet for a little while after that. Alec’s presumably focused on the tv, drawing little patters on Magnus’s side with a wandering hand, but Magnus can’t help but think about possibilities.

“Hey, Alec,” he says, breaking the silence.

“Yeah, babe?”

“I think I know what I want for my birthday.”

Straightening, Alec doesn’t stop moving until they’re sitting, facing each other.

“Yeah? Anything,” he promises, grinning.
Clearing his throat, Magnus reaches for Alec’s hand, sweeping a thumb over his knuckles in a little anxious gesture that he doesn’t even realize he’s doing.

“Well, it occurs to me that it might be lonely at your place now that your siblings are moving out. It also occurs to me that we spend almost every night together. If you put those two things together plus the fact that I’m hopelessly in love with you and I hope the conclusion--”

“Is perfect,” Alec says, eyes crinkling at the corners since he’s smiling so big.

“Yeah,” Magnus asks, gaze searching Alec’s. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to or like I’m expecting anything. It’s an offer, nothing more.”

“Magnus, are you kidding me? I love you and you’re right-- for the past few months, I’ve been here more than I’ve been to my own apartment.”

Magnus lets hope catch in his chest as he smiles a little, just a gentle curve of his mouth. “I don’t want you to feel like you’d be giving up anything. I know you love your penthouse and it’s so much nicer than my place. If you wanted to--”

This time Alec pulls him closer for searing kiss that makes his toes curl against the carpet. Magnus’s breathing is a little unsteady when they break apart a few moments later.

Resting his forehead against Magnus’s, Alec speaks in the space between their lips. “I’d love to move in with you, babe. While I like my apartment, it’s just a place. Especially now that Jace and Iz won’t be there, it doesn’t really hold anything important. Here, though? This is a home.”

“Our home,” Magnus whispers, looking up to meet Alec’s eyes. “If you want.”

“I love you, Magnus. I can’t think of anything I’d love more than moving in together. As long as you’re sure.”

“I’m sure,” Magnus says, no hesitation. He laughs a little, nosing along Alec’s wrist. “Half your shit’s already here anyway.”

Alec laughs too before he leans forward. Magnus lets himself fall back on the couch. They spend the rest of the evening talking about plans and Magnus can’t remember ever feeling so sure of a decision.

Magnus reaches out, frowning when his hand hits something. Blinking open bleary eyes, he lifts up to an elbow looking at where Alec should be.

Instead, he finds a note taped to something. Sighing a little, Magnus sits up and reaches for whatever it is.

Pulling the note from where it’s taped to what Magnus now sees is a CD in a plain, clear case, he reads the note.

_Magnus,

Happy birthday. Did you really think I didn’t get you anything?

P.S. You’re the only person outside of the production team that’s heard this. Management tried their damnedest to talk me out of this but I want you to have first access. You deserve to know the truth and know that I mean every word._
Suddenly wide awake, Magnus picks up the innocuous cd. He turns it over but the only thing that’s scrawled on the cover is *Album 7-- Feel Something*.

He throws the covers off and spends ten minutes running around his apartment looking for a goddamned cd player before he remembers that it’s 2018 and he hasn’t had one of those in a damn decade.

Remembering his laptop, Magnus hurries to his study, wearing just his boxers, as he slides the cd in. Almost immediately the first song starts playing-- he’s a little surprised to see that there are nineteen tracks in all-- and Magnus lets the notes drift over him, turning the volume up to its maximum.

He sits in his chair, closing his eyes as Alec’s voice comes through the speakers. It’s presumably the title track, the single he’d heard back in September. It’s familiar and it makes him smile, emotion clinging to him now that he has irrevocable knowledge that this song was about them.

It wraps around his heart. It fills him with love and he wonders how the hell he got so lucky.

There are songs that make him a little hot under his collar like *Black Magic* and *Crazy in Love* and *I’ve Never Loved This Hard This Fast Before*. There are a few songs that make Magnus wonder at the Alec whose on tour like *Better Man* and *Life of the Party* and *The Way I Am*. He makes them both a silent promise that he won’t let tour come between them whenever the time comes.

There’s a song or two that makes tears threaten to well up like *Worship* or *I Like Me Better* or *Wanna Be Missed*.

He listens to the album once through and then another. He lets the music sink into him and he knows he’s smiling too much, a stupid grin on his face, but he can’t help it.

Most of him that can’t believe that Alec trusted him enough to give him unfettered access to his album. He can’t believe Alec bared his heart to him. Magnus knows Alec’s music is so incredibly personal to him and he doesn’t take this privilege for granted.

God, he loves this man.

After listening through it twice, Magnus puts it on shuffle as he leaves his study. He goes back to the bedroom and picks up his phone from where it’d been charging overnight.

Unlocking it, he swipes over Alec’s contact information and brings it up to his ear. It only rings twice before he hears Alec’s voice, warm in his ear.

“So? What’s the verdict?”

Laughing, Magnus wanders over to his window, idly watching the people down below.

“You have to know I loved it, Alexander. Thank you,” he says quietly. “I never expected you to let me have early access to the album.”

“It’s only fair since the whole damned thing is about you,” Alec replies wryly. There’s a beat of silence before he tentatively asks, “It’s okay? It’s not too much?”

Shaking his head even though Alec can’t see him, Magnus’s answer is honest as he says, “It’s
perfect.”

Alec laughs a little. “Even track 8?”

Narrowing his eyes a little, Magnus goes back to his office, moving his mouse hurriedly to wake the screen up as he scans the track list. When he realizes what song Alec’s talking about, he barks out a laugh.

“Don’t get me wrong, it is explicit,” Magnus eventually says. His voice is low as he adds, “But by all means, darling, if that’s how I make you feel.”

Alec clears his throat. “Every word,” he murmurs.

Running a hand through his hair, Magnus tugs on the strands a little, trying to clear his head.

Conversation drifts to other things after a few more minutes, though Magnus knows that they’ll be talking about this tonight. He has a hundred and one questions he wants to ask-- when did Alec start writing about him? How is it possible that he can make Alec Lightwood feel so much?-- but he wants to do it in person.

Hanging up after their routine I Love Yous, Magnus heads to the shower.

Work stops for no man, no matter how much he might just want to sit and listen to his boyfriend’s album that’s all about him. Magnus spends most of the day on cloud nine as he works through papers and exams and entering grades online, all the while thinking about how to show Alec just how appreciative he is of his artistic talents.

For some reason, he thinks with a smile, grading isn’t quite as tedious as it usually is, not when he has Alec in his ears and in his head.
Chapter 46

“When you said it would take a few hours to get ready, I thought you were joking.’’

Alec looks up at Magnus, who’s standing by the drink cart with a martini. Careful not to move his head too much, he raises a brow. “Why would I joke about that?”

Shrugging a little, Magnus takes a sip of gin before wandering over to the couch. He lowers himself gracefully, crossing one leg over the other while he studies him.

“I’ve never known you to take more than half an hour to get ready. I didn’t know it took so much... effort to make you look so good on the red carpet, darling.”

Magnus’s voice is teasing and Alec laughs, shaking his head before wincing as the hair stylist pointedly shifts his head back into position with a harrumph.

“All the things you see on the red carpet is a carefully planned illusion,” Alec says dryly. “It takes a village, don’t you know.”

“I’m getting the idea,” Magnus replies with an arch look.

Looking up as the makeup artist nears, the room falls to its busy silence. There are muttered directions and the team surrounding Alec works like a well oiled machine. Hair finishes after another half hour or so but he’s not allowed to look at the mirror until his makeup is complete.

From the corner of his eye, Alec sees Magnus’s brows almost fly off his face as the makeup artist comes back to his side with an eyeshadow palette.

With a faint grin, Alec prods his boyfriend. “Yes?”

“I thought when you said the makeup team would be here at four, you meant— I don’t know. Foundation, maybe a bit of concealer. I didn’t expect actual makeup.”

Looking up at the artist’s instruction, Alec focuses on not blinking as eyeliner is applied to his lower lid.

“I wear makeup sometimes. It’s usually for work— concerts, award shows— but I’ve been known to occasionally sport some eyeliner when I’m in the mood.”

“You’re so full of surprises,” Magnus replies and Alec hears the smile in his voice.

He smiles a little to himself and the next little while passes in silence. Once his makeup is finished, his chair is turned toward the vanity that had been set up in their living room.

Leaning towards the mirror, Alec studies his image.

He likes it.

It’s nothing too brazen but tonight’s a big night and he’d wanted to add a little extra something for the Grammys. His eyeshadow is dark, smoky, and there’s sharp silver eyeliner complementing the black. It adds depth to his eyes and will go well with his outfit for the night.

Shaking the hands of the team, Alec heads to the bedroom and changes into his tuxedo. It’s one of three outfits he’ll wear by the end of the night. Reaching for one of two hangers, he looks up as
Magnus walks into the room.

“Getting dressed now, too?”

“Since you’re finally ready, I thought that was my cue to get dressed,” Magnus teases as he takes the other tux off the rack.

They turn to face each other and Alec stills, letting Magnus study his red carpet look with sharp eyes.

“So,” he asks, breaking the spell of silence that seems to have fallen over them. “What do you think?”

Humming a little, Magnus gives his face a thorough onceover. “I like it,” he says after another moment. “You’re certainly going to make an impression.”

“That’s the goal.”

They both change into their suits and Alec shrugs into his jacket as he looks up, the breath knocked out of him at the sight of his boyfriend in purple.

“That looks even better on you than it did on the hanger.”

Smoothing down his shirt, Magnus preens a bit. “It is my first awards show and I’m accompanying the Alec Lightwood. I have to dress my best.”

“You could be wearing a burlap sack and still look edible.”

Raising a brow, Magnus echoes, “Edible, huh?”

“Yeah.” Alec’s voice lowers a bit as he nears him, just to place a kiss at the corner of his eye. “You’ll fit right in.”

Pulling back, Alec turns toward the door as he looks at Magnus over his shoulder. “I’m gonna go out for last minute alterations. You still need to finish your makeup right?”

Magnus waves him on. “Yes, I do. I’ll be out whenever I’m done.”

Alec takes his cue, grinning as he leaves their bedroom. Magnus had done his hair and most of his makeup earlier. There were just a few finishing touches to complete before they were ready to leave for Madison Square Garden.

Leaving him to it, Alec lets the design team fuss over his outfit, making sure it drapes perfectly over his frame. It’s nothing wild-- a standard black tuxedo with black satin trim. While he’d gone for more colorful or interesting suits in the past, Alec hadn’t wanted anything that screamed statement this year. He was only nominated in two categories-- Record and Song of the Year, respectively-- and was going more for moral support to a few friends than any real hope that he’d win.

Plus, he was looking forward to bringing Magnus. When he’d offered his plus one to his boyfriend, he’d been a little hesitant. It was the Grammys, for God’s sake. There was no mistaking that if Magnus accompanied him then they’d be inundated with press and scrutiny. Still, Alec reflects. He was looking forward to tonight. They’d do a few dozen interviews, sit and relax for a few hours, and then head to the after party at Pandemonium.

All in all, there were far worse ways to spend an evening.

To his delight, Magnus had readily accepted his invitation. Alec had offered to get a team for
Magnus but his boyfriend had waved it away, exclaiming that he was more than capable of doing his own hair and makeup.

Alec had been beyond thrilled, however, when Magnus had let him take care of his outfit. They were both wearing custom pieces by Tom Ford-- and hadn’t those fittings been fun.

Magnus was a natural, following the designers instructions and they’d each went for styles that suited them. Magnus’s aubergine shirt had little embellishments with a textured black jacket that fit him like a dream.

Rolling his shoulders a little, Alec tries to release some pent up tension.

The past few days have been a whirlwind, what with rehearsals and last minute fittings and meetings with his label. Alec was performing his latest single tonight-- it’s been holding steady at number one since it’s drop back in the fall-- and hadn’t that been a delightful relief-- and his album is set to be released in just a few short months, with tour immediately following.

Ruefully reflecting that he’d had damn near a year to rest on his laurels, Alec knows that his life is about to kick back into high gear as he starts promo for this next record. After promo, he’s going to eat, breathe, and live this album as he tours for the next several months and while Alec’s ready to get back in the saddle, he’s a little wary, too.

It won’t be the first but it’ll definitely be a considerable adjustment for his relationship. Tour is grueling even when he’s enjoying himself, even when it’s easy. Alec has faith in them, though, that they can weather whatever life throws their way.

He has to, he thinks, or this thing is doomed before it even starts.

This performance tonight is a declaration of sorts. It’s his first real performance since early last summer-- damage control back in August doesn’t count-- and there are nerves he didn’t anticipate. This album was undeniably different to what he’s released in the past. It’s softer; it’s less gritty. It’s a love letter to Magnus, after all, and that’s far different than the songs he’s known for about partying and fucking and all around being the stereotypical elusive celebrity.

It’s him, though. It’s authentic as hell and Alec had been gratifyingly surprised at the reception the single had gotten. Released without promo, it’d reached number one in eighty four countries within the first six hours. It’s been at the top of Billboard since that first day and it’s been certified triple platinum in the meanwhile.

Not bad when this time last year, Alec had been feeling burnt out and damn near despondent over his writer’s block, over the pressure of performing when he didn’t know what his next step should be.

Laughing a little under his breath, Alec knows that he never could’ve anticipated Magnus and the effect he’d have on his music-- on his life.

Alec doesn’t notice as everyone takes a step back from him and he startles a little when arms reach around him, familiar in their familiarity.

“Where’d your mind go, darling?”

Shaking himself from his reveries, Alec smiles over at Magnus. “Just thinking about how this is the first Grammys I actually have a date.”

Watching as everyone finishes packing up, Alec hears his phone vibrate on the coffee table. Picking it up, he sees a text from Dave.
Taking a deep breath, Alec turns to look at Magnus. “Dave’s downstairs.”

Magnus reaches over like he can sense Alec’s nerves and it’s ridiculous because he’s Alec fucking Lightwood. He’s been to dozens of awards shows over the years. He’s intimately acquainted with the carefully erected facade, knows the ins and outs and the behind the scenes fuckery that they’re all plagued with and this should just be another evening where he networks and performs and loses himself in vodka and dancing at the end of things.

It’s not, though. It’s a declaration professionally but it’s also a statement on his personal life.

Magnus is going to stand next to him for all the interviews. He’ll be asked questions— and hadn’t that coaching with Lydia been fun— and the public will really see him for the first time.

And there will be judgement.

His appearance will be remarked on and so will his answers. People won’t see Dr. Magnus Bane, professor. They’ll see Magnus, Alec’s boyfriend.

