**Dark Side of the Moon**

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**Dark Side of the Moon**

by [sugarbucket25](http://archiveofourown.org/)

**Summary**

Drunk Jace was dangerous. Sober Jace was tactile and relaxed about personal space as it was. Drunk Jace, as with all traits when drenched in alcohol, was much more amplified. Sometimes he wanted to snuggle, cuddle, spoon or… sometimes he wanted to talk. The talking was by far the worst. Jace would talk for hours about things; himself, me, the world, his fears, his desires. It was too much, too difficult and every time I got suckered into it, it was even worse the next morning when he remembered none of it and I was left cut open from his beautiful, painful honesty.

Alec and Jace struggle to avoid their growing feelings for each other and they find themselves drawn into misunderstandings and obsession. More warning to be added.

**Notes**

A/N - this literally wouldn’t leave me alone, so I wrote it. Jesus, when you think you’re done with fanfiction and can actually work on y’know, your book - that’s when ALL THE PLOT
hits you in the face. So, yeah. I’m gonna mess around A LOT with canon events, TV and Books. This is extremely AU freestyle - when I started I realised I was going to mess with pretty much everything. A canon event may pop up here and there but don’t be looking for any measure of tracking. Heads up for heartache, misunderstandings, adult themes and gratuitous F Words. The adult themes warning should be taken seriously as I tend to wander into dark territory. This story is pretty much off the cuff so tags will be added as we go. Clary and Jace aren’t together just because. Honestly, if I could erase her I would. I won’t, though. I’m British too, so that’s why there’s superfluous ‘U’s everywhere and probably a fairly easily detectable accent in their speech.
Enjoy.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Everyone knew, now. That was maybe the worst thing about it. This great, all consuming, decade-long infatuation with my wayward Parabatai was now common knowledge. Everyone knew it and while some were more discreet than others, I could tell instantly who knew and who didn’t. The ‘didn’t’ list was small, let’s put it that way. At this point, hanging around with Mundanes would have
been preferable to the strained, kindly glances people gave me whenever I was with Jace. They
looked between us, flickering glances of pity that made me scowl even deeper, causing Perma-
Oblivious Jace to roll his eyes and tell me to lighten up and get laid.

Everyone knew, including Jace but my Parabatai had taken a novel approach in apparently wiping
his memory clean and reverting back to Actually-Oblivious Jace. Maybe it was for my sake, most
likely for his. Either way, everyone knew it. Izzy was great, though - she went to serious lengths to
ensure I knew she was there for me, but more importantly wasn’t going to intrude or poke. Izzy had
always known and maybe that meant she was better prepared to deal with it.

How everyone knew was less clear to me. I suspected it had something to do with Clary. I didn’t
think there was any genuine malice in this action, maybe just a mistake. Trusting someone she
shouldn’t have. That was usually how these things got around. My coming out news had spread
faster than actual intelligence about Valentine. I got congratulations texts from people less than ten
minutes after I branded that heart-pounding kiss onto Magnus Bane. I thought maybe it was Clary
because whenever someone gave me that, ‘Oh poor, poor lovelorn Alec!’ face, Clary usually looked
equal parts guilty and shifty.

The Institute was literally a minefield of people who had the newfound ability to piss me off and that
seemed unfair. I was with Magnus, at the beginning of something real and tangible with someone
wonderful and hot. I’d never even declared my undying fucking love to Jace fucking Herondale!

I sighed. It would pass. Most things did. Rumours and gossip couldn’t maintain steam over time and
things would get better. Jace would’ve spouted some quippy quote. “This too shall pass,” he’d have
said and looked smug at my grimace.

Not everything passed, though. Not everything faded.

“Alexander? Are you OK?”

I blinked. “Huh? Sorry, I was miles away.”

Magnus smiled graciously, not offended. It wasn’t my fault I was distracted, technically. The
Parabatai bond was causing it. Little known/discussed fact; sometimes, just sometimes…the bond
would let me feel things I definitely shouldn’t have been feeling. No one ever sat me and Jace down
and explained or warned that there would be back and forth exchanges to this extent. Certainly, no
one had told me, “Hey Alec - best try and get used to feeling Jace having sex with other people at
random moments without any warning!”

Would I have refused the bond on that basis alone, had I known? Probably not. But still.

It was a weird, invasive feeling like realising how hungry you are all of a sudden, except I wasn’t
hungry. It was rare enough, or it would have been if Jace could have limited himself to having a
normal amount of sex. I could ignore it if I was prepared, like if I knew he was going out. Times like
that pretty much always resulted in sex for Jace, unless it turned into Fight Night Extraordinaire.
Then I’d get a miserable phone call asking me to come save him from whatever mess he got himself
into.

“You’re very pretty when you’re miles away,” Magnus commented smoothly and I viciously scolded
myself for not paying him the proper attention. Magnus was right here, taking me out on a lovely and
very tasteful date to an actual restaurant. I had never been on a date like this, or maybe…yeah OK, a
date at all. So fine, this was my first date. Ever. It was nice, so far. The place was quiet and not
packed, despite it being a Saturday night. The food was good and Magnus knew a lot about wine.

Wine was great, too.

“Thanks,” I said, drinking some more of that wonderful wine and hoping it would dull the distant
sensation, albeit second hand, of Jace having God Damned Apparently Endless Sex. “I don’t think I
am. People say I scowl less, but that’s about it.”

Magnus smirked. “I like that scowl. You’re very serious and it’s quite…well, sexy.”

I choked slightly on my wine. No one had ever called me that. ‘That jacket looks hot,’ Jace would
casually tell me. ‘Those pants are awesome, can I borrow those? They look like they’re painted on!’
Never sexy, though.

I was flustered and blushing slightly. “Um…thanks?” I swallowed the wine and any remaining
embarrassment. Magnus was very graceful. It was difficult to feel awkward around him, despite the
lengths my brain was willing to go.

“You’re welcome,” he said. “So, tell me about your parents.”

With a sigh, I wondered what to say. I could be honest and rant endlessly about the complications
between us, the distance between my Father and I. How much I worried for my Mother. How they
affected Izzy, Max and Jace. I should have been honest.

“They’re all right,” I said. “Parents, y’know. Impervious to fault, endlessly kind and ceaselessly
tolerant.”

He laughed a little. “I see. Do you get on well with them?”

I shifted. “Jace gets on great with Mom, Izzy with Dad. They both adore Max. Maybe he’s still
perfect because he’s young. No mistakes, no disappointments yet. A clean canvas for their dreams
and expectations.”

Ah, fuck. I’d said way too much. Stupid, glorious wine.

Magnus didn’t comment on my overblown, depressing speech. He sipped his wine and chewed table
bread. After a moment, he hesitated. “And what of Jace?”

I looked down. “Meaning?”

“Is it…complicated? I’ve had people tell me that many times.”

“It is not,” I said firmly. “Aside from the fact he’s my brother and Parabatai, Jace doesn’t factor into
this conversation. Why… why do you even ask?”

Magnus gave a delicate shrug, showing a hint of awkwardness. “I have ears, Alexander. People talk.
Shadowhunters, Downworlders, delivery guys.”

“Fucking delivery guys?” I muttered irritably.

“My point,” he went on. “Is simply that I like you, very much. I want to know you and that means
asking questions about things like Jace.”
I massaged my temples, hoping to stave away an oncoming headache. Fuck you, wine. “So ask what you’re asking.”

“Are you in love with him?”

I looked closely at him. God, he was gorgeous. So attractive and intelligent and confident. I remembered kissing him. I liked it, wanted more of it. Oh so distantly, I felt a shudder of something that could only mean Jace was finally done with his latest conquest. It was stronger than the last few times. Must have been quite a girl.

“No,” I said flatly. “I’m not. I had a kind of crush on him while growing up, but it’s not like how people think. I’m not in love with him.”

He stared at me, weighing my answer. “Very well,” he said after a moment or two. “We all have our past, our baggage. I accept yours.”

Desperate to move onto something else, I said, “And I accept yours.”

He laughed again, genuinely amused this time. “I have a lot more than two bags and a carry on, Alexander, but I appreciate the sentiment.”

“So let’s hear some of it,” I said bracingly, going for more wine despite the encroaching headache. “You’re the interesting one, Magnus.”

His eyes softened. “What would you like to know?”

“How about everything?”

The date had ended with a kiss, which while picture perfect had left me wanting a lot more. I felt like I had so much to catch up on, sex wise. It had taken me this long to go a God damned date, let alone kiss someone. It was later than I realised, almost midnight and I walked home instead of taking the underground.

Being alone at night generally made the whole being alone thing a bit easier. Daylight was harder, it had no sympathy for solitude. As I walked through the busy streets, people brushing past me without seeing me, I wondered what Jace was doing. If I concentrated hard enough I could probably sense what he was doing, but I preferred to wonder. The reality was usually grim; him laying in bed with some sexy girl \textit{de jour} or in this case, \textit{de nuit}. They were probably snuggling in a sexy, non platonic way and he was most likely regaling her with his most dangerous exploits. He wouldn’t stay the night and he wouldn’t usually see her again after.

“Flavour’s gone,” he’d say, laughing.

But straight after sex, he liked to get to know them. He was probably curled up in her bed, stroking her hair, telling her who he was and why he was that way.

Stupid. No one would ever know Jace the way I did.

Fairly certain I was scowling again, I wondered if Jace ever thought I was sexy. Magnus did,
apparently. Magnus who I’d just been on a date with. Why couldn’t he be first and foremost in my thoughts?

My phone went off and I stopped, looking at the screen.

It was Jace.

Frowning, I answered. “What’s wrong?”

Over the phone, I heard him heave a huge, rattling sigh and my heart plummeted. Shit, he was in trouble.

“Alec,” he said, voice cracking a little. He was drunk, too. “I need you.”

“Where are you?” I asked, all business.

“Sang’s,” he said and I rolled my eyes. Great, so he’d had sex in the fucking bar. “Come get me?”

No, Jace. I was on a date with Magnus and it was great thanks for asking. Also, no I’m not coming because it’s unfair to swagger through life assuming I’m always there to pick up the pieces of what you break and why the fuck did you have sex in the bar?

“Yeah, of course. I’m coming now. Are you hurt?” He sighed and I heard the sob. Christ. “Jace,” I said insistently. “Answer me. Are you hurt?”

“I really fucked up,” he told me. “Please come get me, please.” He hung up.

I was fifteen minutes away and I broke into a run, flat out.

*

When I got there, the place was still heaving with patrons and the music thumped loudly. I was out of breath, but alert and focused. The guy at the door had the audacity to ask me for ID and then for twelve dollars entry. I shoved a twenty into his chest and barged past, ignoring his annoyed grunt.

“Hey,” I said, tapping on the shoulder of a guy I knew Jace was Drunk Friends with. “You seen Jace?”

The music was loud and the guy turned, Adam, I thought but wasn’t sure. He blinked blearily at me.

“Whuh?”

Temper flared but I contained it. “Jace!” I all but yelled. “Is he here?”

Probably-Adam shrugged. “He was, earlier. Check the bathroom.”

With impressive restraint, I left without punching him in the face. I headed towards the Men’s Room, dreading what I might find when I spotted Jace, hunched and alone leaning against the bar.

Relief hit me hard, followed by anger that he a) seemed to be pretty much fine and b) had taken ten years off my life. I strode over to him, shoving sweaty, drunk dancers aside.
“Hey!” He didn’t react much at first, just poked his drink around on the bar. I shook his shoulder.

“Jace!”

He jerked away from my hand and glared, but then he recognised me and the hostility drained away.

“Alec! O’m God, whah you doing here? D’ Magnus bring you here?” He was really drunk. Drunker than I’d seen him in months. He couldn’t focus, his words were slurred and when he turned fully, there was a huge love bite on his neck. Brilliant. “’s not a good date. I should talk t’im.”

“OK, we’re going. C’mon, get up.”

Jace reached up and wrapped his hand around the back of my neck, pulling me down a little. “Alec, ‘M sorry. Shouldn’a called you. I forgot and…this place is loud.”

I nodded, pulling him gently up out of his seat. “That’s OK, let’s go get some air, huh?”

Without the seat, it was clear he couldn’t stand so I took as much of his weight as I could and frogmarched him out of the club. As we left, several people bade him farewell, including fuck face Adam who attempted to high five Jace and actually hit me in the chin.

Once outside, with the cold night air in my lungs and the music crushed down to a dull thump again, I felt better. We stopped for a moment so I could get a stronger grip on Jace and he turned, leaning his face into my collarbone. He heaved a sigh and his breath tickled my skin.

“Thank you,” he said softly. “Always save me.”

Closing my eyes briefly, I replied, “That’s what I’m here for.”

Jace managed to stand enough to wrap both arms around me. “Love you.”

Ignoring the sadness in my heart, I sighed, “Yeah, I love you too. Let’s go home.”

* 

It wasn’t always this difficult, but it had never been easy. Jace was the love of my life before I even knew what love was. He came into our lives as a broken, but fearless child who pushed and tested those around him to see where he fit in. From Izzy, he found a warrior sister who could kick his ass but would most happily die protecting it. Our mother adored him and it took a while for him to accept that love. Our father was tolerant at first but made more effort eventually. It was he that Jace distrusted the most. The father figure.

In retrospect, I couldn’t pinpoint the moment it had happened. It wasn’t like lightning striking or some sudden realisation that our friendship had turned to something more. From the moment we met, we were friends. He liked me, I felt it. He smiled more for me, he had a different way of speaking when it was the two of us. He was open and honest in a way he couldn’t be with everyone else. Maybe I’d always been in love with him or maybe it was too gradual to notice.

What made it so difficult was the duelling knowledge that he didn’t feel the same, but that if he did...this was exactly how it would be between us. That if we were together, it would be precisely as it was now. We were so close, so connected and open. It was like living in a dream that was hard to break out of. Jace was clearly straight and the human embodiment of God’s Gift to Women. When
he lost his virginity at fourteen, he told me everything. He was so giddy and excited, he came straight to my room and woke me up.

“Alec! Alec, wake up!”

“Ugh, why?”

“Cos I had sex! Wake the fuck up so I can tell you about it!”

I listened groggily as he gave me a painfully detailed play by play of his first time with a sixteen year old girl he’d been pursuing for about two weeks. He didn’t only give me details, he walked me through the whole thing. What he did, what she did, how it felt, what noises he made.

When he was done, I couldn’t help but irritable ask why he’d told me in such astounding detail.

“Cos you weren’t there, idiot!” he said like it was obvious.

Staring determinedly at my quilt, I asked, “And I should have been?”

“My God Alec - it was just amazing and fuck yeah, you should’a been there! Next time, I’ll ask if she has a friend. We can take them to the movies, double up - it’ll be awesome.”

The lump in my throat was painful. “Jace…”

“What? You don’t wanna double? C’mon, man it’ll be fun! You never come out with me and I’m telling you, sex is the beeeeeest! Susie’s got tons of hot friends, I can pick one you’d like. She’s got this blonde one, suuuper hot with great legs and-”

“Jace!”

His rambling came to a halt. “What?” he asked in a small, concerned voice.

I closed my eyes. “Jace, I don’t wanna…go out with a girl.”

The silence that followed was pure, distilled agony. I knew he understood right away. I’d never told anyone before but Jace knew me, he knew what it meant. I waited in limbo, terrified and yet stupidly hopeful.

“That’s…that’s fine, man. You know it’s fine.”

I sighed shakily. “Fine is a stupid word.”

He grinned lopsidedly. “OK, it’s wonderful. It’s great, actually - it’s fucking fantastic. I know TONS of hot guys! You should’a said something earlier!”

A weight lifted in my chest, something that had been there a while, but it was immediately replaced with a fresh new one. “No,” I said quickly. “I don’t want that. I…no one else can know.”

“Oh,” he said softly. “Just you and me then?”

Yes, Jace. You and me forever.

“Yeah, if that’s OK. The more time I can buy myself with Mom and Dad the better. Plus, y’know - the Clave aren’t exactly thrilled at the general concept.”

“Oh well,” he said rolling his eyes. “If the Clave aren’t happy then we can’t possible live our lives
or enjoy ourselves!”

“Be serious,” I admonished. “The law is hard-

“-but it is the law, yeah Alec, I’ve heard that once or twice. There is NO fucking law against you loving who you choose to love.”

I kept my face neutral, but inside my heart was heavy once more. It might have been easier for Jace to be politely disgusted with me. Loving him was impossibly painful and every day it grew. Maybe if there was a law… maybe then I could let it go.

“Yeah,” I said with a fake smile. “You’re right. You know, I think we should talk to them about it.”

“About your gayness?”

“No,” I deadpanned. “About the Parabatai thing.”

The smirk vanished. His beautiful face was still and open, caught offguard. “You mean it?”

“Yeah. Of course I do.”

I wondered if he knew why, in that moment. He stared at me for so long that I began to think he knew. Finally he broke the silence and smiled. “This is the best night of my life.”

He meant it, that was what hurt so much. He was genuine. Jace could be so flippant and guarded with others, but with me he was always himself. Maybe if he was himself with everyone else, they’d fall in love with him too. Probably, he was that amazing.

“I’m glad,” I told him as he leaned into me for a hug.

I wrapped myself around him and closed my eyes tight.

*

“Will you shut the fuck up and drink the water? Angel give me strength!”

Jace snickered into the glass of water, spilling it as he did. “Only you make that sound funny. Water tastes bad, don’t we have juice?”

He was in my bed because that’s where he wanted to go. He claimed it was bigger and softer, which it was definitely not, but I caved because he was noisy when drunk and the others were asleep.

“No juice,” I said sternly. “Drink the water and go to sleep.”

He placed the glass down on my bedside table carefully, legs dangling over the side. He was still pretty much fully dressed, jacket tossed on a nearby chair. I stood before him, arms crossed, and hoped he would just do as I said for once and actually sleep.

Drunk Jace was dangerous. Sober Jace was tactile and relaxed about personal space as it was. Drunk Jace, as with all traits when drenched in alcohol, was much more amplified. Sometimes he wanted to snuggle, cuddle, spoon or… sometimes he wanted to talk. The talking was by far the worst. Jace would talk for hours about things; himself, me, the world, his fears, his desires. It was too much, too
difficult and every time I got suckered into it, it was even worse the next morning when he remembered none of it and I was left cut open from his beautiful, painful honesty.

I waited, but my instincts said the night air had woken him up too much. He kicked his legs impatiently and unbuttoned his shirt.

“Don’t wanna sleep,” he said petulantly. “I’m awake.”

Fucking hell. “OK, fine stay up - I’m going to bed.”

He threw back the covers and extended a hand, face utterly guileless. “OK,” he said, trusting and pure like a child. “We can whisper under the covers like we did when we were kids.”

“No,” I said with supreme effort. “You need sleep and I’m gonna go sleep in your bed, OK?”

He kicked off his boots. “If you don’t stay with me, I could drown in a puddle of vomit. Or fall out of bed. Or dial an ex. Any number of disasters could befall the great Jace Herondale without his better half by his side.”

“You’ll be fine,” I said, strong enough not to be thrown by petty manipulations.

He sighed gently and laid back on the pillows, shirtless. “Please?” he said quietly. “I’ll tell you what happened at the club if you stay.”

The silence was thick as I went to the door, but I felt his relief when I locked it and turned back to him, kicking my boots off and rolling my eyes.

“All right, but you’re gonna keep it down, OK? Izzy’s up early.”

He nodded eagerly, compliant now I’d given in. He made space for me, plumping my pillow unnecessarily and sitting up straight. He didn’t seem drunk now. Jace had a fairly terrifying tolerance for alcohol, always had. I wondered how much he’d drunk earlier to get himself into such a state.

I took my shirt off, but left my vest on. The bed was soft and alluring as I sat down, my body aching for sleep but my treacherous heart was pounding because here we fucking went again.

I laid back and turned on my side to face him, where he was waiting, the mirror image of me except beautiful, blonde and everything I loved.

He smiled softly. “Hey.”

“So what happened?”

“I got drunk.”

“No shit.”

“And I met someone.”

“OK.”

He paused, chewing his bottom lip hesitantly. “Alec, it was a guy.”

Razor sharp, something stabbed through my chest. “What?”

Jace blinked rapidly. “I...I had sex with a guy.”
I sat up a little, mouth open. “Jace, are you serious?”

“Yeah.”

“What guy? Who?”

He shrugged. “I dunno. I don’t remember his name. What does it matter?”

I raised my hand to gesticulate when I saw it was shaking and quickly lowered it. “It matters because you had sex with a fucking guy!”

“Are you mad?” Jace asked, frowning.

Mad really wasn’t the word. How about bone splintering betrayal? I felt that, for sure.

“I don’t understand,” I said, trying to stay calm, but obviously failing because Jace reached out and touched my face, gently stroking my cheek with his thumb.

“Why are you upset?” he asked in a pained whisper.

“I’m not upset,” I lied. “I’m just…shocked. Jace, you realise you lost your gay virginity with some guy whose name you don’t even know?”

“Is it called that? Gay virginity? Am I gay now?”

“How the fuck should I know?” I shrieked hysterically. He sat up quickly, hand on my shoulders.

“Shush!” he admonished in an almost perfect imitation of me. “Alec, please. I just need you to…tell me it’s OK. Things like this happen, don’t they? It’s normal and it doesn’t mean anything. OK?”

His hands kneaded the flesh of my shoulders and I felt like I was in a dream. His sad, desperate plea for reassurance was almost too much to handle.

“Why did you do it?” I asked in a low voice.

“I don’t know.”

“You had sex with a man and you don’t know why?”

Looking down, he said, “I wanted to know…how it feels.”

“Because?”

When he didn’t respond, my heart broke a little more. It didn’t matter. None of it mattered because he was Jace and I was Alec and this dance would go on forever. I loved him and that was enough to look the other way and give only what he wanted from me. “It’s all right,” I said, placing my hands over the top of his. “It doesn’t matter, Jace.”

He looked up, eyes shining with hope and sorrow. “Really?”

“Yup. I mean, girls do it a lot, don’t they? I hear they do. And it doesn’t matter. It’s only sex and I suppose it was a matter of time before you ran out of girls.”

His smile made the lies worth it. It always did.
Chapter Two: Deny Me Nothing

Chapter Summary

Denial isn't just a river in Egypt.

-Dark of the Moon-

-Chapter Two: Deny Me Nothing-

' \textit{It hurts to love you} \\
\textit{But I still love you} \\
\textit{It's just the way I feel} \\
\textit{And I'd be lying If I kept hiding} \\
\textit{The fact that I can't deal} \\
\textit{And that I've been dying} \\
\textit{For something real} \\
\textit{But I've been dying for something real}.'

-Lana Del Rey

*

-Jace-

My head wasn’t as bad as it had been before. That wasn’t the issue. It was more the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I became conscious. A bad feeling that spoke of things I’d done the night before in total lack of judgement.

The sick feeling was easy to ignore after a few seconds, though. Easy to dismiss after years of
practise. As I opened my eyes, Alec was asleep beside me, sharing the same pillow. We’d fallen asleep like this so many times, face to face, knees to knees, our backs framing the exterior of a world created by our bodies. His face was relaxed, that small frown smoothed out perfectly. I listened to the rhythm of his breathing, matched my own to it and felt better than I had in days.

It was tough. Being without him sometimes, knowing he was with Magnus. Alec had never gone on a date, was never anywhere I couldn’t follow. It was selfish as hell, but I couldn’t deny that him turning his attention to someone else was difficult for me to deal with.

Last night was a disaster in more ways than one. I didn’t even really want to think about it too much, Alec had told me it was OK and I was going to run with that. Another stupid mistake I would forget about in less than a week. Practise made perfect.

He stirred and I watched, endlessly fascinated to see him return to consciousness. I’d seen it a million times, but it never got boring. I was always eager for him to wake up and see me, in the way that only he could.

When he finally opened his eyes, he smiled softly. “Hey,” he said, voice rough. “How do you feel?”

“How do you feel?”

“Fine. Headache like a death march, but otherwise good.”

He nodded, staring patiently and I knew he didn’t believe me. It didn’t matter; he wouldn’t press me for the truth. He would never push for anything I didn’t want to give. I stared back, content to stay a few more seconds in our world. Alec and Jace. Nothing else.

Hesitantly, he reached up and very gently pressed his thumb to my bottom lip, staring at it with a soft frown. “You cut it,” he said. “Your lip.”

He didn’t say how it got cut, he phrased it like it could have been an accident in training or anything other than how it happened. We weren’t going to talk about it and that was for the best, I supposed.

I grinned. “Not that it’ll taint my charming smile.”

He rolled his eyes and withdrew, the moment breaking like a bubble. “What could?”

Breakfast was fun, as always. Good natured bickering between Izzy and Alec, Clary and Simon laughing about various Mundane things I often didn’t understand. I liked watching them all, my family. I felt both intimately a part of and disconnected from it. Izzy and Alec were my siblings in every way that mattered, but a voice that so echoed my father told me that I would never truly be a Lightwood. They were too good, too pure. They didn’t have a darkness inside them. I was close to Clary, she felt like a sister to me but again, she wasn’t. We were friends, but it was little in the blinding light of her lifelong friendship with Simon and didn’t quite stand up to her strong bond with Izzy.

I was an outsider in so many ways, kept firmly inside a circle I didn’t deserve by the determination of better people. It had always been this way, except for Alec, of course. The one place I felt like I belonged.

From the very start, something inside me had identified him as mine. My best friend. My Parabatai. I
sipped at a glass of juice and wondered how it would feel when he was officially no longer mine, but Magnus’s. Maybe it was already happening. He was happy with him, I felt it. I’d felt it last night.

The glass smashed spectacularly in my hand, juice and broken glass flying everywhere. Clary jumped and gasped while Simon frantically looked around for signs of danger, but Izzy and Alec - with their Shadowhunter instincts - knew what had happened straight away. I’d smashed the glass, like some fucking attention seeking teenager. Brilliant.

“Sorry!” I said with a wry grin, carefully placing the remaining shards of glass in the nearby sink. “Flimsy ass design. Not built for my manliness.” Izzy rolled her eyes and went for the broom.

Alec was there in a second, holding my hand under the tap. He ignored my feeble protests. “You’re bleeding,” he said, like that was all that mattered. When my hand was free of glass, he moved my wrist under the icy stream of water and held it there, like I might move away.

“Oh, I see,” Simon said leaning over to watch. “Chill the blood to stem the flow. Good idea. I can’t smell it so much when its cold as well.”

“Yeah,” Alec said dryly. “That’s the plan, Simon.”

I felt like a child under his careful ministrations. He didn’t let go of my wrist, holding it until it was numb as he very carefully brushed out the few stubborn splinters of glass from the deep cut across my palm. I watched him the whole time.

“Thank you,” I said, when he felt I was done.

He sighed, but smiled. “What would you do without me?”

Simon snickered. “Get a room, guys.”

The rune healed the cut in no time, but left an invisible scar; jagged and stinging across my palm. I shook it off best I could and no one asked me if I was OK, which was a bonus. But things didn’t feel OK. Everything pretty fucking far from OK and it was nothing to do with my hand.

“You too? What did that mean? What was said on the other end? It hadn’t been enough dates for that, but God this was Alec’s first boyfriend and he was naive after all. The thought of something revolving around the L Word literally made my stomach clench and roll.

Which was pathetic. Alec was happy. He was smiling, soft and fragile with blossoming hope and new found expression of his inner gayness so what was wrong with me?

Because usually, I was the one who made him laugh and smile like that. Usually, I was the only one who could and it hurt that Magnus could do it better. Could do it over the phone, like some kind of…Lothario!
“Jesus, what is up your ass?” Izzy asked me casually as she walked past.

I bit down the snarky, self-deprecating response referencing last night and forced my face to turn neutral. “Huh?” I asked, playing dumb.

Izzy, smart and sharp as a whip, narrowed her eyes and instantly knew everything about me, my life and the shitty, shitty person I was inside for being jealous of Alec’s happiness. She didn’t say anything, but she just shook her head as if to say, ‘You’re better than that.’

“You going out again with Magnus?” she asked Alec, turning from me as though the entire thing hadn’t happened. “That’s great!”

Alec was still looking at the phone. “Yeah,” he said. “He didn’t tell me where though. It’s a surprise.”


“No, it’s Wednesday.”

I was still nodding. Jesus. “Awesome. Wednesday dates are…the best. None of that, y’know. Weekend crowd. So great.”

Izzy shot me a look. “Anyway, are we patrolling tonight? If not, I have a date of my own.”

“You have a date?” I asked, slanting a brow.

She shrugged. “If I’m free.”

Alec sighed. “Izzy, how do you have a date without making solid plans?”

“Cause I’m fluid,” she said, rather suggestively, causing Alec to roll him eyes. “Anyway, not everyone needs to be wined and dined for it to constitute a date.”

“Jace and I will patrol tonight,” Alec said. “You go on your…fluid date.”

I wrinkled my nose. “That doesn’t sound right at all.”

“Are you sure?” she hedged. “Cause I worry about you two without me. You tend to get horribly injured and wind up covered in demon slime.”

“Sounds like your fluid date,” I joked.

She whacked me on the shoulder. “You should talk, bathroom boy.”

I froze for a moment, caught in uncertainty. Had Alec told her? No. He wouldn’t do that. She was referring to my many other bathroom exploits with women, of course.

Alec, to his credit, didn’t even flinch. “What Jace does with nice ladies in semi-private bathroom stalls is his business,” he admonished playfully.

Izzy grimaced. “Not when you’re trying to pee in the next stall, it’s not.”
Patrol was a bust. Typical, whenever I was looking for an outlet to vent my inner loathing and rage, every demonic entity in New York decided to fucking Netflix and Chill. Good thing we didn’t bring Izzy, she would have been pissed at sacrificing her date for nothing.

There were upsides, though. Having Alec all to myself was always great. Parabatai quality time, no Magnus necessary. We walked around, checking known demonic party areas and even spoke to a few local scumbags who were always happy to squeal for a few bucks. Nada. It was a lovely night, though.

“It’s a lovely night,” I said, looking up at the starless, light polluted sky. Alec didn’t respond. “Alec?” I prompted. “Isn’t it?”

He was checking his phone. Face lit up in the whitish blue light. He deposited it swiftly, wiping the small smile away. “Huh? Isn’t it what?”

I made a disgusted noise. “Can’t believe you’re ignoring me.”

He clucked irritably. “Hardly ignoring you, Jace.”

“Well, so-rreeee I interrupted you and Magnus texting sweet nothings while we’re in a potentially dangerous combat situation!”

He looked around for emphasis. “Dangerous combat? Seriously? There’s nothing out here.”

I really wanted to let it drop, but something childish and angry refused. “Yeah, if Magnus isn’t out here I guess there’s nothing worthy of your attention.”

“OK,” he grabbed my shoulder and shoved me around to face him. “This is ridiculous. Am I supposed to act baffled by your behaviour? Like I don’t know you? Grow up, Jace. It’s not fair, what you’re doing.”

“What am I doing?”

“You’re…” he stopped, looked away. “You don’t like it that I’m paying someone else attention.”

Instinctive hackles went up. “Oh, please.”

“You don’t like it and you don’t know what to do about it. You’re just used to having me give you everything whenever you want.”

“Give me everything?” I sneered. “Fuck off, Alec.”

He flinched. “What do you want from me? You want…you want me to break up with him? You want me to go back in the god damned closet and pretend?”

“No, of course not!”

“Then what? Jesus, after everything I’ve had to witness from you? You can’t let me be happy? Just for a while? Not even from a text?”

“We’re patrolling! It could distract you!”

He stared at me very plainly. “We never talk about it.”
Oh fuck. “Don’t.”

“We never really ever spoke about it, Jace.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.”

“I know that. You think I don’t know that there’s nothing to talk about? But we just pretended like you didn’t know and…”

“Because it’s bullshit!”

“…what?”

“Alec, you’re not in love with me, OK? It’s not real. Look, you’re gay and you were repressed. I’m hot, we’re close, it’s natural to have… like a crush! It was a crush.”

I might as well have punched him. “How can you say any of that to me?”

“Because it’s true! You’re not in love with me and you weren’t at any time. That’s not…not possible.”

“Why?”

“Why?” I laughed, somewhat desperately. “Because you’re perfect! Look at you and look at…” My breath caught in my chest. “You’re just perfect and - and beautiful and its a miracle even that you love me at all. Being your Parabatai is the best thing in the world. No stupid crush is gonna fuck that up.”

Yeah, that was good. Solid ground, good argument, back to reality. All right then. Except…

He was just staring at me, looking down slightly because he was so tall. “Jace.” That was all he said. Just my name, as if that was admonishment enough.

Snarkily, I replied, “Alec.”

I wondered what he’d do for a moment. There seemed to be something he was trying to make his mind up about, but when it passed I knew whatever it was, he’d decided on the Alec Lightwood trifecta of Logic-Rationality-Sense.

“You need to get more sleep,” is what I eventually got. “You’re tired and on edge all the time lately. It’s not like you.”

“What is like me?”

“Being my brother, my friend. Not…this.”

“I am your friend. I’m sorry, man this is all…it’s really fucked up in my head right now.”

He looked away. “I know. I can feel it.”

We rarely spoke of the ‘I feel, you feel’ aspect and mostly, I pretended it wasn’t that much of a two way street, but at times like this it was hard to deny how much we bled into each other. Only Alec’s iron will and strength of character held us upright and apart, because honestly, I would have fallen into him at the first chance. Who wouldn’t want to be more Alec and less Jace?

“I’m sorry,” I said again, gentler this time. “Really.”
“Me too.” Yeah, even though he did fuck all wrong as usual. “You’re right, as well. It’s not professional.”

“What’s not?”

He held up his phone, before pocketing it. “The texting.”

“Oh.” I said, sickly guilt trickling down my spine. “No, come on - I was being an asshole, that’s not…”

“No,” he countered calmly. “You were right.”

I didn’t say anything, just allowed myself to feel like the worst person in the world, especially given that it was true. Seriously, who wouldn’t want to be less Jace?

*  

A week passed. A fucking week and I got zero medals despite deserving them for a) containing my asshole personality long enough for Alec to go on his date and b) getting through the week at all. Alec had a lovely time (apparently) and the date was a success.

I hooked up with a girl and after fucking her in the alley behind the club, I gave her my real number. She was actually pretty nice. I called her twice during that week and both times she answered, making witty small talk. I planned to ask her out at the weekend and I was high-fucking-key determined to make this date (yeah, it’s a date - I can go on dates!) into something more than the quick fuck we began with.

I stared at her number in my phone. Alyssa 3. I already had the numbers for two other girls called Alyssa and though I’d deleted them now, I hadn’t when I took her number hence the numerical status of my new maybe-girlfriend.

‘What the hell are you doing?’ Simon asked.

I looked up from my phone. ‘Existing. Being hot. Evolving. What are you doing?’

‘I didn’t even know you guys used phones,’ he said suspiciously. ‘Seriously, since when does Jace Herondale sit and stare are his phone? Waiting on a call?’

I glared. ‘About to make one, actually, fuck-face.’

He didn’t flinch at the loving insult and waited expectantly as I hit dial on Alyssa 3.

‘Hello?’

I sat up straighter. ‘Alyssa, hi. It’s Jace. Again.’

Simon mouthed the word, again, looking bemused.

‘Yeah, hey. How’s it going?’

‘It’s good. I’m good. All is…good.’ Simon bit down a laugh. ‘So, anyway I was wondering if you wanted to meet up this Saturday?’
'Meet up?' she echoed, sounding like she was smiling. 'Like we met up last time?'

'Uh, no. I mean like. For a, y’know. We could go somewhere with…food.’

After a long, painful moment punctuated with Simon’s giggles, she said, ‘I like food. We can get food. Did you have a building in mind or are we walking the streets with snack platters?’

‘There’s actually this little place downtown I really like. Great wine.’

She laughed. 'You like wine?'

'Sure,’ I lied. ‘Anyway, I’ll text you the address if that’s cool?’

'Yeah, I think so,’ she said, in a smiley way. ‘Anyway I gotta go. See you Saturday.’

‘OK, bye.’

I looked at Simon defiantly. He had adopted a calculated expression. ‘So,’ he said. ‘Going to the place Magnus took Alec?’

‘What? No.’

‘You don’t know any places downtown and you certainly don’t like wine.’

‘Oh, well. Yeah. Alec told me about it and it sounded really great.’

‘So I ask again,’ he said leaning back. ‘You’re taking this girl to the same place Magnus took Alec?’

‘Y’know, I really don’t like all this “so and so took so and so here!” They both went, Magnus didn’t take Alec there, Alec isn’t the girl.’

Simon nodded calmly. ‘That’s fair. It’s an antiquated expression with unnecessary gender leanings. Allow me to rephrase. So you’re competing with Alec and Magnus?’

‘Fuck you, vampire.’

‘Despite your eternal apparent hotness, you are not my type.’

He was looking at me with the same kind of knowing Izzy sometimes hit me with. ‘Where’s Clary?’

‘Out,’ he shrugged, not missing a beat. ‘You know what, you guys should double.’

‘Clary?’

‘You and Alicia—’

‘Alyssa.’

‘And Alec and Magnus. Double date!’

I glared again. ‘You’re funny.’

‘Dear God, Herondale. Get over yourself.’

I texted Alyssa the address, after Googling it. ‘If I could, I’d get under myself.’

He nodded. ‘I have no doubt about that whatever. So you like this girl, huh?’
‘She’s cool.’

‘What’s she look like?’

‘Why?’

‘Just wondering.’

‘Wonder elsewhere, I’m busy. Fucking hell, go stalk Clary, won’t you?’

‘Well,’ he said, getting up. ‘I’m gonna break your heart and leave. Let me know how your date goes.’

‘A date?’ I looked up. Alec was there, leaning in the doorway. God, how long had he been there?

‘You have a date?’

Defensive, I rubbed the back of my neck. ‘Uh, yeah.’

He wasn’t judging or teasing, but I knew he was reading me in that way only he could. ‘That’s great. What’s she like?’

‘Catch you later, guys,’ Simon said as he left.

‘Bye,’ Alec said with a gentle smile, never taking his eyes off me.

‘Later man,’ I said. ‘Well, she’s really cool and funny. I like her.’

My Parabatai nodded. ‘I’m glad.’

An awkward silence bubble began to grow. Alyssa text back saying she would see me there.

‘Alec, I meant to ask,’ I said, standing up. ‘I uh, don’t really know where to go for a date. Not really my scene, so I was hoping it’d be cool if I took her to that place you and Magnus went to.’

He blinked. ‘Yeah. I guess. It’s a nice place.’

‘So it’s OK?’

‘I don’t own it. Take her wherever.’ He seemed a little frosty.

‘OK, great. That’s…yeah. Recommend anything good?’

There was a pause before he pushed away from the door-frame and turned to leave. ‘Don’t fuck her in the bathroom. It’s a classy place.’

After that, something was clearly wrong. I shouldn’t have taken her there, I knew that much but I didn’t exactly know why. Was he pissed thinking I was trying to compete with him and Magnus? That I was showing off? That I was trying to get his attention? Because if he was, it was all true.

The date was fun, at least.
Alyssa was the kind of person I could have been friends with if she weren’t so hot. She really was very cool and had a sharp sense of humour. As we drank wine (fucking wine) over a small table and picked at some garlicky bread shaped like a leaf, she told me about herself in the kind of way that painted an interesting, well rounded picture but that clearly left out anything too serious and personal.

‘So, what are you gonna tell me?’ she said, taking a bite of the leaf bread.

I smiled. ‘What do you mean?

With a shrug, she said, ‘Well, you’re private. You’re secretive and very good at making it seem like you’re not. So I’m curious what you’ll share.’

She offered me some bread, which I took. ‘Psych major?’

‘Philosophy and music. I’m intuitive.’

‘OK,’ I laughed. ‘Well. You’re right, I’m pretty private about some stuff.’

She brushed her hands of the crumbs, taking a sip of wine. ‘That’s fair. Do you want to share a little? I like you, I’d be open to knowing you better.’

You’ll never know me like Alec. ‘Yeah sure. OK, uh…not actually sure where to start.’ I struggled to be honest. The dazzling lies were front and centre in my mouth ready to fall out, but I wanted to make an effort. ‘Do you want bullet points? Favourite colour and that shit?’

She laughed and the couple at the next table looked mildly scandalised.

‘That shit is a good place to start. Give me five Jace Bullet Points.’

I held my hand up to count. ‘I like blue. My full name is Jonathon. I hate planes. I can kick ass when need be and I speak four languages.’

She narrowed her eyes. ‘No, you don’t.’

I burst out laughing. ‘Damn, you are good. No, you got me. But doesn’t it always sound cool when people say that? The others are legit, though.’

‘You can kick ass? Is that like real ass or metaphorical ass?’

‘Both.’

‘Awesome. You have family?’

‘Sister and…’ I paused with a frown, wondering how best to describe the other half of my soul. ‘A brother,’ I went with in the end.

‘Parents?’

‘No,’ I told her. ‘You?’

‘Only child, two Dads. The best in the world.’

I drank some red wine. ‘Was it tough at school?’

‘Because of them? Not really. Few whispered comments here and there but I was lucky, really. Lotta people get it so much worse.’
I nodded. ‘Alec, my brother, is gay.’

Her eyes brightened. ‘Is he single? I’ve got a lot of gay friends.’

I rubbed my neck, starting to be aware of how much I was doing that lately. ‘Uh, no he’s seeing someone.’

‘They serious?’

I stared at the wine glass. ‘Yeah, I think so. It’s his first boyfriend.’

She moved on, asking me about college and jobs and other Mundane things I was forced to at least partially lie about but my mind stayed on her question about Alec and Magnus.

‘You sure you’re OK?’ she asked as I walked her home after the meal.

‘Yeah,’ I lied, trying to shake it off. ‘I’m sorry, it’s gonna sound like a line but I really haven’t been on many dates before.’ We stopped outside what was apparently her apartment building. ‘I’m out of my league,’ I added with a charming grin.

She leaned in a little. ‘How about we find a more familiar lane?’

Her smell was inviting and having already slept with her once before did not diminish the anticipation of repeating the experience.

‘Are you inviting me up for coffee?’

‘I’m inviting you up so we can fuck, honey.’

It had happened before. Angel fucking damn it all to hell. It had happened, but never, ever like this.

We were having sex - of course we were having sex. She was hot and pushy in bed and felt fantastic. I was so into it, I barely even noticed it happening at first. This other pleasure, slow and curling around my own distantly approaching orgasm. She was on top and as I flipped her over, reversing our positions, I began to feel it a little more. My pleasure intensified, increasing and evolving into something new.

‘Fuck!’ I gasped, losing my rhythm a little. She arched up, nudging me deeper into her.

‘You like that?’ She bit her lip, eyes heavy lidded.

I tried to focus. ‘Y-yeah.’ When I started to move again, a deep, aching twist hit me hard in the centre of my chest. A jolt of something physical only ever caused by sexual activity. With a rush of dizzying realisation, I knew it was Alec. Alec was doing…something with Magnus the same time I was fucking Alyssa.

Oh fuck. Fuck. FUCK.

I could feel his pleasure, his enjoyment of whatever they were doing together. Holy fucking hell we were doing it at the same time. The very few times it had happened before was when we were
younger, obviously accidentally whacking off at the same time but it was nothing like this.

Eyes screwed up tight, I fucked her harder. She made the kind of noises which meant she liked what I was doing, but I couldn’t focus on her. It was all Alec. He was everywhere, in everything. He was inside me, twisting my pleasure into his own and vice versa.

‘Ohhhhh fuck, yeah,’ I said, barely able to keep up the pace. ‘Come on, yeah.’

She tightened her legs around me, hands clawing at my back. ‘That’s it,’ she said, urging me on. ‘C’mon, make me come.’

My legs ached and my back was gonna give hell tomorrow, but I couldn’t stop. I knew what I was waiting for and it wasn’t Alyssa. Alec felt so good, whatever Magnus was doing felt amazing and everything was muddled and there were no boundaries between us anymore. She orgasmed hard, clenching around me but I didn’t want to come yet. Alec was so close….so fucking close.

‘Come on, baby,’ I panted, eyes shut as I tried to find him in my mind’s eye. ‘Come for me.’

Alec exploded. His orgasm ripped through me, triggering my own. My eyes rolled back, my mind detached from reality. Wave after wave of abject bliss shocked through me, through us. Did he feel it too?

‘Ohh my God,’ Alyssa was saying, running her hands up and down my back. ‘That was fucking amazing.’

She leaned up to kiss me and it felt like a betrayal. I kissed her back of course, trembling through the aftermath of what the fuck had just happened.

‘Glad to be of service,’ I said, planting another kiss and rolling away. ‘Can I use your shower?’

She laughed, stretching. ‘Sure, pass me a handtowel will you?’

From the bathroom, I tossed her one and closed the door behind me. I pulled off the condom and dropped it in the small waste basket by the sink. Shower running, I tried to pull myself together.

‘Fuuuuck, fuck fuck fucking fuck,’ I whispered, gripping the basin hard as I stared in the slowly steaming mirror. It felt like I’d been fucking Alec and no amount of telling myself contrary made any difference.

*
A series of flashbacks reveal rooftop promises and the extent Alec takes care of Jace, while in the present awkwardness abounds after the shared experience.

- Dark of the Moon -

- Chapter Three: Don't Look at Me Like That -

‘Watch the dust come down on the wreckage of another day,

Feeling older than my years.

The fridge is empty, it's been 48 hours since I used the door.

Got myself a little cocoon in here.

Stepping out onto the balcony,

The sun sets the sky on fire for me.

A high-rise horizon,

A lullaby of sirens sings to me.’

- Maiday

-Alec-

Four Years Ago

‘It can’t possibly be that bad,’ I told him. Jace wouldn’t look up at me from where his face rested in his hands. ‘C’mon, just tell me and whatever it is, we’ll fix it like we always do.’

Fucking hell, what was wrong? My stomach was in knots, heart thundering in terror at what had Jace Herondale, my Parabatai, crying on the roof of the Institute. I kept my countenance well enough, though.
‘I can’t,’ he croaked. ‘I’m so f*cked.’

He looked so damned young, knees hitched up to his chest as he cried. I couldn’t bear it. I wedged myself beside him, ignoring the painful scrape of tiles against my shins.

‘I don’t want to hear any of that absolute bullshit, OK?’ I told him sternly, pulled him against me and wrapping an arm around him. ‘Tell me so I can make it better. Please.’

Finally, he looked up and dragged his cuff across his nose. ‘Ugh,’ he sighed. ‘I don’t know how to even say it.’

‘Try.’

‘OK, so - you know Katie?’

I wrinkled my nose, trying to recall. Jace was seventeen and having sex with everything that moved on a regular basis. ‘Sure,’ I lied in the end.

He heaved a great, messy sob and I held him tighter.

‘She’s pregnant.’

Cramming down my initial response, I took a calming breath. ‘And…it’s yours?’

‘She says it is,’ he managed weakly, gesturing.

‘OK. What else did she say?’

He shook his head. ‘She says I have a week to give her ten grand or she’s gonna get rid of it.’

‘What?’

‘I don’t know where I’m gonna get it.’

‘Jace-’

‘I’m gonna have to steal it, somehow. I guess I could, but if the Clave find out, then I’m double f*cked.’

‘Jace!’

He closed his eyes. ‘You’re mad at me.’

‘I’m not mad at you.’

He chuckled darkly. ‘Suppose it was only a matter of time before I knocked up some mundane, huh?’

I rolled my eyes. ‘A little late, to be honest.’

‘I’m f*cked, right?’

‘Jace,’ I said gently. ‘You haven’t given thought to the fact she might be lying to get money?’

‘She showed me the test.’

‘That doesn’t mean anything.’
‘Well, what I am supposed to do then?’ he asked hotly, pushing away from me. ‘Make her take a piss test right in front of me? Frog march her to a fucking ultrasound or whatever?’

‘I don’t know, but maybe hold off robbing a bank for at least a day!’

He stood up, stepping close to the edge. I followed him, of course.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said softly. ‘I just…everything is fucked up right now. I don’t know what to do.’

‘Do you want her to keep it?’

He sighed and closed his eyes. ‘I keep thinking about how if I can just get the money, you know? She said she’ll have it and then give it to me, that I can raise it.’

I refrained from commenting. Jace was always a little naive when it came to women, but this was beyond the pale.

‘All right, if she is pregnant - if!’ I warned. ‘Then I’ll lend you the money.’

Ten thousand dollars was nothing to my parents and I could get the money no problem. Jace would never accept a gift, he was much too proud, even coming from his Parabatai. A loan, though, he might take that.

‘I can’t,’ he protested, but it was weak.

‘Shut the fuck up,’ I cut him off. ‘You can pay me back. With interest, OK?’

There was silence for a while as we stood, side by side looking out at the city. I felt a sense of peace fall over him at last. We had not yet spoken of what would happen if Katie was pregnant, of how he would raise a child as a Shadowhunter. That was not what Jace feared. Jace feared inertia, being unable to help. My beautiful Parabatai was brought to tears only at the prospect of his own limits.

‘Will you help me?’ he asked, after a while. ‘If she’s not lying. Will you help me-’

‘Raise it?’

So quietly, he said, ‘Yes.’

It was ridiculous. The whole thing would turn out to be nothing more than a spiteful, malicious lie. But he was my everything and nothing mattered like he did. I took his hand in mine. There was only ever one answer to that question.

‘Of course, I will.’

‘So, another fluid date, huh?’

Izzy shrugged and stirred her drink. ‘There were considerably less fluids than I expected on the last date, this one may make up for it. He’s hot enough, don’t get me wrong. He’s just slow moving.’ She looked off to the side, frowning. ‘Always makes me uneasy.’

‘You never like to tarry.’
'Unlike you, brother mine.' She swivelled her full attention to me. ‘So.’

‘Here we go.’

‘What went down with Magnus, pun most intended?’

‘Uh,’ I stalled. ‘We had a lot of fun.’

‘Yeeeess?’ she said, gesturing for me to go on.

‘There may have been hands involved.’

She laughed. ‘Ladies don’t kiss and tell, huh?’

‘Shut up!’ I took a swig of bottled beer and shook my head. ‘I don’t know, how do you ever feel easy just talking about this stuff? You’d think growing up with you and Jace, I wouldn’t have any problem saying…y’know.’

‘Hand jobs?’

‘Yeah. That.’

‘Was it good?’

‘It was great.’

She smiled. ‘So happy for you.’

‘Yeah.’ I wanted to talk to her about what had happened, the spill over with Jace. I was confused and more than a little shaken by it. ‘So, how’s Mom?’

Urgh, coward.

‘She’s doing OK. Dad’s continuing his audition for Asshole of the Year by threatening to bring the new love of his life to your birthday party next week. I know she’s hurt by it, but y’know Mom.’

I winced and sipped my drink. ‘Are we seriously having a party? I hate parties.’

‘But we neeeever have parties! And it’s your big Two One! You know Jace won’t let it slide without some horrendous, overblown celebration. If you give him a party you sidestep the likelihood of waking up naked in France handcuffed to a street lamp.’

‘That’s true,’ I said without much inflection because she’d brought up Jace and I wasn’t stupid. In 3, 2, 1…

‘Speaking of Jace.’

‘Please don’t start,’ I begged, looking around the club.

‘He’s over there, he can’t hear us,’ she assured me breezily. Jace was dancing with Clary on the other side of the club. I didn’t dare look too long lest we make eye contact. ‘What’s happened with you two? You had another fight?’

‘No,’ I said honestly. ‘Things are fine. We’ve both been a little distracted lately. That’s all.’

‘You with Magnus, Jace with Alyssa,’ she said nodding, not breaking eye contact. ‘Is there
something I should know?’

‘Like what?’ I asked a little defensively.

‘Well speaking as the top of our triangle, I can tell when something is wrong. I hate being on the
goofy outside, wondering if you two are OK. I’m here for you, you know that, right? Whatever it is.’

I was going to tell her. The words bubbled up in my throat when she saw something behind me and
frowned. ‘Is that…oh wow, yeah. Must be.’

I swivelled to see. A group of four girls had caught Jace’s attention, one in particular who left the
group and greeted him with a hug. Oh.

‘Alyssa,’ I guessed. ‘And her friends.’

Izzy was watching me closely. ‘Should we go say hi?’

Hi, I’m Alec. I felt Jace fucking you the other night, so nice to meet you.

‘Yeah, why not?’

I downed my drink in rather dramatic fashion and trailed behind Izzy.

Jace was animatedly chatting with her, his girlfriend, Alyssa. Clary was smiling and everyone was
apparently happy and in love with this girl and fuck my life all to hell.

‘Hi,’ Izzy said, resting her arm on Clary’s shoulder. ‘I’m Izzy.’

‘Jace’s sister,’ Alyssa said with a sweet smile. ‘He’s told me all about his kick-ass family. Great to
meet you.’

‘You too,’ Izzy said smoothly. ‘This is Alec, our brother.’

Alyssa turned that perfect, genuine smile onto me and I forced my face into something similar.

‘Wow, you’re tall,’ she laughed. ‘Nice to meet you.’

‘And you.’

She introduced us to each of her friends, one in particular kept staring at me. Eventually she
whispered something to Alyssa who rolled her eyes and loud-whispered over the club music, ‘He’s
gay, you moron!’

Shadowhunter hearing picked up what the others did not. For the first time since the fuck-tastrophy,
Jace looked at me. He blinked, wide eyed and I knew he didn’t know what to say or do.

‘Well,’ I said generously, breaking eyes contact. ‘It’s been lovely, but I have to go. Great meeting
you all.’

Amidst the chorused ‘bye’s, Clary slipped away to follow me.

‘Hey, Alec,’ she said, hand on my arm. ‘You got a minute?’

Surprised, I nodded and together we left the club. Once outside, we stopped on the street and I
looked at her expectantly.
‘I wanted to talk to you for a while,’ she said. ‘I owe you an apology.’

‘You do?’

‘I may have…accidentally let something slip about you and Jace a while ago.’

‘Oh. That.’

‘Yeah, I feel terrible and it wasn’t intentional at all, I swear.’

‘No, that’s OK and there isn’t anything to tell. I had a crush on Jace years ago. It’s long past.’

She looked confused. ‘No, that’s not…I mean—’

‘Hey!’ Jace called out, interrupting. ‘What the hell?’

‘Excuse me?’

‘You were rude.’

I shook my head, trying to catch up with whatever madness this was. ‘Sorry, what?’

‘To Alyssa!’

I looked at Clary. ‘I was?’

But she was looking at Jace like he was crazy as well. ‘No, you weren’t,’ she said slowly. ‘Jace, what are you talking about?’

‘You couldn’t stay for more than ten seconds?’ he demanded, ignoring Clary and this time he shoved me a little. The atmosphere shifted in an instant, my back straightened and I tensed all over.

‘Calm down,’ I warned.

‘You made it so obvious you wanted to leave!’

I couldn’t help but laugh incredulously. ‘I didn’t want to stay to get ogled by Mundanes! What’s the big deal?’

‘So now you have a problem with Mundanes?’

‘I don’t have the all-encompassing love for them you do, but no I don’t. I was leaving anyway before she arrived!’

‘OK, well you could have stayed five minutes to be polite! Angel, it’s the Clary thing all over again, huh?’

‘What the hell is your problem?’

My problem,’ he said, shoving me back again. ‘Is that you were rude!’

‘Hey!’ a bouncer interjected roughly. ‘Move it elsewhere!’

‘What do you want from me?’ I asked him, squaring up to his irrational anger. ‘What do you want, Jace?’

It brought him up short, unprepared for such a direct question. Clary and several Mundanes were
watching us now, including the hefty bouncer.

‘I just wanted you to like her,’ he said, a bit helplessly.

‘I do like her,’ I told him. ‘She seems great.’

He stared at me for a long moment. Reality was calling, he knew it. Alyssa was inside. That was where he needed to be.

He looked away first, shaking his head. ‘Fuck it.’

Clary watched him go, mouth open. ‘Jesus,’ she said. ‘What the hell was that about? You weren’t rude, I was right there. Taciturn and brooding as ever, but not rude.’

I managed to give a tight smile. ‘Thanks, Clary. I gotta go. Tell Izzy I’ll call her later, OK?’

‘Sure,’ she said kindly. ‘Have a better night.’

Leaning against the cold, metal railing I waited for the reply text. My message to Katie’s number stared back at me, glaring in the darkness of night.

I have your money.

She didn’t know my number, wouldn’t know who was messaging her and that was part of the plan. Jace didn’t know where I was, or I hoped he didn’t. Izzy was in cahoots with me, distracting him.

Who is this?

I sighed irritably as I typed a quick reply.

It’s me. Do you want the money or not?

I waited, scowling in the dark. Part of me hoped to be proved wrong.

Craig?

But there it was. Multiple scams on multiple guys. Poor Jace.

Yeah, new number. I’m coming up. Buzz me in.

I pushed away from the railing and went inside when the door to her apartment building buzzed open. She couldn’t see me from where I was skulking and she clearly wanted the money so she hadn’t pressed for any more verification. I knew what number she lived at, Izzy had been on recon duty.

Five floors up, I knocked on her door. It swung open and I saw her for the first time. She froze, caught off-guard when it was someone she didn’t recognise.

Katie was attractive, at least objectively. Blonde, petite with expertly applied makeup and long, polished nails. Jace didn’t have a type, appearance wise, but I could tell one smile from her had hit him over the head like a gong.
'Who are you?' she asked, eyes narrowed.

I reached into my back pocket and withdrew an envelope. ‘I’m the delivery boy,’ I told her. ‘Can I come in?’

She looked at the envelope, then back to me. Mistrust and greed clearly warring in her mind, finally greed won over. ‘OK,’ she said and moved aside for me to enter.

It wasn’t what I expected. The place was nice. She wasn’t living in poverty, no visible heroin needles or in-progress crack den. The apartment was flush with expensive furniture, a huge TV and other indicators of at least some wealth.

She shut the door. ‘You’re Craig’s friend? What, he’s too afraid to see me? Afraid he’ll be saddled with a baby unless he pays me?’

I faced her. ‘Oh, so you threatened the opposite with him? That’s smart. I don’t know Craig. I’m here for Jace.’

‘Why didn’t you just say that?’

I shrugged. ‘I wanted to see how many guys you were playing.’

