Agony

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Agony

by SHTWSPNSH

Summary

The New York Institute has been compromised, and Sebastian and Valentine are in the wind. The High Inquisitor is out for blood, and her wrath has zeroed-in on the current head of the Institute; Alexander Lightwood. She decides to make an example out of him, but will her punishment take things too far? Tag to s02e18.

Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own these characters. They belong to Cassandra Clare and I wouldn’t have it any other way!

This story is a work in progress on Fanfiction.net but a kind reviewer mentioned I should try posting it on AO3, so here goes nothing! This is my first Shadowhunters story, so please be kind and comment if you're enjoying the ride!

Also, the non-con is pretty brief and not overly detailed. It's not a main theme to the story and doesn't show up until chapter 14. I've put that section in italics so it can easily be skipped if you prefer not to read it. Plenty of other hurt/comfort moments to enjoy instead! I will do my best to post a new chapter each week until I've caught up to the postings on Fanfiction.net. Now on with the show!
Out for Blood

Alec tried to focus on the conversation happening around him.

He knew Jace, Izzy, and Clary were discussing something important, and as he was still the head of the New York Institute, any final decisions concerning its safety would have to be passed by him first.

But the talk he had just had with Magnus outside of Max’s hospital room kept replaying in his mind, thoroughly distracting him.

Alec had just been getting used to the idea of being in a relationship. It was a brand-new concept for him, and one that was equal parts exciting, terrifying, and- as he had only recently discovered-crippingly painful.

There was still so much he wanted to experience, so much he still had to learn, and so much he wanted to share with Magnus, but now it seemed he’d never get that chance.

Magnus had broken up with him.

If only Alec had just been honest with him about the Soul Sword being missing, maybe none of this would’ve…

“Alec!”

Alec jumped slightly at the close proximity of the voice. He had forgotten for a moment that he wasn’t alone in the room. “Huh?”

He blinked to clear his head, then glanced over at Jace who was leaning back against Alec’s office desk, staring at him with a look of concern on his face.

“You alright, buddy?” Jace asked, his voice soft. Empathetic.

He probably thought Alec was still worrying about Max. God, Max… Did everything really have to fall apart all at once?

Alec let out a slow, steadying breath, then nodded, studiously ignoring Izzy’s sudden frown as she turned to look at him too. “Yeah, sorry. Uh… What were you saying?”

“Just tryin’ to put a little perspective on things,” Jace replied. “Maybe it’ll help us figure out Jonathan’s next step. Any ideas?”

Alec was grateful for the distraction, but now that he was outside of his own head again, he was starting to feel the effects of the day.

There was a sharp ache pulsing just behind his puffy eyes, a dull throbbing in the center of his chest that had nothing to do with heartburn and everything to do with Magnus, and he couldn’t get his exhausted mind to focus.

More than anything, he just wanted to escape to the quiet solitude of his room, curl up on his bed, and let someone else handle the tough decisions for a while.

Realizing Jace was still watching him and waiting for an answer, Alec merely shook his head. Truth be told, he was just too damned tired to come up with an intelligent response.
Jace nodded glumly, then went back to staring at the floor as an uncomfortable silence fell over the room once again. Isabelle was the first to break it this time, her guilt eating away at her soul.

“Saving me from Azazel… It must’ve been part of Jonathan’s plan.”

They had all been thinking it, but no one had dared to say it aloud. Jonathan was just as manipulative as his father. Just as ruthless too, if not worse. He had found a weakness in the Institute’s chain, and he had targeted it. Targeted her.

The plan had worked flawlessly, and as repayment for saving Izzy from the Greater Demon, “Sebastian” had been welcomed into the Institute with open arms.

And now the Shadowhunters were left scrambling to pick up the pieces.

Izzy bowed her head, the responsibility weighing heavily on her shoulders. Maybe if she hadn’t been so weak, if she hadn’t been so desperate for a hit of yin fen…

“I was the one to bring him to the Institute, and…”

Alec was moving towards her before she could finish her next sentence.

His big brother senses were on high alert, especially since Max had been attacked, and he knew his sister was blaming herself for everything that had transpired lately.

But Izzy wasn’t solely at fault. They had all been fooled by Jonathan.

He squeezed her shoulder gently in comfort. “Don’t. We’re all responsible for this.”

“At least now we know that Valentine can never get the Mirror and raise the Angel,” Clary added, trying to lighten the mood a bit.

Jace shook his head, never the one to lean towards optimism when realism is what had kept him alive all these years.

“I’m not so sure. Look, even with our pure Angel blood, doesn’t it seem strange that Clary’s runes would be powerful enough to destroy a Mortal Instrument? And why didn’t it destroy the Sword?”

Alec’s brain instinctively filled with scathing remarks about how Clary probably didn’t do it right since she was still relatively new to their world and was clueless when it came to controlling her angelic abilities.

But for the sake of his tentative friendship with her and his love for his Parabatai, he managed to bite his tongue and keep his mouth shut.

Sometimes it was just smarter to stay quiet and listen.

Clary slowly rose to her feet from her perched position on the lamp table by the door, her eyes widening as comprehension suddenly dawned on her.

“What if the mirror I destroyed wasn’t the Mortal Mirror?”

Jace looked even more confused by the proposal.

“Then why would your mom give it to the warlocks to protect?”

“Maybe she thought it was. We all did.”
Alec watched with a raised eyebrow as Clary made her way to the other side of his office, seemingly transfixed by one of the paintings hanging on the far wall. A painting of Idris.

“Maybe whoever made it wanted it that way,” she finished.

“To distract people from finding the real one,” Izzy supplied, nodding her head in understanding as she too connected the dots.

Jace cast his mind back, trying to recall any details he could from the stories he used to hear about the Mortal Mirror when he was a child.

“Well, the legend says the mirror’s meant to not easily be found. That the Angels hold the key.”

“…The water,” Clary stated out of the blue, earning three equal looks of confusion from her friends. “It’s a reflection.”

Jace frowned at her like he was afraid for her sanity.

“What water? What are you talking about?”

“I didn’t destroy the Mirror,” Clary quickly explained. “These visions I’ve been having, they’re a message from the Angel. The Mirror is Lake Lynn.”

“And you’re sure about this?” Alec pressed, trying to follow the line of logic himself.

“It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

“She’s right, Alec,” Jace confirmed, having thought it through a bit more. “We need to get Idris locked down. We’ve got the upper hand for now, but Valentine will figure it out eventually. We need to be ready when that happens.”

Finally, some intel Alec could work with. “Agreed.”

He strode behind his desk and opened his laptop, intending to reach out to the High Inquisitor, Imogen Herondale. She needed to be apprised of the situation, and there wasn’t a moment to lose.

Jace, Isabelle, and Clary quickly circled around him, preparing to offer help in any way they could.

But before Alec could send the connection request, there was a brisk knock on the door, and in walked the very woman with whom he wanted to speak, surrounded by an entourage of Clave underlings.

Alec quickly stood back up to face her, respectfully.

“Madame Inquisitor… I was just about to contact you with some new information regarding the Mortal Instruments.”

Inquisitor Herondale looked down her nose at their small group, her sharp, condescending eyes locking onto Alec’s and giving him the distinct impression that he had done something wrong.

He shifted uncomfortably but refused to break eye contact.

“By all means, Mr. Lightwood. Enlighten me,” she responded dryly.

“It seems Valentine and Jonathan believe that the New York Institute is in possession of the Mortal Mirror, and they won’t be leaving the city without it.”
“Thank the Angel he wasn’t able to find it here while under the guise of Sebastian Verlac. To think that Jonathan Morgenstern has been practically living within these walls for weeks… There’s no telling how much internal information he could’ve passed on to Valentine behind our backs.”

“There is one piece of information we know they don’t have yet,” Jace stated, stepping forward to align himself with Alec. “The Mirror isn’t in the Institute. It’s in Idris.”

Imogen’s attention immediately shifted over to Jace, momentarily letting Alec off the hook. “I beg your pardon?”

“The Mirror is Lake Lynn,” Clary chimed in. “My connection with the Angel led us to it.”

The Inquisitor paled considerably at the news.

“That’s the very same water that Raziel first rose from. Who else knows about this?”

“Unfortunately, the number of people we can trust is getting smaller by the day,” Jace replied solemnly. “We thought it best to tell you first. We would like to officially request soldiers from the Guard to be placed in the surrounding woods around the lake. It may only be a matter of time before Valentine realizes he’s been had.”

Imogen beamed at him, looking smug as ever.

“And that, my dear boy, is why you should still be running this Institute. Clearly, you’ve managed to keep your priorities straight, unlike some of your friends.”

The scathing look she shot at Alec immediately put Jace on the defensive. He straightened up to his fullest height, challenging Imogen’s authority.

“It’s thanks to Alec’s intuitive distrust of the guy that Sebastian didn’t end up as part of the Guard protecting the supposed mirror. If Jonathan had left here with it, you can rest assured that Valentine would’ve discovered that it was a fake by now. He could’ve already been on his way to Idris and we’d still be sitting around, non-the-wiser.”

“In short,” Izzy added as she stood and took up position on her brother’s other side, “Alec gave us our only tactical advantage.”

Imogen had to fight the urge to roll her eyes.

“Maybe, and maybe not. We could discuss potential outcomes till we’re blue in the face, but that doesn’t change the reason I’ve come here today.”

“Which is?” Jace demanded as politely as he could.

“Mr. Lightwood has crossed too many lines of late to continue to go unpunished for his actions.”

Jace scoffed at the ludicrous statement.

“You can’t be serious…”

“I’m afraid I am. The High Counsel has already reviewed the case at my behest and they’ve agreed with me whole-heartedly, so I’m simply here as a formality to make sure the proceedings are justly carried out.”

“What proceedings? And on what grounds?”
'Jace,’ Alec warned, before returning his attention to Imogen. ‘If I have failed the Clave when it comes to leading this Institute, then I will of course accept any punishment you deem worthy of my indiscretions, Madame Inquisitor.’

Imogen nodded her approval.

‘I’m glad to hear it, Mr. Lightwood. And as to the grounds, Jonathan, the list has grown quite extensive, I assure you.’

‘Name one,’ Jace demanded, crossing his arms over his chest and giving off a threatening vibe.

Alec would’ve trodden on his foot had there been a subtle way of doing so. The last thing he wanted was for his Parabatai to share in his punishment simply because of his insubordination.

‘I hardly know where to begin,’ Imogen responded, then rounded on Alec. ‘For starters, losing Valentine during his transfer to Idris.’

‘That wasn’t Alec’s fault,’ Jace practically growled. ‘One of the guards was either on Valentine’s payroll, or Valentine threatened him into submission. Either way, it was beyond Alec’s control.’

‘Beyond his control? He chose the guard personally, did he not?’

In truth, Alec had been stretched too thinly at the time between his Institute duties and worrying about Magnus that he had allowed Izzy, his most loyal soldier, to hand-pick the transfer team instead.

Izzy shifted forward to admit as much to Imogen, but Alec gripped her wrist and held her back. His sister was already on thin ice with the High Inquisitor as it was.

“Yes. I did appoint the guard,” Alec lied smoothly, “but I realize now that I should’ve walked Valentine through that portal myself. He was a high-priority prisoner and allowing Duncan to be part of the transfer team when he had a wife and two children who could be used against him as leverage was a huge oversight on my behalf.”

“That it was,” Imogen agreed coldly.

Izzy dropped her gaze to the floor. She knew her brother’s self-incriminating words weren’t meant for her, but they still stung. He had entrusted her with an important task and she had failed him. Now he was the one suffering the consequences.

“Such an obvious show of your poor leadership skills,” Imogen continued. “I should’ve forced you to step down as Head of Institute right there and then, but against my better judgment, I allowed your father to convince me that you deserved a second chance.”

Alec, of course, knew the real reason behind Imogen’s falsely portrayed moment of compassion, and he bit the inside of his cheek to hold back his own retort.

His father, Robert, had essentially blackmailed her into letting Alec keep his position once he had discovered that the Clave was lying about being in possession of the Soul Sword.

But now that the truth was out, Imogen had no reason to fear Robert’s reprisals anymore.

She could act as high and mighty as she wanted, but Alec understood that this was nothing more than a petty power play. She didn’t like being up-staged, and now she was going to take her revenge out on Alec.
“And if that weren’t bad enough, you’ve now gone and lost Jonathan as well, and your little pet project to unite the Shadow World has put all of us at risk. The Downworlders are in a revolt against the Clave, no doubt spurred on by your reckless relationship with the High Warlock of Brooklyn, not to mention your little display of juvenile delinquency at your own wedding which has undermined everything that the Clave stands for…”

“You can’t punish someone for falling in love!” Izzy retorted furiously.

“I’ve barely scratched the surface here, Ms. Lightwood. I’ve only recently caught up on Victor Aldertree’s reports on this institute, and I’m sorry to say that I found his allegations to be quite alarming.”

“I’m sure they were, considering Victor couldn’t tell his own head from his ass on a good day,” Jace growled, then grunted when Alec elbowed him in the ribs. Subtlety be damned.

“Then, of course, there was the unfortunate murder of Jocelyn Fairchild.”

Alec swallowed hard at the memory, struggling to reign in his emotions as the horrible events of that fateful day played out in his mind as clear as if it had happened just yesterday.

This time, it was Clary who stepped up to Alec’s defense, and he found himself grateful that he hadn’t said those cruel things about her earlier.

“That’s not fair! Alec was possessed by a Greater Demon at the time of the attack. He can’t be held responsible for what happened to my mother. He didn’t…”

Imogen held up a hand and brought Clary’s rant to a halt.

“I understand that Mr. Lightwood was under a demon’s influence when he removed Jocelyn’s heart from her chest, but that does not change the fact that a Shadowhunter is responsible for the death of another Shadowhunter within the walls of this institute.

“Typically, a crime that heinous in nature would’ve instantly resulted in de-runing and expulsion from the Shadow World. Luckily for you, Mr. Lightwood, there were enough eye-witnesses and visual evidence to protect you from such a fate.”

Jace’s gaze immediately darkened. “I’ve heard enough of this. If you want to sink this ship by removing Alec from the helm, then that’s your mistake to make. But in the meantime, we’ve got fugitives to track down. Come on, Alec.”

Jace took hold of his Parabatai’s upper arm and started leading him towards the door and away from the woman who was out for his blood, but Imogen’s next words brought them both to an abrupt halt.

“Take one more step, Mr. Lightwood, and de-runing will be back on the table. Your life as a Shadowhunter will be over.”

Alec tilted his head to the right slightly but didn’t dare turn back around to face the horrid woman. “And the alternative?” he forced out through clenched teeth, his hands balling into fists at his sides to keep them from visibly shaking.

“You will endure twelve hours with the Agony rune, non-negotiable. After that, we’ll discuss whether or not you will be allowed to uphold your position as Head of Institute.”

TBC
Alec stood rooted to the spot, relatively sure he was about to throw up.

Jace, however, spun on his heel to lock eyes with Imogen, his face red with rage. “Are you insane?! Twelve hours with the Agony rune?! That could kill him!”

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic, Jonathan,” Imogen quickly dismissed. “The rune I’ll be using has, of course, been altered. The pain will start off slow and gradually increase with time. It has been used as a method of punishment for centuries, and I assure you, it’s perfectly safe and will not result in any lasting damage.”

“It’s torture!” Jace spat back, protectively placing himself between his alleged grandmother and his Parabatai.

“It’s a lesson to be learned. Such forms of discipline would hardly be effective if they were pleasant. Be glad I did not push for twenty-four hours instead of twelve.”

Jace took a step towards the tiny woman with a feral growl, perfectly willing to get into a physical altercation if that’s what it took to stop this nonsense, but a strong hand suddenly landed on his shoulder from behind and squeezed tightly.

“Jace, that’s enough,” Alec commanded, and Jace obediently backed down, albeit reluctantly. As pissed as he was, there was no way he was going to undermine Alec’s authority in front of the High Inquisitor. There was too much at stake.

That didn’t mean he couldn’t silently seethe at her though.

Alec stepped around his Parabatai and faced his accuser. After all, Lightwoods broke noses and accepted the consequences.

“Where and when?” he asked, relieved to hear that his voice came out steady and calm, the exact opposite of how he was feeling.

“Here and now,” Imogen responded, pulling out her stele pointedly. “No sense in delaying the inevitable. The sooner we begin, the sooner it’ll be over and done with.”

Not willing to trust his voice a second time, Alec gave a succinct nod and began rolling up his sleeve to receive the rune.

“Ah ah… I’m afraid a wrist isn’t going to cut it for this one,” Imogen stated and Alec glanced up through his bangs at her in question. His heart sank as she gestured towards his torso. “Remove your shirt and kneel down, Mr. Lightwood.”
Alec ground his back teeth together and tried to ignore the blush he felt creeping up his neck at the thought of disrobing in front of everyone present.

To be fair, Jace and Izzy had seen him topless on countless occasions. It was par for the course when living in close quarters and sparring together.

But in front of Clary and the High Inquisitor? That was just plain awkward.

Nevertheless, he let out a slow, steadying breath and did as instructed, his fingers fumbling slightly as he began unbuttoning the front of his white dress shirt.

Feeling Alec’s palpable discomfort emanating through his Parabatai rune, Jace made eye-contact with Clary and jerked his head towards the door.

She immediately got the message and dismissed herself, giving Izzy’s hand a quick squeeze for support and whispering to her friend to come find her later if she needed anything.

As much as she had come to care for Alec, she understood that this was a family matter and there was plenty of work that would need to be done in his absence.

Jace turned to Izzy next, about to suggest she go with Clary, but Izzy held up a hand before he could make a sound. “Save it, Jace. I’m not going anywhere.”

Jace clapped her gently on the back in acknowledgment, then stepped forward to accept Alec’s shirt from him, draping it carefully over his arm like a prized possession. He knew how OCD Alec could be about wrinkled fabric.

Alec’s eyes connected with Jace’s for a brief moment, and the gratitude in them was plain as day. Then the eldest Lightwood swallowed hard against the lump in his throat and lowered himself to his knees in front of the High Inquisitor.

He had never felt so vulnerable and on display in his life. Not even at his own disastrous wedding. It took all of his willpower not to shrink in on himself for protection.

Instead, he kept his back ramrod straight, head held high, as was expected of him.

Imogen’s eyes slowly raked over Alec’s muscular torso, searching for a big enough section of unmarked skin on which to leave her brand.

Dissatisfied with her limited options, she waved Jace out of her way, then circled around to the back of her prey, making Alec tense up even more as she passed out of his peripheral view.

She was toying with him, and he hated her for it.

Alec was so on edge that he jerked forward in surprise as her cold fingers wrapped around his bare shoulder to steady him, then had to quickly stifle a grunt as her stele began to seer into his skin like a fire poker.

Imogen had chosen a spot right in the middle of Alec’s back, between his recently acquired flexibility rune and the one for courage in combat.

He clenched his eyes shut and instinctively arched his shoulders back to try and escape the fiery pain, but Imogen’s firm grip kept him in place.

The pain was so intense that Alec missed Jace’s echoing gasp, but Izzy did not. She shot the blond
a worried look as Jace cradled his side, sympathy pains burning through his Parabatai rune like a bolt of lightning.

Izzy took a step towards Jace but he shook his head at her and she backed off, now dividing her attention equally between both of her suffering brothers.

Alec fought to remain still as Imogen applied the final flourishes. Eyes still squeezed shut, he bit his bottom lip to the point of drawing blood, counting the seconds in his head as they languidly ticked by.

When the cruel woman finally released him, Alec slumped forward onto all fours, breathing heavily through the pain as he tried to control it, his arms shaking with the strain of keeping him from face-planting on the floor.

He needed to get back up on his feet; to prove to Imogen that he could handle whatever she put him through. But the harder he tried to fight the pain, the worse it got until he submitted to it with a cry and dropped down to one elbow, head bowed as he broke out in a cold sweat.

“Alec?!” Izzy called out in fear for her brother as she watched him falter, then she was by his side with one hand on his upper arm and the other wrapped protectively around the nape of his neck.

She guided his head to her chest when he let slip a muffled sob, his entire body trembling. “It’s okay, big brother,” she whispered softly to him. “I’ve got you.”

“Give him a minute,” the High Inquisitor instructed coolly. “The activation process can be rather intense, but the initial effects will recede shortly.”

Imogen looked around, then quirked an eyebrow at Jace’s hunched form. “Something wrong, Jonathan?”

Jace quickly forced himself to straighten up again under her scrutiny, dropping his hand from his side and fighting to ignore the intense burning that was emanating through every nerve ending in his body.

“Indigestion,” he grunted back sarcastically. “Turns out being in the presence of a sadist doesn’t agree with me.”

He didn’t want the horrid woman to know that he was sharing in Alec’s pain.

That was what the Parabatai rune was all about, after all. Their souls were bound together to share the burden of any emotional or physical trauma that was too great for one Nephilim to bear alone.

Jace knew he was partially responsible for his brother’s harsh punishment. The least he could do was share in the consequences. After all, their bond could very well be Alec’s only salvation by the time the twelve-hour marker was finally up.

Jace brushed past Imogen and made his way over to his siblings. He bent down and carefully draped Alec’s shirt back around his shoulders to conceal the angry looking brand marring his brother’s pale skin.

Alec hissed as the cloth came into contact with his burning flesh, but nevertheless, he was grateful to get some of his modesty back. “Th-thanks…” he grunted out in return.

Jace’s hand rested lightly on Alec’s shoulder blade, steadying him like an anchor until he was able to catch his breath. The pain was finally relenting, and they both felt the blessed relief.
After another few tense seconds ticked by, Jace leaned further down until he was close enough to Alec’s ear that only he could hear.

“Can you stand, buddy?” he asked softly, his hand now moving in soothing circles along Alec’s upper back.

Alec squinted up at his brother and blinked a few times, swallowed down the nausea that seemed to be hitting him in constant waves, then latched onto the proffered hand in front of him when it finally swam into focus.

“I… Yeah. Yeah, I’m good.”

The sooner he could get away from the High Inquisitor, the better. And Jace, of course, knew exactly how he felt.

“Let’s get you outta here then. Come on.”

Alec rose shakily to his feet with Jace and Izzy’s assistance, then turned around to face Imogen once again. He schooled his features into a stoic expression, ignoring the drip of sweat trickling down his temple as he awaited further instructions.

The High Inquisitor stood a few feet away, giving them space and looking perfectly relaxed-almost bored- as she returned her stele to her pocket. She then checked her watch to make sure she was still on schedule for the day.

“Right then. My job here is nearly complete. The rune will disappear on its own when the twelve hours are up. Till then, I suggest you find a secluded place to pass the time, away from prying eyes. Don’t want to hurt that reputation of yours any more than it already has been, now do we? You are dismissed, Mr. Lightwood.”

Jace and Izzy began to guide Alec towards the hall, intending to bring him to the quiet salvation of his bedroom, when Imogen called out to them again.

“Jonathan, one more word before I take my leave. In private.”

Jace grumbled some choice words under his breath, then handed Alec over to their sister’s care.

“Get him to his room, Iz. I’ll meet you there in a minute.”

Izzy gave him a calculating look as she wrapped an arm protectively around Alec’s waist to limit his swaying. “Don’t do anything stupid, Jace.”

“Who, me? Wouldn’t dream of it,” Jace replied with a forced wink.

He wasn’t afraid of Imogen, and he had no qualms about letting the older woman know it, especially if his siblings were safely out of her reach.

Izzy opened her mouth to respond, but Alec suddenly yelped, clutching at his stomach as another bolt of pain shot through his entire torso.

Instinctively, Alec’s other hand shot out and latched onto the sleeve of Jace’s jacket as he doubled-over in pain.

Izzy placed her free hand against her brother’s chest to keep him from ending up on the floor again. “Easy, big brother…”
“Breathe, Alec,” Jace coached through gritted teeth, keeping a firm grip on his Parabatai’s bicep and wrapping his captured hand around Alec’s wrist to help steady him.

Hearing the pain in the blond’s shaky tone, Alec lifted his head and his eyes widened in fear as the reality of their situation became clear to him.

“J-Jace…” he rasped out, clutching tighter at his brother’s forearm, hoping to convey his apology with his eyes since his voice didn’t seem to be cooperating.

“It’s okay, Parabatai,” Jace whispered back, resting his forehead against Alec’s in a familial embrace. “For whither thou goest, I will go. We’ll get through this, Alec. Together.”

When Jace pulled back, Alec had turned an ugly shade of green and was trembling violently beneath Jace’s hands, but the pain was already waning again and there was no time to lose.

“Go,” Jace instructed firmly, and this time, Izzy didn’t hesitate. As soon as Jace relinquished his hold on Alec, Izzy guided her big brother to the door and made it out into the hallway.

Jace kept his eyes glued to his siblings till they were out of sight, watching for any signs of Alec wavering. But once they successfully turned the corner, Jace’s worry was immediately replaced by hatred for the woman waiting patiently behind him.

He rounded on her, fire blazing in his eyes. “Alec doesn’t deserve this,” he growled.

Imogen sighed dramatically with a roll of her eyes. “We’ve been over this already, Jonathan. The law is the law, and Alexander…”

“No, you are the law. You can stop this. Alec is the most law-abiding person I know. Any line-crossing you mentioned was either out of his control or at my behest.”

“I see. So you’re saying the Head of the Institute has been taking orders from a subordinate?”

“What? No, of course not. I…”

“Then you threatened him in some way, shape, or form that forced him to comply with your demands?”

Jace knew what she was getting at and he pursed his lips in frustration.

“Look, I asked him to bend the rules for me once or twice, as my Parabatai, in order to protect Clary and bring down Valentine. He only did what he thought was right.”

“And there it is. The crux of the problem. The Lightwoods only ever do what they think is right, regardless of how it affects the world around them.”

Imogen leaned close enough to the blond that he could smell the faint traces of her skin cream that she had apparently applied the night before.

“Perhaps if you had still been in charge, as I had previously appointed, none of this would be happening.”

“So that’s what this is really about,” Jace gritted back, any attempts at self-control quickly going out the window. “You’re pissed that I handed the reins back over to the Lightwoods without consulting you. That was my decision to make, and mine alone. So if you want to punish someone, punish me. Not Alec.”
Imogen smirked confidently up at him and Jace’s blood boiled as her master plan finally hit him.

“My dear boy, don’t you see? I am punishing you. I know what Valentine put you through on that ship. I know you have an incredibly high tolerance for pain, and I know half a day with the Agony rune would be no more than a slap on the wrist for you.

“You’d heal, then move on, and continue to make the same mistakes. Trust the wrong people. Break the same rules. But to witness your Parabatai suffering needlessly for your decisions? That lesson might actually stick.”

“You won’t get away with this.”

“I already have. Although, there was one outcome I had previously overlooked and must rectify immediately…”

She snapped her thin fingers and Jace suddenly found himself being held in place by her trained henchmen, his arms pinned painfully tight behind his back.

“Get off me!” he yelled in outrage, struggling against their strong grips, but to no avail. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” he demanded of the woman as she smugly approached him.

“I can’t have Alexander’s pain putting our best soldier out of commission, now can I?”

Jace instantly paled, realizing Imogen knew he was sharing in Alec’s punishment, then struggled even harder when she brazenly reached out and lifted his shirt just high enough to reveal his Parabatai rune.

“Don’t,” Jace threatened as Imogen’s stele moved towards his skin.

“It’s for your own good, Jonathan,” she stated, emotionless.

“It’s Jace,” he growled back, then bit his tongue as the stele burned against his left side.

The pain was almost as bad as the time Alec had tried to track him through their Parabatai rune, and that attempt had nearly killed them both.

Imogen was slicing them apart. Cutting their tether and separating their souls.

The burning increased until Jace couldn’t help but cry out in agony, every fiber of his being getting torn to shreds.

Then he felt absolutely nothing.

All the emotions and sensations he had been sharing with his Parabatai mere moments ago were now gone. It was like being accustomed to the rhythm and deafening noise of a nightclub, then stepping outside and feeling that disconnect as the door slams shut behind you.

His ears were ringing with the sudden silence, which was so overwhelming, he barely dared to breathe.

Jace hadn’t felt this alone, this empty, since his time on Valentine’s ship. Back then, the water had separated him from his Parabatai, weakening their bond till it was nearly inexistent. But it had been for Alec’s protection, and that was what made it tolerable.

But now… Now, he had promised Alec that he would share in his brother’s pain until the very end, and Imogen had forced him to break that promise.
Jace heard Alec scream his name in the distance and it shattered him. He needed to go to his Parabatai, to protect him, but his legs refused to cooperate.

Imogen’s minions released Jace and he staggered a few feet over to the nearest wall for support.

Leaning against it, he shakily raised his shirt and stared in dumbfounded horror at the angry red binding rune that severed his connection with his other half.

“What did you do?” he whispered out, even that quiet verbalization too loud for his mind to accept.

“Relax, it’s only temporary,” Imogen stated, as if that fixed anything. “I couldn’t have the two of you sharing his punishment through the Parabatai bond or the lesson wouldn’t be nearly as effective. Trust me, you’ll thank me later when things start to get really bad for Alexander.

“Oh, and a word to the wise? The Agony rune is tamper-proof. An iratze won’t heal his pain, and neither will magic. In fact, any attempt to interfere with Mr. Lightwood’s punishment will simply increase his suffering tenfold. You may want to inform the warlock of this before he tries to meddle in Shadowhunter affairs again, as he is wont to do.”

With that, she turned on her heel and left for the elevators, her entourage trailing obediently behind her.

Jace slid down the wall like a puppet with its strings cut, his eyes filling with tears that he was too numb to shed.

TBC
Isabelle and Alec had almost made it to Alec’s bedroom when crippling pain seared through the eldest Lightwood’s abdomen.

He dropped heavily onto all fours with a shout, the shirt around his shoulders fluttering uselessly to the ground behind him.

“Alec!”

Izzy quickly knelt down beside her brother, hands hovering awkwardly over him but afraid to touch until she could pinpoint the cause of his pain.

Alec’s head was bowed, teeth gritted and eyes squeezed shut as he fought to stay conscious. Every muscle in his body was taut, his limbs shaking with the exertion of keeping the darkness at bay.

Sweat beaded across his flushed skin as he clutched at his left side and gasped for air. Judging by where Alec’s hand was, Izzy realized that this particular injustice had nothing to do with the Agony rune.

“Gahh! JAAACCCCEEEE!” Alec screamed, collapsing onto his right side and writhing on the floor as he felt his Parabatai forcibly torn away from him.

The excruciating pain was worse than anything he had felt so far.

Izzy did her best to stay calm for the both of them. “Alec, let me see.”

He struggled against her, but eventually she managed to peel his hand away from his side just long enough to catch a glimpse of the angry red binding rune just above Alec’s Parabatai marking.

“By the Angel…”

The burn flared as soon as the etching was completed, eliciting a choked off yelp from Alec as his hand snapped back into place over the fresh wound, then the marking slowly faded to a cold, dead black.
Alec let out a final whimper and fell still, curled up in the fetal position, as the pain abated just as quickly as it had begun, leaving a black hole of numbness behind in its wake.

The silence stretched on for a full minute before Alec was able to speak again.

“Iszy, I… I can’t feel him,” he panted, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear and confusion as he stared blankly ahead at the bare wall.

“Shh…” Isabelle cooed, sounding much calmer than she felt as she ran her fingers soothingly through her brother’s damp hair, brushing the stray strands away from his pale face. “It’s gonna be okay.”

Her other hand rested on top of Alec’s, still protectively cradling his side.

A wave of nausea assaulted Alec and he squeezed his eyes shut as he lay there, jaw clenched and swallowing convulsively.

“Alec?” Izzy prompted softly. “Talk to me, big brother.”

Before he could respond, Alec’s bedroom door suddenly swung open and Magnus strolled out of it, arms laden with things he had left in Alec’s room since their relationship had started to get serious.

The warlock froze, taking in the sight before him.

“Alexander?”

Alec’s eyes shot open in surprise, nausea temporarily forgotten as Magnus dropped the goods to the side and crouched down next to the huddled Lightwoods.

“M-Magnus?” the Shadowhunter gasped, his throat tightening even further as he blinked up at the immortal man who had crushed his heart mere hours ago. “W-what are you still doing here?” he stuttered out, sounding wary, and to his horror, even a bit hopeful.

Judging by the icy glare Isabelle was giving the warlock after she noticed her brother’s discarded possessions, she had already worked that answer out for herself.

“Yeah, Magnus,” she snapped. “Why ARE you still here?”

Magnus shifted uncomfortably as he tried to formulate an answer while under the intense gazes of both Lightwoods.

“I was just… It seemed easier to retrieve my belongings while you were…” He gave a broad wave to the Institute at large, then sighed in frustration at his own lack of articulation. “Nevermind that right now. What happened? Are you hurt?”

Noticing that Alec was cradling his left side, Magnus reached out a hand to check for an injury, but Alec quickly twisted away.

“Don’t,” the younger man warned, his breath hitching at the sudden movement as every muscle in his body quivered against the lingering echoes of pain.

The warlock frowned in concern. “Alexander…”

“I’m fine,” the younger man bit out, then the tension in his shoulders slowly began to bleed away and his breathing returned to normal. “Just… Just needed a second.”
Using the hand that wasn’t protecting his side, Alec levered his torso up into a semi-reclined position with a grunt, looking like a man on a mission.

“Hey. Slow down, tough guy,” Izzy chided gently, taking hold of Alec’s shoulders to keep him still while sliding gracefully behind him to give her brother something to lean against.

Isabelle’s man-handling threw off Alec’s tentative balance and his support elbow wobbled drastically. His other hand shot out behind him to share the burden of his weight, inevitably revealing the fresh wound on his side to the warlock’s scrutiny.

Magnus’s brow furrowed even deeper as he took in the newly revealed mark adorning the pale flesh that he had come to know almost as well as his own over the past few months; A marking that Alec certainly would never have agreed to if he had had any say in the matter.

“Your Parabatai rune… It’s been severed by binding magic.” Magnus could feel the indignant anger rising in his gut on Alec’s behalf. “Who would do such a thing?”

“Imogen Herondale,” Izzy replied, practically spitting the name as if it had left a bad taste in her mouth.

Magnus’s eyes darkened at the mere mention of the horrid woman. “Why?”

“Because she’s a sadistic bitch…” Alec grunted as he pulled his knees up and attempted to get his coltish legs underneath himself. “Just forget it. What’s done is done. I need to go find Jace.”

As he tried to push his body up off the floor, his shaking arms refused to hold his weight and dumped him back down into Izzy’s waiting embrace with a mumbled curse.

“Rest for a second, would you?” Izzy scolded, her grip tightening protectively around her brother’s chest as he tried to shake her off and stand up again. “You’re just gonna hurt yourself even more.”

“Alec cocked his head at her incredulously. “Pretty sure a few strained muscles will be the least of my problems over the next twelve hours, Iz.”

“Twelve hours?” Magnus questioned, his brain struggling to put the jumbled pieces of the puzzle together.

“That’s how long the High Inquisitor’s punishment for Alec is going to last,” Izzy explained shortly, ignoring the heated glare from her brother for divulging too much information.

“Punishment? What on Earth for?”

“A bunch of trumped up charges that never would’ve stuck in a proper court trial. But I don’t think this has anything to do with upholding the law,” Izzy stated. “I just haven’t figured out what her game is yet.”

“Wouldn’t severing their bond hurt both Parabatais?” Magnus inquired. “If I were a betting man, I’d say Alec might not be her only target.”

“Maybe not, but Alec’s the only one who got the…”

“Izzy!” Alec practically shouted, silencing her instantly.

Magnus’s curious gaze shifted between the two Lightwoods who appeared to be in a stalemate, both unmovable forces of nature waiting for the other to submit first.
Whatever Alec was hiding from him, it was serious.

“Ooo-kay… Clearly I’m missing something here.”

“Just help me get him into his room?” Izzy requested softly, relenting for her brother’s sake. “I’ll fill you in on the details later.”

“Fair enough,” Magnus agreed as he stood back up. “Let’s get you inside then.” He reached for Alec to help pull him to his feet, but the Shadowhunter instantly balked.

“What? No! Guys, I told you. I need to go find…”

“Alec, don’t fight us on this,” Izzy chastised. “You can barely stand let alone go hunting through the halls in search of Jace.”

“But he…!”

“I will go find him, okay? You need to stay here in case the pain ramps up again. Imogen was right about one thing. We don’t need to broadcast this through the entire Institute. You should lay low until the punishment is over.”

Alec ground his teeth together in frustration, then nodded his concession. “Fine. But if I can’t go to him, you’ve gotta bring Jace to me. I need to see that he’s okay.”

The ‘he doesn’t handle being alone well’ remained unspoken but clearly understood between them.

She nodded. “Of course.”

Slightly mollified, Alec finally allowed Magnus to grasp his arms and pull him to his feet. No more sense in delaying the inevitable.

When the younger man swayed precariously on his way to vertical, Magnus quickly drew Alec’s right arm across his shoulders, taking on most of his weight.

Izzy rose to her feet as well, ready to hold up her end of the promise, but she hesitated when her brother faltered.

“Alec, are you sure you’re…”

“I’ve got him, Isabelle,” Magnus reassured, securing his grip more firmly around Alec’s waist to keep him upright. “Go find Jace. Bringing them together may help ease the strain of their separation.”

Izzy locked eyes with her brother questioningly, making sure he was okay with the idea of being left alone with Magnus, even if only for a short time.

Regardless of how mortifying it was to be babysat by his ex, Alec’s concern for his Parabatai easily outweighed his pride.

He inclined his head slightly, and Izzy nodded once in approval. “Alright. I’ll be back soon.”

Then with a swish of her long black hair, his sister was gone.

Magnus cleared his throat, feeling the palpable tension between himself and Alec in Izzy’s absence. “Right then. Let’s get you into bed, shall we?”
Alec felt the blush rise up his neck and into his face at Magnus’s suggestion, remembering a much more pleasant time when those same words had been spoken by that sultry voice.

The warlock looked stricken and quickly backtracked. “I didn’t mean… I was just…”

Alec’s eyes skirted away and locked onto his bedroom door, willing it to come closer. “I know what you meant,” he replied flatly, trying his best not to sound dejected.

Afraid to say the wrong thing again, Magnus opted to keep his mouth shut and focused on setting them into motion instead.

It took longer than either of them would’ve anticipated, the silence between them stretching on for ages. But eventually, Magnus managed to get them across the threshold and lowered Alec safely onto the edge of his bed.

“Thank you,” Alec stated earnestly, receiving a kind smile in return.

“Is there anything else I can get you? A blanket? Or a stiff drink, perhaps?”

“No, thanks. I uh…” Alec flexed the wrist that was still trapped by Magnus’s grip on the far side of the warlock’s shoulders to remind the man that it was time to let go. “I just need some sleep.”

Polite and subtle, but point taken. Magnus had overstayed his welcome.

“Of course. I suppose I should leave you to it then.”

Magnus reluctantly released his hold and allowed Alec to reclaim his arm, though the stilted way the younger man moved and the grimace that crossed his face as he did so caught the warlock’s attention.

His eyes narrowed as he scrutinized the boy, his left thumb gliding soothingly up and down Alec’s left side as he took in the Shadowhunter’s pained expression.

“Are you sure you’re alright? Did you injure your shoulder when you fell?”

“No,” Alec answered, a bit too quickly. “It’s fine. Like I said, I’m just tired.”

Magnus stared at him intently, a fond smile crossing his lips and a touch of humor in his sparkling eyes, until Alec couldn’t take it anymore.

“What?” he demanded.

“You know what I’ve always loved most about you, Alexander?”

Alec quirked a tired eyebrow at him, clearly not in the mood to start guessing.

“Your inability to lie convincingly. It truly is a rare gift these days.”

Alec bit his lip and looked away. “Look, Magnus, I…”

Magnus held up his free hand. “No explanation needed. But if the pain gets any worse, send me a fire message. I could whip something up that would help.”

“Yeah. I’ll do that,” Alec replied, but again, Magnus knew he was lying. The awkward fidgeting and lack of eye contact were dead giveaways.
Alec’s hand strayed to his left side of its own accord, his eyes locked on the door, waiting for his Parabatai to walk through it at any second.

Magnus had rarely seen the Shadowhunter looking so lost before. He gently squeezed Alec’s right knee, drawing his attention back and giving him something else to focus on.

“I know this can’t be easy, but remember, Alexander, this separation from Jace is only temporary. By this time tonight, you’ll be reunited, and no doubt your bond will be stronger than ever.”

Alec nodded somberly, then Magnus finally began to pull away in earnest.

“Alright. As I said, let me know if the pain gets any worse. I’ll be home all…”

As the ornate rings on his left hand grazed past the middle of Alec’s branded back, the young Shadowhunter reflexively jerked forward with a hiss of pain, unintentionally exposing the Agony rune to Magnus.

The warlock’s eyes instantly widened in surprise.

“What in the name of Edom…?”

Realizing his mistake, Alec tried to sit back up quickly, but the damage had already been done. The warlock easily caught hold of Alec’s tense shoulders before he could escape.

“Magnus, wait…”

The older man angled him so that the light streaming in from the open door illuminated the Shadowhunter’s other latest rune, leaving no room for doubt as to what his “punishment” truly entailed.

Magnus’s eyes instantly flashed yellow with fury, his own traumatic experience with the mark still painfully fresh and seared into his mind.

“Imogen did this to you?” he demanded in a deadly tone.

“Stay out of this, Magnus,” Alec mumbled, halfheartedly attempting to pull away again.

Even that feeble struggle was enough to make the younger man’s stomach clench uncomfortably in protest. The burning from the mark had already spread throughout the muscles in his back, knotting and tearing as it went.

He couldn’t quite contain the flinch when Magnus quickly turned him around so that they were face-to-face. Although, Alec’s reaction had more to do with having to confront the angry warlock than any physical pain he was experiencing.

“The Agony rune isn’t just a slap on the wrist, Alexander. Imogen is making this personal, just as she did with Valentine. What does she have against you?”

Alec knew Magnus meant well, but the last thing he wanted to do was get into that lengthy conversation right now.

“Nothing. I screwed up, and now I’m paying the price for it. Simple as that.”

“Fine,” Magnus stated sharply as he stood to his full height and turned for the door. “If you won’t tell me, then I’ll go demand answers straight from the source.”
“Magnus, stop!” Alec called after him, rising unsteadily to his own feet. “Just drop it, alright? This is none of your concern!”

“*None of my concern?!*” the warlock demanded, spinning back around.

“You wanted to break up, remember? You can’t have it both ways! I’m not your problem anymore, so stay out of this and go back to hunting down Valentine with the other Downworlders. *He’s* the priority here.”

“Alexander…”

“Magnus, please. Don’t make this any worse than it already is,” Alec practically begged, his voice so soft that he sounded utterly broken.

Magnus swallowed down his anger and waited for his demon eyes to return to normal before approaching Alec and gently cradling his face in his hands.

“Just because we’re no longer together, it doesn’t mean I don’t care about you, Alec. Just tell me what this is about. Maybe I can help.”

Alec could feel another intense wave of pain starting to build and he was desperately trying to hold it together until he managed to get Magnus out of the room.

His entire torso now felt like a raw, open wound, similar to the aches and pains he has felt after particularly grueling hunts. The kind that required assistance from the iratze rune. It took every bit of his remaining strength to keep that pain concealed.

Maybe after the warlock left, he’d give an iratze a try… But he had to get Magnus to leave first. Showing weakness in front of his ex was not an option.

“You’ve done enough already, Magnus. Just go. And don’t forget your box on the way out.”

Alec’s hands were shaking as he pulled the warlock’s wrists away from his face and took a step back. The sooner Magnus left, the sooner he could wallow in his misery and drop the façade he was struggling so hard to maintain.

Unfortunately, the warlock didn’t seem to be picking up on his cues.

“There’s no rush. I can wait with you until Isabelle returns if you’d…”

Alec’s frustration quickly morphed into anger.

“What part of *just go* do you not understand?!” he snapped back. “I don’t *want* you here, Magnus, and I sure as hell don’t need a babysitter!”

Sensing that the situation was quickly spiraling out of control, Magnus hardened his heart and donned the mask of professional warlock instead of concerned ex-boyfriend.

“I see. Apologies for the unannounced intrusion. I’ll just… take my leave then.”

Magnus turned and headed for the door. As he gripped the knob, Alec’s nausea returned with a vengeance, doubling him over.

He tried to stumble his way to the bathroom at the other end of the room, but the pain had reached the muscles in his legs and they screamed at him in protest, refusing to hold his weight.
His knees buckled and he pitched forward, landing hard on the wooden floor again with a yelp, which was quickly followed by the sounds of distressed retching.

Magnus paused as soon as he heard the loud thud behind him. He had the door cracked and the view of the long stretch of hallway was calling his name.

Part of him wanted to rush to the Shadowhunter’s aid, but the other part of him considered leaving the boy to stew in his own mess for a change. He warred with himself for a moment, then…

“Please, just g-go,” Alec begged quietly, then retched again, followed by a furious, “Ah! Damn it!”

Mind made up, the warlock closed his eyes and let out a heavy sigh as he collected his emotions, then shut the door and went back to Alec’s side.

He waved his hand and cleared up the mess of bile on the floor—thankfully, Alec hadn’t had the chance to eat that morning yet—then stooped down and carefully levered Alec back up and onto the bed again.

“Why must you always be so damned stubborn, Alexander?”

Alec let out a miserable huff of laughter as he laid back on the hard mattress, one knee raised and his left arm wrapped protectively around his rebelling stomach.

"Takes one to know one."

He pressed his right thumb and forefinger against his throbbing eyes, trying to keep the manifesting migraine at bay.

“You really don’t need to be here for this, Magnus.”

“I know. But I want to be.”

“Because you enjoy watching me suffer?” Alec joked darkly, earning a playful swat on his shoulder from the warlock.

“No. Because you should never have to suffer alone.”

Alec’s right hand dropped heavily to his chest and he stared up at the plain ceiling, unable to look the warlock in the eye. “But what if I deserve it?”

Magnus scoffed. “Having been on the receiving end of that horrible rune myself, I can assure you, no one deserves that level of misery.”

“Not even me?” Alec asked softly, his eyes finally connecting with Magnus’s and the pain in them reflected more than just the physical kind.

Magnus shook his head sadly. “Especially not you, Alexander.”

Alec suddenly hissed and his right arm shot down to join the left, hugging his burning midsection as the pain flared again. He tried unsuccessfully to focus on breathing through the fiery torment that was tearing up and down the muscles of his entire body.

Alec barely registered the dip of the mattress as Magnus sat beside him, but there was no mistaking the gentle hands that rested on his biceps, grounding him when all else failed.

The warlock waited patiently for Alec’s pain to abate, whispering words of comfort as the
Shadowhunter tossed and turned beneath his steady grip, desperately trying to escape the agony until it finally plateaued.

Alec fell still, panting heavily and swallowing reflexively against the bile that was forcing its way up his throat again.

When he opened his eyes, he realized that he had curled into Magnus’s side, the top of his head pressed against the warlock’s leather-clad thigh, the fabric of which was tightly grasped in his fist.

The warlock took it all in stride, running one hand gently up and down Alec’s bare arm while the other cradled his head, soothing him until the tension in his body slowly began to bleed away.

As embarrassed as Alec was by the situation, he couldn’t force himself to demand distance between them again. He wanted to be strong, but he needed Magnus, now more than ever.

“I… I’m sorry, Magnus,” he whispered out between panting breaths. “For lying to you. For pushing you away. I screwed everything up.”

“Nonsense. We’ve both made mistakes, Alexander. My decision to end things had more to do with protecting my people than anything you may have done. I simply couldn’t afford to be selfish at a time like this. Though, I’ll admit that I’m rather embarrassed about how I reacted to the whole situation.

“You’d think, considering my age, I would’ve had the wisdom and fortitude to handle a break-up better and not go running to the Seelie Queen for retribution. But believe it or not, letting you go was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do.”

“Which is why you shouldn’t have to see me like this,” Alec muttered dejectedly. “It’s not fair to you.”

“Alexander, whether we’re together or not, I will always do what I can to help you. I only wish you had told me about the mark sooner. I know at least three different spells that could’ve protected you from some of this pain.”

“Think that sort of defeats the purpose of an Agony rune, Magnus.”

Alec nuzzled his head against Magnus’s thigh and closed his eyes, enjoying the brief respite while it lasted, and the warlock continued his comforting strokes until he felt the Shadowhunter become pliant beneath his hands.

“I won’t tell if you won’t,” he responded, softly.

Gently, Magnus upped the pressure against Alec’s shoulder until he was able to roll him flat onto his back with little protest. Alec squinted up at him, his exhausted eyes cracking back open to half-mast. “What’re you doin’?” he croaked out past a dry throat.

Magnus snapped the fingers of his other hand, manifesting a blue ball of light into his palm. “Close your eyes and try to breathe deeply. This may tingle a bit…”

Magnus started to direct the fiery orb towards the younger man’s chest. Then suddenly, the Shadowhunter’s eyes widened in fear as he threw out a hand, latching onto the warlock’s wrist and preventing the orb from getting any closer.

“Wait, Magnus! W-wait! What if… What if the High Inquisitor finds out you interfered? She’ll come after you next for getting in the way of Clave business.”
Magnus scoffed. “Let her try.”

“I won’t let you take that chance. Not for me. Please, just… Don’t.”

Magnus sighed and let the magic slip away into the air around them. After all, there was plenty more where it came from.

Then he gently took hold of Alec’s restraining wrist, dislodging and maneuvering it to rest across the boy’s lower abdomen, reuniting it with Alec’s other arm.

He leaned over the nervous Shadowhunter with a confident expression on his face.

“Listen to me, Alexander. I’m not afraid of Imogen, or the Clave. There’s nothing they can do to me that I haven’t survived at least once already. The only question here is do you still trust me?”

Alec didn’t even have to consider the question. He looked directly into Magnus’s eyes to be sure there were absolutely no doubts about it.

“Always,” he responded, confidently.

Magnus beamed at him. “Then trust that I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe. If done right, the Clave need never know I interfered.”

After the slightest hesitation, Alec gave a small nod of acquiescence and settled back down again.

Magnus snapped the ball of flames back into existence and used his other hand to keep a light grip on Alec’s crossed wrists to prevent any further protestations.

“Alright. Now, close your eyes, and try to lie still…”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh... Looks like Magnus might not be getting the warning about not using magic on the rune in time! Jace better hustle! Thank you all for your supportive reviews so far, and more to come soon! :)
Magic Fingers

Chapter Summary

The chapter title pretty much says it all... haha Lots more hurt coming, but also some comfort for a change!

Chapter Notes

This super long chapter is dedicated to all you loyal readers out there. Thank you for your unerring support and for inspiring me to keep this story going. You all rock!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alec swallowed hard, but allowed his eyes to fall closed as instructed, surrendering control to Magnus.

He startled slightly and gasped as the blue ball of magic slithered its way across his chest and wrapped around his ribs like a living blanket of thin ice, making him shiver as goosebumps broke out all over his body.

“M-Magn-s…” He instinctively tried to pull his arms free to defend himself against the uncomfortable sensation, but Magnus tightened his hold, keeping him still.

“Shh… Just focus on breathing, Alec. Try to relax.”

Alec latched onto Magnus’ words and forced himself to let out a slow, trembling breath.


But then the icy tendrils continued to spread, winding their way around to his back where they brushed against the Agony rune, igniting a sudden wave of fire through Alec’s torso.

The Shadowhunter grunted past a locked jaw at the conflicting sensations, fingernails digging into the vulnerable flesh of his palms as he tried to remain still.

Magnus frowned when his magic didn’t seem to have the desired affect he had been expecting, so he focused his mind and tried harder, pressing the power deeper into Alec’s skin, attempting to numb his pain from the inside out instead.

Alec cried out as the magic stabbed its way into him, tears leaking from the corners of his clenched eyelids as he practically levitated off the bed. His muscles contorted in agony as the intense pain in his back forced his body to arch up into Magnus’s restraining grip.

“Ah! Magnus! S-stop, please!”

“Few more seconds, Alec. I’ve almost got it…”
Just then, the bedroom door slammed open and Jace came stumbling in, looking ghostly pale. “Magnus, stop! You’re making it worse!”

The warlock immediately relinquished his tether to Alec and the blue light disappeared. Alec collapsed back to the mattress with a grunt, his eyes rolling in his head as he fought to stay conscious and his muscles convulsed sporadically as jolts of fire raced across his nerves.

He vaguely registered the warlock’s warm hand tapping at his clammy cheek.

“Alexander?! Can you hear me?”

“Ngh…” Alec groaned out, his brow furrowing as his brain refused to process words properly.

Magnus looked down at his hands in confused betrayal. “I don’t understand. Why didn’t it work?”

“Move,” Jace demanded, pushing Magnus out of the way and taking over his spot beside his ailing brother. He knelt down on the floor and leaned forward to match Alec’s eye-level.

Gently, he turned the older boy’s head towards himself and used his thumb to brush away the tears on the brunette’s flushed cheek before cupping the side of his face.

“Alec? Hey, open your eyes. Look at me, buddy…”

“J-Jace?” Alec whimpered as he squinted up at the blond, his trembling left hand inching out across the mattress towards his Parabatai.

The Herondale boy quickly took up his brother’s wayward hand while using his other hand to check Alec over for any lasting damage.

Alec shuddered beneath his touch, his skin still highly sensitive, but he didn’t object. He had more important concerns that took precedence.

“You o-okay?” Alec questioned sincerely, earning a bark of sorrowful laughter from the blond.

“Am I okay?” Jace asked incredulously. “You should see yourself right now, dude.”

“N-not good?”

“A bit not good, yeah.”

Satisfied that Alec was indeed still in one piece, Jace moved his free hand down to rest on his brother’s left hip. Solemnly, he grazed his thumb over their severed Parabatai rune.

The young Herondale clenched his jaw against the hollow pain in his chest and blinked back the tears of frustration.

“I’m so sorry, Alec.”

_Sorry for getting you into this mess, sorry my grandmother is using you to prove a point, sorry I was too late to warn Magnus off, sorry I can’t share this burden with you like I had promised…_

Alec’s grip tightened minutely around Jace’s hand, giving it a comforting squeeze.

“Not your fault, Jace.”

“I’m afraid it is this time, big brother. You’re not the one Imogen is trying to punish.”
Alec managed a small smirk, though it ended with a wince. “I know. Can’t let you always have the fun though.”

“Can someone please explain to me what the hell is going on?” Magnus demanded, pacing around the room like a caged lion. He came to an abrupt stop when Isabelle arrived at Alec’s door, slightly winded.

“We were right, Magnus. This isn’t just about Alec. The High Inquisitor isn’t happy that Jace gave the Head of Institute title back to us Lightwoods,” she responded, filling the warlock in on what Jace had told her when she found him moments ago. “Apparently she was hoping to keep it in the family now that she has a descendant worthy of the job.”

“As if. Anyone in their right mind can see that Alec is the better choice,” Jace argued. “He’s a born leader. I’m just a foot soldier.”

“This isn’t just… about the job title either,” Alec muttered wearily, his voice sounding gruff and strained. “She wants to punish Dad too… for blackmailing her over… the Soul Sword fiasco.”

“And I’m sure she’s not overly fond of having me and the other Downworlders interfering with Clave business,” Magnus added with a guilty sigh. “Unfortunately, that leaves Alec as the common denominator and most valuable target with which to punish us all. But to what end?”

“What do you mean?” Izzy queried.

“This is quite an extreme measure to go to for settling a few petty grievances,” Magnus stated. “There’s no way the Counsel would’ve given her permission to inflict such a cruel punishment on someone who has committed no crimes.”

“I doubt the Counsel has any idea what Imogen is up to,” Jace growled. “She thinks she’s above the law.”

“That’s ‘cause she is,” Alec grunted, then squeezed his eyes shut against another wave of pain. “Ah!”

“Easy, Alec,” Jace coached, feeling Alec’s grip tightening painfully around his hand, glad that he still had some way to share in his Parabatai’s suffering, however minor. “Just breathe, buddy… I’ve got you.”

Alec shifted slightly as the sharp pain gradually passed, but grimaced as his burning muscles protested the movement. By the Angel he ached...

“Isn’t there something you can do for him, Magnus?” Izzy pleaded, watching her brother tough it out through yet another round of punishment in silence.

“No,” Jace replied for him, somewhat heatedly. “Imogen told me she put some sort of safe-guard on the rune to prevent magic from interfering. Not even an iratze will help. If anything, they’ll just make his pain worse.”

Magnus moved back to the edge of the bed where his eyes connected with Alec’s honey-brown ones. “I’m so sorry, Alexander. Imogen is nothing if not creative. I should’ve realized that she’d cook up something like this.”

“It’s okay, Magnus,” Alec panted as the pain finally receded again, though this time it left every muscle with a deep, acidic burning sensation even after the wave had passed. “It was worth a shot. Thanks for trying.”
“Oh, I’m not giving up quite yet,” Magnus replied, earning wary looks from all three Shadowhunters in the room. “If Imogen can bend the rules, then so can I.”

“What are you talking about?” Jace demanded, tensed and ready to protect Alec from further harm if the need should arise.

“She may have safe-guarded the rune from magical interference, but I know better than anyone that there is always a loophole where rules are concerned.”

“Such as?” Izzy asked, genuinely curious.

“Magic is not the only medicinal art I practice, my dear. There are a few other remedies we could attempt. For instance, the simple art of massage. I can summon my oils and begin working out those painful knots immediately. Should buy us some time, at least.”

Alec raised his head at that, a faint pink blush adding some color to his deathly pale cheeks.

“Magnus, I don’t think that’s…”

“And you’re sure Imogen’s rune won’t have any adverse reactions to it?” Izzy cut in, trying to understand the science behind it all.

Alec shot Jace a pleading look and the younger man didn’t need their bond to know that his brother was asking Jace to get him out of this.

“Yeah,” he joined in, twisting a bit to look up at Magnus. “How do we know this won’t make it worse, like whatever the hell you were doing to him when I got here?”

Magnus turned his attention to the skeptical blond.

“As you said, the rune is fortified against any magical or angelic interference. And while a massage, when done correctly, can feel quite magical, I assure you it’s no more detrimental to him than you holding his hand right now.”

Jace glanced down at their clasped hands, then locked eyes with his Parabatai. He gave him an apologetic look, but seemed determined all the same.

Alec’s brow furrowed the second he realized Jace was about to throw him to the wolves. “Hang on, guys… This is completely unnecess-”

“Do it,” Jace cut in, rising to his feet to allow Magnus to return to Alec’s side.

Alec’s grip on his brother’s hand tightened immeasurably. “Jace!” he hissed.

“It can’t hurt to try, Alec.”

“Yeah, actually. It can,” Alec shot back in frustration.

“Would you two mind giving us the room?” Magnus requested softly, clearly speaking to Jace and Izzy even though his eyes were trained solely on Alec.

“Sure,” Jace agreed, taking a step towards the door, only to be jerked back by Alec’s unrelenting grip.

“Jace, wait…”

“Look, Alec, this is only the first stage, alright? It’s going to get a hell of a lot worse. At least let us
try and ease the pain while we still can.”

“There’s gotta be another way,” the eldest Lightwood protested. “One that isn’t so… intimate.”

Jace snorted. “You’ve already got your shirt off, dude. It’s a free massage. What’s the big deal?”

“The big deal? It’s MAGNUS, Jace! Think it through!” he growled, his voice only loud enough for the blond to hear. Jace raised an eyebrow at him, then moved closer again when he saw the hint of desperation in his brother’s eyes.

“Are you afraid of him, Alec? Cause if so, I’ll tell him to get the hell out right now…”

“No, that’s not... That's not it, Jace. I just…” Alec let out a slow breath and closed his eyes for a moment to compose himself. “I don’t know if I can handle this. Handle him. Not after what happened between us. It’s too soon.”

