One step ahead

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**One step ahead**

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

**Summary**

What if Alec and Magnus had already met during that Pandemonium scene in the very first episode?

Or, how things might have gone if Magnus and Alec had just had a few extra days to get to know each other, before Valentine’s schemes, Clary’s various crusades, Lightwood family history revelations and Clave-Downworld politics made everything more difficult for them than it really needed to be.

It truly might have made all the difference in the world.
Okay, so in that first episode we see Clary run away from Pandemonium after the fight with the demons. And we know that Jace followed her and saved her from the demon at her home. And afterwards, Izzy talks about it like she was there as well. But no one ever mentions Alec having been at Clary’s home at all.

So, this is my entirely-canon-but-what-if-they-had-met-just-a-little-earlier plot bunny :)

There is nothing unusual about the mission.

If anything, it's pretty standard, what with demons putting mundanes at risk - although Alec has no idea why demons would peddle mundane blood in the first place - and thus, Alec and his siblings going in to kill any demons involved.

The mission is so more-of-the-same, that the three of them don't even really need to discuss how they'll handle this. Izzy simply gets ready for her role as the distraction - dressing up in a skintight, white dress and a matching wig - before they gather their weapons and then they are off on their hunt.

Their target is easily found and they follow the demon into Pandemonium, casually slipping through the crowd of mundanes and Downworlders on the dance floor of New York’s most popular Downworlder night club.

Jace is at the front – keeping his eyes on their target – while Izzy and Alec follow a few steps behind, continuously scanning their surroundings for anything that might turn out to be a problem later on.

Like Alec said, just another, standard mission.

They reach the curtained-off area at one side of the club and Izzy casually saunters her way onto the platform in the middle of the room, easily drawing the eyes of every demon in the room as she starts to dance. Jace is keeping the demon they were originally following in his sight, while Alec slips away to check the surroundings, making sure there are no surprises, no demons hiding somewhere and no exits for any of the demons to escape through.

Of course, by the time he gets back to the main room, the fight has already started. But it's not like Alec honestly expected either of his siblings to actually stick to mission protocol and wait for him to get back before starting the fight.

He almost wants to snort. Yeah. The words 'patience' and 'Lightwood' do not go well together.

But all in all, everything is going as planned. Blood-peddling demon found, demon followed and demon killed. And now they only have to kill off the remainders of the demon’s posse. Truly, business as usual.

Of course, that's when the mission goes a little sideways.
Magnus sips his drink, lazily overlooking his club from his slightly raised seating area, surrounded by a group of warlocks and seelies and other Downworlders, sprawled in the seats around him.

These days, this is where he feels most at home. In this place that he owns, where he is never in want of company but no one dares to actually demand his time or anything else from him.

Every night it is simply up to him to decide whether he wants to just observe - sitting on his not-quite-metaphorical throne, surrounded by other Downworlders - or whether he wants to partake in the fun - join the crowd and be entirely anonymous amongst countless strangers just looking for some fun.

It's truly not a bad way to spend your nights.

Of course, every single Downworlder here knows who he is - kind of unavoidable when you are High Warlock - but there isn't a single person in this club who actually knows him personally.

And Magnus has really gotten quite excellent at ignoring the longing for something real, for a real connection, has been doing so successfully for about a hundred years now. He is simply not certain anymore that finding that connection is worth the inevitable heartbreak of people leaving him, leaving him more often by choice rather than by circumstance.

So what if he sometimes sits alone on the balcony of his loft - sits in the dark, listening to the sounds of the city at night, watching as countless lights illuminate countless windows - and wishes to have someone to share this with, to share himself with. At least he has gotten quite good at being alone these days, has had about a century of practice after all. And the good thing about being alone is that there is no one around to call him out on his maudlin thoughts.

Magnus lets his eyes drift across the crowd, the mass of beautiful, dancing people, so young and joyous in their celebration of life. People after his own heart.

Truly, this is not a bad place to feel at home.

Then something catches his eye, making him sit up slightly. His eyes narrow.

There are Circle members in his club just casually standing next to the dance floor, as though they have any right to be here. The audacity.

Anger coils in his chest - pulling him to his feet and away from his rather cozy spot, before he even really makes the decision to move - and he proceeds to drive the two Circle members from his club with just a few words, some well-placed magical threats and extreme prejudice.

Because this is a Downworlder club, a place where his warlocks are supposed to be able to feel safe, to relax. And, sure, mundanes and even Shadowhunters are generally welcome here. But that welcome will never extend to any 'former' genocidal maniacs, not as long as even a single one of Magnus' warlocks doesn't feel entirely safe around them. And that's simply all there is to it.

Magnus sighs, breathes out, trying to let go of that tight resentment still coiling in his chest at the confrontation.

So much for a relaxed night out.
Alec tries to keep the red-headed girl in his sight.

The red-headed girl, who suddenly appeared from seemingly nowhere, who Alec has never seen before and who definitely wasn’t there when they entered the curtained-off area. The girl who also - ridiculously enough - seems to actually have angel blood, going by the unmistakable white glow of Jace's seraph blade in her hands.

And while it wouldn't be the first time that they run into a Shadowhunter from another Institute during a mission, it's more than apparent that this girl actually has no training whatsoever. It's obvious in the choppy way she moves, the way she just stands still and lets demons come at her instead of keeping herself moving as any trained fighter would, the way she barely seems to know which end of the seraph blade in her hands goes where.

She is clearly entirely untrained and thus definitely not a Shadowhunter, apparent angel blood or no.

So, for lack of a better term, she counts as an innocent right now, and Alec is doing his best to keep her safe, working with Jace to make sure she doesn't get herself killed in the few minutes it will take them to dispatch of the remaining demons.

But Alec's focus on the girl also means that he is very much aware of Jace’s focus on the girl, can see how he looks at her, sees how fixated his brother has been on her ever since she appeared, sees how he seems to almost forget Alec and Izzy are here at all.

Jace seems transfixed.

And even as they continue to fluently move around each other, killing demons, Alec can already feel that all-too-familiar, uncomfortable tightness in his chest, as he does every time Jace finds a new girl to crush on. It's jealousy and disquiet and instant dislike of anyone Jace finds even remotely interesting.

And like every time it happens, the doubts come creeping in as well.

Doubts about his own feelings, uncertainty whether what he is feeling is actual jealousy because Alec himself might have not-so-brotherly feelings for Jace or whether it's simply dislike of anyone who might take his parabatai's attention away from him, of anyone who might encroach on their bond.

It's a question he has been struggling with for years and he hasn’t been getting any closer to any sort of answer either.

Because Alec simply doesn’t know whether he has feelings for Jace or not, has nothing to compare their closeness to, no way to figure out whether it’s just Alec being defensive of their parabatai bond or an actual crush that makes him instinctively disapprove of anyone trying to get close to Jace.

Sure, Alec is self-aware enough to know that he is gay, has known for years. And Alec can also admit that Jace is definitely attractive. No one with eyes in their head would be able to say differently.

But it's not like Alec spends actual time thinking about Jace in a romantic manner of any sort, wouldn't know where to even begin imagining ‘being together' with Jace. Which he should be able to do if he were actually in love with his parabatai, right?

The real problem here is that Alec has never actually been attracted to anyone else either. And how is he supposed to know what it is he is feeling if he has nothing to compare it to.
But it's not like he can just go out to find someone - who isn't the safe option like Jace - to let himself feel truly attracted to either. Because for Shadowhunters, being anything other than heterosexual is simply not an option, even less so if you’re the eldest Lightwood son. And Alec just doesn't know whether the risk - coming out and risking his career, his family's reputation, everything he has built in his life - would even be worth it to him.

Which is exactly where he gets stuck every single time he has this internal debate. And it brings him back to their current situation and this girl who has angel blood but clearly isn’t trained as a Shadowhunter, the girl who has Jace absolutely transfixed.

The girl, who immediately runs off as soon as they finish killing the rest of the demons.

Of course, Jace then promptly takes off after her, only calling a distracted, “I’ll go get her!” over his shoulder in Alec’s general direction before he is already disappearing through the curtains back into the main area of the club.

Alec barely keeps in his sigh.

So much for this being just another standard mission.

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Magnus lets himself drift along with the movement of the dancing crowd, uncaring where exactly it takes him within his own club, similarly letting his mind drift away from the darker thoughts trying to crowd his brain - away from the memories of battles fought and friends lost that the appearance of the Circle members brought forth.

He truly doesn't feel like returning to his cozy spot and his eagerly waiting group of Downworlders anymore at all.

I need a distraction. Something to take my mind off things, he thinks with a sigh.

And as if the universe were listening to him, that is the exact moment someone runs into him.

Not just jostles him like is to be expected in a crowded club, but full-on runs into him, with enough force that the other person actually stumbles back, about to fall backwards.

Magnus' reflexes easily compensate for the impact and he automatically reaches out to steady the other person as well.

A red-headed girl - looking lost and almost a little scared - looks up at him. For a few seconds she just stands there, his hand still on her arm to keep her steady, staring at him.

She opens her mouth, “Do I kno-“

Then she frowns, abruptly shakes her head – as if shaking herself from her stupor – before looking over her shoulder in the direction of the VIP area. And with a mumbled, almost confused-sounding apology, she finally turns to stumble away in the direction of the exit.

Magnus watches her disappear into the crowd with a slight frown. There is something oddly familiar about her, almost like he might have seen her somewhere before but he can't seem to quite place her.

Maybe she reminds me of someone I used to know?

Something tugs at his memory and he tilts his head, trying to reach for it.
But he gets distracted when someone else comes sprinting from behind the curtains of the VIP area. The newly appeared, blonde Shadowhunter doesn't even notice Magnus standing there as he looks around, seeming almost a little frantic, before just taking off in the same direction that the girl just ran off in.

Magnus feels a slight grin quirk his lips. Ah, the drama of youth. Probably just one Shadowhunter chasing after the other. A lover's quarrel, maybe.

And the memory that called to him at the sight of the girl has escaped him once more.

Magnus shrugs. No point in trying to dig through his rather vast memory for what might turn out to be nothing of importance. He knows that the memory will either come to him on its own if it is important or remain buried in the centuries-worth of meeting countless important and not-so-important people cluttering his brain.

No use in trying to force it.

And just as Magnus is about to turn around - planning to go looking for that distraction to help get his mind off things - two more Shadowhunters step out from behind the curtains, stopping him in his tracks.

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“Well, he was certainly in a hurry to go after that one,” Izzy says with a smirk as she steps up next to Alec, looking at where Jace just disappeared through the curtains back into the main area of the club.

And Alec just sighs as he glances around the room once more to make sure that they didn’t miss any demons – or any other untrained Nephilim possibly hiding themselves somewhere, for that matter - not even attempting to hide the frown on his face. It's not like there is any use in trying to hide anything from Izzy. She simply knows him too well.

“At least this one seems to be generally interesting,” Izzy mocks airily. "Jace with an interesting girlfriend. Can you even imagine?"

At that, Alec can't help but quirk a grin. Because Izzy is definitely right about that. Jace certainly has a type and 'interesting' is not part of the listed requirements.

She just grins up at him as she wraps a hand around his arm, leaning slightly into him.

Alec looks down at her, pauses and then raises an eyebrow expectantly, waiting. Because she is currently wearing her 'pretty please, big brother' face. The face that she has been using since they were children to wheedle him into things he should know better than to agree to. They both know, he's kind of helpless against it.

She affects a truly unconvincing, guileless smile, asking casually, “So, are you planning to go after Jace or do I have to? Because if you are going, then I think I might just stay here for a bit, you know? It's been ages since I've been out dancing. And I definitely wouldn’t say no to a chance to join in on the fun here for a bit.”

“You don’t say?” Alec says sardonically. “You wanting to join in on any sort of Downworlder fun? I’m not even going to pretend to be surprised.”

But his voice gives him away. Alec already knows that he will be going after Jace and let Izzy have some fun. He’s a sucker for his siblings like that.
Going by her delighted smile Izzy knows it, too, her arm around his tightening in thanks. He just pretends to scoff at her, making her laugh just as they step through the curtains side by side, back into the main room of the club.

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That's when it happens.

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The two Shadowhunters who just appeared are close, the girl practically wrapped around the guy's arm, laughing brightly. She is beautiful and curvaceous and dazzlingly bright. She is the sort of girl that is hard to look away from.

But it's not her who actually caught Magnus' attention.

Instead, Magnus' eyes remain firmly fixed on the guy at her side.

Tall - probably taller than Magnus, which is always a plus – with dark hair and intense eyes, a slight frown on his face and with a presence that has the crowd around them subconsciously make a little more room, including those actually turned away from this man instinctively giving him a little bit of extra space.

He is the embodiment of tall-dark-and-handsome.

And he is also exactly Magnus' type.

His eyes are scanning the crowd, assessing his surroundings in that ingrained, automatic manner all Shadowhunters seem to have. But then, his gaze shifts to the right, unerringly - almost as if drawn in his direction - finding Magnus' own. Their eyes meet.

Something jolts in Magnus, a feeling he knows but hasn't felt in a long time fizzling down his spine. And even from a few steps away, Magnus can see the Shadowhunter's eyes actually widen a little in clear reaction as well.

Well, hello there, beautiful, is all Magnus can think, letting a coy smile curve his lips.

Looks like that distraction managed to find him all on its own.

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Alec doesn't know what it is that drags his eyes to the right, what it is that makes him turn slightly in the direction of the dance floor, but he is entirely helpless to follow the pull.

And almost immediately, his eyes are caught in someone else’s gaze.

Dark, warm eyes in a breathtakingly gorgeous face, eyes outlined by eyeliner and eyeshadow, making them seem even more intense. Eyes that almost seem to glow in the dim lighting of the club.

Alec’s brain stalls for a second.

Because that right there - standing only a few steps away from them, gazing right back at him - has got to be the most beautiful person he has ever seen. Despite the fact that until about ten seconds ago, Alec would have claimed that this - perfectly styled hair, elaborate make-up, silk shirt split to his waist and an almost absurd amount of jewelry adorning his person - would definitely not be his type, would possibly be the exact opposite of what he finds attractive.
But turns out he would have been more than wrong about that. Seems like this is exactly his type.

Because Alec can’t seem to tear his eyes away from the other man - feeling caught and almost a little breathless, the heat of a blush creeping up his neck - not at all helped by the fact that the other man is staring right back at him, his gaze unwavering, apparently just as transfixed.

Then finally, Izzy says something from beside him, shaking Alec from his stupor.

He immediately forces his eyes away, turning back towards her.

“Sorry, what?” he asks, keeping his voice entirely even, ignoring the heat along his neck which only intensifies when the quickest of glances shows him that the stranger still hasn’t looked away, is still watching him.

There is a slight pause, Izzy’s eyes sharpening.

“I said I am going to take off,” she replies slowly, tilting her head, clearly trying to decipher Alec’s expression. Then something seems to dawn on her. Her eyes widen slightly and she immediately flips around, stepping a little to the side to be able to see around him, easily picking out which direction he was just staring in, “What were you…”

Alec is helpless to let his eyes be drawn into the same direction. Only to be caught by that same, warm gaze once more.

The other man is still openly watching him, a slight smile now curving his lips as he returns Alec’s look, amusement but also something considering and almost heated in his eyes. An invitation.

Something almost like a shiver runs down Alec’s spine, the heat of his blush intensifying along his neck.

What in the world is this? Alec has never once reacted to someone like this before.

Thankfully, this time he at least remembers to tear his eyes away after just a one - or possibly two or three - second delay, turning back towards Izzy. Who is already back to watching Alec, now wearing an absolutely delighted little grin. Only her slightly widened eyes giving her own surprise away.

“Oh, I see. So, that’s what you were looking at,” she comments, her tone teasing, but in that good-natured, slightly taunting manner she gets whenever she thinks she has the upper hand. The prerogative of little sisters. She glances around Alec again, letting a somewhat leering grin overtake her face. “Not that I can blame you. Definitely worth staring, that one. Good to know you actually have taste, big brother.”

And Alec just rolls his eyes - actively keeping himself from following her gaze again, not quite ready to be caught once more - but doesn't reply. Really, what am I supposed to say to that? Thanks?

Izzy just continues to watch him for another few moments. And when she finally continues, there is something considering, something cautiously determined in her eyes.

“You know what? I don’t think I feel like clubbing tonight after all,” she says. It sounds casual, but Alec knows it's anything but. "I think I might just go after Jace and his newest interest instead. How about you stay here and have a little fun in my stead?"

Alec immediately frowns in protest - he truly dislikes leaving a mission unfinished or letting someone else do a job that he himself can take care of just as well - but before he can actually speak up, Izzy's
hand is once more tightening on his arm.

“Alec. Go have some fun. Do something for yourself for once,” she says emphatically, almost imploringly. “Just ignore all that weight piled onto your shoulders for a night, or even just for an hour or two. I’ll take care of Jace and the girl and the mission report and whatever else. Just go have a night to enjoy yourself for once. No one deserves that as much as you do.”

Her expression is firm, her eyes warm. And before Alec can try to protest again, she gives him a mischievous grin. Lightning-quick, she reaches up, undoes the two top buttons of his shirt and - with an impish smile and a wink - she is turning around, quickly vanishing into the mass of dancing people on the dance floor.

Alec just stands there, feeling a little blindsided as he stare after her.

And usually, Alec would scoff, ignore everything she just said and either go after Jace to make sure his brother doesn't get himself into any actually unsolvable trouble or go back to the Institute to write up the mission report and check whether there are any more missions to be taken care of tonight.

But.

Wasn’t he just thinking earlier about how he has never had a chance to let himself feel attracted to anyone, never even let himself flirt with someone, for angel’s sake? Alec has never been on a date, never kissed a guy and definitely hasn’t gone any further than that.

He is so tired of watching others live their lives without getting to have any of that for himself.

And if he ever wants a chance to figure this whole dating/romance/flirting thing out, then a stranger in a club honestly seems like a pretty perfect way to start.

So, Alec takes a slightly bracing breath, before finally turning around.

The man is still standing there, looking entirely relaxed as he watches Alec with a slight smile, clearly waiting to see what he will do. His gaze unwavering but the look in his eyes is warm and his expression inviting.

Alec only hesitates for another second before he finally crosses the few steps separating them.

Never let it be said that Lightwoods are chickens.

And even if he makes a fool of himself here tonight, it's not like Alec will ever have to see this guy again.

Right?

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Magnus watches the rather serious-looking discussion between the two Shadowhunters, unperturbed by temporarily becoming the focus of both their stares for a bit. He just happily gazes back, having no problem whatsoever with letting himself be drawn into another staring contest with the most gorgeous human being he has seen in a long time.

And even from a distance, he can tell that the Shadowhunter is clearly just as affected as Magnus is, just as interested – his eyes continue flicking Magnus’ way rather frequently even as he talks to the girl at his side - as much as he tries to downplay his reaction.
Adorable.

Magnus just waits. He will let the Shadowhunter decide whether to come to him or not. And usually he has absolutely no problems with making his interest immediately and unmistakably known right from the get-go, his come-ons always rather direct.

But there is something about this one, something that makes Magnus entirely unwilling to risk spooking him.

So, best leave the first step up to him.

Well, if he decides to come up to me at all, Magnus thinks, fully aware that Shadowhunters generally tend to keep amongst themselves for any sort of romantic entanglements. So, he wouldn't be surprised if this Shadowhunter balks at the idea of picking someone up at a Downworlder club.

But to his delight, the girl then proceeds to vanish into the crowd. A few seconds delay and then tall-dark-and-really-really-handsome finally turns towards Magnus, crossing the short distance between them in a few quick strides.

The first thought that goes through Alec's head once he reaches the other man is that he is even more breathtaking up close. Which really isn’t helping Alec's thought processes right now in the least.

He really has no clue how one is supposed to go about chatting up strangers in a club. So, best go with the basics then.

“Hi, I’m Alec,” he greets simply. *Introductions are a good way to start, right?*

At Alec’s greeting, the man’s smile only widens further.

“Hello, Alec. I’m absolutely delighted to meet you. I’m Magnus.” There is something playful in his voice, something warm and energetic and lilting. Alec quite likes it.

Magnus smiles at the newly introduced Shadowhunter, trying to keep the delight he is currently feeling from showing on his face too much.

Because, *is that an actual blush on Alec’s cheeks?*

Seriously, how can someone like this - gorgeous, tall and with that attention-grabbing, commanding presence so few people have - be actually shy?

*Magic, this has got to be the most adorable thing I have had the pleasure of seeing this entire year, or possibly this entire decade.*

Chapter End Notes

So, this will be an absolutely shameless fix-it fic. As in, I’ll be fixing *everything* I can think of that I didn’t like about the first season (not sure I'll remember everything, so let me know if there was something that particularly bugged you and I'll see about adding it to the list ^^). Thus, prepare for some pure and utter fluff :D

And I actually had no intention whatsoever of starting yet another Malec fic but this particular what-if bunny just got so absolutely stuck in my head that I just couldn't help
myself… Well, I’m also hoping to keep this relatively short, like 15k, 20k at most? Maybe? Hopefully? XD

Would love to know what you think :)}
There is a slight pause right after the introductions - almost as though the man is giving him a chance to say something else - but Alec honestly doesn't know where to go from here.

What is the next step supposed to be after introductions? Do they just start making small talk right here?

Magnus waits just long enough to give the Shadowhunter the chance to take the lead if he wants to. But when nothing is actually forthcoming after a few moments, he just fluently skips right over the brief pause. After all, he is quite happy to take the lead himself.

So, he just takes another step closer. "May I buy you a drink, Alec?"

At that, a slight smile breaks out over Alec's face, as he nod. Magnus easily smiles back at the beautiful sight, despite not actually getting a verbal response.

Definitely not the chatty kind, this one.

*Drinks actually sounds good*, Alec thinks. *Nice and casual.*

He watches as Magnus’ grin turns slightly amused and only then does it occur to Alec that he might have to work on actually verbalizing his thoughts tonight. He flushes slightly.

By the angel, he’s so out of his depths here.

But thankfully, Magnus doesn’t actually comment and just gestures for Alec to lead the way to the bar with a smile.

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They quickly find a spot at one end of the bar, a little out of the way, a little quieter but still close enough to the crowd that it doesn't feel too intimate. It also lets Alec put his back to the wall, so he doesn't feel the need to continuously check for potential threats over his shoulder.

Alec approves. And he is getting the feeling that Magnus might know Pandemonium quite well going by how easily he sought out this particular spot.

They settle at the bar and Alec is shaken from his observations by Magnus asking, "What would you like to drink?"

He throws out the one thing his brain comes up with from Jace's various stories of going out to clubs and bars.

"Beer?" It's more of a question than a statement, but once more Magnus just easily smiles at him and the bartender appears as soon as Magnus turns in his direction to order.

*Pretty good service*, Alec observes absently as their drinks appear in front of them within moments - a beer for Alec and something clear, probably-high-in-alcohol-content in a stemmed glass for Magnus - despite the large crowd surrounding the bar.
Then, Magnus casually snaps his fingers, leaving blue flames covering the surface of the drink. He is watching Alec, clearly waiting for some sort of reaction to his display of magic, even as he picks up his drink.

And Alec just shrugs internally. A warlock then. Good to know.

It's not like Alec is particularly surprised by this revelation. He already knew that Magnus had to be a Downworlder simply due to the fact that the other man could see Izzy and him despite their activated runes which make them invisible to mundanes.

Then there is the fact that Pandemonium is a known gathering spot for warlocks and seelies especially. So, he had kind of assumed that there was a fifty-fifty chance of Magnus being either. Still, good to know which one.

The idea that he is about to have drinks with a Downworlder simply doesn't bother Alec in the least, as uncommon as that particular opinion might be amongst Shadowhunters.

But, well, Alec also isn't a hypocrite, thank you very much. He's had to listen to Izzy describe her various 'encounters' with Downworlders for years now - his sister definitely has a thing for seelies in particular - and at no point has Alec ever thought there to be anything wrong with it. So, why would that change now?

Thus, Alec just reaches for his beer and then looks over at Magnus. The watchful, almost cautious look in the warlock's eyes is already dissipating and instead that small, warm smile is once more curving his lips as they finally clink glasses.

Magnus then turns slightly away from the bar - crossing his legs, glass in hand - to face Alec more fully, his warm, intense eyes unwaveringly focused on him.

"So, tell me," he asks cordially. "Is Alec short for anything?"

Okay, casual conversation it is then, Alec thinks. I can do this.

And as much as he despises small talk on principle, Alec is determined to at least make something of tonight, if only to figure out whether he likes this sort of thing at all.

So, he resolves to make himself stay for at least half an hour, no matter how banal the conversation might turn out to be. Just thirty minutes of this and then he can go home and call it a successful night, one experience richer than he was before. He can manage half an hour.

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The next time Alec checks his phone, it's already half past two in the morning, more than three hours since Izzy took off.

And, sure, Alec knew it must have been longer than that half hour he had first planned on staying, but he hadn't been aware of this much time passing. Because talking to Magnus is just easy, almost ridiculously so.

They've talked about anything and everything, exchanging stories and anecdotes, covering so many topics that Alec has kind of lost track of all that they talked about at this point. There was something about hobbies and interests, about favorite foods, and even some heavier topics relating to Downworld history or Clave politics strewn in.

But they also talked about some personal information, like Alec’s daily routine of missions and
training as a Shadowhunter and about Magnus’ clients and him actually owning Pandemonium, which also explains a lot about the things Alec observed tonight, like the always instant service they get from the bartenders and the fact that most people here seem to somehow know Magnus.

The two of them just talked, barely any lull in their conversation at all.

Alec is honestly surprised just how comfortable he is - sitting here at the bar of a night club with someone who was a complete stranger until just a few hours ago, talking. How much he is enjoying himself.

But it’s also late. Really late. And he has to get back to the Institute soon, has to get at least an hour or two of sleep if he doesn't want to be entirely useless tomorrow.

But by the angel, he also really doesn't want to go.

*Well, tonight is certainly not turning out the way I had expected it to.*

Magnus has been actively ignoring how late it is for a while now. He doesn't actually have to check the time to know that it has to be the not-so-early morning hours by now, just based on the crowd. You develop an eye for that sort of thing after a while. But he is nothing if not good at ignoring reality.

And he is just so captivated by this Shadowhunter, it's almost a little ridiculous.

Magnus doesn't even remember the last time he just talked like this to someone. No agenda, no hidden politics, no cat-and-mouse, nothing to gain beyond enjoying each other's company, but still so far beyond just small talk, the topics ever-changing, the conversation entirely engaging throughout.

He usually gets bored far too quickly to enjoy talking to people for any extended amount of time, with very few exceptions. But several hours of talking to Alexander and Magnus is a little stupefied by just how much he likes being around this one.

It's been a long time since he met someone this honest and open and straightforward. And Alexander is a beautiful amalgam of contradictions. Entirely open but also reserved about some things, no guile but also anything but naive, almost brash in his straightforwardness but careful in his observations, his every opinion showing that he is driven by rationality but also backed by pure empathy for anyone he meets.

Magnus is honestly fascinated.

And if he could he would make the night stretch a little longer, steal a little more time with this beautiful, adorable man.

But it's reaching that point of the night, where they will leave soon anyway, only leaving the options of going home together or separately. So, the only way to keep Alexander any longer would be by trying to seduce him. And as much as Magnus would certainly like to have this one in his bed - oh, would I ever - a quick tumble in the sheets seems like an entirely unsatisfactory end to a pretty perfect night.

No, this night deserves a proper ending, one that doesn't leave a slightly stale taste in your mouth the next morning. An ending that lets Magnus ask for another date at a later point in time.

So, when Alexander finally signals that he really has to leave - and after having heard the Shadowhunter describe his rather grueling daily training schedule at some point during their discussion, Magnus already feels a little sorry for him and how painful it will be to get up tomorrow -
he just smiles, nods and gets up with the Shadowhunter.

And then he promptly insists on exchanging numbers.

Hey, it's been years - *decades* - since Magnus has felt this drawn to another person. Only a fool would leave something like this up to chance. And Magnus may be many things, but a fool he is not.

Then, he follows Alexander outside, happy to wait with him in front of the club for a cab. And just when the Shadowhunter is about to get into the car, he pauses and then turns around once more. Magnus can see something like determination light his eyes, as he takes a step closer.

"I had fun. Maybe we could do this again some time?" Alexander asks quietly.

And at seeing the slight blush on the Shadowhunter’s cheeks combined with the careful determination in his expression and the tentative hope in his eyes, Magnus feels something twinge in his chest, something warm, a tug right where his supposedly impregnable, oh-so-fortified heart resides.

It’s a feeling he hasn’t felt in a long, long time. It should probably scare him.

But Magnus just feels an entirely helpless smile spread over his face in response.

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Alec gets back to the Institute some time after 3am.

Thankfully, he manages to get back to his room without actually running into anyone. Well, no one would have given him even a second look if he had, seeing as missions that go until all hours of the night are really not unusual in the least. Unsurprisingly, demons do not care for their sleep schedules.

But still.

Because Alec isn't sure he would have been able to keep anything even resembling a straight face right now.

He just can't seem to keep the smile off his face, can’t seem to keep himself from pressing his fingers to that still slightly tingling spot on his cheek where Magnus pressed a light kiss in goodbye.

Alec thinks to himself that for someone who hadn't even let himself *look* at another guy before, he really did quite well tonight.

And if he falls asleep with a slight smile on his face, well, it's not like there is anyone around to see.

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The next few days are chaos and Alec barely finds the time to breathe.

When Alec gets up the next day he is informed that Jace not only found the angel-blooded, non-
Shadowhunter girl, but he also saved her from a demon in her own home and then he brought her back to the Institute.

And now she is apparently part of their group.

At first, Alec is simply a little confused as to why this girl they’ve known for less than a day apparently gets as much say as any of them in how they are to go about anything. But he is getting increasingly irritated with every new lecturing rant about a world she literally knows nothing about, with every rough-shod mission his siblings and him are dragged into because of it.

But apparently, he is entirely alone in that.

To his ire, his siblings have also apparently decided that even the most basic rules don’t apply to them anymore. Like the 'no mundanes in the Institute' rule. It’s a rather simple, obvious rule, one you’d think wouldn’t be that hard to follow. But apparently, Clary’s rants about what is ‘right’ trump everything else currently, even basic common sense.

And ‘what is right’ also coincidentally includes the presence of her best friend, which leads to yet another, just-as-opinionated and even chattier non-Shadowhunter running around the Institute.

Although, as annoyed as Alec is, he doesn't actually protest against the chatty kid's presence all that much, at least not once he realizes that it's Izzy who is apparently fascinated with this one. He owes her that much, even though he really really doesn't get what she sees in the mundane. Well, it's too late now anyway, seeing as they've already explained the Shadowworld to this guy for some reason that still isn't apparent to Alec in the least.

He is torn between exasperation and frustration and irritation at the absolute mess his siblings are currently creating.

Although, he can even find a certain level of amusement in the fact that all three of them currently have rather unusual love interests, even if Alec is the only one who knows about all three. Jace who is crushing on the angel-blooded non-Shadowhunter, Izzy who is fixated on the mundane. And Alec who really likes Magnus, a warlock.

Because Alec has definitely started developing a rather serious crush on Magnus, as much as he would like to deny it. But, well, Alec has never been in the business of lying to himself, so at least to himself he can admit that he definitely likes Magnus a little. Or more than a little if he is entirely honest.

And his crush only gets worse with every conversation they have, which are actually surprisingly frequent.

Because the day after they first met, Magnus had called him. Called to ask Alec out.

He still flushes slightly every time he thinks about it. Still doesn't quite know what to do with the knowledge that someone like Magnus - so dazzling and bright and captivating and more than slightly breathtaking - seems to really be interested in Alec of all people.

Because the warlock definitely has other options.

While they had been in Pandemonium - sitting at the bar, talking - Magnus had been continuously approached by others, Downworlders and mundanes alike, flirting, offering drinks and company, sometimes including Alec but more often than not ignoring him entirely or even glaring at him.

Admittedly, the glaring might have been mostly due to the fact that Alec had been a Shadowhunter
in a Downworlder club, but still.

And it would have been a little daunting for Alec to see just how popular Magnus seems to be if it hadn't been for the fact that the warlock hadn't spared any of them even the slightest bit of attention, at most greeting those whom he knew by name, but over all remaining entirely focused on Alec.

And yeah, that had been quite the ego boost if Alec is entirely honest.

Alec just isn’t used to being at the center of anyone’s attention. He has long-since gotten accustomed to letting himself be eclipsed by Izzy’s brightness or Jace’s magnetism. He is used to being in the background, watching, observing. Which is actually not a bad place to be at all. Going ignored until he himself decides to actually make his presence known, honestly doesn’t bother him.

But, this – having someone’s undivided attention, someone who could apparently have pretty much anyone he wanted – is definitely new. It flusters Alec. But he would be lying if he said he doesn’t also enjoy it.

At least when the attention is coming from Magnus.

But point is, that Alec had an utterly frustrating morning of chasing after Jace and his crush - cleaning up their messes but getting lectured whenever he dared to actually express his opinions on anything - and he had just been pacing through the Institute's deserted corridors in irritation, when Magnus had called.

And Alec had been so damn glad that there had been no one around at that point, because he is quite sure his blush wouldn't have gone unnoticed by anyone.

A blush which hadn't gotten any better, when Magnus then just casually asked him out for lunch - and Alec truly is no expert on how this whole dating thing works, but it has to mean something that the warlock had called him less than twenty-four hours after they had seen each other last, right? - and Alec had agreed before he even really had a chance to think about it, possibly sounding a little too eager if he is entirely honest.

And maybe he should actually feel guilty for agreeing to go out right now - what with everything that's currently going on - but, dammit all, his siblings can deal without him for an hour. There is such a thing as a lunch break even for Shadowhunters, even if Alec practically never makes use of it, usually just grabbing something to eat between meetings and missions.

So, Alec is going out for lunch and his siblings can just call him on his phone if they really need him.

Which brings him here, a bistro in the middle of New York, about ten minutes away from the Institute.

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Magnus is delighted.

When he called Alexander, he knew he had been ignoring usual 'dating guidelines' of waiting for a few days until calling, lest you show just how eager you really are. But screw the procedure. Magnus wanted a date - wanted to make it clear just how truly interested he is in Alexander - and he has never had a problem with going after what he wants.

And going by how well they had gotten along last night, Magnus had actually been pretty confident that the Shadowhunter would agree to meet again.
But he certainly hadn’t expected to get that date pretty much immediately.

He had just been intending to ask Alexander out for drinks at some point in the coming days, but then the Shadowhunter hadn’t only agreed in general but also clearly assumed that Magnus’s question of whether he would like to meet again meant ‘right now’ rather than ‘whenever works for you’.

Not that Magnus is complaining in any way. Quite the opposite, really.

So, he had simply ignored the misunderstanding, skipping right to naming a good place for lunch for them to meet at – he knows the owner of that bistro, so Magnus is sure he’ll be able to get a table despite the incredibly short notice – as though meeting Alexander right now had been his intention all along. No need to make the Shadowhunter feel awkward about the misunderstanding when Magnus is quite happy to meet him right now anyway.

And he is so not considering right now what Alexander being so unfamiliar with things that are considered pretty standard when dating – something he had already noticed at Pandemonium, having felt endlessly endeared at the Shadowhunter’s obviously perplexed reactions at some points - in combination with his general shyness might mean about his dating history. Or rather his lack thereof.

Yep. Definitely not a thought for right now.

That’s something to think about tonight when Magnus is back at his place. Alone. And with some time to himself.

Instead he quickly calls the personal number of the bistro’s owner, arranges for a table – unbothered by the fact that it is the middle of the lunch rush and that they will most likely have to ‘lose’ someone else’s actual reservation to make room – and after a glance in the mirror, a snap of his fingers to perfect his outfit, he is out the door to go meet his adorable Shadowhunter for lunch.

Today is turning out to be a rather excellent day.

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Walking up to the bistro, Alec feels a little nervous – unsurprising, seeing as this is the first time he has actually gone out with anyone – but strangely enough it’s not actually in a bad way. Well, he doesn’t particularly enjoy feeling nervous but there is also something like anticipation and almost eagerness mixed into the feeling in his chest. It's new and strange, but again, not in an entirely bad way.

Then he spots Magnus waiting for him out front and Alec lets himself get briefly distracted by how incredible the warlock looks. Magnus isn’t quite as spectacularly dressed as he was at the club last night, but his hair is still elaborately styled, he is wearing a heap of accessories and the blue highlights in his hair perfectly match his eyeshadow as well as the color of the silk shirt underneath the vest he is wearing.

Suddenly, Alec wonders whether he should have made more of an effort and not just have shown up in what amounts to his work clothes of jeans, t-shirt and a leather jacket.

Although, going by the obviously appreciative once-over Magnus gives him as soon as he spots Alec, the warlock clearly sees no reason to complain. Alec can’t help but blush slightly under the attention.

But before he can do anything to actually embarrass himself, a waiter appears to lead them to a table. The restaurant Magnus chose is really nice – and apparently quite popular going by the long line out
And once the waiter has disappeared once more, Magnus smiles and leans forward slightly.

"So, how has your day been so far, Alexander?" he asks lightly.

Alec just sighs, as his mind automatically wanders back to the Institute and his siblings and the thought of just how many new messes they might manage to get into in the one hour Alec allotted himself for lunch.

"Ah, it has been a rather busy day, then, I take it?" Magnus asks - his eyes just as warm and intense as yesterday - and Alec finds he still quite enjoys being at the center of this man's attention. Really enjoys it.

"You have no idea," Alec finally replies. A pause, then he sighs once more. "Having siblings is stressful."

Magnus' laughter is warm and Alec simply can't help but smile in response, already feeling some of his frustration ebbing away, his mood lifting.

And after that they just talk, Alec's nerves almost entirely disappearing as he relaxes once more. Because talking to Magnus is apparently just as easy now, as it was when they were at Pandemonium. They talk and eat and Alec might be starting to get a little bit addicted to the sound of Magnus' warm laughter.

Time passes far too quickly and before he knows it one hour has already passed.

And Alec would honestly love to just stay a little longer, but he does in fact have a job he can't just ignore. So, they say their goodbyes, but it's not quite as reluctant as yesterday. Because this time Alec doesn't have to wonder whether they'll actually see each other again.

He finally gets what people mean with words like 'chemistry' or 'spark' when talking about compatibility. Because Magnus and him definitely have that. In abundance.

And when his phone pings with a new message from Magnus before he even makes it all the way back to the Institute, Alec just smiles.

Chapter End Notes


Seriously, how? I mean, yeah, this is a fix-it (which really just translates into a chance for me to make them happy right from the very start without all the drama), but still! This seems a little excessive, even for me... Well, whatever. Malec deserves all the nice things anyway and apparently they are getting it in this fic :D

Would love to know what you think :)  

And thanks so much for all your comments and kudos (*^_^*)
After that, the texts just keep coming, making Alec grin at the weirdest of moments throughout the coming days.

Which is quite the welcome relief, because things at the Institute only get more chaotic. His siblings are really starting to try Alec's patience.

Another harebrained plan - which involves visiting the Silent Brothers of all things - not only reveals that the girl his brother is crushing on is actually Valentine’s daughter but also leads to the mundane his sister is fascinated with somehow managing to get himself kidnapped by vampires.

Really, before this week, Alec never would have thought that him being interested in a warlock could ever turn out to be anything but the very definition of stressful. However, compared to his siblings' love interests Alec's crush is an absolute cakewalk.

At this point Alec is even entirely on board with getting Clary's mother back. If only because he is hoping that Jocelyn Fray might have at least some common sense and also enough sway over her daughter to stop the girl from just running around doing whatever she pleases while actually knowing nothing at all about their world, but happy to lecture them all about what is right and what is wrong, regularly putting people at risk but seemingly feeling absolutely no responsibility for whatever the fallout might be.

Well, at this point Alec can only hope that the lack of common sense and rational thought doesn't run in the family.

Even worse, Jace has seemingly decided that there is nothing he wouldn't do for this girl, meaning Izzy and Alec get dragged along into their messes as well and then also have to look happy about it. Apparently, it's offensive if Alec voices differing opinions about what the best way to approach their various problems would be. He is starting to get rather tired of getting lectured by a girl he met less than a week ago.

Izzy is definitely doing her best to keep the balance between everyone, she really is. But has always seen more eye to eye on actual issues with Jace, while Alec is the one who cares about the rules, about the Clave's directives.

It's not even like this sort of thing hasn't been a topic of contention between Jace and Alec before - it has quite often, actually - but never to this degree. And they have also always at least tried to find some sort of middle ground between them, tried to come up with a feasible compromise, with Jace's screw-the-rules mentality usually perfectly balancing out Alec's the-law-is-the-law mindset.

But apparently, not anymore.

Because now, they apparently deal in ultimatums. At one point, Jace actually goes so far as to put a you-are-either-with-me-or-against-me choice in front of him. The fact that his parabatai even thinks that could be a choice for Alec at all… It was never about being on Jace's side for Alec, not once.

Alec is just somewhat blindsided by the fact that his opinion, his take on things suddenly doesn’t seem to mean all that much to his parabatai anymore.
He is frustrated and disappointed and if he is entirely honest, also hurt by Jace's exclusive, unapologetic focus on this girl, to a point where he would question Alec's - his parabatai's - loyalty before he would question hers. Alec doesn’t get it.

And none of this has anything to do with his maybe-or-maybe-not feelings for Jace. Because the last few days have very clearly shown Alec that whatever it is that he feels for Jace, it certainly isn’t romantic.

Alec has been on a grand total of two kind-of-dates with Magnus and already he can barely drag his thoughts away from the warlock. Not to even mention Alec's rather vivid shower daydreams revolving around said warlock... And, yeah. That’s something that certainly never happened with Jace.

Which, thank the angel, finally clears up the question whether Alec loves Jace or is in love with him.

But suddenly clarified feelings or not, Jace is still his parabatai, is still the person Alec always looks to first, the one he unquestionably relies on. Alec’s entire life, every part of his existence is at least partially anchored in their bond. And while he doesn’t actually doubt their bond itself, it is certainly a little disillusioning - disappointing, disheartening, painful - to see Jace so willingly push Alec aside in favor of a girl.

And despite his misgivings, Alec has still been going along with every single harebrained scheme his siblings come up with. Because they are just that, his siblings. So, of course he is right there with them - because where one of them goes, all of them go, three go in, three come out, and so on - whether he agrees with them or not. And despite what all of this will mean for him in the long run.

Because the thing that his siblings like to forget whenever it's convenient for them is that in the end Alec is the one who will mainly have to deal with the fallout. He is the oldest, the one who is held to a higher standard, the one with the highest rank among them, who should be reporting to the Clave, who will have to justify the unsanctioned missions and who will have to deal with the fallout for going against the Clave's directives. He is the one who will mainly have to deal with the consequences and punishments as doled out by the Clave. And he is also the one who will be blamed by their parents.

But he can deal with that. He’s used to it.

It's just that sometimes he simply wishes his siblings would at least try keep in mind that - in contrast to them - Alec actually gives a damn about their parents' approval and the Clave's rules.

Alas, currently they apparently couldn't care less.

And after an entire day of once more running after his siblings and trying to fix the messes left behind by their let's-worry-about-the-details-when-we-get-there approach to everything, Alec is finally on his own, exhausted and irritated and still rather frustrated. He is sitting on the couch in his room after just having had a shower and now he finally has the time to actually read through the various texts he got from Magnus throughout the day.

All day, whenever his phone pinged with a new message, Alec had been unable to keep himself from reacting, anticipation and eagerness pulsing through him to read whatever Magnus had sent him this time.

The messages had made him smile more than once throughout today. They definitely made his rather frustrating day a little bit better.
Although, ever since this afternoon when his siblings finally came up with that ludicrous idea to go visit the Silent Brothers, Alec has barely managed a few brief replies and the last few messages he didn't manage to reply to at all.

So now, he sits in his room - entirely exhausted from the day - with his fingers hovering over his phone, staring at the last several texts from Magnus which Alec has yet to reply to, trying to think of something to text back after having seemingly ignored the warlock for a few hours. Alec's mind is blank.

See, the thing is, he doesn't actually want to text the warlock. No. What he would honestly like right now is to actually talk to Magnus.

And Alec knows it's ridiculous. They had their lunch date - it was a date, right? - not even two days ago, they have only seen each other twice in total, talked twice in person, talked a bit on the phone and exchanged a few texts. They've known each other for less than two full days.

So, yeah. Alec knows full well it's ridiculous for him to feel like he really just wants to talk to Magnus.

But that doesn’t change the fact that he does, that he just wants that warm feeling he got the last few times they talked.

So, now the real question is, what to do about it. Will it appear too desperate or clingy or anything of the sort if he actually calls Magnus right now? Alec has listened to Izzy and Jace talk about their dates often enough to be fully aware of the usual playing-hard-to-get thing that is supposedly part of dating. But that always seemed like such a ridiculous game to Alec. He’s far too straightforward for that. And Magnus clearly isn't playing that game either, seeing as he had just continued to text Alec throughout the day despite only getting rather infrequent replies from him. So, at least Alec isn’t alone in his wish to talk some more, right?

And isn’t it already a little late for making it a challenge now anyway, seeing as Alec has already gone on that lunch date with Magnus?

He stares at his phone for another few moments, second-guessing himself. But then he scoffs.

*Man up, Lightwood. You know what you want, so go get it.*

Alec breathes in and then simply presses 'call'. He only has to listen to the dial tone briefly, before someone already picks up at the other end.

“Alexander,” is the delighted greeting he receives. “To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“Hi, Magnus.” Alec smiles. And, damn, it’s certainly nice to have someone be so very clearly happy to hear from him. “No reason.”

There is barely a pause.

“Well, that’s even better,” Magnus replies, somehow sounding even happier now. There is a brief pause - Alec can hear some rustling on the other end, so maybe Magnus is getting comfortable somewhere - before the warlock asks, “So, how has your day been?”

And Alec feels the rest of his nerves recede at hearing the honest interest in Magnus' voice. He leans back on his couch, happy to let himself fall into yet another conversation with the warlock who has been taking up most of Alec's waking - and sleeping - thoughts recently.
And after that it just becomes a thing. They text during the day and talk in the evening or at night if they don’t manage before.

Alec keeps himself from actually thinking about it too much. From thinking about what it means that they spend at least an hour every day talking to each other on the phone, sometimes more. Yesterday they even talked twice when Alec had been forced to cut their first conversation short - this time because he had to go rescue Izzy’s chatty, lost little mundane from a vampire hotel - and Magnus found a rather thin excuse to call him back again a few hours later.

Talking to Magnus is just so incredibly easy. Even despite the fact that they are both very purposely and very obviously avoiding certain topics. Because as much as Alec really truly - absurdly - enjoys talking to Magnus, they’ve effectively only known each other for a few days, so it’s not like Alec can just throw all caution to the wind and discuss the details of his missions or anything else of the more controversial things that are currently going on. Like the fact that they have Valentine’s daughter sauntering through the New York Institute. And Alec is also fully aware that there are a few topics that Magnus is purposely staying away from on his end. Hard to miss when Magnus has yet to mention anything pertaining to other warlocks in their conversations.

Surprisingly, it honestly doesn’t really bother Alec all that much, well, at least not yet. But they’ve already started inching their way towards the more difficult, more contentious topics recently, so he is sure they’ll get there. However, for now, keeping away from any of the more sensitive matters absolutely makes sense in Alec’s eyes. Because having a crush on a warlock is already complicated enough without deliberately bringing Clave-Downworld politics into it right from the start.

Additionally, with Alec avoiding the topic of his Shadowhunter missions and Magnus avoiding the topic of what is currently going on in the warlock community, they tend to just talk about things that purely pertain to themselves instead. Their hobbies, places they want to see, things to try, stories from the past, hopes for the future, plans for right now. And Alec has never been quite this intrigued by another person.

An hour talking about anything and everything not directly work-related passes almost ridiculously quickly when he has Magnus on the phone. By now even the breaks in their conversation aren’t awkward anymore, turning from pauses to be filled into comfortable silences.

Magnus also seems to have a knack for realizing just what Alec needs, happy to listen whenever Alec just needs to randomly vent for a few minutes but just as happy to tell some amusing anecdotes whenever Alec is simply too wired or too exhausted to hold up his end of the conversation.

And Alec does his best to avoid thinking about the fact that - even after just a few days of this - the thing that he now looks forward to the most, is that phone call at the end of the day and listening to that warm laughter at the other end of the line.

"Ah, but that's because you have never seen a djinn drunk before, Alexander. Let me assure you, there is nothing quite as hilarious as watching a drunk djinn trying to bully a group of seelies into
getting a singsong going," Magnus assures - unbothered by just how ridiculous he must look right now, rifling through the ingredients on his desk while smiling at his phone like an idiot - as he listens to the sound of rustling papers at the other end of the line as Alexander continues sorting through some of his paperwork while they talk.

He can hear the answering smile in Alexander's voice as the Shadowhunter replies, "I'll have to take you on your word on that."

"Hm. You truly should," Magnus nods cheerfully, even as he finally finds the correct vial and adds some of the mandrake root to the potion he is currently preparing for a client.

He really does his best to ignore just how almost domestic their conversations have become at this point, how easily they work their phone calls into their daily routines. And he definitely tries not to think about that warm feeling in his chest every time they talk. That feeling that tells him that he is getting too close, too invested.

Because after about a hundred years of shutting his heart off to the outside world, this adorable Shadowhunter has somehow managed to simply bypass all of Magnus' carefully erected, supposedly impregnable defenses and is currently - rather unceremoniously - making himself a place right in Magnus' so very squishy center.

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"I mean, I get that he has a crush on her. I do! But he is being entirely unreasonable. As in unable to reason," Alec huffs in frustration. He has been venting about Jace and Clary's latest moronic stunt for a few minutes now and if it weren't for Magnus' repeated assertion that he truly doesn't mind, Alec would actually start feeling a little embarrassed by his own rant.

"Ah, the loss of common sense once the heart gets involved. It's an age-old story, my dear," Magnus replies warmly, sympathetically.