To her credit, she didn’t seem intimidated. Chin tipped, her eyes hardened. ‘As many as I can,’ she said.

‘On average, how many actually pay out? Just out of curiosity?’

‘I want you to leave.’

‘And I will. I have your money, after all. I wanted to see it with my own eyes, was all.’

Her eyes narrowed again. ‘Alec, right? Jace mentioned you a lot. His bestest friend in the whole wide world. How you grew up together in prep school or whatever. Don’t know what kind of prep school allows tattoos, though.’

I couldn’t help but smirk at Jace’s lazy lie about being a Shadowhunter.

‘That’s me.’

‘Huh,’ she nodded. ‘Makes sense, I guess. Anyway, you know there’s no baby so why are you here?’

‘I’m here to pay you.’

‘But there’s no-’

‘I’m going to pay you ten thousand to tell Jace you lost the baby and that you’re sorry. The other ten thousand,’ I said, opening the envelope. ‘Is to never contact him again and to make sure he never finds out about what you did.’

I withdrew the notes in two neat folds and placed them on a nearby glass coffee table with a neutral expression.

She stared at the money. ‘Why are you doing this?’

‘Because it’ll break his heart to find out you lied and while Jace could use a healthy dose of reality when it comes to women, he doesn’t deserve this. No one does.’
She sighed and shook her head. ‘Jace was the only one who wanted the baby. I told him, expecting him to be like every other guy. Horrified, terrified, desperate for me to get rid of it. But he was happy. Not like cheering or whatever, but I saw this...his eyes lit up. That’s never happened before.’ She cleared her throat. ‘I shouldn’t have pursued it.’

‘But you did.’

She gave me a flat stare. ‘You think you got me figured out? Nice place, what could she want the money for, huh?’

‘I’ll be honest, Katie, I don’t remotely care. What you did is disgusting.’

‘Wow,’ she said quietly, looking down. ‘You really love him, don’t you?’

I barely contained a scowl. ‘You lost the baby, you’re sorry. That’s it. You contact him again and I won’t be showing up here with a calm demeanour and twenty thousand dollars. Next time, I’ll let my sister do the talking and you really won’t like that.’

He wasn’t home. I couldn’t actually believe he wasn’t home. Magnus was supposed to open the door with a lovingly concerned expression, take me into his arms and make me feel better. This was what I got for being spontaneous and not calling ahead.

I sighed and leaned my head against his door, pulling out my cell. After pulling myself together, I called him.

And promptly got his voicemail.

‘Fuck!’ I swore and hung up before I accidentally left a message expressing my disappointment at his absence. What was I even doing here? Seeking out comfort like some kind of... perfectly normal human being.

Caught in the wavering heat of my decision, I gave up and stalked away furious that after walking there I had to leave immediately. Magnus’s building wasn’t exactly a fucking stone’s throw from the Institute either so the journey back would be fun.

Fuck Jace. Fuck him for doing this to me. Fuck him for expecting me to fawn over his new girlfriend and fuck him for ruining me forever.

Ruthlessly, I knocked into unsuspecting Mundanes who gasped and muttered about rudeness.

‘Hey, asshole!’ a guy yelled as I nearly send him flying into the gutter. ‘Watch where you— oh, hey man!’

It was Fuck Face Adam, Jace’s fair-weather drunk friend. ‘Oh, sorry Adam,’ I said, not really sorry at all. ‘You OK?’

He turned fully to face me, grinning widely. ‘I’m great, super-duper!’

‘More drunk than usual?’ I asked, mildly disgusted. He looked like shit; dirty, sweaty and eyes wide as saucers.
‘Nu-uh, man,’ he said, dodging another New Yorker who wasn’t interested in the feelings of his fellow men. ‘This—this is the newest shit, the best fucking shit out there!’

‘Yeah, it looks great,’ I deadpanned, squinting at him.

I went to leave, but he grabbed my arm. ‘You want some?’ he asked, eyes bright and swimming in their sockets. ‘Tell Jace if he wants—’

Before he could finish, I viciously grabbed him by the weak collar of his dirty t-shirt and shoved him against a store front, the shutters clanging loudly.

‘You dare get him anywhere near your filthy, poisonous shit and it’ll be the last thing you ever fucking do!’

‘Jesus!’ Adam choked, writhing to get away. ‘Let me go, you prick!’

I wrapped my hand around his throat. ‘Stay away from him, you hear me? Leave him alone.’

‘I got it, I got it!’ I let him go and left him there, yelling after me. ‘You’re fucking crazy, Lightwood! Crazy!’

‘What you did was crazy, Alec. Mom and Dad are gonna kill you!’

Dismissively, I waved away Izzy’s concerns. ‘They won’t even notice.’

‘Ten grand, taken over the course a few weeks, maybe they wouldn’t notice that. Twenty grand taken in two days? Come on.’

Izzy flipped her awful pancakes at least three minutes too late, revealing the burnt underside she paid no attention to whatsoever.

‘I’ll tell them it was an emergency.’

‘I’m not saying it wasn’t,’ she muttered darkly.

‘That I needed it for something.’

She shot me a disbelieving look. ‘Like what?’

‘Like…’ I fished, gesturing vaguely ‘Money to bail out a friend.’

‘From jail? They’ll never believe that and they’ll want to know every detail.’

‘OK, I get it - I’m a giant idiot and I can’t lie to save my life. Are you gonna help me or just keep shooting down my ideas?’

‘Crap ideas,’ she corrected, sliding the blackened discs onto a plate and walking them over to me at the breakfast table. ‘And of course, I am. The best thing to do is say it was me.’

‘You? No way, Iz.’

‘Look,’ she told me sternly. ‘They care about you too much to let anything slide, especially if they
think it involved something illegal.’

‘They care about you too,’ I said quickly.

‘I know. But not in the same way they care about you. If they think it was me, they won’t delve too deep.’ She laughed with just a hint of sadness. ‘They won’t want to.’

‘Dad will.’

‘Dad will respect his healthy fear of realising the part he played in screwing me up and let me off with a warning. Mom will be disappointed as always but if I tell her I really needed it, she won’t ask.’

I sipped my coffee, looking down. ‘Izzy, you know what they’ll assume.’

‘Which means they won’t delve.’

‘I wouldn’t let you do this for anyone but Jace.’

She smiled and grasped my hand. ‘I know. He deserves to be protected from that little bitch. Has he said anything? Heard from her?’

‘It’s only been a day.’

‘What if she doesn’t say anything? Just takes the money and bolts? You know how he is, he’ll try to find her.’

Out of the deepest brotherly love, I took a bite of the charcoaled foulness that was Izzy’s pancakes. ‘I think she’ll message him like I asked. That’s the impression I got.’

‘I hope you’re right.’

‘He’s gonna be upset either way.’

‘He’s got us and it’s better than the truth.’

We both fell silent in the simple acknowledgement that lying to him was the better option. Jace’s trust was hard earned over the years and watching him slowly open himself up to the world had meant becoming the guardians of his happiness.

‘Don’t tell them you were involved,’ Izzy suggested.

‘No!’ I said firmly. ‘If you’re taking the blame the least I can do is shoulder some of it.’

‘It’ll be easier,’ she sighed. ‘For me. They’ll just try to make me feel even worse for dragging you into my terrible mess of a life.’

‘Well they won’t succeed cos it’s bullshit anyway. Sorry, but there’s no way. I got your back, little sis.’

Mildly annoyed, she rolled her eyes. ‘How’s the pancakes?’

‘Not too bad actually.’

She grinned. ‘Liar.’
The next day, things got worse. A lot worse.

‘Well, this isn’t good,’ I heard Clary whisper to Izzy, quite stating the obvious.

It was after the latest briefing, during which I voiced concerns that the recent bout of quietness might cause our Shadowhunters to become lax or worse, restless. Sparring was part of our daily routine and always had been, so that was where we went. Recent upgrades in the institute meant a fresh bout of enthusiasm for some of the new weapons, Izzy especially.

Things were going sort of OK, in that everything was shit and Jace and I still weren’t talking to each other, when dear old Dad sauntered in with Karina, his French girlfriend.

‘Jace,’ he greeted my Parabatai, who was nearest. He enveloped him in an uncharacteristically warm hug. ‘You’re well?’

‘Yeah,’ Jace said a little stiffly, looking a little more than bemused. My Dad was more tanned than the last time I saw him and wearing a blue shirt with the top two buttons undone. Holiday Dad, maybe. Affair Dad, more accurate. Happy Dad, my mind supplied quietly.

‘Good, I’m glad to hear it. You remember Karina?’

‘Of course,’ he said with polite friendliness. She leaned in for two kisses and they made brief small talk. Dad turned his focus onto me and I winced inwardly.

‘Alec,’ he said, pulling me into the same hug Jace got. He back-slapped me hard. ‘I’ve missed you, son. You should come out soon, all of you!’

‘Hey, Dad,’ Izzy said, rescuing me. ‘What are you doing here so early? Party’s not till—’

‘Do I need an excuse to visit my own children?’

Ah, fuck.

Karina finished with Jace and made her was over to us.

‘Izzy!’ she greeted as more kissing and hugging ensues. ‘You look beautiful, eh? More so than the last time I ‘ave seen you!’ Her strong French accent made every word musical.

‘Thanks,’ Izzy said with grace and an impressively normal smile. Why could everyone smile like it was nothing and where the hell was I when they were handing out Perfect Smile Training pamphlets? ‘How’s your family?’

I left my capable sister with Karina and turned to Dad. ‘You know Mom’s here, right?’ Because of course he fucking did.

‘Is she?’ he asked airily like it was nothing. ‘Well that’s great. We are still your parents after all. How is she?’

I let him see what I thought about that throwaway comment. ‘Why don’t you ask her? Or do you not to want to hear it?’
He put his hand on my shoulder and led me away from the others. ‘I don’t like your tone, Alec. I understand this is an inconvenience to your Mom, OK? But Karina isn’t going anywhere and I want you all to get to know her. I don’t think that’s unfair, is it?’

I glanced over at Karina; even her runes were beautiful. ‘I think it’s unfair for Mom, yeah and to be honest Dad, it’s a little unfair on all of us as well. Max gets back tomorrow from Alicante.’

‘That’s why I brought her. She hasn’t even met the little scamp yet!’

Little Scamp? The fuck?

‘OK, Dad - whatever. Just…try and use a little tact, maybe?’

He grinned brightly. ‘In the winter, you and the others should come to the Paris Institute. It’s a gorgeous place, France.’

Way to sidestep everything I said, you absolute prick. ‘Sure, Dad.’

‘You can bring Magnus, if you’d like,’ he added, like he was offering an impressive gift in a casual tone. He winked at me. ‘Think about it.’

He went back to Karina and the others and left me feeling a deep, intense need to pummel things.

* *

Back on the roof, yet again. It was our place, Jace’s and mine. Our designated secret hideaway from the real world. This week had been a rough one for Jace and we seemed to be spending all our time out here lately. This night would be difficult, though. He’d asked me to meet him here and something told me this was it.

‘Hey,’ I greeted carefully, sitting on his right. He stared out at the city, phone in hand. ‘What’s up?’

He heaved a great sigh, his warm breath unfurling into the night. ‘She lost it,’ he told me. ‘Katie.’

Keeping myself as neutral as possible to avoid him sensing the lie, I said, ‘I’m so sorry, Jace.’ That was completely true.

‘She told me she lost it yesterday. She said…’

‘Yeah?’

‘She said it was my fault. The stress of everything, of me not paying her quick enough. She told me she lost it because of me.’

Ice cold fury was held at bay, but only just. Treacherous little bitch.

‘It wasn’t your fault,’ I told him, wrapping him up in my arms. ‘You hear me? Not even remotely your fault.’

He heaved a dry sob and burrowed deeper, face pressed into my neck.

‘I should have done more,’ he whispered, but I heard the question mark.
‘No,’ I said firmly. ‘Stop that right now.’

‘But it was my baby.’

I closed my eyes, hating myself for not just admitting the truth. That there was no baby. That Katie was a lying, scheming bitch. But I knew Jace better than anyone. I knew what he needed to know and what he didn’t.

‘I know and I’m so sorry.’

We pulled apart, still leaning against each other.

‘I love you,’ he said after a while. ‘You’re my whole world, sometimes.’

Heart clenching painfully, I nodded. ‘And you.’

‘Promise me something.’

‘Anything.’

‘Never leave me.’

‘Jace, you know I wouldn’t.’

‘I don’t mean…dying,’ he clarified quietly. ‘I would never allow that.’

‘You mean—’

‘Just please don’t ever leave me.’

Somewhat bitterly, I said, ‘I don’t think it’ll be me leaving you, Jace.’

He laughed dryly. ‘Other people are…they’re just a distraction. You and Izzy, you’re all that’s real. If you leave me, I won’t survive.’

‘You’re so maudlin,’ I teased lightly, grasping for levity.

‘Please,’ he insisted tightly. ‘Just promise you won’t ever leave me.’

I thought of what Katie had done, how she’d twisted it to hurt him that one final time. I thought of how I always ended up promising something whenever we came up here. I thought of my beautiful Parabatai and how desperately I was in love with him. It was an easy promise to make. No one would ever compare and even if they did, they, much like Jace, wouldn’t be interested in me like that.

I kissed the top of his head. ‘I promise.’

* 

A/N - Hope everyone enjoyed this, sorry for the somewhat of a delay, but hopefully it's a long enough chapter to compensate. As always, I would die for comments and thanks for reading!
Chapter Four: I Prefer Cluster Fuck

Chapter Summary

The cascading failures of Jace Herondale.

Chapter Four: I Prefer Cluster Fuck

‘You’re eager and unashamed,

I grieve by dying every night, baby.

Prove them wrong when you get five dollars.

You’re eager and unashamed, I
don’t think the race is over, baby.

Prove them wrong when you get five dollars,

Five dollars, baby blues, five dollars baby. ’

-Christine and the Queens

Jace

Sometimes, I wished he would hurt me.

‘Almost,’ I teased him as we sparred together with a small audience of Izzy and Karina. Much to
Izzy’s exasperation, Karina had decided Izzy was her good friend and had spent the last few days
trailing after her while Robert interfered with Alec’s running of the Institute and generally did a
pretty solid impression of GoodDad!2.0. Maryse arrived yesterday and to say that things were shit
was a spectacular understatement.

Alec and I hadn’t discussed what happened, the argument that followed anything, really. Pretending
it hadn’t happened was all well and good, but pretending nothing was wrong between us was
impossible and I lived caught between dread and anticipation for when the quiet would snap.

Izzy wasn’t happy, especially as she didn’t know fully what was wrong. Fuck, even I didn’t fully
know what was wrong. Whatever it was, though, it was me. It was always me. My fault.

How could anything ever be his fault? He was perfect.
Except he was pulling his punches. I hated that. Usually it wasn’t necessary. Ordinarily, we were in sync enough to spar without having to resort to such a weak tactic. We could fight and let ourselves dance around each other, expertly battling without ever hurting each other in any significant way.

We weren’t in sync, though. And I wanted him to hurt me.

He was frustrated, too. He felt it as much as I did and it irked him but of course not enough for the great, logical Alec Lightwood to lose control for even a moment. Rather than make a mistake and risk hurting me, he pulled yet another punch and this time I couldn’t contain a small, brief scowl.

‘What?’ he panted, sweeping his hair aside irritably? ‘You done?’

‘Not even close.’

I threw a complex move at him with more force than necessary and he had to think fast. Barely, he side-stepped me and used the momentum to push me over, but before I could hit the ground, he caught me by the arm and pulled me back up.

Now I was furious.

‘The hell?’ I asked, yanking away.

Dark eyes searched my mismatched ones. ‘What now, Jace?’ he asked quietly. ‘What have I done now?’

Sick, icy guilt slid down my spine. ‘Don’t pull your punches,’ I warned, trying to erase the cold sensation by staying in the moment.

No comeback. He didn’t try to argue, at least.

‘Come on guys,’ Izzy called from the side-lines, sounding more than a little bored. ‘I wanna eat!’

‘Well go eat, then!’ Alec called, rolling his eyes.

I used the momentary distraction and hit him in the face, catching him off-guard. He didn’t stumble; Alec was rock solid and it would take more than a sucker punch to drop him. He was shocked, though. When he put his hand to his bottom lip, it came away with a swipe of red.

He locked eyes with me and I maintained the stare.

‘Come on, then,’ I beckoned.

This time, he came at me fast and hard. Heart pumping, I blocked him but only just. He backed me into a corner and I swung wide, trying to gain leverage but he caught my wrist, snaked his leg around my ankle and dropped me easily.

Not remotely done, I kicked up and threw a roundhouse at him. It went on like this for another few, thrilling minutes, our fight seemingly building to some kind of crescendo.

_Hurt me, come on! Hit me!_

He moved towards me over and over, endless opportunities to give me what I wanted, but he refused. He was Alec, after all and hurting me was antithetical to him.

Well fuck that.
Playing dirty was my middle name.

I caught him and yanked him close by the upper arm and whispered, ‘Too tired from fucking Magnus all night, huh?’

He froze for just a second, his heart contracting. I felt it, the same way I could feel so much of him. His pain echoed; a stab of betrayal that hurt me as well, just not in the way that I wanted.

Violently, he pushed me away. ‘No,’ he said, plainly, but his control was shaken now. Like a shark with blood, I didn’t him a chance to recover. Move after move, he blocked and caught them all. We weren’t sparring now, he was just stopping everything I tried to hit him with. If I was making noises, I barely heard them. It had gone too far now, I knew it in a distant kind of way but I didn’t care. I couldn’t stop.

My lungs were burning, sweat was starting to run.

_He’s not going to hit you. You’re not even worth that._

Izzy was calling my name, but it didn’t stop me.

Finally, that perfect composure cracked just a fraction. I saw his eyes flare, saw the anger slip through and for a second, just a fucking _moment_, he wanted to hurt me. Make me stop, make me back up, make me sorry, make me see sense.

He didn’t, though. He just pushed me back, making me stumble.

‘Enough,’ he said, looking away from me. ‘I’m done.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Guys!’ Izzy said sternly. ‘I’m gonna faint if I don’t eat soon.’

‘Yeah,’ Alec said with a nod. ‘Let’s go.’

‘I make a wonderful lunch!’ Karina chimed in, quite oblivious. ‘Your Papa, ‘e says you are not such a good cook.’

She took Izzy’s arm and Alec made to follow them out.

‘Pussy,’ I said under my breath, body trembling with unspent adrenaline.

He stopped. Izzy and Karine left. The door closed and he turned on me.

‘I won’t,’ he said tightly. ‘Stop trying to make me.’

‘Why not? You know you want to!’ I threw my arms wide. ‘You think I won’t recover from your incredible strength? _Please._’

‘What is wrong you with you?’

‘Me? I just want a good fight. Sorry if all the Shadowhunter shit is _dull_ to you now you’re shacked up with a Warlock!’

‘Fuck you, Jace.’

‘You wish.’
Oh fuck.

It was a stupid, off the cuff comment that meant nothing. I said it all the time, mostly to Simon but fuck fuck fuck I should not have said it to Alec.

He closed the distance between us before I could correct myself, make a joke, fucking anything. He stopped only inches away from me. His scent filled my mouth; fresh sweat and his skin, the smell of his hair. My Parabatai. It made me dizzy.

‘This needs to stop,’ he said. ‘Either you stop it or I will.’

‘Oh yeah?’ I sneered, having to look up at him, fucking tree. ‘What’re you gonna do? Not man enough to hit me, that’s for sure.’

‘What have I done?’ he breathed, so angry it made my heart hurt. ‘You blame me for the…transference thing? That’s it, is it?’

‘I don’t know what—’

‘Don’t you dare lie to me!’

I glared dully. ‘Or what?’

After a long, strained pause, he said, ‘Why does it have to be you?’

I swallowed. ‘Why does what have to be me?’

He ignored my question. ‘You need to grow the fuck up. It wasn’t my fault. You want me to swear off sex for the rest of my life? Or shall we make a fucking schedule so it doesn’t coincide? Tell me so you can let this go!’

Disgusted with myself, I turned away. ‘Just leave, then.’

He took my wrist and spun me around, pulling me way too close. He was so angry he was shaking, just like me. ‘I’m sorry, OK? I’m sorry, Jace! Please, please stop doing this to me, you’re…I can’t bear it, all right?’

If I moved forward, our mouths would touch. The thought threatened to devour me whole.

‘I can’t stop it,’ I told him, truthfully, brokenly. ‘I can’t control it. Ever since that night I just feel…’

Whoa. Stop.

I shook myself, moving back eyes firmly closed. ‘I uh, sorry. I’m just fucking going out of my mind with nothing to hunt. Too amped up, you know?’

If I’d been brave enough to look at him, I knew what I’d have seen. That beautiful face twisted in agony as he weathered the fucking storm that was Jace Herondale.

‘Yeah,’ he said and I panicked because it almost sounded like a sob. ‘Got it.’

I opened my eyes, but he was halfway out the door.
The quiet spell was killing me, that wasn’t any kind of a lie. With nothing more than a rogue lower demon here and there to vanquish the fuck out of, my energy and enthusiasm was mostly channelled into Alyssa.

The problem was that it didn’t feel the same anymore. Nothing felt the same. Fucking her felt good, great even. She was fantastic and adventurous enough to keep even me interested, but it didn’t feel like that time.

That time when you and Alec came together?

Yeah, that’s the one.

I was driving myself crazy with it. Thinking about it over and over, how it felt, how he felt. What noises had he made? How had his face looked?

I was fucking pathetic.

Without anything to seriously kill that would put up a decent fight, Alyssa was the simplest and safest hideout.

Until she wasn’t.

‘Jesus Christ!’ she said loudly. I looked up from the takeout box, surprised to see her usually chill and frown-free face twisted up in anger. ‘What is wrong with you lately?’

Defence ready and waiting, I said, ‘Oh I’m sorry, am I not listening closely enough to your endless diatribe?’

‘Endless? That’s a little desperate, isn’t it?’ She got up from the table and dumped her Chow Mein in the trash. ‘You know what? I’ve got friends coming over.’

‘Oh, how I love a coded dismissal!’

She fixed me with an unimpressed stare. ‘You’re bored of me? That’s fine. You’re trying to start a fight? That’s not. I don’t want whatever drama you’re hauling around.’

‘I’m not bored of you! I’m just distracted and…not right.’

‘So, get un-distracted and sort your shit out! Amazing sex doesn’t mean we have to do this,’ she gestured to the food and the table. ‘Don’t feel obligated.’

‘I’m not.’

‘Good. Like I said, people coming.’ She crossed her arms.

‘Aly,’ I said, quietly. ‘I’m…I’m sorry, OK?’

‘OK,’ she said, but she didn’t melt. She didn’t give in the way Alec would have. ‘Call me tomorrow if you wanna do something.’

I was still sitting there at her small table, feeling more and more like an idiot with every passing second. ‘So, I’m just a fuck, is that it?’

She didn’t flinch. ‘That’s all you’re capable of, Jace. I’m not stupid, I won’t tell myself you have
anything else to give that’s not on loan.’

My mouth dropped. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Well, yeah.’

‘Wow. Yeah, that’s—that’s fucking great.’

I’m sorry if that upset you. I like you a lot, but you’re not available and I’ve known that right from the start. Now you’re becoming more and more distant and you just want to fall into bed most times which is fine, but I don’t want whatever this is. It’s not fair to use me like this and give nothing in return.’

I stood up.

‘That’s some rock-solid logic there,’ I said, pulling on my jacket. ‘Well, thanks for your honesty.’

The music was loud. Mundanes were batshit crazy little fuckers but I loved their nightclubs. The others didn’t understand why I liked it here so much. With music this loud, I could drown myself out.

Alcohol helped, too. It always did.

‘More tequila!’ I yelled in the direction of the bar tender. He rolled his eyes but took my money. The bar was sodden with spilled drinks. I was f*cked.

When he returned with my drink and no change, someone knocked into me. I managed to turn, wondering if it was someone I could start a fight with.

‘Hey!’ I said, but it was squeaky and useless. I shook myself, voice lowering an octave. ‘Hey!’

‘Sorry, man!’ the guy said, genuinely apologetic. ‘Fuckin’ twats behind me are tryin’ to start a mosh pit or something!’ He threw a dirty look at the bridal party on the dance-floor.

‘Are you Australian?’ I asked, squinting.

He laughed. ‘British. Did I spill your drink?’

I checked, clutching it protectively. ‘No,’ I said, patting him on the shoulder. ‘It’s safe. I’m Jace.’

‘Declan. You here with someone?’ He sat down beside me.

‘Nope. Here all alone like the hottest fucking loser you ever met. You?’

He laughed. ‘Friends.’ I followed his gaze towards the back of the club where a group of six or seven guys jumped in time to the beat and screamed along with the lyrics.

‘This song is a big deal in the UK,’ Declan explained. ‘You like The Killers?’

I shrugged. ‘Not big on bands.’

He smiled and I couldn’t help but respond in kind as was my slutty way.
'Can I buy you another drink?' he asked, looking at the tequila I was cradling.

*You shouldn’t drink anymore, Alec would have said, about an hour ago admittedly. When do you ever make good decisions when you’re drunk?*

I knocked it back anyway. ‘Sure, thanks.’

He waved the bar tender over. ‘Can I get a tequila and a Budweiser, please?’

The bar tender shot me a look. ‘He’s way over the limit. We’re not meant to serve him when he’s like this.’

Incredulous, I opened my mouth to complain, but Declan spoke over me.

‘Just the tequila then, for myself? You can watch me drink it.’

Slighted, I watched the bar tender pour the drink into a shot glass and slide it very deliberately to Declan with his beer. My new friend downed it and the bar tender took his money.

‘Greedy,’ I told him. Declan smiled secretively and before I could say anything else, he grabbed me gently by the face and kissed me. It wasn’t really a kiss at first. He just kind of gave me the tequila which he had apparently kept in his mouth and holy shit that should not be so hot. Once I swallowed the forbidden drink, it turned into a real kiss. Bruising and hot and fucking hell I was hard already.

He broke away with relish, wiping his mouth. ‘Cheers,’ he said, taking a sip of his beer. The bar tender gave him his change with a less than impressed expression, but he couldn’t prove anything so he left with yet another eye-roll.

Dazed, I tried to get the full measure of this guy I known for two minutes.

‘Why did you do that?’ I asked, when I realised I was too drunk to get the measure of a fucking shoe, the state I was in.

He shrugged. ‘YOLO and all that.’

‘Are you gay?’

‘Are you?’

I laughed at that. ‘Who fuckin’ knows, man?’

‘So, look,’ he said, leaning in so I could hear him. ‘You’re way too drunk for me to take you in the bathroom and fuck you the way I know you need to be fucked. But I’m here for another four days. When you sober up, give me a call, yeah?’

He put a piece of paper in my pocket.

‘When the fuck did you write that?’

‘When I saw you ten minutes ago, before I bumped into you on purpose.’

I chuckled. ‘That’s pretty impressive.’

‘Have a good night, Jace,’ he said with a wink.
‘Hi, this is Alec, leave a message.’

‘Yyyyeah, I’ll leave a message then - thasss fine! Y’know whuh? I met someone and he was hot hot hot, Alec! He gave me tequila…with his MOUTH! YEAH! And yuh know what else? ‘M gonna go find him tomorrow and I’m gonna let him fuck me! Cos he’s only got four days and thass cool, y’know? Four days isn’t enough for him to see what a disgusting, monumental fuck up I am! An’ since when d’you not answer when I call? Oh yyyyeaaah! Since Magnus stole you from me! Well that’s some bullshit cos you’re mine, Lightwood, you hear me? You were mine first and you’ll be mine last? You’ll always be mine cos no-one—’

‘Beep!’

‘—will ever love you like I do and…ah fuck!’

I woke to the smell of ozone, incense and pancakes.

‘The fuck?’ Groggily, I looked around and realised I was on a sofa in a luxurious and lavishly decorated apartment.

‘Oh, awake, are we?’

Magnus. The fuck?

With effort I sat up and pushed down a woven blanket. Magnus fucking Bane came and sat opposite me, placing coffee and a stack of pancakes on the small coffee table beside me.

‘Here, let no one ever say I am not a gracious host.’

With a legendary scowl, I reached for the coffee. ‘I don’t think that’s what they’ll say. Why am I here?’

‘I found you on the street downstairs after you buzzed several other apartment numbers. My neighbour knocked and said some crazy delinquent was asking for me. You were pretty much unconscious.’

Humiliation flooded through me. I gripped the hot cup of coffee hard.

‘Sorry,’ I managed.

He shrugged elegantly, cat eyes fixed upon me. ‘Lucky for you, I was alone.’

That had been my next question. ‘Did you…?’

‘Tell Alec you were outside, drunkenly offering to duel for the right to own him? No, I did not.’

‘I wasn’t offering to duel,’ I mumbled.

‘No? Your memory is crystal clear, then?’
I snuck a pancake and nibbled it. ‘Thank you for not calling him.’

‘I didn’t want to upset him any more than he has been lately.’

I closed my eyes. ‘He’s upset?’

‘Why are you asking me? You’re his Parabatai, aren’t you?’

Quite honestly, I replied, ‘Lately, I don’t know what we are.’

He nodded, chin resting on his fingers as he surveyed me.

‘You’re quite the character, you know that?’

‘I’ve been told.’

‘Are you in love with him?’

My heart clenched painfully. ‘No.’

‘So why were you telling Mrs Bozdemir that he’s yours and anyone who tries to take him is going to their ass kicked to high heaven?’

I chanced looking at him. ‘He isn’t mine. He isn’t anyone’s. I was drunk and stupid. Feel free to ask about other insane shit I’ve done when I’ve been on the tequila. I promise that held no meaning either.’

‘I really like him,’ Magnus said, seriously. ‘I care about him, but you and I both know how he feels about you.’

‘Do we?’

‘Don’t play games with me, little Herondale.’

‘Wouldn’t dare to try, believe me.’

‘If you feel the same way, you owe it to him to say it.’

‘Look, thanks for the help, OK? I owe you one.’ I put the half-finished coffee down and looked around for my shoes and jacket. ‘I didn’t break anything, right?’

He nodded to the coat stand. ‘Maybe your own record for embarrassing drunken activities.’

By the door, I stood in my boots and held the jacket tightly. ‘Not even close,’ I told him. ‘Thanks again.’

When I got home, Maryse was the first to hit me with an all-expense paid guilt trip. It was weird having her there again, but before I had time to adjust, Clary came out of fucking nowhere and joined in.

‘It really is unfair,’ Clary agreed. ‘You could have called, we were worried.’
I poured juice from the fridge. ‘Who was worried?’ I asked casually.

‘Everyone,’ Maryse said sternly, the same way Izzy might have. ‘You’re getting too old to still be doing things like this.’

‘Does anyone have an aspirin?’

‘You’re lucky Simon saw you otherwise Alec would have probably gone out searching all night.’

I spluttered in my juice. ‘What?’

‘At the club,’ Clary said, pouring cereal.

‘Hold up,’ I choked. ‘Simon was at the club? Why the hell didn’t he say anything?’

Clary shrugged, but didn’t say anything. Maryse sighed. ‘Maybe he didn’t want to say anything, darling. He was with his friends from England, he said. They don’t fly over much, apparently.’

I winced. ‘England?’

‘Yeah, they’re a band. They cover old Killers songs,’ Clary said, but she definitely was avoiding eye contact now.

‘You should eat something,’ Maryse said, concerned. ‘You look quite dreadful.’

‘Y-yeah, I will. Clary, is Simon still here?’

‘He’s with Izzy,’ she replied lightly.

‘Thanks.’

Still drunk and nauseous, I made for Izzy’s room. I heard Simon laughing from inside and knocked loudly.

‘Yeah?’ Izzy called and I went inside. ‘Oh hey, how’re you feeling?’

I gave her a smile and took in the scene. Izzy sat on her bed opposite Simon who looked pretty comfortable, truth be told. ‘Not too bad,’ I lied. ‘Uh, can I grab Simon for a minute if that’s OK?’

‘Sure,’ Izzy said, but she seemed suspicious. Simon whispered something as he brushed past her and she giggled. The gesture was not lost on me, but it would have to wait.

I waited for him outside impatiently. ‘What’s up?’ he asked and I debated whether or not to glare or attempt civility.

‘What did you see?’ I hissed, civility failing me as it so often did.

‘Throughout the course of my life, or…?’

‘At the club!’

‘Oh, you mean last night at the club where you made out with my friend, Declan? Yeah, I might have seen that.’

‘You motherfucking asshole, why didn’t you tell me you were there?’

‘When I saw you, you seemed busy, I guess? I don’t know. I was there with my friends.’
'You told Clary.'

'I tell Clary everything. She’s not gonna bandy it around.'

'SHE’S THE ONE WHO ALREADY LET IT SLIP ABOUT ALEC!'

He flinched at the volume. ‘Even more reason for her not to say anything this time. Are you OK? Why are you so worried? Who even cares?’

His point was valid and it brought me up short. Who would care? Izzy wouldn’t be bothered by it. No one would be likely to think any less of me, I was Jace of Slutsville after all. But Alec…would he care?

It felt like a betrayal. Not to Alyssa, either. It felt like I’d betrayed him.

This was so beyond fucked.

‘Look,’ I said, grasping for sanity. ‘He kissed me, OK? You can ask him. Anyway, it doesn’t matter just don’t make a big deal of it.’

‘I heard: Don’t Tell Alec.’

He didn’t seem remotely bothered by my death glare.

Izzy opened the door and sighed dramatically. ‘You guys whisper loud. Can I be in on the secret or is it still Boys Only?’

Simon had just enough grace to not snicker at her comment.

‘Sorry,’ I said, trying to make my body relax. ‘I didn’t mean to pull you away from Simon. Looked like you guys were pretty comfy.’

She gave the kind of gentle smile that made me worried. ‘We’re just talking.’

‘Oh really?’ I crossed my arms, trying to seem intimidating. ‘About what?’

Simon yawned. ‘Game of Thrones.’

I wrinkled my nose. ‘Is that a board game?’

He laughed. ‘For someone who spends so much time with Mundanes, maybe you should check out some TV now and again.’

‘If the Shadow world gets any quieter, I might have to.’

‘You’ve said it now,’ Izzy complained, lightly punching me. ‘Famous last words, Jace.’

My phone buzzed in my jean pocket. When I withdrew it, I saw Alyssa 3.

‘Catch you later,’ Izzy said knowingly. Simon gave me a mock salute and followed her.

‘Hello?’ I answered with no small amount of apprehension.

‘Hey,’ Alyssa said, tone annoyingly neutral. ‘How’re you?’

‘Yeah, I’m OK. You?’
‘I want to be straight with you,’ she said bluntly and my heart sank. ‘I went out last night with my friends. I saw you with that guy.’

Perfect. Just…fucking perfect. ‘Aly that’s not what happened, I wasn’t with him. It was a joke. He gave me tequila.’

She snorted. ‘With his mouth?’

I rubbed my eyes. ‘Actually, yes. What were you even doing there?’

‘What, you think I was following you or some shit? I go there all the time, Jace. That’s where we met, unless you’ve forgotten.’

I had forgotten. ‘No, of course not. I just…I was totally out of it and this guy came onto me. I barely remember it.’

‘I didn’t call for an argument, OK? I called to say don’t bother calling me again. You’re a fun guy and I wish you well but you’re a mess. I don’t want to be involved with a mess.’

I toed the ground, unsure of what to say. ‘I’m sorry?’

‘I don’t think you are and that’s cool. See you around, Jace.’

She hung up.

I stood outside Izzy’s room for a minute afterwards letting it sink in, trying to find my feelings. When I found nothing but a hornet’s nest in my stomach, I gave up.

‘Pathetic,’ I said quietly. ‘You’re fucking pathetic.’

Slowly, I pulled out the crumpled piece of paper from my jacket pocket. He’d written his name and number on a Starbucks receipt. I still had the phone in my hand so I dialled.

He answered quickly. ‘Hello?’

I took a deep breath.

‘Hey, Declan?’

‘Speaking,’ he said brightly.

‘It’s Jace from last night.’

‘Oh, I hoped you’d call, though I had doubts about you making it home alive to be honest.’

I laughed hollowly. ‘I’m tougher than I look, James Bond.’

‘Because that’s the only British guy you know?’ he chuckled, muttering something to someone on his end. ‘So how are you doing?’

‘Y’know people keep asking me that and I’m getting pretty tired of it,’ I said honestly. ‘Are you free today?’

‘I’m free tonight?’ he countered.

‘Wanna hang out?’
‘My hotel room? 10 o’clock?’

‘Sounds like a plan. Text me the details.’

‘See you then.’

I hung up. ‘Onto the next.’

‘I think I’m having a gay crisis,’ I told him when he handed me an insanely expensive bottle of Coke from the mini-bar. ‘Or a sexuality crisis. Bisexual crisis? Whatever. I’m having a crisis.’

He smiled indulgently and sat beside me on the double bed in his moderately clean hotel room. ‘You never been with a bloke before?’

‘Once,’ I said, opening the drink more for something to do with my hands. ‘I don’t really know what I’m doing.’

‘In the gay sex arena or just general life?’

‘Both, I think. I dunno, everything just keeps getting more and more twisted. You ever hear of cascading failures? That’s my life right now.’

‘Am I another failure?’

I looked at him. Good looking, little older than me. I recalled the kiss, how it had sent heat and desire coursing through me. The roughness, the weird sameness. ‘No,’ I said. ‘You’re not. If there’s a failure, it’s me. Fucking up a sure thing in a hotel room with a hot guy.’

He laughed. ‘Have you ever seen yourself in a mirror? You’d have to do a lot worse to fuck this up.’

‘Give me time.’

‘I don’t have much. Gotta fly back in three days.’

I set the drink on the floor. ‘That’s good. You know I got dumped today? About thirty seconds before I called you actually.’

‘I don’t mind being your rebound,’ he said, surprisingly gently.

‘That’s generous,’ I said and nudged his shoulder. ‘This I what I do, you know? Hook up, make a connection, leave before it takes.’

‘A lot of people do that, usually because there’s not enough room for a new connection in their lives.’

I frowned. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Like, if they already have an important connection with someone.’

‘Can I ask you something?’

‘Sure.’
‘Did I look gay? At the bar, y’know?’

‘Sorry?’

‘You hit on me. You even had your number all ready to give me, so…did I look gay?’

He sighed. ‘Actually, no.’

The way he said it made me turn and look at him. ‘No?’

‘My friend, Simon. He knew you when I pointed you out.’

My stomach plummeted.

‘What?’

‘I asked if you were gay and he said you were flexible.’

‘…and?’ I pressed, knowing there was more.

‘Ah, see now I’ve gone and fucked up a sure thing with a hot guy ’

‘What else did he say?’

Declan bit his lip. ‘He said you were in love with your best friend, a guy.’

Fuck you, Simon. ‘He did, huh? Well no offence to your friend, but he doesn’t know what he’s talking about.’

‘Didn’t you just kinda say you’re having a sexuality crisis?’

‘I am, but it’s fuck all to do with Alec.’

‘Listen, we can meet up tomorrow if you’re—’

I turned and pressed my mouth against his, cupping his neck and pulling him close. His tongue was cool and sweet from the drink, he kissed me back right away. When we parted for air, I asked, ‘Are you my rebound or not?’

______________________________

Sex with a guy, I decided as I towel dried my hair in my room later that night, was pretty fucking good. It hadn’t quite eradicated the nasty feeling since Alyssa called to dump me, but it helped.

At least Alec and I hadn’t…coincided again. I shook my head, dropping the towel at the end of my bed. I missed him so much. This weird distance between us was slowly killing me. It wasn’t him causing it, of course. Alec was never the problem.

For once, I was actually tired without being fall down drunk. I went to turn off the light when I heard a gentle knock.

I knew who it was before I even opened the door.

‘Hey,’ he said, eyes somewhat downcast.

‘Hey, come in.’ I stood back and made room for him to enter.
He walked over and sat on my bed.

‘We need to talk.’

...
Chapter Five: I Really Hate Birthdays

Chapter Summary

Alec's 21st birthday looms, Jace and Alec talk, a new enemy makes itself known.

- Chapter Five -

- I Really Hate Birthdays -

‘Always I am mistaken, I look for love, I find a stone.

Of all the seasons winter befriends me, I come to you in friendship,

And hold my breath against the snow. What are you thinking as I gaze into you?

Forgive me the confusion, Forgive me as I realize my thoughts betrayed.

You are the answer, Cry and smile the same.

Overcome me baby, All I'm asking is to be alive for once.’

-Vienna Teng

‘We need to talk.’

I was expecting the diversion. ‘I agree, civilisation would be lost without our expansive and complex communication.’

Looking down, I took a deep breath. ‘Jace, do you want me to leave?’

Cocky swagger, as always. ‘The room? You just got here.’

‘The Institute.’

‘What? What, no, of course not! The hell, Alec?’

‘Dad keeps saying about the French Institute, about spending a year there.’

‘And you’re considering it?’
I dropped my head into my hands. ‘I can’t do this with you, Jace. You understand me? I can’t keep doing this with you. It’s killing me.’

‘I’m not…’

‘Not what? Doing it on purpose?’

‘No, look - I’m sorry, OK? I don’t know what the fuck’s happening to me lately, I just…I’m sorry. I don’t mean to lash out at you this way. I said before I can’t control it, but that’s not acceptable. I’m gonna do better.’

I looked up. ‘Jace,’ I said. ‘What can’t you control? I don’t understand where this is coming from.’

He bit his lip. ‘Alec, I can’t—’

‘Please,’ I begged. ‘Please just tell me.’

He dragged a hand through his hair roughly. ‘I don’t know, some kind of self-defence, maybe?’

‘Against me?’

‘No,’ he insisted sternly. He knelt in front of me, clasped my hands in his tightly. ‘After what happened. With us.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ I said, awkwardness and heat tangling around my heart.

Jace laughed bitterly. ‘Don’t, Alec. None of this is—’

‘Hey, sometimes stuff is my fault, OK? I’m not perfect and I’m beyond sick of you putting yourself down! It has to stop, Jace! You’re…’ Everything? The reason the sun rises? My soul mate? ‘You’re a good person, you’re kind and kick-ass and we all love you. You hear me?’

His eyes were tightly closed.

‘Jace,’ I said softly. ‘You’re the best thing in my life. Do you know that?’

He let out a shaky breath. ‘I doubt it.’

I took his face in both my hands and made him look at me.

‘Jace. You’re the centre of my world. You’re my best friend. You’re the reason…’ Ah, fuck it. ‘You’re the fucking reason the sun rises, OK? Please stop letting your mind fuck you over and put you lower than you are. What happened was weird and it got tangled, but it doesn’t matter. Put your hand here.’ He obeyed silently, pressing his hand to my heart. I placed mine atop his. ‘This is all that matters. Feel it beat in time with yours? That’s home.’

It broke me how difficult it was for him to accept this. To accept even this half-truth, nowhere near the full extent of my love for him.

‘I know what you think of yourself, Jace. It needs to stop.’

Our hands were still on each other’s hearts, beating rapidly. Our connection was firing, blazing with renewed strength, singing at being permitted such contact.

‘I’m sorry,’ he breathed. ‘I’ll try harder.’
‘Just come back to me,’ I said and his eyes slid up to mine.

‘What does that mean?’

‘It means stop putting distance between us because you think I’m going to leave you. Stop sabotaging us. I already promised you I’ll never leave.’

‘One day you will.’

‘I will never leave you. Do you think I’m lying?’

‘No, but…things happen. People move on.’ He smiled tightly. ‘On to better things.’

Better things? Was he fucking kidding?

‘I’m not one of these people, Jace. It’s you and me, forever.’

He exhaled slowly, trying to control his breathing. ‘I’m so sorry.’

‘Me too.’

His hand was still planted hotly against my skin. Gently, I peeled it away and twined my fingers through his.

‘Start over?’

‘Yes, please.’

We hugged fiercely, I delighted in holding him. The frame of all my happiness, the container of everything I ever wanted.

I didn’t have it in me to bring up the phone call or the message he left me. It would embarrass him to know he’d said such ridiculous things and nothing was worth endangering our reunion.

‘Patrol tomorrow?’ he asked, face buried in my neck.

I laughed because it tickled.

‘Yeah. I’ve gotta do something first but after that I’m free.’

‘Birthday stuff?’

I sighed, having completely forgotten my birthday was less than two days away. ‘Not exactly.’

Magnus knew straight away. He was keenly perceptive and it must have been written all over me.

‘You’re here to break up,’ he said when he closed the door behind me.

I closed my eyes. ‘I’m…I’m so sorry.’

‘Don’t be. It’s for the best.’
‘Really?’
‘Well, no. I’m trying to be nice.’

I turned to look at him. He magicked up two drinks and handed me one with a generous, sweet
smile. God fucking damn me and my stupid ideas all to hell. The fuck was wrong with me? He was
incredible and sexy and hot and the closest thing I’d ever come to having actual sex!

‘Things are complicated right now and I don’t want to involve you.’

He sipped his Mai Tai. ‘Jace?’

There was no point lying. ‘It difficult for him. We’ve always been close.’

‘He didn’t ask you to do this, though.’

‘Nor would he ever. This is my decision.’

‘I knew when I first met you that he played a big role in your life. I respect your decision, Alexander.
I’m…disappointed, though.’

I took a gulp of the drink. ‘I am too.’

Staring down, he softly said, ‘So, tell me it’s not forever. Tell me that once things are stable, there’s a
chance you’ll come back to me.’

‘I don’t want to lead you on.’

He smiled bitterly. ‘You mean, you don’t want to lie.’

‘That too. You mean a lot to me, you always will.’

‘Just not as much as him.’

‘He’s my Parabatai.’

‘You know,’ he said, walking towards his French doors. ‘That won’t hold up forever. Parabatai
marry others, have children, live normal lives.’

‘He needs me.’

‘He will always need you. That boy is broken, Alexander. Believe me, I’ve seen it before. It’s in his
blood.’

I stiffened. ‘Jace is not broken and it’s not one way. I need him too.’

He turned those golden cat eyes on me. ‘Need him how?’

‘Don’t, I’ve already told you—’

‘I know what you’ve told me, but unfortunately for you, I’ve been around and lot longer and I’m
well versed in these matters.’

I couldn’t think of anything to say in reply to that, so I finished off the drink and took a deep breath.
‘I truly am sorry.’

‘I know you are. I’m sorry too. This could have been something, I believe.’
The back of my eyes prickled and I clenched my jaw hard.

‘I gotta go.’

‘Wait, there’s…something I got you. For your birthday.’

Fucking. Hell.

‘Oh, I’m…you didn’t have to…’

‘Please take it,’ he said, fetching the small, beautifully wrapped package. ‘It’s not a ring or anything,’ he added with a smile that absolutely broke my heart. ‘I just knew you’d like it.’

With trembling fingers, I accepted the gift. He removed my agonising decision to open it in front of him or not. ‘I’ll see you around, blue eyed boy.’

Patrol, for the first time in months, was eventful. It was not, however, the kind of eventful night Shadowhunters tend to anticipate.

‘I swear to the Angel,’ I breathed, catching my breath. ‘You have a magnet in your pocket for Mundanes.’

Jace didn’t look offended. He smiled at me that way that made my heart skip a beat. ‘I like them,’ he said, for the millionth time. ‘But not this kind.’

Central Park was usually a good, reliable spot for demonic activity, especially near the middle part. Tonight had been spent preventing drunk or drugged Mundanes from attacking each other. Four separate groups were openly brawling, some of them carrying knives.

Jace, Izzy and I dispatched them easily, of course. A few good punches and they were out of the equation or simply out.

‘Where are the fucking cops?’ Izzy asked, shamelessly rifling through the wallet of someone stupid enough to try and stab her. ‘None of them have ID’s, but they all have this card.’

She handed it to me. ‘Floyd’s,’ I read aloud. ‘And a number. Why is it in pink?’

‘Pink Floyd!’ Jace said, laughing. Izzy and I stared. ‘You know, Pink Floyd? You two are so boring!’

I tossed the card. ‘Not our problem, anyway.’

‘Well, humanity is our problem,’ Izzy corrected casually.

‘Their little squabbles over drugs or whatever aren’t.’

Jace held up a small, clear bag. ‘Doesn’t look like anything I’ve seen before,’ he said calmly. ‘Maybe a new thing.’

‘Are there new drugs?’ Izzy asked. ‘Like, have they discovered a new one?’
'Or made one,’ I guessed, only partially paying attention, watching the perimeter. ‘They cook up all kinds of crap.’

Frowning, Jace opened the bag and cautiously sniffed the top. ‘Definitely new.’

‘Jace, what the fuck?’ Izzy yelped.

He gave her a deadpan stare. ‘I’m hardly gonna get high from smelling it.’

‘Oh yeah? That’s what people thought about glue!’

I didn’t comment on Jace’s knowledge of drugs and neither did Izzy.

‘We should move on, see if Barzo has any leads.’

‘I hate that creep.’

‘None of us has fuzzy feelings for him. He’s an informant, what do you expect?’ Jace stood up. He pocketed the bag. When I shot him a questioning look, he shrugged. ‘Barzo might know about it.’

‘Not our problem,’ I reiterated. ‘What Mundanes do—’

‘Affects our world eventually,’ Jace insisted. ‘Let’s go before his shit-hole gets too busy.’

Too busy at Barzo’s meant a single person being there. Alan Barzoon ran a brothel. It catered to Mundane and Shadow World alike. Barzo was the owner, but not manager. That was Gillian. He preferred to sit back, sample the merch as he called the young men and women who worked for him and on occasion get the shit beat out of him for information.

Barzo knew things. Clients he partied with sometimes let things slip. Men talked when they were happy and so did Downworlders and even Demons.

‘Jesus fucking Christ,’ he said the moment he clapped eyes on us. ‘You swore you’d stay away!’

‘Hi Gilly,’ Izzy said to the stern, but generally kind woman who managed the staff.

‘No trouble,’ she warned us. ‘There are sensitive clients around.’


‘No trouble,’ Jace promised with a friendly smile. ‘We just wanted to chat with Barzo.’

Gillian laughed and walked away, taking her iPad. ‘That’s how trouble always starts.’

‘OK, this is bullshit, I know absolutely fuck all!’

‘You want your clients to hear you spill your guts or shall we go somewhere more private?’ He glared at me.

‘Fuckers,’ he swore. ‘In here.’

He led us from the reception area into his office. A cramped, hot little room with a desk that should
never have a black light shone on it.

‘Well?’ Izzy demanded.

‘Well what? I know a lot of shit, ask something specific?’

‘Why is it so quiet lately?’

He inspected a fingernail. ‘Is it? Business is booming in here.’ Izzy hit him. ‘Ow! Fucking bitch!’

Jace smirked. ‘Where’s the demonic activity? The ritual slaughters? Uprisings of once worshipped idols?’

‘Look, all I heard was that there’s something wrong with the Mundanes on the street. Demons can’t stand to be around them.’

‘So, what? They’re staying home and watching a movie? Bullshit.’

Barzo rubbed his eyes fretfully. ‘Some shit about a drug messing up their blood or whatever.’

‘What drug?’ Jace asked sharply.

‘Some new thing.’

‘Why is it interfering with demons?’ I asked with a frown.

‘It’s like…I dunno, demon repellent or something. I really have no idea, we certainly don’t carry it in here, OK?’

‘Anything else?’

Yeah, go fuck yourselves.’

__________________________________________________________

‘We need to do more tests,’ I said as soon as we were outside. ‘Find out what’s in it and if Barzo was full of shit.’

Izzy seemed uncertain. ‘Do you really think it’s the drug?’

‘It might be nothing, but better safe than sorry.’

Jace was checking his phone. ‘Huh,’ he said, smiling.

We stared at him, waiting. ‘Huh, what?’ I asked finally.

He looked up, blinking. ‘What? Oh, nothing.’

A small, petty flicker of something burned inside my chest.

‘Texting while in a potentially dangerous situation, huh?’ I said, managing to make it sound like a joke.

He looked guilty as hell. ‘No, sorry.’
‘Holy shit, are you texting that guy?’ Izzy asked, scandalously thrilled. ‘Simon said he’s hot!’

The fire was doused with a bucket of ice water.

‘What?’

‘Declan,’ Izzy said, trying to grab the phone playfully from Jace. ‘The hot British guy?’

‘There’s a hot British guy?’

‘I’m gonna fucking kill Simon.’

‘Finally run through the entire female population?’ I said with a false laugh that rang hollow even to me.

‘It was Clary, actually,’ he said, looking away. I felt immediately bad for sniping at him. Jace put himself down constantly and he didn’t need me making him feel like there was anything wrong with being promiscuous. ‘Just something about tomorrow.’

My fucking twenty-first birthday. Yay. I thought of the gift I still hadn’t opened from Magnus and felt slightly sick.

‘Whatever,’ I said, hoping to move on. ‘You two can call it a night if you want. I’ll stay out a little longer.’

Izzy shot me a concerned look. ‘Yeah, ‘cause Jace and I aren’t really into the whole Shadowhunting thing anyway. The hell, Alec?’

I wanted to be alone. To walk through the night, to think and breathe the cold air and let myself feel the weight of my decision earlier.

With a smile, I shook my head. ‘Sorry. Piss poor excuse for hoping to sneak away and go see Magnus.’

The lie was easy which should have been worrying.

Neither or Izzy nor Jace seemed especially convinced, but they couldn’t argue it either. They didn’t know, not yet anyway.

‘OK, cool,’ Jace said a little uncertainly. ‘Tell him I said hi.’

‘Will do.’

_____________________________________

*It was the first time I’d ever got drunk and it was an absolute disaster. Almost seventeen years old, dragged out for my birthday by Jace and Izzy to Sang’s - a club packed with Mundanes and guarded by men who didn’t especially care about ID - and I’d never had any alcohol before.*

*My first taste of alcohol was fucking disgusting.*

*‘It gets better,’ Jace insisted, ordering three more shots.*
I was still coughing. ‘The hell was that?’

‘That, my friend,’ he said, lining up more of the poisonous shit. ‘Was Tequila!’

‘I prefer Goldschlager,’ Izzy complained. ‘Hey, can we get three Goldschlager’s over here please?’

After an hour or so of coming to realise alcohol was revolting but the effects weren’t so bad, Jace informed me I was drunk.

‘You’re so fucked, man,’ he laughed. ‘This is the best!’

Everything was wonderful. I felt happy, optimistic even.

‘This is pretty great,’ I admitted, wrapping my arm around him. ‘I see why you do this.’

The music was loud enough that I could feel it rattling in my ribcage. I wanted to dance. ‘Let’s go,’ I said, pulling him by the hand out onto the cramped dance floor. We started to dance, something I had never really done before. I didn’t let go of his hand. Jace was a brilliant dancer and I knew, objectively, that I was not, but I didn’t feel self-conscious.

I closed my eyes and moved with the rhythm. Everything was perfect. All the stress and weight of being Alexander Lightwood was suspended mid-air, gravity was restrained. I felt so free.

It happened before I even realised it was fucking happening.

I pressed my mouth against his like it was the most normal and natural thing in the world.

This is good, my mind assured me. This is the best thing we could have done in this moment. Kiss him more, kiss him harder, deeper. This is a good decision.

It only lasted a second because he moved away.

‘Whoa,’ he said, laughing nervously and reality hit me like a freight train. ‘It’s me…Jace?’

‘Oh yeah,’ I said, pretending like I’d somehow forgotten who he was. ‘Sorry.’

‘It’s OK,’ he said, eyes sparkling and a little awkward. ‘I do it all the time.’

‘Kiss people you shouldn’t?’

Holy shit, stop talking now.

‘Yeah, just random girls,’ he said, generously giving me an out. ‘C’mom let’s get another drink.’

‘Uh, no,’ I said, finally pulling my hand away from his. ‘Gotta take a piss.’

He laughed. ‘Don’t think I’ve ever heard you say it like that before.’

I stumbled away from him without a response. Thankfully, there was no queue for the Men’s Room as there was with the Ladies. Stomach churning violently, I shoved against the door of the only stall and wanted to scream when it didn’t budge.

‘Wait your turn, asshole!’ some guy yelled from inside.

‘Open the door,’ I said, voice trembling. ‘Before I rip it off the fucking hinges and use your head as
A plunger!

A few of the guys around me made sounds of approval.

The stall opened with a bang and before the idiot inside could even get a word out, I grabbed him by the collar and punched him with my free hand. It wasn’t a very good punch; I was drunk and devastated. It still knocked him down, though. He was just some Mundane who hadn’t spent his life training to fight evil.

Now my bathroom audience were cheering loudly. The guy yelled from the floor, hands over his mouth and I stepped over him and into the stall.

I locked the door and emptied the contents of my stomach.

I left the most populated areas, not an easy thing to do in New York City. I didn’t want to be around people, couldn’t bear it. The lie about going to see Magnus sat in my stomach like a stone. Especially painful because I wanted to go see him. I wanted desperately to run back, bang on the door and kiss him the moment he opened it. Tell him I was sorry, I was wrong.

Anything but being alone like this.

And sure, I didn’t have to be alone. Jace and Izzy would be there for me if I wanted them to be. But it was difficult to watch Izzy and Simon getting closer and even worse to see Jace involving himself with a guy…when I was alone.

I knew why it was the right thing to do, with Magnus. He was something genuinely special and he didn’t deserve to be caught up in my stupid in-between obsession with Jace.

Didn’t lessen the agony, but at least it was in aid of trying to do something good. I’d thrown everything out of balance, being with Magnus. It was selfish, I could see that now. Jace, no matter how much he hurt me or broke my heart, was all that mattered.

‘Hey,’ someone called and I looked up, tense and alert.

It was a woman, standing at the far end of the deserted alleyway I’d wandered in to. She was tall and utterly still.

My instincts prickled. This wasn’t good. Shit, where the hell was I?

Warily, I looked around. ‘Yeah?’

She smiled, too wide.

‘Can you help me, little boy?’

She was taller than me. Her arms looked too long as well.

Abandoning any pretence, I drew my bow, arrow locked in place and aimed. ‘Who are you?’ I demanded loudly, voice ricocheting off the walls. The air tasted wet and tangy. Rain on the way.

‘Come closer, I’ll show you,’ she said, still totally unmoving except for the growing joker smile. I
stared, breathing tightly as the smile widened to the point of splitting her face. Rows of teeth gleamed in the dull light from the one street lamp between us both.