“You want me or Izzy to give you the massage instead?” Jace offered nonchalantly and Alec’s eyes widened comically.

“What? No!”

“Alright then. Give Magnus another chance, without using magic this time. And if he makes things worse again or tries to get frisky, I’ll kick his ass for you, okay?”

Alec huffed out a laugh, despite himself. But Jace could tell he was far from convinced.

“We’re gonna get you through this, Alec. No matter what it takes.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Alec quietly admitted, earning a comforting squeeze on the shoulder from Jace’s free hand.

“It’s gonna be fine. Izzy and I will be right outside the door if you need us,” Jace assured gently, and with that promise, Alec finally relented and released Jace’s hand, then resignedly dropped his head back down to the pillow with a heavy sigh.

The blond turned to Magnus before making his exit. “Keep it strictly professional, you hear me?” he threatened.

“Jace…” Alec groaned, his cheeks brightening even further, much to Magnus’s amusement.

The warlock smiled and bowed his head in salute. “You have my word.”

“Jace, come on,” Izzy prompted, then led him out of the room, closing the door behind them.

Alec glanced up at the warlock as he approached the bed, suddenly feeling very exposed.

“This isn’t necessary, Magnus. The pain’s not that bad. I can handle it on my own.”

He forced himself to sit up and scooted back against the headboard gingerly so he wasn’t in such a vulnerably prone position.

His stomach lurched in protest at the sudden movement and he wrapped an arm around his midsection, leaning forward a bit and swallowing convulsively.

“Not that bad, huh?” Magnus teased gently. “Then I suppose you turned that particularly alarming shade of green just for the fun of it?”
Alec glared at him, then looked away, tensing up as Magnus sat down beside him again.

“Look, I know this is uncomfortable for you, Alexander. Even when we were together, you hated feeling vulnerable.”

Alec stared down at his lap dejectedly, too afraid to open his mouth to respond.

“But this doesn’t have to be a big deal. We can make it as clinical as you want. You have symptoms, and I have potential cures. It’s as simple as that. For instance…”

The warlock snapped his fingers and procured a cup with a rather aromatic liquid in it.

“Why don’t you start with this?”

Alec took the glass hesitantly. “Trying to get me drunk first?”

Magnus laughed good-naturedly. “Hardly, not that the thought isn’t tempting… But we’ll save the stronger stuff for later.”

“What is this then?” Alec peered inside the glass and sniffed at the mystery liquid, his nose wrinkling in distaste.

“It’s a little something I whipped up to help with the nausea.” At Alec’s nervous glance, he added, “Don’t worry. It’s a homemade remedy; ginger tea with a hint of peppermint. Completely organic and magic-proof. Does wonders on an upset stomach.”

Alec took a cautious sip and made a face at the taste, similar to the one he had made when having his first alcoholic beverage at Magnus’s house oh so long ago. It brought a warm smile to Magnus’s lips as he remembered that night fondly.

Alec truly had been innocent in every respect back then.

When nothing bad came of it, Alec took another small sip, grimaced, then set the glass aside when the flavor didn’t improve.

“No offense, but this is pretty nasty. I think I’d rather take my chances with the nausea.”

“If that’s your decision, then so be it. And if you really don’t want the massage, then I’m not going to force that on you either. The Herondale boy certainly likes to think he calls the shots, but you’re the one who has the final say here. It’s your body after all. If you aren't comfortable with me getting involved, then I won’t. Simple as that.”

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, Magnus,” Alec quickly explained. “It’s just, this is… It’s weird!” he blurted out tactlessly.

Magnus chuckled at him.

“I understand, believe me. The timing certainly could’ve been better. But I’m not about to let our personal situation get in the way of your health.”

“I told you, it’s not…”

“Not that bad, I know. Yet. Listen to me, Alexander. Jace was right about one thing. Towards the end of the twelve hours, I won’t be of much help to you.

“There are definitely limits when it comes to what modern medicine can do against angelic forms
of torture. So if you can manage to look past the discomfort, let me care for you now, while I can still make a difference.”

Alec hesitated for a moment, biting his lip in thought. Then he nodded, and regretted the motion instantly.

A sharp pain lanced its way up the back of his neck, forcing him to cry out as his hand instinctively shot up to clutch at the injured site, shock-waves of fire emanating from his spine straight through to his skull.

So distracted by the fierce pain, Alec was only dimly aware that an additional hand had found its way to his neck, just below his own fingers.

Magnus’s thumb gently caressed the top of the Deflect rune on the side of his throat while his index and middle fingers carefully pressed and kneaded the tense muscles near his spine until there was a faint popping sensation, followed by a brief stab of increased pain, before it dissipated completely, allowing Alec to breathe a bit easier.

*Maybe this wasn’t such a bad idea after all…*

“Your muscles really are a disaster, Alexander. It’s no wonder you’re in such pain.”

Magnus’s hand proceeded to work in the small space it was allotted, then slowly maneuvered its way up and under Alec’s now relatively lax fingers, usurping control.

But when Alec’s hand continued to linger at his hairline and in the warlock’s way, Magnus gently took hold of his wrist with his free hand and tugged it aside.

“Let me…” Magnus requested in a hushed tone so as not to startle the slightly dazed Shadowhunter.

Alec hissed and flinched as his shoulder was rotated against its will, reminding Magnus that the joint had been bothering Alec when he first found him on the floor outside his bedroom.

Considering how the younger man tended to carry the weight of the world around, it was no surprise that those were the first muscles affected by the cruel rune.

Magnus shifted his hand from Alec’s neck across his trapezius muscle to his deltoid muscles, feeling them quiver and spasm the harder Alec tried to maintain control of them.

“I’ve got you, Alexander. Try to relax.”

After a moment, Magnus felt Alec submit to him, the muscles in his arm gradually uncoiling and surrendering to the warlock’s will, allowing Magnus to manipulate the joint as needed.

“That’s it. We’ll take it nice and slow, alright?”

Magnus carefully straightened out the boy’s elbow and lowered the limb back to Alec’s side, pausing whenever he felt resistance in the muscles so that he could massage the tension away and avoid any further tearing.

Alec’s eyes stayed transfixed on Magnus’s hands, watching every move he made with an expression akin to awe on his face.

"Where’d you learn how to do this?"
"Sweetheart, I practically invented the massage."

"Seriously?"

Magnus chuckled. "No, not seriously! I know I'm old, Alexander, but believe it or not, some things actually do predate me. This skill is just one of many I picked up over the centuries during my travels. Glad to hear you approve though."

Magnus worked his way down Alec’s arm from one set of knotted muscles to the next, smoothing them out and rubbing away the pain.

By the time he finished with Alec’s wrist, the boy had gone limp, slumped with his back against the headboard and his eyes slightly dazed and out of focus.

It was time for Magnus to up his game.

Taking Alec’s lax hand into his own, the warlock brushed his thumb against the back of it for a moment, then reached up with his other hand and cupped the Shadowhunter’s neck.

“Come here, Alexander.”

Using both grips, he slowly guided Alec away from the headboard without much fuss and turned him until his back was presented to Magnus.

The warlock sat up on his knees, and with a snap of his fingers, he procured a few items from his home, including a kit full of massage oils and a towel.

As he started rifling through the bottles, looking for one in particular, Alec tried to crane his neck around to see what was happening behind him, but Magnus gently caught the sides of his head and straightened him out again.

“Stay still or you’ll undo all my hard work.”

“Sorry.”

When Alec didn’t make a second attempt at moving, Magnus returned to his box of oils and found the one he had been looking for; a lavender-scented oil that would help ease Alec’s remaining tension.

“Ah. Here it is.”

Magnus poured some oil into his hands before rubbing them together, warming the fluid, and once it was clear that Alec wasn’t about to fight him on the matter, Magnus placed both hands on his newly tensed shoulders and began slicking up his skin.

"Smells good," Alec mumbled, fighting his instinct to pull away.

"Thought you'd like this one," Magnus replied happily.

As soon as his hands were able to glide smoothly across the broad expanse of Alec’s upper back, he started applying light pressure with his thumbs, loosening the muscles a bit and allowing time for the scent of the oil to take effect.

As he pressed his thumbs a bit deeper into Alec’s trapezius muscle, he felt the younger man flinch away with a pained gasp.
“Sorry, Alexander. You’re literally covered in knots and tension. I’ll be more gentle.”

“It’s okay. Just wasn’t expecting it, is all. Go ahead, I can take it.”

Magnus felt Alec’s shoulders tighten up again as he fortified himself for a higher level of pain so he wouldn’t jerk away a second time, and the warlock sighed in disappointment.

“You’ve never had a real massage before, have you?”

“Uh… No. We don’t exactly have a spa here at the Institute, Magnus.”

“Pity. Perhaps you should invest in one. Considering the hell you angels put yourselves through on a daily basis, adding massages into your training sessions could do you wonders.”

“I’ll take that under advisement.”

Magnus chuckled again. “No, you won’t.”

Alec shrugged, then realized what he did, and apologized for moving.

“Alexander, this isn’t a test in endurance. You’re allowed to move if you need to, and if I go too deep, I want you to speak up. The point is to help ease your pain, not to make it worse. Alright?”

“Yeah. Got it.”

As Magnus continued, Alec’s breath hitched a few more times when the warlock pressed against particularly painful places, but then he’d exhale in relief as the knots were gently eased into submission rather than forced to relent.

Magnus paid extra attention to the space between Alec’s shoulder blades, then worked his way back up his neck, applying pressure on either side of the younger man’s spinal column until he reached the base of Alec’s skull.

He focused on that area for a while, spreading his fingers to reach all the way to the backs of Alec’s ears before running his hands a bit further up into the boy’s soft hair.

“Doing okay?” Magnus checked as Alec’s chin began to dip towards his chest, his breathing getting heavier and deeper.

“Uh… Y-yeah,” Alec responded, then cleared his throat when his voice cracked.

Magnus smirked. “Good. But if you keep sitting like that, Quasimodo, you’ll do more harm than good to that spine of yours.”

Even with Alec facing away from him, he could sense the boy’s dramatic eye roll.

“I’m fine where I am, thanks.”

Still being standoffish then. That simply wouldn’t do.

With a devious glint in his eyes, Magnus took hold of Alec’s shoulders for leverage and tugged the Shadowhunter backward until he landed firmly against Magnus’s chest.

Alec tensed as his balance was thrown off by the unexpected movement and threw his hands out to catch himself.
“Oof! By the angel, Magnus!” he rasped in embarrassment.

“Goodness, someone’s still incredibly jumpy. I haven’t seen a reaction that intense since I last stepped on Chairman Meow’s tail.”

“I’m a Shadowhunter, remember? What did you expect?”

“I dunno, maybe a bit more finesse rather than panicked flailing? I must say, I’m certainly glad you weren’t armed.”

“Bite me,” Alec grunted before settling more heavily against the warlock with a huff, clearly sulking.

Magnus grinned at the familiar banter, knowing he had finally breached that awkward barrier that had been between them ever since they had broken up.

As a form of apology, he lifted Alec’s right hand from the mattress beside his hip and began massaging his way from the palm up, taking extra care as he went since it was the boy’s dominant hand.

By the time he reached Alec’s deltoids, the young archer had become a puddle in Magnus’s lap. He was more relaxed than the warlock had seen him in months.

Switching back to two hands, Magnus returned his focus to the tops of Alec’s shoulders, working his way in till his thumbs met against Alec’s vertebrae and skimmed up along his hairline.

Alec involuntarily let out a quiet moan at the sensation, which was quickly followed by a horrified gasp and heat emanating all along his torso as he flushed in embarrassment.

“I… sorry,” he quickly apologized, then moved as if to sit up.

Magnus, feeling emboldened, snaked his right arm up and over Alec’s shoulders and down his chest like a seatbelt, pulling the boy back and pinning Alec in place against himself.

“Don’t you dare,” Magnus warned. “You have nothing to apologize for.”

“…Nothing?” Alec quietly prompted, attempting to remind Magnus of why they broke up in the first place.

“That’s all in the past now,” Magnus reassured after a moment of introspection, his right thumb brushing across Alec’s sternum a few times before his palm settled over the Shadowhunter’s strongly beating heart.

It was a warrior’s heart and no mistake.

His left arm moved up and under Alec’s elbow to trace the lines of his ribs, stroking smoothly from back to front in a repetitive motion.

“Why don’t you remove your belt?” he suggested softly next to Alec’s ear, and was hardly surprised when the boy’s heart-rate suddenly doubled its pace. “No nefarious intent meant, but if we’re going to do this massage properly, I doubt that thing will be comfortable for you to lay on.”

Alec glanced down at his bulky buckle and found himself reluctantly agreeing.

Having passed out on his bed, face-down and fully-clothed after certain hunts in the past, he remembered all too well the bruises that he’d woken up to on his lower abdomen the next day.
With a resigned huff, he undid the latch and pulled the belt free, handing it to Magnus who tossed it onto the nearby desk.

“Much better. And you know…” he began as his left hand slid further down, tracing the edge of Alec’s waistband till he reached the button on his jeans. “These could go too. For comfort’s sake.”

Alec caught his wandering hand, stilling it, but not removing it. “Don’t push your luck,” he replied, but there was no anger behind the words. If anything, he sounded amused by the warlock’s antics.

Alec settled further into Magnus’s embrace, laying his head back against the warlock’s silk-covered chest.

Magnus sighed in contentment, resting his chin lightly atop Alec’s head. “You may hate me for saying so, but I miss these moments.”

Alec’s thumb slid over the back of Magnus’s trapped hand absently. “I could never hate you.”

It was so much easier to let down his defenses when he didn’t have to look the warlock in the eyes and see the pain of betrayal in them.

But like this, safely encompassed in the arms of the man he still desperately loved, feeling the warlock’s steady heartbeat against his bare back, Alec knew he could speak his mind and not be judged.

“I miss you, Magnus. I miss us.”

Alec traced the knuckles on Magnus’s hand, grazing over each peak and valley.

“Do you think we’ll ever be able to move past this? To fix things and be like we used to be?”

“Honestly? I don’t know. But I hope so.”

Magnus uncurled his fingers, allowing Alec’s to interlock with his. Alec turned his head to glance up at the warlock over his shoulder, every bone in his body sincere.

“Good. Cause I... I don’t think I can live without you.”

Magnus smiled down at him warmly.

“And I thought I had to choose between you and the Downworld, but perhaps that’s not really the case. Though now is hardly the time to discuss such matters. Let’s get you through the next twelve hours first, shall we? Then maybe we can... reevaluate.”

Alec nodded solemnly, settling back into the warlock’s comforting arms. “I’m glad you’re here with me, Magnus.”

Magnus’s heart swelled with affection for the young Shadowhunter as he nuzzled his cheek against the boy’s unruly hair, inhaling the intoxicating scent of Alec’s shampoo that he had been missing so much.

“So am I, Alexander. So am I.”

TBC
Hope you enjoyed that Malec fluff scene! Sadly, this little respite of Alec’s won’t last for long. Plenty more hurt/comfort coming soon. Please leave a comment if you’re still enjoying the story!
For a while, Alec and Magnus were content to simply sit in silence, basking in each other’s presence, filling the voids they had both been feeling for far too long.

But much sooner than either of them were prepared for, the Agony rune began to make itself known again.

Alec started to squirm in discomfort, the muscles in his lower back spasming and forcing him to arch away from Magnus each time they clenched as if someone were repeatedly jabbing him in the kidneys with a taser.

Magnus loosened his hold on the Shadowhunter, allowing him more mobility if he needed it. “Alexander? What's wrong?”

“Back,” Alec grunted out through gritted teeth as he jolted away from the steadily increasing pain, and consequently, away from the warlock.

“M-ah! Magnus… It's g-getting worse again…”

Magnus sat forward and gently gripped Alec's stiff shoulders, his fingers gently searching for the cause of Alec's increased pain.

“Where exactly?”

“Lower,” Alec hissed, then bit his lip, heels scraping along the mattress cover as he desperately sought out relief. "Lower back."

“Alright. I can fix that. How’s the nausea right now?”

“I don’t… Ngh… ’s better, I guess. Why?”

“Excellent. I’m going to lay you down then, alright? But if you feel uncomfortable in any way, I want you to tell me.”

“’kay.”

“Lean forward, nice and slow.”

Magnus carefully eased Alec down to the mattress till he was flat on his stomach, hands instantly fistig the sheets beneath his head.
The movement seemed to wake up every pain receptor in his body at once.

“Magnus… Gah! ‘s gettin’ harder to b-breathe…”

“I know. The muscles in the middle of your back are tightening, which can feel like an anaconda wrapping itself around your chest. Hang on, Alec.”

Magnus ran his trained hands down Alec’s spine, searching for the correct acupressure points to help relieve Alec’s symptoms.

He started around mid-back, pressing down with the index fingers of each hand, gently increasing pressure to both sides of Alec’s spine.

After a few seconds, he’d move down to the next pair of placements, and so on until he loosened the tension in all four Yu points of the digestive system; stomach, spleen, liver, and gall bladder.

When Alec seemed to be breathing a bit easier, Magnus moved his focus to the Shadowhunter’s lower back pain.

He found the first matching set of points just above Alec’s waistline on either side of his vertebrae. And even though his hands were barely touching him, Alec let out a soft whimper and tried to shy away from the warlock’s probing fingers.

Clearly, he had found the primary location for the boy’s pain.

“Alright, Alec… Deep breath in,” Magnus instructed, then waited for the suffering Shadowhunter to obey. It was stilted, but Alec managed the best he could. “And now out, slowly.”

As Alec exhaled, Magnus pressed down hard with his thumbs and the air caught in Alec’s throat. He dug his forehead into the mattress and willed himself not to move, trying to concentrate on the words coming out of the warlock’s mouth.

Multiple seconds passed and the pressure against his spine didn’t let up like before, and only then did the Shadowhunter realize that Magnus wasn’t speaking words of encouragement to him.

He was counting down from sixty.

Alec distracted himself by mentally counting down with him, and it wasn’t until he reached “twenty-five” that he noticed the pain had finally started to lessen a bit.

The pressure Magnus was exerting was releasing endorphins into his system, acting as a naturally-produced analgesic.

Once he reached zero, Magnus slowly eased the pressure off of Alec, giving the muscles time to recover as they were released.

“Any better?” he checked.

“Yeah. I… I think so.” Then Alec’s muscles seized again, sending a searing pain all the way up his spine and making him quickly change his tune. “Ahah! Nope, definitely not!”

Magnus winced in sympathy.

“Don’t fret just yet. There are tons of pressure points in the human body, many of which pertain to the back. It’s been a few centuries since I’ve studied them all, but if I remember correctly, there are additional points right about…”
Alec startled when Magnus shifted his hands lower, running his left one down to the back of Alec’s knee while the right stopped short over the firm globes of Alec’s jean-covered backside.

“M-Magnus!?”

“I promise I’m not getting fresh,” the older man reassured. “There is a rather sensitive pressure point deep in the muscle here that does wonders for back pain, but while these tight jeans look fabulous on you, they make it impossible to find your meridian lines.”

“My what?”

“Think of them like the body’s energy highways, or channels. There are twelve of them in the human body, and your Qi flows through them.

“Those points can be manipulated with pressure to help restore your body’s balance and ease the pain, but I can’t reach the necessary depth through this thick fabric. Apologies, Alexander, but movement is not in your best interest right now.”

With a loud snap of Magnus’s fingers, Alec found himself wearing his tight-fitted briefs, and nothing else. Thank the angel he hadn’t gone commando that morning.

“Hey!” Alec squawked indignantly, trying to roll onto his side to confront the warlock. “What are you…?!”

Magnus easily tugged him back into position, his hands carefully mapping their way along Alec’s muscular body and searching for the proper placement for his fingers.

“Yell at me later if you’d like. But for now, I need you to take another deep breath in.”

Alec grumbled something unintelligible into his elbow, but then did as he was told.

The thumb of Magnus’s right hand came to rest one-third of the way in from Alec’s outer hip to his tailbone.

“…And exhale.”

While Alec’s entire body felt overly-sensitive to touch, that spot was particularly tender when pressed, so Alec bit into the heel of his hand to keep himself quiet.

At the same time, Magnus matched the level of pressure with his left hand, pushing two fingers into the back of Alec’s knee, approximately an inch apart from dead center.

“I know it’s uncomfortable, but it will help make the pain more tolerable.”

“Doesn’t feel very tolerable…” Alec hissed back as soon as he was able to unclench his jaw.

“Give it time,” Magnus implored, taking care to keep the pressure on all three points properly balanced.

The countdown started again, but this time Alec was ready for it and silently joined in right away, trying his best not to wriggle too much.

The pain did lessen another notch when Magnus finally let up, but even the slightest shift of Alec’s hips was enough to make it sky-rocket once more.

His skin felt like it was boiling, and even the brush of a feather would’ve been too much for him to
handle. The poking and prodding was starting to feel like someone was taking a baseball bat to his back.

“Magnus, s-stop… Please. The pressure’s just… Mph… making it worse… Ah!”

The soft curse from behind him verified that Magnus had come to the same unfortunate conclusion.

“The rune is already progressing to the next stage. Acupressure isn’t going to be enough anymore. Alexander… How are you with needles?”

Alec’s eyes widened in panic as he lifted his head high enough to see Magnus over his shoulder.

“No,” he practically squeaked, a slight tremble in his voice. “Not gonna happen.”

Being a Shadowhunter, he didn’t have much experience with the archaic torture devices. Their battle wounds were typically healed with iratzes, occasionally aided along by warlock magic.

But one time when he was out on what was supposed to be an easy solo hunt, chasing down shax demons in the middle of Manhattan Avenue, he had been clipped by a crazy cabbie barreling through a red light and he hit the ground hard enough to get knocked unconscious.

His Invisibility rune shut down when the rest of his body did, leaving him exposed in the center of the intersection for everyone to see.

And when he woke, he found himself in a mundane hospital, covered in strange wires and bandages with a needle shoved a good inch under the skin on the back of his left hand, mainlining who-knows-what straight into his veins.

It had been one of the most terrifying moments of Alec’s life.

Attempting to escape, he had yanked the needle free, watched his blood bubble out of the small hole it left behind in his flesh, then turned and vomited over the side of the bed just as Jace showed up to rescue him.

To this day, Alec insisted that the vomiting was due to the concussion.

“Don’t be so quick to judge, Alexander. I assure you, it’s not as scary as it sounds.”

“I said no, Magnus!” Alec shouted, feeling the nausea churning in his stomach again just from the memory alone. “It’s my decision to make, and that’s final.”

“Okay,” Magnus quickly placated, sensing the renewed fear and tension radiating off of the prone boy.

He slowly walked to the head of the bed and crouched down to be at Alec’s eye level so Alec didn’t have to strain his neck as much. The Shadowhunter’s eyes followed him warily.

The nervous distrust in his gaze nearly broke the warlock's heart all over again. Alexander should never, ever be afraid of him.

“It’s alright, darling. I promised you earlier that I wouldn’t do anything to which you didn’t consent, and that promise still stands. But any physical touch on my behalf just seems to make the pain worse now, which means there isn’t much more I can do for you at this stage.”

“’s fine. If I don’t move, it’s not that… Gah!”
Alec’s back seized again, putting every nerve in his body on high alert.

This particular contraction was painful enough to elicit tears, spilling across the bridge of Alec’s nose and absorbing into the sheets as he clenched his eyes shut and dropped his head back onto the mattress with a muffled cry.

“Not that bad, huh?” Magnus chastised delicately.

He reached forward and gently stroked his fingers through Alec’s hair as they both waited for the pain to subside.

“It kills me to see you like this, especially when I know I can help, if only you’d let me. Just hear me out for a moment before you…”

“You’re not gonna… gshhaaa… change my mind on this, Magnus. No p-point in trying.”

“Then perhaps you can explain your aversion to me? Is it the pain that scares you?”

Alec gave him the saltiest glare he could manage.

“No. It’s… It’s having a foreign object… gahhhh… inserted **underneath** my skin. I just… mph… It’s **unnatural**!”

“As is a body trying to withstand an Agony rune. Unfortunately, desperate times occasionally warrant desperate measures.”

“Yeah, well… Not **this** time.”

“But the slight pinch you can handle, right? I mean, last time I saw you truly injured, your arm had practically been carved to the bone by a Forsaken. This would be nothing in comparison.”

Alec scowled at him. “I can handle the pain, Magnus. Can’t possibly be worse than… Agh!… Than what I’m f-feeling now…”

“So then it’s the sight of the needles that bothers you?”

Alec looked away, swallowing hard and trying to maintain his composure. Then he gave a minute nod.

Magnus laid a hand on top of Alec’s tightly clenched fist.

“It’s alright, Alec. There’s nothing to be ashamed of. We all have our unique phobias. Mine happens to be clowns. Can’t stand those foolish-looking red noses and garishly big shoes. Absolutely horrible fashion sense. Truly terrifying.”

He shuddered at the thought, earning a small twitch of Alec’s lips, then continued.

“But mind over matter, right? What if you didn’t have to see the needles, and I promised you’d barely feel them, if at all?”

Alec was already shaking his head before Magnus had finished speaking.

“I can’t just keep my eyes closed when my brain tells me there’s a threat in the room, Magnus. It goes against every fiber of my training.”

“Oh, I’m well aware of your masochistic tendencies, Alexander. But **that**, at least, is an easy fix.”
The warlock snapped once more, a black necktie appearing in his hands.

Alec blinked at the silk accessory a few times, then quirked an eyebrow up at Magnus. “You want to blindfold me? Seriously?”

“Seriously. That way, you won’t have to fight the impulse to look at what’s happening because we’ve taken that option away from you.”

“I don’t know about this, Magnus…”

“Please, Alexander. At least let me try. If it’s too much or doesn’t help with the pain, we’ll stop. You have my word.”

Alec licked at his dry lips in thought, then let out a slow, steady breath. He nodded, raising his head again with a grimace, and forced his eyes to close.

Magnus gently secured the blindfold around Alec’s head, knotting it in the back.

“Is that too tight?” the warlock checked, waving a hand in front of Alec's face to make sure he truly couldn't see anything.

“No,” Alec answered hollowly, resigned to his fate.

Magnus brushed his thumb against Alec’s cheek endearingly before gently lowering the Shadowhunter’s head back down to the mattress.

“Good. Now just try to relax, and leave the rest up to me, alright?”

As Magnus stood back up and moved further down the bedside, the anxiety rolling off of Alec was palpable, so the warlock began with a very light massage of Alec’s lower back, attempting to get him more comfortable to touch before applying any needles.

Alec flinched drastically when Magnus’s warm fingers softly brushed against his flesh and his hands tightened into a stranglehold around his fistfuls of sheets as he tried to prepare himself for the impending stab.

“Easy, darling,” Magnus comforted. “It’s just me for now. Try to think about something else.”

“Like what?” Alec asked incredulously, his voice higher than usual and his body quivering slightly as the adrenaline threatened to push him over the edge into shock.

“Like… Some of your other first time experiences, maybe? Since we’re adding a few to the list today.”

Alec let out a choked huff of laughter.

“I hardly think now is an appropriate time for reminiscing, Magnus.”

“Oh? I think now is a perfect time actually. For instance, do you remember your first kiss?”

Magnus waved a small stack of sterilized needles into existence beside Alec’s hip.

“Course I do. And so should you, since you were the one who gave it to me.”

“And what an honor it was!” Magnus laughed. “So passionate and fierce… You know, you had me convinced that it wasn’t really your first time.”
“Beginner’s luck,” Alec muttered in response.

Magnus doused his hands in sanitizer, then rubbed it gently into Alec’s lower back. The last thing the Shadowhunter needed was to get an infection from the needles on top of everything else.

The boy shivered harder as the cold liquid dripped onto his flesh, but it didn’t take long to warm his skin back up thanks to the friction of Magnus’s ever-moving hands.

“I must say, beginner’s luck is rarely that good. Talent like that is usually earned with years of experience. Heck, I think even Jace was impressed. And that’s no easy feat.”

The warlock found the first insertion point again and began applying pressure with his thumb, rubbing the digit in small circles over the spot to desensitize Alec’s skin a bit.

“I had absolutely no idea what I was doing,” Alec groaned, half in pain and half in mortification. “I just knew that you were the one I wanted to kiss, not Lydia. Didn’t hit me till afterwards that I did it in front of everyone I’ve ever known.”

“That certainly was a pretty substantial leap out of the closet…”

Magnus broke the first needle out of its sterilized packaging and debated on telling Alec when to breathe in and out again, but the last thing he wanted to do was draw attention back to the task at hand.

Instead, he worked with Alec’s natural rhythm, waiting for him to begin exhaling before tapping in the first needle.

Alec tensed when he realized what Magnus had done, but didn’t make any sounds of discomfort. As Magnus had promised, he hardly felt the actual insertion.

Relieved beyond belief, Alec allowed his clenched muscles to relax, just the slightest bit.

Encouraged, Magnus moved the conversation along, keeping Alec distracted as he removed the supportive tubing around the needle.

“But even that wonderful moment couldn’t hold a candle to your other first time…”

“…Y-you mean the first time I saw your real eyes?” Alec hedged, and Magnus looked up to see the blush returning to Alec’s cheeks, just below the blindfold.

“Well, I suppose that did happen too,” Magnus replied with a chuckle, then lightly grasped the needle between two fingers and manipulated it by hand, slowly increasing the pressure and twisting it in steadily until half an inch of the needle was embedded in Alec’s skin.

He watched as more of the tension slowly bled from the Shadowhunter’s high-strung body and let out his own silent sigh of relief that the acupuncture seemed to be working.

“They were beautiful, Magnus,” Alec stated softly, catching the warlock off guard. “Your eyes, I mean.”

Magnus ran his other thumb comfortingly over Alec’s hip, just above his waistband. “As were you, Alexander. Now be honest with me… How does that feel?”

“Uhh… tingly I guess? With a slight burning. Feel sort of… weighed down. Like someone’s sitting on my back.”
“Excellent. That means it’s working. Just focus on taking slow, even breaths now if you can, and I’ll handle the rest.”

Magnus matched the first needle with one on the other side, and continued to follow that pattern across all the proper pressure points along Alec’s spine. From there, he moved on to a few other points in his arms and legs.

Alec tried desperately not to think about the fact that he was being turned into a human pin cushion, but mental distractions only worked for so long.

While he barely felt the pinch of the needles thanks to Magnus’s talented hands, there was no way to avoid feeling every tap against his sensitive skin as Magnus slid each needle out of the tubing and into the top layers of his flesh.

The sharp pains of the Agony rune were steadily diminishing, but the subtle aching burn of his punctured nerves and muscles kept drawing his mind back to what Magnus was doing.

And Alec’s over-active imagination was making his nausea return with a vengeance.

“Magnus, w-wait…”

The warlock paused immediately, setting aside the next needle to free up his hands in case they were needed. “What’s wrong, Alexander?”

“Think I’m gonna be sick again,” he choked out, attempting to push himself up onto his knees. Magnus quickly put a hand on his shoulder blade and eased him back down.

“It’s alright. Don’t get up. Just hold out your right hand for me.”

Bewildered, Alec reluctantly unclenched his fingers from the sheet and did as he was told. He felt Magnus’s steady grip enveloping his hand, turning his palm to face the ceiling.

“You might feel a minor electrical shock sensation here, but it’ll dissipate quickly…”

Magnus found the spot for which he was looking, approximately two finger breadths up from the crease in Alec’s wrist and in between the two forearm bones.

This particular point happened to be directly on the median nerve, so he was very careful with how deeply he pushed the needle.

“Gah!”

When Alec jolted and tried to pull his hand back, Magnus knew he had reached the right depth.

“Easy now. Just give it a moment.”

“What the hell was that?!” the Shadowhunter demanded nervously, regretting the blindfold more than ever.

“That was your Qi saying hello. It’ll help with the nausea, as well as the nerves.”

Alec had to concede to the fact that his stomach was already calming back down again, as was his pounding heart. Magnus clearly knew what he was doing.

“Please tell me that was the last one,” Alec mumbled, burrowing further into the mattress and
wishing he could disappear through it, leaving all the needles behind.

“Just about.”

Alec groaned.

“Still doing okay?” Magnus checked.

“‘m tired,” Alec muttered honestly.

“I’m sure you are after everything you’ve been through today. You’ll need to rest a bit when I’m done, if you can. How’s your back feeling?”

“…Warm.”

“And the pain?”

“Mostly gone. Except…” Alec cut himself off with an audible clack of his teeth. Magnus was momentarily concerned that the boy had bitten off his own tongue in the process.

“Except…?” Magnus prompted gently when it became clear that Alec had no intentions of ever finishing that thought.

“Never mind. Forget I said anything.”

Magnus sighed in understanding. “The pain has shifted lower, hasn’t it? Into your pelvis and legs?”

Alec remained stubbornly silent, which the warlock took as confirmation.

“It makes sense. The rune seems to be working its way down your nervous system, from your central to your peripheral. First, the cervical nerves in your neck, shoulders, and arms...

“Then the thoracic nerves of your upper and mid back. Most recently, the lumbar nerves of your lower back, and now it’s ending with your sacral nerves.”

“Thanks for the anatomy lesson,” Alec grumbled miserably. He knew all too well how the pain had been progressing without a mental diagram, thank you very much.

“The good news is I should be able to fix the rest of the pain with only two more needles.”

“…And the bad news?” Alec asked, resignedly.

“You’ll most likely feel these ones a bit more. They are slightly longer and thicker than the others, due to their intended location.”

“Which is?”

“Right about… here.”

Alec flinched when Magnus pressed one finger into the direct center of each gluteal muscle in his buttocks. He paled alarmingly and attempted to sit up again.

“Uh uh. Absolutely not.”

Magnus quickly took both of Alec’s hands into his own, preventing the boy from rising any higher than his elbows.
“But you’re doing so well, Alexander. Two more insertions to block the pain from the sciatic
nerve, and you’ll be pain free, at least until the rune progresses again.”

“I don’t care. It’s not happening.”

“You’re a Shadowhunter, Alec. Do you want to risk permanent nerve damage in your legs? If you
can’t run, you can’t fight. They’ll bench you.”

“No, Imogen said there wouldn’t be any lasting damage. Once the rune wears off, I’ll be fine.”

“You really want to take Imogen at her word on this?”

Magnus waited, but no response came. It seemed he was getting through to Alec, so he pressed on.

“You know how bad the pain can get if you try to ignore it, and considering how athletic you are,
the pain in your legs will most likely be the worst yet.

“Now, I can continue with the smaller needles all along your acupoints, but there are quite a few
and I doubt you’ll like those placements any more than you would these.”

“…H-how big are the needles? Wait, I don’t think I wanna know.”

“That’s probably for the best,” Magnus admitted softly, running his thumbs gently over the backs
of Alec’s hands before releasing them. "Why don't you settle in and try to steady your breathing
again."

Alec grudgingly lowered himself back down to the mattress, doing his best not to dislodge any of
the needles sticking out of his skin.

Magnus smoothed the boy’s hair back for a moment, then summoned the properly sized needles
(five inches in length and three times as thick as the smaller gauges) straight into his hand so that
he could keep them away from Alec’s body until he was ready to proceed.

They certainly were intimidating to look at. Magnus curled his upper lip in distaste.

“I hate this,” Alec muttered glumly, lying in wait until Magnus finally finished with him.

“I know. If you’d like, I could have Jace or Izzy come in to sit with you while I finish.”

“No. Definitely not. Just… Just do it.”

“Alright, Alexander. It’ll be over before you know it. But first thing’s first. May I?”

Magnus tugged lightly at the waistband of Alec’s underwear.

“Doesn’t have to be all the way,” he quickly assured when he sensed another fight rising up in the
young Shadowhunter. “Just far enough to reach the entry points.”

Alec tamped down on the inappropriate remarks that entered his mind and chose to bite into his
cheek instead. He nodded his consent once again, and Magnus respectfully lowered his briefs a
little more than halfway down, then stopped as promised.

Magnus took a moment to appreciate the perfectly chiseled porcelain canvas in front of him, then
mentally shook himself back into focus.

Like before, he started with the sanitizer, then began pressing into the skin and muscle, although a
When Alec hissed in pain, he knew he had found the right location. “Alright, deep breath, Alexander…”

Alec jerked in surprise at the sharp pinch he felt when Magnus stabbed the needle into his right cheek. He could feel his heart pounding against the hard mattress beneath him and heard the sheet tear as his fingers clawed through the fabric.

Magnus gave Alec's bicep a gentle squeeze in comfort and allowed the Shadowhunter a moment to adjust and compose himself again.

After the initial puncture, Magnus was able to switch his technique to dry needling, shifting the point of the needle around inside Alec’s muscle, allowing him to make several connections with the median nerve without having to stab through the boy’s outer flesh more than once.

He pressed in a good three to four more inches, pulled back till only the tip remained, changed insertion angles, and repeated at a steady and fast pace until Alec started to go limp again.

Had he been able to see what Magnus was doing with that needle, he would’ve been out of that room and throwing up minutes ago. But as it was, all he felt was the first sharp sting followed by an increasing heat in the muscle, similar to an applied heating pad.

The remaining tension in his body began to ebb away and his erratic breathing evened out as the throbbing pain in his legs slowly began to dissipate.

When he was done, Magnus withdrew the needle carefully and tossed it away before repeating the process on the other side.

Alec twitched again at the initial sharp pinch but didn’t have the energy left to protest. And by the time Magnus pulled that needle free, Alec was in a deep, relaxed sleep.

The warlock eased the boxers back up onto Alec’s hips, then draped a light blanket across his waist for some added security and warmth, cautiously avoiding the other needles sticking out of his skin.

When there was nothing left to be done, Magnus leaned down and placed a gentle kiss against Alec’s temple, taking care not to wake him.

“Rest peacefully, my beautiful angel. I’ll return in half an hour to remove the rest for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Ugh, watching those how-to videos on acupuncture and dry-needling was enough to make me feel nauseous and sympathize with Alec’s pain! Hope it paid off though and you all enjoyed the chapter.
Happy Mother's Day to all those celebrating right now! And what kind of Mother's Day would it be without a little Maryse in our lives? Even tough Shadowhunters need some motherly affection at times ;)

As soon as Magnus stepped out of the bedroom and closed the door, Jace was on him, demanding answers.

“Is he alright? What happened? We heard him yelling…”

Magnus held up a hand to placate the worried blond. “I assure you, Alexander is fine. For now.”

“I want to see him.”

Jace tried to step around the warlock to enter Alec’s room, but Magnus respectfully caught his elbow.

“I wouldn’t advise that.”

Judging by Jace’s feral growl, he was far from convinced. “Let go of me. Now.”

Magnus was starting to worry that he’d have to subdue the headstrong Herondale using magic, but thankfully, there was still someone in the vicinity who could get through to him.

“Jace, calm down,” Izzy implored, moving closer to them in case she needed to intervene. “Starting a brawl outside his room isn’t going to help Alec.”

“He shouldn’t be left alone, Iz. What if he needs something?”

Magnus settled his other hand on Jace’s opposite shoulder, subtly acquiring a better hold on him under the guise of simple comfort.

“What he needs right now is rest, and he managed to fall asleep a few minutes ago. The longer he stays that way, the less pain he’ll have to endure when all is said and done.”

Jace stepped free of Magnus’s restrictive hold and stared longingly towards the bedroom door but, much to the warlock’s relief, he did not advance any further towards it.

“Asleep…” Jace repeated skeptically, glancing back at Magnus. “With the Agony rune. How do you know he didn’t just pass out from the pain?”

“So I look like an amateur?” Magnus questioned imperiously. “I’m well-versed in the sensations of the human body, Shadowhunter. And I can certainly tell the difference between sleeping soundly and unconscious.”

Jace’s anger deflated a bit and he let out a steady, calming breath. “So you’re sure he’s okay then?” he pressed, needing the reassurance.
Magnus softened as well, understanding the blond’s need to know about his Parabatai’s wellbeing. Without their rune connection, demanding updates was the only thing keeping Jace sane.

“I’m positive. The needles are dispersing his pain and keeping it at a more tolerable-”

Jace’s eyes immediately narrowed, his posture stiffening again. “Hang on, did you just say needles?”

Magnus flinched at his own slip up. “Uhh… yes. Unfortunately, the massage wasn’t enough to give Alec the release he needed, so we had to improvise a bit.”

“But he hates needles. They make him throw up.”

“Believe me, I’m well aware of his aversion. Thankfully, we were able to find a way to work past his fears, and control his nausea to prevent any further incidents.”

Jace crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow at Magnus.

“Do I even want to know how you managed that?”

“Probably not. But overall, I’d say he handled the process very well. Alexander is nothing if not resilient.”

“How long do you think he’ll stay out?” Izzy queried, keeping her voice low so it wouldn’t carry and disturb her brother’s slumber.

“Hard to tell. In half an hour, I’ll go back in to remove the needles. But if he manages to sleep through that too, then all the better.”

“I’m gonna go sit with him,” Jace stated. “In case he wakes up sooner rather than later.”

Magnus gave him a wary look and Jace rolled his eyes.

“For your information, I can be quiet. He won’t even know I’m there. Scout’s honor.”

“All right,” Magnus reluctantly replied, stepping aside to wave Jace through. “But call for me if he starts to come ‘round.”

Jace nodded, then eased the door open. He was about to enter the brightly lit room when a formidable voice rang out down the length of the corridor and he froze on the spot.

“Where is he?” the voice demanded as its owner stormed towards them. “Where is my son?”

All three heads whipped around to watch as Maryse Lightwood bore down on them, her heals clicking threateningly on the immaculately polished floor.

“Mom! You made it back!” Izzy greeted the woman with a relieved hug. “I take it you got my fire message?”

“It arrived shortly after Robert and I returned to Idris. It took some convincing to get the Clave to open another portal so soon, but I informed them it was an emergency. Honestly, first Max, and now this… How is Alec? Is he in his room?”

“He is,” Magnus answered calmly. “And we’re doing our best to keep him as comfortable as possible.”
“I don’t doubt it, but I want to see him with my own eyes. I didn’t make the trip back just to stand outside his door while he’s in there suffering, so if you’ll excuse me…”

She reached Jace’s side and he quickly tugged the door closed again, wincing when it made an audible creak, then clicked as it latched into place.

Hands now free, he held them up, placating and hoping to impede the tirade that was no doubt coming his way for his interference.

“Maryse, hang on.”

His adoptive mother placed her hands on her hips and huffed, an expression he had certainly become accustomed to in his formative years growing up in the Lightwood house.

He may have been the Golden Boy in her eyes, but that didn’t mean he hadn’t gotten into his fair share of trouble as a youth.

Never one to back down from a challenge, he looked Maryse in the eye and spoke calmly. “Let us at least explain what’s going on here first, alright?”

“Imogen is still punishing our family because of our history with the Circle, and Alec is currently paying the price. What more is there to explain? Now step aside, Jace.”

She reached past him for the doorknob but Magnus slid in next to the blond to help block her access.

“Maryse, as I was just explaining to Jace, Alexander is asleep. Barging in there now will only confuse and upset him.”

Maryse was done being genial. Enough was enough. She turned to the warlock, eyes blazing warningly. “Out of my way, Magnus, or I’ll have you removed from this Institute.”

Magnus bristled at the threat, then realized he didn’t have much choice in the matter. He begrudgingly stepped aside.

“As you wish. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Maryse shoved her way into Alec’s bedroom, then stumbled to a halt as soon as she laid eyes on her son.

“By the Angel… What have you done to him?!”

SHSHSHSHSH

Alec was dragged back to consciousness by the sound of his mother’s voice in the distance. She sounded upset. Very upset.

Too groggy and disoriented to do anything but lay there and listen, he focused his hearing, trying to make out what was being said.

He heard his mother mention Max’s name and his stomach clenched in dread. Had something gone wrong? Did his little brother take a turn for the worse?

That thought alone made his heart stutter in his chest, adrenaline flooding its way through his sluggish system and leaving an uncomfortable burning sensation in its wake.
He had to get up. Max might need him.

*Max*

He thought he heard Magnus’s voice next, but his words were too hushed for Alec to make out what was being said. His slightly ajar door creaked loudly as it swung before snapping shut, blocking the voices out completely.

*No, wait!*

Alec needed to know what was going on. *Now.*

He tried to open his eyes but found he couldn’t, and that certainly didn’t help his panicking in the least.

Reaching up with his right hand, his fingers came into contact with silky fabric, jogging a fuzzy memory from the back of his scattered mind.

*Magnus, pain, blindfold, needles…*

Heart now hammering away in his chest, Alec yanked the blindfold off, then gasped in pain as his sensitive eyes were subjected to the blindingly bright light in his room.

The blindfold had kept him in the dark long enough that he had forgotten it was only midday. The sunlight was pouring in through the open curtains and no matter how he turned his head, he couldn’t escape it.

Dark blotches and dancing sparks floated across his vision and it felt like there was an icepick being jabbed into his right eye socket. He had to blink repeatedly and squint before he was able to bring anything even remotely into focus.

The first thing he saw clearly was the glint of light off of a thin metal rod which, upon further inspection, was jutting out of the inside of his right wrist.

He slammed his eyes shut again and swallowed convulsively against the bile rising up the back of his throat.

Now that he was fully awake, he became more attuned to the other symptoms he was experiencing that he had been blissfully unaware of before.

Painful cramping was assaulting his abdomen, along with the rolling waves of nausea that had returned with a vengeance.

And his body was so sensitized that he was certain he could feel each and every needle that was piercing his skin, and they were *everywhere.*

*Oh god, oh god, oh god…*

Allowing himself to have a panic attack was only going to make things worse. He had to get himself under control.

He had to get to Max.

Jaw set in determination, Alec slowly cracked his eyes open again, giving them time to properly adjust.
Much to his disgruntle, the needle was definitely still in his wrist, mocking him with its innocent glinting.

He let out a slow, shaky breath.

Maybe it wasn’t that deep. He could handle this. Just pull it out, and everything would be fine.

He gripped the top of the needle with the trembling fingers of his left hand and desperately tried to ignore the fact that the needle bent and flexed under the lightest pressure, wiggling the sharp end around deep within his skin.

As he accidentally jostled the needle in his clumsy haste, another shock raced up his arm from his fingertips to his elbow and he suddenly felt lightheaded.

He was definitely going to pass out, or throw up. He just really hoped he wouldn’t do both.

He forced himself to stop and take some deep, steadying breaths, blinking back the tears of frustration at his own weakness.

Then very slowly, he began removing the needle from his forearm. More and more metal kept appearing as he withdrew it until half an inch came out and the tip finally slipped free of his skin.

His whole arm gave a sympathetic throb as he dropped the needle to the floor with a tinny clatter, then he gagged.

Ignoring the pain from his screaming muscles, he clawed his way to the edge of the mattress just in time for that foul drink Magnus had given him earlier to make a reappearance.

Mixed with the acids from his otherwise empty stomach, the sickly concoction burned its way up his esophagus and temporarily stole his breath away.

After that, he dry-heaved repeatedly, his stomach tying itself into painful knots that refused to let up.

He was only dimly aware of his door being thrown open again, but the mortified blush quickly spread from his chest to the tips of his ears as soon as he heard his mother’s voice, clear as day.

“By the Angel… What have you done to him?!”

She hadn’t shouted per se, but her voice was loud enough and pitched high enough that it sent a bolt of agony through Alec’s skull. He cried out, cradling the right side of his head.

“Alec!” Magnus was by his side in a second, supporting him the best he could as Alec dry-heaved over the edge of the bed again. “What’s happening? Is the muscle pain back?”

Alec attempted to shake his head no, then froze as the room started to spin around him. Movement quickly aborted, he slammed his eyes shut against the tilting scenery.

“’s too bright,” he whimpered, trying to curl into himself.

His stomach clenched again, forcing him to swallow hard and he winced as his throat burned in protest. He wrapped his arm more effectively around his head to block out the light and hide his face from the others.

Shaken out of her stupor, Maryse immediately began closing all the shades in Alec’s room as Magnus waved away the mess on the floor.
“Easy now,” the warlock cooed, placing a hand gently over Alec’s forearm to help him hide from the sights and sounds of the room. “Try to stay still.”

“M-Magn’s… N-needles…”

“I know. Hang on.”

The warlock considered his options, then with a snap of his fingers, he banished the remaining offenders from Alec’s body.

Alec shouted in pain as the forbidden magic brushed across his sensitized skin, but it was all over quickly and for that, he was grateful.

“Thanks,” he panted, trying to catch his breath.

Just the idea of Magnus having to remove each needle individually while his senses were currently at their heightened state of awareness was enough to have Alec clenching his teeth against another bout of nausea.

But there were more pressing issues at stake. Max…

He felt his mattress dip on the other side, then cool fingers began rubbing up and down his back soothingly.

Lowering his arm away from his head, Alec pushed against the damp mattress cover so that he could twist onto his left side, craning his stiff neck around just enough to squint up at his worried mother.

“Mom…” he croaked out, ignoring the protestations of his abused throat.

“Oh, my beautiful boy,” she lamented with tears in her eyes, reaching out with her other hand to brush the bangs away from his sweaty forehead before cupping his pale cheek. “I’m here.”

“Where’s M-Max? ’s he okay?”

The dancing lights were still impeding his vision and he was struggling to keep her face in focus.

She smiled down at him sadly.

“Your brother is going to be fine, Sweetheart. They’re running a few more tests to be sure that there are no lasting effects from the procedure, then they’ll release him later this afternoon.”

_He was okay. Max was okay._

“Thank the Angel,” Alec sighed in relief, the strained muscles of his right arm giving out on him and dropping him back down onto his stomach. He rested his forehead against his left wrist wearily, using it as a makeshift pillow.

Now that the adrenaline was abandoning him, he felt completely exhausted.

His entire body was shaking violently, but he didn’t know if it was because he was cold or because of the physical and emotional exertion he had just endured.

He curled his right hand around the edge of the mattress to make the trembling less noticeable, but he knew his mother could still feel the tremors through the hand that was pressed against his back.
Without a word, Maryse reached down and tugged the light sheet free from his tangled legs, then draped it over his body, tucking it in around his shoulders.

He was grateful when the shaking lessened a bit as the warmth enveloped him, but it refused to dissipate entirely.

And the cramping… God, it was starting to get intolerable.

Magnus crouched down and placed his hand over Alec’s fist, attempting to soothe the strain from his clenched fingers.

“I’m sorry, Alexander. I didn’t think you’d be awake so soon or I never would’ve left you alone.”

“How long?” Alec mumbled out, then hissed as another painful cramp tore through his abdomen.

Magnus winced and squeezed Alec’s hand reassuringly. “I’m afraid you were only out for about five minutes, if that.”

Alec gave a short shake of his head and squinted up at him imploringly. “No, how long?” he tried again, then Magnus realized what he was really asking.

“Oh, you mean overall? I’d say just past three hours. You’re a quarter of the way there, Alexander.”

Alec closed his eyes again and let out a soft, disappointed sob.

He was hoping he had at least made it halfway by now, but no such luck. He didn’t think he could take much more, let alone another nine hours’ worth.

Every muscle in his body ached deeply, including many he didn’t even know he had, his stomach was continuing to churn even though it had nothing left to give, and the foul taste in his mouth certainly wasn’t helping matters any.

Neither was the pain in his head which had reached astronomical proportions. He knew what was happening to him, but that didn’t make it any easier to accept.

He hadn’t had a migraine like this since he was a child, and back then, all it took was a few minutes in a quiet room and an iratze rune for the worst of it to pass.

Clearly, this time around wasn’t going to be such a simple fix, and it certainly wasn’t helping when the others started arguing loudly about his condition.

“I knew we should’ve checked on him sooner.”

“He looks twice as bad as he did before.”

“The rune is progressing. What did you expect?”

“Maybe he should eat something.”

“Why? He’s just going to throw it back up again.”

“I didn’t say he should eat your cooking, Iz…”

Alec wanted to tell them to knock it off. To play the peacemaker like he always did. But all he could manage was to curl into a tighter ball with a groan of misery, drawing his knees up to protect
his stomach and burrowing his head beneath the sheet to block out the incessant noise.

Magnus moved his hand up to rub soothingly at Alec’s shoulder.

“Could you two please take your discussion outside? You’re upsetting Alexander.”

“Maybe you’re the one who should leave. It’s your fault he’s throwing up in the first place. Maybe if you hadn’t used him as a human dart board…”

“That’s enough!” Maryse hissed angrily. “What your brother needs right now is some peace and quiet. All of you, get out.”

“But, Mom…”

“We were just-”

“Maryse, I assure you, I can-”

“Now!” she hissed, keeping her voice low but no less authoritative.

Magnus rose to his feet, giving Alec’s shoulder one last gentle squeeze before breaking contact with him entirely, leaving the Shadowhunter feeling dizzy and unanchored.

“Here, in case he needs anything,” Magnus stated quietly, then snapped his fingers, manifesting all sorts of supplies along the far wall.

Maryse nodded gratefully at him. “Thank you, Magnus. For everything. I’ll take it from here.”

Multiple sets of feet shuffled towards the door, it latched closed, then the room fell blissfully quiet. For a moment, Alec thought he was completely alone again.

He startled when someone began tugging the sheet away from his head.

“It’s alright now, Alec. Come on out so I can get a look at you.”

While he didn’t help his mother in her endeavor, he didn’t resist either. He was just too tired and miserable to give a damn.

Maryse’s fingers brushed lightly against his cheek before the back of her hand came to rest on his furrowed brow. “You’re burning up.”

Alec found himself leaning into her touch, needing the comfort only a mother could provide, as well as the cool relief of her flesh against his heated skin.

She stood up suddenly and his vision blurred as he tried to follow her, setting his equilibrium off kilter again. His stomach lurched and he wrapped his arms tightly around his abdomen with a groan.

When Maryse returned, she was carrying a basket full of items from Magnus’s supplies.

“That boyfriend of yours doesn’t miss a beat, does he?”

“He’s uh… He’s not my boyfriend. Anymore,” Alec rasped, then grimaced at the additional pain that the simple admission invoked.

Maryse sat back down on the bed and took Alec’s hand into her own.
“What? I’m so sorry to hear that. When did this happen?”

“After Max. Was my fault. I screwed everything up.”

“Oh, honey… I highly doubt that. Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not really,” Alec replied quietly. “Head’s killing me,” he added by way of apology.

Maryse nodded in understanding.

“Well, whatever happened between you boys, I’m sure you’ll be able to fix it. That man is still clearly in love with you.”

Alec couldn’t help himself. “What if that’s not enough anymore?”

Maryse smiled warmly down at him. “Sweetheart, love is the only thing that matters. Trust me, it might take some time, but it’ll be enough.”

Alec smiled back at her through heavy eyelids. “Thanks,” he stated sincerely.

She ran her fingers through his matted hair, then allowed her palm to settle against his overly-heated cheek as his eyes drifted closed.

She felt his jaw clench beneath her hand as his brow furrowed in discomfort.

“How’s the nausea now?” she prompted.

“…Not good,” he eventually grunted in reply.

“Let’s start with that then, shall we? Here, chew on this a bit.”

Something moist and gritty prodded at his lower lip, demanding access, but the tangy smell was so offensive that he jerked his head back in disgust.

“Ugh, what the hell is that?”

“It’s raw ginger. Perfect for relieving nausea and migraine pain. I’d make it into tea for you if I thought you’d be able to keep fluids down, but I think it’s best we try it this way for now.”

“Agree to disagree,” Alec muttered, turning his head away when Maryse attempted to get him to eat it again.

“Just try it, Alexander,” she scolded halfheartedly. “It’s for your own good. I used to eat it all the time when I was pregnant with your sister.”

Alec snorted softly, forcing his eyes back open to blink up at his mother. “If memory serves, you ate sauerkraut on pickled sardines back then too.”

Maryse huffed out a laugh despite herself.

“Believe me, there is no controlling pregnancy cravings. Or morning sickness. But I promise you, the ginger definitely helped. Just try it, for me?”

Well, he supposed he couldn’t feel much worse…

Alec cautiously parted his dry lips and opened his mouth the tiniest bit, accepting the thin slice of
ginger root from his mother’s hand.

He regretted it instantly as the heat began to build and his tongue felt like it was on fire. Even Izzy’s mystery chili wasn’t that unpleasant.

He tried just holding it in his mouth at first, afraid to bite into it and make it worse, but when the intensity built anyway, he knew he either had to chew and swallow it down or spit it out before he’d find any relief.

Alec braced himself, then sank his teeth into the oddly textured root.

His mouth instantly flooded with saliva as his taste buds protested against the fiery burn. But his empty stomach recognized the tangy piece of plant as food and growled loudly as it contracted, demanding attention.

He grimaced in distress, breaking out into a cold sweat.

“It’s alright, Alec. Keep chewing.”

Alec was breathing hard now, panicking at the uncontrollable sensations. He was sure his stomach was going to rebel again if he didn’t get that thing out of his mouth, pronto.

The more he chewed, the worse it got, and the pulpy juice was dripping its way down the back of his throat, scorching as it went.

“I can’t…” he spluttered, then started coughing. “C-can’t do it.”

He tried to sit up so that he could spit out the root before it was too late, but Maryse wouldn’t let him, keeping him pinned to the mattress with a hand against his chest and a preventative finger against his lips.

“Don’t quit now,” she encouraged. “Just finish it off. I promise it’ll help.”

Alec struggled feebly for a moment, but it quickly became clear that his only salvation was to suck it up and swallow the horrid thing.

His throat closed up and it took a few tries, but eventually, he managed to get it down.

“W-water…?” he gasped out afterwards, his mouth feeling numb after the intense burning.

“Give it a minute first. Let it reach your stomach.”

That’s exactly what Alec was dreading, worried that it would burn twice as badly on the way back up as it did on the way down. But as the seconds ticked by, he was surprised to find that the nausea was slowly abating and his stomach was settling again.

Finally, Maryse allowed him to sit up enough to accept the small glass of water that she handed him.

“Small sips, Alec. Don’t push your luck,” she warned, keeping a hold on the bottom of the glass to prevent him from chugging it. After a few mouthfuls, she took the glass away from him. “Alright, that’s enough for now. If it stays down, you can have more water later.”

Feeling completely worn out after that tribulation, Alec started to slump back down to the mattress, but Maryse caught his shoulder.
Alec whined in protest. Why wouldn’t they all just let him rest in peace?

“Hang on. Let’s get you propped up a bit this time.” Maryse slid some pillows behind Alec, then helped him recline against them. “That’s better. Should help with any reflux issues,” she explained. “As for that migraine…”

Maryse ran the tips of her middle fingers over another slice of the root, then dabbed the juice against Alec’s temples before gently rubbing it into his skin.

He hissed at the acidic heat it produced against his flesh and his eyes watered from the irritation. He reached up to wipe the liquid away, but Maryse gently took his hands into her own and lowered them back to his lap.

“Close your eyes, Sweetheart,” Maryse whispered soothingly. “Just try to relax and let the ginger root do its job.”

Alec did as she asked, if only to ease the burning of his eyes. The relaxing part was a bit harder to obey though. His insides now felt like they were on fire just as much as the outside of him did with the fever wreaking havoc on his system.

He knew he was sweating profusely from all the discomfort, and the dehydration was doing nothing for the pain in his head. He tried to shift to a cooler spot on the mattress, but no matter how much he tossed and turned, he couldn’t escape the furnace that was his body.

Alec distantly recognized the sound of dripping water before a cool cloth patted against his feverish forehead. He stilled, basking in the minor relief.

After a moment, Maryse brushed the cloth against his cheeks, then rubbed it lightly over his cracked and burning lips, wiping away any residue from the ginger that the small sips of water had missed.

She dipped the cloth back into the bowl of cold water, wrung it out again, then progressed down to Alec’s throat, over his muscular shoulders, and across his broad chest.

By the time she skated the cloth down his ribs and reached his lower abdomen, his damp skin sent a chill racing up his spine and into his throbbing head.

He arched slightly off the pillows with a hiss.