Alec feels an immediate flush crawl up his neck at the endearment. The warlock has so very recently started using affectionate terms in their conversations and it makes Alec blush every single damn time.

Thankfully, there isn't actually anyone around to see him impersonating a tomato.

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'Do you enjoy the opera?'

Alec raises an eyebrow at the rather random text.

'Don't know. Never been,' he types back, unbothered by the fact that he is currently exchanging private texts while in the middle of the Ops center.

It's not like anyone here would be suicidal enough to actually try and sneak a glance at his phone. Alec has a reputation, thank you very much. Even his siblings know better than to try something like that.
'Oh, you are missing out. Even for those who do not particularly enjoy that kind of music, the opera itself is still an experience to be had. There is an excellent production of Aida coming to town soon. I could easily get us tickets if you would like to go?' is the reply.

Alec tamps down on the smile that immediately threatens to spread over his face. Magnus has been continuously adding to the list of things he wants to do with Alec or show Alec or where to take Alec, which places they should visit or what kind of food Alec 'just has to try' and so on.

Alec is honestly looking forward to all of it. He might even be keeping his own mental version of said list.

Is it normal that despite only having known him for a few days, I have never once even considered saying no to anything?

"Why did you decide to start a nightclub?" Alexander asks.

And Magnus can't help but frown a little. Not at the question, but at how tired the Shadowhunter sounds even over the phone.

It's almost midnight and Alexander called him about ten minutes ago. Magnus knows that the only reason the Shadowhunter is still awake is the fact that something about the day - something about the missions that are keeping him so very busy - has him simply too wired to sleep.

Magnus had actually been at Pandemonium earlier for a night out. But one glance at his flashing screen and he had just unceremoniously portaled home to get comfortable on his couch instead. Because, apparently, talking to Alexander trumps having a fun night out these days.

Magnus isn't even going to pretend to be surprised at that particular revelation.

But point is, Alexander sounds tired. Or rather, utterly exhausted. And Magnus would love to help him solve whatever problems are currently keeping him so insanely busy. Alas, they are not quite close enough for that yet, haven't known each other for long enough that he could just offer to come over and help. Magnus is quite certain they will get there, that they'll get to the point where Magnus can offer his help freely for no other reason than to help Alexander out, maybe even to the point where it will be Magnus’ place to openly worry about Alexander’s health.

But for now, the only thing he can do is providing some sort of distraction for the Shadowhunter from time to time, a chance to relax a little as they talk.

Thus, Magnus keeps his worry over Alexander's lack of sleep out of his voice and instead just replies lightly, "Well, for one, I like trying new things from time to time. And it was originally just intended as a place for Downworlders to go, to let loose, without having to worry about the politics that usually come with seelies and vampires and warlocks and werewolves and whoever else gathering in one spot. Just a place for like-minded people who want to forget about their worries for a night, to have fun. The fact that it has become one of the most popular nightclubs in New York is just a bonus."

Alexander only hums in reply, so Magnus continues talking.

And when - about fifteen minutes later - the deep breathing at the other end of the line signifies that
the Shadowhunter actually fell asleep to the sound of Magnus' voice, something so all-encompassingly warm and affectionate expands in Magnus' chest, that it almost feels a little hard to breathe for a moment.

Magnus falls silent, listens to the adorable little snuffles the Shadowhunter is making in his sleep for a few moments. Then he breathes in and finally admits to himself that any thoughts of pulling back - of keeping his distance, of keeping his heart safe - come far too late to actually make a difference any more.

He is already in too deep.

Alec can feel himself become more and more infatuated with Magnus with every lengthy, brief, texted, verbal, random conversation they have.

And he knows the very idea of falling for a Downworlder should make him balk, should make him step back and keep his distance. But the truth of the matter is that every time he sees a new text from Magnus or his phone starts ringing with the warlock's name on the screen, he just can't help that warm, anticipatory feeling that expands in his chest and sends a slight flush crawling up his neck.

And if he is entirely honest, he doesn't want to stop it either.

And then comes the day where his siblings decide they should lure the High Warlock of Brooklyn out of hiding to get his help with Clary's memories. But Alec is barely listening as the others around him discuss how to best go about that, instead he stares somewhat speechlessly at the pictures of Magnus on the Ops center's screens.

*Huh.*

Chapter End Notes

Erm... So, is it just me or did this somehow get even more fluffy? How is that even possible? XD Would love to know what you think :)

Also, from here on out the plot from canon and the other characters are going to start making more of an appearance despite the slight what-if twist :)

And thanks for all your comments and kudos! You guys are wonderful (*^_^*)
Magnus immediately looks up from the scrolls spread out in front of him on the table when his phone pings with a new message.

These days, the likelihood of any messages he receives being from Alexander is quite high, which apparently also makes it utterly impossible for Magnus to ignore his phone whenever it makes even the slightest noise.

Honestly, at this point it's simply pointless to pretend that he isn't entirely infatuated with the Shadowhunter, infatuated to an almost ridiculous degree.

So, he just drops the scroll in his hand and reaches for his phone instead, swiping his thumb across the screen, already grinning slightly when he sees that the new message is indeed from Alexander. Only to pause, his eyebrows rising slightly in surprise, once he actually reads what it says.

'So, I'm currently in a planning session with my siblings about how to lure the High Warlock of Brooklyn, a certain Magnus Bane, from hiding in order to get him to help Clary Fray recover her memories. Any thoughts?'

Magnus just quirks a grin.

Straight to the point, as always. His lovely Shadowhunter might truly be the most straightforward person he has ever come across. Alexander's no-patience-for-bullshit attitude is honestly refreshing and in Magnus' opinion also absolutely endearing when coupled with that adorable scowl of his.

Although, maybe he should focus on the fact that Alexander now knows about Magnus being the High Warlock.

It's not like Magnus has been deliberately hiding this. Well, maybe in the beginning - when Alexander had still seemed so very skittish - Magnus might have purposely avoided the topic, worried that his position as the High Warlock might be a little much, possibly even scare Alexander off before they ever got the chance to get to know each other. And then later on, the topic has simply never come up, mostly due to the fact that they have both been avoiding anything too contentious, including Clave business on Alexander's end and Downworld business on Magnus' end.

Still, him being the High Warlock of Brooklyn is apparently out now and it's quite the relief to see that Alexander doesn't actually seem to hold it against him.

*Thank magic.*

+++ 

Alec's lets his eyes flit between the various pictures of Magnus displayed on the screens, as he tries to focus on figuring out what eras the pictures have likely been taken in. Better to focus on that instead of on how good Magnus looks in all of them.

Because Magnus apparently *always* looks incredible, no matter which century he's in or how he might decide to dress.
Alec feels himself flush slightly. This is just so not the time.

He should be focusing on the revelation that the warlock he has been falling for is apparently also the High Warlock of this city and - according to Hodge - possibly one of the most powerful warlocks alive. Or on the fact that Magnus is apparently much older - and thus also likely much more powerful - than Alec had thought.

But as surprised as he feels, Alec isn’t actually mad at Magnus for not mentioning any of this. He had known that there were some things Magnus wasn't telling him, same as Alec has been keeping some things to himself. Thinking about it, he is actually quite sure he never mentioned being the oldest son of one of the most influential Shadowhunter bloodlines to Magnus either. So, they might as well just call it even on that end.

He is drawn away from his thoughts by Izzy hopping up from her seat on the table to start fiddling with the screens, swiping the pictures of Magnus aside in order to pull up a poster for some sort of Downworlder rave, as a possible place for luring the High Warlock from hiding.

He once more glances down at his phone, waiting for Magnus' reply to his last message. He texted the warlock earlier, almost out of reflex, when he realized that his siblings are currently planning to track Magnus down.

It’s an absolutely ridiculous plan in Alec’s opinion. There is such a thing as fire messages and if you want a warlock's help you send them a message and either they accept or they don't. Luring a powerful warlock from hiding under false pretenses is an absolutely ridiculous idea.

Of course, Alec has clearly stated his opinion on that, but as has become the norm so very recently, his objections are simply ignored and the planning of yet another unsanctioned mission - which Alec will have to justify in front of the Clave later on - continues.

At this point, it just makes Alec want to roll his eyes. Sometimes his siblings are simply exasperating.

His phone vibrates and Alec immediately looks down, swiping a thumb across the screen to read the new text.

'Hm, I might in fact have something to add on that topic.'

Alec immediately has to fight the smile tugging at the corners of his mouth, because. He can practically hear Magnus' teasing grin in the written words. Which should be odd considering that they’ve known each other for less than two weeks but also really isn't because of the many hours they've spent talking to each other whenever they can squeeze it into their schedules.

And it looks like they are apparently also skipping right past the recent revelation of Magnus being the High Warlock. But that is honestly just fine with Alec - they can always talk about it later - because he has more pressing matters to talk about right now anyway.

So, he just taps out his reply, 'Which would be?'

The answer is prompt. ‘Now that would entirely depend on how you would like to play this, my dear. Should I let myself be lured out of hiding by your siblings' ever-so-cunning plan or should I just portal over to the Institute right now to join the discussion?’

Alec immediately feels a slight flush crawl up his neck at the endearment. He still hasn't quite gotten over his reaction to Magnus calling him anything other than Alexander. Which he also quite likes, likes the way his full name sounds when Magnus says it.
And yes, Alec is fully aware just how gone he is on the warlock, no need to point it out.

Thankfully, no one notices his slight blush, everyone too focused on Hodge who mentions having something that they can use to lure Magnus. And Alec just follows after their little group on their way towards the Institute’s safe, even as he sores slightly at the second part of Magnus’ message.

Because he knows exactly just what Magnus is offering him here, not only regarding this particular situation but also regarding their acquaintance in general. Namely, that he’ll leave it entirely up to Alec to decide whether they let people in on them knowing each other at all, that he’ll go along with whatever Alec is more comfortable with.

It just seems so like Magnus to simply leave this up to him and it warms something in Alec to have Magnus be so very clearly concerned with Alec’s feelings and well-being and comfort first and his own second.

Alec definitely never had that before. And it only makes him want to return the favor.

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Magnus stares absently at the far wall as he fiddles with his phone, waiting for Alexander's reply. Another few seconds of this and Magnus finally huffs a breath - exasperated at himself - and he gets up to make himself a cocktail to distract himself with.

For the first time in a long time, Magnus is actually nervous.

Because just now, Magnus gave Alexander carte blanche to decide how they'll treat their 'acquaintance' in front of others. The Shadowhunter could come back with anything, from being entirely open about them recently spending as much time as they can possibly manage talking to each other, all the way to not even admitting that they know each other at all.

And as much as Magnus hopes it won't come to that, he would even understand if Alexander chooses to keep them knowing each other entirely under wraps. Because it's one thing for Alexander to enjoy talking to him, but something else entirely for him to openly admit to other Shadowhunters that he enjoys a warlock’s company. Magnus is well aware that not all Shadowhunters are as open-minded about Downworlders and the last thing he ever wants to do is make Alexander's life any harder than it needs to be.

But in the end, that’s really all there is to it. Magnus will play along with whatever Alexander prefers, despite Magnus being already in so deep, already so very invested in this beautiful - but still so very new and fragile - connection that has been developing between him and Alexander over the past few days.

So, yes, Magnus would understand. But that doesn't change the fact that he still hopes.

+++ 

Alec watches Hodge open the Institute's safe, even as his mind remains focused somewhere else entirely. Namely on the question of whether to be open about knowing Magnus or whether to keep it a secret.

The thing is that Alec honestly doesn't want to tell anyone about Magnus and him, about the fact that he has been spending a good amount of time every day talking to Magnus, by text or on the phone or - whenever he can manage – even in person, about how much he enjoys spending time with Magnus.
And it has nothing at all to do with being ashamed or with an actual need to hide it. It's simply because Alec himself isn’t quite sure yet what this thing between him and Magnus even is, much less what it could possibly become. And he would really like the chance to figure that out, before complicating things by letting anyone else in on it.

Alec likes what he has with Magnus right now, likes spending his evenings talking to him, likes it when it’s just the two of them, no jobs, no conflicting responsibilities, no politics, no busybody siblings sticking their noses into his business and no parents disapproving of Alec’s life choices.

Alec likes having something in his life that's just for himself for once.

But.

With his siblings so dead-set on implementing their newest scheme, Magnus will likely be dragged into this mess shortly anyway, no matter what Alec's preference may be. And while Izzy clearly didn't recognize Magnus from the pictures as the guy they had seen at Pandemonium, there is a good to fair chance she will remember him once she actually sees him in person.

And as much as he would like to keep Magnus to himself - for himself - there is also absolutely no chance that Alec would be willing to pretend not knowing Magnus at all once the warlock is actually here. Yeah, no. That's definitely not happening.

So, if Magnus is going to be involved soon anyway, then there really isn't any reason to hide the fact that they already know each other. It's not like Alec has to proclaim the fact he has been developing quite the crush on one Magnus Bane recently to the entire Institute. But if anyone has a problem with Alec just knowing the High Warlock of his city, they can simply go take a hike.

Decision made, he focuses back onto his phone to tap out his reply.

+++ "They are still arguing. Do you have time right now?"

Magnus stares at the text for a second, the implications of which making something warm and hopeful and light expand in his chest. So, apparently Alexander is not going to hide the fact that they know each other. It's not like Alec has to proclaim the fact he has been developing quite the crush on one Magnus Bane recently to the entire Institute. But if anyone has a problem with Alec just knowing the High Warlock of his city, they can simply go take a hike.

A possibly rather ridiculous smile starts spreading over his face even as he replies, ‘On my way.’

He is already moving, quickly checking his appearance in the mirror – always got to look his best for his lovely Shadowhunter - before opening a portal with a wave of his hand.

Just as he steps out of the portal onto the Institute’s lawn, his phone pings once more. 'Ask for Alec Lightwood at the door.'

Magnus raises an eyebrow at that, tapping out a response, 'Well, well, well. A Lightwood, hm?'

Well, it’s not like the thought hasn’t crossed his mind before – Alexander really wears the Lightwood family traits ridiculously well – but Magnus just never bothered getting an actual confirmation. Alexander’s ancestry simply makes no difference to him, because that would make Magnus just about the biggest hypocrite in history.

So, he just cheerfully continues up the steps of the old church that serves as New York’s Shadowhunter Institute, already looking forward to getting to see his lovely Alexander again.
Alec feels a slight grin tug at the corner of his mouth as he reads Magnus' last message.

Within a few minutes, they went from 'just a random Shadowhunter and a random warlock’ to 'oldest son of an influential nephilim bloodline and High Warlock of Brooklyn’. Quite the development.

Knowing that Magnus is on his way, Alec finally puts his phone away again, wiping his face clean of emotions once more and tuning back into his surroundings.

He is still at the back of their little group – it’s not like he can’t see everything over everyone’s head anyway - so thankfully, no one has seen him grinning stupidly at his phone during his brief texted conversation with Magnus. The conversation which still has something fond and light and so very warm pulsing in his chest, as it pretty much always does whenever he spends any amount of time talking to Magnus.

It’s a feeling Alec has grown rather - almost embarrassingly - addicted to these days.

Hodge is currently explaining how much Magnus wants the necklace he is holding in his hands. Something about a townhouse in London, the context of which Alec completely misses when his attention is once more drawn away moments later by some sort of commotion coming from the Institute’s entrance area.

Raised voices, someone going from sounding surprised to increasingly angry with every new mockingly condescending reply from a voice that Alec has come to know quite well recently. Apparently, Magnus is already here and making life difficult for the Shadowhunters guarding the door.

Then Raj comes striding into the Ops Center, a scowl on his face as he looks around. He quickly focuses on Alec and makes his way over to their group, stopping at the foot of the steps leading up to where they are standing around the safe.

"Alec," Raj says, successfully bringing the attention of their entire group onto himself.

Alec turns towards him slightly, raising an eyebrow questioningly. As though he doesn't already know exactly just who is currently demanding entrance to the Institute to Raj's apparent irritation.

"There is a warlock here to see you? He says his name is Magnus Bane."

There is a surprised noise from Clary, as their entire group immediately flips around to stare at Alec incredulously.

"What?" Jace and Izzy ask at the same time.

Alec just ignores them all and nods calmly at Raj. "I asked him to come. He has permission to enter the Institute."

Raj's scowl only deepens further in what looks like disapproval- Alec also honestly couldn't care less - but after a few seconds he finally turns to once more disappear in the direction of the entrance.

"Alec?" Izzy asks, bringing Alec's attention back to their group.

Turning back towards them, he is met with absolutely incredulous expressions all around.
"You called the High Warlock?" she continues.

He just raises an eyebrow at the group and deadpans, "Your plan for contacting Magnus is absolutely ridiculous. We want his help, so I decided to just ask."

He doesn't even try to hide just how absolutely unimpressed he is with their plan to lure the High Warlock from hiding and Izzy promptly snorts a laugh at his deadpan reply, not looking offended in the least.

But Jace is clearly less amused than her. "Since when do you have the High Warlock on speed dial?" his parabatai asks incredulously. A pause. Then, "Wait, 'Magnus'?!"

Alec is saved from having to answer the implied question of how it is that Alec is on first name basis with the High Warlock of their city by Magnus entering the Ops center from the direction of the entrance, flanked by two Shadowhunters.

Magnus immediately spots Alexander across the room, coming towards him from where he had been standing with a small group of Shadowhunters in a slightly raised area. There is a small smile tugging at the corners of Alexander's mouth and Magnus is entirely unable to keep an answering smile from spreading over his face.

"Magnus. Thank you for coming on such short notice," Alexander greets as soon as he comes to a stop in front of him.

Okay, first name basis but still generally formal. That gives Magnus a pretty clear indication of just how Alexander wants to play this. Clearly, the Shadowhunter has no intention of hiding the fact that they do know each other - well enough to call each other by name and also well enough to just ask each other for help - but he clearly also doesn't want to give away that there might be something else developing between them.

Which is actually pretty perfect in Magnus' opinion. Because as much as he might be hoping that their relationship will turn into something more at some point, so far they themselves haven't yet defined what they are, much less what they could be. And until they do, everyone else can just keep their curious, opinionated, interfering noses out of it.

So, he simply greets warmly in return, "Alexander. Thank you for the invitation." Then, he turns in a half-circle, looking around himself. "It has been a while since I've been here. It really has changed quite a bit."

"You've been in the Institute before?" the blonde Shadowhunter - most likely the infamous Jace - standing to Alexander's right, speaks up, eyeing Magnus rather suspiciously.

"Oh yes, of course." Magnus nods at him, but not deigning to actually offer a reply to the unasked questions of when or how or why he might have been in the Institute before. Shadowhunters are really such a fun lot to mess with. They tend to take themselves far too seriously.

Instead he just fluidly turns to address Clary. "Clarissa Fairchild, you have grown into a beautiful young woman. Last time I saw you, you were about half your current size."

"You mean last time when you stole my memories." Clary sounds so reproachful, so condescending, that Alec honestly just wants to sigh in exasperation. Why would she speak like that to someone who she is planning to ask for help, not to even mention someone who is several centuries her senior and also far more powerful than her? Aren't mundanes taught any manners? Or at least survival instincts?

Magnus however just raises an eyebrow at her, looking entirely unimpressed. "I mean last time,
when I removed your memories at your mother's request. She knew the risks."

The reprimand is clear and it has Clary actually drop her eyes, apparently now a little flustered at the reminder that she shouldn’t go around blaming random strangers for her mother’s actions.

But after a few seconds of silence, Magnus just continues, "I was informed that you are looking to recover the memories that your mother had me remove from your mind."

Clary's head flies up once more. "Yes! They were taken against my will. I have a right to get them back."

Alec barely keeps from rolling his eyes. Magnus is already here, came here when asked for this very reason. There really is no need for the dramatics.

"Hm." Magnus tilts his head, watching this girl who he still remembers from several years ago, her mother fretting at her side, desperate to find the best possible way to protect her child. He still remembers feeling moved by Jocelyn's absolute love for her daughter and that being the reason why he agreed to help her in the first place despite his resolution to keep out of Shadowhunter business. "I see no problem with restoring your memories. However, it is not quite as simple as giving them back to you."

"Those memories belong to Clary," Jace promptly speaks up. "You have no right to keep them from her."

Magnus makes sure not to roll his eyes at Alexander's parabatai. "As I said, I have no problem with returning them. However, and let me repeat, it is not quite that simple."

"I fed them to a memory demon," Magnus replies, spreading his hands in a fluid gesture – rings glinting in the light - promptly derailing Alec's thoughts for a moment. Seriously, those hands.

"But why would you do that? Those memories are mine!" Clary exclaims, Jace taking a step closer to her.

And finally, Magnus's expression sobers, possibly having enough of all the teenage melodramatics. "For the very simple reason that it was the safest place to keep your memories, somewhere no one, especially not Valentine, would be able to get a hold of them. Not even if he were to capture me and try to torture them out of me."

There is silence.

Alec looks around their little group. Everyone is clearly uncertain how to react to this reminder that this is in fact much more than just a simple case of removed memories, that it might actually be a good idea to have more than just one or two levels of security in place in this case.

And where better to hide something from Valentine than in the one realm he cannot reach. Even if Valentine were to somehow figure out which particular demon has Clary's memories, which demon to call upon, he would still need the help of a powerful warlock for the actual summoning. And considering that Valentine is currently doing his best to eradicate their entire species, it seems quite unlikely that any of them would be willing to help him. Hiding the memories in hell is actually kind

So, he decides to speak up, hoping to speed things along without giving anyone a chance to go off on yet another tangent about things owed and the unfairness of not getting exactly what they want when they want it.

"How do we get them back then?" Alec asks firmly.

At Alexander’s question, Magnus immediately turns towards his lovely Shadowhunter, a slight smile on his lips once more. "I will simply have to summon the demon I fed the memories to."

Magnus is entirely happy to fully focus on Alexander. He might also be a little turned on by seeing how the entire room seems to come a little more to attention the moment Alexander decides to speak. Even the Shadowhunters who are scattered around the room and not involved in their little discussion at all, still seem to sit up a little, straightening their spines, everyone immediately reacting to the sound of Alexander’s voice.

Suddenly, it's absolutely clear just who is actually in charge here, whose command these Shadowhunters would follow in case of an emergency, who they would listen to if they were truly pressed. Alexander is their leader. Alexander who doesn't speak up until he actually has something to say, who observes and watches and assesses until he has all the information and then makes a decision, which everyone here will then do their best to implement, without question or compromise.

It's the sort of leadership that is born from respect, the sign of a true leader. And it's also something that Magnus finds endlessly attractive.

His thoughts are interrupted by Isabelle tilting her head slightly, asking doubtfully, "Just summon the demon? That's all?"

Magnus replies to Isabelle's question even without actually looking away from his lovely Shadowhunter. "Well, I wouldn't quite put it like that," he says. “The ritual itself requires a lot of power and concentration and four of you would have to join me to keep it stable. But in essence, I will summon the demon, we will pay its price and then the memories will be returned to Clarissa."

He is still looking at Alexander, who finally throws a quick glance in his direction but then just as quickly glances away again, clearly a little flustered by whatever he sees written on Magnus' face. So adorable.

"What price?" Jace interjects promptly.

"I couldn't say." Finally, Magnus deigns to look away from Alexander, shrugging fluidly. "This will just be a standard summoning ritual, even if the demon I will be calling upon is quite a bit more powerful than most. But as always, it will be up to the demon to name the actual price and once the ritual has started it cannot be interrupted. Anyone who agrees to join has to be willing to pay whatever price is asked."

Which of course leads to an argument between the Shadowhunters of whether they are willing to pay an unknown price or not.

Magnus tries to keep his exasperation off his face at the entirely obsolete discussion. Either they want the memories and pay the price or they don't. Everyone here should already know that demons always have a price. You want them to do something for you, you will have to give them something at least just as valuable in return. It's just a fact. No use in arguing about it.

It still takes the them some time to get to that inevitable conclusion. Which is then promptly followed
by yet another discussion when everyone realizes that they will have to leave the Institute for the actual summoning.

Although, even without the excuse of the Institute's wards hindering the summoning of such a powerful demon, Magnus would insist on performing the ritual at his place. Hodge Starkweather’s presence - someone he remembers quite well and quite darkly from the Circle’s most zealous days – is already making his magic rather twitchy, so there is simply no way that Magnus will even consider performing the ritual here.

And if he is about to summon a demon at the loft, then Magnus needs to get some fire messages out to his warlocks about today’s get-together at the Lair being cancelled. Because with his magic focused on containing the demon, the wards around the Lair – which is really just his apartment with a different setup, shifted to another location for whenever New York’s warlocks get together for their regular gatherings under Magnus’ wards - will be weakened. And Valentine has been waiting for a chance to take out the warlocks who regularly gather under Magnus’ protection for a long, long time.

So, Magnus wants to get out of here to let his warlocks know about the summoning and the cancelled get-together even before any of them start portalling in.

Thus, when the group finally - and unsurprisingly - makes up their mind that they do in fact want to go through with the summoning, Magnus immediately starts herding everyone outside. On the way out, he sees Alexander grab something from Starkweather, but he is far too concerned with getting everyone’s asses into gear to ask about it right now. He might be a little more pushy than absolutely necessary due to his need to get out of the presence of any ‘former’ Circle members.

A quick portal trip later and their group of five arrives in the main ritual room of his apartment.

Magnus immediately disappears into his living quarters under the pretense of getting his chalks and the scroll depicting the ritual circle. Then he promptly proceeds to shoot off a collection of fire messages to NYC’s warlocks to let them know about today’s get-together being cancelled.

Only once that is done - reassured in the knowledge that his warlocks will likely not be leaving their individual, fortified hideouts tonight while Magnus is occupied - he finally feels himself relax slightly.

So, he pulls on his glittery I'm-friends-to-all-people smile, grabs his set of chalks and then finally returns to the ritual room, where the Shadowhunters are waiting for him. It really is a rather colorful group.

The lovely Isabelle, who is looking around herself interestedly, trying to see more of Magnus’ apartment beyond the doors of the ritual room without actually going to poke around. Jace, who is clearly torn between his focus on Clarissa and distrustfully keeping Magnus in his sight. Clarissa, who is so very clearly taking her cues from the others while also trying to appear in control, wearing her bravado like a shield but floundering like a fish out of water in a world she knows nothing about.

And Alexander who keeps watch over all of them, his face almost impassive. Although, as soon as he spots Magnus a slightly worried, questioning frown forms on his face, apparently – and rather surprisingly – having been able to tell that something had been worrying Magnus before.

And Magnus is entirely helpless against the warm smile that spreads over his face at the thought that Alexander might actually be worried for him. It only widens when Alexander's frown clears almost immediately in response to Magnus' own smile, replaced by that endearing, quirked smile of his.

By magic, Magnus is so very, absolutely, helplessly gone on this one.
The summoning goes off without a hitch, despite how much of a struggle it turns out to be for Alec. A struggle, not only because they all have to give up a memory of the one they love most in exchange for Clary's memories. Alec isn't surprised in the least when his own memory turns out to be one of Jace - although in all honesty it could just as well have been a memory of Izzy - but he still has to actively push down that ingrained, panicked need to protest, to deny everything, almost automatic after so many years of trying to hide his maybe-or-maybe-not attraction to his brother.

But in the end, he has so very recently gotten past this particular hang-up - thank you, Magnus – and then he is honestly too busy feeling touched at seeing both Izzy and Jace give up a memory of him. So, he manages to bite down on that reflex urging him to protest and instead keeps hold of Magnus and Jace's hands.

Which is also a struggle for an entirely different reason, because it turns out that Alec finds Magnus' show of absolute power - easily keeping such a powerful demon contained, no matter how much it clearly tries to push past the established boundary keeping it in place - incredibly, breathtakingly attractive. Which is a revelation he most certainly wasn't expecting.

But finally - with a last push against the summoning circle's boundaries held up by Magnus' magic - the demon withdraws. And suddenly Clary has her memories back.

Only for her to promptly collapse where she stands.

Jace immediately jumps forward to catch her, gathering her into his arms, trying to shake her awake. She doesn't so much as stir and Jace asks urgently, "What happened? Is she okay?"

Magnus glances his way, sounding entirely unbothered as he replies, "She is fine. Her mind just needs some rest to catch up with recovering a chunk of her childhood memories. She'll likely sleep for at least twelve hours and it would be best to just leave her entirely undisturbed during that time. Once she wakes up she should be right as rain once more."

Jace frowns, only glancing up briefly before looking back at the girl in his arms. "Are you sure? Maybe the demon did something."

"This isn’t my first rodeo. I can assure you, I had the demon fully contained," Magnus replies with a rather mockingly raised eyebrow. "Of course, you all did a wonderful job of holding each other's hands as well."

And because Izzy is Izzy, she can't just let a remark like that slide. "Thank you," she quips with a smirk. "I rather thought so myself."

Magnus just grins at her, clearly delighted at the returned quip. And as he starts walking across the room to pick up the chalks still lying off to the side he remarks cheerfully, "You really got a great team here, my dear pretty boy."

Immediately, Alec feels his lips quirk in a grin, as always slightly bashful at the endearment. I'll get over this reaction of blushing every time Magnus says something at some point, right?

But then Jace unexpectedly decides to join in on the banter, apparently assuming that Magnus must have been talking to him.

"I know I do," his parabatai says, finally looking up from Clary's face with a somewhat cocky smirk.
There is a second of silence and then Magnus just laughs, patronizingly patting Jace on the shoulder as he passes behind him on his way into the living room.

"Oh honey, I’m not talking to you," he smirks over his shoulder, right before disappearing through the door.

The cocky expression slowly drops off Jace's face as he looks after the warlock confusedly, a few seconds of silence, and then both Izzy and Jace simultaneously swing their heads towards Alec to stare at him rather incredulously.

Alec doesn't bother wiping his expression clean, just raises his eyebrows at them in a clear question of what they could possibly want from him.

It's not his fault they are apparently completely baffled at the mere idea that someone might call Alec pretty. Shows what they know.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. So, this chapter somehow ended up as pure character development for Alec to get him to that I-like-Magnus-so-everyone-can-just-deal mindset of his future canon self. But there is much less actual Malec interaction in this than I had planned... I also tried to make the whole Lair thing actually make sense while also fixing the attack itself (no randomly killing off numerous warlocks despite how much that would weigh on Magnus, just so that the Shadowhunters can save the day) and this is what I came up with :D

And I hope the rather frequent POV changes weren't too confusing! Would really love to know what you think :)

Also, it's weirdly exhausting to write Clary and Jace while they are still stuck in their entirely-blind-to-anything-and-anyone-else phase, so I'm hoping to maybe fix that a little earlier... Well, next chapter should be pretty much purely Malec at least, 'cause I'm planning to send them on a date :D

And thank you so much for your comments and kudos! You guys are wonderful (⁎˃ᴗ˂⁎)
Alec looks around himself.

He followed Magnus out of the ritual room - his siblings of course tagging along - and is now standing in what appears to be the living area of Magnus' place.

It's a large, open space, seemingly combining several rooms - with wide doorways and red-brick columns serving as the only room dividers - and a large floor-to-ceiling window front taking up an entire wall, leading out to a balcony with a beautiful view of the New York City skyline.

The entire room is also a perfect blend of contrasts. The open space with its high ceilings and numerous light sources, offset by dark wood furniture, ancient rugs, exposed red brick walls. Glass tables right next to old leather armchairs, abstract art next to a roman bust, large bookcases filled with ancient leather-bound tomes intermixed with colorfully laminated paperbacks, a random array of knick-knacks spread over various surfaces.

Despite the room being so large and open, it still appears quite warm, cozy, almost intimate, and no matter where you look, there is something different, something new to see.

The entire space just feels like Magnus to Alec. He honestly quite likes it. Although, he'd like it even more if said warlock were here right now as well.

Because Magnus is currently nowhere to be seen - apparently having disappeared through one of the doors leading off from this room - which leaves Alec alone with his siblings. Both of whom have been side-eyeing him ever since Magnus' not so subtle comment and Alec's even less subtle reaction to it.

Finally, Izzy is apparently unable to stay silent any longer. "Alec," she says.

He turns towards her, raising an eyebrow.

Going by her rather speculative expression, Izzy has definitely realized that there is something going on that she doesn't know about. Well, not like Alec has been putting all that much effort - or any effort, really - into hiding that there might be something going on with him and Magnus. Does she remember Magnus from Pandemonium now?

But either way, she is clearly ready to start demanding some answers now. Thankfully, that's also the exact moment Magnus finally reappears from a room to the right, interrupting anything Izzy might have been about to say.

And Alec just can't help but immediately focus on him, fixate on the warlock, entirely helpless to let his eyes follow as Magnus saunters closer from the other side of the room.

Earlier, Alec didn't really have time to take in the warlock's appearance but now that there is no potential crisis looming over their heads, Alec suddenly can't seem to notice anything but just how incredible Magnus looks, the way his black silk shirt perfectly molds to his arms and chest in some places, the fabric shifting with his every movement, giving just enough of a hint of the body underneath that Alec finds it a little hard to focus for a few moments.
Thankfully, no one seems to notice his distraction as Magnus finally stops in the middle of the room, only a few steps away from Alec.

"So, what now, my dear Lightwoods?" he asks with a slight uptick of his mouth as his eyes flick over to Alec. So, maybe the warlock did notice Alec's distraction after all. But then again, this definitely isn't the first time Magnus has caught him staring and honestly, there really are worse things.

Of course, Jace promptly disrupts Alec's nice little just-me-and-Magnus bubble, speaking up before anyone else has a chance to say anything.

"We need a portal to get Clary back to the Institute," Jace says. "She can't stay here to sleep off whatever the demon did to her." His parabatai looks up at Magnus, frowning - whether out of worry for Clary or whether it's about Magnus himself or whether Jace is pissed off about today's events in general, Alec couldn't say.

But Alec feels a frown of his own forming on his face. Because that definitely wasn't a question just now, much less a request. It was just a demand for a portal. Like Magnus jumping at Jace's say-so is just a given.

However, Magnus just sighs - clearly unsurprised at having someone throw demands his way - already flicking his hand to open a portal off to one side.

And Jace barely reacts beyond readjusting his grip on Clary so he can carry her more easily and even Izzy just gives another interested look around the room they are in before she is already stepping towards the portal. Neither makes any move to thank Magnus - not even so much as an acknowledging nod - clearly happy to just take off without another word.

Alec feels his frown deepen and it suddenly occurs to him that he is actually quite disinterested in leaving with his siblings right now. For several reasons.

The main reason being, that it actually looks like Alec might get an entire, catastrophe-free evening to himself tonight, what with Clary currently passed out and Jace busy fussing over her and thus the two of them being less likely to get themselves into any additional trouble for another few hours at least. An evening without constantly having to check his phone for any messages from his siblings about potentially cataclysmic events unraveling somewhere in NYC, which his parabatai of course somehow got himself involved in.

Which means that if Magnus is free tonight as well, then maybe Alec could finally ask him out for drinks or maybe even dinner and they could spend a bit of time together again, something Alec has been hoping for ever since they saw each other last.

So no, he has absolutely no intention of making use of that portal.

Instead he turns towards Magnus and remarks casually, "We have yet to discuss your fee."

Magnus raises an eyebrow at him, a minimal pause, before a slight smile curves his lips. "You are entirely right, of course. How forgetful of me. If you still have time, we can do that right now."

Of course, Jace is as oblivious as always. "Alec, we don't have time for this," his parabatai says. "We need to get Clary back to the Institute."

From beside him, Izzy gives an audible, rather exasperated sigh - at Alec's not-so-subtle excuse for staying behind or at Jace's obliviousness to everything aside from the girl in his arms or possibly at both - before she just unceremoniously starts herding Jace towards the still open portal.
"You take care of the 'fee', Alec," she says, sarcasm rather heavy in her voice. "And I'll make sure these two actually make it back to the Institute. We wouldn’t want them to get lost on the Institute’s lawn or to somehow start the apocalypse on their way home. I mean, it's Jace. You never know with him."

Alec feels his lips quirk in a grin. "Good call," he says, just as Jace protests, “Hey!” His parabatai sends both of them a scowl, although his gaze quickly returns to the girl in his arms when she stirs a bit in her sleep.

Izzy doesn't even deign to react to Jace’s half-assed protest, just returns Alec's slight grin with a smirk of her own and continues herding their brother towards the portal. Within moments Jace has disappeared and Izzy follows barely a step behind, only taking the time to give a little wave in Alec's direction, the look in her eyes telling him that she'll be demanding answers as soon as he gets back to the Institute. Whenever that might be.

And then it's just Magnus and Alec.

Finally.

This is the first time they have seen each other in person since their spontaneous lunch date a few days back. And while being in the same room as Magnus still makes Alec feel a little flushed, a little nervous, it also somehow doesn't because it's Magnus and they spend several hours each day talking on the phone and sending text messages back and forth and the warlock has never once made Alec feel uncomfortable beyond his own nerves.

And if he is entirely honest, Alec might have spent a somewhat embarrassing amount of time over the past few days thinking – possibly daydreaming – about getting to see the warlock again, about going out again, about spending some more time together.

So. The sooner they get the payment for today's ritual settled, the sooner Alec can ask whether Magnus is free tonight and whether he would maybe like to have dinner with Alec.

He very actively doesn’t think about the fact that he has never asked anyone on a date before and that he doesn’t have the first clue how one is supposed to go about doing that, not to even mention that he couldn’t name a single restaurant in New York City to go to. But then again, he has always been rather excellent at winging it. He’ll manage.

But payment for services rendered first. So, Alec reaches into his pocket for the necklace he grabbed from Hodge on his way out of the Institute and then holds it out to Magnus.

Magnus blinks at the necklace that is suddenly dangling in the space between them, its chain wound between Alexander's fingers, the pendant swinging slightly, alternating between showing off the stone glinting beautifully dark red in the light and the oh-so-familiar inscription on its back.

Oh.

That's Camille’s necklace, the one Magnus gave to her almost two centuries ago. Camille, who Magnus had loved so very desperately despite always somehow knowing that she would break his heart - the same way everyone else Magnus has ever given all of himself to inevitably does - but still somehow foolishly believing that this time would be different, that he could win her affections, could earn her love, could have her devotion. That with her being a fellow immortal, his heart would finally be safe from the recurring heartbreak of people leaving him behind by choice or circumstance.

He'd been wrong.
If he had known then what he knows now - if he had known just how cruelly and uncompromisingly she would make sure to leave a lasting mark on his heart, if he had known how long it would take him to pick up the scattered pieces of himself after she finally left him, if he had known that giving himself to her would leave him so much less open to others, more closed-off to the entire world...
Well, if he had known, he might have put more of an effort into keeping at least parts of his heart protected, might not have quite so willingly offered her all of himself, might not have let down all of his defenses for her.

But Magnus had been blind in his love for her - foolishly convinced that he had found true love, had found someone he could love indefinitely - despite Ragnor’s warnings to the contrary. Really, Magnus should have just listened to his old friend. He should know better by now than to just ignore him.

Still, despite the heartache of the years - decades - after Camille had finally disappeared from his life, this necklace doesn’t really remind him of any of that.

No, to him this necklace represents what he felt when he gave it to her, barely even yet knowing her at that point. The feelings of blossoming love, of hopeful affection, of love unburdened, not yet weighed down by the heartbreak to come.

This necklace reminds him of a time in his life before he had shut his heart off from the world, a time where he had not yet erected impenetrable defenses around himself after finally gathering all the pieces of his tattered heart back together in the wake of Camille’s mind games and cruel manipulations, a time where he had still been able to love freely.

And now that necklace - after having shut his heart off to the world for more than a century now still a reminder that he can love like that at all - is dangling right in front of him, dangling from Alexander's hand. From the hand of the man who so recently dragged Magnus’ heart out of stasis, easily bypassing all of Magnus' carefully and painstakingly erected defenses as though there were nothing standing in his way at all.

*Thank you, powers-that-be, for this particularly unsubtle hint.*

It takes Magnus a few moments but finally he manages to gather enough of his composure, to reach out slowly, running a finger along the stone's ornate silver setting, its feeling oh-so-familiar to his hand.

"I thought, that was just an excuse," he says absently, for no other reason than to have something to say at all, to buy himself some time and Alexander raises an eyebrow in clear question. "Wanting to discuss my fee," Magnus elaborates, finally glancing up at the Shadowhunter with a slight shrug.

And Magnus honestly hadn't even considered requesting payment for today, much less something as precious as the necklace. Alexander had asked for his help, so Magnus had simply shown up at the Institute, the thought of payment never even entering his mind. The thought of Alexander being willing to ask for his help at all worth so much more to him than any sort of monetary compensation.

But for once, they clearly aren’t on the same page, because Alexander is now frowning slightly. "Well, it kind of was an excuse? I mean, I didn't want to leave yet and I thought... I mean, I don't have any plans tonight and I thought, maybe, if you are free, maybe we could... go out for dinner? Tonight?"

Magic, this boy is adorable when he is flustered. And Magnus is so so on board with spending some more time with this lovely Shadowhunter, will happily clear his entire schedule for tonight. So, he nods cheerfully, about to suggest that they go to that little Moroccan place only a few minutes from
his loft where they have that truly divine tangia dish that he is sure Alexander would enjoy.

But before he can say anything, Alexander is already continuing, bringing them back on topic. “But I also thought we might as well handle your payment right now. Or do you generally prefer to send a bill to the Institute first?”

Magnus just shakes his head with a slight smile. “No, what I meant is that I don’t require payment for this at all, Alexander. I was happy to help,” he says, wanting to reassure the Shadowhunter that he really doesn’t need the payment. Well, Magnus does want that necklace – quite desperately so - but it also feels somewhat strange to accept actual payment from Alexander for anything, much less for something that to him seems like little more than a simple favor.

The look in the Shadowhunter’s eyes only grows more intent as he says, “But I asked you for your help.”

Hm. Seems like Alexander either isn’t convinced by Magnus saying he doesn’t need payment or his problem lies somewhere else entirely. So, Magnus decides to try another route, not sure that the Shadowhunter actually knows just what he is currently offering as payment.

"Alexander, that necklace is truly valuable. Exceedingly so. The stone alone is worth a literal fortune. I doubt the Institute will approve of you using it as payment for something that could be considered a private matter."

Alec watches Magnus, not sure whether to feel bothered or flattered at Magnus’ hesitation to take the necklace as payment from him.

Flattered, because Alec really likes the idea that Magnus would just come to the Institute to help him out for no other reason than that he is the one asking. Yeah, Alec definitely likes that.

But also bothered, because giving out favors like this should be just between just them, it’s not supposed to include others, much less the personal issues of a girl Alec has known for all of two weeks and who has already used up all of his - admittedly rather limited - goodwill a few hours after they met.

Alec feels his frown deepen, not liking the thought that anyone other than himself could just show up at Magnus’ doorstep and demand favors from the warlock just by claiming some sort of connection to Alec. He really doesn't like that thought at all.

What if Clary or his siblings show up here on her own tomorrow to demand more help from Magnus? What about the rest of the Institute? Would Magnus just lend his aid to them no questions asked and no payment required? Going by the impression Alec is getting right now, there is a pretty good chance that Magnus might just do exactly that.

So, all the better if this necklace is actually worth something. Because if Magnus is just going to be handing out favors indiscriminately, then Alec can at least be somewhat assured in the knowledge that Magnus got a sort of advance payment for some of it at least.

And yes, Hodge did mention something about this necklace being worth quite a lot and even more so to Magnus for some sort of personal reason. Hodge had clearly known about its worth and still offered it, so the necklace is what Magnus is going to get as payment. And that's that.

Accordingly, Alec just says, "Magnus, this wasn't just a private matter on Clary's behalf. Getting Clary's memories back is part of finding the Mortal Cup, thus it is Institute business as well as Clave business and thus you get paid.” He pauses, unsure whether to continue but in the end he just shrugs,
"And if you start handing out free rituals to Shadowhunters, soon the entire Institute will be knocking down your door to demand more. My siblings being first in line."

Magnus blinks at the Shadowhunter, honestly surprised. He hadn't expected that last part.

Suddenly it dawns on him that this isn't about Alexander not wanting to owe him, but rather that the Shadowhunter is honestly trying to protect Magnus' interests of all things.

Which is just... It's normally - or rather always - the other way around, people accusing Magnus of taking advantage, of not doing enough for the payment he is given, of demanding too much in exchange for his services.

But Alexander is apparently scowling at the thought of Magnus potentially not being compensated for his services.

He swallows, warmth and wonder and so so much affection for this Shadowhunter spreading in his chest.

By magic, Magnus can't even remember the last time someone was worried about his interests, about him being taken advantage of. Honestly, there is a very good chance that this might be an absolute first in his several centuries of life.

Alec continues to watch Magnus, who still doesn't make any move to take the necklace from him. So after another few moments, Alec just reaches out for one of Magnus' hands, turns it palm up in his own and then just unceremoniously settles the necklace into it.

And when he looks up, he finds Magnus watching him, his eyes intent, focused on Alec, clearly searching his face for something. Alec has no idea what the warlock might be looking for, but he seems to find it after a few moments and finally Magnus moves to close his fingers over the necklace in his palm.

"Thank you, Alexander," he says and there is something in his voice that tells Alec that the warlock is thanking him for much more than just the necklace itself.

And when Magnus smiles at him - his expression so open, his eyes so soft, the small smile curving his lips so warm, and all of it focused on Alec - Alec quite literally feels his breath catch at the sight. 

*By the angel, Magnus is beautiful.*

+++ 

They are currently walking to a Moroccan restaurant that Magnus suggested for dinner.

Alec honestly doesn't care where they go for dinner, mostly busy with pushing down his nerves at the thought that this is kind of their first real date. So far, they've had drinks at Pandemonium and lunch at that bistro, but going by what he has gathered from Izzy and Jace's stories over the years, neither of those apparently really counts as a date.

Alec doesn't quite get where the distinction is but admittedly there is something different about tonight. He can't even really put his finger on it, but something about tonight just feels different, less casual, like this is simply about the two of them, nothing else. Maybe it's the promise of an uninterrupted evening, maybe it's the adrenaline from working together and coming face-to-face with a powerful demon earlier, maybe it's just Magnus' presence in general or having his undivided attention.
Whatever it is, it makes Alec feel eager and also a little nervous, so very aware of Magnus' presence at his side, but still also weirdly relaxed, comfortable because it's Magnus.

Feelings are annoyingly confusing sometimes.

But the walk to the restaurant is brief and once they get there Magnus cheerfully greets the staff by name, clearly coming here rather often going by the happy greetings he gets in return. There is a line outside but they are immediately led to a table a little bit out of the way from the rather crowded main room, the voices of the other guests fading into little more than a nice background hum by the time they reach their little corner table.

It’s cozy, intimate. Warm lighting, oriental rugs and fancily embroidered pillows everywhere. Magnus assures him that the decorations and the restaurant's setup are mostly in the traditional Moroccan style, not that Alec would be able to tell even if they weren’t.

The food really is excellent and entirely different from what Alec is used to. He has to ask Magnus more than once about the to him entirely unrecognizable dishes that are brought to their table, but the warlock seems entirely happy to answer Alec's frequent 'so what am I eating now' questions, giving him any and all information on every dish Alec could possibly wish for, more often than not with some sort of anecdote about its origins.

Their table is small and their legs are touching and it distracts Alec from their conversation more than once. He has no idea why a simple touch like this seems to take up so much of his focus every time he feels Magnus shift even slightly. Maybe it's the warmth that seems to radiate from that point of contact, maybe it's just the casual intimacy of it, or maybe it's just the atmosphere of the entire evening, feeling like it's just the two of them in their own little bubble.

And they talk all through dinner about anything and everything, losing track of time more than once, only reminded of the passage of time whenever a waiter appears with yet another fancily arranged dish.

They also get into a few more serious topics. Somehow the revelations of today - about Magnus being the High Warlock and Alec being a Lightwood - has pushed them past that hurdle of constantly trying to avoid the harder, potentially contentious topics in their conversations.

They spend quite some time talking about Magnus' role as the High Warlock - Alec is honestly interested in hearing just what that actually entails - and they also talk about some of Alec's missions, about his goal to become Head of the New York Institute and even about Clave politics at one point. Magnus might not be a Shadowhunter but he definitely knows just as much about the Clave as Alec does and easily outstrips him on knowledge about the intricacies of Clave-Downworld diplomacy. And while they obviously see things from completely different perspectives, they still share surprisingly many opinions regarding the Clave and the Downworld in general.

And it's refreshing to talk to someone about Clave politics or the things that bother Alec about his mission orders sometimes, without either getting a dismissive 'the law is the law' thrown his way or without his siblings' particular brand of 'screw the Clave' reaction to anything they don't like without never even bothering to think about the complexities behind it.

Although, thinking about his siblings reminds him of their stunt earlier and another question he had wanted to ask.

"What were you so worried about earlier, when we were still at the Institute? You seemed to be in a hurry," Alec asks as he inspects the slice of some sort of yellow vegetable on his fork that doesn't really look like any vegetable he knows.
It's a bit of a non-sequitur, because they were just talking about one of Alec's missions last week, so it's understandable that it takes Magnus a second to catch on to the rather sudden change of topic.

"Ah," Magnus says, tilting his head slightly. "I just wanted to get a move on so I could send some fire-messages. There was supposed to be a get-together of the city's warlocks at my place today and I needed to let everyone know about it being cancelled due to the summoning."

"Oh," Alec nods, even as he finally takes a bite of the unidentifiable vegetable on his fork and chews slowly. Oh, it's not a vegetable at all. It's mango. And it's also quite good. He scans his plate for another piece, even as he continues, "But why cancel it? Couldn't it still have taken place? We could have just stayed in the ritual room."

Magnus knows he is fighting a losing battle against the smile that is trying to take over his face, helplessly endeared as he watches Alexander eat. Whenever the Shadowhunter finds something on his plate that he doesn't recognize or whenever he tries any of the dishes for the first time, he spears some of it on his fork, inspecting it from all sides, then carefully taking a bite, chewing cautiously, before his expression either lightens in approval as he munches on or he pulls that adorable little, almost slightly offended grimace whenever it doesn't quite meet his approval.