Alec’s under no illusions that the red carpet’s going to be anything but exhausting.

Still. This is his job and it’s his life and for better or worse, Magnus has thrown himself right alongside Alec come what may.

Realizing that he still hasn’t answered his boyfriend, Alec looks up, smiling a little as he sees Magnus watching him with that patient look that sneaks under his defenses.

“Are you sure,” he asks one last time. “Are you ready to throw yourself to the wolves?”

Are you sure about me?

While Alec and Magnus have stopped hiding their relationship, they’ve been infuriatingly tight-lipped about it to the media. There may be pictures of them holding hands or enjoying brunch, but neither have said a word about each other since Alec’s little damage control tour.

It’s a new stage and as new phases always are, it’s nerve wracking. This is the last barrier between Magnus and the rest of the world and Alec doesn’t take that lightly.

As his eyes meet Magnus’s, he sees his real question is clear. But Magnus doesn’t pull away, doesn’t change his mind.

Instead, he winks, reaching a hand up to smooth down his lapel. “Don’t think you’re going to offer to take me to my first Grammys and then try to back out of it, Alexander. I believe I was promised the celebrity experience?”

Alec laughs, wrapping his arms around Magnus’s waist to haul him closer. He hears the closing of the door and knows they’re alone now.

“I am a man of my word,” he murmurs, nosing along Magnus’s jaw.

Without warning, Magnus is pulling back and Alec opens eyes that have fallen shut as Magnus reaches for his hands, intertwining their fingers before taking a step back towards the door. He watches as Magnus tilts his head in that direction, affection overlaid with challenge.

“Shall we?”
Alec follows eagerly and they go down the elevator, and Alec almost runs into Magnus when he stops abruptly in the lobby.

“Alexander.”

Humming a little, Alec looks up from where he’d been staring at his ass to see what must have caused such a reaction. He grins when he realizes.

“Magnus.”

He throws an arm over his shoulders, leading him outside where Dave is holding open the back door to the limousine.

Nodding in his direction, Alec urges Magnus inside. He’s bemused as he sees Magnus shake his head a little as he follows but Alec doesn’t immediately slide into the backseat.

Instead, he stands just outside of it, looking over at Dave.

“Think you’ll win anything tonight?”

“Nah,” Alec replies with an easy grin. “An Arrow in the Dark won its awards last year. I only have one song up for anything but I’ve been on hiatus so damn long they’ve probably forgotten about me.”

Dave scoffs. “It’ll take more than six months for the world to forget about you, Mr. Lightwood. Not with your date this evening.”

Leveling his driver with a look, Alec asks sotto voce, “How many reporters are gonna be on my shit list by the end of the night, do you think?”

Laughing heartily, Dave just shakes his head as he shoos Alec into the car. “Don’t tempt fate, Boss. Always go into things on a positive note, that’s what I always say.”

Alec doesn’t deign to answer to that-- he and Dave have talked shit about too many in the industry to give credit to his response-- and he hears his driver chuckle as he closes the door behind him.

Settling into his seat, Alec glances over to see Magnus giving him an appraising look.

“You don’t do anything by half measures, do you?”

“It’s the Grammys, babe. There’s no such thing as half measures.”

With a raised brow, Magnus replies, “You would know, I suppose.”

Reaching over, Alec lays his hand on top of Magnus’s for a brief moment before flipping it over and interlacing their hands. He brings their joined hands up and kisses the back of Magnus’s hand, just above his rings.

“How’d you know I was performing,” Alec asks with a little noise of indignation. He’d been looking
forward to surprising Magnus with it.

Magnus just sends him a deadpan look. “Forgetting that you’ve been oddly mum about how you’ve been spending your days for the past week and I’d have to be living under a rock not to hear the commercials on the radio and TV. They’ve listed your name along with half a dozen others set to perform tonight.”

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” Alec says glumly before looking over. “I’ll be gone about half an hour during the show between costume changes and the actual performance. Think you can handle things without me?”

“I’m sure I’ll manage and even if, for some reason the hot seat gets a little too warm, I’ll have Simon there.”

“Definitely,” Alec says. “I’m so glad they seated us next to each other this year. Simon hates sitting with people he doesn’t know and this way you have someone to talk to during the lulls.”

“I only wish Raphael was attending, too. That would’ve been too much fun.”

Alec just looks at him. “Something tells me awards show will never be Raphael’s cup of tea.”

“How right you are, darling. Raphael despises this sort of thing. Whenever Catarina used to talk about these events, you could just see his eyes glaze over in a combination of boredom and horror.”

Switching topics, Magnus asks, “Do you think we’ll see Catarina tonight? She told me Ragnor and she hired a babysitter for the evening.”

“I’d imagine. I don’t know where their seats are but we’ll make sure to at least say hi.”

Before Alec quite knows it, they’re slowing down as they join the line of other celebrities waiting to be let out. While the Grammys alternated between here and L.A., Alec was glad to be on his home turf for the night.

Seeing them creep up to where they’re to be dropped off, at the start of the press frenzy, Alec brings Magnus’s chin up, wanting to make sure this moment holds the gravitas he feels it deserves.

“Remember what Lydia told us,” he starts warmly. “Thankfully she doesn’t like to micromanage the entirety of my press but she doesn’t want us--”

“Revealing everything. Yes, I know. We can talk a little, throw a few details out there, but we don’t want to spill our entire story. I was listening, you know,” Magnus teases him.

Letting his lips tip up into a faint smile, Alec continues, “I’m not going to harp on your every word. You can say whatever you want and I’ll have your back but I want to know if there’s anything you don’t want me to say up front?”

Magnus shakes his head. “I trust you, Alexander. I trust that you won’t go divulging our personal business to the entire world. Whatever you let slip, I’ll support you, too.”

Alec’s eyes warm at his boyfriend’s answer and then Dave is pulling up to the curb and he watches as Magnus takes a deep breath before almost bracing himself.

“Hey,” he soothes, turning so that he can run his arms over his shoulders. “Whatever’s waiting for us out there, I want you to know I love you and I’m so incredibly proud to stand next to you tonight. You’re the only one I want by my side. You can’t fuck this up, babe.”
Looking up, Magnus meets his eyes. “Yeah?”

“Yeah,” Alec echoes on a breath. “I think it’s time we gave everyone what they want, don’t you?”

Alec’s relieved to see Magnus’s shoulders lose a bit of their tension and the grin at each other before Magnus is pulling him close for a desperate kiss.

When he pulls back, Alec opens his eyes and feels a little dazed at the sight in front of him.

“I love you so much, Alexander. Thank you for inviting me here, for thinking I’m worth it.”

“Don’t you know,” he asks softly, heart aching in the best damn way. “You’re worth everything.”

Letting the words hang in the backseat, Alec steps out of the limo. Almost immediately, he’s blinded by the flash of dozens of cameras and he throws them all an easy grin as he turns back to the car.

Holding out a hand, he leans close as he murmurs, “Out of the frying pan?”

He’s delighted as Magnus laughs, as he lays his hand in Alec’s. “And into the fire,” he agrees.

If Alec thought the cacophony at his arrival was loud, it’s nothing compared to the dull roar of the reporter’s crowd when they realize that he’s brought a date-- that he’s brought Magnus.

Sliding a hand around Magnus’s waist, Alec leans close to to murmur in his ear, “Let me know if it becomes too much, okay?”

Looking over at Alec, Magnus raises a brow. “I think you’ll find I can handle myself just fine, darling.”

Alec’s grin ratchets up a notch and then they’re in line for interviews. To his surprise, Magnus is a natural. He knows when to play coy and Alec already knows his boyfriend is going to make the morning’s best dressed list.

Some reporters ask evasive, pointed questions but Alec handles them like a pro, not giving Magnus any opportunity to falter as he throws out such riveting information like if Magnus was still working, if there was any hope for his fans or if he was off the market for good, or how they split bills.

Thankfully, they’re mostly done when Alec sees one of his favorite faces in front of them. Turning his head so that his lips touch Magnus’s ear, Alec says, “Our next interviewer is a friend. You can relax with her.”

Magnus nods to show he’s heard and then Alec breaks away from where they’d been holding hands for most of the press walk. He takes a few steps away to stand in front of a photo spot. He poses for a few moments, just him, and when he glances over at Magnus it’s to see his boyfriend smiling at him.

Throwing him a wink, Alec sees more than hears Magnus laugh and so when he turns back to the cameras, his grin is a little more natural-- real-- than they usually are during these sorts of things. Not wanting to hog the spotlight, though, Alec quickly gestures for Magnus to join him, holding out a hand.

Magnus goes to his side without hesitating, lifting a hand to rest it over his chest while Alec’s arm goes around his middle, pulling him imperceptibly closer.

As he stands in front of dozens of reporters and cameras blind them, Alec feels something settle over him.
This is his life. While he often enjoys awards shows, they’ve also become ordinary. A chore that needs completed. Alec’s been around the block more times than he cares to count and it’s all old hat to him. It’s just another day at work.

It’s different today. Magnus is the one standing next to him, looking over at him with warm eyes whenever they have a moment to breathe and he doesn’t look on the edge of panic. No, he doesn’t look like he’s in desperate need of an exit. He stands next to Alec and he contributes beautifully to soundbites that will be buzzing around the internet tomorrow. He’s his regularly charming self that Alec fell for so long ago-- that he falls a little more in love with every day.

Finally, Alec sees their future. He can see them next year, five years from now. Ten. He sees Magnus teaching and the occasional gala and forty eight hours stolen from jampacked tours just to fly home and see Magnus-- or for Magnus to fly to whatever city he’s in just to see each other.

It’s all so painfully mundane yet extraordinary that Alec can’t breathe for a moment. For the first time, everything seems not like a desperate wish but something they have a shot at after all.

He guides them to the next reporter on autopilot, shaking off epiphanies and he grins as he sees a welcome face.

He sees Magnus’s surprise as he leans in for a quick hug. “Evening, ladies.”

Laughing, Aline hugs him back. “Evening, Alec!” She pulls back and Alec doesn’t try to hide his smile as his cousin goes to hug Magnus next.

Magnus warms up quickly, staring over Aline’s shoulder with bemused eyes.

Shrugging a little, Alec says, “Did I forget to mention? Aline’s my cousin. She and Helen are my favorite reporters in New York.”

“Don’t lie, Lightwood. We’re your favorite reporters anywhere.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” he agrees easily and the next few minutes are the best so far. It’s far more relaxed than the other interviews and Aline knows what questions to ask and which to steer away from. He’s definitely a little disappointed when it’s time to move on.

Looking over his shoulder, Alec calls out, “Text me and we’ll get lunch sometime.”

“A double date,” Helen asks and Magnus nods with a grin.

“Count on it,” he replies and they hear Aline and Helen laugh behind them.

It’s not too much longer and they’re in Madison Square Garden. Alec’s just guiding them to their seating area when he hears someone shout his name and then Magnus is putting a hand to his chest to stop him.

Looking up, Alec scowls. “What are you doing here?”

Simon bounds up to them looking far too happy. He claps him on the shoulder before turning to Magnus to do the same.

“Hey,” he says. “I’m nominated for a Grammy the same as you tonight.”

Alec lets his expression ease into a faint smile and he doesn’t even grimace-- too much at least--as Simon pulls him into a hug.
“Nice suit,” he says, raising a brow at the maroon silk, but Simon doesn’t bat an eye, just smiles serenely.

“Nice eyeshadow.”

Alec barks out a laugh as he shakes his head ruefully, Magnus joining him as their hips bump into each other.

They walk to their seats together. MSG’s a dull roar as everyone socializes, as the fans talk amongst themselves.

He’s just about to sit down when Simon exclaims, “Wait!”

Pausing, Alec raises a brow. “Yeah?”

Waving at them, Simon says, “Let me get a pic of you two! It’s Magnus’s first Grammys and--” he throws a reassuring smile to Magnus as he continues, “I know how surreal it can be. Alec’s been to so many that it doesn’t even faze him anymore but you two will definitely want a picture to commemorate the occasion!”

Alec looks over at Magnus and they share a look before shrugging. They move until they’re standing in the aisle and Alec hands Simon his phone. Standing close, he’s smiling for the camera when something catches his eye. He turns to look at Magnus and he just can’t help himself.

He leans in and he’s smiling as he kisses his boyfriend. He hears Magnus make a sound of surprise, feels the faint hum against his lips, but he’s kissing back.

Just a moment and then Alec pulls back and he raises a hand to brush over Magnus’s cheek.

“Love you,” he says quietly, in the space between them.

“I love you, too.”

Abruptly remembering where they are, Alec turns back to Simon who’s watching them with a delighted gaze.

“I feel like a proud parent at prom,” Simon says, wiping an imaginary tear from his eye. “You two are just too damned cute.”

Wondering for the millionth time why he’s best friends with Simon, Alec tries to glare at him, though even he can tell there’s next to no heat to it.

They take their seats after that and Simon leaves them alone as he makes his rounds. Alec takes out his phone when it’s just the two of them and Magnus leans close as he starts scrolling through the pictures Simon had just taken.

There’s about a thousand and it looks like Simon had just pressed the shutter every goddamn millisecond.

They decide on a photo and Alec types out the caption before posting.

It’s a picture of the two of them kissing. The caption reads *everything’s better with a plus one.*

The awards start not long after that Alec looks over a few times to see Magnus taking every detail in. When an attendant comes up to him a little while later and taps him on the shoulder, Alec nods before turning to his boyfriend.
Not wanting to disturb everyone, he leans close, whispering, “Hey babe, I have to go get ready. I’ll see you in a little bit, okay?”

Magnus looks over at him, smiling a little before pulling him in with a quick kiss. “Break a leg, darling.”

Huffing out a laugh, Alec follows the attendant backstage. There, he’s escorted to his dressing room where he changed into his second outfit of the night. It’s just a black t-shirt under another black suit jacket with black leather accents. It perfectly complements his black leather pants and then he’s getting set up with his ear piece and mic pack.

Through the ear piece-- the custom ones he’d used last tour-- Alec hears the latest category announcement and listens to the pop star’s speech. He bounces up and down on the balls of his feet a few times before cracking his neck. He walks over to the stage and lets a dozen people fuss over him, making sure everything’s set as they adjust his mic and everyone rushes to their places.

He’s done this a thousand times before and he feels the familiar rush of energy flow into him. As nice as his break’s been, he has missed performing-- the rush, the heat, the energy-- and he’s looking forward to the next four minutes.

Hearing the celebrity who was announcing him, Alec tunes into her spiel.