Her eyes rolled back, white and blank.

I let the arrow fly. It hit her right in the throat. I thought she was choking, but it was laughter. A long, thin arm reached up and pulled it out.

Then she moved so quickly I could barely see it. She came at me like a shark, dead on and frighteningly fast, mouth agape. I fired another arrow, but it didn’t slow her. I dropped the bow, grabbed my Seraph blade and prepared for close combat.

Jace took me home, which had to be a first. He got me into the Institute without anyone, especially my parents, noticing. Carefully, he led me through the halls to his bedroom.

‘Here you go,’ he said, gently depositing me on his soft bed. I was still drunk, though not quite as much as before. He knelt in front of me and unlaced my boots, pulling them off. I watched as he went to unbuckle my belt, but thought better of it. I hated myself so powerfully in that moment I wanted to die. He wouldn’t forget the stupid, reckless press of my lips to his.

It wouldn’t destroy everything between us, but it had fractured it.

‘Why don’t you strip down and I’ll get you some water?’ he said, rising and leaving me to bite my bottom lip as hard as I could so I didn’t cry.

With numb hands, I kicked off my pants and viciously threw my jacket at the wall. He reappeared with a glass of tap water and wide eyes.

‘Was that meant for me?’ he asked, grinning.

‘No,’ I said without inflection. ‘Thanks for your help.’

He handed me the water which I sipped mostly for something to do, rather than out of thirst.

‘I think I owed you a few, huh?’

I wanted him to leave so I could collapse into a wretched sleep, but he didn’t seem to be obliging.

‘You can go,’ I told him. ‘I’m fine.’

‘I’ll stay, if that’s OK. It is my room, after all.’

I felt stupid. ‘Oh, right. I’ll go in my own—’

‘No,’ he said, grabbing my hand. ‘Stay here, please.’

‘Why?’

‘Do you need a reason?’

‘You don’t need to watch me to make sure I don’t die in my fucking sleep, Jace.’
'Actually, I do. This is your first time being drunk.'

'And last,' I spat.

'Oh, really?'

'Yup,' I said, leaning back. My head hit the pillow and began to fucking spin like crazy. My heart hurt. My throat burned. 'Definitely.'

'That sucks, man. You didn’t have fun?'

He sounded so hurt. Only Jace could take my insulting alcohol as a personal affront.

'I had fun with you and Izzy.'

'Till she left us for that dude.'

I huffed a laugh despite myself. ‘Great to meet you, dudes!’

‘You dudes having a good night?’

‘Can I get any dudes a drink?’

Jace laughed with me. ‘I’m not gonna let Izzy live that down for a while.’

‘Angel, you should talk, Jace,’ I admonished lazily. ‘Izzy went off with one guy who says dude every other word, but you’ve been with some absolute rejects of the highest order, let me tell you.’

My eyes were closed, but I felt him crawl on the bed beside me.

‘Like what?’ he asked, snaking his arms around my middle.

I swallowed hard. ‘Like that girl with the friend.’

‘That narrows it down.’

‘The one who wanted her friend to go with you, remember?’

He chuckled. His breath ticked the back of my neck. ‘Oh, holy shit, yeah. She wanted her friend to keep watch while we fucked outside.’

‘Then she wanted her friend to go home with you both.’

‘OK, that’s one. I’ve made good choices, Lightwood.’

‘I’ve yet to see them.’

‘What about uh…Christine? She was cool.’

‘You were intimidated by her, didn’t even call her the next day.’

‘I was not intimidated by her!’

‘She asked you for a threesome.’

‘Why would that intimidate me?’
‘It was with another guy.’

‘Yeah, so?’

Why? Fucking why?

‘Go to sleep, Jace.’

‘Hey, I’m the sober one here. Or, the most sober one. I’m in charge.’

‘Great, we’re screwed then.’

‘Happy birthday, Alec.’

He pressed a kiss to the back of my neck and then nestled himself closer to me, wrapping himself around me almost completely. I opened my eyes, trying to steady my breathing.

‘Thanks.’

He whispered, ‘Love you.’

‘Yeah, you too.’

‘Forever?’

‘Forever.’

I waited until the rhythm of his breathing levelled out, confirming he was asleep before I let myself silently cry.

I was losing. This demon thing, whatever it was, had the upper hand in speed and strength. I was losing and it was going to be a bad way to go.

The long arms split into two, making four razor sharp weapons which clawed at me with relish. The first cut was deep, right across my chest and the sting alerted me to the fact that there was some kind of poison tipping the talons.

Panicked, I tried to get a better stance but the claws were everywhere. She knocked me down and the teeth came at me. I managed to roll away, but she anticipated the move and a claw pierce my shoulder. She gurgled victoriously.

I used the moment to thrust the blade up into her chest.

The gurgle morphed into an angry scream and she yanked the blade away indignantly. Ichor poured from the wound; my hands were wet with it as I scrambled to reach for my weapon and she pinned me down.

‘Naughty!’ she screeched, teeth inches from my face. ‘If I wanted you dead, you’d be in pieces!’

I struggled. ‘Fuck you!’

She giggled monstrously. ‘No, but thanks. I’ve got a better use for you, little Shadowhunter.’
A/N - MY WONDERFUL READERS! This chapter was written fast for you. OK, well it was fast by my standards. I apologise that it's a teeny bit shorter than the last one, but the next one will make up for it. I hope you enjoy this latest addition and I just want to thank everyone who has commented with such amazing, wonderful support. You are literally the reason I wrote this chapter in one night. Comments help me write, see how that works guys? Just a heads up that we are about to veer into the dark territory I warned about in my thousands of crazy tags. I won't spoil anything, but if you're triggered by anything especially dark, check the tags before you read the next chapter - I'll update them accordingly or at least put a warning at the top.

I'm not going to lie, I ended the Magnus/Alec relationship earlier than I planned just due to the SHEER LEVEL of comments I got (and promptly deleted) telling me not to write this ship and involve Malec. It got boring, then annoying, then hurtful. Sorry to anyone who's disappointed. I promise Magnus isn't just going to vanish (like Clary, lol!) and he'll still be involved now and then but it was too much stress. I've never experienced anything like this backlash in any other fandom and it was unexpected to say the least.

Thanks again for reading and for reaching out to me. It means the world.

xxx
Chapter Six: I Looked Away For a Second

Chapter Summary

Alec is gone and Jace is beside himself. In trying to get his Parabatai back, he makes a deal.

CHAPTER SIX

- I Looked Away For a Second -

‘Ever since my baby went away,
It's been the blackest day, it's been the blackest day
All I hear is Billie Holiday,
It's all that I play It's all that I play.
Because I'm going deeper and deeper,
Harder and harder,
Getting darker and darker.
Looking for love In all the wrong places,
Oh my god, In all the wrong places, Oh my god.’

-Lana Del Rey

Jace

It had been three days.
Three days.
Three fucking day.
Alec had been gone for three days and nothing I did, no matter who I hurt or beat up or threatened to murder…nothing yielded any results.

He’d been taken in an alley; his trail went stone cold less than a block away which usually meant either a portal or a car.

We had evidence of neither. CCTV picked up nothing. Magnus, who I involved less than an hour after his disappearance, said there was no portal opened or used in that area. Local chatter yielded nothing.

Alec was gone.

I was helpless. Lost. Alone.

The bond stretched and threatened to snap, unable to track him or do anything but feel, quite distantly, that he was in pain. He was hurt, he needed me. He could have been dying for all I knew.

And I could do nothing.

‘Check again,’ I said, not looking at the people around me as I sat staring at the operations map. They kept throwing me worried looks, asking if I’d eaten, if I’d slept. ‘There has to be someone who knows something.’

‘He’s right,’ Izzy said, voice rough, beside me. ‘There’s always something. Alec is well known, we all are. Someone had to see it, be in on the plan, whatever the fuck it was.’

‘All the usual suspects swear blind they know nothing,’ said the guy we relied on for street knowledge, Henson.

‘One of them is lying,’ I said. ‘What about the scene?’

Henson sighed. ‘We’ve been over the scene a hundred times. We know he was hurt, we know he lost blood. The blood we tested was teaming with a paralytic agent. Scrape marks indicate a short, brutal fight with four claw-like weapons, likely a demon.’

‘It sounds like we know a lot,’ I said through gritted teeth. ‘When in reality, we know fuck all!’

Izzy placed her hand on my arm. ‘Do another sweep of the bars; ask quietly, offer whatever you have to, no matter how much of a scumbag they are. Anything that points to his whereabouts is invaluable.’

I stared hard at the map, three square miles around where he vanished, and only when they dispersed did I let go of the edge of the table. I exhaled slow and shaky.

‘I need to go,’ I told Izzy. ‘I have to try again.’

‘He won’t do it,’ she said, resigned. ‘He’s said it already.’

‘Do you think I shouldn’t try, then?’

Izzy closed her eyes. ‘Endanger one brother for the other? What a choice.’

Maryse came around the corner and I wished I’d left sooner. Battle-stations was all well and good when you were planning a fucking battle and knew the time and place. Staring at maps and going over the last few moments Alec experienced before he was taken was utterly unbearable, especially for his Mother.
‘Well?’ she asked, shrugging her jacket off carelessly.

Izzy shook her head. Maryse had been expecting it, but I looked up long enough to see that little bit of hope get well and truly crushed.

‘All right,’ she said, nodding. ‘We should consider expanding the search radius.’

It was a bad idea and she knew it. Expanding the search meant losing control of the search, it meant needle in a national forest.

Izzy asked her, ‘How’s Max?’

Poor Max had only arrived yesterday, late from Alicante training. He’d mostly been stuck with Robert and Karina.

‘He’s doing well,’ she said briskly. ‘He just wants to help.’

Izzy managed a kind of smile. ‘He’s brave.’

‘Well, right now he can’t,’ I said coldly. ‘He’s best kept out of it.’

Maryse looked down. ‘Yes, I suppose you’re right.’

An awkward silence brewed around us until Izzy rolled her eyes and hauled me up and away from the map. ‘C’mon, then. ‘While he’s still letting us in.’

‘For the last time,’ Magnus said irritably. ‘I will not do it!’

I glared dully at him. ‘I am not ever going to stop asking until you do.’

‘Then I’ll leave.’

‘I don’t know how you can even think of leaving him behind.’

‘Leave the apartment, not the city. Do you really think so little of me?’

‘Fine, you care so much then do it!’

‘It is too dangerous, the risks to your life and worse, your soul—’

‘I DON’T CARE!’

‘I KNOW YOU DON’T CARE BUT HE WOULD!’

‘Hey!’ Izzy cut in over our yelling. ‘Back the fuck off, both of you. What does this solve, huh?’

I turned away and rubbed my eyes. They itched with something like tiredness, only I couldn’t possibly have slept.

‘If you don’t help me find him, I’m gonna die anyway, do you understand that, Warlock?’

Magnus sighed. ‘The risks are too great. I have limits.’
‘You’re the High Warlock—’

‘Moral limits, Jace.’

My breath caught in my chest; a kind of pain that had struck the first time I realised Alec had been taken and had only got worse every moment he was away.

‘If I can travel through the bond, I could find him, Magnus.’

Magnus pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘Let’s say I could do it. I send you through the bond that is weak and stretched at best, either due to distance or, more likely, a barrier. Say you go through unharmed and see through his eyes…getting out will be a hundred times harder and you know why?’

‘Magnus,’ Izzy rebuked him, but he ignored her.

‘Because he won’t want to let you go! Accidentally, he could trap you there with and believe me, the time it takes for your body to adjust to having no soul is minimal!’

I looked at him dead on. ‘I don’t care.’

He shook his head. ‘Of course, you don’t. You’re grieving.’

‘I am not grieving, he’s still alive!’

‘You’re not thinking clearly and you know it!’

My hands clawed at the air, trying to contain the impotent rage burning me alive.

‘I…please Magnus,’ I begged. ‘I can’t be without him.’

He gave me a look I despised. His anger had almost melted away, revealing a core of pity. ‘I know, Jace. That’s why I can’t do it. You won’t want to leave him either.’

‘Fuck you!’ I hissed and slammed the door on my way out.

I watched the sun rise.

Four days.

This couldn’t be happening.

This could not be how it went down. Not for him, not for me. Alec couldn’t go first. I couldn’t be left behind. No great battle, no heroic sacrifice. He was just fucking gone. No reason why. No greater good. No trail or set of trials to get him back. Nothing.

Just the gaping, hollow chasm left in his wake.

I sat on the roof and tried to control myself that I might tune into the thin, wavering connection between us.

Pain. Distress. Fear.
I felt him. He was in some kind of…resting phase. Not asleep, but not quite conscious. He wasn’t alone. He couldn’t relax. The pain was constant. Restraints.

I focused harder, my head hurt but I viciously ignored it.

The restraints were tight, they cut into his wrists. His arms screamed with agony. He was chained to a wall, standing. The wall was rough, it hurt his back.

It was dark. Quiet. He wasn’t alone.

The connection vibrated too hard. I clutched him head, nose stinging.

‘Fuck!’

I was useless. Even this wasn’t enough. No distinctive details. He was chained to a wall in the dark. He was in pain. He was afraid.

He would die without me there.

No. No.

I would do whatever I had to in order to prevent that. I would burn the world down.

‘Hey,’ Clary’s voice came from behind me. ‘You said to meet you up here?’

‘Did you tell anyone?’

‘No.’

‘Good. I need a rune.’

‘Jace, I’ve already tried every tracking rune I can think—’

‘No, not a tracking rune. I stood up, facing her. ‘A summoning rune.’

‘For what?’

‘A bargaining demon.’

She swallowed. ‘No.’

‘Draw it and leave, Clary.’

‘Jace, he wouldn’t want you to do this.’

‘If one more person says what he would or wouldn’t have done—’

‘He’d never be able to live with himself if you died trying to save him.’

‘Yes, he would. He’s stronger than me.’

‘Jace, please.’

‘Draw it or I’ll find someone else.’

Clary swore and shook her head. ‘This is so fucked.’
‘Yeah, welcome to my world.’

She drew the rune on the flat part of the rooftop. Once the lines were completed, it shimmered and began to glow blue. The air sizzled, bent and distorted with magic.

A voice came from the light.

‘You summon the old one?’

Clary pleaded with her eyes, begging me to say nothing.

‘Yes, I summon him!’

‘You know the price?’

‘Whatever it is, I’ll pay it.’

‘You cannot pay unless you know.’

‘Tell me then!’

‘If you must be told, you cannot know.’

‘FUCKING TELL ME AND I’LL PAY IT!’

‘Learn the price of Belaphim and return willingly.’

The light and voice vanished entirely. Clary had her hands over her mouth. Disappointment hit me hard, right in the gut.

Fuck.

‘We shouldn’t have done that,’ she breathed.

‘Don’t tell anyone,’ I warned her. ‘I mean it, Clary.’

Defiance shone in her eyes. ‘I know how much Alec means you to. I won’t say anything.’

‘All right.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘Research.’

I had no time to go through musty old books or even the archives. I couldn’t risk typing in something that flagged up as restricted or alerted anyone to what I was doing. I went straight to the only person who would know.

‘Back again?’ Magnus snapped as I barged my way in. ‘I swear I’m moving to Canada.’

‘Do what you want, just tell me something,’ I said, hands itching for something to do. ‘And spare me all your Warlock Code of Honour bullshit, OK? What’s the price of Belaphim?’
His expression soured even more. ‘Are you serious?’

‘Well?’

‘You tried to summon a bargaining demon?’

‘Spare me the warning labels, OK?’

Mouth in a thin line, he shook his head. ‘I should have known.’

‘You’re the one who refused what I asked! So again, what’s the price of Belaphim?’

He looked disgusted. ‘He collects futures.’

‘OK…so?’

‘Tell me exactly what he said.’

Impatiently, I echoed, ‘Learn the price of Belaphim and return willingly.’

‘It wouldn’t be death,’ he said, almost to himself. ‘Anyone can see you’d die for him in an instant. It would be something difficult to give up.’

‘Like what?’

He stared at me. ‘Do you want to be a Father one day?’

‘Yeah, of course,’ I said, unthinkingly. ‘Oh.’

Nodding, he said, ‘That would be it, I think.’

I tried to let that sink into comprehension. No children, no babies made of my DNA. My family name dying with me.

‘OK,’ I said, my chest feeling tight. ‘He can take it.’

‘Yes, because I’m sure you can truly appreciate the gravity of such a decision at the ripe old age of twenty!’

My vision darkened and I stumbled. Magnus rushed forward to catch me before I pitched forward.

‘…ridiculous,’ he was saying, dropping me into a plush chair. ‘How do you expect to save him when you can’t even stand?’

‘I’m just tired,’ I said, but my vision was still swimming, chest tight. Fatigue was eating me alive. ‘I have to…summon him, find Alec.’

‘And then what? Snore at whatever is holding him? You need some sleep.’

I tried to get up. ‘No!’

‘You’re getting at least three hours,’ he said sternly. When I struggled, he rolled his eyes and snapped his fingers. Darkness flooded. Consciousness dimmed. Sleep came.
I dreamt.

Alec was fine, he was home safe. We were laughing and hugging, discussing the battle. He was with me once more.

No. Not real.

Alec wasn’t fine. I hadn’t made it in time. He was gone, really gone. Eyes glassy and unfocused. An empty vessel. No connection. No bond.

No. Not real, not real! I would save him.

Alec was destroyed, but alive. He was in a cell, arms breaking slowly, shoulders separating. He was being injected with something. He’d given up pleading for them not to. The injection stung, but he barely felt it.

The drugs pulsed around his system, dulling and sharpening everything at the same time. He was bleeding. He was breaking apart.

He breathed my name.

His companion, a woman, laughed.

‘There is no Jace, silly boy. You dreamed him up.’

Alec threw his head back screamed.

________________________________________

‘Jace! Stop, it’s OK, calm down!’

Magnus’s hands were clamped tightly around my wrists. I felt like I was having a heart attack. Alec’s scream rang in my ears.

‘Breathe slow,’ he told me. ‘Look at me!’

I did as he bade, trying to take deep breaths. My heart was thundering in my chest, mouth dry.

‘I saw him,’ I managed after a few deep, trembling breaths. ‘I saw him in chains, he was…’

I burst into tears. My body was done. There was no holding it in.

Magnus, to his absolute credit, enveloped me in a firm hug and held me there until I felt strong enough to draw back and pull myself together.

‘It’s going to be all right,’ he said. ‘I know how much you love him. He’s strong, Jace.’

‘I should have been with him.’

‘You will be.’

‘He would never have been taken if I was with him.’
‘Blaming yourself is about the worst, most useless thing you can do.’

Roughly, I scrubbed a hand over my face. Magnus got up and returned moments later with a steaming mug of coffee.

‘I still don’t know why he didn’t come to you,’ I said, gratefully accepting the beverage. ‘Why he went so far in the opposite direction. He didn’t get any calls or messages.’

Magnus cleared his throat. ‘Jace…Alec and I broke up that day.’

I froze, coffee hovering under my mouth. ‘What?’

He shifted hesitantly. ‘He came here. We talked and we broke up. It wasn’t a fight.’

The bottom dropped out of the world. ‘Oh my God.’

‘I’m sorry, if I thought it was relevant, I’d have said something sooner.’

*I’ve gotta do something first but after that I’m free.* That’s what he’d said when we made up. He knew then, planned it.

‘Magnus,’ I said, voice uneven. ‘Please don’t lie to me, OK? Did he break up with you…because of me?’

The Warlock stared, unblinking. ‘Yes.’

I knew what he was going to say, but it didn’t lessen the impact. A twisting, wrenching gut punch. My spiteful attitude, isolating myself and hurting him…it had caused all this. He’d broken up with Magnus because of me. Wanted to be alone because of me. Had *been* alone because of me.

Belaphim wanted my future? He could fucking take it.

‘Jace?’ Magnus was saying. I shook myself. ‘Izzy is calling you. Your phone, see?’

Numbly, I took it from him and placed the coffee down, untouched.

‘Yeah,’ I answered.

‘Jace,’ Izzy breathed. ‘We might have a lead.’

Lightning struck my weary body, bringing me to life again.

‘I’m coming now,’ I said, about to hang up.

‘No!’ she said quickly. ‘Meet us here, I texted you the address.’

I glanced at the screen. ‘Ten minutes,’ I said and she hung up.

Magnus stood, eyes alight and intense. ‘Where are they?’

I read aloud the message. ‘I hate that place,’ he said, drawing himself to full height, swinging his arms back. He opened a portal. ‘Let’s go.’
It was a pretty poorly decorated Thai place. We portalled right into the kitchen and scared the shit out of the chefs and wait staff. I couldn’t have cared less.

‘Sorry for the fireworks,’ Magnus told them as I weaved through, heading for the back exit.

I pushed the door hard and cold, night air flooded my lungs. I saw Izzy with Clary and Simon. Simon was crouched on the ground. They looked up at us.

‘It’s Alec’s blood,’ Izzy said without preamble. I didn’t question it; she would never have announced it unless they were 100% certain.

Simon nodded. ‘There’re trace amounts of it over there too, but a fairly decent set of droplets here. He likely stood right here for a few moments.’

I looked around. The significance was lost on me.

‘Does it lead inside?’

‘No. It leads up.’

I followed his gaze. ‘The roof?’

He nodded. ‘Three drops, increasing distance between them.’

I let his information sink in. ‘He was carried away by something that flies?’

‘It seems to make sense.’

‘Why stop here, then?’

‘There’s more blood,’ Simon answered, standing. ‘Not human.’

‘He hurt it,’ Clary said. ‘More demon blood over there, a few scuffle marks. He hurt it and forced it to land. It got it’s bearings, picked him up and then took off again.’

‘In what direction?’

Izzy sighed. ‘Assuming the thing went in a straight line? That way.’

I looked where she pointed. Towards the east river.

‘Very impressive, I must say,’ Magnus chimed in. ‘This also narrows down the search for the demon. Wings and a paralytic agent? Not very common.’

I turned to him. ‘Can you try and find it?’

‘I can ask around, but I have to be careful. I don’t want to tip it off.’

‘Do it.’

He drew a portal. ‘Please,’ he said. ‘Keep me updated, yes?’

‘Of course.’

Once he was gone, I turned to the others. ‘I have a chance to pinpoint his location.’

Clary shook her head. Izzy’s eyes widened. ‘How?’
'A deal.'

‘With a greater demon,’ Clary filled in angrily.

‘What did it offer, specifically?’ Izzy asked.

I shook my head. ‘I didn’t get that far along. Look, I’m just saying we have a backup option, OK? This is a solid lead. We can follow this up. Hack into drone footage, narrow down the directional area.’

‘And if that doesn’t pan out,’ Clary said, crossing her arms. ‘Are you gonna pay the price, whatever it was?’

I didn’t blink. ‘Yes.’

Simon asked, ‘What was the price?’

‘Some bullshit I wouldn’t even miss,’ I lied flawlessly. ‘We need to move fast if we’re gonna tighten the trail. Clary, can you access drone footage from the Institute?’

‘Yeah, should be fine.’

‘OK, then Simon can stick around as our human blood hound.’

Izzy and Clary hugged. Simon and I stood awkwardly near each other.

‘Call once you have something,’ Izzy said.

Clary nodded and shot me a heated look. ‘Think before you do something monumentally stupid, please?’

‘I’ll try.’

I didn’t say anything because I was in no position to do so, but I caught sight of a bite mark on Izzy’s inner wrist and knew suddenly how Simon was able to track Lightwood blood with such accuracy. Izzy saw me staring.

She tipped her chin defiantly. He was our brother, there were no limits to what we would do to save him.

‘Here,’ Simon said, drawing away from our extremely dangerous rooftop trail. ‘Another splatter. Tiny, but definitely him.’

‘It’s still a line,’ Izzy said, looking at Google Maps showing our journey so far. ‘A wonky line, but no deviation so far.’

‘How far out are we?’

‘Mile and half. Can you feel him more, a stronger link?’

I closed my eyes, testing the bond.
‘No,’ I said after a moment, bitterly disappointed. ‘But he’s still alive, that’s one good thing.’

Izzy’s phone went off. ‘Any luck? Oh, Clary, you’re the fuckin’ best! Send it over along with anything else. We’re still finding blood. Yeah, it’s still heading towards the river. OK, thanks again.’ She hung up. ‘Drones picked up several shots. She’s sending it over now.’

‘Is anyone else never sleeping ever again?’ Simon asking, looking up at the sky. ‘Like, for real? Things flying around up there?’

‘Here,’ Izzy said, ignoring him. We gathered around her phone. The footage was fuzzy. We waited and about 10 seconds in, something white flew past.

‘Go back,’ I said unnecessarily. She was already dragging her finger along the time line. Slowed down, frame for frame, we watched.

‘There!’ I pointed. ‘That’s Alec.’

It was difficult to make out, but it looked like some kind of woman in tattered white rags carrying Alec. The wings weren’t large; bony and spindly.

‘Jace,’ Izzy breathed. ‘He’s unconscious.’

‘We’re on the right track,’ I insisted.

‘A track that’s leading to the river.’

‘Guys,’ Simon said, squinting at the photo. ‘Isn’t that the river, below them?’

I stared hard. ‘Fuck.’ Sure enough, I could make out the bridge and a body of water, lit up fractionally by the lights. ‘FUCK!’

‘Looks like the Lower East Side,’ Simon pointed out. ‘Should we cross and try to pick up the trail there?’

I swallowed. ‘We have to accept that fact that this thing could have flown him to fucking Algeria for all we know. I can barely feel him.’

Izzy looked pained. ‘He could just be weak.’

‘Look, we’re wasting time. I know I can find him.’

Concerned, Simon said, ‘If you summon this…demon thing?’

‘Belaphim and yes.’

I fixed my gaze on Izzy. I needed her permission.

‘We do it together,’ she said after a long moment. ‘Or not at all.’

I was fifteen. I’d had alcohol before but not like this. This marked the very first time I was drunk beyond my ability to take care of myself. It happened almost by accident. I was waiting outside some
dive of a Mundane nightclub, doing recon for a lead on a demonic cult, when a group of girls walks past and one of them started talking to me.

Confident and flirty, she asked how old I was. I told her eighteen.

Her group took me inside, vouched for me with the doorman. The first drink was bad, but the effect was immediate. A painful, sour burn that worked to numb the core of who I was.

I had another. And another. And five. Then ten.

The girls wandered off, meeting older guys than me and the one girl who spoke to me also lost interest when it became apparent my new obsession was the alcohol itself and not her.

I sat there mostly alone, save for the odd person coming and attempting to flirt, and I tried all different kinds, finding I liked Tequila the best.

But after a while I realised, I was going to need help to get home. The thought was scary at first; it was the first time I wasn’t able to take care of myself, my independence stripped away. Then I remembered Alec would take care of me. My Parabatai.

I called him from outside, leaning against the wall with my eyes closed.

‘Angel, what the hell is wrong with you?’ he asked, panicked at my slurred response. ‘Are you hurt? Where are you?’

I laughed. ‘M drunk, Alec. Fuckin’ absolutely wasted!’

‘Fuck,’ Alec swore fervently. ‘Mom is gonna kill you.’

‘She’ll never know.’

‘Oh really?’

‘You’re gonna help me.’

There was a long, drawn out sigh. ‘Yeah, of course. Where are you?’

I turned around and peered up at the sign. ‘Sang’s,’ I read aloud.

He was there within ten minutes and he looked pretty pissed.

‘What happened to recon, huh?’ he asked quietly, snatching my phone from me.

‘Hey!’

‘Don’t need you drunk dialling some ex and causing more trouble, do we?’

‘Guess not, but still - ‘S’not nice to snatch!’

‘How are you this drunk? Did you drink the whole bar? And how did you even get in?’

‘Girls, almost and charm.’

He rolled his eyes. ‘C’mon, we need a cab.’

‘I hate cabs.’
'Oh, so I get to princess carry you, do I?'

I graciously allowed him to hail a cab for us and spent the entire journey home shamelessly snuggling against him, trying to burrow into his chest like a woodland creature hibernating. He was so warm and he smelled good.

'Hey, wait till you're in the room, eh?' the driver said, testily.

'It’s not…never mind,' Alec said, trying to move me gently away but eventually giving up entirely. He softly ran his fingers through my hair for the rest of the ride. I stilled, basking in the contact and something clicked into place.

This is where you belong, Jace.

I'd always know it, ever since I met him, but it was very clear then. I levelled out my breathing and pretended to be asleep. He bent lower and pressed a kiss to my hair.

'Love you,' he breathed.

I didn’t reply, not because I didn’t love him, but because my heart was stuck in my throat. Even drunk and dizzy, my mind slipping in and out of focus, I knew I would never love anyone like him. This was the closest I would ever come to real, genuine happiness. Completion.

The cab stopped and Alec paid him. I swayed at the door as he sought his keys. The air was bitingly cold and I was tired now.

'Will you take me to bed?' I asked.

He faltered a little, but regained control quickly. 'Of course,' he said barely missing a beat. 'Can’t exactly leave you alone.'

'Why not?'

'First time drunk is dangerous. You don’t know how your body will react.' He opened the doors silently and shot me a warning look.

We crept through the living quarters, avoiding the people working through the night to make the world a safer place. He held my hand the entire way.

'Here,' he said, finally leading me into his bedroom. I let myself fall onto his soft, squishy double bed and sighed loudly.

'Finally,' I said. 'C'mere, Alec.'

He hung his jacket on a chair and obeyed warily.

'Do you need anything?'

'You,' I said honestly.

'Yeah, right. Not some hot girl and her cousin?'

I grimaced. 'Urgh, you know what I really want?'

'Dazzle me.'
A sandwich. No! A melty sandwich, with cheese and bacon!

He grinned, despite himself. ‘You really want one?’

I sat up, excitement and pleasure burning away at the alcohol. ‘Yes, please.’

‘All right, I’ll make you one, but then you need to sleep, OK?’

‘Can I have extra bacon?’

‘I’m not your wife, y’know? Maybe you could haul your drunk ass up and do it yourself!’

‘You’re sooo my wife,’ I said gleefully. ‘But I’m a good husband. I’ll come and help, how’s that?’

‘Actually, no - stay here. You’ll create chaos, I can see it now. Stay there and I’ll be right back.’

I smiled, kicking my boots off. ‘Thanks babe!’

‘You’re welcome, sweetheart.’

Clary confirmed that there was no more drone footage to track the demon. Nothing to indicate where it went or how far they travelled. There was no other choice, or so I told myself.

Alec was in more pain than ever now. I felt it so distantly it terrified me.

‘Hold on a little longer,’ I told him quietly. We were by the river, waiting for Clary to arrive. Simon and Izzy were speaking a little distance away from me, closer to the water. I sensed Izzy was on the verge of crying, judging by Simon’s expression.

He cared about her.

I watched him gently pull her into his arms and kiss her hair. I thought of the time Alec did that to me and I had to look away.

It started to rain, but I didn’t care. Moisture made the air heavy. Clary’s cab finally arrived.

‘Did anyone ask anything?’

‘No,’ she said, squinting in the rain. ‘But your Mom and Dad were arguing.’

‘Great,’ Izzy said, turning away from Simon, though I noticed her hand lingered in his for a few moments. ‘Just what everyone needs. Poor Max.’

‘Max is OK,’ Clary said. ‘A couple of new people arrived to help with the search. He’s playing with one of them, he seemed nice’

Izzy tied her hair up. ‘Anyone we know?’

‘Uh, Sebastian, I think?’

‘Are we doing this or not?’ I snapped, impatiently.
'We are,' Izzy said.

The rain was pouring now. The four of us stood by the river, drenched but determined.

'Simon, you’re lookout. Anyone gets near, either get rid of them or let us know about it.'

'Sure,' he said and gave a nod.

'Clary, you’ll draw the rune but nothing else. You’re backup for us. Can’t have this thing thinking you’re a part of the deal.’

She didn’t seem happy, but she agreed.

‘All right then. Let’s do it. We should get closer to the water, more cover.’

We stood on a high, man-made bank with the water only four feet below. The ground was wet, but flat. Clary crouched and drew the rune while Simon stood further away, guarding us.

‘Remember what I said,’ Izzy warned. ‘Both or neither.’

I looked at my sister. ‘I remember.’

She took my hand and held it tightly. The glow was almost instant. I couldn’t help but think the demon was eager.

‘You return, little Shadowhunter?’

‘Yes,’ I said loudly, over the white noise of the rain.

‘Who comes to me to bargain? Does this woman also wish to pay the price of Belaphim?’

‘No,’ I said before Izzy could speak. ‘I’m so sorry,’ I told her and shoved her hard, into the river below. She fell with a surprised yell, landing with a splash that was muffled by the rain.

‘Jace! What the hell?’ Clary demanded.

‘Go help her!’

Clary ran to the edge. I heard Izzy screaming at me not to do this, that Alec was her brother too.

‘I pay the price knowingly and willingly!’ I yelled at the glowing rune.

‘What price?’

I ground my teeth. ‘I forfeit my ability to father any children.’

‘Then ask your favour, Shadowhunter.’

‘Tell me where Alec Lightwood is!’

Silence. I waited, heart twisting and fingers trembling.

‘No,’ the voice said after an agonising minute.

‘What? You said—!’

‘I will not tell you where he is. I will take you.’
The light expanded and swallowed me whole.

I landed hard with a crunch. The fall knocked the air from my lungs and winded me, but I’d been trained against worse. I got up quickly, pulling out my blade. It was a dark room, almost pitch black. I felt around for my witchlight, but it had shattered when I landed and so had my phone.

‘Fuck,’ I swore under my breath and waited for my eyes to adjust as I inched forward. The blade gave off a faint glow, but not enough to reveal my surroundings.

Finally, I hit a wall. Hand flat against the rough, concrete surface, I followed it until I came to a corner and a door.

Painstakingly slow, I opened the door. Meagre light flooded in through the tiny gap and I peered through.

It was a long hallway with several doors. I tasted a sour undercurrent in the air and sensed demons were nearby. I gripped the handle of my blade tight. Distantly, I heard rain.

There were seven doors in total. Three on either side and one at the end, not including mine. I debated the value of stealth versus strength and decided to just see what happened and who attacked me.

I examined the Parabatai bond. It was stronger, but not by much. That worried me. The compound, or whatever it was, didn’t seem to be guarded and that worried me too. I couldn’t see any cameras. Aside from the rain, I couldn’t make out any sounds.

I tried the first door and to my surprise, it opened without any resistance. Body tense and ready for an attack, I ducked inside, checking the corners. Light from outside revealed a middle-aged man chained to the wall, unconscious.

He didn’t even look like Alec, but my heart contracted all the same. I went to him, patting his cheek.

‘Hey!’ I whispered, trying to wake him.

His eyes rolled, he seemed groggy. He wasn’t that badly hurt, but he wouldn’t wake.

The decision to leave him there was tantalising, caught in the urgency of finding Alec, but I couldn’t do it. I used the Seraph blade to cut the weakest part of his chains from the wall and free him. He fell in a heap, scraping his arm.

He remained unconscious, occasionally groaning.

‘I’ll come back for you,’ I promised. ‘But I can’t carry you, so stay here and try to wake the fuck up.’

I left the room and closed the door because it didn’t lock. If he did wake up, he could be able to get out. I told myself that over and over as I left him behind.

The next door revealed another person and then another. All six doors had people inside in varying degrees of consciousness. Some were almost fully aware. They cried silently and begged for me to help them even as I cut them free. I asked where the demon was, what had happened, but they just kept pleading for help. The other four were too out of it and I had to leave them slumped in their
cells. The two who could walk came with to that seventh door where I knew what I would find.

I opened the door, barely breathing, when a shrill, piercing scream struck the air. It wasn’t human. The door yanked wide open and a monstrous creature spilled out into the hallway, pushing me down.

It was like an enormous bat with four long claws and two legs. Spider-Bat, I cleverly named it in my head. I kicked up, preparing to kill the fuck out of it, whatever it was.

The face was that of a woman.

‘How I hoped you’d come!’ she snarled, mouth too wide. ‘He spoke of you often. I wanted to see this delicious boy, this Jace!’

‘Well, here I am, bitch!’

The two humans had fled into the door I came through. I kept my focus on the demon.

‘You want him back, do you?’ she asked, eyes narrowing and smile stretching. ‘I taste you inside him.’

‘Enough!’ I roared and attacked. The thing was fast and strong, but hand to hand was my forte. The anger and abject despair that had wracked me the last four days came out in jagged gluts. I used every inch of it to rent the Spider-Bat apart.

When I sliced off a claw, she screamed and it wiped the smile away. My ears hurt, but I pushed on. She managed to slice my cheek with the tip of a claw and I remembered the paralytic venom, praying I had time to kill it before it began to work.

‘He is lost to you now!’ she scathed. ‘What will you do without your soul?’

Teeth bared, I dropped and rolled below her and plunged the blade between two of her long, bony claws right into soft organs. I didn’t stop; I pulled the blade out and stabbed her again, over and over until I was drenched in black ichor.

She collapsed, landing on her side. Her teeth stained with black, she tried to smile and gurgle something, last words maybe.

I stood up and swung the blade as hard as I could, severing the head in one smooth, clean motion.

The body went limp. The head rolled and then stilled.

My whole face was numb, I could feel it spreading. I dropped to my knees amongst the gore and ooze, used my Stele to draw an Iratze and an Amissio over my heart.

‘Alec?’ I called, crawling towards the room and using the frame to stand up again.

He was there. Angel, he was there. Chained to the wall, just like the others but unlike them he had sustained severe and obvious injuries. He was unconscious, just hanging there.

‘Alec! Wake up, come on, look at me!’

I held his face and shook it, but got no response. His pulse was there and I could have cried if there was time. With aching arms, I freed him from the wall and caught him before he dropped. Gently, I laid him down and began to frantically draw healing runes over his heart and any others I could think that would help him. I drew the energy rune last.
His eyes opened and he drew in a sharp breath.

‘It’s OK,’ I said, running my hands over his bare shoulders, trying to calm him. ‘I’m here now, it’s all OK.’

His whole body was shaking violently, his teeth chattering.

He stared at me for a long, painful moment. ‘Jace?’ he asked, not quite trusting that it was really me.

‘Yes,’ I promised him, voice cracking. ‘I’m so sorry.’

He pulled me into him, the embrace sufficient to bring tears to my eyes.

‘You came, I knew you would,’ he whispered.


‘We have to go,’ he said, drawing back. ‘Did you kill her?’

‘And then some,’ I assured him. ‘But yeah we need to go. There’s other’s in here too, some not awake yet. Was it magic?’

His expression darkened. ‘No.’

He held up his arm. Track marks.

‘That fucking drug?’ I gasped. ‘That’s what this is?’

‘She was giving it to me constantly,’ he said, as I helped him stand. Some of his minor injuries had healed, but he would still need better help than I could provide.

‘Why?’

He laughed bitterly. ‘Didn’t say. Just said I should enjoy the ride.’

‘Are there others? Guards or goons?’

He shook his head, blinking in the light of the hallway. ‘I only ever saw her.’

‘Anyone who’s awake and wants to leave, get your ass out here!’ I called.

The two who had run did not return through my door, but three more came from their cells.

‘Thank you,’ a woman said, staring at the dead Spider-Bat on the floor. ‘You’re an angel.’

Finding a way out while carrying/dragging the still unconscious guy was a nightmare unto itself, but it didn’t matter because I had Alec. Alec was alive, he was with me. I maintained contact with him at all times, almost terrified to let him go. The compound was vast and empty. It had been a warehouse at some point in time, maybe even a factory.

‘It’s warded,’ Alec said as we finally came to a set of doors. I could still hear the pouring rain outside.
'That’s why we couldn’t trace you,’ I said, shifting my weight to better carry the unconscious guy. ‘Or feel you.’

The others opened the doors and warily, we went through. The barrier was almost invisible; a shimmery sheen, like a bubble. We had no choice but to pass through it.

‘Oh, thank fuck!’ I exhaled when we made it through unscathed.

‘You thought it was gonna burn us?’ Alec laughed weakly. I hated that it was weak, felt impatient to make him fully happy once more, no matter what it would take.

‘Knowing our luck,’ I said. The rain was falling thick and heavy. I looked around and saw that we were on the other side of the river, barely two miles from where I’d sold my future and any chance of ever conceiving children.

If we’d crossed the river, tracked the blood…we could have found him without Belaphim. ‘Ah, fuck it.’

‘What?’ Alec asked.

‘Nothing. My phone got smashed, we need to get help.’

‘How did you even find me?’ he asked.

A burst of light saved me from answering. From the portal, Clary, Izzy, Simon and Magnus came. Izzy ran at us the moment she saw us, flinging her arms around Alec and me. The others jogged over.

‘Let me see him,’ Magnus said, but I wouldn’t let go.

‘I’m OK,’ Alec said. ‘They need help, though,’ he indicated to the Mundanes. Magnus gave him a look, but went to their aid, reviving the unconscious older man almost immediately.

Simon called the cops, leaving out any details which might have caused problems. Izzy and Clary gave their jackets to the two women.

‘We’re going home,’ I told Alec.

He squeezed my hand. ‘I already am.’

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A/N - I hope this longer chapter makes up for the shorter one, writing this absolutely kicked my arse and I tried to get it done super quick. Hope you liked it, would love some feedback, as always!
Izzy has watched them for years. She sees more than anyone thinks. It's lonely, watching from the side-lines.

CHAPTER SEVEN

- I Think Fifth Wheel is More Accurate -

‘Now I’ve come to cry,
Shed my skin to rest my naked eye,
And criticise.
All that I implore
Seems to be one foot outside that door,
Caught between me and waking.
Underneath the corset of your mysteries,
Piece by piece undress of you of your history,
I’m sleeping with seclusion in sweet disarray.
You can go heavy on me,
I will not weigh you down, down, down.
You can be steady and clean,
I can take it.
Heavy on me
And I will not weigh you down.’

-Holly Brook
This is such bullshit!’ I hissed at Jace. ‘Go over it again and this time how about not lying to me?’

I would have felt bad, given how tired and utterly wiped out he was, but I was too angry. The minute Alec was safely asleep in his bed, I dragged Jace away from him (no easy feat) and hauled his ass into a bathroom, turned on the shower and rounded on him.

‘Please,’ he said, holding up a hand. ‘Cut me some slack, Izzy. I’m fucking exhausted.’

‘You made a deal with that thing, it took you to him! What did you give it?’

He sighed deeply, eyes shuttered. ‘I’m either not going to tell you or I’ll lie. Which is it?’

I slapped him across the face. ‘How dare you? Talk to me like one of your latest fucks, I think fucking not! He’s my brother too, Jace! You think you’re the only one allowed to sacrifice? You had no right to dictate my role in saving him!’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Tell me what you gave up!’

He looked me in the eye. My hand-print was forming, starkly contrasted with his pale, drawn face. ‘If I do, will you swear not to ever tell him?’

Tear sprang to my eyes, somewhat due to my own exhaustion and emotional roller-coaster, but mostly because I knew it was something terrible. Jace loved Alec more than anything. There was nothing he wouldn’t do for him.

‘I swear.’

‘Swear never to tell anyone?’

‘I swear it.’

He turned away from me and gripped the basin of the sink, avoiding himself in the mirror. ‘Belaphim collects futures.’

‘My God, Jace! What the fuck did you give it? Your whole life?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I would have offered it freely, had it asked, but no.’ He paused, looking up at himself in the steaming mirror. ‘Children,’ he said softly. ‘I gave away my ability to have children.’

It rendered me dumbstruck. I wanted to cry, but I held it at bay. For a few moments we were silent, together. Just standing in that small bathroom, rapidly filling with steam as he let the truth sink in.

‘I can’t ever have children,’ he said again, frowning like it was the first time he’d really heard it. ‘I’m the last Herondale.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ I said, shaking my head. ‘I don’t even know how to quantify what you’ve sacrificed.’

He gripped the basin hard. ‘What does it really matter, anyway?’

‘It matters because despite auditioning for Lovable Fuck-up of the Decade… you’d have been a
good Dad.’

He blinked hard and two tears spilled over his lashes. ‘Izzy,’ he whispered. ‘I’m so lost. I don’t know what world this is, who I am anymore.’

Fiercely, I pulled him away from the mirror and into my arms. ‘You’re Jace,’ I told him, holding him tight. ‘You’re my brother and you’re Alec’s Parabatai. That’s who you are.’

‘I fucked up,’ he choked. ‘So bad.’

‘We all have. It’ll be all right, we’ll make it all right.’

‘What do we do about Alec?’ he whispered. ‘She was giving him that drug for four days straight.’

My heart tightened and I swallowed. ‘We take care of him.’ The way Alec and I take care of you, I thought.

He drew back, wiping his nose on his sleeve. ‘I don’t know what to do.’

‘We wait and see how bad it is. He’ll need you, Jace. More than anything. You know that.’

‘What do I do, Iz?’

I smiled and smoothed his hair back. ‘You love him, that’s what you do.’

He nodded, trying to steel himself. ‘What if it’s not enough?’

‘Jace,’ I said. ‘You’re enough, OK? I know you don’t believe me, but you are Alec’s whole world. He’s given up so much for you. Now it’s your turn.’

I watched them often. They were intertwined, beyond their own recognition at times. They would touch each other, thoughtlessly. Constant, small touches. Reassuring in nature; bumping into one another, fingers skimming a hand, playful pulled punches and arms wrapped around shoulders. They sought each other out, even when close. They needed to be closer, to feel each other in whatever way.

I’d noticed it since they were young, way before the Parabatai bond. Alec, who had never been tactile with anyone, touched Jace the way one would comfort a stray animal. Jace, touch starved and fiercely independent, accepted this love and grew into it.

It was easy to see what was going to happen. The problem was obvious, though perhaps not to them. They so idolised each other, neither believed they were good enough. Jace believed himself to be broken, unworthy of Alec’s rare and reserved intimacy. Alec was so in love with Jace he could barely see straight, his hesitation came from a twisted sense of self doubt that he would never burn as bright as Jace. That he would weigh him down, hold him back.

And it was really fucking lonely, too. Always on the outside, looking in at them. I loved them so much, but they were involved in a way I never would be.

My phone buzzed on the nightstand. I gave up on the idea of sleeping and grabbed it. I smiled. A message from Simon.
You up, Lightwood?

No, I ’m fast asleep, idiot.

I knew you were up. How ’s Alec?

Resting. Healers want him to get a full night before they examine him. Jace won ’t leave his side.

Big shocker there. How are you holding up?

I ’m tired.

So, sleep then, silly.

I can ’t.

Why not?

Don ’t know. Too much adrenaline, maybe?

Are you afraid of something bad happening while you sleep?

Well, if I wasn ’t before, I am now.

Nah, you ’re not afraid.

Oh really?

Do you want me to come over?

I sighed, hesitating. We’d been circling around this for a while now. Did I want him to come over? Yes. Did I want to sleep with him? Yes. Did I like him? Yes. Was it a bad idea? Probably. Did I want him to bite me again? Definitely.

I ’m gonna try and sleep, but thanks.

No problem. I ’ll be round tomorrow. Sleep well, Princess.

Fuck you, Lewis.

Not tonight, honey. I ’ve got a headache.

I smiled, despite myself. I put the phone on charge and lay there, running my fingers over the bite mark. It had been necessary for him to get the base of the scent, but it had felt fucking amazing too. That feeling of being needed. An old addiction rearing its head in a time of dire need.

But Simon was something new. I hadn’t felt this way before.

‘Fuck,’ I breathed and slipped my hand between my legs.
All of us had faced death at various points in our short lives. The risks were high. We had all come close, but what had happened to Alec felt different. He’d been taken. Stolen away and poisoned with whatever this shit was.

The fallout hadn’t even settled on the ground yet.

‘I want to get up,’ Alec said. I rolled my eyes, kicking him gently. I sat on a chair next to his bed, feet up on the mattress. Jace was on the bed, obviously. He sat opposite Alec, their legs brushing.

‘You can’t,’ I said, before Jace cracked like an egg and gave in. ‘Silent Brothers will come soon. You don’t wanna piss them off, do you?’

He frowned and rubbed the bandaged crook of his arm. I’d only seen the track marks briefly, but there were at least a dozen of them. We hadn’t spoken of it at all. Light-hearted banter and snacks, that was about it.

A knock on the door made him flinch, just a fraction. Jade soothed him instantly, by rubbing his leg against his. I didn’t stare, I never did.

‘Hey!’ our Dad called cheerfully, letting himself in. Max was with him. Alec smiled, especially bright for our baby brother. ‘Got a visitor!’

‘Alec!’ Max ran straight for him, leaping up on the bed and throwing his arms around his big brother. ‘I’m so glad you’re OK, I missed you!’

‘Yeah, me too, buddy,’ Alec said, holding him close.

‘Are you hurt bad? Mom and Dad won’t tell me anything except you need rest,’ he said with an eye-roll that was apparently genetic. ‘What took you? Is it dead? If not, I’ll go with Izzy and Jace and kill it for you!’

Jace laughed and grabbed Max around the middle, hauling him away down to his end of the bed. ‘Sorry, I already chopped it’s head clean off!’

‘Was it a demon?’

Jace shrugged, considering. He’d taken over for Alec and it was seamless.

‘Kind of a Spider-Bat thing, I’d say. Magnus will tell us more later.’

‘Did it hurt you really bad, Alec?’


Max giggled. Our Dad came into the scene like some awkward guest.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked Alec.

‘Yeah, great,’ his son replied, not meeting his questioning gaze.

‘He’s clearly milking it,’ Jace added, plopping Max down on the floor and hopping off the bed himself. ‘Who wouldn’t wanna lounge in bed all day with nothing but snacks and anecdotes of the illustrious victories of Jace Herondale?’

‘I definitely wouldn’t,’ I drawled. ‘Sorry to burst your bubble.’
‘Plebeian,’ he sighed.

Max looked at me earnestly. ‘Are you gay too?’

All three of us burst out laughing. ‘Plebeian,’ Jace chuckled, ruffling the kid’s hair. ‘Not lesbian.’

Our Dad cleared his throat, not impressed with the joke. ‘Can I get a moment alone with Alec?’

I glanced at Jace who was, no doubt about it, on the verge of outright saying no. I frowned and indicated towards the door.

‘C’mon little one,’ I said to Max. ‘Let’s go rustle up some more snacks. You can help.’

‘But we have a lot of snacks already,’ Jace said, crossing his arms.

Alec looked at Jace. ‘It’s fine.’

Unwillingly, Jace caved and followed us out of the room.

‘Is Dad gonna tell Alec off?’ Max asked.

‘Not unless he wants his ass kicked,’ I told him happily.

Despite Max’s question about Dad admonishing Alec seeming ridiculous, it turned out that was pretty much the basis of their little Father-Son chat.

‘He wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to do anything embarrassing,’ Alec explained when we returned, laden with snacks he wouldn’t eat. Max hadn’t returned, he wanted to show his friend Sea-Bass, whoever the fuck that was, his new comic.

‘Fucking asshole,’ Jace muttered, ripping open a bar of chocolate and glaring at it.

I shook my head. ‘What did you tell him?’

‘That I’m fine,’ Alec said. Jace and I glanced at each other.

‘Are you?’

He considered the question. ‘I don’t know yet. I can’t feel if it’s still in my system.’

‘The Silent Brothers will know,’ Jace said, but he was taut with concern.

‘Alec,’ I said hesitantly. ‘Do you know what she was shooting you up with?’

He swallowed. ‘I think it was that…the same shit we found on those guys.’

‘Can you tell us about it?’

He closed his eyes. ‘Do I have to?’

‘No,’ Jace said. ‘Of course not.’
‘I just don’t want to…not yet. Not unless it’s bare facts.’

‘Whatever you need,’ Jace said.

‘I’ll tell you what I need,’ Alec said, throwing the covers off. ‘I need to move. I can’t stay here another minute.’

‘Alec,’ I protested, simply so Jace could be the good cop.

‘C’mon, Iz,’ he said, not letting me down. ‘He knows what he needs.’

_Actually, neither of you do._

‘OK, where do you wanna go?’

Alec and Jace looked at one another. I knew instantly where they would go. Their little place on the roof.

I pulled my phone out and scowled at nothing more than the home screen.

‘Fuck,’ I swore, shaking my head. ‘Clary said there’s some bullshit with the cops about the other humans from the warehouse. Is it OK if I catch up with you later?’

‘Sure,’ Alec said easily, obviously a little relieved.

‘Great,’ I said and hugged him tight. It was difficult, giving them the space they needed and knowing I was not a part of it. I was good at it, though. Been doing it for decades. ‘Call if you need anything.’

I left them alone and felt incredibly sad all of a sudden.

Phone in hand, I called Clary.

‘Hey,’ she answered after one ring. ‘What’s happening?’

‘I uh,’ I said, voice catching. ‘Are you free?’

‘Of course,’ she said. ‘I’m with Simon, but I can drop his ass and be to you in five.’

I heard Simon protest in the background and I laughed, despite myself.

‘No, it’s cool. Can I come hang out with you guys for an hour?’

‘Yeah, that’d be great,’ she said. ‘We’re having coffee. There’s a poetry slam.’

‘Of course there is,’ I laughed. ‘I’ll meet you there.’

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Simon was wearing a faded t-shirt and jeans. Clary looked cute in her Mundane get-up; a blue sweater and skinny jeans, her hair piled messily in a bun. They looked adorable, sitting there, sipping coffee from enormous mugs. They chatted animatedly, paying a decent amount of attention to the performer, loudly proclaiming her adoration for Chopin and smashed peas.

I envied them their alternate life. Their escape. Their friendship.
Jace had Alec and that was the totality of their world. Clary and Simon had been friends since, like, birth. They had the Mundane world in common and the Shadow one. What did I have?

*Level the fuck up, Izzy.*

‘Hey guys,’ I said, approaching the pair.

Simon’s eyes widened and he stood abruptly, a weird attempt at chivalry. He could be incredibly cool at times and utterly dorky at others. I liked both aspects equally.

‘Hey, Izzy!’ he said, shaking the fingers he’d scaled when he jumped up. ‘We got you a coffee.’

‘A normal one,’ Clary added, rising to hug and kiss me before I sat beside her. ‘Nothing weird in it, like last time.’

I laughed, shrugging off my jacket and stretching a little. A small group of guys at a nearby table eyeballed me in a highly unsubtle way.

‘You’ve got a little fan-club over there, I think,’ Clary said.

Simon frowned in their direction, but didn’t comment. I had zero energy to make a witty remark. I drank my coffee.

‘How’s Alec?’ Simon asked.

I sighed, staring at the beverage. ‘It’s hard to tell.’

‘Jace is with him?’

‘Yeah.’

‘That’s good.’

‘Yeah, it is. It’s what needs.’

Clary reached over and clasped my hand. ‘He needs you too, Iz.’

‘Not like he needs Jace,’ I said.

Simon shook his head. ‘I should hope not. That would be illegal and gross.’

‘Simon!’ Clary warned as her best friend rolled his eyes.

‘Puh-leeese!’ he said, loud enough that a few people behind us shushed him. ‘Are we *still* all in denial?’

‘It’s none of our business,’ Clary said firmly.

‘I just feel that this is only the start of something bad,’ I told them quietly. ‘Like getting him back wasn’t the end of it.’

I thought of Jace’s sacrifice. The sacrifice I wasn’t even given a chance to contemplate. Jace and Alec. Alec and Jace. No room for Izzy.

Fuck, now *I* was being maudlin.

Simon cleared his throat. ‘Was it definitely drugs?’
‘Some sort of drug, we don’t know what kind, yet.’

‘Magical, you think?’

‘For a demon to be dicking around with it, I have to assume so.’

‘Shit,’ Simon sighed, shaking his head. ‘Poor Alec.’

‘Do the Clave know about,’ Clary lowered her voice. ‘What Jace did?’

‘No one does,’ I told her. ‘Magnus is going to help cover it up. If anyone finds out, Jace is screwed.’

‘Did he tell you what it was?’

‘What?’

‘The price?’

‘Oh. No, I fucking begged him, but he wouldn’t budge. He’s not going to, either. I know him well enough to see when he’s batten down the hatches.’

Clary nodded, but Simon’s eyes narrowed a touch. He didn’t quite believe me. He could tell when I was lying, or at least sense it.

‘Whatever it was, I’ll bet it’s not good.’

‘There’s plenty of not good going around.’

I realised I’d kind of ruined their night. They were having fun before I got there. Now everything was gloomy and quiet.

‘You know what, maybe I should get back,’ I said.

‘Hey, you can’t leave now,’ Simon said. ‘You’ll miss my slam!’

‘Sorry?’

Puffing out his chest, he said, ‘Do you really want to tell your grandkids that you missed the first ever performance of Simon Lewis as he makes his grand poetry slam debut?’

I cracked an unwilling smile.

‘Are you serious?’ Clary asked, not quite buying it.

He shrugged and finished his coffee, eyes sparkling. ‘Watch me.’

He went up next. No nerves, no insecurity. He stood on the stage, held the mic and cleared his throat.

‘Hi everyone, thank you for coming out tonight to see me.’ A few people laughed. Clary shook her head, grinning. ‘I’d like to recite for you this slam poem which I have just been struck by, this very moment titled…It’s Rude to Stare.’

He closed his eyes, holding out a finger, instructing us to wait.

‘It’s really rude to stare,’ he said at last, looking directly at the table of guys. ‘Staring at a girl like she’s a piece of meat is rude and makes us all look bad. Just because she’s wearing leather doesn’t
mean she’s yours…that’s BAD!

Everyone laughed, much louder this time except for the table of men who looked pretty pissed off, a few of them colouring.

‘Men! Staring! This is why girls run away! Try! CARING! One day a girl might stay!’

It was so cringe-worthy I almost wanted to cover my eyes, but I was laughing too much. Every time he spoke, he made some grand, overblown hand gesture with a pained, far off expression.

‘A final word of advice, then I’ll let it pass. When a girl is wearing leather, it means she’ll kick your ass!’

The whole place erupted into uproarious laughter and applause. Simon took several bows, handing the mic back to the proprietor.

I definitely should have been embarrassed, angry even, but I was still laughing. I felt lighter than I had in days. Happy. As he weaved his way back to his seat, he dropped a kiss onto my cheek and winked at Clary.