_Honestly, how can a grown man be this adorable?_

"Well, the gathering takes place at my apartment, even though magically shifted to a different location," he replies. "And my wards can easily hold off someone like Valentine, so everyone is safe to gather there, to mingle. But if my magic is occupied with something else, like keeping a powerful demon contained, the wards will be weakened which is unacceptable. So, I just needed to let everyone know about today's get-together being cancelled."

"That sounds like the gathering is a fairly regular thing?" Alexander asks, looking up at him.

"Oh yes," Magnus says. "And this is also not the first time I had to cancel for one reason or another either. My warlocks are pretty used to something coming up unexpectedly by now. Unavoidable really, with so few warlocks still offering their services in the open but the demand not having dropped off in the least. We are being kept rather busy." He smiles sardonically.

Alec nods. That definitely makes sense. Everyone knows that the warlocks have gone to ground ever since Valentine started hunting them, but now that Magnus brought it up it absolutely makes sense that they would still be meeting amongst themselves.

Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of yet another new dish but they easily pick up where they left off once the waiter has disappeared again. And they just continue talking and Alec only realizes that they've already been here for more than two hours when the waiter finally comes to their table to ask them whether they would like some mint tea and dessert to finish off their meal.

Dessert turns out to be some traditionally spiced orange slices, which are probably quite good but Alec isn't really paying all that much attention to the taste.

Because Magnus is definitely enjoying them. The warlock keeps making these delighted little hums as he eats which are far too distracting and Alec can't really seem to focus on anything else.

Of course, Magnus catches on fairly quickly but for once he doesn't simply take mercy on Alec's nerves. So far, Magnus has always dispelled the sometimes charged atmosphere between them pretty much immediately, mostly by just telling an amusing anecdote from his life.

But this time, Magnus doesn't really say anything at all, just proceeds to stare right back at Alec
through slightly lowered lashes.

Their legs have been touching under the table for most of the meal but suddenly the warmth spreading through Alec from that single point of contact seems much more intense, distracting him but at the same time only seeming to sharpen his focus on the warlock across from him, everything else just fading into the background.

For all he knows there could be demons attacking the restaurant right now and Alec wouldn't even notice unless one of them got into his line of sight, blocking his view of Magnus.

He watches, mesmerized, as Magnus licks his lips free of fruit juice, and he feels the heat of a blush slowly starting to crawl up his neck. He simply can't rip his eyes away.

By the time they leave, Alec’s blush is pretty much permanent, perfectly matching the smile on Magnus’ face.

+++ Magnus thinks that tonight has been going almost ridiculously well. Even if this hadn't been entirely spontaneous, even if he had time to come up with an actual plan for a date beforehand, there is no way he could have made tonight any better.

Everything with Alexander just always seems to fall into place so naturally, absolutely no planning required.

Alexander's unabashed delight during dinner at the various food - not even attempting to pretend to know the first thing about Moroccan cuisine and-or culture, happy to just ask Magnus - was absolutely delightful and incredibly refreshing. With Alexander there are none of the subtle and sometimes-not-so-subtle games of trying to show off - of trying to appear suave, to impress each other with real or pretend cleverness - that Magnus is so used to from other people.

Being with Alexander is open and honest and straightforward. It's real.

And now they are walking through this adorable little park right by the water - the night air is still summer warm, only a light breeze coming in from the river - on their way back to Magnus' loft.

The park is only a little bit out of the way, but it will stretch their way home from five minutes into at least twenty, maybe thirty. And Magnus just isn't quite ready for the night to end yet, would honestly love to stretch it even further. He just has no way of knowing what will happen once they actually get back to his place, whether Alexander will want to return to the Institute right away or whether he will agree to come up to his loft for drinks. Even if Magnus really only mean drinks.

But there is a chance that Alexander will decide to take off instead and if that's the case, then Magnus just wants to hold on to this pretty perfect night for just a little bit longer.

Alec glances over at Magnus, thinking that he really quite likes walking with Magnus like this, leisurely, close to each other, their shoulders brushing from time to time, listening to Magnus talk and watching the expressive, expansive movements of his hands as he emphasizes this point or that during his story.

Alec really likes this. Even if there is one thing that would make it even better.

I really want to hold his hand.
The thought is as much a surprise as it just isn't. Alec has wanted to reach out to touch Magnus in some way or other all night - has wanted to do ever since Magnus walked into the Ops center a few hours ago, if he is entirely honest - and that is doubly true for his hands. Those hands have been distracting him all night, their fluid, sinuous movements capturing his attention more than once.

And Alec might be many things, but he has never been one to really hesitate once he actually knows what he wants. So, the next time Magnus' hand falls back to his side after he finishes making his point, Alec just reaches for it, threading his fingers through Magnus'.

There is barely a moment of hesitation before Magnus' fingers are already curling around his, the warlock not even faltering in his story of his time in Tokyo before the city was even called that.

Alec happily continues to listen, mentally congratulating himself for a job well done, only winding their fingers a little tighter together.

And if he maybe gets a little distracted at one point as he marvels at how nice and warm Magnus' hand feels in his and how perfectly their hands just seem to fit together, well, that's really no one's business but his own. And maybe Magnus'.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I know I promised you some Malec, but I still have no idea how the supposed-to-be-just-a-single-scene date mutated into a huh-I'll-have-to-split-this-into-two-chapters, veritable fluff fest XD And yes, there is a second part to this which is also even sappier ('cause some more fluff is clearly what this fic has been missing XD)

I'm also a little worried about how Alec turned out in this chapter because I want him sure of himself but the whole dating thing is also still entirely new to him, so there have to be at least some nerves on his end... I would absolutely love to know what you think :)D

Thank you so so much for all your comments and kudos! You guys are just lovely (*^^*)
Magnus watches as Alexander steps past him onto the balcony of his loft, still a little surprised that he suddenly has his lovely Shadowhunter in his loft, all to himself, without any distractions around.

Magnus forces himself to focus back to his bar cart, so he can actually see what he is doing while he prepares their drinks.

After their walk Magnus had asked Alexander whether he would like to come up for drinks and the Shadowhunter had easily agreed. Almost like it wasn't even a question, like he had just assumed that tonight was going to continue.

And Magnus more than approves of the mindset.

They are teetering at that point right between casual getting-to-know-each-other and making this into something more.

Even before tonight, it had been oh-so-clear that there was something between them, all those conversations and exchanged messages making that more than apparent. And now, with the wonderful dinner date they just had and their legs staying pressed together under the table and with the hand-holding and the walking close, they have reached that point where their attraction to each other, that spark between them, just isn’t a question anymore.

And Magnus is absolutely certain that he himself wants more, really wants to try turning this into a relationship, wants to see whether they could have something real and true and lasting. So, he would love to just take the next step, has been fighting with himself all night to refrain from just stepping up to the Shadowhunter and pulling him in for a kiss.

But.

Magnus also knows that the situation is a little more complex than just making up his mind on whether he likes Magnus as well on Alexander’s end.

Because he is well aware that Alexander being interested in him is one thing, while Alexander being willing to actually date him - to deal with the inevitable conflict he will have to face if he really decides to be in a relationship with a Downworlder and a male one at that - is something else entirely.

Which doesn't even take Magnus' recent and very clear impression into account that Alexander might not have quite as much experience with relationships as one would assume for someone as self-assured and as ridiculously gorgeous as Alexander.

Which only serves to strengthen Magnus' resolution not to push Alexander into anything.

So instead, Magnus resolves to make his own attraction - his interest in making this thing between them into something more than just a casual acquaintance - unquestionably clear tonight. And then he will back off and give Alexander all the time he needs to make up his mind, to make a decision.

Magnus will make it clear tonight that he is right here, here to stay and absolutely willing to wait, for however long it takes. Because Magnus can tell already that what they could have is worth the wait.
and he has nothing if not time.

Well, Magnus also tries to remind himself not to get his hopes up too much, that they haven't yet talked about it, have yet to even so much as kiss. He tries to remind himself that there is a very realistic chance that if truly faced with that choice Alexander might still decide against committing to Magnus, if only to please his parents or to avoid the hassle he will inevitably have to deal with if he decides to date a Downworlder. Magnus tries to remind himself of all that.

Well, 'tries' very much being the keyword here.

Because when he finally follows Alexander outside - their freshly prepared drinks in hand - and looks up, he just kind of stops short at the sight that greets him.

Alexander leaning sideways against the parapet, calmly looking out over the city, only part of his face visible to Magnus, his form backlit by the countless flickering lights of Brooklyn at night.

He is so incredibly, breathtakingly gorgeous.

And when he spots Magnus from the corner of his eyes, he turns his head towards him fully, a small but honest and open smile lighting up his face, the sight quite literally makes Magnus' heart skip a beat.

By magic, this one has me so caught, I might as well throw in the towel now.

Thankfully, he at least manages to stick with his resolution from a few minutes ago and refrains from just dropping both of the glasses in his hands to reach out for Alexander and pull him in for a kiss.

He resists. Even if only barely.

Instead, he swallows once and then takes the remaining few steps to reach the Shadowhunter’s side, handing over one of the glasses and then holds out his own to clink against.

Alexander smiles, tries the drink and promptly pulls that adorable little grimace of his. So damn adorable.

And apparently martini isn't to his tastes, maybe I should prepare something a little sweeter next time?

Of course the Shadowhunter doesn't actually say anything, just turns back to watch the city at night, his profile once more illuminated by countless city lights, dark eyes calmly gazing out over the river.

And Magnus is happy to just join him, basking in this moment of almost surreal peace and quiet, standing right here next to Alexander, close enough for their arms to be touching, silently enjoying the beautiful night and the even better company.

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Alec has absolutely no idea what time it is. He also doesn’t much care.

He knows that they've been back at Magnus' loft for a while now and they had cocktails on the balcony and once those were gone, Magnus prepared another round - Alec liked the second kind of cocktail much better - and they took those drinks with them to settle in the seating area on the terrace instead.

And they’ve just been sitting outside, enjoying the warm night air, talking and laughing and
discussing and even arguing at some points. And from time to time there are even breaks in their
conversation, comfortable silences which neither of them really feels the need to fill, before they just
naturally find something else to talk about, easily falling into yet another new conversation.

Alec kind of absolutely adores this, has enjoyed the entire evening, mind you, but this right here, this
is simply perfect. He can’t remember ever feeling so comfortable before, so relaxed, so truly himself.

And the longer they sit there, talking, entirely focused on each other, the less all those other things
that usually crowd Alec’s brain seem to matter, just falling away. Alec can barely rip his eyes away
from Magnus and the warlock has been returning his attention in equal measure all night.

By the angel, is it like this for everyone? Reality narrowing down to just that one person across from
you? Their presence taking up your entire field of vision to the point where you can't see anything
beyond them anymore? Everything else just somehow fading into the background until it’s just the
two of you?

And they sit and they talk and they laugh. And not once does Alec bother checking the time, simply
uncaring what time it is or just how long they’ve spent together at this point, unbothered by losing
track of time entirely.

Which also means that he has absolutely no idea at what point of the night he falls asleep on
Magnus’ couch.

Alec just knows that they were talking and then next thing he is waking up on one of the couches in
Magnus’ living room, covered by a fluffy blue blanket.

Alec blinks, pushing himself to sit up slightly as he looks around with bleary eyes. It's clearly
morning already, the early morning sun bathing the living room in a warm orange glow.

Where is Magnus?

He pauses for barely a moment but then he proceeds to actively ignore the fact that just now, his
actual first thought after waking was about Magnus. Alec’s mind is still far too sleep-addled to want
to consider the implications of that particular development.

And barely a second later - almost as if called by his thoughts - Magnus appears in the doorway,
holding two steaming mugs of what smells deliciously like coffee.

“Good morning, Alexander,” he says brightly. “I hope you slept well,”

The warlock is already perfectly dressed and styled, looking just as amazing as always in a dark-red,
long, kind of Asian-style shirt with gold patterns, several necklaces and rings, his hair swooping
upwards and then to the side, golden highlights at the tips, a few strands falling into his face almost
like a fringe and is that gold glitter lining his eyes?

Alec just blinks at him for a moment as his brain tries to catch up, feeling almost a little blinded by
the sight.

It’s like trying to look directly at the sun, he thinks a bit dazedly.

A fitting comparison if ever there was one. Magnus really seems about ready to out-shine the
morning sun that is coming in from the outside.

How can someone already look this pretty this early in the morning? Alec thinks to himself a little
helplessly. How is that in any way fair?
Magnus does his best not to coo at the absolutely adorable sight of the Shadowhunter on his couch, looking all sleep-rumpled and soft and lovely with his messy hair and only partially open eyes, blinking up at him slowly.

Instead, he just smiles brightly and thinks that it really is a good thing that his hands are currently full with mugs of hot coffee or he honestly might have been unable to keep himself from touching. Really, he deserves some sort of reward for managing to resist.

Finally, Alexander clears his throat, greeting in return, "Mornin’.

And Magnus promptly has to suppress an appreciative shiver at the gravelly quality of Alexander's still sleep-rough voice.

Oh yes, definitely a fan.

He just holds out one of the mugs in his hands - which is immediately and rather eagerly taken from him – to the Shadowhunter, takes a seat himself and remarks, "We must have fallen asleep at some point last night."

The comment just gets him a nod and nothing else. Clearly, Alexander is even less of a talker in the morning than he is at any other time of the day. And apparently, Alexander also doesn’t feel uncomfortable at all at having unintentionally slept over, clearly not bothered in the least, just taking everything in stride as always.

And Magnus tries to tamp down on his smile as he watches Alexander curl around the mug in his hands, inhaling the aroma of the coffee with a rather blissed-out expression. He is just so absolutely, stupidly endeared with this boy.

Yes, I so deserve a reward for keeping my hands to myself.

"Would you like some breakfast before you have to leave? Or do you have to get back to the Institute right away?" he asks as casually as he can, trying not to sound too eager. Then, he can't help but add the small incentive of, "I already prepared a small spread."

And Magnus truly limited himself to a rather small selection of breakfast foods for once - fully aware that his tastes tend to lean towards the extravagant and still a little worried that he might overwhelm his occasionally somewhat skittish Shadowhunter - despite even the most grandiose selection of foods being just a few flicks of his fingers to Magnus.

But having to decide between fresh croissants from Paris and those delicious pancakes from that restaurant in Chicago really is a small sacrifice to make, if it means Alexander feels entirely comfortable here.

Well, he just can't help but want to spoil Alexander at least a little, even if Magnus doesn't quite dare being too obvious about it yet.

And so what if Magnus just took a little round-trip to Spain a few minutes ago, just so he could get them a cup of coffee from that little place in Barcelona where they have the best damn coffee he has ever tasted.

It's not like Magnus actually has to tell Alexander that he just skipped across the Atlantic just to make sure Alexander gets a really nice cup of coffee to start his day with, now does he?

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Alec decides that he can definitely spare another thirty minutes to grab a quick breakfast with Magnus before he has to take off again, seeing as it really is still rather early in the morning.

And then there is also the fact that there is just no way of knowing how soon they'll manage to actually see each other again. Going by the past few days, there is no sense in even trying to plan ahead, at least not as long as Clary and Jace are running around, making a mess of everything they so much as look at.

So, Alec is just not quite willing to leave yet, to go back to the real world and bury himself in missions and reports once more, without any clue when they'll be able meet again.

A nice breakfast seems like a perfect way to end their - admittedly rather extended - date.

But his decision to stay just a little longer is also the reason why Alec entirely misses his mother's arrival at the Institute.

He only hears about it afterwards, while drinking his second cup of truly excellent coffee and smiling at Magnus, who is still giggling slightly at one of the embarrassing childhood stories Alec just told him about his siblings. Puberty truly is kind to no one and as the oldest sibling Alec has the privilege of knowing all the embarrassing details for all three of his siblings. It makes for some excellent stories. Not to even mention the blackmail material.

So, Alec is still smiling when his phone dings with a new message. It's from Izzy.

‘Heads-up: Mom is back. As always, she’s in a mood. Jace and I have been sent on a diplomatic mission with the seelies. And before anyone could check, I also signed you in for that early morning patrol you are obviously on right now.’

Alec stares at the text for a few seconds. His mother is back at the Institute? Damnit.

He had honestly hoped that his parents might stay away a little longer, would give Alec a little more time to figure himself out, if only to better prepare himself for the fight ahead of him.

A fight which is entirely unavoidable at this point, not only in regards to all those unsanctioned missions but even more so once his parents realize that Alec finally has something he might not be willing to simply shove aside just to conform to their ideal image of him.

Just the fact that he is gay is already going to be enough of a fight, but add to that the fact that Alexander is also rather infatuated with a warlock of all people... yeah, the fight is truly unavoidable at this point.

Of course, the one morning where Alec for the absolute first time in his life is doing something entirely for himself, is the exact point in time his parents decide to check up on them. How typical.

Still, at least he can count on Izzy to cover for him. Apparently, by claiming that the reason for his absence is him already being out working.

And Alec finds definite amusement in the fact that this is certainly not the first time that Izzy and him have exchanged messages exactly like this before. But until now it has always been Alec who was covering for Izzy - claiming she was on patrol or on a mission or meditating or not to be disturbed in her room for whatever reason whenever their parents were looking for her while she was actually out doing something not-so-Shadowhunterish - and not the other way around.

But, isn't that what siblings are for? Having your back?
So, he just texts back a simple, ‘Thanks.’

Izzy’s reply is prompt. ‘I want details once you get back.’

Alec quirks a grin. ‘Yeah, not going to happen.’

‘Spoilsport.’

He can practically see the pout she must be wearing right now.

Angel, does he love his sister.

+++ 

Magnus watches as Alexander shrugs into his jacket.

Their undisturbed time with each other has finally run out. And he would love to keep the Shadowhunter a little longer – always ‘just a little longer’ with this one - but it’s sadly unavoidable that they have to part at some point, what with both of them having rather stressful day jobs that require quite a bit of their attention.

Even more so, now that the elder Lightwoods are apparently back in the city.

Magnus promptly pushes that thought aside. He can worry about what sort of an effect the return of his parents might have on Alexander later. Magnus can only hope that this still so very new and fragile connection between them will survive the elder Lightwoods’ presence.

Sure, so far Alexander has proven himself to be utterly self-assured in his own choices, including spending time with Magnus and not even making much of a secret out of it. But it is an indisputable fact that there are few influences in life greater than that of a parent. Magnus would know.

And the fact remains, that they still haven't defined what they are or what they could be or what they want this to be. So, who knows what Alexander will make of it now that his parents are back.

There simply isn't anything Magnus can do about it. He is already in far too deep to try pulling back now, to put some of his defenses - which Alexander bypassed so effortlessly - back up to protect himself, to protect his heart. It truly is too late for that. So, Magnus has no other choice but to simply wait and see how this plays out, to see whether he'll have a chance at actual real happiness again or whether he'll have to deal with the fallout of letting himself get so very invested so quickly.

It's simply out of his hands now. If he is entirely honest, Magnus might never have been holding any of the cards to begin with. Alexander had him caught pretty much the moment their eyes met that night at Pandemonium.

So, he pushes the thoughts of all that might go wrong soon aside and instead focuses on these last few undisturbed minutes they have left before Alexander has to go.

He looks at the Shadowhunter, who also seems rather distracted right now, clearly caught up in his own thoughts, possibly even thinking along similar lines as Magnus, about what his parents’ return might mean for them.

Alexander had refused his offer of a portal, so as not to undermine his own alibi as provided by the lovely Isabelle of having been on patrol if someone were to see him step out of a portal in front of the Institute. Instead, he said he'd actually patrol the city for a bit - to make up for slacking - and then make his way back as he usually would when coming back from patrol.
Always the consummate Shadowhunter. Magnus just smiles fondly and finally reaches out to pull open the door for him.

Alec is about to leave.

After what might have been the best night of his life – and yes, he is fully aware how that sounds – his uninterrupted time with Magnus is pretty much over now. The dinner and the walk and the drinks and the talking and the nice but short breakfast this morning, everything was just pretty much perfect.

And now he is about to leave.

But then there is the fact that his mind keeps nudging at him, reminding him that this is the third time he has gone out with Magnus, the third time they spend hours talking while pretty much ignoring the rest of the world, not to even mention their countless texts and lengthy phone conversations. And at this point it’s not even a question anymore whether he wants to make this thing with Magnus into something more.

Hell, whenever they aren’t spending time with each other in one way or another, Alec can still barely even drag his thoughts away from the warlock.

And Alec has been thinking about it, about defining their relationship as more. But he is also a little clueless how to go about getting there. Sure, Magnus has made it so very absolutely clear last night that he is definitely interested in more, but the warlock made it just as clear that he is leaving it up to Alec to take the next step, that he is not going to push for anything and is just happy to take whatever Alec is willing to offer him.

Which is a nice sentiment and all but it also means that it’s now up to Alec to figure out the next step. And excuse him for being a little clueless here. All of this is entirely new to him, the dating and the handholding and the talking and the flirting. Alec just doesn’t know what the social conventions for taking the next step are.

All he knows is that he does want to take this further, that he does want more.

And he just spent an entire night staring at Magnus, at the sinuous movements of his hands, his warm eyes, his smile.

His lips.

Alec just really wants to kiss him. It’s pretty much all he has been able to think about for days now. Kissing Magnus. He wants to know how Magnus’ lips will feel against his, wants it so much he sometimes loses himself in thinking about it for minutes at a time.

But how do you go about kissing someone you’ve never kissed before? Do you ask? That seems a little awkward to be honest. But just pulling someone into a kiss without warning doesn’t seem the best idea either.

But then, Magnus is pulling the door to the loft open for him, saying something and smiling at him warmly, and suddenly Alec’s time is up.

"Hopefully we’ll see each other again soon," Magnus says with a smile, holding the door open and not letting any of his doubts about what might happen once Alexander leaves show on his face. He turns slightly to fully face the Shadowhunter again, wanting to make sure Alexander knows just how much Magnus enjoyed their date. "I truly enjoyed this and I would love to do it again. Just let me know, whenever you have."
He trails off.

Because the look in Alexander's eyes has changed, something intent and determined and eager and almost a little hungry in his gaze which keeps flicking between Magnus' eyes and his lips.

Then the Shadowhunter is taking a step closer to him, another. One of his hands comes up to settle lightly on Magnus’ shoulder. And then Alexander is slowly pulling him in for a kiss.

It takes Magnus not even a second to get with the program - magic, has he been waiting for this - letting one of his hands come up to lay against the side of Alexander's neck, the other settling on his waist.

And he can't help but smile slightly into the kiss, as warmth and relief and joy spread in his chest. Alexander made his choice. Alexander wants him.

The kiss is everything Alec has imagined and at the same time so much more than he ever dared to expect.

It’s just a rather chaste press of lips at first. But it changes, their lips moving against each other and, angel, it feels good.

Magnus' lips are soft and warm and Alec takes another step closer, and another, following Magnus' movement until the warlock is leaning back against the door, one of Alec’s hands against the wood next to his head.

Alec doesn't know how long the kiss lasts. It might be just a few moments or minutes or even longer.

And then, Magnus’ hand on the side of his neck shifts slightly, his thumb running slowly, gently along Alec’s cheekbone, and Alec just helplessly steps even closer, entirely losing track of reality for a bit.

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Magnus is still standing in the open door to his loft, slowly swiping his thumb over his lower lip, feeling a ridiculously wide, happy smile spread over his face as he stares in the direction where Alexander just disappeared down the corridor.

Alexander just kissed him.

No preamble, no hesitation, just a kiss. Long and slow and testing.

And then the Shadowhunter had pulled back, enough to be able to meet his eyes, just staying focused on each other for another few moments. Finally, Alexander had given a decisive nod and with an almost neutral sounding "I'll call you tonight." had then left rather quickly.

Although, not before Magnus got a nice view of that really rather adorable blush on Alexander's cheeks.

Magnus just feels his grin widen. Goodness, what this boy does to me.
So, as promised, even more Malec fluff :) And I really hope the development in this chapter seems generally organic and that the kiss didn’t happen too abruptly here...

Would absolutely love to know what you think :D

And I hope all this fluff will tide you over for a bit because the next chapters are probably going to be more about pushing the storyline forward a little (cause this fic has 25k already and I barely made it to episode 5 at this point and just how in the world did that happen?). And though I wasn't able to keep the iconic wedding kiss as their first kiss in this version, I'll do my best to include some version of it later on in some way :D

And thanks so much for your comments and kudos! They always make me so happy (*/^_^*)
Further

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Alec walks through New York City, still supposedly on patrol but for once he is only partially focused on the task of checking the streets for demon activity. His mind is somewhere else entirely.

Because Alec just kissed Magnus.

Every time he so much as thinks about it - remembers having Magnus so close, his hand cradling the side of Alec neck, heat spreading from every point of contact, the feeling of their lips moving against each other, the warmth between them - he feels a renewed flush crawl up his neck. Not to even mention the rather uncharacteristic smile he is currently wearing.

Because Alec is happy. For the first time in years, Alec is actually happy. So happy in fact, that he can't help but smile slightly even while on patrol.

And okay, they have yet to actually talk about whatever this thing between them is and the kiss didn't clarify that in any manner, but it’s still something, it’s still a definite step closer to being together. And so far, everything with Magnus seems to have simply evolved naturally, things just happening and moving along, without either of them pushing for something to happen or trying to define it.

So, maybe they don't actually need to talk about it. Because why mess with that?

And admittedly, after that kiss earlier, Alec is suddenly not quite as keen on ‘just talking’ the next time he sees Magnus.

Because, damn, that kiss. Alec doesn’t really know what he was expecting kissing Magnus to feel like, but he definitely hadn't been expecting for his lips to still feel slightly warm even now, to still tingle with the memory almost an hour later.

Yeah, the next time he sees Magnus, Alec definitely intends to spend at least some of their time very much not-talking.

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By the time he makes it back to the Institute, Jace and Izzy still aren’t back from their mission with the seelies yet - whatever that mission actually entails - and Clary is apparently still sleeping off the effects of having her memories returned.

So, it's actually rather easy for Alec to slip past everyone without being seen, glad that he gets to take a shower and can change his clothes before he has to face reality in the form of his parents' return and his siblings' usual tendency towards producing trouble.

Heck, Alec just got more than twelve uninterrupted hours with Magnus. If their history taught him anything, then it's the fact that Alec is due another one of his siblings' calls for help with the next imminent catastrophe they somehow got themselves involved in any second now.

It comes just as he expected.

As soon as he finally sets foot into the Ops center, his mother immediately calls him into the Head of the Institute’s office for a talk. A talk which really just amounts to her expressing her disappointment
Alec just takes it, never having been one to make up excuses. He has always been a firm believer in doing what you think is best and then dealing with the consequences afterwards.

So, as much as he actually agrees with his mother’s assessment of recent events - and as much as Alec also disapproved of his siblings’ recent penchant for running into situations without any real plan, without waiting for approval from the Clave and definitely without any thought to the potential fallout - in the end Alec always went along with it. Because no matter how irritated he is with Izzy and Jace, there is still absolutely no chance of him ever letting his siblings run off into a dangerous situation without Alec there as backup in case things go south.

Sure, his siblings tend to forget that they could in fact make life a little easier for Alec, but that doesn't mean that there will ever be a situation where Alec doesn't have their backs.

Accordingly, he just listens to his mother berate him and takes the punishments she deems fit to dole out. Finally, she gets to yesterday’s events in her list of his recent failures.

“And you invited a warlock into the Institute, Alec?” She sounds absolutely reproachful.

And it's almost a little humorous to him, because thing is, she isn’t even aware of the worst of it. If she knew just why Alec had been so very willing to invite 'a warlock' to the Institute - namely the fact that it was very much about that specific warlock who Alec then also proceeded to go on another date with as soon as the ritual was done - their current discussion would certainly be devolving into something else entirely.

So, he makes sure to keep his voice neutral, as he replies, “The High Warlock of this city to be exact. Retrieving Clary Fray’s memories is the most reliable way we currently have for finding the Mortal Cup. I called in the most powerful warlock in the Institute’s jurisdiction to perform the required ritual to guarantee its success.”

At that his mother finally loses her reproachful air, actually looking interested now. “And the warlock succeeded?”

Alec nods, trying not to feel too bothered by Magnus being referred to by his species instead of his name or even his title. “The ritual was successful in returning the memories to Clary Fray and now it is only a matter of waiting for her to wake and hopefully she will at least recall something about the Mortal Cup's whereabouts. Of course, I am aware that there is no guarantee that her mother actually told her anything, but it seemed prudent to try this route first before starting to randomly comb through the entire city for clues. And as it wasn’t an actual mission and just a simple commission for a warlock ritual I saw no need to get approval from the Clave beforehand.”

His mother is now actually nodding in approval. “The ritual was a good call, Alec. Although, you still should have let your father and me know before going ahead with it.”

Alec feels himself relax slightly, relieved that the berating for his failures is finally over and done with. Still, he makes sure to keep his face absolutely neutral.

He knows that the only reason his mother would have wanted to know about the ritual ahead of time is so she could claim some of the credit in case Clary’s memories truly end up leading them to the Cup. Nothing concerns his mother more than her reputation.

But at least they have finally made it past the part of their conversation concerning all the recent unsanctioned missions, so now they proceed to discuss everything else that has taken place at the
Institute in his parents' absence.

It's still rather harrowing and it takes them almost two hours to get through everything. He is honestly quite happy once he finally makes it out of there.

Although, his relief doesn't last long, as the second half of his earlier assumption of being due another mess to clean up for his siblings promptly proves itself to be true when Jace calls Alec in a panic barely twenty minutes later.

Because Clary is missing.

Apparently, while Alec was stuck in the meeting with his mother, the girl not only woke up but then also seemingly simply took off without any sort of explanation to anyone. Only to then most likely get herself kidnapped, because when Jace tracked her on a whim the only thing Alec's siblings found at Clary's old home is her bag.

But it's his parabatai calling him for help, so of course Alec immediately takes off to meet him and Izzy.

Only to then be told that it is apparently his fault that Clary is missing.

“This wouldn’t have happened if you had been watching her!” Jace exclaims, something between anger and fear in his eyes, clearly worried about the girl.

But Alec just feels his eyes narrow slightly in irritation at being once more made to carry the weight of other people's moronic decisions. He might not mind doing exactly that for his siblings whenever they get themselves into their various messes, but he does not extend that same courtesy to near strangers.

And then there is also the fact, that Alec actually had a pretty excellent morning - a wonderful breakfast with Magnus and an even better goodbye - and even his conversation with his mother actually went rather well, all things considered.

For once, there is nothing hanging over his head - except for the inevitable conflict with his parents regarding his sexuality - and he actually has numerous things - like seeing Magnus again as soon as he can possibly manage - ahead of him to look forward to.

Alec doesn't think he's ever had that before.

But instead of getting to enjoy feeling actually happy for once in his life, he gets to listen to his parabatai reprimand him. For not babysitting a teenager who was supposedly sleeping while Alec had also been stuck in a discussion with their mother.

Jace's complete focus on Clary over the past few weeks - his utter indifference towards anything not directly Clary-related, his disregard of everything that does not entirely go along with Clary's objectives - is really starting to get on Alec's nerves. Not to even mention how his parabatai just keeps brushing him off as though Alec's opinions simply don't matter, at least not if they oppose Clary's.

And maybe it's the contrast between how happy Alec felt this morning - just a few hours ago when he left Magnus' loft - compared to how frustrated and disappointed he feels right now. Or maybe it's the fact that his parabatai apparently couldn't care less how Alec might be doing, how Jace seems to be exclusively and unapologetically concerned with only himself and his own interests.

Alec doesn't know what exactly it is, but something about this situation is just simply too much.
Maybe it's about time he lets Jace know just how much he is currently stretching Alec's patience.

He lets his eyes narrow at his parabatai's last comment.

"Run that by me again, Jace." He tries to keep his irritation out of his voice, but he knows he doesn't fully succeed. "The girl wakes up and promptly runs off on her own without letting anyone, not even you, if I may remind you, know about it. But it is somehow explicitly my fault simply because I did not decide to... to do what exactly? Sit at her bedside until she woke up in case she'd be stupid enough to just take off on her own without telling anyone? And we both know that even if I'd been aware of her waking up, talking to her wouldn't have done any good whatsoever. Neither one of you has had the greatest track record of listening to me over the past few days, Jace."

But his parabatai has that stubborn look on his face that tells Alec it's completely useless to actually try to argue with him. Jace already chose his version of the events and nothing and no one will change his mind.

Alec lets out an explosive breath. He is just so done with Jace's almost purposeful blindness to everything but a near stranger, a girl they've known for less than a month but who keeps putting all of them in danger for her own personal crusade. And for some reason, Alec is supposed to just cheer her on.

He takes another step closer, now looking down at his brother. From the corner of his eye, he can see Izzy step closer as well, maybe afraid that Alec might actually go for a punch or something.

But he just keeps his eyes fixed on Jace’s. "I don’t know what is going on with you lately, Jace, but I really hope you get a grip of yourself soon. Because you are really starting to piss me off."

Jace scowls, opening his mouth, clearly about to say something. But Alec just makes a slicing gesture with his hand, to stop him from actually saying a word. Just based on his parabatai's expression, it's more than clear that nothing Alec just said actually made a difference to Jace.

"Let’s just try and track the girl," Alec sighs. "Maybe once she is back you'll actually be able to think straight again."

Thankfully, that is the exact point Clary's phone starts to ring from her bag which Izzy is still holding. It's Clary's mundane friend who was apparently kidnapped alongside her - because for some unfathomable reason the girl had decided to call her mundane friend to help her instead of taking a Shadowhunter with her instead - but now they at least know where to look for the two of them.

Once they have a location, Alec waits barely a second before he is already turning to lead the way towards the docks.

And he might actually have to revise his opinion of that Simon kid. Because while clearly just as likely to get himself into trouble as everyone else around Alec, in contrast to the rest of their little troop the mundane seems to be at least some sort of help in resolving the trouble he gets himself into.

What a novel concept.

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Saving Clary and her chatty mundane friend doesn't even turn out to be that difficult at first, despite them having been kidnapped by werewolves of all things.

Having to deal with werewolves is definitely better than if it had actually been Valentine who took them, but still, Alec could have done entirely without having to deal with yet another Clary-related
catastrophe.

Which of course only gets worse once they get outside.

Because turns out they managed to once more get involved in a Downworlder conflict, or more specifically, a struggle for the position of alpha in the local pack.

Alec sighs to himself in irritation, even as he helps Jace drag a barely conscious werewolf to the car while Clary flutters around them rather uselessly and Izzy takes off back towards the Institute to cover for their absence.

So much for not giving the Clave or their parents even more reasons to reprimand them.

Damn it all.

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The next time Magnus sees Alexander it is once more because of a need for his services as a warlock.

Alexander and Jace are dragging a badly injured werewolf - the newly crowned alpha of the most powerful NYC pack to be specific - into his loft, closely followed by Clarissa and a mundane Magnus hasn’t seen before.

What is with all the teenagers that have so recently taken to gathering in my loft?

But it's not like Magnus is going to complain about seeing his Shadowhunter again so soon, no matter what the circumstances may be.

Although, even as he runs his magic over Luke to scan his injuries, Magnus worriedly notes the very clear rift practically gaping between Alexander and his parabatai. Clearly, something happened.

But as much as Magnus wants to ask, wants to offer a sympathetic ear at least, Luke very much takes precedence right now. The wolf is already much further gone than Magnus would like and if he wants even the slightest chance of actually healing him, then Magnus has to focus on the rather complex potion he needs to brew first. Alpha-inflicted wounds are always a bitch to heal.

Thankfully, Magnus at least knows the required potion quite well. It’s not like this is the first time he has healed a newly crowned alpha werewolf from the wounds incurred during the fight for alphaship.

Mentally noting the extent of Luke's wounds, Magnus quickly makes his way towards his study to collect the ingredients he needs, completely ignoring the drama between the three teenagers he doesn’t really know arguing in his living room.

A love triangle. What fun.

Magnus only realizes while he is already digging through his cabinet for a certain vial that the reason he doesn't hear Alexander chiming in on the argument is because the Shadowhunter apparently decided to follow Magnus to his study instead. And he is now standing in the doorway, interestingly watching him gather some of the vials he needs for the potion he is about to brew.

Once Magnus actually focuses on him, Alexander immediately takes another step into the study and says, “Thanks for helping us again, Magnus.”
"Oh, don't worry about it at all, Alexander." Magnus smiles at him reassuringly. "I'm glad you brought Luke here. He'll make a much better alpha than the previous one and I'm happy to heal him."

Magnus truly doesn't mind. Actually, he really rather likes the fact that Alexander's first thought when he needed help was to come to Magnus.

Alexander's lips quirk in a smile as he gives another interested glance around the study before focusing on him fully once more, saying, "I think, I'll go back to the Institute to help Izzy keep things under wraps and to cover for Jace and Clary."

And Magnus nods and finally turns to face Alexander fully, his arms full of vials and containers with various ingredients which he will need for the potion. He feels a slight smile curve his lips at the sight of the Shadowhunter so casually standing in what is truly the heart of his home.

Although, he can't help but once more notice that there is something aggravated in the way Alexander holds himself, something uneasy in his expression. And Magnus is quite sure that it has something to do with that oh-so-clear rift between Alexander and his parabatai he observed earlier.

And urgency to get back to Luke or no, Magnus just can’t help but take a step closer, asking carefully, worriedly, “Are you alright?”

He doesn’t specify what he is asking about. There truly is no need.

There is a brief pause as Alexander's eyes focus on him fully for a few seconds before the Shadowhunter just gives a single, slow, not-quite-hesitant-but-not-entirely-certain nod.

Magnus accepts the non-verbal ‘I think so, but we will see’ that is implied, not wanting to push, and instead just asks, “Would you like me to make you a portal back to the Institute?”

Alexander raises an eyebrow. “Oh, are you sure? Aren’t you too…” He waves a hand vaguely at the numerous ingredients Magnus is currently holding.

“Very sure, my dear,” Magnus just grins, flicking two of his fingers which aren't currently occupied holding on to something, easily opening a portal off to the side.

His Shadowhunter just smiles at him rather bashfully – Magnus really doesn’t think he’ll ever get tired of these lovely reactions – before giving a slight nod in thanks and stepping towards the portal. But then Alexander halts mid-step, unexpectedly pauses. Before quickly turning instead and crossing the few steps separating him from Magnus and then leaning in.

It’s a chaste kiss, warm and light, just a quick, but far-too-new-to-be-casual press of lips. And Magnus hates that his hands are currently too full to actually reach out to touch Alexander before the Shadowhunter is already pulling back.

“Thanks for the portal,” he murmurs against Magnus lips.

And before Magnus can think of anything to say in reply, Alexander is already gone, quickly disappearing through the portal.

Magnus just stands there for a few seconds, blinking at having been taken by surprise with a kiss for the second time on the same day.

Then, he huffs a rather helpless laugh, shaking his head in wonderment even as he closes the portal and finally starts making his way back towards his living room.
Really, he is so smitten with this one it’s not even funny anymore.

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When Alec returns to the Institute, Izzy is waiting for him at the entrance, seeming almost frantic, pulling him aside immediately.

There is anger and desperation and something that almost looks a little bit like fear in her eyes. Alec has never seen her like this before and just the thought of what could possibly have her look like this immediately has all of his protective instincts rising.

Only to then stare at her absolutely blindsided when she finally pushes him into an empty room and tells him just what his parents are planning for him.

Apparently, his parents are planning to marry Alec off. For a political alliance. His parents are planning to pretty much trade in Alec's future for a slightly better standing with the Clave.

And they didn't even have the guts to tell him themselves, much less to actually consult him. Like his future and his happiness is a commodity for them to simply trade away as they please.

Fury pulses through him as he clenches his teeth. And Izzy can clearly tell just how angry he is, her eyes uncharacteristically wide in open, honest worry.

"Alec, we'll find a way out of this. We will," she says emphatically, something desperate and imploring in her eyes. But he can also see her helplessness, can see how very afraid she is of what their parents might get him to agree to.

And honestly, he gets where she is coming from, gets why she is so worried.

Because not so long ago and Alec might have maybe raged and railed against the unfairness of it all, but there is a very good chance that he might still have gone along with his parents' demands. For the sake of the Lightwood name.

There honestly isn't much that he wouldn't be willing to do for their family.

And not so long ago, Alec had still been entirely convinced that he would never be able to have what he actually wanted anyway, that he would never have a chance to truly be happy. So why would he have bothered to fight his parents on this?

But. So very recently, things have changed. Quite significantly so.

Because Alec met Magnus.

And right from the very start, right from that first night spent talking at the bar of a Downworld club, it has just been so easy, so natural to simply be with Magnus, to let himself fall into this thing between them. And then the phone conversations that are still pretty much the highlight of Alec's day. And so very recently making this into something more.

And Alec knows that he is already well on his way to falling for Magnus. Angel, does he know. But even though it should scare him, it somehow just doesn't. Not really.

Sure, there are nerves and doubts and a certain level of insecurity. But not nearly enough to actually deter Alec in any way.

Because he wants Magnus. Of that he is certain.
Just like he is sure that Magnus wants him in return.

And suddenly, for the first time getting what he wants, being happy is actually an option.

Alec honestly can’t remember ever feeling even remotely as happy as he does whenever he spends time with Magnus, whether it's just sitting on his balcony talking or whether it's kissing him this morning, or whether it's just thinking about seeing Magnus again or every time Magnus sends him a text message or calls.

Honestly, anything that includes Magnus in any capacity seems to make Alec ridiculously, stupidly happy.

And Shadowhunter reputation or no, now that Alec knows he can have this, that it is even an option for him, there is simply no way he is willing to give it up again.

Marrying for anything less than this? For anything that makes him even slightly less happy than he is whenever he so much as thinks of Magnus? Yeah, sounds like an absolutely ludicrous thing to even consider.

And, yes, from the very start he has been fully aware that dating a male warlock was never going to go down well with his parents or the Clave. Ever since the moment he realized that he not only likes Magnus but that he also definitely wants more, wants an actual, committed relationship with him, Alec knew that a fight with his parents was inevitable.

But at the same time this fight is also already over. Because thing is, Alec has already made his choice, has already made up his mind. And he will not budge on this.

So, yes, Alec gets why Izzy is worried. And, yes, he is absolutely furious with his parents for making plans for him as though he were little more than a pawn for them to move around as they please, not even having the damn decency to talk to him beforehand.

But he doesn't feel any real panic, no actual fear.

It might have been a different story if his parents had suggested this just a few weeks ago. But now, they are simply a little too late.

And Alec is entirely ready to just go confront his parents about this fact right now, to disabuse them of this notion of theirs that they can just make decisions for him regarding his future, but he doesn't actually get the chance to do just that.

Because of course that's the exact moment his phone starts to ring. It's Jace asking for his help with Luke's healing.

And Alec just sighs in exasperation, even as he promptly starts making his way back towards the Institute's entrance. After trying to assure Izzy as best as he can without actually mentioning what is going on between him and Magnus, for no other reason than that explaining that would simply take up far too much time right now. He'll have to fill her in later.

Seriously, not a single damn moment of peace in his life.

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Magnus can admit that the little troop of Shadowhunters - plus one almost impressively chatty mundane - makes a pretty great team if they want to and healing Luke turns out to be the very definition of a team effort.
Jace and Simon run around New York getting ingredients, Clary does her best to help Magnus with brewing while also keeping Luke calm - and despite having a sort of identity crisis on the side - and Alexander returns to the loft just in time to lend Magnus the strength he needs to finish the healing.

And usually, this procedure wouldn’t even come close to depleting Magnus’ magic reserves but he might have been overdoing it a little recently, what with the strain of yesterday’s summoning - he might have downplayed just how much power had been required to summon such a powerful demon -, portaling Shadowhunters every which way, dealing with a small emergency of a young warlock who had gotten himself stuck halfway in portal-limbo earlier today and also spending quite a bit of his magic in a scrying ritual looking for Dot - or at the very least her body, because if she is truly dead then she at least deserves the proper rituals for her burial - and now even Magnus’ reserves are running a little low.

He is truly thankful when Alexander shows up again just in time and, goodness, if this boy doesn’t have pure, unadulterated strength hidden away in his core.

And, yes, he might have been fibbing a little about specifically needing Alexander here to help him with the ritual. But for one, it is in fact much easier to borrow strength from someone Magnus feels a personal connection to and who also trusts him enough to actually open himself up to Magnus' powers. And secondly, because Magnus might also secretly have hoped that having Jace actually call Alexander for help might help heal whatever rift there is between the two parabatai.

Which also seems to have worked at least somewhat, to Magnus' relief. Anything that helps making Alexander's life even a little bit easier is a success in his eyes.

Still, with Luke healed and resting in his guest bedroom, Magnus promptly proceeds to boot the entire group of teenagers out of his loft - even Clarissa who tries to insist on staying behind - sending them back to the Institute or wherever else they might be staying. Well, Alexander makes absolutely no move to leave with the others, clearly assuming that Magnus kicking everyone out doesn't actually apply to him. Quite rightfully so.

And then, it’s only him and Alexander once more.

Magnus certainly hadn’t expected to get to spend another evening with Alexander so soon and honestly, if this is the result, Magnus is actually quite happy to deal with depleted magical reserves and teenagers taking over his loft from time to time.

And now, they are sitting outside again, this time both of them with a glass of red wine. Although, there isn’t nearly as much talking going on as usual.

Because Magnus has spent most of his day thinking about their kiss by the door this morning. Then that brief, casual kiss in his study earlier in his study, which honestly felt more like a tease than anything else.

He has been wanting another taste.

So, once they have settled outside, glasses in hand, Magnus just reaches up to cup the back of Alexander’s neck, pulling his Shadowhunter in for a kiss. And Alexander immediately follows, easily letting his arm settle along the back of the bench behind Magnus, making space for Magnus to lean into his side.

And it’s nice and chaste at first, just lips moving against each other. Gentle and testing and absolutely unhurried. And so so warm.
But gradually it changes.

The kiss keeps growing more and more intense, until Magnus is leaning halfway against Alexander’s chest, the Shadowhunter’s hand buried in Magnus’ hair. Lips moving, tongues sliding together, sharing their breath.

It still takes Magnus a while to realize something really rather important, something he should maybe have realized before but simply didn't. Because when Magnus finally licks his way into Alexander's mouth, the Shadowhunter just seems to entirely lose his breath for a second, only to then promptly relax into it, easily copying the movements of his tongue.

And while Alexander definitely knows how to kiss chastely, this right here, really making out, kissing open-mouthed and hot and languid, this is apparently a different story. *This* is clearly new to him.

*Magic.*

Alexander is learning how to kiss. From Magnus. Right now.

Molten heat fizzles down Magnus' spine.

He can’t help but let the kiss grow even more intense, hotter. Lets his tongue slide languidly, slickly against Alexander’s, swallows down the deep, rather rumbly sound Alexander makes when Magnus licks along the roof of his mouth, pulls back a bit to nip at Alexander’s lower lip and delights in the way Alexander's hand immediately tightens in his hair in reaction, the slight shiver it elicits.

Magnus has to actively push down the desire that is making it slightly harder to think. He so wants to pull away slightly, wants to kiss along Alexander's jaw, wants to run his lips and tongue along that ridiculously hot neck rune, down towards where his neck meets his shoulder, wants to set his teeth there. Wants to see and hear and *feel* Alexander's reaction to having Magnus leave a mark on him.

But he forces himself to keep the kiss slow, even if bone-meltingly hot. Because this simply isn't the time to take this any further. Not before they’ve actually talked and definitely not if what Magnus is starting to suspect about Alexander’s dating history is actually true.

So for now, this right here is absolutely perfect.

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Alec thinks that unless the apocalypse starts going down around him right now, he simply isn't going to move. Possibly not ever.

They've been kissing for a while now and the mind-meltingly hot kiss from earlier has by now turned into something slower and softer and somehow even *warmer,* their lips just moving together languidly, unhurriedly.

And Alec just keeps getting lost in the feeling of kissing Magnus and being so close to each other and being allowed to run his hands through Magnus' hair and having the warlock leaning easily into his side.

Finally, Magnus pulls back slightly, out of the kiss, but doesn't actually move away, just lets himself relax even further where he is leaning against Alec, taking a sip from his glass before tilting his head back against the arm Alec still has settled along the back of the bench.

It's warm and comfortable and so easy and natural. And Alec just absolutely adores it.
He feels his chest expand with an absolutely content sigh, as he fully relaxes as well. Yeah, he definitely isn't moving.

They just relax in silence, neither of them saying anything as they watch the city at night, just enjoying the peace and quiet in each other's company.

Alec is currently so content right where he is, his thoughts just aimlessly drifting, but also somehow entirely focused on Magnus, unable to really think about anything else. His mind unfocused but also somehow full of everything that happened today, everything that changed but still somehow stayed entirely the same.

Not only this morning but also with the whole Luke situation. There is just something about Magnus having apparently told Jace earlier that he needs Alec, having been entirely open about not only needing help but also wanting that help to come from Alec. Just as Alec's decision to bring Luke here for help had been entirely automatic. It had simply seemed natural to come here, knowing that Magnus wouldn't turn him away.

He really likes that they are able and also willing to so easily rely on each other, not even questioning whether the other would help.

Alec wants that. Quite desperately so.

Wants to be able to lean on Magnus when he needs help and desperately wants Magnus to lean on him whenever the warlock needs something as well. And Alec doesn't want it to be just because they know each other, or work well together, or even know that they can count on each other, or anything of the sort.

No, he wants Magnus to lean on him because he's Alec's and wants to be able to lean on Magnus because Alec is his. Or the other way around. Whichever.

Point is, Alec wants that, wants that sort of equal partnership and devotion and trust. It's all he's ever wanted and all he never thought he could actually have.

So, when Magnus slightly tilts his head to look at him, a warm smile curving his lips, his eyes soft and his expression entirely open, Alec is simply helpless to follow the almost physical pull to lean back in for another kiss.

And maybe it's simply because Alec has never felt quite this happy and wants some sort of affirmation that he'll get to keep this, maybe it's because of everything that happened today, maybe it also has something to do with his parents planning to marry him off and thus Alec suddenly wanting to be able to put a name to whatever it is they have between them.