“Our next performer is no stranger to this stage. He’s won eight Grammys, including last year’s Album of the Year for An Arrow in the Dark. That album would go on to win him three Grammys alone. The song he’s performing tonight is his lead single for his next album, expected this spring. Everyone give it up for Alec Lightwood!”

Alec grins as the crowd roars at him. Counting beats in his head, Alec looks up as the band starts playing the intro.

Since Feel Something is a slower song, it’s just Alec performing in front of a microphone. No background dancers or extravagant scenery, no one else except background vocals standing behind him. The lights are low, twisting shades of gray and wolf’s blue and Alec can’t see the crowd through the heat of the lights in his eyes.

So he closes them instead and sinks into a feeling he knows as well as breathing. It’s his first performance of anything new in over a year. There are always trials when performing new songs-- making sure he knows them inside and out can only go so far sometimes.

Luckily, everything goes wonderfully. He hits his notes and as the bridge comes around Alec takes his mic from its stand and pulls his ear plug out, wanting to hear the crowd without restriction. He loses himself in performing and it’s all so beautifully familiar. The heat on his skin, the feeling of thousands of eyes on him, the euphoria of doing what he loves.

This song packs one hell of a punch as well and as Alec’s eyes close for the chorus, it feels like the emotions are being ripped out of him.

By the time the last note rings out, the chorus accompanying him echoing in the arena, Alec feels a little wrung out. It’s a combination of not performing in a little while and the sheer feeling that grabbed his throat and squeezed for those few minutes.

Alec slides the mic back into its stand as the stage lights go out around him, leaving him barely visible to everyone. He still hears the cheers, though, and they light a fire inside of him.
He’s still got it.

Walking backstage, one of the managers eagerly takes his mic pack and any other tech. He grabs a flute of champagne and downs it in one go, relishing the muted burn of alcohol. He heads back to his dressing room and takes a look in the mirror. His makeup is remarkably intact and it goes with his performance outfit so Alec doesn’t deign to change. Instead, he runs a hand through his hair and with one last once over, leaves the dressing room.

It’s a commercial break when he slides back into his seat next to Magnus but his boyfriend barely glances over, all of his attention focused on something going on across the room.

“What’s happening,” Alec asks under his breath and he scowls as Simon reaches over and hits him with a hissed, “Shut up.”

Distractedly, Magnus replies, “A waiter spilled wine on an artist’s dress and she has to present an award soon. She’s giving him hell.”

Alec looks up and snorts softly as he sees who the star in question is. “She’s a bit of an ass. I wouldn’t be surprised if it was her fault and she’s blaming the poor guy now.”

Relaxing in his seat now that his job for the evening is done, Alec reaches over and rests his hand on Magnus’s thigh. He tunes out the drama on the side of the room and instead people watches. He sees a few friends in the rows around him and he wonders if he’ll run into any of them at Pandemonium later.

As a celebrity hot spot, Pandemonium was going to be busy as hell tonight. Alec couldn’t wait.

Still, there were a couple of hours left at this shindig. Catarina wins a Grammy for a song she’d written and recorded for one of last year’s biggest films and Magnus is the first out of his seat as he claps for all he’s worth.

Alec stands next to him and it’s a little different-- sure he has friends in the industry but no one he’s so close to besides Simon. It’s a nice feeling to know that the artist deserves every bit of praise and some more besides.

As they sit back down, the next announcer steps up to the stand. Alec mostly tunes her out but he shakes his head a little when he sees a snippet of the Empty Hearts music video.

“And the winner for Song of the Year is... Alec Lightwood and Simon Lewis: Feel Something!”

Simon catapults out of his seat but it takes Alec a second to realize what’s just happened. He looks over to Magnus to see him grinning, laughing as he claps along with everyone else.

It’s like time fast forwards and then he’s standing and pulling Simon in for a bear hug. Simon holds on tight and Alec knows that he’s not imagining the breath that sounds suspiciously like a sob in his ear. Alec goes to follow Simon to the stage but at the last minute, he turns around and grabs Magnus by the lapels, pulling him in for a bruising kiss. It’s only a second before he breaks the kiss. He winks at Magnus-- who looks a little dazed-- and then continues his path.

While Alec had been primary songwriter, Simon had a credit on the song. Greeting the announcer, Simon takes the Grammy and holds it up, everyone laughing at his unbridled joy. Alec lets Simon take over the acceptance speech. It was his first Grammy, after all. While he’d been nominated a few times before, this was Simon’s very first win and Alec is more than willing to take a back seat and let his friend bask.
Simon’s speech is a little rambling and a lot endearing and by the time he finishes there’s no time for Alec to say anything. He waves to the crowd, touching his fingers to his mouth and blowing a kiss for an exuberant, heartfelt thanks.

It feels like just a few minutes later that his next category is being called and he feels Magnus tense beside him as the nominees for Record of the Year are announced, his face showing on the screen with the other four artists.

And the truth is, while Alec had downplayed his chances to everyone else, he wants this award. He’d just made the deadline for this single to be considered for the 2019 awards season and privately, he thinks his chances are good. He hasn’t released a music video for the song yet-- he was waiting to drop it with his album release-- but even without one, it had been staying steady on the charts. The past five months have been good to that song and his optimism for this next phase of his career and he’d love to be able to point to something tangible-- like an award-- and know that he was on the right track, that something different could still bring him gold.

Alec lets out quiet breath as announcer fiddles with the envelope, seemingly taking ages to open it. He feels Magnus lean close, hand on his thigh, and he relaxes the tiniest bit in his seat.

His eyes close when he feels his boyfriend’s breath on his ear. “While I have every confidence that your name is in that envelope, I want you to know we’re still going to celebrate handsomely tonight, Alexander.”

Without quite planning it, Alec’s grinning at Magnus’s words and a second later he hears his name being called out from the stage.

Eyes flying open, his first sight is Magnus. His smile is quieter but no less heartfelt and this time around, it’s him who pulls Alec close for a searing kiss, running a hand through his hair for a moment that runs white hot before he’s pulling back and all but shoving Alec towards the stage.

Clearing his throat, Alec tries to clear his head and as he passes around Simon’s seat, he sees his friend giving an exuberant thumbs up and smiling widely.

Walking to the stage solo, Alec works on his breathing, trying to calm his racing heart. It’s always a rush to win something-- let alone a fucking Grammy-- no matter what Simon might think.

He hugs the announcer, shaking their hand, and then he’s holding the little gold statue of a gramophone. He looks down at it and then up into the blinding lights and cheering crowd.

Alec leans down toward the mic, still sporting a smile, and starts his acceptance speech.

“What an incredible honor it is to receive this award tonight. I honestly didn’t expect this even if I secretly hoped,” he laughs and he hears everyone echo that laughter as he continues. “Feel something is a little different to what I’m sure everyone’s used to from me. I’m glad you all like this new direction of my music and I’m eager to see everyone’s reactions when the album’s released in a few months. I’d like to thank my manager, Lydia, my team at Institute Records, my family for always having my back and-- one last person.”

Looking down, Alec gathers his thoughts before he lifts his head and makes eye contact with Magnus. His smile turns deeper, softer and everyone else in the room seems to vanish for a brief moment as he says, “He’s the reason that I’m holding this award tonight. When I met him, I’d just finished my world tour for An Arrow in the Dark and I was facing a turning point in my career. Truth be told, I was in crisis mode. And then I met him and he breathed new life into me and my music in a way that I never could have anticipated. So thank you, Magnus, for loving me and letting
me love you. I couldn’t have done it without you, babe.”

Alec steps back from the mic, raising the award in a salute of sorts as he clears his throat again. He heads to the side entrance of the stage, entering backstage where he takes a few press photos before he’s allowed back to his seat.

When he finally gets back to Magnus, it’s to see his boyfriend talking animatedly with Simon. Sitting down, Alec barely opens his mouth before Magnus is kissing him. Immediately abandoning any thought of talking, he raises his free hand to cup Magnus’s face, shifting for a deeper angle.

He doesn’t know how long they stay like that before Magnus pulls back. Alec looks up, catching his breath, only to lose it again when their eyes meet.

Magnus runs a thumb over his lip and Alec shudders.

“You really are extraordinary, aren’t you,” Magnus asks.

Alec’s voice is hoarse when he replies, “Every word, babe. I mean every goddamn word.”

He leans close and the kiss this time is softer, lingering. Alec gives up on paying attention to the show, clapping on autopilot when he hears everyone else do so.

His attention is far too full of Magnus to give a fuck about anything else.

Finally, finally, the show is over and everyone is escorted to their cars. There’s a bit of shuffling and they lose track of Simon-- though they do run into Catarina and Ragnor for a few moments waiting for their rides to pull up-- and then Alec and Magnus are climbing into their limo.

There’s an ice bucket there and Alec laughs when he sees what’s inside.

“What is it,” Magnus asks bemused.

“Lydia,” Alec replies shortly before he grabs two flutes. The bottle’s already been opened and he fills the glasses as Dave makes his painstaking way through traffic. “We have this tradition. Every time I win a Grammy, she surprises me with champagne for the ride to the after party.”

Magnus accepts his glass graciously, taking a sip while he eyes Alec over the rim. “That’s a lovely tradition. And definitely well deserved since you won not one but two awards tonight. That’s such an achievement, Alexander.”

Chuckling, Alec shakes his head ruefully. “I didn’t think I’d win either. Today’s turning out to be one hell of day.”

Magnus moves closer, coming to rest a hand on the side of his neck. “I’m proud of you, Alec. I know I’m a little biased but I love that song and you deserve recognition for it. You took a chance and-- well,” he trails off sheepishly. “I’m so happy that chance was worth it.”

Turning his head a little so that he can kiss the palm of Magnus’s hand, Alec sighs. “I’m happy you like it and that the world doesn’t hate it. That’s more than enough for me.”

“So the two Grammy’s aren’t really important?”

“Hey,” Alec says with a grin. “I didn’t say that.”

The two of them laugh, leaning into each other.
Traffic is brutal tonight, even for New York standards, and it takes almost an hour to get back to Magnus’s loft. Alec reaches for the champagne a few times, refilling his glass often since every time he looks down, it’s turned empty somehow.

He always tops off Magnus’s flute before his own and they spend the drive to their place talking quietly in the backseat. They can hear the radio playing in the front-- Dave’s always loved smooth jazz-- and it’s nice. Alec’s not already drunk, like he’s been known to be in the past and it’s nice, to be able to enjoy some calm in the storm.

Unlocking his phone, Alec sees a dozen texts of congratulations from his family and he laughs a little when he sees the dozen heart eye emojis accompanying Izzy’s message mentioning his acceptance speech. Opening Twitter, retweets a few links to news articles about his win and both he and Magnus making it onto the best dressed side of red carpet looks. He likes a few other tweets that are just fans talking about him and Magnus.

While there are a few posts that are bullshit, that are nasty and entitled and just plain wrong, there are far more people supporting Magnus, including one from a Twitter handle that makes him laugh out loud.

@prayformalec: omg did you see the way @AlecLightwood was looking at Magnus when he was talking about their first date? I got cavities just watching those two! And don’t get me started on the way they couldn’t keep their hands off each other djfhgsdjsdfkh

@Alec_komh: Holy shit @AlecLightwood always looks amazing but can we talk about MAGNUS!!! Can he p l e a s e **** **** ****

Shaking his head a little, he shows Magnus that one and they both laugh at his fan’s exuberant support.

They make it back to Brooklyn and get ready for the after party. Magnus changes into a sheer maroon button down that he leaves undone to his fucking navel. Over that, he’s wearing a dark blue jacket and it leaves his chest-- and most of his abs-- on display. Alec watches as his boyfriend goes through his jewelry, deciding on a handful of necklaces in varying lengths.

Alec, for his part, stays in the leather pants he’d worn for his performance. He just switches his shirt for a see-through black lace one with a floral pattern. He’d bought it ages ago but was never in the mood to wear out. Giving a mental shrug, Alec figures tonight’s as good a time as any.

Cleaning up his makeup a little, Alec before Magnus. He heads to the living room to wait and ends up standing in front of the drink cart. He pours a finger or two of whiskey in a glass, taking his time as he drinks.

“Ready, darling?”

Alec looks up but doesn’t say anything right away. Instead, he blinks. His gaze roves over his boyfriend and he swallows hard.

Magnus doesn’t seem to mind the silence. His mouth kicks up in a lazy grin as he walks over to him. Sliding fingers into the waistband of Alec’s pants, Magnus uses his free hand to snag Alec’s half-finished glass, swallowing the rest of it in one go.

He’s barely lowered the glass when Alec’s tipping his face up for a kiss. He’s dizzy with it, the taste of whiskey on Magnus’s tongue, the smell of his cologne, the sounds Magnus makes that he feels more than hears.
Half of him thinks about abandoning the rest of their plans for the night. His mind fills with images of stripping Magnus bare, laying him out on their bed, and spending hours trying to show Magnus how he makes him feel.

His rumination is fractured, though, as Magnus breaks the kiss, leaving Alec breathless and more than a little confused.

When he opens his eyes, it’s to see his boyfriend staring at him with amusement. “I do believe we have plans, Alexander. It wouldn’t do for us to get too carried away.”

“I think that’d be just fine,” Alec says, voice low in the quiet of their loft.

Magnus laughs a little before he brings Alec close for a smacking kiss on his lips. “Let’s go.”

Alec grumbles a little but it turns mostly for show as they head downstairs. Thankfully Pandemonium isn’t too far away and they’re pulling up to the front of the club a short while later.

Even through the blacked out windows, Alec sees hordes of paparazzi lingering on the sidewalk. The flashes from their cameras are a hundred starbursts and Alec rolls his eyes as he opens the door.

Almost immediately, the cameras turn to him. He ignores them as he turns back to escort Magnus out and without ceremony, he throws an arm over his shoulders, pulling him close to the side. Questions are shouted at him but Alec doesn’t even try to pick them out of the cacophony.

Nodding to the bouncer, there’s not a hitch in his step as the rope is pulled back to grant them access, allowing them to bypass the line stretched around the corner for those still waiting admittance.

The club is dark and full of flashing lights in a riot of color. He feels the bass in his chest and snags Magnus’s hands as he forces their way to the bar.

He’s immediately ordering half a dozen shots. Making way for Magnus, he hands one to his boyfriend and his gaze is struck by the way slender fingers pick up the shot glass, the way his throat works as he swallows.

They finish the shots in rapid succession and then it’s Magnus who’s pulling Alec onto the crowded dance floor.