“Shh…” Maryse whispered before checking his forehead again. Relieved that he seemed a bit cooler than he had been earlier, she set the cloth aside and pulled the sheet back up to Alec’s chest.

Alec stopped trying to fight the pain in his body and allowed it to wash over him instead. It didn’t make it any easier to bear, but at least he wasn’t burning the candle at both ends and pointlessly expending energy he didn’t have.

He sank back into the pillows, floating on the razor-edge of pain and feeling utterly exhausted.

Maryse began humming a song that Alec hadn’t heard her sing since Max was an infant and it immediately began lulling him into a sense of security and peace.

Her hand moved down to rub soothing circles over his stomach like she used to do when he was a child, sick in bed.

A blanket of calm settled over his nerves, and that was the last thing he remembered before he
drifted back into the darkness.

TBC
Seizing a Slice of Hell

Maryse stayed by her son’s side as he slept fitfully, soothing away his muffled sounds of distress with comforting caresses and a cold compress.

The lull in the action gave her time to reflect on the relationship she had built with her children over the years. It had been ages since she had been this close to any of them, and she had no one to blame for that but herself.

Maryse had always held her children to the highest of standards, hoping they would be able to salvage the legacy of the Lightwood name after she and Robert had badly tarnished it, thanks to their history with Valentine and the Circle.

It was clear that from the moment they chose their personal weapons, all of her kids were destined for greatness, and the last thing she had wanted to do was hold them back by coddling them.

Too much affection would only make them weak, and ultimately get them killed.

They needed to be strong, independent leaders if they were going to thrive in the Shadow World, and the only way to ensure that was by keeping them at arm’s length. Allowing them to make mistakes and learn from them. Setting them up to fail, and demanding they do better.

When Alec was just a child, she had ingrained in him that showing pain was weakness, that questioning orders was insubordination, and that putting his own happiness ahead of his duty was selfish.

She had been hard on him, even cold at times. But she did what she thought was in his best interest, and in the best interest for the family.

Alec had always understood that, and accepted his role as the obedient son.

He believed in the law, submitted to the chain of command, and worked his way up the ranks from soldier-in-training to the Head of the New York Institute.

And while Maryse was proud of the man he had become, she regretted the distance that those harsh life-lessons had put between them.

Her obvious disapproval of Magnus certainly hadn’t helped mend their relationship either.

Now that the initial shock had worn off, she could see how much the warlock loved her boy, and wasn’t that what every parent wanted for their child?

Alec had been willing to give up his own happiness by marrying Lydia for the sake of his family, and that’s when Maryse realized the amount of damage she had inadvertently done.

Right there and then, while hovering over her ailing boy, she made a vow to do better. To show her prodigy that they weren’t just pawns in the game of Life, destined to suffer in the murky shadows of their parents forever.

She was going to love them unconditionally, support them in their decisions, and tell them how proud she was of each of them for everything they’d achieved over the years, despite the lack of support.
She needed to apologize to her eldest for making him shoulder so much burden all his life. For making him feel like his desires and dreams didn't matter unless they somehow benefited the family.

Her greatest fear was that it would be too little, too late.

But Alexander hadn’t been the only one Maryse had pushed away. She had been just as hard on Isabelle.

After all, she only had the one daughter, and that daughter had a rebellious streak that led to multiple indiscretions with Downworlders, and those types of proclivities dishonored the family name that Maryse had been working so hard to reinstate.

But she never stopped to see how brilliant Izzy was at politics and diplomacy. Her connections with the Downworld could lead to future alliances the Clave had never even dreamed were possible.

Then there was Jace. Maryse hadn't been nearly as cold to him as she was to her own children, but she still owed him an apology.

When he had first arrived at the Institute and was left in her care, Jace had already endured more than his fair share of grief and pain, and if anything, a little show of affection was exactly what he had needed to keep him from giving in to the darkness that plagued his every step.

He had been born a warrior, and his confidence reflected his skills.

Jace had been at the top of all his combat-training classes, and he had already been so self-sufficient by the age of ten that Maryse hadn’t needed to worry about him being tough enough to face the cruel realities of life.

Looking back on it now, she was incredibly relieved that her blatant favoritism hadn’t come between her boys. While a little competition never hurt anyone, anger and jealousy could easily create rifts between the closest of friends.

But the day Jace and Alec had become Parabatai, she had known that they would forever have each other’s backs, and that was the day she had felt the harsh sting of reality.

Her children didn’t need her anymore.

They had all grown up so quickly, and she had missed it all.

The only one she had left to care for was Max, but now even that small thread was slipping through her fingertips. Her youngest was well on his way to becoming a fierce Shadowhunter, just like the rest of his siblings.

For the past few years, Maryse had been terrified that one day she'd wake up and her children wouldn't need her anymore. And that thought had left her feeling lost and adrift, utterly devoid of purpose.

So she had allowed that distance between them to grow, protecting herself from the inevitable fallout when that fateful day finally came.

But sitting here now, keeping vigil over her eldest son as he slept, she finally understood something that melted the icy cage locked around her heart.
It didn’t matter how old her children were, or how tough they grew to be. They would always need their mother, just as she would always need them.

Maryse dabbed the cool cloth against Alec’s forehead again, worried about the high heat that was emanating off of him.

Alec kept alternating between sweating and shivering as his fever continued to rise. He’d toss and turn one minute with a tortured groan, then curl into a ball with a shuddering whimper the next.

And each time the cramping attacked his insides, his back would arch reflexively and his brow would furrow as he hissed through the worst of it.

It pained Maryse to watch her boy suffer, but Alec wasn’t going to escape this torture until the Agony rune eventually expired. Till then, she’d do her best to keep him as comfortable as possible.

While Alec’s sweating was keeping the fever modulated, Maryse knew her eldest was becoming rapidly dehydrated because of it. The vomiting from earlier certainly hadn’t helped matters either. She’d have to wake him soon to get some more fluids into him.

Not yet though.

For the first time in the past two hours, Alec had finally fallen still and seemed to be getting some restful sleep. He had been disturbingly quiet during the last twenty minutes, so Maryse had sat back and given him some space.

Hopeful that his immobility might be a sign that his fever was coming back down, she quietly stood and made her way back to Magnus’s supplies. It only took her a moment to find an array of mundane thermometers that thankfully came with instructions.

She chose one that was non-invasive and simply needed to be pressed against her son’s forehead. It certainly sounded easy enough. The marvels of mundane technology…

Maryse popped the protective cap off of the sensor, played with the settings until she knew the flashing lights and beeps were turned off so as not to wake Alec, then moved back to his bedside.

There had been a warning about how perspiration could affect the reading of a temporal thermometer, so she reached out and felt Alec’s forehead first.

She frowned when the contact yielded nothing but bone-dry skin. His fever clearly hadn’t broken though because he was painfully hot to the touch.

Worried, Maryse quickly pressed the button on the small contraption and ran the sensor across Alec’s forehead from dead-center to his left temple. Alec didn’t react whatsoever to the light pressure.

Checking the digital display, Maryse’s heart seized when she saw the output… 106.8°F.

She may not have been a doctor or known much about mundane medicine, but she certainly knew that a fever like that was dangerously high and required immediate intervention.

Lowering the light sheet back down to Alec’s waist, she gasped when she saw how red the skin on his chest had gotten, as if he had been baking out in the sun for hours.

Leaning closer, she noticed that his breathing had become shallow and labored.
He was suffering from heat stroke.

His systems were shutting down like an overheated computer, and even the simplest of involuntary acts were becoming a struggle for him.

It was no wonder he had stopped moving a while ago, but the pain was clearly still there if his pinched expression was anything to go by.

It was definitely time to rouse him.

She brushed the bangs off of his forehead and cupped the side of his face.

“Alec, wake up, sweetie.”

Nothing.

Maryse tapped gently at his cheek, and when that failed to elicit any response, she patted a bit harder.

“Come on, open your eyes for me…”

She tilted his face towards herself with a firm grip on his chin, giving his head a bit of a shake in the process.

“Alexander!”

She slapped his cheek hard enough that he furrowed his brow and his head lolled to the side in protest, but he still wasn’t cognizant.

Maryse swallowed down her panic and forced herself to think clearly.

She had to get his temperature down before he slipped into a coma. Her best option was to get him into some cool water, but there was no way she’d be able to lift him on her own.

“Jace!” she yelled towards the closed door, unwilling to leave Alec’s side, even for a moment.

The blond burst into the room like an avenging angel, seraph blade in hand.

“What’s wrong?!” he demanded, wild eyes darting around the room for any potential threats before settling on his Parabatai as Maryse pulled the sheet completely off him and let it flutter to the floor.

Seeing Alec looking so sickly and still, propped up against the pillows with his eyes closed, brought back terrible memories for Jace. Memories of the day he almost lost his Parabatai.

He swallowed hard and moved closer as he put away the blade.

“What happened?”

“He’s too hot. We need to get him into the bathtub. Help me get him up.”

Jace quickly got into position by Alec’s side, then carefully lifted his brother’s torso from under his shoulders, taking care to support his head and neck as he settled his Parabatai securely against his own chest.

Jace marveled at the incredible heat radiating off of the older boy’s limp body and his jaw clenched in anger.
He was definitely going to give Imogen a piece of his mind when all was said and done.

“Hang in there, buddy,” he whispered against Alec’s unruly hair.

Still at the foot of the bed, Maryse took hold of her son’s legs from under his knees and together they raised him into the air and began making their way towards the adjoining bathroom.

Izzy appeared in the bedroom doorway, a hand quickly covering her mouth as it fell open in shock. “Mom?! Is Alec….?”

“Stay there, Isabelle,” Maryse instructed before disappearing through the bathroom doorway.

Jace shot Izzy a comforting nod as if to say he’d fix things and it’ll be okay, then he followed Maryse into the other room and all three of them disappeared from her view.

Izzy chewed on her lower lip anxiously, but did as she was told. The bathroom was barely big enough for one person let alone three, so any attempt at helping would only put her in the way.

If they needed her, they’d call. So she leaned against the doorframe and waited.

She was so lost in her worries that she jumped when a gentle hand squeezed her shoulder. She turned to see Magnus smiling sadly at her. “He’s going to be okay, Isabelle.”

Izzy let out the breath she hadn’t realize she had been holding, then turned into Magnus’s awaiting arms, resting her head against his warm chest and taking comfort in the steady beat of his heart.

“I know,” she replied quietly before turning her attention back to her brother’s bathroom door as it snapped shut.

SHSHSHSHSH

In the small confines of the bathroom, Maryse and Jace eased Alec down onto the cold floor, propping him up against the wall.

Maryse quickly turned on the tap and began filling the tub with lukewarm water.

Jace crouched down and placed two fingers against Alec’s carotid artery. “His pulse is racing,” he informed his adoptive mother.

“I know,” Maryse responded tightly, willing the tub to fill faster. Once the water level reached halfway, she gave up on waiting. “Alright, get him up.”

Jace pulled Alec’s right arm around his shoulders and stood with a groan. While his brother was thin, he was all muscle and a good four inches taller than Jace, making the position awkward and cumbersome. But it was effective.

Maryse appeared on Alec’s other side and helped guide them forward, then they carefully lowered Alec’s unconscious form into the steadily rising water.

As soon as Alec’s waist was immersed, all hell broke loose.

His eyes flew open in panic and he started thrashing around, desperately trying to claw his way back out of the tub and away from this new source of torment.

“Alec, calm down!” Jace shouted above the sounds of splashing water, turning his face away to protect his eyes from the constant spray.
Alec’s foot managed to find purchase against the side of the porcelain long enough for him to raise himself halfway out of the water.

“No, wait!” Jace yelled in fear, reaching out for him but not quite in time.

The older boy’s foot slipped out from underneath him and he tumbled back into the tub with a terrified yelp, his head getting fully submerged before Jace was able to grip his shoulders and pull him upright again.

Alec spluttered and coughed as Jace thumped him on the back, expelling the water he had accidentally inhaled in his surprise.

He blindly grabbed for Jace’s forearms and tried to use them for leverage in pulling himself out of the tub, but his family was too fast for him.

Maryse lunged forward and held his legs down as Jace easily reversed Alec’s hold on him, doing his best to keep his brother’s arms pinned to his chest and beneath the water.

“N-no… Don’t!” Alec choked out past chattering teeth. “Lemme up, Jace!”


“’s too c-cold! Ahha!” Alec jerked involuntarily as his muscles spasmed painfully in protest.

“It’s not that cold, Sweetheart,” Maryse responded in a calming voice. “It’s just the fever. You need to stay still or you’re going to injure yourself further.”

Ignoring her warning, Alec continued to struggle against them, desperately trying to escape their restraining grips as his already abused muscles clenched and unclenched reflexively against the painful shivers wracking his body.

“P-please, stop…” Alec begged as he failed to break free and his strength began to betray him. “It h-hurts…” he whimpered.

“I know, baby,” Maryse whispered back, stubborn tears in her eyes. “We’ll get you out of there in a few minutes, alright? Just try to relax until then.”

Alec did his best to settle down, but the constant tremors continued to send sharp pains throughout his limbs and along his spine. He kept shifting restlessly, trying to find a more comfortable position to wait it out, but nothing he did helped.

His calf muscles cramped painfully and he tried to raise his knees but Maryse didn’t allow his legs an ounce of maneuverability.

The tremors continued to build in their intensity and Alec was having trouble getting his watery eyes to focus. The room was spinning around him and his nausea returned, forcing him to swallow convulsively against the bubbly fluid rising up the back of his parched throat.

By the angel, he was thirsty…

His head and heart were both pounding at an incredible rate, and for the life of him, he couldn’t remember why he was in a tub of cold water.

“S-somethin’s… w-wrong…” he gasped out as his vision darkened. “I c-can’t…”

Alec’s eyes rolled into the back of his head and his body seized, froth dripping steadily from the
corner of his mouth.

“Crap…” Jace muttered, immediately pulling Alec upright again and sliding into the tub behind him to prevent Alec’s head from slamming into the unforgiving porcelain.

He kept a restraining hold on Alec’s crossed wrists, keeping them pinned to his chest with one hand as the other wrapped around his brother’s forehead to protect his neck.

Jace leaned Alec forward, allowing the frothy liquid to drain out of his mouth instead of down the back of his throat.

“Easy, buddy… I’ve got you,” he spoke softly, hoping Alec could still hear him.

It took nearly a minute and a half for the seizure to finally stop. Alec slumped into his brother’s arms, unconscious once again, froth still dripping from his slightly parted lips.

Maryse cautiously released Alec’s legs, then grabbed a washcloth from the sink, wiping Alec’s mouth and chin clean before they eased him back against Jace’s chest to get a better look at him.

Alec’s face was horribly pale, but at least the redness of his chest was finally fading. His eyes darted back and forth beneath his closed eyelids as he struggled against the pull of the darkness, his body attempting to reboot itself.

His breathing was still fast and labored, but another scan with the thermometer informed them that Alec’s fever had fallen to 103.2°F. Still not great, but certainly better than it had been.

Reaching back into the tub, Maryse pulled the plug and allowed the water to start draining out. Then she grabbed a fresh towel and began patting Alec’s head and torso dry.

“Maryse…”

She glanced up when Jace suddenly gripped her wrist and felt her stomach sink at his wide-eyed look of horror.

Following his gaze to the far end of the tub, she watched as the final remnants of the water disappeared down the drain, tinted with a dark red.

“By the angel…” she breathed out in a whisper. Before she could start investigating for the source of the blood, a knock came at the door.

Izzy popped her head in, holding out a fresh pair of her brother’s boxers. “Heard the water shut off and thought you might need these. I just finished changing out Alec’s bed linens, and…”

She stopped abruptly as she took in the sight before her.

“Mom?”

“Isabelle, go get your medical kit. Quickly.”

Izzy was gone in a flash and Maryse turned her attention back to her eldest. She carefully began shifting Alec’s limbs around until she found the source of the bleeding.

Two long, deep gashes, similar to claw marks, had appeared on the backs of Alec’s calves. The cuts were jagged, the skin clearly torn rather than strategically sliced.

She checked the tub beneath his legs for a potential cause, but suspected she wouldn’t find one.
Glancing at her watch, she let out a steadying breath. Alec had just entered the third quarter of his punishment.

Izzy returned just as Maryse and Jace were laying Alec down, stomach-first, on a towel that had been spread out on the floor.

Jace hovered over his brother, unsure of how to help anymore. Izzy squeezed his shoulder gently as she carefully stepped around him.

“Go get some dry clothes on, Jace. Then bring some ice back with you.”

Jace looked down at his dripping outfit and nodded glumly before stepping out of the room and giving Izzy enough space with which to work.

She prodded gently at the cuts on Alec’s lower legs, and came to the unfortunate conclusion that they would need stitching in order to slow the bleeding.

She cracked open her med kit and began threading a curved needle, ignoring the fact that her hands were shaking.

“Are you sure you know how to do this?” Maryse asked gently, not in the least bit condescending. She was genuinely curious. After all, Isabelle was a forensic pathologist, not a doctor.

“I’ve stitched up plenty of corpses over the years, mom,” Izzy replied, hoping she sounded more confident than she actually felt. “How different can it be?”

Izzy’s first stab went a bit deeper than she meant for it to go. Living flesh was much easier to penetrate than that of the dead. She winced as Alec groaned in distress, the fingers of his right hand curling slightly against the hard floor in unconscious protest.

“Sorry, big brother,” Izzy stated softly, then tried again. This time, she reached the proper depth, then pierced through the other side and drew the thread into a tight knot.

With a quick snip of the scissors, she moved on to the next stitch and grew more and more confident as she went. That is, until Alec started to shift beneath her hands.

He was waking up.

Maryse quickly knelt down by his head and ran a hand soothingly through his hair. “Stay still, Sweetheart. She’s almost done.”

Alec blinked his eyes open in confusion, frowning as he took in his odd surroundings. Was he laying on the bathroom floor? Then he hissed as a sharp pain radiated through his lower right leg.

He tried to raise his head to look behind himself and find out what was causing the pain, but Maryse kept up a steady pressure on his skull that his weakened neck muscles couldn’t fight against.

Instead, he tried to shift his leg away from the source of pain, but another hand closed firmly around his ankle, keeping him in place.

“Not yet, Alec,” came Izzy’s voice from beyond his view, followed by another jabbing pinch.

“Wa’s goin’ on?” Alec slurred, his dry mouth refusing to cooperate.

He shivered as the cold from the floor radiated through the thin towel and into his exposed flesh.
Maryse grabbed another towel from the stack on the toilet and draped it gently over him.

“You’re past the halfway mark, darling,” Maryse responded, avoiding any details that would upset her son. She moved the towel up and down his back, continuing to dry off any water spots she had missed the first time around because he had been leaning up against Jace.

Isabelle finished the last stitch on Alec’s right leg, then stepped over him and prepared to start on the left.

Once again, Alec tried to follow her movements, but Maryse prevented it. He practically growled in frustration.

“Trust me, it’s better if you don’t know,” Maryse explained. “Just a little longer, then we’ll get you back into your nice, warm bed. How does that sound?”

Alec grunted in response, then gasped and jerked a bit when Izzy slid the needle through his torn skin. The pain was helping to ground him, clearing his mind of the heavy fog bank inside it.

His strength was also slowly returning, but so were all the aches and pains of his body. He’d rather get hit by a hundred more crazy cabbies than have to endure this torture for another six hours.

Without any warning, a searing pain lanced across his back and he cried out, squeezing his eyes shut against the unbidden tears.

Isabelle jumped at the sound and pulled away. “For goodness sake, Alec… I didn’t even touch you that time!”

“My b-back…” he rasped out, clawing at the floor beneath him for some kind of purchase.

Frowning, Maryse lifted the towel off of Alec. He flinched violently as the cloth grazed against the site of his pain.

Maryse cursed under her breath as she took in the long welt that had appeared out of nowhere, spanning from Alec’s right shoulder blade all the way down and across his spine to his left hip.

It looked like he had been whipped, but while it was certainly a painful injury, she was relieved to find that it hadn’t broken the surface of his skin. A bit of ice would help with the swelling. No stitches necessary.

The second lash that suddenly appeared across the middle of his back, however, did draw blood. It was as if an invisible assailant were striking him, and there wasn’t a damned thing they could do to defend him.

Alec tried to curl into a ball to protect himself from the attack, but the hits continued to rain down on him, tearing up his back, slicing across his ribs, and raking down his chest.

Jace came running back into the room, bucket of ice in hand, when he heard his Parabatai scream in pain. Once he saw what was happening, his eyes flashed gold with rage.

He moved forward to comfort his brother, but Izzy stopped him with a hand on his bicep.

“Jace, wait. Your eyes… You need to calm down or you could accidentally activate one of Alec’s runes.”

Jace took a few deep, steadying breaths until his eyes returned to normal. He looked up at Izzy
from beneath the hair that had fallen out of place and she smiled at him comfortingly, then nodded her approval.

Half a second later, he was on his knees by his Parabatai’s side, but he didn’t risk touching him. The lashes were appearing at random and at an unfairly fast rate.

There was no way Alec would survive this flogging if it lasted the full three hours. The pain alone would kill him.

To everyone’s intense relief, the barrage seemed to slow and eventually petered out about fifteen minutes later.

Alec was a simpering, bloody mess by the end, jumping and flinching away from every touch for fear of another hit.

His family did the best they could to soothe him until Alec was reduced to the occasional whimpers and hitched breaths.

It may have been kinder to just leave him there, curled up on the floor, but he was still shivering from the cold and that could easily make his fever climb again so the decision was made to move him back to his bed.

It was slow going, and Alec did his best to help, but for the most part, Jace carried him along. Izzy and Maryse started fawning over him as soon as he collapsed onto the mattress with a pained groan.

They made makeshift ice packs from the cubes Jace had brought back with him and placed them over the deepest lacerations.

Alec hissed at the cold and tried to twist away from it, but the movement just made the rest of the pain in his body throb again so he curled onto his least damaged side and fell still, resigning himself to the lesser of the two evils.

Izzy finished bandaging his calves so he didn’t pull out any of the stitches, then applied smaller bandages here and there where needed as Maryse gently bathed the blood off of Alec’s ravaged skin.

When they were done, the two women stepped outside so that Jace could change Alec’s soaked boxers out for the dry ones, then he draped the fresh sheet over Alec’s curled form.

The shivering slowly started to abate and Alec let out a small sigh of relief. “Th-thanks.”

Jace pulled a chair up to the side of the bed and took his Parabatai’s hand into his own like he had done earlier. The position seemed to comfort them both.

“What can I do to fix this, Alec?” he asked softly, brushing his thumb over the back of his brother’s hand. “How can I help you?”

Alec’s hand tightened around Jace’s. “D-don’t… leave.”

Jace shook his head. “I’m not going anywhere, buddy.”

Alec nodded slowly, then let his eyes fall closed. He knew this round of pain was far from over, but he appreciated the short respite nonetheless.

Out in the hall, Maryse and Izzy found Magnus chewing on a painted thumbnail as he waited
anxiously for an update. They filled him in on what had transpired in the bathroom, and he immediately rose to his feet.

“I need to see him.”

“And you will. But first, we need your help,” Maryse stated, grabbing the warlock’s attention.

“With?”

Izzy stepped closer and explained.

“Magnus, I can keep the bleeding under control if this is how this round is going to play out, but I’ve got nothing to give him for the pain and I doubt ice is going to cut it for long. Do you have anything that might help?”

Magnus bit his lip in thought.

“Well… Typically, I would never suggest alcohol for someone in his condition, but considering the circumstances, I’d say the stronger the proof, the better. And I know just the cocktail to get the job done.”

TBC
Hail Mary

Chapter Summary

Who’s ready for a taste of some drunk! Alec?? Magnus to the rescue!

“I had a feeling you might have something in mind,” Izzy beamed at Magnus.
The warlock gave a mock bow.

“When it comes to booze, my dear, you’ve enlisted the right man. However, I think we can all agree that Alexander isn’t much of a drinker. I have my doubts that he’ll be able to stomach something strong enough to dull the pain of an Agony rune long enough for it to take full effect.”

“I was afraid you’d say that,” Izzy replied, disheartened.

“Don’t give up just yet, Isabelle. I’m simply suggesting that we’ll need a plan B, and I happen to know exactly who to ask for such a thing. Excuse me for a moment.”

Magnus pulled his cellphone from his pocket and stepped away from Maryse and Izzy for a bit of privacy. His call was answered on the second ring.

“Magnus, to what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Catarina, my dear… I have a favor to ask of you.”

“Name it.”

“I need a strong painkiller. Preferably, the strongest one Mundanes have managed to produce, and not in an oral form.”

“A painkiller? What’s wrong?” The tension in her voice was palpable. “Are you hurt?”

“It’s not for me,” Magnus quickly consoled. “It’s for a friend. Alec, in fact.”

“Your angelic ex? Can’t he just use an iratze if he’s wounded?” she asked, confused by his request.

“It’s a bit of a long story, I’m afraid. And time is of the essence.”

“Alright. I’ll set some medicine aside for you at the hospital. But Magnus? I want the full story later.”

“You’ll have it, I promise. Thank you, my friend.”

Magnus hung up and returned to the Lightwood women, a determined look in his eyes.

“I must go and gather my supplies, but I won’t be long. Try to get Alexander to drink some water before I return. If we’re going to start plying him with alcohol, he certainly doesn’t need to add a hangover to his ever-growing list of ailments.”
With that, Magnus strode off down the hallway and disappeared from sight.

Maryse and Izzy returned to Alec’s bedroom to find him curled up on his mattress, covered with a fresh sheet. The fingers of his right hand were tightly entwined with Jace’s who was sitting vigilantly by his side.

At first, Maryse thought her son had managed to fall asleep. His eyes were closed and his breathing had mostly evened out.

But as she neared his bed, she noticed that his entire body was tensed up in morbid anticipation. Then he jolted forward a bit, a choked-off yelp getting caught in his throat.

He was still conscious then, if only just.

“Breathe, Alec,” Jace reminded him quietly, apparently not for the first time.

She frowned and looked to the blond for answers.

“Jace?”

The boy glanced up at her, his eyes dark with a blend of pained emotions. Without saying a word, he reached toward Alec with his free hand and gently tugged the sheet halfway down his back.

Dozens of small, relatively shallow cuts littered his skin, each new one eliciting a strained gasp from Alec as he tried to jerk away from the invisible instrument of torture.

Maryse watched in horror as a new gash was sliced into her son’s flesh in the middle of his back before Jace tugged the sheet back up to Alec’s neck, shielding him from view.

“A new one appears every ten seconds,” Jace informed her quietly as he counted the timing in his head, then right on cue, he felt Alec’s grip reflexively clench against his own. “Started about five minutes ago.”

Maryse’s brain automatically did the math.

*Thirty slices and counting…*

“Oh, Alec,” Izzy lamented beside her mother.

Maryse put a comforting hand on her son’s shoulder, feeling the tremors coursing through his coiled body that had nothing to do with the lingering fever.

Being on the razor-sharp edge of pain for so long was pushing him closer and closer to shock. Not to mention the amount of blood loss…

“M-mom?” Alec stammered out weakly, squinting up at her with glazed eyes.

She forced a smile onto her face and prayed to the Angel that it was more convincing than it felt.

“Magnus has a plan, Sweetheart. He’ll be back very soon with some pain relief. Just hang in there a little longer.”

Alec nodded once, then squeezed his eyes shut and pulled away from her with a pained grunt.

Maryse watched sadly as a thin line of blood stained the sheet directly where her hand had been a second ago.
Jace reflexively leaned forward, tugged the sheet down far enough to expose the new wound, and eased one of the discarded ice packs against his brother’s bleeding shoulder.

“Some cuts are deeper than others,” he explained dejectedly.

“Ahh…” Alec hissed through his clenched teeth as the ice made the skin around his wound burn fiercely. “Just leave it alone, Jace. P-please.”

Alec’s breathy voice was horribly strained and raspy. Maryse was surprised he was able to make any sounds at all, let alone speak full sentences.

“I will, buddy,” Jace assured quietly. “As soon as the bleeding stops.”

“…burns,” Alec mumbled, teetering on the edge of unconsciousness.

“I know. Not much longer though, promise. At least these are shallow.”

Frustrated and feeling miserable, Alec fell silent again and curled further into himself, burrowing his head deeper into his pillow so that his face was barely visible. Much to his disgruntle, the ice on his shoulder moved with him, never breaking contact with his sensitive skin.

Jace squeezed Alec’s hand lightly in apology, but Alec didn’t respond. He clearly wasn’t in a forgiving mood.

The blond lowered his head sadly, feeling guilty about causing his brother more pain in order to help him.

Maryse moved around the bed to stand by Jace’s side and rubbed his back till he glanced up at her, his eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“I know it’s hard, Jace. But you’re doing what’s best for him. We all are.”

Maryse leaned across her prone son and picked up another homemade ice pack.

Alec cracked a tired eye open at the sound of movement and watched his mother apprehensively, a hint of betrayal in the narrowing of his brow.

“It’s alright, Alec,” she quickly consoled as she opened the pack and fished out one of the small, half-melted ice chips. “We just need to get you rehydrated a bit. Come on now…”

Ignoring her son’s half-hearted protests, Maryse gently gripped Alec’s chin and tilted his head up so that he wasn’t able to hide his face in the pillow anymore. Then she ran the ice cube lightly over his chapped lips, moistening the brittle skin that had split at some point and bled.

At least, she hoped that was the cause for the flecks of blood around Alec’s mouth. She didn’t think her heart could handle anything more sinister than that.

“Open up, baby,” she encouraged when he continued to resist, his teeth remaining tightly clenched.

To be fair, the last time she had fed him something, he had regretted it for quite some time. He’d never eat anything with ginger in it again.

But as the melting ice started to drip down between his lips, Alec realized how thirsty he really was and instinctively opened his mouth to accept the soothing offering.

He nearly moaned with relief as the small cube instantly melted on his tongue and trickled down
the back of his burning throat, slightly diminishing the cottony feeling that had taken up residence there ever since the seizure.

“That’s it,” Maryse praised with a genuine smile. “Good boy.”

He tentatively licked the remaining moisture from his sore lips, but it still wasn’t enough to ease the ache. Alec looked yearningly up at his mother, his desperate eyes silently pleading for more.

She happily gave him another piece of ice, and another after that until he was able to swallow again without feeling like he had razor blades in his esophagus.

While Maryse kept Alec distracted, Izzy stepped in behind him and tugged Jace’s hand away from his shoulder.

“Let me see,” she instructed and Jace happily complied, easing the ice pack off of his brother’s wound and tossing it aside.

Izzy lowered Alec’s sheet to his waist and inspected his wounds with a clinical eye.

“The cut on his shoulder has almost stopped bleeding. It won’t need stitches, but I’ll put some butterfly bandages on it to keep it from getting any worse. The rest of these cuts along his back look painful, but thankfully, superficial.”

While her brother was far from okay, she had seen him in worse condition before. This she could handle.

However, as she tended to Alec’s injured shoulder, two deeper lacerations appeared; one across his right shoulder blade, and the other on the bottom left of his ribcage.

Izzy huffed in frustration, trying her best to keep up. Every time she finished tending to one, she’d find three new ones. The Agony rune seemed to be mocking her.

Thankfully, the majority of the slices didn’t make it past the multiple layers of skin, leaving the muscles beneath it intact. So while the cuts bled profusely, they wouldn’t do any serious damage, unless they went untreated and became infected.

Not on her watch.

Once she finished taping up the most recent wound, which had appeared along the length of Alec’s left forearm, she sat back with a sigh of relief when she failed to find any more.

No doubt that meant that the rune was about to change tactics again, but she’d consider the short break in between a win.

Her brother was starting to look like a mummy with all the white bandages decorating his pale skin. Painful looking bruises and welts littered nearly every inch of flesh in between.

She soaked a fresh cloth in the bucket of melting ice and began gently sponging it over the still exposed injuries crisscrossing her brother’s back, sopping up the errant trickles of blood.

Alec jerked away with a gasp as the freezing cloth touched his torn flesh, but whether his reaction was due to the pain of his injuries or the shock of the cold against his overly-heated skin, Izzy didn’t know.

“Easy, Alec,” she comforted softly, taking a restraining hold on his left bicep with her free hand
before gently dabbing the cloth against his back again.

This time, Alec hissed his displeasure but managed to remain still and allowed Izzy to carefully clean him up.

After the initial shock of the icy towel against his ravaged back, the cold water began to feel soothing and Alec finally allowed his muscles to relax a bit, breathing steadily through the lingering pain as he had been taught to do as a child.

Another three minutes passed in this manner, and Alec was drifting somewhere on the edge of blissful unconsciousness when a brutal cut sliced its way into the meat of his left thigh, deep enough to carve through multiple layers of muscle and tissue, nearly exposing the bone.

“Ahha!”

He kicked his leg instinctively as he tried to flail away from the newest source of agony. He wanted to wrap his hands around the injury until the pain eased to a more tolerable level, but Jace quickly took hold of his wrists and wouldn’t let go.

Alec struggled to break free, but if anything, the blond simply tightened his grips as he stood from his chair, his sharp eyes scanning up and down Alec’s body as he desperately searched for the latest cause of his brother’s pain.

It didn’t take him long to catch sight of the large blood stain that quickly began to grow across the previously white sheet entangled around Alec’s legs. “Son of a mundane…” Jace muttered.

He didn’t need to see the injury hidden underneath the sheet to know it had to be bad.

Izzy surged forward and clasped a hand tightly over the wound, using the sheet as a compress and doing her best to ignore her brother’s cries and the hot blood oozing between her fingers as she applied ample pressure.

The pain was so intense that Alec arched off the bed, praying to the Angel that he would just pass out, but his body refused to grant him that escape.

Instead, his mind retreated and he lost all sense of reality. He couldn’t remember where he was, who was with him, or why they were hurting him so badly.

He had to get up, had to find a way out, had to fight until backup arrived… Had to make it stop!

There were more hands on his body now, pulling and pushing at him until he was forced to lay flat on his flayed back. Clearly, they weren’t done with him yet.

Alec didn’t think he could take any more. Every nerve in his body was on fire. He fought hard to break away, but their restrictive holds were relentless.

“Get off me!” he yelled as he thrashed against the unwanted contact, but the meddling hands refused to yield.

Jace had to practically lay on top of his brother to keep him from writhing off the bed, and Alec fought him with every ounce of strength he had left.

“Damn it…” Jace grunted under his breath, struggling to keep Alec pinned down beneath his weight. “I know you’re in a lot of pain, buddy, but you need to stay still!”
Alec managed to get an arm free and lashed out, catching Jace squarely in the jaw with a harsh right hook.

Jace grunted in pain and had to blink away stars for a moment before he was able to recapture and restrain the arm that had broken loose from his grip.

Alec had one hell of a punch when he wasn’t holding back.

“Hey! Calm down!” the blond commanded, hoping his tone would get through to the older boy even if his words didn’t. “There’s nothing here to fight, Alec! You’re only going to injure yourself more!”

Jace’s warnings fell on deaf ears.

“Let. Me. Go!” Alec demanded, attempting to get his arm free again to take another swing.

He shouted in pain and fear as his captors stabbed a knife straight through his right side, pinning him to the table like a bug to be studied.

Apparently, they weren’t happy with his futile struggling.

Any movement on his behalf sent waves of agony throughout his torso, forcing Alec to whimper and fall still, surrendering to his captors’ will and hoping to avoid further punishment.

Tears began to stream from his eyes as the bloodied sheet was extricated from the lower half of his body, exposing his latest wounds for inspection.

“Please, d-don’t!” Alec sobbed as someone began prodding at the lacerated tissue in his thigh and other hands pressed heavily against his bleeding side.

The pain was so intense, he could barely breathe. He couldn’t move. Couldn’t think.

“It’s alright, Parabatai,” Jace tried again, doing his best to keep his shaking voice steady. “We’re only trying to help. Please, just calm down.”

Alec screamed as another sharp, stabbing pain radiated through his left shoulder, just below his collarbone. He wouldn’t be surprised if the blade had severed his rotator cuff, rendering the limb utterly useless.

He had been trying to cooperate. Why were they still punishing him?

When submission didn’t seem to appease his captors any, panic took over and he resorted to one last desperate attempt at escape.

If he couldn’t manage to get away, odds were the creatures that had taken him would end up killing him, slowly and painfully.

He had no other choice but to fight back.

Alec kicked out with his uninjured leg and felt a sense of satisfaction when he heard a grunt of pain and the hands on his thigh instantly disappeared.

Ignoring his body’s protests, he twisted his hips and tried to roll off of the bed, using his own weight to attempt to break the hold of the one keeping his torso pinned down.

He’d never have a snowball’s chance in Edom to fight his way free if he remained flat on his back.
He had to get back up on his feet.

His good leg slipped off the mattress and he was elated to discover how close he was to the edge. If he just swung himself a little further forward…

"Alec, stop!"

Unfortunately, his relief was short-lived as something grabbed at his wounded shoulder for leverage, sending bolts of agony through his left side.

His knees instinctively rose up to protect his chest, and there they were quickly recaptured and he was pinned back down to the bed, more relentlessly than before.

“Gah! No!”

Izzy had been trying to assess the damage of the wound in her brother’s thigh when he had struck out and kicked her in the stomach.

With his legs free, Alec had nearly succeeded in breaking away from them, but Jace had made a desperate grab for him and inadvertently dug his fingers into Alec’s punctured shoulder, buying Izzy enough time to recover and recapture Alec’s lower limbs.

That didn’t stop Alec from struggling with all his might though, and she watched in dismay as blood continued to flow freely from his thigh. But due to her current position, there was nothing she could do about it.

“Jace, I need you to come down here and keep his legs still!” Izzy barked.

Jace huffed in irritation, still trying to keep Alec’s strong arms pinned to his chest. He needed to put pressure on his brother's heavily bleeding shoulder, but he couldn't spare a hand, let alone two.

“Little busy at the moment, Iz! Where the hell is Magnus?!” he hissed angrily.

“Not here,” Maryse retorted, keeping firm pressure on the slice in Alec’s abdomen once Izzy managed to straighten his legs back out again. “And while an extra set of hands would be really useful right about now, we’re just going to have to make do with what we’ve got.”

“Then we need to either knock him out or restrain him,” Izzy huffed, continuing to wrestle with her delirious brother. “He’s losing too much blood!”

Jace’s eyes darted around the room for something that could help and they landed on Alec’s discarded belt less than three feet away.

He hooked an ankle around the table leg and tugged the small piece of furniture closer, then snagged the belt off the top.

With a whispered apology to his brother, he tethered Alec’s right wrist to the headboard.

“No… Nonononono!”

Alec immediately pulled against the binding, his eyes widening in anxiety when the leather had no give to it. As Jace launched himself around the bed to the other side, Alec tried to take advantage of his absence and sit up, but the blond was too fast for him.

Jace shoved his left forearm against Alec’s upper chest, effectively knocking him back down to the mattress while his free hand deftly removed his own belt and secured his brother’s left wrist a safe
distance away from his right so that Alec couldn’t reach the clasps to undo them.

Alec shouted in pain as his damaged left shoulder was rotated, but his primary focus was on the fact that he was now tied down, making escape a virtual impossibility. The overwhelming fear flooding his already taxed system pushed him over the edge into a full-blown panic attack.

He couldn’t see anything more than blurry shadows moving around him. Couldn’t hear anything but the pounding of his own heart in his ears. Couldn’t get air into his oxygen-deprived lungs.

He was going to die at the hands of these creatures, and there wasn’t a damned thing he could do about it.

Once Alec’s arms were properly secured, Jace moved down to keep his brother’s legs still so that Izzy could let go and finally get an unhindered look at his extensive injuries.

“All right, Iz. He’s all yours, but make it quick. Keeping him flat on his injured back is just going to cause him more pain.”

Izzy nodded in agreement and didn’t waste any time carefully tugging the two sides of the thigh wound open and irrigating out the blood to get an unimpeded view.

She gasped once she saw just how deep the slice really went. It looked as if an ax had been thrown and embedded itself into her brother’s upper leg.

In fact, the wound looked similar to the one Alec had acquired in his left bicep while fending off the Forsaken that Hodge had allowed into the Institute a while back.

An iratze had kept that injury from bleeding profusely and also kept the pain levels to a minimum. But this time, Alec wouldn’t be afforded such luxuries.

Izzy looked up at Jace sadly, then shook her head. A bag of ice wasn’t going to slow this bleed.

“There’s too much damage here for a handful of surface stitches to repair. I’ll have to stitch this one in layers from the inside out, and it’s going to hurt. A lot. But if he struggles like this while I’m working on him…”

Maryse caught her daughter’s drift and turned her attention to distracting her eldest while Izzy began preparing her suturing tools.

“All right, Sweetheart. I need you to look at me.”

Alec was so caught up in his pain and panic, his mind didn’t register his mother’s loving tone. He couldn’t acknowledge the fact that he was surrounded by family, not the enemy. But Maryse was determined to get through his delirium.

Keeping one hand firmly pressed on Alec’s stomach wound, she reached up and cradled the side of her son’s face, ignoring the smeared blood she left on his pale cheek. She turned his head towards herself and spoke again.

“Don’t you dare give up on us, Alec. I need you to keep fighting, understand? Just follow the sound of my voice and come back to me, please…. Alexander!”

Alec’s wild eyes looked right through her at first, but then they slowly began to focus, his sweat-slicked brow furrowing in confusion.
“Mom? W-what…?” He pulled against the bindings on his wrists, crying out when unimaginable pain flared through his left shoulder. He couldn’t breathe… Couldn’t breathe…

He squeezed his eyes shut in distress, writhing the best he could against everyone holding him down.

“Stay still, sweetie. I know you’re scared and confused, but I need you to open your eyes. Alec, open your eyes.”

Against his better judgment, Alec did as he was told. He couldn’t ignore a direct order. He tried to focus on his mother again, but his vision wasn’t cooperating. He was getting lightheaded and black spots were popping up everywhere in front of his eyes.

“Don’t hold your breath, baby.” The hand on his face moved down to his chest, pressing insistently against his sternum. “You’ve got to breathe. Come on, Alec. Talk to me.”

Alec was so close to letting go. He could feel himself drifting into the darkness. So close…

His eyelids started to flutter shut again, when he felt the harsh thump of a clenched fist against his chest and the breath stuttered out of him.

His lungs were suddenly screaming for air and he was forced to inhale greedily, resulting in a painful coughing fit.

“That’s it…” Maryse encouraged, rubbing soothing circles over his chest as he fought to regain control of his spasming abdomen. “Nice and easy. In… and out…”

Alec swallowed thickly as his glazed eyes roamed aimlessly around the room.

“Where…?” he rasped out, unaware if he spoke loud enough to be heard over the persistent ringing in his ears. “Wha’s h’pp’n’?”

Maryse smiled sadly at him.

“Shh... It’s alright, Alec. Everything is going to be fine. You’re in your bedroom at the Institute, and Jace and Izzy are here with us too.”

“J-Jace…?” Alec whimpered, raising his head high enough to look for his brother.

“I’m right here, buddy,” Jace replied, giving Alec’s good knee a gentle pat. “You’re gonna be okay. We’ve got you.”

Alec let out another shaky breath as the room spun unpleasantly around him, then dropped his head back down to the pillow.

His unfocused eyes sought out his mother’s again as she stroked her fingers through his hair.

“Take it easy, Alec. All of this is being caused by the Agony rune. Do you remember now?”

Alec grunted in protest as he felt fingers pulling at the wound in his thigh again.

“I… Ah! I d-don’t…”

“It’s alright,” Maryse stated calmly. “It’s just Isabelle. She’s going to get you all patched up, but you need to stay still, understand?”
“Jus’ make it stop,” Alec whimpered.

“We will, baby. We will. But first, your sister needs to repair some of the damage.”

Alec shook his head wearily. “No. Please…”

“It’ll all be over soon, Alec. Just keep your eyes on me, okay?”

Maryse cradled her son’s cheek again.

“I’m right here, sweetie. Stay with me.”

Izzy began digging deeper into Alec’s leg, trying her best to clean the wound out before suturing it closed.

Alec opened his mouth to beg, plead, scream, or whatever else it would take to get his sister to reconsider, but a wonderfully timed voice beat him to the punch.

“Wait!”

Everyone looked up as Magnus strode into the room, a thermos in one hand and a prepared syringe in the other.

Jace bowed his head in relief before glaring up at the warlock. “Always with the damned dramatic entrances, huh?”

Magnus didn’t even spare him a glance as he crossed the room in three long strides. “What can I say? It’s a gift. Isabelle, take this. Looks like we may need it sooner than anticipated.”

He handed over the large syringe and Alec groaned at the sight of it. So much for being spared from Izzy’s stabbing.

“I know, darling, but it’ll be worth it, I assure you,” Magnus stated as he came to a rest by Alec’s side.

“M’gnus… Help me,” Alec begged, breaking the warlock’s heart as he pulled tentatively against the restraint on his right wrist.

“Shh… It’s alright now.” The warlock curled his hand over Alec’s to still his struggles as he took in all the damage that had been done during his absence. “Oh, Alexander… What has Imogen done to you?”

“Jus’ wanna… go home,” Alec whined between wheezing breaths, his pleading gaze giving Magus a meaningful look.

“He’s delirious,” Jace mumbled sadly. After all, Alec was in his own bedroom. Couldn’t get any closer to home than that.

“No. He’s not,” Magnus replied as he smoothed Alec’s sweat-slicked bangs away from his eyes.

He knew from Alec’s look that the young Shadowhunter was referring to Magnus’s loft, and it made his heart swell to know that Alec still considered his place to be home.

At least, he had before they’d broken up. His happy bubble quickly burst.

Magnus shook himself mentally. Now was not the time to be melancholy about their situation.
Alec needed him.

“Here,” Magnus offered, sliding a hand beneath Alec’s neck and raising his head gently. “Start with this. It should help take the edge off a bit.”

He magicked the cover off the thermos in his other hand and eased it against Alec’s lips. The younger man sipped thirstily at the liquid inside, assuming it was water, then spluttered and gagged as the nearly pure alcohol burned its way down his already sore throat.

“Easy,” Magnus cooed. “Just a little bit more… Smaller sips this time.”

Magnus tipped the thermos higher and Alec swallowed reflexively, grimacing as he did so. But the pain lines in his face slowly began to diminish as the strong booze assaulted his system.

He blinked heavily as Magnus gently lowered his head back down again.

“How do you feel now, Alexander?” the warlock asked tentatively as Alec stared up at the blank ceiling in fascination.

“‘m I floating?” Alec mumbled through numb lips. “Feels like ‘m floatin’… ‘m I a bug?” He let out a small giggle and Jace raised an incredulous eyebrow at the warlock.

“Is he… Is he drunk?”

“I should hope so,” Magnus responded. “This is my special brew. The one I only bring out when I have a truly miserable day I wish to forget.”

“But he only had a few sips!” Jace protested. Sure, Alec wasn’t much of a drinker. But he didn’t think his brother was that much of a lightweight.

“Yes, well… You try taking a swig of 98% alcohol and tell me you don’t feel like your head abandoned the rest of your body. I assure you, this stuff is quite effective.”

Jace blanched at him. “98%?! Is that even safe to drink?!”

“I admit, it’s a bit of a Hail Mary, but if what Imogen said to you about no permanent damage is remotely correct, then once the twelve hours are up, Alexander’s body should eventually return to normal as if none of this had ever happened. Judging by the amount of pain he is in, I’d say it’s worth the risk.”

“So what’s in this then?” Izzy questioned, looking closely at the clear liquid filling the syringe.

“A morphine cocktail Catarina put together for me. Unfortunately, we don’t have time to test it to find out how long it’ll last or how well it’ll work, but she did the best she could with the information I provided.

"Best guess is it'll last about two hours. With any luck, it should get him through the worst of this phase.”

“And if it doesn’t?” Jace demanded.

Magnus sighed. “Then we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

TBC
Izzy rolled the syringe between her fingers in thought, then glanced up at Alec’s pale face, which was a stark contrast to the deep red of Maryse’s bloody handprint, still lingering on his alabaster cheek.

The older boy looked dazed, his eyes slowly tracing the patterns on the ceiling as if the mesmerizing swirls somehow contained all the answers to the meaning of life.

While she had no doubt his body was still suffering from the Agony rune, it didn’t appear as though Alec were currently feeling its effects, thanks to Magnus’s potent concoction.

Opioids were not something to mess around with, especially when they’re only in an experimental stage. Who knew how the drugs would react to his angelic blood, or to the alcohol already permeating his system?

Weighing the options, it would probably be in Alec's best interest to not use the drugs if they could avoid it.

Mind made up, Izzy set the syringe aside. As long as they could control his pain via other means, she would save the drugs as an absolute last resort.

She glanced up at the others who were watching her intently, then went into command mode, taking charge of her brother’s care.

“Let’s see how far we can get without the opioids, Magnus, give him a few more sips of your cocktail, then monitor him. With the amount of pain his body is in, he’ll probably burn through the buzz pretty quickly, regardless of how high the proof is.

“Mom, keep some pressure on his shoulder and side wounds till I can get to them. The alcohol is going to make him bleed more because it acts as a blood thinner, but we’ll just have to deal with it the best we can. There’s no way I’m operating on his thigh while he’s sober and conscious.

“Jace, keep his leg as still as possible. I can’t have him moving while my hands are in there.”

Everyone snapped to Izzy’s instructions immediately, glad to have something useful to do.

Maryse rose to her feet in order to maintain enough pressure on both of Alec’s torso wounds. As she leaned over him, his clouded eyes met hers, looking despondent.

His body registered the pain of the added weight on his injuries, but his brain felt disconnected, receiving a myriad of jumbled signals that culminated in one official outcome.

“M’m… I don’… feel so g’d…” he mumbled, shifting unhappily on the bed.
“I know, honey. We’re doing our best to keep you as comfortable as possible.”

“Think… Think m’ leg’s leakin’… An’ m’ back hurts. Like, a lot.”

He frowned and lifted his head, trying to find out why he was in so much pain. But before he could get a good look at himself, the thermos was being pressed against his lips again.

“This should help, Alexander. Just a few sips at a time, okay? Even angels can suffer from alcohol poisoning if you’re not careful.”

Alec turned his head away petulantly. “Don’ wan’ it. Tha’ stuff burns.”

“I know it’s not particularly fun to ingest. But trust me, it’s the lesser of two evils.”

Izzy started prying open Alec’s thigh wound again and Alec gasped in pain. Magnus took advantage of the situation and poured some of the beverage into the Shadowhunter’s open mouth.

Before Alec could spit it back out, Magnus clapped a hand firmly over his lips.

“Don’t even think about it,” he warned. “This is high-end liquor that has been aging for over two centuries. It’s too good to waste, so swallow…”

As he watched over Alec carefully, he witnessed the reluctant bob of the boy’s Adam’s apple and knew he had done as he’d been told.

After a moment, Alec’s eyes glazed even further and he blinked very slowly as the alcohol worked its way into his already inebriated system.

“That’s it, darling… Don’t fight it. Just ride the high while it lasts.”

As Magnus eased his hand away, Alec’s mouth opened and closed, searching for words that apparently wouldn’t come to him.

“It’s alright now, Alexander. Try to relax.”

“I… ugh… Room’s spinnin’…” the Shadowhunter muttered with another heavy swallow, this time against his protesting stomach.

“Then close your eyes.”

“Can’t,” Alec replied sincerely. “That’s worse.”

“Then focus on me.”

Magnus cupped Alec’s bloodstained cheek, turning it towards him in hopes that it would help ground him a bit.

Alec fought against his hold at first. Even the slightest movement of his head sent him reeling. But then he caught sight of the warlock’s glowing cat eyes. It mystified him enough to bring the spinning room to an abrupt halt.

Magnus smiled as the younger man’s soft eyes locked with his own.

“There you are… Now just stay with me.”

"Always..."
Izzy listened in to their quiet exchange, and when Alec seemed to be sufficiently distracted, she tried her luck and dug a bit further into the wound, reaching the deepest layer and watching her brother closely for any reaction.

Alec grunted and squeezed his eyes shut, his brow furrowed in discontent, but he wasn’t struggling to get away anymore. Time to get down to business.

She began the slow, arduous process of cleaning and stitching his thigh back together from the inside out.

A gentle caress on his cheek coaxed Alec into opening his eyes again, and this time, they stayed open.

His muscles slowly began to relax, one-by-one, as he lost himself in the adoration emanating from the warlock’s steadying gaze.

Alec was cooperative for the rest of the first layer, but as Izzy started the second in a more tender, more raggedly torn area, he moaned and the muscles in his leg tensed again as he attempted to pull away.

“He’s fighting me,” Jace reported, doubling his hold on his brother’s injured limb.

Magnus swooped in with his elixir once more, and after a couple tentative gulps, Alec fell still, a goofy, satisfied smile crossing his face.

Izzy continued making progress. And each time Alec started coming out of his haze, Magnus would ply him with more alcohol.

The more Alec drank, the more vocal he became, much to his sister’s amusement. She had never seen him so open before, always hiding behind his walls of stone and trying to be what everyone else wanted him to be.

But this? This was Alec with no filters.

“You ’ave really nice eyes,” Alec mumbled deliriously, staring up into Magnus’s heavily applied mascara and eyeshadow. “Nice face too. Shouldn’ hide it behin’… all that.”

He gestured vaguely with a quick flip of his restrained right hand at the decorative makeup Magnus was wearing. The warlock smiled warmly back at him.

“What on earth for?”

“I… I thin’ I took a bath with Jace earlier.”

Jace’s head whipped up and he gaped at the two of them from the other end of the bed.
“’s hazy, but he just sorta… jumped in behin’ me…” Alec continued earnestly, much to Jace’s dismay. “’Nothin’ I could do.”

Magnus raised an amused eyebrow at the flabbergasted blond. “Is that so?”

Jace quickly held out a placating hand. “Wow, that is not at all what it sounds like…”

Alec nuzzled his head against Magnus’s palm. “Wish it had been you though. I like showerin’ with you.”

“Too much information, buddy,” Jace warned him with a grimace, shooting an awkward look at their mother who was still hovering over Alec’s prone form.

Maryse’s mouth thinned out a bit, but she kept her composure.

“As uncomfortable as I may be with the whole… situation, Alec is an adult. So whomever he decides to date, and what he decides to do in said relationship are his business. As long as he’s being safe about it. And if he’s not, Magnus, you and I will be having a very different conversation, understood?”

Magnus scratched the back of his neck uncomfortably. He could only imagine what the “safe sex” talk from Maryse would sound like.

“Understood,” he replied instinctively, fighting the urge to add "ma’am" at the end of it.

He was about to assure the woman that he would never put her son at risk when Alec sniggered loudly.

“’s not like he can get me pr’gnant, Mom…” When Magnus didn’t immediately agree with him, Alec’s eyes widened comically at him. “Wait, can you?”

Jace groaned and squeezed the bridge of his nose, trying to block that particular image from his mind.

Magnus huffed out a laugh at Alec’s drunken innocence.

“Calm down, Alexander… I’ve told you before. As a warlock, it’s quite impossible for me to have children. Regardless of what gender my partner is.”

“Oh. Right.”

Alec actually seemed disappointed by this revelation, so Magnus did his best to cheer him up. He tapped him on the tip of his nose, making the young Shadowhunter go momentarily cross-eyed before blinking up at him in surprise.

“But perhaps when this is all over, we can put that theory to the test. I mean, there’s no harm in trying, right?”

Alec grinned goofily up at him, and Izzy couldn’t help but cackle when Jace muttered a curse under his breath.

“Can we please change the subject before you guys permanently scar me for life?” he practically begged.

“Oh, come on, Jace… Sounds like our big brother is finally learning to enjoy life a bit,” Izzy stated, winking up at Alec before starting on the final layer of outer stitches. “You should be happy
for him."

“Oh, I’m ecstatic he’s finally getting a life,” the blond groused. “Doesn’t mean I wanna hear all the details though.”

“I hear cats,” Alec supplied, unhelpfully, spiraling off on another tangent. “Or ‘s that birds? Do you hear them? ’s loud!” he practically shouted.

He tried to mimic the sounds in his head, like fingernails on a chalkboard.

Magnus winced. “I think I heard Church make that noise once. Or perhaps it was the rodent he was eating…”

“This is gonna last how long?” Jace inquired dryly, nearly yelling to be heard over Alec’s din.

“Hopefully, just long enough,” Izzy stated as she finished with Alec’s thigh, then moved to switch spots with her mother to examine Alec’s seemingly impaled side. “This one looks like it went all the way through, but surprisingly, there doesn’t appear to be any major damage.”

Alec stopped his caterwauling and rolled his head to see his sister prodding at the hole in his side. His nose wrinkled in disgust as her finger disappeared inside of him, checking for internal bleeding.

“Gross. ’s like 'Alien’…”

Jace cocked an eyebrow at him. “Since when did you start watching mundane movies?”

“Since he started dating an amazingly cultured warlock who insisted that he at least get through all the classics,” Magnus supplied, turning Alec’s head back towards himself to keep him from watching Izzy's ministrations.

“Don’t you think he sees enough horror and gore on a daily basis while out fighting demons?” Jace tossed back. “Next time, get him to watch 'Footloose' or something.”

“The original, or the remake?” Magnus queried. “Cause if you’re referring to the later, I must say that was more horrific than anything involving aliens.”

“The original, obviously. Wait, there was a remake?”

Izzy sighed. “Boys, can we focus for a minute here? Jace, help me roll Alec onto his left side. I need to see the exit wound.”

Alec cried out as his abused body was manipulated and additional pressure was put on his bad shoulder.

“Sorry, Alexander,” Magnus muttered. “Sounds like you need another top-off.”

He poured the last few swigs into Alec’s anxiously awaiting mouth.

“That’s the last of it, Isabelle. Best make it quick.”

“I’m going as fast as I can. Alec, can you feel this?”

Izzy prodded tentatively at the half dollar sized hole in Alec’s back.

“Feel wha’?” Alec asked, trying and failing to crane his head around to see what his sister was doing.
“Lie still,” Magnus admonished as he eased Alec’s head back down to the pillow. “Not much longer now.”

“’s gettin’ hot in here…” Alec mumbled with a frown.

Magnus checked his forehead for fever, then shook his head at Izzy’s questioning glance.

“He’s still warm, but no worse than he was before.”

“Where does it feel hot, Alec?” Izzy pushed, worried that one of his injuries might already be getting infected.

“Stomach,” he replied wearily, curling his knees up a bit now that Jace wasn’t forcing him to keep his leg straight anymore.

His brother had been relegated to propping Alec’s right hip up so that Izzy had full access to his wounded side.

Magnus grimaced. “That’s probably just from all the alcohol, darling.”

“N-no…” Alec was starting to sweat profusely again as he pulled his knees up even tighter. “No, it really burns. It… Ah!”

“Alexander!”

Magnus blinked in stupefaction when he saw actual smoke coming off the younger man’s body. Lunging forward, he pried Alec’s knees away from his chest far enough to find the origin of the smoke.

He quickly summoned a cold, wet cloth into existence and held it against Alec’s stomach.

“Isabelle, my dear… I’m afraid the next stage may have just begun.”

The sound and stench of searing flesh permeated the room.

“By the Angel…”

Alec screamed and pulled so hard against his restraints that his wrists began to bleed and were in danger of dislocation. He bucked against Jace’s hold on his hip, desperately trying to escape the torment.

An angry burn mark had appeared across the skin of his abdomen, approximately three inches long, as if the hot end of a fire poker had been pressed against his flesh.

Magnus shifted the cloth accordingly, trying to cool off the worst of it.

“I think it’s time to test out those drugs, Isabelle.”

“But Magnus, we don’t know if…”

Alec screamed again as the perfectly stitched wound in his thigh began to sizzle and seal itself shut, leaving what appeared to be third degree burns behind in its wake.

Apparently, the Agony rune wasn’t about to let its victim die from blood loss either. It wasn’t quite done with Alec yet.
“Just give it to him, Izzy!” Jace shouted as he wrestled his brother’s writhing torso back down to the bed.