But when he finally pulls back again - after who knows how long of getting lost in kissing Magnus again - the words just slip out, murmured against Magnus' lips.

"Be my boyfriend?" It's out before Alec even makes the conscious decision to speak. But, angel, does he mean it.

There is only a brief pause, just a second or two before a smile is spreading over Magnus' face, a smile so wide, so bright, so happy it makes the warlock's eyes crinkle slightly at the corners.

Alec breathes out - caught somewhere between relief and joy and breathlessness at the happiness he can see in Magnus' eyes - and he doesn't even give Magnus a chance to actually say anything before he is already leaning in for yet another kiss.
It's not like Alec actually needs a verbal reply. The answer is all too clear in Magnus' eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Alright. So, this was just absolutely cavity-inducing XD This entire chapter turned out far, far heavier on the malec content than I had planned… But, oh well, hope you enjoy the malec goodness :) 

And I'll try to continue including a few (altered) scenes from season1 from time to time, even as I'm really going to start twisting the plot from here on out, with most of the changes originating from Alec's now pretty much established season2, he's-mine-so-deal-with-it attitude :D

And thank you so so much for all your wonderful comments and kudos! They always make me so happy (°^°)*
When Alec returns to the Institute the next morning, his chest is still warm with the memory of Magnus’ smile as Alec kissed him goodbye at the door, as he kissed his boyfriend goodbye at the door.

Alec immediately has to fight against the ridiculously happy smile that is threatening to spread over his face at that thought.

Last night, they had an honest and entirely open discussion about them. And while Alec had been pretty sure that they were on the same page before, it’s still somehow surprisingly reassuring to have really talked about it, to know exactly where they both stand, the assurance that they are both committed and want to see where this will go.

The conversation really was entirely open and even surprisingly non-awkward considering some of the topics of conversations, particularly regarding their individual dating histories.

Well, Alec might forever loathe the number seventeen from this point forward - not to even mention, seventeen thousand - but there is really nothing he can do about that.

Point is, last night Alec actually asked the High Warlock of Brooklyn to be his boyfriend and he is now in a committed relationship with Magnus Bane. Magnus who is insanely powerful and breathtakingly beautiful and so incredibly compassionate and kind.

And he is now Alec's. And anyone who doesn't like it can just go deal with that on their own time.

So, yes, Alec is in a rather excellent mood right now.

Of course, his thoughts are promptly derailed as soon as he steps into the Ops center and spots Izzy standing by one of the screens. Or possibly an Izzy impostor. Alec isn’t entirely sure.

Because this Izzy doesn’t look anything like his sister. She’s in a dark blue, rather conservative dress, the skirt reaching well below her knees, her hair pulled back into a strict, sleek pony tail, and even her movements definitely lack some of her normal flourish, that swagger and self-assurance she usually carries herself with.

She looks muted somehow. And Alec promptly feels his eyes narrow, as he immediately changes direction to cross the Ops center instead of going to his room as he had been planning to do.

Of course, as soon as she sees him, she immediately starts ribbing him for having stayed out for the second night in a row now, needling him and making more than a few rather suggestive, Magnus-related comments, clearly hoping to get some answers out of him.

But as much as Alec knows he won’t be able to avoid that particular discussion forever, they have more important things to talk about right now. Like the fact that Izzy currently doesn’t look anything like herself. Alec doesn’t like it.

Because he can tell that she doesn’t feel entirely comfortable in her skin, can see the worry and frustration and uncertainty in her eyes, even as she nags him about always keeping things too close to his chest. He just watches her through slightly narrowed eyes. The thing he has always admired
about his sister the most is that she is always and uncompromisingly herself, never changing anything about herself even in the slightest to conform to anyone’s image of her. So, this non-Izzy version of her? Alec doesn’t like seeing it and it just makes him suspicious what her reasons for suddenly doing just that could be.

And when she then finally tells him about breaking it off with Meliorn - the seelie his sister has been more than a little infatuated with for years now, always being drawn back to Meliorn's side - Alec immediately feels a scowl form on his face. Because Izzy might always have claimed that Meliorn was just about having a bit of fun, but Alec knows that the seelie means much more to her than that.

“Really?” he asks skeptically, watching her closely.

She sighs. “Apparelly, I need someone more… ‘shadowhunterish’,” she says with a slight roll of her eyes that is clearly intended to make light of the fact that she just cut someone from her life who actually means a lot to her.

But with that comment, Alec immediately knows exactly where this sudden change in her originated. And damn their parents for making all of them feel always so very inadequate.

Because it’s suddenly all too apparent why she is doing this in the first place, changing herself to the point of being barely recognizable as Izzy at all. She is trying to turn herself into another perfect Lightwood Shadowhunter soldier for their parents to brag about, someone aside from Alec to pile their expectations on top. She is trying to help him.

Maybe something about this entire situation - their parents trying to push Alec into an arranged marriage to fix their family name - might have finally helped her realize just how much of the messes his siblings so love to create without any thought to the fallout tends to land as additional weight on Alec’s shoulders instead.

Maybe she finally saw how uncompromisingly their parents expect Alec to be the one to carry all that weight - as the eldest, as the one who ‘understands his duties’, as the one who is willing to make the sacrifices for their family name - while Izzy and Jace continue on with their lives, railing against the unfairness of being told what to do by the Clave or their parents, but never getting to feel the fallout of their decisions to ‘get creative’ as they call it.

Maybe the thought that Alec might have to trade in his future and any chance he might have for true happiness in order to make up for all of their mistakes actually got through to her for once.

Maybe she finally gets it.

Because this right here is clearly her attempt at being a sort of counterweight, desperately scrambling to take on some of that weight, clearly so very worried that if she doesn’t, Alec will be the one to pay the price for all of their individual and collective mistakes. She is afraid that Alec will truly marry at their parents’ say so.

And, angel, does he love her for trying to help him, for attempting to lighten his load for once, for not only realizing it but then also immediately, desperately scrambling to help.

But.

Thing is, her decision to try her hand at becoming more ‘shadowhunterish’ to please their parents, also perfectly coincides with Alec’s decision to do the exact opposite. And no matter what, he absolutely won’t let Izzy become the one to carry the weight of their parents’ expectations in his stead just so he can live his life. He just won’t.
So, he frowns slightly, saying carefully, “Izzy, I know you are trying to take some of the family heat. And I appreciate it, really, I do,” he asserts, pausing slightly before continuing firmly, "But you can’t change who you are."

She immediately raises her eyebrows at him and Alec just wants to sigh. Because he knows that stubborn expression that is starting to form on her face.

And maybe she was right earlier. Maybe it’s about time he lets her in on what has been going on in his life, let her in on the fact that there is absolutely no reason for her to try following his example in obeying their parents now when he is currently in the process of merrily throwing a large chunk of their teachings out the window.

Yeah, maybe it’s time that he tells her about Magnus beyond what she has clearly already guessed.

And there might also be a not-so-tiny part of him that is actually quite giddy at the thought of getting to tell someone about the so recent development between him and Magnus, at the thought of being able to tell someone that Magnus is in fact his now.

Yeah.

So, he doesn’t give her a chance to reply to his last assertion and instead just starts walking up the walkway - away from the Ops center and away from anyone who might overhear what he is about to say next – knowing that she’ll follow, as always unable to just let someone else have the last word.

He is proven right when he immediately hears the clicking of her shoes follow after him.

“I can’t change who I am, but you can?” she demands with a scoff from barely a step behind him, just as they reach the door leading out of the Ops center.

And Alec just shrugs lightly as he turns down a deserted corridor, pretending absolute nonchalance despite the slight grin he can’t seem to entirely wipe off his face as he says, “I know who I am. I’m the guy who’s about to be disowned as soon as Mom and Dad find out that I’m currently dating a warlock. And a male one at that.”

There is a choked sound behind him, then silence, even the clicking of Izzy’s heels pausing for a few seconds as Alec just calmly walks on, knowing she’ll catch up. And as expected, only seconds later Izzy’s hand lands on his arm in a firm grip as she immediately proceeds to drag him into the next empty room she can find.

The door closes behind her none too gently and then she immediately spins to face him.

“Say that again!” she practically squeals. She seems to be almost vibrating in excitement where she is standing in front of him.

Alec tries to fight down the slight smirk he can feel tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“You heard me,” he says as he wanders over to one of the desks in the room they are currently in and casually leans back against it.

She follows barely a step behind, a grin spreading over her face. “You’re dating a Downworlder? A warlock? Wait.” Suddenly, her eyes widen even further as the pieces clearly click in her mind. “You’re dating Magnus Bane?” She sounds absolutely incredulous.

He raises his eyebrows at her faux-calmly, but doesn’t say anything in reply. He thinks that part should be obvious.
Izzy apparently disagrees, twitching forward to grab his shoulder and almost shaking him in her excitement. “Seriously, Alec, I need a verbal confirmation here. I need you to actually say the words and confirm that my older, the-law-is-the-law, I-do-whatever-the-Clave-tells-me, I-live-for-the-family-honor brother is finally doing something for himself. Something which apparently includes dating the very male and also stupidly hot High Warlock of Brooklyn.”

Alec loses the fight to keep his face neutral, feeling his mouth quirk into a possibly rather smug grin as he waits a few seconds, before finally granting, “I am. Dating Magnus Bane, that is.”

A pause.

She doesn’t quite squeal, but it’s a near thing and the smile spreading over her face is so wide, so full of glee and relief and so much happiness for him, it is honestly starting to look a little ridiculous. “Well, damn, Alec. Magnus Bane? When you do something you certainly do it all the way. I mean, the High Warlock?”

He just shrugs, grinning slightly himself. Angel, it feels good to be able to just say it, to simply claim Magnus as his out loud.

She snorts a still somewhat incredulous laugh even as she finally moves to lean against the desk right next to him, turning to face him halfway. “Since when?” she asks.

Ah, this is the start of the interrogation then, is it?

“Officially since last night,” he replies.

She raises an eyebrow at him. “And unofficially?”

He looks at her, knowing she’ll be a little pissed at what he is about to say next, once she realizes just how long he has been keeping this to himself. “Well, you remember him from that night at Pandemonium, right?”

As expected, she nods at the question but then just continues to watch him expectantly, clearly waiting for him to elaborate.

Alec just gives a one-shouldered shrug.

A pause. And then her eyes widen. “Wait. You’ve been together ever since then? Alec! That was weeks ago!”

“Well, we weren’t really together,” he amends quickly. “We were just…” He falters, unsure how to explain that he does feel like he and Magnus have been together ever since that night at Pandemonium regardless of the fact that they only kissed yesterday for the first time and that they only put a label on it less than twelve hours ago.

Izzy just watches him, clearly waiting for him to continue but willing to give him the time to sort out his thoughts.

Finally, he shrugs with a huff. “We just… That night at Pandemonium, we talked for several hours before we finally went home. Separately,” he immediately adds on at her rather suggestive eyebrow waggle, which only makes her leer widen further. Alec rolls his eyes at her exasperatedly but continues. “And then he called me the next day and we went out again and we talked some more. And we… we just never really stopped talking after that.” He shrugs a little helplessly, still not sure how to explain how everything about them just simply fit right from the start and just evolved naturally.
Izzy continues to watch him and when he doesn't continue she asks, “What do you mean by that? 'Never really stopped talking.’”

Alec looks at her and remembers her complaint earlier that he never talks to her about his personal life – which might be true but is actually mostly due to the fact that until so very recently, he simply didn’t have a personal life to talk about – and he decides that he might as well tell her.

So, he does. He tells her about the phone calls and the texts and the endless conversations, about how he has been talking to Magnus every day for the past few weeks, about how Magnus always seems to have time for Alec, no matter what time he calls or how long their conversations stretch, about how Magnus is happy to talk whenever Alec wants to listen and simply listens whenever Alec wants to talk about something. About how it feels like they’ve been having a single, extended conversation, which never quite seems to drop off even if they don’t see each other for a few days because they just keep it up via text or phone calls.

And Izzy watches him attentively, her eyes a little wide in the beginning but soon starting to smile at his depiction of what he has with Magnus.

Well, he doesn’t really get into specifics, doesn’t tell her that yesterday morning was the first time they kissed, doesn’t tell her that kissing is all they’ve done so far, doesn’t tell her that his mind still swims a little with heat whenever he thinks about last night, the memory alone sending a fizzle of electric heat down his spine.

He doesn’t tell her that now that he got to kiss Magnus, Alec seems entirely incapable of dragging his mind away from wondering what other parts of Magnus might taste like, how Alec wants to kiss his skin, his neck, along those collarbones that tend to be so freely on display in some of Magnus’ shirts, the sight of which has admittedly been driving Alec a little bit insane recently, if he is entirely honest.

He doesn’t say how Magnus is the first person Alec has ever really felt attracted to, but how he kind of feels like he might already be well on his way to truly falling for him. How when Izzy told him about their parents’ plans to marry Alec off, his immediate reaction was simply immovable conviction that there is no way he would give up what he has with Magnus for their parents’ schemes. Or anything, really.

He doesn’t tell her that despite only knowing each other for a few weeks, Alec spends his days thinking about Magnus and whenever something happens during the day his first thought is about how it will either make Magnus laugh or frown when Alec tells him about it during their phone call at the end of the day.

How Alec is so helplessly gone for Magnus that he can barely think of anything else.

Alec doesn’t say any of that, wouldn’t even know how to really put it into words. But going by her smile, he thinks Izzy gets the gist of it anyway.

And once he is done, she doesn’t tease him, doesn’t rib him about Magnus or finally admitting his sexuality, about not only choosing to come out as gay but also doing so in the most in-your-face manner possible, by being in a relationship with a Downworlder. Well, she only ribs him a little but it's definitely quite mild to her usual commentary. And then she just reciprocates.

She tells him about her confrontations with their parents earlier today, what their mother said about Alec ‘understanding his duties’ like him agreeing to marry at their parents’ say-so is not even a question and how the mere idea that Alec would possibly give up his happiness like that without protest - simply because their parents demand it of him - was the reason for Izzy deciding it might be
about time that she take some of the ever-increasing duties off Alec’s shoulders.

She tells him how breaking it off with Meliorn was the last thing she actually wanted to do but she knows that if she doesn’t get a clean break - a full break - she will never be able to truly stay away from the seelie.

Alec nods carefully – having expected as much - and then tells her that no matter what she decides, he’ll have her back either way. Like that was ever even a question.

"I know you are trying to help me and I really am grateful," he says seriously. “But I don't want that to be at the expense of you giving up who you are. I don't want you to change yourself just to make our parents happy. So, if you want to be with the guy, just be with him. Our relationships are the one part of us neither the Clave nor our parents get to touch."

It's a conclusion he himself has only very recently come to but he will absolutely stick with it. Beholden to the Clave or not, no one gets to tell him who he should or shouldn't be with. That’s not their place. That’s no one’s place but his own.

Izzy is now wearing a slight frown, even as she scoffs slightly at his words, probably unsure whether to believe Alec's assertions. Something about all of this marriage business clearly has her truly rattled.

So, he decides to truly spell it out. “Izz,” he says, waiting for her to fully focus on him. “I will not agree to an arranged marriage. I might have at one point, but I won’t now. Not anymore,” he says emphatically.

There is a pause as he meets her eyes, just returns her rather intent focus on him.

And then, she blinks and Alec can finally see that worry - worry at what their parents might get him to agree to for his future, his happiness - leave her eyes. He lets his lips quirk into a slight smile to match the one on her face, even as he internally breathes a sigh of relief at finally seeing those shadows of fear disappear from her expression.

They just sit quietly for a few moments, just leaning against the desk, their shoulders pressed together in companionable silence.

Finally, Izzy breaks the silence with a snort. “Oh, wow. Mom will absolutely flip once she finds out about all of this. Her poster child being in a gay relationship with a Downworlder.”

Alec just shrugs and deadpans, “Not our fault if she picked out the wrong poster.”

Izzy grins and her quiet but relieved laughter at his levity warms him all the way down to his very core.

After that, things get truly hectic at the Institute.

For one, it turns out that Clary having her memories back doesn’t really change much. Her recovered memories neither contain the all-encompassing knowledge she had clearly been expecting nor the common sense Alec had not-so-secretly been hoping for.

The removed memories were mainly about things that would have revealed the Shadowworld to
Clary, like being attacked by a demon in a park, seeing her mother use her runes or her weapons, witnessing a warlock friend do magic. Nothing that actually pertains to their search for the Mortal Cup.

Honestly, Alec doesn't get why everyone seems so very surprised at the fact that Clary’s mother never sat her daughter down to have a talk along the lines of 'so there are these mystical Shadowhunter artifacts that I hid from everyone, which is the main reason you and I are in so much danger right now but, here, let me paint an even bigger target on your back by telling you exactly where to find them'. Seriously, Alec doesn’t get why everyone is so surprised.

But apparently, he is alone in that. Clary sulks, while Jace tries to reassure her that they’ll still find the Mortal Cup and Izzy seems to be having a blast laughing at everyone from the sidelines.

Alec is simply just as exasperated as before. Add to that the fact that his parents are now back at the Institute and things have somehow gotten even more stressful than before. Alec hadn’t even thought that was possible.

He thinks the headache behind his eyes might possibly be becoming permanent.

The only good thing that comes from Clary having her memories back is that she now seems to at least generally trust Magnus as well as Luke, both of whom were apparently friends of her mother. So, with her suddenly having two reasonable adults in her life, there is at least a general chance of avoiding any more half-planned, harebrained missions in the future.

Alec isn’t holding his breath, but at least there is hope.

Of course, then Clary figures out where the Mortal Cup is hidden - namely in a tarot card, which is a thing apparently - so maybe her memories were worth something after all.

Alec’s hopes that common sense might have returned to their mission planning are promptly dashed when that tarot card turns out to be kept in a police station and Jace and Clary of course immediately run in without any real plan and just a vague idea how to get at it. Only to - rather unsurprisingly - promptly get themselves stuck.

Which means they then call in Izzy and Alec to fix it.

It's an entire day spent playing games of subterfuge, when they could have just waited until nightfall and simply sneak inside. But no, as always Jace and Clary proceed with their let's-worry-about-the-details-when-we-get-there bullheadedness and promptly make everything far more complicated than it really needs to be.

But what else is new.

For Alec, the only lesson learned from the entire day is the fact that he is apparently just as hopeless as ever when it comes to flirting with anyone who isn’t a certain warlock. The police woman he tries to distract - so Izzy can sneak past her - seems just as confused by his attempts at flirting as Alec himself is. He honestly feels for her.

Angel only knows how he managed to attract and then actually keep Magnus’ attention. Because it's certainly not due to some sort of undiscovered suaveness or a particular ability to charm on Alec’s end. Yeah, that much is really damn apparent.

But point is, their harebrained, hastily-cobbled-together scheme succeeds and suddenly – absurdly enough – they have the Mortal Cup in their possession.
A fact which they then promptly decide to keep from everyone, including the Clave. Because Alec is an absolute sucker for his parabatai’s pleading eyes.

One day, Alec will learn how to deny his siblings something they want from him. He will.

_But that day is apparently not today_, he thinks exhaustedly as he watches the safe with the newly added tarot card in it sink back into the floor.

Their recovery of the Mortal Cup also pretty much perfectly coincides with Lydia Branwell’s arrival at the Institute.

Lydia Branwell, daughter of one of the oldest and most influential Shadowhunter bloodlines, who was sent as a Clave envoy to check on the Lightwood handling of the Institute.

And Alec has never been quite this angry at the Clave for the insult, frustrated with his siblings for role in instigating this mess in the first place and disappointed in himself for not being able to handle everything in such a way that might have prevented this from happening at all.

Admittedly, his instinctive dislike of Lydia herself due to her role proves to be pretty unjustified.

Alec decides to go with her to check out an attack on Luke and he is honestly surprised to find that he doesn’t dislike her half as much as he had expected he would just on principle. Lydia is a take-charge kind of person, doesn’t pussy-foot around anyone - whether they be werewolf alphas or Alec’s parents - and she is honest and direct and he really quite likes her no-nonsense attitude.

Even in the brief time they spend together that day, they just _click_ somehow.

But then, with just a few carelessly spoken words about his parents, she proceeds to unintentionally turn his entire world on its head.

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“My parents were in the Circle.”

Alexander’s voice is practically vibrating with anger and Magnus’ head flies up from where he was leaning over the desk in his study.

He felt Alexander come through his wards but hadn’t thought anything of it – and yes, Magnus might have given Alexander access to his loft yesterday night after only knowing him for a couple of weeks, what of it? - but now the Shadowhunter is standing in the doorway to his study and he looks absolutely furious.

Then it registers what Alexander just said and Magnus actually feels his eyes widen. He stares, blindsided, and before he can come up with anything to say, Alexander is already continuing.

“My parents. _Were in the Circle,”_ the Shadowhunter repeats through gritted teeth, anger practically radiating off him, his eyes on Magnus but somehow also kind of looking through him, focused on something else entirely.

And Magnus nods slowly, getting up from his chair as he says carefully, “Yes, Alexander, they were.”

Alexander breathes out a harsh breath. Almost like he had been hoping for Magnus to refute him in some way.
And Magnus is honestly feeling a little blindsided right now, unsure how to react or what to say. But talking around the issue would feel like a sort of disservice to Alexander. So, he finally just says carefully, honestly, “I thought you knew.”

Alexander snorts, his eyes a little wild, teeth clenched, tension in every line of his body.

“Well, I didn’t. Apparently, there is a whole number of things I didn’t know which are however common knowledge to others. It’s just that no one deigned to tell me. Least of all my parents who spent my entire childhood preaching to me and my siblings about ‘the law is the law’ and ‘following the Clave’ and ‘the true Shadowhunter way’.” He sounds truly angry, furious.

Magnus watches him and then he starts slowly making his way around his desk, over to where Alexander is still standing in the doorway.

And the closer he gets the clearer he can see that Alexander’s anger is just a very good front. Because while his expression might be angry, his eyes are those of someone who just had the rug pulled out from under them. He has that lost look of someone who realized that one of the foundations they built their entire life upon is less made of solid stone and more made of quicksand.

Magnus’ chest aches at seeing it.

He finally comes to a stop just a step away from where Alexander is standing and Magnus slowly reaches out, carefully resting a hand against Alexander’s arm. To his relief, he isn’t shrugged off and instead the Shadowhunter’s eyes finally focus on him fully.

“They lied to me.” Alexander sounds angry and so, so lost, his eyes fixed on Magnus' own, like he is looking for answers, for some sort of justification, for an explanation. “They have been lying to me for years. Everything they told me was a lie, was based on a lie.”

Now that he knows his presence is welcome, Magnus can’t help but take another small step closer. He absolutely hates hearing Alexander sound like this, lost, floundering. Hurt by what amounts to a betrayal of the very values his parents themselves taught him.

Alexander’s next words come out sounding somewhere between angry and almost plaintive. “I followed the rules, did everything they asked, fulfilled every task they put in front of me, lived by their rules. I have done everything they demanded of me. Everything. And now it turns out all they told me was lies.”

Magnus just continues to watch him, all of his attention focused on Alexander, but there is really nothing he can say at this point. Not yet.

Maybe later Magnus can try to offer some words of wisdom, of comfort, try to help in some way. But not right now. Alexander clearly hasn’t yet had the time to entirely work through this revelation himself and the last thing Magnus wants to do is mess with that by chiming in with his own, admittedly not-so-generous opinions of the elder Lightwoods.

And as much as he would have preferred for Alexander to never have to experience feeling betrayed by one of the foundations he built his very self upon, Magnus can't help the warm feeling spreading in his chest at the thought that Alexander apparently came here while floundering, that he sought out Magnus while trying to find steady ground under his feet.

So, Magnus is going to let Alexander lean on him, give his full and unquestioning support no matter what decisions or conclusions he might come to today in the wake of having his world view rattled so thoroughly. Just be a sort of safe place for Alexander to retreat to when the rest of the world
around him is shifting.

Magnus is so very happy that Alexander is apparently willing to let him do just that.

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Alec doesn't quite remember how, but by the end of the night they end up on the couch in Magnus' living room, Magnus leaning back against the armrest and Alec lying back against his chest, head resting against the warlock's shoulder. Magnus' arms are settled around him and intertwined with Alec's own fingers on his stomach. And Alec just feels secure and comfortable and so so warm.

He doesn't even know how long he ranted, how long it took him to finally make sense of what he learned today, so very rattled by this revelation that everything he thought he knew about his family is apparently a lie. Or at the very least tinted by falsehood.

Lydia's unintentional revelation about his parents' history with the Circle - he believed her when she said that she wasn't aware of Alec not being in-the-know - and Luke's confirmation of it as fact, and suddenly Alec hadn't been entirely sure anymore whether the ground under his feet was quite as steady as he had always assumed, suddenly unsure which parts of his entire life to believe in and which parts to discard as lies.

He had needed somewhere to retreat to, somewhere to make sense of things, to work through everything. Just needed time to draw his own conclusions, to make up his mind what to do with this information, how to fit it into his world view and into his sense of self.

So, he had simply left the Institute, simply walked out with no clear goal in mind. And before he knew it he had been standing in front of Magnus' apartment building.

It's unsurprising. Because Magnus always makes him feel so sure and safe and certain. Makes Alec feel like he is himself, completely independent of what others may see when they look at him or whether they may approve.

So, coming here had just been entirely automatic.

And Magnus had just taken one look at him, promptly put everything else aside and given Alec all of his attention. Without giving his own thoughts on the matter at all.

Magnus had simply listened, had just let Alec rant himself out as he tried to make sense of everything, tried to find steady ground under his feet again. And only when Alec finally got there, got to that point where he felt like he finally knew himself once more, knew where he stood and what to make of the recent revelations about his family's history, only when he then specifically asked for Magnus' opinion, only then did the warlock finally speak up in any way.

Magnus' clear unwillingness to take any influence on Alec while he had been struggling, but also making his absolute support - no matter what conclusions Alec might come to - clear, has something warm and light expanding in Alec's chest.

Because it's about trust and having someone to rely, to lean on, and Alec has simply never had that before. Unquestioning support.

Everyone else always has some sort of conditions attached. The Clave, his parents, other Shadowhunters, his siblings. They all have conditions, something that Alec has to give them in return for their support, even if it is just his parents requiring loyalty to their family from him - something he'd give anyway - or his siblings demanding he go along with their take on things whenever they go on missions.
But Magnus apparently doesn't. Doesn't ask for anything from Alec in return, not even that he take Magnus' opinions into account while he tries to make sense of everything. Simply offers Alec support, no questions asked.

And there is just something about that, about the assurance that Alec is welcome to come here when his world view and his view of self is being challenged, that he is welcome to lean on Magnus, welcome to use him as an anchor when the world around him somehow stops making sense.

Because Alec's entire world just shifted slightly. He is utterly exhausted - was already endlessly tired due to everything that has been going on recently but now there is a sort of mental exhaustion as well that makes it hard to fully focus on anything anymore - and one of the foundations of his life, the Lightwood name, has suddenly changed, has become something different. Not necessarily less, but just something that he doesn't quite recognize as his anymore.

But at the same time he also found a steady rock to hold on to, to rely on, a place where he can rest and find his center again.

Something about that reassurance makes Alec just fully relax back against his boyfriend's chest, turning his head slightly to tuck his face against Magnus' neck, curling their intertwined fingers on his stomach even tighter together.

And this right here, this sort of intimacy, is something Alec doesn't think he's ever experienced before. It's definitely different from hugging his siblings and also completely different from kissing Magnus or even from making out. Somehow, this calm, quiet warmth of just resting against his boyfriend's chest feels like so much more.

It's warm and secure and despite the arms wrapped tightly around him, Alec thinks he has never breathed quite as freely as he does right now.

Alec absolutely adores it and if it's up to him, he'd much rather remember today for this than as the day he found out about his parents' history with the Circle. Yeah, remembering this as the day he discovered that cuddling with Magnus on the couch might just be Alec's absolute favorite thing to do in the entire world sounds much more appealing.

And when Magnus turns his head slightly to press a gentle, lingering kiss against his temple, Alec simply closes his eyes. And he just breathes.

Chapter End Notes

Hm, somewhat weird chapter. I tried to move the plot along a bit but the malec scenes just keep sneaking in XD It makes for a rather weird flow in this chapter, I think... Still, hope you liked the slight twists of the canon events, though. Would love to know what you think :D

And thanks so much for your comments and kudos! You guys are just wonderful (°^°*)
Alec breathes in peacefully, fully aware of the happily contented smile currently on his face.

But it’s not like there is anyone here to see him grin sappily at seemingly nothing, considering that the only other person around – who also happens to be the focus of all of Alec’s attention right now as well as the very reason for his smile in the first place – is also still very much asleep.

Because last night - for the first time since they’ve known each other - Alec actually got to sleep in Magnus’ bed.

Last night, after Alec finally managed to find steady ground under his feet again - after Magnus had given him all the time Alec needed to make sense of things again – and Alec finally felt like himself again, Magnus just ordered take-out and they had a quiet dinner on the balcony, sitting close, but mostly spending the meal in comfortable silence only interspersed with some random conversation here and there. Alec had been grateful for it, having effectively talked himself out earlier.

And then afterwards, Magnus asked him not-quite-casually whether he’d like to sleep over. Or rather, Magnus asked whether Alec wanted to stay the night and whether he would like to sleep with Magnus - as in, sleep in Magnus’ bed - tonight.

Something which Alec somehow hadn’t done so far. The only other two times he had stayed over at Magnus’ loft before, Alec had just fallen asleep on the couch at one point during the night, always so very exhausted from recent events, the countless missions, the various upheavals in his personal life.

And just the thought of getting to fall asleep next to Magnus immediately had warmth creeping through Alec, which is nothing to say of the relief at just getting to stay here – here, where Alec is comfortable and relaxed, where there are no duties waiting for him, no one to make additional demands of him, where he can just be himself – feeling almost like a physical weight lifting off his shoulders.

So, Alec had agreed to Magnus’ offer before the decision even fully registered in his mind.

And Magnus just smiled, leaned in for a quick kiss and then went to find Alec some clothes to sleep in.

Getting ready for bed was surprisingly non-awkward, the two of them just moving around each other fluidly, despite the slight nerves on Alec’s end just simply due to this definitely being something new for him.

Not that there had been any reason to.

Quite honestly, last night Alec hadn’t even really considered the implications of sleeping over, of sleeping in Magnus’ bed, too emotionally and mentally wrung out from the day to think further than being happy about the warmth and comfort of getting to stay here instead of having to make his way back to the Institute, risk running into his parents once there and then having to go to sleep alone in his bed while wishing he was back at Magnus’ loft.

And clearly, Magnus’ offer hadn’t been intended as anything beyond simply sleeping either. Because once they had both settled in bed, Magnus just leaned over to press a warm kiss goodnight to Alec’s
lips and Alec only remembers smiling in reaction, turning slightly to find a comfortable position and then he had been out like a light pretty much as soon as his head hit the pillow.

He must have slept for several hours straight – something that is definitely not a given for him – because when he finally woke again just a few minutes ago, the slivers of sunlight creeping through the curtains show that it is clearly morning already.

It took him about a second or two to remember where he is, remember whose bed he is in. His memory very much helped along by the sight of a still sleeping, warm and so soft-looking Magnus lying next to him.

Magnus is asleep on his stomach, face turned towards Alec on his pillow and Alec had woken pretty much mirroring his position, lying close and with one of his arms curled slightly over Magnus’ back.

And Alec hasn’t moved an inch since he woke, in no way willing to risk waking Magnus, far too taken by just lying so close and being able to observe every detail of Magnus’ face.

And despite them truly just having slept next to each other, this still feels significant somehow. The trust of sleeping next to each other, of letting yourself be vulnerable, in combination with Alec fully letting his guard down in front of Magnus yesterday, somehow feels like they’ve taken a rather significant step in their relationship.

Alec has never made himself vulnerable in front of another person before in his entire life. It’s something he very much deliberately avoids doing, never willing to let anyone truly see beyond all of his masks, to truly let his guard down.

But his almost subconscious decision to do so yesterday with Magnus - to come here whilst knowing full well that he was already somewhat falling apart - surprises him just as much as it simply doesn’t.

Because it’s Magnus. Who else would Alec be willing to let his guard down around?

And something about waking up next to Magnus now, to see him vulnerable in an entirely new way and getting to watch the warlock slowly coming awake as well, that warm, unguarded, sleepy half-smile on Magnus’ face when he finally blinks his eyes open and sees Alec watching him, and the lazy good morning kiss, just a warm press of lips against his…

Alec doesn’t even know how to really describe it.

It’s warm and perfect and quiet, almost serene. Just the two of them, so comfortably, contently relaxed, like these few moments are just for them, just a few moments where the rest of the world doesn’t quite matter.

He watches as Magnus turns slightly onto his side to face him, before reaching out to lay one hand against the side of Alec’s face, thumb stroking along his cheek bone, and then moves to lean across the small distance between them to press a gentle, unhurried good morning kiss somewhat off center to Alec’s lips, before he pulls away again, wearing a small but so tender smile, blinking at Alec with still somewhat sleepy eyes, looking so soft and sleep warm and unguarded, that it feels like something is quite literally tugging at Alec’s heart.

And it’s in that very moment, as he watches Magnus watching him - their eyes locked, neither of them really moving, unwilling to risk disrupting this peaceful and tender and simply happy moment between them – when Alec realizes almost absentlty that he must have somehow missed the point in time where he started truly falling in love with Magnus Bane. Because he might honestly be halfway there already.
And maybe that thought should give him pause, maybe Alec should balk at the realization that he is well on his way to falling for someone he only met a few weeks ago, a Downworlder, someone who by definition supposedly doesn’t fit into his life at all. Maybe Alec should panic. But he just doesn’t.

Because everything Alec feels, he also sees mirrored in Magnus’ eyes.

Magnus smiles and Alec’s chest feels a little too small for the warm happiness that keeps curling through him every time he breathes.

It feels right. Feels like this is exactly how things are supposed to be.

Magnus is currently leaning over the autopsy table, examining the corpse of the creature that attacked Luke at the Jade Wolf as best he can with his magic.

He knows that Isabelle is hovering somewhere behind him as well, having requested Magnus’ help and now impatient for him to finish his magical scans so she can finally get started with her own examination.

Magnus had easily agreed to her request, not only because he honestly wanted to do his own scan of the corpse but also because he is kind of hoping to be able to see Alexander while he is here. Because they haven’t been able to see each other in the past two days – not since Alexander stayed the night after finding out about his parents having been in the Circle – and as ridiculous as it may seem, but Magnus kind of misses him already.

And speaking of family drama, Magnus throws a glance at the rather fidgety Isabelle, now hovering at his side.

He suspects that there might be another reason for her having called him in for help right away. Because Alexander told him about letting his sister in on them officially being an item now, so Magnus is kind of expecting there to be some sort of interrogation waiting for him at some point during this.

His thoughts are confirmed only moments later, when Isabelle clearly can’t keep silent any longer and steps up to the autopsy table next to him.

“So,” she asks faux-casually, pretending to poke at the corpse in front of them, but her entire attention clearly focused on Magnus. “You and my brother?”

Magnus just quirks a half-grin, still leaning over the corpse as he replies rather vaguely, “Indeed.”

She glances at him exasperatedly, clearly not very amused by his one-word answer. “So, how long has this been going on?” she asks, her face remaining mostly neutral but her voice gives her eagerness away.

She sounds so endearingly excited - clearly hoping to get some details about his and Alexander’s relationship out of him - that Magnus just can’t help but grin at her. Honestly, what is it with this generation of oddly endearing Lightwoods?

Still, it’s not like he is actually going to give her what she is clearly after. It will always be up to Alexander to decide how much his friends and family know about his personal life.
So, he just raises an eyebrow, not even fully looking away from his spell’s read-out. “Well, I’m sure Alexander told you it’s only been official for about five days now.” He actually knows full well that Alexander already told her about this.

“Hm.” Her stare boring into the side of his face is really rather intent. “That’s what Alec said as well.” She actually sounds thoughtful, as though their stories matching is somehow food for thought. Honestly, Shadowhunters and their ever-constant need for mystery solving, only getting suspicious if they can’t find any secrets to uncover.

So, Magnus affects a rather over the top relieved sigh, “Oh thank magic, I was so worried one of us might slip up and actually tell you the truth.”

She blinks and then she lets out a surprised laugh. He grins back at her, before he focuses back on the corpse in front of him, switching up his detection spell. Because there is something off about this body, but for some reason he can’t quite pick out just what that might be.

They continue to work in silence for a while. And it’s clear she wants to ask or say something else, but seems unsure how to actually say it.

Thankfully, she seems disinclined to try giving him an actual shovel talk. Magnus honestly just never understood what those are for – in his mind it simply goes without saying that he would be hunted down by pretty much every Shadowhunter in the city if he were to deliberately hurt who they so clearly see as their leader, something which would only be doubly true for Alexander’s siblings – and the included threats just tend to leave him feeling either annoyed, awkward or near laughter depending on how they are delivered.

So, he is grateful when she skips right past that and instead finally settles on, “So, you two are serious?”

Well, there is something almost like a warning in her voice but it sounds less like the you-hurt-him-I-hurt-you sort and more along the lines of please-be-careful-lest-you-hurt-him. And someone being worried about Alec and his happiness is something Magnus will always approve of.

So, he finally straightens and turns slightly to looks her straight in the eye. “Very much so,” he confirms seriously, holding her gaze.

Only a bare second of pause, her eyes intent on his, before she finally nods in acceptance, quirking a slight smile. Magnus just smiles back, happy to have reassured there and then they fall back into working alongside each other silently for another few minutes.

When Isabelle speaks up next, her voice is a little more hesitant than before, almost giving him pause. “You know, you are only his second serious relationship, right? His first relationship with a man?”

Magnus is back to leaning over the corpse, so he doesn’t worry about her seeing his slight surprise at this claim. Because as far as Magnus knows, he is actually Alexander’s first serious relationship. His first relationship, period.

And since he is absolutely certain that Alexander wouldn’t have lied to him – his Shadowhunter is far too straightforward for that sort of thing - he refrains from replying to her statement verbally, just humming in vague assent to her question.

Isabelle sighs after a brief pause of her clearly waiting for him to say something more. “Well, only the second one he has told me about,” she finally admits with a somewhat exasperated huff. “Honestly, Alec is just so reticent about these sorts of things. I always have to needle every piece of
Magnus just throws her a quick commiserating grin at that, even as he finally moves aside making room for Isabelle to fully start working on the corpse. She is certainly right about her brother having a tendency to act out the part of the strong-and-mainly-silent type. And, oh, does Alexander do it ever so well.

Although, what she just said also makes it sound like that first supposed relationship Izzy ‘knows’ about might have just been Alexander’s attempt to get her - and her needling - off his back. Which seems a rather reasonable thing to do for someone who would have been trying to hide not only his sexuality but also his overall inexperience from everyone around him.

Still, Magnus doesn’t say anything. There is no way he is going to risk giving away any of Alexander’s secrets to anyone, not even to his sister.

Although, she is now throwing him rather suspicious glances, possibly suspecting that he knows more than he lets on and possibly considering whether she might have more success at nagging the information out of him than out of her so reticent brother.

And having absolutely no interest in sticking around for that, Magnus promptly announces that he’ll be bringing the preliminary results upstairs, already halfway on his way out the door with a wave, folder in hand.

‘Upstairs’ just meaning ‘wherever I can find Alexander’ in his mind, because that’s all he really cares about right now. Magnus just wants to see his boyfriend, even if only for a few minutes.

And as he makes his way through the Institute’s halls towards the Ops center, figuring someone there will be able to tell him where he can find Alexander, Magnus feels a rather broad smile spread over his face at that thought.

Because that’s another thing.

**Boyfriend.** He’s never been a 'boyfriend' before.

Sure, he’s had relationships, has loved so often his heart doesn't quite like to remember the countless instances of seemingly inevitable heartbreak anymore. Over the years, decades, centuries, Magnus has had lovers and partners and paramours, has been absolutely devoted to some of them. He’s been a companion, an admirer, an escort, a suitor, a sweetheart, has been called dearest or honey or even beloved, has been given countless pet names and been called by so many different affectionate terms over the course of his many relationships that he has long since lost track.

But never boyfriend. Not until now. That one is definitely a first.

Of course that’s mostly due to the fact that the term itself is relatively new, hadn't really been around - at least not in this particular context - when Magnus had last been dating seriously more than a hundred years ago.

But Magnus honestly quite likes it, for more than one reason.

For one, he actually likes the term, likes what it signifies, as in a definite, committed relationship but not quite in that finalized, ultimate way yet, definitely implying a stronger bond than suitor or admirer, but not quite on the level of partner or beloved yet. To Magnus it just conveys that there is still room for change, for progression between them. That their relationship can become even more if they let it.
And secondly, Magnus also really likes being able to call Alexander something he has never called anyone else, just as he definitely quite enjoys the fact that Alexander has never had someone to call boyfriend before either.

Yes, Magnus most certainly likes that.

It’s just… Magnus just knows that Alexander is different somehow. Different from everyone else Magnus has had in his life, different from every relationship he’s had before.

He has certainly never found himself falling so hard, so quickly – irreversibly, unavoidably, helplessly – for someone and it seems simply fitting that Alexander would get his very own title in Magnus’ mind and in his heart. A title shared by no one else.

Magnus can't help but smile to himself at that thought, at the thought that whatever he has with Alexander already feeling like so much more than it's supposed to at this point and just what that might mean for their future.

The future.

Because that's apparently something he thinks about in relation to Alexander, despite only having known him for less than two months at this point. And Magnus just shrugs internally. It's not like this is in any way news to him.

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Alec’s muscles are burning in the best way, physical exhaustion heavy in his limbs, but he continues going, another swing, two quick punches, weave to the side, another punch, a powerful hook from the right, spin to the left, repeat.

The entire training area is empty save for him.

As soon as Alec had stalked into the training room, a dark scowl on his face, frustration almost palpable in the air around him, everyone else had pretty much fled the area, too afraid he might order them to serve as his sparring partner right now.

Alec knows he has a reputation. And while Shadowhunters might generally be always up for some sparring, no one at the Institute is stupid enough to want to train with him while he is in a mood.

He has a tendency to put people through their paces even when he is just in it for the training, but in his current mood any sparring session can go on for hours on end until he finally decides he is done. And spare the fool who tries to tell him that they want a break at any point. Because he’ll have no problem giving them that break, only to promptly assign that person endless training hours for the coming weeks to ‘get them back in shape’.

So, yeah. Everyone had taken one look at him and then promptly scrambled to gather their gear, babbling about a mission or something they just had to get done right now and within moments Alec had the entire area to himself.

Which is fine by him.

He is annoyed and frustrated and his head is too full and he just needs a chance to sort through some of the things circling through his mind. And nothing clears his head better than the physical exertion of putting everything he has into his training.

So, he trains, letting his mind drift as he does.
Things at the Institute have gotten truly hectic over the last few days.

First, there is Lydia whose very presence here says some really not so great things about the standing of the Lightwood name in Idris. And while Alec honestly likes her, likes her attitude and her absolute perfectionist approach to her job, his parents are apparently too proud, too stubborn, too offended to do their job and work with her. Which has thus fallen to Alec instead, only adding to the already insurmountable pile of tasks in front of him.

Then there is the not-so-insignificant fact that Clary’s overly chatty mundane friend was apparently bitten by a vampire at some point, a clear breach of the Accords. And while Alec had believed the vampire who brought the no-longer-quite-mundane’s body to the Institute about this being the fault of just a single vampire going rogue, there is no telling yet how that particular mess will work out. And if this turns out not to be an isolated incident, if the Clave gets involved due to the breach of the Accords…

Just the thought of possibly having a war with one of New York’s strongest vampire covens on their hands in addition to Valentine’s ever-loom ing presence, is already keeping Alec awake at night.

Then there is the creature thing that attacked Luke at the Jade Wolf. Izzy is spending most of her time in the labs examining the corpse, while Alec is spending a truly stupid amount of hours out on patrol, combing the streets of New York, looking for clues where the creature came from and whether there are any more of these things hiding out somewhere.

And Alec is doing his utmost best to ignore the fact that he hasn’t heard from Jace for more than twenty-four hours now, so who knows what sort of mess is waiting for him on that end once his parabatai finally resurfaces. Alec honestly has no idea where Jace and his troublesome crush are at - much less what they might currently be up to - but he simply doesn’t have the time to babysit them right now. In all honesty, he would truly appreciate it if Jace could put his own issues aside just for a while and instead help Alec with the seemingly never-ending work he is struggling with.

No such luck though.

And with everything that’s currently going on, Alec hasn’t even found the time yet to confront his parents, neither about lying to him about their past nor about making plans for Alec’s future without thinking to actually consult him.

So, all in all, Alec simply has too many things in his head and not enough time to sort through it all, people demanding his time left and right, being held up for one reason or another no matter which room he steps into, too many things to get done and not enough time to do it, much less to do it well.

Not to even mention the fact that he hasn’t even had the time to see Magnus in the past two days, which certainly does nothing to improve Alec’s mood in any way.

So, yes, Alec has been getting increasingly frustrated. With everything and also pretty much everyone.

Hence, the training.

And now, after more than an hour of focusing on nothing but the punching bag in front of him, he feels like he can finally think again, feels like his brain isn’t quite so overcrowded anymore, like he might even be able to talk to other people without immediately ripping into them.

And he is just in the process of cooling himself down, just throwing a few light punches at the punching bag to give his muscles the chance to cool down a little, when he sees movement from the
corner of his eye, someone approaching the training area from the direction of the Ops center.

Which is honestly rather unusual. Whenever Alec takes over the training area in his current mood, everyone here very much likes to avoid him until he comes back out on his own again, back to his normal, controlled self.

He turns slightly towards the entrance to see who is currently breaching this particular piece of unofficial protocol of self-preservation.

And then he can’t help but smile slightly. Because it’s Magnus coming up the steps leading to the training area.

Is it weird that Alec’s mood immediately improves as soon as he sees Magnus? That he missed Magnus so much, despite it only having been two days since they saw each other last and despite the fact that they have talked twice on the phone in that time? But, well, Alec doesn’t much care whether it’s weird. He’s just happy to get to see his boyfriend so unexpectedly.

“Magnus,” he says. ”Hey.” He pauses, and then for some unknown reason continues with the astute observation of, “You're here.”

And sometimes Alec really wishes he would stop dropping into these random phases of awkwardness around Magnus where he suddenly forgets how to act or talk like a normal person.

Magnus however just smiles at him – as always not put off by Alec’s awkwardness – coming to a stop a few steps away from Alec, his eyes fixed on him rather intently, gaze dragging slowly – and rather obviously - over Alec's naked chest and arms before finally settling on his face once more.

Alec blinks. And he is rather glad that for once he can easily blame the heat in his cheeks on still being overheated from training. Yeah.

Then, he notices the folder held in Magnus’ hands and absently puts a hand out to steady the punching bag that is still swaying slightly from his punches.

But before he can actually ask about the folder, Magnus almost seems to give himself a shake, as though bringing himself back into focus, before the warlock’s lips start to quirk into a slight grin.

“Oh, please don’t stop on my account,” Magnus says, his smile widening even as he starts casually sauntering over to the benches lining the training area, but with his eyes remaining entirely fixed on Alec.

Alec raises his eyebrows, watching Magnus sit down gracefully on the bench – right next to where Alec threw his sweatshirt earlier – and then cross one leg elegantly over the other, clearly intending to get comfortable right there.

“Don’t mind me,” Magnus comments with a lazy wave of his hand. “I’ll be happy to wait right here until you are done.” His smile widens. “Wouldn’t want to interfere with your training.”

Alec almost opens his mouth, about to reply that he is pretty much done with his training already. But the look in Magnus’ eyes stops him. There is something heated, something almost hungry in the warlock’s eyes and Alec feels a hot shiver run along his spine, a slight flush crawling up his neck.

No one has ever been this blatant about being attracted to him.

And Alec would definitely be lying if he said he doesn’t like Magnus looking at him like this, his
eyes dragging over Alec’s arms and chest and stomach, like he can’t quite decide where he wants to look the most, heat in his eyes.

And, yes, Alec might be new to the whole dating thing, but he does know what the look in Magnus’ eyes means – inexperienced or not, he’s neither oblivious nor an idiot, thank you very much – and having the warlock so entirely, exclusively, absolutely fixated on him is most certainly something Alec quite enjoys.

So, after another few seconds of watching Magnus get comfortable on the bench, Alec just shrugs internally and then turns back towards the punching bag.

From the corner of his eye he can see Magnus leaning forward slightly as if in anticipation, his elbow on his knee, chin in hand, watching intently.

Another round of training won’t hurt and if Magnus wants to watch him throw a few punches shirtless, well, who is Alec to deny him?

Alec breathes out, centering himself, and then he goes about losing himself in another round of training.

And if he chooses to position himself in a way that he can catch a few quick glances of Magnus staring at him appreciatively, well, that’s entirely his business, now isn’t it?

Magnus is quite happily mesmerized by the sight in front of him.

Alexander shirtless, upper body fully and unselfconsciously on display, skin glistening with sweat as the muscles in his back and arms and chest coil with every swing, with every punch, with every twist of his body.

*Dear magic, what a sight.*

Alexander’s absolute control over his own body is incredible to see, the graceful fluidity of his movements, the effortless power behind each move obvious. And also a massive turn-on.

Magnus is absolutely enthralled.

And he has to remind himself to stay where he is, to remain seated on the bench. Because if he gets up, if gets any closer to that, Magnus doubts he’ll be able to keep his hands to himself or to refrain from following some of those sweat drops running down Alexander’s neck with his tongue.

And once he does that, well, Magnus might have excellent self-control, but he doubts he’ll be able to just walk away once he finally gets to put his mouth on that body. Yeah, Magnus doesn’t think anyone’s self-control would be that good.

It truly is a shame that the Shadowhunter Institute’s training rooms with its many, many cameras definitely isn’t the right place to go about ravishing his boyfriend. Alas, he will have to wait until they have a little more privacy.

Hm, come to think of it, it has been a while since they went out on an actual date, hasn’t it? So, maybe it’s about time he takes Alexander on another date anyway. Maybe they could go out for dinner again, have some excellent food in even better company, talk, just spend some time together.