The music is loud, drowning everything else out but the way Magnus feels against him. Lights bounce off highlighter, plays over his boyfriend until he’s covered in shifting shadows. Letting his hands rest on his hips, Alec pulls him closer.

He loses track of time quickly. There are more shots and the music doesn’t stop and Alec’s dizzy in a mix of low grade lust and top shelf liquor.

He knows people in the crowd, though, and he does rounds. Bringing Magnus with him, Alec introduces him to acquaintances and friends and-- to his surprise-- Magnus isn’t cowed by the dozen celebrities he talks to. He’s witty as ever, as irresistible as ever, and it’s a potent sight to see his boyfriend fit in seamlessly with another part of his life altogether.

Alec doesn’t remember quite how it happened, but the next thing he knows, he’s popping open a bottle a Dom Perignon. He has no goddamn clue where the cork is but it doesn’t matter. Bringing the bottle up to his lips, Alec drinks straight from the bottle before handing it over to Magnus who accepts it with an arch look, smug grin on his face as he tips it up and takes a healthy swig.

It’s all so much and it’s been ages since Alec felt like this-- like he was on top of the world, like
nothing mattered except right now, here in the moment.

He’s won two fucking Grammys— bringing his total up to ten— and his album has been sent off to be mastered. He’s at the top of his game with no signs of that changing anytime soon.

He’s so in love he doesn’t know what to do with himself. He’s in love with the man in front of him and it’s all so overwhelming.

Time seems to slow for an imperceptible moment. His mind is hazy, the only thought he can catch Magnus, and so he pulls his boyfriend in, sliding a hand to his back. Leaning close, he kisses the pulse at Magnus’s throat and tastes salt. He sucks a bruise or three along unblemished skin, losing himself in the warm scent that lingers there.

One hand brings their hips together while the other goes to Magnus’s nape. He moans low in his throat when his boyfriend arches his neck, granting more access, but it’s drowned out by the crowd and music.

Leaning back to admire his handiwork, Alec takes in blown pupils and the flush that rides high on Magnus’s cheek bones.

They grin at each other, heated smiles, and then Alec’s pulling Magnus with him. Away from the dance floor, away from most eyes.

They stumble down a dark corridor on the edge of the room and Magnus lets Alec guide him until his back hits the wall. Magnus is already reaching for him, pulling him close, and it’s a heady feeling to be the one he wants.

Magnus’s hips roll up to meet his and Alec’s gasp turns into a stuttered groan at the friction. Nothing matters so much as this and Alec knows he’s a hair’s breadth from coming in his pants.

There are hands in his hair, running through messy locks and pulling, just the tiniest bit, and it goes straight to his dick, leaves him feeling lightheaded and like he’s about to burst.

Still while this is far from the first time Alec’s had a hookup at a club, he doesn’t want that here. It takes infinitely more willpower than he thought himself capable of but Alec pulls back— almost immediately going back in when he sees Magnus, waiting and willing.

He ducks close so that his lips touch Magnus’s ear. He feels the shiver that wracks his boyfriend and grins.

“I think it’s time we headed home, don’t you?”

Magnus nods so fast he almost gives himself whiplash and then they’re both laughing as they stumble to the front of the club. They can’t keep their hands off each other and Alec finds that he doesn’t want to.

Pandemonium is still crowded and they run into more people than he can count. Finally, though, cool air wraps around them as they make it to the front entrance.

As soon as they have the space, Alec’s spinning Magnus around. His arms are around his waist and the only thing he knows is the man in front of him.

They kiss and it’s a mess, even as drunk as he is, Alec knows that. It doesn't matter though because Magnus is kissing him back and then they’re tripping on the sidewalk. Pulling back just enough for a desperate breath, Alec tries to gain his equilibrium. He sees the limo down the block and tugs
Magnus in that direction and in the back of his head he knows—*he knows*—that there have to be reporters around, that this will probably be plastered across the internet tomorrow but it’s just so good and Magnus is so hot and it seems a crime to think about anything else.

The partition is up when they fall into the backseat and Alec doesn’t waste time. Dave pulls away from the curb and they fall sideways on the seat, Alec on top of Magnus—and then they’re laughing. And it’s so silly and they’re so drunk but it doesn’t matter because Alec has everything he ever wanted and it’s all in front of him.

They pick up right where they left off in the dark of the club and Magnus reaches for his pants. With a broad, deliberate stroke along his cock, he takes his time unzipping Alec’s pants and Alec would glare if it didn’t feel so goddamn good, if he had the breath to do anything but chant Magnus’s name in an endless stream of *please and faster and fuck, babe, that feels so good.*

After moments of agonizing anticipation, Magnus’s hand finally closes around his cock and Alec groans harshly in the silence of the car. *Jesus Christ,* he thinks and then he’s not thinking at all.

He gets enough wherewithal to undo Magnus’s pants and then he’s reaching for a compartment on the side of the limo, breaking the kiss to glare at the space when he can’t find what he needs.

Magnus glares at him in turn and Alec’s breath stalls in his chest at the look, at the way his eyes reflect the muted light. Finally his hand closes around a small bottle and Alec grins sharply.

It takes Magnus a moment but when he focuses on the object in his hands he laughs, even as his legs fall open wider, one foot planted on the floorboard to steady them.

“Really, Alexander?”

His voice is breathless, teasing but his eyes are trained on him—on the bottle—and Alec’s nodding even as he flicks it open.

“Course, babe. Always be prepared, that’s my motto.”

Magnus laughs out loud but it turns into a long, drawn out moan as Alec finally gets a hand around him, now warm and slick.

They shove their pants and underwear down and when Magnus arches up, their cocks slide together. It’s messy and when they run over a pothole it’s downright hazardous but they just press together more, seeking friction and that overwhelming, scorching heat.

Alec comes first, pressing desperate fingers into Magnus’s hips hard enough to bruise and it doesn’t take more than a dozen thrusts before Magnus is following him, spilling across their stomachs.

It takes several minutes for them to catch their breaths, both of them gasping harshly in the backseat. There’s a buzzing under Alec’s skin and even though he knows the mess between them will be annoying soon enough, he’s perfectly content for the moment as he places kisses across Magnus’s chest, over his heart.

Magnus slides hands through his hair and Alec lets out a little hum of happiness and the gentle scratch against this scalp.

It takes herculean effort but they manage to eventually sit up. Thankfully, Alec really had prepared for anything and they manage to clean everything up and straighten their clothes remarkably easily.

Dave doesn’t get out and Alec’s grateful. They make their stumbling way out of the car. It seems like
they both want to be as close as possible and so they keep tripping over each other’s feet.

They fall against the back wall of the elevator eventually. Alec’s arm is over Magnus’ shoulder as his boyfriend leans against him and he turns his head, nosing along his hair before laying a soft kiss against his temple.

Everything’s hazy and slow. Looking through the balcony doors once they make it into the loft, Alec’s almost positive he can see the first traces of dawn in the dark sky.

His focus shifts as Magnus comes around to face him, smiling at him.

“Time for bed,” he asks lowly and Alec bites his lip at the promise in his voice.

Nodding, Alec follows him to the bedroom. Their clothes are taken care of quickly and then they’re falling into bed.

The energy from earlier is disappearing, being replaced by exhaustion. Alec’s eyes close of their own volition and he shivers as Magnus mouths over his collarbone, tongue dipping into the hollow of his throat.

He feels so close to falling asleep but he can’t, not when everything feels so good. Alec runs a hand down Magnus’s back, stroking his ass, urging him closer.

This second time is slow and sweet. Instead of frantic hands, there are lingering touches as the shadows in their bedroom grow shorter. Sighs replace groans and Alec feels like he’s sinking into the bed, like he could wake up at any moment just to discover everything’s been a dream.

The best dream.

He grins up at Magnus and sees the happiness that seems to be pouring through him in waves reflected in achingly warm brown eyes.

There are low words, murmurs they strain to hear. “I love you,” they both whisper and it’s quiet but no less profound, the way Alec’s heart surges in his chest.

Sunlight spills through the curtains when they finally fall asleep, wrapped around each other, a haphazard sheet pulled up to their waists.
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

Song mentioned in this chapter: Void by The Neighbourhood

Just a friendly reminder that I have a playlist on spotify titled HttBT and that if you wanna talk about this fic, I keep track of the #httbt tag on Twitter!

Happy reading!

Grabbing two flutes of champagne from a passing waiter, Alec holds one out for Magnus while taking a deep drink from his own glass. There are over a hundred people in the restaurant that had been booked out for his album release party.

It’s early June and the sun is shining brightly outside, no matter that evening’s growing later. It’s warm and Alec pulls a little at the collar of his shirt, desperately trying to calm the fuck down. Tonight’s nothing new. He should be happy, ecstatic, over the moon at the finish line that’s bearing down on him.

His album comes out tomorrow. A year of his life, captured in nineteen songs, released onto the public in just a few short hours. Just the thought has him taking a desperate swig of his drink, has him irrationally thankful for the open bar tonight.

He looks over to see Magnus taking an absent sip from his own flute as he studies the scene around him. It’s nothing extravagant. For his seventh album, the label had reserved one of the most popular restaurants in Brooklyn for his launch party. It’s casual with a dozen waiters making the rounds in the small space, hefting trays of appetizers, with the bar running along the back wall.

His family are milling about and he sees a few friends interspersed with other people from the industry. Lydia’s mingling somewhere with her fiance and he can just make out Jia Penhallow, the president and CEO of Institute Records, talking to Helen and Aline in the corner.

He and Magnus are to one side, just taking everything in, and Alec startles when Magnus slides an arm around his waist, squeezing just a little.

“What’s going on in that head of yours, darling?”

Looking up, Alec smiles as he makes out a few lines from I Like Me Better audible over the din of the crowd. His album’s been on repeat the entirety of the party and he tries not to think about it too much.

He’s been unsuccessful since they stepped foot in the restaurant an hour ago.

Still, he smiles at his boyfriend and kisses the side of his head, nose wrinkling a little as Magnus’s hair crunches under the sheer amount of product in it.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about, babe,” Alec tries to deflect and Magnus levels him with an unimpressed look.
“You’ve been tense since we left home. It’s like trying to cuddle up to a stick right now.”

Shrugging, trying to get rid of some of that tension, Alec scowls. “Is it hot in here or--”

“It’s just you, Alexander.” His voice softens a little as he adds, “Talk to me, Alec.”

Alec sighs, turning to look around at everyone. This is far from his first time at this sort of thing-- with a sardonic bite of amusement, he knows that it’s the seventh-- but it’s like a vise is gripping his throat. Eyes scanning the room, Alec takes his boyfriend’s hand and starts toward an empty doorway.

They’re stopped a few times by someone wrapping a hand around his elbow, by another calling out his name. Alec, of course, flashes his trademark grin and knows that no one sees the way it strains at the corners except Magnus.

There’s small talk and rounds of congratulations and when one of the record label execs speculates that projections have placed Feel Something on track to sell over a million copies in its first week, Alec’s grin grows a little weaker though he laughs along with everyone else and gives a sheepish shrug, merely offering, “Let’s hope so, Imogen,” in a light voice that doesn’t betray the sheer intensity of nerves that are digging their little hooks into his back.

Finally, they make it into the darkened corridor. A waitress passes them, hardly sparing them a glance, and Alec all but collapses against the wall, sighing out a ragged breath.

A moment later, his chin is being tilted up by a hand he’d know anywhere and he loses himself in Magnus’s eyes. He sees the warm concern in them and it settles something in him, those eyes that have come to mean home and safety and a world of comfort.

He watches as Magnus quirks a brow and then his eyes are falling shut as he focuses on his breathing-- deep, slow breaths to help relax his shoulders. The party is only a few feet away but it’s like he and Magnus are in their own little world right now.

Pulling him closer with hands at his hips, Alec’s eyes are still closed as he leans down, nosing along the column of Magnus’s throat where his scent is the warmest. Magnus, for his part, lets him have a few moments. He raises his hands until dexterous fingers can slide through his hair. A thumb sweeps along the nape of his neck and that helps ground Alec, too.

Like this, it’s like no one else exists and Alec can shut everyone else out. Like this, it’s the easiest thing in the world to pull back after he regains his equilibrium and meet his boyfriend’s gaze.

He clears his throat. “I’m a little nervous tonight.”

Humming thoughtfully, Magnus smiles a little and it reaches his eyes, sets them shining in the low light of the hallway. “Yes,” he humours Alec. “I’d picked up on that.”

“It’s just--” Alec breaks off with a frustrated sigh and his eyes fall to the front of Magnus’s shirt, a navy and gold button down with military accents. He trails a hand over the gold chain pattern and frowns. “This album means a lot to me. And it’s-- it’s different to anything I’ve released before. This isn’t playboy Alec Lightwood singing about one night stands on tour. This is Alec, singing about being in love for the first time. There’s a world of difference between this era and my last.”

Taking a shuddering breath, Alec raises his eyes to meet Magnus’s. “What if they don’t like it?”

While the single Feel Something had been on Billboard’s charts for weeks, Alec still can’t quite cut the doubt that’s been creeping up on him the past month or so. Once he’d gotten the album back,
mastered and packaged—a finished product—he’d started rethinking everything.

The past year has been tumultuous. Meeting Magnus had been the catalyst for so much and Alec had eventually thrown himself into production for his album, working like a dervish as he recorded and met with producers and artists and had regular check-ins with the label.

Perhaps surprisingly, they supported him one hundred percent. While his new style was a bit softer, there was an undercurrent of energy that he realizes now had been missing for awhile.

He felt renewed, energized. His music reflected that.

But it doesn’t mean that he’s not worried that fans will abandon this new style, the aching sentiment in his new material. Fuck but it’s nerve-wracking, airing his deepest feelings and thoughts and wishes for the world to hear and judge.

He’s startled out of his thoughts as Magnus leans in. He kisses him and it’s soft, gentle, and soothes Alec more than he thinks a simple kiss probably should.

When Magnus pulls back, his face is serious. “And what if they love it?”

Alec starts to scoff but Magnus holds up a finger to stop him. He’s struck by the gesture, the easy grace that imbues every movement Magnus makes and he smiles a little, entranced.

“Let me finish, darling. What if your fans—who love you and support you—see how happy this new music makes you and love it just as much as you do? What if this seems like a natural progression of your style and they love it just as much—more—than your older stuff? Have you stopped to think about that?”

Opening his mouth to reply, Alec abruptly closes it. He sees Magnus’s mouth twitch in bemusement and frowns.