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I didn’t spend the whole night with them like I wanted to. A couple of hours was enough to recharge and find my centre, though it was especially difficult to part from Simon.

‘I’ll see you tomorrow,’ I said, looking down at my hand in his. It slid up my wrist and he ran his thumb over the almost healed bite mark. He swallowed hard, a small frown creasing his forehead.

‘This is tough, huh?’ he said, after a minute of clearly searching for what to say. He was nervous again, stripped of his earlier confidence.

‘Yeah,’ I said, my pulse racing. He must have felt it, heard it. Tasted the heat of my blood in the air. ‘It really is.’

He took a deep, steadying breath and let go.

‘Good night, Izzy,’ he said, moving back.

Part of me was almost disappointed at his restraint. I wanted to him to hug me, to get so close he wouldn’t be able to control himself. I badly wanted to lose myself in him, get caught up in passion and sex and something else I wouldn’t dare name yet.

But he would regret that and for the first time, I cared that rushing it might actually ruin it.

‘Good night,’ I said. Clary was texting nearby in the street.

‘Hey, Simon, is it cool if we go see Luke?’

‘Sure thing, Frey,’ he said and I broke eye contact with him because it was painful to watch him leave. When the hell had that become a thing?

Clary and I had already said goodbye, she gave really good hugs. The two of them went off together, huddled close against the cold night air. I watched them until they were out of sight.
Where to now? Back to the Institute to sit around and watch Mom and Dad fantasises about murdering one another? Become the third wheel with Alec and Jace? Wander the streets looking for something to pummel the shit out of?

The third option seemed to be the clear-cut winner, when my phone went off. The number was unknown, but I answered it anyway.

‘Hello?’

‘Hi, I’m so sorry - is this Isabelle?’

‘Yeah, who’s this?’

‘This is Sebastian. Verlac? We met the other day? I came with the additional—’

‘No, yeah I remember. Sorry.’

He laughed softly. ‘That’s quite all right. I can’t imagine what you’ve gone through the last few days, etiquette can certainly take a backseat for all I care.’

I smiled, even though he wasn’t there to see it. ‘So, what’s up?’

‘I uh, I’m sorry for calling you so out of the blue. I just wondered if you were around? I’m hanging out with Max and he’s a little bit down, to be honest.’

‘Oh,’ I said, guilt lancing me right in the chest. I hadn’t even thought of Max. ‘Yeah, of course! I’m coming back right now.’

‘Actually,’ he said haltingly. ‘I was thinking maybe it would be good for him to get some fresh air?’

It was fair testament to how messed up everyone was that Mom put up absolutely no fight when I said Sebastian and I were taking Max out for cheeseburgers at 9:55pm. On the way out, I heard Dad ask where we were going and when Mom told him, he said, ‘Good, good.’

Max was way too excited, evidence of his recent neglect and I wanted to slap myself.

‘You know,’ Sebastian said conversationally as we sat down to eat in a diner. ‘I haven’t ever had a cheeseburger.’

Max laughed, flicking through the menu. ‘You don’t have to have a cheeseburger and how have you never had one? They’re amazing!’

He looked at me and I shrugged, grinning. ‘They are. Can’t deny it.’

‘Well, I’ll give it a shot for you, Max,’ he said kindly.

I definitely didn’t want to eat which was a good sign that I should.

‘You getting a milkshake?’ I asked Max who nodded excitedly.

Sebastian leaned over to his side. ‘A huge one?’
'Yes, please! Are you two gonna have one to share?'

When Sebastian caught my eyes, I got the distinct feeling that this could easily have been a date. Cute kid between us, generic background, kind gestures. He was beautiful, dauntingly so, actually. He reminded me of Jace, if Jace hadn’t been bitch-slapped by life quite so hard.

It wasn’t a date, though. He was just being kind and there for me and Max and I knew when he looked at me.

I relaxed. ‘Why not?’

Max slept soundly that night and I stayed with him for a while even after he’d drifted off, clutching the comic he’d read to me. I sat and watched him, thinking about his bravery and innocence. How abruptly both would be tested in the Shadow world. I thought of Alec, so brave and strong and still, taken from the streets like a child. I couldn’t protect them, the ones I loved. They would be hurt and taken.

I drew the covers up and carefully places his beloved comic on the nightstand. He sighed and burrowed deeper into the pillow.

‘Good night baby,’ I whispered.

It was past midnight. The living quarters of the Institute were quiet, but recent events were crawling under my skin and sleep seemed impossible.

I thought of Alec and how I wanted to go to him, but it was better to leave him with Jace. That was what he needed, deep down. He would heal faster in the presence of his Parabatai, mentally and physically.

Emotionally was a whole other thing, though.

I went to HQ in the end, wandering around like an enormous loser only held appeal for so long. Before I could even step foot into the glassy area, Henson saw me and made a beeline for me.

‘Silent Brothers are here,’ he said without preamble. ‘Get Alec, would you?’

‘You want him here?’

He rolled his eyes impatiently. ‘They went straight to his room, he’s not there. Find him and get him back there, please,’ he added, perhaps seeing my less than impressed expression.

‘You got it,’ I said with mock enthusiasm and a highly derivative salute.

On the way there I sent Alec a message, but it went unread. I really, really didn’t want to interrupt them if they were into heavy emotional dealings.

Or worse.

The rooftop was their thing, it had been ever since Jace first came to us. I approached quietly, listening for a moment to make my presence known.
At first, I heard nothing and I thought maybe they weren’t there. I peered around the slanted roof and saw them sitting side by side, Jace’s arm wrapped around Alec, legs dangling over the edge.

My heart broke for them, it really did.

‘Guys,’ I called softly. ‘The Silent Brothers are here.’

‘Tell me, then,’ Dad insisted, an intense frowny scowl in place, wrinkling his tan. He had not been in the room for the examination.

Mom sighed. ‘The base of the… compound is Yin Fen, roughly a quarter of it. The bulk is a mish-mash of human drugs; opiates, stimulants. A small percentage is thus far unidentified. They know it’s magical, they just don’t know what it actually is.’

‘Will there be long term effects?’

‘Minimal, if any but they warned that the substance would be highly addictive.’

‘My son is not an addict.’

I sneered, staring hard at the table. ‘Let’s shoot you up with it then, see how you fare!’

‘Watch your tone!’

‘The point,’ Mom pushed on, shooting me a warning look. ‘Is that he’ll need to be watched.’

Dad looked incredulous. ‘How long for?’

‘A while, at least.’

‘Well, it’s not feasible. He’s going to take over this Institute, Maryse. He can’t have something like this hanging over his head! No, it’s ridiculous.’

Jace had been silent up until now, staring down much like I was.

‘I’ll watch him,’ he said. ‘I’ll do it discreetly.’

‘There,’ Dad said slapping the table triumphantly. ‘Finally, a member of this family who understands! Very good, Jace. Who better than his Parabatai? Needs to be watched! Your doubt in our eldest boy is destroying him, you know that, Maryse?’

Alec was still in his room, mercifully away from this discussion. I knew Jace wanted to go to him. He would sleep in the room with him, like they often did.

‘How dare you presume to know how I feel about my son? You swan in here with your shirt buttons undone and your little upgrade in tow and think you’ll take my children away from me?’

‘They’re our children and Karine is a part of this family, whatever you may think of her! We’re getting married next year!’

‘Well, fuck,’ I breathed, quite unnoticed by our warring parents. I shot Jace and look and quietly, we
slipped out together, leaving them to it.

‘That went great,’ he said, dryly. ‘Angel, can’t they put Alec first, just once?’

‘Life time of practise, I guess. How is he, really?’

‘It’s bad, I think,’ he told me in a low tone. ‘But I meant what I said. I’ll stay with him, make sure he’s OK.’

‘I know you will.’

‘He’s been through so much.’

‘You have too.’

‘I don’t care about me. I just care that he’s home again.’

He absent-mindedly reached up and placed his hand over his heart for a moment. It was a strange gesture, but he didn’t seem to even realise he’d done it.

‘We’ll keep him safe,’ I promised him.

‘Yeah,’ he said and wrapped an arm around me. It was a hollow promise, but the intent was real.

Outside Alec’s room we said goodnight. I could have gone in with him, but I was genuinely too tired. They needed rest, too.

Head heavy, I opened the door to my own room and paused, sensing a presence.

‘Simon?’ I squinted through the gloom. He was on my bed.

‘Hey,’ he greeted in a whisper. ‘I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be waiting here for you like some…gross, stalkery…’

I smiled tiredly. ‘Vampire?’

‘Well, yeah. But I just…I couldn’t leave you alone tonight, Izzy. I wanted to be here with you and I thought that you might want me here too.’

I was suddenly so relieved he was there with me, I could have cried. ‘I do, I do want you here. Thank you.’

He pulled back the blankets for me and waited while I changed right in front of him, uncaring and beyond exhausted, into an over-sized, old t-shirt and not much else. I crawled into bed, leaning into his side.

He was fully clothed, coat hanging nearby and shoes on the floor. He wrapped his arm around me and I sank low.

‘I’m right here,’ he said as my eyes drifted shut. ‘I’ve got this watch.’

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_A/N Yes, this was an Izzy chapter and I'm not even sorry. I feel like she's always shoved on the side-
lines a bit too often so this was my way of apologising to her. Next chapter will be Alec and Jace
centric again, so don't worry, those beautiful tortured boys will be back soon.

Thank you all so so so much for the amazing comments, feedback and support. It's blown me away
and always inspires me to write faster (hint!) You're all wonderful, I love you, thank you!
Chapter Eight: So I'm Not Sick Enough, Is That Right?

Chapter Summary

Alec deals with the fallout and tries to control what's happening to him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

- So I’m Not Sick Enough, Is That Right? -

‘I paint my nails black,
I dye my hair a darker shade of brown,
‘Cos you like your women Spanish;
Dark, strong and proud.
I paint the sky black,
You said if you could have your way,
You ’d make it night time all today,
So it suit the mood of your soul.
Oh, what can I do?
Nothing, my sparrow blue.
Oh, what can I do?
Life is beautiful but you don ’t have a clue.
Sun and ocean blue,
Their magnificence, it don ’t make sense to you.
Black beauty. ’

-Lana Del Rey

- Alec -
Sleep was the absolute last thing I wanted, but it was what everyone thought was best. The bed was itchy and hot, covers were cloying and damp with my sweat. It creaked and moaned. I despised it. Even with Jace curled around me, I hated it.

I knew what was happening. The Silent Brothers had told me.

*Your body will crave this substance. It will twist and seek it out, hurt you when you do not provide it.*

Yeah, I fucking knew what was happening.

My stomach hurt so bad, it was making me tremble. Heart pounded irregularly, ribs felt too tight and my head thundered like I was hungover.

‘Fuck,’ I breathed, turning my face into the pillow.

Jace woke, his sleepy breathing pattern broken.

‘You OK?’ he asked, turning his face to mine.

‘Yeah fine,’ I said, moving away. ‘I’m sorry, you’re covered in my sweat.’

He sat up, blinking the sleep away. ‘Oh, hey, doesn’t matter. Are you feeling all right?’

‘No,’ I said honestly, because there was no point in denying it.

‘Oh, fuck,’ he said quietly. ‘What can I do?’

I closed my eyes. I knew very well what I *wanted* him to do. Go get me that bag he found on those junkies in the park and give it to me.

‘Get me some water, please?’

‘Sure,’ he jumped up almost comically fast, dashing off to my en suite.

‘Actually, don’t worry,’ I said, throwing off the sheets. ‘I’m just gonna get up and have a shower.’

‘You sure?’ he asked and I heard the distinct sounds of him taking a leak. ‘It’s only like 3:30 in the morning. Did you sleep?’

‘Some,’ I lied. ‘I just want to keep busy, you know?’

‘I get it,’ he said, turning on the shower for me. I went in the bathroom and saw him sitting perched on the closed lid of the toilet, brushing his teeth. ‘I’d wanna be busy too.’

‘You gonna sit there while I shower?’

He shrugged. ‘Any reason I can’t?’

I stripped down, noticing in my peripheral vision that he politely looked away when I peeled off my bottoms. I stepped into the shower. The water was hot and it felt good, soothing my aching muscles.

‘Feel better?’

‘Yeah, a lot actually. I could stay in here all day.’
'We can, if you want.'

I laughed, squeezing shampoo into my hand. ‘I think I might prune.’

‘We can alternate, y’know, if we don’t both fit.’

God fucking damn it, withdrawal from drugs and being kidnapped for four days apparently did fuck all to stop my mind going straight to a bad place when Jace said we could spend all day in the shower.

I viciously scrubbed the shampoo through my hair, clawing at my scalp harder than necessary. It didn’t help. He was right there, on the other side of frosted glass and even with frosted glass he was very clearly going to see how turned I was.

I carefully turned down the temperature of the water to cool.

‘How are the other people doing?’ I asked, the cold water helping my situation, but immediately wiping the relief gained from the heat.

‘I don’t know,’ he answered. ‘Luke is handling it. You want me to find out?’

‘No, we’ll hear about it sooner or later. Pass me a towel?’

He flung it over the top of the shower doors. I wrapped it around myself and stepped out.

‘You look better,’ he commented.

‘I look like shit,’ I said, watching myself in the mirror. Without the bandages, the track marks were clear as day. Vile, purple marks littered around the crooks of both arms. New cuts that were healed, leaving only small scars. Broken ribs left dark clouds of bruises that would take longer to vanish. The substance was still in my system and it was apparently messing with my rune’s ability to heal.

‘You look,’ he said, wrapping his arms around my middle, looking at our reflection. ‘Beautiful. Get dressed, I’ll be out in a minute.’

He stripped off, stepping in the shower without hesitating. I watched him in the reflection, unable to make myself turn away the way he had. His bruises and cuts had all healed. He was the beautiful one, as always. Naked, he took my breath away. Fuck.

This was going to be a long day.

Breakfast was a nightmare. Worse than them arguing, Mom and Dad were making some monstrous effort with each other to be civil for my sake.

‘Pass the syrup, please, Karine?’ Mom asked clipped and polite, with a smile that could have frozen water.

Karine, to her credit, didn’t detect the tone or didn’t care. ‘Bien sur,’ she said, obliging, licking the same syrup off her thumb. ‘Alec, you are seeming,’ she paused, conferring with my Dad in French, grasping for the word of her choice. ‘Pale? Pale. You are pale, Alec. Will you not come out into the sun with me today? We can go kill things.’
Jace and Izzy bit down smiles, Max shook his head also grinning. Dad didn’t seem too impressed, so I raced to the rescue.

‘Killing things sounds great, thanks. Are there things to kill…during the day?’

‘In France, there are many, yes. Not in New York?’

‘Not so many,’ Izzy said, sipping her coffee. She hadn’t eaten anything again. I frowned, but wasn’t stupid enough to point it out in front of Mom or Dad.

‘The demons in Paris are uh, how you say…c’est quoi? Ah, bold! Yes, they have large balls.’

Max snorted into his juice.

‘Perhaps another day,’ Mom said blandly. ‘There’s an official assignment from the Clave.’

We all looked up at that. ‘Oh?’

‘We can discuss it after breakfast.’

Dad cleared his throat. ‘Actually, there’s also something I’d like to discuss with you after breakfast, too, if that’s OK, son?’

Son? What the fuck now?

‘Yeah sure,’ I sighed, pushing away the mush cereal and cold toast. ‘Get in line, huh?’

Dad walked with me to HQ. Mom went ahead and Karine hung back with the others. My hands were shaking a little, so I curled them tight into fists and waited for whatever he was about to lay on me.

‘Listen, what I said yesterday…that was out of line.’

I glanced sideways. ‘What?’

‘I shouldn’t have said what I did. It was cowardly and undeserved. I have no doubts in you whatsoever, Alec.’

‘Right.’

‘Also, I wanted to give you your birthday present. We didn’t get to do anything and, well - here you go.’

We stopped in the hallway. He handed me a set of keys.

‘I don’t drive, Dad.’

‘No, I know. It’s not a car.’


‘No,’ he said, looking reasonably pleased with himself. ‘It’s an apartment.’

‘…what?’

‘It’s your apartment. Bought and paid for, your name on the lease.’
'Dad…what the fuck?'

He winced at my language, but didn’t rebuke me.

‘Look, it’s for all of you, really. I know you’re not going to come and stay with Karine and me in France and I know I’m not exactly an ideal Father to you all. But I also know how these walls can weigh you down. We’ve always lived here and if you take over, this will become your home all over again if you want, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have a place of your own.’

My throat was tight. ‘This is too much, I can’t.’

‘Like I said, it’s for you all. Izzy, Jace, even Max. You can all use it. Live there, stay there… whatever you want.’

I looked down at the keys. There were three sets of two, each with different coloured caps.

‘Dad, how can you afford this?’

He shrugged. ‘Divorce is finalised, assets are all divided. Karine, you know her whole family own, like, at least four castles in France. They’re pretty much royalty. I don’t need the money.’

‘I still can’t—’

‘Alec,’ he said, cutting off my protest. ‘It’s nothing compared to what you kids deserve and what you actually got. I’m an asshole sometimes. This is my way of trying to be nice. Just take it, OK?’

He pushed my fingers closed, curled around the keys.

I nodded and he smiled, slapping my back.

‘Good. The paperwork is inside the apartment. I’d install a security system, it’s a decent place but the area is a little rough.’ He laughed. ‘Get Magnus to magic up some furniture too, eh?’

‘We uh,’ I said, shaking my head. ‘We broke up.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘I’m sorry, that’s…am I meant to be angry at him?’

‘No, Dad. It wasn’t anything he did.’

He rubbed his neck, clearly not sure what to say. ‘Well, I’m still sorry. He seemed to genuinely care for you.’

‘Yeah, look, I gotta go find Clary, OK? But uh, thanks. This is really nice.’

Saying that buying us an apartment was nice had to be an understatement, but he took it with a bracing grin and another manly back-slap.

‘My pleasure.’
It was a mark of our training and how seriously missions were taken that Izzy and Jace didn’t object loudly. I felt Jace’s anger spike, felt him control it and try to calm down.

‘I know this is an especially tough assignment, but it’s direct from the Clave so that’s all we need to know.’

‘Do they know anything?’ Dad asked.

Mom shrugged. ‘They know the drug is called DOM, a shoddy acronym for Dark Side of the Moon. That’s about it.’

Izzy frowned. ‘Is it limited to New York?’

‘So, far yes.’

‘That’s good,’ the new addition, Sebastian said with a decisive nod. ‘I’d like to help, if you’ll have me. I have some experience with tracing Yin Fen shipments and might know a few contacts who could help point us in the right direction.’

Izzy gave him a friendly smile. Clary seemed a little bemused, watching him with something almost resembling recognition.

‘That would be great,’ I said, scratching my forearm subtly. ‘Any help is welcome at this point.’

‘Good,’ he said. ‘There’s a place downtown that would be a decent starting point, unless you want to head to the factory?’

Everyone looked at me. ‘No,’ I said, looking down. ‘I don’t think I could provide objective investigative skills in this instance.’

‘We should split up,’ Jace said, leaning against the desk. ‘Clary, Simon and Izzy do a pass of the scene at the factory, Alec, Sebastian and I will head downtown.’

‘Sounds good,’ I said, relieved and grateful for his backup. ‘Karine? Would you be OK to help us with something?’

Karine straightened, eyes wide and interested. ‘Bien sur, cherie.’

‘There’s a couple of bars with known addicts and users of things like Yin Fen. It would be helpful if you could go there and ask a few questions, as though you’re interested in trying it.’

She nodded fiercely. ‘I will infiltrate and destroy them.’

‘Well,’ Mom said hurriedly. ‘Not so much destroy them as infiltrate.’

Karine shrugged. ‘As you wish, but I am very great at destroying.’

‘No one doubts that,’ Izzy said with a wink and smile. ‘Simon is speaking to Raphael and a few others, asking about it. So far hardly anyone knows about it though.’

‘It’s new,’ Sebastian said grimly. ‘But it’ll take hold soon enough.’

‘Why is it making the rounds with humans if it’s a supernatural drug?’ Clary asked.

‘A drug is a drug,’ Jace said.
‘The Silent Brothers said the drug seemed to have been engineered to be addictive, especially so,’ Dad said. ‘Spreading it through the human ranks first is smart.’

‘OK,’ I said, crossing my arms. ‘I think we’re all set.’ My stomach was coiling and tightening like a nest of snakes. I needed to throw up.

‘Yup,’ Jace agreed. ‘Let’s check in after two hours.’

Hand on my back, he escorted me out of the room and into the nearest bathroom. He’d barely locked the door before I had my head in the toilet bowl, body contracting and seizing, stomach acid burning my throat as it exited my body.

‘It’s OK,’ he said, crouching beside me, his cool hand stroking my hair. ‘Get it all out.’

I gasped, fighting for breath as it slowed and finally stopped. He handed me a warm, damp towel and a glass of water. I gurgled and spat it out, staring down at the yellow, foul liquid I’d brought up.

‘I feel like I’m dying,’ I whispered. He stroked my neck now, side by side with me.

‘I know,’ he said. ‘But you’re not. It’s your body, tricking you. I’m right here and we’ll fight it, together.’

For a moment, we just sat there together on the marble floor. His fingers stroked my neck absently. I closed my eyes and tried to find my centre again.

‘Jace,’ I said.

‘Hmm?’

‘How did you find me?’

He didn’t hesitate to answer. ‘I’d find you anywhere, Parabatai.’

Sebastian did not mention anything about us vanishing into a bathroom and emerging half an hour later.

‘Ready?’ he asked, like we’d been waiting for him.

‘Yeah,’ Jace said. ‘Ready to kick some fucking ass, that’s for sure.’

He smiled at that. ‘Always good to meet someone who lives up to his reputation.’

Jace didn’t ask if he had a reputation or what it was. Sebastian didn’t press it. I was impressed with them both.

We took the subway, runes making us invisible to Mundanes. Jace took none of his usual gleeful pleasure in bumping into them. The journey was mostly quiet, save to occasionally confer about direction.

Sebastian led us to an extremely seedy bar which seemed, from the outside, to be a Chinese Herbalist Store. It was some kind of a speakeasy for magical drugs. The walls were dark green, the lights were
dim and the smell was enough for me to want to throw up again, but I held it together.

‘Henry,’ Sebastian greeted a short, fat little man who eyes Jace and I suspiciously. ‘They’re with me.’

‘If you say so,’ he said, but still seemed reluctant. He and Sebastian had a quiet conversation, while Jace and I looked around.

‘So gross,’ Jace said under his breath.

Instead of tables, there were pod-like beds, each with little curtains creating the illusion of privacy. I could see quite clearly the people inside them, eyes rolled back as their bodies undulated and rolled with pleasure.

The smell was unbearable.

‘Let’s go,’ Sebastian said, not a moment too soon.

I took a deep breath, steadying myself against the filthy glass.

‘It’s not even midday,’ Jace said with disgust. ‘Does no one have day jobs?’

‘Apparently not,’ Sebastian chuckled. ‘Henry has heard of the DOM, he doesn’t deal it because no one knows the source. He’s had a few customers say they were offered it by a friend.’

‘Any names?’

‘No.’

‘You trust him?’

‘He’s survival orientated. In this field, it’s as good as you get.’

‘Jace,’ I said slowly. ‘Your friend Adam.’

Jace blinked. ‘Huh?’

Impatient, I rolled my eyes. ‘Fuck-face Adam? From Sang’s?’

‘Oh, yeah. What about him?’

‘He offered me some drug, last time I saw him. Said it was new.’

‘Worth a shot,’ Jace said, pulling out his phone. ‘Though he is a total fuck face.’

‘I knew you’d come around, Herondale. This shit is the best thing you’ve ever tried, believe me!’

Jace, with admirable restraint, did not murder Adam.

‘Where’d you get it from?’

Sebastian was waiting outside the Mundane bar. Adam was nursing a lukewarm beer at 1pm,
occasionally eating bar snacks.

He shrugged. ‘You gonna pay to know?’

‘I’ll not put my first through your face, how’s that?’

Adam took a messy slurp and sneered. ‘Fuck you, coming around here bein’ all high and mighty! Where were you last month? On your knees in the bathroom same as I was!’

‘Watch your mouth,’ I said through gritted teeth.

‘Fifty bucks,’ Adam said.

‘We want the dealer, not whatever bullshit you’re about to make up for money,’ Jace warned. ‘If it’s accurate, it’s worth a hundred.’

Adam sulked. ‘I got it from a friend.’

‘Whose name is…?’

‘Can’t remember, but he hangs around outside the store with the really shitty 90’s porn.’

‘Hangs around?’

‘Yeah, mostly at night.’

‘He’s a trick?’

‘God, obviously. He gave me few samples, said I’d get a discount on more if I sold it around.’

‘What’s he look like?’

‘Brunette, curly hair, always carrying a red backpack. He’s got a knife so watch out when you approach him.’ Adam laughed at the idea of one of us getting stabbed.

‘Well, that was a waste of time,’ Jace said as we headed home empty handed. ‘Fucking bullshit lying liar Adam.’

‘Maybe he’s just sleeping?’ Sebastian suggested. ‘A lot of…’

‘Whores?’ Jace suggested, offhand.

‘Well, yes, they sleep during the day, no?’

‘We can try later,’ I said, but it was a hollow suggestion. I wasn’t really invested in what was happening at this point. My body was warring with me, hurting me and demanding that I cave spectacularly and give in.

Give in, find that drug and get it in my body somehow.

Fucking pathetic.
Jace shot me subtly concerned a look. ‘You wanna get something to eat?’

‘No,’ I said, stomach rolling.

‘Me neither, let’s go have a drink.’

I stopped dead in the street. ‘Are you serious? It’s early afternoon.’

He totally ignored me. ‘Sebastian, you wanna come?’

Our companion didn’t look especially thrilled at the idea of day drinking while on duty.

‘If it’s all the same to you, I’ll pass. I have a few errands to run of my own.’

‘People are always running errands,’ Jace sighed. ‘It’s so fucking twee.’

‘Thanks for your help, man,’ I said, offering him a tight smile.

‘We’ll find the source,’ he said, aiming for kind reassurance. ‘I know a couple of other—’

Jace linked his arm through mine and pulled us away. ‘Catch you later!’

‘That was rude,’ I said, but allowed myself to be dragged. ‘And I’m not day drinking like that loser Adam.’

‘It’ll help, trust me.’

He steered us into a cab he’d hailed.

I shifted in the seats as he told the driver to head to a bar I’d never heard of. ‘How will it help?’

‘If you’re drunk, everything is numb. If you’re numb, you can’t feel that shit in your system as it burns out.’

‘Jace, I feel like I’m dying, the last thing I wanna do is drink.’

‘Yeah, well - needs must, baby.’

We were the only two people in the bar - an oddly classy place - and the bar tender didn’t seem to mind us sitting there, steadily drinking. He knew Jace, apparently.

‘Fuckin’ hate when you’re right,’ I said, drawing a wet line on the bar with a straw.

‘It’s rare,’ Jace admitted. ‘So, I’ll enjoy the moment.’

‘So, now that we’re on the verge of unconsciousness,’ I slurred, trying to sit upright. ‘You gonna tell me what’s been happening with you lately?’

‘With what? You gotta speci-specifuh…you gotta be clear.’

‘What happened with Alyssa?’
‘Urgh,’ Jace dropped his head on the bar. ‘She was great and I fucked it up. Next.’

‘What was with the guy? Declan?’

‘C’mon, man.’

‘What? M not allowed to ask?’

‘I met him at Sang’s. He was hot.’

‘Did you fuck him?’

He turned to smile at me. ‘Do you know how weird it is to hear you say that? You never talk like that.’

‘Did you?’

‘We had sex, yeah.’

‘Did you bottom?’

He wrinkled his nose. ‘Whassat?’

I laughed, sitting up enough to drink some more. ‘Were you, like…the girl?’

‘I don’t think you’re supposed to say it like that. You’re bad at being gay. And yeah, the two times I’ve done it, I was always the girl. I bottomed, if that’s the way you say it. Two more, Paul!’

Paul didn’t comment or complain that we were clearly over-served. He poured the drinks and gracefully returned to his maintenance of the bar.

Jace took a deep breath. ‘Do you bottom?’

I spluttered into my drink and laughed. ‘I’ve never had sex, Jace. How would I know.’

‘Oh yeah,’ my Parabatai said, looking down. ‘Why’d you break up with Magnus?’

Even drenched in alcohol as it was, my brain snapped to attention as we veered into Stuff We Mustn’t Discuss territory.

‘He told you?’

‘Yeah he did and how could you not tell me?’

I huffed. ‘There’s plenty you don’t tell me, Jace.’

‘Oh yeah? Like what?’

‘How could you not tell me you were seeing a guy?’

‘OK, first off - it was casual sex and he was only here for four days, so I wasn’t seeing anyone. And B, I was going to tell you, but that’s when shit was all weird between us.’

I tried to maintain his gaze. ‘Are you bi?’

He scoffed, but then frowned as he considered my question. ‘Huh, I guess I might be. And anyway, you’re leading us off topic which was me asking how you could break up with Magnus and not tell
me?’

‘I thought you’d assume it was your fault.’

‘It was my fault.’

‘No, see - I’m capable of making mistakes too. Not everything is some monstrous Jace-a-culpa.’

‘So, you dumped him ‘cause you were bored, then?’

I swallowed hard. ‘No.’

‘So why then?’

‘Jace, it’s not—’

‘Then it was my fault, wasn’t it?’

I waited a beat. ‘It was not your fault. There was more than one reason.’

‘Name one.’

‘I don’t think I loved him.’

‘You should have given it more time. Love doesn’t just happen overnight!’

I looked at him, watching him openly as he tipped his glass all the way back and finished yet another vodka and lime. Fucking hell did he have to be so painfully beautiful?

‘Sometimes it does.’

He wiped his mouth. ‘Well, whatever happened, I’m here for you. If you wanna talk about it, don’t wander the fuck off again. M right here.’

‘I know you are.’

His expression darkened. ‘You can’t do that to me again, Alec.’

‘I didn’t do it to you, Jace. I was fucking airlifted away.’

‘You can’t leave me like that. I nearly…I would have died.’

I looked at him sharply. ‘Meaning what?’

Staring at the bar, he said, ‘Where you go, I go. You go somewhere I can’t follow, I’ll kick the fucking door down.’

‘Don’t say things like that.’

‘Well don’t leave me again and I won’t have to.’

A beat of silence lapsed before I spoke.

‘How did you find me, Jace?’

‘I told you.’
‘No, you didn’t.’

‘I felt you. I followed the bond.’ He looked me right in the eye. ‘I would find you anywhere. Follow you anywhere. Do anything for you. Don’t you know that?’

‘OK,’ I said, pulling out a few bills and placing them on the bar. ‘Follow me now, then.’

‘It’s fucking huge!’

Jace’s voice echoed in the mostly empty apartment. It had been freshly painted recently, the smell hung in the air. The keys were warm in my hand.

It was light and airy, double windows in the main living room. The kitchen was small and fairly cosy, fitted with modern appliances and there were three decent sized bedrooms, one of which had a lovely en-suite with a tub.

Jace ran from room to room, squealing excitedly. His childlike exuberance soothed me intensely.

‘Wow, this is one of the best guilt gifts I’ve ever seen!’

‘Twenty-one years’ worth,’ I said, laying the keys on the countertop and turning the taps on and off. ‘I guess we need some furniture.’

‘Can I choose it?’ Jace panted, hopping up onto the countertop in front of me, his leg knocking absently against my thigh. ‘Can I choose the sofa, at least?’

I smiled. ‘You can choose it all.’

‘Yesss!’

It felt like my gift to him, almost. Part of me wondered if this was my father’s intention.

‘This is amazing,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘A little freedom!’

‘It is, actually,’ I agreed, starting to become very aware that we were a little too close. I was standing between his legs as he looked down at me with his beautiful mismatched eyes. I moved back a little, but he used his feet to pull me back in.

‘You know what we need?’

“What?”

He bit his bottom lip. ‘A party.’

“What? No, Jace.’

‘A housewarming party.’

‘No way.’

‘A little one?’
‘Jace.’

‘Ten people?’

‘Come on.’

‘Five?’

‘Five is hardly a party.’

‘Clary, Simon, Maia plus me and you and Izzy is six.’

‘Maia is hardly going to drop college—’

‘OK, just everyone else then. Five is a party if I’m throwing it.’

The alcohol was wearing off. I felt too weak to argue. ‘Whatever you want.’

‘You’re the best.’

I solidly moved away this time. ‘We should get back before it gets dark.’

‘Sure,’ he said easily, now that his demands had been met. ‘You wanna hail a cab?’

‘Sounds good.’

Izzy was just as excited about the apartment as Jace and now I was positive my Dad had given me the keys knowing how good I would feel telling them about it. Fucking sneaky bastard.

‘Oh my God, can I use it this weekend?’ she asked as we sat on breakfast stools in the kitchen back in the Institute.

‘There aren’t any beds yet,’ Jace laughed. He seemed a little curious too. He’d doubtlessly noticed, as had I, her recent growing connection with Simon.

‘Not for that,’ she said, rolling her eyes. ‘Gutter brain. It’d be nice to hang out with Clary somewhere less gloomy and intense every now and then.’

‘It’s your place too,’ I said, separating the keys. ‘Look, here’s your set and yours too Jace.’

‘Our place,’ Izzy said with a pleased smile, accepting the keys. ‘Give Dad his due, this is a rare home run. Our own place.’

‘No rules!’ said an ecstatic Jace.

‘Some rules,’ I rebuked gently, but it was mostly teasing.

Izzy and Jace began discussing plans for whatever party Jace was determined to throw and I watched them for a few minutes, feeling strange.

The drunk feeling had mostly worn off a while ago, leaving me weak and gutted. I had almost convinced myself that Jace was right; that drinking would keep the pain of withdrawal at bay.
I felt cold. Like something liquid and metallic was creeping up my spine, spreading into my veins. Izzy and Jace seemed further away than I knew they really were. Their words echoed in my head, but the voices were slightly off.

‘Hey, Alec?’

I shook myself, turning to Sebastian. ‘Huh?’

Jace and Izzy stared. I tried to dismiss the feeling.

‘Sorry,’ he said, halfway in the kitchen. ‘Magnus Bane is here to see you.’

‘Oh. Right. Thanks.’

‘Hey,’ Jace said softly as I went to leave. ‘You don’t have to see him.’

I shrugged. ‘Why wouldn’t I see him? He did a lot for me and the others.’

‘I know, but if you’re not up for it—’

‘I’m fine.’

‘You’re fine? Really?’

Magnus didn’t seem impressed.

‘What do you want me to say?’ I asked tiredly. He shook his head and sat down on my bed.

‘How about the truth? I’m not someone you have to be strong for, Alexander.’

Moodily, I stared. ‘I feel better than I thought I would, considering.’

‘That worries me.’

‘Of course it does.’

‘A human drug would have you rolling on the floor vomiting.’

‘Small victories aren’t for nothing.’

‘I’m just saying with it being a supernatural drug, we can’t know the side effects until they happen. The whole thing feels weird to me anyway. What’s to be gained?’

‘Why take me?’

‘Why keep you there? Why give you the drug?’ he said, rubbing his eyes. He had beautiful eyes. ‘I don’t know, it’s weird.’

‘Thank you for everything you did.’

‘I barely did anything,’ he said. ‘It was Jace who found you. Jace who saved you.’
‘Can I ask you something?’

He looked at me. ‘I don’t know how Jace found you,’ he said. ‘Whatever it was, it didn’t involve me.’

‘So, it wasn’t the bond?’

‘He wanted to travel through the bond, into your body to see where you were. I refused. I know he could feel you, very distantly. He dreamt of you and saw you at one point.’

‘How do you know that?’

Magnus shrugged. ‘He fell asleep at my place.’

Awkwardly, I kicked the base of my bed. ‘How was he? While I was gone?’

‘How do you think he was? You’re his world.’

‘I just have this feeling he’s done something bad.’

‘You can’t just prod at your bond?’

I sat beside him. ‘There’s something wrong, like it’s weak because it was stretched too far. I’m sure in a few weeks it’ll be back to normal.’

‘I’m glad you’re back,’ Magnus said. ‘I care you about you.’

My throat contracted. ‘I do too.’

‘If you need anything, I’m always here.’

I stared down at my boots, his shoes next to mine. ‘Thanks.’

‘Look after yourself, OK?’

‘I’ll try.’

I insisted Jace sleep in his own bed that night, despite his protests. He needed some real sleep and I needed distance to let myself feel whatever was happening to me without trying to hide or contain it.

I showered again, trying to chase away the cold feeling, but it was settling into my bones. I stood naked before the mirror. The bruises were almost gone now, cuts all healed and track marks had faded, but not vanished.

Water dripped from my hair and I closed my eyes as the distance formed once more. When I was little, sometimes in bed at night things would look much further away than I knew they were. It would pass eventually, but I remembered the feeling of my body going rigid and hoping it went away.

This was much worse.

My body ached and screamed, but that was tangible. Pain was real. It kept me present.
‘What’s happening?’ I said, and my voice sounded far away. The cold was travelling through me steadily now.

The higher it rose, the more distant I became. I wanted to smash the mirror because the pain might have grounded me, but I didn’t. I couldn’t.

You moron, a much colder Alec said. You dropped all your defences getting drunk like some whiny, attention-seeking little brat and now look what you’ve let in.

I screwed up my eyes, shaking my head. When I opened them, the distance was so great that the mirror looked small. Like I couldn’t have touched it if I tried.

You’re pathetic. A sad, shadow of a man. A dull little virgin who can’t do anything that might make him happy because Angel forbid you actually crack a smile once a blue moon!

‘Shut up!’ I yelled, but it was faded and muffled.

All this power and you use none of it. You shame yourself. You’re weak and weakness is despicable!

‘SHUT UP!’

Your weakness is what let me in. Four days was plenty of time for someone as weak as you are! Well, you know what? It’s my turn now!

...

I must have blacked out. I was still standing, there had definitely been a break of some sort. The cold was everywhere, but it felt pleasant now. Cool, relaxing. The pain vanished and the distance was gone.

There was a bang as the door opened and Jace ran inside.

‘Alec?’ he called. ‘You OK?’

‘I’m fine!’ I replied, watching myself speak. I tightened the towel on my hips, pushing it a notch lower than usual and then I ran a hand through my hair.

Jace came inside the bathroom clad in only a t-shirt and boxers.

‘You scared the shit out of me!’ he said, hand on heart. ‘What the hell was all the yelling? I felt something weird too, were you hurt?’

‘I had a shower and banged my damned elbow as I got out.’

‘Funny bone?’

‘Yeah, it was hilarious,’ I said with a playful eye roll.

He was gorgeous, even when sleep tussled. I wanted to reach out and touch him, so I did.

I put my hand on his shoulder, brushing my thumb up the side of his neck just slightly.

‘But thanks for coming running, my knight in shining armour.’

He smiled. ‘Knight in PJ’s, but I’ll take it.’
I moved closer. ‘Jace, will you stay with me tonight?’

‘But you said—’

‘I know, but I don’t think I can be away from you. I want you near me.’ I pitched my voice lower. ‘I need you near me.’

His reactions were delicious. The slight bob of his Adam’s apple, his pupils dilating, the way he wet his lips. He reigned himself in quickly, but I had seen it now. I wanted more. I wanted to puncture his control.

I wanted him to lose all his control.

‘Whatever you need,’ he said, touching my shoulder in return. An acceptable friend gesture that wasn’t satisfying. He was being kind and caring. That wasn’t what I wanted.

‘Jace,’ I said, voice pained as I screwed up my face. ‘It hurts when you’re away from me.’

Concern flooded him immediately. ‘I’m right here. What can I do?’

I linked hands with him, pulling him nearer. ‘Never leave me?’

He laughed, but his eyes were wide. He wasn’t sure what was happening. I was never like this, he was suspicious. I had to be careful or I wouldn’t get what I wanted.

‘That’s my line,’ he said. ‘And you know I couldn’t if I tried.’

I shook my head. ‘Nah, look, I’m sorry. I just feel so fragile right now. You don’t need this shit. Why don’t you go back to bed?’

He was openly searching my expression. Adrenaline was flowing through me, part of me excited about him calling me out on my unusual actions.

‘Are you OK?’

‘Yeah, of course, go back to bed,’ I said, leaving his space and retreating like a sad, broken little puppy. He followed me into the bedroom. ‘You deserve a night without me.’

‘I don’t want to leave you.’

‘Get some sleep,’ I said with a put-upon sigh. ‘We’re up early. I’ll be fine.’

‘Alec…’

I waited, but he couldn’t find the words.

‘I know,’ I whispered. ‘Love you too.’

He left to return to his room and I grinned, deciding to get some much-needed sleep.

Tomorrow was going to be fun.

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A/N – I’m sorry this took longer than usual to post, but I had to do some Actual Book Writing and it ate a lot of my time. I did work super hard to get this up today for everyone, especially
midnightsky7702 who wanted to read this before exam time.

I hope you all enjoyed this and are excited for what's to come.

Because oh yes, good stuff is on the way.

Feedback is oxygen.

xxx
Chapter Nine: You Lose Your Way Again?

Chapter Summary

Multipl POV's in this chapter. Dark!Alec tries to find his footing in his pursuit of Jace.

CHAPTER NINE

- You Lose Your Way Again? -

‘You took my sadness out of context,
At the Mariners Apartment complex,
I ain ’t no candle in the wind.
I ’m the void, the lighting the thunder,
Kinda girl who ’s gonna make you wonder,
Who you are and who you ’ve been.’

- Lana Del Rey

- Alec -

For a Shadowhunter in the midst of an action-packed Institute in New York, there sure was a lot of loving family crap sometimes. Breakfast was dull and boring and I marvelled at my family’s intent to be there for me and maintain some web of support, because it was bullshit and I was long over it.

Mom was droning on and on about leads and links to the shipping of the drug into the Manhattan area and I tried not to look too bored, but it was difficult.

‘—really got to step this up if we’re going to get the results the Clave are looking for,’ she was saying as my attention drifted in and out. There were better things to pay attention to. Interesting things.

Jace was listening, an avid little frown on his face. I watched him as he felt me staring, watched how he tried to not to show that he’d felt it. He shifted in his seat, swallowed and then refocused his dutiful attention to the woman who raised him.
I was usually the dutiful one, but he was making effort to cover for me. He would always cover for me, give me whatever I needed.

Through clear, cool eyes I acknowledged that my love for him did not wane or bend. It was total, all-consuming and in every part of my being. I adored him, worshipped him and yet he was not entirely mine. That was wrong. I didn’t like that and would not accept it. He loved me, I loved him. This was all that mattered.

‘This doesn’t matter,’ I interrupted. Mom stopped, brought up short. Everyone looked at me and I did not falter. ‘None of it matters.’

‘Excuse me?’

‘You’re not in charge of the Institute,’ I said, ignoring pointed looks from Jace and Izzy. ‘You’re not even supposed to be here.’

She huffed indignantly, colour rising in her cheeks. ‘Alec, I don’t know what you presume to—’

‘I presume nothing. You’re not head of this place.’

‘There is no head, currently. A replacement has not yet been selected!’

‘No and we’ve been running it just fine without one. Without you.’

Jace leaned closer. ‘Alec.’

I pressed on. ‘When the Clave does eventually select a leader, we all know who it won’t be so I don’t know why you’re sitting there, wasting our time as if you know anything about this situation beyond the information the Silent Brothers handed you.’

‘How dare you speak to me like that?’

I cracked a grin. ‘How dare I? I dare speak the truth, Mom, because that is what you’ve taught me. The law is hard, but it is the law. The truth hurts, but it’s the truth. Reality sucks, but here it is. You’re not in charge. Stop acting like you are.’

‘Well, someone has to!’

‘You’re right,’ I said, standing up. ‘And someone will.’

The uproar was dull. Mom and Dad fighting and yelling was dull. Their entirely predictable Turn It On Each Other routine bored me instantly. Dad couldn’t hide how pleased he was that I was taking aim at Mom, even yelled at one point how proud he was of me while Mom insisted that I clearly wasn’t myself because her Alec would never speak like that.

‘Dude, what the fuck?’ Jace asked, hurrying to catch up with me as I made my way to the training room, Izzy in tow.

‘I’m done with their bullshit,’ I said easily, pushing the door and holding it open for them. ‘It’s more than I can stand.’
‘You shouldn’t have said that to her, though,’ Izzy pointed out frowning. ‘She’s doing the best she can.’

I shrugged out of my shirt, leaving my vest on. ‘It’s not good enough.’

Sebastian was there already with Clary and Max. He smiled and waved at Jace and Izzy, but it faltered when he saw me. His eyes narrowed, head cocked and I wondered distantly if he sensed something.

Interesting.

Though nothing was as interesting as my Parabatai. Nothing ever would be.

‘Hey,’ he said, pulling me aside before I could warm up. ‘Alec, what the fuck is happening?’

I gave a put-upon sigh and tried to look sad. ‘Jace,’ I said, shaking my head. ‘I’ve been taking their crap for years, my whole life really. I just…my tolerance is gone.’

‘Izzy’s right, though,’ he said gently. ‘She just wants to help.’

‘I don’t need it,’ I told him honestly. Just you, I wanted to add but didn’t.

‘Still,’ he said with a worried once over. ‘Overkill.’

I smiled. Not a tight smile or a brief smile. I smiled fully because I knew he loved seeing me smile. ‘Maybe you’re right,’ I conceded generously. ‘I didn’t sleep great. I’ll apologise later.’

That settled him. Karine joined us, Simon following soon after.

‘Why is it World War Three out there?’ he asked worriedly.

‘You friend is ‘ere,’ Karine pointed out unnecessarily to Clary. ‘I like that you ‘ave made friends with a vampire. Most clever to understand their sneaky ways.’

I grew bored of whatever little interactions were about to happen between Simon, Clary and inevitably, Izzy. Izzy was very caught up with the two of them and while I loved her completely, I didn’t especially care about whatever witty banter was about to be exchanged. Karine approached Jace and me, tying her long hair back.

‘Your Father says we are leaving,’ she informed me. ‘But I came to say that if you need me to stay, I am ‘appy to do so.’

‘We appreciate your offer. I’m really sorry,’ Jace told her, throwing me a mildly scolding look. ‘Alec is gonna apologise later and fix it.’

Karine laughed. ‘I doubt anyone can fix what is between them, cherie. Robert also says that you are not coming to stay with us for the winter?’

‘It seems unlikely,’ Jace went on, looking regretful.

‘Well,’ she said, waving her hand airily. ‘I understand zat completely; your Father can be rather boring, indeed but I assure you there are plenty of things to destroy in Paris and if you do not wish to sleep near where we will be sleeping, you can stay in one of my castles.’

Jace’s eyes widened. ‘Castles?’
‘You can ‘ave the small one. You would like it, I think.’

Great, then maybe we’d be far away enough not to hear you and my Dad fucking, I almost said. But Jace was right there and he was already suspicious and not happy with me.

‘Sounds great,’ I lied.

‘I would also like to say,’ she said, lowering her voice and moving closer. ‘Your friend, Sebastian? I do not like him at all.’

‘Oh?’

‘No,’ she confided, shaking her head. ‘Not at all. ‘E is too pretty and too clean. The two never combine for anything less than a lie.’

‘Hey!’ Jace laughed, mostly to break the tension. ‘I’m pretty!’

‘You, ma cherie, are beautiful, but you are little bit of a salope.’

I gave a bark of laughter before sealing my lips and trying to look serious.

‘She called you a slut,’ I explained solemnly.

‘What?’ Jace squeaked.

‘It is fine,’ Karine assured him. ‘In France, everyone is this way. We are beautiful, bien sur, but also sluts. France is truly the land of rude, pretty sluts.’

‘Can’t wait to visit,’ I sighed.

‘Your friend?’ Karine went on in a conspiratorial whisper. ‘Is not in balance. Be careful with someone ‘oo is not in balance, OK?’

‘Well, sure,’ Jace said, still a little stung and baffled.

‘Alors, I will say goodbye in case we ‘ave to leave suddenly because they begin fighting.’

She did a round of double kisses with goodbyes. I watched her leave with no real feeling beyond relief that my Father would be going and soon after, my Mom would likely follow. I had no time to play the role of good son or to live up to their anchor-like expectations.

‘Can we fight now?’ I asked when she was gone. ‘Mon petite salope?’

Jace shook his head, but he was grinning. ‘How dare you? My honour is forever impugned.’

‘What honour?’ Izzy chimed in, sparring with Clary.

‘I have honour, screw you all!’

‘I think that’s why you’re lacking in the honour department,’ Simon added from the side-lines.

Sebastian was patiently training with Max. Karine’s warning made sense, but I wasn’t interested in pursuing it just then.

I warmed up a little, just enough not to injure myself. Jace stretched in front of me and I couldn’t take my eyes off him. ‘You ready?’
'Yeah, let’s do it.'

- Jace -

OK, maybe something was different. Maybe. Alec barely warmed up at all, which wasn’t exactly like him. The outburst earlier was so unlike him I had whiplash, but it was understandable to an extent. He’d been through trauma and really, a rebellious yelling match was long overdue between him and Maryse.

He was being so…forthright. Alec had always been honest, but this was like he didn’t care if he upset anyone. That wasn’t the only thing, either. There was something kind of around him, like he was crackling with energy. I felt like if I touched him, maybe he would shock me a little.

‘C’mon!’ he called, stretching his arms and then shaking them, jumping on the spot. ‘Let’s go already!’

I joined him on large, flat crash mat. My heart was already beating faster.

He grinned and threw himself at me.

Alec and I were Parabatai; training was usually like dancing, moves and steps and sequences that we felt because of our synchronisation. Alec would rarely hurt me and often held himself back.

He wasn’t holding back now.

The part of me that should have been worried was drowned in excitement and sheer thrill because he was fighting me. This was the thing I longed for in darker moments and it was actually happening.

It was fast, way too fast to plan ahead or coordinate. Moment by moment, I moved and reacted to his attack. He was fast when he wanted to be, but I wasn’t exactly a wallflower.

He hit me first. It didn’t hurt like it should have. He had clearly controlled how much he’d put into the hit, which meant he had decided to hit me, just not too hard.

I didn’t stop to comment, just kept fighting with him. I caught him right on the chin with a left hook. He didn’t even react, just swung around and hit me with his elbow. He smiled and cocked an eyebrow.

He was playing with me.

Move after move it went on, my heart beating so hard I felt like I might have passed out if I weren’t so caught up in what we were doing. Distantly, a voice warned that we should stop now. One of us was going to get hurt in a minute.

It kept going. I was out of breath, almost winded. I felt an edge of competitiveness in his actions. Well, if he wanted to win, he’d have to earn it.

He tried to sweep my leg, but I hauled him back and reversed it. I slammed him down hard, holding him by the wrists. It felt intimate and enticing, but I was too high on triumphant adrenaline to feel
self-conscious.

‘You got me,’ he said, no trace of humour in those dark eyes. He breathed hard, opened mouthed and I realised I was sitting on his chest, literally holding him down.

‘Yeah, uh, rematch?’ I asked, climbing off.

He rolled over, sitting up. ‘Maybe in a minute.’

I worried that I’d gone too far. ‘You OK?’

‘Yeah, fine.’ His back was to me, I reached over and touched him to see if he was all right. He whipped around so fast I barely even knew what was happening. He grabbed my hand and flipped me over, knocking the air from my chest. He pinned me down, leaning close, legs straddling me tightly.

‘Got you back,’ he breathed, smugly.

‘Oh, you sneaky fucker,’ I laughed, trying half-heartedly to push him off but he held me there, his superior weight and height making it tricky. ‘C’mon, move your ass!’

‘Why? What are you gonna do?’

I pushed up, trying to dislodge him and I became slowly aware that this was a potentially dangerous situation to be in. The others were right there and he was on top of me in a way that would have made anyone’s interest prick up, let alone me with Alec.

‘Alec,’ I said firmly. ‘Come on.’

He leaned right down over me, his face so close I felt his breath. ‘Or what, Jace?’

Intentionally or not, his hips rolled a little and the friction sent my nervous system spinning into overdrive. I struggled to maintain a neutral expression, jaw setting.

‘What are you scared of?’ he whispered, devouring me with his unblinking eyes. ‘I’ve got you.’

I was completely frozen, mesmerised and terrified. Powerless beneath him, I hoped and dreaded in equal measure that he was going to kiss me. It was crazy, but my head was spinning and my body was pulsating with a need unlike anything I’d ever felt. I would die if he kissed me and I would die if he didn’t.

Alec loosened his grip on one wrist enough to drag his index finger into the centre of my palm and trace small, soothing circles.

His lips brushed my ear as he bent closer. ‘I’ve always got you, baby.’

My blood was pumping so hard I make out the rhythm of my pulse in my eyes. Before I could say or do anything, he slowly withdrew and rolled off of me with cat-like grace, as though it was nothing. Like he hadn’t just torn my world apart. Like he hadn’t had me pinned there, five seconds away from coming untouched like a horny teen.

Like he hadn’t called me baby.

‘The fuck?’ I muttered under my breath, chancing a glance at the others who were either far too adept at pretending they hadn’t noticed anything or were genuinely too distracted. ‘Gonna shower,’ I said, grabbing a towel on my way out.
Alec nodded thoughtfully. ‘Me too.’

She wasn’t pleased that I turned up unannounced, let’s put it that way.

‘Fuck off, Jace,’ she warned, sighing into the intercom. ‘This is not OK.’

‘Alyssa,’ I said, pressing my forehead to the wall. ‘I’m really sorry, I just need to talk to you for five minutes. It’s not about you and me, I promise.’

‘What is it about?’

‘I… please just let me in?’

‘Are you drunk?’

‘I wish.’

‘God, fine. Five minutes and I’ve got a taser in here, so don’t get comfy.’

She buzzed me in and I took the stairs two at a time, desperate to get inside her apartment and have someone to talk to.

She was waiting in her doorway, unimpressed.

‘You look great,’ I said, aiming for charm and landing on pathetic.

‘Yeah, I do,’ she agreed dryly. ‘Let’s hear the drama, then.’

She closed the door and politely waited for me to speak.

‘Can I sit down?’

‘I suppose, yes.’

I sat at her small table, where we’d been eating Chinese food the last time I saw her. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes.

‘Let me just skip through the whole, I’ve fucked up my entire life and everything in it, OK?’

‘Please do.’

‘Something is happening between me and Alec.’

Cautiously, she sat opposite me. ‘Happening? Like an argument?’

‘No,’ I said, running my hands through my hair, too long, needed a trim. ‘Like, happening, Aly.’

‘Like sex?’

‘No.’

‘Like, building up to sex?’
‘He’s being so weird and I know it’s…’ I trailed off, not wanting to drag her into the whole mess with the drugs. ‘He’s been through a lot lately so it might not be him, y’know?’

‘What happened?’

I shook my head. ‘He’s flirting with me.’

‘And?’

‘It’s aggressive flirting, not light-hearted banter. He’s…looking at me differently or whatever, I don’t know but I do know, you see?’

‘I see that we clearly didn’t get to the part in our relationship where you told me that Alec isn’t your blood brother.’

‘I’m sure I told you that,’ I said, a little defensively.

‘You absolutely did not. You told me about Clary, about thinking she was your sister for a while. You never said Alec wasn’t your brother.’

‘Because he is my brother, just not in that way, why is it even relevant? Are you saying adopted siblings aren’t real siblings?’

She gave a flat sigh. ‘I’m saying you clearly being in love with him and referring to him as your brother repeatedly when he’s not technically your brother isn’t even one of the top five reasons we broke up.’

My jaw dropped. ‘What?’

‘Why is this my job? Seriously. Jace, you’re in love with Alec.’

‘I’m…’

‘Not? No, because you’re not good enough, right? He’s too perfect and you’re just trash, is that it? Suuuch bullshit, Jace! C’mon, you’re smarter than that. And now, what? Because he’s showing you interest, you’re panicking?’

‘You don’t understand,’ I said, swallowing her words thickly. ‘He’s not himself.’

‘That’s just an easy way to reject someone without hurting their feelings.’

‘I can’t risk it with him, not with Alec.’

‘He’s not worth the risk?’

‘The risk is not worth Alec! He’s too important. I can’t risk what we have over some weird thing that’s happening because he’s upset or traumatised!’

‘How many times have you told yourself that?’

I rubbed my eyes. ‘A lot.’

‘Do you admit you’re in love with him, Jace?’

Quietly, I said, ‘I can’t.’
‘Because things you love get hurt?’

‘To love is to destroy.’

She pursed her lips. ‘Whoever told you that wanted to destroy you and they almost succeeded. Not quite, though. You’re here, he’s here and you only get one life. Look, I don’t know Alec and I barely knew you. Here’s what I do know. You love him and that’s not a bad thing, OK? What you feel for him is not bad or forbidden or harmful. Love is beautiful and you should give it a chance at least.’

‘He’s my Parabatai.’

She wrinkled her nose, discreetly checking the time on her phone. ‘The fuck is that?’

‘It’s…we’re not allowed to be together in that way.’

‘Is it a religious thing?’

‘Sort of, yeah.’

‘Jace, are you ever going to stop loving him?’

‘Never.’

‘Then that’s a long time to be in pain, don’t you think?’

‘What if I hurt him? What if I fuck it all up?’

‘What if the reason you’ve been fucking everything else up is because you love him so much? Ever think of that?’

I dropped my head in my hands. ‘This is so fucked.’

‘So un-fuck it. Talk to him.’

‘I can’t.’

‘Because that would actually clear things up?’

‘What if I’m wrong and he was just messing with me?’

‘Your five minutes was up five minutes ago and do you seriously think Alec would ever do that to you?’

‘No, but he’s…he’s different today.’

‘Well, maybe he’s having an off day.’ She looked at me expectantly, a softer expression in place than before. ‘I got stuff to do, Jace.’

‘Yeah, sorry. Uh, thanks for talking to me.’

I got up and she followed me. ‘You’re welcome.’

By the door, I took a deep breath. ‘I should have treated you better. I’m sorry.’

She cracked a smile. ‘You’re sorry a lot today.’
‘Yeah, I’m grateful too. You’re fucking amazing, Aly.’

‘Go,’ she ordered, smiling wryly. ‘Make better decisions, Jace Herondale.’