Izzy yelped and backed away as the wound in Alec’s side began to heat up beneath her hands and cauterize itself as well.

She gaped at the newest level of injury, watching as actual sparks flared to life within his punctured side, eventually fading to a charcoal black.

Alec’s desperate voice drew her back to awareness, her brain registering his agonized pleas.

Izzy snatched up the needle again and uncapped it, silently praying to the Angel that the concoction didn’t do more harm than good to her suffering brother.

Magnus nodded to her encouragingly as he summoned a second soaked cloth and eased it against Alec’s burning thigh. It made a terrible hissing sound as the steam rose from the wound.

“Hang on, Alexander. Relief is on its way.”

Izzy quickly approached the head of the bed, looking Alec over carefully for the best possible insertion point, then let out a slow breath.

She needed to inject the fluid directly into her brother’s bloodstream, but with Alec’s arms restrained the way they were, the crook of an elbow was out of the question so she moved on to the next best thing.

She reached out with her empty hand and ran her fingers gently over the exposed deflect rune on Alec’s neck, searching for the pulse point.

He startled at the unexpected touch, eyes popping back open to see the needle hovering inches from his neck.

“No! Nonononono… Don’t want it, don’t want it…” he yelled, shaking his head back and forth, effectively keeping the needle at bay.

“Magnus, I need you to distract him,” Izzy instructed, trying to sooth Alec as her brother tried to shy away from her in fear.

“Izzy, what are you doing?” Jace asked nervously from the other side of the bed, holding a mostly melted ice pack against Alec’s sizzling side.

“I need a major vein for the injection. His arms are at a bad angle, so it’s either his neck, or I go digging around in his inner thigh for the femoral one. Which would you prefer?”

Jace cringed. “Pretty sure he’s not gonna like either option…”

“Here, hold this,” Magnus instructed the blond, having him take over with the cloth on Alec’s thigh. The initial burn on Alec’s stomach had been more of a warning than anything so it wasn’t nearly as deep or serious as the other burns.

He handed the second cloth to Maryse, correctly assuming that Alec’s shoulder would be the next injury to be attacked.

Magnus moved up the side of the bed until he stood on Alec’s right, capturing the side of his face again and keeping him focused on himself instead of Izzy.
“Just stay calm, Alexander. You’re going to be alright.”

Just as Izzy was about to insert the needle, Alec caught sight of it again out of the corner of his eye and immediately resumed struggling.

“D-don’t!”

Alec screamed as his left shoulder began to smoke and burn, but it didn't slow him down any. He was fighting them all with everything he had left.

Izzy quickly pulled back just in time to avoid stabbing Alec in the windpipe.

“Magnus! Keep his head still!”

“I’m trying!”

“Well try harder!”

Magnus huffed at her.

“What would you have me do? Press so hard that I snap his neck?”

“The more you restrain him, the harder he’s going to fight,” Maryse stated, doing her best to keep Alec’s torso pinned down while she held the cold cloth against his shoulder.

“So what are you suggesting, Maryse?” the warlock demanded.

“That we should simply back off and watch him suffer alone?”

“Of course not! I’m merely suggesting you try honey with him instead of vinegar!”

Magnus gaped at her for a moment, wondering if he had possibly misunderstood. Judging by her exasperated expression though, he had understood every word. Then he made up his mind.

Easing the restraining grip on Alec’s cheek the slightest bit, he tilted the boy’s head back and descended on him, kissing him passionately on the lips.

Alec immediately froze in shock and Izzy took advantage of the small opportunity. She carefully inserted the needle into Alec’s neck and began injecting the fluid.

Alec recoiled a tiny bit and hissed as the analgesic burned its way through his veins like a corrosive, but then Magnus’s lips found his again and the needle in his neck was quickly forgotten.

Izzy eased the needle out and threw it away. “Okay, Alec. It’s done.”

But apparently, the other two weren’t quite done yet. Jace had to clear his throat awkwardly before Magnus and Alec finally broke apart, panting for breath.

Alec was still a bit shell-shocked by his ex’s sneak attack and he blinked up at him stupidly, a soft blush heating up his cheeks as the corners of his mouth lifted into a small smile.

“There now,” Magnus stammered uncomfortably once he realized that all eyes in the room were currently staring at him. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“I… Whoa,” Alec whispered in awe, blinking hard as the room morphed around him like a bad acid trip. Multiple faces leaned over him in concern, watching expectantly.
“You alright, buddy?” Jace asked worriedly as his brother closed one eye and squinted at him through the other.

“You’re blurry… And, purple?” Alec muttered, sounding perplexed.

“I think it’s safe to say the drugs are working,” Magnus stated, earning a snort from Jace.

“Ya think?”

The tension in Alec’s body slowly began to bleed away as he sank heavily into his mattress, feeling like every inch of him had turned to liquid.

“Can’ move…” he murmured, half in wonder, half in fear.

“That’s probably for the best, buddy,” Jace replied.

Izzy lifted Alec’s half-mast eyelids and confirmed that his pupils were reduced to mere pinpoints. A hand on his chest revealed shallow, depressed breathing.

“Well, he’s officially stoned. We’ll have to keep a close eye on his respirations.”

Alec blinked up at her like she was a new species he had never seen before.

“You’re really tall…” he stated in surprise and Izzy chuckled.

“Only cause you’re lying down, Alec. Trust me, you’re still my obnoxiously tall big brother.”

Alec pouted back sourly. “Not ‘noxious.”


When Alec didn’t respond, too busy enjoying the light show flickering around the mutated room, Izzy snapped her fingers in front of his face.

“Alec!”

“…Huh?”


“I… yeah…” he finished unhelpfully, his eyes rolling aimlessly in his head before the lids fell closed and he let out a blissful sigh.

“I doubt you’ll be getting any straight answers out of him while he’s tripping the light fantastic, Isabelle,” Magnus comforted. “The good news is he doesn’t seem to be in pain anymore.”

Magnus manifested a jar of ointment from his loft and gently began dabbing the cream on the burn across Alec’s stomach.

Alec hissed and squirmed a bit.

Magnus pulled back with a frown. “Did that sting?”

“No. It’s cold.”

“My apologies, Alexander.”
Magnus attempted to warm the cream between his fingers before running them gently over the sealed wound in his side.

“Is that better?”

“Yeah. Feels… fuzzy. ‘n soft. Like a bunny…”

Another burn scalded its way across Alec’s right pectoral.

“Somethin’s burnin’… Jace, get Izzy outta the kitchen.”

“Very funny,” Izzy grumbled, pressing gently around the latest wound to gauge its severity. “You’re the one cooking, genius.”

Alec lifted his head unsteadily and glanced down at himself, watching the smoke rise with detached mesmerism.

“Oops,” he mumbled. “Did I… do somethin’ bad?”

“You did no such thing, darling,” Magnus responded as he continued applying the cream to Alec’s burns. “Just try to relax and let us know if you’re in any pain, alright?”

Alec nodded.

“Blueberries,” he blurted out a few moments later. “You should get some… for the loft. For pancakes.”

“I’ll put them on the shopping list, okay? They’ll be waiting for you when you come home.”

“…Home?” the boy asked, hope in his overly-bright eyes.

Magnus smiled fondly down at his Shadowhunter.

“Yes, Alexander. Home.”

Chapter End Notes

More drugged! Alec to come in the next chapter! I also made my first meme at the request of a friend which I will attempt to embed with it. Alec tends to ramble a bit when he has no inhibitions! :)

And speaking of memes, if anyone else feels inspired to create fanart to go with any part of this story, please let me know and I'll happily include links! I love seeing people's artwork on this site :) Challenge issued to you all, should you choose to accept!
Dealing with the Devil

Chapter Summary

Sometimes the hardest decisions aren't always the right ones.

Chapter Notes

The meme for this chapter will be posted separately in the next chapter. Hopefully it will give you a little chuckled to lighten the mood after how this chapter ends!

Alec drifted on the edge of sleep, blissfully ignorant of most of the burns appearing on his skin thanks to the strong painkillers flowing through his system.

But when the manifesting wounds did go deep enough to draw him out of his drug-induced haze, Magnus’s gentle, sure hands skillfully reduced the fire to a smoldering ash with the salve before Alec even had the chance to groan in discomfort.

Magnus was nothing if not attentive to him.

Isabelle was busy keeping a close eye on his stats, constantly checking his pulse and respirations in case one or both should falter unexpectedly.

Whether she didn’t trust the drugs they had given him, or was simply afraid of what the rune might do to him next, Alec didn’t know. But he wasn’t worried. He felt confident that if there were any complications, she’d be able to handle them.

Jace was methodically switching out Alec’s bloodied bandages. Evidently, some of the shallower slices had already healed enough, thanks to his angelic genes, that Jace had no qualms about leaving them exposed, much to Alec’s relief.

He hated the restrictive feeling of the adhesives on his skin, so the fewer bandages, the better in his opinion. The deeper wounds, however, were carefully cleansed and rebandaged before Jace moved on to the next.

Maryse was up by the head of the bed, gauging Alec’s fever and running her thumb back and forth across his forehead as she hummed her soothing lullaby again.

Alec felt cared for. He felt loved. And suddenly, this whole punishment situation didn’t seem so terrible.

His family had come together with one specific goal; to protect him. If that wasn’t worth every ounce of the pain he had endured so far, he didn’t know what was.

He fought hard to stay awake just a little bit longer, not ready to surrender to the solitude of darkness just yet. But the pull was too strong, and it quickly dragged him down.
Alec had no idea how much time had passed when he next resurfaced, but it couldn’t have been long. He was still exhausted, and it was a struggle to open his eyes.

The first person to swim into focus was his Parabatai.

Jace was standing over him like a sentinel, itching for the Agony rune to manifest itself into corporeal form so he could kill it ten times over.

Alec longed to reach out to him. To let him know he could stand down.

With a significant amount of effort, he managed to shift his restrained right arm a bit, catching Jace’s attention. The blond leaned down over Alec with a worried frown.

“Hey, buddy. Thought you were still asleep. You doing alright?”

Magnus, who was further down the bed, applying the ointment to a deep burn just above Alec’s right knee, paused and glanced up at the eldest Lightwood, waiting for his response.

“I’m fine,” Alec mumbled tiredly, then realized his room was a bit less crowded than he remembered. His mother and sister were no longer present. “Where’d...?”

“Clary came by and said they had a possible lead on Valentine. Things were getting pretty crazy out there so Maryse and Izzy went to assist for a bit.”

Jace kept shooting looks towards the locked bedroom door and Alec could tell he was itching to join the fight as well.

“You should... go,” he breathed out, feeling his mind slipping away again and fighting like hell against it. *Damn, these drugs are strong.*

Jace shook his head. “No. I’m exactly where I need to be.”

“But, Jace…”

The blond laid a warm, steadying hand on Alec’s chest and the older boy felt his anxiety ease a bit as the contact grounded him.

His tired eyes locked with Jace’s, the gratitude in them palpable.

“Go back to sleep, brother,” Jace prompted softly. “I’ll still be here when you wake up.”

He gave Alec a weak smile, but even without their bond, Alec could still feel the waves of sorrow emanating from Jace.

The blond never did like it when his adoptive siblings were hurt. He took it personally every time, as if their injuries were always somehow his fault.

And thanks to the drugs coursing through Alec’s bloodstream, that guilt was revealing itself in some colorful ways. He squinted up at his brother as his vision swam in and out of focus.

“Your skin’s... blue now,” he mumbled deliriously, causing the blond to blink down at him like he had six heads.

“Huh?”
"'s nice… with your eyes."

Magnus had to stifle a chuckle at Jace’s resulting expression.

“I could make that a permanent thing for you, if you’d like,” the warlock offered with a smirk. “I hear blue is the new orange."

*Man, if looks could kill…*

“Magnus has nice eyes too,” Alec added sincerely. “Jace, d’jou know they… turn yell’w when we’re havin’…?”

“I think we’ve tortured your brother enough for one day, Alexander,” Magnus quickly interrupted, pushing a traumatized Jace aside and moving up the bed to pat Alec’s shoulder affectionately, attempting to distract him from his current train of thought.

“’s true though. They’re beautiful,” Alec reaffirmed wistfully, a love-sick smile on his face, earning himself another brief peek at the older man’s warlock mark as Magnus returned the warm smile.

“And you’re delirious,” Magnus chuckled, giving Alec a quick peck on the forehead. “Why don’t you just rest a bit more while we finish getting you cleaned up?”

“Don’ wan’ ‘nother bath,” Alec grumbled petulantly. “’s too cold.” A shiver tore up his spine just in time to prove his point.

Magnus checked Alec’s forehead to find his fever was still lingering but sufficiently lower than it had been. He raked his fingers gently through Alec’s unruly hair.

“No more baths,” the warlock promised, earning a dopy smile from Alec who tilted his head into Magnus’s hand like Church did when he craved affection. “Just a good old-fashioned sponge bath. Well… cloth anyway.”

Magnus snapped his fingers and the blood-tinged water in the bowl became fresh, warm water. He soaked a clean facecloth in the fluid, then began washing the blood and sweat off Alec’s face.

“You certainly are a mess, aren’t you, Alexander?” he tutted softly in mock disapproval.

“’m sorry,” Alec replied sincerely as his eyes drifted shut against his will, the magically heated liquid and gentle gliding of the cloth against his sensitive skin lulling him back towards exhaustion.

“Hush now,” Magnus whispered, brushing the backs of his fingers across Alec’s freshly cleansed cheek. “With any luck, by the time you wake again, this will all have been nothing more than a bad dream.”

Unfortunately for Alec, fate wasn’t so generous.

He did manage to sleep through most of the burning phase, but by the end of the hour, the pain had steadily climbed back up to nearly intolerable proportions, making it very difficult for Alec to find a comfortable position in which to lay.

At that point, nearly eighty-five percent of his body was scarred by deep burns, cuts, and bruises.

Alec tossed and turned restlessly, on fire one minute and then shivering the next as his body tried to compensate for the severe temperature changes afflicting his skin.
But what really drew him out of his slumber was the more recent pressure against his chest which was making it increasingly difficult to breathe. It felt as if someone had heaped a ton of rocks onto his torso, steadily adding to the pile by the second.

Alec cracked his dry eyes open again and blearily looked around. Jace was pacing the room to pass the time and Magnus was sitting in the seat beside his bed, fiddling with his bejeweled hands in his lap.

Clearly, neither of them was responsible for the weight on his ribs. Alec shifted a bit to try and ease the ache, but all he managed to do was reawaken the other pains in his body.

He stiffened immediately, grunting as he exhaled through clenched teeth. Then his eyes widened in fear when he found it was twice as hard to refill his lungs with air.

“Alexander?”

Magnus stood back up and hovered over Alec. He frowned worriedly at the distress on the Shadowhunter’s face.

“What’s wrong?”

“M-Magn’s… Can’t breathe…”

There wasn’t much Alec feared in life considering his line of work, but suffocation was one of his biggest. That, and spiders. Oh, and needles.

Jace checked his watch and paled. The rune was shifting into the next stage of punishment. He was back at Alec’s side so quickly, he must have blurred across the room.

“Try to stay calm, Alec,” he coached, attempting to keep his own voice steady as he began untying the belt from his brother’s wrist. “Magnus, get his left arm free.”

Every time Alec exhaled, it was exponentially harder to inhale again. The pressure was crushing his lungs and he was desperately gasping for air by the time his right wrist was freed.

His hand immediately shot out and latched onto Jace’s jacket as he tried to lever himself upright. But the second his back came an inch off the bed, a loud snap resonated throughout the room, followed by a strangled scream of pain as Alec fell back to the mattress.

“Alec!”

Jace’s hands were on him in an instant, methodically patting him down as he searched for the broken bone.

Alec had to swallow back the nausea as Jace pressed against the right side of his ribs and one of them shifted freely beneath the prodding.

“Gah! Jace, don’t…” he panted, the last word coming out as a sob as he captured Jace’s wrist.

“Sorry, buddy,” his brother stated sincerely, then laid his hand flat to envelope Alec’s side and maintained a gentle pressure, keeping the two broken ends together to prevent them from shifting and doing more internal damage.

Alec tried to breathe through the pain but every time his chest expanded, it sent waves of agony through him.
He found it was much easier to take quick, shallow breaths instead, but then he started to hyperventilate and the dizziness overwhelmed him, prompting the nausea to increase tenfold.

He gagged, then whimpered as the muscles in his abdomen contracted, aggravating his injury further.

Now that he wasn’t struggling to sit up, Magnus finally managed to get Alec’s left wrist free and took Alec’s hand into his own.

“Easy, Alexander. Trust me, the last thing you want to do is vomit with a broken rib. Slow, deep breathes if you can manage them.”

Alec did his best to follow Magnus’s instructions, but the panic started to build again when the pressure on his chest began to increase a second time.

“Nononono…” he whimpered, then squeezed his eyes shut, his body breaking out in a cold sweat.

Can’t breathe, can’t breathe, can’t breathe…

He tried to stay as still as possible, hoping the pressure would just ease and go away if he didn’t move. But the resonating crack that followed seconds later quickly disproved his theory.

Alec cried out again, tears streaming from his clenched eyes as a rib on his left side broke to match the right. All the air rushed out of his lungs and he stopped breathing completely.

Nearly a minute went by before he realized that Jace was slapping at his face.

The ringing in his ears finally cleared enough that he could hear his brother frantically yelling at him to inhale, but that was the last thing Alec wanted to do.

His chest was paralyzed by the pain, and his only hope was that suffocation would be a quick death if he didn’t fight it.

“Damn it…” Jace grunted as he watched his brother turn from red to a pale blue. “Help me sit him up, Magnus.”

Together, they lifted him from under his shoulders, and Alec felt the broken bones in his chest shifting freely as he was maneuvered upright, then he promptly lost the battle with his stomach.

Luckily for Jace, all Alec had to bring up was water.

The blond held his brother steady through the spasms, maintaining careful pressure against his ribs to the best of his ability given the odd angle.

Magnus grimaced as he watched Alec christen Jace’s shirt.

“Perhaps moving him wasn’t a great idea…”

Jace scowled at the warlock, then softened a bit as Alec’s forehead came to rest wearily against his collarbone, his brother letting out an overtaxed whine.

“It’s alright, Parabatai. I’ve got you. Just focus on breathing, okay?”

“C-can’t… Hurts.”

“…Hang on.”
Jace used one hand to keep his brother upright as the other yanked his belt free from the headboard.

With Magnus’s help, he carefully cinched it around Alec’s broken ribs, making sure it stayed loose enough to not restrict his chest from expanding, but tight enough to lend his ribs some support.

Alec yelped as his brother fastened the buckle with a swift tug, but at least he found it a bit easier to breathe afterwards.

“Th-thanks…” he whispered when he finally had enough air to do so.

Alec tugged lightly at Jace’s shirt where his clenched fingers had found purchase around the loose collar. Jace understood the motion as the older boy’s silent apology and chuckled.

“Don’t worry about it, Alec. Let’s face it, a little regurgitated water is hardly the worst thing I’ve had on my shirt. But seriously, if you really wanted me to take it off, all you had to do was ask.”

Alec huffed out a laugh, then grunted as the pain spiraled through his torso.

“Jerk…” he hissed on his next forced exhale.

Jace shrugged, running a comforting hand up and down Alec’s spine as his brother tried to get his breathing back under control. “I’ve been called worse, too.”

As the blond comforted his Parabatai, Magnus gathered the pillows that had been removed earlier while they were dealing with the burns and piled them up at the head of Alec’s bed again.

At least if he were sitting up, he wouldn’t have to fight against gravity so much every time he inhaled.

Jace could feel the pained tremors coursing through Alec’s body as he held him against his chest. He looked up at the warlock as Magnus finished positioning the pillows.

“I think it’s safe to say the drugs have worn off. Do you have a second dose?”

Magnus shook his head sadly. “That concoction was extremely potent. A second dose could prove lethal. I’m afraid Alexander is on his own for the remainder of his punishment.”

Jace’s jaw visibly tightened at the news.

“But he still has four more hours to go, Magnus. There’s got to be something you can do for him.”

Magnus stared at the broken and beaten boy he loved so dearly. Witnessing his suffering was a worse torture than anything he had experienced while under the influence of the Agony rune himself.

His own punishment had been strictly emotional, but he still carried those newly reopened scars with him every day. He’d give anything to protect Alec from facing the final quarter of his sentence.

_Anything._

“Perhaps there is,” he replied quietly. “I’m going to pay Imogen a visit. See if I can appeal to her better nature.”

“Not sure she has one,” Jace grumbled.
“Believe it or not, there was a time when the High Inquisitor was known for her kindness and generosity. Obviously a lot has happened since then that has turned her heart to stone.”

Jace raised a skeptical eyebrow at him. “And you think you can somehow convince her to end Alec’s punishment early?”

“Probably not,” Magnus admitted with a heavy sigh. “But I will do my best.”

He started towards the door.

“Magnus, wait… What if she doesn’t agree and he just keeps getting worse?”

The warlock looked to Alec again, then back at Jace.

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that. I’ll return as soon as I can.”

Then he was gone.

Jace was lost in his own thoughts when Alec suddenly stiffened in his arms, every muscle coiling beneath his hands.

“Alec?”

The older boy whimpered and released Jace’s shirt in favor of cradling his left forearm against his chest. Jace eased his brother back against the pillows to get a better look at him.

Alec was horribly pale, sweat trickling down his temples as he hugged his arm protectively, just below the wrist.

It felt as if the two long bones in his forearm were being constricted by a vice, squeezed inwardly until they were rubbing abrasively against each other.

“Alec…” he whimpered, half in warning, half in desperate plea.

Jace sat down on the bed by Alec’s side, prepared to help fix the damage but completely helpless to prevent it.

“Stay with me, Alec. Just breathe. Don’t fight it.”

Alec’s eyes locked with Jace’s, and the blond swore he felt the agony in his own arm as both of Alec’s bones broke simultaneously.

SHSHSHSHSH

Magnus strode into the High Inquisitor’s office, unimpeded by her guards. He surmised that she had been expecting him, and that made his eyes flash yellow in anger.

She had set up an unavoidable trap, and he had waltzed right into it. The chess game hadn’t even started yet, but she already had his king in check.

No need for proper politics then.

“Imogen!” he called out, not bothering to disguise the anger from his voice.

“Mr. Bane… To what do I owe the pleasure?”
“As time is of the essence, what do you say we skip the foolish games and idle chit-chat? You know perfectly well why I’m here.”

She folded her hands imperiously and rested her elbows on her desk, leaning towards him to show he had her undivided attention.

“Alright then. How is Mr. Lightwood holding up?”

Magnus scoffed at her. “Don’t pretend you care.”

“But I do. He is one of my best soldiers, after all. Such a shame that he’s out of commission.”

“Then fix it. He’s learned his lesson.”

“Has he?”

“Yes.”

“I’m glad to hear it. But have you learned yours, Magnus?”

He had known this was coming, but that fact didn’t quell the rage he felt when those words left her lips. He let out a steadying breath, then met her gaze calmly.

“What exactly is it that you want from me, Imogen? You want me to owe you a favor? Fine. Name the time and place.”

“My my… That is a generous offer coming from the High Warlock of Brooklyn, and I must admit, it’s rather tempting. But you know I have other warlocks at my disposal for such occasions. I’m not looking for a favor from you, Magnus, so much as a commitment.”

Magnus’s hands curled into tight fists behind his back.

“You want me to stay away from Alexander.”

She smiled coldly at him. “Perceptive as always.”

“And yet I fail to see how our time spent together is of any concern of yours…”

Imogen had the gall to look disappointed in Magnus.

“I would’ve thought that part obvious. Your relationship with Mr. Lightwood is bad publicity for the Shadowhunter world, and it could easily be perceived as favoritism towards warlocks over the werewolves and night children.

“You’re well-aware that our peace agreement is a fragile one, and even something this simple could undermine it.”

“Oh, please…” Magnus scoffed heatedly. “If anything, our relationship proves that an alliance can exist between our people. Your aversion has nothing to do with keeping the peace and you know it.”

“Alright then. You want another reason? How about your reputation?”

“What about it?”

“You realize how an association with someone who possesses such a… colorful past can hurt his
chances of furthering his career, don’t you?”

“Ah, I see. So you’re worried about Alec’s future now? How altruistic of you. But all due respect, Madame… That decision should be left up to him, and him alone.”

“Be reasonable, Magnus. You and I both know the boy thinks he’s in love. He won’t do what’s in his own best interest if he continues to think with his heart instead of his brain.”

“His best interest? I’m sorry, has our relationship been affecting his performance as Head of Institute? From what I’ve seen, he’s just as diligent as ever. He was born to be a diplomat. Just as good at peacekeeping as he is with his bow.”

“He certainly has the mind for it. Which is why I’m surprised you’d willingly stand in the way of his potential success. Agree to my terms, and he will return to his duties as soon as he’s up for the task.”

“You’re assuming he’ll have any interest left in being your puppet when all is said and done.”

Imogen smirked at him.

“I assume nothing. Alec chose to endure the most painful punishment imaginable over having his runes removed and being exiled. He’s not going anywhere.

“He is a leader, and his duty is to his people. Always shall be. With any luck, the punishment he has endured so far will get him to fall back in line, and no further action will be necessary.”

Magnus stared down at her confidently. Counter-check.

“In that case, you have nothing to worry about. As you say, his duty is to his people and always shall be, regardless of whether or not he’s in a relationship.”

Imogen sighed heavily in annoyance.

“I’m not going to argue every detail with you, Mr. Bane. If you’ve come to me willingly for help, he must be in a significant amount of pain and we’re just wasting our time here. Give me your word that you will keep your distance from Alexander.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then he will carry out the remainder of his punishment as scheduled. But I must warn you, Magnus, the worst is still yet to come. You, of all people, know what kind of toll the Agony rune can have on the mind and body.

“The physical damage will heal rather quickly as promised once the rune has expired, but I’ve seen much stronger men driven to insanity by the final phase. To be honest, I’m amazed Alexander has lasted this long. I had assumed you’d come to me much sooner than this.”

“Had there been any other option, I would not be standing before you now. But such as it is…”

Magnus hesitated, fully aware that he was caught between a rock and a hard place. Imogen held all the leverage within her boney fingers, and the longer he prolonged their disagreement, the longer Alec was left to endure the pain.

He looked back up at the horrid woman.

“And if I agree to your terms, you will put an end to his suffering immediately?”
“Of course. Believe it or not, I do not wish to see him harmed any more than you do. He’s of no use to me or the Institute if he ends up a babbling, drooling mess in the care of the Silent Brothers.”

The fight drained from Magnus’s eyes in defeat. After all, there was nothing he wouldn’t do for Alexander. Even if that meant letting him go.

“…Then, you have a deal.”

Imogen quirked a skeptical eyebrow at him. “Really? You’ll walk away from him, just like that?”

“I am a man of my word. But there is one condition. If he comes to me in need, I will not turn him away. As the High Warlock of Brooklyn, it is my duty to assist in the wellbeing of all creatures that fall under my jurisdiction, Shadowhunters included. And as he is one of your best soldiers,” he added mockingly, “it would be in your best interest to agree.”

She studied him for a moment, trying to gauge whether or not his loophole had ulterior motives. When he didn’t flinch under her gaze, she realized he was being genuine.

“Fine. I will allow your one condition. I have nothing against platonic relationships, Mr. Bane. The world revolves around them. But I’m sure you can understand that your more… personal relations with Mr. Lightwood must end for his own good.”

“There are plenty of fish to be had in your pond, Magnus. But this boy has aspirations, and a family name to protect and uphold. This little dalliance of yours is only going to cause him harm, and the sooner you let him go, the better off he’ll be.”

“I’m truly sorry you feel that way. And I can only imagine the amount of heartache you must’ve experienced to have made you so jaded to love. But for someone to have experienced such pain, you must also have felt compassion at some point. I hope someday you remember that a career is not a future if there is no one beside you to celebrate the achievements.”

“Well spoken, Magnus. But I assure you, Alexander is well-loved by his family, and there will be plenty of people by his side to watch him rise through the ranks should he choose to do so.”

“Of that, I have no doubt. But I wasn’t speaking of Alec,” he stated pointedly. “It’s not too late for you, Imogen. You can still fix this of your own volition. But if you allow your grandson’s Parabatai to continue suffering needlessly over some petty revenge, you will lose Jace forever.”

“Jonathan is a soldier, and while he may be upset with me right now, he will come to realize that what I’ve done has been in both of their best interests.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure.”

“No. I suppose you wouldn’t.” She stood and retrieved her stele from a drawer in her desk. “Shall we then?”

Magnus nodded and swept his hand towards the door, prompting her to lead the way.

SHSHSHSHSH

By the time they made it back to Alec’s room, five more bones had been added to the broken list. The fibula of his left leg had broken straight through the skin and Jace was doing his best to reset it.

The sounds Alec was making tore at Magnus’s heart. He’d give up anything to stop the boy’s pain.
Even Alec himself.

He turned to Imogen.

“End this. Now.”

She nodded and stepped closer to the bed, drawing Jace’s attention.

The blond looked up and his eyes flared with hatred. He stood, his blood-coated hand immediately moving to the hilt of his seraph blade.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

Magnus raised a hand, telling Jace to stand down. “She has come to remove the Agony rune.”

Jace’s brow narrowed in suspicion. “Just like that? Why?”

“Because,” Imogen replied. “Mr. Bane and I have reached an agreement that will benefit all parties.”

Alec’s eyes immediately sought out Magnus’s and his heart stuttered in his chest when the warlock quickly looked away, the pain in his expression comparable to the pain in Alec’s body.

Imogen pulled her stele out of her pocket and approached Alec.

The eldest Lightwood shied away. “Magnus?” he grunted out, demanding answers.

“It’ll be alright, Alexander. Just please… Let her take the pain away.”

“No. Not until you tell me what you agreed to do in return.” Alec shifted further back on the bed, paying the consequences as his right wrist snapped and gave out from underneath his weight, dropping him back down to the pillows. “Ahha!”

Magnus took an unconscious step forward to soothe the young man, but Imogen’s hand shot out and gripped his wrist, halting his movement.

“I will take it from here, Mr. Bane. Your presence is no longer required.”

“At least let me stay until the mark is removed so that I may say goodbye.”

Alec’s head jerked up at that, his eyes flickering between Imogen and Magnus.

“No…” he breathed out, barely audible. “Magnus, wait… Don’t do this.”

“It’s the only way, Alexander,” Magnus replied, his voice heavy with regret. “I’m so sorry.”

“No! I can do this, Magnus! Please! I’ve made it this far…”

Magnus broke away from Imogen’s hold and strode past her to Alec’s side, taking his hand into his own.

“You’ve suffered enough on my behalf already. Maybe it’s best that I step aside and let you live your life, the way it was meant to be lived.”

Alec’s eyes darkened angrily.

“That’s not your decision to make.”
“Alexander…”

“I said no, Magnus. You told me in the beginning that you wouldn’t do anything I didn’t want to do, remember?”

“Yes, of course, but that was…”

“Send her away.”

“But the fourth quarter, Alexander…”

“I don’t care. Whatever it is, I can get through it. But only if you’re by my side. That’s the only way any of this will have been worth it.”

Magnus was floundering with indecision, but it was clear that Alec had already made up his mind. Imogen stepped closer but immediately found her path blocked by a very pissed off Jace.

Nevertheless, she tried to plead her case one more time.

“Mr. Lightwood, I urge you to reconsider. It’s in your best interest if…”

Alec didn’t even spare her a glance, too focused on the warlock in front of him.

“Send her away, Magnus,” he repeated softly, his hand closing tighter around Magnus’s beseechingly. “It’s in my best interest to have you by my side. I just got you back. I can’t afford to lose you again. Not over something like this.”

Magnus closed his eyes for a moment, his worry for the boy battling it out with his relief.

“Alright. If you’re sure this is what you want, then the deal is off,” he stated calmly and clearly, earning a tired but honest smile from Alec.

Imogen bristled angrily. “Mr. Bane, we had an agreement! If I don’t…”

“You heard them,” Jace butted in. “Get the hell out.”

“Mark my words, Alexander. You will regret this decision,” she threatened.

“No,” Alec responded confidently. “I won’t.”

Imogen threw her hands in the air with a frustrated huff and headed for the door. “Fools. All of you!”

“Imogen,” Jace called after her, making her turn back.

She froze when she saw the feral glint in his golden eyes, his hand still wrapped securely around the hilt of his seraph blade.

“See you soon.”

TBC
Here it is! Let me know what you think!

And again, if anyone out there feels creative enough to take on my aforementioned challenge, please feel free to create your own artwork for this story and send me the link! I’d love to see what you come up with :)

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Go back to sleep, brother.
I'll still be here when you wake up.

Magnus has nice eyes too...

D'you know they turn yellow when we're havin'...

Your skin's... blue now.

Huh?

's true, though. They’re beautiful.

And you're
An awkward silence fell over the room as soon as Imogen left. Clearly, more needed to be said between Magnus and Alec, and Jace was feeling like the third wheel.

He coughed uncomfortably, then pointed over his shoulder towards the door.

“T’ll uh… Go change my shirt and give you guys some privacy.”

Magnus nodded in acknowledgement and the blond silently slipped out into the hall.

Alec was the first to break the silence, his voice soft and raspy with pain.

“Were you really just going to leave like that? I thought… I thought we had fixed things between us.”

The warlock sighed heavily, gently running his thumb over the back of the boy’s hand, wishing he could grasp the limb tighter but afraid to cause Alec more damage.

“Alexander, you know how much I love you. Possibly more than I have loved anyone else in my entire life. But you’re still so young. You have dreams, ambitions… An entire plan for your future, and being with me puts all of that at risk. You tried to explain that to me in the very beginning, and I’m afraid my desires may have clouded my judgement.”

Alec opened his mouth to respond but Magnus held up his other hand to silence him, then continued.

“I’ve survived centuries of prejudice and persecution. I knew what I was signing up for when I asked a Shadowhunter to date a warlock, and I was willing to take that risk. But you… You had no idea what you were getting yourself into.”

“That’s not true!” Alec blurted furiously.

“Please, just… Think about it for a moment, Alec. You were so starved for affection when we first met. Always hiding behind Jace’s shadow, desperately waiting for someone to pull you into the light, and I was honored to be the one to do that for you. But now, I have to wonder if my interference has done you more harm than good.”

“Magnus, no. I…”

“Let me finish, Alexander. My point is that I was so focused on trying to seduce you back then, it didn’t even occur to me until recently that as your first experience with love, you were going to fall hard and cling to our relationship with all the incredible strength that you possess, whether it was in your best interest or not.
“It was wrong of me to take such advantage of your innocence and ignorance, and to see now where our forbidden love has gotten you… I can’t help but think you would’ve been better off had our paths never crossed.

“So yes, Alexander. When presented with the option of freeing you from your pain and torment, while also giving you back the future you want and deserve in exchange for me letting you go, I was willing to make that sacrifice. Your happiness is all that matters to me.”

Alec shook his head in disbelief, the corners of his mouth twitching upward in amusement.

“…And you think I’m the naïve one…”

Magnus raised an eyebrow at him. “Excuse me?”

“This isn’t a childish fling, Magnus. I love you for you. Not just the idea of you. It was never about a rebellious streak or some misguided teenage crush. I may not be as old as you, but I am an adult. I knew exactly what I was getting into from the start, and I said yes anyway. More importantly, I don’t regret it. Not for a second.”

“Alexander…”

“No. You let me finish now. Meeting you was the best thing that has ever happened to me, and losing you was the worst. But in our time apart, I was able to reevaluate my life, and what I learned was that dreams change. People change.”

“But you shouldn’t have to…”

“Stop. You changed my life for the better, Magnus. You taught me not to hide who I really was anymore. You taught me there was more to life than demon hunting and obeying every Clave law. And most importantly, you taught me that a relationship is built on trust.

“So trust that I’m going to make mistakes. I’m not perfect. Not even close. But also trust that I love you, and I don’t ever want to lose you again. The rest we can figure out as we go, together. You’re my future now, Magnus. My happiness. Please don’t take that away from me after we’ve come so far.”

Magnus gently raised Alec’s captured hand and pressed a soft kiss to his knuckles, tears of overwhelming affection in his eyes.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Alexander. After an epic speech like that, you’re stuck with me for life. For better or worse.”

“And everything in between.” Alec’s beaming smile lit up the whole room.

Magnus leaned down and kissed Alec properly, feeling the heavy weight on his shoulders lift until he felt like he could soar. After a minute, he broke away and rested his forehead against Alec’s as they both panted for air.

“You better make it out the other side of this, Alexander,” Magnus muttered.

“Course I will. You promised to make me blueberry pancakes.”

Magnus chuckled in delight. “I did. I’m surprised you remember that. You were pretty out of it at the time.”
Alec’s cheeks darkened with an adorable blush. “I remember most of what was said, unfortunately.”

Magnus laughed heartily. “I’m sure your brother does as well. In fact, I’m willing to bet those sensual images you so lovingly described for him will be seared into his brain for all of eternity.”

Alec groaned, letting his head thunk back down on the pillow beneath him. “He’s never gonna let me live it down.”

The warlock snorted. “Oh, please… Like he can talk. That boy has built quite the reputation for himself, spanning across every species known to man. And he’s not exactly subtle about his conquests, so he can hardly judge you on yours.”

Alec winced. “He definitely outranks me in the experience department.”

“Don’t you worry about that, darling. I plan on teaching you all kinds of things that Casanova didn’t even know were possible.” He winked suggestively at Alec.

Few things in the world brought Magnus greater joy than making his young Shadowhunter turn beet-red. The boy was still so damned innocent…

Magnus swooped down and kissed his speechless boyfriend passionately, the gentle caress of his tongue along Alec’s bottom lip promising much more in the near future.

Everything felt perfect between them again, until the Agony rune decided to rear its ugly head once more.

Alec suddenly jerked back with a blood-curdling scream that took Magnus’s breath away. The warlock quickly rose to his feet, his eyes scanning his beloved’s body for the cause of such pain.

He didn’t hear an audible crack this time to indicate another broken bone, which could only mean the rune had moved on to yet another form of torture.

He frowned in confusion when he noticed that Alec’s broken leg was half a foot longer than his right one. Following the leg up towards the boy’s torso, Magnus had to swallow back his own nausea as he realized that Alec’s hip had been yanked clean out of the socket.

Every hitched breath of pain, every frantic beat of the boy’s pounding heart, was sending bolts of fire down Alec’s side all the way to his knee and back up again. Every single muscle and ligament responsible for keeping his hip in place was screaming almost as loudly as Alec had.

He was terrified to move, but in too much agony to stay still.

“Magnus!” he cried out through a clenched jaw, desperately needing the warlock to do something. Anything.

But Magnus was completely out of his depth. No herbs or spices were going to keep Alec from being drawn and quartered. And trying to blindly force the limb back into place would likely do more harm than good.

Alec had turned an ashen-grey color, his remaining limbs digging into the mattress for any source of relief he could find.

Magnus hoped he would simply pass out and be done with it, but no such luck.
As Alec continued to flail, every muscle in his body tensed as he struggled to breathe, the warlock reached out and cupped the side of Alec’s pale face, wiping away the tear tracks with his thumb.

“You need to stay still, Alexander,” he practically pleaded.

“I c-can’t,” Alec stuttered out, then whimpered as another ferocious throb tore through his hip, forcing him to jerk painfully away from it. “Magnus, please… M-make it s-stop… Ah!”

Alec’s right shoulder was the next to go. He threw his head back, his neck muscles cording as the rune continued to live up to its name.

Magnus’s hands hovered uselessly over Alec’s broken body, wishing there was more he could do to ease the boy’s suffering.

As far as he could tell, the pain was strategically being kept right at the crest of what the poor Shadowhunter could tolerate, but keeping him just this side of conscious.

Magnus considered asking Catarina for more drugs, but he quickly dismissed the idea. He highly doubted anything less than another mega dose of what he had before would even scratch the surface of Alec’s pain at this point, considering an angel’s high tolerance for mundane medicine.

And sneaking the meds out of the hospital could take time. Something Alec certainly didn’t have.

So Magnus simply sat beside the boy, stroking the side of his face while reminding him to breathe. Alec’s heartrate was out of control, and his blood pressure was no doubt through the roof.

If Magnus couldn’t find a way to ease Alec’s pain soon, his heart would give out under the stress. He certainly wouldn’t survive another half hour of the final physical round.

He felt completely helpless as he leaned over Alec and tried to keep him as still as possible.

There was a time when Magnus would’ve given anything to have Alec writhing under him like this, but in pleasure rather than insurmountable pain. What he wouldn’t give for…

Then the warlock’s eyes widened as an idea hit him out of the blue.

Perhaps if Alec was unable to pass out on his own, he could still find respite in an altered state of mind. If Magnus could gently push the boy over that cliff into blissful oblivion, then maybe Alec might still have a chance.

But to do so would require magic, and that was beyond dangerous. There was no way he’d take such a chance without Alec’s implicit consent.

“Alexander, can you hear me?” he asked softly, leaning close.

“Y-yes,” Alec gasped out, his eyes squinting open to find Magnus’s.

“Good. I need you to focus if you can. I may have a way to dull the pain for a while, but it involves taking steps in our relationship that I’m not sure we’re particularly ready for yet. It’s a risky plan to say the least, so I won’t even consider it without your approval.”

“W-what is it?”

Alec moaned in distress as his left elbow started to bend slowly in the wrong direction. Magnus replied quickly, hoping to give the boy something else to focus on.
“Have you ever heard of subspace?”

Alec blinked up at him in surprise. “Isn’t that… some sort of… k-kink thing? Gah!”

His arm made a horrendous sound as his elbow snapped inward, leaving the limb completely useless at his side. The air froze in his lungs and his head spun nauseatingly.

It took a moment for him to realize Magnus had gently cradled his disfigured arm to keep it still as the other hand rubbed soothing circles on his burning chest.

"Breathe, Alexander..." _Oh, right._

He whined in the back of his throat as he slowly exhaled and came back down from the throbbing pain.

Magnus reached up and brushed Alec’s bangs away from his sweaty face.

“Subspace can be sexual, but it doesn’t have to be. It’s nothing more than a natural chemical or emotional high, typically reached through the careful balancing of pleasure and pain.”

“…So it’s a kink thing,” the younger man confirmed through clenched teeth.

Magnus sighed.

“The point is, I think I can push you over the edge to where you won’t feel the pain anymore.”

“And the downside?” Alec gritted out, swallowing hard as he tried to prepare himself for the worst.

“Getting to subspace can be… intense. More so than anything you’ve ever experienced before. It can be exhilarating, but also terrifying. Pleasurable, but painful. Relief and torture all at the same time. I mean, if you thought the massage earlier was out of line or in any way intrusive…”

“Do we have any other choice?”

“Not particularly, no,” the warlock admitted apologetically.

“Then do it.”

“Alright,” Magnus rested a hand gently on Alec’s tense stomach, stilling the boy’s squirming as much as possible. “But to do so will require magic. The pain will get worse before it gets better, but that is the point, after all. To push you over that edge you can’t reach otherwise.”

Alec gave a short nod, staring blankly up at the ceiling. “I know.”

Magnus tilted Alec’s chin towards himself until they made eye contact.

“Alexander, I need you to understand that once I start, I can’t stop until I get you over that precipice or the attempt will do nothing more than amp up your current pain. Normally, it takes years to build up this kind of relationship, and this is certainly not how I wanted your first experience to go, but…”

“Magnus, I trust you.”

Magnus smoothed back Alec’s sweaty hair with his free hand and kissed him on the forehead reverently.
“Then just try to stay relaxed, Alexander. I’ll do my best to get you there as quickly as possible, alright?”

“’kay,” Alec replied, barely above a whisper.

Magnus closed his eyes for a moment, and when they opened, they were glowing yellow with his demon mark. He had to put all of his concentration into doing this correctly.

Upholding his human mask was the least of his concerns, especially around Alec.

“Here we go…”

Blue sparks began to emanate from Magnus’s fingertips, dancing along Alec’s abdomen before plunging beneath the surface of his skin.

Alec shouted involuntarily as the initially gentle heat suddenly gave way to intense pleasure, but also set his muscles ablaze. It was the most conflicting experience of his life. He couldn’t tell if he wanted it to stop, or if he wanted more.

As Magnus slid his hand a bit lower, Alec was sure that the warlock’s magic had invaded every cell in his body. He was burning hot, yet icy cold. He was exhausted, yet flooded with adrenaline. He was in agony, and yet, in bliss.

The confusing sensations were building by the second and Alec felt himself inadvertently resisting the loss of control. His body was no longer his own, and that sudden realization had a wave of panic flooding through his system.

Wait… he tried to speak, but his throat had locked up, suffocating him as his fight or flight instincts kicked in. It’s too much…

The more he tried to regain control of himself, the more the pain overrode the pleasure and Alec wanted to scream again. Please, make it stop!

“Don’t fight me, Alexander,” Magnus reprimanded, struggling to snake his way past Alec’s defenses, resolutely trying to ignore the tears streaming from his boyfriend’s clenched eyes.

The door opened behind Magnus.

Jace had returned, wearing a clean shirt. He froze for a second as he took in the sight before him.

“What the hell are you doing?!?” he shouted furiously, making a beeline for the warlock.

With his free hand, Magnus used his magic to shove Jace against the nearest wall, pinning him there so that he couldn’t interfere.

But now his attention was split between containing Jace’s struggling form and keeping the chemical levels inside of Alec balanced.

This time, Alec did manage a strangled scream as the pain levels shot past the pleasure ones without contest.

“Leave him alone!” Jace barked, his struggles redoubling upon hearing his brother cry out.

Alec was purposefully fighting Magnus now, his fingers scrabbling desperately against the warlock’s wrist, trying to break their connection.
He was terrified by the unimaginable pain flowing through his body, completely unchecked. Magnus tried to keep him still, but every passing second was splitting his concentration even further, ramping up Alec’s pain.

“Bane!” Jace shouted as Alec screamed in agony again. “If you don’t let him go right this second, I’m gonna…”

“Jace, you need to stop! Now!” Magnus ordered and the blond momentarily stilled, breathing hard as he tamped down on his anger. “I’m trying to help Alexander, but I need to focus!”

“I told you before that we can’t use magic or runes!” Jace argued back.

“Because it’ll make Alec’s pain worse, I know! But if he doesn’t pass out soon, he’s going to die. Do you understand? This rune has gone on for too long and it’s more than his body can take. I need your help right now, not your hindrance. So step up, or step out. Decide quickly.”

Jace looked between the warlock and his brother, indecision warring on his face. Then he gave a small nod.

Magnus released him and Jace slowly approached the bed, watching Alec twist and turn madly as he tried to break away from Magnus’s hold.

“If I stop now, it’ll only make his suffering worse. I’m going to force him into subspace to give his mind and body time to heal.”

Jace did a double-take when he heard the word subspace, but now wasn’t the time for cracking jokes. “What do you want me to do?”

“Keep him steady. He’s almost over the precipice, but I need to use both hands. Just a little bit longer, Alexander…”

Jace crawled onto the bed and knelt behind Alec, lifting his brother’s thin torso into his lap and doing his best to contain Alec’s flailing limbs so that he didn’t do any further injury to himself.

“Alec, listen to me. You need to calm down.”

It didn’t seem like Alec was able to hear him as his struggles continued without hesitation. Jace held on tighter, wincing in sympathy as Alec’s right knee popped out of place, eliciting another scream of pain.

Now that Magnus was able to focus again, he used both hands to send a surge of pleasure through Alec’s body, causing the boy’s breath to hitch as it pushed back against the surge of agony.

Alec clawed at the restrictive arm around his chest, already losing touch with what was happening around him. But that smell… He’d know that comforting smell anywhere.

It was the smell of strength, protection, and home. It was… “J-Jace?”

“Shh… I’m right here. I’ve got you, buddy.”

“It’s not… It’s not working…” Alec whimpered, clutching desperately at his brother’s arm now instead of trying to break free.
“Give in to it, Alec,” Magnus instructed. “You’re still resisting me. Just let me do all the work and let the waves course over you.”

“I’m trying, but it’s too much, Magnus! I can’t do it!”

Magnus had an intimate knowledge of what Alec liked and didn’t like in the bedroom, and he used it to his advantage, allowing his magic to connect with all the places that caused the boy immeasurable pleasure at the exact same time.

But doing so made the pain in Alec’s body flare to an all-time high, and the conflicting sensations made black spots dot his vision.

Alec’s head fell back onto Jace’s shoulder with an over-sensitized whimper and the blond’s chest burned with the need to protect his brother.

His free hand absently found its way to Alec’s severed Parabatai rune, his fingers curling around his hip tightly to keep Alec still, his heart breaking as he felt every tremor that emanated from his brother’s high-strung body.

“Magnus…” Jace warned, quickly losing patience.

Each of his brother’s desperate cries were like individual daggers to his heart. Unbeknownst to himself, his own eyes had begun to turn gold again.

“Nearly there,” the warlock promised, hoping like hell that it was the truth. But if he were being honest with himself, he hadn’t anticipated Alec’s pain being so insurmountable. He was starting to doubt that he could heighten Alec’s dopamine levels enough to counteract it.

Determined to succeed and unable to back out now that he had begun, Magnus drove his magic into Alec's abdomen even harder and the boy's eyelids started to flutter, his body slowly starting to go limp as he gave up the fight.

Jace was so caught up in Alec’s pain that he didn’t realize his own side was starting to burn. But when Alec suddenly gasped and arched up under his hand again, Jace caught sight of the faint golden glow coming from Alec’s Parabatai rune.

“Crap!”

Horrified by his mistake, Jace quickly pulled his hand away and tried to get his new-found ability under control, but the damage had already been done. Their collective pain was growing more intense by the second, as was the light emanating from both of their runes.

Jace doubled over, wrapping himself around Alec with a shout as the pain rose to an intolerable level.

“Jace?! Magnus yelled, sparing one hand to grip the blond’s shoulder and trying to lever him upright to see what was wrong. When he got a look at Jace’s glowing eyes, his own widened in fear. “What are you doing?!”

“Magnus, I… I can’t stop it! I don’t know how I’m… Argh!”

As the pain reached its crescendo, Jace felt something foreign inside of him snap and he screamed, dimly aware of hearing Alec do the same.

When Jace was able to lift his head again, he was met with Alec’s terrified eyes. And he could feel
his brother’s growing sense of horror as the older boy realized what had happened.

Jace almost laughed in delight as his fingers ran over Alec’s fading red binding mark. He had his Parabatai back again. But the elation slowly fizzled out as Alec spoke.

“Jace, what have you done?” he whispered.

Jace was about to reply when their connection completed and the worst pain he had ever felt in his life came streaming through the bond without any warning.

“I… Ah! By the Angel… Alec!!”

He clutched his brother tighter to his chest as all of the boy’s emotions and nine hours’ worth of incredible pain overwhelmed him at once.

“Jaacceee!”

Alec clung to his arm again in return, his eyes clenching tightly as all of Jace’s heightened emotions came flooding back to him. After such a long silence of them being apart, their rejoining was the equivalent of an explosion.

But as Alec’s pain levels leaked over to Jace and became a shared experience, he realized he could suddenly breathe again.

Taking full advantage of the situation, Magnus redoubled his efforts and the pleasure chemicals in Alec’s brain finally balanced out with the pain receptors as planned.

The warlock reached for Alec just in time to catch him as his eyes rolled into the back of his head.

Jace gasped as his own brain was overwhelmed with the conflicting sensations, and Magnus was more than a little alarmed when not one, but both of the Shadowhunter boys slumped into a heap on the bed, unconscious.

Their Parabatai runes pulsed simultaneously, and the binding rune that had severed their bond had completely disappeared.

As much as that worried the warlock, he took comfort in the thought that Alec would have his brother at his side throughout the final quarter of his punishment.

There was no doubt in his mind that they would need each other to get through it.

TBC
WARNING: This chapter deals with arachnophobia, so please tread carefully!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Jace opened his eyes, he found himself surrounded by impenetrable darkness.

His training kicked in automatically and he stayed perfectly still, fighting back the rising anxiety as he tried to take in as much information as he could with his remaining senses.

He was laying on his back, and judging by the fact that the ground beneath him felt like stone-cold and unforgiving- he was definitely not laying on his brother’s bed anymore.

*His brother*...

“Alec?” he called out softly, hoping that wherever they had ended up, they’d still be in the same proximity.

There was no response.

Growing bolder as concern for his Parabatai began to take over, he slowly pushed himself into a sitting position, stifling a groan as his body protested the movement.

He was clearly feeling pain, but as far as he could tell, he was not injured, which could only mean one thing. It wasn’t his pain.

Alec was still alive.

And if Jace needed any further proof, the terror snaking its way through his chest did not belong to him either. Wherever Alec was, he was in trouble.

As Jace carefully pushed himself to his feet, he heard the crackling of dried leaves beneath his boots and felt the snapping of dead pine needles under the weight of his hands.

He was clearly somewhere outdoors then. Judging by the cool dampness of the air and the unforgiving darkness, he guessed a cave of some sort.

Definitely not in New York then.

With arms outstretched, he stumbled forward until he was brought up short by a jagged rock wall.

“Alec?” he called out again, louder this time, needing a direction in which to head.

Jace strained his ears, but all he heard was the distant sounds of the forest; chirping bugs, hooting owls, and the howling of... werewolves.

*Shit.*

Blindly patting himself down, he came to the unfortunate conclusion that he was unarmed. No stele
or seraph blade to be found. He groaned.

*Please let it be Luke and his pack...*

As his eyes slowly adjusted to his surroundings, he noticed a very faint light coming from his left. And while the acoustics were messing with his sense of direction, he was sure most of the sounds were originating from that general vicinity as well.

*Hang on, buddy. I’m coming.*

With one hand firmly planted on the wall and the other stretched out in front of him, he began moving as quickly as he dared towards the light, picking up speed as the soft glow grew brighter.

Once he made it to the mouth of the cave, he realized that the light he had been following was emanating from the full moon above.

While the wolves didn’t need the full moon to shift, having it would undoubtedly make them stronger. More feral.

*Great.*

A barely audible whimper reached Jace’s ears, putting him on high alert. He’d know that voice anywhere, and it brought out a primal need in him to protect.

Following the sound to the right of the cave entrance, relief rushed through Jace as his eyes locked onto what he surmised to be Alec’s huddled form. He was hiding behind a fallen tree trunk, the wolf pack slowly zeroing in on his position from all angles.

Jace crouched down as low as he could and crept to his big brother’s side. His big brother, who appeared to be around the age of twelve…

“Alec?” he breathed out as he approached, afraid to startle the young boy.

Alec’s eyes were clenched shut and he appeared to be holding his breath. One hand was pressed firmly to his left side, his fingers coated in fresh blood.

Jace instinctively reached out to check his brother for injuries, but his hand passed right through the boy. He frowned, blinking at his fingers in confusion.

“Alec?” a soft voice called to him from behind, making the blond whirl around in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

Alec, the properly-aged Alec, was sitting against the outside of the cave wall, knees drawn to his chest and looking utterly miserable.

“Alec? What is this?”

The older boy rubbed the back of his right hand against his wet cheeks and sniffed before answering.

“It’s a memory. We’re trapped inside my head. I can’t wake up.”

Jace took a moment to observe their surroundings. The place seemed oddly familiar, and yet…

“Where the hell are we?”
“Brocelind Forest,” Alec mumbled dejectedly.

Jace spared the cave another glance, his eyes widening as the pieces slowly started to fall into place.

He had been in that cave before. Many times when he was a child. It had been a refuge on the days when his father’s temper had gotten the better of him.

Jace looked back down at the boy shivering beside him and his own memories began to resurface.

“I remember this night…”

It had been shortly after the Lightwoods had taken him into their home.

Maryse and Robert had gotten word from Alicante that a fellow Shadowhunter named Lucian Graymark had been bitten and turned by the leader of the Brocelind pack. They rounded up the children and portaled to the city straight away.

That was the first time Jace had ever stepped foot in Alicante, and he had been blown away by its unmatched beauty.

SHSHSHSHSH

From the highest towers in the Gard, Jace could see clear over the plain to the sparkling jewel that was Lake Lynn, hidden deep within the forest.

Recognition hit him like a brick.

There was a cabin at the edge of those woods where his father used to bring him. Valentine trained him there, he taught him there, and he experimented on him there.

It had been a couple years since they had visited it, but Jace would know that lake anywhere.

As far back as he could remember, his father had spent their little vacation trips repeatedly pushing Jace to his limits, then making notes in his collection of journals which he kept on the highest shelves, just out of Jace’s reach.

But when Jace was old enough to let his curiosity overwhelm him, he managed to get one of those journals in his hands. His father had caught him before he was able to open it- he still had the scars to prove it- and they hadn’t been back to that cabin since.

Jace’s memories of that place were far from pleasant, but they felt like a different lifetime. Or perhaps, as if they had happened to someone else.

Standing there at the window, looking down at the shimmering lake, he couldn’t ignore the piece of him that desperately wanted to step inside that cabin again. To find a piece of his past to prove it hadn’t all just been a bad dream.

With his mind made up, he headed for the spiral staircase, mentally preparing himself for the long trek ahead of him. That’s when he literally ran into Alec who was coming up the stairs at a fast clip in search of him.

The younger boy stumbled back a step and might’ve fallen down the rest of them had Jace not latched onto his upper arm to steady him.

“Whoa, where’s the fire?” the blond chuckled as Alec righted himself. The younger boy blushed
“Sorry, Jace. I was just looking for you to see if you wanted to join me and Izzy for some sparring in the main hall. Not much else to do around here since we can’t leave the Gard.”

“Yeah, about that… How pissed do you think your parents would be if I snuck out for a little bit?”

Alec gaped at him. “Jace, you can’t! They’d kill you!”

“Better not get caught then, huh?” he winked at Alec conspiratorially, then stepped around him. “I’ll be back before dark, promise.”

“Jace! Wait! It’s not safe out there!”

“You’re welcome to come with me if you’d like,” Jace challenged over his shoulder with a cocky smirk.

As he expected, Alec had flat-out refused, ever the obedient son. So Jace had teased him a bit about being afraid to bend the rules, and then he set off on his own, just as he had planned.

He was only supposed to be gone for an hour or two, but he had drastically underestimated the distance. By the time he reached the woods, it was late afternoon and quickly approaching dusk.

But he hadn’t gone that far just to turn back, so he pressed on.

He spent a few more hours wandering around the woods, but he never came across the cabin. With a heavy heart, he left Brocelind Forest and headed back to the Gard, hoping against hope that his adoptive parents hadn’t discovered him missing yet.

As it turned out, he needn’t have worried. The Lightwoods were still out, no doubt trying to decide how best to punish the werewolves for their indiscretion.

Instead, he found Izzy bustling away in the kitchen.

She smiled warmly at him. “Hey, Jace! Where have you been? Have you had dinner yet?”

“I... I was just exploring a bit. And no, I haven’t.”

She pushed a bowl of mysterious goop towards him and his stomach flipped uncomfortably.

“On second thought, I’m actually not very hungry.” Alec had already warned him about Izzy’s cooking. He cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Hey, have you seen Alec recently?”

“He went up to his room a few hours ago. Said he wasn’t feeling well either. Maybe you both caught something.” She frowned at him in concern.

Jace had a feeling the older boy was more likely stewing over the fact that Jace had broken his parents’ most important rule.

“Yeah, maybe. I’m gonna go check on him, then head to bed.”

Izzy nodded and gave his shoulder a comforting pat. “Feel better!”

When Jace reached Alec’s room, the door was closed and the lights inside were clearly off. He knocked softly. “Alec? You awake? It’s Jace.”
There was no response.

“Look, man… I’m sorry about earlier, okay? There was just something I had to do.”

Still nothing.

“Alright, guess I’ll just leave you alone then. See you in the morning?”