“And if I’m right? If they think it’s too—what? Sappy? Boring? Different? And forget about the fans for a minute. What about the critics? The press? What if they say I’ve gone soft, that I took a chance and it backfired stupendously? I could be staring down at the implosion of my career, Magnus. This could be the end.”

Magnus shrugs, leaning close, pressing Alec against the wall. “Forgetting for a moment that you have the tendency to be just the tiniest bit dramatic, so what? For sake of argument, what if all of that comes true? What if your fans hate it and the magazines declare this album to be a goddamn catastrophe of heretofore unseen proportions? Will that make you hate the album? Will it turn your own opinion on the record?”

Alec takes a deep breath as he digests Magnus’s words. He knows the answer and it’s a little terrifying that he doesn’t even have to think about it. “No,” he replies hoarsely, voice sure. “I made this record after suffering the worst writer’s block of my career. I wrote that album for you, because of you. I’ll never regret writing those songs or letting the world know just how much you mean to me. I can’t, not when it’s become a love letter to you.”

Magnus grins softly at the words, ducking his head to hide his reaction. Alec doesn’t want that, though and he reaches out, lifting Magnus’s chin with a finger.

“I love you, you know that?” His voice is a whisper between them and his heart feels so full that it’s a wonder it doesn’t burst out of his chest, it aches so much.

“I do,” Magnus says, laughing a little as he nips a quick kiss to Alec’s hand. “And I hope you know
that love is returned in spades, Alexander.”

Alec answers on a breath. “I do,” he echoes before sighing. “I love when you call me that,” he
confides, voice low as he lets his head fall against the wall, tilting it to the side as Magnus starts
kissing along his throat.

“What,” Magnus laughs, nibbling down the column of his throat. “Alexander?”

“Yeah,” Alec gasps. “No one else calls me that except you. It drives me crazy.”

“Well in that case--”

Whatever Magnus was going to say is cut off as Alec turns and kisses the words right from his lips.
Whatever worries and anxieties have been plaguing him disappear when they’re like this, close
enough to touch, to block everything else out.

He hears the breaking of a glass that comes from the kitchen down the hall and the raucous crowd in
the restaurant. This is an in-between space, though, a moment stolen from everything else.

Losing himself in Magnus, it’s not a heat that burns. It simmers, low in his gut, and distantly, Alec
knows he’d be content right here for an eternity, kissing Magnus, feeling the shift of muscle under
his hands, the dig of fingers into his own hips.

Breath leaves him in a thready moan as Magnus rests a hand along his neck, on his jaw to change the
angle, to deepen the kiss. His mind grows hazy and God, he loves this, wants nothing more than to
sink into this feeling forever--

“Yo, cut it out, bro! They need you up front.”

Breaking the kiss, Alec’s eyes fly open. Magnus’s labored breathing is harsh in his ear and he knows
he’s not faring any better.

All of a sudden, it’s like coming up from water, from almost drowning. Noise fills his ears and seems
louder, more grating than it was before. He meets Jace’s eyes and scowls.

“Fuck off, Jace.”

Chortling, Jace just raises his brows along with his hands in a surrendering gesture. “Don’t shoot the
messenger. It’s time for you to give a speech, Mr. Bigshot.”

Alec doesn’t let up on his glare and Jace just snorts and points a finger in his direction. “That’s what
you get for all those times you’ve walked in on me and Clary. Trust me, I’d bleach my eyes if I could
bro.”

Turning to leave, Jace looks over his shoulder and even from here, Alec can see the glee in his eyes
as he points to his own neck. “Might want to cover that mark up, though.”

Laughing to himself, he leaves without another backwards glance and Alec groans as he falls against
the wall. Magnus is a steady present in front of him and when he looks up, he sees his boyfriend
wince.

“I may have gotten a little carried away,” Magnus admits as he eyes Alec’s neck. “Oops.”

Rolling his eyes, Alec straightens as he runs his hands down Magnus’s arms until he can lace their
fingers together. “Really, babe?”
“You’re just too damned irresistible, Alexander.”

Growling a little, Alec leans close for a searing kiss before pulling back a bare second later. “You think you’re so funny, don’t you?”

Shrugging, Magnus grins coyly. “I’m sure I have no idea what you’re talking about, darling.”

Alec huffs out a laugh, shaking his head. “Whatever you say.”

Squeezing his hands a little, Alec takes a deep breath before releasing his grip. They take a few seconds to straighten up their appearance as best they can and Alec gives a little mental shrug and an internal fuck it to whatever the hell Magnus had done to his neck.

The next couple of hours go by quickly. Alec doesn’t know how, but he feels remarkably steady as he gives a little speech, thanking everyone for coming tonight to support him and his music. He gives special thanks to the label, to the producers and other crew and technicians that helped make this album.

He performs a couple of songs on a little stage that’s been set-up. Slinging his guitar over his shoulder, Alec sings a handful of songs from Feel Something and it eases something else in him.

The crowd sings along to the choruses after the first time or two and he doesn’t see anyone walk out so maybe he’ll avert complete disaster after all.

Taking Magnus’s hand, they make the rounds. He introduces his boyfriend to Jia and they spend a few minutes talking to Lydia and Catarina and Ragnor and Simon. Raphael is a silent sentry beside him but Alec sees the way he leans into Simon’s touch when he throws an arm over his shoulder and grins a little into his drink.

The night is just starting to wrap up, the waitstaff starting to dwindle, people starting to leave, when Alec announces that he’s going to the bar to get a refill. He and Magnus have been talking to Jace, Izzy, and their dates for the last little bit as everyone retreated to their friends and he wants one last drink before it’s time to leave.

“I’ll go with you,” Isabelle says easily and pulls away from Maia with a quick kiss and a warm smile.

Making their way toward the bar, Alec leans against it as he waits to be served. Isabelle mirrors his stance, resting her elbows on the dark wood, shoulders touching.

“So,” she starts and Alec looks over at his sister to see her looking uncharacteristically nervous.

“So,” he echoes with a raised brow, nudging her shoulder with his own.

He’s treated to exasperated laughter and then Izzy’s shaking her head, clearly impatient and self-deprecating.

He watches as she takes a deep breath before turning to look at him, trepidation clear in her eyes along with certainty.

“I have something to tell you.”

Alec doesn’t say anything, merely turns until he’s facing her, making sure she knows that he’s given her his undivided attention.

“I’ve decided to stay in New York.”
Frowning a little, Alec’s confused for a few seconds before Isabelle clarifies, “For good.”

“For good,” he repeats before his eyes widen. “You’re quitting modeling?”

Isabelle shrugs and picks at a nonexistent chip in the bar’s wood. “I’m actually going back to school in the fall?”

She looks up and doesn’t give Alec a chance to respond as she continues in a rush, “I’m not getting any younger and I’ve managed to save quite a bit of money over the years. Modelling always was just something I sort of fell into and while I’ve enjoyed it a lot, I think it’s time for a change now. You know that I’ve always wanted to go into medicine and I was thinking that—”

“Now’s the perfect time,” Alec says with a grin rapidly spreading across his face.

He pulls her into a hug. “That’s great, Iz! I’m so happy for you.”

Pulling back, Isabelle looks up at him. “Yeah?”

“Of course,” he replies. “You always were a science nerd,” he teases and he gets to watch as she snorts and pokes him with a sharp nail.

“And you were a literature nerd, you big dork.”

The bartender comes over at that moment and they order their drinks—Alec getting Magnus a refill too—and as they wait for them to be made, the silence is comfortable.

“What made you decide to stop now?”

Isabelle shrugs but he catches the look she throws behind her and the look her girlfriend returns in spades. When Izzy looks over at him a few seconds later, there’s a warmth to her happiness that he’s getting used to seeing lately.

“I’m happy here. I’m tired of spending so much time away from home.” _Away from Maia_. She doesn’t say it but it’s clear in the way she smiles, the way her hand trails over the bracelet that was a birthday present from the woman in question.

“You’ve applied somewhere?”

“I’ve been accepted to NYU,” Isabelle confirms. “I know I’m older than most freshman but my plan always was college eventually. I’m excited for this next chapter, hermano. Really excited.”

Nodding his thanks to the bartender who drops off their drinks, Alec raises his glass towards his sister with a mile-wide smile. “I’m excited for you, Iz, and really, really proud of you. Happiness looks good on you.”

Iz raises her own drink up to meet his in a toast and then she’s surprising him by setting her drink down and stepping close. She wraps her arms around him, holding tight, and rests her head against his chest in a move that’s achingly familiar from when they were teenagers, so much younger and unsure about their future.

Kissing the top of her head, Alec holds her just as tight and they spend a moment or two just like that, frozen in time.

Eventually, Isabelle steps back and laughs a little. They both ignore the way she raises gentle hands up to wipe under her eyes.
“Maia has an early shift tomorrow, so we need to be heading home. I’ll see you tomorrow night, right?”

“Right,” he confirms and then Isabelle is sending him one last smile before downing the rest of her drink and making her way over to Maia.

Everyone else leaves shortly after and then it’s just Alec and the waitstaff.

Magnus joins him, reaching over for his martini, downing it in a few efficient swallows. He looks over at Alec, running a hand through his hair before asking, “Ready to blow this popsicle stand?”

Alec laughs before wrapping an arm over Magnus’s shoulders and hauling him close for a quiet kiss against his temple.

“Yeah,” he breathes. “Let’s go home.”

Less than an hour later, Alec turns his key in the lock and they enter the loft. The city’s visible through the french doors and it makes something ache in his chest.

Magnus heads towards their bedroom to change but Alec doesn’t follow him. No, instead he wanders over to the piano. It’d been a bitch to move from his penthouse and he’d had a dozen heart attacks as he’d overseen the movers try to wrestle the thing through the door but any home of Alec’s couldn’t be complete without his Steinway.

One hand lifts the cover of the keys while the other undoes a few buttons on the shirt he’d worn tonight. Settling onto the piano bench, Alec plays a few keys aimlessly before finally picking out a tune.

It’s a slow song that hadn’t made it onto this record but Alec thinks it’s already a strong contender for his next. He barely has lyrics, humming scarce words under his breath and finally his shoulders relax as he loses himself in the music, the slow melody, the chords he already knows by heart.

And now I need you to feel the vibe
I need you to see the point
I need you to feel alive
I need you to fill the void

Eyes closed, Alec still doesn’t startle as arms wrap around his shoulders. His hands don’t stop finding their meandering way around the keys as Magnus leans close.

Shivering as he feels his breath against his ear, Alec smiles a little as Magnus says, “Come to bed, darling.”

He’s shaking his head before Magnus is finished. “I can’t, babe.”

Making room for Magnus on the bench, Alec slides over and looks up at his boyfriend. The sight eases his heart. Magnus has taken his makeup off, changed into a pair of pajama pants that hang low on his hips with a matching robe thrown on. His hair is flat, eyes betraying the late hour.

Turning back to the piano, Alec looks down at rows and rows of black and white. His fingers rest against the keys but he doesn’t press any, content for a moment to soak in the silence between them before breaking the spell that seems to have fallen over the living room.

“It’s the night before my album drops. I always stay up-- sometimes until dawn-- to read first reactions.”
“Refreshing your Twitter feed every millisecond,” Magnus breaks in, smiling a little.

Looking over at him, Alec shrugs. “Each record is a piece of me thrown into the world. I can’t ever sleep without knowing what everyone thinks. For better or worse, I’m an artist. An entertainer. I need to see what public consensus is before I can rest.”

Magnus doesn’t say anything for a moment. His expression is thoughtful as he straightens, resting his hands on some keys next to Alec. “Teach me to play, then.”

“What?”

“If we’re not sleeping tonight, we might as well be productive.” With a quick glance at the clock, Magnus continues, “We have a couple of hours until midnight. So. I do believe I remember a promise to teach me to play Yankee Doodle one day. What do you say?”

Alec just stares at his boyfriend a minute before he laughs and it’s a little breathless. All of it’s overlaid with relief, though, and he’s so goddamned grateful that he’s found someone who recognizes his little ticks but indulges him anyway.

The light in the living room is low, a single lamp lit near the couch. Moonlight fills the rest of the living room as Alec teaches Magnus a song or two. Magnus, for all his achievements, is decidedly not musical in the slightest though he gives it his best effort.

They’re laughing as Magnus finally manages to pick his way through Mary had a Little Lamb, slow but competent enough given the amount of practice he’s just had.

As he listens to Magnus snort a little, inelegant but charming all the same, Alec tries to imprint this moment into his mind. It’s one of dozens that he’s trying to remember. There have been so many firsts over the past year and he never saw any of them coming.

He wants to make sure he doesn’t miss a moment.

Looking over at his boyfriend, his heart ache, chest shuddering under the onslaught of emotion. It’s the night before his career changes once more. There’s always another era, another mountain to climb that seems infinitely more challenging than the last. This time around, he has Magnus.

They have each other.

Seeing the slightest bruising under Magnus’s eyes, Alec’s lips quirk up a little before he’s standing and reaching for his boyfriend. Interlacing their hands, he guides them to the bedroom and urges Magnus to lay down.

Alec lays down next to Magnus, intending to stay put just long enough for his clearly exhausted boyfriend to fall asleep. There’s no way he’ll be able to sleep when his album is due to drop in less than an hour. He needs to be on the forefront of reaction, wants to engage with his fans who will no doubt be tweeting at 12:01am with their brutally honest, endearingly intense opinions.

Magnus is a long line of warmth along his side and when he hums a little, clearly almost asleep, and rests his head on Alec’s chest, Alec closes his eyes at the feeling.

Five minutes, he gives himself and relaxes deeper into their sheets.

When he wakes up in the morning, bright sunshine spilling across his face, it’s to an empty bed.

He hears Magnus padding around the kitchen and smells coffee strong enough to kill a man.
Throwing the sheets off, he rubs a hand over his face while the other reaches for the phone he’d left charging on his nightstand. His movements are a little jerky, adrenaline rushing through him.

There’s a Google Alert pending on his notification bar and when Alec clicks on it, the breath leaves his body for one dizzying moment.

*Feel Something, Alec Lightwood’s seventh studio album, became available at midnight EST. It’s reached number one in 89 countries.*
*Last updated one hour ago.*

Closing his eyes, Alec grips his phone in a tight fist and lets his head fall. He feels like a puppet whose strings have been cut, relief dizzying as pride surges in his chest.

*Fuck.* He’d done it.

Hearing a noise, Alec’s eyes fly open as he turns his head to see Magnus leaning against the door jamb looking adorable rumpled, sporting a mile-wide grin.

“Looks like you haven’t tumbled down from your pedestal since you fell asleep.”