And if we end up at my place afterwards with some time to ourselves and some much appreciated privacy… Magnus’ thoughts stall for a second as Alec does a quick double punch thing that has the muscles in his arms bunching beautifully. And he barely refrains from openly licking his lips at the
sight. Well, you certainly wouldn’t hear me complaining.

Chapter End Notes

So, I was debating for a while whether to post this chapter at all, because it’s kind of just loads and loads of introspection with barely anything happening plotwise... But in the end, I just couldn’t make myself cut it entirely after all because there are some things about their relationship in this that I really wanted to include :) So, hope you like this even though it oddly enough kind of feels like a sort of filler chapter? Would absolutely love to know what you think :D

And thank you so much for all your comments and kudos! You guys are just lovely (*^_^*)
Magnus carefully adds another ingredient to the perception-dulling potion currently brewing in front of him.

The potion one of his own inventions from about two-hundred years back which had quickly become rather popular with packs wanting to help their newly turned werewolves handle their so recently enhanced senses a bit better. It’s also one of the more volatile-to-brew potions in his repertoire, so it’s a good thing that he has prepared this particular potion so often he can quite literally brew it blind.

Because his mind is somewhere else entirely, circling around the utterly exhausting last couple of days. Exhausting, on more than one level.

Just yesterday, Magnus had granted himself his last, his *final* attempt to scry for Dot, the last attempt before he would finally let go of his hope to still somehow be able to find her.

He *knows* he should have given up a while ago, had known that his friend was gone the moment her magic had disappeared from his senses.

But that first time he had looked for her body for the proper burial rituals, Magnus hadn't found anything - not even the site of her death where traces of her magic should linger as they tend to do after a warlock’s death - and immediately there had been that tiny niggle of treacherous hope at the back of his mind. Maybe she wasn't dead after all.

So, he had hoped. Futilely.

And he knows how dangerously easy he tends to fall into that trap, the trap of treacherous hope, and he also knows how that very hope will start to slowly but surely eat away at him. With a life as long as his, with as many friends as he makes and inevitably loses, Magnus simply had to teach himself how to let go, how not to hold on to blind, stubborn, futile hope forever.

So, after several weeks of searching for Dot, yesterday, Magnus had permitted himself one last try, a final ritual, just one more attempt before finally letting go.

He had found nothing.

And, sure, he had already known before, had even already mourned her death as is proper after her magic had first disappeared from his senses, but he had still held on to that tiny bit of hope, hope not to have to mourn yet another friend.

But it truly seems like Dot is gone. Yet another longtime friend lost.

So, Magnus had been caught somewhere between mourning and reminiscing, already in a less-than-great headspace anyway. But apparently one trip down memory lane within twenty-four hours hadn’t been enough, seeing as Camille picked today of all days to make a reappearance in his life.

Thankfully she didn’t make an actual, physical reappearance, but Raphael had called him early today – *really* early, as in barely morning yet at all – asking for Magnus’ help with her.
Because apparently Camille is once more making a mess of everything - turning mundanes and cheerfully breaking the Accords as she pleases - and her clan had finally had enough, not wanting to risk the Clave coming down on them collectively. So, they wanted her out for the count for at least a couple of years, maybe a few decades, hoping that the most recent mess she has made will have blown over by then. And honestly, what is a decade or two between immortals like them?

But overpowering an ancient vampire like Camille truly is no mean feat and keeping her down even less so. So, Raphael had called Magnus and there will simply never be a point in time where Magnus doesn’t lend any and all help he possibly can to his Downworlder children.

So, Magnus had promptly made his way to Hotel Dumort and lent Raphael a bit of his magic, a few spells here, another few enchantments there, to make permanently binding Camille in her coffin - where her clan had apparently stuffed her - a little easier, make her confinement a little more permanent, a little less breakable.

Which had drained him. Not so much magically but more because anything involving Camille is always more than a little taxing for Magnus. Their personal history sees to that.

And now, Magnus is back home, on his own, magic recovered by now but his mind circling, caught in the mess of memories brought up by the whole Camille-thing and giving up on his hope that Dot might still be alive.

In all honesty, the past twenty-four hours have just been a rollercoaster ride down memory lane and he could really do with a distraction right now. Or maybe with a drink. Possibly ten.

Which is the exact moment, his perimeter wards ping with a warning, alerting him to the fact that someone just crossed into the wards surrounding his apartment building. Not only that, but it's Alexander who is approaching.

And, Magnus immediately feels himself perking up slightly.

He pauses for a second at his own reaction, at the immediate uplift in his mood. But then he just shrugs.

Why wouldn’t the thought of getting to see his boyfriend cheer him up?

These past few days have been incredibly busy for both of them and they have barely managed to spend any time together at all despite only having started dating so very recently.

And, okay, they are pretty good at keeping up with their previously established nightly phone calls – even if it’s just a few minutes at the end of the day to ask how the other is doing – and, sure, it hasn't actually been that long since Magnus visited the Institute to help with the autopsy, where he did in fact get to see Alexander for a bit. And what a lovely vision it was...

But still, that doesn’t change the fact that it's simply been too long since Alexander came by for a visit at Magnus’ place, where they can spend some uninterrupted time together and maybe even have dinner and if he is really lucky, Alexander might even be able to stay the night again.

Magnus is allowed to feel delight at getting to see his boyfriend after several days of barely seeing each other at all. And if Alexander’s presence is also kind of exactly what Magnus needs right now after the day he's had, well, then that’s just a perfectly lovely coincidence, isn’t it?

So, he hurries to finish the final steps on the potion in front of him, not at all interested in being stuck in his study if Alexander is going to be here.
He hears the door to his loft open just as he is decanting the last of the potion into vials, there is a little bit of shuffling in the entranceway and then Alexander’s voice calling, “Magnus?”

“In here, Alexander,” he calls back, already feeling a slight smile curving his lips.

Keying Alexander into his wards had been an entirely spontaneous decision, but Magnus absolutely adores how it has taken the Shadowhunter no time at all to get used to having full access to Magnus' loft, rarely if ever even bothering to call ahead anymore, just wandering in whenever he comes over. As though he simply belongs here.

Not to even mention that one time when Magnus had gotten back from a house-call, only to find Alexander reading a book on demon lore on his couch, apparently having come by while he had been gone. And Magnus had certainly forgotten how nice it is to have someone welcome you home with a kiss and a smile, to have someone waiting for you.

His smile widens at the memory. Oh, what this boy does to me.

Seconds later, Alexander appears in the doorway of his study and by the time the Shadowhunter has wandered over to pull Magnus into a much anticipated kiss hello, Magnus has already finished stoppering the vials and is thus free to let himself fully relax into greeting Alexander.

Alexander finally pulls back a little, even though he remains close. "Hi," he murmurs into the small space between them.

"Hi, yourself," Magnus murmurs back with a smile.

He watches an answering smile spread over Alexander's face, eyes entirely focused on his, hands still on Magnus' waist, clearly unwilling to pull away entirely. And Magnus is simply unable to stop himself from leaning in for another lingering, warm, tender kiss.

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They decide not to go out and instead have dinner at his loft, out on the balcony.

Alexander apparently just kind of snuck away from the Institute to see him - which is honestly all kinds of adorable and there is something warm expanding in Magnus' chest at the thought that Alexander came by for no other reason than to see him and spend a little time with him - but he is still very much on call for missions tonight, so who know how long they'll actually have before he is called away again. So, neither of them wants to waste what little time they might have on finding a restaurant, making their way through the city, getting a table and whatever else.

Seems like their next actual date will just have to wait a little longer.

Not that Magnus is complaining in the least. He doesn't much feel like going out tonight anyway and is simply happy to get to spend a little bit of uninterrupted time with his boyfriend.

They have dinner - a wonderful spread from that tiny but excellent tapas place Magnus knows not too far from his loft - and they just talk, about a lot of things but nothing that is particularly important, not even touching on either of their work or duties or the various catastrophes currently making their lives much more interesting than they really need to be, just easy topics and relaxing conversation and enjoying in each other’s company. It's honestly exactly what Magnus needed today.

And he can see the slight worry in Alexander’s eyes from time to time when he looks at Magnus, a question in his eyes but not yet quite asking, clearly able to see past Magnus' cheerful mask right to his rather maudlin thoughts.
And maybe it should surprise him how easily Alexander is able to read him. But then again, somehow it just doesn't. Goes to reason that someone who so easily bypassed all of Magnus’ carefully erected defenses around his heart might also have a comparatively easy time to see past his many just as carefully maintained masks.

Magnus just smiles a little helplessly, grateful that Alexander isn't immediately asking questions, demanding answers, happy to be given a reprieve of his own, circling thoughts. But just as happy, just as reassured in the knowledge that Alexander cares enough to notice at all.

_Honestly, how am I ever supposed to stand a chance against this one?_

So, over dinner, they just talk, about everything and nothing at all. And afterwards, Magnus pours them both another glass of wine as they move over to the bench with its view over the city skyline, sitting close, Magnus leaning into Alexander’s side, relaxing, able to almost physically feel most of his tension draining away.

For a few moments, they just sit in silence, relaxing in each other's presence, soaking up that warm, comfortable feeling between them.

Magnus finally decides to ask, “So, how has your day been?”

And Alexander promptly heaves a heavy sigh, making Magnus smile in sympathy. “Stressful as always, then, I take it?”

There is a pause, before Alexander tilts his head thoughtfully.

“Well, yes, when is it ever _not_ been?” he asks sardonically. Before saying, "Although, it's actually gotten a little more manageable recently.”

Magnus hums. “I did notice that you seem to have just a little more room to breathe these past few days despite everything that’s happening at the Institute.”

Mostly, Magnus is just glad that his boyfriend isn’t being run into the ground anymore, but he has still been wondering how Alexander seems to have a little more free time recently despite also seemingly taking on yet another new responsibility every time Magnus turns around.

Alexander glances at him, clearly contemplating how best to continue. And Magnus barely keeps a frown off his face. It's strange to see Alexander so hesitant about saying something, usually so very straightforward.

Thankfully, after another few seconds of hesitation the Shadowhunter seems to just give up on his uncharacteristic hesitation, giving a slight shrug, “It’s because of Lydia.”

Magnus blinks, honestly surprised. “Lydia Branwell? The Clave envoy?”

Alexander nods, even as he moves his free arm from the back of the bench to fully settle around Magnus. "I've been working with her a lot, mostly showing the inner workings of the Institute. The Clave might have taken full control thereby making Lydia the effective Head, but she isn’t actually familiar enough with the Institute to really run it on her own.”

“Ah,” Magnus nods in understanding, getting fully comfortable against Alexander's side. “I can imagine. Going by what I’ve seen over the years, running an Institute is already enough of a job for two people who are familiar with its inner workings.”

“Exactly.” Then, Alexander sighs. “But my parents are too offended at being replaced to work with
her, so it’s been mostly on me to show her around. And Lydia is honestly pretty good at her job, so it’s not like I have to constantly be holding her hand or anything. But with me already being used to handling most of the Head of the Institute duties in my parents’ absence anyway and her being the interim Head, we’ve kind of just been splitting a lot of the responsibilities between us.”

“But that’s good, isn’t it?” Magnus asks, getting the feeling that Alexander’s initial hesitance while talking about this might mostly be stemming from his parents’ aforementioned feelings of offense. “Having someone to split responsibilities with can only help with getting things done, right?”

Alec nods slowly, letting his fingers absently run over one of Magnus’ long necklaces where it is resting against the warlock’s clothed chest. It’s made from some kind of metal, larger beads in some places, and the way it has been lying over Magnus’ collar bones has been distracting Alec all night. But now, running his fingers over the uneven chain, the metal warm from Magnus’ skin, is almost soothing somehow.

“It does,” Alec finally remembers to actually reply.

Because Magnus is right, working with Lydia really has made things easier, especially with his parents still more concerned with getting back into power – after being ‘usurped’, as his mother calls it – than actually helping Alec make sure that things run smoothly.

Thing is, Alec honestly likes Lydia, likes working with her. She is straightforward like him, preferring honesty to subterfuge, but she definitely also knows how to play the political game if needed. And they seem to just click somehow.

And Lydia clearly feels the same, because within days of knowing each other she had seemingly decided to just accept Alec’s help in Institute matters, letting him – as the person everyone here had always assumed would one day lead the Institute – balance out her outsider status as a Clave envoy.

They actually make a pretty great team, having quickly fallen into a rhythm of handling the official and not-so-official side of running the Institute together, both of them taking on the jobs they are particularly good at and thereby saving each other endless amounts of time.

Hence, Alec suddenly having a bit more free time on his hands despite effectively co-running the Institute right now.

But with how his parents and his siblings have been acting towards Lydia – seeming to almost blame her personally for being sent to check on the happenings at the New York Institute – Alec has been feeling a little weird about just how well he has been getting along with her.

Magnus however is just watching him attentively, expression encouraging, as always willing to just listen.

So, Alec blows out a breath. “She just… Lydia just gets it. She gets how I see things and that the job comes before most everything else. But she also gets that following the Clave isn’t just a one-time decision, but rather a decision you make with every new order you are given. That it’s less about absolute obedience or disobedience and much more about navigating the grey area in between, about following their laws without compromising your own morals, your own convictions. And, okay, sometimes you simply don’t have a choice but to do exactly as is demanded of you, but other times you can find ways to work around an order, find a way to make them better.”

Magnus is watching him with an expression that is hard to decipher, warm and approving and almost proud, something that almost looks like respect in his eyes.
Alec ignores the slight flush he can immediately feel creeping up his neck at the expression Magnus is currently directing at him and instead finishes with, "Lydia believes in the institution of the Clave, but she also isn’t a blind follower and our views really seem to mostly match. Working with her really has made getting things done much easier."

Magnus watches him for a few seconds, that same expression of warm approval on his face, before finally saying, “I’m honestly glad you have that, Alexander. Not only someone to work with, but also someone you know sees things as you do, someone you can fall back on if you are ever in doubt, someone you can rely on to pick up the slack if you need it. That’s worth a lot.”

And Alec breathes out.

Because that’s it exactly. The reassurance that if he really needs it, there is someone at the Institute who is able and willing to take on a share of his work without Alec feeling the need to check every detail afterwards to make sure that it is done to his standards, knowing that not only does Lydia agree with him on most issues but that she is also just as much of an uncompromising perfectionist about the job as he is. Yeah, that’s exactly it.

So, he just smiles back at his boyfriend, relieved that Magnus gets why he likes working with Lydia so much, how nice it is to have found another Shadowhunter whose convictions pretty much perfectly match Alec’s own.

Which also reminds him. He might have kind of forgotten to tell his boyfriend that Lydia knows about them, the only person aside from Izzy who he told about being in a relationship at all.

It's something Alec has been worrying about, how it must feel for Magnus to still be a sort of secret.

And it's not like Alec is in any way ashamed of them, isn't even deliberately keeping Magnus a secret as such. Sure, he’d like to keep it professional at the Institute for now but that's mostly because Alec has yet to figure out how to handle his parents and also because he'd much rather not have to deal with everyone sticking their noses into his personal life.

But Alec also made the decision a while ago that if the topic ever does come up in conversation or if anyone ever asks him outright, there is no way Alec will ever actually deny being with Magnus. He won't.

So, when Lydia had told him about her late husband - about marrying the love of her life and about losing him far too soon - Alec had repaid her in kind by telling her about currently being in a relationship with a Downworlder, even if he has yet to tell her that his boyfriend also just so happens to be none other than the High Warlock of this city himself.

And, yeah, Alec kind of forgot to tell Magnus about it.

“Actually told Lydia about us,” Alec says trying for casual, even as he watches Magnus intently.

"That my boyfriend is a Downworlder," he adds, as though there is any need to specify on that.

Magnus blinks and then raises his eyebrows in clear surprise, and Alec can see a smile starting to slowly make its way onto his face. He can't help but feel somewhat exasperated at himself for immediately feeling so flustered at the clear happiness he can see in Magnus' eyes.

“I haven’t told her who you are yet, though,” he adds, suddenly wanting to make sure that he gets this fully across, not wanting to give Magnus the wrong impression only to have to disappoint him later.

Magnus just tilts his head slightly in order to fully meet his eyes and smile at him warmly, “I'm happy
you did, Alexander. But you know I don't mind if you want to keep things to yourself.” The look in
his eyes is happy and also so full of understanding. "It’s entirely up to you who to tell or not to tell
and what to tell them.”

Alec smiles back, something warm expanding in his chest, so very aware of the fact that Magnus
seems only ever concerned with making Alec as comfortable as he possibly can, never even
attempting to push him into anything, never pressuring him in any way.

And, angel, is Alec ever so grateful for having such an understanding boyfriend, who is willing to
give him all the time in the world to figure everything out in his own time. It just makes him want to
do the same thing for Magnus, wants to put his boyfriend first wherever he can. And he can only
hope that Magnus will be willing to open himself up to him the same Alec has been doing for him,
can only hope that Magnus might be willing to tell him what had him so subdued earlier.

There is nothing Alec wants more than to be there for Magnus the same way Magnus seems to just
always be there for him, wants them to lean on each other, wants that trust and devotion and
uncompromising, unwavering warmth and welcome between them. Wants it more than he has ever
wanted anything else in his life.

But for now, Magnus smiles at him, eyes soft and for the first time tonight looking entirely happy and
relaxed - the shadows in his eyes finally gone - and Alec is just entirely helpless against the pull that
has him leaning in for a kiss, the arm he has around Magnus only curling a little tighter around his
boyfriend.

The kiss is warm and lingering and gentle and there is something tender to it that is entirely new and,
by the angel, Alec is falling for this man, can practically feel it, can feel it in the warmth curling
through him when they pull apart only to linger close, their foreheads still touching, can feel it in the
way his heart swells a little in his chest, giving a slow, pronounced thump when he opens his eyes to
see that Magnus' are still closed, his expression open and warm and quietly happy.

And Alec doesn't quite yet dare asking himself just how one is supposed to tell the difference
between still falling in love and already being in love. And whether the fact that this question occurs
to him at all, should kind of be his answer already.

Alec gets back to the Institute just in time to witness one of those creature things – the same kind that

Well, he more than just witnesses the attack, seeing as he is very much involved in fighting it off
together with Hodge and even manages to get injured in the fight, the gash in his upper arm a
constant, painful throb.

But he honestly doesn’t even really care too much about his injury right now, far too angry at having
been taken off guard in the first place. He has never even heard of an Institute's wards being
breached like this, without any sort of alarm being sounded.

It has him clenching his teeth. Not only because this is home and their place to feel safe, but also
because when the creature first broke through the wall of the training area, Alec’s first thought had
been that it was there for the Mortal Cup, that someone had found out about the ancient, powerful
artifact hidden in the safe just a few steps away from where the fight was taking place.
It had made Alec’s fighting sloppy because in that moment he had been more concerned with protecting the safe and the Cup, than with keeping himself perfectly protected.

It’s all he can think about in the aftermath.

Because if the Institute isn’t safe, the Cup simply can’t stay here.

It needs to be returned to Idris, needs to be put under all those security measures they have available there. Immediately.

And the only thing keeping Alec from just simply handing the Cup over to the Clave right now, is his unspoken promise to Jace to keep it safe. So, he needs to talk to his parabatai first.

Which however turns out to be much easier said than done, because Jace and Clary are currently too busy running around New York, trying to find Clary’s newly-minted-vampire friend, who is apparently pissed at everything and everyone because he wasn’t actually given a choice whether he wanted to turn in the first place.

And while Alec can even somewhat sympathize with him, right now he already has too many things on his plate and a fledgling vampire running unchecked around New York is just another thing to worry about. Not to even mention that this entire situation still has the potential of erupting into a conflict between the Clave and one of New York’s strongest vampire clans. Which is the absolute last thing Alec wants to have to deal with right now.

And it also means that he just can’t seem to get a hold of his parabatai to talk about the Cup and returning it to Idris.

At least, Izzy figures out how the Institute’s security was breached in the first place. Somehow these creatures have seelie blood but without its demonic component, leaving only the angelic properties behind, thus letting them simply walk past the wards, nothing at all standing in their way.

Of course, Magnus is immediately called in to strengthen the wards, tweak them to provide some sort of protection against angel-blooded non-Shadowhunters. But Alec barely even gets a few minutes to talk to his boyfriend in the middle of the corridor - just time enough for Magnus to subtly twirl his fingers, pretty much entirely healing the wound on Alec’s arm - before Alec is already called away again.

This time it’s his parents calling him, who apparently decided that now of all times would be the perfect chance to finally have that discussion about Alec’s future.

The timing is just ridiculous even if Alec has been waiting for this. It’s honestly about time they finally have this talk.

Because his parents’ plan to marry him off has clearly been in the works for a while now - so much so that even when Lydia first got here from Idris she had already known about Alec’s alleged wish to settle down with a nice, ‘suitable’ Shadowhunter girl - but his parents have yet to actually tell Alec himself about it.

He is even a little curious how exactly this is going to go. Whether his mother is just going to present him with the name of his future wife or whether he’ll be given a selection of Maryse-approved candidates to pick from, like some sort of choose-your-wife catalogue.

Not that it’s going to make a difference either way, Alec thinks even as he finally reaches the door to his father’s office.
Because while his parents may think that this is going to be a brief discussion about Alec agreeing to a political marriage - probably counting on his unwavering willingness to do pretty much anything for his family - they don’t know yet that Alec’s future is not going to actually be up for debate at all.

So, Alec might not be particularly looking forward to this particular discussion, but in contrast to his parents he already knows exactly how it is going to end.

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Alec listens to his parents’ spiel about family honor and tradition and Shadowhunter allegiances, thinking to himself that they certainly aren’t being subtle about where this entire discussion is heading. Even if he hadn’t already known ahead of time just what this conversation was going to be about, he’d probably have figured it out by now.

Still.

Just because he already knows what it is they want from him doesn’t mean he is willing to make it any easier on them. If they are going to do this - tell him he is to trade in his future for their family - then they can damn well at least say as much to his face.

But while they certainly seem to have no problem with bringing up all of Alec’s recent failures, they have yet to admit to any faults of their own, no mentions of how they themselves might have contributed to the blemish on the Lightwood name.

Alec doesn’t even get why. They must know that he would find out about their past with the Circle at some point.

Are they honestly hoping he’ll remain ignorant just long enough for it to be too late? Are they really hoping that he won’t find out until he has already traded his future away to make up for a fault that is not actually his own? And what exactly does that sort lie, that sort of underhanded betrayal of Alec’s trust, make his parents?

So, when his mother finally does get around to announcing that Alec is to get married for a political alliance and that she already started looking at possible candidates for him, he just remains silent for a few seconds longer, waiting.

But when they truly leave it at that - truly try to make it seem like the blemish on the family name is exclusively Alec’s and his siblings’ fault - he finally replies, calmly, seriously, firmly.

"I refuse."

There is silence.

His mother just blinks at him, his father looking honestly surprised at her side, both of them so very unused to Alec not simply doing as he is told. Never mind that this is not just a standard mission order but rather his entire future they are talking about here.

Alec waits for several moments, just wanting to let his refusal sink in, before he affirms, “I will not agree to an arranged, politically-motivated marriage.” He is glad to note that his tone is neither aggressive nor particularly confrontational, but that it also brooks no question. It sounds like Alec is stating a simple fact.

Because that’s what it is. A fact.

Alec simply will not marry for a political alliance. Won’t marry for anything but the sort of happiness
he now knows is something he can have.

Or to put it in simpler terms, Alec can’t even imagine ever marrying anyone who isn’t Magnus Bane, as ridiculous as that may seem. But it’s just another fact in his mind. Though admittedly, this really might not be the best point in time to articulate that particular conviction of his.

So, instead he just waits for his parents’ reactions.

His mother is frowning now. It’s the same disappointed look Alec has seen a thousand times throughout his childhood. For the first time in his life, her disapproval, her disappointment doesn’t move him in the least.

“Alec,” she says, reprimand clear in her voice. “I had thought you understood that being a Shadowhunter requires sacrifice, that our personal lives always come second to our duties. It is your duty to repair the damage done to the Lightwood name.”

“No, it is not,” Alec refutes calmly, feeling some of the anger he has been carrying around with him for days now finally bleeding through, his eyes narrowing slightly. “It is not my duty to fix what you broke.”

Her expression remains unchanged but he can see definite surprise and something almost like dawning comprehension in her eyes.

Alec doesn’t give her the chance to say anything, however. He is done listening to them lying to him.

"You have been lying to me, to us. It wasn't anything Izzy or Jace or I did that tarnished the Lightwood name, messing with Downworld business or not. The blemish on the family name is on you.” He pauses, then breathes out harshly. “You were in the Circle. You followed Valentine.”

The room around him is utterly, deadly silent.

"Son.” It’s his dad who finally speaks up, eyes slightly wide and tone regretful.

But Alec is suddenly too angry to care. Let them deal with their children being disappointed in them for a change.

He doesn't bother mincing his words, "You were the ones who tarnished the family name, the ones who made the Lightwood name less than it could be. And now you are trying to push the fault, the responsibility for your failures onto our shoulders.” Alec doesn’t quite call them liars or cowards to their faces, but it’s a near thing and he thinks they might still be able to hear the words quite clearly, unspoken or not. “Did you honestly think I would never find out? That you could just continue hiding this from me?”

And Alec already knows exactly what excuse they are going to give him, namely the only recently lifted ban making it illegal to so much as even talk about anything related to the Circle.

As expected, his father speaks up, “Son, you know that it was forbidden-“

Alec makes an impatient, slicing hand gesture. “And how convenient that was for you,” he says sharply. “But we both know that the ban wouldn’t have stopped you if you actually wanted to tell us the truth. Because it’s certainly not illegal to talk about the Circle any longer and you have yet to stop lying to me.”

His parents are silent, neither of them speaking for several moments.
Maybe they are realizing that this conversation right here - before they tried to make Alec carry the burden of their own failures - had been their last chance to come clean, their last chance to redeem themselves at least slightly in his eyes. Or maybe they don’t realize it at all. Either way, they missed their chance.

Alec breathes in, managing to mostly calm his anger. “But you are right. I do believe in the true Shadowhunter way and I am proud of the Lightwood name.” And a part of Alec truly detests his parents for cheapening that, for tarnishing the Lightwood name, for making it less than it could be.

So, he leans in slightly, continuing emphatically, "Far too proud in fact to sell my future, or any Lightwood’s future for that matter, for something as cheap as a political alliance."

He makes sure to meet both of his parents’ stares to show them just how serious he is.

But there is a look in his mother's eyes that he recognizes, a look that tells him she is already rallying new arguments. And she knows him so well, knows exactly which buttons to push to make him see things her way. At one point, she might have even stood a good chance at still winning this argument.

But she doesn’t know yet that there is simply no way to sway him on this. She doesn’t know about Magnus.

And just for a second Alec considers throwing it in her face, considers telling her that not only is he not going to agree to a 'suitable' marriage as determined by her, but that he is also gay and in a relationship with a powerful warlock who Alec doesn’t intend to let go anytime soon. Or ever, really.

Considers telling her that he is perfectly, stupidly happy and that nothing and no one will make him give that up.

He considers it. But only for a second.

Because, yes, a large part of his conviction not to agree to an arranged marriage definitely stems from his relationship with Magnus, from realizing how happy he can be if he lets himself, from Alec deciding to be selfish for once in his life.

But.

Throwing his relationship in his mother’s face now, somehow feels like it would cheapen what he has with Magnus in some way, making it seem like his relationship is nothing but some sort of revenge he is deliberately taking on his parents, like he is dating Magnus just to prove something or to rebel against them.

And Alec won’t allow anyone to ever think that. Magnus is simply so much more than that.

So instead, he lets his calm fully settle around himself once more and finally continues, "Don’t get me wrong, I will fix what you broke, I will restore the Lightwood name. But I will do it on my own terms."

He calmly keeps his eyes on them for another few seconds. Watching them, almost inviting them to protest. There is nothing they can say that could possibly sway him. And maybe they can tell, because neither of them says a word.

Another few seconds of silence and then, Alec finally just gets up and - with barely a nod at both of them - he simply turns around and leaves.
So, yes, Alec might not have been particularly looking forward to this conversation, but he had always known exactly how it was going to end.

Alec was never going to be the one who lost this argument. It quite simply hadn't even been an option.

Chapter End Notes

So. This chapter didn’t turn out as planned at all XD It was supposed to be mainly plot and setting up dynamics and I told myself there would be barely any malec for once...

Yeah.

Instead you get an absolute monster of a chapter with some Magnus-centric plot for once (I feel like I've been neglecting his side of things a little ’cause he got barely any screen time during this part of s1...), a malec kind-of-date (even if they stayed home), a little bit of plot progress and finally the confrontation between Alec and his parents :) I would absolutely love to know what you think :D

And I'm sorry about having to move the scene with Magnus finding out about the whole arranged marriage thing to the next chapter, but the word count of this one would have just been plain ridiculous otherwise XD

And thank you so much for your lovely comments and kudos! You are wonderful (*^^*)
The whole arranged marriage thing is such a non-issue to Alec that he doesn’t even realize he might somehow have entirely forgotten to mention it to Magnus at any point.

Well, he forgets until the day after his argument with his parents when Magnus and Alec are sitting outside on the balcony, entirely comfortable and relaxed. And then, Alec manages to bring up his parents' attempts to marry him off in possibly the worst way possible. Even days later he’ll still want to kick himself for it.

Alec had come over to the loft earlier, having decided to just take a night off — wanting to get away from the Institute and his parents who have kept continuously hounding him ever since their argument and he simply just wants a break, a few hours without either his mother or his father cornering him somewhere — and Magnus had of course enthusiastically approved of them having an entire evening to themselves, promptly suggesting they use his night off to go out for dinner.

And, well, it’s not like Alec has ever been able to say no to anything that his boyfriend suggests.

So, Magnus took him to a really nice Italian restaurant for dinner and afterwards they went for a rather extended walk — Alec being the one to suggest they walk home instead of using a portal, for no other reason than that he might have become a bit of a fan of getting to hold Magnus’ hand as they walk anywhere – before coming back to the loft about half an hour ago.

Now, they are sitting outside and Magnus has an arm resting behind Alec, along the back of the seat they are on, and Alec is leaning mostly against his side, head on the warlock’s shoulder. The fingers of their left hands are intertwined, resting on Magnus' thigh, after Alec had almost absently reached for one of Magnus' hands as soon as they sat down.

And, yes, Alec might have a bit of a thing for Magnus’ hands. Their fluid, sinuous movements, never entirely still, rings glinting in the light and catching Alec’s attention as Magnus talks. Even more so whenever Magnus is doing magic, blue light dancing along his fingertips, only highlighting his soft, olive skin, the warmth of it, the long, nimble, deceptively slender fingers wielding so so much power, making it simply impossible for Alec to look away.

So, yeah, Alec might have a bit of a thing, but no need to point it out. He is already fully aware, thank you very much.

And he knows they have been officially dating for less than two weeks, have known each other for only two months in total, but somehow in the span of that short amount of time, Alec has gone from nervously anxious about anything related to dating, to just finding everything he does with Magnus simply natural. Don’t ask Alec how or when that happened.

Point is, everything about tonight is comfortable and wonderful and relaxed and it’s exactly what Alec needed, just the two of them spending some time together, talking. Or rather, for once Alec has been doing most of the talking and it’s almost cathartic to just get to rant about how irritating his parents have been ever since their discussion.

"They just won't leave me alone,” he is grumbling, head resting comfortably on Magnus' shoulder. "Dad keeps seeking me out to talk about them hiding their history with Circle from us and about not
admitting that they were the ones who tarnished the Lightwood reputation."

Magnus hums sympathetically, his free hand reaching up to card his fingers through Alexander’s hair soothingly.

He can immediately feel Alexander relax even further, leaning a little heavier into his side. By magic, does he adore how comfortable his Shadowhunter is with him at this point.

Still, Alexander grumbles on, "They are the ones who screwed up. And not once have they had the decency to actually own up to it. Not to even mention, trying to push the responsibility for fixing it onto me."

Magnus feels a slight frown flit over his face at the somewhat odd phrasing of that, not quite sure what the Shadowhunter is talking about. Sure, Alexander has been mentioning his parents’ trying to blame the loss of the Lightwoods’ standing in Idris on him and his siblings, but the ‘responsibility for fixing it’ part certainly hadn’t been mentioned before in this manner.

The way Alexander is sitting, he currently can’t actually see Magnus’ questioning expression and thus just continues on, "And Mom just won't stop nagging me about those 'suitable candidates' she has apparently picked out for me. As though her having gone through the effort of finding them somehow means that I’m obligated to actually choose one of them."

"Suitable candidates?" Magnus finally asks a little confusedly, feeling like he might be missing something. He really can't recall Alexander having told him about anything happening at the Institute that he'd require a specific partner for. And usually Magnus is an excellent listener. "Candidates for what?"

Alexander just shrugs dismissively - entirely comfortable where he is leaning into Magnus' side, his eyes only halfway open at this point as he relaxes into the movement of Magnus' fingers running through his hair - and grumbles, “Oh, you know, the candidates for my future wife. For my politically motivated, arranged marriage designed to strengthen the Lightwood name and fix what my parents broke. Those candidates."

Magnus has frozen. There is something almost like a ringing sound in his ears.

No forewarning, no chance for Magnus prepare himself, to even try to put up any of his shields, to keep at least parts of himself protected.

His fingers are entirely motionless in Alexander's hair, Magnus’ very breath having halted for a second, before he manages to make himself breathe again, tries to make himself think.

Because he heard the sarcasm, the derision in Alexander’s voice, he did.

But Magnus simply can’t seem to think past Alexander saying the words ‘my future wife’ so casually, nonchalantly. Like there is nothing to it.

Like those words don't make Magnus feel like he can't breathe in fully, lest something inside of him tear apart at the strain. Like they don't immediately bring up too many memories of 'I didn't think you cared' and 'we both knew this relationship had no future' and 'it's been fun' and 'I want to have a real family' and most devastatingly 'it's not like either of us expected this to actually last forever'.

Memories his heart doesn't quite like to remember but simply can't seem to forget. Memories that remind him of the fact that he has yet to find someone who wants Magnus enough, loves him enough, to want to spend their forever with him, even if Magnus’ very blood makes it impossible for him to offer them the same in return.
But Magnus must have misunderstood somehow. He must have.

Because Alexander is the least callous person he knows and even if he ever did intend to break up with Magnus he wouldn’t do it so callously, wouldn’t just nonchalantly announce his intention to marry someone else. Alexander wouldn’t do that to Magnus. He wouldn’t.

So, Magnus tries to wipe his expression clean, tries to make his mind work despite still being entirely blank, simply too blindsided by having been ripped from comfortably, happily relaxed and thrown into scrambling for something – anything – to say that sounds even generally casual, something that doesn't quite give away just how afraid he is of the possibility that he might not have misunderstood Alexander at all.

He doesn’t get the chance to say anything anyway.

Another few seconds of silences and Alexander clearly notices something having changed - if only because Magnus has been entirely frozen in place for several seconds now – and tilts his head on Magnus’ shoulder to look up at him questioningly.

And something of what Magnus is feeling, what he is thinking, must show on his face despite his best efforts, because there is about a second delay and then suddenly something like shock flits over Alexander's face, his eyes widening, as he abruptly sits up, clearly realizing exactly what he just said, what he just implied.

He quickly reaches for Magnus' hand - the hand that had been carding through his hair until a few seconds ago and now has fallen back into Magnus’ lap - eyes fixed intently on him.

“Well, screw them. Screw all of it.” Alexander’s voice is urgent but steady. “I am not a pawn to be moved around as they please and I am not going to marry for their little game of political one-upmanship. I refuse to. I already told my parents just that and I will not be swayed on this. I refuse to just give up my happiness like that.”

A pause.

And then Alexander moves closer, letting go of one of his hands to cup the side of Magnus' face instead, almost leaning their foreheads together and saying quietly but firmly, "I refuse to give you up like that.”

Magnus breathes in, as the pressure in his chest once more releases.

And he tries not to think about what his reaction at Alexander’s announcement - at the thought that Alexander might be taken away from him, that he might already be lost to Magnus - means. Tries not to think about the fact that if Alexander did decide to marry someone else, it would already be far too late for Magnus' heart to come out of this unbroken, possibly irreparably so.

Magnus tries to ignore all of that for now, instead tightening his fingers around Alexander’s, leaning their foreheads fully together. And he tries to just breathe.

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Even days later, the memory of the expression on Magnus’ face at Alec’s oblivious announcement continues to haunt him.

Sure, Alec might have succeeded in driving that shuttered but far-too-vulnerable look from Magnus’ eyes within moments. And, of course, Magnus had just waved it off seconds later, called it a simple misunderstanding and didn’t seem to hold Alec forgetting to even mention his parents’ plans before
against him at all.

And the rest of the night had even quickly gone back to being entirely comfortable, if a little careful, a little tentative and quite a bit more attentive on Alec’s end. But after talking through everything and Alec telling Magnus about his conversation with his parents in detail, the warlock truly seemed to simply be back to his normal self again. As though nothing had even happened at all.

But Alec simply can’t seem to forget that look in Magnus’ eyes. The last thing he ever wants to do is hurt Magnus and what he had seen on his boyfriend’s face right then had felt like someone had taken a dagger to Alec’s own heart.

Heartbreak. He had seen heartbreak in Magnus’ eyes.

It had just been for a second – just until Alec had reassured him that he has absolutely no intention at all to let himself be pushed into an arranged marriage – but definitely there.

And he knows that Magnus immediately jumping to conclusions, believing - even if only for a second - that Alec was leaving him, hadn’t ever really been about Alec himself, about trusting him, at all.

Because Magnus trusts Alec in a way that would almost be a little frightening if it weren’t also for the fact that Alec knows he feels the exact same way for Magnus. So, he knows that Magnus’ reaction wasn’t about him per se, wasn’t about trusting Alec himself.

No, something about the way Magnus had reacted, something in his expression, the look in his eyes, had told Alec that the warlock’s reaction had been one of resignation, like an old pain resurfacing, almost like he were used to it. Like his partner just casually announcing their plans to break it off - whether to marry someone else or not - might be nothing new to Magnus at all.

And Alec doesn’t know what to do with this.

Even the mere thought has fury pulsing in his chest, has him wishing that he could get his hands on every single person who has ever been given Magnus’ heart and then proceeded to rip it apart instead of keeping it safe, instead of treasuring it the way something as breathtakingly beautiful as Magnus’ heart should be treasured.

Because Alec has recently been coming to realize that there isn’t much he wouldn’t do in order to keep Magnus and his ridiculously soft heart protected. That all Alec wants to do is to keep both safe from the world as best as he possibly can.

In the week after that, Alec tries to make as much time for Magnus as he can manage.

Well, ‘trying’ being very much the key word here.

After the security breach, things only continue to escalate, everything getting increasingly stressful. With the very real threat of one of those creatures getting through their wards again, the hall patrols within the Institute itself are increased, all guard shifts are doubled up. Add to that their seemingly ever-increasing number of missions – having Valentine running around their city certainly isn’t making their lives in any way easier – and Alec can only be grateful that they currently don’t have any prisoners to guard as well because he simply wouldn't know where to get the required
In addition to his usual duties, Alec is still pretty much splitting the Head of the Institute responsibilities with Lydia, although she is admittedly doing more than her fair share - handling several of the more time-consuming duties - because Alec is also still doing the jobs he had already been doing while his parents had still been running the Institute, like mission assignments and training schedules, as well as also still doing his usual share of patrols.

Add to that the fact that the Clave keeps hinting at possibly removing Lydia from her position – for some reason expecting her to miraculously come up with a way to take down Valentine, never mind the fact that the entire last generation of Shadowhunters already failed at doing just that – and Alec feels he hasn't had a chance to actually get a decent night of sleep in days. It seems that whenever he finally manages to get to bed, his phone starts ringing with a mission or some sort of alarm or other as soon as his head touches the pillow.

Additionally, he is pretty much avoiding his parents, simply having neither the time nor the patience to spare for their sometimes-more-sometimes-less-sincere apologies right now. They all said what they wanted to say and Alec would be grateful if they’d give him at least a few days to settle his temper again before he is forced to rehash the entire argument once more.

And he refuses to even think about what Jace might currently be up to. His parabatai rune tells him that Jace is uninjured and that will just have to do for now. Once things at the Institute calm down again, Alec will be able to worry about whatever messes his parabatai and his crush manage to create in the meantime.

Point is, Alec barely even manages to grab something to eat during the day, much less actually spend any significant amount of time with his boyfriend.

And of course, Magnus is perfect as ever, always reassuring Alec that he entirely understands, that Alec being too busy to come by the loft is completely fine and not to worry and so on. Magnus points out that they still have their phone calls and even cheerfully invents various reasons to stop by the Institute at least once a day, so Alec does get to see him, even if only for a few minutes at a time and never without having to keep the countless cameras scattered throughout the Institute in mind.

But thing is, while he loves that Magnus doesn't put any additional pressure on him, that his boyfriend is so very understanding about Alec’s job demanding pretty much all of his time right now, Alec himself simply isn’t willing to entirely give up on spending time with his boyfriend, stressful job or not.

Alec likes spending time with just Magnus, likes it when it’s just the two of them, freely relaxing, talking or even just being silent in each other’s presence. And he definitely likes being able to kiss his boyfriend whenever he wants, being able to hold hands, likes cuddling on the couch and sleeping in the same bed. Alec likes it when they get to be just them.

So, with things at the Institute only picking up speed - his job taking up his entire day with barely enough time to eat in between meetings and missions and training and patrols - Alec gets into the habit of just making his way to Magnus’ loft whenever he can weasel even the slightest amount of time away, even if it’s just for an hour or so. Sometimes for lunch, sometimes for dinner, sometimes just for half an hour between patrols.

It’s not perfect, but it’s something at least. And the extra time making his way across New York is definitely worth the bright, happy smile Alec is greeted with every single time he walks into the loft.

He can only imagine what it would be like to actually get to come home to that smile every night.
Alec is on his way to the Ops center, having just left Lydia’s office after the two of them spent almost twenty minutes trying to come up with a mission schedule that would conform with the Clave’s latest order about implementing additional patrols but without also working everyone at the Institute into an early grave.

The two of them have finally gotten used to the workload, having fallen into a good, manageable rhythm of splitting tasks between them, but recently there have been more and more veiled – and not-so-veiled – hints coming from Idris that the Clave is thinking to replace Lydia as the interim Head of the Institute soon.

And, sure, her assignment was never intended as a permanent position but Alec knows that as soon as she is removed from the position she’ll be ordered back to Idris. Alec honestly just wants her to stay here, not only because he really likes working with her – someone who just gets him – but also because they’ve become actual friends.

Which isn’t even mentioning the fact that Alec absolutely hates the idea of someone else taking over in her stead. The chances of another Head of the Institute being like Lydia - especially in regards to letting Alec pretty much co-lead the Institute - are pretty much non-existent. And it's not like the Clave is just going to hand the Institute to Alec himself.

Which is kind of a moot point anyway because even if they did decide to give Alec the position, they'd promptly take it from him again as soon as they find out about Magnus. Something which – considering that Alec simply will not give up Magnus no matter what – is simply inevitable at this point.

But Lightwood or not, a Head of an Institute not only being in a gay relationship but also with a Downworlder - and a powerful one at that - is just not going to go over well with the Clave.

Maybe if the Lightwoods' standing in Idris was still what it once was, maybe if the Lightwood name hadn’t so clearly lost quite a bit of its weight in the political games the more powerful Clave members so like to play, maybe if the Lightwood name was still as untarnished as the Branwells’. Maybe then the Clave wouldn't quite dare insult their entire family by taking the position away from him without at least pretending to have a reason beyond disapproving of his personal life choices.

And Alec suddenly stops in the middle of the corridor.

Now, there’s a thought.

He stares at the far wall for a few seconds, mind whirling, before he turns abruptly, quickly making his way back towards Lydia's office. He knocks but doesn't really wait for her reply before he is already entering.

Lydia is still standing next to her desk, pretty much in the same place as she had been when he left her office just a minute or two earlier. She looks up from the reports in her hands, raising her eyebrows at him, "Alec, I thought you were-"

He waves her off. "This isn’t about the schedule. This is about something else.” He focuses on her. "You know what you said about our families having been allies for a long time?"

"Yes, but Alec, what-"
He holds up his hand, asking her to hear him out. He is actually rather excited about his idea. "And you said they are never going to give the position of Head of the Institute to you. Because you are an outsider and too young and an unmarried woman in childbearing age and without any real merit to your career yet."

She frowns at him but just nods this time, clearly realizing that he is going somewhere with this.

He continues, "And while they might consider giving the position to me because of the Lightwoods' history with the Institute, they probably won’t because of my parents’ history with the Circle and even if they did, they’d immediately find a reason to take it from me again, as soon as they find out about my relationship with a Downworlder."

Her frown has deepened as she watches him, clearly not seeing why he is listing all of their supposed failings but she just nods again, signaling for him to continue.

He takes another step closer to where she is standing. "So, what if we throw our hats into the ring together?"

She blinks. It takes her a second or two, but then raises her eyebrows in surprise, asking, "You mean, for Head of the Institute? An official bid for us to share the position."

"Yes," he nods. "A Branwell and a Lightwood together, the family heirs no less. That should count for something, right? I have the Lightwoods' history with the Institute behind me and you have the un tarnished name. And like you said, our families have been allies for a long time. Maybe together, we'd get to keep the Institute."

There is a slight pause as something considering and even cautiously excited enters Lydia’s expression. "And we'd get to run it," she says.

"Exactly," Alec says, pleased that she seems to at least generally agree. But then he sighs and points out the one big flaw in his plan. "Admittedly, I've never heard of the Clave handing control of an Institute to friends, only ever to distinguished members of the Clave and even then they prefer married couples."

Lydia nods slowly, but Alec is glad to see that she still looks rather excited about the idea. "I've never heard of that sort of thing either. But we could look through the archives? Check whether there is any sort of precedent for something like this."

Alec wanders over to lean against the table right next to where she is standing, frowning thoughtfully. "A precedent would definitely strengthen our case. And we do have the longstanding allegiance between our families, which we can cite and that should at least be worth something."

He really likes how they just click, how she just takes his idea and runs with it, how he doesn’t have to explain every single thought process to her. Like the fact that he balances out all of her supposed failings in the eyes of the Clave, just as she does for his, doesn’t need to tell her that if they actually got the position, the Clave would definitely hesitate to take it from them again – even once they find out about Magnus – because they wouldn’t want to insult two political heavyweights like the Lightwoods and the Branwells - two of the oldest and most powerful Shadowhunter bloodlines in Idris - at the same time.

Lydia is frowning slightly, clearly considering something else. "Although, even if there is a precedent for this, we'd definitely need some sort of success, something that we actually achieved while working together and that would give the Clave enough reason to even consider us for the position. What we are doing right now won't count in their eyes."
Hm, she's right. They might have been effectively running the Institute together but so far Alec has only been unofficially involved, helping her without anyone the wiser. But if they had some sort of achievement, something to present to the Clave to distinguish themselves at least slightly in their eyes, that would definitely help their case.

And Alec’s mind immediately jumps to that tarot card he locked away. The card that holds one of the three most sought after artifacts in Shadowhunter history. Handing the Mortal Cup to the Clave would certainly give Alec and Lydia the edge that they’d need over any other contenders for the position.

But.

Alec might have been just as involved in recovering the Cup as his siblings or Clary herself, but he still took it from her at his parabatai’s request with the unspoken promise of keeping it safe, not in order to use it for his own personal gain.

And while he has been itching to finally get the Cup out of the Institute, get it back to Idris where it belongs and where it will be safe, he also can’t just hand it over. Not without at least talking to Jace first. Same as Jace would never go behind his back and just take the Cup and do whatever he pleases with it either.

So, not wanting to promise Lydia a solution he might not actually be able to provide in the end, Alec just says, "I might have something. But I’ll have to talk to Jace first."

Lydia watches him intently for a few seconds but then she just nods, as always willing to trust his judgment. Well, there is a reason he likes working with her so much.

And even now, the look in her eyes matches the excitement Alec himself feels. Excitement at the thought that if this works out, the two of them might actually be able to keep the Institute, might be able to fulfill the dream they both share. Their dreams of one day getting to run an Institute.

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Alec is on his way to the loft, looking forward to telling Magnus about his and Lydia’s plan of trying for the Head of the Institute position together. He pretty much just walked out of the Institute as soon as he got done with his work for the day, immediately starting to make his way to his boyfriend’s apartment.

And maybe it should give him pause that Magnus is the one person, Alec wants to tell about this, everyone else coming very much second.

But then again, even with something as important as this, Alec isn’t really surprised anymore to find that telling Magnus about it, is the first and kind of the only thing he wants to do right now.

It used to be Jace, Alec thinks. The person I would seek out to share this kind of thing with before anyone else, used to be Jace.

It used to be. But it’s just not anymore, hasn’t been for a while.

And Alec kind of missed the point in time where that changed.

Something which is probably not at all helped by the fact that these days he sees his parabatai in passing once a day at most – even today he hasn’t seen Jace since this morning when he ran into him at breakfast already on his way out –, or the fact that the last several times they did speak at all it was either quickly on the phone or always with a certain red-haired girl hovering at Jace’s side, or that it
has been longer than Alec honestly likes to remember since he and Jace truly talked about something actually important.

And maybe the two of them drifting apart a little at one point is even natural, possibly even inevitable. But, by the angel, Alec doesn’t even want to imagine what this would feel like - how devastated he would be at being left behind, brushed aside, entirely ignored by his parabatai - if he didn’t have Magnus. To feel like he might be losing his parabatai, the most important connection in his life, while scrambling for the pieces of himself, being stretched thin by work, by his parents’ demands, the Clave’s directives, and having no one to lean on, seemingly no one truly on his side. Not to even mention that Alec very much doubts he would be anywhere near as comfortable with himself or his sexuality if it weren’t for Magnus.

So, no, Alec doesn’t want to imagine what that would be like at all.