Jace went a few doors down to his own room and closed himself in, feeling more alone than ever. He had really screwed things up, and for what?

He flopped onto his bed with a heavy sigh and waited for sleep to take him.

Never in his wildest dreams did he consider the fact that Alec had gone out looking for him. No one had ever cared that much about him before, and the older boy barely even knew him. There was no reason for him to take such a crazy risk.

But nevertheless, Alec was outside the city gates, stumbling through the dark forest in search of his newly adopted brother. That’s when he heard the first howl.

It was nearly dawn when Jace was startled out of his restless sleep by a heavy thud against his door. When he opened it to investigate, Alec had collapsed into his arms, bleeding everywhere and begging Jace not to tell his parents.

That night, Jace had been convinced that the only person who seemed to really care about him was going to die right there in his arms, and it would’ve been his fault.

SHSHSHSHSHSH

Jace shuddered as he pulled himself out of the memory.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been that scared in my life,” he admitted quietly, his throat tightening as old emotions, long suppressed, threatened to break free again.

Alec scoffed at Jace’s admission. “Yeah, me either.”

Alec hugged his knees tighter for comfort, then let out a small gasp of pain, dropping his head onto his crossed forearms as he struggled to regain control. “Gah!”

“Alec?”

Jace silently moved over to his brother and knelt beside him. When he reached out and gently gripped the older boy’s shoulder, Alec’s head jerked back up in fear, his arms raised defensively.

“Hey, it’s just me,” Jace placated, his eyes narrowing when he got a good look at his brother’s pale face. It was streaked with dirt. And tears. And blood.

“Not for much longer,” Alec stated. “They’re gonna find me again, Jace.”

Jace cursed beneath his breath, tilting Alec’s head back a bit further to find the origin of the bleeding.

“Looks like they already did. Thought you said this was just a memory,” he berated as Alec hissed in pain at the jostling.

“It is,” Alec huffed back. “Mine.”
Jace froze as the reality of their situation hit him. Alec was reliving his worst memories, and they were just as real to him now as the injuries from the previous phases had been.

If that were true, then the younger version of Alec wasn’t the only one bleeding heavily from deep claw marks across his ribs.

“Damn it... Let me see, Alec.”

Jace reached for his brother’s knees to push them out of the way but Alec refused to budge, tensing even further with a stifled yelp.

“Don’t,” he nearly pleaded. “I don’t wanna see it. Just leave it alone, Jace.”

“Can’t do that,” Jace replied, trying to sound reassuring. “It was my fault you came out here in the first place, remember? The least I can do is keep you from bleeding out till the next phase starts.”

Alec shook his head, close to tears again. “It won’t make any difference. You’re not supposed to be here, which means you can’t interfere.”

“Yeah, well… Take it up with Imogen after you wake up. Till then, you’re stuck with me. Now come on. Let me see how bad it is. Lay down for a sec.”

He cupped the back of Alec’s neck with his left hand and took hold of his left shoulder, intending to ease Alec away from the cave wall and flat onto the ground.

Alec was halfway down when he suddenly stiffened, his bloody right hand latched onto Jace’s left wrist, stilling them both.

“Not on the ground! Please!”

“It’ll only take a sec, Alec. Just try to relax.”

Alec suddenly paled alarmingly and he began writhing in the dirt.

“Not again, not again…!”

Alec’s hands immediately wrapped around his midsection, clawing desperately at his open wounds.

Jace was completely baffled. When the bleeding intensified, he snapped out of his shock and pulled Alec’s bloodied hands away.

“Alec, stop! What the hell are you doing?!”

“Aahah! Get them off me, Jace!” he begged, continuing to squirm at his brother’s feet.

“Get what off?” Jace demanded, his keen eyes searching Alec’s body for answers. Only then did he notice that his brother’s shirt seemed to be moving of its own accord.

Reaching down with trepidation, Jace gently lifted the tattered cloth, carefully peeling it away from the open wounds, and what he found nearly did him in.

Jace had seen a lot of awful things in his life, but this was definitely high up on the list. It took everything in his power to fight back the gag reflex closing in on his throat.

There were four bone-deep claw marks that had been raked down the left side of Alec’s ribs,
revealing slivers of white amidst the seeping red. But that wasn’t what bothered him.

After all, he had been the one to patch Alec up the first time around, so he knew exactly how bad the wounds were going to be before he looked.

What he hadn’t been privy to back then were the hundreds of nickel-sized, furry black spiders that were skittering across Alec’s entire abdomen, attempting to escape the brisk night air by burrowing into the warmth of his open wounds.

Jace grimaced. No wonder Alec was terrified of spiders.

Apparently, when his younger self had crouched down behind that rotten tree trunk, he had inadvertently knelt on a cluster of spiders and they had swarmed to his unnaturally high heat.

Sure enough, the boy-version of Alec realized the predicament he was in and gave a yelp, jumping to his feet and swatting the spiders away.

Every brash swipe of his hand tore at his wounds and made them bleed even more, the stench of copper filling the air.

Most of the eight-legged creepy crawlies fell off as soon as the boy stood, but the few that had lodged themselves partially under his skin like ticks were a bit harder to shake off.

Grasping their hairy, squirming bodies long enough to pluck their fangs out of his wounds was enough to have the boy stumbling towards the cave entrance just in time to vomit.

Adult Alec curled onto his right side and threw up as well. Jace braced him the best he could, relieved to find that most of the spiders had already left his brother’s body, mimicking the events of the memory.

Alec brushed the last few off, ignoring their angry hissing as he ground them into the dirt with his boot. He sat up with a barely stifled whimper, looking wildly around himself for more of the ugly critters.

Jace gripped his shoulder, steadying him.

“It’s alright, Alec. They’re gone now, okay? By the Angel… I swear I will never tease you about being afraid of spiders again. That was just messed up.”

Jace felt the insane urge to check himself for spiders even though he knew they weren’t actually real for him. This was all in Alec's head after all. The bugs were nothing more than memories.

Nevertheless, he shrugged deeper into his jacket, trying to ignore how itchy his skin suddenly felt.

“They’re gonna find me now, Jace,” Alec whimpered again, curling into his brother’s protective hold. “I couldn’t get away. Wasn’t fast enough.”

As expected, all the commotion younger Alec had made alerted the wolves to the boy’s exact location, and even though he tried to hide in the darkness of the cave, it didn’t take long for them to sniff him out and drag him back into the moonlight, dumping him at the Alpha’s feet.

What happened next was beyond brutal.

Adult Alec clenched his eyes shut and covered his ears, unwilling to listen to his younger version’s screams as the wolves took turns playing with him, laughing as they sliced and bit into his fragile
skin, though thankfully, not deep enough to turn him into one of them.

Jace forced himself to watch it all happen, the guilt steadily rising in his chest until tears were streaming down his face, unchecked.

Every bruise, cut, puncture, and tear that the younger Alec endured appeared on the older version’s body as well. Jace hovered over his brother, wishing there was something he could do to stop this, but Alec had been right.

Jace hadn’t been there to save him back then, and because of that, there was nothing he could do to prevent it now. What was done was done. He couldn’t change history. Unless…

He focused on his Parabatai rune and placed a hand over his brother’s shuddering chest. Their matching runes began to glow once again, as did Jace’s golden eyes.

Alec opened his own eyes in fear as he felt their connection start to build.

“Jace, don’t…”

He tried to break away from his brother but Jace’s firm hand on his chest pinned him back to the ground.

“I’m right here, Alec,” Jace stated calmly. “I failed you the first time around, but I’m not gonna let that happen again. We’re in this together.”

“J-Jace…” Alec gasped out, then the connection completed. “Wh-what are you doing?” he demanded as Jace began to syphon his pain away.

“Righting a wrong,” Jace responded past gritted teeth, the pain nearly unbearable but worth every second if it meant Alec didn’t have to endure it again.

“Stop…” Alec breathed, then tried a second time, more forcefully. “Jace, stop!”

This time, he did manage to break Jace’s hold on him and scuttled back a few feet to put distance between them.

Jace collapsed onto all fours breathing heavily as he struggled to adjust to the high pain levels radiating through his body.

He raised his head just in time to see the leader of the pack lift young Alec by his throat, leaving him to dangle in midair for a moment, before tossing him onto the ground like a rag doll into the middle of the pack where the boy remained, whimpering softly.

Adult Alec was gasping for air as well, head thrown back as he coughed painfully.

“Trust the Shadowhunters to break the Accords the same night the agreement is made,” the Alpha growled angrily at the boy. “Sending their scouts to keep an eye on us…”

“I’m… I’m not a scout,” Alec forced out. “Just l-lost.”

“Well, lost boy, consider yourself lucky that I don’t kill cubs. Let your people know that this is their first and only warning. The next Shadowhunter to enter our forest without permission will receive the bite and fate will decide if they live or die. Now go, before I change my mind.”

Young Alec stumbled to his feet, hunched over to protect his extensive wounds, and ran.
Jace and Alec both remembered the rest of that night in vivid detail.

**SHSHSHSH**

Alec had run all the way back to the Gard, never stopping until he reached Jace’s door. He had been so relieved to find the blond boy safe and sound on the other side of it that he had collapsed right then and there.

At the time, Jace had wanted to bring him to his parents for proper healing, but Alec was terrified at the thought of repercussions.

So instead, Jace had spent the rest of the night peeling bits of cloth out of Alec’s deep wounds, shushing his whimpers as he cleaned the cuts thoroughly, and drawing iratzes around the worst of them.

It was being under the care of Jace’s gentle ministrations that first sparked a more than platonic feeling of love in Alec.

Afraid to ruin their budding friendship, Alec curled away from Jace and mumbled something about needing to sleep.

Jace sat up the rest of the night, watching over his brother while he slept restlessly, wishing there was more he could do to help the older boy.

The next day, Alec had repressed his feelings for Jace and hidden the fresh scars and unhealed bruises beneath multiple layers, blaming his paleness and discomfort on the stomach bug everyone seemed to believe was going around.

No one had been any the wiser.

**SHSHSHSH**

And that night had remained their secret all these years.

Jace watched as the werewolves disappeared into the night, then crawled his way back to Alec’s side.

His brother was breathing heavily through the remaining pain and didn’t acknowledge Jace’s unsteady approach, mentally lost in the trauma of reliving his past.

“Alec? You alright?”

Jace reached out to him but then hesitated for fear that any unexpected contact would traumatize his brother even further.

Instead, he dropped his hand back into his own lap and continued to talk, hoping Alec would at least find comfort in his voice until he found his way back.

He had no idea how long he rambled on about nothing, but his heart leapt in hope as Alec finally blinked and met his gaze.

“...’m sorry,” Alec whispered out after a long pause, making Jace cock his head in confusion at him.

“For what?”
“For making you feel guilty all these years.”

Jace mouthed wordlessly at him for a moment, then it occurred to him that the Parabatai rune was a two-way street. While he was experiencing Alec’s pain, Alec was being overwhelmed by Jace’s emotions.

“Alec, I…”

“It was never your fault, Jace. I chose to go after you. If I had just waited a little longer, you would’ve made it back just fine on your own and none of this would’ve happened.”

“I never should’ve snuck out in the first place,” Jace argued. “I didn’t even find what I was looking for that night. The whole thing was pointless and the only result was you getting hurt. I wasn’t used to having people care about me back then. I had no idea you’d actually follow me.”

“I know. You’d been alone your whole life, Jace. I saw my chance to prove to you that it didn’t have to be that way anymore because you had us, but then I blew it. Instead of me taking care of you, you spent the whole night taking care of me.”

“Well, that part I don’t regret in the least. We all watch out for each other. That’s what family does, and that was the first time I truly understood that concept. I still think we should’ve just told Maryse and Robert what happened though. They could’ve done a better job of healing you.”

“They would’ve been pissed.”

“You were their son, Alec. They would’ve been more worried for you than upset.”

“At first, maybe.”

“So they’d ground you for a few weeks. Big deal. Was avoiding that really worth the pain you went through?”

Alec snorted in disbelief, then winced as the movement jostled his throbbing body. “You still don’t get it, do you?”

“Get what?”

“I didn’t care if they were pissed at me, Jace. I was terrified of what they’d do to you. I thought that if they discovered that you snuck out and broke their biggest rule that they’d send you away again. And I couldn’t let that happen.”

Alec had almost died that night, and he refused to get proper help because he was afraid of what would’ve happened to Jace?

The blond swallowed hard against the lump in his throat. “Why?”

Alec looked away, a faint blush spreading across the tops of his cheekbones. “Because I… Because I was already falling in love with you, Jace.”

Jace blinked at him stupidly. “Oh.”

Alec rolled his eyes. “Yeah, oh. You were never supposed to know that, by the way. Next time I tell you to break our connection, break the damned connection, alright?”

Jace nodded, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. “If it’s any consolation, I didn’t even know what love was until I met you and Izzy. You two mean everything to me, buddy. Max too.”
“Yeah, yeah…” Alec huffed out a laugh as he tugged his torn shirt back down to his waist and raised himself up onto his left elbow with a pained grunt. “Don’t go getting sentimental on me now.”

He held his right hand out to his brother.

“Help me up?”

“You sure you’re alright to stand?” Jace asked, taking in the amount of blood coating Alec’s ragged clothing.

“I’m fine. The marks are already fading. I don’t know what time it is, but I think this round might be over.”

Jace took Alec’s hand and levered him up onto his feet. Alec swayed for a moment as his head tried to catch up to the new altitude, but he needn’t have worried.

Jace immediately pulled him into a tight hug, grounding him instantly. “Next time, two go in…”

“And two come out,” Alec finished their patented phrase, closing his eyes and giving himself fully into the hug, cradling his brother’s head against his shoulder. He only opened them again when he felt Jace tense in his arms.

He blinked in surprise when he discovered that their surroundings had completely changed.

“Isn’t this… the Hotel Dumort?” Jace asked, clearly baffled as he spun in a slow circle. “What are we doing here, Alec?”

Alec shook his head, looking just as confused. “I… I don’t…”

“Well, hello there, handsome. What brings you to my humble abode?”

“Camille?” Jace practically growled as he sent his deadliest glare to the sadistic vampire who used to be the leader of the Brooklyn clan.

Her seductive eyes were focused entirely on his brother.

Or more specifically, on the teenaged-version of Alec who was being dragged unwillingly into the room by two vampire underlings, his arms wrenched painfully behind his back.

Jace turned slowly, putting himself between his Alec and Camille as he watched the proceedings warily.

“Alec, what is this? What’s going on? When did you…?”

Jace glanced over his shoulder and stopped short at the look of dawning horror on Alec’s face.

“No…”

TBC
A/N: The next section begins the chapters on the dubcon/noncon stuff. I'll post the warnings at the beginning of each chapter, should you choose to skip those parts!
Warning! This chapter deals with implied dub-con and non-con touching, although not overly detailed. Please proceed with caution to avoid triggers!

“Alec?” Jace tried again, frowning in concern as his brother instinctively stumbled back a few paces to put more distance between himself and Camille.

“Nononono…” Alec mumbled to himself. “This isn’t happening…”

His wild eyes scanned the room erratically, taking in every detail and getting paler by the second as his worst fears were validated.

Jace turned back to the scene in front of him and watched in trepidation as the younger Alec was frogmarched into the center of the room.

“This is the boy who killed two of our kind last week,” the vamp on Alec’s left hissed angrily, twisting his captive’s arm further up his back and eliciting a pained grunt in response. “Took us a while to track him down, but we finally got him alone.”

“I see,” Camille replied, sounding unimpressed as she settled back against the ornate couch cushions. “And instead of just killing him then and there, you thought it best to bring him back to our nest, John? You do realize his people will come looking for him…?”

“But without probable cause, they cannot step foot in the Dumort, thanks to the Accords. And knowing you, my queen, he won’t be staying here long anyway.” The man sneered at Alec.

“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure about that…” Camille’s appreciative gaze roamed up and down Alec’s lithe body as if she were assessing a piece of prime meat. “He is rather adorable, isn’t he?”

John hissed his displeasure. “He’s a prisoner, Camille. Not one of your pleasure pets.”

The female vampire shrugged innocently. “I don’t see why he can’t be both.”

“He killed my brother,” John snarled. “He needs to pay!”

Camille rolled her eyes. “And he will, John. But when I say so, not you. Is that understood?”

John reluctantly backed down. “Yes, my queen.”

“Excellent. Now if you’ll all excuse me for a moment, I was in the middle of my lunch before you so rudely interrupted.”

She stroked a hand through the curly hair of the young blonde girl sprawled across her lap. The subjugate blinked slowly up at her with an expression of pure bliss on her drugged face.

There were shallow cuts and bite marks all over her exposed flesh, mixed in with a myriad of
bruises and scars. Some were definitely newer than others; proof that she had been Camille’s feed bag for quite a while.

“Leave her alone!” Alec demanded, trying to break loose from the two holding him in place.

Camille glanced back up at Alec seductively. “Someone’s feeling chivalrous… Don’t you worry, handsome. You’ll get your turn with me. Feel free to watch in the meantime though, if you’d like. I’ve been told I can put on quite a show.”

And with that, she leaned down and resumed kissing the girl passionately on the lips, slowly hiking her conquest’s knee-length Summer dress up to mid-thigh before her hand disappeared beneath it. The girl moaned loudly in delight.

Both Alecs looked away in disgust.

Jace shifted uncomfortably but continued to watch, wishing once again that he had his weapons, regardless of the fact that they would be of no use to him in this memory realm.

The girl writhed in ecstasy as Camille tilted her head further back and sank her fangs into her carotid artery. She was completely oblivious to the fact that she was moments away from death.

Although it felt like hours to Alec having to stand there and listen to this young girl’s demise, it was all over in a matter of minutes.

The subjugate let out a final gasp, arching up as the last dregs of her life were literally drained from her, and then she fell limply into Camille’s lap, her dead eyes glazed over and staring blankly at a spot over Alec’s left shoulder.

Camille sighed in dissatisfaction. “Thought this one would last a bit longer due to her young age. Disappointing, but still… She was certainly enthusiastic. Not a bad way to go, if you ask me.”

She looked up and was surprised to find Alec’s gaze still firmly averted. She studied his appalled reaction with interest.

In her experience, most men found a scene like that erotic and hard to resist, even if they were a bit squeamish about blood and death. Unless, of course, they weren’t interested in women to begin with…

She smirked knowingly at him.

“Forgive my manners. As my guest, I would’ve invited you to join in, but clearly a bit of girl-on-girl action isn’t your kind of thing anyway, is it?”

Alec looked back up at her defiantly just in time to watch the girl’s exsanguinated body drop unceremoniously onto the floor like discarded trash.

“To be honest, it’s not really my thing either, but when in Rome, right?”

Alec’s haunted eyes stared at the dead girl’s body. He was barely breathing and it looked like he was about to be sick.

Jace had to remind himself that the poor girl had already been dead for at least five years, judging by the younger Alec’s appearance. There was nothing he could do to save her, just as there was nothing he could do to protect Alec from reliving the horrors of his past.
But he could remind his brother that he didn’t have to face any of them alone.

He turned his back on the replaying memory and made his way to Alec’s side, but Alec didn’t acknowledge his presence.

He was still staring at the dead girl, lost in his own thoughts, and Jace had to wonder if this had been the first time his brother had ever seen a dead Mundane.

Perhaps that was why this memory made it into the top five greatest hits conducted by the Agony rune…

If so, then Jace was the perfect man for the job. He knew plenty about dealing with death and feelings of failure for those he couldn’t save.

He reached out a tentative hand, giving his shell-shocked brother’s shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“Alec?”

The older boy jumped fiercely at the contact like a skittish horse ready to bolt at the first sign of danger.

“Easy… It’s just me,” Jace quickly stated, holding up his hands in a placating gesture.

“Alec?” Alec whispered as his wide eyes flickered down to lock with his shorter brother’s, somehow managing to go even paler than before as he came back to his surroundings.

Then his gaze instantly shot back up to Camille, afraid to let her out of his sight for even the briefest of moments.

Jace huffed in exasperation and stepped directly in front of Alec, attempting to command his full attention.

“Hey, keep staring at the vamp like that and you’ll give me a complex, bro. I’m supposed to be the prettiest one in the room, remember?”

Jace forced a smirk to try and lighten the mood and reassure his brother, but his attempt fell flat as he caught sight of Alec’s gaunt face. He looked like he was on the verge of passing out.

Alec’s shaking hands rose to blindly fumble against Jace’s jacket for a moment before latching onto it with a death grip.

“Alec, we… We gotta go,” he muttered, using the recent adrenaline rush to keep his overwhelming panic at bay long enough to get his legs moving.

Without any warning, Alec turned and began dragging his brother towards the nearest exit.

Jace stumbled in surprise as he was yanked off balance, but he righted himself quickly, falling into line beside his Parabatai.

“Woah! Go where exactly?”

“Anywhere but here.”

Alec heard the groan of the leather couch as Camille rose to her feet behind them and he quickened his pace.
The boys reached the door a few seconds later, but the knob wouldn’t budge. It was locked from the outside.

“No!”

Alec rattled it a bit, then swore loudly and kicked at the door in frustration.

“Damn it!”

“Alec…”

“It was open last time!” the older boy barked, running a shaking hand through his hair and pacing in a small rectangle, looking like a caged animal. “I saw it open! I remember!”

“I believe you, but it’s not opening now.”

Alec was definitely hyperventilating and on the verge of a massive panic attack. Jace moved closer, trying to intercept his repetitive path without making his brother’s panic any worse.

“If this is about the girl, Alec, she’s dead. There’s nothing you can do to change that.”

“You think I don’t know that?!” Alec shouted back icily as he continued to wear a hole into the floorboards. “We shouldn’t… even be here,” he panted, his pace slowing as he struggled to draw in air. “None of this… is real. Doesn’t make… any sense…”

Every time Jace managed to get close, Alec switched direction and pulled away from him. Jace sighed heavily after his third attempt to corral his brother failed.

“Come on, buddy. We can figure this out. Just stop and breathe for a second, alright?”

“We don’t have a second!” Alec yelled back just as Jace finally managed to cut him off.

“What’s the rush?” Jace demanded. Clearly there was more to the story than feelings of guilt over a dead Mundane. “What is this all about, Alec? Why did the rune bring us here?”

Refusing to answer or allow himself to be boxed in, Alec abandoned his pattern and shoved past Jace, moving further down the wall, trying the next door.

“There has to be another way out…”

When that door also failed to open, he moved on to the next, and then the next, always getting the same result.

As his brother searched futilely for an exit, Jace allowed his curiosity to get the better of him and turned back to watch the scene unfolding on the other side of the room.

“Bring the boy closer,” Camille instructed her henchmen as she stepped over the rapidly cooling body that lay prone at her feet.

Alec was carelessly dragged forward again, and Camille met the trio halfway.

Her tongue snaked out to lick the fresh bloodstains from her lips, sending a violent shiver up Alec’s spine.

He attempted to struggle again, but John kicked his knees out from under him, letting all of Alec’s weight fall onto his already stressed shoulders. “Knock it off, grunt!”
Then the vampire grabbed a fistful of Alec’s jet black hair and yanked his head back, straining his neck and offering his tender throat to their leader.

“He’s all yours, my queen.”

Camille slowly traced a sharpened fingernail from the cleft of Alec’s raised chin all the way down the significant length of his throat, making him swallow uncomfortably and attempt to jerk away in resistance.

“And what a prize he is. He’s quite the fighter, isn’t he? I do enjoy breaking the wild ones…”

Camille smirked at Alec as his Adam’s apple bobbed reflexively beneath her icy touch. She cupped his chin and looked deeply into his eyes.

Her head slowly tilted to the side as she took in his striking features, then paused.

“You seem familiar, darling… Have we met before?”

“Pretty sure I’d remember,” Alec grunted back, earning a smug smile in return.

“You flatter me.”

“…Wasn’t a compliment.”

She laughed heartily.

“Feisty! I like it. But seriously… You remind me of someone. What’s your surname?”

Bored with the conversation, Jace was about to check on his adult brother’s progress when his own name made him freeze.

“Hang on… You’re not a Herondale, are you? The name Will ring any bells?”

Before Alec could respond, she yanked his shirt collar to the side and inspected his shoulder.

“Huh. You don’t have the Herondale mark, but the resemblance is truly uncanny.”

Jace’s free hand rubbed absently at his own shoulder, knowing perfectly well to which mark she was referring. He pursed his lips in annoyance.

Why hadn’t anyone told him that the star-shaped scar on his skin was a clue to his heritage? It would’ve saved him a lot of trouble and doubt over the years, particularly where Clary was concerned.

“Perhaps a Lightwood then?” Camille continued, circling the young captive slowly and observing him from all angles. “You’ve certainly got their bone structure…

“Either way, good ol’ Magnus would sure be jealous that I found you first this time. With those pretty eyes and pouty lips… You are definitely his type.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Alec ground out, trying to keep Camille in his sights as much as possible as she circled him again. She reappeared on his right and leaned in so close, he could smell the fresh blood on her breath.

“Oh, nothing, darling.”
She batted her eyelashes at Alec as she moved directly in front of him, running her hands up his firm chest as she knelt to match his height.

“Just the crazy ramblings of a starved woman.”

“Thought you just ate,” Alec spat back, trying to pull away from her wandering fingers as they crested over his strained shoulders and glided up the back of his neck, sending an uncomfortable chill down his spine.

She chuckled at him and ruffled his bangs affectionately. “Not that kind of starved, sweetheart. Wow, you really are an innocent one, aren’t you?”

She gripped his jaw tightly and tilted his head to the right, watching as the vein in his neck pulsed rapidly.

“Though now that you mention it…”

Jace took a panicked step towards the younger version of his brother, his hands clenching into fists at his sides.

He was convinced that he was about to watch Alec being fed on and his own blood boiled with the knowledge that there was nothing he could do to stop it.

But what actually happened made him gape in surprise.

*Camille leaned in close and sniffed at Alec’s exposed throat.*

“*Mmm... You smell so good. So young and vulnerable. So... inexperienced,*” she purred in delight as one hand kept his head in place and the other drifted down his abs, two fingers curling behind the belt buckled around his jeans.

She yanked his waist forward until their hips were flush against each other, then licked a thick stripe up the side of Alec’s neck, tracing his deflect rune from his collarbone to his earlobe.

Alec grunted in disgust.

“Don’t you worry, my pet,” she whispered in his ear. “You’ll have plenty more experience by the time I’m done with you.”

**BANG!!!**

Jace jumped and whirled around as the harsh thud echoed throughout the room in response.

Alec took a few steps back, then lunged forward again at the first door they had tried, slamming his shoulder into it with a grunt of pain.

The door refused to budge.

“Alec... Alec, stop! You’re gonna hurt yourself!”

Jace dove forward as Alec prepared for another assault and the blond managed to catch his brother’s upper arm, jerking him to a stop.

Alec spun on his heel, wrenching himself free of Jace’s tight hold. “Get off me!”

“Calm down!” the blond shouted back, putting as much command into the order as possible.
Alec ignored him and charged at the door again. This time, Jace physically got in the way. Alec barely stopped himself in time and Jace flinched at the fury he saw burning in his brother’s eyes.

“Move, Jace,” he demanded coldly.

“Not until you talk to me.”

“We can talk when we’re on the other side of that door.”

“The door isn’t opening, Alec. We’re trapped here until this scene plays out and the rune moves on.”

“No. No, there’s gotta be another way.”

Agitated, Alec tried to move past Jace, but his brother spun him around and pinned him back-first against the sturdy door with his forearm pressed against Alec’s upper chest.

“Stop it, Alec! Just tell me what…!”

“It never happened!” Alec blurted back emphatically.

Jace was pretty sure he had figured things out for himself by now, but he needed Alec to verify his suspicions.

“What?! What didn’t happen?!”

Alec clenched his eyes shut, feeling the ghostly echoes of Camille’s tongue worming its way up the side of his face, and he slammed the back of his head against the door in vexation.

His heart was pounding furiously against Jace’s forearm.

“Hey! Look at me!” Jace demanded. He waited until Alec’s red-rimmed eyes met his gaze.

“Tell me the truth, Alec. What the hell did Camille do?”

Alec’s jaw twitched as he ground his teeth together.

“I told you… Nothing, Jace. Okay? None of this is real. It never was.”

Jace raised an eyebrow at him. “What are you talking about?”

“I mean it was just a nightmare that I had when I was a kid. Just a really, really bad dream. There’s no way this counts as a memory.”

“This is a pretty detailed dream, Alec,” Jace stated skeptically. “You didn’t even know Camille when you were that young, did you?”

“No, I… I don’t know. Maybe? I…”

Teen Alec’s voice drew their attention back to the fray in the middle of the room.

“Get off me!” Alec growled, struggling against his captors with all the strength he possessed, furiously trying to break free as Camille’s hands began to explore her latest prize.

He did manage to get one arm free and threw his elbow back as hard as he could, right into the groin of the vampire on his right.
The man stumbled away to catch his breath and Alec rolled counter-clockwise, sweeping John’s legs out from under him, effectively freeing his other arm as John lost his balance.

Alec shakily made it onto his feet, turning to face Camille, the final adversary between himself and freedom.

But just as he located her, less than a foot away and quickly closing in, her fist plowed into his gut with a supernaturally strong sucker-punch, knocking all the air from his lungs.

He landed heavily on all fours at Camille’s feet, coughing and gasping in rattling breaths.

The air huffed out of adult Alec’s lungs and his legs gave out from under him, starting him on a slow slide to the ground.

“Shit! Alec…”

Jace followed him down, guiding his descent until he landed safely with a soft thud, his back resting against the door and legs sprawled haphazardly in front of him.

The older boy’s head was bowed as he curled protectively over his aching stomach and struggled to inhale.

Jace winced in sympathy at his brother’s painful gasps and rubbed comforting circles over Alec’s upper chest. His other hand wrapped firmly around the back of Alec’s neck, helping him lean forward so he could catch his breath.

“Don’t fight it, buddy. Slow, shallow breaths for now. It’ll ease up in a minute.”

“J-Jace…” Alec forced out between ragged coughs, gripping his brother’s wrist tightly. “We have… to get out. Please. I-I can’t…”

Alec’s voice broke, signaling that he was close to tears.

Jace could tell from their bond that Alec’s upset had nothing to do with the pain currently emanating through his torso. The older boy was terrified of what was to come.

Jace tugged Alec’s huddled form gently towards himself until his brother’s head was safely cradled against Jace’s chest, hoping his own body heat might alleviate the uncontrollable shivers wracking the older boy’s abused frame.

“I need you to trust me here, Alec,” he stated softly. “We got through the previous trial together, and we can get through this one too, but you’ve gotta tell me what we’re up against here so I can try to help.”

Alec shook his head in denial and Jace pulled back far enough to see the lost expression on his face.

“It wasn’t real,” Alec whispered out, the words lacking conviction this time around. “It couldn’t’ve been real, Jace.”

Alec dragged his knees up into his chest and wrapped his arms around his head in a childlike version of a protective barrier, making himself as small a target as possible.

He was mumbling something beneath his breath and Jace had to lean closer to hear him.

“Wake up, Alec. Wake up… Please, just wake up…”
Jace sat back and sighed, continuing the steady pressure on the back of Alec’s neck as he glanced over to the other side of the room, checking on the younger Alec as well.

Camille patted him mockingly on the head as Alec fought to regain his breath.

“There, there… I know it hurts. Things would be so much smoother, and less painful for you, if you just cooperated.”

Alec cried out in pain as his arms were recaptured by the pissed off male vampires and yanked higher behind his back than before, his shoulder muscles screaming in protest.

Camille crouched down in front of him and tutted with false sympathy.

“You should be more careful, darling. These boys will happily tear your arms from your sockets if given half a chance. They’re not exactly fans of the Nephilim children, and it doesn’t help that you killed John’s brother.”

“His brother killed three innocent Mundanes,” Alec bit back coolly. “I was just doing my job.”

Camille rolled her eyes in exasperation. “See? That’s just it. We kill them, you kill us, we kill you… It’s a vicious cycle, don’t you think? Where does it stop?”

As she spoke, she ran one of her sharp nails down the center of Alec’s chest, pulling his shirt collar down in its wake and exposing the flawless pale skin beneath it.

Alec tensed against the cold touch.

“If you’re gonna kill me, then just get it over with,” he growled, then grimaced as Camille’s nail pressed harder, biting into his flesh as it cut a shallow slice down the center of his sternum.

“Now what would be the fun in that?” she asked with an impish pout. “I’ve always preferred to play with my food first.”

Alec watched in dismay as she raised her hand to her mouth and licked his blood from her fingernail with relish.

“Mmm… You really do taste divine. I think I’ll keep you a while, Angel.”

She ran her fingers through his disheveled hair, then gripped a handful of it tightly and lifted his head up at an awkward angle, planting a dirty, possessive kiss on his lips. Her fangs descended and pierced his skin just enough to make blood rise to the surface.

He tried to jerk back when his brain registered the pain, but she didn’t let him.

She sucked his punctured bottom lip into her mouth, relishing the coppery taste, and by the time she finally released him, he was coughing and panting desperately for air again, a trickle of blood dripping down his chin.

“We’re going to have so much fun together, my pet. I can hardly wait. Take him to my room,” she instructed the other two vamps. “I’ll be in shortly. And try not to hurt him too badly along the way. I don’t like my food spoiled.”

Teen Alec was dragged back across the room, straight toward Jace and adult Alec.

Jace was about to warn his brother of their approach when the older boy let out a startled yelp and tumbled backward through the now open doorway.
Glancing up, Jace saw Raphael stick his head into the room.

“You called for me, Camille?” he prompted, an air of irritation breaking through the feigned respect in his tone.

She huffed at him. “Took you long enough. Luckily for you, I’ve been pleasantly distracted in the meantime.”

She motioned absently over her shoulder at the dead subjugate on the floor.

“I’ve finished my lunch, and I want you to dispose of her. Discretely, of course.”

Raphael gave a curt nod, though he looked less than enthused by the order.

“Understood. Who’s the boy?” he asked, maneuvering out of the way as the lackies dragged a struggling Alec out of the room.

Camille smirked at him. “The girl’s replacement, of course.”

As soon as Raphael was out of the doorway, Jace moved to stand up and check on his brother but the scene around them suddenly started to warp.

He dropped back to the ground and flung an arm out, managing to get a firm grip on Alec’s boot as the world began to spin. He refused to be left behind or separated from his Parabatai as they were thrust forward through time.

When the room settled back into focus, Jace glanced around to find that they had ended up in an intricately designed bedroom, presumably Camille’s.

Alec was flat on his back, spread-eagled on the floor and completely limp.

Jace quickly crawled up along his body to reach Alec’s head and fought down the panic when he saw the small puddle of blood pooling beneath his tousled hair.

His brother was out cold.

“Alec… Alec! Wake up!”

Jace shook the older boy’s shoulder until Alec let out a groan and managed to pry his eyes open. He squinted up at Jace, the bright light in the room sending bolts of agony through his skull.

“Gah! Wha… What the hell happened?”

“I’m not sure, but I think those assholes must’ve knocked you out. Well, not you you. The other you. Damn, this is confusing…”

Alec tried to sit up but only succeeded in lifting his throbbing head off the floor. The rest of his body stayed perfectly still. He tried again, then grunted in irritation when it yielded the same results.

“J-Jace, I… I can’t move,” he whimpered out, his muscles cording as he fought to draw his limbs back in, but to no avail.

Frowning, Jace tugged on his brother’s outstretched wrist but it seemed to be invisibly tethered to the floor.
Sensing Alec’s rising panic again, he leaned over him and put a comforting hand over his heart. “It’s okay, Alec. Just relax and conserve your energy till I figure this out, alright? Here…”

Jace shrugged his jacket off, rolled it up, and placed it under his brother’s head as a makeshift pillow. Alec grimaced as he carefully rested his cracked skull against the rough fabric, but it was definitely softer than the hard floor.

“Thanks.”

“Sure thing. But you’ll owe me for the dry cleaning. Blood is a bitch to get out of leather.”

Alec snorted despite his predicament, then hissed as the pain flared through his head again.

Jace patted Alec’s chest encouragingly, then stood up and turned his attention back to the room. He caught sight of teen Alec who was heavily restrained in the same position as adult Alec, but directly in the center of Camille’s bed.

Judging by his muffled groan and feeble shifting, the boy had just started to come round from the blow to the head.

Jace made his way over to the boy and clenched his jaw, grinding his teeth together. He definitely did not like where this memory was going.

He reached out to touch the bindings on the boy’s wrist but his hand passed right through it, just like it did out in the woods.

“When did this happen, Alec?” he asked gently. “And how come you never told me about it?”

The “Why wasn’t I there to protect you?” remained unspoken between them.

“I told you,” Alec replied numbly from his spot on the floor, almost sounding resigned to his fate now. “It was just a dream. Nothing more.”

Jace shook his head in frustration as he made his way back to his brother’s side.

“You don’t wake up from a concussion in your dreams, Alec. *This*?” he reached under Alec’s head, then showed his bloody fingers to his brother. “This is definitely real.”

Alec glared up at him.

“What do you want to hear then, huh? That I screwed up? That I got myself captured by Camille’s thugs? That I watched her kill that girl and was powerless to stop it? That she…”

Alec cut himself off mid-rant and looked away from Jace, refusing to continue.

“That she *what*, Alec?” Jace pushed again.

“Like I said,” Alec muttered wearily. “Nothing happened.”

Jace could feel the truth emanating through their Parabatai bond though, and it damn near broke his heart.

He swiped a hand angrily down his face and wasn’t all that surprised that it came away wet.

“Alec, please…”
“Don’t. Just… don’t.”

“Fine. Then we’ll find another way, alright? But you have to face this, Alec. The longer you stay in denial, the longer you’ll be stuck here. I get that you’re scared, but you can do this, buddy. You’re stronger than you think.”

Alec let out a slow, steadying breath, then looked straight into his brother’s watery eyes.

“Listen to me, Jace. I know you tried, and I love you for it. But it wouldn’t be called the Agony rune if there were any easy ways out. Fact is, I’m trapped here till the end, and there’s nothing you can do about that. So it’s time for you to go back.”

“Alec, wait. We can figure this out! I’m not gonna leave you!”

A tear slipped free from the corner of Alec’s eye, running down his temple and eventually landing on Jace’s rolled up jacket.

“Tell Magnus… Tell him I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t you dare… Alec!”

Jace’s surroundings blurred again and the next thing he knew, he was sitting bolt upright on Alec’s bed next to his still unconscious brother.

“Alec? Hey, open your eyes, buddy…”

Jace reached over and shook him hard, but Alec hadn’t returned back with him. He was still trapped in the Dumort, and now he was facing Camille alone.

“No! Damn it!”

Magnus stood up from his chair by the bed and hovered over the boys, worriedly.

“Jace? What’s going on? How did you…?”

“He pushed me out of his mind!” Jace growled in exasperation. “You’ve gotta put me back in there with him, Magnus. He’s giving up.”

The warlock shook his head in denial. “Alexander would never…”

“Your bitch of an ex-girlfriend has him!” the blond shot back. “Trust me, he’s giving up!”

“Ex-girlfriend? Are you referring to Camille? I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I. All I know is that I have to get back to him right now, or Alec is never gonna wake up again.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Phew, this was an intense chapter to write… If you enjoyed it, please share your thoughts and review :) It only gets darker from here!
It hadn’t been a dream.

That much was clear to Alec now as he tried to fight back the ever-rising panic that was threatening to suffocate him.

He had apparently buried the truth long ago for the sake of his sanity, but the Agony rune had just blown the hinges of his lockbox to smithereens, completely exposing him to every horrible detail that he had fought so hard to repress over the years.

And his Parabatai had almost had a front row seat to the entire show. Just the thought of it had Alec’s heart stuttering painfully in his chest.

He knew that if Jace had had to stand by and watch everything Camille had done to him, their relationship would never have been the same again.

Alec couldn’t bear the thought of his brother seeing him as a victim who needed protecting rather than as the equal he was meant to be, capable of fighting his own fights and of watching his Parabatai’s back in combat.

That loss of faith would’ve broken Alec far beyond what Camille had ever been capable of doing to him.

So he had found the invisible tether that was linking Jace to his own body in the real world and he gave him the hardest mental shove he could manage.

Jace would be pissed at him if Alec ever woke up from this, but the older boy didn’t regret his decision.

It was simple, really. Alec would either survive the rest of the Agony rune’s punishment on his own, or he wouldn’t.

*That*, at least, was still his choice to make.

And now here he was, strapped down in the dark, helpless and alone, trapped in a hell of his own
memories with no hope of escape.

He had no idea how long he had been laying there, stewing in his own morbid thoughts and waiting for the ax to finally fall. It could’ve been minutes, or hours, or even days.

A trickle of sweat (or was that blood?) dripped down the side of his face and made his skin itch, heightening his frustration even further.

This wasn’t how it was supposed to end. He had moved past this day a long time ago, damn it! It wasn’t fair to reopen such old wounds!

He pulled furiously against the invisible binds that were keeping him secured in place, but he knew in his heart that they wouldn’t give. They certainly hadn’t the first time around.

The distant clicking of high heels on wooden stairs broke through the percussive sound of the blood pounding in his ears.

His entire body broke out in a cold sweat and made his stomach clench in protest, the taste of bile creeping up the back of his throat.

At least the torturous wait was finally over.

Camille was coming for him.

SHSHSHSHSH

Magnus was pacing the floor wrathfully by the time Jace had caught him up on Alec’s current predicament. And if he happened to blast a few trinkets across the room as the blond told his story, who could blame him?

“How did I miss this?!” he growled to the room at large, then sent the wash basin hurtling through the air to smash against the opposing wall.

“We all did.” Jace replied despondently.

“Perhaps, but you didn’t know Camille like I did. Sure, she could be selfish and sadistic at the best of times, but I had no idea that she could do something so… abhorrent to an innocent boy!”

“Yeah, she’s a real charmer. I can see why you switched teams.” Jace ducked just in time as a bucket of melting ice flew over his head, sending a cascade of cubes and water all over the floor.

He gave Magnus a warning look.

“Listen, I’d love nothing more than to slice Camille’s head off with my seraph blade right now, but there’s nothing we can do while she’s still in Clave custody.

“There is still a chance we can save Alec though, so if you’re done destroying his room, I think we’ve wasted enough time already.”

Jace settled back down on the bed beside his brother, albeit rather stiffly in anticipation of what was to come.

“Put me back in with him before it’s too late.”

Magnus let out a slow breath, pushing aside his raging emotions so that he could think logically. “I’m not sure that’s a wise decision, Jace.”
The blond raised his head and glared at the warlock. “Excuse me?”

“Think about it. Using magic on him aside, after what you just told me, there’s a good chance you’ll be arriving when Alec is in a rather... *compromising* position.”

“I don’t care if he’s running around naked and singing showtunes at the top of his lungs. He needs me, Magnus.”

The warlock blinked at him, then raised an eyebrow. “Thank you for *that* interesting image…”

Jace rolled his eyes. “My point is, he’s terrified right now, and I made a vow to always have his back, regardless of the situation. He’s my brother. My Parabatai. He-”

“-Pushed you out of his mind for a reason,” Magnus interrupted matter-of-factly.

“So he’s embarrassed about me seeing what he went through back then. He’ll get over it when he wakes up. I’m not letting him face this again on his own.”

“Neither am I. Which is why I propose that I go instead.”

Jace scoffed. “Right… Cause you think his ex-boyfriend watching him get molested or worse by said ex-boyfriend’s ex-girlfriend is going to be any easier on him?”

Magnus’s upper lip curled in disgust at the notion.

“I see your point. But the fact remains that if Alexander truly doesn’t want you in his head, he will simply force you back out again. So if your plan is to continue wasting precious time and expending his waning energy by making him fight you as well as the Agony rune…”

“Alright! I get it!” Jace barked in exasperation, levering himself back up to stand by the side of the bed and motioning Magnus towards his vacated spot with an exaggerated sweep of his hand. “If you’ve got a better plan, Mary Poppins, then by all means.”

Magnus stared at the proffered section of mattress for a moment, then raised his eyes a bit to take in Alec’s still form.

“Better' might not be the appropriate word,” he stated solemnly. “But I fear it might be the best chance he has at surviving this.”

Jace crossed his arms over his chest and frowned. “Care to elaborate on that?”

“Not particularly. As we’ve already discussed, time is of the essence. For now, you’ll just have to trust me.”

Magnus moved past Jace before he lost his nerve and settled down next to the unconscious Shadowhunter. He rolled onto his side, facing the boy, and placed a warm hand on Alec’s bare chest, taking comfort in the steady rise and fall of his breathing.

He was about to begin the process when Jace gripped his upper arm from behind.

“Wait. Is this going to hurt him?”

The warlock spared one last glance over his shoulder at the blond.

“I doubt he’ll sense any pain, considering he’s lost deep within the past. The real question is whether or not his body will be able to tolerate it. Unfortunately, I don’t have an answer to that. I’ll
just have to find him as quickly as possible and hope for the best.”

“And what exactly am I supposed to do in the meantime?” Jace demanded.

“Call Catarina. She should be getting off duty soon. We’ll need all the help we can get to put Alexander back together when all is said and done, and Clary can portal her here without the Clave being any the wiser.

“Other than that, just try to keep Alec from hurting himself. Use your bond to keep him calm. He only has to make it through the next two and a half hours before the Agony rune finally dissolves, and then we’ll be able to help him heal properly.”

Jace nodded sharply, falling back into soldier mode now that he had his orders.

Magnus turned back to Alec as the boy’s heart stuttered in his chest beneath Magnus’s hand. The warlock placed a comforting kiss against his temple.

“I’m coming, Alexander,” he whispered in Alec’s ear. “Just hold on a little bit longer.”

Golden threads of magic shot from his palm and connected them, plunging Magnus into a world of Alec’s fractured thoughts and long-forgotten memories.

SHSHSHSHSH

The bedroom door swung open with a loud creak and Alec grunted, twisting his head away from the bright light that suddenly flooded in from the hallway, making his already aching head throb mercilessly.

He heard the door close behind him and was plunged back into the impenetrable darkness of the bedroom. It wasn’t long before his angel eyes were able to readjust again, but he didn’t dare turn back around.

He couldn’t face this. Couldn’t face her. Not again.

Alec’s whole body was trembling and he was barely breathing, trying his best to remain invisible to the predatory vampire for as long as possible.

Against his wishes, his sensitive ears picked up every little hint of Camille’s whereabouts as she crossed the room. The soft groan of springs alerted him to the fact that she was crawling her way onto the right side of the bed.

He squeezed his eyes shut in denial.

Nonononono…. Please, no!

Alec startled when he felt one of her cold hands slide beneath the hem of his ratty, thin t-shirt and glide across his taut abdomen.

His eyes flew open to discover that he was no longer on the floor, but in the bed, trapped in his teen self’s shackled body, with Camille’s face hovering less than a foot above his own.

He swallowed hard as the vampire made a shameless groan of approval that raised the hairs on the back of Alec’s neck.

“My my, you Shadowhunters certainly know how to stay in shape! I’m betting you’ve been training your whole life, haven’t you, handsome? Not that you’ve lived a long one, of course…”
You’re what, nineteen? Twenty?”

“S-seventeen,” Alec heard himself mutter back after a brief hesitation, fated to follow the script of the past no matter how hard he fought against it.

Camille laughed. “Oh, baby boy, I’ve got shoes that are older than you! None that are quite as pretty though, I admit.”

With her free hand, she brushed his bangs out of his eyes, then trailed her fingers down his cheek and along his strong jaw line.

“I bet you’ve got all the Institute girls fawning over you… Maybe even some of the boys. And who could blame them with a body like yours?”

Alec stopped breathing completely as one of the sharp nails on her other hand suddenly started slicing its way up the front of his shirt. The two halves easily parted, revealing the flushed skin beneath.

He desperately needed a new wardrobe.

“You know, I’ve always been fascinated by the beauty of tattoos and their meanings,” Camille stated casually as she took in every single rune on his torso. “Got a few myself, in fact.”

Eventually, her roaming eyes settled on the new mark she had personally left on him earlier.

She smirked as her hand crept up the center of his chest until she reached the slice on his sternum, then reopened the partially healed wound with a shallow stab of her nail.

Alec flinched, then grimaced in disgust as she coated the tip of her middle finger in the fresh blood pooling at the center of his chest.

He ground his teeth together angrily as she began tracing his blackened runes with crimson red.

“This one is pretty…” Camille commented, drawing the final flourishes on the rune located on his upper right abdomen. “What’s it for?”

“S-stamina,” Alec stuttered out and Camille’s intense gaze instantly locked with his, a twisted smile playing across her blood-coated lips.

“Intriguing, but what on earth would a seventeen-year-old boy need with such a rune?”


“That’s just sad, and rather boring. And this one?” Camille asked as she followed the complicated curves on the largest rune on his front side, covering the bottom span of his left ribs.

“…Agil-ity.” Alec’s voice cracked on the word as she leaned down and placed a soft kiss at the very center of the rune. She sat back up for the sole purpose of watching him squirm.

“Agility, huh? I bet that must come in handy quite often considering your line of work. Tell me, did you use it to take down my two clan members the other night?”

“No,” Alec answered honestly, feeling his anger overriding his fear once more at the memory of his most recent hunt. “Didn’t need it. Those idiots weren’t much of a challenge.”

She smirked at him.
“Tell that to the Mundane they had eaten for breakfast, which they did without my permission, by the way. I would’ve had to punish them myself, had you not beaten me to it. So I suppose I owe you a thanks. It would’ve been a shame to ruin my new manicure on the likes of them.”

“Great. Then how about you let me go and we just call it even?”

“I’m afraid not, darling. I’m just having too. Much. Fun.”

Alec shifted tensely as her hand slid further down with each of the last three words, coming to a stop just above his waistline where they began tracing yet another rune.

“Now this one I recognize… Means you have a Parabatai somewhere, right? Looks pretty fresh, too.”

That was certainly an understatement.

In fact, he and Jace had just undergone the Parabatai binding ritual the day before.

After celebrating with their family and friends for a few hours at an elaborate party, Alec had taken a midnight stroll through the park to wrap his mind around his feelings for Jace and what this new bond would mean for their relationship.

He was so wrapped up in his troubles that he never heard John and the other vampire approaching from behind. By the time he realized he was no longer alone, it had been too late.

“I wonder…” Camille mused, pulling Alec from his self-recriminations. “Do you think your new brother-in-arms is going to feel everything I’m going to do to you?”

Alec tried not to outwardly react but his heart instantly started racing and his breathing had quickened at the thought.

He understood the basics of the Parabatai rune thanks to their many years of schooling, but he had no idea how powerful their connection could truly be.

Would Jace have felt something off already? Would he have realized that Alec hadn’t returned to the Institute yet? Would he come looking for him?

“It doesn’t work like that,” Alec grunted, lying through his clenched teeth.

“Could be fun to find out though…” She slowly bent over him again, this time running the tip of her tongue up the long, central line of the Parabatai rune, lapping up the blood she had previously smudged there. “Think he felt that?”

“Stop it,” Alec growled, trying to shift as far away from the vampire as his bonds would allow.

“Make me,” Camille challenged back before gliding a leg over Alec’s hips, straddling him to keep him still. “I bet you’ve never even been in a relationship before, have you?”

Alec grudgingly shook his head when he realized she was actually waiting for a response.

“No wonder you smell so… untouched. But let’s be honest here. You can’t be a complete virgin, right? I mean, you must’ve explored a little after your body started changing. Every guy does.”

She made a crude gesture with her fist to get her point across and Alec looked away, embarrassed and refusing to answer.
Camille gaped at him.

“Seriously?! Not even once?!”

Alec felt the heat rising in his face at her blunt interrogation, but if anything, his silence seemed to make Camille even giddier.

“That is truly precious. Let me guess, your parents told you that too much playtime will make you go blind, right?” She laughed as she ran her free hand lightly up his inner jean-clad thigh in a seductive caress. “None of that crap is true, you know. Here, I’ll show you…”

“Don’t!” Alec yelped, lifting his head in alarm as her palm skated along his zipper, copping a feel. But Camille chose that moment to lunge up at him, pressing him back into the pillows with a dominating kiss.

Alec’s throat clenched against the inevitable gag reflex. Thankfully, there was nothing left in his stomach to bring up.

Tied down the way he was, he’d probably end up choking, and that was a pretty gruesome way to go. Then again, considering the circumstances… Maybe asphyxiation wasn’t such a horrible end after all.

When she finally pulled back again, Alec was stunned to find that his belt was draped across her left hand. He hadn’t even realized she’d been unfastening it.

He blinked up at her, wide-eyed, his mouth suddenly completely dry.

“Look at that adorable face… Don’t you worry, darling,” she cooed, placing a finger across his lips as he attempted to protest. “I fully intend on having dinner with you first. What kind of girl do you take me for? Speaking of, how about a little appetizer to take the edge off a bit?”

She hissed slightly as her fangs descended, then twisted Alec’s head to the left before aiming for his carotid artery.

“Stay still and I promise I won’t go too deeply…”

Alec instinctively yanked hard against his bindings again, desperately fighting to break free before it was too late.

Unfortunately, all he managed to do was cut a painfully deep slice into his chafed left wrist thanks to the sharp edges of the rough, metallic cuffs.

Just as Camille was about to sink her teeth into his neck, she caught the whiff of freshly spilt blood and paused.

She followed the scent to her right and watched with rapt fascination as the warm liquid began trickling its way down Alec’s tethered forearm.

The sinister grin she gave him sent a violent shiver up Alec’s spine.

“How very sweet of you to offer, handsome. Didn’t realize you were into foreplay. I can definitely work with that…”

She leaned forward and lowered her mouth to lick away the rivulet of blood that was about to drip from his elbow onto her clean sheets.
She sighed in disappointment at the taste.

“You really do need to calm down, my pet. Fear is a rather bitter flavor.” She began twirling her fingers slowly in front of Alec’s face, attempting to encanto him. “I can help you with that if you’d like. Just… relax…”

Realizing what she was attempting to do, Alec quickly jerked his head away and clenched his eyes shut again. “No!”

Camille huffed in aggravation.

“Fine. Have it your way then. I was only trying to make this easier for you, but if you don’t want my help, we’ll just have to do it the old-fashioned way. This may sting a little…”

Her tongue followed the bright red trail back up his pale arm to its origin, and after releasing the cuff to lick once over his raw wound, she greedily sank her fangs into his exposed wrist.

Alec cried out at the sharp, piercing pain that radiated throughout his whole arm and tried to buck her off of him, succeeding only at making her cackle delightedly as she rode him back down to the mattress as if she were on a mechanical bull.

“Now that’s more like it!” she crowed, settling herself more firmly against his hips to keep herself balanced.

She yanked his captured wrist back up to her mouth, sealed her wet lips around the puncture marks, and began to suck at the raw wound until Alec started to feel lightheaded.

Camille ran her free hand up and down his raised arm, exploring the corded muscles she found there whilst encouraging his blood to continue flowing steadily throughout the extremity.

Alec desperately wanted to fight with every ounce of strength he had left, even after his arm felt ablaze with pins and needles. But he knew struggling was futile.

Camille’s venom was already coursing through his veins, and it wouldn’t be much longer before he was as docile as a lamb, oblivious to the fact that he was being led to the slaughter.

Just like that poor girl downstairs.

There was only one way to protect himself from this, and there was a good chance that if he walked through that door into the deepest recesses of his mind, he wouldn’t come out the other side of it when all was said and done.

He had sworn to himself that he would never check out like that on his family. No matter how bad things got over the years, he would always find a way to struggle through it. For them.

But he couldn’t go through this again. He just couldn’t.

Camille released his wrist and his arm fell limply to his side. He stared at it dejectedly, willing it to move. To fight back. To defend himself. To help break him free.

But his arm didn’t so much as twitch. In fact, his entire body was feeling lethargic and spent thanks to the copious amounts of blood loss.

“That’s more like it,” Camille purred, her hands roaming down his torso. “Now, where were we? Ah, yes…”
Alec blinked sluggishly up at her as her fingers reached the button on his jeans, popping it open with ease. She leaned back down, her ample chest settling against his as her hot breath ghosted across the shell of his ear.

“You took something of mine, handsome, and now I’m going to take something of yours.”

She sank her fangs into the soft flesh around his right collarbone just as her hand slipped beneath the coarse denim fabric and into the waistband of his standard issued shorts.

Alec couldn’t take it anymore.

It was now or never.

He choked back a sob as he sent out silent apologies to his loved ones, then closed his eyes and, trying desperately to block out Camille’s ministrations, he began searching his mind for the off switch.

It was a safe haven of sorts that he had discovered long ago, away from the pain of never being good enough, away from the torture of unrequited love, and away from Camille’s clawed fingers and sharp fangs.

It was a place where no one else could ever find him. Where no one could ever hurt him. And that thought settled a blanket of calm over Alec.

If he could just find it again… All his pain would simply cease to exist.

His mind was slipping further and further away into blissful oblivion when soft lips captured his own and immediately stopped his descent into darkness.

He let out a quiet whimper, terrified that Camille had found him again and that there would be no escape for him after all. But then…

“Alexander, open your eyes.”

That voice. He could never refuse that voice.

Alec cracked his eyes open and a soft smile of relief spread across his tired face. Maybe his mind wouldn’t allow him to suffer eternity alone after all.

“Magnus,” he croaked out, reaching his newly freed right hand up to cradle his savior’s cheek.

He was fully expecting his hand to go straight through the mirage, sealing his fate like the last nail in his coffin, so it startled him when he actually made contact.

“M-Magnus?” he whispered again in confusion, sitting up as the warlock drew back far enough to allow him to do so. “How…?”

Magnus placed his own hand over Alec’s, nuzzling his cheek against the boy’s palm.

“You didn’t really think we’d simply abandon you in the last leg of your punishment, did you?”

Coming back to himself, Alec looked around wildly to find that the bedroom, as well as Camille, had vanished. The two of them were surrounded by nothing but darkness, and yet he could see Magnus clear as day.

“Where are we? What is this place?”
“I was just about to ask you, actually,” Magnus replied, glancing around as well. “It took me ages to find you. So many doors into the past, it’s a miracle you manage to wake up every morning without getting lost in that oversized brain of yours! I bet learning some meditation techniques would do you a world of good to clean out some of the clutter.”

He didn’t elaborate on the things he had seen in Alec’s head whilst looking for him. That was a topic for another day.

“Anyway… When I couldn’t track you down through your memories, I recalled the fact that Jace told me you were starting to give up. So I figured I’d find the darkest place I could and wait for you to come to me.”

Alec dropped his head in shame. “Magnus, I’m so sorry. I just… I couldn’t…”

“Shh… None of that.” Magnus pulled Alec into the warmth of his arms. “You have absolutely nothing to apologize for, do you hear me?”

“I should’ve been stronger,” the boy mumbled brokenly, burying his face against Magnus’s neck as he sobbed.

“Nonsense. Sweetheart, you’re the strongest person I’ve ever met. Which is how I know you’re going to go back there and see this thing through to the other side.”

Alec immediately tensed in his embrace, pulling back just far enough to look into Magnus’s apologetic eyes. “No. Magnus, I-I can’t go back. I can’t…”

“You can, and you will. Listen to me.” He gripped Alec’s shoulders when the boy started to turn away from him. “This is merely a shadow of your past, Alexander. You’ve already beaten it once, and you were just a child back then.

“Think of how much you’ve already conquered these past ten hours. You’re so close to the finish line, and I refuse to let you quit on yourself now.”

Alec shook his head. “You don’t understand. You don’t know what she did, how it made me feel. She…”

“Made you enjoy it?” Magnus asked sympathetically. Alec froze, staring at him in wonder.

“How did you…?”

“I’ve lived for centuries, Alexander. Not all of them were pleasant. Even warlocks have their crosses to bear.”

“By the Angel, Magnus…”

The warlock held up a hand, silencing him.