“No,” Alec rasps and he can feel the tears welling as he smiles, as his laughter echoes in their bedroom. “Number one album, babe. I’ve got the number one album in the whole fucking world right now.”

Pushing away from the doorway, Magnus ambles over to his side of the bed. Straddling his hips, he settles against Alec.

Alec’s hands automatically go to his waist, securing him, while Magnus cups his face. Leaning down, he kisses Alec’s forehead before pulling back to meet his eyes.

“You did it, Alexander, and I’m so proud of you.”

Surging up, Alec kisses him and it’s a desperate thing, full of joy and bone-jarring relief. Full of so much love that he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

When he twists, pushing Magnus onto his back in their bed, Magnus’s laughter rings out. They pull each other closer, lose themselves in the heat of the moment.

Days later, Alec gets the call that his album has exceeded all expectations, selling a record-breaking 2.6 million records in its debut week.

The first person he tells is Magnus.
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Endless thanks to Elle (ByTheAngell (SomeLittleInfamy) on ao3!) for being so supportive throughout this story:) I don’t know what I would’ve done without you being willing to read through my work and talk through things with me and reassure me when my head was a mess over my writing and this story! She’s so lovely and I’d highly encourage everyone to check her out!

Songs alluded to this chapter: Hey Ma Look, I Made it by Panic! at the Disco and If I Can't Have You by Shawn Mendes

Alec looks over as the door to his dressing room opens, smiling as his boyfriend pokes his head in.

“Hey, you,” Magnus says as he kicks the door closed.

“Hey, yourself. How are things out there?”

Setting his drink down on the vanity, Alec hears the tinkling of ice against the glass as Magnus wraps his arms around his neck from behind. Leaning down until their cheeks brush, he turns his head a little so that he can lay a kiss over Alec’s jaw.

“Last I saw, the crowd had started spontaneously singing one of your songs. Chocolate Raspberry, I think?”

Alec smiles a little, just a tilt of his mouth that betrays his endless relief and gratitude. “I always love when they do that.”

“It gave me chills,” Magnus agrees. “Thousands of people singing something you wrote acapella is a little eerie.”

“You never get used to it,” Alec says softly and there’s something there, behind the words, lingering in the undertones so that he’s not surprised when he sees Magnus’s eyes sharpen in the mirror.

“And how are things in here, Alexander?”

Alec doesn’t say anything for a moment, instead taking the time to look at the image the two of them present in the vanity’s mirror. So close they’re touching, Magnus’s hair tickling his ear, his boyfriend wrapped around him with a warmth that makes him shiver.

His mouth upturns slowly until he’s grinning, until his eyes crinkle at the corners in a hint of the laugh lines that will start forming in just a few years.

“We’re pretty damn good, babe.”

He’s gratified to hear Magnus snort out a laugh as his arms tighten around Alec’s neck.

“Well, I’m happy to hear that, darling. I was a little worried.”
Shrugging a little, Alec swivels his chair around until he’s facing Magnus, bringing him in until he’s between spread thighs. With fingers hooked into his belt loops, Alec tugs him closer.

“I’m always a little sentimental before my first show of the tour. It never gets old, you know? Sorry if I worried you.”

Magnus waves that away with a quiet smile. He reaches out a hand, sweeps a thumb over Alec’s cheek before cupping his face. “No need to apologize, I assure you. I’m just happy to see that you don’t appear to suffer from stage fright.”

Alec laughs. “No, I’ve never really been one to get nervous in front of crowds-- and good thing too. I had my meet and greet and soundcheck a couple of hours ago and everyone was friendly and excited. It helped temper any nerves that may have cropped up anyway. No, I was just thinking about the past year-- the past decade since my career took off.”

“Good things I hope?”

“The very best,” Alec assures him. His gaze drops down to the mostly undone buttons of Magnus’s shirt, to the bare skin visible between silk. He raises a brow as he laughs to himself.

“Did you know that I’ve ripped my pants on stage before? And I fell once-- well, twice,” Alec corrects with a grimace. “It was raining and the stage was slick as hell. My ass was bruised for a week.”

“Poor Alec,” Magnus drawls, reaching out with his other hand to rest against his chest. “However did you recover?”

Alec just sends him a droll look. “I laughed it off and hobbled over to the mic stand. I stayed in the same spot pretty much the entire concert. Walking hurt too much.”

“At least it’s sunny today, not a cloud in the sky.”

“Yeah,” Alec agrees. “But that just means it’s a hundred degrees and when the stage lights go up, it’s going to feel like I’m boiling.”

“It is summer in New York, darling.”

Huffing out a laugh, Alec just replies, “Hazards of the job, I suppose.”

Silence falls over them and while Alec can hear the shout of his techs out in the hallway, in his dressing room it’s a goddamn oasis of tranquility. While Alec was always more than willing to help out-- he was a very small piece of the performance, after all, even if he was the most visible-- he was usually left alone before the concert to get ready, relax, have a drink with some friends.

It leaves a lot of room to think.

They’ve been skirting the topic for ages, it seems. It’s been almost two months since his album dropped back in June and Alec had watched as the start date for his tour grew closer and closer with anticipation and dread.

Tonight was a home show in New York to kick off his tour. The first date of over a hundred. The first night in a long line that wouldn’t wrap up for over six months.

As Alec looks up and meets Magnus’s eyes, he sees that knowledge there, the grim reality.
“So,” Alec starts, tongue darting out to run over his bottom lip. “Tonight’s the night, huh?”

Magnus smiles though it doesn’t quite manage to reach his eyes. “It is and I’m so incredibly proud of you.”

Alec relaxes in his seat a little before he reaches up and grabs Magnus’s hands, intertwining their fingers. He squeezes a little before tugging Magnus closer until he gets the hint and straddles him.

Raising their hands up to his lips, he kisses the back of Magnus’s hands. “How are you feeling,” Alec asks and he tenses a little as he waits for an honest answer.

Magnus hums a little and this time when he smiles, it’s real even if it’s a little wan. “While I’m looking forward to seeing you perform, I’ll admit it’s a little bittersweet.”

“Yeah,” Alec breathes, tightening his hands on Magnus’s hips. “It’ll be an adjustment.”

Magnus’s hands go into his hair, careful not to muss too much, as he says, “There’s always texting and face time and who knows,” he teases, “Maybe I’ll even be able to visit you for a few dates during the fall semester.”

“I’m in Amsterdam and Germany during Columbia’s fall break,” Alec replies immediately and his grin turns smug as his boyfriend just stares at him. “What,” he asks coyly. “So I did a little research when I got the finalized itinerary.”

Magnus shakes his head a little, bemused, before tilting his face up with a finger under his chin. He leans down and kisses Alec and he breathes easier at the gesture.

“Well, then,” he says softly. “I’ve always wanted to visit Berlin and the Netherlands.”

He leans down a little more and Alec’s eyes sweep shut as their foreheads touch. They breathe each other in and distantly, Alec knows that he has to start getting ready in earnest for his show but he’s loathe to do anything that will take him away from Magnus. This is the first of three nights in New York City and he wants to steal every second he can with his boyfriend.

It feels like grains of sand, golden and all too fleeting, are falling through his fingers and he knows it’s only a few months but that doesn’t make the prospect of going weeks and months without being with Magnus any easier. He’s trying to hold onto as many grains— as many seconds and minutes and memories— as he can before his tour bus rolls out of the city in a few days.

Never enough, he thinks. He could have an eternity with Magnus and it would never be enough.

His nose wrinkles when he feels Magnus brush it with his own, pulling him away from his thoughts. Easing away the tiniest bit, Alec opens his eyes to stare up at his boyfriend.

He sees bright eyes and artfully done makeup. He sees intelligence and wit and so much warmth that it reaches out, wraps around Alec’s bones until he figures he’ll never be cold again.

He sees his life, so much different than it was a few years ago. The tour is bigger, the stakes always higher. The man in front of him is his solace, though, his eye of the storm.

Magnus is everything to Alec and his chest cracks open at the knowledge.

His breath fractures and Alec’s mouth kicks up. “I’ve never done this before, you know.”

Making some noise of confusion, Magnus strokes along the back of Alec’s neck with a raised brow.
“I’m notorious for tour being no strings attached.”

“Yes, I’d heard,” Magnus replies dryly.

Glaring without heat, Alec runs his hands down Magnus’s thighs. “I just want to be sure that you know this is a first for me, too. I have no idea what the hell I’m doing.” Looking up, his smile is small and barely there when he asks, “Just don’t forget about me, okay?”

Magnus is quiet for a moment and Alec sees something shift in his expression, too quick for him to pin down, before it settles into humor. “I’ll make you a deal,” his boyfriend says lowly. “I won’t forget about you as long as you don’t forget about me.”

“Not a chance in hell, Magnus. I couldn’t forget about you if I tried.” His voice drops to a whisper as he adds, “You’re it for me, babe.”

Tension ratchets up, a heady promise. Before their lips can connect—before they can say another word—the door to the dressing room is flying open and Lydia’s walking in, phone to her ear as she scowls at the two of them.

Magnus climbs off Alec and he shakes his head, laughing to himself as Alec lets him go but not without sweeping a hand over his ass. Magnus sends him a wry look he pretends not to catch.

Lydia hangs up and shoves her phone in to her pocket before giving both of them a once over. “How are you feeling Alec? It’s forty five minutes to show time.”

Alec’s reply is easy as he answers, “Never been better,” with a surreptitious wink in Magnus’s direction.

It’s Lydia who rolls her eyes but she only maintains her stern look for a few seconds before she eases into a grin. She walks over to him, spins him around until he’s facing the vanity mirror once again. The lights are bright as she slaps her hands on top of his shoulders and meets his eyes through the glass.

“Ready for another go around the block?”

Alec grins. “You know it.”

Lydia laughs, patting his shoulder a few times before stepping back. “Get ready then,” she scolds goodnaturedly. “Simon’s killing it out there and the crowd is definitely ready for you.”

She leaves just a few moments later, waving at Magnus on her way out.

Alec looks up, meets Magnus’s eyes. “What were your plans until the concert started?”

“Why,” Magnus asks, standing from where he’d been relaxing on the couch.

Arching a brow, Alec reaches for the eyeliner. When he waves it, there’s a challenge heating his eyes. “Thought you might want to make yourself useful.”

Magnus laughs as he takes the few strides over to the vanity. He plucks the eyeliner out of Alec’s hand before flicking him on the shoulder. “Oh,” he asks idly. “I thought you had people for that?”

Shrugging a little, Alec nudges Magnus’s shoe with his own as his chair is spun around yet again. “If I feel like makeup, I usually do it. I already have a wardrobe designer on tour. No need for a makeup artist too whenever the most I ever do is, like, eyeliner.”
“Well, then,” Magnus says archly. “Say no more, darling.”

The next few minutes pass silently. Alec’s breath catches in his chest as Magnus leans close, as he follows murmured directions to close his eyes. His breath shudders out and Alec smells the whiskey on Magnus’s breath and he laughs a little, stills almost immediately after hushed orders not to mess up his boyfriend’s work.

Magnus pulls back but Alec still doesn’t open his eyes. Instead, he sighs as he feels Magnus’s hand sweep over a brow and down his cheek.

“Beautiful,” Magnus whispers and when Alec opens his eyes it’s to see his boyfriend leveling him with a stare, intent.

“You’re not so bad yourself,” Alec demurs and then he’s laughing out loud as Magnus harrumphs, as he shoves playfully at his shoulder.

Someone knocks on the door and it’s the costume designer with his outfit for the night. Magnus acknowledges her and then his train of thought’s lost as Magnus pulls him in for a smacking kiss before grabbing the glass he’d left on the vanity and starting toward the door.

Looking over his shoulder, Magnus says, “I’ll let you get changed in peace. See you later.”

Alec nods back and then the costume designer’s closing the door and motioning for Alec to undress while she unzips the garment bag.

Alec rakes a critical gaze over the finished suit and he’s pleased with the result. It was linen and the button down that accompanied it was almost see-through, easily breathable for whenever the stage inevitably grew too warm.

The turquoise tone is warm against his skin and, deciding to take a page out of his boyfriend’s book, Alec leaves a few buttons undone.

After making sure all’s well, the designer leaves and Alec’s left alone. He only has fifteen minutes or so before it’s time to take his place and mic up and Alec breathes deep in the quiet of his dressing room.

Leaning down until he rests flat palms against the counter, Alec leans close to the mirror, stares into his own kohl-rimmed eyes, runs his gaze over a perfect complexion thanks to stage makeup and last night’s face mask.

He’s twenty seven and at the top of his game. His tour is sold out-- every date, every venue. There’s fifteen thousand people waiting just outside these doors to see him, to hear his music, to have a night that they’ll always remember.

It’s heady and overwhelming in the best goddamn way.

He smiles a little, tracks the shift of expression in the mirror. He’s done this a thousand times and if he has anything to say about it, he will a thousand more. Magnus is his constant and even if he’s in a different city every night, he hopes he can be the same for his boyfriend.

“Let’s do this,” he says under his breath.

Turning, Alec’s left his dressing room and is just about to make the final turn to where the stage is when someone wraps a hand around his arm. Alec looks over his shoulder, expecting a tech with panic in their eyes from an impending disaster that’s always in the periphery of tour. Instead, he sees
a man that fills his mouth with a sour taste.

“What the hell are you doing here,” Alec hisses before wrenching his arm free.

Jordan raises his hands in an appeasing move. “There was a time I was on the standing invitation list.”

“Yeah, well, those days are over,” Alec snaps back. “How the fuck did you get through security?”

“I have my ways,” Jordan replies slyly but when Alec doesn’t say anything, just stares at him without flinching, the man begrudgingly adds, “I may have bribed Raj.”

“Fucking Raj.” Alec curses viciously under his breath before glaring at Jordan. “You need to leave.”

Jordan ignores the threat in Alec’s eyes. He moves closer until he’s just in front of Alec and Alec’s gut twists at the lascivious once over he’s treated to.

“We had some great times last tour, Alec. I didn’t think it was out of the question to think we might have a few more this time around.”

“You thought wrong,” Alec grits out.

He doesn’t have a chance to say anything else before Jordan reaches out, trailing a finger over his open shirt. The bastard has a spare second to dip below the linen before Alec snatches his hand, tightening his fist around it.

“In case you’ve been living under a rock, I’m taken.” Alec’s voice is low, feels forced from his throat.

To his frustration, Jordan doesn’t back off, just smiles and it’s smarmy. Alec’s left feeling distinctly unclean at the fact that he let the man anywhere near him once upon a time. Exasperated, he reflects that he’d had no idea Jordan would take his ignoring his calls so ill-mannered.