And Jace and him will definitely have to talk at some point - and it’s probably going to be a rather painful conversation as well - but Alec is sure that in the end, they’ll be fine.

But for now, he just wants to see his boyfriend and tell him about possibly having found a way to make his dream of one day running the New York Institute a reality.

So, even as he starts climbing the stairs in Magnus’ building towards the loft, Alec’s mind is mostly focused on the various strategies and ideas he and Lydia came up with to potentially increase their chances in the race for the Head of the Institute position.

Although, all thoughts about legal precedents and Clave politics promptly vanish from his mind as soon as he walks through the doors to Magnus’ loft and is greeted by the sight of his boyfriend training with his magic on the balcony.

And what a sight it is.

Magnus, shirtless and barefoot, his back to Alec, wearing nothing but some kind of stretchy, clingy sort of pants that hint at everything but also not nearly enough, moving fluidly, gracefully, strands of magic glowing brightly and coiling between his fingers.

For a few seconds, Alec just stares from the entranceway, hypnotized, before he finally manages to get his feet to move and bring him closer, absolutely fixated on the sight of his boyfriend.

The vision only gets better the closer he gets.

Magnus manipulating his magic, his hands in constant winding motion, the magic vibrating, flickering, flowing between his hands, easily, smoothly following his movements. Magnus’ muscles rippling, his upper body glistening slightly with sweat, a sight only enhanced by the backlight of the countless lights of New York City at night.

Alec might be honestly speechless right now, mesmerized, not wanting to so much as blink lest he miss even the tiniest detail.

Sure, he might have gotten a glimpse of Magnus shirtless before, once when he slept over but fell asleep pretty much immediately and another time in the early morning when Magnus had still been wandering around the loft in an open silk robe – which is a sight all on its own, believe him – but this, seeing those muscles actually at work, is definitely something else entirely.

Magnus twists slightly, his magic following even the tiniest twitch of his fingers, cords of muscle coiling smoothly under his glistening skin.
Alec just about swallows his tongue.

He decides then and there that he urgently needs to find out Magnus’ training schedule, needs to find out whether this is something that happens regularly. Because Alec would quite happily rearrange the entire Institute’s mission schedule if it would free up the appropriate timeslots for Alec to stumble in on this sort of thing more often. He can always claim it to be a coincidence.

Finally, the glowing threads of magic flowing between Magnus’ hands start to dissipate, quietly dispersing into the night air, before Magnus lowers his arms, breathes out calmly, centering himself. And then he finally turns to fully face Alec with a soft, welcoming smile curving his lips.

And Alec doesn’t even pause before he is crossing the remaining distance between them in a few quick strides, one of his hands curling around Magnus’ naked waist as he pulls his boyfriend into a kiss. Alec is quite simply incapable of not doing so.

Honestly, he would challenge anyone to try and resist the sight of Magnus with his skin still glistening slightly with sweat, a slight flush on his cheeks from exertion, and a warm, but definitely somewhat teasing smile on his lips…

Although, come to think of it, Alec actually wouldn’t challenge anyone to do that. Instead, he’d very much recommend keeping your hands off this one.

Yeah, everyone else can go find their own breathtakingly beautiful, ridiculously hot warlock boyfriend.

This one is already taken.

Chapter End Notes

So, hm. What a wonderfully random mix of scenes XD And I'm sorry for the somewhat depressing start but I really wanted Alec to catch on a little sooner that Magnus having loved before also means that he has lost before and all the heartbreak that would come with that. Hope the rest of the chapter managed to make up for it, though :D And I know I stole Magnus’ training scene from s2 but I decided, in the interest of fairness, there should be equal ogling opportunities for both of them :3 Would absolutely love to know what you think :D

Also, the next few chapters will twist away from canon a bit because I'm getting rid of some things I really disliked in season1. I'll still keep the overall plot, but some things will change quite significantly. Just, fair warning and all that :)

Thank you so much for all your wonderful comments and kudos! You guys are just amazing (^_^)
The first time Magnus and Alec get into an actual argument, it’s about something absolutely ridiculous. So ridiculous in fact that afterwards Alec isn’t even sure what it was about in the first place.

Although in hindsight, the entire fight is likely his fault, seeing as he is definitely the one who starts it.

Alec blames it on the particularly stressful past few days at the Institute and the fact that he hasn't been able to get any real sleep – much less a full night of rest – ever since the security breach. Because just the thought of the risk they are taking by keeping the Mortal Cup at the Institute despite the compromised wards is quite literally keeping him awake at night.

Add to that Alec and Lydia’s search through the archives taking up most of his free time right now, the fact that the safety of the Mortal Cup doesn't rank high enough on Jace’s list of priorities for him to give Alec even a couple of minutes of his time to discuss it, his father managing to corner Alec this morning to ‘talk’ and Izzy choosing today of all days to start pestering Alec for details about his relationship with Magnus, even bringing up Alec's supposed sex life. Which however only served to remind him that he and Magnus have yet to actually get around to taking their relationship further, seeing as the possibility of an attack on the Institute while Alec is absent makes it plain impossible for him to even consider staying the night at Magnus’ currently.

So, yeah. By the end of the day, Alec is just plain annoyed with everyone and everything.

And all he wants to do right now is to see his boyfriend, even if it is just for an hour or for dinner or a walk or something, even if he is quite likely to fall asleep as soon as he so much as sits down anywhere for more than a few seconds.

Alec needs a break and he just wants to see Magnus, and the Institute can damn well deal without him for an hour or two.

At least that's the plan. Alec has no idea why he – as soon as he gets to the loft – then proceeds to take out his general irritation on the one person who didn’t do anything to contribute to his sour mood in any way.

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Magnus feels a smile spread over his face as soon as Alexander crosses the wards of his loft.

By magic, he has missed his Shadowhunter over the past few days.

Admittedly, it's not even been that long - only three days - but Magnus might possibly have become a little spoiled by getting to see Alexander at least once every day before.

Of course, he knows that Alexander is just incredibly busy right now and simply doesn’t have the time right now to come by that often and Magnus doesn't want to put even more pressure on him by commenting on it. And Magnus would simply have stopped by at the Institute instead, but with Alexander clearly still so hesitant about who to let in on their relationship, Magnus isn't sure whether showing up there – even with an offer to help – would actually be welcome.
Excuse Magnus for having his own little hang-ups and insecurities.

And he knows he should just ask Alexander, but Magnus also doesn’t want to put him in an awkward position by having to refuse his offer of help.

But point is, Alexander is evidently here now.

Magnus sets the scrolls he is holding aside, quickly making his way out of his study. His smile widens once he sees Alexander standing in the entranceway, just in the process of taking off his jacket.

_Yep, definitely missed him._

Although, Magnus also can’t help the slight worry that overtakes him at seeing the clear stress and exhaustion on Alexander’s face. At least some of which is erased by the smile the Shadowhunter sends him as soon as he sees Magnus coming towards him.

His answering smile is ridiculously bright and also entirely automatic.

“Hello, Alexander,” he says affectionately, trying not to let his worry for the Shadowhunter show too clearly as he reaches him and then _finally_ leans in for a warm, lingering kiss hello.

He feels both of Alexander's hands immediately come up to curl around his waist on either side, their hold tightening briefly before relaxing again, but even then not fully letting go, instead staying right there, keeping a loose hold on Magnus’ waist.

It's certainly lovely to know that he wasn't the only one to feel the separation, as brief as it may have been.

When Magnus finally pulls back from the kiss, he keeps one of his hands against the side of Alexander’s neck, thumb curving over his jaw. Seeing the exhaustion on Alexander’s face from close up only increases his worry.

“How has your day been?” Magnus asks quietly.

Alexander doesn’t reply verbally, just closes his eyes, leans into the hand still cradling the side of his neck, giving a rather explosive sigh, a small shrug and a deepening frown in reply.

So, truly stressful then.

Magnus hums in sympathy, leaning in for another soft kiss before he says, “Why don’t you sit down and I’ll make us something to drink. Have you had dinner yet?”

Alec nods his head at the last question even as he makes his way over to the couch to sit down, frowning slightly.

Going to the loft to spend some time with Magnus is all he has wanted to do for the past few days. But now that he is here, he suddenly seems unable to relax, still wired and annoyed from the past few days, his mind caught on all the things still to get done.

He tries to focus on the rather hypnotic visual of Magnus mixing their drinks instead, tries to make himself relax.

“It’s been stressful,” he finally admits out loud with a sigh. "I’m sorry I haven’t had the time to come over more often."
The wistful note in Alexander's voice makes Magnus smile.

And, magic, does he feel the same, wishing they had more time to spend with each other. But the last thing he wants is for his Shadowhunter to stress himself out even more by trying to make time for Magnus while he is so clearly struggling already.

“I get being busy,” he returns honestly, throwing a quick smile over his shoulder. “You know I’m happy with however much time you can manage, Alexander.”

Alec feels a frown forming on his face, doing his best to ignore that thrum of annoyance still tugging at his mind from the events of today.

Of course, Magnus is being perfect as ever, just willing to go along with whatever works best for Alec.

So, Alec has absolutely no idea why he then - instead of taking Magnus' comment as it is clearly intended - almost consciously decides to misunderstand what Magnus just said.

“You're happy with how things are?” The annoyed note in Alexander’s voice takes Magnus off guard. "So, you don’t want me to come over more often, then?"

Magnus just blinks at Alexander. That's just such an odd thing for him to say.

It honestly takes him a few seconds to catch up and by the time he finally manages to reply, Alexander’s face is already pulled into a scowl.

“Oh no, Alexander, that’s not what I meant to say at all,” he says carefully, cautiously, setting down the drinks he just finished preparing.

Something about this tells him that they are about to have an argument, despite Magnus having absolutely no clue what it is they will be fighting about.

Alec knows that Magnus is trying to calm his temper but he is simply too annoyed at everyone but Magnus to actually give him the chance. He gets up from the couch to pace, tries to push down his irritation. He doesn't succeed in the least.

Instead, he says something to Magnus. Something about people with too much time on their hands. Something he doesn’t mean at all and something he'd take back immediately if he were thinking straight.

He doesn’t. He doubles down instead.

Alec just can’t seem to let it go and for a while Magnus quite impressively even keeps his temper, staying entirely calm, trying to salvage the situation. But with every new topic Alec drags into the argument, he can see the frustration building in Magnus’ eyes. And he has no idea why it satisfies him on some level to see it there.

And turns out, Magnus certainly knows how to hit where it hurts once he finally does lose his patience. Just a single comment from him has Alec going from generally irritated to spitting mad. It just escalates from there.

They argue. Loudly. Angrily.

Mostly about things that don’t actually have anything to do with either - much less both - of them.
Thankfully, neither of them takes it too far, nothing truly hurtful being said or brought into the argument.

And then, just as abruptly as the fight started, it’s suddenly over.

In the middle of Alec saying something rather tauntingly, harshly sarcastic, Magnus seems to finally reach the end of his tether, suddenly reaching out, gripping the front of Alec’s shirt and then abruptly pulling him into a rather aggressive kiss.

It takes Alec barely a moment to react, for his brain to switch tracks, before he is kissing back just as heatedly, just a few seconds before he is stepping forward, closer, and even closer, forcing Magnus to move backwards with him until the back of Magnus’ knees hit the sofa.

Thus, their first ever argument somehow ends with Magnus halfway sprawled back on the couch, still sitting mostly upright, and Alec straddling him on his knees, locked in a heated kiss.

Angel only knows how this turned into the result, but he is far too focused on Magnus right now to figure out exactly how this happened. He also doesn’t much care, either.

During their less-than-graceful sprawl onto the sofa, Alec somehow managed to get his hand under the warlock’s shirt and now he can’t quite focus on anything but the warmth of Magnus’ smooth skin under his fingers and the feeling of Magnus’ tongue sliding against his.

And he really really likes the position they are in right now, with him kneeling over Magnus, Alec having to actually lean down as Magnus has to stretch slightly to reach his lips, and he definitely likes how it feels to run his thumb along Magnus' stretched throat as they kiss, feeling the vibration of his quiet moan against his fingers when Alec bites his lower lip sends a shiver of heat through him.

Magnus' arm curls tighter around Alec's waist, and this kiss is just so much hotter, so much more intense than any kiss between them before. Everything about it has heat pulsing through Alec, his thoughts hazy and at the same time entirely focused on everything Magnus.

And then Magnus’ pulls away a little, his hand tightening slightly in his hair, tilting Alec’s head to the side as he starts trailing kisses along his jaw, nips at the skin of his neck right above his deflect rune, before his lips wander further down along its dark outline, down Alec’s neck. The warmth of his lips, Magnus' teeth pressing gently into the skin right where his shoulder meets his neck, his tongue soothing the sting.

Alec’s mind swims with heat.

Alec suppresses a sigh as he finally closes the collection of archived reports from the Singapore Institute. Yet another text without so much as a vague mention of something that might help him and Lydia strengthen their case in front of the Clave.

He glances up. Lydia is sitting in the armchair across from the couch Alec himself is on, an even heavier, probably just as mind-numbing, and likely just as irrelevant legal text in her own lap.

Their search for any sort of precedent of two unmarried Shadowhunters sharing the position of Head of an Institute is turning out to be much more time-consuming than either of them had hoped.
They are currently in Alec's office, having decided early on to keep the Head of the Institute's office for their day job and drag any and all material that might be relevant to their research here. So, at least they are comfortable.

He frowns slightly, even as he reaches for yet another collection of archived annual reports on the table in front of him, this time from the Kyoto Institute.

The last time he saw Magnus was two days ago when their still-not-entirely-sure-how-it-started argument ended rather... heatedly on Magnus' couch.

The mere memory has a fizzle of heat run down his spine.

Although to Alec's endless frustration, just when things had really started going somewhere – Alec having managed to get most of Magnus' shirt unbuttoned and finally getting his mouth on the warlock's ridiculously alluring collarbones – his phone had started to ring with a mission alert. Because, of course, it had.

It had been a call for backup from one of the patrol teams and Alec had been forced to leave immediately, barely having the time to get his breath back, to apologize to Magnus for starting their fight in the first place, and to make sure that everything between them was good, no thanks to Alec himself.

Magnus had of course assured him that everything was just fine between them and not to worry, had given him a brief, sadly much less heated kiss goodbye, before opening a portal for him with a smile and even flicked his fingers to fix Alec's appearance.

Magnus hadn't however done anything to fix his own.

And it had taken Alec quite a bit of willpower to make himself leave at all, the sight of Magnus now sitting primly on the couch but looking so incredibly, attractively disheveled, watching him with a coy smile, made Alec want nothing more than to get right back to what they were doing before.

Yeah.

Alec shuffles a bit in his seat and Lydia glances up at him for a second, clearly thinking he is about to say something, before she goes back to her text with a small sigh of her own, just as enthusiastic about their current mode of research as he is.

The point is, Alec would much rather be with his boyfriend right now.

He suppresses another sigh as he makes himself focus on the text in his hands. And promptly scowls at the barely legible handwriting he is faced with. Still, nothing for it.

He is once more shaken from his focus barely ten minutes later by a knock on the door. Lydia doesn't even react and just continues reading.


The smile spreading over his face at seeing Magnus appear in the doorway is just entirely automatic. Alec is simply beyond caring whether it's normal for him to miss his boyfriend this much after having been apart for less than forty-eight hours.

Magnus feels his lips curl in a smile in response to the obviously welcoming, happy expression on Alexander's face.
Earlier today, Magnus decided that it's about time he get over his own insecurities about whether his help and-or presence at the Institute is actually welcome or not, and just go offer both to Alexander.

Worst case scenario, Magnus will have to sulk about being sent away. Best case scenario, he'll get to lighten his boyfriend’s workload a little, possibly even freeing up some of his time. So, giving it a try is really a no-brainer.

"Hello, Alexander," Magnus greets with a smile.

He remains standing in the doorway, however. Because Lydia Branwell is sitting in the armchair across from Alexander and as far as Magnus is aware, his boyfriend has yet to tell her exactly who it is he is dating.

So, he just raises an eyebrow at Alexander in silent question.

Alec knows exactly why Magnus is hesitating to come in.

Seriously, Alec has got to finally figure out a way to deal with this whole coming-out thing. It's rather annoying having to keep his distance from Magnus whenever he stops by the Institute, just because Alec doesn't want someone to see them and then go spreading their relationship around via rumor mill. If only because of his parents. Alec might have had a sort of falling out with them recently, but he'd still very much prefer for them not to hear about Alec’s relationship with Magnus via the Institute’s gossip circles.

But none of this applies to Lydia. She already knows that Alec is gay and that he is dating a Downworlder, so she might as well know exactly who his boyfriend is.

Thus, he just gestures for Magnus to enter as he greets easily in return, "Hey, Magnus."

Surprisingly, at the name Lydia’s head immediately comes up from the text in front of her, as she turns to face Magnus wandering over to where they are sitting after closing the door behind himself.

By the time he reaches them, Lydia has set her book aside and is even getting up from her seat to introduce herself, “It's an honor to meet you, High Warlock Bane. I’m Lydia Branwell.”

Magnus smiles genuinely. The Branwells of the more recent generations have been rather proud of their association with him. His and dear Henry’s invention of the portal might have been more than a century ago but it still is quite the thing to have in your family portfolio.

"Likewise," he returns cheerfully. “I always so enjoy meeting the next generation of Branwells.”

Lydia’s smile widens. "My grandfather and father speak very highly of you," she says. "I’ve truly been looking forward to meeting you ever since coming to New York. Your original research and notes for the invention of the portal is one of the most fascinating reads I’ve ever had."

"Oh, Henry would have been thrilled to hear one of his own family take interest in his research," Magnus says with genuine delight. He sighs somewhat nostalgically, "I do so miss dear Henry. He truly had one of the most inventive minds I have ever encountered. He would just look at things and see possibilities and the portal was just one of his many should-not-be-possible ideas. A great Shadowhunter, a spectacular inventor and a truly wonderful friend."

Alec blinks, even as Lydia and Magnus continue conversing.

So.
That almost just sounded like Magnus might have been involved in the *invention of the portal*… Because, of course, his boyfriend helped invent the most commonly used spell throughout the Shadowworld.

Seriously, how is Alec always the last one to hear about these sorts of things?

He doesn’t get a chance to ask for details before Magnus is already turning toward him to say, "I thought, I’d stop by and maybe offer my help with that research you mentioned. Us warlocks do have some additional, rather helpful tools at our disposal."

Alec tries not to look too adoring, even as he nods.

Of course, despite having a truly demanding job of his own, Magnus' reaction to Alec being swamped with work at the Institute would be to come by for a visit and offer his help. For no other reason than that he can.

Alec still doesn't know how he ever managed to find himself someone like his boyfriend in the first place.

“That would be great,” Alec finally replies, even as he casually pushes some books lying next to him on the couch to clear a space for Magnus to sit down.

He entirely ignores Lydia’s slight, somewhat questioning frown at why the resident High Warlock decided to take time out of his no-doubt busy schedule to help them with their research in the first place. She’ll figure it out soon.

Magnus just sits down gracefully, humming cheerfully, before letting his eyes drift over the stacks upon stacks of books and papers and texts and scrolls spread over the table and various other surfaces in the office, his eyebrows rising in askance.

*Magic, how did they ever plan to work their way through all of this?*

He claps his hands. "Alright. So, precedents, laws and legal loopholes is what you are generally looking for in this veritable, insurmountable mountain of assorted paperwork?" Magnus asks.

A nod from both Shadowhunters currently watching him expectantly.

Magnus quirks a grin, breathes out, magic easily, *eagerly*, freely jumping to his fingertips as he loosens his hold on just a fraction, feeding intent into it as he lets go. And then he just watches it do its work.

There is something indescribably radiant about Magnus as he does magic.

Alec has never seen his boyfriend look so loose and free and joyful before. Seeing him like this, a small, but luminous smile on his face as the feeling of magic around them intensifies is honestly breathtaking.

The magic surrounding them finally manifests as a wind seems to pick up in the office, loose papers being twirled around in a sort of vortex, books being leafed through, lifting off the surfaces they are scattered over, scrolls joining the dance.

It takes barely a minute before the magic is dissipating once more, leaving just a couple of books and a stack of scrolls lying on the table, the rest just haphazardly pushed to the side.

"Those all contain something generally relevant," Magnus points at the few remaining texts.
cheerfully, already leaning forward to reach for one of the books. "Let me know if you think of anything in particular you want to look for. This little trick works much better with specific keywords."

Alec and Lydia just blink rather baffled at the much reduced stack of materials left for them to go through on the table.

Well, then. Turns out having a warlock help you with your research truly is ridiculously convenient.

And Alec just can't help but lean over to press a quick kiss to Magnus' cheek in thanks.

Magnus smiles brightly in response.

Lydia chokes.

When Alec glances at her, her eyes are wide, almost comically so, as the pieces of Alec’s stories about his Downworlder boyfriend clearly click into place, as she realizes that Alec’s boyfriend is no other than Magnus Bane, High Warlock of Brooklyn, himself.

Alec tries to suppress the smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. But he might not be entirely successful.

To Lydia’s credit, it only takes her a few moments, less than a minute, to collect herself.

Then, she coughs, probably a little embarrassed at being caught so off guard, before throwing Alec a narrow-eyed glance – indicating Alec might be paying for this the next time they spar – before she sets her previous reading material aside to pick up a book from the new selection on the table to start paging through instead.

And if it takes a bit longer for Alec's possibly somewhat smug smirk to disappear from his face, well, really, who can blame him?

Things at the Institute finally come to a head only two days later, when the Clave orders Lydia to arrest Meliorn. Who then of course casually reveals to her and several other Shadowhunters that Clary already found the Mortal Cup.

Alec only hears about it afterwards when he gets back from patrol and by that time his siblings have already picked their villain, angrily ranting about Lydia.

He just wants to roll his eyes at them once more acting like Lydia is somehow the root of all of their problems and entirely ignoring the fact that the Clave now being after them might also have something to do with their decision to frequently go against orders.

Sometimes his siblings truly act like children. Thing is, he actually agrees with Lydia that she couldn’t have possibly just ignored a direct order from the Clave like the one for Meliorn’s arrest.

Seriously, he doesn't get why he has to explain this to his siblings at all.

"What did you expect Lydia to do? She was following orders," he says, trying to get them past this rather obsolete topic. "You two know that sometimes you simply aren't given a choice in doing what the Clave demands."
"She could at least have tried to reason with them," Izzy argues, anger in her own features and admonition in her voice, as Jace nods along.

And, okay, Alec gets that Izzy is simply worried about Meliorn, someone she cares about. So, she does get a bit more leeway in this. But there is still very much a limit to his patience.

"Then, by the angel, why don't you do that?" he returns abruptly, clearly startling her. "He's your informant. So, send the required missives to the Clave. Make your objections known. Tell them that Meliorn is a trusted informant and whatever they have been fed about him using you for information in turn is fabricated. Go and do that."

Izzy stares at him wide-eyed, clearly taken aback by his outburst. Even Jace looks startled.

"Wha- Alec?" Izzy asks.

And he just shakes his head slightly, mostly just feeling exasperated now and unwilling to discuss this any longer. They are arguing about things that have already happened. They can talk about Meliorn later. Right now, Alec has more pressing matters on his mind.

"We need to figure out what to do with the Cup now that the Clave knows we have it," he asserts.

Because this is exactly the kind of situation Alec has wanted to avoid since the beginning. People know now that they have the Cup at the Institute. From this point forward, neither freeing Clary’s mother nor Alec’s own agenda could possibly justify keeping the Cup in a compromised location any longer.

The Mortal Cup needs to be returned to Idris, needs to be put somewhere safe, buried so deep under ancient spells and protections that no one - no matter how altruistic their reasons - can get their hands on it. It’s a race against time now.

Jace just scoffs, "Well, it’s not like we can just hand it over to the Clave. Remember what happened the last time they had it?"

Alec just sighs in exasperation, bringing a hand up to frustratedly rub at his forehead. "What are you even saying, Jace?"

Both of his siblings blink at him in surprise, clearly not having expected him to contradict them on this.

Alec raises an eyebrow at them. "The Clave has had the Cup ever since its creation and seems to have managed just fine in keeping it safe. Yes, they messed up once and numerous Shadowhunters and Downworlders paid for that mistake with their lives. But just because of that, you suddenly think the three of us are a better protection for the Mortal Cup than what the entire Clave can provide? Especially now, that everyone knows we actually have it?"

There is a slight pause.

Then, Jace huffs stubbornly. "Well, we’ll just have to figure something out. We are just trying to protect everyone."

"No, you're not," Alec says, scoffing at that ludicrous claim. Seriously, what is it with this all-encompassing self-righteousness that seems to have taken hold of everyone recently? “You might be doing what you think is best but you definitely aren’t doing it for others. You only seem to care about helping Clary, and she only cares about getting her mother back. Other people’s safety doesn’t factor into your decisions at all.”
Jace looks almost offended at that, although Alec really doesn’t get why.

He sighs, exhaustion pulling at him, but he keeps his voice steady. “The Clave wants the Cup, Jace. Clary might have the excuse of not knowing how far they are willing to go to get what they want, but you don’t. You know we can’t win this.”

“But we can’t just hand it over,” Jace says imploringly, pleadingly. "She risked everything to find it." And that right there is the crux of the matter, isn’t it?

To Jace, this isn’t about the fact that they are going against orders or that they are risking one of the most powerful artifacts in the Shadowworld. To Jace, this is solely about Clary, solely about helping her. Nothing else even seems to factor into it for him.

And with how his parabatai is currently looking at him, asking Alec without words to chose Jace’s side, usually this would be where Alec gives in, let Jace have his way. As he always seems to do.

But for once, Alec just can’t. This is just too important, too dangerous, too potentially devastating for him to give in to his siblings’ whims.

So, Alec keeps his voice absolutely firm as he says, “And we risked everything to help her.”

He watches his siblings for a few seconds, trying to impress the importance of what he is saying on them, "The Clave knows we have the Cup now, so Valentine will soon know as well if he doesn’t already. And there is simply no telling what he might do in order to get his hands on it. He has already gotten past our wards once. The Cup has to go back to Idris, where it can be properly protected and the three of us should be figuring out how to get it there without letting it fall into the wrong hands along the way."

Alec looks at his siblings and he just wants to sigh at the stubbornness and calculation in both their eyes. He can practically see both of them scheming.

So apparently, Alec not going along with their harebrained schemes for once doesn’t mean they’ll return the favor and actually help him for once, but rather means that they’ll just try to get around him instead. He keeps his face blank, keeps the disappointment at this not-truly-surprising revelation off his face.

But if they really want to pit themselves against him, then so be it.

So, he finally lets his authority bleed into his voice - takes on the persona of unbending leader that he never uses on his siblings - stating in a tone that brooks no argument, "Just to be clear, this isn’t actually a discussion. This is me telling you, that the Cup is going back to Idris. It isn't safe here any longer. So, either Clary gives the Cup to Lydia or I will hand it over myself.”

His assertion is met with silence and he can see the surprise in his siblings’ features, surprise at Alec for once being utterly unwilling to bend the world for them.

And sometimes he truly wonders what the world looks like through his siblings' eyes.

Whether they truly think that disobeying orders leads to no reprimand, that making demands of the Clave just makes things happen. Whether they truly never figured out that the reason there have never been consequences for their actions was simply because Alec made sure there wouldn't be, that their demands for change only ever made a difference because Alec made sure they would.

And as he finally turns around to leave, he can’t help but think that maybe it’s really about time they
Magnus comes to find him a few hours later.

Alec is in his office, mind still circling around the Cup and his siblings and contingencies and security and so many eventualities and possibilities that his head is honestly starting to spin.

He immediately wipes his face clean of all emotions at the knock on his door.

And then Magnus is sticking his head inside with a slight smile, “Hello, Alexander. Are you busy?”

“Hi,” Alec almost sighs out, feeling something inside him relax at the mere sight of his boyfriend.

Magnus clearly takes that as a sign of welcome, slipping inside and closing the door behind himself.

Alec honestly doesn’t know how he manages to keep getting into the Institute, but clearly everyone here seems to have gotten the not-really-incorrect impression that Magnus just has general access.

Although, by the time Magnus comes to a stop right next to where he is sitting, a concerned frown has overtaken his face.

“You look troubled,” Magnus lays a hand on Alexander’s shoulder, looking down at him worriedly. "Is everything alright?"

Because there is something in Alexander’s eyes that speaks of more than just stress right now. His Shadowhunter who is always so very sure of himself and of his convictions is for once looking almost unsettled, hesitant. It’s uncertainty and Magnus isn’t used to seeing it in Alexander’s eyes. He doesn’t much like seeing it there either.

Alexander breathes out, slightly leaning into the hand Magnus has on his shoulder. “Yeah.” A pause. Then, his shoulders slump slightly. "No, not really."

Alec looks up at his boyfriend, who is just watching him attentively as always simply willing to listen but not pressuring him in any way. Always, always on Alec’s side.

He breathes in.

And then he just lets everything come tumbling out. The Cup in his safe, Meliorn's arrest, Izzy’s anger, being torn between his loyalty for Jace and his duty to keep the Shadowworld safe, his disappointment at finding that the one time he doesn't just go along with his siblings they promptly start scheming how to get around him instead.

And Magnus just listens, as he always does. Although, when Alec talks about his siblings, there is suddenly something slightly darker in Magnus’ eyes, something almost angry. But Alec blinks and it’s gone again as though it had never been there at all.

"So, your siblings are worried about the Cup not being safe in Idris?” Magnus asks, tilting his head slightly as he considers what he has just been told.

Alexander snorts. "I think the Cup's safety is very much second to them just wanting to have it at their disposal. And I don't know what exactly they are planning but I do know there is something."

“Hm,” Magnus hums, trying to hide the anger he is feeling on Alexander’s behalf. "So, you need to get the Cup safely to Idris."
"Yes," Alexander immediately asserts. "The Cup can’t stay here, not now that everyone knows we have it. But I can’t just hand it to the Clave because we know there are traitors hidden somewhere and I don’t want to trust the wrong people with something as important as this." A tired sigh. "But where does that leave me? I can't keep the Cup here, it’s too risky. But I can't just hand it over either. And it's not like I can tell the Clave I’m going to hide it as I see fit. That’s not a fight I can possibly win."

Alec rubs his forehead in exhaustion. He simply doesn’t know what to do.

“You are right, that is not a fight that can be won." Magnus says, looking thoughtful as he leans back against the table right next to where Alec is sitting. Then, "So, why don’t you just turn it entirely around on the Clave?"

"Turn it around?" he raises an eyebrow in question.

Magnus nods, "Just look at the situation from the flipside. Not as the Clave forcing you to give them what they want, but rather as you having something the Clave wants, quite desperately so. Well, it won’t be long before they catch up, figure out your soft spots and flip the situation around on you, making you the one scrambling to meet their demands."

Alec clenches his teeth. He knows that. That is exactly what he is so afraid of, exactly what he means that this is simply not a fight they can win, not if they have to go up against the Clave.

“But, Alexander, right now you are the one holding all the cards.” There is suddenly something mischievously scheming in Magnus’ expression. "If you approach them now, you can probably spin your hiding the Cup as a precaution against spies. And whoever you choose to approach will likely be happy to agree to any demands you make anyway, simply because by being involved they get to take at least some of the credit for the return of one of the Mortal Instruments to Idris. And you know how much the Clave members love one-upping each other in their little power struggles."

Alec blinks. Somehow the option of using the leverage of the Cup to make the Cup itself safer hadn’t even occurred to him until now.

But Magnus is absolutely right. The Clave wants the Cup. And Alec could easily demand additional security measures, demand to get to hand it over to someone Alec chooses, and while he's at it, he might as well make sure that there won't be any backlash for him and his siblings for having kept the Cup at all. He could probably even include Meliorn’s freedom in the deal…

And suddenly, an idea takes root in his mind. An idea that would quite neatly solve most of Alec’s current problems in one go.

Although, for this to work, he will definitely need some help.

Magnus watches his boyfriend just stare sightlessly at his desk for a while, lost in thought as his mind runs through possibilities, formulating and discarding plans.

And when Alexander finally looks up at him again, focuses back on Magnus, the Shadowhunter's usual self-assuredness has clearly returned, a confident, triumphant gleam in Alexander's eyes.

Well, would you look at that delightfully scheming expression, Magnus thinks, a heated shiver running down his spine as he watches a slight smirk tug at Alexander's mouth. And, magic, does he wear it ever so well.
So, a malec fight, Lydia finding out, the argument between the siblings and then malec plotting together... I honestly quite like the mixture, even though it turned into yet another absolute monster of a chapter XD

And it was surprisingly difficult writing the Lightwood argument without having Alec turn all ooc and air all of his grievances at once, but I hope it still turned out alright. And I know I could have just cut the entire first scene but I really wanted to make malec’s first fight about something trivial instead of those frequent, dramatic existential crises they had in the series... Would absolutely love to know what you think :D

Also, I tried something new for the malec scenes with rather frequent POV changes instead of longer single-POV segments. Would love some feedback on whether that worked out alright :)

And thank you so much for your comments and kudos! You guys are just lovely (^^^)
Alec opens the door to Meliorn's cell, letting Lydia and Magnus enter first before following them inside.

The seelie looks up from where he is sitting on the floor, back against the wall, both palms flat against the ground.

"Oh, what a delight. Visitors in my cell," he notes mockingly.

"Meliorn," Magnus greets.

"Bane." A nod. "And the Clave representative herself. My, what an honor to receive such esteemed visitors in my cell, where I await my sentence for my dastardly deeds." His voice practically drips with sarcasm.

Magnus snorts. "Oh, don't be so dramatic. I've seen you stuck in situations much worse than this. This barely counts as a pickle in comparison."

Alec is honestly a little surprised at the lighthearted banter between the two Downworlders.

"As have you," Meliorn promptly returns.

"Oh, please don't remind me," Magnus waves a hand at him. "Last time I was stuck in a Shadowhunter cell really isn't a good time to remember."

"Is it ever?" Meliorn asks with a smirk before he finally sobers. "So, what brings you here, High Warlock."

Magnus promptly turns serious and gestures at Alec and Lydia standing beside him. "These two have a proposition for you. I'm here to vouch for their character and to ensure that this conversation stays entirely private."

Meliorn turns towards the two of them. "A proposition?" There is an almost impressive amount of skepticism in his voice.

Alec honestly couldn't care less what the seelie thinks of him as long as he plays along with their plan.

So, he just nods, saying, "We are about to negotiate a deal with the Clave and we would be willing to include your freedom without a transfer to Idris or additional questioning in that bargain."

"Hm." Meliorn pauses, looking thoughtful. "I assume this would be the deal surrounding the Mortal Cup, then?"

"Yes," Lydia confirms.

Meliorn turns back towards Magnus. "You are willing to just let them hand the Mortal Cup back to the Clave, Bane?"

"No, I am not," Magnus raises his eyebrows at him. "And please get off your high horse. The only
reason the Clave knows about the Cup's location at all is because you told them. This is simply
damage control. But no one here intends to just simply hand it over to the Clave."

The seelie concedes the point with a nod, turning back to eye Alec and Lydia intently, expectantly,
clearly aware that if it were as simple as them just demanding Meliorn's freedom from the Clave in
exchange for the Cup, there would have been no need to approach him beforehand. "So, some sort
of plan then? And you need something from me to make it work," he states more than asks.

"Yes," Alec confirms. "The Cup as a bargaining chip will give us quite a bit of leeway with the
Clave, but we still don't know what sort of motivation or even who might have been behind
orchestrating your arrest."

Lydia adds on, "It would be much easier to assure your immediate freedom if we could reasonably
claim we already got you to talk, even better if we can prove that whoever fed them the information
about you working with Valentine was lying."

"Ah. You need information." Meliorn is now smirking rather condescendingly. "You need
something at the very least relevant, preferably big, but definitely easy-to-prove. And in exchange,
you would include my freedom in the bargain around the Mortal Cup."

Alec nods, "Exactly."

Meliorn nods slowly, watching them intently, before finally focusing specifically on Alec. "Your
sister always claimed you are a man of your word."

"I am."

The faerie turns towards Magnus. "And you vouch for them?"

"I do," Magnus affirms.

Another few seconds of contemplative silence.

Then, Meliorn shrugs, nonchalance in every line of his body, even as a slow, rather devious,
vindictive grin spreads over his face. "Well in that case, I could offer you the location of one of
Valentine’s lairs, the place where he murdered our scouts, where he conducts most of his experiments
and where he is holding Jocelyn Fray."

Alec keeps his face impassive despite his surprise.

That’s actually much better than he had ever dared to hope Meliorn would be able or willing to
provide them with. Yes, they can definitely work with that.

They are currently in a meeting with Imogen Herondale, the Inquisitor of the Clave, and Magnus
watches as Alexander calmly, confidently handles one of the most powerful figures in the Clave.

Once done with their plotting, the three of them - meaning Lydia, Alexander and Magnus himself -
had quickly settled on the Inquisitor as the best option of who to approach about their plan.

Magnus might not particularly like her – her less than favorable views of Downworlder and
uncompromising insistence on the law sees to that – but he can still admit that she is one of the few
Shadowhunters he knows with true integrity. Imogen Herondale would never lower herself to working with someone like Valentine.

And while some of the bargains they want to strike might be somewhat outside of the Inquisitor's purview, her personal influence in the Clave is such, that if she signs off on it, it's still a done deal.

Personal dislike or not, she had simply been the best choice for what they needed.

So, Lydia had requested a meeting and Imogen had arrived at the Institute barely a few hours later, most likely assuming this to concern the Mortal Cup.

Sure, she clearly hadn't expected the meeting to also include a Lightwood as well as the resident High Warlock - her suspicion likely not helped at all by Magnus immediately raising additional, rather heavily fortified security wards around the room - but the thought of the Mortal Cup had clearly been enough of a motivation for her to at least hear them out.

And now, the four of them have been in this meeting behind closed doors for more than an hour, having already argued their way through Lydia and Alexander's bid for a joined Head of the New York Institute position, discussed the intel they got from Meliorn regarding Valentine's lair, and lastly they confirmed that they do in fact have the Cup and are even happy to hand it over to the Clave.

Just with a few conditions attached.

Admittedly, they have yet to tell her that Meliorn's information isn't actually accurate any longer, that the Cup isn't at the Institute anymore, hasn’t been here for going on two days now.

Because the very first step of Alexander's - beautifully multilayered - plan had been to simply go ahead and move the Cup to a safe location, without anyone the wiser, before people figured out that it wasn't Clary but Alexander who had it and would thus start watching his every move rather closely.

So, Magnus had made a flawless - though entirely useless - copy of the tarot card Alexander handed him to be kept as a decoy in the safe. And then, in a perfectly clandestine meeting, Magnus and Lydia had taken the real card to his friend Zachariah of the Silent Brothers. And Magnus could practically see the relief in Alexander as soon as they had returned with the news that the Cup was safe.

So. Everyone in the Shadowworld might currently think they know the Cup's location, but they would all, collectively be wrong.

The third Mortal Instrument is already back in Idris, kept safe in the Silent City - or wherever Zachariah chose to hide it - and there are currently only four people who know about that fact. Well, soon to be five, once they've struck their deal and let Imogen in on it.

Which brings them to the next part of the plan.

"We suspect that we have a traitor at the Institute," Alexander asserts calmly, his face impressively calm, despite the fury Magnus knows he feels at that very fact.

"A traitor?" Imogen asks but there is no actual derision in her voice. Everyone knows that Valentine has his people everywhere.

"Possibly more than one," Alexander confirms. "Valentine is simply too well informed. But we have yet to figure out who exactly is providing him with the intel."
"We want to root them out," Lydia asserts.

Imogen watches them, her eyes sharp but her expression not giving anything away. “And how are you planning to do that?” she asks.

Lydia doesn't so much as twitch despite the intent, somewhat condescending stare she is faced with.

Magnus might have only officially met Lydia a few days ago, but the more time he spends with her, the more he likes her. She is the exact right amount of straightforward and devious, honest in general but cunning if needed, reliable, loyal and knows perfectly well how to choose her battles, knows which things in life are worth fighting for, even already knows true loss despite her age. Her hard shell exterior built out of necessity more than preference and hiding quite a bit of compassion and kindness underneath.

He can definitely see why Alexander gets along with her so well.

“We want to use the Mortal Cup as bait,” Lydia says calmly.

“No,” Imogen refuses immediately, her face set and her tone brooking no question. "That is not an option. The Cup is far too valuable for that.”

“We agree,” Alexander takes over again. “We don't intend to use the real Cup. But we would propose keeping its removal from the Institute a secret for another few days and claim there to be a sort of ceremony to be held around it here in a few days, where the Cup will supposedly be brought out of hiding."

Lydia promptly picks up where he leaves off, and this easy, almost natural rhythm these two Shadowhunters have developed despite only having known each other for a couple of weeks is honestly rather beautiful to watch.

"The real Cup will be nowhere near the Institute at that point," she says. "But the promise of the Cup being accessible during the celebration will make it the best time of attack and might root out anyone who would try to get at it." 

Imogen still has her eyebrows raised with a skeptical expression but Magnus can see the consideration in her eyes.

It's a good plan. The benefits if it works are immense, and if it doesn't work they won't lose anything, no one even aware of there ever having been a scheme at all.

Alexander's mind truly is a beautifully devious place.

“A ceremony involving the more prominent members of the Clave, I assume?” Imogen finally asks, her face unreadable.

"Yes," Alec nods in reply to her question.

Imogen raises her eyebrows at them. “And who exactly is in on this plan of yours?”

“Only the people in this room,” Alec replies.

This part of his plan for rooting out any traitors isn't really necessary, but the thought of anyone loyal to the Circle hiding in their midst, amongst the people he works with and trusts, giving out information to Valentine, putting Shadowhunters from his Institute at risk, makes him clench his teeth in fury. Whoever the traitors are, he wants them found and he wants them out.
“And I assume you don’t want to tell anyone else going forward,” she continues.

“No one aside from the people in this room,” Lydia nods.

“What about your parabatai, Mr. Lightwood?” she raises her eyebrows at him almost challengingly.

“Absolutely no one,” Alec reiterates firmly.

He knows Jace and Izzy would never truly betray him - no matter how irritated he may be at them right now - but they simply aren't the best at keeping their mouths entirely shut. Izzy tends to let information slip once she gets talking and Jace would at the very least tell Clary.

And if Alec has learned one thing about that girl it's the fact that she will use anything she can get her hands on for her own advantage. She'd trade the information away in a heartbeat if it got her any closer to her personal goals, no matter what that might mean for the rest of them.

Thankfully, Imogen is now nodding thoughtfully, at last indicating her general agreement with their plan.

Suddenly, for the first time since she got here, her eyes switch over to Magnus, sitting at Lydia's other side and having kept mostly silent until now.

There is something in Imogen's eyes as she focuses on Magnus that Alec can't quite identify. It's definitely nothing particularly positive but it also isn't the sort of hatred or even disgust he has seen from other Shadowhunters when looking at Downworlders.

And Magnus just watches her right back, entirely calm, unbothered by her stare, looking perfectly relaxed.

Finally, her lips curl slightly as she says, "I might not trust you, High Warlock Bane, but I do know about your history with the Circle and thus that there is simply no chance whatsoever of you ever betraying anyone to them."

Magnus just keeps his expression perfectly bland. "Indeed, Inquisitor."

She nods – rather grudgingly – and then goes right back to entirely ignoring him.

Magnus feels himself relax a little. He had been worried that his presence here might make her less inclined to go along with anything they brought before her today. Hence, his silence in this meeting so far.

So, he just continues to watch as the three Shadowhunters proceed to haggle over the details of their deal, fleshing out plans and striking bargains.

At this point, he is mainly just here to make sure that nothing and no one is listening in on this conversation. And, sure, he could maintain the wards just as well from the outside but then again, there is also no way he is leaving. Just in case something in the plan changes for some reason.

Because if Alexander is truly planning to go up against Valentine - the most wanted man in the entire Shadowworld – as well as any possible traitors hiding in his own Institute, then you can bet that Magnus will want to know every detail of what will be going on.

How else is he going to protect his boyfriend’s back?

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The first part of their plan commences entirely - almost surprisingly - smoothly and much sooner than they had honestly expected.

Apparently, Imogen sees no reason to delay making use of the piece of intel they managed to get their hands on and just has them follow her back to Alicante as soon as their meeting is done.

And once there, she promptly signs off on their raid on Valentine's lair, having them assemble a taskforce of twenty of Idris' finest right then and there. Alec is honestly relieved - they simply do not have this sort of manpower at the Institute, at least not without thinning out the personnel for guard duties, missions and patrols at the same time - and also rather surprised by just how willing she is to take immediate and efficient action.

Especially considering just how displeased she had been when they finally told her about having already moved the Cup out of the Institute and back to Idris.

Thankfully, she seemed to agree with their reasoning that it had been safer to move the Cup before anyone thought to focus too much attention on them, because a meeting between the Inquisitor, the current Head of the Institute, a High Warlock, and the Lightwood most likely in possession of the Cup won't stay a secret for long and they will likely be watched rather closely from now on for an attempt at remove the Cup from the Institute.

There was even something almost like grudging respect in Imogen's eyes when they told her about their solution for how exactly to hide the Cup.

Point is, instead of reprimanding them for moving the Cup without informing the Clave beforehand, Imogen had accepted their reasoning - if only because it put the Mortal Cup's security above everything else - and then just moved on to the next part of their deal, namely the raid on Valentine's hideout, and most importantly, putting Alec and Lydia in command.

Because this right here is actually one of the essential pieces of their plan and getting themselves appointed Heads of the New York Institute.

During their initial planning session, Alec and Lydia had quickly decided against using the leverage of the Cup for their own personal agenda.

It just feels cheap somehow, like being appointed Heads in exchange for returning the Mortal Cup where it belongs wouldn't be much of an actual success at all. They want to get there based on their own merits.

Sure, Alec might have been just as involved in retrieving the Cup as his siblings and Clary herself had been, but distracting some mundane police so others could sneak invisibly through their offices doesn't really feel like much of an achievement. Not to even mention that Lydia hadn't been involved at all and also how hypocritical it would have been to lecture Clary about abusing the Mortal Cup for her personal gain and then turn around and do the exact same thing.

And then, Meliorn had given them his intel and they had decided to gamble on this mission – a raid on one of Valentine’s main hideouts – being enough to give them an edge over any other contenders for the title of Head of the New York Institute.

Hence, their need for today's mission to go well.

And for once, thankfully, everything just goes exactly to plan.

They assemble the taskforce for a spontaneously organized stealth raid, the mission parameters only being given out at the very last moment, no one wanting to risk some sort of warning getting to
Valentine beforehand.

Magnus, as a powerful warlock already in-the-know - and somehow already having gotten the location from Meliorn - is officially commissioned to portal them all pretty much right to Valentine’s doorstep.

And once their entire group makes it through the portal, Magnus promptly turns to face the warehouse they find themselves standing in front of and then proceeds to take down the rather impressive wards surrounding the building. By simply tearing them apart with his own magic.

Alec watches as that same glow returns to the warlock as the last time he saw him do magic, watches as his magic gathers in glowing strands coiling around his hands, watches Magnus look breathtakingly free and radiant despite his obvious focus on the task at hand and the seriousness of his expression.

Alec just can't rip his eyes away from the sight of him, surrounded by the blazingly bright, swirling tendrils of his magic, the air around them seeming to practically vibrate with Magnus' power.

And there are a few moments where Alec thinks he can almost feel the magic curl along his skin, can almost taste it in the air, as their surroundings seem to actually warm just from the sheer amount of power Magnus is emitting.

Magnus is breathtaking and Alec simply cannot look away.

Then, for just an instance, Magnus glances his way.

And Alec kind of forgets how to breathe.

Because, Magnus' eyes. Magnus' warlock mark - something Alec has admittedly spent more than a little time wondering about - is in his eyes.

Beautiful, golden cat eyes, ablaze with power, bright with his magic curling around him, through him, almost luminescent in their glow.

By the angel, Alec just wants to step closer, wants to reach out and touch Magnus, wants to run his thumbs along his cheekbones below those breathtakingly beautiful eyes, wants to see them close up.

They are stunning, so very, incredibly beautiful.

Magnus blinks, still focused on him. And Alec swallows.

They are also incredibly attractive.

There is a small, almost tentative smile quirking at the corner of Magnus' mouth now and Alec is so caught up in staring that he almost wants to protest when the warlock finally turns away from him again to fully focus back on the wards.

Alec manages to stop himself, though.

So. Yet another thing to add to the list of things he finds attractive about his boyfriend. Because that list clearly wasn't long enough already, he thinks sardonically.

The wards come crumbling down, seeming to simply buckle under the weight of Magnus' power. Alec makes himself focus forward again, hand tightening on his bow.

*Later. I'll have time to think about those eyes some more* later.
Another few seconds for the magical backlash of torn-apart wards to subside, and then, their group of twenty Shadowhunters presses forward.

The raid itself is almost ridiculously easy.

The seven Circle members guarding the warehouse stand absolutely no chance against them and are easily overtaken, not one of them given the chance to get away. Three are killed in the fight, two near-fatally wounded but two of them captured with barely a scratch on them.

And not a single Shadowhunter under Lydia and Alexander’s command gets more than a few scratches in the fight.

The entire raid takes them all of thirty minutes from the moment they stepped through the portal.

Like he said, almost ridiculously easy.

Valentine himself isn’t there - well, they hadn't really expected him to be - but just as Alec had hoped, they do find Jocelyn Fray, asleep under some sort of green-glowing spell, as well as the two dead seelie scouts, proving Meliorn's claim regarding just where Valentine had gotten the seelie blood for those creatures from.

They also find numerous other bodies, twisted, mutated in various ways from the experiments done on them. It's a gruesome sight and packing up everything they find here to be analyzed by the tech department later takes longer than the raid itself did.

Thankfully, they do have a warlock with them who makes the entire packing process much easier, or they might have been stuck here for quite a while longer.

And now, as Lydia and Alec sit through the usual post-mission debrief - Magnus just having taken off to Brooklyn instead of sitting through yet another Shadowhunter meeting - he can’t quite help the quick smile flitting over his face.