- Alec -

There was no way he was in there long enough for it to be anything but a conversation. Even Jace wasn’t *that* good. It was ten minutes, max, before he was out of the apartment building again. I watched from a distance, obscured by crowds of people who meant less than nothing to me. He seemed so shaken when he went in and now, *now* he seemed better.

Had she made him feel better? How?

Jealousy churned in the pit of my stomach, bitter and cold. He’d gone to someone else for help. For fucking comfort. My Jace had sought another in time of weakness.

That wasn’t right.

He was confused and that was my fault. The shift was too much for him, he would need something to ground him and reassure him I was still *his* Alec.

I realised I’d gone about this all wrong and cursed my impatience. It was nothing I couldn’t undo, though.

‘Fucking hell,’ I muttered, realising I was going to have to make reparations with Mom and useless small talk with others. Jace would be worth it, though and it would only be temporary.

I dropped a few dollars on the table, enough for the coffee. The waitress scooped it up, shooting me a dirty look as I left.

‘Some tip,’ she griped.

Sebastian, I decided, had ulterior motives. He was far too invested in helping to be genuine. It was a dull-as-fuck investigation that involved way too many Mundanes and not enough Demons to be interesting to a veteran Shadowhunter. He’d gone above and beyond, working tirelessly and that just did not make sense.

‘I thus conclude,’ he explained, making me work to suppress a smirk. Who the fuck spoke like that? ‘That we’re looking at a targeted supply, intended to hit the Shadow World.’

‘You found the dealer?’ Izzy asked as we stood, arms crossed looking serious around the situation table.

‘I found a dealer,’ he conceded. ‘I’ve got multiple samples in the lab and one has been sent to the
'Silent Brothers.'

‘What did the dealer give up?’ Jace asked.

‘Unknown supply, drop offs and pick-ups. Most worryingly, the earnings from the drug aren’t being collected.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning money is of no interest to whoever is supplying the drug.’

‘That’s gotta be unheard of, right?’

‘The drug is supernatural,’ Izzy said with a furrowed brow. ‘There’s clearly an ulterior motive.’

‘You read my mind,’ I said, staring at Sebastian.

He took my death-like stare well, barely letting it slow him down.

‘Clary has news from Luke, I believe?’

‘Yeah,’ she said. ‘Luke said the effects from the drug on the humans have more or less worn off by now. They seem to be normal.’

Jace let out a breath he’d apparently been holding. ‘That’s great!’

‘Yeah,’ Izzy said, giving me a pat on the arm and a smile. ‘No side effects of anything?’

‘Post-traumatic stress, he said, but nothing more.’

‘That’s to be expected,’ Sebastian said. ‘And very good news.’

Clary frowned at him. ‘Then why do you think the drug is targeting the Shadow World?’

His hesitation grated on me. ‘We have to consider the fact that on a Shadowhunter, the effects might be…’

I cocked an eyebrow, ‘Different?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘Why don’t you just ask me? I’m standing right here.’

‘Would you be honest?’

‘Hey,’ Jace warned. ‘Don’t talk to him that way.’

‘I apologise. Listen, I have multiple samples of the stuff - I will know more by tomorrow. In the meantime, Alec, if you feel any different please don’t attempt to hide it.’

I glared. ‘Why would I hide it?’

He knew. He knew I knew, as well. Fuck.

Meeting over, we scattered and broke off into smaller groups; Izzy with Clary, Simon and Jace were talking about something to do with the waterfront and I followed Sebastian out, ignoring Jace’s attempts to stop me.
He seemed to be expecting me to follow him. ‘After you,’ he said, holding his bedroom door open for me.

‘You’re staying here?’ I asked, somewhat incredulous.

‘While you were away, Izzy and your Mother invited me to stay, yes. I’m still looking for an apartment and they’re expensive here.’

He closed the door and we faced each other.

‘Well?’

He shrugged. ‘Well what?’

‘What do you want?’

‘Believe me when I say I want track down the dealer of this drug.’

I narrowed my eyes, trying to get his measure and coming up short.

‘You know what it does?’

‘Of course, I do.’

‘Do you, really?’ I asked, moving closer.

He rolled up his sleeve, removing a discreet glamour rune and showed me track marks, fresh ones.

‘I really do. You’ll want to find some for yourself soon enough,’ he said. ‘After a few days, you’ll need it to sustain the change.’

‘I feel fine.’

‘You will, right up until you don’t. You’ll need it about once a week. Injecting is best, but if you’re a little slow on glamours, I can show you a few other ways.’

‘How long have you been using?’

‘A year.’

‘You followed it here,’ I said, nodding. ‘Where did it come from?’

‘Russia.’

‘Huh, wouldn’t have guessed. So, you want me to stay quiet and in turn you’ll do the same? You really think I’d let you endanger my family?’

‘Are you a danger to your family?’ he asked, eyebrows raised. ‘Has the drug made you homicidal? Murderous?’

‘No,’ I said quickly. ‘I feel…clear.’

‘All I want is to the find the source, nothing more.’

‘So that you can manufacture it yourself?’

‘A version of it,’ he said carefully. ‘For personal use only.’
I considered him. ‘I could just turn you in, tell them everything you’ve said.’

He tipped his head. ‘You could, but then I would tell them about you and how will you ever seduce your wayward Parabatai then?’

‘Don’t you talk about him!’

He smirked. ‘They’ll lock you up in a cell right next to me until all the clarity is drained from you and you’re shackled down by self-doubt and obligation once more.’

I didn’t like what he was proposing, but he was right. I couldn’t risk losing what I’d gained, how could I return to what I once was? No, there was no way.

‘If you hurt anyone, even look at them wrong,’ I threatened, lip curling. ‘I will rip you apart.’

‘I’ve no doubt,’ he said. ‘Once we find the source, I’ll be long gone.’

‘Fine. Stay out of my way and I’ll stay out of yours.’

As I went to leave, he said, ‘A little advice? Patience is the way to go, believe me.’

‘Hey,’ Jace said, catching up to me. ‘What did you talk to him about?’

I made sure to look tired and weary, even though I was alert and full of adrenaline. ‘I wanted to reassure him that no matter what he might think of me, I wouldn’t lie if I was feeling something that could help us get to the root of all this.’

‘Was he reassured?’

‘He seemed to be,’ I said offering my beautiful Parabatai a worn smile. ‘I just can’t bear the idea of anyone thinking that about me. It’s making me crazy.’

‘I know,’ he said. ‘You’ve been different.’

‘My defences are low, that’s all. Nothing that can’t be solved.’

‘Solved how?’

‘Being with you?’ I said, slinging an arm around him. ‘Look, I called Mom earlier and apologised. She was fine. Dad too, though I think he was kinda rooting for me a little there. I’m sorry if I’ve been on edge. The last thing I want is to upset anyone, you know that.’

He wrapped his arm around my middle. ‘Of course,’ he said earnestly.

‘Good. Do you want to patrol tonight? Simon and Clary are following up a few leads and Izzy and helping Sebastian in the lab.’

‘We don’t have to, Alec.’

‘Sure, we do, it’s our job.’

He stopped us and faced me, evaluating me best he could. ‘You feel up to it?’
‘Standard patrol? Yeah, with you by my side.’

It was working, I could feel it. The apparent return of *his* Alec was fast erasing suspicion and worry. I just had to control myself enough to let feel in control, for him to make the first move when he felt ready, with a little subconscious pushing of course.

Pushing aside his hesitation, he said, ‘I’ve got you.’

Maybe patience could pay off after all.

Patrolling was not a good idea, but it was the best I had. Jace’s needs went so much deeper than reassurance and normality. Adrenaline was best; fight or flight. Nothing like vanquishing all those pesky moral questions about *feelings* in the face of necessary action.

We got a tip off about a rogue vamp nest, hoarding warm human bodies for snacking and it was ideal, until it wasn’t.

Everything was going well. Killing things was always fun. The vampires put up a decent fight and it was me and my Parabatai against the world again, the only way it should ever have been. At one point we fought back to back and the *rightness* of that hit me hard, leaving a mark that would never fade.

I fired a final arrow into the last enemy and silence fell, save for our heavy breathing and the muffled sobs of chained humans in a nearby cage.

He went straight for the humans and that was fine, I understood. They were weak and helpless and he trusted me to be all right. I watched as he unchained them, checking for serious injuries.

‘Shit,’ he said. ‘Alec, there’s bodies here.’

Well, of course there were. It was a den. ‘Do you want me to deal with it?’

‘No, I can—’

A vampire we hadn’t seen came flying from the shadows behind where the humans were chained. It threw itself at Jace, clawing and trying to bite. I couldn’t get a clean shot, so I grabbed and pulled the petite vampire girl off him.

She turned on me, wild with fury, and in my distraction trying to see if Jace was OK, she sunk her teeth into my neck.

Ah, fuck.

She reeled back instantly, howling and spitting. I dropped her.

‘What?’ she gagged and retched, skittering backwards. ‘What is that?’

‘Are you all right?’ Jace asked, frantically examining the wound on my neck.

‘It’s nothing,’ I dismissed, trying to push him away so I could kill her.
‘Alec, it’s *not*, that’s your jugular!’

‘Why is it cold?’ she gasped, eyes wide and teeth stained with the blood she’d been disgusted by. ‘So cold and dark! You *burn*!’

Jace threw her a distracted glance, but a moment later what she was saying sunk in and I saw it.

‘Raving bitch,’ I muttered, firmly pushing him away and firing an arrow right in her chest, putting an end to her, albeit too late.

‘Alec,’ he said slowly. ‘What is she…?’

I pitched forward, eyes rolling and he only just caught me. He laid me down, holding me around the shoulders and went to work healing me. I clung to him the entire time.

‘Can you hear me?’ he asked, turning my face towards him. ‘Hey, open your eyes!’

I obeyed, keeping myself weak and pliant, letting him take over and rescue me. ‘I’m sorry,’ I said, pretending to try and sit up.

‘Hey, stay down,’ he warned. ‘You lost a lot of blood.’

‘That was stupid, I’m so sorry.’

‘It’s fine,’ he said, wiping blood off my chin and smoothing my hair back for me. I wanted him so much I could taste it in my mouth. If that *bitch* hadn’t said all that shit, I would probably have thrown caution to the winds and just kissed him.

‘What was she talking about, Jace?’ I asked, worriedly. ‘Is it…Angel, do you think it’s still in my system?’

‘No,’ he lied kindly, still stroking my hair. ‘Probably just wasn’t ready for Shadowhunter blood, that’s all.’

‘You should help them,’ I said. ‘I’m OK now.’

‘No, you almost died.’

‘No, it was a normal fight,’ I insisted bravely and fuck me this was going to get old really fast. ‘I’ll still get hurt sometimes. Doesn’t mean I’m going anywhere.’

His eyes were so intense. ‘Not as long as I’m here.’

I place my hand around the back of neck. ‘Thank you.’ He flushed a little, my touch bringing out the most delicious shade of pink around his ears. ‘Go, help them.’

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- Izzy -

‘This is not good,’ I said with a sigh.
Sebastian looked up from the microscope. ‘That seems like stating the obvious, a bit.’

I grinned and rolled my eyes. ‘Well, obviously the whole thing is bad, but that’s not what I meant. The more I learn about this shit, the more I fear it.’

‘The great Isabelle Lightwood? Afraid?’

‘Fuck you, Sea-bass,’ I jibed good naturedly, using the nickname Max had given him. ‘What’ve you got so far?’

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. ‘A headache. These lights are bright.’

‘So, you have nothing?’

‘What about you?’

‘There’s no way of knowing what it does without testing it,’ I said. He looked at me worriedly.

‘You mean…?’

‘The supernatural element is well masked. We’ll never know for sure what it does unless we see it happening.’

Sebastian paused, looking down. ‘And you’re not seeing it in Alec?’

The question made my stomach tighten. There was something wrong with Alec, that much was certain but I just couldn’t figure out what.

‘It’s unclear,’ I settled for.

‘So, what do you suggest?’

‘If we had enough of it, I would suggest testing it on me.’

‘What? No!’

I shrugged casually. ‘I’ve had experience with Yin Fen and we would have answers, at least.’

‘And what if it affects everyone differently?’ he asked, leaning back arms crossed. ‘What if we only learn what this drug does to you?’

‘I said, if we had enough. We don’t, so it’s moot anyway.’

He returned to analysing the sample. ‘My best guess,’ he said slowly, twisting a dial. ‘Is that it’s some kind of magical amplifying agent.’

‘Amplifying what?’

‘Aspects of the host?’

I thought of Alec and how different he was.

‘Which aspects?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Clear as a cloud.’
He pushed the microscope aside. ‘Can I ask you something?’

I hopped up onto the surface and looked at him expectantly. ‘Sure.’

‘Is Clary your friend?’

‘Yes, I said without hesitation. ‘My best friend.’

‘That’s good. She’s lucky to have someone like you watching out for her.’

‘Clary is great friend. Why do you ask?’

So quietly, he replied, ‘I wonder if she’s happy?’

‘You like her?’ I asked him after a long moment of consideration.

‘Not like that.’

‘Oh, then I’m not sure why you’d even ask.’

‘I like her very much, just not in that way.’

‘You barely know her.’

‘True.’

‘So why are you concerned about her happiness?’

‘Is attraction a prerequisite to caring?’

I was about to answer when my phone went off. It was Jace.

‘What’s up?’ I answered tensely because he rarely called when they were patrolling for anything less than an emergency.

‘Are you in the lab?’ he asked quietly.

‘Yeah, with Sebastian.’

‘I’m just outside the Institute. I’m gonna give you a sample of Alec’s blood and I need you to test it.’

‘Test for what, the drug?’

‘I don’t know just test it and don’t tell him.’

I didn’t ask how he had his blood. ‘OK.’

He hung up. Sebastian had returned to his study of the samples.

‘Everything OK?’

‘I’ve got another sample coming your way,’ I explained, jumping down neatly. ‘Back in five minutes.’
I took a shower while Jace checked in with everyone to make a quick report. I knew it would be quick, he wouldn’t want to leave me alone for too long. There was a possibility he was still suspicious, but I felt fairly confident I had done a good job of distracting him.

While I towel dried my hair, I stared at my reflection. There were dark circles under my eyes, but I was tired. The cool feeling from last night was starting to wear thin around the edges, letting in an itchy kind of heat now and then. It wasn’t bad yet, but soon it would be. Fucking Sebastian was right. I would need more.

‘Hey,’ Jace greeted, slipping quietly into my room. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘Great,’ I said with a wry, somewhat sad smile. My patience was almost eroded to nothing and if I had to pretend to be that pathetic, virgin loser, that’s what I would do. Every moment that passed without him in my arms, his taste in my mouth…was fucking torture. ‘I just…maybe you should go.’

‘What? Why?’

I turned away from him. ‘I feel low,’ I said. ‘Like I’m just broken apart, Jace. Who even I am anymore? This shit has fucking destroyed my perception. I feel like I don’t know how to be me anymore.’

I waited for the rush of reassurance. I waited for him to come to me. Neither happened.

Silence and then, ‘Do you really mean that?’

I turned to him, frowning and a little shaken to see him watching me like I was a stranger. My heart clenched.

‘You think I’m lying?’

He was pale and alert, like I was an animal he was frightened of.

‘Oh, you think I’m…what? Possessed?’ I laughed bitterly. ‘Fuck you, Jace.’

‘I don’t think you’re possessed.’

‘You think I’m not Alec, though?’

Swallowing, he said, ‘Are you?’

‘How can you even ask me that?’

‘I can’t feel our bond.’

‘Well I can feel it,’ I said, viciously yanking on a t-shirt. ‘I can feel that my own Parabatai doesn’t think I’m really myself because I need some help!’

‘Please just tell me,’ he begged in a strangled kind of voice. ‘If you’re not you, I won’t be angry just
please don’t lie to me!’

I didn’t have to fake the anger. ‘If I’m not me? Who the fuck am I then, Jace? Look at me! You don’t even love me enough to know the other half of your own soul?!’

His expression cracked, revealing the turmoil beneath. He was holding back tears and his pain materialised inside me like the most bittersweet agony imaginable.

‘I love you more than anything,’ he said, somewhat breathless. ‘You know I do.’

‘I don’t know that!’ I spat, barely able to control myself. ‘How would I know that? From you using me? Distancing yourself from me the moment I get with someone? From you stringing me along for your own amusement?’

A bigger fracture now, I just had to push until he broke. If I broke him, he would come to me in perfect supplication. I would repair him even better than before, treasure the pieces of the man I loved more than I knew how to live with.

‘No,’ he denied, wiping away two tears. ‘Never.’

‘You have no idea what love is!’ I went on, unable to stop my voice from trembling. ‘You think it’s sex and a deep connection? Love is trailing after someone you know will never love you back! It’s cleaning up your mess, it’s lying to you again and again and ruins my life so you can live yours!’

Hand over his mouth, he cried silently. It should have stopped me, should have made me go cold with guilt. It didn’t.

‘Love is ending a relationship with someone I cared about because you can’t share! Love is standing in the shadows so you get all the sun to yourself!’

‘Alec, please.’

‘Love is paying off the psycho bitch who lied about being pregnant so you don’t realise how fucking naive you really are!’

He faltered, looking up at me through his tears. ‘Wh-what?’

I was too far gone, out of breath and blood racing so fast I was dizzy. ‘You heard me.’

‘I don’t understand…you…you paid Katie? What for?’

‘I paid her so she wouldn’t tell you the whole pregnancy was a lie!’

‘She said she lost the baby.’

‘There was no baby, you fucking idiot! How can you be this stupid when it comes to women? She made it up for the money! I paid her to say she lost it and to leave you alone.’

Through his breathless grief, I could see anger trickling in. ‘She told me the miscarriage was my fault. You pay her to say that too? Teach me a fucking lesson?’

‘Of course, I didn’t pay her to say that! She was a manipulative little bitch, just like your fucking ex who you went crying to today!’

‘You followed me?’
‘I was worried about you and you went to her!’

‘How dare you fucking follow me? What are you, my keeper?’

‘YES!’ I shouted, finally losing all ability to control myself. ‘I AM YOUR KEEPER!’

That made him flinch. ‘Well, who asked you to be?’

‘Who else was going to be?’ I demanded roughly. ‘Who else would be stupid enough to attach their soul to yours, knowing how much it would be dragged through the dirt? I did, because I fucking love you! I was crying too, now. When had that happened? ‘I love you so much, so much!’

He swiped his face, shaking his head. ‘How could you do that to me? Watch me cry for something that never existed?’

‘Because I love you,’ I said, voice cracking. ‘Everything I do is because I love you, Jace! Don’t pretend like you don’t know how in love with you I am!’

He froze.

‘No.’

‘Yes, you know it’s true.’

‘No, we’ve talked about it before. It was a crush, just a stupid crush.’

‘I’m fucking in love with you.’

‘You’re not!’

I closed the distance between us and he backed away, like he was terrified. When his back hit the door, he let out a shuddering breath.

‘You’re not,’ he repeated, shaking his head. ‘Please, Alec.’

I took his face in my hands, towering over him and crowding him into the wooden surface. ‘You want proof?’

‘Please stop.’

‘Let me kiss you and you’ll feel it.’

‘Alec!’

‘I’m in love with you and I can’t take it anymore,’ I sobbed, raw emotion breaking me apart. ‘Every moment you’re not mine is painful. Do you know how unbearable it is to see with you other people? To feel you fucking other people?’

He closed his eyes and tried to turn away, but I kept him there.

‘I felt you fucking her, Jace. I felt the pleasure building inside you, felt it like I was fucking you. You felt it too, I know you did.’

‘Alec, stop.’

‘Did you feel me? Did you feel my orgasm?’ I pressed my forehead to his, eyes closed. ‘It was us,
Jace. I came because I felt you.’

He opened his eyes and the heartbreak in them threatened to unmoor me.

‘You’re not Alec,’ he said, but he wasn’t certain, it was a defence mechanism.

‘I am,’ I promised him. ‘I’m your Alec. I kiss your hair when I think you’re asleep, I listen to your breathing because you drink so fucking much, I worry you won’t wake up. I love everything about you, I love you so much it kills me! Look at me.’

I held his gaze, fingers sliding up into his long hair.

‘It’s me, Jace.’

He broke.

A/N -Holy crap 7200 words, that's how much I love you guys. Yes, I'm evil. So hoping you guys all enjoyed this chapter, it was fun to write. Lots of suuuch good stuff to come.

Feedback? Comments?
Chapter Ten: You Gathered Wrong, I'm Afraid

Chapter Summary

Strap in, guys.

CHAPTER TEN

-You Gathered Wrong, I’m Afraid-

‘Find myself picking up the pieces of me that you discarded.

So this what they talk about when they say broken hearted.

Thought I was a together kind of person the type who had it handled,

As fate would have it, I'm exploding, like a roman candle.

And it’s pretty in the sky, Such a beautiful way to die.

But I want my sparkle back, Why does it always fade to black?’

-Maiday

-Jace-

My resolve smashed like the fucking Titanic.

Months, fucking years of absolute resolve and determination. Alec was special, I didn’t deserve him but I somehow had his love and friendship and it was the best thing I’d ever had, so of course I couldn’t mess it up with…with whatever was wrong with me.

Resolve and dedication. Control and strength. Restraint. That was the fucking word. Restraining myself from touching him the way I wanted to, training myself to not want him that way. Keeping myself restrained.

‘It’s me, Jace,’ he’d said. It was Alec, it had always been Alec.

Everyone had breaking points.
The ceremony was tomorrow and my excitement was palpable. I was jittery, almost. This was it - my last night with my soul intact, lonely in my chest with no one else in there. From tomorrow, it would never just be me again.

Alec had finally agreed to my endless pestering and though my excitement was genuine, his was a little less so. I knew he was trying to seem excited for my sake.

Probably not thrilled about shackling himself to you for all time, I thought.

Alec loved me, though. I knew that much. It was the greatest gift in the world and a greedy, anxious part of me was desperate to keep him, even if it meant pressuring him into the whole Parabatai thing. I’d never been loved by anyone in such a way and Alec was so amazing, so cool and awesome he would inevitably find people a million times better than I was.

This way, he would always be mine, if only in this capacity.

‘You asleep?’

I grinned, throwing back the covers. ‘No,’ I whispered. ‘Get in here!’

He dashed inside, graceful and silent. I made room for him on my bed and he joined me there, settling on the soft mattress nervously.

‘How are you feeling?’ he asked, biting his lip.

‘Great. You?’

‘Yeah,’ he said softly. ‘I feel great.’

It wasn’t entirely true. ‘Alec…’ I said, trailing off because I couldn’t bring myself to be a good person and say that it was OK for him to have second thoughts. ‘This is gonna be so awesome. We’ll be connected forever! We’ll be able to fight so much better, too! You and me against the world!’

He swallowed, facing down. I stared at his long eyelashes, his shadowy features and viciously shoved down that pang of whatever it was I got if I stared at him without restraint. ‘Us against the world,’ he echoed.

‘Unless you don’t want me anymore,’ I joked, pathetically, shuddering at my use of manipulative language so he couldn’t reject the bond without rejecting me.

‘Don’t be stupid,’ he said with a stern frown. ‘It’ll be great.’

I smiled. ‘Good.’

‘I never understood why, though.’ I watched as he grew somewhat apprehensive again. ‘That rule about, y’know.’

‘No,’ I lied. ‘Which rule?’

‘Parabatai are forbidden from—’

‘Doing it?’
He rolled his eyes. ‘That’s crass.’

‘Oh, I sincerely apologise, Sir Alexander - making love!’

‘That’s worse, somehow.’

‘Banging?’

‘That’s not even—’

‘Fucking?’

He flushed gently. ‘I guess that’s the word you’d like most. I meant the rule forbidding Parabatai from falling in love.’

‘Oh. I thought it was like, just fucking?’

Alec laughed. ‘No, it’s the whole thing. Romantic bond.’

‘What does that even mean?’

He didn’t look at me. ‘It means being in love, moron.’

‘I dunno,’ I countered breezily. ‘It doesn’t even specify what would happen if anyone formed a romantic bond or whatever. Misery and heartbreak, the fuck is that? Like you’re guaranteed to avoid that shit if you abstain? Sounds like cautionary bullshit to me.’

‘I guess.’

We had wandered into potentially gloomy territory and I wasn’t entirely sure why.

‘You devastated to never have the chance to get on me, Lightwood?’

My phrasing made it banter, nothing more. He cracked a grin and shot me a playfully dirty look.

‘Yeah, I’m crying inside.’

‘Well, it’s our last night of freedom if you want to get it out of your system,’ I said, heart beating faster. It was only a joke, nothing more.

Eyes narrowed suspiciously, he mildly glared. ‘Ha ha.’

‘No, I’m serious,’ I went on, moving closer. ‘I mean, I am pretty irresistible, so please do what you need to.’

He scowled. ‘If you’re so irresistible, how have I managed to keep my hands off you?’

‘No, I know, I’m only kidding,’ I said, unexpectedly hurt and scrambling to hide it.

He softened. Alec never hurt me on purpose.

‘You’re beautiful,’ he told me. ‘And you’re my best friend.’

That was enough. Plenty. More than I even deserved. ‘You’re mine, too.’

‘Tomorrow we’ll be bound,’ he said closing his eyes. ‘That’s all I want.’

Of course he didn’t want more. Angel, why was I so stupid?
‘Me too.’

‘Then get some sleep, Jace.’

‘I’ll try.’

He scooted closer.

‘You want me to stay?’

I rested my head on his shoulder. ‘Always.’

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His hands were in my hair, the door handle digging into my side and as he moved forward and I had nowhere to back away into anymore. He pressed himself against me and I was drowning in his eyes. The eyes of everything I’d ever wanted, the man I loved more than I knew how to verbalise.

My soul, my Alec.

He wanted it, he wanted me. He was begging me for this.

It was too much.

I smashed my mouth to his, pulling him down onto me and he shoved me back against the door. The kiss was deep and sliding. He made noises; raw, guttural sounds from his throat and I swallowed them hungrily. I touched him wherever I could, wanting more of him than I could hold. His neck, chest, shoulders; I needed him closer.

He drew back and caught his breath, pupils blown wide.

‘Tell me you love me,’ he breathed. ‘Say it.’

I could barely stand upright, I was so dizzy. ‘I love you, Alec,’ I said, clutching at his shoulders. ‘I love you so much.’

It wasn’t enough, he wanted more.

‘Please,’ he begged.

I closed my eyes, shaking. ‘I’m in love with you.’

He groaned, fisting my shirt and pulling me to him. ‘Say it again.’

‘I’m in love with you,’ I said, voice cracking. ‘I always have been.’

Alec bent enough to grab me under the ass and haul me up, slamming me into the door, hard. I wrapped my legs around him as our mouths reconnected, devouring like we could shed our skins if we kissed hard enough.

‘You’re mine,’ he said between kisses. ‘Mine, Jace.’

I threw my head back as he trailed his mouth wetly down my neck, eyes closed against the torrent of emotions pounding through me. ‘Yes,’ I gasped. ‘Yours, Alec, always yours.’
With trembling hands, I yanked my shirt off and he paused long enough to take in the sight of me. ‘You’re so beautiful,’ he praised reverently. ‘Look at you, so fucking perfect.’

The world tilted and my eyes rolled back a little. ‘Oh, fuck.’

He caught it, smiling wickedly before he reclaimed my lips with wet, possessive kisses. ‘You’re gorgeous,’ he said, briefly sucking my lower lip into his mouth. ‘Do you know how long I’ve wanted you?’

‘H-how long?’

‘Forever,’ he said, staring into my eyes. ‘I’ve wanted you forever. You drive me crazy ‘cause I’ve been in love with for fucking ever and I had to pretend that you weren’t all I ever wanted.’

I needed him inside me, verging on desperately. I fumbled with his belt, yanking it open but he took my hands away and I froze, terrified he was about to say we shouldn’t have done this, it was a mistake.

He murmured, ‘Bed.’

Still carrying me, he walked us over to his bed and dropped me carefully, pressing a burning kiss to my lips, slanting his mouth over mine as his hands roamed the planes of my chest, skirting down to my hipbones and tracing circles there, tantalisingly close to where I wanted them.

‘You’re amazing,’ he whispered, lips against my skin as he kissed a trail down the centre of my chest. ‘I’ve never loved anything like I love you.’

‘Fuck,’ I moaned, experiencing a blend of frustrated inertia and squirming delight at the attention he was giving me. ‘Kiss me again.’

He obliged, kissing me deeply and straddling me, holding my wrists, just like when we were sparring.

‘I wanted to fuck you then,’ he murmured, apparently reading my mind. ‘Right in front of everyone. So hard for me to stay away from you, baby, always controlling myself.’

‘I know the feeling,’ I said, swallowing hard as he unbuckled my belt and slid it out smoothly.

‘Do you? Tell me.’

I shook my head, turning away a little but he gave me no room to withdraw. He leaned over me, one hand running through my hair and the other sliding down underneath my jeans and over my cock.

‘Tell me, Jace.’

It was hard to breathe, fucking hard to stay conscious my head was spinning so much. The pleasure was pulsing, flooding me with delirium and heat. Getting everything I’d ever dreamed about was too much.

‘Always stopped myself from kissing you,’ I told him, mouth open and panting a little, eyes still firmly closed. ‘Touching you.’

He ground the heel of his palm against the length of my cock, biting and then suckling on my earlobe. ‘When?’

‘Any t-time you were close,’ I stuttered. ‘Fucking always, Alec.’
‘Why did you refrain?’

I looked at him, our noses touching. ‘You know why.’

He withdrew his hand and moved so he could slowly grind his cock over mine, lips hovering as he repeated the motion and began to drive me insane.

‘Never again,’ he said. ‘You understand? You’re mine and I am yours. No barriers.’

‘Alec, please,’ I begged.

‘You want me to fuck you?’

‘Yes, yes, fuck!’

‘Ask nicely.’

Frustration and impatience crackled. I flipped us over and kissed him messily, making short work of his belt and shoving his trousers down, pants too.

His eyes flashed, biting his wet and swollen bottom lip. I kissed his jaw, his neck, his chest. I dragged my teeth over his nipple, revelling in the way he arched his back up but I didn’t linger there long.

His cock was fucking perfect and I’d never wanted anything so much. I didn’t hesitate, placed my mouth over it and hollowed my cheeks, gripping the base and I swirled my tongue over the head.

He swore violently, throwing an arm over his eyes. He tasted amazing, I could have sucked him off all night. I ran my tongue over the head every time I came up, making it as slick and wet as I could.

‘Fuck, fucking yes, right there, ahhh, Jace!’

I took him deep, controlling the automatic reflex and letting him fuck into my mouth. I was painfully hard at this point. He was everywhere, filling my senses. This couldn’t be real.

‘Stop, wait,’ he said, pushing me away. ‘Can’t come yet.’

He was so far gone, his eyes almost black with overblown pupils, his control in tatters. Our mouths clashed forcefully, lips sucking and teeth biting. Frantic hands went to work removing clothes, removing anything between us. Our joined soul screamed for more contact, deeper contact. Kissing the entire time, only when we were both naked and flush against one another did he reach a fumbling hand into his nightstand for lube.

He drizzled it clumsily onto his fingers, making a mess. He quickly resumed attacking my mouth desperately and pressed one long finger into me, shallow at first and careful, but speeding up as he fucked me with it.

‘C’mon,’ I pleaded, arching up. ‘Fuck me, Alec!’

‘Not yet,’ he insisted, adding another finger. My mouth fell open, my nervous system consumed with the aching, fiery burn as he penetrated and stretched me. ‘Fuck, so beautiful, wanna suck you.’

He moved to go down, but I stopped him.

‘I’ll come the second you do,’ I warned. ‘Wanna come with you inside me.’
‘OK,’ he breathed, reaching for the lube again.

‘No, I’m ready. Fuck me, Alec, please.’

‘Jace—’

‘Please.’

He kissed me deeply, tongue twining with mine as he lined up his leaking cock to my ass and slowly, carefully pushed inside.

I couldn’t help but make noises, the pain was as intense as the pleasure. He pressed his forehead to mine, breathing raggedly as he fought to control himself and not plough into me the way I knew he wanted to.

Well, fuck that.

I shifted my weight down, fucking myself onto him in one motion.

‘Ahhh, fuck!’

It was painful, the stretch was almost unbearable and he was fucking huge, but he was inside me. He was inside me and the world didn’t implode, the sky didn’t fall.

The feeling was astonishing, fucking transcendent. It shook me to the core, struck me hard and showed me, look, see? This is what you and he could have been doing all this time.

I felt our bond, at last. It was electric heat, a twisting all-consuming love between the two shapes who shared the same soul.

‘F-fuck,’ I gasped, clinging to him, fingers digging into his arms. ‘Do you feel it?’

‘I feel you,’ he said, fucking wrecked and when we made eye contact it was like I was going to come just from seeing him feel us like this. ‘Love you,’ he gasped, sweat beading on his brow as he traced my lips with his thumb. ‘So much.’

‘Move, Alec,’ I told him. ‘Fuck me.’

He rolled his hips, slowly and experimentally. This was his first time, I had to remind myself. I was taking his fucking virginity. I was the first, I would always be his first.

The pain and the burn were melting away, my nervous system alight with ecstasy and emotion.

‘More,’ I said, reached down to grip his ass cheeks and make him move the way I needed him to. ‘Harder!’

He started to fuck me in earnest and I couldn’t control the noises I was making. It got so loud that he had to clamp his hand over my mouth.

Hot, voltaic bliss was building, unlike anything I’d ever felt. It was in every molecule in my body, every time he fucked into me it became more intense. I was going to fucking explode. I would have been screaming if his hand wasn’t over my mouth. He made short, deep little noises, emotionally ruined and verging on crying.

‘Say you love me,’ he panted, fucking me so hard and fast I was almost detached from my body. He moved his hand from my mouth, eyes screwed tight shut. I fisted his hair, dragging his mouth down
over mine, holding him a hair’s breadth from my lips.

‘Love you,’ I managed to say, each staccato breath punched out in the rhythm of him fucking me. ‘Always, ohhh fuck, Alec!’

It was coming. This monstrous, colossal orgasm that had been brewing and coiling inside me since the moment we’d first kissed.

‘Come for me, baby.’

It swelled, expanded and fucking erupted. He hadn’t even touched my cock.

The orgasm tore through me, wrenching every emotion and feeling I’d ever repressed and smashing it together with the best feeling in the world. It was too much to bear. A sound ripped from my throat so loud I was sure he would put his hand over my mouth again, but he covered it with his own instead.

His hips faltered, slamming hard as he came inside me. I felt it. I felt him coming inside me, felt the rapture as it flooded through him.

We were connected, we were one.

He kissed me through the entirety of his orgasm, we were so tangled up in each other I was certain we could never part again.

He slowed and finally stopped, collapsing onto me. I wrapped my arms around him, kissing his neck and whatever else I could reach. Before I had to tell him to roll over because he was crushing me, he pushed up enough to do so of his own volition, but he didn’t go far.

He captured my face in his hands, eyes heavy lidded and still panting softly.

‘I fucking love you,’ he said, thumbs brushing away tear tracks I didn’t even realise were there. ‘You’re…you’re everything.’

‘I know the feeling,’ I told him without any hint of humour. I felt stripped and exposed, but there was no insecurity or regret. Here I was and he still wanted me. ‘I love you so much.’

We kissed again, gentle and exhausted.

‘You’ll stay?’ he asked, dragging covers from the floor and pulling them over us.

‘Of course,’ I said. ‘I just wanna, y’know…clean up a little?’

He lay back on the pillow, arms out like a starfish and closed his eyes. ‘OK.’

‘You don’t?’

He cracked one eye. ‘Can’t move,’ he slurred. ‘Never moving again.’

I sighed happily and reached for my discarded t-shirt and used it to wipe his sticky, sated cock and then tossed it back on the floor.

‘You’re the best,’ he said, but he was already pretty much asleep. ‘Don’t be long.’

I padded naked and barefoot to his bathroom, grabbing my jeans from the floor and fishing out my phone. In the bathroom, I ran the tap and splashed water on my face, cleaning myself up with a damp
hand towel.

‘You just had sex with Alec,’ I quietly told myself in the mirror. The evidence was overwhelming. Bites and marks, places he’d nipped the skin and held me tightly, gripped with his hands. The reality was almost impossible to reconcile, though. My mind was wrecked, heart hammering and I had never felt like this; so shaky and fragile because I was so, so…happy.

It hadn’t just been sex, or even just the best sex of my entire life. It was love. He was in love with me.

Alec was in love with me.

‘Fuck,’ I said, but I couldn’t help smiling a fraction. Part of me wanted to laugh, I was high on adrenaline and endorphins.

I decided to have a shower, then I would crawl into bed with him and watch him sleep until I couldn’t stay awake any more. Feeling so light I could have floated away, I quickly checked my phone before turning on the shower.

Two missed calls from Izzy and four messages.

Got results, call me.

Call me when you get this.

Jace, call me ASAP. I’m in the lab, it’s urgent. Can’t come to you if you’re with Alec, please call me back.

Are you OK?

Fuck.

I called her, pushing down the sick feeling of guilt for not answering. It rang once before she answered.

‘Are you all right?’

‘I’m fine, sorry I didn’t answer.’

‘Oh, thank the Angel, I was worried Jace, fucking hell answer your phone when I call! I couldn’t come to you in case he was there!’

‘Why not?’

‘The tests, Jace!’ she said impatiently. ‘You need to get here now. We’re in the lab. Don’t tell Alec, OK?’

‘What, is something wrong?’

‘Now, Jace.’
I left Alec sleeping in his bed and met Izzy where she requested, having dressed quickly, having to wear Alec’s shirt, hoping nothing was especially obvious. The entire way there, I felt sick.

Simon, Clary and Sebastian were there as well and Luke arrived a few seconds after I did, before I could even ask what was happening.

Izzy looked me up and down with a worrying frown. ‘Where’s Alec?’

‘Asleep, I think,’ I said, wrapping my arms about myself. ‘What is it?’

‘You should listen to Luke,’ Clary said.

I glanced at him, worry and fear gnawing at the edges of my temper. ‘OK?’

‘The others from the warehouse, they’ve been exhibiting symptoms of something other than drug weaning,’ he said unhappily. ‘Two of them have been hospitalised. Another was arrested up for killing his wife.’

‘What?’

‘They’re not themselves,’ Clary said, shaking her head. ‘I’ve seen them, spoken to them. The guy who killed his wife, he was a paramedic. Saved more lives than any of us.’

Sebastian indicated to the equipment they had obviously been using. ‘Alec’s blood didn’t seem to contain much out of the ordinary, but upon closer inspection there’s reason to believe the drug has taken up residence in his system.’

‘Meaning?’

‘The drug is certainly not gone,’ Izzy said darkly. ‘It’s hiding in his cells.’

‘Be more clear, please,’ I requested because none of this was making any sense or maybe I just didn’t want it to.

‘I can smell it in his blood,’ Simon said, indicating to the sample I’d given Izzy. ‘It’s there, like a warning.’

The vampire who spit his blood out, but no, that wasn’t…fuck.

I gripped my arms tightly, holding myself together. ‘So, what is it? What is it doing to him?’

Sebastian sighed, throwing a quick glance at Izzy before speaking. ‘It’s causing a split.’

‘A split?’

‘Yes. In simple terms, light and dark, warm and cold, but it’s much more complicated than that. People are complicated and so the split affects everyone differently.’

I blinked slowly. ‘Izzy, tell me what it is,’ I asked, because everyone else was fucking tiptoeing.

‘Nearest we can tell, it brings out the dormant side of the host. The dark side of the moon.’

Her words echoed in my mind. They would echo there forever.

‘So, Alec isn’t himself, that’s what you’re saying?’
‘He’s split,’ she said, eyes glistening a little. ‘It is Alec, but not the side we would ever normally see.’

I looked down, nodding. ‘So…what? He’s dark? Evil?’

‘We don’t know,’ Sebastian admitted. ‘We don’t know what his dark, or dormant side entails.’

‘Do you have any…ideas?’ Clary asked hesitantly. ‘You’re the closest to him, Jace.’

My mind was slow and sluggish, like a defence mechanism.

‘Ideas about what? This isn’t right, Alec isn’t murdering people or hurting anyone, OK? I’ve been with him the entire time since he’s been back!’

Looking pained, Izzy said, ‘You’re denying he seems different?’

‘Of course he’s different, how many times do I have to say what he’s been through?’

‘Alec would never yell at Mom like that.’

‘Maybe she had it coming!’

‘You don’t believe that,’ she said and I couldn’t bear the implication because she had noticed I was wearing his shirt. ‘Jace, he’s not himself.’

I was about to deny it some more, when the realisation hit me like a ton of bricks.

‘Oh God,’ I breathed, blood running cold. ‘No.’

Clary seemed concerned. ‘What is it?’

How could I not see it? I was so stupid. So fucking pathetic and stupid and naive. My Alec would never do that. Would never be interested. Would never…

‘Oh no, no, please.’

‘Jace,’ Izzy said and when I looked at her, I saw the tears in her eyes. ‘I’m sorry.’

I was thunderstruck, the cruel and icy reality settling and utterly destroying me. It wasn’t Alec. It was of course it was.

Alec would never, ever do that with me.

It. Wasn’t. Him.

My knees gave out. Izzy caught me and held me as I began to cry.

‘Leave,’ she told the others.

The world was imploding.

The sky was falling.

What had I done?
They were on a date, a fucking date? Really? Alec got to go out to a swanky little restaurant with pretentious wine and bread or whatever the fuck and have Magnus swoon all over him all night.

Fucking bullshit.

It wasn’t jealousy, no sir. I was just…disgruntled? Displaced?

It was their first proper date and I had almost convinced myself it wasn’t even going to happen. Alec and Magnus clearly had some kind of chemistry together, but Alec had never seemed like he was even interested in dates and wine and bread.

Who went to a restaurant, anyway? What was wrong with fucking in the alley behind the club? Fucking Magnus Bane thinking he ruled the world.

Sang’s was packed with sweaty, heaving bodies. I would doubtlessly find one to fuck soon and then I’d feel better. I downed another tequila and looked around at the dancefloor, scanning for decent looking women.

‘What you’re actually doing,’ I told myself, out loud. ‘Is scanning for a girl who looks like Alec, you fucking loser.’

‘Sorry?’

There was apparently someone standing right next to me at the bar. I turned and for a moment, I thought it was Alec. I was drunk, but not enough to be fooled for more than a second though. This guy was super tall, dark haired and pretty decent looking.

‘Huh,’ I said, wondering if this was one of those Meant-To-Be things. I was only halfway to being fall-down-drunk at this point and it was prime time for magical thinking. ‘No, nothing – just talking to myself.’

I gave him my best Seductive-Jace smile and leaned against the bar.

Less than ten minutes later we were in an empty stall and my jeans were around my ankles. He was sucking my cock, doing a pretty great job too. I looked down at him and tried to pretend it was really Alec. Alec on his knees, Alec wanting me enough to be on his knees, mouth on me...

I came embarrassingly fast.

He stood up, spat down the toilet and wiped his mouth, grinning. ‘Can I fuck you? I promise. I’ll be quick.’

I turned around, facing the wall. Alec wasn’t here, he would never be here. He was with Magnus on a perfect little date that definitely didn’t involve toilets.

Fuck it.

‘Sure,’ I said, closing my eyes. ‘Can I…?’

‘I’ve got condoms,’ the guy said.

‘That’s great, can I call you Alec?’

He laughed. ‘Ass like that? Call me whatever you want.’
Time passed. When I couldn’t cry anymore, Izzy explained what we needed to do and I just wanted to die.

‘It’s the only way to help him,’ she said, pushing my hair back, so similar to the way Alec had done mere hours before.

‘I know,’ I said flatly. ‘It’s just gonna be…difficult. He’s asleep right now. Can’t we just leave him there and do this in the morning?’

‘It’s too risky, we don’t know the full extent of what he is with this drug in control.’

‘We know he’s making terrible decisions,’ I said, voice hollow.

‘Jace, don’t do this to yourself.’

‘Why not? I’m disgusting, Izzy. How could I not have seen it? How could I not have known? It’s like I... violated him.’

The words tore me into piece and I felt the sting of fresh tears in my nose.

‘No,’ she insisted sternly. ‘Jace, he’s been in love with you for years, you can’t think like that!’

I couldn’t hear it, her pity and comfort. I wouldn’t hear it.

‘Please, don’t.’

‘What can I do?’ she asked.

I laughed bitterly. ‘Kill me?’

‘Jace,’ she warned, low and serious. ‘I know this hurts, but you need to be strong for Alec, OK? Sebastian said this could easily go sideways and he might stay this way forever if we don’t contain him.’

I took a shaky breath. ‘Fine. No one else is involved, OK? We keep this in-house and no one breathes a word outside of our circle.’

‘Absolutely, all of this stays secret.’

She meant what Alec and I had done, of course. Or what I had done to Alec. What if he’d been watching the whole thing from inside, screaming to stop?

If the Clave wanted to de-rune me, they could. Let them fucking execute me for all I cared. But first, I owed it to Alec to get him back.

‘No involving Magnus, either,’ I said. ‘Not until I’ve contained him at least.’

‘We don’t know his mental state, we don’t know if he’s only been playing nice up until now. Magnus is the only one who can contain him, Jace.’

‘No,’ I said, forcing myself to stand. ‘He’s really not.’
When I got back into the room, he wasn’t in bed. I heard the shower and cursed my own luckless existence. It would have been so much easier if he was still asleep.

‘Jace?’ he called out, shutting the water off.

‘Yeah, it’s me.’

‘Is everything OK?’

He emerged from the bathroom, drying his hair and absolutely naked. He didn’t seem to care, at all. It took my breath away, quite literally.

‘Whoa!’ I said laughing nervously. ‘You’re X-rated, Lightwood!’

‘I felt something,’ he said, ignoring my pathetic joke. ‘What happened?’

‘You felt…what did you feel?’

‘I don’t know,’ he shrugged, dropping the towel and opening a drawer for fresh clothes. ‘Felt like you were upset so I figured sleep wasn’t exactly on the horizon. Is there trouble?’

‘Yeah,’ I said, and holy fuck the bond was obviously way stronger than before if he could feel things this accurately ‘We need to suit up.’

He yanked on a t-shirt. ‘What is it?’

‘Not sure yet, but we need to do a sweep downtown.’

He looked at me, not blinking. I did everything I could not to panic.

‘Jace, what’s wrong?’

I rubbed my face, like I was tired. ‘Won’t know until we’ve seen it, but best guess from Clary is that there’s a lead on a shipment of DOM coming in early this morning.’

‘You don’t feel right,’ he said, eyes narrowed slightly. ‘What is it?’

‘I just…’ I said, turning away.

‘You don’t regret what happened, do you?’ His voice was deadly, like if I said yes, he would seriously lose his mind.

‘No, it’s not that,’ I said, trying to keep myself in control. ‘I just keep thinking how difficult it’s gonna be to not touch you in front of people now.’

‘We’ve managed it for years.’

‘I never knew how it would be though,’ I told him, eyes closed. ‘I never knew it would be like this.’

From behind, he wrapped his arms around me and rested his chin on my shoulder.

‘You don’t have to worry about anything anymore,’ he promised. ‘I’m going to take care of you. If
we need to leave, we’ll leave.’

‘Leave?’

‘It would be better if we did, really. I’m never going to be able to control myself around you, not when you’re so fucking beautiful.’

I swallowed hard, blinking back tears.

‘Whatever you think is best.’

His arms tightened, his mouth moving over my neck. ‘Really? I was expecting a big fight.’

‘I love you so much.’

He froze. ‘Jace, what—’

The handcuff clicked into place over his wrist. He yanked it hard, but the other was already attached to my own hand.

‘What the fuck?’

‘I’m so sorry.’

He looked angry, betrayed even. ‘Don’t do this.’

I wiped away tears with my free hand. ‘I have to.’

‘Why?’ he demanded. ‘What have I done?’

‘Don’t play with me,’ I warned.

Teeth bared, he snarled, ‘What is it you think you know, huh? Sebastian been running his mouth? Izzy saying how unlike myself I am?’

‘They tested your blood, I asked them to.’

Now he really did look betrayed. ‘How could you do that to me?’

‘Because you’re not him!’

‘I am Alec, I’m just free.’

‘No, it’s the drug.’

‘You fucking idiot! You’re so blinded by what everyone has told you, you can’t even see what’s right in front of you!’

‘You’re not Alec.’

He viciously pulled me to him, gripping my hair. ‘YES, I AM!’

I didn’t fight back. ‘Alec would never hurt me.’

‘I’ve hurt you plenty, Jace!’

‘Alec would never want me like that.’
Disgusted, he shoved me back releasing his painful grip on my hair. ‘You’re pathetic!’ he screamed. ‘I love you more than anything, you are all I want in this world! How dare you use this as an excuse to convince yourself it wasn’t real, because it was, Jace! Every moment I was inside you was real!’

‘But it wasn’t him!’

‘You’re so in love with your version of me, aren’t you? Your dutiful Parabatai, self-sacrificing and fucking perfect,’ he spat. ‘You have any idea how soul destroying it is to go through my life like that? Denying what I want, putting myself last, saving everyone!’ A sneer twisted his mouth. ‘Maybe what really upsets you, Jonathon, is that you can’t be sure if I really am Alec or not. If I’m not, then great - you can go back to pretending we’re friends and that this whole thing was some weird alter-ego possession! But that’s not what this is.’

He tipped his chin, staring at me with loathing.

‘I am Alec Lightwood and this time, you’ve really fucked up. No matter what happens, no matter what you do to tear out the little bit of freedom I have inside me...I will never forgive you for this! I might pretend like I do, like it’s all fine but you’ll know, deep down, I’ll never, ever forgive you.’

Two tears rolled down my face, chest tight as I took everything he had to say. The pain his words inflicted was absolute, that was his intention of course.

The bedroom door burst open and Izzy came inside aiming a tranq gun right at him. Before he could even say anything, she fired the shot and the dart hit him squarely in the shoulder.

The effect was instant and I caught him as his eyes rolled back and he collapsed. Carefully, I laid him out, making sure he wasn’t hurt.

‘You OK?’ Izzy asked, kneeling beside me.

‘No,’ I said, staring down at him. ‘I don’t think so.’

We took him to the new apartment. It was essential to get him out of the Institute as soon as possible before anyone could question what the hell was happening. With Luke and Clary’s help, we got him there and managed to restrain him with Magnus’s help. The Warlock created an invisible barrier around the area of floor where we placed him and drew a soundproofing glamour around the entire apartment.

‘You should have called me sooner,’ Magnus said quietly when I thanked him. ‘I care about him, I could have helped.’

‘You already have and I didn’t want you to be have to see him like this.’

He sighed, staring at Alec’s still form on the carpet.

‘This is going to be tough,’ he said. ‘You know that, don’t you?’

‘Yeah, I know.’

‘He’s going to pretend to be Alec again so you’ll let him out.’
'I know.'

'He’ll manipulate you and do everything he can think of to get more of that drug and it’ll tear you apart, Jace.'

'I know, Magnus.'

He didn’t seem pleased, but relented and summoned a portal.

'Call me if you need anything else,' he said. 'I'll check in when I can.'

'Thank you, again.'

He nodded and walked through the magic.

Izzy came out of the small kitchen, having unpacked the supplies Clary brought for us, mostly food. ‘We should take it in shifts,’ she said heavily. ‘That way we can cover for each other back at the Institute.’

‘I’ll take first shift,’ I offered, but she immediately shook her head, frowning.

‘When have you last slept?’

I couldn’t remember. Two days ago? ‘I’m fine.’

‘We have to keep the cover in place,’ she said, hands on hips. ‘Go back, try and sleep or we’re fucked, Jace.’

‘I can’t sleep, Izzy. There’s no way.’

She took my hand. ‘You’ll sleep, I promise. Please just try.’

‘OK, I’ll try for a few hours, but that’s it.’

‘That’s all I ask.’

‘Fine. Call me if he wakes, promise?’

‘I promise. The dart will knock him out for at least eight hours. You need to gather your strength.’

We both look at Alec, sleeping soundly. ‘Magnus is right, this is going to be hell.’

A/N - I’m so nervous about this chapter, I rewrote it a lot and I hope the final product is as good as what I was aiming for. Sex scenes are so tricky for me! Take pity on me and tell me what you thought of it! So hoping you guys enjoyed it.
Chapter Eleven: I Can’t Bear to See You Hurting if I’m Not The Cause

Chapter Summary

With little else to do but talk, Alec inflicts pain through words and Jace makes another bad decision. This chapter is dialogue heavy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- I Can’t Bear to See You Hurting If I’m Not the Cause -

‘He used to call me poison, Like I was poison ivy.

I could've died right then, ‘Cause he was right beside me.

Jim raised me up, He hurt me but it felt like true love. J

im taught me that, Loving him was never enough.

This is ultraviolence.

Ultraviolence, ultraviolence, ultraviolence.

I can hear sirens, sirens.

He hit me and it felt like a kiss.

I can hear violins, violins,

Give me all of that ultraviolence. ’

-Lana Del Rey

- Jace -

‘You know what I like about Izzy?’

‘What?’

‘She knows her place.’
‘Way above us and kicking ass, you mean?’

‘That’s kind of you but no, I mean she knows when to leave. Clary never got that. I remember when you first met her and urgh, that girl does not know when to go the fuck away.’

‘Do you think that upsets me?’

Alec shrugged, leaning against the wall where he sat, looking pretty comfortable.

‘No, but it gets under your skin.’

‘Maybe you don’t know me that well.’

He grinned, knowingly. ‘Baby, I know you better than anyone alive. I was inside you years before I was inside you.’

I sat on the floor opposite him, legs stretched out. My three hours of sleep last night were tormented by nightmares and anxiety, to the point where I’d have been better off not even trying.

‘You’re chatty when you’re evil, huh?’

He rested his head against the wall, eyes closed. ‘Oh, so now I’m evil?’

‘Do you think you’re good?’

‘I think you’re a little under-qualified to discuss the concepts of good and evil.’

‘Oh? Dazzle me, won’t you?’

‘You know, you’re pretty chatty too,’ he pointed out lightly. ‘Usually you’re drunk when you talk this much. I’m surprised you didn’t just go out last night and get wasted, actually. Unlike you to face a tragedy sober.’

‘So this is what you’re going to do? Keep hurting me and cutting me open with words, ’cause that’s all you’ve got?’

‘Why not? You did it to me for years.’

‘I’ve never—’

He pouted, making a sad face. ‘No, Alec! Don’t go! Don’t leave me when I’m drunk, you have to stay with me and talk to me all night!’ He mimicked me in a high, insincere falsetto. ‘And while we stay up, let’s talk about everything! About how insecure I am, how I worry I’ll turn into Valentine without noticing it, how I feel numb when fucking nameless girls and of course, how you’ll always be my bestest friend-zone friend ever!’

‘No one made you stay.’

‘I stayed because I loved you more than anything.’

The past tense hurt.

‘Oh, was that too much?’ he asked, opening his eyes and most likely sensing my pain. ‘Too raw for you, Jonathon?’

‘Don’t call me that.’
‘Why not? You won’t call me Alec.’

‘You’re not Alec.’

‘I remember every moment of my life as Alec Lightwood, so what does that make me?’

I shifted my legs. ‘You’re not him.’

‘We can play this game if you want.’

‘I don’t want to play any games.’

‘Let’s see, how about when you cried on the roof and asked me to raise a baby with you? That was a corker, for sure.’ My jaw clenched and he smiled, triumphant. ‘You see? I’ve hurt you plenty in the past, you just don’t acknowledge it.’

‘You…he wanted to protect me.’

‘It was Izzy too,’ he said. ‘We both knew you had to be protected, as you put it, from your own shocking naivety. Cleaning up your messes, as always. How about the time Clary rejected your ass? That was a fun month spent watching you mope and sulk.’

‘Wow, so much for loving me, huh?’

He raised an eyebrow, expression flat. ‘No one’s making you stay.’

‘You need to be watched.’

‘So watch from the kitchen, you don’t have to sit in here and talk to me.’

After a moment, I quietly said, ‘Where else would I be, if not here?’

‘Well, you could be bottoming for Declan or playing house with Alyssa.’

‘It’s only a matter of time before the drug leaves your system.’

‘I feel fine. Maybe I don’t even need the drug. Maybe this feeling is permanent.’ He leaned forward a little. ‘What would you do if it was?’

‘It’s not.’

‘Humour me?’

I looked away. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Would you avoid me for years? Travel and mope some more? How long before you came back to me on your hands and knees begging for forgiveness?’

‘I have nothing to be forgiven for.’

‘Well, you would see it like that, wouldn’t you?’

‘Alec would see it that way too.’

‘I don’t. I see that I showed you my true feelings and instead of accepting them, you decided I’m possessed and went running for help from the others instead of talking to me.’
‘I should have seen it before.’

‘Poor, broken little Jonathon. Can’t actually get what he wants, that’s impossible!’

Anger prickled up the back of my neck. ‘Don’t call me that!’

‘Or what? You’ll lock me up? Threaten to destroy my happiness? Fuck you!’

A bitter silence grew between us until he turned to face the window, eyes glassy.

‘Why did you go to Alyssa?’

‘I just wanted to talk to her.’

‘About what?’

I scowled mildly. ‘None of your business.’

‘Ironic, considering I’m fairly sure you went there to talk about me.’

‘Way to live up to the evil stereotype by following me.’

‘I’m not evil,’ he said, staring out at the sunny day. ‘I don’t want to kill anyone or hurt people.’

‘But you don’t care about them.’

‘Not especially, no.’

‘That, above all else, proves you’re not Alec.’

‘Maybe I’m just tired, Jace,’ he said softly. ‘Tired of saving the world, tired of protecting them.’

‘It’s what we do.’

‘And it’s tiring. I don’t feel like a twenty-one year old, that’s for sure.’

‘You can’t deny you’re not who you were a few days ago, be honest.’

He looked at me. ‘Is that really what you want?’

‘Yes.’

‘The truth is, I am Alec, but,’ he added quickly before I could roll my eyes. ‘I don’t get to drive much, you see? I don’t really understand it myself, but I’m not an impostor.’

It was the first thing he’d said that rang even slightly true, but my suspicions were deeply rooted and impossible to ignore. ‘So you’re like, an impulse? Some dark place in Alec’s mind.’