“You were always up for a good time, Lightwood. Don’t tell me that’s changed now.”

Alec smiles but it’s cold. “Oh no, I’m still always up for a good time. It’s just that now I have my fun with my boyfriend. Magnus.”

Jordan’s stare is incredulous when it lands on him, when it lifts from his chest. “You can’t really expect me to believe that, can you? Alec Lightwood’s, what? You’re monogamous now? A one man kind of guy? I call bullshit. There’s no way—especially when you have tour about to start.”

“I don’t give a good goddamn what you think, Jordan. All you need to know is the last time we fucked, it was the last. I don’t cheat and I don’t lie. Now I suggest you leave before I really get angry.”

Alec twists his hand, and he’s gratified to hear Jordan’s little grunt of pain before he’s moving smoothly back, just in time for security to come barreling up to him. With a curt nod, Alec lets them have Jordan, who’s cursing him as he’s taken to the exit.

“Hawkblue,” Alec calls out, not looking back to his Head of Security.

“Yes, boss?”

“Raj won’t be here when I get to the venue tomorrow. Got it?”
There’s a beat of silence before Jessica’s answers smoothly. “Whatever you say, boss.”

Alec’s mouth twists in a wry grin and as he looks down at his watch, he curses as he sees there’s only five minutes until the concert starts. Right on time, the lights outside in the audience go out and the shrieks are almost enough to make his ears bleed.

God, he loves it.

Turning on his heel, Alec’s just set to hurry to get his mic and earpieces. He stumbles to a stop when he sees the person casually leaning against the wall, arm crossed, watching him silently.

“Magnus,” Alec greets. He wracks his brain for any hint of when his boyfriend might have joined the scene. “What’s up?”

He watches as Magnus’s mouth kicks up before he’s straightening. When Alec reaches him, Magnus still hasn’t said anything and then he’s grabbing Alec by the lapels and pulling him close for a searing kiss that launches Alec’s brain offline.

When Magnus ends the kiss, they’re both breathing hard and Magnus is grinning when he says, “I like this suit, darling.”

“Yeah,” Alec breathes in the space between their mouths.

“Oh yeah,” Magnus echoes and then he’s pulling Alec in for a lingering kiss that’s twice as intent as the first. “Break a leg.”

And then Magnus is shoving him away, towards the stage. On the clock visible behind the stage, Alec sees he has two minutes to mic up and he’s cursing and laughing as he turns to the sound tech that’s waiting impatiently at the edge of the stage.

“Alexander.”

Alec takes the mic pack as he looks over his shoulder to see Magnus studying him intently.

“Yeah, babe,” Alec asks when the silence stretches between them.

Magnus’s grin is wicked, a little sharp, as he merely offers, “I like you taken.”

It takes Alec a second to place the words and when he does, his eyes widen before he’s grimacing. He takes a sharper look at Magnus but his boyfriend looks perfectly unperturbed. Deciding to trust his gut, Alec shoots back, “Then it’s a good thing that I like being taken.”

Magnus’s expression lightens and then they’re both laughing and Alec swears that if he wasn’t about to walk out on stage in front of thousands of people that he’d haul Magnus close and never let go.

He sees the rueful acknowledgement in Magnus’s eyes and then the crowd just yards away is absolutely losing their minds as the timer on stage starts blinking a row of zeroes.

Showtime.

Alec shoves his earpieces in and strides out to his mark. Everything falls away except the chants of the crowd, their screams, their love and support and fury that never stops making his chest ache under the onslaught.

The opening notes to his latest single starts and Alec picks up the mic and hits his cue dead on.
The lights come up, bathing him in warm golds and blues. He can only see the first few rows from his vantage point and as he nears the edge of the stage he looks down into the grinning faces of his family as they sing along to his music in the front row.

The crowd is an echoing cry and he sees countless phone lights in a veritable sea of fans. He pulls the mic away from his face at the last chorus and it’s only a little bit to catch his breath.

He’s stunned but unsurprised when the crowd fills the stadium, singing his words back to him, following his melody until it feels like the venue will collapse under the weight of it all.

Alec feels on top of the world and when he turns his face away from the crowd and looks to the side of the stage, he sees Magnus singing along, too, and his heart feels fit enough to burst inside his chest.

He wonders how a body’s meant to contain it all. He feels happy and full and like every damn dream he’s ever had has come true.

He smiles at Magnus, nods in a gesture that he knows is arrogant and cocksure but he just can’t help himself.

Magnus laughs and dances a little in his place and Alec swallows hard as he turns to look back at the blinding crowd.

He’s on top of the world and there’s not a fucking thing he’d change about it all.

Every failure, every nerve-wracking bit of doubt has brought him here and it coalesces in Alec’s chest, makes him shudder on the pedestal that he’s by turns resented and yearned for since the start. He’s luckier than most, Alec reflects, and he still has his whole life ahead of him.

With Magnus at his side, Alec knows anything’s possible.

As he brings his mic back up, as the song transitions into what will be his next single in the fall-- and hadn’t that music video with Magnus been a blast to film-- Alec lets it wrap around him, gives himself up to the feelings crashing through him.

He wouldn’t have it any other way.
Epilogue Part I: 8 Months Later

Magnus takes a few seconds to look over his lecture notes one last time. His class starts in ten minutes and today’s lecture isn’t one of his favorites of the semester. This afternoon’s class was the standard History of Modern Europe 1815-Present and as the first class after midterms, Magnus knew his students would be preoccupied with getting their exams back, not interested in dadaism or The Silent Generation.

Everything looks in order-- after all, Magnus has been teaching this course every semester for over five years-- and his attention shifts to his phone.

He smiles as he sees a few unread texts.

*Only 37 days until tour’s over and I’m back in New York, babe. I can’t wait to be home.*

*I can’t wait to kiss you.*

*I can’t wait to. . . Well. Do a lot more than that, too :)*

Magnus laughs quietly in his office even as he’s struck by a pang of yearning so intense it steals his breath. It’s the middle of March and he hadn’t seen Alec in person-- hadn’t touched him, hadn’t held him close-- since Christmas.

It looks like they’re both going a little crazy from it.

Alec was in The States for the first part of the year, still touring for Feel Something. Magnus kept up with social media, watching the travelogues his Youtube Channel posted every week, liking Alec’s own posts about being on the road.

They talked every day, compensating as best they could for always changing time zones. Magnus couldn’t count the number of times he’d been woken up from a dead sleep to hear his boyfriend on the other end, voice hoarse and tired but so damn fond as they talked for a few minutes, catching each other up on their days.

It’s not perfect; but, then, Magnus knew that tour would be hard. He hadn’t quite anticipated missing Alec so damn much, though. That had taken even him by surprise.

He missed holding Alec-- he missed Alec’s icy feet and the way he wrapped around him like a damn octopus. He missed waking up to those adorable little snores that had quickly become the perfect sound to fall asleep to.

It’s been an adjustment, these past months. But Magnus can’t begrudge his love his passion. He hears the vivacity in Alec’s voice when he talks about performing to a sold-out crowd. He sees the excitement in his eyes through face time whenever Alec talks about his meet and greets and how funny and genuine his fans are.
A little over a month, Magnus thinks, and then Alec will be home for the rest of the year. There are a few festivals over the summer that Alec has signed on for but those are weekends that Magnus can join him. Mostly, the rest of the year is wide open for Alec, with no tours scheduled until next spring.

A full year to have Alec all to himself. With a wry laugh, Magnus acknowledges the butterflies he feels at the promise.

With a sigh, Magnus takes a minute to respond. *I miss you, darling. I can’t wait to talk to you tonight. How’s Texas this time of year? I hope it’s not too dreadfully hot.*

Sliding his phone into his pocket, Magnus stands with a sigh and tries not to think about how damned cold their bed is without Alec, how empty the loft feels without his boyfriend’s presence.

Straightening his notes, Magnus places them in their folder and grabs his laptop, leaving his office with his bag. There are a few minutes until class starts and he has just enough time to swing by the cafe on the ground floor of Bowman Hall and grab a tea. It’s a chilly day for being spring. No matter that it was in the seventies yesterday, today is forty and drizzly and Magnus knows a chai tea latte is just the thing to warm him up.

Blowing across the top, Magnus takes a spare sip as he makes his way towards his classroom where fifty young minds are waiting to be shaped.

Or more likely, he thinks with a shake of his head, trying desperately not to fall asleep.

The afternoon lull is hitting him pretty hard but Magnus blames the fact that he was up until two in the morning grading and talking to Alec. Throw in the dismal, gloomy weather and all Magnus wants is a nap.

And since his thoughts just seem to be revolving around Alec today, he wishes he had the man to cuddle up to this afternoon.

Shaking his head again, this time impatiently, Magnus banishes thoughts of his boyfriend. He’s an adult, after all, a noted academic and pillar of Columbia. He’s made of stronger stuff that *pining*.

He swings open the door to his classroom for the next hour and fifteen minutes and he’s struck by the silence that’s permeated the space. It’s always a given that his students will take every second they can to talk, idle chitchat a dull thrum to the start of class.

Instead, it’s dead quiet and Magnus is fairly sure that he’d be able to hear a pin drop. It’s unnerving to say the least.

Chalking it up to his students being hungover-- it is Friday after all-- or exhausted from midterms or just a fluke, he thinks nothing more of it.

Walking down the slope until he gets to the front of the classroom, Magnus takes a few seconds to set up the projector for his PowerPoint. While he often lectured without any extraneous material, since he was showing an art movement today, he had slides to show about some of the better known pieces of the era.

With a last drink of his tea, Magnus starts lecturing.

His students seem a little slow on the uptake and Magnus doesn’t hear the scratch of pens against paper, the tapping of laptop typing for a few seconds. A delayed response that’s as curious as it is inconsequential.
He’s made it through a few pages of his notes when he turns toward his laptop and changes the slide to a full color painting done in dull tones with melting clocks.

“Now,” he breaks in. “Looking at this painting, can anyone tell me why this style of art might have become popular after The Great War?”

It’s silent for a moment and when Magnus flicks his eyes up to scan the room, he sees no one has their hand raised, not even the few people in the first row he can always count on to know the answer.

Raising a brow, Magnus is just set to rephrase the question, maybe show another painting, when a voice sounds from the back that has him freezing, hardly daring to breathe.

They don’t raise their hand as they call out, “They’d lived through the worst carnage the world had ever seen to that point. The art became grotesque and macabre to ridicule their new reality.”

Magnus hears the amusement in the answer. Damn him, Magnus thinks, and then his gaze is snapping up to the top of the lecture hall where Alec’s sitting with a shit eating grin on his face.

No one says anything and the moment becomes charged.

Meeting Alec’s eyes, everything else falls away. It’s been almost three months since he last saw Alec in person and he swallows hard under the onslaught of feeling. Alec, for his part, doesn’t look much better as his grin shifts into something smaller, softer, more private.

Without breaking eye contact, Magnus manages to get out, “Class dismissed.”

It takes a few seconds for his students to realize that Professor Bane has just cancelled class, something he’s never done before. And while some are hesitant to leave— they clearly want to see what’s going to happen next— they reluctantly start packing up and leaving in a rustle of papers, the sound of zippers closing backpacks loud in the otherwise silent room.

And then it’s just the two of them. Alec’s still sitting at a damned desk and he’s too far away. Luckily, he stands and starts making his way down to Magnus, who feels rooted in his spot, like if he looks away for a second, it’ll all come crashing down and he’ll wake up to realize that Alec’s still halfway across the country and out of his reach for weeks more.

Coming to stand just inches in front of him, Alec smiles but makes no move to touch him. “Hey, babe.”

Magnus lets out a little incredulous laugh and they both ignore the way tears are evident in the undertone. “Don’t you _hey, babe_ me, Alexander. I can’t-- how are you here? Don’t you have a concert tonight?”

Alec shrugs, leans against the desk and looks up at Magnus. “The venue cancelled the show. Something about their electricity going out. It’s been rescheduled for Sunday.”

“That means…” Magnus prompts, voice soft as he tries not to get his hopes up.

Finally, Alec reaches out and grins. He hauls Magnus closer, between his spread thighs, and Magnus shudders at the contact.

“It means that I’m yours for the next thirty six hours. I booked a flight as soon as we got word. I have to fly back to Houston Sunday morning but that means we have the rest of the day and all of tomorrow.”
A part of Magnus knows it’s not a lot; it’s certainly not enough to be so goddamn emotional over. But God, the idea of getting Alec for a day and a half is the best news he’s had all week and the truth is, twenty minutes would’ve been enough to send him over the edge.

“Then let’s make the most of it,” Magnus says quietly and then he’s leaning down, tilting Alec’s head up for a kiss that starts slow.

It quickly morphs, though, and becomes something hot and desperate and then Magnus is rucking Alec’s plain t-shirt up, fingers digging into warm skin, leaving bruises that make them both groan at the contact.

Alec’s hands fall to Magnus’s ass, pulling him closer and it feels so fucking good that Magnus is almost delirious on it. Which is ludicrous, he thinks a little hysterically. A simple kiss shouldn’t be enough to make him feel so much, to feel everything.

But then, Alec’s always been an exception to his ironclad control.

With his last damn brain cell, Magnus pulls back and it takes everything he has not to dive back in once he opens his eyes and sees Alec, face flushed and mouth bruised, looking at him like he’s everything he’s ever dreamed of.

“God, Alec,” Magnus groans but he holds his boyfriend back when Alec’s gaze sharpens, when he grins wolfishly and moves to pull Magnus in for another kiss.

“Not here,” Magnus says, still breathing harshly. “Anyone could walk in.”

Stepping back, Magnus runs his hands down Alec’s arms until he can intertwine their fingers. “Let’s go home, darling.”

He grabs his laptop and notes with one hand, throwing them in his briefcase and slinging it over his shoulder distractedly. He tugs Alec towards the door.

Alec follows with a smile that’s turned quiet and fond and then he’s wrapping an arm around Magnus’s shoulders, pulling him close for a kiss against his temple.

When they enter the hallway, it’s to see most of his class lingering outside of the classroom. Magnus spares them a glance, a raised brow, and says, “Don’t think this gets you out of your discussion posts this week.”

Most of them laugh and Magnus follows suit. His focus shifts to Alec again, like a magnet he supposes, and he leaves Bowman Hall without a backwards glance.

The two of them hail a cab and they’re home soon thereafter, traffic not as busy as it usually is for the time of day.

Magnus drops his briefcase in the entryway only to wrap his arms around Alec’s neck. Leaning into each other, it’s silent in their loft as they focus on their breathing, as they reconnect.