Everything today went either exactly as planned or - ridiculously enough - even better than they had hoped. That's definitely not something you get to say all that often in their line of work.

But somehow, within less than just forty-eight hours, most of Alec's more pressing concerns have suddenly been taken care of. The Cup's safety, Meliorn's freedom, their bid for the Head position, Jocelyn' retrieval, his siblings' scheming and as a cherry on top, Alec was even able to bring in Magnus as an official, Clave-approved collaborator with their Institute.

So.

With all of this suddenly resolved, Alec could actually take a night off for once, could maybe even think about finally staying at over at his boyfriend's again.

Because he hasn't been able to get the image of Magnus with magic swirling around him, eyes - those beautiful golden cat eyes - aglow with power, so very easily tearing down the wards, out of his head. Magnus' magic had been so thick in the air that Alec thought he’d almost been able to taste it. And he can't help but wonder whether he would be able to taste the magic on Magnus' skin as well.

A low thrum of heat runs through him. And for the first time, there is nothing keeping him from doing something about it.

So, Alec decides he has plans tonight. Plans that involve him, Magnus, and hopefully a bed.
Now, if only they could please get done with this debrief, that would be great.

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When they finally get back from Idris, Lydia and Alec are both still a little giddy from today's success.

They get to the Head office and then just stand there, looking at each other for a few seconds, before Lydia finally huffs a laugh. "Well, don't take this the wrong way, but I certainly never expected this rather convoluted plan of yours to work out this perfectly. No offense to our collective planning skills, of course," Lydia says sardonically, but unable to entirely suppress her smile.

Alec lets his lips quirk into an answering grin. "You're telling me. I didn't even know that plans could do that, just work out exactly as intended."

Her smile widens, even as she eyes the stacks of paperwork on her desk with definite exasperation, clearly not in the mood to just get back to work right now.

"You know what? I think I'm going to take the night off, reward myself. Take a long bath and maybe even get an early night. We certainly deserve it." She starts moving towards the door, throwing him a glance. "You should do the same."

He follows her out of the office, even as his grin widens slightly, "Oh, I intend to."

She side-eyes him, her eyes lighting with some humor as they come to a stop at a corridor crossing. "Going out to celebrate, then?" she asks, clearly knowing exactly just where Alec is going to be spending his night off.

He just ticks one of his eyebrows up briefly at her with a slight grin and then easily turns down the corridor in the direction of the Ops center. His smile widens at Lydia's quiet laughter sounding along the corridor as she starts making her way in the opposite direction towards the cells in the basement.

They don't even need to discuss that Lydia is going to set Meliorn free - as per their agreement - and Alec is going to let Clary know about her mother being safe. Sometimes it really is a little eerie just how easily they understand each other, how naturally they work together.

Now, where to find one Clary Fray?

Thankfully, he runs into Raj in the Ops center, who gives him a look that tells Alec he might still very much look like he came fresh off the battlefield, but at least points him in the right direction.

Alec finds Clary and his siblings in one of the training areas, Izzy apparently in the process of teaching Clary how to use a short-staff against a sword.

He stops a few steps into the room, having no intention to actually stick around for longer than he needs to. He definitely still has plans.

“Clary,” he says, his voice carrying, immediately getting their attention.

The three of them turn.

And Izzy promptly does a rather obvious double-take at Alec’s current appearance, clearly recognizing his post-mission look, immediately scanning him with her eyes, assessing him for any injuries he might be hiding. Jace steps up next to her, the same sort of worry in his eyes.
But their worry is entirely unnecessary.

Well, Alec did get a few scratches during the raid, even one rather deep gash in his thigh, but those have already been healed.

Hey, he is dating a possibly-all-powerful warlock. His wounds were gone pretty much the moment he walked within reaching distance of Magnus’ magic. And he is sure that the only reason Magnus stopped short of also fixing the rips in Alec’s clothing or cleaning the dust, dirt and sweat off him, was to avoid making his preferential treatment too obvious, lest it lead to some uncomfortable questions for Alec.

He barely manages to keep his smile suppressed, even as he nods at both of his siblings, telling them without words that he is just fine.

Clary speaks up, “Yeah? What is it?” She sounds rather wary, most likely at Alec seeking her out at all.

He doesn’t bother with any sort of preamble, ”We found Valentine’s lair and your mother’s location.”

There is silence.

"What?” Clary takes a step towards him, desperation flitting through her eyes.” How? Where?"

Alec skips right over the question of how exactly they managed to find her.

Because Alec understands bargaining chips, understands why Meliorn would have kept something like the hideout's location to himself, something to offer in case he ever needed to strike a bargain but not essential enough to be accused of betrayal for holding it back and he had certainly been proven right to have taken that precaution.

But Alec very much doubts Clary would see it that way.

"In an abandoned warehouse,” Alec just answers her last question. “We organized a full assault to take the location and retrieve your mother-“

He doesn't get the chance to continue before Clary takes another step closer, exclaiming, ”An assault? You can’t! What if she gets hurt?” Determination lights her eyes as she pleads, “You have to tell me where she is, Alec!"

And he just wants to sigh. This is exactly why he didn’t tell her about the raid beforehand.

Clary wouldn't care that Shadowhunters are all highly trained and that they literally do raids like this for a living, wouldn't care that an organized full-on assault by a group of Idris’ best is pretty much unstoppable.

No, Clary would take the information and run with it, would disappear within moments to start her own unplanned, disorganized attempt at saving her mother, most likely dragging half of Alec’s family along with her, put everyone in danger and in the end self-righteously proclaim it had been 'the right thing to do'.

Angel, he is tired of this.

But she also misunderstood what he just said, clearly assuming that the assault has yet to happen.

“That's not wha-“
“Yes, it is!” she interrupts. He feels his eyes narrow and Jace steps forward to lay a cautioning hand on Clary's arm, clearly able to tell just how thin Alec's patience is wearing with her right now. She seems undeterred, “You can’t just put my mother at risk like that, Alec! You have to tell me where she is!”

Alec really wishes someone would finally explain to this girl that there is in fact an entire world outside of her self-absorbed little bubble of self-righteousness.

He keeps his face entirely impassive but his voice gaining a clear edge as he says, “We found Jocelyn Fray under an as of yet unidentified sleeping spell and she is currently in the process of being transferred from Idris to the medical bay upstairs, entirely unharmed.”

There is a second of absolute stillness, before he can see Izzy’s eyes actually widen and something almost like hurt flitting over Jace's face.

And Clary just stares at Alec, apparently speechless.

He raises his eyebrows at all three of them and then - before they have a chance to say anything - he just turns around and leaves. He has no interest in waiting around for them to get their bearings.

Alec has other things on his mind. Things like Magnus. Things like maybe finally getting to have sex with his ridiculously hot boyfriend, something Alec has been thinking about - daydreaming about - for literally weeks at this point, even since before they ever officially got together.

He isn't even particularly nervous about it anymore. Maybe because still being a virgin has never been this big thing to Alec or maybe simply because it’s Magnus he’ll be having sex with.

So. Shower first - to get all the grime and blood and sweat off himself - and then he very much intends to go by the loft to see his boyfriend and maybe finally take the next step in their relationship.

Even if they don't get around to actual sex tonight, Alec simply wants more, wants to have Magnus, wants to be able to touch him, taste him, see him, feel him.

Just something more.

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Magnus is rather pleasantly surprised when he feels Alexander cross his wards.

It's been barely two hours since Magnus made a portal for the Shadowhunters to get back to Alicante and for himself to return home. And as he makes his way to the entrance to greet his boyfriend, he can't help but smile at the thought that it certainly is lovely to have someone so very clearly wanting to be around him and also entirely unashamed to show it.

Although, Magnus' vague thoughts about them maybe having a nice dinner together before spending the evening relaxing on the balcony again are promptly discarded as soon as Alexander steps into the loft. Only to immediately pull him into a kiss, the door barely having closed behind him.

And this kiss is different, weightier somehow. There is intent behind it, the sort of intent that has an immediate pulse of arousal run through Magnus, heat dragging through his veins.

He just can't help but respond to it, one hand coming to land on Alexander's chest, curling slightly into the fabric of his shirt, the other sliding around his hip, keeping him close.

And immediately, Alexander steps in even closer, deepening the kiss, quickly turning it from their
usual, quick greeting kiss into something heated, hotter.

Magnus is powerless to just let himself sink into the heat, reacting to the obvious want radiating from the Shadowhunter.

Only when he feels Alexander start guiding them towards the bedroom, does he manage to make himself pull back a little. Well, not too far, not even letting go of his lovely Shadowhunters but enough to detach their lips, enough to speak.

"Alexander?" he asks, watching as the Shadowhunter glances down at his lips before he focuses fully on Magnus.

And what a lovely sight it is.

Alexander's eyes are slightly darker than usual, desire dilating his pupils slightly, and he clearly has no intention to withdraw in the least. If anything, his hold on Magnus only seems to grow a little tighter.

And maybe Magnus should pull back, should make them talk this through before they actually take this step.

But then again, they have been building up to this, have been dating a few weeks now, have been growing closer for months, building a solid relationship. They even talked about sex before - even if in rather abstract terms - and some of their make out sessions having gotten more than heated recently, so it's not even like they haven't done anything at all before.

But Magnus still has to at least ask. Not whether Alexander is sure or whether he has thought this through - his Shadowhunter never does anything without having thought it through beforehand - but simply to make sure that there aren't any outside reasons for Alexander deciding he wants to go further, nothing that makes him feel like he has to or that he should.

As long as this is a decision Alexander made on his own, simply because he wants to, then Magnus is absolutely, fully on board.

"Darling," he says quietly. "You know there is no pressure, right?"

"I know," Alexander says, both of his hands coming up to frame Magnus’ face, fingers curling around to the back of his head, cradling his skull. "But I want this. I want you." He moves to press a kiss to Magnus' lips, this one warm, firm, just their lips moving against each other, unhurried. An assurance.

Alexander pulls back a little, meeting Magnus' eyes, saying quietly but without hesitance, "I want to take the next step." He leans in again. This kiss is definitely a little firmer, a little more heated, though still mostly chaste.

And when he pulls back again, there is once more something in his expression, something that has electricity running along Magnus' spine, as Alexander murmurs against his lips, "Can we?"

And, really, how is Magnus supposed to ever say no to that?

So, he doesn't resist anymore, lets himself be pulled into another deep kiss, lets himself be pushed backwards in the general direction of his bedroom, his hands coming up to curve around Alexander’s jaw on either side, fingers tangling in his hair.

The heat between them builds quickly.
Alexander is kissing him hot and deep and languid, and Magnus almost finds himself pressed against
the door to his bedroom, too distracted by the hands running up underneath his shirt to remember to
open the door behind his own back.

Alexander doesn’t even seem to notice, one of his hands coming to press into the small of Magnus’
bak under his shirt, warm against his skin, heat spreading from the point of contact, as though to
make sure that Magnus stays as close to him as possible. Magnus rather agrees with the sentiment.

And once in the bedroom, there is even a bit of laughter as they stumble around trying rather
unsuccessfully to help each other undress while both of them seem entirely unwilling to actually stop
touching, stop kissing, hands unwilling to really let go.

They tumble onto the bed, Alexander shirtless now, but Magnus only having succeeded in removing
his boots so far, both of them grinning a little, and Magnus adores the lightheartedness, the laughter
at their own eagerness shared in the space between them.

Alexander reaches out, hand settling at the back of Magnus' neck, pulling him down for another kiss,
licks into his mouth, and within moments the kiss turns from giggly and eager, to slow and sensual,
unhurried, hands brushing over skin still hidden beneath clothes.

He lets Alexander take the lead, lets him undress Magnus with large, warm, weapon-calloused hands
immediately running over any exposed skin, easily, sensually exploring, leaving tingles of heat in
their wake.

The reverence and heat and desire in his eyes once he finally gets Magnus entirely out of his clothes
is more than a little heady, his absolute focus on Magnus sending shivers of heat along his spine,
want curling through him, tingling across his skin.

And somehow, sex with Alexander is something else entirely, something entirely new.

It’s heat and sweat and laughter. Intense desire and tender warmth. Alexander with his eyes dark and
blown-out from desire, absolutely fixated on Magnus.

But it’s the rosy-cheeked intrigue at everything new Magnus shows him that truly does him in, that
has him so absolutely helpless to let Alexander do whatever he pleases with him, happy to only take
over whenever he falters.

Magnus knows he has never had anyone quite as innocent as Alexander in his bed, but at the same
time the Shadowhunter is so very clearly unbothered by his own inexperience, entirely
unselfconscious, simply relying on Magnus, trusting Magnus to show him what he needs to know.

And, magic, if that trust doesn’t do things to him.

There is just something about being Alexander's first in everything.

Something that has desire dripping through his veins like morphine, his fingers curling in want,
possessive heat and warm adoration pulsing in his chest. It should be a contrast, but with Alexander
it just isn't.

Oh, what this boy does to him.

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Alec is tired, boneless, his limbs lethargic, feeling happily exhausted in a way he doesn’t think he’s
ever been before.
He is lying mostly curled along Magnus' side, head resting on the warlock's arm, their legs tangled together. There is just enough space between them to be able to look at each other and Alec is warm and comfortable, and sleep actually sounds like a great idea right now. But he can’t seem to make himself actually close his eyes.

Because Magnus like this - blissed-out and happy, skin still a little flushed, eyes mostly closed but open just enough for Alec to see the glowing gold of his cat eyes, pupils still slightly blown, blinking lazily back at him - might just be the absolutely best thing he has ever seen.

He watches almost absently as Magnus lifts one hand - the one currently not curled around Alec’s back - lazily twirling it in the air above them, the glow in his eyes briefly flashing as his magic runs over them gently, cleaning them as well as the sheets they are lying in.

How convenient.

Because there is simply no way Alec is moving right now, not even to get clean or to switch off the light. He is staying right where he is, curled along the warmth of Magnus’ side, comfortable and relaxed and happy.

Magnus tilts his head slightly forward to press a warm, lingering, tender kiss to his lips, his magic dimming out the lights around them. And Alec feels his chest expand on a content sigh as he presses slightly closer into the warmth of Magnus’ body and finally closes his eyes.

The world can just wait a while.

Chapter End Notes

So. Stupidly long chapter with planning, plotting, a raid and then smut, at last! Well, at least kind of smut XD But since this fic has been perfectly pg so far and my smut tends to turn out rather explicit, I didn’t want to just up the rating like that without any warning. Maybe I’ll add another scene later on...

And I would love to know what you think about the fix-it for the whole stele-theft thing. Because I absolutely hated that in canon and thus I decided to fix it before anyone even has the chance to go behind Alec's back like that :)

Also, fair warning, there is likely going to be three more chapters (four at most) to this fic in total, so the end is drawing near now!

And thank you so so much for your lovely comments! They are truly keeping me so motivated for this fic right now ( aldı)
There is a small but entirely irrepressible smile on Magnus’ face as he lets his fingers lightly follow the patterns painted by the early morning sun on the covers over a still sleeping Alexander's chest.

He woke up a while ago to find himself curled along his boyfriend’s – his lover’s – side, warm and comfortable and just simply happy.

By magic, it has been a long time since he had this. Not just the physical intimacy of waking next to someone like this, but also the feeling of belonging here, of feeling entirely comfortable, like this is where he is supposed to be, no hurry to be anywhere else.

Because this one is Magnus'.

He smiles, heart swelling in his chest with pure, simple happiness, can't help but press a light kiss to the skin of Alexander's chest, feeling entirely peaceful as he indulges in simply lying pressed into his warm side, skin against skin, heartbeat under his ear, even breaths ruffling Magnus' hair.

He thinks he could easily, happily spend an entire day just like this.

Although, it isn't much longer until he feels Alexander starting to move slightly, clearly about to wake and Magnus merely stills his fingers, rests his hand fully on top of the covers.

There are a few more seconds of silence and then the arm Magnus is resting on moves to fully curl around his back.

“Morning,” Alexander rasps.

Magnus' smile widens. “Good morning,” he greets back, tilting his head slightly to look up at Alexander.

Who just smiles back openly, eyes still slightly bleary, his expression so absolutely comfortable and happy and content that Magnus immediately abandons any thoughts of asking him how he is feeling. It’s more than clear by the expression on his face that Alexander feels nothing even remotely negative about what they did last night.

“Sleep well?” he just asks instead, pressing a kiss beneath Alexander's jaw before once more relaxing fully into his side.

Alexander sighs out happily, stretching slightly in the covers before his free hand comes up to cover Magnus' hand on his chest. “Better than I’ve slept in what feels like months. I honestly can’t even remember the last time I slept this well.”

Magnus immediately swallows down any and all rather lascivious remarks promptly springing to mind at that.

Comfortable with having taken the next step in their relationship or not, he should at least let Alexander get a little more used to having sex at all before Magnus starts with the playful teasing and suggestive commentary.
After all, it’s not like they are in any sort of hurry. If Magnus gets his way, he’ll have decades to introduce Alexander to anything and everything that’s worth trying in the bedroom, starting with verbal foreplay all the way to anything not-so-vanilla Magnus has come across over the years.

But for now, he just presses a kiss to Alexander’s chest, very effectively hiding his playful, possibly somewhat predatory smile.

A smile which then promptly turns sappily endeared when Alexander just reacts by pressing a sweet kiss to Magnus’ forehead in return, arm tightening even further around him.

And of course Alexander would turn out to be all sweet and cuddly the morning after. Because, clearly, Magnus needed even more reasons to absolutely adore this boy.

Alec grimaces down at himself as he finally makes it back to the Institute, wanting nothing more than to take a shower.

His morning patrol shift that had forced him to leave the loft about two hours ago ended with him having to chase a demon through the sewers of New York. Something which certainly did nothing to improve his less-than-enthusiastic mood at having had to leave Magnus’ place in the first place. Because Alec would much rather have stayed there. Would much rather have stayed with his warm and smiling boyfriend, looking all alluring and soft in his silk robe worn over pajama pants - opened just enough for Alec to see the marks he left on his chest yesterday - as he kissed him goodbye at the door.

Alec doesn’t even try to suppress his grin at the mixture of excited giddiness and shivery heat cursing through him at the thought of his boyfriend.

He hasn’t been able to really stop thinking about Magnus for more than a couple of minutes ever since he left the loft earlier, images from last night keep flashing in front of his eyes. Magnus naked and kneeling above him, Magnus with his skin flushed and sweaty spread out over the sheets below him, golden cat eyes almost glowing with heat and desire.

Alec shivers, licks his lips.

Yeah. He’d much rather be with his boyfriend right now.

Alas, he does have a job and quite a number of duties to attend to.

So, clean-up first, then work and after that he absolutely plans to promptly return to his boyfriend’s place. He definitely wants a repeat of last night as soon as possible, is barely able to even think about anything else.

Of course, things don’t quite work out according to Alec’s plans.

Because, of course, today would be the day Jace finally chooses to seek him out for that conversation Alec has been trying to have with him for weeks now. A conversation that turns out just as painful as Alec had expected it would.

When Alec steps back into his room after his desperately needed shower, Jace is already in there, pacing slightly, clearly waiting for him.
Alec just raises his eyebrows at him but when it becomes apparent that Jace is not quite ready to actually talk yet, Alec just continues getting dressed. It's always easier to just let Jace sort out his thoughts in his own time rather than press him before he is ready.

By the time his parabatai finally speaks up, Alec is already trying to sort his hair into some sort of order. He scowls irritably at the longer strand of hair that just won't stay out of his eyes. It's becoming kind of unmanageable. Maybe it's about time he gets a cut again, maybe even cut it really short this time. That would save him at least a few minutes of time every morning.

_Hm, come to think of it, is there any sort of rule about changing your look while in a relationship?_ Alec honestly doesn’t have a clue. But having an actual discussion about his hair with his boyfriend seems utterly ridiculous as well.

“Clary agreed to give back the Cup,” Jace finally speaks up, interrupting Alec's internal debate over whether he can just get a haircut without announcing it to Magnus beforehand.

Alec turns slightly, facing him, but waits for Jace to continue.

"She really just wanted her mother back," Jace adds on slowly, carefully, almost imploringly.

It’s his attempt at justifying his actions in the aftermath, almost-but-not-quite apologies now that he already achieved what he set out to do.

It’s so typically Jace that Alec can’t help but smile slightly. His parabatai has been doing this since they were children. Stubbornly charging ahead, trampling over anything and anyone in his way, and once he gets what he wanted he promptly starts retracing his steps, going out of his way to try and explain his actions to others. And Jace’s magnetism makes sure he's easily forgiven for the mess he created along the way. Alec certainly never managed to hold a grudge against him.

"I know, Jace," he just replies. But he doesn't continue, neither pointing out just how incredibly, irresponsibly selfish Clary and Jace have been acting in the past weeks, nor giving him the absolution Jace is so clearly hoping for.

Going by the frown on his face, his parabatai understands very well exactly what Alec is and also what he isn't saying.

There is some more silence as Alec waits for him to continue.

Because he knows that Clary agreeing to give the powerful artifact that never belonged to her in the first place back to its rightful owners now that it has become worthless to her agenda, isn’t Jace’s actual reason for seeking him out in the privacy of his room.

And as expected, Jace finally focuses on him fully. “That raid on Valentine's hideout. Did you know about it beforehand?” he asks.

"I did," Alec nods. "It happened quickly but I was involved in getting the intel, planning and getting the raid approved."

He is not going to lie to his parabatai just to make this conversation a little easier on them.

"And you didn't tell me,” Jace continues, carefully, clearly trying to keep his tone, his expression neutral.

Alec just looks at his parabatai, not actually saying anything.
And he knows exactly what's coming next. Because they might not necessarily tell each other about every mission they are assigned to, but they are parabatai, so taking each other along for anything that might be a little more dangerous should go without saying.

It should.

It used to.

And yesterday, Alec didn't.

“We never go on raids without telling each other,” Jace continues, still hesitant but something a little harsher, more accusing bleeding into his expression. “We are supposed to have each other’s backs. What if you had gotten hurt?”

Alec remains silent, continuing to watch him, waiting him out, waiting for the question that this is actually about.

And finally, Jace’s face contorts into something between uncertainty and anger and something almost like hurt. “Why didn’t you tell me?” There is confusion and a whole lot of accusation in his voice.

Alec sighs out. He knows that this is going to be painful.

But he has never been the type to beat around the bush, so he replies honestly, “Because I wasn’t sure I could.”

A pause, as Jace clearly waits for Alec to continue. When it becomes clear that he won’t, Jace takes a step closer, definite frustration in his eyes. “What sort of reason is that?” he demands. “Of course you could tell me!”

“No, Jace, I couldn’t,” Alec asserts, outwardly calm. “I couldn’t tell you because I couldn’t be sure you’d keep it to yourself.”

Jace looks absolutely furious now. “What are you even saying?! I would never betray you! We are parabatai!”

“Then why are you so upset about this mission?” Alec asks, still calm.

“No, Alec, you don’t understand. I would never betray you! We are parabatai!”

“Yes, we are,” Alec says, taking a step closer as well and putting every ounce of his conviction into his words. “You are still the person I look to first and there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that you would never truly betray me.” He pauses for just a moment, braces himself. “But the past few weeks have shown me that there are some things you will put above our bond. The intel for this mission would have given you a choice between staying true to me or staying true to Clary. And quite frankly, I didn't like my odds in that scenario, seeing as I have yet to win even once when pitted against her.” Alec pauses - angel, it hurts to say this - before breathing out again. “So, no, Jace. I couldn't tell you. This was too important.”

But there’s no use. Because what he said is the absolute truth.

“I, I would never- Alec, I would never- We are parabatai. We are brothers. How can you think I would ever go behind your back like that?” Jace looks almost desperate.

But Alec can hear the uncertainty in his voice, the hesitance, the guilt. And he even knows why it’s there.
He raises his eyebrows at Jace, trying to mask just how much this conversation is hurting him as well. “So, if I were to ask you right now whether you and Clary have been planning something to take the Cup from the safe without my knowledge to prevent me from giving it to the Clave before she can use it to get her mother back, before she can use one of our world's most powerful artifacts for her personal gain, what would you tell me then?”

There is a pause.

And then Alec watches something in Jace’s expression change, something just giving way, crumbling, leaving something else behind that is almost painful to look at. But despite the pain in his eyes, his parabatai just stares back at him, looking lost but not saying a word, his silence confirming Alec’s suspicions.

Alec nods, disappointed but unsurprised.

Because he knows his siblings. Even if he hadn't already guessed they were scheming behind his back, them having stopped badgering him about Melior’s freedom and the Cup was a dead giveaway that they had been planning something to take matters into their own hands.

But both of those problems have already been taken care of, so no need to make this entire discussion more painful than it needs to be by digging into open wounds.

Instead he says, calmly, quietly, “So, you see, Jace. I couldn’t tell you. I simply couldn't trust that our bond would win out in your eyes as long as it also involved Clary Fray.”

Silence stretches between them as Alec watches Jace blink rapidly, clearly trying to come to terms with what Alec is saying, finally taking two steps to the side and letting himself fall to sit at the foot end of the bed.

Alec watches him for a few seconds and then easily moves over to join him, sitting down right beside him. The minutes stretch, both of them clearly lost in thought.

They both know that their bond has changed. It’s still there, still strong, still unbroken. But they lost something, lost some of that uncompromising trust and focus on each other that they had before.

"How did this happen?" Jace finally asks, almost sounding bewildered. “How did it turn out like this?”

Alec just shrugs slightly.

He is pretty sure that it was Clary's arrival at the Institute and Jace's absolutely unapologetic focus on her that lead to this but he already told Jace everything there is to say on that and now it’s up to his parabatai to draw his conclusions from that, to decide whether he is willing to at least try for a balance between keeping their bond and keeping Clary, whether he will start mitigating some of his selective, willful blindness of the past weeks.

But pointing fingers right now, flinging around accusations isn't going to fix anything.

And, sure, Alec also had Magnus - he still doesn't want to imagine what all of this would have been like if he hadn't had Magnus - but in contrast to Clary, his boyfriend never once made him choose, not for anything, much less between things that are truly important to Alec. Actually, Magnus takes absolute care to never put Alec in a position where he would have to so much as pick sides, much less actually choose.

And Alec adores him for it.
By the angel, do I love that man.

He blinks. Wait, what? Did I just...?

Jace interrupts Alec’s self-induced stupor before he has the chance to think on this particular revelation any further, eyeing him carefully, "You changed, Alec."

His brain is still very much trying to reboot, so he just looks at his parabatai and returns easily, "So have you, Jace."

Because that is just as true. They have both changed, and their bond changed with them. They both found something, found someone, and no matter how much the loss of trust between him and his parabatai may hurt there is also no way Alec would be willing to give up Magnus, even if it could restore their bond to what it was before.

He doesn’t think there is anything in this world that would be worth losing Magnus to him.

And maybe that thought should scare him. But it just doesn't. It never has.

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As cathartic as that conversation had been, despite knowing it was coming and even while knowing - hoping - that with both of them on the same page now there is a chance they might be able to fix some things between them again, it had still hurt.

And Alec makes it through the rest of the day by sheer force of will.

First he goes to find Lydia to make sure their stories match, something they simply hadn’t gotten around to yesterday.

Because yesterday’s success had definitely increased their chances for becoming Head of the Institute. More than that actually because to both of their surprise, right before they had stepped through the portal back to New York, Imogen had announced she would back their bid for sharing the Head position in front of the Clave, something Lydia and Alec hadn’t even thought to include in their deal.

But the Inquisitor's support kind of makes them shoe-ins for the job.

Still, it's not actually official yet and without actually being able to talk about the Cup and everything else involved, explaining their sudden certainty about getting the position would be rather hard to do. Add to that all their other secrets and schemes, the fake ceremony for rooting out traitors, Meliorn’s involvement in everything, the Cup’s actual location that no one knows about...

Yeah, they really need to make sure they have their stories straight.

Lydia also informs him that the Clave has decided to order his parents back to Idris. But, quite honestly, the only thing he feels at the news is a sort of relief that he can finally stop worrying about having to avoid their repeated attempts to corner him, glad to be getting a break from their flimsy excuses and not-so-subtle attempts at revisiting the topic of an arranged marriage.

That's another thing to cross off his list of things he has to worry about.

The rest of the day turns out just as busy as he had suspected it would. He catches up on the truly astounding amount of paperwork that accumulated in his one-day absence and once more reorganizes the patrol schedule now that they won’t have to include the search for Jocelyn Fray any
longer.

He runs into Clary in the Ops center and nods at her thanks for bringing her mother back. He honestly cares little about her gratefulness, simply hopeful that with her personal agenda taken care of, there might be a chance she’ll stop dragging his siblings into her messes. Well, one can hope.

Izzy comes looking for him between meetings and he easily accepts her gratefulness for Meliorn having been set free, but he is glad for the excuse of having to go on another patrol minutes later. Usually, he’d be happy to talk to her but Alec quite simply can’t deal with another discussion like the one he had with Jace earlier right now, doesn’t want to even consider whether Izzy of all people would have gone behind his back as well, would have truly joined Clary and Jace in their scheme.

Alec fixed everything before they could take matters into their own hands and now he will do his utmost best not to think about what they might have gotten up to if he hadn’t.

And as soon as he can reasonably manage, as soon as all imminent crises have been resolved, he simply walks out of the Institute, makes his way to Brooklyn as quickly as he possibly can.

But, damn, that conversation with Jace had hurt. The expression in his parabatai’s eyes as he finally realized what Alec had been trying to tell him for weeks now. That having his absolute trust betrayed several times, even if never truly broken, having his opinions discarded, having his loyalty questioned in favor of someone barely more than a stranger at that point, had simply been too much even for Alec’s absolute devotion to take.

It had just been too painful to always look to Jace first, only to find his parabatai already looking somewhere else, at someone else.

So, Alec had adjusted accordingly.

And he had drawn these conclusions about their bond a while ago, but seeing the realization of those facts bleed into his brother’s eyes... Alec’s heart squeezes just thinking about it.

It's also one of those things he hadn’t talked about to anyone before, not even to Magnus. Because he simply couldn’t do that to Jace, couldn’t speak these thoughts about their bond out loud for the first time to someone who wasn’t Jace.

But now, Alec just wants his boyfriend, wants to curl up with Magnus, wants to be in the one place where he feels safe and warm and wanted and secure.

Wants to be somewhere where the world can’t quite reach him if Alec doesn’t want it to. Simply because Magnus will do everything in his power to make sure that it doesn’t.

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When Alexander gets to the loft, it takes Magnus one glance at the look in his eyes, to just drop everything he had been doing before, immediately making his way over to where he is standing in the doorway to his study.

He presses a light kiss to his lips in greeting, one of his hands cradling the side of Alexander’s face, the other on his waist. “Hello, darling,” he greets, voice quiet.

And Alexander sighs, pulls his face out of his hold, only to promptly bury it in Magnus' neck instead, one arm coming to tightly curl around his waist, holding him close. And Magnus simply returns the embrace, one arm around Alexander’s back, the other one coming up to run through the hair at the back of his head.
They stand just like that for what must be several minutes and he can feel some of the tension slowly but steadily bleed out of Alexander’s form.

Finally, there is a sigh, muffled against the skin of his neck and then Alexander is pulling back a little, head still resting on his shoulder, but enough to say, “I talked to Jace.”

And Magnus immediately understands. He breathes out, his heart squeezing in empathic pain, as he tightens his embrace briefly, presses a gentle kiss to Alexander's temple.

Alec feels most of his remaining tension leave him at the warmth of the hug. There is just something about having his boyfriend in his arms that is soothing like nothing else. If he had a choice, he'd likely stay an entire day of just like this, tucked into his boyfriend's arms, feeling warm and secure.

"It went alright," he finally asserts, pulling back just enough to meet Magnus' eyes.

Alec can't even say he is surprised that there is nothing but absolute understanding in Magnus' eyes. Of course, Magnus would have figured out just how frustrated Alec has recently been feeling with his siblings and their gung-ho, devil-may-care approach to anything, trampling over rules and traditions and anyone standing in their way.

How disappointed and hurt he'd been when that turned out to even include Alec.

Of course, Magnus would have realized just how much of a toll that had been taking on Alec.

And, by Raziel, is he ever so grateful to have Magnus on his side, at his side. Grateful that of all people, his heart chose this man to fall in love with.

He blinks. *There it is again.*

And when Magnus tugs on him to move them over to the couch, sitting first to then pull him to rest against his chest, Alec just lets himself be held close, revels in the feeling of his boyfriend's magic joining in the warm, enveloping embrace.

Alec is good right where he is. And everything else will just have to wait for a while.

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When Alec wakes the next morning, it’s to Magnus sleeping mostly on top of him, face tucked against his neck.

And Alec can't help but bring up one of his arms to settle around Magnus' waist, but other than that makes sure not to move too much, not wanting to wake his boyfriend or make him move despite his slightly restricted breathing.

But going by the somewhat muted light filtering in from the outside, it seems to be pretty early in the morning still, so there is still some time until they have to start the next day.

He lets his thoughts drift. All things considered, yesterday had ended on a far better note than Alec had expected.

His discussion with Jace had actually gone quite well - as painful as the conversation itself might have been - and after cuddling with Magnus on the couch for bit, giving Alec all the time he needed to sort out his thoughts, they had gone out for dinner, just this little Thai place right around the corner
from Magnus’ apartment, nothing extravagant this time.

Alec quite simply didn't have any interest in going out somewhere fancy, much more interested in a nice dinner and then getting to come back here and maybe continue where they left off the night before.

Which they had. Angel, had they ever.

He feels a flush crawl up his neck at the images immediately flashing in front of his eyes.

Maybe it's actually a good thing Magnus isn't awake yet, lest he see Alec currently impersonating a tomato.

Alec just tilts his head slightly to tuck his nose into his boyfriend's hair, a giddily excited smile quirking his lips. Because despite all of this being so new to him, everything with Magnus is just always so natural and exciting and sensual and it never feels like Alec has to prove something to either of them.

Sure, there are mishaps but Magnus always seems to know exactly just what to do or to say to make sure that Alec doesn’t feel bad or even self-conscious about it.

Which is something that definitely doesn't only apply in the bedroom but rather throughout their entire relationship, holds true for pretty much everything that involves Magnus in Alec's life.

Magnus, who has never asked him to be anything but entirely himself, who from the very start made Alec feel like – for the first time in his life – he could breathe freely. Magnus, who is always there when Alec needs him. Magnus, who seems to always think of Alec's comfort and happiness first, everything else second.

Magnus, who Alec is in love with.

He feels his smile widen ridiculously, eyes crinkling at the corners.

By the Angel, this is a sort of happiness, Alec didn’t even know existed until he met Magnus.

He breathes out, lets himself relax into the feeling of strangely serene exhilaration, closes his eyes and buries his face further in Magnus' hair.

Because this right here, buried partially under his warm and sleep-heavy boyfriend, surrounded by Magnus’ smell and the barely-there humming of what he has come to realize is his boyfriend’s magic, there is quite simply no place on earth Alec would rather be.

He must doze off again, because he only fully comes to again when he finally feels Magnus stirring slightly on top of him.

There is a whisper of eye lashes blinking against the skin of his neck, a few seconds delay, before Magnus is moving slightly - as if to slide off of him – which only makes Alec tighten his arms around him.

“Morning,” he just murmurs, letting one of his hands lazily run across Magnus’ naked back once he is certain he got the message about staying put across.

“Good morning,” Magnus replies, voice a little raspy, stretching slightly on top of him to press a warm kiss under his jaw before relaxing right back on top of him, face once more more tucked against his neck.
And Alec shivers, a rather visceral sensual flashback of last night making his skin tingle with sudden arousal.

Yesterday, Magnus had clearly taken a sort of liking to his neck – or rather, to his deflect rune – and had delighted in discovering just which spots Alec is particularly sensitive in.

And now, feeling his warm breath curl across his skin immediately brings up images from last night, memories of heat and want and desire, intense and sensual and almost a little overwhelming, Alec in Magnus’ lap, teeth sinking into the skin where his neck meets his shoulder in that exact same spot.

Magnus moves, pulling back slightly, clearly able to tell just what it is Alec is thinking about right now because when he untucks his face from his neck, there is a definite uptick to the warlock’s lips, something playful and almost hungry in his eyes.

Alec only gets a quick look at the expression before Magnus is already leaning down for a quick, mostly chaste kiss.

Then - rather unexpectedly - Magnus is pulling away, suddenly moving to get out of bed.

Alec leans up on his elbows as he blinks confusedly after his boyfriend, who - just a few seconds ago - was lying all sleep-warm and alluring on top of him but is now sauntering across the room towards the ensuite.

But just as he reaches the doorway, Magnus turns slightly, glancing back at him over his shoulder. "Shower?" he asks, eyes full of heat, a coy, teasing smile on his lips.

And Alec is already moving, halfway out of bed by the time Magnus turns to disappear into the bathroom ahead of him, hips swaying, warm laughter in his eyes.

Yeah. As if Alec is ever going to be able to resist an offer like that.

Chapter End Notes

So, yet another chapter that went just perfectly to plan… Yeah right XD This isn’t even half of the plot that was supposed to be in this chapter and instead it kind of turned into pure malec fluffiness with loads of introspection about adoring each other. I was considering editing out some of the fluff so I could fit a bit more plot into this but then decided to just split the (by then 9k) chapter in two and keep it as is :) Would love to know what you think, especially about the conversation between the parabatai :D

And thank you so much for all your lovely comments and kudos, they kept me so motivated for this fic despite the brief slump I fell into (#^_^#)
As unenthusiastic as Alec may be about leaving the loft that morning, he does have duties and responsibilities to attend to, the number of things he urgently needs to get done already going well beyond what he’ll be able to fit into a single day and seemingly ever-increasing, so he doesn’t really have much of a choice about returning to the Institute today.

Although, after their shower – which has a slight flush shivering across his skin every time he so much as thinks about it – Alec decides that, duties or not, he still does have time at least for a quick breakfast with his boyfriend before he has to make himself leave.

Well, at least for a while. Because if there is one thing he’s sure of, it’s that even if the apocalypse decides to go down today, Alec is definitely coming back to the loft tonight.

Yeah, there is simply no way he doesn’t want to continue where they left off earlier.

He glances across the breakfast table at Magnus who meets his eyes, an immediate smile curving his lips, looking a little different today in a black, high-collared shirt, a green, somewhat military-style jacket on top, dark makeup around his eyes and fingerless leather gloves on his hands. But no highlights in his hair and not a single piece of jewelry in sight.

It seems pretty different from his usual style.

Or in other words, Magnus looks stunning as ever.

Well, his hair isn’t nearly as perfectly styled as usual, but that might admittedly be Alec's fault, seeing as he has been entirely unable to keep his hands to himself this morning. And why should he?

There is just something about knowing he is allowed to touch.

Sure, he knew that he could touch Magnus before, of course he did. But ever since they took the next step, some sort of barrier that Alec hadn’t even really been aware of before - but which still had him hesitate just slightly whenever he reached out to touch Magnus - seems to be just gone now.

Magnus is his to touch.

And similarly, there is a sort of natural ease about Magnus touching him now that just hadn’t been there just a few days ago. Before, whenever Magnus reached out he had always started out with a soft, testing touch, making sure that Alec was entirely comfortable before he would move closer, would let his touch settle fully. It’s something that Alec admittedly hadn’t even been aware of, only really noticing the difference now.

And just as before Alec is still very explicitly aware of Magnus’ every touch – if anything, ever since they had sex he’s become even more aware of it – but the familiarity, the openness, the casual ease of it is definitely new.

Like when his boyfriend walked past him on his way out of the bedroom earlier, his hand briefly resting against the small of Alec’s back as he passed, and he only realizes afterwards that he had automatically leaned into it. Or the hand on his waist as Magnus leaned past him to reach for one of the dishes on the kitchen counter, the touch feeling natural, almost normal.
And Alec kind of adores it.

So, even now, he doesn’t hesitate to reach out and pull Magnus into yet another kiss, having to lean a little across the table to do so, hand curling around the back of his head, fingertips tangling in Magnus’ hair, messing it up even further.

Like he said, he just can’t help it.

There is just something about seeing his usually so perfectly styled boyfriend slightly disheveled from their kisses. And quite honestly, Alec thinks he can’t really be blamed for being unable to keep his hands off Magnus.

First of all, how is he even supposed to do that? And second of all, why would he?

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As much as Alec might have hoped things would calm down a little, they simply don’t.

To the contrary, the next few days turn out to be almost ridiculously stressful as things start happening at an almost ludicrously fast pace.

The first thing he hears once he finally returns to the Institute – after having made himself leave the warm, bright, easy, comfortable, almost surreally happy bubble that is the loft and Magnus’ presence – is that waking Jocelyn Fray is going to be much more complicated than they had hoped.

Turns out, their medics are entirely baffled by whatever enchantment she is under and unable to do anything at all to wake her.

Which means they need outside help, and thus they do as they recently always seem to do whenever they run into a problem.

They call Magnus.

Who of course appears within minutes after their call.

Although, Alec isn’t actually expecting much to come of this, seeing as Magnus had done a quick scan of Jocelyn immediately after the raid and rather plainly told Alec and Lydia that she is under some sort of truly powerful and truly complex spell that won’t be easily broken. Otherwise, Magnus would have just woken her then and there.

So, Alec isn’t really surprised when Magnus - after some more detailed scans of the magic surrounding Jocelyn – turns towards Clary, who is watching him expectantly, and reiterates his previous assessment.

“I’m sorry but I cannot wake her without knowing what spell she is under,” he tells her gently.

She blinks, looking honestly surprised, clearly having expected Magnus to just solve all her problems with a snap of his fingers as he usually does.

And then her face falls, the look in her eyes devastated at the news, and Alec can admit he honestly feels for her, having to find out that she is still no closer to truly having her mother back. Although admittedly, he’d feel even worse for her if he weren’t already dreading the inevitable messes she is going to create now that she once more has an agenda to work towards.

"Can't you do anything?" Clary asks Magnus, desperation in her eyes and something almost
accusing in her voice.

Her tone makes Alec frown, really not liking what she is implying.

But Magnus just ignores it, spreading his hands in a fluid gesture and stating rather plainly, "Not if I don't want to risk putting Jocelyn in danger. The magic she is under is too complex and powerful. If I were to try and overpower it without knowing what exactly it is I’m going up against, the backlash of the spell might harm her. The safest way to wake her is to determine exactly what spell she is under so we can figure out how best to counter it."

There is a look of absolute – in Alec’s opinion, rather ominous - determination in Clary’s eyes as she watches Magnus, already opening her mouth, likely to grill him for some more information.

But she doesn’t get the chance.

Suddenly there is a familiar flash of fire and then Magnus is holding a Fire Message in his hand, his focus immediately, entirely diverting to it.

From where Alec is standing just a step to Magnus’ left, he can clearly make out the missive being addressed to ‘High Warlock Bane’, meaning that there is something that requires Magnus’ attention in his capacity as the High Warlock.

And only moments later, Magnus lets the message once more dissolve into fire as he looks up at their group again, wearing a charming smile on his face that does absolutely nothing to hide his sudden distraction from Alec.

"Well, it seems my flock needs me elsewhere, so I will have to leave you here," he says, voice cheerful but something urgent in his eyes. Before he adds on sardonically, “Although, I'm sure you will let me know as soon as you need something from me."

Alec almost wants to smirk at that last part – especially as it was so clearly directed at Clary – but as he watches his boyfriend then hurry out of the Institute without a backwards glance, a portal springing to life in front of him as soon as he steps outside the wards, Alec feels a frown form on his face instead.

This is certainly a rather jarring reminder that Magnus does in fact have other responsibilities that do not revolve around Shadowhunter problems.

With how readily and reliably Magnus is available whenever Alec needs him, even if he just wants to see his boyfriend - with how naturally, easily, unquestionably Magnus seems to always put Alec first - sometimes it's a little too easy to forget that Magnus actually has a full-time job, a job that is just as stressful and carries at least as much responsibility as Alec's own.

Even as he leaves his siblings and Clary behind in the Ops center to figure out how best to find the information they need while he goes to join Lydia for some paperwork in her office, Alec feels his frown deepen, truly not liking that he apparently needed a reminder of this fact at all.

And sometimes he can’t help but wish there were someone in Magnus' life – on Magnus’ side – who Alec could rely on to remind him of things like this if he ever actually manages to lose sight of it.

*But it really doesn't seem like there is anyone,* Alec thinks. Which really just means one thing.

If there is no one else around to make sure that no one - *including* Alec - tries to take advantage of Magnus' kindness and compassion and endless empathy, then Alec himself will just have to be the one to do just that.
He lets his frown darken into a scowl.

Yeah. He'd really like to see someone try to take advantage of his boyfriend while Alec is around.

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Magnus does his best not to let his utter amusement show as he eyes the images on the screens in front of him, images of warlocks supposedly more powerful than him. He is back at the Institute, as expected having received a message as soon as this lot managed to make any sort of progress, barely hours after having been called away.

The Fire Message had called for his help with a demon-summoning-gone-wrong that two of his younger warlocks decided to perform without supervision.

Well, there had been no actual demon summoned, seeing as the warlocks performing the ritual hadn’t had nearly enough power to force the demon to appear in this realm. But as is the problem with performing magic beyond you, it promptly turned around on them, proceeding to mercilessly suck the young warlocks' magic dry.

So, Magnus had to forcefully break the established link between realms, something which always leads to extreme magical backlash and tends to be more dangerous than any spell you could perform.

Well, Magnus isn’t the High Warlock for nothing and all in all it had actually been a rather easy fix but, oh, will he be having words with Corinne later about making sure to teach her students properly and impress on them just how bad of an idea it is to perform shoddily prepared rituals of any kind, much less ones attempting to summon powerful demons within the bounds of Magnus' city.

Something he hadn’t had the time to do right away, seeing as he had received a message from Clarissa claiming that they had already found the solution for how to wake Jocelyn.

And Magnus had been almost impressed at how quickly they managed to find the information they need. However, upon returning to the Institute he had promptly realized that the Shadowhunters didn’t in fact find a solution at all and apparently decided to just look for warlocks more powerful than Magnus instead.

Somehow Clarissa and Jace must have misunderstood him when Magnus told them that brute magical force isn't an option for waking Jocelyn. Or maybe they just assumed that Magnus simply isn’t powerful enough to break the spell and too proud to admit as much and thus decided to look for someone more powerful to help them.

Which brings him to the part that has him so utterly amused.

Because the three, supposedly-more-powerful-than-Magnus warlocks they came up with in their search are apparently Catarina, Ragnor and Tessa.

Which, really? Don’t these Shadowhunters know anything about warlocks and their powers at all?

His parentage alone gives him a power advantage over most everyone else in the warlock community, and there are maybe a handful of warlocks on earth who might have a chance to beat Magnus based on pure, raw power. And his three friends currently featuring on the screens? They certainly aren’t amongst those.

Sure, Tessa might be special due to her blood but she is quite simply too young to have fully grown into her powers yet. How is she even up there with the other two? And, yes, Catarina's skills in healing far outstrip Magnus’ own, but that’s mostly because she has niche magic, her powers
specifically honed towards healing, almost exclusively so. And, Ragnor? Even putting aside the fact that the Clave records apparently claim Ragnor to be much older than Magnus - and just where did they get that particular piece of misinformation? - is the Clave truly so misinformed to think that age is the only thing that matters for magical strength?

Honestly. Sometimes the ignorance of the Clave truly astounds him.

Although, Magnus is far too amused to actually point any of this out to the four Shadowhunters in front of him currently showcasing their ignorance by attempting to explain to him how the magic of his own people supposedly works.

Really, the only thing missing is a drink in his hand and he'd be happy to cheerfully listen to this group making utter fools of themselves for the rest of the afternoon.

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Alec is a little surprised - and a whole lot relieved - when he receives a message from Jace only a few hours after Alec left the others behind in the Ops center.

For once his siblings seem to not only be willing to come up with an actual plan but also seem to actively be trying to keep Alec in the loop.

Which is such a relief, he can’t even tell you.

And by the time Alec and Lydia get to the Ops center to join the others, not only is Magnus already there – clearly already having dealt with whatever warlock-related emergency called him away earlier, which Alec will have to ask him about later – but there really seems to be a sort of plan in place.

Well, at least that’s what his siblings, Clary and Hodge seem to think. Though, the clear amusement in Magnus’ eyes really rather seems to point to the contrary.

Magnus tilts his head, listening with half an ear to Alexander and Lydia being briefed as to the 'plan', if you can call it that. He is still far too amused by everyone’s bumbling to want to interrupt.

Although, when Alexander looks over at him with a questioningly raised eyebrow - clearly able to read some of his current amusement on his face - Magnus lets his lips quirk into a small smile and resolves to maybe explain some things about warlocks and their magic and power levels to Alexander later. Once it’s just the two of them.

No reason to actually clue the Clave as a whole in on some of the finer points of warlock powers.

For now, Magnus just turns back towards the screens and then decides to finally move the discussion along a little. By proceeding to act mortally offended at the list of warlocks supposedly-more-powerful-than-Magnus that Starkweather procured.

He might admittedly be having a little too much fun at the Shadowhunters' expense.

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In the end, it turns out that the most likely candidate for being able to help them is actually an old friend of Magnus’, simply because it seems rather likely that this is actually the warlock who provided the spell in the first place.

Although, they'll apparently have to seek Ragnor Fell out personally seeing as he isn't responding to
And Alec knows that he should let the others take care of this, that he should stay at the Institute, still has to go over the guard schedule and the mission plan for the next week, should help Lydia plan that fake ceremony which has been taking up most of her time and thus leaving Alec with most of her normal share of tasks for running the Institute in addition to his own already barely manageable, never-ending list of things to get done.

He knows he should stay.

But the thought of getting to meet someone from Magnus’ life, someone whose mere mention makes his boyfriend smile slightly in delight and remembered joy and anticipation. Well, honestly, it’s not really a contest.

Thing is, Magnus knows pretty much everyone who Alec cares about in his life, his family, the few friends he has, even his colleagues. But Alec definitely cannot say the same thing in reverse.

The only person from Magnus’ life he has met at all is Raphael but back then Alec hadn’t yet known about Magnus having practically adopted the vampire as his at some point, so he isn’t sure that really counts as ‘meeting’ him.