“That’s all in the past, dear one. Long past for me. My point is, you can’t help how your body reacts to stimulus. When you get stabbed, you feel pain. It’s natural. And the pain Camille put you through is no different.”

Alec began pacing back and forth, his footsteps completely silent in the empty vacuum around them.

“You have to know, I-I never wanted…”
“Of course you didn’t. Alexander…” Magnus tried to reach for his hand but Alec pulled back and continued his pacing.

“I tried to get away. Tried to make her stop. But there was nothing I could do!”

“I understand. Truly, I do. You don’t need to explain yourself to me.”

Alec stopped dead in his tracks and looked straight into Magnus’s eyes. “Then how can you ask me to go back?”

“Because I’m selfish,” Magnus responded bluntly. “Because I’m not ready to let you go.”

“But if it were you… If you had to go back and face your past again, what would you do?”

Magnus smiled sadly at him.

“I would run as far in the opposite direction as possible. But you’re not me, Alexander. You’re so much stronger than I ever was. You’ve never run from a fight in your entire life, and I have all the faith in the world that you can make it through this one.”

Alec shook his head again, but Magnus could tell his resolve was starting to crack.

“This isn’t fair,” Alec muttered miserably.

“No. It’s not,” the warlock agreed. “But I can stay with you the entire time if you’d like, as long as my magic allows. And your brother has most likely worn a hole in your floor by now, anticipating your safe return. It’s probably best not to keep him waiting for much longer.”

Alec roughly wiped away the tears on his face, buying himself another minute to think before glancing back up at the warlock.

“And you’ll stay with me?”

“The entire time,” Magnus confirmed. He stepped forward and placed a hand on Alec’s chest. “You can do this, Alexander. Don’t let Imogen win now.”

This time, Alec gave a slight nod and Magnus beamed at him.

The warlock gave him one more passionate kiss on the lips, and when Alec opened his bleary eyes again, he was back in Camille’s bedroom, strapped to the bed with the vampire’s head bobbing enthusiastically between his spread legs.

Magnus was nowhere to be found.

Alec was overwhelmed by the sudden tension rising in his gut. He threw his head back and screamed in anguish as his innocence was once again ripped away from him.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry… Please don’t hate me! Haha I’d love to hear your thoughts if you’ve got the time to send a review!
Ten minutes. That’s all it had taken.

Jace had only left the room for ten short minutes to track Clary down, get her to open a portal where no one else would see or interfere, and bring Catarina through it.

He had been standing guard outside the otherwise empty office belonging to the Head of the Institute when a sharp, fiery pain emanated from his Parabatai rune and nearly dropped him to his knees.

*Alec…*

Only the fear of losing his brother kept him on his feet as he stumbled his way back down the hall and burst into Alec’s bedroom.

Just ten simple minutes, and all Hell had broken loose in his absence.

Jace’s eyes widened in horror at the sight before him.

Alec was thrashing on the bed. His head was thrown back as he struggled to draw in each rasping breath, and his fluttering eyelids occasionally revealed the whites of his rolled-back eyes before twitching closed again.

Blood was leaking steadily out of the bite marks that had appeared in his left wrist and around his right collarbone, not to mention the jagged slice down the center of his sternum and the blood matted to the back of Alec’s head from the blow that had knocked him out earlier.

As Jace stared, another pulse of magic flowed from Magnus’s hand into Alec’s chest, prompting a high-pitched keening sound to emanate from the Shadowhunter’s slightly parted lips as his body jerked again in protest.

The pain in Jace’s side also flared, shaking him out of his shocked state.

“Gah! Alec!”

He dashed forward and supported his brother’s strained neck with one hand. With the other, he tried to separate Alec from Magnus but the magic was so powerful, it felt like they were magnetized together.

“Magnus!” he shouted, trying to wake the warlock up. “Magnus, let him go!”

Unfortunately, the High Warlock was too deep in Alec’s mind to hear the blond’s desperate pleas. If Jace was going to save his brother, he’d have to do it on his own.
Seeing no other option, Jace resorted to brute force.

With a significant effort and a determined bellow, he finally managed to pry Magnus’s hand away from Alec’s chest, forcibly breaking their connection.

There was a blinding flash of light that surged through the room, and for a moment, everything seemed frozen in time. Then Alec’s body went completely rigid.

His back arched off the table at an inhuman angle as he let out a blood-curdling scream before collapsing back onto the bed and falling eerily still, blood now dripping from his nose and ears too.

The sharp pain the brothers shared through their Parabatai bond died instantly, though Alec’s scream continued to echo in Jace’s ears for what seemed like an eternity.

The blond shivered as he slowly reached out for his brother.

He felt cold inside.Disconnected and hollow. It was almost as if…

No… Please, no…

“Alec?” he croaked out through a steadily tightening throat, the possibility that he was too late threatening to completely unhinge him.

He held his breath as he pressed two shaking fingers against Alec’s warm neck, then let out a quiet sob of relief when he found his brother’s pulse. It was weak and erratic, but present.

Alec was still alive, if only just.

That had been a close one. A little too close for Jace’s comfort.

“By the Angel, Alec… Don’t scare me like that!” he hissed, resting his forehead against his Parabatai’s as he allowed his pounding heart a minute to calm itself back down. “You keep fighting, you hear me? It’s all up to you now, brother.”

“Alexander!”

Magnus suddenly jerked awake on the other side of the bed, looking around wildly in confusion. When he realized he was back in Alec’s room, he slammed a fist against the mattress in frustration.

“Damn it! I had him! I was this close to convincing him to go back…”

He took in Jace’s flustered state and Alec’s deathly still and bloodied form before looking to the blond for answers.

“What happened?” he demanded.

“You took too damned long, that’s what,” the boy snapped, hiding his vulnerability and fear behind a barricade of anger.

Jace was mad at himself for leaving Alec unattended. He was pissed at the warlock for taking things too far with his magic. And he was downright furious with the world for always dealing them a bad hand.

Alec sure as hell didn’t deserve any of it.

“I found him as quickly as I could,” Magus responded quietly, frowning at the young
Shadowhunter’s less-than-welcoming demeanor. “Is he alright?”

“Does he look alright to you?!”

Jace grabbed some tissues from the bedside table, then began dabbing at the blood along Alec’s upper lip, trying hard to ignore Magnus’s presence before he did something that he’d regret.

Unaware of the underlying danger, Magnus moved closer, trying to assess Alec’s condition for himself. He reached out to take the boy’s hand, but Jace latched onto the warlock’s wrist with a bone-crushing strength.

“Don’t touch him,” he growled. “If I were you, I’d get scarce for a while.”

Magnus shifted back warily, more afraid of the implications than of Jace’s empty threat.

Was Alec’s condition deteriorating because of him? Did his magic give out before he could convince Alec to keep fighting? Or had Alec pushed him out like he did with Jace because he couldn’t bear the thought of Magnus witnessing his past?

Regardless of the reason, Magnus felt like he had failed the boy.

An uncomfortable silence blanketed the room as Jace continued cleaning his brother up and assessed his latest injuries.

The eldest Lightwood didn’t so much as twitch under his ministrations.

SHSHSHSHSH

Alec had never felt more drained in his entire life as he slowly dragged himself back to consciousness.

His entire body was throbbing to the beat of his heart, and for just one blissful moment, he had forgotten where he was, what had happened, and who was in the room with him.

Then cold, dead hands grazed upward along his thighs and his heart sank into his stomach.

He lifted his aching head just far enough to see Camille slithering up his tethered frame from between his relatively numb legs.

“Welcome back,” the vampire snickered, clearly gloating at her own skills as she dabbed at the corners of her mouth with a fingertip. “Thought I lost you for a minute there.”

Ice flooded through Alec’s veins as his predicament came rushing back to him in technicolor detail. He tugged feebly against the restraint on his right wrist, but the limb barely responded.

In fact, practically every inch of his body felt heavy and numb. Alec was as weak and helpless as an infant, a sensation he certainly hadn’t been accustomed to in a long time.

“Wha… Wha’d you do ta me?” he croaked out, his throat sandpaper dry as his strained neck muscles gave out and dropped his head back into the pillow.

“Nothing you didn’t thoroughly enjoy, as evidenced by my newly stained sheets.”

Camille smirked at him as she settled her weight back down on the boy’s hips and Alec felt his face heat up as he realized what she had made him do.
The vampire bit at her slightly swollen bottom lip and rocked back teasingly. Alec hissed, still feeling incredibly sensitive. His left hand grasped weakly at her thigh, desperately trying to still her movements.

“Don’t,” he practically begged, then hated himself for sounding so pathetic.

She laughed haughtily at him.

“Poor dear... Guess I’ll have to give you a bit of a break before you return the favor, huh? Apparently, even teenaged angels have a refractory period. Disappointing, but don’t you worry, handsome. We’ve got all the time in the world.”

Camille leaned down over him, running a hand through his messy hair as she began pressing a line of gentle kisses along the side of his face.

She tilted his head to the left and sucked his earlobe into her mouth, biting down softly with her teeth. Not enough to break the skin, but enough to make the boy tense and shift uncomfortably again.

“Please...” he rasped, then coughed feebly as his torn vocal cords protested.

He didn’t remember screaming, but there was no doubt in his mind that he must’ve done so at some point. He swallowed painfully, then tried again.

“Jus’ lemme go.”

Camille pulled back to gaze into his half-lidded eyes for a moment as she stroked his hair again, affectionately.

“Shh... Save your strength, darling. You’re gonna need it. Speaking of...”

The vampire placed a delicate kiss on the corner of his chapped and bloodied lips, then glided a cold finger across them, tugging his bottom lip down far enough to make his mouth part slightly.

Alec’s eyes fluttered shut in exhaustion, no longer caring what else Camille might have in store for him. In hindsight, that was most likely due to the concussion.

“You must be thirsty, baby. Allow me.”

There was a soft squelching sound that turned Alec’s stomach, then a thick, warm liquid began to trickle past his parted lips. He recognized that coppery tang instantly and his eyes flew open as he tried to twist his head away.

Camille held his jaw in place and kept it open by exerting pressure against his cheeks as her bleeding wrist hovered over his mouth. “Just a little taste, Angel. It’ll help, I promise.”

Alec tried to spit the blood out but it was no use. He began to choke on the thick fluid as it coated his tongue and dripped down the back of his throat.

His body convulsed as he was forced to swallow and the foreign substance invaded his system.

“That’s my boy...” Camille cooed. “Nothing like a little vamp blood to keep your stamina up.”

SHSHSHSHSH

Jace tore a strip of fabric from Alec’s sheet and wrapped it tightly around his brother’s bleeding
wrist, attempting to staunch the sluggish flow.

Magnus watched in silence for a moment before he couldn’t contain his questions any longer.

“Talk to me, Jace. Did Alec push me away too? Or did my magic give out?” He looked down at his hands as if they had betrayed him. “If it’s the former, I can try again before it’s too late.”

“Alec didn’t break the connection. I did. But judging by the resistance, he was refusing to let you go.”

“You broke the connection?” the warlock accused, starting to feel his own anger rising.

“Damn right, I did.”

“Do you have any idea how much damage that could’ve done to him?! Magic isn’t just a string you can cut! You, of all people, should understand what it feels like to have a bond broken!”

“I didn’t have a choice!” Jace yelled back. “You were killing him!”

Magnus blinked at the blond, stupefied. “What?”

“You heard me. I left to get Catarina like you asked, then my Parabatai rune practically ignited. When I got back to the room, Alec was flailing in pain and it looked like his spine was going to snap in half. If I had been just one minute later…”

“I… I had no idea. I couldn’t sense any of that while I was in his mind.”

“I figured as much.” Jace sighed as he ran an agitated hand through his hair. “We never should’ve used magic on him in the first place. We knew it was dangerous, and it clearly did more harm than good. What the hell were you doing to him in there, anyway?”

“I was trying to convince him that he needed to face Camille. That it was his only way to make it past this level of the Agony rune.”

Jace grimaced. “I’m guessing he didn’t take it well?”

“He wasn’t particularly happy about it, no. But I promised I’d stay with him if he chose to keep fighting. I thought we had an agreement, then the next thing I knew, I was waking up on the bed.”

“So did he go back to Camille or not?”

Magnus shook his head sadly. “I don’t know, but I could hardly blame him if he didn’t.”

Jace rested a hand on Alec’s chest, his jaw flexing at the results. “His heartrate is getting weaker by the minute.”

Magnus looked absolutely crushed by the news.

“Then he’s giving up,” the warlock stated softly. “I know how this sounds, but I have to get back to him, Jace. Only for a moment. He needs to know I didn’t just abandon him.”

“Don’t even think about it,” Jace growled ferally. “You stay the hell away from Alec.”

“Jace, please… I can convince him to keep fighting. Just give me another chance!”

“I think you’ve done enough damage already, don’t you?”
Alec suddenly began to twitch and make aborted choking sounds, drawing the attention of the other two males.

“Shit,” Jace muttered, immediately snapping into action. He rolled Alec onto his side and held him steady the best he could as the older boy seized.

Magnus leapt off the bed to give them more room, but hovered over Jace’s shoulder in case he needed help.

Bright red blood began to leak from the corner of Alec’s mouth. Too bright to be human, or angelic. Jace frowned in confusion.

“What the hell?”

Magnus leaned closer and his eyes flashed with anger as soon as he recognized the foreign substance.

“Vampire blood.”

Alec continued to cough and seize long after Camille drew her freshly healed wrist away. He whimpered as her demon blood scorched every angelic cell it touched in his body, making him feel as though he were burning up from the inside out.

“You should’ve just let me Encanto you earlier,” Camille stated wistfully as she studied her nails, waiting him out. “The whole process would’ve been a lot less painful for you.”

Alec jerked uncontrollably a few more times, then finally settled down with a miserable groan as the burning abated, leaving him with the same numb, floating sensation from before, but exponentially worse.

His head was spinning and he felt drunk. Or at least, he assumed that was what being drunk felt like as the experience itself still eluded him.

Camille’s long fingers skated back and forth contemplatively over Alec’s heaving chest before inching up and wrapping loosely around his throat.

“How easy it would be to make you one of my night children right here and now…”

She stared down into his blown pupils, wondering what it would be like to watch the light leave them, only to bring him back later as her fledgling.

“Just think, pet… All it would take is a little squeeze, and you really could be mine forever.”

The pressure steadily increased until Alec could no longer breathe.

The remaining air ghosted its way out of Alec’s lungs as the boy collapsed into his brother’s supporting arms, Camille’s blood still trickling slowly from the side of his mouth.

Jace’s left hand, the one that wasn’t cradling Alec’s head, settled over his brother’s heart again, needing all the confirmation he could get that Alec was still in there. Still fighting for every breath.
Except, Alec wasn’t breathing.

Jace’s heart began to race.

“No… Alec, come on, buddy. Don’t do this.”

Jace jostled his brother’s limp shoulder, his gaze locked intently on the older boy’s chest, but Alec’s broken and bound ribs refused to expand.

“Come on, Alec! Breathe! Please!”

Alec’s body flopped around bonelessly at the manhandling, but there was no change in his condition.

“Jace, give him to me. I can help,” Magnus stated calmly, yet urgently.

“No way. Not happening.”

“Listen to me! I know it’s risky to continue using magic with the Agony rune still in place, but I can go in and get his lungs functioning again, then get out relatively quickly. It’s a simple spell. Just stand back for a second…”

Magnus manifested a ball of light within his hands and circled around to the other side of the bed where he had better access to Alec’s chest.

“Try it and it’ll be the last thing you ever do,” Jace snarled, keeping his arm wrapped protectively across Alec’s torso as a shield.

“Damn it, Jace! He’s running out of time!”

“He survived it back then, and he can survive it again now. We just have to give him a chance!”

“This situation is different and you know it! He needs all the help he can get!”

“Not from you, he doesn’t!”

Once Magnus saw that Alec’s lips were turning blue, he made a desperate move forward and found himself frozen in place with a seraph blade at his throat.

“I told you to stay back. I won’t warn you again.”

Before Magnus could argue his case, Catarina entered the room, having followed her oldest friend’s raised voice from down the hall. She stopped abruptly when she caught sight of the standoff between the warlock and the Shadowhunter.

“Magnus? What’s going on?”

“Catarina!” Magnus cautiously stepped back from the blade and met her in the doorway, waving her in. “Impeccable timing as always. Alexander needs your help.”

Catarina moved further into the room, giving Jace a wide birth as she assessed the situation. As soon as she caught sight of Alec’s broken and bloodied body curled up on the bed, she raised a hand to her mouth in horror.

“By the Angel… What on earth happened to the poor boy?”
Magnus quickly closed the door, then came up beside her, looking solemn.

“In short? He’s ten hours into a twelve hour Agony rune, and he’s running out of will to fight.” He turned back to the blond. “Jace, his best chance of survival is if you allow Catarina to help.”

Jace had put the seraph blade down in favor of unfastening the belt from around Alec’s broken ribs to check the damage done during the boy’s previous flailing, but he hadn’t lowered his guard in the slightest.

“No more magic,” Jace grunted, tossing the belt aside. “If I see a single spark from either of you…”

Catarina moved carefully to the edge of the bed, stopping just out of the boy’s reach, her hands raised placatingly. “I’m not here as a warlock, Jace. I’m here as a nurse. I just want to help him. No magic, I swear.”

When Jace finally looked up at her, she didn’t see a fierce warrior. She saw a lost boy with tears of frustration streaking down his cheeks, desperate for someone to tell him how to fix things.

*That*, she could do.

He was hardly the first over-protective family member she had come across over the years. She would maintain a safe distance and give Jace instructions, allowing him to stay in control until he felt comfortable enough to trust his brother’s care to her.

“Does he still have a pulse?” she asked kindly.

Jace swallowed against the lump of anxiety in his throat, then nodded. Alec’s heart was pounding now, fit to burst, beneath his palm. His brother had clearly entered a state of panic.

“Good. How long ago did he stop breathing?”

“I-I dunno… Two minutes maybe?”

She noted the blood coating Alec’s lips and chin.

“Did he bite his tongue?”

“That’s not his blood,” Magnus stated softly, sharing a meaningful look with Catarina who nodded solemnly, the overly bright red color suddenly making sense to her.

She had seen it before at bleeder dens, and on the rare occasions when fledglings managed to escape their demise and sought help at her hospital.

She turned back to Jace.

“All right, honey. This is what we’re gonna do. I need you to lay him down flat and tilt his head back.”

Jace’s grip tightened protectively around his brother. “Why?”

“Because if he can’t breathe on his own, then you need to do it for him.”

SHSHSHSHSH

*The pulse in Alec’s neck pounded furiously against Camille’s clenched fingers as his lethargic*
brain began to panic.

His left hand instinctively rose to claw at her wrist, but he didn’t have the strength to push her away.

She interlaced the fingers of her right hand with his left and pinned it back down to the mattress near his head.

“Shh… Don’t struggle, baby. Just relax and give in to it…”

Alec writhed beneath her, trying to force his weakened body to fight back, but Camille simply tightened her grip around his throat.

The boy’s eyes flared wider for a moment as if he were looking Death straight in the face as every muscle in his body coiled in protest.

The vampire began grinding her hips back against Alec's again, and this time, she was starting to get a reaction out of him.

She smirked as she gave his clenched left hand a gentle squeeze of approval, her fangs descending in delight. “Feels like someone’s ready for round two… Didn’t take you very long after all, now did it?”

Alec’s eyelashes fluttered as his eyes began to roll back in his head again, having been deprived of oxygen for too long.

SHSHSHSHSH

Under Catarina’s watchful eye, Jace carefully laid his brother down flat on the bed, then tilted the older boy’s head back to open his airway.

After looking in his mouth to make sure there was nothing obstructing his throat, Jace pinched Alec’s nose shut, and sealed his lips over his Parabatai’s, then delivered one rescue breath as instructed.

He sat up and stared intently at Alec’s partially inflated torso.

“Excellent,” Catarina encouraged. “His chest is expanding like it should, which means there’s no physical reason for him to have stopped breathing. The obstruction is only in his mind.”

Thanks to gravity, the air Jace shared was slowly compressed back out of Alec’s lungs without having to apply any pressure to his broken ribs. But then his chest remained still once more.

Jace looked up at Catarina in alarm.

"He's still not breathing on his own."

“It’s alright, Jace,” she placated. “I didn’t expect it to work on the first go. I need you to keep giving him one breath every five seconds, okay? Let’s see if we can jump-start his respiratory system the Mundane way.”

While Jace was focused on his task, Catarina had Magnus fill her in on the extensive injuries Alec had accumulated throughout the day.

As he neared the end of the lengthy list, she reached out and subtly took hold of Alec’s wrist, monitoring his pulse. It was far from the pace it should’ve been at, but at least it was still there.
As long as his heart continued to beat on its own, she wouldn’t risk attempting compressions. He’d be better off on a ventilator, pumping pure oxygen into his struggling lungs, but they’d have to make do with what they had.

In his current condition, he would never survive a portal to a hospital.

Catarina checked her watch. Approximately three and a half minutes and counting since Alec had stopped breathing.

It wasn’t looking good for the young Nephilim, but Jace refused to give up. He was starting to feel a little lightheaded as he delivered yet another breath for his brother.

He counted to five and prepared to go again when the greatest sound in the world graced his ears.

Alec gasped in a breath on his own.

SHSHSHSHSH

A loud rapping on the door brought Camille’s fun to an abrupt halt. She sighed heavily in disappointment and released Alec’s throat as she climbed off of him.

He immediately sucked in a wheezing breath of air and curled in on himself the best he could as a coughing fit wracked his strained body.

“This better be important!” she yelled as she went to unlock the door. “What do you want, Raphael?” she demanded impatiently as she caught sight of their visitor.

There was a muffled conversation on the far side of the room, but Alec was too preoccupied with staying alive to eavesdrop.

He was so hopeful that Camille was being called away for something that he nearly whimpered in defeat when she returned to run an icy hand up and down his trembling back.

“Good news, my pet. As it turns out, our friend, John, has agreed to spare your life, so long as he gets to play with you for the rest of the night. He’s more your type anyway, right? I’m sure you’ll get along fabulously.”

Alec couldn’t stop the terrified tears from falling down his cheeks as he shook his head in denial, his throat too tight for speech.

“There, there… Don’t fret now. It’s best to just get it over with and make nice with the guy. Let bygones be bygones. And when he’s done with you, we can pick up where we left off. Fair enough?”

She kissed him gently on the temple, then stood up without waiting for a reply and headed back towards the door.

“Raphael will help clean you up a bit before John arrives.” She brushed past the other vampire on her way out. “He’s all yours, darling. Be gentle with him.”

And with that ominous remark, she was gone.

TBC
Any Raphael fans out there? Please review if you're still enjoying this story! More to come soon :)
Jace straightened up in surprise, barely daring to believe it as the older boy shuddered through his exhale. He held his own bated breath until he saw Alec draw in another hard-earned gasp, then another.

“Yes! That’s it!”

Jace nearly whooped in euphoria as he gathered Alec’s spasming torso into his arms, cradling the boy’s head in the crook of his right elbow as his brother’s respirations slowly fell into a steady rhythm of desperate wheezes and pained coughs.

“I’ve got you, buddy. I’ve got you. Nice and easy now…”

Catarina sank into the chair by the bed and blew out a slow breath of relief.

Magnus bowed his head and gripped Catarina’s shoulders tightly as his knees threatened to give out from underneath him.

Alexander is alive. Wherever he is, he hasn’t given up yet.

Catarina reached up and squeezed his hand in comfort, a warm smile on her face as she looked up at him.

“I’d say that’s definitely a good start,” she sighed, resting her head on Magnus’s stomach as she relaxed backward into his embrace for a moment.

It may have only been a small victory considering Alec’s current state, but it was a victory nonetheless.

Jace had taken to gently rocking the older boy, silent tears streaming down his cheeks as the gravity of the situation finally caught up with him.

He couldn’t remember ever feeling this overwhelmed in his entire life, and didn’t know how much more his own heart could take, let alone his brother’s.

Valentine’s lesson of old invaded his thoughts and set his teeth on edge.

“To love is to destroy, and to be loved is to be destroyed.”

He curled Alec a bit tighter into his embrace, wary of his injuries but needing the physical contact just as badly as the older boy had needed air.

Alec’s head rolled limply towards Jace’s chest at the manhandling, and that’s when Magnus saw it.

“Jace, look…” he commanded in a soft tone, pointing to Alec’s newly exposed throat.

The blond glanced down and eased Alec far enough away to get a good look at him. He frowned, tilting his brother’s chin up and to the side to get better lighting.
He ran his fingers gently over the mottled skin outlining his trachea.

“Is that… bruising?”

“Finger marks,” Magnus confirmed, tears of pride and happiness gliding down his face as an affectionate smile curled the corners of his lips. “And they’re fresh.”

Oh, my beautiful and brave Alexander…

“It’s gotta be from Camille then, right? That crazy bitch was strangling him!” Jace looked up with fury in his eyes, then froze, staring at Magnus as if he had lost his mind. “Why the hell are you smiling?!”

“Don’t you see? This is the proof we needed!”

The warlock moved around Catarina and sat on the edge of the bed to be level with Jace.

The blond tensed as Magnus closed the gap between himself and Alec but he didn’t protest or raise the seraph blade again. Baby steps.

“Proof of what?” Jace demanded.

“I had my suspicions when he started coughing up vampire blood, but that could’ve been in his system for a while and simply regurgitated recently due to the seizing. It wasn’t concrete evidence. But those marks… They definitely weren’t there before.”

“Which means…?” Jace waved him on impatiently.

“Which means Alexander hasn’t given up. He did go back to face Camille.”

“Yeah, great. And because of that, Camille nearly turned him into a blood-sucking vamp!”

“Nonsense,” Magnus dismissed with a careless wave of his hand. “Don’t you think we would’ve noticed over the past few years if he had grown fangs and an affinity for blood? Clearly, whatever her plan for him was back then, it did not succeed.”

Jace’s gaze fell to the garishly bright blood currently staining Alec’s cheek and lips, his eyes slowly widening as a terrifying thought dawned on him.

“Magnus… Thanks to the Agony rune, he’s just ingested Camille’s blood again. If he dies today, even for a second, will that mean…?”

The moment of elation quickly turned to dismay as the same thought occurred to the warlock. He rose to his feet.

“I’m not sure, but I certainly don’t want to find out the hard way. Catarina, under no circumstances can Alexander’s heart be allowed to falter. Please, do whatever you can to keep him alive, but do your best to avoid using magic. I won’t be gone long.”

He strode to the door as quickly as his feet would carry him.

“Of course, Magnus, but where are you going?”

“The situation has clearly escalated. Perhaps Imogen will be more open to ending Alec’s punishment early to preserve his Shadowhunter status. I must speak with her at once.”
And this time, he had no intentions of allowing her to refuse.

SHSHSHSHSH

Alec stared blankly up at the ceiling, oblivious to the tears that continued to fall down his temples and disappear into his raven hair.

With the yin fen coursing through his system, the amount of blood loss he had experienced, and the events he had recently endured, Alec was well on his way to a state of shock when a decidedly male hand curled around his tethered left ankle and sent him into a state of panic instead.

“No!”

Alec instinctively tried to jerk away but the grip intensified, not aiming to cause him injury but clearly willing to wait him out.

“Calmate,” a soft voice instructed in Spanish. “I’m not going to hurt you, unless you leave me no choice.”

Alec stilled, breathing heavily as adrenaline coursed through his veins again like wildfire. Every muscle in his body remained tightly coiled, ready to defend what remained of his honor with his dying breath if necessary.

But after a brief moment of jostling, the hand left him, having done no harm as promised.

Uncomfortably aware that he was still on full display, Alec longed to raise his knee a bit to create a barrier and was surprised to find that he suddenly could.

The vampire had released the restraint.

Alec managed to lift his head high enough to warily watch as Raphael moved to the other side of the bed and began working on setting his right ankle free.

This time, Alec didn’t fight him, hopeful that he may have found an unexpected ally.

That is, until the guy took hold of his freed pantlegs and proceeded to divest him of his soiled jeans with a well-timed yank.

“No no nonono…” Alec whimpered, instantly curling in on himself and reaching for his right wrist, his shaking fingers scrabbling desperately against the final restraint that was keeping him confined to the bed.

He cried out in frustration when his nearly useless left hand was forcibly tugged away before he could release the binding on the cuff.

“Calm yourself,” the vampire repeated with infinite patience, this time in English. “As Camille said, I’m only here to help get you cleaned up. I get that you’re scared, but fighting me is a pointless waste of energy.”

Alec wasn’t particularly in a listening mood though.

Instead, he attempted to yank his arm free of Raphael’s grip and kicked a foot out simultaneously, hitting the vampire square in the stomach and managing to shove the older man back about a yard before Raphael regained his balance.

“Get the hell away from me!” Alec shouted furiously as he attempted to roll off the bed and get his
feet on the floor.

Raphael surged forward again with vampire speed, recapturing Alec’s left wrist while the other hand immediately clamped down over Alec’s mouth, pinning him back to the pillows with enough force that it gave him whiplash.

“Cállate!” the vampire hissed, resting a heavy knee against Alec’s stomach to limit his thrashing. “Keep it down or Camille will come back, and believe me, you don’t want that.”

Alec froze at the threat, then after a slight hesitation, he nodded once, if only to appease the vampire so he would get off of him.

Raphael’s hand eased back from the boy’s lips but it lingered nearby, a constant threat in case the Shadowhunter decided to start yelling again.

Alec wisely chose to remain silent.

“That’s more like it. Now hold still,” Raphael instructed.

He maintained eye contact with Alec as his free hand reached blindly for the boy’s lowered boxers. Alec jolted as if he’d been burned at Raphael’s initial touch against his thigh.

“Please, don’t…” the Shadowhunter begged softly, his hips shifting away in protest.

“Relax, hermano. I want nothing from you.”

Alec was stunned once he realized that the man wasn’t removing his boxers, but tugging them back up onto his hips instead, hiding his shame and giving him back a modicum of dignity.

As soon as he was done, Raphael slid off of the bed to give Alec a bit more space to calm his pounding heart. Then he reached for the final tether.

Only this time, instead of removing the cuff from around Alec’s wrist, the vampire was releasing the last restraint from the bedpost itself, keeping the boy on a leash of sorts.

It seemed he wasn’t going to take any chances that Alec might bolt for the door once freed.

“Let’s go. On your feet,” Raphael ordered.

He tugged at the restraint, but when Alec failed to move fast enough for his liking, he reached down and used the tatters of Alec’s sliced shirt to yank him off the bed.

The boy swayed immediately at the sudden change in altitude, his knees buckling as the room spun around him.

“Easy,” Raphael grunted as he took on most of Alec’s weight, drawing him in closer and pulling Alec’s left arm across his shoulders, using his own body as a prop to keep the Shadowhunter off the ground. “I’ve got you.”

“Where’re you… takin’ me?” Alec slurred, struggling to acclimate his throbbing head to the new vertical position in which he found himself.

“The bathroom, obviously,” Raphael responded shortly. “Camille really did a number on you, huh? She does have a tendency to drink too much… I’ll take a look at those bites while we get you cleaned up. You’re no good to any of us if you bleed out all over the floor.”
As soon as Magnus left the room to confront Imogen, Jace returned his attention to caring for his brother.

He reached for more tissues from the bedside table and pressed them gently to the bite mark on Alec’s collarbone, hoping to stem the sluggish bleeding a bit before bandaging the wound.

After that, he moved on to checking his brother’s broken ribs, gauging whether they needed to be wrapped again or not.

Alec let out a soft whine of pain at the prodding, but Jace shushed him and the older boy relaxed back into his deep sleep.

Catarina observed his ministrations closely, a small smile gracing her lips.

“I’m impressed. You actually seem to know what you’re doing.”

Jace shrugged noncommittally.

“I can handle basic injuries. Breaks, strains, cuts, bites… It’s all part of the training process for field work, in case you don’t have a stele on hand when someone on your team gets injured on a hunt.”

“Smart plan. Must be harder to distance yourself and stay focused when the one who’s hurt is your Parabatai.”

Jace pursed his lips, his fingers settling over Alec’s Parabatai rune.

“He’s not supposed to get hurt,” he stated softly, his throat closing up on him as he stared down at his unconscious brother. “It’s my job to keep him safe. My duty… No, my honor to watch his back in battle. But I have no idea how I’m supposed to fight against an invisible foe.”

“Unfortunately, I think this is one battle he has to face alone.”

“That’s now how this is supposed to work. ‘Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried. The Angel do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.’ He’s not supposed to go where I can’t follow. Where I can’t protect him, or at least die trying.”

“You’ve been watching out for him a long time, huh?”

“We watch out for each other. At least, I thought we did,” he muttered sadly, reaching up to run the thumb of his free hand along the edge of bruising on Alec’s throat.

Catarina leaned forward, resting her elbows on the edge of the bed. “You know none of this is your fault, right? Not what’s happening now, and not what happened to him back then either.”

“How could it not be? He’s my responsibility. My brother. And I didn’t even know he had been…”

Jace broke off, fighting back the threatening tears. He couldn’t even say the words out loud.

“I’m sure he had a good reason for not saying anything. Something that traumatizing… It’s nearly impossible to discuss with the ones you love.”

Jace nodded grimly.
“I get it, I do. But now he’s going through it all over again, and there’s still nothing I can do to protect him. What kind of Parabatai does that make me?”

“The best kind there is,” the warlock responded warmly, finally getting Jace to look up at her. “You’re both stuck in a helpless situation, but instead of walking away, you’re still here by his side.

“And even though he’s trapped in his mind, I’m certain Alec knows you’re here for him, and that’s why he’s still continuing to fight.”

Jace squeezed his brother’s shoulder gently and sniffed, then cleared his throat loudly.

“There’s gotta be something else I can do. I can’t just keep standing around here waiting to pick up the pieces when he wakes.”

“Maybe there is something… He’s lost a significant amount of blood, judging by his pallor and racing heartbeat. I think it’s safe to say he’s in the mid stages of hypovolemic shock. Do you know if your blood type is compatible to Alec’s?”

“I… I don’t, to be honest. It’s never come up before.”

Jace’s eyes suddenly widened as a thought occurred to him and he looked up at the warlock with unadulterated hope. “I have pure angel blood in me. Do you think that will help?”

Catarina put her hand gently over Jace’s- the one still resting over Alec’s Parabatai rune- feeling the heat radiating up from Alec’s abdomen without having to make direct contact with the older boy’s skin.

“It certainly couldn’t hurt to find out. Take a seat and I’ll run a quick blood test on you both before we get started.”

As Jace slid onto the bed next to Alec and rested his back against the headboard, he felt a sense of calm wash over him knowing that the hell he had suffered through as one of Valentine’s experiments might finally be put to good use.

Catarina summoned a test kit and a transfusion apparatus, then set about sorting through the supplies.

Jace didn’t even feel the lancet prick his finger, too focused on his Parabatai’s pale form. He had completely lost track of time, lulled into a hypnotized state as he watched Alec’s chest rise and fall in quick panting breaths beside him.

Struggling, but still alive…

Jace jumped when Catarina’s hand gently squeezed his bicep a while later. He had honestly forgotten she was even in the room.

“Your blood certainly has unique properties, Jace, but it doesn’t seem to be doing any harm to Alec’s sample. I don’t see any reason we can’t get started if you’re ready.”

Jace held out his arm confidently. “Do it.”

SHSHSHSHSH

The attached bathroom was only a few yards away, but it was slow-going as Raphael dragged Alec across the floor.
As they neared the small attached room, Alec tentatively shifted his weight, attempting to get his feet underneath himself as he planned to make a desperate break for his jacket which had been carelessly thrown in an armchair on the other side of the bedroom.

If he could just get to his stele…

Which is how he found himself shoved face-first into the closest wall, his restrained arm twisted painfully behind his back.

Raphael was pressed tightly against him, hissing angrily in his ear. “Don’t even think about it, hermano.”

“Please, don’t do this,” the boy whimpered out, shifting slightly as he tried to ease the strain on his screaming shoulder. “I can tell you’re not like the others. Just let me go, and I’ll…”

Raphael scoffed at him. “Let you go? And then what, huh? You’re gonna fight your way out of here? You can barely stand on your own right now.”

“I can make it,” Alec panted desperately. “Just give me a fighting chance.”

Raphael spared a knowing glance towards Alec’s jacket, spying the thin metallic stick jutting out of one of the inside pockets. He shook his head.

“No way. You’ll get caught in three seconds flat and it’ll be my head on the chopping block, right next to yours. But if you behave yourself, I’ll let you wash up on your own. Now move.”

He yanked Alec away from the wall and shoved him across the bathroom threshold. The boy stumbled as his bare feet met the cold tiles, then his body’s needs finally won out.

He barely made it in time as he collapsed to his knees in front of the toilet and vomited Camille’s blood into the bowl.

Raphael sighed heavily behind him. “Dios, give me strength…” he muttered as Alec finished emptying his stomach with a few dry heaves and a pained groan.

Once the boy was completely spent, the vampire flushed the toilet and dragged Alec backward to deposit him up against the side of the tub.

Half a second later, Raphael had fastened the other end of the wrist cuff to the sturdy foot of the old-fashioned cast iron steam radiator on Alec’s right.

The giant metallic beast was bolted to the floor. Alec wouldn’t be going anywhere anytime soon.

Satisfied that the kid was properly subdued, Raphael turned his back on him and grabbed a hand-towel off a shelf, then began soaking it in the nearby sink.

“Here.”

He wrung it out and tossed it at Alec, hitting him square in the chest before it landed in his lap with a juicy splat. The boy stared down at it numbly as it began soaking a wet spot into the only substantial layer of clothing he had left.

The vampire rolled his eyes in annoyance and walked back over to him. He picked up the cloth, ignoring Alec’s flinch as his cold fingers brushed against his boxers, squatted down, and swiped once at the blood and tears staining Alec’s right cheek.
Alec pulled back at first contact and Raphael let him. Then after a moment, the vampire reached forward again, slower this time, and Alec reluctantly stayed put.

As Raphael worked, he could feel the boy trembling beneath his touch. It tugged at his big brother instincts and he sighed again, this time at his own weakness. What remained of the kid’s clothing certainly wasn’t going to help preserve his body heat or fight off the shock at all.

“Lean forward a sec.”

He helped ease Alec away from the tub, then with a sharp yank, he tore the back of the ratty shirt in half to match the front, then allowed the two pieces to fall from Alec’s torso.

Alec blinked down at the half that was trapped against the cuff, looking scandalized by the vampire’s maneuver.

“Let’s face it, that shirt was a goner long before you even got here.”

Raphael grabbed a full-sized towel off the shelf and gently wrapped it around Alec’s shoulders before guiding him back against the tub.

“This’ll help for now. And I’ll find you something else to wear, after…”

‘After John’s done with you’ remained unspoken between them.

The boy shakily drew the edges of the soft cloth tightly closed over his chest with his free hand, hiding as much of his body from sight as possible while he continued to shiver.

The vampire returned to his task of washing the grime from Alec’s face, the silence between them stretching on uncomfortably.

The boy had become despondent again.

“So what’s a guy like you doing in a place like this?” the vampire asked casually, hoping some conversation might distract them both for a while as he lifted the boy’s chin and dabbed gently at the bruises blossoming on Alec’s neck.

The boy met his gaze for a brief moment, then went back to staring down at his lap, clearly not in the mood to answer.

“Come on, kid. Neither of us is happy with this situation. Least we can do is make a little small talk to pass the time, right? May I?”

He indicated the steadily bleeding bite mark on Alec’s collarbone, just barely visible under the edge of the skewed towel.

Alec shifted uncomfortably, then nodded silently.

Raphael gently tugged the cloth barrier aside just far enough to inspect the wound, grimacing at the rawness and depth of it.

Camille’s blood that Alec had unwillingly ingested would help the punctured skin heal quicker, but a little pressure would help the boy from losing more of his own necessary fluid as well.

“Can I at least get a name?” the vampire asked as he rinsed the cloth in the sink before dabbing at the rough edges of the bite. “I’m Raphael, by the way.”

“A-Alec,” the Shadowhunter responded, wincing when Raphael pressed the rapidly cooling cloth against the raw wound. “Alec Lightwood.”
Raphael swore in Spanish beneath his breath.

“Lightwood? Isn’t your family considered Shadowhunter royalty or something?”

Alec shrugged his left shoulder. “I guess…?”

“Well that’s just great. Camille’s definitely stepped in it this time. There’s no way our clan will go unpunished if they discover what she has done. This changes everything…”

Raphael moved to pull away but Alec released his death-grip on the towel in favor of catching Raphael’s wrist, stilling him.

“If you let me go right now, I’ll speak to the Clave on your behalf,” Alec stated, looking Raphael in the eyes to prove his sincerity.

The vampire dropped his gaze and shook his head.

“I’m sorry, hermano, but I can’t let you talk to the Clave,” he replied solemnly. “I admit that what Camille did here was abhorrent, and John is equally to blame for killing those Mundanes for sport. But the rest of my people are innocent.

“The Clave won’t care about that though. They’ll see Camille’s transgressions as an act of war against your kind, and that’ll be the end of the Accords. Everything we’ve worked for will have been for nothing.”

“So you’re just gonna let her get away with all this then?” Alec demanded, indignantly. “You know she’s going to kill me, right? Eventually. After she’s had her fun…

“And what about that poor girl downstairs? By the looks of her, she’d been Camille’s pet for weeks, and now she’s dead. But I guess her life wasn’t worth saving either, huh?”

“People die every day,” Raphael shot back as he jerked his wrist free of the boy’s grip, Alec’s accusations clearly getting underneath his skin. “There’s nothing I can do about it.”

“If that’s how you truly feel, then you’re no better than Camille.”

Raphael growled at him, his fangs peeking out from beneath his lips. “Don’t act like you know anything about me, or my clan, Shadowhunter. You think I haven’t tried to save her pets before?!?”

Alec blinked up at him, his nausea returning at the vampire’s implications.

“Pets, as in plural? That girl wasn’t Camille’s first victim, was she?”

Raphael grimaced at his mistake, choosing to focus on scrubbing the blood off of Alec’s chest rather than replying.

“How many?” Alec demanded. “How long has this been going on?”

“I don’t know, alright? I stopped keeping track months ago.”

Alec swallowed hard against the lump in his throat.

“You get that Camille is never going to change, right? And at some point, she’s going to get caught, and she’ll take all of you down with her. Unless someone stands up to her and puts an end to it.”
“And you think that insane person is going to be me?” Raphael laughed incredulously. “She’s much older and stronger than I am. I didn’t live to be my age by making foolish mistakes, hombre.”

He slapped the bloodied towel into Alec’s left hand, motioning towards the boy’s lap as he stood back up to his full height.

“Finish up. John will be coming for you soon.”

*Then he turned his back to give the boy some semblance of privacy.*

**SHSHSHSH**

This time when Magnus reached the Citadel, he was waylaid at the gate by the High Inquisitor’s personal guard. It seemed Imogen was no longer interested in what he had to say, but Magnus was short on time and done playing games.

A wave of his hand took care of the guards easily enough, and he strode through the halls and into her office, tossing aside anyone who dared to oppose him.

He blasted the double doors open and Imogen immediately stood from behind her desk at the intrusion.

“Mr. Bane, what is the meaning of this?!” she demanded, brandishing her stele.

As if it were any match for the pissed off High Warlock of Brooklyn…

“Alexander is dying,” he replied bluntly.

Imogen frowned at him, clearly not impressed. “Of course he isn’t. I altered the rune myself. It’s designed to act as a painful lesson, but certainly not a means to kill.”

“It’s Alexander’s *memories* that are killing him, and you’re the one forcing him to revisit them! Believe me, I know all too well the effects of the final quarter. The damage you’re doing will be irreversible.”

Imogen scoffed.

“Oh, please… I think you’re overreacting here. Mr. Lightwood was raised in the Institute by loving parents and dedicated trainers. There may have been a few hunts gone wrong in his past that will bring back unpleasant scars temporarily, but if anything worse than that had ever occurred, I’d be well aware of it.”

“You have no idea what he’s been through!” Magnus barked at her, sparks flying uncontrollably from his fingertips. “That boy has suffered enough. You will remove his mark now, or so help me…”

“Bring me to him,” the Inquisitor commanded. “I will decide if he has had enough. And if it turns out that you have broken into my office and attacked my guards without due provocation, then make no mistake, Magnus. You will pay for your insubordination.”

*TBC*
John will be arriving in the next chapter! Please review if you're excited to see where all this is going :) And thank you all for sticking with me this long! More to come soon.
This chapter mainly deals with attempted non-con, so please proceed with caution if that triggers you in any way!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“It’s time,” Raphael stated softly, turning back around to find that Alec had done nothing more than pull his knees into his chest. He was staring blankly ahead at the toilet, the facecloth clenched tightly in his fist where Raphael had placed it five minutes ago.

Apparently, the young Shadowhunter didn’t even want to touch himself after what Camille had done. Raphael certainly couldn’t blame the boy.

If she had ever degraded him the same way… He shuddered at the thought.

Raphael cleared his throat pointedly, breaking Alec out of his trance.

The Shadowhunter’s eyes flickered up to him questioningly, the pain and despair palpable in their depths.

“It would help, you know… To wash up. Not a lot, but it’d be a start.”

Alec shook his head numbly, then went back to staring into the distance.

The vampire sighed as he returned to Alec’s side and tugged the wet cloth out of his hand, then placed it on the edge of the sink.

“I’m sorry, hermano. For all of this. You’re just a child, and you don’t deserve it. Hell, no one does.”

Alec didn’t say a word.

He didn’t blink when Raphael released the restraint from the radiator, and he didn’t struggle when the vampire used it to cuff Alec’s wrists together in front of him.

He didn’t even balk when the towel fell from his shoulders as he was pulled to his feet, leaving him with nothing more than boxers for warmth and protection.

In fact, he didn’t react whatsoever.

For all intents and purposes, the boy had become nothing more than a drone, responding to verbal and physical cues from his captors on autopilot to avoid any further punishment.

As far as Raphael could tell, Alec was completely and utterly broken.

Just as Camille had wanted.

Unable to stand the haunted look in Alec’s eyes, Raphael glanced away and gently nudged the boy
to walk ahead of him.

“Go on.”

As Raphael began guiding the subdued Shadowhunter out of the bathroom and back towards the rumpled bed, the boy froze at the sight of it, awareness and recognition returning to him as his blank mask began to crack.

His knees suddenly gave out from under him. It was all Alec could muster in form of protest, the fight having literally been bled out of him earlier by Camille.

Raphael quickly stepped in front of him to prevent the traumatized boy from face-planting on the hardwood floor, allowing Alec to collapse shakily against his thighs instead.

Had the vampire’s heart been beating, it would’ve stuttered in his chest when Alec’s cuffed hands rose up to curl desperately around fistfuls of his dress pants, silently begging Raphael not to bring him any closer to that stained mattress.

He could feel Alec’s warm tears soaking into the fabric just above his knee.

“P-please,” the Shadowhunter whispered brokenly, craning his neck to look up at Raphael imploringly. “Not again. I jus’… I just wanna go home…”

Alec’s fear and innocence reminded the vampire of his own little sister, Rosa, when she would come running into his arms after a nightmare.

His hand instinctively carded through the boy’s hair in a semblance of comfort, wishing there was more he could do to protect him from what was about to happen.

Which is the scene John walked in on when he arrived seconds later.

The older vamp took in the sight of Alec, practically naked and on his knees, then smirked at Raphael. “Getting started without me, huh? Is he any good?”

Raphael quickly pulled Alec back up onto his feet by the chains around his chafed wrists, a pink hue brightening his upper cheeks at the implication. Who knew vampires could blush?

“He fell,” Raphael responded, indignantly.

John snorted.

“I’m sure he did. And right into your lap, conveniently enough! But your time’s up, Santiago. According to my agreement with Camille, the kid is mine, from now until sunrise. And man, the things I’m gonna do to him…”

The sadistic, toothy grin on the vampire’s face turned Raphael’s stomach. He subconsciously tightened his hold around the Shadowhunter’s thin waist, turning ever so slightly to put himself between John and the broken boy.

John noticed the guarded movement and the smile fell from his lips. He took a threatening step forward, his height and the broadness of his shoulders clearly superior to Raphael’s smaller frame.

“Are we gonna have a problem here?” he growled, his fangs descending.

Raphael gave John the once-over, taking a moment to size up his opponent.
It seemed as though he were actually considering taking the bigger man on, but it was clear to everyone present that if he did, he’d lose rather spectacularly.

He reluctantly backed down and dropped his gaze in submission. “No. No problem, John. The boy’s all yours, as promised.”

That sickening smile was back on John’s ruddy face as he clapped Raphael harshly on the shoulder. “Knew you were smarter than you looked, buddy.”

Without the slightest hesitation, John reached forward and yanked Alec away from Raphael, pushing him roughly towards the bed.

Alec’s left side hit the mattress so hard that he bounced twice, eliciting a grunt as his bony elbow dug painfully into his ribcage and knocked the wind from his lungs.

Before he could so much as reorient himself, John was towering over him.

“Rumor is you’re still technically a virgin,” the man sneered, leaning down and resting his hands on Alec’s upper thighs, pinning him in place as the boy tried to scramble away from him. “Is that true?”

Alec glared defiantly up at him in silence.

That is, until the vampire’s hands began moving north and a fresh wave of adrenaline flooded his system. He didn’t want anyone to touch him there ever again.

Alec tried to lever himself back up so he’d be in a better position to fend John off, but even his natural agility was no match for the vampire’s supernatural speed.

John moved so quickly that Alec didn’t even see the vicious backhand coming, but it left his head reeling and his cheek throbbing.

Before Alec could recover from the blow, John shoved him flat onto his back and then clambered fully onto the bed, hovering over the boy for a second before dropping his substantial weight onto Alec’s stomach to keep him in place.

Alec instinctively raised his bound hands to defend himself, swinging at any part of John he could reach, but his wrists were soon captured and pinned above his ringing head.

The boy growled furiously at his predicament as he tried to struggle free with zero success, much to John’s delight.

“Good thing you’re better with that bow than you are at hand-to-hand combat! I’ve eaten Mundanes who put up more of a fight than you. How you managed to get the drop on my brother is beyond me…”

“Why don’t you untie me and I’ll show you?” Alec challenged.

He knew that without his stele or a weapon, he’d have no chance at all of winning against the bigger man, but he’d rather die in combat than face the alternative.

John snorted derisively. “Nice try, kid, but I’ve got bigger plans for you.”

With one hand still keeping Alec’s arms pinned to the mattress, the man dropped the other hand to massage the front of his own pants pointedly, rocking his hips lewdly against Alec’s abs with a
satisfied groan.

“Hope you enjoyed your time with Camille, kid, cause I’m nowhere near as generous. I’ve got one goal tonight, and that’s to hear those pretty pink lips of yours scream.”

John reached forward and ran his thumb over Alec’s thinly pressed lips, attempting to gain access to his mouth.

Alec jerked his head away and spat directly into the vampire’s face.

For a moment, time stood still as the two males locked loathing gazes.

Then the vampire hit Alec again, this time with the hard knuckles of his clenched fist, gaining a muffled yelp from the boy as the pain echoed throughout his skull.

“That’s more like it!” John crowed, sending another punch to the exact same spot, earning a pained hiss from Alec as the vampire’s ornate ring opened a gash along the Shadowhunter’s upper cheekbone. “Sing for me, boy. Louder! Don’t hold back now…”

As hard as he tried to defy the man, Alec cried out inadvertently as John lunged over him and sank his fangs into the juncture between Alec’s neck and right shoulder, tearing at the soft flesh.

After a few seconds of agonizing pain, the boy felt the now familiar rush of yin fen seeping into his system, forcing his muscles to go lax and his vision to waver.

“N-no…”

He blinked heavily as the room swam around him, his heart pounding furiously in his chest as his brain and his body disconnected from each other, his limbs refusing to respond to the commands he was desperately trying to give them.

With every passing second, he felt the blood being leeched from his veins and the lethargy spreading throughout his system. He couldn’t fight back now, even if his life depended on it.

And more than likely, it did.

“That’s enough, John!” Raphael’s voice commanded angrily. “Camille won’t be pleased if the boy doesn’t survive till morning.”

When John finally sat back up, licking the viscous fluid from his lips, Alec was barely conscious. John looked up at the other vampire, giving him a bloodstained grin and a cheeky wink.

“Forgot you were here, Raph. Enjoying the show?”

Alec moaned in distress as he fought against the encroaching darkness. If he gave into it now, it would be all over for him.

John slapped at his bruised and bleeding cheek until Alec’s eyes stopped rolling in his head aimlessly.

“Hey. Don’t pass out on me yet, boy. We’re just gettin’ started.”

As soon as Alec’s gaze locked with his, John smirked and lifted his weight off the Shadowhunter long enough to flip him onto his stomach.

Alec panicked anew when he felt John’s interest pressing against his lower back as the man settled
down over him, kicking Alec’s legs further apart to make room for himself in between.

The boy did everything he could to try and defend himself, but there was no way for him to get the upper hand in his position, especially with the drug flooding his system and slowing down his reactions.

A sour taste filled his mouth when he realized he wasn’t going to get out of this. Unless…

“Raphael, please…” Alec whimpered so softly, he doubted the vampire even heard him from his location a few yards away.

But it was certainly loud enough to grab John’s attention as the man bent down and licked a long stripe up the side of Alec’s sluggishly bleeding neck, sending a shiver down Alec’s spine.

John snickered cruelly at the shaking boy as his strong hands ran possessively up and down Alec’s lithe body, digging his fingertips into each rune as he passed them.

“He’s not gonna help you, kid. But if it makes you feel any better, I could be persuaded to let him stay and watch. Bet you’ve never seen an angel break before, have you, Raph?”

John looked up at Raphael, his eyebrow raised in curiosity at the complex emotions warring for dominance in the other vampire’s eyes.

“I’d say Camille has already done a sufficient job of breaking him,” Raphael muttered back.

John studied Alec for a moment, watching as the boy curled his fingers into fists above his head, sluggishly trying to pull his elbows in and underneath himself for better leverage.

He smirked, impressed by Alec’s strength of character.

“Nah. He’s still got some fight left in him. Not for much longer though.”

He ran a splayed hand over Alec’s clothed backside, feeling the boy jerk away from the touch as much as possible in his contained position.

John groaned in approval.

“I’m telling you, Raph... Watching that golden glow of his fade to darkness? Prettiest sight you’ll ever see. So what do you say, amigo? Interested in sticking around for some live porn?”

John toyed with the waistband of Alec’s boxers, pulling it away a few inches, then releasing it so that it snapped back into place, making the boy flinch.

“Might even give you a shot with him after I’m done. Deal?”

Alec struggled to lift his head just high enough to make eye contact with Raphael, imploring him to do something. Anything.

Raphael blinked back at him for a moment in indecision, watching the tears of desperation roll down Alec’s cheeks. Then he vanished from the room, taking Alec’s final dregs of hope along with him.

John chuckled, patting the boy’s hip in a mock impression of sympathy.

“Guess he wasn’t all that interested in you after all, kid. But don’t worry. I’ll keep you plenty occupied. All. Night. Long.” He punctuated each word with a thrust of his hips against Alec’s.
“Shall we get started then, Angel?”

One meaty paw pressed Alec’s head back into the mattress while the other tugged the boy’s boxers down to his knees.

Alec flailed the best he could, and earned a harsh swat against his newly exposed flesh in return.

“How still, you worm.”

John pulled Alec’s hips up for a better angle, then chuckled as he caressed the reddened flesh of Alec’s backside, marked by his own large hand, before giving the smooth globe a rough squeeze.

“I stand corrected, kid. This, right here, is the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen…”

Alec wanted to fight for his freedom. To defend his own honor. To kill the vampire for daring to lay a hand on him.

But with the venom coursing through his already weakened system, he couldn’t even hold onto a coherent thought for longer than three seconds. Couldn’t get his arms underneath himself for leverage.

Couldn’t do more than whimper in protest as he heard a zipper being undone behind him.

Alec closed his eyes and braced himself the best he could for what was to come.

Then he jolted in surprise as warm fluid splattered all over his trembling back.

At first, he thought John was marking his territory in some sick fashion, but then the man’s bulk collapsed heavily on top of him and the smell of copper filled his nose.

John’s detached head landed on the bed next to Alec’s. They stared at each other in shock for a moment before John turned to ash and disintegrated right in front of Alec’s eyes.

As soon as the man’s bulky weight was no longer keeping him pinned in place, Alec managed to flop onto his left side just in time to see Raphael lowering the bloody blade that was clenched tightly in his hand.

After a brief hesitation, the vampire dropped the dripping blade onto the carpeted floor and reached for Alec’s clothing on the chair. He tossed the articles onto the bed within the boy’s reach, causing the Shadowhunter to flinch minutely when they landed next to him.

“Get dressed,” Raphael instructed softly, his attention now focused on the bedroom door, listening for sounds of approaching footsteps. “We don’t have much time.”

He frowned when Alec made no further attempts to move. Turning back to the boy, he took in Alec’s rapid breathing, the blue tinge to his lips and fingernails, and the sheen of sweat covering his entire body.

Alec was going into hypovolemic shock due to the excessive blood loss and trauma he had just endured.

Raphael swore beneath his breath and sat on the edge of the bed, directly in front of Alec’s fading line of sight. He reached for the boy’s carotid pulse only to draw back his hand as if burned, his fingers now coated in Alec’s blood.

Fighting the urge to lick the coppery fluid from his fingertips, Raphael wiped the blood on the
sheets and fumbled through the boy’s discarded clothing to retrieve the stele from his jacket pocket.

“Stay with me, kid,” he demanded, easing Alec flat onto his back and curling the boy’s limp fingers around the heavenly tool. “Come on. You’ve gotta make this thing work. I can’t do it for you. It’s this mark you need to heal, right?”

Raphael guided their combined hands down to Alec’s left side and helped him activate his iratze rune to begin the healing process.

Alec whined in discomfort as the rune flared to life and began attacking the demonic cells flowing through his bloodstream, then his heavy eyelids started to drift shut.

Raphael gripped Alec’s jaw tightly, giving the boy’s head a shake until Alec blinked back up at him dazedly.

“Alec, I need you to focus, alright? Look into my eyes.”

Alec understood that he was about to be encantoed by the vampire, and he didn’t fight it. He was beyond caring what happened to him at this point. He did as instructed and stared up into Raphael’s dark irises.

“None of this was real, do you understand me? It was all just a bad dream.”

Alec felt warm relief flood through his body as his mind was forced to believe Raphael’s words. He nodded slowly.

“‘s just a dream…” he mumbled back.

“Exactly. You’re going to wake up in your own bed, and put all of this behind you. You will not seek retribution against my clan. Rest assured that Camille’s punishment for her actions will come, in time.”

Alec nodded again halfheartedly, then promptly lost the fight with his eyelids as they fell closed and stayed that way.

Distantly, he could still hear the vampire’s anxious voice.

“Hey! Open your eyes, hermano. Come on, stay with me, Alec…”

SHSHSHSHSH

“Stay with me, Alec,” Jace whispered to his unconscious brother as he watched his own blood travel through the thin plastic tubing and into his Parabatai’s limp arm. “The twelve hours are almost over. You can’t give up now, you hear me?”

Jace fell silent as Catarina came back over to check the pulses in Alec’s neck and wrist.

“How are you feeling, Jace? Getting lightheaded at all?”

Jace shook his head but stopped quickly as the room spun a little around him. “Nah. I’m fine. Is he getting any better?”

“It’s hard to tell with something like this, but the good news is he doesn’t seem to be getting any worse.”
“I suppose that’s comforting…”

Catarina gently brushed Alec’s bangs away from his face, then let her palm linger on his forehead, gauging his temperature.

“His fever is still high, but at least he’s not as pale as he was before. His heart rate is returning to normal as well. That’s definitely an improvement. Alec’s a tough kid.”