‘It’s hard for you to accept that I’m him, isn’t it?’ he said knowingly. ‘You need to separate it, the before and after. I get that, it’s cleaner than way. But if we’re going for honesty, that’s not how it is. I’m the part of Alec that gets shoved to the back of his mind. I am every needy desire and dark sense of longing he’s ever had and repressed.’

‘There’s no part of Alec that’s dark.’

Trademark Lightwood Eye-roll.
'You only see the moon as it faces you, bright and shining. There’s another side, Jace.'

'And that’s you, is it?'

'I think so.'

'So then why don’t you hate me? If you’re Alec’s flipside—'

'There is no part of me that could ever hate you,’ he said like it was obvious. ‘No part of me that doesn’t love you, despite what you did and despite what you’ve put me through over the years. Every part of me, even the worst parts, loves you completely.’

I flushed a little, unprepared for such a statement. Looking down at my hands, I tried to keep myself even. ‘Manipulative behaviour, not really your forte.’

‘It’s easier for you to dismiss it, I suppose, but I’m not your falcon, Jace.’ My eyes snapped to his. ‘Keeping me at arm’s length won’t protect me. You and I both know how we feel now. How are you ever going to go back to friendly back-slaps and playful banter? Are you going to let me pick you up from the club after fucking some slut in the toilet? You going to watch me go through my whole life alone because there will never be anyone I love as much as you?’

‘It was a mistake.’

‘The only mistake was fucking you there, in the Institute. I should have brought you here, destroyed your phone, kept you closer.’

‘Kidnapped me?’

‘Protected you from the truth, like I always do.’

I tapped my fingers against my thigh. ‘So, how often does he…do you lie to me, then?’

‘It depends on what shitstorm you’ve gotten into, but fairly often.’

‘I don’t need to be protected.’

‘Au contraire, mon coeur.’

‘You don’t get to decide that.’

‘Who does? Who loves you more than I do?’

‘That doesn’t mean lying to me.’

‘That’s exactly what it means and you know it. Love isn’t some saccharine fairy tale, it isn’t perfect goodness. It’s a series of moment and the choices we make in those moments. I have all those moments inside me, every time I made the decision to stay with you, knowing how hurt I would be but not caring. Every time I put your happiness ahead of my own.’

‘And what about me? Do I get to make any of these grand decisions?’

‘Like you haven’t already.’

‘Name one.’

He sighed. ‘How’d you find me, Jace?’
My heart caught in my throat. ‘What?’

‘How did you get to me in that place? The barrier was masking the bond. There’s no way you could have found me without help. It wasn’t Magnus, he’d have been with you if he could, so would the others if it was just magic or a rune. How did you find me?’

He looked like he already knew, but I maintained a cool expression.

‘I wouldn’t expect you to understand the way we’re connected or how the bond works.’

‘Now who’s the liar? See, you did what you did to save me. You put me above yourself and made a decision. That’s love, isn’t it?’ His eyes were so intense, rarely blinking. ‘What did you give up for me?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Come on, Valentine trained you to lie better than that. If I’m not even your precious Alec, what’s to be lost in telling me?’

‘I didn’t give up anything, but I would have. I’d have done anything to get to you sooner.’

‘It must be pretty big if you’re still trying to protect me from knowing it. Do you know how much it eats away at me, not knowing? I mean, did you sign away your soul? Cut your life expectancy in half, what?’

I kept my lips pressed together, expression flat.

‘You betray us both,’ he said softly, looking away once more. ‘I know you’re lying. I can feel it in the bond, Jace.’

‘Why…’ I swallowed. ‘Why is it stronger than before? I could barely even feel you before last night.’

‘I assume the drug was interfering in our bond.’

‘Was?’

‘Not anymore.’

‘Because of what we did?’

‘Yes. It’s why you can feel me and I can feel you, more so than before and it’s getting stronger.’

That part he wasn’t lying about.

‘Maybe it’ll wear off after a while.’

‘Does being Parabatai wear off? Idiot.’

‘Well, you’ll wear off eventually.’

‘Maybe, but I’ll always be here in some form, even if I get relegated again.’

I felt so tired. ‘You really believe you’re him?’

He returned his gaze to me. ‘When you get drunk, are you still you?’
'To an extent.'

‘You’re still Jace, just without the inhibitions and insecurities that weigh you down when you’re sober.’

‘I’ve seen Alec drunk. This isn’t it.’

‘Even drunk, I could still feel the weight of the world around my neck. This is different.’

‘Tell me.’

‘Why, so you can invalidate it?’

‘There’s nothing else to do but talk, why not tell me?’

‘Why don’t you come in here and let me fuck you some more? That’s a good way to pass time.’

It was a cold thing to say and I knew it came from a place of genuine hurt.

‘When you said we should leave did you really mean it?’

He frowned. ‘Of course.’

‘Why?’

‘So we could be together, obviously.’

‘Why would we need to leave?’

‘The Clave. Judgement from Mom and Dad and of course, the wonderful moment when you managed to twist all of this around and make it something bad. That was what I hoped to avoid most. Then again, even I didn’t think it would be this fast. That’s just how damaged you are.’

‘I’m sorry I let this happen,’ I said, tears stinging a little because, fuck that hurt too. ‘I’m sorry I didn’t know it wasn’t you.’

‘Save your pity. I’m over it.’

‘I’ll get you through this, no matter what.’

‘That’s why you’re sitting here, taking all my verbal abuse? You think you’re helping?’

‘You hurting me doesn’t mean I love you any less.’

‘You love me, do you, Jonathon?’

I twitched a little at the name, but let it go without comment. ‘I do.’

‘So, you’re not going to deny that you’re in love with me?’

‘I don’t want to talk about this.’

‘Why not? You didn’t mind talking about it while you took my virginity. You were such a good boy, doing what you were told.’ He leaned forward and moved closer to me, crawling until he was inches from Magnus’s barrier. ‘You liked me being in control, didn’t you?’

‘Stop it, I’m serious.’
'You liked me manhandling you, huh? Lifting you and up and holding you in place while we kissed.'

Unbidden, heat curled through me at the memory.

'I know you liked me saying how perfect you were. Who knew Jace Herondale had a praise kink, huh?'

'Fuck you.'

'We already did, baby, keep up. We were made to fit together and I know you felt it. Did you love it when I put my hand over your mouth?'

He bit his lower lip, watching me carefully. I cleared my throat and flushed a little, treacherous cock twitching with interest despite my best intentions.

'Oh, I can feel that you did,' he breathed, running his hand around his neck. 'I almost came from that alone, but I managed to hold on because I wanted you to come first. Wanted my beautiful, perfect Parabatai to come before me.'

'Stop.'

'I want you to come in here with me. What better way to help me get past this? You know once the drug is gone I’ll go back to being horrified with my lack of self control and you’ll be back to fucking random Mundanes in Sang’s, if you haven’t already run out. Please, Jace, don’t leave me alone in here. I need you, I need to feel you. Please just let me kiss you.'

'No.'

'No?'

'Even if I wanted to, it would be like…'

His expression soured. 'Like raping me? You’re pathetic.'

'Yeah, maybe. It’s not happening though.'

I felt his mood shift abruptly. 'Fucking leave then, why are you even here?’

'Because I care about you.’

'No you don’t. You’re just obligated to see this through, you don’t actually love me. No one who loved anyone could do this to them.'

'Alec—'

'No, I’m done with you. Why should I bother? I’ve been waiting around all these years hoping one day you’d see what’s between us and now...’ he swallowed and looked away, eyes bright. 'Now I know it’s all bullshit. The only reason I haven’t dumped you like everyone else up until now is because you let me think there was a chance.’

My mind shorted out with the pain of hearing him say the thing I’d always dreaded most.

'I should have known,' he said tightly, thudding his head back against the wall. 'You’d toss me aside like everyone else you ever fucked. I wasn’t even special enough to get strung along for a few days like Alyssa. Fuck, even your boy-toy Declan got a repeat visit.’
'That’s not—'

‘You know what? I don’t wanna see you anymore. Go get Izzy to come watch me. If I have to suffer through this shit, I wanna be with family. Real family.’

It was like being gutted. The feeling was visceral. I got to my feet, wiping my face.

‘I love Alec more than anything in this world,’ I said thickly. ‘You’re not him.’

‘Keep telling yourself that, sweetheart,’ he seethed. ‘And if this is what it means to be the lucky recipient of your love, tell me which bargaining demon you used so I can pay him to rip it the fuck out of me!’

The drink sat on the bar, thus far untouched. I stared at it moodily. It was early, too early to even be in Sang’s, but the owner, Nick, sometimes let me in early.

‘You gonna drink that, kid?’ he asked, standing on a stool and dusting off the top shelf in a manner that could only be described as shoddy. ‘Not like you to let tequila breathe.’

‘I’m thinking.’

‘Again,’ Nick said, climbing down carefully. ‘Not like you.’

‘Maybe I’ll just get a coke.’

‘Dude,’ the older man said. ‘Are you dying?’

‘Fuck you, maybe I just want a nice, refreshing coke!’

‘Dude, what’s up?’

‘You really wanna hear it?’

Nick shrugged. ‘If it’s interesting, maybe.’

I downed the shot, barely wincing. ‘I’ve destroyed my life.’

‘Ah, that old chestnut.’

‘No, like…really. Everything is fucked, Nick.’

‘Girl broke your heart?’ I shook my head. ‘Boy?’

‘I think maybe I’ve fucked my life up so much that it will now never, ever get un-fucked.’

Nick snorted, pouring me another. ‘That’s what everyone thinks.’

I knocked it back. ‘I had one good thing. One.’

‘OK, not to rain on your pity parade, but I’ve seen you in here with your brother and sister. You looked pretty happy with them. Who cares if some twink shot you down? Family is everything.’
‘Yeah,’ I said, playing with the shot glass. ‘Ain’t that the truth.’

‘Look, you’re my best customer and I mean that literally. You’re a good kid and you help out when there’s trouble. But you gotta see the other side, sometimes. Life ain’t all drinking and fucking.’

‘I got another side,’ I said, somewhat defensively.

‘Oh yeah, doing what? You a tattoo artist? In a gang?’

‘Yeah,’ I laughed, pushing the glass, silently requesting another. ‘I’m in a gang, what of it?’

‘What kinda gang takes pretty boys like you?’

‘Hey, I’m tough!’

Nick patted me on the shoulder. ‘I don’t doubt it.’

I glared mildly. ‘You clearly do.’

‘So, what’s this heart break over?’

‘I did something I shouldn’t have.’

‘Did someone, you mean?’

‘Sort of.’

‘And you’re approaching it with the same attitude as always - drink yourself stupid?’

‘I’m already stupid, Nick. Another.’

He poured the tequila and sighed. ‘Well, hiding out in here ain’t the best idea, that’s for sure.’

‘I can’t face him. I thought…I thought if I made myself look at him it would be better.’

‘And?’

‘I’m drinking tequila in your beloved dive at 5pm, Nick.’

‘Look, if it’s that bad and you can’t face him, you gotta try to move on. Turn a new leaf. Start from scratch. Look at me; had a bitch of a wife, three kids I couldn’t stand! I left ‘em, overnight! Started fresh, moved miles away and opened this place.’

I rolled my eyes. ‘Oh yeah, you’re a real beacon of fuckin’ inspiration.’

He held up his hands. ‘I’m a lot happier.’

‘Running a nightclub for brats like me to fuck in?’

‘Taking your money sure helps.’

‘Whatever man, leave the bottle, huh?’
‘You hurt him, Alec.’
‘He fucking deserved it.’
‘Because he feels bad?’
‘Because he doesn’t believe I’m really me.’
‘If Jace was drunk and you had sex with him, wouldn’t you feel bad?’
My brother snarled, pacing in his invisible cage. ‘It’s not the same!’
‘The drug is in your system. It’s in your cells.’
‘Barely,’ he spat, hands twitching. ‘It’s fading, I can feel it.’
‘Are you in pain?’
‘Of course I am!’
‘Can I help?’
He didn’t say anything, but I knew what he wanted.
‘Look, you need to eat. When the last time you had anything?’
‘You should talk.’
I graciously let that go. ‘It’s important you stay strong, Alec. Your body is going through a hell of a lot.’
‘I feel OK,’ he blatantly lied. ‘Mostly I feel drunk.’
‘What do you mean?’
‘Jace is drinking.’
‘And you can feel it?’
He glowered. ‘I can.’
‘That’s not good.’
‘You think?’
‘Jace is wrong,’ I said after a few contemplative moments. ‘You are Alec, I can tell.’
He threw me a suspicious look. ‘Oh really?’
‘You’re different, like…a different angle, but it’s you. I know you, big brother. I’ve always known you and I can see you even in this distorted reflection.’
That, if nothing else, seemed to calm him a little. ‘Why won’t Jace believe me?’
‘I think it’s hard enough for Jace to believe you love him at all, let alone love him in this way. Any hint of you not being yourself is going to throw him.’

‘Why can’t he trust me?’

I pushed a glass of water through the barrier on the floor. ‘Alec, you must see what’s happening here.’ He said nothing, but drank the water. ‘This drug has changed you. You’re off balance, not at your strongest.’

‘I feel strong.’

‘Locked in a barrier without your Parabatai? How is this strength?’

‘And what is strength, Izzy?’

I shrugged a little. ‘Family. Love. Trust.’

To that, he scoffed. ‘You should put that on a fucking Hallmark Card. Family is an anchor around your neck, tying you down, preventing you from moving up and on. Love is nothing but a damned plague, tricking you into delirium and walking you right off a cliff and trust? Fucking trust is for people who haven’t been betrayed yet.’

‘And you’ve been betrayed?’

He scratched his inner arm again, more viciously this time. ‘I’ve betrayed myself, believing in something that was never fucking real!’

‘God above, Alec, get the fuck out of this mood! You’re not helping anything.’

‘Oh please!’ he snapped. ‘You feel the same, you’re just better at hiding it!’

‘I do not.’

‘What about Simon? Why haven’t you slept with him already? Not like you to tarry.’

I crossed my arms. ‘It’s not like that with him.’

‘Oh, because you care? Because you’re in love?’

‘Maybe.’

‘Then you’re just as stupid as I am. Love isn’t real; just the highs and lows of pursuit, the satisfaction of capture and the entropy of longevity.’

‘I don’t believe that.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because I see you and Jace, the way you are with each other.’

‘Yeah and look where I am now!’

‘You’re in here because we all love and you want to protect you, Alec.’

‘PROTECT ME FROM WHAT?’

‘From yourself!’ I yelled right back. ‘The same way we protected Jace!’
He didn’t like that at all. ‘What have I done, Izzy? What have I done that’s so bad? Have I hurt anyone? Gone on a killing spree, huh?’

‘We can’t take the chance. Some of the others you were locked up with, the drug has affected them drastically.’

‘Like how?’

‘One of them committed suicide, the other killed his partner. A few have been arrested.’

‘So that’s what it does, this thing? Turns me dark or whatever?’

‘Not necessarily. I wanted to ask what you meant about Sebastian? I heard what you said, that Sebastian was running his mouth or something?’

‘Blathering on about his never ending knowledge of Yin Fen and supernatural drug shipments.’

I watched him very carefully. Alec had never been an especially talented liar, but this wasn’t exactly him.

‘Alec,’ I said softly. ‘Do I have anything to worry about with Sebastian? He was spending time with Max, you know that. If there’s anything I need to know, please tell me.’

He stared at me, then sighed, ‘Ah, fuck it.’

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-Jace-

‘Jace, what the fuck?’

Izzy was pretty angry, or at least I thought she was. It was hard to tell.

‘How are you this drunk? It’s barely 8 at night! Oh what the hell am I even saying? Of course you’re drunk.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said, trying to pour a glass of water from the tap.

‘That’s the hot water, you idiot!’ she hissed, snatching it away from me. ‘What is wrong with you? This is hardly a night off kind of deal!’

I rubbed my face, avoiding looking in the direction of the living room where Alec was still caged with magic. ‘I needed a drink.’

‘Or thirty? Angel, I know what he said hurt you, but I need you to be with me on this, Jace!’

I took her hands and kissed them. ‘I’m so sorry,’ I said. ‘You’re right. I am here with you. I’m just… I don’t know how to be, right now.’

‘It’s hard on us both, you especially and I’m aware of that. This is about more than our own ability to cope. If anyone finds out about any of this, our lives will be ruined.’
'I’m here now, OK? Go to the Institute, cover for us. I got it.’

‘How can I leave you with him in this state?’

‘I’m sobering up, see?’ I took a swig of lukewarm water as if that proved anything. ‘Go, everything is fine.’

‘At least eat something,’ she said, about turning to get her stuff. ‘He could probably use a sandwich too. Keep me updated.’

‘I will,’ I promised, shoving down the guilt. ‘I’m sorry again.’

‘Just watch him,’ she said, pulling on her jacket. ‘I’ll be back early in the morning.’

I watched her leave and then waited a good two minutes, in case she’d forgotten anything, before I made a run for the bathroom, just getting my head down the toilet in time. My stomach clenched and purged, forcing the poisonous alcohol from my sleep deprived body.

‘Urgh, fuck,’ I groaned, wanting to wipe my mouth and finding only two sheets at the end of the roll. The bag of supplies was back in the kitchen. Spitting the last of it, I made my way back there, head spinning.

‘I don’t want to hear it!’ I warned Alec, not even looking at him. He either had the sense to stay quiet or her simply didn’t care. I wiped my mouth, gargled water and forced myself to eat half a slice of dry bread.

Part of me wanted to just leave him in there and actually get some sleep. Fatigue was eating me alive now. He had to be watched, though, in case he needed help.

‘You want anything?’ I asked from the kitchen, fishing out painkillers from the bag, intended for Alec, but just as useful for me. ‘Drink or some food?’

‘Water,’ he said and the tone caught my attention. He sounded weak and sick.

My alcohol clogged brain was slow, but not that slow. I poured him some water and took it in, focusing on him in the gloom. The main lights were off and we had no lamps. Izzy had left her witchlight on the floor, creating a soft glow.

‘Are you sick because…I was just sick?’

‘No,’ he told me. ‘I’m sick because the drug is leaving my system, you fucking asshole. Can I please get some water?’

‘Are you gonna try and grab me?’

He had his arms wrapped around himself, knees to chest. ‘D-don’t flatter yourself.’

I bent down and pushed the water through the barrier. He waited until I’d backed away to reach for it with trembling hands.

‘I see you did exactly what I said you would,’ he said after draining the glass.

‘Yeah, well I may be a dumb whore, but at least I’m predictable.’

‘Don’t,’ he said sharply. ‘Don’t say such things.’
'Isn’t that what you said to me, more or less?’

‘The difference is I don’t believe it, you do.’

‘Lifetime of practise,’ I slurred, leaning back against the wall and stretching my aching legs out. ‘Anyway, you’re not yourself and now neither am I. Maybe I can bear to be around you now.’

‘Did you…’ he shook his head. ‘Find someone else?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘You’d have felt it anyway, right?’

‘Drinking tampers with the bond.’

‘You’d still be able to feel it.’

‘Because you’re such hot shit when it comes to fucking?’

‘Because you’d feel my heart break in two, you prick.’

Silence fell between us. I checked my phone and saw a message from Izzy asking me if everything was OK. I carefully replied, ensuring there were minimal errors before I put it in my pocket.

‘Do you need anything else?’ I finally asked him.

‘I’m cold,’ he admitted. ‘Are there blankets?’

I glanced around, trying to recall what Clary had hastily brought. ‘There are not,’ I said. ‘It’s OK, here.’

I shrugged off my jacket and threw it gently to him.

‘I don’t want to take your—’

‘I’m boiling, just take it.’

He put it on quietly, making a small noise of relief when his arms were covered.

‘Thanks.’

‘No problem.’

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, teeth chattering a little. ‘About earlier.’

‘It’s fine.’

‘No, it’s not. Maybe you’re right.’

‘About what?’

‘Me not being exactly… me.’

‘Are you just saying that?’

‘If I was, it’s hardly a master plan and no, I’m not just saying it.’

I watched him levelly. He looked bad, even in this low light. He was sweating, his eyes swimming in dark circles and his hands shook badly. He took a deep, shaky breath and said, ‘I didn’t mean what I
said.’

‘So why did you say it?’

‘Because you hurt me and for the first time, I wanted to hurt you back.’ He groaned and clutched his head. ‘Ugh, that’s instant karma, right?’

‘You want painkillers?’

‘No,’ he said, face screwed up. ‘No, no pills.’

‘Alec,’ I said gently. ‘They’re only painkillers.’

‘All the same, no thanks. This too shall pass, right?’

‘Not everything.’

He looked up, eyes locking with mine. There was a bolt of something flowing through the bond. A kind of need that went beyond lust or desire. He needed me.

‘I can’t bear this,’ he ground out. ‘It’s like I’m dying, Jace.’

I could feel his pain, mostly the emotional side to it, despite my inebriated state.

‘I’m sorry.’

‘It’s not your fault,’ he said, clutching his hair. ‘I’m so scared, Jace. I don’t want this to go, I know it’s making me something…less than myself, but I’m so fucking terrified to go back.’

‘Why?’

He let out a broken little sob. ‘I was free.’

‘Free of what?’

‘Everything that stops me being in love with you.’

At the mere mention of the subject I was most afraid of, my stomach clenched hard.

‘Don’t say that.’

But he didn’t listen, just buried his face in his arms. ‘It’s worse than if nothing ever happened. Now I have to go back being a coward, knowing what it felt like to be happy. I’d rather die.’

‘Alec!’ I shouted. ‘Shut the fuck up, you’re talking shit!’

‘Please,’ he begged, back heaving as he cried. ‘Please, Jace, don’t let me go back. I’ll do whatever you want. I’ll learn to care about everything you care about, I’ll be kinder, just please—’

‘Please what?’ I asked tightly. ‘Please go get more of that crap and shoot you up?’

He crawled forward, revealing a tear stained face. He tried to get through the barrier, but it held him back like a pane of glass. He put his hands against it, leaning forward.

‘Please,’ he openly begged and fucking hell, now I was the one dying. How was I supposed to see him like this and refrain from giving in?
I went to him, trying to remember to steer clear of the barrier that would let me in, but not let him out. ‘C’mon,’ I said, throat constricted. ‘Don’t do this to me.’

‘I can’t go back!’ he cried. ‘Don’t make me go back to pretending!’

I’d never seen him cry like this and it was, quite frankly, destroying me. A quiet, sober part of me warned that this could be a trick but the majority of me believed that emotions like this couldn’t be faked, not to this extent. I felt him; his pain was mine, cyclical and consuming.

‘It’s gonna be OK,’ I tried to say, barely inches from him now.

‘No, it won’t, I know what he’ll do, Jace and I can’t live with it, please!’

‘Alec, don’t—’

‘Kill me, Jace. Please, just kill me!’

I couldn’t help it, I went into the barrier, pressing my hands to his and forcing him back.

‘Shut up, shut the fuck up! How can you say that to me?’ I shook his arms hard, gripping his hands. ‘You wanna hurt me? Call me names, tell me I’m trash, tell I’m nothing but a fucking whore but don’t you ever ask me to imagine a world without you in it!’ I grabbed his face, making him look at me. ‘There is no world without you. There is nothing without you!’

I knew it was going to happen. I’d known since the first moment I heard his broken voice, saw the pain he was in. I was weak and it was always going to happen.

I brought his face to mine, pressing a messy, wet kiss to his mouth, tasting his tears. At first it was just a press, I could have pulled back and left in that moment before he responded. I made a choice not to and everything that followed would be shaped by that choice.

He arched up, slanting his face to get a better angle, treating the kiss like it was oxygen and he was dying. The desperation between us was tangible.

‘I’m so sorry,’ I sobbed against his lips, hands caressing his face and hair. I wanted to devour him, wanted to shed this skin and meld with him irreversibly. ‘Forgive me, Alec.’

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_A/N - Hey guys, I worked super extra hard on this CH as I wanted to get it up fairly quick. Over the next few days and possibly week, I need to focus more on my actual book as my agent is probably less than thrilled that I’m spending all my time on beloved fanfiction. That said, reviews always get me writing more of it, so if you want a quicker update, you know what to do. I really hope you’re still enjoying the ride. Also, if anyone wants to follow me on twitter i’m at azriel_green._
Chapter Twelve: Why Wake Me For Bad News?

CHAPTER TWELVE

- Why Wake Me For Bad News? -

‘Remember when you were young? You shone like the sun.
Shine on you crazy diamond.
Now there’s a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky.
Shine on you crazy diamond.
You were caught on the crossfire of childhood and stardom,
Blown on the steel breeze.
Come on you target for faraway laughter,
Come on you stranger, you legend, you martyr, and shine! ’

-Pink Floyd

- Alec-

I watched Jace sleep longer than was necessary. He was exhausted and the temptation to stare at him was simply too much. His expression smoothed out in peaceful rest as I mapped every part of him to memory.

After we had sex, he’d fallen into an incredibly deep sleep. He’d needed it, his body drained and running on empty after the last week. The decision to use his phone to message Sebastian was one I wrestled with, but only for a few seconds.

Sebastian brought me more of the drug, pre-prepared in a syringe. He didn’t ask questions, didn’t comment on the sleepy Shadowhunter laying in my lap. He injected me between my toes and the pain was nothing in the face of the instant, overwhelming calm that washed over me like an ocean at dawn. The hot, itchy guilt was soothed instantly, cooling my blood and ironing out the creases in my troubling moral tapestry. I had that perfect crystal clarity once more.

I felt strong, in control. In command.

‘I told Izzy about you,’ I quietly told him, afterwards. ‘I’m sorry.’

He paused, contemplating my confession. ‘I see,’ he whispered. ‘I may have to improvise there.’

‘Improvise how?’

He ignored that. ‘I need your help with a shipment coming in tomorrow night.’

‘Where?’ I asked quietly, soothing Jace by tracing my fingers over his bare shoulder. His skin was warm and soft.
'Lower Eastside docks, 10pm.'

‘What about the others?’

‘They’ll come along, one way or another.’

I narrowed my eyes at him. ‘That doesn’t sound smart.’

‘I have no intention of hurting them, Alec. I need the supplier to give me the base compound and then I’m gone.’

‘Why did you cover for me? You don’t really need my help that badly, do you?’

Sebastian sighed and gave me a tired smile. ‘Maybe I have soft spot for dark sides, eh?’ He turned his attention my sleeping Parabatai. ‘Do you need to get out of the barrier?’

I shook my head, stroking Jace’s hair. ‘No. I won’t make the same mistakes I did last time. The change was too abrupt, I threw him off.’

‘You’re going to pretend to be yourself from before?’

‘I have to try.’

‘That’s a complicated choice, isn’t it?’

‘Love always is.’

‘I won’t be around to cover for you, so I advise you prepare in advance to interfere with the blood tests.’

‘Thanks.’

He hesitated. ‘How do you know he’s not awake and listening?’

I closed my eyes. ‘Because I can feel him dreaming.’

‘And what does Jace Herondale dream about?’

I unmoored my thoughts, letting them flow in the direction of my Parabatai. They entered his slipstream effortlessly; his unconscious mind was unguarded and welcoming. Colour and sensation hit me, there was a dark undertow of worry and regret but the river was familiar. I touched it and the water whispered my name.

‘It’s a privilege you’ll never be afforded, I’m afraid,’ I said, opening my eyes and catching just the barest hint of naked curiosity in his. It vanished fast.

‘Fair enough,’ he shrugged, as though he didn’t care. ‘See you tomorrow.’

‘Thanks again,’ I said, watching him leave. I would go to the docks and help him, but not out of debt or a sense of gratitude. I had allowed things to get out of hand. To ensure nothing came that close again, I’d need my own supply. He was potentially useful.

I bent to press a reverent kiss to my lover’s face. I would do whatever was necessary to keep him, to prevent crippling doubt and regret from breaking the bond between us. The weight of holding everything I ever wanted galvanised me into utter determination.
So, I would pretend to be guilty, insecure and full of regret. It was what he needed to believe and what he needed, I would provide. It would be tough, sure, but he was worth it. He was worth everything.

‘Whatever it takes,’ I whispered. ‘I promise.’

- Jace -

When I began to wake, the bone deep contentment I felt slowly drained away. I was cold and uncomfortable and alone.

I rubbed my eyes with one hand, blearily looking around the room. It was barely light out, the beginnings of pink light filtering through the thick clouds. ‘Alec?’

He was there, inside the barrier but as far away as possible from me against the wall.

‘Stay there, Jace,’ he said in a low, rough voice. ‘Just stay there.’

The sleep had been incredibly deep and it was hard to remember the last time I’d slept so well and it was messing with my brain. ‘I uh…what—?’

‘You were drunk,’ he said, refusing to look at me. ‘He…I should have pushed you away. Should have stopped it.’ His face screwed up, eyes closed. ‘Why couldn’t I stop it?’

I sat bolt upright, panic shocking my system as the memories of last night hit me like a freight train. ‘Fuck!’ I gasped. ‘We…’

‘It’s not your fault,’ he said, refusing to look at me. ‘It was me. I’m so, so sorry.’

The situation came back to me in full and I tried to suppress that most fragile emotion I so rarely entertained…hope. ‘Are you…back?’

‘It’s not like that,’ he said tightly. ‘What I said before was right, it’s not clean cut. I remember everything. Angel, I wish it was a clean split.’

‘Alec, look at me.’

‘Please, Jace. Please just leave.’

‘Leave you here?’

‘Yes.’

I crawled over to him, trying to ignore how it hurt when he flinched. ‘Angel damn it, look at me, Alec!’

Miserable and tear stained, he brought his eyes to mine. His expression threatened to break my heart. ‘I’m so sorry.’
I wanted to grab him, to pull him into me and comfort him however he would let me, but I had reason to be cautious, or so I told myself. I examined the bond between us; it was strong and tangible and through it, I felt his pain. Self-disgust, shame, loss.

Loss?

‘Alec, no,’ I said, reaching out, but he moved away, pressed himself further into the wall.

‘Jace,’ he begged. ‘Stop.’

‘No, I just…not anything like that.’

He wasn’t sweating, the rolling tremors from yesterday were gone. He was upset, but physically he seemed fine. That, above all else, gave me reason to hope.

‘Do you feel all right?’

‘No,’ he said.

‘The effects of the drug seem to have faded.’

‘There’s no guarantee,’ he said, avoiding me as much as possible. ‘I don’t want to risk anything. Just leave me here.’

I finally backed off, giving him some space. ‘We have to talk about last night.’

‘No,’ he said, shaking his head.

‘Alec, don’t you do this to me,’ I said, heart twisting so hard I wanted to press my hand there. ‘Don’t shut me out.’

‘What else can I do?’ he burst out. ‘It hurts to even look at you!’

‘It was my fault. I got drunk and came back here, I did that, not you.’

‘Don’t bother trying to make me feel like less of a fucking rapist, because it’s really not going to work.’

‘Alec, that’s not—’

‘You were way beyond incapable of giving consent and even if you were, I was still…still not me.’

I wanted so badly to come up with the perfect comeback to that. I searched for the words to dismiss what he’d said, reassure him to the point of calming down.

‘Yeah,’ he rasped, taking my silence for tacit agreement. ‘Like I said, just leave me here. I mean it.’

‘I can’t.’

‘You can and you will.’

‘Please, just listen to me!’

‘So you can lie and make out like you’re not hurt by any of that—that poison I was saying to you? So you can make it all better, somehow?’ He shook his head, staring blindly away from me. ‘I know when I’ve fucked up, Jace. I know when there’s no going back.’
Jagged anxiety carved into my chest.

‘No, that’s not what this is.’

He wiped his eyes. ‘Leave, Jace.’

I was about to launch into a massive protest, when I felt the ripples of something vibrating on the wooden floor. I looked around for my phone, finding it under my jacket nearby. It was Clary.

‘Hello?’

‘Oh my God, where are you?’

‘I’m here with Alec, what’s wrong?’

She sounded so upset, my stomach clenched in anticipation. ‘Sebastian has taken Izzy, he left a note telling us if we want her back, we need to meet him at 10pm, Lower Eastside Docks and to come alone.’

My mind raced. ‘Wait, Sebastian?’

‘There was something wrong about him, I’ve felt it for a while and now…’ Clary said, voice cracking. ‘He’s got Izzy, Jace.’

I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. ‘We’ll get her back no matter what.’

‘You and Alec have to come here; the rest of the Institute doesn’t know yet but I can’t cover for all three of you.’

‘We’re coming, we’re both coming right now.’

‘Is Alec—?’

‘He’s fine. We’ll be there in twenty.’

I hung up, staring at the floor. ‘Sebastian has taken Izzy, he’s holding her captive and wants us to go to the docks tonight.’

Alec, if possible, paled even further. ‘What?’

‘He’s got her.’

‘No, he…shit! Why? Did he say why?’

‘Fuck, Alec. We need to go.’

He seemed unsure. ‘Go where? It’s not safe, what if the drug takes control again?’

‘It won’t,’ I said, grabbing my jacket. ‘And even if it does, are you really going to take the fucking risk of losing Izzy?’

His expression smoothed out and he got to his feet, exuding shaky determination. ‘No, of course not.’

‘I’m letting you out now,’ I said, only a little warily. I went to the kitchen, read from the hand-written note Magnus had left me and the incantation dropped the barrier in an instant.
He stepped through it carefully. ‘I can’t believe he took her.’

‘I can’t believe we ever trusted him.’

‘He didn’t seem evil, Jace.’

‘People never do. It’s us and them, always.’

He gave me a kind of sad look, like he wanted to say that we were no longer us.

‘We should go,’ he said finally. ‘No one fucks with Izzy and lives.’

-Izzy-

‘Why are you doing this?’

My hands were bound cleverly, stripped of my weapons and any useful runes. It was dark where we were, a small room with no natural light and a work bench he was constantly bent over, laden with lab equipment.

‘Do you need to pee?’

‘No.’

‘Then please be quiet.’

The small cut on my hand had already begun to heal. I thumbed it carefully, satisfied Sebastian hadn’t noticed it or the small droplets of blood I’d trailed as we entered the building. ‘I’m going to destroy you,’ I promised him. ‘You’re going to slip up and I’ll be waiting.’

‘I’ve no doubt, Isabelle. Your strength and skill are the main reason you’re here, regrettably restrained.’

He fell back into a concentrated silence, focusing on whatever he was doing. There was nothing within reach for a weapon, no way of removing the restraints.

‘Are you even a Shadowhunter? If you’ve hurt Max—’

‘I never harmed a hair on his head, he’s a sweet boy. I’m trying to be a better person, Izzy. Believe it or not.’

‘Hard to accept when I’m shackled to a steam pipe in your evil-doers dungeon.’

‘It’s a basement.’

‘Much less evil.’

He turned around on his chair, surveying me wearily. ‘Look, I’m not going to hurt you or anyone, not if I can help it. I need for your brothers to go crashing in, blades a’blazing so I can get what I
want. After that, I’ll be gone.’

‘With what? The drug? That’s what you want?’

‘Yes.’

I laughed bitterly. ‘So, you’re just another junkie, huh? Too weak to part with something that gave you power for once?!”

‘No, no,’ he said with a polite smile. ‘I don’t want power. I’ve no interest in that.’

‘Bullshit!’ I yelled, yanking on the restraints and hurting my wrists. ‘What is all this for then?’

He fixed me with an unblinking stare. ‘Isabelle. I need the drug to stay good.’

-Jace-

‘Do we know where she was taken?’

Clary paced, biting a fingernail. ‘No. I last saw her three hours ago. She asked me where Sebastian was, if I’d seen him.’

Gently, I prodded, ‘Had you?’

She swallowed. ‘He came to see me, yeah.’

I glanced at Alec, who took over. ‘Clary,’ he said softly, placing a hand on her shoulder. ‘What happened?’

‘He told me…’ she paused, gathering herself. ‘He asked me if I was happy? He said he wanted me to be happy and if I needed anything, he would help me get it.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I told him I was fine and asked what was happening. He didn’t answer, he just said he would check in on me from time to time and if I ever needed help, he’d be there for me.’

She seemed uncomfortable, so we didn’t push, but Alec felt my suspicions through the bond. Was it really possible he was…no, that couldn’t be it?

‘Clary, when you told Izzy this, where did she go?’

‘She just went, told me to stay and make sure he didn’t slip back in to the Institute. Then I got this text.’

She held out her phone.

Clarissa, I’ve taken Izzy. I need her, you and the others to help me intercept a shipment arriving tonight. I apologise for this, but know that it is truly necessary.
Eastside Docks. 10pm.

Sebastian.

‘Fucker,’ I breathed, mind running rampant with images of him hurting Izzy.

‘She’s strong,’ Alec said, jaw clenched. ‘Stronger than all of us. She’ll be OK until we can get her back.’

‘I’ll kill him if he touches her,’ Clary swore.

‘Where’s Simon?’

‘He went out looking for her.’

‘With what leads?’

‘I think he’s just running around trying to catch the scent of her blood, to be honest. He’s…upset.’

‘We’re all upset,’ Alec said gruffly. ‘But I get it.’

‘What’s the plan?’ she asked, looking between us.

‘Obviously, we’ll play it mostly by ear. His intent must be to get his hands on a shipment, right?’

Alec looked disgusted. ‘That’s what he wanted all along, you think? A massive supply of his own?’

‘The timing of his arrival makes sense, I guess. We don’t know anything about him, really. Clary, we’ve got some time - see what you can turn up about him. Anything that might be useful.’

‘What will you do?’

‘I want to do a scout of the area while there’s daylight, basic recon.’

Alec said, ‘I’ll come with you. We’ll get her back, Clary,’ he offered the redhead kindly, albeit a little awkwardly.

She smiled and the two hugged briefly. ‘It’s good to have you back.’

We left Clary’s room and headed to the armoury to stock up.

‘We’re gonna need Magnus, right?’ I said quietly as we walked.

Alec hesitated. ‘I don’t think we should involve him.’

‘Why? He’s the most powerful of us all, Alec. We’re gonna need firepower on this one.’

‘It’s your call,’ he said heavily, taking his bow from the rack. ‘But we call on him way too often and I can’t help but feel we need to keep this from becoming a battle. My instincts say we should keep it contained. We don’t know Sebastian’s motives yet.’

‘He took Izzy,’ I pointed out, sheathing a fresh blade. ‘The bastard is going down.’

‘He knows we would react like that,’ Alec said quietly. ‘He knows we’’ll be upset, go in hard and emotional.’

‘You think he’s expecting it?’
‘I think he’s counting on it. Why else would he take her?’

‘To hurt her?’

‘But why? It doesn’t add up.’

‘Alec…’ I said, hesitantly.

He closed his eyes. ‘If he touches her, I will rip out his spine. Until we know more or Clary digs something useful up, we work from facts and good old-fashioned recon.’

‘I still think we should at least involve him, as a backup if nothing else.’

‘Your call,’ he said, stocking up on arrows.

‘Thanks.’ I adjusted a strap and watched him suit up before placing my hand on his arm. He stared at it for a long moment, the point of contact between us.

‘Jace,’ he said so softly I could barely make it out. ‘I’m so sorry for what I did. I know this isn’t the right time, there won’t ever be a right time…but I am sorry and I need to you to know it.’

‘I do,’ I said earnestly. ‘I do know it, Alec. I can feel it.’

He looked a little relieved. ‘Good,’ he said. ‘I’m glad you can. I wasn’t sure if you could feel anything.’

‘I-I can feel everything,’ I admitted.

His eyes fluttered, seemingly affected by my admission. He withdrew his arm, disconnecting us, but in body only. We were always connected.

‘We’re gonna get her back.’

‘I know we are. Let’s go.’

- Izzy -

‘Good? What the hell does that mean?’

Sebastian sighed. ‘I’ve been evil my entire life. Not the silly kind you keep referring to, either. Evil, Izzy. Cruelty, violence, sadism…it was my life. For years now, I’ve been planning to destroy you all, Jace especially.’

My heart lurched. ‘Why Jace? Why us?’

‘Jace was the son Valentine always favoured.’

My jaw dropped a little. ‘You’re Valentine’s son?’

‘After a fashion, yes. Whereas Jace and Clary carry Angel blood, so Demon runs through mine. I
came from ugliness and pain, brought into this world a gruesome mistake and a despised creature—'

I rolled my eyes. ‘Skip the sob story!’

He bristled, but obliged. ‘Five months ago, I’m breaking a Demon into pieces. Experiments, you know. It starts crying. Demons never cry. I test its blood and I see this strange anomaly. Something in its cells. The Demon had fed on a human recently, some junkie in Central Park. The drug had infected the Demon, brought out a lesser seen side. Aspects like weakness, fear.’

‘And, what? You thought wow those sound great, where do I sign up?’

‘I was intrigued. At first, I thought the drug only weakened the user. Something powerful enough to infect Demons was worth investigating. I intended to utilise it myself, perhaps. Infect my enemies and weaken them. My search led to me being captured by the same creature who took Alec.’

‘The spider bat thing?’

‘Her name was Arinchel and yes, one and the same. I was held captive, injected for four days and then let loose.’

My hands tightened. ‘And?’

‘At first, nothing. I was furious with myself. I was planning an especially vile revenge when something happened. This…’ he trailed off, unable to find the right word. ‘It was small. Some tiny part of me that had always been drowned in Demon blood and darkness…it fought its way to the top and took control.’

I sneered doubtfully. ‘The drug made you good?’

‘It made me want to be good. I had blood on my hands, guilt slowly seeping in for the first time in my life. I grieved for those I’d hurt. I thought I was dying, at first. It spread like a plague, contaminating every part of me. It was too much.’

‘And now you want to stay like this?’

He cleared his throat. ‘Because of Clary, yes.’

‘Angel, she’s your sister,’ I said slowly, my heart going out to her.

He nodded, looking down at his hands. ‘I realised that the way I had been feeling about Clary was wrong. Very wrong.’

Eyes narrowed, I asked, ‘Wrong how?’

‘Just…wrong,’ he replied darkly. ‘I couldn’t go back to that. I had to maintain the switch for her, even if only to protect her from a distance from myself.’

‘Why not just kill yourself?’

That made him laugh. ‘Oh, Izzy,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘I really do like you. I’ve tried to kill myself a hundred times, maybe more.’ He held out his wrists, removing a rune which then revealed dozens of vertical scars. Further up his arm, I saw track marks. ‘Nothing works. I don’t know, maybe I don’t want to die now. This second chance is…precious.’

‘Why do you need the shipment? The drug is everywhere.’
‘It’s being diluted. Middlemen and other junkies getting greedy, cutting it with whatever household cleaner they can buy in bulk from Costco. It barely lasts when it’s not pure. No, I need the supplier. I need to know how it’s made and then I can manufacture it for myself. That’s all I want, Izzy. I want to stay good.’

He was pleading with me to see it and I wanted to believe him.

‘Why didn’t you just tell us?’

He sighed. ‘I couldn’t risk you holding me and preventing my intake of the drug. If the other side gets control again…it’ll be bad and this side will never be allowed to resurface again.’

‘How bad?’

‘Let’s hope you don’t find out.’

-Jace-

In broad daylight, the docks didn’t look the same. It was a huge area, full of shipping containers, loading bays, buildings but my instincts drew me to the waterfront. I glanced along the high edge, water below and thought of that night.

‘Hey,’ Alec called. ‘If you do decide to involve Magnus, this would be a good place for him to stake out. Simon should be over there, watching from those containers, so he can see if others are coming.’

‘Sounds good,’ I said, eyes still glued to the spot in the distance where Belaphim had taken my future, taken away my ability to have children.

‘Are you OK?’ Alec asked, following my stare. ‘What is it?’

I shook myself. ‘I’m thinking it’ll be a boat, right? Bringing it in?’

‘I would assume.’

‘Once we have Izzy, we need to destroy the shipment if we can.’

He nodded solemnly. ‘Absolutely.’

‘We should burn it.’ I stared out at the water. ‘Alec, do you think he’s keeping her there?’

‘The warehouse?’

‘Well, yeah,’ I said. ‘It’s warded, it’s conveniently nearby, right?’

‘You want to check it out?’

I looked up at him. ‘Is that OK?’

He nodded a little, like he was telling himself it was. ‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘I can do it.’
The journey across the water by small ferry was quick and uneventful. A ride I could have made myself not a week ago, saving myself the trouble of bargaining with a demon. The waves made Alec feel sick and I fought to restrain myself from stroking his back as he dry heaved, barely keeping down the little water he’d ingested the last few days.

Once we hit solid ground, I couldn’t help but think of the last time we were here. How good it had felt to have a solid enemy, a purpose.

Before things were absolutely fucking fucked.

‘Hey,’ he said, nervously. ‘Is that it?’

It loomed large and shadowy, but that might have been my general sense of outrageous hatred for the place.

‘Yeah.’

‘It was dark when she brought me here,’ he said quietly. ‘I couldn’t see it properly.’

As we approached, I felt something growing in intensity, like static build up. Ten feet from the building, I stopped.

‘Alec…I can’t go any further.’

He was behind me and when I turned to face him, his expression was grim.

‘The barrier has been reactivated,’ he said. ‘When the others came back, it was down. Magnus dropped it.’

‘Who drew the new one?’ I asked, trying to push forward, but it was like being held in place by giant magnets. ‘Shit.’

‘How did you get in before?’

‘Huh?’ I realised way too late what he was going to ask next.

‘How did you past the barrier when you came for me?’

I swallowed, trying to think fast. ‘I went around the back of the building.’

‘Why?’

‘No, I… there wasn’t a barrier then. I went around to scope the place out and—’

‘You’re lying, I can feel it.’

‘Alec, this is hardly the time.’

‘How did you get inside?’

Traitorous heart thundering, I tried to relax and shrug it off. ‘The more important question is who put the barrier back up and how we’re going to get through it?’

‘Well, how did you get through it last time?’
‘It wasn’t activated then!’

‘Of course it was, that’s why you couldn’t track me!’

‘Look, please can we just please focus on Izzy? If the barrier is back up, it makes sense she could be inside.’

He glared dully, like he was disappointed with me. ‘Fine,’ he relented. ‘But later, we’re talking about this.’

‘If there is a later,’ I hedged. ‘We can talk about whatever you want, OK? I promise.’

‘Fine,’ he sighed. ‘How are we going to—?’

He pushed his hand through the barrier as though it was nothing.

‘Whoa,’ I said. ‘How’d you do that?’

‘I can’t feel anything,’ he said. ‘But then I didn’t feel anything when she brought me here the first time. Maybe because I was with her?’

‘Hey, no way are you going in there without me!’

Distractedly, he said, ‘I’m not,’ but he moved right through the invisible wall which held me at bay. ‘Huh.’

He turned back, reached through and pulled me. The moment his hand touched mine, two things happened. The barrier vanished and I stumbled forward, where he caught me and kept me from falling.

But also, our skin was touching again. This time, his hand on mine was like a fucking shock to my system. From nowhere, a fever dream of heat and longing hit me. When he caught me, he held me close just a little longer than he should have. I stared at him, unable to contain myself and the desire to kiss him was beyond overwhelming.

I felt him feel it, too. We were going to kiss, we had to kiss.

He let me go gently, moving away and rubbing his neck. The loss of contact shattered the feeling, leaving me disoriented and lost.

‘Yeah I uh,’ he cleared his throat. ‘I thought that might work.’

‘I’m your guest, huh?’ I tried to laugh because that sledgehammer of wanton lust sure was fading but not fast enough. ‘Good call.’

We faced the building and he rolled his shoulders, the mood shifting.

‘Let’s do this.’

Almost immediately, it was clear that the warehouse wasn’t empty. He covered the left side while I advanced. I heard noises; voices from up ahead inside the door. We were barely inside the complex. I flattered and stopped, signalling to him.

*Hold.*

He halted, arrow drawn from a crouch, covering me as I slowly crept towards the source of the
noise. I heard voices, five males inside. Their conversation was muffled.

5 inside.

Silently, he came to stand opposite me. I looked to him, asking his opinion on approach. I felt him make the decision. If they were here, they had something to do with the drug. They weren’t civilians, they weren’t innocent.

He kicked the door open and let his arrow fly.

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-Izzy-

‘So, did they have sex, then?’

Sebastian hadn’t spoken to me for at least twenty minutes. He’d been focused on his work and I’d been carefully cataloguing the room for potential weapons and means of escape.

It caught me off guard. ‘What?’

‘Alec and Jace.’

Protective of my brothers, I answered carefully. ‘Why would you even think that?’

He shrugged, not turning away from his observations. ‘I thought it was fairly obvious, no? They’re so clearly in love.’

‘What do you know of love?’ I sneered.

‘Until this drug, nothing,’ he admitted. ‘But the more I grow as someone who wants to be better, the more I notice. So, did they have sex?’

‘That’s none of your business.’

‘Such a shame, they’ve made their lives so difficult now.’

‘You don’t know anything about them.’

He fell silent for a moment before writing a few notes. ‘I know them well enough that they’ll go and scope out the docks hours before we’re due to meet.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked, fear growing in the pit of my stomach.

‘I know that they’ll look across the river and wonder if I’m holding you in the warehouse and they won’t take the chance of not checking it out.’

‘You set them up?’

He tipped his head, considering. ‘I’m utilising their skills.’

Angrily, I yanked on the chains again, ignoring the pain in my wrist. ‘What for?’

‘The shipments don’t come in by boat, obviously. The dealers are convening at the warehouse, high
level players. When Jace and Alec take them down, the supplier will be drawn out. That’s all I need. The elusive creator.’

‘Why did you even kidnap me, if that’s all you need?’

He smiled at me, so beautiful and yet something dangerous still there.

‘The boys will be more reckless with your life on the line. More intrepid. But I do need you, Izzy. I need you to protect me.’

Fear curled in my stomach. ‘Why would I do that?’

‘Because,’ he sighed sadly. ‘I have Max.’

‘WHAT? You fucking piece of shit!’

‘Calm down, you’ll hurt—’

I threw myself forward, stretching the chains away from the pipe to their absolute limit and swung my right leg at the nearest thing to me, a metal trolley laden with scientific equipment. It went flying upon contact, the instruments scattered and the trolley shot towards Sebastian who moved before it could hit him.

‘Enough!’ he yelled, but I kept thrashing, determined to get free of the chains. Pain shot up my arms, bones screaming in protest as skin tore. He marched towards me, exactly what I wanted, but he didn’t grab me like I thought he would.

He raised his hand and my body froze, caught in stasis against its will.

‘You will not trick me into coming closer,’ he said, deadly calm. ‘You’re going to let me explain.’

I wanted to open my mouth and scream at him, but it wouldn’t cooperate. I tried to convey how much I was going to hurt him with my eyes, but he didn’t seem to get the memo.

‘Understand, Max is not chained up somewhere. He’s safely in Paris with your father, but I have someone working there, watching him. If I don’t check in with him every hour, Max will be taken and…well, I’m sure you get the idea.’ He took a deep breath, eyes closed. ‘You think I’m evil and believe me, I know how disgusting a threat this is to make, but understand this above all else. I am a threat to the world unlike anything you’ve faced and without this drug, I will be unleashed.’

My body trembled with the effort to break the stasis. He stared at me for a long moment and then sighed, dropping his hand and I fell hard to the ground, knocking my chin and knees.

‘If you’re…’ I gasped. ‘Truly good now, let me take you in. I’ll make sure you get the drug and we’ll contain you.’

‘I can’t risk it,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘There’s too many variables.’

‘Then you are not and never will be good.’

‘You might be right,’ he relented, taking his seat once more. ‘But as my father used to say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.’
‘Well, that was fun,’ I said, catching my breath as Alec toed a dead body. ‘Ah, look,’ I said with a grin. ‘Your scowl is back.’

He gave me the middle finger and crouched to search the bodies.

‘You think we shouldn’t have killed them?’ he asked quietly.

‘They had guns,’ I said easily. ‘They tried to kill us.’

‘Still,’ he said. ‘Mundanes.’

‘Drug dealing, life ruining murderous Mundanes who would have killed us if we hesitated.’

He let it drop, though I hadn’t really convinced him. ‘I’ll do a sweep of the compound. There aren’t others, they would have come running at the sound of gunshots.’

‘They could have headphones on,’ I suggested playfully, simple to earn another of his unimpressed scowls that I wasn’t taking this seriously enough.

But he didn’t look at me, I didn’t get my scowl. His eyes were fixed on something else across the room.

‘Holy shit,’ I said when I followed his line of sight.

There were crates, huge pallets with stamped numbers on the wood. One of the crates was open, revealing large, clear packs of slightly pink tinged powder.

‘That’s a lot,’ Alec said with a nervous attempt at a chuckle. His whole body had gone rigid and I felt a sick thrill of worry for the first time since he’d refused to leave the barrier this morning.

‘You OK?’

He stared at the packs. ‘Not really,’ he answered. ‘My body is…arguing with my mind.’

‘I can’t really feel it,’ I offered, hoping to reassure him. ‘Not like I felt it last night.’

That seemed to break his fascination. ‘We should get rid of it,’ he said. ‘Burn it or whatever.’

‘I’ll get Clary to contact Luke, he can impound the lot of it,’ I said, messaging Clary quickly. She’d know what to do.

Alec sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘Ugh, my head. Look, we need to get back to scoping out the docks for—’

A phone rang from the pockets of a dead drug dealer. The tone was cheery and insistent. We exchanged a glance before he pulled it out and answered.

‘Yes?’

His eyes darkened and he put the phone on loud speaker.
‘Say again?’

‘I said, why haven’t you checked in? He’s seriously pissed, man.’

‘Your men are dead,’ Alec explained in a flat monotone. ‘Your shipment is gone.’

Static and silence until, ‘Is this Sebastian?’

We shared a wide-eyed look.

‘Yes,’ Alec said, with impeccable cool.

The speaker rattled with a sigh. ‘What a pain in the ass you are, boy. He’s really gonna kill you now.’

In his best Sebastian voice, Alec said, ‘He can try.’

‘That shipment cost a lot. You’ve really fucked up.’

‘So, tell him to come get me.’

The called ended. Alec stowed the phone.

‘He planned this,’ he said quietly, almost to himself. ‘He knew we’d come here. Fuck, Jace, he’s using us. Moving us like pawns.’

‘You really think so?’

Implacably, he replied, ‘I know it. ‘We can’t risk him hurting Izzy. We need to get her back, that’s the priority.’

‘OK, any ideas how?’

‘It might be time to call our resident Magi Ex Machina.’

-Alec-

It was almost too difficult. There had been moments throughout the day when the desire to relax and be myself had nearly overwhelmed me. The only thing had kept me going was that somehow, he did seem to believe I was his Alec.

The trick was to hate myself. That gave Jace just enough of what he seemed to think comprised his normal, boring Alec.

Pretend I hated myself for what we did last night.

Pretend I hated myself for finally giving him exactly what he needed.

Pretend I wasn’t going to ruin him the moment he was convinced I was his and only his version of myself.
My concern for Izzy made the whole thing bearable, just. Fucking Sebastian was dead. How dare he take her, help or no help, the fucker was going to pay.

Magnus was probably the worst thing about today, though. Having to go to him for help was the last thing I wanted to do.

He didn’t exactly know from what I could tell, but it would be close.

‘I’m getting rather tired of saying this, but you should have come to me sooner,’ he sighed, stirring his tea magically. ‘But of course, I’ll help Izzy.’

‘Great,’ Jace said, sounding relieved. He shot me a glance, suggesting I should thank Magnus. I shook myself.

‘Yeah, thank you,’ I said, hoping I looked sufficiently awkward and ashamed of my general existence. ‘Can you track her?’

‘If she’s not held in a barrier,’ he said, holding eye contact with me. ‘Like you were.’

I let my cheeks colour, ducked my head. Pussy Alec 101.

I said, ‘Let’s hope not.’

Jace gave me a kind of reassuring smile without actually smiling. Fucking hell, I loved him so much. It was so hard not to touch him.

Magnus closed his eyes, making complex movements with his hands. While I waited, I let myself examine what, if any, feelings I had for him.

I liked him, at least in an abstract kind of way. He was kind and intelligent and generous. He was attractive, too.

*He’s not Jace, though,* snarled my entire being. *Not our Jace.*

My Parabatai frowned slightly, glancing at me. I did my best to look pathetic and ashamed of myself for being in love with him. I held up a glass wall, showing him what he needed to see, but cloaking him from the truth.

*Not long,* I promised myself.

‘No,’ Magnus said, dropping his hands angrily. ‘I can’t feel her at all.’

‘Damn it,’ Jace swore. ‘We have to find her!’

Magnus shot him a disapproving look. ‘Well, let’s not do anything rash just yet.’

Jace flinched, a spike of lightning panic lancing his chest.

‘What?’ I demanded quickly, looking between them. ‘What does that mean?’

‘Nothing,’ Jace said, shooting Magnus a cold, warning look. ‘Look, even a radius of where she last was would be useful.’

My beautiful soul mate was lying once again. He lied so much. It hurt me that Magnus seemed to know something about how Jace had found me, but I would put it aside for now.
For now.

I checked my phone, mostly debating sending Sebastian a vile death threat or two, when it burst to life. Simon was calling.

‘Hello?’

He was so out of breath it hurt my ear. ‘I’ve found her trail!’

‘What? Where?’

‘Apartment building on North Moore Street.’

‘OK, we’re coming now.’

‘I’m going inside.’

‘No, wait for us, Simon!’

‘If she’s in there, I’m getting her out right the fuck now.’

‘You wanna risk something going wrong? We’ll be there in like ten seconds!’

‘How the fuck—?’

‘Magnus?’ I pleaded, mostly with my eyes. ‘North Moore Street.’

He sighed. ‘One day, I’ll start charging you pesky kids.’

It was busy, but Magnus was smart. He portalled us in the back of a nearby store and we ran the rest of the way. Simon was lurking unsubtly in a doorway of the apartment building.

‘Her blood,’ he said without preamble. ‘There’s a droplet of it right there.’

‘How fresh is it?’

‘Hours,’ he confirmed as we stared up at the huge building. Strategically, it was a nightmare. Too many rooms, so many ways tip him off we were there. ‘She’s in there, I can feel it.’

‘Where’s Clary?’

‘Inside,’ he said. ‘Seeing if anyone has seen anything weird.’

‘Hey,’ Jace said, touching his shoulder. ‘We’ll find her.’