Alec just really wants to go with Magnus to visit this Ragnor, wants to maybe learn something new about his boyfriend, to get to know a different part of his life, to meet someone who is truly important to the man Alec is in love with.

He glances over at Lydia and is promptly met with an amused but understanding grin as she makes a vague gesture, waving him off.

He lets his mouth quirk in an answering grin, even as he turns towards the others to announce he’ll join Jace, Clary and Magnus on this mission. He loves working with Lydia.

Magnus watches Jace interact with Alexander as their group of four makes its way across the field towards where he vaguely remembers Ragnor's house to be located.

He makes sure to keep his observation casual, not wanting to be too obvious about his focus on the two parabatai, all too aware of the fact that Jace doesn't actually know about Alexander being in a relationship - much less who with - and not wanting to give anything away before Alexander is ready for his parabatai to know about them.

It’s just, Magnus has been honestly worried that Jace might just ignore yesterday’s talk, disregard the things he was told, carry on as before, and inevitably continue to hurt his parabatai with his actions.

Magnus is really rather tired of seeing Alexander being hurt by the people he cares about most.

But to his relief, it looks like the conversation between the two parabatai truly made an impact.

There is something tentative but also definitely rather intent in the way Jace has been watching everyone today, mainly focused on Alexander but watchful of everyone who interacts with his parabatai, including Clarissa, Isabelle and even Magnus himself. Assessing.

Jace is clearly trying to work out how much of what was pointed out to him yesterday is actually true, how justified Alexander was in his claims, clearly rattled by the mere idea that he has been deemed unreliable by his parabatai if things ever truly get sticky.
Magnus is just honestly relieved to the two parabatai talking, interacting honestly, and – for the first time since he met him – to see something attentive towards Alexander in Jace’s eyes.

And accordingly, Magnus makes sure to keep Clarissa engaged in a conversation as the parabatai continue to talk as they follow a few steps behind them, makes sure she doesn't stick as closely to Jace as she clearly wishes to after having made him her anchor in this world that not only has her entirely, helplessly adrift but is also threatening the life of the one person she cares about most in this world.

Clarissa is so very exclusively focused on herself and her struggles, that she cannot even see the damage she is doing in the world she found herself thrown into or to the people who are trying so very hard to help her.

And it is so very easy to forget that - in a world where children are trained to be soldiers from a young age - she wasn't actually raised as Clarissa Fairchild, Shadowhunter and heir to two strong nephilim bloodlines, but as Clary Fray, a mundane without any awareness or knowledge of the very real dangers of this world.

Jocelyn truly dropped the ball on this one and once she is awake Magnus will make sure that she finally teaches her entirely - dangerously - unprepared daughter some of the very real truths about the life of a Shadowhunter and all that comes with it, privileges, responsibilities and duties included.

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Getting into Ragnor's house is one of the odder experiences in Alec's life.

First there is the fire ward ring - which they manage to get past - but then there is the whole thing with being turned invisible to each other's eyes while Ragnor demands that they bargain individually for his help.

Alec is rather bemused at it all.

And, sure, he'll help if he can, but his main reason for being here is not to get involved in yet another one of Clary’s little crusades but simply to meet Ragnor himself. And so far the experience has been rather... odd.

Although, Alec doesn't actually feel like he or the others are in any real danger - tied to a chair or not, he trusts Magnus’ assertion about this being a true friend of his - and thus he just frowns at the question. Then, he shrugs at the warlock, and doesn't say a word.

There is a slight pause, Ragnor blinking in surprise at Alec's nonchalant dismissal of the entire situation, before a rather amused smile quirks the warlock's lips, something almost intrigued in his eyes.

And afterwards, once Clary has declared dramatically that she'd do anything to get her mother back – while admirable in sentiment, also definitely confirming Alec’s stance on not ever letting this girl have any sort of leverage over him – they are all freed from their binds and he finally gets to watch Magnus interact with someone he so very clearly considers a friend, and a close one at that.

There is just a sort of easy, automatic, unquestioning understanding between the two warlocks that Alec doesn't think he has ever seen between two people before. Not between friends, not between married couples, not even between parabatai.

Jokes being exchanged just based on a barely there twitch of expression, the enunciation of their words making the other quirk a grin, seeming to almost finish each other's sentences despite not
having seen each other for years.

And it's also that ease of understanding that clearly has Ragnor realize within moments just what Alec is to Magnus, can see the exact moment he figures it out, the look in the warlock’s eyes going from intrigued to sharply assessing within an instant, stare unrelenting.

Ragnor confirms he was the one to provide Jocelyn with the sleep spell, tells them about having gotten it from some sort of mystical warlock book, informs them that he doesn't actually have the book in his possession any longer. And all throughout, his eyes remain fixed on Alec, his gaze sharp and evaluating.

Alec just meets Ragnor's eyes, calmly. It's not like actually has anything to hide from this man. And from the corner of his eye, he can see Jace bristle on his behalf, his parabatai clearly aware of the warlock’s focus on him but without a clue just why that is.

Which serves as a rather jarring, uncomfortable reminder that his parabatai doesn’t actually know about Alec having a boyfriend, much less who it is he is dating.

It’s something Alec resolves to fix as soon as possible – never having intended to keep his relationship a secret from his parabatai for so long – but right now definitely isn’t the right time to have that discussion with Jace, much preferring to do so without an audience around.

Magnus almost wants to roll his eyes at his old friend's antics.

He can see Ragnor watching Alexander, can see the mixture of mischief and assessment and challenge in his eyes.

Admittedly, his old friend figuring out they are together was to be expected from the moment Alexander decided to come along.

They have simply known each other for too long to be able to truly hide anything from the other, have seen each other at their best and at their absolute worst, seen each other happily in love and desolately heartbroken.

Ragnor is the person who knows more about him than anyone else alive does or anyone ever did, the person who sometimes seems to know Magnus better than he knows himself, possibly the only person on earth who truly knows him, Magnus, without the name, without the masks. Knows the good parts of him as well as all the truly abhorrent, ugly parts, his weak spots, his vices, his strengths.

Ragnor is one of the very few people Magnus has met in his several hundred years of life who he would call a true friend, someone he knows he can always unequivocally rely on, trust to never betray him, to always be on his side, to drop anything and everything if Magnus ever truly calls for him, the one person he knows he can always come back to no matter what happens or how long they might have gone without so much as exchanging a single word. Just as Magnus would do the same for him.

To put it simply, Ragnor might as well be Magnus’ family.

So, of course he doesn’t need Magnus to actually tell him just what Alexander is to him.

“I might have something to help you find the book,” Ragnor is currently saying and then continues with a bright, utterly unconvincingly guileless smile, "Although, I could do with some help looking for it."
Magnus just wants to roll his eyes in exasperation at that unsubtle leading statement and a quick glance to the side shows him that Alexander has just raised an eyebrow, face impassive, looking at most a little resigned, clearly already knowing where Ragnor is going with this.

And Magnus suddenly can’t help but feel a little amused, barely manages to suppress the grin that is trying to spread over his face.

Because Ragnor likes to present a rather stoic persona in front of everyone he meets, only to then throw them off balance with seemingly erratic changes between stoic and bubbly and threatening and inquisitive and guileless and challenging. Magnus can’t help but kind of look forward to seeing Ragnor trying to poke holes into the immovable brick wall that is Alexander’s temperament, to see his old friend trying to deal with someone who doesn’t wear reticence as a mask but who really is just as stoic as he outwardly appears.

Magnus is certain that Ragnor will be throwing up his hands in defeated exasperation before his friend comes even close to needling Alexander into any sort of reaction his boyfriend doesn’t want to give.

That’s definitely something to look forward to, he thinks amused.

Alec just keeps his face entirely impassive when Ragnor turns towards him to specifically ask for his help in searching for whatever it is they need to find the book. Not like Alec is surprised by the request in the least.

He just calmly follows the warlock up the stairs, knowing he is in for at least a few questions or comments.

And Ragnor doesn't waste any time either, barely waiting until they make it halfway up the stairs before he is asking, "So, ‘Alec’ was it?” A sweeping glance top to bottom, then, “A Lightwood, I assume?"

Alec keeps his face neutral, giving a nod just as they step into what appears to be a library or study of some sort at the top of the stairs.

Ragnor seems unbothered by his lack of verbal reply, changing tracks rather abruptly once they are out of hearing range of the others, a bright grin on his face. "So, you and Magnus, hm? Well, well, well. A Lightwood and a High Warlock. Never thought I'd see the day," he remarks cheerfully, gaze intently fixed on him.

Maybe the comment is intended to throw him, but Alec has always preferred straightforwardness and just gives another nod, still not bothering to verbally reply, seeing as no actual question was asked.

Although, this is not quite what he had expected from today. He had imagined meeting one of Magnus’ friends, not being asked about their relationship in his boyfriend’s absence. And usually, he wouldn't even consider letting anyone inquire about his private life like this - much less a complete stranger - but he can’t very well tell one of his boyfriend’s closest friends to piss off with his questions, now can he?

Going by the definite amusement in his eyes, Ragnor is clearly well-aware of Alec’s current dilemma. He just proceeds to prod cheerfully, "Something serious then?"

But with that question there is suddenly something intent and assessing and almost challenging in his eyes.

Yeah, Alec can't afford to make a bad impression right now.
So, he makes sure to fully meet the warlock's eyes, holds them for a second before he replies honestly, surely, firmly, "Very serious."

It's not like his relationship with Magnus being something real is even a question.

Ragnar tilts his head slightly, watches him for a few seconds longer, the look in his eyes unchanging, unblinking, and, alright, Alec very much gets the unspoken words contained in that gaze.

It's not even so much a threat, more of a fact.

A fact that says 'You hurt him and you're done.', and Alec absolutely believes it as well. Not that it matters.

He calmly, surely, seriously meets the other man’s eyes, holds his gaze, not wavering under the penetrating stare. Because there is no reason not to. Hurting Magnus is the absolutely last thing he ever wants to do.

And maybe Ragnar can see something of Alec's conviction in his eyes, because after another few seconds he finally blinks.

A slight tilt of his head and then his smile is turning a lot less bright and a lot more honest before he finally claps his hands.

"Now. With that taken care of, on to our search," he says cheerfully, finally turning away from Alec to walk further into the room, now – after having been at least somewhat reassured as to the sincerity of Alec’s feelings for Magnus – apparently willing to actually focus on the task at hand.

Alec certainly approves of his priorities.

Although, with Ragnar's focus finally off him, Alec breathes in – feeling weirdly like he just passed some sort of test – and gives himself a few seconds to gather his composure before following after the warlock.

The brief delay has him just a couple of steps behind Ragnar, who is currently disappearing around a bookshelf that serves as a sort of room divider a couple of steps to the left.

Alec loses sight of him for just a few seconds, but can still hear him mumbling to himself, "Now where did I put that bookma-

A sharp breath, Alec's instincts flare.

Adrenaline pulsing through him, he is catapulting himself the two remaining steps forward, seraph blade already glowing bright in his hand, flipping around the bookshelf after the warlock mere seconds later.

Just in time to see Ragnar fry two demons with his magic.

Another lunge forward and Alec has the third demon – which is dropping from the ceiling right above Ragnar - skewered on his sword before the thing even makes it halfway down.

He puts his back to Ragnar, eyes scan their surroundings for any more threats, the warlock clearly doing the same behind him, hands raised, magic at-the-ready.

But it seems like these three were it.

Steps are thundering up the stairs behind them and barely a second later Magnus is there, eyes wide,
magic already dancing along his fingertips, prepared for a fight.

"What happened?" he asks, urgency in his voice, worried eyes scanning over Ragnor and Alec.

The desperate fear in his eyes - giving way to relief at seeing that they are both entirely fine - is so stark that Alec wants nothing more than to reach out and touch him, reassure him.

But his battle instincts are still humming in his blood, still not entirely assured that these three demons were really it, so regrettably cuddling is out until he has his fight-or-flight reflexes back under control.

Ragnor huffs at his side and replies, "My wards have been compromised. A couple of demons must have slipped through when you guys passed the protections." The warlock affects a sigh but Alec can see the anger in his eyes.

Well, Alec would be pissed as well if someone came asking for his help and managed to compromise his entire security system along the way.

Then, Jace appears behind Magnus, blade also in hand, just as ready to throw himself into a fight if necessary - even though he clearly has no idea what is going on, most likely just having sprinted up the stairs when Magnus took off - his eyes sharp, quickly focusing on the very telling ichor of recently killed demons spattered over the floor.

His eyes narrow, glancing up to immediately focus on Alec who just gives a slight nod to show that he is entirely fine.

His focus is drawn away from his parabatai when Ragnor turns towards him. "Thank you, Mr. Lightwood," he says, tilting his head at Alec. "For your assistance."

And when Magnus looks at Alec, there is something so warm and all-encompassingly grateful in his eyes that he honestly doesn't quite know what to do with himself.

So, he just gives a slight shrug even as he nods at Ragnor's thanks.

It's not like Alec actually did that much. He is actually pretty sure that the warlock would have been just fine without him.

There had been barely seconds between Ragnor stepping around the shelf and Alec flipping around it after him. And in that time, Ragnor had already taken out the first two demons with absolute ease. Goes to reason that the third wouldn't have stood a chance to do him any harm either.

It might have been dropping from the ceiling right above him, right in his blind spot, but Alec is sure, the warlock would have still seen it in time. So, Ragnor would have been just fine even without his help.

Right?

+++ "Ragnor, stop being so stubborn," Magnus says with the sort of exasperation only his oldest friend ever manages to bring out of him. "Your wards have been compromised. You can't stay here."

Despite his irritation, Magnus makes sure to keep his voice entirely even, doing his best to hide that anxious, fearful jittering still in his blood, stuck in his very bones.
The remainders of the absolute terror that had ripped through him when he had felt Ragnor's battle magic spike aggressively, countering some sort of attack right above where Magnus had been standing, an attack right where two of the absolutely most important people in Magnus' life had been right that moment. Ragnor, his little cabbage, his longtime companion, brother, closest, dearest friend, and Alexander, the man Magnus knows he is in love with, no matter how much he is still trying to avoid thinking about that very fact.

Both of them in the same place, both under attack.

Magnus’ breath frozen in fear, heart-stopping, ice-cold terror dragging through his veins, even as desperation had him catapult himself up the stairs.

But they are both entirely fine, nothing having happened to either of them it’s already been about half an hour since the attack.

Magnus still can't entirely breathe right but he is getting there.

Now if only his oldest friend would stop being such a stubborn, prideful fool.

"I bloody well shall stay, Magnus," he is huffing in reply. "A couple of demons aren't going to drive me from my home"

"One of your homes," Magnus asserts, caught somewhere between pleading and irritation at his friend’s stubbornness as he follows Ragnor into the next room. "You could just as well move into one of your other places for a bit. Or move in with me for all I care, as long as you don't just stay here."

"Because the two of us living in the same place worked out just wonderfully last time, you mean?" Ragnor asks archly. "Remember what happened last time? Because I definitely still remember."

"Oh, would you stop bringing up that incident every time you are losing an argument with me!" Magnus exclaims, pure exasperation on his face.

Alec watches nonplussed as the two warlocks fight, standing in the living room, watching Ragnor stride irritatedly from one room to the next, Magnus following after him, his expression the very picture of exasperation.

Alec honestly doesn't know whether to be amused at seeing two incredibly powerful, ancient beings bicker like children, or to feel exasperated for that very same reasons.

It's just the three of them right now, Clary and Jace already left more than twenty minutes ago, almost immediately after Ragnor had used a bookmark to track the Book of the White and identified the person who apparently has it in their possession right now.

"Well, that's easy for you to say," Ragnor replies archly just as he turns the corner into one of the other rooms. "You weren't the one traumatized by it."

Alec hears Magnus huff exasperatedly in reply but remains where he is, knowing the two warlocks will reappear within a minute or so as they finish their circuit through the rooms on the ground floor.

He is also admittedly a little distracted by his thoughts, circling around one Camille Belcourt.

All Alec knows about her based on the Clave records is that she is a rather old vampire, although based on Clary’s exclamation at the name, this is also apparently the vampire who turned Simon.
But there was definitely something odd in both Magnus and Ragnor’s expression when the vampire’s name the current owner of the Book of the White came up.

Alec hadn’t wanted to ask while Jace and Clary were still around, but something about Magnus’ reaction at her name had given him the definite impression that there might be something about this vampire that has specifically to do with either Magnus, Ragnor or both.

The two warlocks who just then reappear from a door to the right, still in the middle of their argument, although the mood between them seems to have shifted slightly.

"Ragnor, please," Magnus is currently saying, his voice having gone soft and imploring. "Just move in with me until you can redo your ward structure to make sure no weaknesses were left behind by the critters. I'll even lend you my magic to put the wards back up."

Ragnor finally comes to a stop only two or three steps away from where Alec is standing and turns to fully face Magnus, frowning as he holds Magnus’ worried eyes for a couple of seconds.

Finally, he sighs. "Fine, Magnus, *you old worrywart*. I'll redo my wards and in the meantime I'll move out."

Magnus blinks, looking almost surprised at the sudden agreement, but then he smiles, his expression bright and full of relief, "Thank you, Ragnor." A pause. "*You stubborn old fool.*"

"But I am *not* moving in with you," Ragnor promptly asserts emphatically.

"Oh, thank magic," Magnus breathes out immediately in such absolute, honest relief, it's almost a little comical. "I was worried you might actually take me up on that offer."

Ragnor grins mockingly. "Like I have any interest in dealing with you on the regular, much less while you are still in the honeymoon phase with all of *that,*" he says the last while suddenly turning towards Alec, gesturing at him top to bottom and back again.

Magnus turns towards him as well, lips immediately quirking into a grin as he blatantly lets his eyes drag over Alec in the wake of Ragnor’s gesture.

Alec just blinks at them, surprised at unexpectedly finding himself dragged into the discussion, already feeling the heat of a blush creep up his neck at the rather smug smile now curling Magnus’ lips.

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They help Ragnor move.

Well, the two warlocks use some magic to pack up most of Ragnor’s belongings and a single portal trip later, Ragnor is fully moved into another one of his houses, this one apparently in Chicago.

Alec kind of just tags along.

And once that is done, Ragnor promptly suggests they all have dinner together and Magnus looks absolutely delighted at the idea as he glances at Alec for his opinion. Which means that Alec is absolutely incapable of saying no.

And going by that little quirk to Ragnor's lips, the other warlock knows it too.

Although, in the end they don’t actually get the chance. Because barely after agreeing on which
country to visit for dinner – and, yes, there are certain perks to dating a warlock – Magnus promptly
receives a rather stressed call from Clary about the newest mess she has somehow managed to create.

Because in a not-so-genius move Clary and Simon apparently decided to risk a conflict with one of
New York’s strongest vampire clans by breaking into Hotel Dumort and freeing Camille. To free the
vampire who clearly has no respect whatsoever for the Accords, mundanes or even common
decency, as it turns out.

Chapter End Notes

So. This monster of a chapter somehow turned out to be almost entirely about character
dynamics... And about saving Ragnor, of course! Because I still think his death was the
most devastatingly sad thing to happen in the entire series (I absolutely adored those few
brief moments we got of him and Magnus interacting in canon) and I’ve been wanting
to fix it ever since I started this fic. Would love to know what you think :D

Also, RL is currently keeping me rather stupidly busy, making writing rather difficult
right now, but your lovely comments keep bringing me back to this and trying to finish
the last few chapters (*^_^*) So, thank you so much for all your wonderful comments
and kudos!
Alec scowls as he makes his way through the Institute's hallways, utterly irritated. Instead of going to dinner with Magnus and one of his oldest friends, instead of spending time with his boyfriend and getting to know someone who is truly important to the man he loves, Alec finds himself forced into once again – and seemingly forevermore – dealing with yet another Clary-induced catastrophe. Hence, his irritation.

After Clary's call, they had decided to split up.

Ragnar stayed behind at his new place for now - so as not to give away that whoever tried to kill him via demon critters didn't actually succeed - and Magnus went back to the loft where Clary and Simon apparently decided to bring Camille.

Alec decided to quickly stop by the Institute before he'll follow him there. For one, he needed to bring Lydia up to speed on the truly ludicrous number of things that have happened in the few hours since Alec left the Institute, what with them finding Ragnar, then the murder attempt - and thus the confirmation that they definitely have a traitor in their midst who passed on the information about Ragnar to Valentine -, then the fact that they might have a way to wake Jocelyn Fray, and finally Clary's newest mess which also included her single-handedly almost starting a war with New York's vampire population.

And at this point Alec has gone well beyond just being irritated with Clary and her trampling over everyone and everything just so she can potentially reach her goal that little bit quicker.

As annoyed as he had been by her actions before, when her mother had still been in Valentine's hands Alec had at least been able to understand her hurry, her exclusive focus, her need to get her family back and out of danger as quickly as possible.

But now?

Jocelyn is safe at the Institute, there is no threat to her life any longer and they only have to figure out how to wake her. And angel be damned, they've all been willingly helping Clary, even brought her mother back after that raid on Valentine's hideout without any sort of help or input from Clary. Doesn't that count for anything?

Lydia had seemed even more uncompromisingly angry than Alec at Clary's newest show of absolute unconcern for the damage she is doing, the trust she is losing, the lives she is risking. And as she had been reaching for the phone on her desk to call the Dumort clan's leader - to try and smooth things over with them -, Lydia had hissed something about having Clary sent off to Idris for some training as soon as they've dealt with all of this, if only so the trainers in Alicante can maybe beat some sort of sense for collective responsibility into that girl's head.

Alec most certainly approves of the idea.

And Lydia already dealing with the Dumort clan left him free to deal with the other side of the problem, namely the rogue vampire once more roaming the city due to Clary Fray deciding to free her. Which is certainly giving Alec a chance to appreciate how nice it is to have someone to share the Head duties with.

Above
So, he went to collect his siblings as backup - because based on what he has heard about this vampire and how little she seems to care about the Accords, having some more backup in the form of two more fully trained Shadowhunters really seems like a good idea - which brings him here, making his way through the Institute’s halls with Jace and Izzy beside him on their way to Magnus' loft.

The only thing he can be grateful for in all of this is that for once his siblings don't seem to actually be involved, didn't even seem to know what is going on until Alec came to collect them.

To the contrary, Clary and Jace actually seem to be in some sort of spat.

And Alec doesn’t know whether whatever they are fighting about has anything to do with his and Jace’s talk two days ago, whether his parabatai is actually taking the things Alec told him to heart, possibly even trying for something of a balance between their bond and his crush, whether Clary approached him and Jace for once didn’t just simply agree with whatever harebrained, screw-the-rest-of-the-world plan she came up with.

Alec doesn't know and he isn't going to ask but the thought that Jace might honestly be trying to find some sort of balance does make a certain weight lift off his chest, a weight that has been there ever since his parabatai started utterly ignoring Alec and their bond in favor of one Clary Fray.

But point is, for once it’s Alec who has to bring his siblings up to speed on what is going on.

And - spat or no - ever since his parabatai heard that Clary decided to take her childhood friend along instead, Jace has been in a mood and is now very effectively contributing to Alec’s own irritation by apparently having decided that Lydia is somehow the villain in all of this.

"She was right there when we were planning our visit to Ragnor's place!" Jace is currently exclaiming - for the second time now, as though Alec's reaction to the accusation is somehow going to change this time around - throwing up his hands in clear frustration, even as he continues striding along at Alec's side. "She could easily have passed on the information to Valentine once we were gone."

Izzy nods on his other side and Alec just breathes out in irritation, endlessly annoyed at once more being stuck arguing about Lydia with his siblings.

"We were freely talking right in the middle of the Ops center, Jace," he returns strongly. "Half the Institute was 'right there'."

"But she is the only real outsider here, Alec," Izzy adds on, her tone a little more careful, a little less accusing than Jace's. But definitely still very much on the let's-blame-everything-that-goes-wrong-in-our-lives-on-Lydia bandwagon.

And Alec just wants to roll his eyes.

 Outsider. Right.

In the past few weeks, Alec has been spending more time with her than with anyone else at the Institute - his siblings most definitely included - not to even mention that Lydia is about to become the actual, appointed Head of the Institute.

It doesn't get much more 'insider' than that.

Sure, she'll be sharing the position with Alec and, okay, admittedly his siblings don't actually know about that yet, but still.
He'd actually love to tell them, he truly would. Alas, for now the subterfuge is needed, they are still in the middle of their various plans and schemes, and he simply can't risk being overheard telling his siblings about his future appointment right now lest he make any eavesdroppers suspicious just what else might be going on behind the scenes.

He can only hope that they'll get their official confirmation as co-Heads soon, so he and Lydia can finally start officially running this place as well as clear up the various misconceptions apparently running wild.

But for now, he can only assert emphatically, "Lydia is not a mole for Valentine."

"But how can you be so sure, Alec?" Jace asks, sounding frustrated and almost a little bewildered by Alec's rather vehement defense of her.

"Because I trust her," he returns for what feels like the tenth time, just as they turn the final corner of the corridor, entrance finally in sight.

"But why?" his parabatai exclaims once again, clearly just as annoyed by this recurring argument of theirs as Alec is.

At the same time as Izzy says carefully, "Alec, we don't even know her."

And Alec just has enough.

He comes to an abrupt halt in the middle of the corridor, only a couple of feet away from the door leading outside. His siblings only take another step before doing the same, turning to face him as soon as they realized he stopped.

He focuses on them both, watches them for a couple of seconds, makes sure they are truly listening to him.

"You mean, you two don't know her," he finally emphasizes sharply. "Because you never so much as exchanged a damn sentence with her what with your constant running around on your own little quests instead of trying to help me get things done here." He watches them, notes their surprise at his sudden vehemence. "But in contrast to you, I do know her. I like her and I trust her. And quite honestly, that alone should damn well be enough for you two to at least give her the benefit of the doubt," he finishes strongly.

They blink at him.

Then, Izzy tilts her head consideringly, something of what he just said seeming to finally seeming to get through.

Another couple of seconds, and then she finally gives a slow, conceding nod, suddenly something almost apologetic in her eyes, either finally getting it or at the very least conceding that they are making claims about someone they don’t know anything about despite Alec himself being the one vouching for Lydia.

So, that's one. What a relief.

He turns towards Jace, hoping to find something similar in his expression.

He doesn't.

Instead his parabatai is just blinking at him, looking almost comically perplexed. "Wait, you like
her?" he asks.

Alec frowns. Why is that the part that Jace filtered out of what he just said?

"Yes, I like her," he confirms. It's the truth after all. Although seriously, shouldn't that part have been obvious?

"Oh." Jace's expression is weird, a grin starting to form on his face. "I didn't know, man, sorry." A pause. "What about her? Does she know?"

Alec feels his eyes narrowing slightly as he observes his parabatai closely, suspicious at the sudden delight on Jace's face, but returns slowly, "Of course she knows." He feels like he might be missing something here. And Izzy practically facepalming beside him only increases that suspicion. Alec still adds on, "I told you we are working together. We are friends."


And suddenly it dawns on Alec just what Jace just took from this conversation.

A second, and then he finally gives up on keeping his face impassive, rolling his eyes in utter exasperation. Jace thinks Alec has a thing for - or possibly even - Lydia.

What is it with all these people suddenly taking an interest in his love life? No one ever seemed to care before and now suddenly everyone seems to have an opinion.

"Jace, we really are just friends," he tries, hoping to stop the train wreck he can see coming in the form of his parabatai probably attempting to meddle in his love life. "I like Lydia and she likes me. As friends and coworkers."

"Oh, I'm sure that's all it is," Jace grins broadly, clearly not believing a word.

And Alec just watches his parabatai turn and disappear through the doors to the outside, watches as he takes off ahead of them towards Magnus' loft - without any clue that it's Alec's boyfriend they'll be visiting - with the sort of exasperation only his siblings ever manage to bring out of him.

"Well, at least that promises to be rather entertaining once he finally catches on," Izzy says stepping up next to him, sounding just as nonplussed as Alec feels at Jace's obliviousness. Although, there is a definite smile starting to form on her face, likely already looking forward to the explosions.

Alec sighs, not even sure whether to feel exasperated, irritated or amused at this point.

By the angel, he has got to sit Jace down and finally let him in on some of the recent changes in his personal life.

So, even as he gestures for Izzy to follow him so they can catch up with Jace, Alec swears to himself that he is going to take the very next opportunity to at least let his parabatai in on the fact that Alec is not only not interested in Lydia but also that he is already in a committed relationship with a very male, very powerful, ridiculously gorgeous Downworlder. At which point Alec might as well add on just who it is he is dating, tell Jace that Alec somehow managed to snag himself Magnus Bane. And that he has absolutely no intention of letting him go any time soon either. Possibly not ever.

Alec even wants to tell him, honestly looks forward to sharing this not-quite-new-anymore part of his life with his parabatai.

So, yeah. Next possible opportunity.
Then again, who knows when that will be.

Because - if recent experiences are to be believed - dealing with any mess Clary Fray creates is probably not only going to take a while to clean up but also put all of them as well as the entire Shadowworld in danger on multiple occasions.

All just so one Clary Fray can get exactly what she wants when she wants it.

But, then again, what else is new?

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It only takes the three of them a couple of minutes to get from the Institute all the way to Brooklyn, thanks to their runes.

Well, Alec might also be setting a rather harsh pace, Izzy and him even catching up with Jace before his parabatai actually reaches the loft.

It's just that despite having seen his boyfriend less than an hour ago, Alec can't help but want to be back with him as soon as he can, maybe even steal a kiss before they're off on their next ludicrous adventure. Too many things have already happened today and something tells him that it's not even close to being over yet.

So once they reach the loft, Alec might actually be rather exclusively focused on getting inside his boyfriend's apartment. Which means he simply just enters as he usually does, no calling ahead, no knocking and definitely no waiting until someone comes to open the door for him.

Having full access to Magnus' place has become so natural to him that he kind forgets about this still very much being news to his siblings, to Jace in particular.

A fact which only occurs to him when he - after already having stepped inside - turns to hold the door for the two of them.

Only to be faced with Jace frowning - expression caught somewhere between confused and suspicious as he glances between Alec and the door - and Izzy blinking in surprise.

"He gave you a key?" she asks, tone teasing as she steps through the door he is still holding, but not entirely able to hide the actual surprise still in her eyes.

At her comment, Jace's suspicious frown only deepens even as he moves to follow her, now glancing between Izzy and Alec, clearly having caught on to the fact that he is missing something possibly rather significant here.

Alec watches him, tilts his head slightly in consideration.

Well, this might not quite be what he had in mind, but he did say 'at the next possible opportunity', didn’t he?

And as much as Alec hadn't thought his chance to tell Jace about Magnus would come this quickly, this - with just the three of them here, no limpets or unwanted eavesdroppers around - is honestly as good a chance as any to finally bring his parabatai up to speed regarding some of the things that have recently changed in Alec's personal life.
Yeah.

So, he looks at Izzy, expression casual, his tone entirely deadpan as he calmly announces, "It's my boyfriend's apartment. Of course I have a key."

A second.

And Jace chokes. Flips around so quickly he almost smacks his face into the door Alec is still holding, eyes wide.

"What?!"

Alec turns towards him, raises an eyebrow, before finally letting go of the door, the gesture and the sound of it closing behind them somehow making his announcement seem even more dramatic. Admittedly, Magnus and his love for flair might be rubbing off on him a little.

Jace just stares at him. But when Alec just looks back and doesn't make any attempt whatsoever to revise his previous statement, Jace's expression moves from surprised all the way to dumbfounded, staring wide-eyed at Alec.

"Wait, you're actually- You're saying-" he sounds absolutely flabbergasted. "Wait. Magnus Bane?"

Alec waits another second. Then he just nods, calmly, nonchalantly, and then a shrug for good measure in his best well-of-course manner. Jace continues to stare.

Of course, Izzy couldn't possibly miss an opportunity like this for ribbing one of them, her grin absolutely delighted as she takes a step closer to his parabatai. "Oh, Raziel," she chortles. "Your face, Jace."

Who immediately swivels towards her. "You knew?!" he demands.

She snorts, tone rather patronizing as she says, "Jace, big brother's infatuation with that man has been so ridiculously obvious right from the very start, I knew before they even officially started dating."

Alec just raises an eyebrow at that definite exaggeration. She might have noticed something between him and Magnus, but she had been just as surprised to hear about them actually dating as Jace currently is. But he doesn't say anything, having absolutely no interest in getting into separate arguments with both his siblings at the same time.

Jace is scowling now. "It couldn't have been that obvious," he grumbles. Then his eyes widen as he turns toward Alec again. "Wait. You called him to help with Clary's memories. Were you already together then? And you didn't tell me? Just how long has this been going on?"

Alec shrugs calmly, almost says 'since the day you met Clary and stopped paying attention to everything else' but in the end just settles for, "A couple of weeks now."

But Izzy clearly isn't done gloating yet, "Honestly, Jace, the question should be, how did you not notice?"

Jace sputters in offense and denial, fully focusing on her to defend himself.

Alec thinks this is all going much better than he had honestly expected and he is rather happy with Jace's current focus on Izzy instead of himself, knowing Jace will be turning his questions on Alec soon enough. But for now he is happy to leave them to it, casually walks around them, continues on towards the living room, hoping to find his boyfriend - preferably alone somewhere - to maybe steal
a kiss before they are once more entirely busy fixing someone else's problems.

His siblings will catch up as soon as Jace gets his bearings back and Izzy is done gloating.

But him going on ahead also means that his siblings are still in the entrance hall when Alec reaches the living room. A fact he will be rather grateful for in hindsight.

Alec steps through the doorway. And just freezes in place at the sight that greets him there, feeling like the breath has been knocked out of him.

Because there is Magnus, kissing someone else.

It lasts for less than a second, before the vampire is already taking a quick step back, her hands promptly releasing Magnus, a smug, anticipatory smirk on her face as her eyes immediately flit in Alec's direction.

_Almost like she knew I was coming._

Alec can't really focus on the thought.

There is blood rushing in his ears. He can hear his siblings coming closer, arguing behind him. Can see the anticipatory grin on the vampire's face, challenge in her eyes.

But the only thing Alec can really focus on is Magnus.

Magnus who hasn't even noticed him yet, who is frowning slightly, wearing a strange expression - one that Alec can't quite interpret, one he hasn't seen on him before but something almost like relief in his eyes - as he stares at the vampire, looking almost absently considering.

And then, he sees Alec standing in the doorway.

A second.

And then his eyes widen as he immediately turns fully towards Alec, skin almost seeming to pale a little, mouth opening as though to say something, something frozen and panicked and almost pleading suddenly in his eyes.

There is blood rushing in his ears and anger in his veins and something seems to be restricting his breathing.

Alec listens with a forcefully impassive face as Magnus says something about their search for the Book of the White, almost - even if not quite - stumbling over his words in his hurry to explain, watches his boyfriend’s almost choppy gestures, his movements nowhere near as expansive or fluid as usual.

His eyes narrow. Because something is wrong. Something about this is really really wrong.

Despite that hot, clawing _something_ in his chest, all Alec can really see is the pleading in Magnus' eyes, the way his entire body seems to be curving away from where the vampire is standing far too close to him, his shoulders almost a little hunched.

The way Magnus doesn't look _at all_ like he usually does after kissing, at least not after kissing Alec, not after kissing someone he actually wants to kiss.

Alec pauses.
Oh.

He gets it then. Like an epiphany, he suddenly knows exactly what is going on here.

Another quick glance at Camille's self-satisfied, anticipatory smirk and at the ever-increasing panic in Magnus' eyes the longer Alec remains silent, and he knows he is interpreting the situation correctly.

*Playing games, is she? Trying to come between us? Yeah, think again, vampire.*

He feels his siblings step up next on either side of him where he is still standing in the doorway. Jace's deluge of questions halts abruptly as soon as he gets just a single glance at Alec's face. Whatever he sees written there promptly has him falling silent, a dark scowl forming on his face as he immediately turns to face the two Downworlders instead, despite his parabatai not really knowing which one of them to direct it at. Izzy seems to be doing the exact same thing on Alec's other side.

But he can't really care about that right now.

Instead, he finally speaks up, letting that commanding tone that always gets him the attention of the entire room seep into his voice.

"We don't negotiate with prisoners."

Magnus' focus is fully on him, hasn't really been anywhere else ever since he noticed Alec standing in the doorway, but his boyfriend has fallen entirely silent now, still that same, careful look in his eyes.

For the first time since Alec met him, Magnus looks almost subdued.

And Alec absolutely abhors seeing it.

He glances at the vampire, can't help but wonder just what sort of hold she has over his boyfriend.

His eyes narrow further.

And then he just starts crossing the distance between them, shoulders back as though going in for an actual confrontation, purpose in his every step.

Camille immediately turns slightly to fully face him, even takes a small step forwards, clearly ready to meet his challenge. And pretty much confirming Alec's suspicions just what she might be trying to do here.

But she is absolutely mistaken if she thinks Alec is aiming for her. He quite simply couldn't care less about her beyond the effect she seems to be having on his boyfriend to have him looking not at all like his usually so bright, confident, radiant self.

So, when he reaches the two of them, he just side-steps her, like she is barely worth his notice at all, entirely, *purposely*, obviously dismissing her.

Instead, he reaches past her, reaches for his boyfriend, lets his hand settle at the back of Magnus' neck. And then, unceremoniously pulls him in for a kiss.

There is a moment of hesitation, of surprise, Magnus clearly not having expected the kiss. Barely a second, and then all tension just seems to bleed out of Magnus, lets himself lean fully against Alec's chest, seems to almost go pliant in obvious relief.

Magnus' hands come up to settle on Alec's waist, their hold on him maybe a little tighter than usual,
pressing just the slightest bit closer as Alec lets his arm curl fully around him.

Still, the kiss is nothing heated and it only lasts for a few seconds. It's just a firm, \textit{claiming} kiss.

Because this is \textit{his} warlock. And Alec dares anyone to try and say differently.

And when he finally pulls back slightly, enough so he can see Magnus, his boyfriend looks exactly as he \textit{should} after being kissed.

All warm and soft eyes, focused on nothing and no one but Alec himself.

Like the rest of the world doesn't quite matter right now. Like Alec is the only thing he \textit{can} see.

Yeah.

Whatever games the vampire thinks she's playing, Alec wants no part in it. And clearly neither does Magnus.

He leans in for another brief, much softer kiss, before pulling back, arm staying curled around Magnus not sparing the vampire so much as a single glance as she is led out of the room by his siblings.

And, sure, Jace may be giving him a rather significant look to match Izzy's questioning frown, but Alec is honestly glad that his siblings know him well enough to keep their questions to themselves for now.

Because the arm curled around his waist is still holding on a little tighter than usual and Alec truly doesn't like seeing Magnus so rattled, doesn't like being messed with himself and likes someone screwing with Magnus even less.

So, as the soon-to-be Head of the New York Shadowhunter Institute let him just say that, whether she is aware of it or not, but Camille Belcourt just managed to make a new enemy she maybe really shouldn’t have.

+++ Magnus listens with half an ear as Clary and Simon ramble on about the bargain they have struck with Camille to get the Book of the White from her.

He quite honestly couldn’t really care less about any of it right now.

The only thing he wants is a couple of minutes alone with Alexander. To talk. To clarify things. To clear up what just happened, even if Alexander seems to have seen right through Camille’s little mind games.

And, \textit{dear magic}, is Magnus ever so incredibly grateful for that.

Magnus has never understood Camille’s enjoyment of playing games with others’ minds and hearts, the more damaging the better. And, oh, does she love playing with Magnus’ heart especially. Some of his deepest scars have been left by her cheerfully gauging yet another wound into his heart, smiling brightly as she did so.

He glances at Alexander who remains standing close, not having left Magnus’ side ever since so clearly staking his claim after Camille’s stunt with the kiss. Not that Magnus is complaining. Quite to the contrary.
The thing is, Magnus doesn’t do devotion halfway, never quite managed to figure out how not to give all of himself. Magnus quite simply loves with all that he is.

Magnus feels something like a smile tug at his lips despite the situation.

Because, oh, how he loves Alexander.

It’s something Magnus has been aware of for a while now, simply knowing his own heart too well not to notice his feelings for Alexander changing over the past weeks.

But still, despite being fully aware of his own feelings, somehow the realization of just how far his devotion for this Shadowhunter goes - how exclusive it has become - had only come to him when Camille kissed him.

Admittedly, when she had reached for him Magnus might have kind of forgotten to move away from her, far too used to her kissing him and just for a bare instant forgetting that she didn’t have that right any longer.

She’d had his heart for a long time, and even once they were finally over he had more than once been honestly scared - terrified - at the thought that he might never fully shake her grip on him, that he would always take her back whenever she decided to return to him.

But apparently not anymore.

Because she had kissed him, her lips against his so very familiar, and he’d been honestly shocked to realize that he didn’t feel anything. No longing or nostalgia, no twinge in his heart.

And when she had pulled back after that mere second of a kiss, Magnus had just stared at her – in surprise, in delight, in bone-deep relief – feeling like a weight he had almost-but-never-quite forgotten was there had finally lifted off his chest.

Whatever hold she’d had on him for so long was just gone.

Because Magnus is Alexander’s now, wholly and completely.

Of course, that’s the exact moment he noticed Alexander standing in the doorway, clearly having stepped into the room just in time to see Camille pull away.

And Magnus isn’t naïve enough not to know that she’d timed it exactly right. She has never dealt well with someone taking something she considers hers, so of course the first thing she’d do when seeing him for the first time in decades would be to try and come between Magnus and Alexander as soon as she realized there was someone new who had usurped her position in Magnus’ life.

But Alexander hadn’t fallen for it.

For a few heart-stopping moments, Magnus had thought he might have, that Camille might have succeeded with her attempt to drive a wedge between them. But then Alexander had pretty much just scoffed in derision, scowled at the centuries old vampire who dared put her hands where they didn’t belong, before proceeding to very effectively stake his claim.

Turns out, while vampires in general may not deal well with someone touching something they consider theirs, apparently neither do Shadowhunters.

And ever since, Alexander has been sticking close to his side while - knowingly or unknowingly - doing the one thing Camille hates most, namely utterly dismissing her and all of her attempts to rile
him even in the slightest.

Alexander isn't even doing her the favor of expending the effort to actually ignore her presence in repayment for having kissed his boyfriend, just reacts to the things she says the same way he does for everyone else, impassive nonchalance in every gesture, face neutral, casual disinterest in his every word. Like she doesn't even really register.

And Camille is absolutely fuming. Sure, she might be trying to hide it, might even succeed in fooling the others, but they've known each other for too long for Magnus not to be able to see the annoyance in her eyes.

Which brings them here, everyone gathered in his living room, listening to Clary and Simon explaining the bargain they struck – the Book of the White in exchange for the guarantee that Camille won't be prosecuted for her most recent breaches of the Accords – but neither of the two realizing that no one here is really listening to them.

Alexander is still sticking close to Magnus' side, Camille is busy acting unaffected by being dismissed, and Isabelle and Jace keep glancing between the three of them, questions in their eyes, clearly aware that something happened earlier that they only got to see the fallout of.

Which is another thing.

Because apparently Jace knows about them now, what with Alexander just stepping up to Magnus earlier and having so freely kissed him despite his parabatai being in the room, something which would have Magnus really rather giddy.

If only he weren't so very focused on Alexander.

They need to talk.

Even with Alexander having so easily seen through Camille’s games, if there is one thing Magnus' many years in this world, his numerous relationships have taught him, it's that there is nothing quite like misunderstandings and festering doubts to erode trust, to ultimately break a relationship. As cliché as it may sound, but communication truly is key.

So, Magnus barely halfway listens to the plan – not bothering to point out how cheap the bargain is, that Camille would never give in to their demands so easily if she didn’t have something else up her sleeve, never one not milk an opportunity for all it could possibly be worth – and when asked, he makes the portal they need, even follows the others through it.

But he is honestly just here because Alexander is. Let the others deal with Camille and digging through her apartment to find the book. He has far more pressing matters on his mind.

And clearly he isn’t alone in that.

Because pretty much as soon as they get to Camille's lavish apartment, Alexander quickly glances at him, before saying casually, “We should check the perimeter.”

It’s truly not the most convincing excuse but Magnus will most definitely take it, simply glad that Alexander seems to agree with his need for a few moments of privacy.

"Oh, definitely," he agrees. "If I know Camille, she'll have a trick or two up her sleeve." Which may be true enough but honestly has very little to do with his prompt agreement.

Neither of them even bothers to wait for the others' reactions, just leaving them behind in the library,
turning down the wide corridor, lined rather tackily by portraits and roman statues, walking side by side down the wide corridor, to check the rest of this place for traps or other sorts of surprises.

For a while, neither of them speaks. And while it isn't the most comfortable of silences, there is still surprisingly little tension between them despite what just happened barely half an hour ago.

Finally, he calls himself a coward in his own mind, and then stops in the middle of the corridor just a couple of steps away from the door to the next room for them to check. Alexander immediately does the same, facing him.

Magnus makes himself speak up. “Camille and I used to be together,” he just says, outwardly calm, inwardly rather anxious.

The this-is-the-list-of-my-past-lovers-please-don’t-judge talk is never a particularly fun conversation to have, much less if you have as long a list as Magnus does and even more so if the other party doesn’t have a list at all.

Magnus has never been with someone who hadn’t had at least one relationship before him, and while he truly quite enjoys the fact that he is Alexander's first in everything - adores it, honestly, doesn’t wish in any way for that to be different - he can't help but wistfully think how nice it would be if he didn't have to be entirely alone in this.

Although, at his pronouncement Alexander just nods, clearly having figured as much at this point, but doesn’t react beyond that, not actually saying anything, eyes calm and fixed on Magnus as he clearly waits for more.

So, he continues, feeling like he owes Alexander at least some sort of explanation. “We were together for a long time, more of an on-again-off-again thing than a real, continuous relationship. And it was a long time ago. We have been over for longer than we were ever together.”

A pause.

Alexander nods again, this time more slowly, continuing to watch him, something almost-but-not-quite like a frown on his face.

And Magnus can't help but wonder just how much Alexander might be able to read on his face about just how less-than-optimal his relationship with Camille had been for his heart or for his mental health. Or maybe he is just trying to come to terms with having met one of Magnus' exes.

Either way, Alexander finally just huffs out a breath, something endearingly frustrated in his expression as he says, “I don’t really care about your exes.” Then his expression darkens, voice quite a bit more menacing as he adds on decisively, “As long as they know to keep their hands to themselves now.”

Magnus blinks at him.

And then he chokes on a laugh.

That’s just such a typically Alexander thing to say.

At his reaction, Alexander's expressions lightens, a sardonic, slightly sheepish, but still somehow determined smile on his face as he watches Magnus laugh quietly. It’s such an endearing expression that he just can’t help but reach up to cup the back of Alexander's head and pull him in for a brief, warm kiss, relief in his heart.
How did he ever manage to find someone like this? Someone who is just like Magnus, only knowing how to do devotion all the way or not at all, someone who doesn’t look for weaknesses or leverage to be used later on, someone who doesn’t play games, doesn’t even know how to?

Magnus honestly has no clue how he managed to catch himself this one, how he got so incredibly lucky, but is he ever so grateful he did.

Even when the kiss ends, Alexander doesn’t fully draw away, staying close, one hand on Magnus’ hip, the other coming up to curve around Magnus jaw. And there is now something serious in his expression that makes it impossible for Magnus to move away either.

They stand like that for a few moments, just quietly, foreheads almost leaning against each other.

“It was bad?” Alexander finally asks quietly, the words murmured in the space between them.

He doesn’t specify. But then again, he doesn’t need to. Magnus knows exactly what he is asking.

And of course Alexander would pick up on just how much of a toll his relationship with Camille had taken on him, how much damage she had done. It just figures that Alexander – who is so used to always observing everyone around him – would notice when even most of Magnus’ closest friends hadn’t seen it, even while he had still been with Camille.

Magnus closes his eyes for a moment - memories of walking around with a battered, constantly somewhat broken heart immediately overtaking his mind - before he opens them again.

“It was,” he replies just as quietly. He won’t pretend not to know exactly what his boyfriend is asking about.

Alexander nods, carefully, but clearly unsurprised. Before he leans in for another lingering, soft kiss. Nothing but gentle comfort.

Magnus just lets himself lean into it, into the tender warmth of it, the reassurance that is so freely offered.

How was I ever supposed to not fall in love with this man?

When he finally pulls back from the kiss, there is something gentle and so, so warm in Alexander’s eyes that Magnus can’t help but simply smile back at him, openly and unguardedly, marveling at the fact that he can see everything he feels reflected right back at him in Alexander’s eyes.

Magnus doesn’t know for how long they stay like that, gazing into each other’s eyes, perfectly content to simply be standing close, in each other's space, kind of just lost in each other.

They likely would have remained like this for even longer if there hadn’t been a noise from the room they are standing beside. The sound of several people coming closer.

And maybe things would have been different if he and Alexander had actually been arguing right now, thereby unintentionally announcing their exact location to anyone coming closer beforehand. Or maybe if they had still been kissing, entirely distracted from their surroundings.

But, as it is, they both hear it, automatically take a step apart as they glance in the direction of the sound.

Just in time for someone – or rather several someones – to appear from the room just a couple of feet to their right.
And everyone freezes in surprise.

‘Everyone’ being not only Magnus and Alexander, but also the eight Circle members and Valentine of all people who just stepped into the corridor.

And who are all clearly just as surprised to see them here as Alexander and Magnus are by their presence in return.

Chapter End Notes

So, quite the busy chapter... Lightwood siblings dynamics (which I feel I might have been neglecting a little), Jace finding out about Magnus, and finally the involuntary-kiss scene, fixed via possessive!Alec :3 And loads of introspection, despite so many things happening XD Would absolutely love to know what you think :D

Also, it's becoming rather clear that I won't be able to fit everything I still want to include into just one more chapter, so this fic will likely turn into eighteen chapters total after all :)

And thank you so much for all your comments and kudos! You guys are just wonderful (°^°°)

Works inspired by this one

[Art] One Step Ahead by Kaister

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!