“He certainly is.”

“We’ll give it a few more minutes, if you’re up for it. Then I’ll unhook you guys.”

“Whatever he needs.”

A portal suddenly opened in Alec’s room and Jace jumped to his feet, ever vigilant, though his head swam at the abrupt change in altitude. Perhaps he had given too much blood after all…

The sharp tug to his inner elbow reminded him that he was still connected to his brother via the plastic leash so his fighting technique would be drastically limited if it came down to it.

Imogen stepped through first, instantly raising Jace’s blood pressure, followed closely by Magnus who then closed the portal behind them.

The High Inquisitor took one look at the scene before her and her mouth fell open in horrified shock.

“By the Angel…”

She took a step towards Alec’s bed but Jace held out his left hand, forcing her to halt in her tracks. The blond looked past her to Magnus.

“Please tell me you didn’t make another stupid deal with the Devil…”

“Believe it or not, she’s here of her own accord.”

Magnus looked just as skeptical of his words as Jace did.

“Yeah… Let’s go with not on that one.”

Imogen reached out and took hold of Jace’s right wrist, turning it gently to expose the needle in his arm.

“What is this?” she demanded.

“The only thing that’s keeping my brother alive right now, thanks to you,” Jace shot back angrily.

She released Jace and stepped around him, unimpeded this time as the blond found that he actually wanted her to see the damage she had done to his Parabatai.

With a shaking hand, she reached out and lowered the sheet from around the unconscious boy’s shoulders down to his waist.

Alec’s angelic body was trying desperately to mend itself, but he had little to no strength left for such a daunting challenge.

The result was mottled bruising, half-healed broken bones, a few joints still visibly dislocated, and
angry red burn marks as well as scabbed over lacerations across every inch of his pale skin.

Imogen raised a shaking hand to her mouth as tears of grief filled her eyes.

“My rune was not designed to take things this far,” she stated softly. “This never should’ve happened.”

“Well, it did.” Jace growled in reply as Catarina carefully removed the needle from his arm and had him bend his elbow up around a cotton ball to stem the bleeding.

As Cat moved to do the same for Alec, she finally caught Imogen’s attention.

“And who are you? I don’t think we’ve ever had the pleasure…”

“Catarina Loss, Madame Inquisitor. I’m a nurse for the Mundanes, and I came to assist Alec at Magnus’s behest.”

“Another warlock then,” Imogen deduced. She looked at Magnus sharply. “Please tell me neither of you have used magic on him.”

“We did what we could to help Alexander through this,” Magnus replied coolly.

“You fools! That is why the rune has escalated so dangerously! I warned you, Jonathan, not to allow magic near him!”

“You didn’t leave us much choice!” Jace shouted back.

Imogen took a closer look at her grandson, noting his rumpled appearance, his bloodshot eyes, and the tightness of pain that was only evident in the stiff way he moved.

She glanced back down at Alec and her eyes widened even further once she noticed that his binding rune had been broken.

“What have you done, Jonathan?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Jace’s hand subconsciously rose to rub at his aching Parabatai rune.

“That part was accidental, believe it or not, but I certainly don’t regret it. Alec should’ve never had to suffer through this alone in the first place. I think we can agree he has more than paid the price for your little game. So can you fix this, or not?”

“I can try to remove the rune ahead of schedule, but now that it’s been tampered with, I honestly can’t say what the effects will be. You’ve all done significant damage to my fail-safes. He may not tolerate the removal process well.”

“Anything would be better than this,” Jace responded pointing to his unconscious brother. “Get that thing off him. Now.”

Imogen drew her stele from her inner pocket. “I need direct access to the mark. Turn him onto his side.”

Jace sat down on the edge of the bed and carefully curled his brother up into his arms, exposing the older boy’s back to the High Inquisitor.

She pressed the tip of her stele against the rune, then slowly drew the metallic stick away. Red sparks of fire shot between the two points and Alec jerked in Jace’s hold, emitting a choked-off
sound of pain from deep within his throat.

“Easy, buddy…” Jace cooed softly, cradling Alec’s head against his shoulder to keep him steady. “It’s almost over.”

The rune itself began to glow red like an angry burn. Alec’s twitching morphed into actual struggling, his trembling body breaking out in a cold sweat.

Jace tightened his grip around his Parabatai as he fought to keep him still.

“What the hell is taking so long?!” he demanded from the woman sitting across from him.

“I told you, the tampering has allowed the rune to break free of its fail-safes. It’s been ingraining itself into Alec’s body like a seeping infection. It has to be removed carefully, or it could take a piece of Alec with it.”

Jace ground his teeth together in frustration. “Just get it done,” he gritted out.

The Agony rune began to break up along Alec’s skin like a cracked eggshell.

Alec cried out and Jace was startled to find that his brother’s hand had fist ed around his shirt. He eased the older boy away from his shoulder just far enough to look down into his face. “Alec?”

The brunette blinked back up at him through a haze of pain and confusion.

“J-Jace…?” Alec stuttered before crying out again, his eyes clenching shut as he latched onto his Parabatai like a lifeline, curling back into his arms in hopes of escaping the pain.

The fiery red glow grew brighter for a moment, bathing Imogen’s skin in a deep red color that made her look all the more like a cartoon devil, then the flare dulled back down before disappearing entirely.

Alec slumped limply against Jace with a whimper, his breathing ragged and his entire body screaming at him in distress.

“Is it gone?” Jace demanded of Imogen, straining his neck to look over Alec’s shoulder to confirm things for himself. “Can we heal him now?”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that, I’m afraid. I’ve separated the rune from Alexander’s DNA so it’s contained once again, but it’ll take some time for the mark to fade completely. And until it does, I strongly advise against using any more magic or you could break the tentative barrier I’ve just created.”

Jace carefully lowered his brother into his lap, and sure enough, he could see the angry brand on Alec’s upper back. It was chipped in places and lined with fissures, but far from gone. He ran his fingertips over it lightly, eliciting a weak shudder and whine from his Parabatai.

The blond squeezed Alec’s shoulder gently by way of apology, then ran his palm soothingly up and down his brother’s arm.

“What about his iratze then? Can we use that?”

“That could grant him temporary relief, but as you’re well-aware, the more you activate it, the less powerful it becomes, so use it sparingly. I’d estimate he has another half hour or so left before he’s completely free of the mark. Till then, just try to keep him calm.”
Imogen stood and made her way towards the door.

“I will make sure Maryse and Isabelle are recalled from the field. The more family Alexander has around him right now, the better.”

And with that, she left the room.

Jace eased Alec back down to the mattress, taking care to make sure his brother was comfortable before gently cupping his bruised and scraped cheek.

“Still with me, brother?” he asked quietly, hoping to draw his Parabatai back to the light.

Alec slowly blinked his eyes open again, his gaze taking in the room around him before settling on Jace.

“’s it over?” he slurred tiredly.

“Just about, buddy. How’re you feeling?”

“…Hurts…”

“I know. Hang in there just a little bit longer, okay? This should help…”

Jace ran his stele over Alec’s iratze rune. Alec grunted and caught his wrist, though it was more to ground himself from the pain than it was to stop his Parabatai from activating the mark.

He slumped back into the mattress wearily as some of the pain in his body abated.

“Is Raph’l still here?” Alec whispered out, earning a worried frown from his brother.

“Raphael? Why would he be in your room, Alec?”

“Br’ght me home, after C’mille ‘n… ‘n John. Not s’posed to ‘member that though… ‘s a secret. “m tired, Jace…”

Jace and Magnus exchanged a tense look over Alec’s bed, then the blond took his brother’s hand into his own.

“Get some rest, Alec. I’ll watch over you.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

And there you have it! Only half an hour left to go with the fading rune, but it does not go quietly... Please review! :)
Blood of the Angels

Chapter Notes

I had at least three different versions of this chapter written before deciding to go with this one. Hope it isn’t too confusing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Get some rest, Alec. I’ll watch over you.”

Alec blinked heavily up at his brother.

He was so exhausted, he could’ve slept for a month. It was taking every ounce of energy he had to keep his burning eyes open, and he wanted nothing more than to surrender himself to the state of blissful unconsciousness.

But he couldn’t suppress the nagging feeling that something still wasn’t right. The harder he tried to ignore it, the more tension he felt rising in his gut.

Jace frowned down at him in concern, feeling his brother’s heightened anxiety pulsating through their bond.

“Hey, what’s wrong? Is the pain still bad?”

Alec shook his head. He didn’t know how to explain it. Everything just felt… off. Like the walls were slowly closing in on him, enveloping him in darkness.

But that darkness… It wasn’t natural. It wasn’t welcoming.

It was ominous, and deadly.

More importantly, it was coming for him, stalking its prey by lurking at the edges of his mind, and Alec suddenly knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he needed to stay awake until this strange phenomenon passed.

If he gave into it, he feared he’d never wake up again.

His grip on his brother’s hand tightened, demanding his undivided attention.

“J’ce… You g-gotta…” help me. “Need to s-stay…” awake.

“I’m not going anywhere,” the blond quickly promised, misinterpreting Alec’s unintelligible plea.

When that declaration failed to pacify Alec, Jace reached forward with his free hand and cradled his brother’s throbbing cheek, stroking his thumb back and forth across it in a soothing motion.

“It’s okay, big brother. I’m right here,” the blond reaffirmed in a comforting tone, and Alec reluctantly felt himself relaxing into the sheets as a wave of calm flowed through their bond.

His previous panic was quickly demoted to an unfounded bout of paranoia, born from the stress and pain he had suffered throughout the day.
As long as Jace was beside him, nothing bad was going to happen.

He let out the shuddering breath he had unknowingly been holding and leaned into his brother’s warm caress.

Jace’s ring and middle finger subtly slid down and pressed against Alec’s neck, relieved to find the older boy’s thundering heartbeat was slowing back down to a more acceptable rate.

“You’re so close to the finish line, buddy. There’s only about half an hour left before that stupid thing is gone for good. Why don’t you try to sleep? Then it’ll all be over by the time you wake.”

Jace’s thumb brushed lightly against the jagged cut—the one made by John’s intricate ring—just below Alec’s left eye, skimming the edge of his nail against the very tips of Alec’s long eyelashes and prompting his Parabatai to begrudgingly close his weary eyes.

And once they were shut, they were impossible to reopen.

Alec’s exhaustion won out and he drifted off, allowing the darkness to swallow him whole.

Jace felt his brother’s bone-crushing grip on his hand all but disappear, as did the plethora of shared emotions that had been overwhelming him just moments ago.

“He’s out,” the blond announced quietly to the room at large. “Thank the Angel.”

The tension in the air dissipated at his words and the two warlocks took that as their cue, cautiously approaching the bed.

While Catarina did a quick check of his stats, Magnus couldn’t stop himself from running a ringed hand gently through Alec’s hair.

He wouldn’t say his boyfriend looked peaceful in his coma-like slumber, but it was by far the most relaxed he had been since this whole mess had started.

“Well, this has certainly been an adventure I hope to never repeat…” Magnus stated honestly.

“If Imogen even considers doing anything like this to him again, I’ll kill her myself,” Jace replied.

“Careful, Jace,” Catarina admonished. “Making threats against the High Inquisitor will land you in the same spot as your Parabatai, if not worse.”

“Let her try,” Jace growled ferally.

Cat rested a comforting hand on the blond boy’s shoulder and felt him sway slightly under the added weight. She frowned in concern.

“You’ve both been through quite a lot today. Why don’t you try to get some sleep too?”

Jace shook his head. “No way. I’m staying right here till I know that thing is officially off his back.”

The female warlock sighed at his stubbornness. “I figured you’d say that. At least drink this then…”

With a snap of her fingers, she procured a glass of orange juice for him. He cocked an eyebrow up at her.
“Why? Is it breakfast time already?” he quipped, knowing full-well it was barely approaching midnight.

She threw him her best motherly disapproval face. Hands on hips and everything.

“You gave a lot of blood tonight, Jace. Probably more than you should’ve.”

He opened his mouth to argue, but she held up a warning hand.

“Don’t think I didn’t see you waver when you stood up earlier. Activate your iratze to replenish some of what you lost, and I want you to eat something soon too, you hear me? None of that nourishment rune bullshit. I’m talking a real-life steak with green veggies.”

Jace huffed out a bemused laugh. “Will do, nurse.”

“And don’t be pulling that fake obedient patient card with me either, kiddo. We all know I wasn’t born yesterday.”

Catarina stepped closer to her oldest friend and wrapped an arm around his waist, leaning against his shoulder and keeping her voice low so as not to disturb the sleeping Shadowhunter.

“Magnus, I’m putting you in charge to make sure he actually does as he’s told. Spoon feed him if you have to.”

“Your wish is my command, my dear.”

Ignoring the death glare Jace was throwing his way, Magnus turned his head and placed an affectionate kiss against the top of Cat’s hair.

“Catarina, I owe you the world for all you’ve…”

“You don’t owe me a thing, Magnus. Although... I suppose you might be able to convince me to take one of your famous foot massages as payment in full. I have been on my feet all day, after all. My dogs are barking!”

She winked up at him and earned one of his genuine smiles, the kind that lit up a room.

“You’ve got it,” he replied. “Full spa treatment, on the house. I can think of no greater way to pass the time. Shall I summon us some chairs? A massage table perhaps?”

She patted him on the back, then straightened up.

“Raincheck, Mags. Right now, I need to go home and take a nice long bath, and you need to be here with your beau when he wakes.”

“Wait, you’re leaving?” Jace demanded. “What about Alec?”

“His wounds are healing on their own now. Look.”

As the three of them watched, the most minor of cuts along Alec’s skin sealed themselves, then disappeared without a trace. Not even a scar left behind in their wake.

“It’ll take some time of course, but he’s going to be fine. Make sure he gets lots of rest, plenty of water, and a few more activations of his healing rune to fix the more extreme damage. And if he needs someone to talk to after everything he’s been through, I’m only a fire message away.”
Magnus bowed his head in acquiescence. “You have always been an incredible listener, my friend. I’ll be sure to pass the info along once he wakes, and I will be in touch soon to let you know how he’s progressing.”

“You better,” Cat warned playfully as she made her way to the door. She had just managed to crack it open when Jace spoke up again.

“Thank you,” he stated sincerely, looking over his shoulder at her. “For everything.”

She smiled warmly at him, gave a quick nod of acknowledgement, then left just as gracefully as she had arrived.

Magnus manifested himself a rather uncomfortably hard looking chair- no doubt to aid him in his plight to stay awake as he resumed his vigil over Alec- and sat down by his boyfriend’s bedside, opposite Jace.

“Now what?” the blond asked wearily.

“Now? We cross our fingers and wait.”

Unfortunately, they didn’t have to wait long. Less than ten minutes had gone by since Catarina’s departure when Alec began to stir.

His brow furrowed and his head started to toss restlessly from side to side.

Jace let out a heavy sigh. “Damn it.”

He stood up and gently shook Alec’s shoulder.

“Hey, buddy… Can you hear me?”

**Alec’s head was full of voices. Some soft and loving, some harsh and threatening.**

He couldn’t discern one from the other. *They echoed in the endless space around him, combining and diminishing in clarity by the time they reached his ears.*

*He couldn’t tell where they were coming from, or how many there were.*

*But there was one thing he knew for certain… He was outgunned, and outnumbered.*

Worse still, there didn’t appear to be any way out of the darkness into which he had fallen. *It was infinite and eternal, and he was trapped.*

*That didn’t stop him from trying to outrun it though. He picked a direction and took off at the fastest speed his lanky legs could carry him. But the voices followed.*

*If anything, they grew in intensity until they were joined by the sounds of scuttling, grunting, growling, clicking, and low, desperate whines. Whines born of an unquenchable hunger.*

*He knew those sounds. Remembered them from when he was a boy. Remembered how they terrorized him night after night.*

*He ran until he couldn’t run any more.*

Then he stumbled to a halt, doubling over as his chest screamed for more oxygen. And when he chanced a glance up again, he discovered that he was surrounded by eyes of all shapes, sizes, and
They had found him. In this place, they always found him. There was no escaping the beasts of the night.

Alec let out a whimper of fear and Jace shook him harder.

“Alec! Wake up!”

The creatures were closing in, and the sounds morphed into a cacophony of screams, hisses, cries, and roars.

Alec tried to make his legs move again, but they refused to respond. There was nowhere for him to go anyway. No place to hide, and no one coming to rescue him.

So instead, he sank to his knees with a sob and surrendered. At least this way, he knew it would be over sooner rather than later.

They were on him before his knees even hit the invisible ground.

Alec sat bolt upright with a blood-curdling scream, his wide, vacant eyes darting around the room but taking nothing in.

Faceless shadows moved around him, clawed hands reached out for him, and the voices… They were still there, shouting loud enough that he was sure his ears would start to bleed if the ruckus didn’t relent soon.

One hand suddenly wrapped itself firmly around Alec’s bicep, and when he turned to face its owner, the creature came into sharper focus, the bloodied fangs and malicious intent unmistakable.

Alec’s heart leapt into his throat.

It was John.

“Hey there, pretty boy. Long time, no see.”

No…

The creatures that used to torment him had always been faceless. Dark, and sinister, but faceless. This was a whole new level of torture, and Alec couldn’t tell if it were real or in his head.

John was supposed to be dead after all, but that grip on his arm sure as hell felt real.

“Get away from me!”

Alec jerked free of the grasp and scrambled backward until he was precariously balanced on the edge of the bed, a terrified whine escaping his tight throat.

Jace quickly held his hands out placatingly. “Whoa! Alec, take it easy! You’re okay!”

All Alec saw was the brutish man towering over him with that smarmy smirk on his face, his hands reaching for him with hostile intent.

“You’re… You’re supposed to be dead…” the boy whispered in horrified disbelief.
“Huh?”

“I am dead, genius. *Perks of being a vampire!* You didn’t think we’d actually just let you go, did you? After all, *I still haven’t had my turn yet.*”

“What are you talking about, Alec? Who are you seeing?” Jace inched closer, fearing for his brother’s safety.

Alec moved back even further, one hand slipping off the edge of the mattress, nearly dumping him onto the hard floor several feet below.

Magnus instinctively stepped in behind Alec to prevent the boy from falling. But as soon as the warlock’s chest brushed against Alec’s bare back, the younger man began to thrash, shouting threats and swinging wildly at what he perceived to be his attackers.

Worried for his boyfriend’s safety, Magnus dodged an errant fist and wrapped his arms around Alec securely, minimizing his struggles.

“It’s alright, Alexander…” Magnus attempted, keeping a firm hold on the terrified boy. “You’re safe here.”

“No! Let me go!” the boy shouted desperately.

“Easy, handsome,” came the sultry voice of the only woman Alec had ever hated. “It’ll hurt less if you don’t struggle. Don’t you remember, baby?”

Alec bristled instantly as Camille’s cold breath ghosted across the shell of his left ear, one of her hands sliding south across his abs. Her other hand was flat against his sternum, trapping him against her ample chest.

He squeezed his eyes shut, swallowing down the sob that threatened to escape.

This isn’t real, this isn’t real… Please wake up!

“Been dreaming about me again, haven’t you, darling? Don’t worry, I’ve been missing you too. After all, *I haven’t properly thanked you yet for John’s demise…”*

Alec’s head whipped back around in John’s direction, intending to point out the obvious fact that the man was clearly not dead, only to notice the thick blood streaming down the vamp’s neck, oozing out from a perfectly straight line that went from one side all the way to the other. A blatant side effect of a severed head.

“A blatant side effect of a severed head.

“Rumor has it you managed to break free of the bindings and poor John didn’t stand a chance. You were a bad boy, darling. And bad boys need to be punished.”

“No! I didn’t kill him, I swear! Just stop, please!” Alec shouted to a foe only he could see. He was twisting and flailing, trying to break free, and Magnus was terrified that he might actually manage to do so.

The warlock tightened his hold even further in response, struggling to keep the boy safe.

Of course, that just made Alec fight all the harder in a desperate bid to regain his freedom.

“Get off me!”
“Alexander! Calm down!”

Magnus was starting to lose his grip on the squirming boy.

Realizing that his Parabatai wasn’t about to relax anytime soon, Jace darted forward and, after a brief battle, managed to capture Alec’s frantically kicking legs.

“Get him on the floor!” he shouted to Magnus, and together they lifted Alec off the bed and wrestled him down to the ground where falling was no longer a concern. “Alright, let him go…”

As soon as they released him, Alec threw a vicious elbow behind himself and caught Magnus in the jaw.

The warlock stumbled back a few steps and watched sadly as the man he loved most in the world crawled into the nearest corner and made himself as small a target as possible.

“You alright?” Jace checked, observing as Magnus gently palpated his bleeding lip.

The warlock waved away his concern. “I’m perfectly fine.” And with a flick of his wrist, the small injury vanished. “It’s Alexander I’m worried about.”

“Stay back…” Alec whimpered, one hand shooting out to keep his imaginary adversaries at bay. “Don’t you touch me! Just stay back!”

“What the hell is wrong with him?” Jace questioned, at a complete loss for how things had escalated so quickly. “Why is he afraid of us?”

Magnus had a theory, but it wasn’t a pleasant one.

“I don’t think he is. He doesn’t even know we’re here. Jace, did Alec ever suffer from night terrors as a child?”

“Night terrors? Not that I’m aware of. Why?”

“Yes, he did,” came Izzy’s soft voice from the doorway.

She looked a little worse for wear upon her return from the field, random splashes of blood and ichor staining her outfit and her normally perfect hair disheveled. But thankfully, none of the blood appeared to be her own.

She watched with tears in her eyes as her typically strong and resilient brother cowered in the corner.

Jace looked up at her sharply. “Wait, what? Why don’t I remember this?”

“Because they stopped right after you came to live with us,” she replied, entering the room to stand by Jace. “I guess you made him feel safer than any of the rest of us could.”

She crouched down to Alec’s height but didn’t dare get any closer to him.

“For months, it seemed like he was waking up every night, screaming. It was horrible. At the time, he and I still shared a bedroom, so I was always the first to respond. I tried to calm him down, but even though it looked like he was awake, he was never actually seeing me.”

“Then who’s he seeing? Who’s he keep talking to?”
“No idea. That part’s all new. He never spoke out loud back then. Just kept screaming. When it first happened, I thought he was in pain from some serious injury he’d hidden from us after one of Hodge’s training sessions, so I tried activating his iratze.

“But when that didn’t help any, I ran to get Mom. I guess she figured out what was really happening, and she started singing to him. That lullaby was the only thing that managed to get through to him and calm him down.”

“Where is Maryse?” Magnus asked, giving Jace a chance to absorb all the new information.

“She was following a different lead on Valentine. Command was having trouble reaching her because her team is down by the water, but Imogen says she’ll keep trying. And speaking of Imogen… Since when is that evil woman on our side?”

“Since about twenty minutes ago,” Jace muttered in reply. “Nothing like a last-ditch attempt at redemption…”

As far as Jace was concerned though, it was too little, too late.

“I guess now the question is whether this is all due to the Agony rune messing with his head, or is Alec having some sort of traumatic relapse?”

“I’d put my money on a combination of both,” Izzy replied. “Night terrors are typically caused and exacerbated by sleep deprivation, stress, and fever. All of which Alec has dealt with in extremes today.”

“Yeah, but do adults even get night terrors? I thought it was just a kid’s thing.”

“It’s rarer for adults, but it’s still very possible,” Magnus cut in. “And age-wise, Alec’s within the high-risk bracket for reoccurrence.”

“Of course he is…” Jace pinched the bridge of his nose, silently praying to Raziel to give them all a much-deserved break. “So how do we snap him out of it?”

Izzy shrugged sadly. “Unfortunately, the best option is to just wait it out till he wakes up on his own. Any physical contact could heighten his fight or flight mode, potentially making him more violent and unpredictable.”

Jace rolled his eyes. “*Now* she tells us…”

Alec cried out and began swatting at himself, fighting off invisible foes. Jace had it on pretty good authority that they would be of the eight-legged variety.

He ran a frustrated hand through his hair and began pacing in front of his brother, needing to help him but afraid any contact might make things worse.

“We can’t just leave him like that, Iz. Look at him! There has to be something we can do!”

“Well, like I said before… His night terrors stopped when you came into our lives. Maybe you can find a way to get through to him.”

“Wow. That’s very helpful. Thanks,” he shot back, sarcastically.

“What about your Parabatai rune?” Magnus suggested. “Perhaps you can reach him through your bond?”
Jace looked to Izzy who merely shrugged.

It was Jace’s decision to make, and his alone. He let out a steadying breath.

“…I guess it’s worth a shot. Here goes nothin’. Sorry about this, buddy.”

Jace pulled his stele from his back pocket, lifted his shirt slightly, and activated his Parabatai rune.

His side began to burn, and judging by Alec’s startled yelp, his Parabatai’s did too.

The older boy started clawing at his rune in terror, apparently believing the pain to be caused by more burrowing arachnids. He was starting to draw blood.

Jace couldn’t stand it anymore.

He approached Alec cautiously, then knelt down in front of him.

“Alec, look at me…”

The brunette flinched as Jace’s shadow fell over him, pressing himself back into the corner as much as possible.

“D-don’t,” he whimpered. “I just… I gotta get ‘em out…”

“Come on, brother,” Jace whispered beneath his breath, gently taking hold of Alec’s wrists and pulling his hands away to keep him from tearing his own skin open even further. “There’s nothing there, Alec. Whatever you’re seeing, it’s all in your head. Understand?”

"No, please... Just let me..."

Alec fought against him for a moment, then he stillled, head slumping down against his own chest.

Jace leaned in closer, afraid that Alec had passed out on him again.

“Alec?”

Then his brother’s head slowly lifted, his eyes wide open.

Except, there were no irises or pupils in them. Just a glowing white light, similar to when Jace activated his runes with his angelic gift instead of a stele.

The same glow Clary emanated when she created new runes.

If it weren’t for his Shadowhunter grace and balance, Jace would’ve toppled over backwards at the sight.

“What the hell?! Alec?!”

The older boy tilted his head slightly in confusion at the sound of his brother’s startled voice.

“J-Jace…?” he stuttered out, one hand shakily searching for him in the darkness. “I… I can’t see… Why can’t I…? Ahh!”

Alec’s body seized, his spine arching, his head thrown back.

“Alec!”
Images were flashing quickly through Alec’s mind. Almost too quickly for him to comprehend.

He saw Valentine. The flash of a knife. Jace’s wide-eyed disbelief. Clary crying inconsolably. The unmistakable glow of an Angel reflecting harshly over the water of Lake Lynn.

And a pain in his side that was indescribable. Worse than the pain of when Imogen bound his Parabatai rune.

But that could only mean…

*Jace*…

Before he had the chance to recover from his state of panic, the images abruptly changed.

He saw Alicante. The demon towers. A shadowy figure climbing over one. Smoke, fire. Izzy stumbling in disorientation, and… and Max…

There was blood. Lots of blood.

Max wasn’t moving.

*No… Please, no.*

“M-Max…?” he whimpered, horrified, as an invisible fist attempted to squeeze his heart into pulp.

Then Robert was there, standing over him.

“You left him… How could you leave his side, Alec?!” Robert demanded. “He was your responsibility! You were supposed to protect him!”

“No no no… Please… It’s not real, it’s not real…” Alec repeatedly sobbed to himself, rocking back and forth for comfort, his palms rising up to cover his sensitive ears as his father continued to rain blame down on him.

“It should’ve been you,” Robert stated plainly, disappointment in his tone and face. “You let this family down again, Alec. And now your little brother is dead, and it’s all your fault.”

“No!” Alec suddenly yelled, lunging forward to try and get to his fallen brother. But instead, he barreled straight into Jace, knocking him flat on his back and landing on top of him.

“Oof! Alec, what…?!”

“I can fix this! He’s not dead! He can’t be dead!”

*There was so much blood. Too much blood. And a hammer laying on the ground just a few feet away.*

“Who, Alec?” Jace demanded, feeling his brother’s pain and panic through their bond. Whatever he was seeing, it was devastating. “Who’s dead?”

The older boy was lost in his own thoughts. In Alec’s mind, he was leaning over Max’s bloodied body, the boy’s dead eyes staring straight through him.

Alec shook him by the shoulder, desperately trying to get him to respond.

“Max! Please! Wake up! Open your eyes!”
Jace felt like he had been punched in the gut. *Max? Dead?*

Alec’s overwhelming emotions left Jace out of breath and frozen in place for a moment. But his brother’s broken sobbing spurred him back into action.

He easily reversed their positions, pinning an inconsolable Alec to the floor.

“Alec, calm down! Max is fine, alright? Izzy, go check on him for me, just to be sure.”

Isabelle only hesitated for a moment, but then she was out the door in the blink of an eye.

Alec’s eyes were still glowing, blind to what was actually happening around him. All he knew was that his baby brother was dead, and he was suddenly under attack.

Another sharp pain flashed through his head, and he found himself staring up into the face of an owl-like demon that was sitting on top of him. He had never seen the likes of this entity before.

Its clawed hands were resting on his chest, leaving bloody streaks on his skin as he shifted desperately beneath them.

The only thing that made sense was that this creature must’ve been Max’s killer.

“What did you do?!” he screamed furiously at the demon, dead set on ending the beast to avenge the little boy’s death. “He was just a child, you son of a bitch!”

Alec began struggling against Jace with everything he had.

“Damn it, Alec, snap out of it!” Jace shouted, doing his best to keep his Parabatai pinned.

Alec put up one hell of a fight, prompting Magnus to step closer, hands glowing with magic as he prepared to intervene.

“Don’t! Just stay back!” Jace warned, then took a punch to the gut for his momentary lapse in concentration.

The move rocked him back just far enough for Alec to break free of his hold and scramble up onto his unsteady feet, assuming a fighting stance.

Jace sighed as he stood, flipping the errant hair out of his face. “Come on, buddy… Are we really going to do this?”

Alec started coming towards him, fury written all over his tear-stained face.

“I guess so,” Jace acquiesced. Then they were going at it, matched almost equally, blow for blow.

Alec was fighting injured, but also with the intent to kill.

Jace was pulling his punches, focusing more on defense rather than offense, and trying his best not to hurt his brother any further until the older boy returned to his senses.

With a well-placed kick to the chest, the blond managed to knock Alec back against the wall, then caught the wrist that was aimed for his face as he caged him in.

“Alec, stop! You’re gonna hurt yourself!”

The sharp pain shot through Alec’s head again and his knees went out from under him. Jace eased
him down the wall till they both reached the ground. Then the light in his eyes flickered, and died out.

Alec suddenly froze, blinking at the blond in confusion as the mirage wavered in front of his eyes. “Jace?” he whispered brokenly, his heart sinking as the owl mask transformed fully into the visage of his concerned brother.

“Yeah, buddy. It’s just me. You’re okay now.”

Jace’s hope soared as Alec seemed to finally recognize him, but then it plummeted again when the older boy’s face twisted with fury.

“How…? How could you?!”

“What are you talking about?”

Alec opened his mouth to reply, but instead screamed in pain as he felt his right wrist suddenly snap in two.

Jace let him go immediately, afraid he had been the cause of Alec’s pain. But from what he could tell, whatever his brother was experiencing, it was only taking place in his mind.

Alec collapsed onto his side, then flipped violently onto his back with a grunt as if he had been kicked in the stomach.

“What the hell is happening?!?” Magnus demanded, still circling around them and waiting for the cue to act.

“I have no idea!” Jace shouted back. He knelt down next to the older boy, trying to decide how to proceed.

Alec made the decision for him by reaching for his throat, with his left hand, which confused Jace all the more. Why wasn’t he using his dominant hand?

The grip was easy to break and Jace kept Alec’s captured arm at a safe distance, only using the amount of force that was absolutely necessary to put an end to his brother’s fighting.

“Alec, that’s enough!”

“Why’d you do it?” the other boy whimpered out. “Why’d you kill Max?”

Jace felt like he was going to throw up. How could his brother ever think he’d do such a thing?

“What are you talking…?”

“You killed him, you son of a bitch! After everything my family did for you!”

Alec swung at him with his right fist and Jace caught his wrist, trying his best to ignore the scream of pain the action caused, then he intertwined their legs and dropped his hips down.

Enough was enough.

Alec was effectively pinned, writhing in both physical and emotional agony from what Jace could sense via their Parabatai bond.

The pain was unimaginable.
Unable to spare a hand to retrieve his stele again, Jace reached inside of himself instead until his eyes began to glow.

The light traveled down his arms and into his brother’s, activating Alec’s iratze for a second time. He hoped like hell that it would be enough.

Alec’s eyes glowed white again and he arched off the ground with a choking sound.

*Jace was holding one of Alec’s arrows just above his heart, pressing down with all the strength he possessed until the tip pierced the skin of Alec’s chest.*

“Your boy’s crying, you know…” he taunted. “He’s begging me. Begging me not to do this…”

*The arrow slowly sank between two of his rib bones and into his chest cavity.*

Alec jolted in pain, mouth opening and closing as if he were struggling for air.

Then the glow in his eyes died away again, and the brunette blinked up at Jace with a defeated look on his face.

He understood now.

Jace wasn’t really *Jace*.

That first scene that had flashed through his head… Jace had gone up against Valentine, and he had lost. The bloody knife, Clary crying… Alec’s Jace was dead.

This owl creature must be possessing his brother’s body somehow, just like when Alec had unwittingly killed Clary’s mother. None of this was actually Jace’s fault.

On the off chance that the blond was still somehow trapped in his own body, riding shotgun to the demon, Alec forced himself to speak.

“It’s okay… I forgive you,” he grunted out, words he had needed to hear once he had realized what he had done to Jocelyn.

The resulting guilt had been so overwhelming, he had nearly taken a nosedive off of Magnus’ balcony just to escape it. He didn’t want that for his brother.

“It wasn’t you, Jace,” he stated firmly, determined to get his point across before he passed out.

“Alec… I don’t know what’s happening here. Talk to me, buddy.”

“I’m sorry we couldn’t save you…” Alec panted, then his eyes rolled into the back of his head.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

There will be more explanation in the next chapter in case Alec's flashes didn't sound familiar to you, so stick with me if you can, and please review if you're excited that the Agony rune is finally over!
Rejections and Reunions

Chapter Notes

So to clarify Alec’s futuristic visions from the previous chapter, the scene with Max in Alicante is from the book “City of Glass”. And the flashes of Alec fighting the Owl-demon/Jace is from the end of episode 3x10. Okay, on with the story now!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jace watched the lone tear fall from the corner of Alec’s closed eyes just as the older boy went limp in his grip.

“Alec?” he practically whispered, unable to get enough air into his lungs to project.

His chest was unbearably tight, but at this point, he didn’t know if it was his own fear and pain that he was experiencing, or Alec’s.

He reached for Alec’s neck, confirming that he still had a pulse, then he gently shook his brother’s shoulder, but the brunette was completely unresponsive.

“The mark… Check the mark,” Magnus pressed, inching closer to get a better look.

Heart thudding painfully hard against his ribcage, Jace quickly- but carefully- rolled Alec onto his stomach, his frantic eyes darting over the pale skin of the older boy’s upper back.

The Agony rune was gone.

Hardly daring to believe his own eyes, Jace ran shaky fingers over the smooth spot of flesh, then flopped back on his heels and blew out a relieved breath. “It’s over. It’s finally over.”

That was all the permission Magnus needed.

He immediately encompassed Alec in a blanket of healing magic, assisting the boy’s overtaxed immune system as broken bones began to mend, torn ligaments stitched themselves back together, angry-looking burns faded to pink scars, and any remaining dislocated limbs popped back into their proper sockets.

Once he was sure that moving Alec wouldn’t cause any additional damage, he slowly levitated the boy off the floor, rotated him in mid-air, and eased him back down onto his mattress.

Then he summoned a fresh bowl of water and a soft hand towel before settling in by Alec’s side and proceeding to wash the remaining blood, sweat, and tears from the younger man’s face.

Jace rose to his feet unsteadily, pressing a hand to the side of his head with a frown as the room spun a bit around him.

“Is he okay? Why isn’t he waking?” he demanded as he stumbled his way to the other side of the bed.

“Because I’m keeping him under until his body has had enough time to repair itself a bit. He could
certainly do with some proper rest. And so could you, by the way.”

“I’m fine,” Jace replied, not at all convincingly as he pressed a palm harshly over his right eye to combat the pounding pain in his head.

“Oh huh…” the warlock responded with a disbelieving eye-flare/roll combination.

“I am,” the blond insisted, reluctantly dropping his hand to support his claim. “See? All good.”

Magnus didn’t miss the fact that the blond had opted for leaning a thigh quite heavily against the edge of the mattress for stability.

He looked back up at the boy, unimpressed, as Jace continued with his side of the argument.

“I just got a little dizzy cause of… cause of whatever it is you’re doing to Alec.” Jace gestured vaguely at his sleeping brother as he swayed. “Our connection… It’s heightened right now because it’s… it’s freshly re… re-uh…”

“Established?” Magnus offered.

“Y-yeah. That.”

Jace shook himself mentally, blinking repeatedly until his vision came back into focus. He cleared his throat and straightened up a bit more, repressing any weaknesses or vulnerabilities that might have previously been showing.

“How long can you keep him under?”

Magnus shrugged, absently moving the cloth across Alec’s chest, continuing to wash away the grime and gore from his pale skin. “As long as he needs. Why?”

“Good. Because I want you to keep him that way until I get back.”

Jace started towards the door, listing a bit on unsteady legs.

The warlock raised an eyebrow over his shoulder at the stubborn boy.

“And where exactly do you think you’re going?”

“Gonna go find Raphael. I’ve got a few questions for him.”

Jace reached the door and grasped the knob, pausing in confusion when it refused to turn.

“You’ll do no such thing,” Magnus stated, keeping the door firmly closed with his magic. “You can’t even walk a straight line. The last thing you should be doing is picking a fight with a century-old vampire.”

He gave Alec the once-over and, short of depositing the unconscious boy in a bathtub to scrub him clean, he decided that Alec was as clean as he was going to get.

With an absent wave of his arm, he switched out Alec’s boxers for a fresh pair and dressed him in a loose-fitted t-shirt for comfort.

It would do. For now.

Jace huffed at him. “I don’t remember asking for your permission.” He jostled the knob again in
frustration till it sent a mild shock up his arm and he released it with a curse. “Ah! Damn it, Magnus! Open this door!”

“Not until you’ve at least had something to eat,” the warlock compromised, turning his full attention back to the blond. “Doctor’s orders, remember? I promised Catarina that I’d look after you too, and I’m nothing if not a man of my word.”

Jace pursed his lips in annoyance.

“Alec is the patient here, not me. I’ll eat when I’ve got the whole story and know my brother is actually safe from all this crap.”

“It was the past, Jace. You can’t protect him from his memories.”

“Maybe not, but I can make damned sure they never repeat. I know Camille is no longer a threat since you handed her over to the Clave, but we don’t know anything about this John guy he mentioned. If I find out he’s alive and well, I can promise you he won’t be when I’m finished with him.”

“And if he’s as old and as strong as Camille?”

“Then all the better. I’m not looking for an easy fight,” Jace stated, his eyes glinting with the promise of pain. “I shouldn’t be gone long, so just keep Alec asleep, alright? I want to be here when he wakes up again.”

Magnus smiled sweetly at him, unnerving the blond.

“Oh, don’t worry, darling. You will be.”

With a snap of the warlock’s fingers, Jace fell limply into Magnus’s magical hold.

Cat eyes gleaming in the low light of the room, Magnus glided Jace’s body back across the floor and placed him on the other side of the bed next to his Parabatai.

Honestly... Who needs kids when you’ve got obstinate Shadowhunters in your life? These youngins were downright exhausting.

Magnus settled back into his uncomfortable chair and resigned himself to babysitting both of the sleeping boys until the sun rose the next morning.

SHSHSHSHSHSH

For the first hour or so, Magnus kept himself busy by using his magic to care for the brothers, doing everything within his power to help them heal.

Once he was satisfied that they were out of harm’s way and resting peacefully, he allowed himself to relax and let his mind wander.

He found himself reflecting over everything that had occurred that day.

The part that bothered him the most was how Alec had reacted to the fourth quarter.

Having experienced that part of the Agony rune personally, Magnus had no explanation for why the boy’s eyes had glowed white, or why he had seen things that weren’t a part of his memory.

As far as he understood it, the rune was meant to torture its victims with the horrors of their past,
bringing to light their deepest, darkest secrets. The kind that were meant to remain long-buried.

From what he could surmise, the fourth quarter had started out that way for Alec. Jace had filled Magnus in earlier on the werewolves, the spiders, and… and what had happened with Camille. All of which were confirmed to have happened during the course of Alec’s life.

Then came the night terrors from Alec’s childhood. Those might not have been tangible threats to the boy, but they were obviously real enough for Alec.

What didn’t make sense was that business about Max dying. That certainly hadn’t been real.

Isabelle had popped back in shortly after Magnus had put the boys to bed, and she confirmed that Max was still alive, and well on his way to a full recovery.

Relieved that her other two brothers were finally in the same boat, she activated their iratzes and a few other helpful runes, then left them in the warlock’s capable hands while she returned to the command center to get an update on their mother’s location.

The longer Magnus sat there in silence, the more worried he became.

Was it all just a strange contrivance of Imogen’s poorly machinated rune? Was it another side-effect of their unintentional meddling? Or was it something more sinister?

Alec’s eyes had glowed white shortly after Jace had activated their Parabatai rune, binding them together as one, and Magnus couldn’t help but wonder if it had something to do with Jace’s angelic blood transfusion.

The blond had the ability to activate runes without a stele. Magnus had seen him do so repeatedly with his own eyes.

And after drinking Jace’s blood during the ploy to fool Valentine, Simon had been transformed into a Daylighter. The only one in existence to have ever walked the planet aside from Cain, according to the rumors.

Clary, who also had angelic blood, was able to create her own runes by manifesting visions of them in her mind.

Visions… Had the transfusion given Alec the gift of glimpsing the future?

Magnus shuddered at the thought.

If that were the case, then Max… And even Jace weren’t going to survive the battle ahead. Magnus looked down at the boys with a heavy heart.

The thought didn’t bear repeating.

Without Jace, a part of Alec would die as well. And if Max died too, it would break Alec beyond repair.

As if he could hear Magnus’s disturbing thoughts, Alec’s brow creased with anxiety and his head began to toss on the pillow.

The sight snapped Magnus out of his musings and he sparked his magic back to life, refocusing his energy on keeping Alec in a deep enough sleep to avoid any nightmares of the past that the Agony rune may have stirred up again.
After a few moments, the boy relaxed back into a peaceful slumber.

And just as Magnus was about to let his guard down again, Jace began to stir.

Magnus’s magic was already running on fumes, as was the man himself. He couldn’t remember the last time he had felt so completely drained.

It took everything he had to split his focus between the two boys and keep them both properly sedated.

The blond appeared to be fighting against Magnus’s magic, trying to wake himself back up to resume his self-appointed mission of interrogating Raphael.

He tossed and he turned, he frowned and he flinched. And at one point, he actually mumbled something that sounded very similar to Alec’s name.

That gave the warlock an idea.

Reaching forward, he gently lifted Jace’s twitching right arm and eased it across Alec’s torso, the boy’s palm coming to a rest over his brother’s steady heartbeat.

Jace’s head lolled against Alec’s shoulder where he nuzzled his cheek like he was cuddling with a giant stuffed animal, and Alec’s head instinctively inclined towards his brother’s in return.

Both boys immediately settled, comforted by their Parabatai connection.

Smiling warmly down at his contented boys, Magnus summoned a soft blanket and draped it over the two of them, barely resisting the urge to fully tuck them in and kiss them each on the forehead.

Jace curled further into the warmth of his brother and seconds later, began to lightly snore.

And that was the position Jace found himself in hours later once Magnus deemed him rested enough to be revived.

The blond cracked his bleary eyes open and squinted in the bright light of day filtering in through the open window. He could hear birds calling out in the distance and relaxed into the gentle breeze against his face.

He couldn’t remember the last time he had felt so calm and comfortable.

That is, until he realized that his pillow was rising and falling beneath the palm of his hand.

Jace lifted his head and frowned down at his sleeping brother in confusion. “What the…?”

A bright flash and mechanical whir put him instantly on alert and he turned just in time to see a chuckling Magnus lowering an old-fashioned camera.

“Now that's one for the books.”

The warlock pulled the Polaroid from the front of the contraption and, after fanning himself with it for a moment, added it to a rather large pile by his hip with a self-satisfied smirk.

“What the hell is that thing?” the blond demanded.

“An old-fashioned camera I’m rather fond of. Used to be all the rage in the Mundane 60s and 70s.”
“A camera?” Jace gaped up at him. “Wait, did you just…?”

“I certainly did. Multiple times in fact,” Magnus replied, flipping through the stack of photos to show the blond. “You drooling on your brother’s shoulder is one of my personal favorites.

"Magnus, I swear I'll...

“Now now, don’t fret just yet. I promise I won’t release the scandalous photos to the entire Institute, as long as you eat everything on this tray.”

He snapped his fingers and a well-balanced breakfast appeared on Jace’s lap, a fresh glass of orange juice included.

Jace blinked down at the food stupidly, still trying to orient himself.

“Are you… Are you *blackmailing* me?”

Magnus winked at him. “And he gets it in one. I knew you weren’t a natural blond.”

Jace scowled back, then slid the tray onto the mattress beside his hip.

“I don’t *want* any food. I’m not…” He glanced over at the door, vague memories from the night before slowly coming back to him. “Wait, what the hell happened? What time is it?”

“You took a well-deserved nap, and it is now ten o’clock in the morning.”

“Ten o’clock?!”

Jace opened his mouth to give the meddling warlock a piece of his mind, only to find his jaw suddenly obstructed by a sizable apple, making him look very much like a roasted pig on a platter.

He glared furiously at Magnus who continued as if the blond hadn’t tried to interrupt.

“And unless you want everyone to know that the brave badass, Jace Herondale, is an adorable cuddler, I’d focus more on eating and less on talking.”

Jace bit off the large chunk of fruit, if only to get the makeshift gag out of his mouth, then fumed in silence as he chewed.

The warlock smiled and nodded at him in approval.

As soon as the first bite hit his stomach, Jace realized just how hungry he really was and, putting aside his anger, he practically devoured the rest of the apple, then quickly followed it with the plate of eggs and sausage.

He paused for a moment, eyeing the bowl of oatmeal on the upper left side of his tray, his face twisting in disgust. “I’m not eating whatever the hell that is. It looks like someone else already beat me to it and puked it back up again.”

To be honest, Magnus wasn’t expecting him to eat everything without protest. The boy was argumentative by nature, so he figured he’d aim high and let Jace meet him halfway.

“Fine,” he acknowledged. “Eat the banana instead, and we’ll call it even.”

The blond shrugged, peeled back the skin of the bright yellow fruit, and ate half of it in one bite, then turned his attention to his still slumbering brother as he chewed.
“How is he?” he asked after a few gulps of orange juice helped wash the banana down.

“Physically, he’s nearly healed now. I’ve been working on him throughout the night. The major damage has been taken care of, but he’ll be sore for quite some time, I’m sure. My magic is nearly depleted, so I thought you might be willing to take over with some angelic magic instead.”

Magnus summoned Jace’s stele directly into the blond’s free hand.

Jace tossed the banana peel back onto the tray, then reached over and lifted the hem of his brother’s shirt before activating his iratze rune.

The rune glowed for half a second, then quickly dissipated. Apparently, it had already been overused. He frowned in confusion, looking to the warlock for an explanation.

“Isabelle came to check on you both a few times throughout the night,” Magnus offered. “She activated multiple runes for him, including the iratze, stamina, and nourishment ones so he wouldn’t require IVs. I doubt he would’ve taken kindly to more needles.”

Jace nodded in understanding, then began searching Alec’s skin for a blank spot on which to create a fresh rune. He found a space on his brother’s inner right forearm and set to work.

Alec’s brow furrowed for a moment at the burning sensation, then smoothed out again as the rune did its job and the sharp pain eased, along with the underlying full body ache.

“How’s he doing… you know… mentally?” Jace hedged warily as he tugged the blanket aside and drew another iratze on Alec’s upper left thigh for good measure, allowing the two runes to work more efficiently in tandem.

The poor kid was going to be covered with them by the time Jace was satisfied.

Magnus leaned forward and glided a soothing thumb across Alec’s cheek, craving the physical contact.

“I’m afraid we won’t know that until he wakes.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

Jace had wanted to speak to Raphael first so he would be better prepared for the fallout, but now that it was daytime, the vampire would be holed up in the Dumort with the rest of his clan, and getting him alone was going to be much more difficult.

No doubt all part of the warlock’s devious plan when he knocked Jace out till late morning. He didn’t know if the man was trying to protect him, or the vampire. Quite possibly, both.

Magnus rose to his feet with a sigh. “I suppose now is as good a time as any. You may want to stand back though. I have no idea what mood he’s going to be in once I bring him around.”

Remembering how poorly things had gone last time Alec woke up in a state of panic, Magnus snapped his fingers and procured padded medical restraints which instantly fastened the boy’s wrists to the sturdy bedframe.

Jace didn’t appear to be happy with the warlock’s chosen methods, but he didn’t argue either. Just prepared himself for the worst. At least this way, Alec wouldn’t accidentally fall to the floor if he awoke in a panic.
With a final nod of consent from the blond, Magnus waved his hands over Alec’s body, removing the healing spell that was keeping the boy unconscious. He brought him out of it as slowly as possible, doing his best not to jar him back into reality.

Alec began to stir, then his eyes cracked open, blinking blearily up at Magnus. He tensed the second he discovered he wasn’t alone, then his eyes widened further upon the realization that he was secured in place.


He yanked against the bindings, but they didn’t budge.

“What…?”

The warlock moved in quickly, resting one hand over Alec’s wildly beating heart as the other cradled the side of his face, drawing his attention.

“You’re alright, Alexander. The restraints are only there for your protection. You’re safe here. Do you understand?”

Alec locked pleading eyes with Magnus, the desperation in them palpable.

“Take them off, please. Just let me go.”

“I will, I promise. I just need you to answer a few questions for me first. Do you know where you are right now?”

*Brocelind Forest. Hotel Dumort. Hospital.*

“I…” Alec blinked hard, then glanced around, taking in the familiar bed and bland wallpaper with confusion. “M-my room?”

“Good. How are your pain levels?”

“I don’t…” Alec pulled against the restraints again, clearly getting anxious. “Magnus, what’s going on? Why am I…”

Alec caught a glimpse of motion out of his peripheral vision and snapped his head around to see Jace inching closer.

“Alec?” he asked softly, one hand reaching out to his brother. “Are you back with us?”

The older boy instinctively recoiled upon recognition.


That wasn't Jace. Jace was dead.

“No… You’re not him. You’re not my brother! Get away from me!”

The blond looked stricken, taking a few steps back to placate his traumatized Parabatai. “Alec, please. It’s me. I…”


“Stop,” Alec whimpered, pressing himself as far away from Jace as possible. “Just stop!”
“But I’m only trying to…!”


“Jace, perhaps it’s best if you wait outside for a bit,” Magnus stated sympathetically, trying his best to soothe Alec as the boy began thrashing against the restraints.

Jace knew his presence was only making things worse for his brother, so without another word, he stumbled out of the room on numb legs and closed the door behind himself.

Magnus turned back to Alec, shushing him as the boy’s tears began to fall.

The pain was so intense, he could hardly breathe. It took him a while to calm down enough to realize the majority of the pain was coming from one location. His Parabatai rune.

He tried to reach for the hem of his shirt, needing to know if the rune was still there. Needing to know if his brother was still alive somehow. But the restraints prevented him from managing it.

He bucked against the bindings in frustration.

“Take it easy, Alexander!” Magnus fretted, trying to steady the young Shadowhunter.

“My Parabatai rune…” Alec panted out. “Is it still there?”

“Of course it is. Why wouldn’t it be?”


“Your boy’s crying, you know… He’s begging me. Begging me not to do this…”

Painpainpain…

“Show me!” Alec demanded with a pained grunt, and the warlock humored him, lifting his shirt to halfway up his ribs.

“It’s right there where it belongs. See?”

Alec raised his head and stared down at his hip, feeling more confused than ever. The mark was pure black and strong as ever. By then why was it hurting so badly?

“Something’s wrong, Magnus,” he choked out as he dropped his head back down to the pillow. “It’s burning. Jace, he’s…”

And then he suddenly understood.

It wasn’t physical pain that he was feeling. It was emotional, and it was coming from his brother. He was hurting beyond belief.

Because Alec had just told him to leave.

The realization took the air right out of Alec’s lungs. No…

“J-Jace?” he stuttered out as his throat constricted with emotion. I’m sorry, I’m sorry…

“Shh… You’re alright, Alexander, and so is your brother. Both of them, in fact. It’s all over now. The rune is gone. It can’t hurt you anymore.”
“But Max… He’s…”

“He’s perfectly fine, I assure you. Recovering nearby with the help of the Silent Brothers.”

Alec’s head was spinning, the images flickering before his vision at a rapid pace, disorienting him. Confusing him. Refusing to leave him alone.

“I d-don’t understand. I saw him… I saw Jace… By the Angel, I don’t know what’s real anymore. Magnus, what’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing at all, dear one,” the warlock assured, running his fingers through Alec’s hair in comfort. “You’ve been through a lot and I can only imagine how conflicted you must be feeling right now. I’ll do my best to try and clear things up a bit, alright? What exactly do you remember?”

“I… It’s all kind of a blur. I just…” Alec’s eyes darkened as more bits and pieces of the past day started coming back to him.

The pain, the terror, the shame, the guilt... The betrayal.

“You left me,” Alec accused quietly, his brow narrowing as he recalled the last time he had seen the warlock.

Magnus had convinced him to go back and face Camille.

Alec had wanted to stay in the darkness and keep those memories buried forever, but Magnus wouldn’t let him. He had told Alec that he was strong enough to get through it.

They were supposed to get through it together.

“You promised you’d stay until it was over, but you didn’t. I went back to Camille like you wanted, and then you were gone. You just… You handed me over to her…”

Magnus blinked at him, his heart constricting in sorrow at the accusation.

“Alexander, I’m so sorry. I had no choice. My magic, it was causing you harm, and…”

Alec couldn't hear him anymore.

Camille’s hands were digging into his thighs, her warm mouth and sadistic tongue were wrapped around him as her head bobbed up and down, the tension building in his gut...

Then she smiled in triumph as he succumbed to her will.

Alec gagged and lunged for the right edge of the bed.

Magnus immediately released the restraint on Alec’s left wrist so he could roll freely, then tried to support the weakened boy as he vomited onto the floor, but as soon as he was able, Alec jerked away from him.

“Don’t touch me,” he rasped. He couldn’t bear the feeling of hands on his skin. Not with thoughts of Camille so fresh in his mind.


His numb fingers started scrabbling against the remaining restraint. He needed to get free. Needed to get away. But he couldn’t get his shaking left hand to cooperate.
Alec let out a sob of frustration as he lost his grip on the buckle yet again.

Magnus sighed and stood, leaning over him to reach his far wrist.

“Let me help you.”

“I don’t want your help! Just go!”

Pathetic. Weak. Failure.

“Alexander…”

“Magnus, please… I… I need to be alone right now.”

Magnus could see how badly the boy was shaking below him. Alec was still in shock. Still traumatized from the memories that were now fresh in his mind. He shouldn't be on his own just yet.

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea,” he replied softly.


Alec’s jaw clenched.

“I said go, Magnus!”

The warlock reluctantly pulled back.

“Allright. If that’s what you truly wish, then I’ll give you some space.”

He made his way towards the door, following in Jace’s footsteps. He turned back once he reached the frame.

“I’m sorry for everything, Alec. I hope you can one day forgive me for the pain I’ve put you through.”

With a snap of his fingers, the other restraint disappeared entirely and he left Alec to process his thoughts in peace.

Memories were hitting the boy in waves, crashing over him and threatening to drown him. Flashes of the horrors he had been subjected to over the past twelve hours. Of the buried secrets his family had witnessed him enduring.

Object. Toy. Disappointment. FAILURE.

It was too much. It was all too much.

He squeezed his eyes shut, covered his ears, drew his knees into his chest, and sobbed brokenly as the mental assault continued for what felt like years.

Too loud. Too bright. Too painful. Please, make it stop...

He never heard the door open again, but a gentle hand on his shoulder startled him enough to make him open his eyes and he found himself staring up into the watery gaze of his little sister.
“Iz-zy?” he gasped out between hitched breaths.

“I’m right here, big brother.”

She opened her arms to him and he lunged into her embrace, allowing his pent-up emotions to flow out as he grasped her tightly to his aching chest.

She rocked him gently, whispering soothing words he couldn’t discern over his own gut-wrenching sounds of misery.

“Breathe, Alec,” Isabelle coached, stroking a hand up and down his shuddering back. “You’re going to be okay. We’re all here for you.”

When the door swung open the second time, Alec was facing it and he jumped skittishly at the sudden movement. But a wave of childlike hope flooded his chest when his harried mother strode in.

“…M-Mom?” he squeaked out past a tight throat.

“Oh, my baby boy… I’m so sorry. I never should’ve left.”

She sat down on the bed and engulfed both of her children in a bone-crushing hug. Alec buried his face in her shoulder and continued to sob, his defenses shattered into oblivion, leaving him as exposed as a raw nerve.

Jace watched surreptitiously from the doorway, taking care to stay out of his brother’s line of sight for fear of upsetting him even further.

The second he had stepped outside the room, he had sent a fire message to Isabelle, alerting her to the fact that Alec was awake and needing her by his side. She told him she was on her way, and that Maryse had finally returned, safe and sound.

As Maryse began singing the one song that could always calm Alec since he was a baby, Jace knew that he had made the right choice.

Regardless of what he wanted everyone to believe, his brother didn’t really want to be alone right now. He just wanted to feel safe again. Izzy and Maryse could give him that.

They were going to get through this. Alec was the strongest out of all of them. The glue that kept their family together.

He had survived it all before, and he was going to again. He’d be okay, in time. He just had to be.

And until then, Jace had a vampire to interrogate.

Hardening his heart, the blond turned and headed down the corridor to the weapon’s room.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Uh oh... Jace is on the warpath!
This chapter is dedicated to Nadja who made a lovely hurt! Alec video, inspired by this story. So if you're liking the fic so far, please go check out her work and show your support here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5japdu-6z8s&feature=youtu.be

Only about four chapters left if all goes according to plan!
Jace had just reached the door to the weapons room when a flash of blue light caught his attention out of the corner of his eye.

He turned to find Magnus on the training floor, performing some sort of dance with a magical orb contained between his hands, guiding it through the air as he combined an impressive amount of martial arts moves, the likes of which Jace had never seen before.

The warlock was mesmerizing to watch due to his fluid grace and determined focus, but having vented his pain many a time on that very same training floor, Jace could tell that Magnus wasn’t just practicing to kill time.

The blond sighed, gave the weapons room one last longing gaze, then made his way into the larger room.

“Hey, you alright?” he asked softly, trying not to startle the warlock as he approached.

Magnus never broke concentration as he continued his dance, but he forced a smile on his face that looked distinctly more like a grimace. “Never better. Why do you ask?”

“Call it a hunch,” Jace replied, inspecting the training rack for a viable weapon. “That ball of pixie dust is pretty and all, but fancy a real challenge?”

“Excuse you, Boy Wonder… This ‘ball of pixie dust’ as you say could decimate an entire country if I chose to release it.”

“But you won’t, because that would kill a lot of innocent people. Which means you’re keeping that thing completely under your control. It’s safe. Boring. I, however, am not.”

Magnus raised an eyebrow at Jace over his shoulder, watching with interest as the boy chose a set of Kali sticks.

When Jace tossed them at him, Magnus had to dissolve the orb quickly before catching the sticks on reflex.

Jace nodded in approval.