I tried to imagine Simon’s feelings for my sister, but it was too distant and not relevant enough. Izzy was important, his feelings for her were not.

I looked around at the street, packed with Mundanes in broad daylight.

‘We’re at a distinct disadvantage here,’ I pointed out.
'Undoubtedly his intention,' Magnus said.

Clary came out, still smiling, fake and polite. She let it drop the moment she saw us. 'Basement,' she said, hurrying us away from the main doors and to the left. 'Few people have seen someone matching Sebastian’s description coming and going. He wore a janitor’s uniform but apparently nothing’s getting cleaned.'

'How do we get inside?' Jace asked. 'Without him seeing, I mean?'

'I can go,’ Magnus said. 'I can glamour myself to be invisible.’

'Alone?' I said. 'No way.’

'I can go and check, at least. See if he’s there.’

I didn’t like it and neither did the others, but it was the best we had.

'Fine,’ I bit out. 'But be careful and don’t interact with him, just come straight back.’

He gave me a mock salute and vanished.

The four of us waited down the side of the building, standing around stupidly. Clary and Jace were taking turns speaking to Luke on the phone.

'So, you feel better?' Simon asked me after an awkward minute of silence.

'Obviously,' I said, raising an eyebrow.

'Obviously,’ I said, raising an eyebrow.

'That’s good,’ he prattled on, nerves making him chatty. ‘I’m glad we found you, even if it was a huge fuck up.’

I didn’t react, stayed calm. ‘Fuck up?’

‘Yeah, Jace and the whole thing,’ he said distractedly eyeing the building.

‘Hmm,’ I said. ‘He didn’t say you were there with him.’

'I was lookout, but I heard what happened. Clary told me. I heard the Demon’s voice too. As if there wasn’t enough that night to give me nightmares.’

‘He was stupid,’ I sighed, not wanting to alert him to the fact he was, perhaps unwittingly, revealing more than he should. ‘Using a Demon.’

‘Clary said Bargaining Demons can’t be trusted.’

‘I would have done the same for him.’

‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘Did he tell you what he gave up?’

‘No,’ I said carefully.

‘Thought as much, wouldn’t tell us either. Ah, he’s back!’ he said, dashing towards a newly visible Magnus who shook his head.

‘They were there, but they’re gone.’

‘Fuck!’ Clary said in a rare outburst. ‘Any indication—?’
‘Not really. A bunch of science and dull notes about formulas. There was something, though. Izzy wrote a word on a pipe in what seems to be her own blood.’

‘Which was?’

‘Supplier.’

‘I knew it,’ I said. ‘He’s going after the supplier of the drug.’

‘Why?’

‘From what I saw,’ Magnus said. ‘He wants to make it himself.’

‘OK, I ask again, why?’

‘Maybe he wants to control the supply to others,’ I said, but that wasn’t true and I knew it. He wanted it for himself, a lifetime supply to maintain his change.

I knew it because it was what I wanted.

Jace looked at me, frowning a little. I immediately cut the chords on that thought, let myself feel ashamed and guilty, base ingredients for the Alec he needed to see.

He wouldn’t always need that Alec. Over time I would let myself relax, little by little. Small steps, nothing to alarm him.

Then we would leave together, run away and disappear into each other for all time. He would be mine with nothing in between.

It was all I wanted.

‘Makes sense,’ Simon said. ‘We need to find them. Magnus, can you trace her now if she’s not inside a barrier?’

The Warlock closed his eyes, connecting to his magic. ‘Yes,’ he said, frowning intensely. ‘But it’s… not easy.’

‘What is it?’ Clary asked.

‘She’s with Sebastian, but I can’t see him or anything around him. I can feel her, but he’s somehow blocking me.’

‘Fuck, can you see anything?’

After a minute of intense, palpable concentration, he opened his eyes.

‘She’s so smart,’ he said, running a hand through his hair. ‘She’s tapping her location in Morse code against her thigh. Sixty in SoHo.’

‘The hotel?’

‘Must be. Everyone ready?’

‘Which part are we portalling into?’

‘Rooftop bar,’ Magnus said. ‘Fabulous Mai Tai’s.’
The scene we landed in was not what I expected. The rooftop area was large and chilly, stylishly set out but totally devoid of people and after a second it was easy to see why.

There were people, technically. They were just in pieces.

Blood and gore was strewn like streamers and confetti; seats, floor, the bar. Everywhere we looked we saw little pieces of meat and blood.

Distantly, I heard the fire alarm ringing beneath us.

Clary knelt down and poked some clothing, attempting to locate anything we could use to ID the scraps of flesh. ‘What the hell happened?’

Simon stopped, turning abruptly. ‘Izzy?’

We all spun around, searching frantically. ‘What? You smell her?’ Jace asked, sharing my panic and worry.

‘There,’ Simon instructed, heading towards the small wooden bar area. ‘Behind.’

I ran to the edge of the rooftop, skidding to a halt as I peered behind the bar and saw my sister unconscious and lying in a wide puddle of blood on the ground.

‘Izzy!’ I put my hands on her still warm body, gently trying to assess the damage. Jace was right there a second later and he activated her healing rune and drew a few others to help. She stirred, but her injuries had been severe. She’d been beaten and shot twice in the stomach.

‘It’s OK,’ I said, ripping the hem of my shirt and wadding it against the wounds on her stomach which would not heal so quickly. ‘We’re here now.’

She groaned and tried to move, but Jace stopped her. ‘Let us heal you up some more first, OK? You can kick ass later.’

‘Is she all right?’ Clary called out. The area behind the bar was so narrow there wasn’t enough room for them to follow.

‘Move the bar back,’ I instructed.

Simon obliged, running to her side the moment he was finished.

‘Hey,’ he said shakily smiling at her as she tried to focus her vision on him. ‘What have I told you about showing off, huh?’

Jace was steadily applying fresh runes as I tore off more material to press against the still bleeding gunshot wounds close together in her stomach. Izzy looked at Simon and smiled weakly before croaking out, ‘Max...need to get Max here.’

‘Of course,’ Simon assured her. ‘Does Sebastian have him?’

She shook her head slowly. 'S'one...watching him.'
'Mother fucker,' Jace snarled quietly. 'We'll get him back here, sweetheart, don't worry.'

Izzy swallowed. 'Clary.'

Clary dropped to her knees, eyes bright as she took her friend's hand.

‘I’m right here.’

‘Sebastian,’ Izzy said thickly, throat working. ‘He’s your brother. I’m…sorry.’

‘I don’t care,’ Clary said, kissing her hand. ‘You’re all I care about right now.’

‘Alec,’ Jace said in a low tone that made my heart plummet. ‘One bullet is still inside her I think.’

‘Fuck. We need to get her back to the Institute.’

‘Should we risk moving her?’

‘I can freeze her body, put her in a kind of stasis,’ Magnus said. ‘That should be safe enough so we can move her.’

Jace looked at me, naked fear in his eyes completely mirroring mine. The feeling was unexpected and part of me distantly wondered if it was the bond between us bleeding his emotions so strongly into me…or if the other Alec was slowly taking control through my weaknesses.

I stroked my sister’s hair and nodded. ‘Do it.’

The medics in the Institute were second to none and it was less than an hour before they came to us with reassurances that Isabelle would be fine in a day or so. It was mostly the blood loss, they explained. The bullets had been removed, internal scarring fully healed.

‘Her injuries were substantial,’ one of them told me quietly. ‘She took one hell of a beating.’

Clary was beside herself, all unspent rage and anxiety. ‘I’m going to kill him,’ she said, head in her hands as we sat outside the medical rooms. ‘I’ll pull him apart, I swear to the Angel!’

‘We’ll all help,’ Simon said, staring at the doors. ‘But right now, we need to be smart and we need to be there for Izzy.’

‘Of course we will,’ Clary said. ‘That goes without saying. I just…feel responsible. He’s my brother, how could I not see it?’

Simon wrapped his arm around her and the two sat silently for a while. Jace had been quiet ever since the medics assured us she would be fine, but I could feel him so clear it was like his soul was speaking aloud.

He needed comfort. My Parabatai was mentally wrecked and he needed me.

‘Jace,’ I said softly. ‘Walk with me.’

He leaned away from the wall uncertainly, but Clary and Simon didn’t even look up from where
they sat, holding each other. He followed me as I led him to our living quarters and then his bedroom.

‘Shouldn’t we…?’ he asked.

‘She’s gonna be asleep for at least a few hours, you heard them.’

He looked down, unease plaguing him as he questioned my motives.

'Did Robert get your message?'

I nodded. 'He's taking Max to Alicante, they're going alone. He should be safe.'

'That's what he was using against her, right?'

'Had to be. She'd do anything for Max. He could have been lying, but she wouldn't take the risk.'

‘You need to shower,’ I told him firmly, but kindly. ‘You need to eat and then you need to sleep.’

‘Alec,’ he said in a rush, like he was forcing himself to say it. ‘We need to—’

‘No, we don’t,’ I countered gently. ‘We don’t need to do anything, OK? You need to take care of yourself and so do I. What good will we be otherwise?’

I went into his en suite and turned on the shower for him, setting it to the red-hot temperature he liked and then set out a fresh towel on the side.

‘I’m gonna make something for Clary too,’ I said as I dried my wet hand on my jeans. ‘She looks so pale.’

He was watching me, I felt it. In these quiet in-between moments, his scrutiny of me was intensified and I knew I had to be so careful.

‘Will you…?’ he began, but trailed off. ‘Do you want to stay?’

I looked up. ‘With you?’

He blushed. Oh, it was almost too much. ‘Yeah.’

I let out a pained sigh, shaking my head. ‘I’m so sorry, Jace,’ I told him. ‘I wish I could go back and be stronger for you. Not let it happen. I’ve fucked up so bad.’

‘No,’ he insisted, coming closer. ‘No, it was me too.’

I put my hands up, gesturing as though trying to control myself. ‘I just need some space, please. Let me take care of you like I know how to.’ I gave a half-hearted smile. ‘With food and sleep.’

His pain radiated over me. ‘Are we…going to be OK?’

I let myself experience that pain, let it penetrate me so that my eyes clouded with tears. ‘I want to believe that we will, Jace,’ I told him.

He had been slowly closing the distance between us and he stopped bare inches from me, his heartbeat echoing in my chest.

‘Is it really you?’ he breathed.
I laughed bitterly. ‘I wish it wasn’t.’

‘I can’t live without you, Alec. You know I can’t.’

I wiped my eyes. ‘So we’ll get past it, then. Whatever we have to do, OK?’

He wanted me to stay. He wanted me to kiss him and never leave his side. His soul sang it to me and the agony of not giving in there and then would forever stay with me.

‘I have to go,’ I forced myself to say. ‘Shower, rest. I’ll bring food.’

That was it. A little click as a final piece of his suspicions chipped away and fell. He believed me, now. My denial of self was enough to convince him.

At the door he said, ‘Say you still love me.’

I closed my eyes, chest tight. ‘Always,’ I promised. I waited for the door to close behind me before I allowed myself a small, victorious smile.

*A/N - That was one long motherfucker of a chapter and, quite frankly, testament to how much I love you all. I will warn you all that the next chapter is going to take a dark and triggery turn so be prepared. I am also way behind on my book so gaps between updates will vary for a while. Hope you enjoyed. Comments would be so appreciated.*
Chapter Thirteen: Fucking Hell

Chapter Summary

Trigger Warnings for this chapter.
Jace's night takes a dark and irreversible turn.

TRIGGER WARNINGS!!
This chapter is dark and grim (I warned you in the tag a while ago I tend to go dark and yup, here we are)
SPOILERS! It involves non explicit Non-Con by OMC's. End Spoilers!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

-Fucking Hell-

' Blue, blue caravan
Won't you drive away all of these tears?
For my true love is a man that I haven't seen in years.

He said, "Go where you have to for I belong to you until my dying day."

So, like a fool, blue caravan,

I believed him, and I walked away. '

-Vienna Teng

-Jace-

He’d left me to sleep, but it was unlikely to happen in the best of circumstances. The food he’d made, melty cheese toast pockets, sat uneaten on a plate by my bed. My mind and heart were a tightly wound knot of confusion and pain. A headache formed and took up residency right in the back of my skull.
I wanted to get drunk so bad my hands were shaking.

People had teased me before; Izzy and Alec often expressed their disapproval over how much I drank but I never listened. Drinking was fun, it made everything better, at least in the moment.

When I was alone though, it was clear how much I relied on it.


The ghost of Alec’s presence lingered long after he’d gone. He was only next door, our separation made of nothing but brick and plaster. I felt him, still, through the bond. This intangible thing, a link between us on a basic level. It was stronger than it had ever been before, now. His emotions were back to being well controlled again, nothing like how he was days ago. He felt like my Alec, but we were closer now. Bonded on a deeper level.

In the crashing quiet that always followed coming down from a mission, I sat alone and every bad thought I’d kept at bay came flooding in.

There were hundreds of images; regrets and fears. I experienced them one by one, letting those with the sharpest edges cut the deepest.

I was so fucking weak. Last night was my fault. It was my fault that Alec thought it was his fault. This was all on me.

It was always on me, right from the start.

‘So, your name’s Jonathon?’

I flinched. Every time someone said my full name, I heard my father and his masterful way of turning it into a rebuke.

‘I go by Jace,’ I said, slightly puffing out my chest.

The young Lightwood boy narrowed his eyes. ‘That’s not a derivative of Jonathon.’

As insolently as possible, I leaned back in the chair. ‘Jonathon Christopher. JC. Jace.’

‘I guess.’

Silence spread between us awkwardly. I looked around at the kitchen, taking in everything and delaying the time when I needed to look back at him.

‘When is your Mom coming back?’

‘I don’t know,’ he shrugged. ‘They might be a while if they’re discussing important stuff.’

‘Like what to do with me, huh?’

‘I suppose.’

I sighed and looked at him. ‘What was your name again? Alex?’
‘Alec,’ he corrected quickly.

‘Well,’ I said with no small amount of snark. ‘That’s not technically a derivative of Alexander, is it? There’s no C in Alexander.’

He changed the subject. ‘How old are you?’

‘Ten.’

‘I’m nearly twelve.’

I scoffed. ‘You want a medal?’

‘You’re rude.’

I balked slightly. ‘I am not. My…people always say I’m polite. You Mom said I was one of the most well-mannered boys she’d ever met.’

‘Well, you’re being rude to me.’

‘Yeah, well I’m just pissed off that I got shoved in here with you, like I need a babysitter.’

‘I think they didn’t want you to feel alone,’ Alec said softly, though still scowling slightly. ‘After, y’know.’

Just the mere reference to it got my back up. ‘Whatever.’

The kitchen door opened and a young girl was pushed gently inside by her Dad, Robert.

‘But I don’t want to!’ she insisted under her breath.

‘Why don’t you make the boys something to eat?’ he said, still pushing her in. ‘Won’t be long!’ He closed the door quickly and she turned with a defeated sigh.

‘Hello,’ she said dully to me. ‘I’m Isabelle.’

‘Jace,’ I said, giving her a nod.

She went and leaned up to the counter on tiptoes, reaching for a glass.

‘I’m not making any food,’ she warned. ‘I don’t even know why he said that.’

‘Did you hear anything?’ Alec asked his sister. ‘About what they’re saying?’

Isabelle shot me a hesitant glance. ‘Maybe.’

I looked down. ‘You can tell me, if it’s…what did they say?’

‘They said you saw it. You saw your Dad die.’ She didn’t say it with pity or sadness, just statement of fact, waiting for me to confirm.

Suddenly, my swagger faltered and threatened to crack. The vicious and vivid memory flared up painfully, so much that I could almost smell the smoke, feel the heat of the fire.

‘Yeah,’ I said, swallowing. ‘I saw it.’

Alec moved like he was going to put his hand on mine, but thought better of it. Traitorous
disappointment hit me hard, catching me off guard. Had I wanted him to touch me?

My father would have been disgusted.

Seeking physical reassurance, Jonathon? Weakness incarnate.

‘That’s…I’m sorry,’ the Lightwood boy said, glancing worriedly at his sister.

A retort sat ready and waiting, but I kept it at bay. ‘Thanks,’ I said instead. ‘So, what do you think will happen to me? I don’t have any other family. Is there, like, Shadowhunter foster care or whatever?’

‘No, not that I’m aware of,’ Alec said. ‘It’s possible you’ll stay here.’

‘With you?’

‘Our parents run this Institute, so yeah, I would think so.’

I tried to look annoyed. ‘OK.’

‘Do you want to come and train with us?’ Isabelle asked after a moment of silence.

Anything was better than sitting there. ‘Sure,’ I said, following them out of the kitchen.

‘Are you a good fighter?’ she asked.

I snorted. ‘Only the best.’

‘Arrogant, huh?’ she smirked.

‘Just honest.’

Alec chuckled, holding the door for us. ‘We’ll see.’

Unable to sleep and knowing how much Alec needed to sleep, I walked the residential halls of the Institute, careful to avoid anyone on active duty. I ended up circling back to the medical area, surprised to see Simon still there without Clary.

‘Hey,’ I said quietly. He looked up, blinking owlishly. ‘Sorry, were you asleep?’

‘Not really,’ he said, wincing and rubbing his neck. ‘Well, maybe but I immediately regret it. My neck is destroyed.’

I sat beside him. ‘No news?’

He shook his head. ‘Clary went to get coffee. We thought you were sleeping.’

‘I tried. No use.’

‘You’ve been through a lot, man,’ he said. ‘Sleep is necessary.’

I let my head fall back against the wall. ‘I’d rather be drunk, truth be told.’
'Hey,’ he said with the tone of someone breaching an awkward conversation. ‘I was thinking about something Alec asked me earlier and I…I don’t know if I’ve unintentionally fucked up.’

‘Oh?’

‘He was asking me about the…y’know, the deal you made.’

The gnawing feeling twisted. ‘What did you tell him?’

He blew air through his teeth. ‘I wasn’t paying attention enough to even think maybe I shouldn’t have said anything, that maybe you hadn’t told him. I said that you’d made a deal with a demon.’

No.

‘Oh, fuck, Simon!’

‘I’m really sorry,’ he said. ‘I really wasn’t thinking and he made it seem like he already knew, but when I asked Clary, she said he definitely didn’t know.’

If I didn’t want a drink before, I sure as shit did now. ‘Fucking hell!’

‘Language,’ a medic reprimanded, standing in the doorway.

We both whipped around comically fast.

‘Is she awake?’ Simon asked.

‘She is. If you’re quiet and contain your foul mouth, you can come see her but only for a few minutes.’

Trying to appear calm, we walked briskly in and made a beeline for her bed. She was sitting halfway upright and already looked so much better.

‘Izzy!’ I gasped, gently pressing a kiss to her cheek. ‘Are you OK?’

She smiled up at me. ‘I’m OK. You got Max out of France?’

‘He’s safe,’ I promised. ‘He’s travelling with Dad only, they’re gonna check in with us tomorrow so we know they’re OK.’

Simon bent to hug her, wrapping his arms carefully around her and holding her there longer than convention would have dictated. ‘I was so worried,’ he whispered.

‘I really am fine,’ she said. ‘Getting shot absolutely fucking sucks, though.’

I sat on the other side of her bed so Simon could sit beside her and hold her hand.

‘What happened?’ I asked.

She sighed and shook her head. ‘He took me, fucking asshole is stronger than he looks and he’s got some kind of powers. He explained that he needs the drug to stay good.’

‘Wait, what?’

She nodded. ‘I mean, that’s what he told me. Said he’d been Valentine’s evil experiment all his life and that until he was taken, like Alec was, and shot up with that shit, he’d been the biggest evil thing
“That ever evilled.”

Simon asked, ‘And then what? He just became good?’

‘Better than he was, at least. He wants to manufacture the drug for himself so he can sustain the change. He needed me to protect him when he went to meet the supplier. He threatened Max.’

‘So, the whole thing about the docks was bullshit then?’

‘He knew you’d check out the warehouse, stir up shit with the dealers and force the kingpin out in the open.’

‘What happened on the roof?’

She sighed. ‘He didn’t tell me how he knew, but the supplier was on the rooftop deck of that hotel. We went, he attacked the henchmen and all hell broke loose. I…” she faltered. ‘I did my best to protect him.’

‘We understand, Izzy,’ I assured her. ‘You did it for Max.’

‘I tried not to kill anyone,’ she said. ‘But his magic tore people apart, like they were bread. They panicked and started blanket shooting. I got hit, ducked for cover and must have passed out.’

‘You didn’t see the supplier? What happened to Sebastian?’

‘No,’ she said morosely. ‘It was chaos. Jace, I saw Alec with you all. He’s OK now?’

I nodded. ‘He got it out of his system.’ I left out the details, especially about how I helped him flush it out of his system with reality shattering sex.

‘You’re sure?’

‘I can feel it,’ I said. ‘He’s completely different.’

‘All right, that’s something good at least.’

‘She needs to rest,’ the Medic said as he walked past.

‘Yeah, we’ll come back tomorrow,’ Simon said before she could protest. ‘Do a full and impressive debrief after we’ve all slept.’

Reluctant, but clearly still exhausted, she agreed. ‘OK.’

I tried not to watch them part, but I saw the way he framed her face before pressing a fervent, gentle kiss to her forehead. I didn’t hear what he whispered.

‘Jace,’ she said as Simon moved away. ‘Thank you.’

I rubbed my neck. ‘What for?’

‘For taking care of Alec. He wouldn’t have got through it without you.’

The guilt of that pretty much split me in half.

‘No problem.’

‘Get some rest, huh? What use will you be if you can’t even stand upright?’
'Only the best,’ I told her with a wink.

She sighed, snuggling down into the bed, beneath the covers. ‘Still so arrogant.’

That first night was the worst. It was the most alone I’d ever felt in my entire life. I’d always had my father, even when things were difficult. Now, I had no one. Ten years old and alone in the world, in a strange bedroom with alien objects and a weird, almost sterile smell.

The bed was huge and too spacious. Four posters made it darker than it needed to be. This wasn’t anyone’s room. It was intended for guests. People staying briefly before moving on.

But I was not moving on.

In the darkness and cloying quiet, I lay wide awake and stared at the ceiling, seeing my father burn to death. He had screamed as he died. I’d never heard him scream before. The fire was so hot, everything since then had felt oddly cold.

I’d watched him burn and die, like a coward.

The emotion threatened to eat me alive. I kicked off the covers and sat on the edge of the high, ridiculously huge bed, feet dangling above the hardwood floor.

‘I’m sorry,’ I whispered, eyes tightly closed. ‘I’m so sorry.’

He wouldn’t have liked that, though, me apologising. ‘Try harder, Jace,’ I told myself, hearing his voice instead of my own.

That, more than anything, caused a sob to bubble up in my throat. I would never hear his voice again. The last time I’d ever heard him, he was screaming as he burned.

The sob turned into a wrenched yell, anger and despair crashing through me with no outlet but my own sorrow. Tears came, despite training against such weaknesses.

I wanted to go home, but it was burned to the ground. They told me they’d recovered his body, or what little remained of it, two days ago. Maybe I had no home anymore, but I could still try and find one for myself. Go to the places Dad had told me about, hunt the things we spoke of late at night. Become the warrior he expected me to be. I could finish my training alone; I was disciplined enough.

Alone. That word again.

I jumped down from the bed quietly, scouting around the room for what I could take. The clothes they gave me were all new, slightly too big and not worn in. I just needed a bag, something to put them in.

There was a soft knock on the door. I froze. Maybe if I stayed quiet, they would go away.

But no, the knock came again. ‘Jace?’

It sounded like the Lightwood boy.
I scrambled back up onto the bed, diving beneath the covers. ‘Yeah?’ I called out sleepily.

He opened the door and came inside.

‘What?’ I asked, sounding annoyed to have been woken.

‘Uh, sorry,’ he said quietly, slipping inside. ‘I heard…yelling?’

Oh, right.

‘Wasn’t me,’ I lied sullenly.

‘Yeah, I just didn’t know if you heard it too,’ he said. ‘Wow, your bed is huge.’

I sat up. ‘Yeah. I hate it.’

The older boy watched me for a moment. ‘You wanna swap? Mine is smaller.’

I bristled. ‘Smaller bed for the small boy?’

‘No. Just thought you might be more comfortable.’

I wouldn ’t be comfortable anywhere. ‘No, I’m fine.’

‘You said you hate it.’

‘Yeah, so?’

He looked bemused. ‘So, if you hate something, you should change it.’

‘We’re not all spoilt little rich kids, you know.’

He came closer and I was surprise to see he was smiling a little. ‘I know. You’re much cooler than I am and clearly tougher.’

‘Are you teasing me?’

‘No. Being honest.’

I frowned. ‘You’re weird.’

‘I know that too,’ he said. ‘Look, whatever that noise was, it scared me. Do you mind if I stay in here with you for a while?’

‘I don’t want you stay in here,’ I said. He blinked, clearly a little hurt. His pain affected me, made me want to take it back but I couldn’t. Instead I said, ‘Could we go into your room?’

‘Oh,’ he perked up. ‘Yeah, of course.’

I hopped down from the bed. ‘Lead on, Macduff.’

He grinned and held the door open for me. ‘You know, that’s a misquotation. It’s actually, Lay on, Macduff.’

I was about to snap at him, call him a know it all loser, but he hadn’t said it with hubris. I contained my response and nodded. ‘Huh. You learn something new every day.’
Part of him seemed to be expecting me to sneer at his correction. I knew I’d done the right thing when his face lit up. His smile was beautiful. There was no other word for it.

His room was miles away. Two different corridors to get there. It was already a drastic improvement from the hollow guest cavern I’d been given. His bed was reasonably normal, still a double but much lower and he had no curtains on the posters. It was lived in, well used and smelled of him.

‘There’s a bathroom in there,’ he pointed. ‘I don’t know if you got a chance to have a shower or whatever.’

‘I did,’ I told him. It was one of the first things the paramedics suggested, once they established I had no injuries. I remembered them saying it would be good for me to get clean as soon as possible. Wash away the smell of…

I shook myself. ‘Can I stay in here? I’ll sleep on the floor. I just don’t want to go back to that other room.’

‘Of course you can,’ he said. ‘But you take the bed, I’ll just go next door whenever you’re tired.’

‘No,’ I said quickly. ‘That’s OK.’

He nodded and seemed to understand, though he didn’t comment.

‘You wanna talk?’

‘No,’ I said automatically because that seemed like some girly bullshit.

He sat on his bed. ‘Yeah, that would be lame. You’re a great fighter, you know.’

‘I do indeed know that,’ I said, sitting at the end of the bed opposite him.

He cracked a grin. ‘So humble.’

‘Why should I pretend to be ashamed of being talented? You’re amazing with a bow and arrow, you’re not ashamed.’

He blushed a little. ‘I’m not amazing.’

‘Oh, you are ashamed.’

‘No,’ he said, picking at the bedspread. ‘I just don’t go around broadcasting it.’

‘Why not?’

He opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out.

‘Yeah, exactly. Modesty is useless.’

‘People won’t like you if you go around saying how great you are.’

‘Some people won’t,’ I shrugged. ‘But you’re not great at everything. I mean no one is. Being proud of what you are great at shouldn’t be an issue.’

‘You’re great at a lot of stuff.’
'Yeah,’ I nodded, leaning back. ‘I can speak four languages. I play piano. I kick ass.’

He smiled. ‘No denying that.’

I couldn’t help but smile in return. ‘And you’re a kick ass archer. Own it.’

‘I like that you’re full of yourself,’ Alec said. ‘Confidence is good.’

‘Do you go out on missions?’ I asked, changing the subject.

‘Yeah,’ he replied. ‘Izzy and me go out with some of the older kids, the teenagers. Hodge always comes along to supervise. Have you had much experience in the field?’

‘I have.’

‘You killed things?’

‘Yup.’

‘Scary things?’

‘They’re not scary,’ I said. ‘They’re just dangerous.’

‘Like what?’

‘Demons.’

His jaw dropped. ‘You have not killed demons!’

I grinned. ‘Have too. Well, banished them after a solid ass kicking.’

‘On your own?’

‘My Dad supervised,’ I said. ‘But mostly on my own, yeah. Last one was tough, I did it all myself. My Dad just watched to make sure nothing went wrong; he didn’t intervene at all.’

‘What kind of demon?’

‘Nasty fucker,’ I said. ‘Bela-whatever.’

Alec gasped. ‘You swore.’

Dad never let me swear. Vulgarity was unappealing and a waste of vocabulary. It had felt good though, giving me a small thrill of exhilaration.

‘So?’ I said smugly. ‘It’s only a word.’

‘Yeah, but it’s a bad word.’

‘Alec,’ I sighed. ‘It’s just a word.’

‘Right, but it means…y’know.’

‘Sex? What’s wrong with that? It’s not like it’s a bad thing.’

He bit his lip, clearly a little excited. ‘I guess. Don’t let Mom hear you say it, though.’
I snorted. ‘Please. She’s not my Mom.’

He looked around the room. ‘Haven’t heard that noise again.’

‘No,’ I said. ‘Maybe Isabelle had a nightmare or something.’

‘Yeah, maybe. So, tell me more about the demons you banished?’

I moved closer, crossing my legs. ‘All right, get ready to swoon, Lightwood.’

There was no sleep to be had and I couldn’t face going back to that room alone. So, I went where I usually did when I couldn’t look myself in the mirror.

‘Another,’ I slurred, music loud enough that I blissfully couldn’t hear myself think. It was like white noise. ‘S’meant to be to the top!’

The bartender rolled her eyes. ‘It was, dipshit.’

‘That’s rude,’ I said and threw back the freshly poured tequila. I felt level again; calm and relaxed. My hands were steady, my entire system at ease. ‘But I’ll let it go.’

‘Hey man!’

Someone clapped their hand on my shoulder, hard and clumsy. I looked up slowly, supremely pissed off to see that my calm had been smudged by none other than Fuckface Adam.

‘Fuck off,’ I told him, eloquently.

‘Haven’t seen you in here for ages,’ he chattered, blinking rapidly. I peered at him.

‘You’re fucking sky high, man.’

‘Yeah?’ he sniffed, eye twitching. ‘And you’re not?’

‘Nope. I’m drunk. There’s a difference, you tweaker piece of shit.’

He leaned on the bar beside me, not noticing his elbow was in a small puddle. ‘Where’s your bodyguards? Don’t see them around anywhere.’

‘I’m shocked you can see at all.’

‘All alone, then?’

I narrowed my eyes. ‘I was tryin’ to be, yeah!’

‘Well,’ he said, not remotely talking the hint. ‘I’ve got some friends over there, y’know. They’d love to meet you, especially after you started taking it up the ass.’

‘Fuck you!’

He snorted. ‘Not without a condom. Who knows what I might catch?’
I grabbed him by the collar and shoved him down painfully against the bar. People yelled and scrambled to get away, while others excitedly crowded closer to see a fight.

‘HEY! Let him go, Jace!’ I looked up at Nick’s serious face and relented, not in the mood to fight in the slightest. Adam slumped to the ground, coughing.

‘Rude,’ I said, grabbing my wallet from the bar and heading to the bathroom. People gave me a respectful distance, but when the music resumed, they went back to their night and the incident faded almost immediately.

The queue for the Ladies Room was long and as I passed, several of the girls greeted me. I managed a wave, but didn’t reply. I shoved past the three guys waiting outside the Mens Room and went inside, blinking in the harsh lights.

I tried to steady myself over the urinal, unzipping my fly.

‘You Jace?’ someone asked, coming to stand nearby.

‘One ‘n only,’ I said.

‘Thought as much.’

I didn’t look at the guy. Didn’t care enough to.

‘I think you know my friend?’

I sighed. ‘Probably.’

‘Yeah, you remember Dan? He said he met you in here.’

‘Uh huh.

‘Said you were a great fuck.’

I finished up and gave him the best cold glare I was capable of in such a condition.

‘That’s what they all say,’ I said and turned to leave.

‘How about we go back to mine?’

‘How about no?’

He followed me out of the bathroom, back into blissful noise and darkness.

‘C’mon, I’ll let you call me Alec.’

I stopped dead, facing him. ‘The fuck did you say?’

He gave a sneering grin. ‘Dan said you wanted to call him Alec while he fucked you. Said he’s never had such a good fuck. We asked around and apparently, you’ll fuck anyone.’

I managed a nasty, brief smile. ‘Not you, though.’

His expression lost the sneer, a splinter of anger cracking his cockiness. ‘Why not?’

‘I’m really fuckin’ bored now. Why don’t you go find your little buddy Dan and take turns fucking each other?’
He didn’t reply, eyes glittered with unvoiced anger and rejection. I left him there and shoved through the crowd, a sick feeling welling in my stomach. I shouldn’t have come out tonight, should have stayed home.

I left the club and waited at the side of the door to see if the asshole followed me, but he didn’t. People came and went, but not him. After a few minutes, I left.

This would normally be the part where I called Alec. I’d call, he’d come running and make sure I got home safe. My phone felt heavy in my pocket, but I didn’t call him. There were too many reasons, chief among them was that in my drunken state, I was more than likely to attempt something stupid.

Like kiss him.

Like telling him I needed him more than anything.

Like telling him I wanted his hand over my mouth while he fucked me again.

I had money for a cab, they were usually parked two blocks over so I took a shortcut through the alley between Sang’s and the building that used to be a gym. It was a little colder than usual for this time of year and the air felt nice in my lungs. I tasted moisture and sensed it would rain soon.

Though my instincts were drenched in alcohol, I heard footsteps. More than one pair. I turned and saw two men following me.

‘Where you goin’, Jace?’ the guy from before asked. His friend, Dan, gave me a look that, even in my drunk state, made pretty fucking crystal clear what his intentions were.

‘Home,’ I said loudly.

‘Nuh uh,’ the guy said.

I heard the third pair of footsteps too late. I tried to spin around but something cracked me over the head. Pain exploded, yellow light flashed inside my eye sockets and before I had time to react, he hit me again in the same place.

I went down hard, the world spinning as I struggled to stay conscious. I felt hands on me, someone picked me up and for a moment, I thought it was Alec. I thought he’d saved me.

But it wasn’t. I heard them laughing as they carried me somewhere else.

‘Don’t worry, sweetheart,’ one of them said, patting on me the cheek. ‘Wouldn’t wanna fuck you in the rain, would we?’

‘Jace,’ Maryse said, looking at me over her morning coffee.

The way she said it made me hesitant. ‘Yeah?’

‘I’ve noticed you’re sleeping in Alec’s room. Every night.’

Defensively, I shrugged. ‘So? He gets scared, sometimes.’
‘You’re protecting him?’

I stared down at my cereal. ‘Yeah.’

She nodded. It was just us two in the small kitchen.

‘Well, I wanted to ask if you would mind moving into the room next to Alec?’

‘What?’

‘There’s a room next to Alec, it’s a lot smaller than the one we originally gave you, but I would consider this a favour.’

‘Why?’ I asked with no small amount of suspicion.

‘Alec sleeps better when you’re near him,’ she said, sipping her coffee. ‘He seems happier too. For a while, we were all very concerned about him, but having met you, it seems to have changed him.’

She was talking about me, offering me what I wanted in the guise of me doing her a favour for Alec.

‘Yeah, OK,’ I said. ‘I guess I don’t mind.’

‘Thank you,’ she said with a warm smile. ‘It’ll mean a lot to Alec.’

‘He’s nice,’ I said. ‘And Izzy.’

‘Is there anything I can do for you in return?’

I considered her question. ‘Maybe…maybe I could go out on patrols with Izzy and Alec?’

She seemed surprised.

‘Yes, I suppose that would be fine. Hodge still supervises.’

‘I know, Alec told me. I’d like to get back to doing what I’m good at.’

She smiled indulgently. ‘Alec has told me how gifted you are. He said you’re like a superhero, only real.’

Her compliment, even second hand, made my stomach swoop low with something resembling pride and pleasure.

‘I try,’ I said with a cheeky grin.

She leaned across the table and cupped my face briefly, fingers stroking my cheek.

‘Alec will learn a lot from you, I’ve no doubt. You’re a good boy, Jace.’

‘JACE! JACE!’
Hands on my face, slapping lightly, pulled me into consciousness.

I jerked awake violently, trying to shove him away. It was dark, the only light coming through a window behind him. I pushed him back as he said my name repeatedly.

‘JACE, STOP! It’s me, it’s Alec!’

Alec. It was Alec. Relief slammed into me so hard I could have cried.

‘Jace,’ he said, breathlessly as his hands moved, uncertain of whether to touch me or not. ‘Jace, I couldn’t find you; the bond was…you were too drunk, I…”

‘Alec,’ I said slowly, trying to clear my head from the nightmare. ‘What happened?’

His voice broke. ‘Jace, I’m sorry.’

He was crying. Angel, why was he crying? Was he hurt?

The thought of injury made me realise, quite suddenly, how much pain I was in. My whole body felt like it had been beaten with a sledgehammer and my head was splitting with the worst migraine I’d ever experienced. Gingerly, I put my hand to the back of my head and felt sticky, old blood. My skin was cold and I was in a state of undress that triggered a primal fear.

‘Alec,’ I said again, mind not cooperating. ‘Why…?’

He was still crying; I’d never seen him cry like this. His sorrow resonated deeply inside me; a great chasm of grief and anguish and in the centre of it, was my name.

Abstractly, I began to understand, but my mind was determined not to cooperate.

‘I was so close,’ he sobbed. ‘I was outside, I-I couldn’t find you until it was too late!’

For the first time, I looked around, eyes adjusting to the darkness. It was a dilapidated, vast room. Broken windows and dirty floors. No lights but for the streaming, cold moonlight from outside.

This was…where they’d carried me.

‘Oh,’ I gasped, realisation punching the breath from me. ‘Oh my God.’

‘I’m sorry,’ he cried, not knowing what to do. ‘I’m sorry, Jace, please…I’m so sorry!’

Small, distorted pieces trickled back slowly, but I didn’t want them. I could not bear them.

No, my mind said. No.

‘It’s OK,’ I told Alec, raising a torn and bloodied hand to try and calm him somehow. ‘I-I’m OK.’

He couldn’t stop saying he was sorry. Over and over he said it. His heartbreak was too great for me to absorb even an echo of it. Distantly, I felt myself disconnecting from my own pain. It had to be put away, locked up tight somewhere at least for now.

I would die, otherwise.

‘Alec,’ I said, trying to make him look at me. I couldn’t keep my voice steady. ‘I’m OK. See? Look, I’m fine. A little banged up, but nothing a rune won’t fix.’
He put his hands on my face, his devastation total and evident. ‘I failed you.’

‘No,’ I said, shaking my head despite the pain. ‘No, you… it’s all OK.’

‘It’s not,’ he wept. ‘I don’t know… please tell me what to do.’

I gripped both sides of his face, ignoring the pain in my hands and fingertips, and held him steady.

‘Look at me! Alec, I need you to be strong for me. You understand?’ he blinked tears down his face, so much sadness in his beautiful blue eyes. ‘Be strong for me, Parabatai.’

Gently, his hands wrapped around my wrists, just holding me.

‘I could feel it,’ he said, face screwed up. ‘I felt what they did and I c-couldn’t get to you to stop it.’

I pressed my forehead to his, allowing myself a moment of pure, undiluted suffering, shared by us both.

‘You did what you could,’ I said shakily. ‘I’m alive, Alec. That’s all that matters, right?’

The thought of losing me struck him hard; a minor chord in his symphony of distress.

‘Yes,’ he said, trying to shore up enough strength to control himself. ‘You’re alive.’

He was telling himself that, the same way I was. It could have been worse. I was alive. It didn’t matter, not really. I was alive. Bruises and cuts, skinned fingernails, internal bleeding maybe.

Alive, though. That was enough, it would fucking have to be enough.

‘And I’m OK,’ I told him, closing my eyes. ‘Or I’ll be OK once I’ve been healed.’

It was a lie, one of my worst, but it said I lot that he didn’t challenge it.

‘What can I do?’

I move back, releasing his face. It hurt to move.

‘Take me home.’

Almost immediately, he went to call for an ambulance and I stopped him. He didn’t ask why, just silently helped me get dressed and on my feet. I tried to ignore details, but it was difficult. My jeans and belt were cut with a knife, tossed in a corner near my jacket. The jeans didn’t stay up well, but I gripped them tightly and he helped me walk.

‘Let me carry you,’ he suggested. ‘Or at least do a healing rune.’

‘No,’ I said, teeth gritted. ‘Not until we’re home.’

‘Jace…’

How could I explain to him that healing myself before I was clean filled me with terror that somehow, a piece of them would get stuck inside me?
I didn’t have to, of course. He felt it.

‘Let me carry you then,’ he begged.

Like they carried me in there?

‘I’m OK,’ I said, flashing him a brief hint of a smile. ‘Been hurt worse.’

In the end, we went back to the Institute. I wanted to go to the apartment, but there was nothing of ours there. No clothes, no beds even. We took a taxi home, the line of cabs not thirty feet from where I’d been hit over the head. The journey back was silent. He held me as much as I would let him, which wasn’t much.

I would not have him contaminated.

So many times we’d made it back to our rooms without detection, but tonight had to be the exception. Henson was headed to HQ with two others as we made it inside.

‘Oh,’ he said, shooting us a disdainful up and down. ‘Looks like quite the party.’

Alec said nothing and we continued to move. Henson hung back as the others went on.

‘Y’know,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘I get that you like to let loose drinking, Herondale, but this is pretty beyond the pale. It’s not a damned Frat House!’

‘Get the fuck away,’ Alec said, low and cold. ‘Before you cease to exist.’

Henson blinked. ‘What?’

‘I will rent you apart,’ Alec said. ‘Unless you move.’

The man faltered, clearly unsure of the seriousness of the threat. After a moment, however, he stalked away, muttering under his breath.

‘What a dick,’ I said, trying to be funny and failing completely.

‘Nearly there,’ Alec said, supporting me almost entirely at this point. It would have been easier for him to carry me and I knew it, but the thought was too much.

We went into his bedroom. He had the en suite and it was pretty much my room as much as his anyway. Gently, he lowered me onto the same bed where I took his virginity and finally, I let go of him and tried to catch my breath.

He went straight to the bathroom and got me a glass of water. I took a few sips, painfully reminded of our role reversal, not long ago.

I kept my focus on the glass, not wanting to look up and see him.

‘You want to shower,’ he said. It wasn’t a question.

‘I need to, yeah.’ I almost wanted to make a self-deprecating joke about how stunningly accurate the stereotype of rape victims always being in the shower really was, but that was the first time I’d even thought of the word and it brought bile up into my throat. I kept it down by sheer force of will.

‘You can’t shower like this,’ he said gently. ‘You can barely stand.’
‘I’ll be fine,’ I said, slowly reaching to put the glass on his nightstand. He took it and placed it down for me, making his point pretty well.

‘You won’t let me heal you first?’

‘No.’

‘Can I help you, then?’

‘Help me shower?’ I stared unseeingly at some point across the room. ‘OK.’

It was quite something to have him undress me and it be the least sexy thing in the world. He’d only helped me get dressed less than half an hour ago. Each time he peeled off a layer, I felt his pain at seeing some new injury I forced myself to avoid.

The disconnect was strong and I wanted to keep it that way.

‘All right,’ he said thickly. ‘Let’s go.’

Together, we made it to the bathroom. He ran the shower, adjusting the temperature. Then he removed his jacket, shoes and shirt, but left on his vest and pants.

‘Ready?’ he asked. I gave a brisk nod.

The water hit my skin and my nervous system jolted.

‘Too hot?’

‘No,’ I said flatly. ‘I’m fine.’

We got inside the spacious shower together and I stood under the spray, letting my eyes fall shut. The hot water brought attention to each little cut, graze, bruise and ache. I knew if I looked down, I would see my own blood circling the drain.

‘Jace,’ he said hesitantly, holding me up with one arm. ‘Do you want me to…clean you?’

I really didn’t. I couldn’t bear any of it. Him touching in me this way, having to let him do this after…I shook my head, hoping to dislodge the thought.

It was easier, though and then he could heal me. I would be healed and all of this, it would be like a bad dream.

‘Yeah, OK,’ I said.

He rubbed soap onto his hands. ‘I…I’m going to touch you now, OK? Tell me to stop if anything is too much.’

‘Yeah.’

Slowly and methodically, he began to clean my body. He knew what I wanted and he sought to give me that cleanliness, if only exterior. His hands were careful, making sure every inch of me was washed and rinsed. He stayed silent the entire time and now he was trying to control his thoughts and reactions. I appreciated the effort, if not the lack of success.

When he came to the last place, the thing I dreaded most, he paused.
‘I don’t—’ he broke off, unable to vocalise his inability to proceed as emotion overwhelmed him. I opened my eyes and braced myself, leaning against the glass.

‘Just do it,’ I said. ‘Make me clean.’

But the water would never be hot enough. My skin would never shed and regrow enough.

I would never be clean again.

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Only once I was dry and my clothes were all thrown away did I allowed him to heal me. I sat on his bed wearing his pyjamas while he worked angelic magic to remove my injuries.

Him drawing the rune made it stronger, somehow. It worked faster and in barely a minute, my body was entirely damage free.

‘You feel OK?’ he asked tentatively.

‘Yeah,’ I said, looking down at the freshly repaired skin on my fingers. ‘Much better.’

‘Jace, I’m so sorry,’ he told me. I couldn’t bear his apology.

‘Don’t,’ I said. ‘Please, I just…I can’t do this, all right?’

‘I know you can’t,’ he said, wiping his eyes. ‘I can feel what you want, what you need and I don’t know if I can do it.’

‘You have to.’

‘I can’t pretend nothing happened to you. I can’t!’

I turned to the side, anywhere but his eyes. ‘It’s what I need. At least for now.’

‘You think it’s your fault,’ he whispered.

‘It was,’ I said bluntly. ‘I got drunk, I provoked him. I left without calling you. I’m amazed it hasn’t happened before, really.’

‘No,’ he insisted. ‘No, it was not! The fault is theirs; you know that!’

‘Alec,’ I said, forcing myself to look at him. ‘I need you to promise me two things.’

‘No.’

‘I’m asking as your Parabatai.’

‘Don’t make me promise it, I won’t.’

I took his hands in mine.

‘You promise me right here and now that you won’t tell anyone.’ He resisted. ‘If you love me, you’ll do it.’
He ground his jaw; eyes bright. ‘I promise I won’t tell anyone.’

‘Good, and now promise me you won’t kill them.’

He looked down, tears running as he shook his head.

‘No.’

‘Promise me right now.’

‘I won’t.’

‘Alec, I can feel what you want to do to them. I just…I can’t have that, all right? Promise me. Hey, I mean it.’

‘I don’t want to make a promise I know I’ll break.’

I leaned back. ‘Then you don’t love me.’

He looked up, resentful of this boundary and of my manipulation.

‘That’s not fair.’

‘It’s what I need,’ I said plainly. ‘Swear to me.’

Finally, I felt him acquiesce, albeit bitterly. ‘I swear I won’t kill them.’

‘Good,’ I said as quicksand-like exhaustion began to pull me down. ‘After tonight, we don’t talk about unless I say so, got it?’

He nodded miserably. ‘Whatever you need.’

‘OK. Do you want me to stay?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘I’ll go back to my own room.’

There was this moment where he stood and I knew exactly what he was thinking. If he’d have stayed with me earlier that night, none of this would’ve happened. He hated himself then, blamed himself more than I would ever be able to talk him out of.

‘You stay here,’ he said, grabbing his phone and a change of clothes. ‘You’ll sleep better in here. I’ll only be next door.’

His heartbreak was mine, everything shared between us now. No walls or divides. Ostensibly, there wasn’t any point asking him to leave.

But I needed to be alone. I couldn’t be near him.

‘Yeah, sure,’ I said. ‘Remember what I said.’

‘Of course. Night.’

He didn’t look back as he left and I knew it was because he was crying again. Part of me was so disconnected, I wondered why he was even that upset.

‘You’re OK,’ I breathed so quietly once he closed the door. ‘You’re fine.’
Tomorrow would be better. Tomorrow I would solidify the necessary pretence that none of this was real and eventually, it wouldn’t be real. It was fade, like a scar.

I told myself that until darkness came and took me.

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_A/N - OK, so I realise this is a bit of a left turn, but that's how I wanted it; an unexpected gut punch. I hope the trigger warnings were sufficient for anyone who needed them._

_Apologies for the delay, this was tough to write, thanks so much for all your comments and support so far. Next chapter up sooner, I hope._
Chapter Fourteen: Won't You Let Me Try?

Chapter Summary

Aftermath, decisions, flashbacks involving Clary and Alec says, 'What?' more than usual.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

-Won’t You Let Me Try?- 

‘There's a dream that I see, I pray it can be.

Look cross the land, shake this land.

A wish or a command.

A dream that I see, don't kill it, it's free,

You're just a man, you get what you can.’

- Cat Power

- Clary -

‘This is so fucked up.’

‘Language!’

I rolled my eyes, Lightwood style. ‘Luke, I’m not a kid.’

‘You’re my kid,’ he said firmly. ‘And you sound just like them. They swear a lot, especially Jace.’

‘Alec swears just as much,’ I told him, cracking open can of cola. ‘Only not in front of adults.’

Luke chuckled. ‘I think Alec is an adult.’

The sugar and caffeine hit me in a blissful jolt. ‘You know what I mean.’

‘How are they?’
I shrugged. ‘Still waiting to see Izzy. Simon said she was up for a bit, seemed OK.’

‘You care about her.’

‘I love her,’ I told him. ‘She’s my best friend.’

‘I thought Simon was your best friend.’

‘He is. You can have more than one. Anyway, it’s inevitable that they’ll be Simon and Izzy soon. A couple. My two best friends.’

He nodded quietly. ‘And how’s Alec?’

‘He seems fine,’ I said to him. ‘Jace stayed with him while he got the drug out of his system. He seemed almost normal again.’

‘The others who had the drug, they all reacted differently.’

He was hedging. ‘What? You think he’s still in danger?’

‘No, just that you and the others should all keep an eye on him.’

‘Jace will.’

‘I know that, but Jace is hardly objective when it comes to Alec.’

I put the drink down on Luke’s coffee table. There were no coasters. He didn’t give a damn about rings on the cheap wood. ‘They slept together I think.’

Luke nodded solemnly. ‘I thought as much from seeing Jace in the lab. The blood drained from his face. I’ve never seen him look that way.’

‘Luke, why is it forbidden by the Clave?’

‘I knew you’d ask that.’ He sighed. ‘The law is hard, but it is the law, Clary.’

‘OK, but why?’

He stared off for a moment. ‘I’m sure they have their reasons. You want to talk about Sebastian?’

‘You mean Jonathon?’

‘Whatever you’d like to call him.’

His offer was genuine, but I wasn’t ready to discuss anything beyond what was next.

‘No, I’m OK,’ I said, glancing at my phone and seeing messages. ‘When things are more stable, maybe.’

‘You just said everything is fucked up.’

‘It is, but it’s not totally *fucked* just yet.’

‘What can I do to help?’

I stared at my father, for all intents and purposes. ‘I need you to find him.’
'Find Seb— Jonathon?'

'Yes, on top of your amazing and never-ending help keeping any heat away from us as a result of the huge rooftop blowout.'

He waved a hand dismissively. 'There was no CCTV for hours before and during the attack, no leads. I wouldn’t worry.'

'Thanks.'

'You’d better get back. Your tribe will be lost without you, kiddo.'

I smiled wryly as I stood. 'I kinda doubt it.'

My hair was fanned out on the bedspread, his fingers curling through it every few seconds and he kissed me deeper. The room was hot and stifling, summer determined to be everywhere. My skin was damp with sweat.

Kissing Jace was incredible. He was a force of nature when it came to kissing; hot, intense and caring. His plush lips were confident as they moved against mine.

It was perfect, except all we ever did was kiss. I wanted him to kiss me harder, to take things further, but he never did. The urgency was not there for him as it was with me.

'Jace,' I broke off breathlessly.

'What’s wrong?' he asked, concern flooding his mismatched eyes. 'Are you OK?'

His concern prickled me, sparking irritation.

'I’m fine, why wouldn’t I be fine?'

'I don’t know, it’s hard to know without…' He trailed off, rubbing his neck.

'Without what? Reading my mind?'

'I can’t actually read Alec’s mind,' he explained patiently.

My irritation blossomed into anger.

'You’re not your Parabatai, Jace.'

His concern expanded into worry. 'I know that, Clary. What’s wrong?'

What was wrong? He was literally the most beautiful boy I had ever met. We had chemistry; I was attracted to him. He was a superhero, of sorts. He was everything I dreamed of.

'We never do more than kiss,' I said, unable to shake the anger.

'What? I don’t—'

'All we do is make out, Jace.'

He looked hurt. 'And that’s boring?'

'No, it’s not boring but I want more.'
He didn’t move or react. ‘OK.’

‘OK as in…we’ll have sex?’

‘As in OK I’m listening to you.’

I huffed. ‘Jace, I know you’ve had sex with other girls.’

‘Yeah, so?’

‘So, don’t you want that from me?’

‘Clary,’ he moved back. ‘What the hell? I do want that with you, just…not yet.’

‘Look,’ I said. ‘You know how I feel about you, but it’s been months! We only ever kiss! You’ve never even felt me up!’

‘Maybe I don’t want to rush things,’ he said a little defensively.

Don’t say it. Don’t say it.

‘Well, apparently it’s never stopped you rushing with other girls!’

He blinked. ‘What?’

‘I heard—’

‘You heard what?’ he asked quickly, sitting way back, expression closing off. ‘Heard from who, huh?’

‘I know you sleep around sometimes,’ I said, attempting to be diplomatic and immediately failing. ‘Not in a bad way or anything, but I just don’t understand! You only ever want to kiss me.’

‘I like kissing you.’

He said it so earnestly, without guile and my anger wavered.

‘I do too,’ I said. ‘But it never goes anywhere.’

He looked to the side, frustrated. ‘Why does it have to go somewhere? I like being with you and kissing you without the…expectation of anything else.’

‘So, you don’t want anything else from me?’

He looked back, meeting my questioning gaze. ‘This sounds weird, I guess but I like you too much for it to be…’ he trailed off, rubbing his eyes. ‘I like you too much to ruin it with sex.’

‘Jace,’ I said, huffing a laugh. ‘Why would sex ruin what we feel?’

He didn’t answer. ‘I care about you.’

‘I care about you too,’ I told him. ‘Sex won’t ruin that.’

‘You can’t be sure,’ he said. ‘And I don’t want to take the risk.’

I sighed. ‘Jace, are you not attracted to me?’
‘Of course I am,’ he said a little wildly now. ‘You’re gorgeous, Clary, and I care about you so much! I want to be with you all the time, I just don’t want to spoil anything.’

He seemed to think that explained everything when really, it explained precisely zero about what the hell was happening between us.

I wanted to talk more, but he had already detached from the moment.

‘Look,’ he said, sliding off the bed and gathering his shoes. ‘I gotta go find Alec, we’re patrolling tonight.’

‘Yeah, sure,’ I said easily, not wanting him to see how upset I was. ‘I’ll just…wander around.’

‘Izzy is training, I think,’ he offered, pressing a kiss to my cheek. ‘Love you.’

‘You too,’ I told him as he left.

Izzy still seemed sore, despite the Medics all proclaiming she was fully healed. It was hard to tell, of course, because Izzy was so brave, but I knew her. I knew what that small wrinkle of her nose meant when she sat up in the hospital bed.

‘How are you?’ she asked me quietly.

‘Jesus, Iz,’ I said. ‘You’re the one who was shot. Twice!’

‘I’m good,’ she said, eyes trained on me. ‘I’m not the one who found out I had a brother.’

‘I don’t really know what to make of it,’ I sighed, stomach clenching unpleasantly. ‘I feel like I knew but I just couldn’t see it, you know?’

‘He was a good liar,’ Izzy said. ‘I didn’t see it either. Alec knew. Thank the Angel he was nearing the end of his high on that shit, he broke down and told me.’

I took her hand in mine. ‘I thought you were dead,’ I told her. ‘I saw you and I thought you were dead.’ Tears sprang to my eyes. ‘You can’t do that to me.’

She smiled gently. ‘Never.’

‘Did he hurt you?’

‘No. He was polite and kept his distance.’

I nodded. ‘That’s good.’

‘You want to ask what happened on the roof,’ she ascertained.

‘If you’re OK to talk about it.’

Izzy shrugged. ‘I already gave my statement, it’s fine.’ She took a deep breath which trembled on the last of the exhale. ‘I was his bodyguard. He took me there knowing I would protect him because he
had Max, or so he said.’

‘And who was there on rooftop?’

‘It was a meeting. Top tier people, apparently. There were civilians too,’ she added, softly. ‘As soon as they saw him, everything went to hell. They started shooting before we could even get close. Sebastian… he used his powers or whatever and tore them up. I protected him best I could, but it was chaos. I got shot and he picked me up and put me behind the cabana.’ She paused, looking down at our hands entwined. ‘Clary, he gave me a message for you. Only for you.’

My heart clenched painfully. ‘What is it?’

‘He said to tell you only. I debated just telling the boys, but I wanted to let you decide.’ Izzy took a deep breath. ‘He said he has something to tell you…about Jace.’

‘What? What does that mean?’

‘I have no idea. “I have something to tell Clary about Jace.” That was verbatim what he said. I passed out after.’

I leaned back a little, staring off at the wall. ‘OK, well let’s do the logic walk. A trap. Maybe, but why? I seek him out without the others knowing and he… what? Grabs me?’

Izzy’s hand tightened on mine. ‘He told me that before the drug, in his natural state of evil, he was kind of obsessed with you. It could be his endgame. We know so little about him.’

‘I just…I don’t know, I don’t think that’s it. He could have taken me any time. We didn’t suspect anything.’

‘OK, so maybe he’s counting on you telling Jace, like before with the waterfront.’

‘I tell Jace, he goes after Sebastian and gets taken prisoner. Sebastian has Jace, but for what?’

‘Or,’ Izzy said. ‘It’s a distraction. To get us out of the Institute? To draw our focus? He’s smart, Clary.’

I thought for a minute, mind whirling. ‘No,’ I said. ‘I think he told you knowing that we were close. He knew you’d only tell me. He knew we’d consider the possibility of a trap or a betrayal.’

‘You think he’s going to contact you.’