The apartment is full of shadows as they make their way to their bedroom. They take their time, unwrapping each other slowly. When they finally fall into bed, it’s to soft sighs and muffled laughter.

A few hours later, Magnus wakes up and almost immediately wants to fall back to sleep. He aches in all the right places and when he opens his eyes, his breath catches.

Alec’s a vision always, he thinks, but like this he’s perfect.
His mouth is open to let out little snuffles. He hadn’t shaved this morning and his jaw is dark with stubble, making Magnus shiver as he feels the tenderness on his own thighs from beard burn.

Wincing a little, Magnus is mostly smug as he sees the row of marks along his boyfriend’s collarbones, not subtle in the slightest but then, Magnus wasn’t really trying to be.

He’d been much more focused on other things.

Leaning close, he kisses Alec’s shoulder before climbing out of bed.

Throwing on a robe, Magnus leaves their bedroom, makes his way to the kitchen where he pours a glass of wine and takes a lingering sip, quickly finishing it before pouring a second.

Walking out into the living room, his interest is piqued as he sees an open book on the coffee table. It’s open to a page in the middle and it doesn’t take but a second for him to realize it’s Alec’s songbook.

The man must not have fallen asleep as quickly as Magnus had, he thinks with a quiet laugh. Alec always turned to writing when he couldn’t sleep.

Seeing the words scrawled over the page, Magnus can’t help but glance toward the bedroom, as though waiting for Alec to come out and snatch his book back. However, seeing that his boyfriend must still be sleeping soundly, Magnus can’t resist taking a peak.

_Happily ever after_
_How could I ask for more?_
_A lifetime of laughter_
_At the expense of the death of a bachelor_

“Did you save some wine for me?”

Magnus gasps as his eyes fly up to land on Alec’s back. He’s standing in the kitchen in nothing but a pair of sweatpants that hang low on his hips, rummaging through a cupboard for a wine glass. Quickly standing, Magnus grabs his own glass as he joins Alec.

He tries not to read more into the words but they make his head spin, the potential meaning behind them something Magnus desperately wants, though he hadn’t known just how much until he’d read them in Alec’s messy mix of print and cursive.

“There should still be more than enough for you, darling,” he replies absently and when he reaches Alec, Magnus sweeps a hand down his back until it rests on his hip.

It’s quiet as Alec pours his own glass. Turning toward him, Alec stares at Magnus for a moment and it’s silent in the loft, dead quiet in the kitchen as he lets Alec look his fill.

“I love you, you know that?”

Something squeezes in Magnus’s chest and his mouth kicks up. “I had heard that, yes. Did you know I love you too? So much,” he murmurs and Alec laughs a little as he ducks down for a quick peck.

Leaning into Alec, Magnus suddenly looks up, meets Alec’s eyes with a raised brow. “How on earth did you manage to tamp down on what I’m sure was pandemonium when you walked into my class?”
Alec laughs, shakes his head in amusement. “I got there pretty early and told everyone I wanted to surprise you. To keep them quiet and from a riot breaking out, I took pictures and signed autographs until, like, two minutes before class started. I may have also mentioned that you might be persuaded to end class early and that got most of them to chill,” he admits sheepishly.

“College students are so predictable,” Magnus says with a wry laugh.

Humming a little, Alec drains his glass before moving closer to Magnus. He starts nosing along his jaw, kissing a line down his throat. “How lucky for us,” he drawls against warm skin and Magnus shivers, finishing his own glass before setting it down on the counter hard enough that he’s surprised it doesn’t shatter.

“Enough about them,” Magnus whispers. “Take me back to bed, Alexander. I only have—” he looks up, toward the clock hanging up, “— thirty two hours left with you. I need to make the most of every minute.”

He feels the words, hushed against his chest, and urges Alec up until their eyes meet. “What do you say to breakfast in the morning?”

“Waffles,” Alec asks hopefully and Magnus chuckles.

“Waffles,” he confirms.

“Hell, yes.”

With a sharp intake of breath, Magnus manages to get out, “Something tells me we’ll have worked up quite an appetite by morning.”

Alec’s response is too low to hear but it doesn’t matter because then they’re kissing and it takes Magnus far longer than it should to realize they aren’t moving out of the kitchen. When he finds himself on the kitchen table, robe shoved off his shoulders to pool behind him, he loses every thought in his head except the clock that ticks ominously in his periphery.

He plans to make the most out of Alec’s impromptu visit.

In the back of his head, Magnus can’t help but wonder at the words he’d read in Alec’s songbook, the lyrics filling him with a well of love so deep he knows it’ll never run dry.

A couple of months later, when the two of them wander into Marv and Anna’s ice cream shop after taking a meandering walk through Central Park, Magnus doesn’t think anything of the wink Anna throws his way when he orders his own cone.

When he turns around, though, and sees Alec on one knee with a beautiful ring, Magnus’s heart stops.

He drops his ice cream cone, completely forgetting about it as he listens to Alec ramble a little in a speech he’d clearly practiced.

He’s nodding before Alec can stutter out his question and then both of them are crying, just a little, as they kiss in the empty ice cream shop where they’d had their first date so long ago— though neither one had dared hope that it could be the beginning of so much more than simple friendship.

Anna claps her hands together, overcome, and pulls them both into a bear hug.

Magnus gets another ice cream and shares it with Alec, both of them so focused on the other that
they barely manage a bite between mile-wide grins.
Epilogue Part II: 5 Years Later

Chapter Notes

Song: What a Heavenly Way to Die by Troye Sivan

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Happily Ever After: Alec and Magnus Lightwood-Bane
People Magazine

The two of them walk into the little pâtisserie that had been chosen for the morning’s interview. They’re alone and the easy affection is obvious in the way they hold hands, in how Alec kisses the top of Magnus’s head as the two laugh at some joke between them.

Watching them, the reporter tries to maintain her objectivity but she can admit it’s difficult. She’d first interviewed Alec years ago when he was a rising star and had just swept through his first awards season, winning four Grammys and considerably more household notoriety.

At the time, she’d been struck by the man who reveled in his image and single status. To see him today as one half of an incandescently happy couple-- and to know why they’re on the cover of next month’s issue-- is a bit surreal.

Still, Alec and Magnus sweep into the restaurant and it’s just a few minutes before she’s starting the interview.

“So,” she starts briskly. “What’s new?”

Alec and Magnus look at each other for a minute before laughing and turning back to face her.

“Oh you know,” Magnus replies airily. “We’ve just adopted the cutest twins in the world and that’s kept our focus fairly well.”

Shaking his head with a soft smile, Alec joins in, “That’s definitely the most exciting thing that’s happened to me-- hell, all year.”

Taking the cue, the reporter leans in a little. Her eyes gleam but it’s considerably friendlier than Alec had initially thought. She’s getting her scoop but there’s genuine interest there, too, and not just a need for the exclusive they’ve granted People.

“The internet had a meltdown last week when you posted that photo on Instagram of the two of you, each holding a baby. Did you anticipate that level of fervor?”

Alec’s mouth kicks up into a lazy grin as he relaxes back against his husband. “People don’t like change and even when they do like it, they want to be the first to know. That’s why we’re doing this. The babies are getting old enough to where we’ll want to take them out of the apartment and I wanted to face the world before we made that first step.”

“Our children’s privacy and safety is of the utmost importance to us. While this isn’t an invitation further into our lives, we had the discussion and it was equally important to be able to acknowledge and celebrate that our family had grown from two to four recently,” Magnus interjects.
“How recently?”

“The twins are seven months old and we adopted them the day they were born. It was finalized earlier this summer.”

“A lot of people were shocked to see that you two were officially parents. Had this been the goal all along or was it a more recent desire for a bigger family?”

“My brother Jace and his wife Clary had their first kid a couple of years ago. I was away from home as often as I was in the city back then and neither one of us had any thought of settling down. But then Jace asked Magnus and I to be godparents and it became an elephant in the room for a little while. Neither of us wanted to come out and say that we wanted kids but every time we babysat or talked about kids in general, it was fairly obvious we were thinking along the same lines.”

“I never really let myself think of the possibility of being a father,” Magnus says softly, flicking his gaze from Alec to the reporter. “I always joked that my students were my children and that I didn’t have time for kids of my own. Alexander was home for a few months on a break, however, and as we started babysitting regularly I think there was a sort of mutual realization that our goals had shifted. Alec was like a new father, anyway, with the way he was constantly researching how to care for a baby. It was as adorable as it was exasperating.”

"Hey," Alec cuts in indignantly. "I wanted to be prepared! I wanted my niece to be as comfortable and safe and happy as possible."

Humoring him, Magnus agrees, "You did. But it was also a sign that maybe we were both ready and eager for that next step."

Alec nods along.

“Yeah, there were a few hard discussions about how to make it work and if we really were ready but at the end of the day, I love Magnus and I want it all with him.” With a laugh that edges on self deprecating, Alec adds, “I’m very happy that he feels the same.”

“Of course, darling,” Magnus murmurs before raising their joined hands up to his mouth for a kiss.

It’s quiet for a moment and the reporter watches as Magnus and Alec share a look that feels intrusive to witness, no matter that they’re in public.

Clearing her throat a little, she diverts the conversation. “The last time you two were on our cover was four years ago when we were given exclusive access to your wedding in Florence. In that time, things have changed quite a bit for you, isn’t that right Alec? Fans and media have missed you as you’ve moved to a position behind the scenes of the music industry.”

Alec takes in the question lurking in her tone and crosses one leg over the other. Absently fiddling with his wedding ring, he answers her unasked query with a raised brow.

“I’m just as active on my social media as I’ve ever been with the exception of keeping quiet about our kids. While my role has shifted to producing and writing, I’m still very much an entertainer and artist. It’s just that I keep more regular hours and get to spend more time with Magnus these days.”

Humming thoughtfully, the reporter’s eyes sharpen as she bluntly asks, “Do you miss it?”

“Touring?” Alec chuckles, shaking his head in a wondering yet confident gesture. “It’s not like I’ll never go on tour again. And I still release a few songs a year or collaborate on projects. I’m hoping to release my next album late next year. I’m just enjoying this time now. It’s been wonderful to
challenge myself in a new area of the industry and establishing Iratze Records has been a very rewarding, if grueling, process. I still perform a few times a year and that’s enough for me. It’s more than enough that I get to have the best of both worlds.”

"And what about you, Magnus. Your last book landed on the New York Times Bestsellers list in the nonfiction category where it's still sitting at number one. Last fall you were brought onto an Emmy winning show as a historical consultant and that's not to mention your duties as the Chair of the Columbia University's history department. Do you two find it difficult to juggle caring for kids with your demanding careers?"

"It's hard work," Magnus allows but looking at him, it's hard to picture the man breaking a sweat over anything. "We work hard, every day, to be the best we can be-- the best partners, the best parents, the best professionals. It's exhausting but I wouldn't trade my life now for anything."

Alec grins and it's a little dopy at the corners as he looks over at his husband with his heart in his eyes. "What he said."

“You sound like the picture of a happily settled man, Alec. It’s hard to believe that at one time you were known as a sort of Lothario. Is it true what they say then?” There’s a glint of humor in her eyes as she asks, “Do reformed rakes make the best husbands?”

Magnus is quiet though he flashes a quick grin as he looks down at his wedding ring. It’s a simple band but is obviously well cared for. They both seem to be waiting for Alec to answer and Alec does so, but not before taking his husband’s hand and interlacing their fingers.

“I love Magnus more than anyone in the world,” he says, “And there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for him. The truth is, if he asked me to give it all up today, right now, I’d do it, no hesitation.”

Alec glances over at his husband just to see Magnus already staring at him, smiling with eyes so warm that he can’t ever imagine being cold again.

“But I wouldn’t,” Magnus says softly, thumb stroking over Alec’s where they’re hands rest on his thigh.

“But he wouldn’t,” Alec echoes with a quiet smile. He forgets for a minute that they’re not alone, that there’s a journalist right on the other side of the coffee table watching them with eyes that capture everything.

He comes back to himself after a minute though, looking over at her with an apologetic grimace that the reporter waves away, her expression far from annoyed and instead veering much closer towards enamored.

Clearing his throat, Alec says, “The past five years have been one hell of a journey and I couldn’t imagine anyone else by my side other than Magnus. I’m grateful every day that I stepped into that diner in the middle of the night and that Magnus took a chance on me. This next adventure, kids? I never thought that was in the cards for me.”

His voice is self-deprecating as he continues, “I never thought any of this was meant for me. I’m excited, though-- we’re excited to grow our family by two more and be the best parents we can be, every day.”

The journalist’s voice is warm, curious as she asks, “So is it fair to say that Alec Lightwood is still at the top of his game, even if he’s more concerned with his family and producing behind the scenes these days?”
Alec’s voice is confident as he answers, “Yeah. I’ve never felt better. I’ve finally found my place and that’s worth all the sold-out stadiums in the world.”

Magnus scoffs a little, though his expression is anything but doubting as Alec raises their joined hands up to his lips, kissing his husband just above his wedding ring.

As the reporter watches her subjects, she can’t help but think that this is one of the easiest, most enjoyable interviews she’s ever done. She writes the conclusion of the article in her head as she watches the couple in front of her act like the newlyweds they haven’t been in years.

_Alec Lightwood’s been a staple of these pages since he was a teenager. It’s been a long time coming, but the boy is now a man and instead of the confirmed bachelor we’d started thinking of Lightwood as a few years ago, domestic bliss is his best look yet._

_There’s an easy contentment to Alec now, as he sits beside his husband and they banter back and forth, easily answering our questions between little inside jokes that we have no hope of deciphering._

_We don’t mind, though. It’s hard to when the couple sitting across from you looks nothing but ecstatically happy._

_We can’t wait to see what’s next for Alec and Magnus and their growing family. Best of luck to the Lightwood-Banes. We’re sure this is far from the last time we’ll see them between our pages!_

_Make sure to check out Alec’s new single What a Heavenly Way to Die, available now on a variety of streaming platforms and wherever music is sold._

Chapter End Notes

And there we have it! Higher than the Big Trees is officially complete and I am so, so incredibly happy to be able to share this finished story with you after so long! This fic has exceeded any and all expectations I could've had and I just want to thank you-- each and every person who took a chance and read this. Your support means the world to me and this has definitely been one hell of an experience! :’)

I hope everyone found this last chapter to be a fitting conclusion for Alec and Magnus’s journey and I hope that this isn't the last I'll hear from you! <3

End Notes

Catch me on tumblr @carmenlire

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