I nodded. ‘And this was just to prepare me.’

‘Do you think we should tell the boys?’

‘No,’ I said with certainty. ‘They’ll be looking to intercept him and it’ll throw them off, it potentially being about Jace.’

‘I agree. But, Clary, what do you think he wants? If he genuinely only had something to tell you, he could send a text, right?’

I narrowed my eyes. ‘It’s a peace offering. He wants to something resembling forgiveness in my eyes when he looks at me.’

‘And will he?’
I looked at her, my best friend. ‘Not after what he did to you, babe.’

She grinned a little. ‘Thank you. Are you OK? What happened while I was gone?’

‘Honestly? Not that much.’

-Alec-

The divide was crumbling. There was no other way to describe it. The drug was strong and still very much in my system, but this overruled it.

He was coming through. The other.

The… incident last night, it transcended everything. It had affected me on every level, conscious or otherwise. My self was shaken, disjointed. It was a bare echo of Jace’s pain, of course. Nothing but a reflection, but even that was unbearable.

Why hadn’t I been able to find him? He was so close, I’d been able to sense his presence, but I couldn’t pinpoint it. His fear and pain had infected me, driving common sense and reason away. Why hadn’t I called for help or backup?

Well, I knew the answer to that, at least.

Because I wanted to save him myself.

Because I wanted him to be grateful.

Because I wanted to show him the dangers of being away from me.

Because I wanted to control him.

‘You let it happen,’ I said to myself, quiet and trembling. ‘You let harm befall him.’

It felt like I was coated in some thick, cloying poison. The harm that had befallen my Parabatai, it went beyond failing him, beyond letting him down.

The guilt was seconded only by an absolute and all-consuming fear that I would lose him to this. I knew Jace, I knew how he would deal with it.

Pretend it had never happened. Put it in the rear-view and move on.

Only he wouldn’t be able to. Fucking hell, I wouldn’t be able to and it hadn’t even happened to me. I worried that it would eat him alive, slowly consume him.

He was asleep, at least. I felt his mercifully dreamless sleep.

How had this happened? How was this real?

My heart and soul demanded that I go out into the remains of the night and find them. Find the men
who did this, who hurt him and…and raped him. Find them and end them.

I would not offer clean deaths, either. It would be agony. Drawn out and brutal, enough to soothe the screaming in my head, the rolling echoes of noises Jace had made.

But he’d made me swear and even though I was almost certain I could have fooled him - his end of the bond was much less clear than mine - I could not betray his confidence at such a time.

I had already betrayed him so, so much.

I closed my eyes and let my head drop into my hands. In turmoil, I clawed at my hair, revelling in the pain. I deserved it and worse.

A part of me screamed silently in despair. It was him. Weaker Alec.

He blamed me and thus himself as much as I did. I felt him so keenly, it was like there was no divide at all.

The shock had sent a fracture through the structure of the divide. It could not hold in these circumstances much longer.

“There is no part of me that does not love you,” I had told Jace and it was true. Every single part of me grieved for him. For what he had endured, for my utter failure to save him and most of all for my part in it.

Hindsight was crystal fucking clear. Wasn’t it always?

‘There’s a decision we need to make,’ Jace said, quite calmly. He entered the kitchen like always, the room where we spent a lot of time. Izzy was up and out of the hospital, at last and I was making breakfast. I hadn’t expected Jace to be up so early. I’d hoped he would want to sleep a while longer.

He looked…fine. He didn’t seem upset or agitated or whatever the fuck I was expecting. He seemed normal.

‘Oh?’ Clary said, glancing up at him. ‘Is it to do with syrups? ‘Cos we have both kinds.’

He sat down beside Izzy, dropping a kiss onto her hair as he did. ‘I’m not talking about pancakes.’

Jace sounded all business, but absolutely in control. I knew I was gawking and he wasn’t pleased. I forced myself to look back at the pancakes I was making.

‘You mean Sebastian,’ Izzy surmised. ‘Whether or not we pursue him.’

‘Yeah,’ he said, reaching for coffee. ‘That’s the one.’

‘Well,’ Clary said. ‘Are we talking about Clave orders or Screw Them Let’s Make Our Own Fate orders?’

‘The Clave don’t know he’s your brother, Clary,’ I said, flipping a pancake with ease. ‘Or, so far they don’t know.’
‘I think Clary should decide that,’ Izzy said firmly. ‘The implications upon her will fall hard and fast. Nobody knows but us. It can stay that way, if that’s what she wants.’

Clary reached for juice. ‘I think for now, Izzy is right. The less people who know, the better. As for pursuing him, I say for now we leave it.’

I changed looking over my shoulder. Jace was watching Clary intensely.

‘If that’s what you want,’ he said. ‘Then that’s what we’ll do. Alec, you agree?’

‘I mean,’ I said, serving up another round. ‘You pretty much already made the decision, but yes. I agree.’

‘Good,’ he said, sipping his coffee. ‘Then for now, can focus on the real issue.’

‘The supplier.’

‘Yeah. We need to find this guy and we need to take him out.’

Clary and Izzy exchanged glances. ‘You mean, down.’

‘No, I mean out. This shit is destroying people. Ruining lives.’

Carefully, I placed a couple of small, round pancakes on his plate. He ignored them and drank more coffee.

‘Jace,’ Izzy said with concern. ‘Our mandate can’t just be to take out a Mundane.’

‘We don’t know it’s a Mundane!’

‘His guys were all Mundanes,’ she argued gently. ‘I know the drug has supernatural elements, but we can’t just decide to kill him. The Clave has given a clear order to bring him in alive.’

‘Fuck the Clave.’

‘Jace,’ I said, ever so softly. ‘Come on.’

Izzy frowned. ‘Are you…OK?’

For the first time that morning, I saw his throat work, Adam’s apple bobbing.

‘I’m fine,’ he said through lowered lashes.

But our sister was not to be dismissed to easily. ‘Are you sure? You don’t seem—’

‘We need to speak to Magnus,’ Jace said, standing and taking the coffee with him. ‘He sent me a message saying he has some intel. Alec and I will go, you guys see if there’s any CCTV from other sources that might have picked up who this guy is. We need to track him down, priority one.’

As acting head of the Institute, I wanted to point out that I was the plan-maker here, that he could have at least checked with me that this was a solid plan.

As the other half of his soul, I nodded quietly.

‘Hmm,’ I agreed. ‘Let’s check in at midday, OK?’

We left the girls looking fairly suspicious.
‘Are we really going to see Magnus?’ I asked, unable to keep the nervous note from my voice. Magnus was the last person I wanted to be around. There was always an outside chance he would just look at me and instantly proclaim that I was not, in fact, Alec. One never knew with Warlocks.

‘Yeah, of course,’ he said, still walking with the coffee. I was afraid to touch him, so I jogged a few paces ahead and slowed, bringing him to a gentle halt.

‘Hey,’ I said. ‘You still have the cup.’

He looked down. His hand was red and wet, scalded slightly from the hot coffee he’d spilled during his march.

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Yeah.’

He handed it to me and went to suit up. I hung back for a few seconds, clutching the warm cup and trying to ignore the chorus of screams from the captive side of myself.

The journey to Magnus was long and unbearable. We took public transport, which made sense. I supposed he didn’t really want to think of the last time we were in a taxi. The issue was that it was a Saturday and therefore, insanely busy. Every single time someone bumped into him, this vicious spike of fear and pain shot through him and tore him up anew.

His exterior reactions were minimal. An observer might think he was irritable, perhaps. Maybe he had stitches that gave him pain when someone knocked into him.

They couldn’t feel him like I could.

After the seventh or eighth time, he reached very surreptitiously for my hand and held it. I moved closer to him so it wasn’t immediately obvious to outsiders. He gripped it tighter when someone nudged past him, but his fear lessened. I did everything physically possible to send him my strength, whatever was left of it anyway.

After what seemed like an age, we were outside Magnus’s door.

‘Greetings, little Shadowhunters,’ he said, opening the door and standing back to allow us entry. ‘You are rather late.’

‘Sorry about that,’ I said, not elaborating. ‘We appreciate your help.’

‘Of course. Drinks?’

‘No, thanks,’ Jace said. He wanted to ask what the intel was right away. He felt uncomfortable here and nervous. Magnus was perceptive, after all. ‘So, uh?’

‘Please, take a seat,’ the Warlock offered pleasantly. Jace and I sat side by side on his plumb, comfortable sofa. Magnus magicked up refreshments anyway, despite our refusal. He made himself tea and then sat back, observing us both.

‘Well,’ he said after a beat. ‘I think it’s best to get something out of the way, right off the bat.’

I swallowed as Jace stiffened. ‘Oh, really?’
‘I have two pieces of intel, one which concerns the drug and the other is much more…sensitive.’

I hoped, for the first time, that he was going to say he knew about me and not about Jace. I wanted to protect Jace, even if it meant losing the clarity and strength I had previously so treasured.

‘Spit it out, then,’ Jace said tersely.

Magnus sighed. ‘I think it’s quite obvious what’s happened between the both of you.’

I blinked. ‘Sorry?’

He indicated with a scone. ‘You two. Sex has clearly been had.’

Jace wasn’t breathing.

‘Magnus,’ I said, pressing my leg subtly against Jace for what I prayed was comfort. ‘This isn’t—’

‘Believe me, I’m not about to sit here and languish in self-pity, Alexander. This has to do with the Clave.’

Oh fuck.

‘Do they know?’ Jace asked tightly.

‘They suspect,’ Magnus replied delicately. ‘There was a report made, early hours of this morning. Oscar Henson.’

‘Motherfucker,’ I snarled. ‘He did it out of spite, he doesn’t even know anything!’

‘Knowing means nothing when you have a vendetta,’ Magnus said airily. ‘My point is this; clearly, neither of you needs any official scrutiny right now. I would consider getting him to retract the report and confess to malicious interference or…’

I looked up sharply. ‘Or what?’

‘Or make it clear that there’s nothing to investigate.’

Silence followed his suggestion, broken only by me with absolute determination not to be rude. It was hard to recall why I had ever felt so strongly for Magnus in those moments, a strange disconnected part of my life which had no inflection now.

‘What was the other intel?’ I asked, at length.

‘I’ve been extensively studying the compound,’ the Warlock explained. ‘And this morning, I believe I’ve made a breakthrough.’

‘Oh?’

He handed us a weighty pile of notes I sincerely hope he didn’t want us to read there and then. ‘The Too Long Didn’t Read version is this,’ he said. ‘The drug contains a new agent I’ve never encountered before. It seeks to suppress the host’s natural and prominent instincts and personality and bring to light the weaker, lesser utilised ones.’

‘We know that already,’ I pointed out with a frown, because that should have been obvious.

‘Yes, I’m aware. However, you’re probably not aware that it’s contagious.’
Jace flinched. ‘What?’

Now Magnus was deliberately not looking at either of us. ‘It can be passed along by blood or… fluids.’

I ground my teeth. ‘You’re saying this shit is…what? Sexually transmitted?’

‘Yes.’

‘Hold up,’ Jace said. ‘The host had to be shot up with this for four days straight, now it can be passed along in microscopic amounts? With what effects?’

‘If it has a solid hold in the host and the host’s cells—’

‘You can just say my name, you know,’ I snapped. ‘In Alec’s body and Alec’s cells.’

He sighed again. ‘Because you incubated it properly, your body would be capable of passing it along, most likely for an extremely brief amount of time, to another. It likely wouldn’t be permanent and if I can’t imagine it would be strong.’

‘But?’

‘But it would be there, it would show up, even days later. Trace amounts. My point is, it could be passed back to the…to you, Alec. Even after the drug had left your system, you see?’ He winced. ‘I assume you two didn’t use…’

Jace’s nervous system was in overload. He cleared his throat and slightly turned to me for help.

‘Look, this isn’t relevant,’ I insisted loudly. ‘The drug isn’t in me anymore, OK? It’s gone and Jace is…he’s fine. Was that it? Was there anything else?’

Finally, he seemed to get the message to back off. ‘Well,’ he said. ‘The notes will help, I hope.’

Jace stood up abruptly. ‘Yes, I’m sure they will, Magnus, thank you.’

The Warlock politely rose from his chair. ‘You’re welcome.’

‘Can I just, uh,’ Jace said, handing me the bundle of hand written notes. ‘Use your bathroom?’

‘Of course. Second door on the right, down there,’ Magnus said. Jace fled in the direction he pointed. Magnus frowned.

‘Alexander,’ he said heavily. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘With the best will in the world,’ I said slowly. ‘I’m not sure that’s your business.’

‘Your Parabatai is emptying his stomach in my toilet, I have a right to be concerned.’

‘About him?’

‘About you both. Your situation is precarious at best. The Clave don’t forgive matters like this and Jace has always been…unsteady.’

‘Not always,’ I defended automatically and also, it was true. There was a time when Jace Herondale had been the most confident boy I knew, before time and experience had jaded and aged him prematurely. ‘Though I appreciate your concern.’
'Alec,' he said very quietly. 'I still care about you. I always will.'

Jace emerged a few minutes later, face blank and giving nothing away. Magnus looked away and I couldn’t find the strength to say anything back to him.

‘Thanks again,’ Jace said to Magnus and together, we left.

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-Clary-

‘Jace is a complicated guy, right?’

Izzy paused, coffee halfway to her lips. ‘Is he?’

‘I mean, I don’t know him as well as you, so I’m asking.’

‘Complicated isn’t the word I’d choose,’ Izzy said, sipping the drink and then wincing. ‘Not enough sugar.’ She got up out of her seat and grabbed a few sugar packs from the side in the cafe where we sat. ‘I thought you guys were doing better.’

‘We are. It’s just…how do I get him to, uh…?’

‘Open up?’

‘Have sex with me?’

Isabelle spluttered into her newly sweetened beverage. ‘Sorry?’

A few people from other tables glanced over, but I couldn ’t have cared less.

‘How do I get him to have sex with me?’

Izzy stared, her mind clearly working. What did I know, what didn ’t I know? I watched her working it out.

‘Clary, you haven’t slept with Jace yet?’

‘No.’

‘You’ve been together for months. The other day he was talking to me about asking you to move in with him.’

‘Into his room.’

‘Somewhere else, I think.’

‘Izzy,’ I sighed. ‘Is it me? I know it’s dumb to even ask, but I can’t help feel like he’s not into me that way.’

Fingers tapping against the ceramic mug, she said, ‘Did you talk to him?’
‘I tried. He shut me down.’

‘Clary, I don’t want to get in the middle.’

‘I know, and I don’t want to put you there but I feel like I’m losing my mind.’

‘Look, Jace isn’t overly complicated. Anyone with half a brain can see how much he likes you. Clary, he loves you.’

A bubble of resentment grew in my throat. ‘Like he loves Alec?’

‘Alec is his Parabatai. It’s different.’

I stirred my tea slowly. ‘Is it? Izzy, I know he’s slept with plenty of girls before, so why doesn’t he want that with me? It’s been a month since I brought it up and still, no change.’

‘Have you tried to instigate it?’

‘Plenty of times. He makes an excuse about something he’s forgotten, or literally just…gently pulls me back.’

Izzy frowned. ‘Maybe he’s genuinely not ready for sex with someone he cares about, Clary.’

‘I believe that’s part of it, but why? Why isn’t he ready? He told me he doesn’t want sex to screw it up between us, but why would that even be an issue?’

Izzy swallowed a fraction, biting her bottom lip. ‘He said that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Hmm, OK, well that’s a little complicated, I grant you.’

‘Why is it complicated?’

‘Clary, if I tell you something you have to swear not to tell anyone else.’

I held up my hand. ‘I swear.’

‘You know how Alec feels about Jace?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Well, I’ve always suspected privately that maybe Jace sort of feels the same.’

‘What? No, Izzy, come on.’

Isabelle tipped her head, considering. ‘I don’t think he realises it, not the way Alec does. They’ve always been extremely close, even before the Parabatai bond. I think perhaps Jace is confusing the way he loves you for the way he loves Alec. Maintaining a kind of no-sex embargo and keeping things platonic to an extent.’

I let her words sink in, settling near a place where I had suspected something similar myself.

‘So, how do I get past it?’ I asked.

‘I have no idea.’
‘So, you’re saying I’ve been friend-zoned?’

That made Izzy laugh, though she tried to reign in it with apologetic look.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said, trying to school her face back to normal. ‘It’s kind of ironic what with you and Simon, you know?’

‘Oh, ha-ha,’ I deadpanned.

‘I don’t think it’s the friend-zone, Clary. He’s kissing you and stuff, right?’

‘Only kissing. It’s like being stuck in a YA novel.’

‘You should talk to him again, make him see it from your perspective.’

‘Or,’ I said, finishing my coffee. ‘We could go out and get drunk.’

-Alec-

He hadn’t said anything for a while, so when he spoke, it made me jump.

‘Usually when I feel anything like this,’ he said, low and hoarse. ‘I go out and get drunk. Isn’t that funny?’

We were poring over Magnus’s notes in the library. I, personally, hated the library and this wasn’t exactly endearing it to me.

‘Is there something I can do?’ I asked, knowing what a useless question it was, but needing to offer anyway.

‘No,’ he said, but it was gentle. Weak, almost. ‘I don’t know what I feel. I can’t feel anything, sometimes. Other times…’

‘Let me help you,’ I said. ‘Please.’

‘How?’ He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. ‘What would you even do? I don’t know what would help. I don’t think anything can help.’

‘Jace—’

‘Please don’t,’ he said, refocusing on the notes. ‘We need to do a blood test.’

I shook myself. ‘What?’

‘If Magnus is right and it can be passed that way, then we need to be sure.’

I didn’t say anything. I watched him closely as he pretended to read what was before him, his eyes fixed on a single line and not moving.
‘I said don’t,’ he breathed shakily. ‘I can feel you feeling it.’

‘I’m trying not to,’ I told him.

He closed his eyes. ‘Try harder.’

The decision to go back to Magnus’s alone came upon me by surprised. Wandering the streets at night while Jace slept in a wretched state, plagued by nightmares, I began in search of something that needed killing. My useless hands itched for something to hurt and break. To let arrows fly and feel a sense of purpose.

But the streets were quiet and my feet took me to Magnus. Old habit, maybe.

He opened the door, but didn’t greet me. I stepped inside and immediately, my even being there felt like a betrayal to Jace.

‘I…I’m sorry,’ I said, feeling stupid. ‘I don’t know why I’m here.’

‘Sit down,’ he said in a tone of voice that made clear it was not a suggestion.

The chair was ridiculously comfortable and within seconds he handed me a drink. Herbal tea of some kind. I despised tea, but in an effort to be polite (see how the divide between us crumbles?) I drank it.

‘What happened to Jace?’ he asked without preamble.

The question was so direct I wanted to cry, faced with the reality both Jace and I had been trying to suppress. The overwhelming emotions I was losing to bubbled up viciously, sensing an outlet.

‘Something bad,’ I managed, taking another sip.

‘I can see that much. I can see it reflected in you.’ He stirred his own tea, considering how best to phrase whatever was coming next. ‘Do you feel a stronger connection to him, after you slept together?’

_Lie, my instincts said. Lie cleverly. There is no one outside of you and Jace._

But I was so tired and so _alone_.

‘Yes,’ I admitted. ‘The connection is much stronger than before.’

Magnus nodded in a non-judgemental way. ‘Does it feel intrusive?’

Staring down at the tea, I nodded. ‘More than that, it feels like I’m intruding. Like there’s nothing between us now to keep us separate.’

‘So, you feel his pain too, then?’

I closed my eyes. ‘Yes.’

‘That must be difficult.’
‘It’s nothing to what he went through.’

‘Your pain is still real. If you experienced it as you say, then in many ways whatever happened to
Jace happened to you too.’

His words hung heavy in the air between us.

‘And Jace would hate that,’ Magnus went on. ‘He might even feel as though he has inflicted this
pain upon you by proxy.’

I gripped the teacup. ‘This is not his fault.’

‘Fault has precious little to do with pain. What you feel and what Jace feels will not dissolve if you
properly assign blame, will it?’

‘I don’t know what to do, Magnus,’ I said after a beat. ‘For the first time, I don’t know how to take
care of him.’

‘Perhaps that’s because Jace doesn’t know what to do either. Your intuition with him stems from
your empathy and connection. If he’s lost, so would you be.’

Quietly, I asked, ‘Do you know what happened?’

Eyes downcast, he said, ‘I can guess. I’ve known a great many people and I’ve seen reactions similar
to Jace’s.’

Anger twisted the pain like a hand around my throat. ‘He was raped.’

‘I’m so sorry.’

‘And I did nothing. I, with all my brilliant intuition and Jace centric empathy couldn’t find him. I was
too late.’

‘Blaming yourself will make his recovery more difficult,’ Magnus intoned gently. ‘He can’t worry
about you.’

‘I’m not blaming myself. It’s a statement of fact.’

‘I assume you haven’t told anyone?’

‘No.’

‘Well, that’s to expected, but Alec, he might need help. Everyone reacts differently to trauma and this
is one of the worst kinds.’

‘Who can I tell?’ I asked, shaking my head. ‘He’ll never forgive me.’

‘Isabelle doesn’t know?’

‘No.’

‘She would want to know, though.’

I sighed shakily, barely keeping myself together. ‘It feels like if I tell anyone else, then it’s really real.
That if I tell people, I’ll be making him relive it.’
‘I think that’s a natural instinct, but over time you both might need to consider additional help.’


‘Why not?’

‘Just…I can’t see Jace wanting that.’

‘I said over time. All you have to do for now is keep yourself together and be there for Jace. If there’s one person who can care for him at a time like this, it’s you.’

‘He barely speaks to me. Barely looks at me.’

‘But he will speak to you eventually and you need to be ready, Alec.’

‘He made me promise not to kill them.’

Magnus winced. ‘Them? Tuhanku.’

‘It’s all I think about doing. Like if I could just find them and wipe them off the face of the earth, it would be like this never happened.’

‘But that’s not real,’ he reminded me.

‘Jace doesn’t even remember most of it. Maybe I could—’

‘No,’ the Warlock said sternly. ‘I don’t blame you for considering it, but removing his memory, however fragmented, of such a thing would destroy him over time. He could lose his mind, knowing something terrible happened, but not knowing what.’

‘But if the memories were all wiped…’

‘His body would know,’ Magnus said.

‘I just want to help him,’ I said, voice cracking. ‘I love him more than anything else in this world and I can’t help him. He’s breaking apart right in front of me and I’m useless, just like I was that night.’

Magnus placed his teacup down and reached for my hand. ‘You are not. Jace is strong. Give him a little time and try again. Be close by, make yourself ready for when he comes to you, which I think he will.’

I blinked and tears rolled down my cheeks. ‘Thank you,’ I said, squeezing his hand. I laughed sadly. ‘Who knew you were a psychologist?’

‘Immortality has a few perks in coming to know the way people work.’

I sniffed and carefully withdrew my hand. ‘I never thanked you for my birthday present,’ I said. ‘The ancient arrowhead? It was beautiful.’

He smiled. ‘You’re very welcome. I’m always here for you, Alexander. You did the right thing to come here. Dealing with something like this alone will take a toll. The weight of the world is no state to be in with a weapon in hand.’
A week passed with no real results. The supplier remained elusive and I wished I cared more. My mind was honestly not with the search.

Jace barely slept anymore, he hardly ever ate and he would only drink water if and when I nudged him during the rare times he would sit and pretend to eat with us.

Twice I had managed to go out into the night and find a shady dealer who sold me the drug. The second time, he charged me considerably more and I was so frazzled, I briefly considered flat out murdering him, but then where would I get my next fix from?

Jace had become the centre of my universe for a very different reason. He was a collapsing star, sucking everything into his space. The pull of his despair was unstoppable and I was too close to break free from it.

Perhaps the worst thing about it was that he was doing such a flawless job of pretending everything was fine. Aside from looking like maybe he was about to come down with the flu, he was energetic and witty, laughing and bantering with the others. It was almost enough to make me believe it, had I not been given an all access pass to the dark and grim reveries of his heart.

The week had gone slow. Jace didn’t want to patrol or go out. He hadn’t left the Institute since the incident as I had taken to calling it in my head. The word was vague and common; a far easier name for what had taken place.

When Izzy questioned why Jace didn’t want to leave, he would complain of a pulled hamstring that hadn’t healed right and how he wanted to train a little before hitting the streets. Izzy assumed it was something to do with us needing time and so she left us to it, mostly. She asked me a few times if Jace was OK and I felt like the lowest of the low, telling her that yes, of course Jace was fine.

The Clave had not yet done anything regarding the report of Jace and myself, but they would. Henson often shot me increasingly shifty looks and the lack of recent orders from the Clave was confirmation enough. They were circling, waiting for their moment.

Let them come. Let them try to even touch Jace. I would wipe them out.

Jace was broken, quite badly. He seemed to accept it, but refused to talk about it or let me comfort him. This was difficult to bear. We slept in separate beds and I learned that if he made noises, it was best not to go into his room.

Not since the first night he came to us had I done that. Let him cry or scream without running to his side. It felt alien and wrong, to let him suffer alone.

I had no idea if I was even doing the right thing by him. Should I have told others? Ignored his requests? Was there an official way of handling someone in his… situation?

For all my confidence a week ago, I felt absolutely at sea. Lost and adrift, wondering how best to keep my Parabatai going from moment to moment.

Pride goeth, my Dad always said. Pride goeth before a fall.

Yeah, well, pride had well and truly fucking gone now and here was the fall.

The blood test hadn’t happened, thankfully. He’d sort of given up on the idea and not mentioned it again which was so unlike him, but I was a pathetic coward and the less he saw of my blood, the
We were in between the big moments. The quiet time when something resembling a normal life might have occurred if it hadn’t been rent apart. I wanted to be close to him, to help him however I could but things were so bad.

It couldn’t get worse, if it got worse, I didn’t know how I could go on.

Famous last words.

‘Jace, stop mumbling! I can barely hear you!’

It was 11:42pm and I hadn’t exactly been asleep, but I’d been close. Angel damn it all to hell, I could never ignore Jace when he called this late.

‘Y’keep texting me!’ Jace accused. ‘I ressponding!’

I pinched the bridge of my nose. ‘I texted you about four hours ago.’

‘Oh,’ he said and sniffed loudly. ‘Well, as you were.’

The call ended. I looked at my phone, stung. He’d hung up.

For a few minutes, I sat there wondering what to do. Go back to bed, pretend to sleep and wait for him to call and ask for an escort home or cut out the middle man and just go there now?

By the time I got to Sang’s, it was closing, way earlier than usual. A few determined party goers were lurking outside the club which was unusually silent. Maybe there had been a fight. I zeroed in on someone Jace occasionally hung around with, Aaron maybe?

‘Hey,’ I tried to think of his name and failed. ‘You seen Jace?’

‘He left with a chick, before it all kicked off,’ the annoying idiot said, furiously rubbing his nose. ‘That way.’

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and tried to find some reservoir of strength.

Jace was down the alley behind Sang’s, making out with a girl. Of course.

‘Jace!’ I barked loudly, hoping to shatter any and all magic between them.

The pair broke apart suddenly. The girl, who looked suspiciously like Clary, seemed alarmed to see some tall, angry guy yelling at her but Jace relaxed once he saw me.

‘Hey,’ he greeted. ‘You can keep watch.’

I blinked slow. ‘Excuse me?’

He was still upset, then. For God’s sake.

‘Or you we can take turns with her, what do you think?’
The girl shoved him away, outraged but it was nothing to how I felt. He finally looked at me, eyes wild. He was lashing out in a way I’d never really experienced.

‘Fucking asshole!’ she yelled, pushing him again for good measure before she stalked towards the street.

Jace leaned into the wall and laughed. ‘Y’ scared her away.’

‘The fuck is wrong with you?’ I demanded; my blood still cold from his previous spiteful comment. ‘Huh? Clary breaks up with you and less than a day later you’re out fucking someone else?’

He swiped at his nose again and something clicked.

‘Are you fucking serious?’ I asked, marching over to him.

‘Hey!’ he yelped indignantly as I began to search his pockets. ‘The fuck, Alec?!’

When I found it, that little bag with scattered white powder, I yanked it out and held it higher than he could reach. ‘Fucking cocaine? Really?’

‘And what? It’s my life!’

‘Every time you come here, you destroy that life a little more.’

‘So what? Life is nothing without a little fun!’

‘This is fun?’

He shoved me away, as hard as he could.

‘Maybe not for you, boring tight-ass!’

I threw the bag to the ground and viciously used my boot to grind it into wet asphalt. ‘This is beneath you, Jace.’

‘FUCK would you know?’ he shot back, but his voice cracked a little. ‘You’ve never had anyone beneath you!’

‘I know you,’ I reminded him, wanting to be calm for him. He would come to me if I was calm, like a wild animal. ‘You’re better than this.’

He shook his head, nose scrunching. ‘I’m not.’

‘Yes, you are.’

‘I’m not, Alec. She…she broke…’

‘I know she did, but this isn’t OK. There isn’t any excuse for this.’

My words seemed to take the last of the wind from his sails. He shook his head, biting his bottom lip and I could see how much pain he was in.

‘I love her, Alec,’ he said. ‘What’s wrong with me?’

I put aside my own pain at his declaration. ‘For loving her? Nothing’s wrong with you for that.’

‘No, what’s wrong with me that it’s not enough for her?’
'Jace, she said it wasn’t you.’

He scoffed. ‘Yeah, an excuse I’ve used a billion times.’

I came closer, not wanting to invade his space too suddenly. ‘Look, I don’t know what happened between you two. You’re entitled to be upset, of course you are, but this isn’t the way.’

Softly, he said, ‘I wanted to feel different.’

‘I know.’

‘I’m so sick of being like this. What is wrong with me? And don’t say nothing, we both know that’s not true. You have your whole life on track, Alec. You’re the best at what you do, you believe in yourself.’ He let out a shaky breath. ‘Look at me.’

‘OK,’ I said. ‘That’s it. Come on.’

I pulled him away from the wall. He looked up, alarmed. ‘What?’

‘I’m not listening to the Jace Herondale Self Deprecation Society Monologues in a filthy fucking alley at midnight.’

‘I don’t wanna go home.’

‘We’re not going home.’

Clary

The text message was from Luke and I didn’t feel too bad that I only glanced at it. The night time air in Manhattan was freezing, almost enough to make my teeth chatter. Central Park was hardly an ideal place to meet Sebastian, but after changing the location three times once I agreed to meet him, this was the place I felt confident I was safest.

There were Mundanes nearby, a group of teens laughing and playing music. I’d seen a few cops making the rounds. They didn’t get rid of the teenagers, just warned them about the noise. Picking their battles, I supposed.

‘Clary.’

I didn’t jump and for that, I was proud. He’d appeared out of nowhere, standing by a tree on a grass knoll. I took a deep breath and slowly approached him.

‘You still look like him,’ I said. ‘Sebastian.’

My brother shrugged. ‘I like the way he looks. I like that this was the body I wore when I first gained access to whatever small spark of goodness lay within me.’

‘Seems kind of unfair to his family, but sure.’
He smiled at me. ‘You always think of everyone but yourself.’

I huffed a laugh. ‘What absolutely bullshit. I think about myself all the time. A woman doesn’t have to be some paragon of selflessness to be a good person.’

‘I am sorry for the trouble I caused,’ he said after a beat of hesitation. ‘Isabelle seems to have recovered well.’

I didn’t comment on the fact that he was clearly monitoring us.

‘Why am I here?’

‘There are things I want to explain, face to face.’

‘Does any of it pertain to people I care about?’

‘Well—’

‘Then I’m not interested.’

A spark of sadness flickered through his eyes. ‘Clary, I’m doing this - all of this - for you.’

‘So you can be decent enough not to murder my family? Not to obsess about me in ways that would give me nightmares?’

‘Yes.’

‘You expect me to thank you? You put people I love in danger!’

‘And I hate myself for it, believe me.’

‘I believe in what I see, and all I see is someone who infiltrated my family when they were vulnerable and used them for your own gain.’

He looked down. ‘You’re right.’

‘Damn right.’

‘I…one day, do you think we could talk?’

*Be careful, I told myself. Get the information about Jace first.*

‘Maybe,’ I said, crossing my arms.

That cheered him up a little, I saw hope bring life to his eyes. ‘Thank you. Even just the chance to be in your life—’

The idea of him actually being involved in my life was enough to make me snap, ‘Do you have information about Jace or not?’

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Then tell me.’

‘It’s twofold,’ he said, pulling a small piece of paper from his inner jacket pocket. ‘First, I have the supplier. I’ve extracted the procedure for recreating the compound from him. I’ve no use for him now, so I left him in a warehouse for you.’
For you. He didn’t mean for us, he meant for me. A gift.

‘OK. What’s the other thing?’

Sebastian sighed. ‘When I was extracting information from him, he told me a lot of other information; screamed it, actually. Most of it was useless, but something he said about Jace that I knew you’d want to know.’

I stared at him coldly. ‘Are you going to ask for something in return before you tell me?’

‘I want to,’ he admitted. ‘But no, I won’t. I just want you to see that I could use this information to destroy Jonathon Herondale. Instead I’m handing it to you because I know you care about him.’

‘He’s my family, they all are.’

My brother seemed to feel some kind of pain at that. ‘I’m glad you have them.’

I sighed impatiently. ‘Well?’

‘The warehouse is in Brooklyn; I’ll give you the address. Officially, you can find it from a source or whatever you need so as not to be tarnished by association when the Clave asks what happened.’

‘I’m waiting to be stunned by this apparent information.’

‘This is going to be difficult to hear.’

I crossed my arms. ‘Let me hear it, then.’

Izzy looked up from her conversation with Simon, smiling and happy until she caught the look on my face.

‘What’s up?’ she asked, concerned.

I shook myself. ‘I, uh. Where’s Jace and Alec?’

‘Training, I think,’ Simon ventured. ‘Why? What is it?’

My chest tightened. ‘I need to talk to them about it first, actually.’

‘Is something wrong, though?’ Izzy asked, eyes wide and searching. ‘Oh God, what is it now?’

I tried to take a steadying breath. ‘OK, don’t get mad but I went to meet Sebastian.’

‘Fray, what the—’

Izzy shushed him and waited for me to explain.

‘He has the supplier; he’s giving him to us. But he also had information about something that’s happened to Jace.’

I watched as Izzy nodded, taking it hard. ‘Is it bad.’
‘It’s bad. I can’t get into it with you before I speak to him.’

‘Go,’ she said. ‘We’ll be here.’

Isabelle grasped my hand as I walked past, giving me momentary strength but by the time I was outside the sparring room, I almost lost my nerve.

Jace and Alec were inside, just like Simon had said, but something was seriously wrong with the scene. They were nowhere near each other for one thing.

‘Oh, hey,’ Alec said looking up at me, dragging his forearm across his brow. He’d been pummelling the fuck out of a punch bag. ‘What’s up?’

I looked around the hall. They were alone, at least. It was late at night, residents only at these hours usually.

‘Guys,’ I said, making sure the door closed behind me. ‘I need to tell you something. It’s gonna be difficult and I don’t have long before we need to act.’

Jace had been shadow boxing. He seemed wary, lips tight as he glanced at his Parabatai, assessing the situation.

Alec nodded, the pair of them coming closer. ‘Tell us.’

‘Sebastian has the supplier of the drug; he’s already extracted the formula he needed apparently and he’s left him alive for us in a warehouse in Manhattan.’

They waited, sensing I wasn’t done.

‘During his extraction, he learned something else from this guy,’ I said, voice trembling slightly. ‘About Jace.’

Jace’s reaction was instant. He flinched, that perfect control fracturing to reveal a deep well of pain beneath it and although he regained control a moment later, I’d seen it nonetheless.

Alec swallowed and asked, ‘And?’

Jace shook his head. ‘Alec, no, tell her to stop.’

I’d never, ever heard Jace Herondale sound like that. His voice was in complete contrast to his expression.

‘Clary,’ Alec warned. ‘Maybe we should go somewhere else for this.’

‘No,’ I said. ‘I’m sorry, but this can’t wait.’

Jace turned away. ‘I don’t want to hear it,’ he said quietly.

I had to just say it. ‘Jace, the supplier is Nicholas Sang.’

Alec
'You want milk duds?'

I shrugged. ‘They’re not my thing.’

Jace rolled his eyes. ‘Your thing is gross, Lightwood. You can’t put chocolate in popcorn.’

‘I can and I must. It melts and then you get bunches of popcorn with chocolatey goodness. Perfection.’

Jace was still a little drunk and probably high from his dabble with cocaine, but he had cheered up significantly when he realised we were going to a 1am showing of old horror movies at the multiplex. We were the only two people in there, waiting for the movie to roll as he jammed his feet up high on the seat above.

‘Are they always open this late year-round or ‘cause it’s nearly Halloween?’ he asked, throwing milk duds high and catching them in his mouth.

I suppressed a yawn. ‘Halloween.’

‘That’s cool. Can’t believe there’s no one else here.’

‘Probably because they’re not crazy.’

He grinned askew. ‘Fuck normal. I love this movie.’

I stared at him and smiled to myself. ‘I know you do.’

The screen burst to life, grainy black and white and Jace was enthralled. I watched the movie with him for a while, but I wasn’t really watching it. I was so focused on him, on making sure he was happy, that I could barely pay attention to the zombies.

After a while, he rested his head on my shoulder.

‘I’m sorry,’ he whispered, though we were alone in the stands.

‘That’s OK,’ I said, quite automatically. ‘It’s always OK.’

‘One day it won’t be,’ he said. ‘One day, you’ll say no it’s not OK, Jace.’

I wrapped my arm around him and he moved closer, head resting against my chest. We looked like lovers, intimate and comfortable.

‘It will always be OK,’ I said. ‘I’ve got you, Herondale.’

‘Love you,’ he said.

‘You too.’

Clary
Alec frowned. ‘No, what?’

Jace didn’t turn back to me, nor did he speak.

‘Nicholas Sang,’ I repeated.

‘As in…Sang’s? The shithole dive we drink in?’ Alec questioned with a strong measure of disbelief. ‘No, Clary, come on.’

‘That’s not all,’ I pushed on because fuck, this was so much harder than I thought. ‘Jace, Sang has been feeding you the drug for years.’

Still he didn’t move. I wanted to reach out to him, but if Alec thought it best to give him space then I would follow suit.

‘And before you say it, I know Sebastian is hardly trustworthy and we have verify all this ourselves by bringing him in, but I wanted you to hear it before it came out of his mouth or…fuck, I don’t know…as leverage or whatever from this guy! Sebastian told me he’s been putting it in your drinks, in everyone’s drinks, for years.’

When Jace moved, it was to raise his hand a little, like he was motioning for something. He cleared his throat.

‘Alec,’ he said and his Parabatai went to him as though someone had cut a rope that had been holding him back. It wasn’t a second too soon. Jace’s knees gave out and Alec caught him just in time. I rushed forward, but Alec motioned me to stay back.

‘I’m sorry,’ I babbled. ‘I just…I didn’t want to you—’

‘It’s OK,’ Alec said, but his focus was on Jace. ‘You did the right thing.’

‘The decision as to whether or not we find Sang officially is yours, Jace.’

Alec nodded in lieu of his Parabatai, stroking his hair and touching him in such an openly intimate way that I worried for them. Alec didn’t seem to care, though.

‘Thank you,’ he said and it was clearly a dismissal.

Alec

The implication hung in the air like the aftermath of an explosion. By some miracle, Jace got to his feet when she left and tried to look normal.

I opened my mouth to speak but Jace shook his head ever so slightly and then a moment later Henson came in, towel in hand and dressed for a workout.

'Hey,' he said with such purposeful nonchalance he may as well have just graduation from Spy
'Ready for patrol?' Jace asked. 'Bring Izzy too.'

'Good idea,' I said firing off a text telling her to meet us at the apartment.

This was thin fucking ice, now. The Clave were either going to have to be dealt with or we would need one hell of a cover-up once we had a better footing.

Jace was on the edge. Even if I hadn’t been able to feel it, I could see it so plainly now. Assuming any of this was true, did it mean Jace had seriously been on the drug for years? What did this mean?

You know what it means, a small Un-Cold part of me whispered.

Henson followed us, tailing at a stupidly obvious distance until we activated anti-tracking runes and lost him easily. The net was starting to close, we had no time.

The apartment was untraceable. Our last bastion of freedom, though it was still empty of furniture and had never been home to any of the parties or hang outs we dreamed of. A prison and a hideout, little else.

Izzy paced. ‘How long do we have?’

‘Not long. Whatever we’re going to do, we need to do it fast.’

Our sister sighed. ‘OK, so we go to the warehouse. We see if any of this is real.’

‘I agree,’ I said, watching Jace out the corner of my eye. He was just standing there, staring out of the window. This was where we’d slept together, right on this floor. The things he’d said to me…

That was before, though. Before and after. Two time lines, split completely.

‘No point speculating, we may as well just go there.’

‘What if it’s a trap?’ Jace asked, arms tight around himself.

Izzy frowned, considering. ‘Set by who? Sebastian?’

‘Maybe.’

‘It’s a possibility, of course, but as evil plans go it’s not one of his best. He’s had the opportunity to kill us all at various times. Also, he wants Clary’s approval. This whole thing is a gesture for her benefit.’

‘You don’t know that.’

Izzy glanced at me. ‘We don’t know anything, that’s why we need to go find out. The implications, if true—’

‘Let’s not jump to conclusions,’ I hastened to add. ‘Izzy is right. We need to know what we’re dealing with before we consider how to move forward.’
He fell silent again and I waited, trying to ignore Izzy’s concerned looks.

‘Alec and I can go,’ she offered uncertainly. ‘If you want to stay here.’

‘No,’ he said, finally looking away from the window. ‘No, you’re right. Let’s go.’

The warehouse was huge and empty, save for a man tied to a chair in the centre. Around him was a pool of dried blood, splatters going off in every direction like some monstrous finger painting of a flower. Cautiously, I signalled to Izzy to check the perimeter of the room, letting Jace hang back.

I didn’t expect her to find anything. Though it wasn’t especially advisable, I couldn’t help but believe Sebastian didn’t want to harm us. If he’d gotten what he came for, then I imagined he wouldn’t bother us again.

The man tied to the chair was alive from what I could make out.

‘Clear,’ Izzy said.

The closer I got to him, the more evident it became that this was in fact Nick Sang, the same overweight, balding fat guy who owned and managed Sang’s. Proximity also alerted me to the rather jarring fact that his hands had been cut off at the wrist. Two bloodied, bandaged stumps remained, taped tightly to the back of the chair.

‘Oh fuck,’ Izzy swore, facing him.

One of feet had been removed also. I felt a dizzying kind of shock seeing such a thing. Nick wasn’t bruised or beaten. Gagged within an inch of his life and deathly pale, but aside from the loss of three appendages, he didn’t appear to have been roughed up at all.

_Clever_, I thought to myself. Bruises and cuts heal. Hands and feet don’t grow back.

I looked to Jace and saw only my shock reflected there, but dull and distant.

‘Nick,’ he whispered, shaking his head. ‘What the fuck?’

The man looked up, tears streaming as he made strangled sounds. I tore the gagging tape off, taking some skin from his lips as I did. He let out a scream which simmered down into a sob.

‘Please,’ he cried, back heaving. ‘Please!’

I looked around at the warehouse. There were anti-tracking sigils everywhere and many more I didn’t recognise. We still had to be quick.

‘So, it was you?’ I asked. ‘You’re the one behind all this, huh?’

Nick shook his head, sobbing quietly. ‘Please, don’t hurt me anymore.’

‘Was it you or not?’ Izzy demanded.

‘Yes!’ he yelled, struggling against the extremely tight ropes binding him. ‘YES, ALL RIGHT! PLEASE JUST UNTIE ME!’
I looked at the restraints with doubt. ‘I’d hazard a guess they’re the only thing keeping you alive, stopping you from bleeding out entirely.’ I knelt before him. ‘Tell us what we want to know and I’ll call the cops. You’ll live.’

He scrunched up the toes on his remaining foot and after a shuddering breath, he nodded. ‘OK.’

‘You made the drug?’

‘I did.’

‘Why?’

Snot pouring from his nose, he swallowed hard. ‘My wife was a warlock, I wanted…we both wanted to make her human. I’d worked in chemistry all my life, I thought I could find something to access the human part of her and give it dominion.’

‘But it didn’t, did it?’ Jace guessed softly. ‘You invented this shit instead.’

He was shaking violently, his body in shock. ‘Yes,’ he rushed to agree. ‘It backfired at first so I—I added other elements, then my wife used magic for the last part, but it didn’t work like we thought.’

‘You’ve been the one selling it all this time?’

‘Yes, using —ahhh!’ he flinched, pulling on his left shoulder which seemed to be spasming. ‘Using proxies and middle men, obviously.’

‘Why?’

‘God damn it, I already told your psycho friend all this!’ he screamed, face contorted with agony.

‘That’s not our friend,’ Izzy said. ‘And if you wanna live, keep talking.’

Nick sobbed some more and I marvelled at how expertly Sebastian had broken him.

‘Did you order that thing to take Alec?’ Jace asked quietly. ‘Did you?’

‘Yes,’ Nick wheezed. ‘But not for the reason you think.’

‘You ordered it to take Alec,’ Jace said, slowly getting closer to Nick. ‘Hold him and shoot him up with your poison?’

‘It’s not poison!’ Nick yelled suddenly. ‘And I did it for you, kid!’

Jace was stunned into silence, we all were.

‘I wanted you to get your happy ending,’ Nick said. ‘You were so obviously in love with him. You know how many times I listened to you in that bar? I knew he’d never make a move, too cowardly!’

‘You fucking piece of shit,’ Izzy breathed with abject disgust. ‘Who the fuck are you to ruin lives like this?’

‘And it’s not entirely true either,’ I said, watching him. ‘He wanted to spread it through the Shadow world too. Have it infect everyone.’

‘I wanted you all to know the other part of yourselves,’ Nick insisted. ‘To embrace the darkness like I did! I injected myself with it and I saw everything crystal fuckin’ clear! It made me better than who
‘I’d been all my life!’

‘The next question I ask,’ Izzy said. ‘Will determine if we call the cops to collect a corpse or a cripple. Did you give Jace this shit in his drinks?’

Nick stilled, looking her in the eye. ‘I gave it to everyone. It was in every single drink I ever sold. It’s not my fault that he drank five times as much as everyone else!’

‘So, you weren’t targeting Jace?’ I asked doubtfully. ‘You knew we were Shadowhunters.’

‘I knew, yeah. I didn’t force any of you inside. Didn’t make you drink. I didn’t want to be alone,’ Nick said, eyes rolling back a little. ‘I just…wanted to see…’

‘See what?’ Jace asked tightly. ‘See how you were destroying me for years?’

‘I’m sorry,’ Nick slurred. ‘Brought out the worst in you. It’s usually the other…way…round.’

Jace slapped him across the face, bringing him back to the present moment. ‘Answer me this,’ he said, pressing against the severed area where a foot had once been. ‘Is it permanent? If I detox or whatever, will I get myself back?’

Nick swallowed his screams, eyes bulging. ‘No!’ he burst out. ‘You’ve been taking it too long, too often. It’s in your cells now. Irreversible.’

‘No,’ Jace said, voice cracking. ‘No.’

‘This is who you are now,’ Nick said wildly. ‘I have altered you! Made you into something different. You’ll pass it along to whoever you’re with. Don’t you see? You’re the carrier, Jace!’

Jace whitened. ‘What?’

‘Shadowhunter blood can sustain the change better than human blood,’ Nick went on. ‘You’ll even pass it to your children, think of that!’

To my surprise, Jace laughed, ice cold. There was no humour in his eyes at all and it quite took my breath away.

‘You’re all out of luck there, Nick,’ he said softly. ‘Too bad.’

Izzy swallowed nervously and glanced at me.

‘I’ll change the world, you hear me?!’ Nick yelled, his manic energy peaking as he struggled uselessly.

Jace pulled out his blade. ‘You won’t even put a dent in it.’

Nick eyed the blade. ‘No, I have lots more to explain! The history, how I created it!’

Jace held the blade out. ‘Is there a cure?’

‘No, but there is so much more—’

Jace cut his head off.
There was very little discussion about what to do. Izzy volunteered to dispose of the body nearby. She seemed to have a very specific plan which she didn’t share. Jace and I kept watch atop the warehouse roof.

‘I’m so sorry,’ I said after we hadn’t spoken for a while. It was cold, but with the distant sounds of the city around us, it felt comforting. Like the rooftop back at the Institute. ‘I don’t…’

‘It’s OK,’ he said. ‘I can’t really um…process it, too much?’

‘No, I understand,’ I rushed to say because holy fuck, he was talking to me again. ‘It’s a lot, too much to take in.’

Fuck, I was so useless.

‘Alec,’ he said hesitantly. ‘I know you’re still on the drug.’

The bottom of my stomach fell out. ‘What? No, Jace—’

‘It’s OK,’ he said tiredly. ‘I don’t mind.’

I didn’t know what to say. ‘How…?’

‘I think I’ve known for a while; I just didn’t want to believe it. I’m not mad.’

‘But I’m…not your Alec.’

He laughed, teeth chattering in the cold. ‘I’m hardly one to be choosy, am I? What the fuck version of myself am I? Broken, ruined, pathetic.’

‘Don’t say that,’ I said automatically.

‘But now it’s actually true,’ he said. ‘Like, it’s really true. That shit has been inside me for years. I’m not myself anymore and I never will be again.’ He wiped at his eyes, real tears this time. ‘Alec, I want to leave with you.’

‘What?’

‘You…before, you said we should leave.’ He looked at me. ‘I want to leave with you. I want to go somewhere, I don’t care where the fuck it is, and just be with you. Whatever of you I can get, I’ll take. If you’re…if you want to, that is.’

My heart was doing crazy things. ‘Jace, why are you saying this?’

‘I just can’t do this anymore. There isn’t a way for me to cope and if there is, I don’t know it. I can’t be here; I can’t make myself seem OK on the outside anymore. What Nick said, he’s right. I’m not myself and I never will be again. This is who I am now and I have to accept it.’ He moved closer. ‘I accept you like this if you accept me.’

The fracture between the two Alec’s became a chasm. The divide was crumbling, there and then.

‘Jace, you’re perfect,’ I said, unable to stop myself taking his hands in mine. ‘Fucking perfect.’

He let out a small, breathy sob. ‘But I’m not.’
When he didn’t recoil from my touching his hands, I wrapped my arms around him and pulled him close. I enveloped him in a hug as he cried in earnest.

‘You’re perfect to me,’ I insisted.

‘Alec, I…I sold my ability to ever have children,’ he confessed wretchedly. ‘I gave it away.’

All the air left my lungs. ‘What?’

‘I found you with a bargaining demon,’ he said, drawing away to look at me. ‘It asked for my ability to father children and I agreed.’

‘Oh, Jace,’ I said, eyes stinging with un-shed tears. ‘I’m so sorry. You shouldn’t have come for me, look at the mess I’ve made since then!’

He drew his thumb across my jaw. ‘Not come for you?’ he said, eyes shining. ‘Never.’

‘But I’ve fucked everything up,’ I went on, hellbent on venting. ‘I can’t give this shit up, Jace! I…I took advantage of you, I planned on making you come to me because I was…’ my breath gave out as a huge rolling sob crashed through me. ‘Because I was so in love with you.’

He pressed his forehead to mine. ‘It doesn’t matter.’

‘It does matter, Jace! You deserve better, you deserve him.’

‘No,’ he said firmly. ‘I really don’t. Maybe it’s better this way. We’ve both fucked up so bad at this point, there’s no reason to keep tabs.’ He gave a breathy, fragile laugh. ‘At least I won’t have to feel guilty about tainting you by association.’

I wanted to insist how wrong he was, but it would go on all night.

‘You’ll be an amazing Dad,’ I told him fiercely. ‘You can adopt or use a surrogate or whatever you want.’

He managed a small smile. ‘I should have listened to you before. Of course you’re Alec.’

‘And you’re Jace,’ I said, head spinning. ‘No matter what that asshole said.’

‘So, can we leave?’ he asked in a hopeful whisper.

‘We don’t have to. We can find a way to fix things here.’

‘No, I can’t be here anymore. I hate it. Everywhere I look there’s piece of that night. I still…’ he shook his head, eyes scrunched. ‘I still can’t remember it, but I know you do. You felt it all and that’s…it’s like I don’t have to remember it because you do. You felt it for me.’

It was like I’d never felt pain before until now.

‘So, if we leave, I won’t have to remember any of it, ever. We can go somewhere new, start fresh. Both of us. Together.’

‘Jace,’ I said hesitantly.

He dreaded the thought of me rejecting him. I felt it. So he kissed me. A chaste press of his mouth to mine, nothing more. But it wasn’t a kiss borne of the desire to do so. It was bargaining.
‘Together,’ he insisted, almost like he was trying to convince himself. ‘Together.’

The moment slowed, froze.

If I agreed, he would go with me. He would let me choose where and how; he would follow. He would be grateful. He’d lean into me and let me lead us both from there onwards. He would love me unconditionally. He would not prevent me from maintaining my use of the drug.

It was everything I wanted.

But there was no part of me that did not love Jace Herondale and that was my undoing. The common link between myself and the other Alec had corrupted my determination and ruthlessness. A virus, a weak link. Heavy and immediate, morality infected my perfect ambition.

Everything I ever wanted… and I couldn’t take it.

But I didn’t let him feel that. I kept it tightly under lock and key.

‘Together,’ I lied and let myself feel him in my arms one last time.

The demon wasn’t easy to summon.

‘You come willingly, Shadowhunter?’ a ghastly voice asked from a pillar of smoke and light.

Eyes closed, I said, ‘Yes.’

‘I do not require from you the price of Belaphim.’

‘Wait, what?’

‘I have already taken from your lover. From you, I want something more.’

‘OK, what?’

The voice sounded calculating. ‘Tell me first, what you ask of Belaphim?’

‘I ask that you give my Parabatai his strength back and remove the substance from his body that has been poisoning him for years.’

Silence, until, ‘This is a great deal more than I simple location request.’

‘Tell me the price, then.’

‘First, you must agree to pay it.’

‘The fuck? No!’

‘The price affects only you, no others.’

‘I won’t blindly agree to—’

‘Then we have nothing to discuss.’
The light vanished, leaving me blinking in the darkness.

‘Fuck.’

I redrew the rune, fresh from a print out from the library and waited.

‘You irk me, boy,’ the voice said, lightly slowly filtering back. ‘Decide.’

‘I need a guarantee that the price affects no one but myself!’

‘You have it.’

My whole body was shaking, sick with dread. ‘Then I agree to the price upon completion of a bargain between us.’

‘Clever little Shadowhunter,’ the demon said. ‘You may state your request.’

‘Like I said before, I need you to remove the poison from his body. Make him whole again.’

‘Your request is poor,’ the Demon chided with evident amusement. ‘Why not take his memories of the assault he suffered?’

I thought of Magnus’s warning. ‘No, that’s not…no.’

‘So many requests you could voice,’ it said. ‘And you ask this?’

‘Yes.’

‘It could be done.’

‘Name the price, then.’

‘I will clean your soulmate, purify him of the rot in his blood and in exchange, I will take all your memories since the first moment you were born unto this strength and clarity.’

My mind scrambled to understand. ‘Wait, no! I can’t do that.’

‘You beg a great gift; it comes at a great price. I will have the memories of your time since the moment your consciousness was altered. Every moment of it.’

‘I won’t remember anything from the last few weeks?’

‘Nothing. Every moment of your delicious torment and self-destruction will be mine for all time.’

I considered the offer, heart thundering. ‘I can’t,’ I bit off. ‘No, Jace needs me to remember it. I’m the only person who knows.’

‘As a goodwill gift,’ the demon extolled. ‘I will impart unto you the knowledge that your Shadowhunter is dying.’

My blood turned to water. ‘What?’

‘He has barely five years left of health enough to keep him standing before the poison in his blood eats him alive. He will die a twisted, broken little thing, unrecognisable and you will feel relief at his passing, such was the indignity he suffered in his final months.’

‘You’re lying!’
'You know the science of Yin Fen. You know the dangers posed. I have no need to lie, little Shadowhunter.'

'Let me verify this,' I begged.

I expected the refusal. 'No,' it said calmly. 'My offer expires the moment you leave and I will never make such a generous one again. A few memories and in exchange I clean you and your Parabatai, saving his life in the process?'

'Take something else. Take my ability to have children!'

The demon went quiet for a moment. 'I cannot.'

'Why?'

'I have stated the price; it cannot be altered.'

'Please,' I said. 'I can’t leave him alone in this.'

'He will have his strength once more. His true Parabatai by his side. Everything he needs to survive in this world. Are you so selfish to deny him this?'

My heart was fit to cave in. This could not be borne.

'Make your offer properly,' I said through gritted teeth and tear stained eyes.

'I offer to remove the corruption from both you and Jace Herondale, resulting in good health and returned state of mind. In exchange, I will take all memories of yours since you were so affected by this blight.'

I tried to breathe. 'I will never have existed.'

'Indeed,' the demon said, I could tell it was smiling. 'Look into the light of your own extinction, creature born of science and madness. I will take you for all time and cradle you in glass and steel.'

'He’ll have his Alec back?' I asked, wiping my eyes. 'His strength and true self?'

'He will.'

With closed eyes, I searched for any last trace of that cool, calm tranquillity but it was long gone. Faced with the prospect of my own death, I took a steadying breath and opened my eyes. I thought of Jace, let him fill my senses as I held his memory close.

'The price is acceptable. Do it.'

*

A/N -Holy fuck guys I am SO SORRY that was well over a month, honestly I'm so sorry. However, this chapter was basically two chapters in one at a whopping 13000 words so hopefully that makes up for a bit? Book writing really took over this month and I had so little time to get this done, but here it is.
Please let me know your thoughts, I know I ask this every time but hearing from readers makes writing this all worth it and every word you say means so much to me. As you can see we are headed for misunderstandings galore in the next chapter and more bittersweet interactions. I'm also sorry if any of this was triggering.

So, yeah. If you liked it, I'd love to hear from you. Like, I need to hear from you or I'll cry into a pillow.

p.s even if the comments section is as barren as last time, I won't be this long updating again, promise.

End Notes

Thanks for reading, reviews are life.

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