“Besides, should you even be wasting more magic right now? I mean, you have been using a lot of it lately…”

“You make me sound like an addict.”

Magnus squared off with the blond as Jace chose a second set of sticks for himself and settled into a proper stance opposite him.
The younger boy shrugged innocently as he skillfully twirled the sticks around in his hands.

“Your word, not mine.”

He waved the warlock on, inviting him to make the first move.

Magnus didn’t disappoint.

He launched forward with a series of attacks, the sounds of the wooden strikes echoing throughout the open arena as the barrage forced Jace to lose ground and retreat.

Magnus finished his assault with a fancy pirouette, his strike being blocked by the blonde less than an inch from the side of Jace’s head. This time, Magnus’s grin was genuine, and feral.

“You’re right. Schooling young pups like yourself is definitely more entertaining. I thought you said this was going to be challenging though…”

Eyes darkening at the unexpected taunt, Jace subtly shifted from training to fight mode with a dangerous smirk on his face that rivaled the warlock’s.

“Be careful what you wish for.”

Jace launched into battle, instantly putting Magnus on the defensive. Every strike was blocked, every step was matched, and every lunge was deflected.

The two men moved as one, equally skilled and beautifully balanced.

This was exactly what they both needed.

The warlock ducked under a strike that was aimed at his head, then crossed both sticks to deflect the follow-up strike that was gunning for his left knee.

Magnus countered by divesting Jace of said stick with a perfectly executed maneuver.

As Jace dropped back a few steps to regroup, Magnus tossed his own second stick aside to even the playing field. This time, he waved Jace forward.

On and on it went, until both men were weaponless, reduced to hand-to-hand combat, covered in a fine sheen of sweat, and completely out of breath.

Finally ready to call it quits, Magnus waited until Jace swung high, then dropped to the floor and swept the boy’s legs out from under him. It was a dirty move, but perfectly legal.

Jace hit the ground with a grunt and was too tired to kip back up again and continue so he stayed where he was, thus forfeiting the match.

“Nice move,” he panted, watching warily as the warlock slowly rose to his feet and casually leaned over him.

“You’re quite the worthy opponent,” Magnus conceded, reaching out a hand in truce. “For a moment there, I was almost afraid that I was actually going to have to work for it…”

He winked at the young man.

Jace snorted. “I guess I’ll take that as a compliment,” he replied, accepting the proffered hand and leveraging himself back into a standing position.
“As you should,” the warlock agreed, conjuring them each a towel with which to dry off. “But in all seriousness, I haven’t sparred like that since the Dark Ages. So thank you. For the distraction.”

Jace nodded in understanding, then wrapped the towel around the back of his neck. “So what happens now?”

Magnus paused in thought, then looked up at the blond. “Now? I go have a little chat with Raphael.”

Jace’s eyes narrowed. “What? No way! You’re not going without me.”

“To get the answers that we seek, we need him on our side, Jace. Threatening him won’t get us anywhere.”

“Who said I was going to threaten him?”

Magnus scoffed at the blond.

“Your face, for one. Look, I know you like to handle things yourself, but I think it’s best if I take the lead on this one. Besides, you should be here with your family. Be here with Alec.”

“Alec doesn’t want me here,” Jace shot back, the pain in his voice clearly evident, the wound of rejection still raw.

The warlock rested his hands on the younger man’s slumped shoulders in a gesture of comfort.

“Alexander doesn’t know what he wants right now. He’s scared and confused, and from what I’ve seen, he relies heavily on you under these circumstances. Just give him a bit more time, and I promise, he will come to you when he’s ready.”

“And what exactly am I supposed to do until then? Take up knitting?”

“I’m sure you can figure out some way to pass the time. Preferably something that does not require needle work if you’re hoping to get back in Alexander’s good graces. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Magnus, wait. Are you sure you don’t want…?”

Jace shielded his eyes from the bright flash and sudden gust of air as a portal opened a few feet away from them.

“I’m sure!” Magnus yelled back over the din, then he and the portal disappeared, leaving an uncomfortably still silence behind in their wake.

“Great,” Jace mumbled in frustration, absently kicking one of the Kali sticks across the floor. “Just great…”

SHSHSHSHSH

Magnus stepped out of the portal right in front of the entrance to the hotel Dumort.

He braced himself for what was sure to be an uncomfortable conversation, then entered the building in search of Raphael.

It didn’t take him long to find the current leader of the New York clan, praying in his favorite room which he deemed “the chapel”.

SHSHSHSHSH
The warlock waited patiently for him to finish, knowing the vampire would already be aware of his presence thanks to his heightened senses.

After a moment, Raphael crossed himself, then stood to greet his old friend. “Magnus… What brings you to my humble home? Is everything alright?”

“I’m afraid not,” Magnus replied. “We need to talk, Raphael.”

“I see. Is this a business or a social call?”

“Neither exclusively. And yet, perhaps a bit of both.”

Raphael sighed. “Magnus, if this has anything to do with Isabelle, I swear to you I have kept my distance as promised.”

“And I appreciate your candor, but this isn’t about dear Isabelle. It’s about Alexander.”

Raphael frowned. Last time he had seen the boy, Alec had every intention of beating him to a pulp for getting involved with his yin fen-addicted sister.

“What about him?”

“I need you to tell me what happened the night Camille captured him.”

The vampire’s eyes widened a moment in surprise and he opened his mouth to deny any knowledge of the incident.

But one look at Magnus’s expression, and Raphael knew this wasn’t the time to play dumb.

He nodded solemnly. “I think it’s best we discuss this in private,” he stated, then stepped back and waved Magnus into the chapel, closing the heavy door behind him.

SHSHSHSHSH

Regardless of the amount of energy he had expended while sparring with Magnus, Jace still felt the urge to keep moving. To keep fighting. To keep burning off steam.

There was a tingling itch crawling through his veins, just below his skin, and he couldn’t quite scratch it.

He paced across the otherwise empty training floor in the warlock’s absence, tidying up here and there simply to keep his hands busy.

He wasn’t built to just sit around and wait.

Jace needed to take action. To make himself useful. To earn his place in the Lightwood family, and in the New York Institute. Idle hands never got him anything but punishment and pain.

He knew he wasn’t going to be able to settle down again until he checked in on Alec and fixed this horrible void between them.

If he could just explain to the older boy that what Alec had seen under the influence of the rune wasn’t real… Convince him that he was the same Jace he had always been… Then maybe their bond could finally begin to heal.

Mind made up, Jace headed back down the hall towards the bedrooms. The nervous energy
coursing through his body increased the closer he got to his brother’s door.

He raised a fist to knock on the doorframe and announce his presence, but he stopped short once he got a look inside the room.

Alec appeared to have cried himself to sleep (or perhaps more accurately, passed out from exhaustion) in Maryse’s arms as she continued to hum quietly, stroking her fingers through his hair in comfort.

Izzy sat next to them on the bed, holding one of Alec’s hands in her own while her other hand gently glided up and down Alec’s arm soothingly.

Jace’s gaze shifted down to his unconscious brother and his chest tightened painfully at the sight.

Alec looked like absolute hell.

He had partially healed scars of all shapes and flavors decorating every inch of his exposed skin, he was pale and drawn like he’d been kept prisoner in a dark basement for years, his cheeks were red and blotchy from crying, and his lips were dried and cracked from dehydration.

The poor guy probably needed to sleep for a week before he’d be able to feel even remotely human again.

Now wasn’t the time for their little heart-to-heart. It was best to let Alec rest for now, and maybe once he woke up again, he’d be more receptive to Jace’s presence.

Backing away from the door silently so as not to draw attention, Jace turned and found his legs carrying him further up the hall instead of back towards the training floor.

At first, he wasn’t aware of having any particular destination in mind. But then he came to a stop just outside another door and, after a brief hesitation, he pushed it open gently.

Max Lightwood was fast asleep in his bed, still hooked up to a few remaining machines as he recovered from his ordeal with Jonathan.

The boy looked so small and alone that Jace knew this was where he needed to be while the others tended to Alec.

He perched himself on the edge of the single chair by Max’s bedside and let out a slow, shaky breath, his right knee bouncing up and down with the nervous tension he couldn’t seem to shake.

But as he watched the boy’s chest rise and fall steadily in his healing sleep, Jace felt the pent up stress finally start to slip away.

He had no idea how much time had passed while he kept vigil over his youngest brother, but the longer he sat there, the calmer he felt.

Eventually, he leaned forward, resting his forearms on the edge of the mattress, his fingers interlaced and outstretched in front of him, brushing against Max’s tiny left wrist.

“Hey, kiddo,” he whispered. “I don’t know if you can hear me or not, but I have a big favor to ask of you.”

He swallowed hard as his throat began to tighten and his eyes began to well up. He blinked the tears away, then lifted his clasped hands to his chin as if in prayer.
“Everything’s been falling apart lately, Max. I’ve tried my best to fix it, but no matter what I do, it doesn’t seem to help any.

“I know you’re still recovering from your own wounds, and I have no right to put this burden on your shoulders, but our brother is in a dark place right now, and he needs you. We all need you, buddy. So if there’s any way you could just wake up and let us know you’re alright…”

Jace’s voice cracked and he fell silent, watching the young boy for any signs that he might’ve heard him.

But when minutes passed and nothing changed, Jace allowed his stubborn tears to fall and nodded his head in acceptance.

“Oh, it’s alright, Max. You just get the rest you need and feel better, you hear me? I’ll find another way to help Alec. He’s gonna be fine. I promise.”

SHSHSHSHSH

“Shh... Save your strength, darling. You’re gonna need it…”

“Rumor is you’re still technically a virgin. Is that true?”

“Either way, good ol’ Magnus would sure be jealous that I found you first this time. With those pretty eyes and pouty lips... You are definitely his type.”

“I wonder... Do you think your new brother-in-arms is going to feel everything I’m going to do to you?”

“Think he felt that?”

Alec sat bolt-upright with a gasp, his heart hammering away in his chest.

There were hands on his body, trying to restrain him. Trying to pull him back down to the mattress.

Nonononono...

He whined deep in his throat as he struggled to break free.

“Alec! It’s alright! You’re okay!” Izzy repeated over and over, willing her words to be heard by her panicked brother as he roughly transitioned from nightmare to reality.

“Breathe, sweetheart,” Maryse added, rubbing Alec’s shuddering back as she tried to get him to lay down again. “You’re safe here. It was just a bad dream.”

Alec’s brain finally caught up with his surroundings and he felt the stirrings of embarrassment and shame as they overcame his panic. He groaned in frustration as he carefully extracted himself from his mother’s hold.

“No, Mom,” he stated dejectedly, raising his knees and dropping his head into his hands as he attempted to calm his frantic heartbeat. “It wasn’t just a dream. It was real. All of it was real.”

He still had the scars to prove it.

He flinched when Maryse’s hand suddenly combed through the hair at the back of his bowed head before sliding down to give his tense neck a reassuring squeeze.
“But it’s over now, right? The rune is gone. Everything is going to be okay, baby.”

Alec loved his mother dearly, but she didn’t understand. How could she? She hadn’t been there in the end to witness him reliving his worst memories.

And thank Raziel for that...

She had no idea that it wasn’t the pain he had endured over the past twelve hours that haunted his dreams. It was the unwanted pleasure and betrayal of his own body that left the deepest wounds.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Izzy pressed gently, her hand resting on one of his raised knees.

Alec shook his head. The last thing he wanted to do was give voice to the images that still haunted him.

He just wanted it all to go away. The pain, the fear, the shame...

The hands, the sounds, the sensations...

The nightmares. The panic attacks. The babying.

Alec subtly slid his knee out of Izzy’s grasp, hoping she wouldn’t take offense.

Without missing a beat, Izzy drew back and gave her brother more space.

“What can we do to help, Alec? What do you need?”

That was a loaded question if he ever heard one.

He needed to put the past back in the past and bury it once and for all. He needed to feel a modicum of normalcy again. He needed to fix all the relationships he had recently broken. He needed...

He needed his Parabatai.

His brother’s name left his numb lips before he even realized he was going to say it.

It sounded pathetic and weak to his own ears, but it was too late to take it back now. And he couldn’t deny the truth of it, even if he wanted to.

He needed Jace. He needed his other half in order to feel whole again.

“Okay,” Maryse replied, a pained smile on her face that was meant to be comforting, regardless of the fact that Alec wasn’t even looking up at her. “Isabelle and I will go find him, alright? You just stay right here and catch your breath.”

Alec was being overwhelmed by the multitude of emotions that his body and mind still weren’t ready to address, so the best he could do was give her a slight nod, face still hidden in his hands.

His bed rocked a bit as both women stood and Alec fought back his sudden nausea, anxiously waiting for them to leave so he could regain a modicum of control over himself.

“You check the weapons room and training floor,” Maryse instructed her daughter. “I’ll check Jace’s bedroom and get in touch with Clary. Maybe she’s seen him recently. I doubt he’ll have gone far.”
“On it. We’ll be right back, Alec.”

Alec heard the door close behind them and he slowly unfurled from his defensive position, glancing around to verify that he was indeed alone.

Then he closed his eyes for a brief moment and swallowed down his ever-rising anxiety.

He knew that the rune was truly gone, and the punishment itself was over. His injuries were mostly healed, although there was a deep ache that penetrated all the way into his bones that would take days to pass thanks to his overtaxed body.

But his mind… His emotional stability had taken such a brutal hit, he wasn’t sure he’d ever fully recover.

He was still struggling to separate current events from memories. Still feeling the heightened emotions from his past as if he had just suffered them moments ago.

And he couldn’t stop shaking.

That one simple fact was what frustrated him the most. It was physical evidence that he was decidedly not okay, and it was putting his trauma on display for all the world to see.

He needed the only person who had always been able to talk him down from the verge of panic.

As he thought about Jace, he focused on his Parabatai rune and any potential feelings emanating through it. He needed to know if Jace was alright after everything that had gone down.

To Alec’s surprise, their connection seemed to be muted, as if Jace were out of range (the thought alone made his heart leap into his throat), or quite possibly, sleeping.

Knowing his brother, Jace had been awake and by his side the entire time Alec had been suffering through his punishment. It wouldn’t surprise him in the least if the younger boy had passed out somewhere by now.

He was also surprised to feel a sense of protective contentment flowing through him, a feeling very similar to how Alec felt sitting by Izzy’s bed while she struggled her way through the yin fen withdrawal.

And then he suddenly understood. He knew exactly where Jace was hiding.

Alec gingerly slid off his bed and limped his way towards the door, ignoring his body’s objections to movement.

It took longer than it had any right to, but eventually, Alec reached Max’s bedroom and quietly nudged the door open.

As anticipated, he found the blond boy, slumped by Max’s bedside, his head pillowed in his arms on the edge of the mattress. The sound of his steady breathing instantly helped to ease the knot in Alec’s chest and he found himself matching his brother’s relaxed pace.

Feeling weak on his feet, Alec rested against the doorframe for a moment, then gently called out to his Parabatai.

Jace jerked upright in his seat, glancing down at Max as if trying to figure out what had woken
him. Then a creak from the direction of the doorway had him whirling around.

His eyes widened as they landed on the older boy.

“Alec?”

Jace instinctively stood up and took a step towards his fragile brother, but then stopped, remembering what had happened the last time they were in the same room together.

Alec didn’t trust him anymore. Even worse, he had been afraid of him.

A dozen questions immediately flooded Jace’s mind.

*Why are you awake already? Shouldn’t you still be in bed? Are you okay? Did something else go wrong? How much do you remember? How did you find me?*

Then a horrible thought occurred to him. Maybe Alec wasn’t here looking for him, but simply came in to check on Max. To prove to himself that the young boy was in fact going to be okay.

If that were the case, then Alec’s fear of Jace might be what was keeping him from entering and being by his little brother’s side where he belonged.

“Shit. I’m sorry,” the blond blurted out, backing away from the bed to grant his brother safe passage to it. “I shouldn’t be in here. I just wanted to make sure Max was okay, but I’ll go now so you can… Oof!”

Jace froze as he suddenly found himself engulfed in Alec’s arms. It took him a moment to realize that he was being hugged rather than attacked, and his own arms slowly came up to return the embrace.

“Alec?” he whispered again, worried that his brother had yet to say a word.

The older boy was trembling against him, and his hitched breaths informed Jace that he was crying. Baffled, Jace tightened his hold, cradling Alec’s head to his shoulder.

“’m s-so sorry,” Alec sobbed. “P-please forgive me, Jace…”

“Hey, hey… it’s okay, buddy. There’s nothing to forgive, you hear me?”

“It’s just, the Agony r-run… It was confusing me! I-I saw things that weren’t real. And I saw you…”

Jace drew back far enough to see into his brother’s red and watery eyes. The poor kid looked truly miserable.

“Saw me what, Alec?” he prompted warily.

Alec shook his head and pulled Jace close again, unwilling to put those horrid images into words.

“Doesn’t matter,” he stated softly. “I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“Me?” Jace chuckled, a bit hysterically. “I’m fine, dude. You should probably still be in bed though. Why don’t we get you back to your room and…”

“No!” Alec shouted accidentally, then winced as Jace drew away from him in surprise. “Sorry, I just… I feel like I’ve been laying in there all day. I needed to get up and get out for a bit.”
Jace could read between the lines. He even felt the flutter of panic that emanated between their Parabatai runes.

Alec felt vulnerable while flat on his back. More than that, every time he closed his eyes, his memories returned to haunt him again.

And after the pitiful show he had just put on for his mother and sister, Alec didn’t intend to fall asleep again anytime soon.

“Alright,” Jace acquiesced. “At least sit down then. Come on…”

The blond led his brother to his own recently vacated chair and eased him down onto it. Alec’s attention automatically shifted to the boy sleeping in the bed before him.

“How’s Max doing?” he asked softly.

Jace sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

“As well as can be expected, I guess. According to Izzy, the Silent Brothers said he should make a full recovery. But he won’t wake up until he’s ready.”

Alec leaned forward and took Max’s small hand into his own. The size difference was laughable, but it was also a painful reminder of how young the boy truly was.

Max never should’ve been in a position to go up against Sebastian alone. He could’ve easily died that day, and it would’ve been Alec’s fault.

He was the Head of the Institute, and he had allowed this stranger to come into his home and threaten his family. What kind of leader makes such a drastic mistake?

Alec had had his suspicions about Sebastian ever since the guy conveniently rescued Izzy in that vampire-laden alleyway, integrating himself into their tightly-knit family.

The eldest Lightwood’s gut had told him something was wrong about the Brit, and he had ignored it because there were too many other things on his plate and he needed all the help he could get with the manhunt.

He had been so focused on tracking down Valentine and Jonathan, that he never once stopped to consider the fact that one of them might’ve been right there under his nose the entire time.

And for that mistake, his innocent little brother had paid dearly.

Jace felt Alec’s shift in emotions and gave the older boy’s shoulder a gentle squeeze.

“This wasn’t your fault, Alec. None of us realized what was happening until it was too late.”

“Max figured it out,” Alec replied, a hint of pride in his tone and a fond smile crossing his weary features.

Jace chuckled. “The kid always was one step ahead of his class.”

Sensing that Alec needed some time alone to make amends with Max, Jace retreated a step towards the door and pointed at it over his shoulder.

“I should probably go find Maryse and Izzy. I’m assuming they’re out searching for me, and that’s how you managed to escape from their doting clutches?”
Alec huffed out a laugh. “Good assumption. They’re probably harassing Clary for answers by now.”

Jace winced. “That’ll go over well… I should probably buy her something nice to go with the apology I’m gonna owe her after Maryse’s interrogation.”

“I hear jewelry works,” Alec supplied offhandedly. *Speaking of jewelry...* “Hey, do you have any idea where Magnus is?”

“Yeah, he uh… He had to go run an errand.”

Alec’s heart sank into the pit of his stomach. Magnus had left him. Again.

“Oh.”

“I’m sure he’ll be back soon though,” Jace quickly added when his brother’s face fell.

The older boy shrugged, poorly faking indifference. “He’s free to come and go as he pleases, apparently…”

Jace frowned, crossing his arms over his chest in consternation. “Okay, spill. What happened between you two after I left? I thought you guys were working things out?”

“So did I. But what if… Jace, what if he blames me for what happened with Camille?”

Jace gaped at him. “What? Why the hell would you even think that?”

“Because when we were trapped inside my head, he told me he’d stay by my side if I went back and faced her, and then he just… He disappeared. I guess I can’t blame him for not wanting to see what happened next, but… I didn’t think he’d just take off like that.”

Realization hit Jace like a ton of bricks.

“Oh, buddy… That was my fault. Magnus didn’t know it at the time, but his magic was killing you because of the fail-safes on the rune. I had no choice but to break the connection.”

Alec’s head snapped up in Jace’s direction, searching his face for any signs of deceit. He found none.

“So he… He didn’t abandon me?” Alec whispered, barely able to say the words out loud.

“No, Alec. In fact, he was pretty pissed at me for pulling him away from you. He actually kinda kicked my ass on the training floor a couple hours ago to pay me back for it too.”

Alec pressed his palms into his eyes in frustration. “Crap. I’m such an idiot…”

Jace gently clapped him on the back. “Hey, don’t sweat it, alright? Magnus isn’t the kind of person who’s easily chased away. You guys will work this out. Have faith.”

Alec *did* have faith in Magnus. Ever since the day they first met. And he was kicking himself now for letting his own self-doubts get in the way of that.

“Thanks, Jace. For everything.”

“Of course. Oh, and Alec?”
“Yeah?”

“If you’re considering getting Magnus an apology gift, I hear jewelry works.”

Jace winked at him, then left.

Alec shook his head in amusement, then let out a slow breath as the weight on his shoulders caught up with him again. He reached for his little brother a second time, brushing his thumb soothingly over the back of the boy’s hand.

There was so much he wanted to say to Max. So much he needed to hear from him. If only he’d just wake up…

“I’m so sorry, Max. I should’ve known Jonathan wasn’t the real Sebastian. I should’ve been there to protect you.”

Max’s fingers slowly curled tighter around Alec’s, making the brunette look up at his face in shock. The boy smiled fondly back at him through half-lidded eyes.

“’s okay, big brother. You’re here now.”

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Only two more chapters to go! I can't believe it's almost over. Thank you all for your continued support and inspiring comments, and I hope you'll stick with me for many stories to come! I love you all!!
A/N: This chapter is dedicated to Sandmann for her wonderful beta assistance and for keeping me on track! Your help has been greatly appreciated, and I’m looking forward to the big finale!

For a moment, Alec was afraid he was still hallucinating. That Max wasn’t actually awake, but simply another manipulative contrivance of the rune.

He stared at his little brother in wonder, unable to believe his eyes, but wishing with every fiber of his being that what he saw was indeed reality.

Max frowned at him and slowly sat up. “Alec? What’s wrong?”

The older boy tentatively reached out a trembling hand and cupped his brother’s cheek. His skin was warm, possibly a bit feverish. And very much tangible.

Max covered Alec’s hand with his own.

“You’re scaring me, Alec… Are you okay?”

Alec let out a heartfelt sob of relief and pulled the boy gently into his arms as he transferred himself from the plastic chair onto the edge of the mattress.

“I am now. By the Angel, it’s good to hear your voice, kiddo.”

Max patted his big brother on the back, each of the boys equally giving and receiving comfort from the warm embrace.

The younger sibling was the first to pull back, concern written all over his face. “You’re shaking,” he stated bluntly.

Alec quickly swiped away the tears on his face and gave Max a tight smile. “It’s been a long day. You really had us worried for a while there, Max.”

The boy smirked deviously. “Don’t worry about me. Not even Jonathan Morgenstern can take me down!”

Alec chuckled at his brazen brother. “Not for lack of effort, mind you. What were you thinking, going after him alone?”

Max dropped his gaze to his lap, fiddling with a pulled string in his blanket. “I just wanted to prove that I was good enough for a real mission.”

Alec sighed.

“No one doubts your capability, buddy. Or your courage. But never ever go on a hunt without
someone having your back, understand?"

“You mean like a Parabatai?”

“That’s one option, sure. Doesn’t have to be though. Any one of us would follow you into battle.”

Max rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, to babysit me…”

“No, Max. That’s not what I mean. Shadowhunters are trained to fight on their own when necessary, but they’re best as a team. Working hand-in-hand with the people they can trust. You’ve still got a lot to learn before I’ll even think of putting you out in the field.”

“Oh, come on, Alec! I get it, okay? I screwed up. I promise it won’t happen again.”

“This isn’t a punishment. It’s just a fact. The schooling and training are there for a reason. We’ve all gone through it, from start to finish.”

“Even Jace?”

Alec huffed out a laugh. “Yes, even the mighty Jace. He wasn’t always the badass warrior we know and love today. He had to work for it. And some things come easier than others. Jace is good at combat, you’re an incredible tracker…”

“And you’re the best archer the Institute has ever seen!”

Alec ruffled Max’s hair affectionately. “Thanks for that, but over-the-top flattery isn’t going to change my mind.”

Max shrugged. “Worth a shot.”

“My point is, being great at one or two things isn’t enough to keep you alive out there. You either have to be great at everything, or surround yourself with a team who excels in the fields that you don’t. Does that make sense?”

Max’s face scrunched up in thought. “I think so… Basically, add up all the different pieces to make one whole demon-killing machine?”

“Exactly. And yeah, even then it doesn’t always go to plan. But at least with a team, you stand a better chance of making it back home when all is said and done.”

“Live to fight another day,” Max added with a nod of understanding.

“See? We’ll make a Shadowhunter out of you yet.”

Max threw himself into Alec’s arms again, not missing the subtle flinch of pain in response.

“I’m sorry I scared you,” he muttered into his brother’s chest.

Alec rested his cheek on Max’s soft hair and stroked a hand soothingly up and down the boy’s back.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m just glad you’re alright.”

After a moment, Alec glanced up at the closed door.
“We should probably let the others know you’re awake. They’ve been waiting anxiously to see how you’re doing.”

He went to stand up, but Max grabbed his wrist. “Wait! Not yet, okay? They’re just going to scold me again for getting hurt. Can’t you just… sit with me for a bit?”

The older boy hesitated, but he couldn’t deny his little brother anything. Not after what they’d both been through. And those damned puppy dog eyes… He was helpless to resist.


“No. Just you,” Max stated unabashedly, tugging on Alec’s wrist again until his brother sank back down onto the mattress.

How could he say no to something like that? The kid had him wrapped securely around his little finger.

This time, Alec perched himself further up the bed, then leaned his back against the headboard with a groan of relief as the position took some of the weight off his aching muscles.

Max immediately curled into his side, slinging an arm around Alec’s waist and resting his head on his brother’s chest.

He didn’t know what had happened in his absence, but he had heard Jace’s plea. It had given him the strength and courage to pull himself from the darkness.

There was no denying that Alec was in pain.

Max could see it in the pinch of his eyes and the flexing of his jaw. In the careful way his brother moved, and in the wince he felt earlier when he hugged him too tightly.

But when he settled in against Alec, he felt that tension ease. Felt the steadying of Alec’s breathing, and the slowing of his heart rate against his cheek.

If this was all the older Lightwood needed from him to heal, then Max was more than willing to give it to him.

Alec let out a sigh of contentment as he held the boy protectively, rubbing a gentle thumb back and forth across his shoulder.

It didn’t take long for Max to fall back asleep. And Alec soon followed.

SHSHSHSHSH

Jace had barely stepped foot in the Ops Center when Maryse and Izzy descended on him from opposite sides.

“There you are!” his mother exclaimed, a bite of impatience in her tone.

“We’ve been looking all over for you,” Izzy added, hands on her hips in exasperation, but a look of concern on her face.

“Sorry. I was down the hall, keeping an eye on Max. Alec is sitting with him now.”

“He’s out of bed?!” Maryse fretted, already turning and making her way back towards the bedrooms. “I told him to stay put until we returned.”
“He’s doing okay, Maryse,” Jace pacified quickly, trying his best to keep up with her stride. “I think he just needed a change of scenery for a while.”

“Be that as it may… Neither of those boys should be unsupervised right now.”

They made short work of the distance, and Maryse entered first. She came to an abrupt halt and Jace nearly walked right into her.

“What’s wrong?” he demanded, stepping around her to see for himself. What he found made his throat tighten with emotion.

His brothers were curled up in each other’s arms, sleeping soundly and healing together.

Maryse took a moment to gather herself, then silently made her way to the bedside. She brushed Max’s bangs out of his face and almost sobbed with relief when he shifted at the contact.

Her baby boy had woken from his coma. He was going to be okay.

Both of her boys were going to be okay.

She leaned down and kissed Max on the forehead, then stretched a bit further and gave Alec a gentle kiss as well.

It took all the willpower she possessed not to draw them both into a tight hug or continue touching them to prove to herself that they were alright. But for now, it was best to let them sleep undisturbed.

Maryse was just about to sit down and take up vigil in the open chair by the bed when her daughter’s raised voice came from just outside the doorway.

“Hey! Where do you think you’re going?”

“Jace!” Maryse hissed. “Tell them to keep it down out there, or shut the door.”

“On it.”

As Jace moved back towards the door, the most annoying silhouette he had ever seen appeared in the frame and brought out his inner urge to punch something.

The man made it two steps into the room before Jace shoved him back out.

“You’re not getting back in that room. And if the Clave has a problem with that, they can take it up
with me.”

Raj stepped back just enough to break Jace’s contact with him so he could smooth out his shirt.

“Be it on your head then.”

“Whatever. When is the debriefing?”

“Now.”

“What?”

“Would you like me to speak louder? I said THE DEBRIEFING IS RIGHT NOW,” he shouted, loud enough to ensure that Maryse would hear him.

Jace shoved Raj further down the hallway and away from Max’s bedroom.

“Consider your task completed, asshole. Now get the hell out of my sight before I give you a black eye to go with that bruised ego.”

Raj glanced over Jace’s shoulder, then smirked as he backed away towards the Ops Center with his hands spread in a gesture of peace.

“No need for threats. We’re all on the same team here, right? See you around, Herondale.”

Jace watched the jerk turn and head down the hall before a cool voice from behind him made him cringe.

“Can someone please tell me what on earth is going on out here?! What is this I hear about a debriefing?”

Jace spun slowly to find a rather irate Maryse standing in the doorway, looking twice her normal height.

He made a mental note to kill Raj later when no one was looking. He was reasonably sure that Alec would help him hide the body.

Jace fortified himself before responding. “Apparently the higher-ups want to hear your personal account of how things went down on your earlier mission.”

Maryse flexed her jaw, biting back her anger, and nodded once. “And when does the inquisition start?”

“According to Raj, right now.”

“Not possible. They’ll have to reschedule. I’m not leaving my boys again.”

“I get it, trust me. But if your report gets us any closer to Valentine…”

Izzy gripped her mother’s elbow gently. “Mom, you have to go. Don’t worry. We’ll look out for Alec and Max in the meantime.”

Maryse glanced back into the room where her sons lay sleeping.

“If anything happens to either one of them…”
“They’ll be fine, Maryse,” Jace assured. “You have my word.”

Maryse knew Jace didn’t give his word lightly. If he made a promise, he would do everything in his power to ensure that it was kept.

And still, she hesitated. Her motherly instincts told her that this was where she belonged, not in a board meeting. But there really wasn’t any choice in the matter.

“Send me a fire message if things start to go south again. I want to know immediately.”

“Understood.”

Maryse rested a hand over Jace’s heart for a moment in gratitude. His dedication to their family was unparalleled.

“Stay with them. And I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Jace nodded resolutely, accepting the command without a second thought, and then Maryse forced herself to leave before she could change her mind.

Izzy sat against the wall outside Max’s room, trying to make herself comfortable for the long-haul. It wasn’t easy in her typical attire of high heels and tight leather pants.

She shifted around repeatedly as time passed, and Jace watched her from his sentinel position in the doorway.

From there, he could keep an eye on his brothers, as well as see any approaching threats before they arrived.

Nearly half an hour of his sister’s antsy behavior went by before he couldn’t take it anymore.

“Iz, why don’t you go try and get some sleep? It’s been a really long day.”

“I’m good,” she replied, mid-shifting.

Jace gave her a pointed look and she huffed, stopping herself from moving around restlessly just to prove that she could.

Not long after, the uncomfortable silence was broken by the sounds of two pairs of sharp shoes against the hard linoleum floor.

Both Shadowhunters looked up in time to see Magnus turning the corner and heading their way, followed closely by Raphael.

Isabelle immediately pushed herself to her feet, dusting off her pants as she stood.

“Raphael? What are you doing here?”

The vampire glanced over at Jace and the blond quickly shook his head behind his sister’s back. She didn’t know the whole story yet, and now was not the time to get into it.

Raphael turned his attention back to Isabelle and forced a tight smile onto his face.

“It’s a long story,” he replied. “Where’s your brother?”

“Max? He’s...”
“No. I’m looking for Alec.”

Izzy’s eyes narrowed as she stared at the vampire suspiciously. Last time the two guys had been face-to-face, it had come to blows and Magnus had been forced to step in to break them up.

“What do you want with Alec?”

Raphael took a moment to answer this time, but he replied honestly, nonetheless. “I’ve come to apologize.”

“He’s here to help put the past in the past,” Magnus added, sending a rather cryptic message to Jace.

The blond’s eyes widened in realization.

Raphael had the ability to Encanto someone into forgetting whatever they wanted.

If there was even a chance that he could do that for Alec now and help him bottle all that pain back up into a mental lockbox to remain closed forever, then it was an option worth considering.

Isabelle shook her head, oblivious to the secret conversation going on around her. “Now really isn’t the best time, Raphael.”

“I think it’s the perfect time,” Jace interrupted quietly. When all gazes landed on him, he jerked his head towards Max’s bedroom. “He’s in here. Give me a minute to wake him up.”

Jace’s heart was pounding in his chest as he stepped backward into Max’s room and closed the door behind him. He didn’t know if Alec was ready to face the vampire again or not, now that his memories were intact.

But Magnus had brought Raphael here for a reason, and the warlock now knew more about the situation than Jace did.

There was no doubt in Jace’s mind that Magnus only had the best of intentions where Alec was concerned.

He only hoped that the warlock knew what he was doing. If anything went wrong… Jace would never forgive himself.

Making up his mind, he resolutely reached out and gently shook Alec’s shoulder.

The older boy startled awake, but somehow managed to not disturb Max. Alec glanced around, then frowned up at Jace in confusion.

“Wa’s wrong?” he rasped out tiredly, and Jace felt like an ass for ruining Alec’s chance to sleep peacefully.

“I need you to step outside for a sec,” Jace whispered, keeping an eye on Max to make sure the boy didn’t stir. “Magnus is back.”

That woke Alec up rather effectively. He swallowed hard, taking a second to gather his tired thoughts, then nodded.

With Jace’s help, Alec was able to extract himself from his octopus of a little brother, and he silently followed the blond to the door.
He had to shield his sensitive eyes when he stepped out into the bright lights of the hallway, and it took them a moment to adjust. But when they did, his stomach turned to ice.

Not only was his boyfriend back, but he had brought Raphael too.

The vampire nodded at him tentatively in greeting, uncertain as to how Alec was going to receive his presence. But before Alec was able to form a coherent response, Magnus stepped forward, drawing his attention.

“Alexander… Can we talk for a moment? Perhaps in your room?”

Alec’s gaze darted to everyone around him, hoping someone could give him a clue as to what was going on.

Jace looked worried for him but that was nothing new, Izzy was clearly just as confused as he was, and Magnus seemed cautious but determined.

If anyone knew what was happening here, it was the warlock.

Alec nodded slowly in agreement, and Magnus gave him a grateful smile.

He motioned Alec forward with a sweep of his hand, and the boy tried to straighten up as much as possible, pushing down the pain that the simple process of walking incited.

He didn’t allow himself to relax until he reached his bedroom, the short distance feeling akin to walking the plank.

But as he pushed the door open, his breath caught in his throat. He entered cautiously, taking in the disaster that still remained.

Alec’s room looked like a war zone.

His blood was splattered across multiple surfaces, bits of stained gauze and discarded bandages littered his bedside table as well as the floor, and an ice bucket lay upturned in the corner with a sizable puddle of water surrounding it.

Alec’s bed was still unmade and appeared haphazardly skewed as if it had been knocked about repeatedly, and three of the padded restraints that Magnus had manifested still remained attached to the frame.

Alec rubbed absently at his right wrist, still able to feel the phantom discomfort of the cuff.

The far wall was completely lined with all forms of medical equipment, no doubt procured by the warlock at some point, and Alec came to a stop in the center of the room.

He wasn’t ready to be in here again. Wasn’t ready to face the evidence of everything he had just gone through. He’d talk to Magnus as promised, then go back to Max’s room.

Hell, he’d sleep on a cot in the Ops Center if he had to. Anywhere but here.

Mind made up, Alec turned around to face his boyfriend, only to find that Raphael had also followed them in and closed the door behind them.

This clearly wasn’t the heart-to-heart that Alec had been expecting.

The Shadowhunter instinctively stumbled back another step, raising his right hand as if to ward off
He was extremely cognizant of the fact that he was only wearing a t-shirt and boxers, just as he had been the first time he had met Raphael.

The parallel was off-putting to say the least.

“What is this, Magnus?” he asked his boyfriend sharply. “Why did you bring him here?”

The warlock motioned towards Alec’s bed, a few feet to the boy’s left. “Why don’t you take a seat first? You’re looking alarmingly pale…”

Alec sent another glance towards the bed, taking in the rumpled, blood-stained sheets and the restraints just waiting to fasten themselves around his limbs again.

The sight sent a shiver up his spine and he stepped further away from it, dropping his arm back down to his side and clenching his hands into fists as if preparing for a fight.

“No. Answer the question. Why is Raphael in the Institute?”

“Because I think he can help you,” Magnus stated plainly.

“Help me with what exactly?” Alec practically growled.

He didn’t need help. He needed time to cope.

Magnus gave him a simple shrug in return.

“That depends on you, really. The way I see it, there are two options. He can either help you find closure by filling in any missing pieces you might have about what went down that night…”

“Hard pass,” Alec interrupted, crossing his arms over his chest protectively and trying to look tougher than he actually felt.

Thanks to his trip down memory lane, he remembered more than enough details already, thank you very much.

“But he can do what he did back then and Encanto you to forget it ever happened.”

That offer gave Alec pause.

“Wait, how do you even know about that?”

Magnus winced. “You sort of implied it at one point…”

“And I confirmed it when he came to me for answers,” Raphael admitted. “I’m sorry, Alec. You were never supposed to remember any of this. But I can convince your mind to forget it all again if you permit me to do so.

“Of course, that would have to include yesterday’s memories as well…”

“And which would probably be for the best,” Magnus finished softly.

Alec’s gaze drifted to the vampire who was watching him warily.

“And what exactly do you get out of this?”
Raphael shook his head.

“Nada, amigo. Consider it making amends for not getting involved sooner that night. I should’ve gotten you out of there before John arrived. Hell, even earlier, before Camille had any chance to…”

“Stop,” Alec demanded. “I don’t want to talk about this right now.”

It was still too fresh in his mind. Too real to address.

Magnus stepped closer to Alec, drawing his attention back onto himself.

“Please, Alexander… You don’t have to carry this burden with you. Let Raphael take it away. You’ve suffered enough already.”

Alec would’ve been lying if he said the idea of the memory wipe didn’t appeal to him. For years, Raphael had him convinced that what he went through at the Dumort had been nothing more than a terrible dream. He had been content in that knowledge, and because of that, he had managed to move past the horrors of it all a long time ago.

But now… Now he knew the truth, and it was like an open wound, continuing to fester the more he thought about it. And it stirred up so many emotions that he wasn’t ready to face just yet.

Had he been the only one aware of his history, he probably would’ve jumped at the proffered chance to return to his state of blissful ignorance. But thanks to the rune, it seemed his secrets were no longer his own.

It certainly wouldn’t make any sense for everyone but him to know what had happened in Camille’s bedroom that night. So unless the vampire was willing to Encanto all of them, himself included… Simply scrubbing Alec’s own memory wasn’t really an option.

Magnus took another careful step towards him, worried about Alec’s extended silence and afraid he may have pushed things too far by bringing Raphael in without any warning.

“Alexander?” he prodded lightly, shaking the boy out of his thoughts and prompting him to respond.

Alec blinked at him, then swallowed uncomfortably. “How much do you know, Magnus? About… About what happened back then.”

“I know enough,” Magnus replied sorrowfully. “And as for what happened with Camille… Alec, I swear to you that I never would’ve abandoned you like that if I had had any choice in the matter.”

“I know,” Alec responded earnestly. At the warlock’s surprised look, Alec added, “Jace told me he broke the connection. I shouldn’t have doubted you, Magnus. I was just…”

“In a bad place?”

Alec nodded. “Yeah. I’m so sorry.”

Magnus took one final step forward, closing the distance between them, then placed a comforting hand on Alec’s shoulder. He was relieved that the boy did not pull away from his touch.

“Consider it already forgotten, dear one.”
“Speaking of forgotten…” Raphael piped up again, sounding a big uncomfortable with being the third wheel in the room. “Shall we get this over with?”

As much as Alec wanted to forget the majority of what had happened the day before, there were still some pieces worth holding onto, like getting back together with Magnus, having his loved ones working together to take care of him, and seeing Max wake up from his coma.

The pain that the Agony rune had inflicted on him had certainly been bad, but it didn’t outweigh the good that had come out of this whole mess.

Those few moments of contentment and happiness were what kept Alec going.

He wasn’t about to throw those away just so that he could continue avoiding thoughts of Camille. She had already taken so much from him. He wasn’t going to give her this as well.

Alec was older now, and he had a strong support system at his back. It was time to come to terms with his past, and learn how to live with it.

Decision made, Alec locked eyes with the vampire. “No. I don’t want you to erase my memories. Not this time.”

“Alexander, I urge you to reconsider,” Magnus implored, curling his fingers around the boy’s right hand and prompting him to unfurl his arms, dropping the tough guy façade.

Alec glanced down at him with a frown. “Why are you pushing this?”

“Because…” Magnus broke off, his voice cracking as he struggled to keep his own raw emotions under control.

He took a steadying breath, then tried again.

“Because when I found you in that dark corner of your mind, I recognized the look on your face. It was the same look you had just before you tried to take a swan dive off of my balcony during Max’s Rune Ceremony.”

*Well, shit.*

Alec dropped his gaze, unable to stand seeing the pain in his boyfriend’s watery eyes.

“Magnus, we already discussed this. That only happened cause of Iris’ spell. I would never, *never* do something like that under normal circumstances. Not to you, and not to my family.”

The warlock smiled sadly at him. “And yet, you seem to have left yourself out of that equation.”

Alec rolled his eyes with a huff. “That’s just a technicality.”

“Is it though?”

Alec shifted uncomfortably, perfectly aware of their attentive audience. “Can we not talk about this right now? I just… I’m really tired.”

Magnus nodded reluctantly.

“As you wish.” He blinked back his tears, then turned to the vampire. “I’m sorry, Raphael, but it seems we won’t be needing your assistance after all.”
“No worries. Consider it an open invitation, in case you ever change your mind,” Raphael offered, then turned to open the door.

“Wait,” Alec called after him, pulling away from Magnus and making his way over to the vampire. “I never got the chance to thank you for getting me out of there.”

Raphael smirked at him. “Hard to be thankful for something you don’t remember. I didn’t take it personally.”

“Still. You risked a lot going against your own clan. And when you killed John…”

“Oh, I didn’t kill him. You did. According to the official Clan records anyway. Turns out John sorely underestimated you, just as his brother had done. You broke free, and you took his head off, using the same weapon he had intended to use on you. Rather poetic, I daresay…”

“By the way, you also killed two more of Camille’s loyal followers who were guarding the door, so thanks for that. I figure it’s important to get our story straight now, should questions ever arise.”

The Shadowhunter snorted. Leave it to Raphael to use Alec’s escape as an opportunity to thin out his own competition. The man was nothing if not resourceful.

“And you did it all with a nearly-lethal dose of yin fen in your system. A rather impressive feat, I dare say. Which is why my people never went after you again.”

The full extent of what this vampire had done for him hit Alec like a ton of bricks. Raphael’s finely spun web of lies had kept Alec safe for years after the event itself, protecting him from any retaliation attempts Camille’s followers may have been planning.

And, of course, he used the tale to his own advantage, sparing himself from the Clan’s wrath as well. Camille would certainly not have been pleased if she knew her second in command had set her prized pet free.

Raphael was clearly smarter than Alec had ever given him credit for.

The Shadowhunter swallowed his pride and stuck out his hand. Raphael gladly shook it.

“I’m grateful for everything you did,” Alec stated, then tightened his grip and pulled the vampire closer, lowering his voice. “But just so we’re clear, if you think this little fling you’ve got going on with Isabelle is some sort of repayment…”

Raphael looked him straight in the eyes. “Absolutely not, hermano. I wasn’t lying about what I said. I do care for your sister. She’s not some sort of prize or recompense. But out of respect for both of you, I will keep my distance from her. At least until the addiction has passed and we can reevaluate with clear minds.”

“Fine. But if I see any evidence of her relapsing…”

“She won’t be getting her fix from me or my people. You have my word.”

Alec nodded, then pulled back.

“Then I look forward to seeing you at the next cabinet meeting.”

“As do I. I’m curious to discover what else you’re capable of. You’re a good man, Alec
Lightwood. Don’t let the pain of the past change that. Learn from it, then move on. You’ve got a lot more going for you than you think.”

Raphael clapped Alec on the shoulder, tipped his head at Magnus in goodbye, then left.

As soon as the door closed, Alec slumped against the nearest wall, what little energy he had accumulated from his short nap having been fully depleted.

Magnus was by his side in an instant.

“You really should get back into bed, darling…”

“I can’t,” Alec admittedly quietly, allowing his eyes to close for a moment in exhaustion. “Not here.”

Magnus smiled warmly at him in understanding. “Then how about we go home?”

Alec’s eyes popped back open at that and he gazed down at his boyfriend in wonder.

“H-home? You still… You still want me there? Even after everything that happened?”

“Oh, my dear Alexander… Nothing would please me more.”

Magnus held out a hand to his Nephilim and Alec latched onto it like a lifeline.

The warlock opened a portal a few feet away and drew Alec away from his wall support.

“Shall we?”

“What about the others? Shouldn’t we tell them we’re leaving?”

“I’ll send them a fire message while you get settled in. The sooner we get you off your feet, the better.”

Alec couldn’t have agreed more.

Three steps later, and they disappeared, leaving bits of gauze and cotton floating around the barren room in their wake.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Only one more chapter to go! :)
Aku Cinta Kamu- Part One

Chapter Summary

Okay, so the final chapter ended up being about 32 pages which is twice my normal length, but once I started, I couldn't stop! haha So I've split it into two. But I will post both parts back-to-back. Now on to part one!

Chapter Notes

A/N: This chapter is dedicated to La for her highly entertaining comments! You truly make my day every time you respond, so thank you, and hope you stick around for the next fic!

Jace had begun pacing up and down the hall outside of Alec’s room, still nervous about his decision to blindside his brother with Raphael’s presence.

What was happening in there? How was Alec reacting to the situation? Would he go through with the memory wipe again?

“Are you ready to tell me what’s going on yet?” Isabelle asked, arms crossed as she watched her adopted brother pass by for the umpteenth time. “What is Raphael really doing here?”

“Like he said, it’s a long story,” Jace replied, not missing a step in his stride.

It was taking way too much time for that door to reopen…

Screw it. He was going in.

Jace had just reached out for the handle when it began to turn from the other side. He stepped back just in time to allow Raphael to exit.

“Well?” the blond demanded as the vampire closed the door behind himself.

“He’s going to be okay,” Raphael stated without any further explanation.

The simplicity of it was infuriating.

“But did you do your hocus pocus trick?” Jace pushed. “Does he remember anything?”

“I did offer to Encanto him again, but he didn’t want me to interfere this time.”

Izzy stiffened beside Jace at the mention of Encantoing Alec, but the blond ignored her for now. He was sure to get an earful later.

“Why the hell not?” he barked at the vampire.
“That’s for your brother to explain. Now if you’ll excuse me… I have Clan duties which require my attention. Isabelle, good to see you, as always.”

He nodded respectfully at her, then headed for the front door. It was still pitch-black outside so there was no need to take the tunnels. He’d be back at the Dumort long before the sun came up.

Jace turned back to Alec’s bedroom, preparing to enter again, when Izzy grabbed his elbow.

“Hold up, you were going to let Raphael Encanto Alec?!”

“Trust me, it was in his best interest.”

“Why?! What do you know that I don’t?”

“I know Alec is going to need all the support he can get,” the blond replied.

“Jace, that’s not an answ…”

A loud gusting sound from the other side of the door had Jace’s heart stuttering in his chest. Without any hesitation, he shoved the door open, just in time to see the portal close a few yards away.

“Alec!”

SHSHSHSHSH

As soon as his feet touched the soft area rug in the living room, Alec felt his remaining strength bleed away. So much so, that he was struggling to keep his eyes open.

Magnus noticed the Nephilim’s heavy swaying and gracefully slid in behind him, his arms wrapping securely around Alec’s waist, feeling the boy automatically sag back into his embrace.

“Come, Alexander,” the warlock mumbled softly against Alec’s shoulder blade, before leaving a gentle kiss against the cotton cloth of his shirt. “Let’s get you into bed.”

The idea of waking up next to Magnus in the morning sent a wave of warmth through Alec’s chest, eliciting a tired smile; A vastly different reaction to when the man had said those very same words to him the previous day.

Had it really only been around fifteen hours since this whole mess had first begun?

The idea was unfathomable to Alec. Then again, he wasn’t really functioning on all cylinders.

Magnus began maneuvering him towards the master bedroom when the gravity of the situation caught up with the younger boy.

“Hang on,” Alec implored, coming to a halt and bringing Magnus up short. “I should… Can I shower first?”

He felt beyond disgusting, covered in more bodily fluids than he cared to identify. Not to mention the fresh memories of Camille’s body on his that he just couldn’t seem to shake.

There was no way he’d enter such a sacred space as their shared bed until he scoured every inch of his body first.

Magnus frowned, concern written all over his face at the obvious effort it was taking Alec just to
stay on his feet.

“Are you sure you’re up for that? I could just magic you clean and put you in a fresh set of sleepwear with the snap of my fingers…”

He raised his hand in front of the boy as an offer of proof, but Alec wrapped a hand over his, lowering both back down to their sides.

“No, I…” Alec twisted free of Magnus’s arms so he could turn around and look him in the eye. “I need to do this properly. Please?”

“Of course,” the warlock acquiesced, giving the boy a sad smile of understanding. “Right this way then…”

Magnus altered their direction with an arm around Alec’s waist and half-carried the boy into the master bathroom, then set him down on the closed toilet lid, propping him back against the tank.

He sent off a quick fire message to Jace, explaining Alec’s sudden disappearance as promised, then began turning on the complex system of taps.

“Shampoo and soap are already in there, and I’ll find you some comfortable clothes to sleep in for when you’re done. Is there anything else you require?”

When nothing but silence greeted his question, Magnus turned back to find Alec staring groggily at the far wall. The poor boy looked utterly depleted of energy.

“Alexander?”

Alec blinked heavily before managing to locate the warlock with bleary eyes. Magnus was standing by the shower, sleeves rolled up and staring at him fondly.

Apparently, he was waiting for a response.

“Sorry, what?”

“Are you sure this can’t wait till morning?” Magnus pressed.

“No. I mean, yes, I’m sure. I just…”

Alec reached for the hem of his shirt and began pulling it up to show initiative, but his muscles protested at every turn and he soon found himself tangled up in the fabric.

He let out a pitiful whine of frustration.

Magnus chuckled and approached the helpless boy. “Arms up,” he instructed, and after another moment of feeble struggling to free himself, Alec surrendered and straightened his elbows.

The warlock carefully extracted his boyfriend, then tossed the shirt into the corner with every intention of burning it later. No need to keep any reminders of the hell Alec had recently endured.

The monochromatic Shadowhunter could use some new clothes anyway.

“Better?” Magnus inquired, taking the opportunity to scan Alec’s upper body to catalogue any damage that remained. The boy still had some stubborn bruises and scarring, but he’d be good as new by the end of the week.
“Yeah. Thanks.”

Alec slumped forward, resting his elbows on his knees as he rubbed at his dry eyes, looking very much like a tired child fighting naptime. His tousled hair and glazed expression only added to the image and Magnus wanted nothing more than to cradle him in his arms until he fell asleep.

But considering the circumstances, he figured he should probably excuse himself instead and let Alec shower on his own so that he wouldn’t feel pressured in any way.

Magnus ran his fingers through the boy’s messy hair, regaining his attention.

“Think you can take it from here, love?”

The boy considered the question rather intently, then his brow suddenly furrowed and he straightened up a bit. He began looking around the small room, patting the sides of his boxers as if he had lost something.

Magnus watched him worriedly.

“Alexander? What’s wrong?”

“My stele… Where is it?”

The warlock winced. He didn’t exactly give Alec time to make sure he had everything before they left.

“Most likely back at the Institute. I can conjure it here for you if you’d like.”

Alec sighed, sounding both disappointed and resigned.

“No, ’s okay. I was jus’ gonna activate some runes…”

Magnus gently tilted Alec’s head up by his chin, needing to see the truth in the boy’s eyes. “Is the pain still bad?”

Alec shrugged halfheartedly, then casually removed himself from the warlock’s grip.

“No really. It’s Endurance that I need, not an Iratze. Maybe I should just make a coffee first or somethin’. I can barely keep my eyes open.”

He reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose, fighting his exhaustion the best he could.

Magnus crouched down in front of him, balancing himself with one hand on Alec’s knee. His other hand cupped the back of the boy’s stiff neck, massaging it gently.

“Trust me, the last thing you need right now is caffeine, darling.”

“But… ’m tired, Magnus.”

“I know you are, sweetheart.” He took a deep breath and steeled himself before adding, “So let me help you.” Proper protocol and respectful boundaries be damned.

Alec shook his head, and the warlock’s heart sank at the rejection. “No. I can stay awake long enough to shower. You’ve already used too much magic today.”

“Who said anything about using magic?”
Alec frowned at him in befuddlement.

Magnus took Alec’s free hand into his own, stroking his thumb across the back of it as he attempted to clarify his intentions.

“I’m saying I’d like to take care of you, Alexander. But only if you feel comfortable with me doing so.”

The boy’s weary eyes met his again, taking in the love and sincerity on Magnus’s face before widening a bit in understanding.

Magnus was offering to shower with him.

At first blush, Alec’s instinct was to turn the offer down. He was already feeling incredibly vulnerable, and he wasn’t sure he was ready to be in such an intimate circumstance just yet.

But the more he considered it, the more Alec realized that he had nothing to fear. He trusted the warlock with his life. With his body, and with his heart.

Regardless of the turmoil their relationship had been subjected to over the past few weeks, he knew Magnus would never judge him or take advantage of his defenseless state.

The Shadowhunter could finally let his guard down again. He was safe here.

He was home.

Alec curled his fingers gently around Magnus’s, then gave a small nod.

“I trust you.”

The genuine smile of affection that crossed the warlock’s face was more than worth it.

SHSHSHSHSH

Jace watched in stupefaction as the lighter materials such as paper and gauze floated around the room before settling on Alec’s floor.

Izzy followed him in and grimaced at the mess that was left behind.

Jace’s jaw flexed in anger and he pulled his cellphone out, immediately trying to get his brother on the line. The familiar ringtone of “I’m Too Sexy” by Right Said Fred- a gift from Magnus that Alec had yet to discover how to fix- began chiming from the other side of the room.

He went over and picked it up, then found Alec’s stele sitting next to it.

His brother was out of communication, unarmed, and without the ability to activate his runes if needed. So much for keeping an eye on Alec…

Maryse was going to kill him.

He collected Alec’s effects and set a direct course for the door.

“Jace! Where are you going?!?” Izzy called after him.

“To strangle a warlock!” he announced over his shoulder.
“Wait!”

Izzy caught up to him easily enough.

“Look, Alec is with Magnus, right? He’s safe. And probably better off there than he would be here. At least until we can get this place cleaned up.”

Jace whirled around to face her, the heat in his eyes scorching hot. “That’s not good enough! What if he needs more runes? Or he was taken against his will?”

Izzy gave him a disapproving look. “You know he wasn’t.”

“That doesn’t make me any less pissed about this!”

The telltale sound of a fire message approaching from behind caught Jace’s attention.

His hand instinctively shot out and caught it, then he frowned as he read the message. Izzy stepped closer to read the letter over his shoulder.

“Alexander needs rest. Took him home to recover. MB”

Jace pursed his lips and let out a slow breath. Izzy rested her chin on his shoulder and smiled.

“Like I said, he’s with Magnus. He’ll be fine, Jace. He’s in good hands.”

“Yeah, well… Those hands better behave themselves.”

SHSHSHSHSH

Magnus gently gathered both of Alec’s hands into his own, then stood over him.

“Shall we?” he prompted, and Alec shakily rose to his feet with the warlock’s assistance.

Once he was sure the boy wouldn’t fall without his support, Magnus dropped back down to one knee in front of him with the elegance of a cat.

He slid his fingertips just beneath the waistband of Alec’s boxers, then paused, looking up at him for permission.

Alec swallowed hard as he met Magnus’s eyes, but not because he was afraid. He still felt sullied. Marked and molested by Camille. And the last thing he wanted was for that darkness to tarnish his boyfriend in any way.

But Magnus was going to take care of him. He had promised. All Alec had to do was let him.

He nodded once more, then held his breath as the last piece of clothing was respectfully removed, baring every bruise, scar, and imperfection left on his body.

Magnus rose back up, then removed his own shirt, tossing it on top of Alec’s discarded clothes before reaching out for him once more, easing the boy’s arm across his firm shoulders.

Alec leaned heavily on him as they moved to the clear glass door of the shower. Magnus slid it open with practiced ease, then waved the boy forward.

“After you…”
Alec was met with a plume of steam and it sent a shiver down his spine. His battered body ached for that warmth, so he gladly stepped inside.

Magnus let go of him once Alec had safely crossed the threshold, switching his focus to divesting himself of his socks and shoes.

Alec moved under the spray like a moth drawn to a flame, then supported himself with his palms flat against the far wall. He dropped his head low, allowing the hot water to cascade over his shoulders and down his throbbing back.

He bit his lip as it scorched fiery paths down his chilled flesh, but it burned so good…

Alec closed his eyes, lifting his face to redirect the flow down his front. He hissed at the initial heat, then groaned in relief as that feeling of being defiled was slowly washed down the drain, along with the tangible stains on his skin.

He moved to adjust his stance and wobbled dangerously backwards. One foot slipped out from beneath him and he lost his supportive contact with the wall.

Alec’s heart leapt into his throat, convinced that he was going to fall. But he needn’t have worried. Magnus was there.

The warlock caught him from behind, and seemed perfectly content to just stand there under the powerful spray, his Shadowhunter safely encompassed in his arms.

“It’s alright. I’ve got you,” he whispered, his thumbs slowly gliding along the wet skin of Alec’s abdomen, just below his ribs.

Magnus could feel Alec’s heart pounding where the boy’s back was pressed against his chest. He placed a gentle, soothing kiss against the younger man’s temple, giving him time to calm back down.

“Alec… Breathe…”

Alec braced himself with his hands against Magnus’s firm thighs. He was surprised to discover that the man was still wearing his form-fitting jeans, which were quickly getting soaked.

“Magnus…” he started, feeling the need to point this fact out to him. As if the warlock hadn’t already noticed himself.

“Shh… They’re only pants, darling. Just try to relax. Let me do the worrying for a change.”

They stayed entwined together until the boy’s breathing evened out and matched the warlock’s.

Then Magnus carefully reached forward and grabbed a bright blue luffa from the shower caddy. Alec watched curiously as his boyfriend poured lavender-scented body wash onto the mesh ball and began working it into a lather.

He craned his neck to glance up at Magnus with a perplexed frown, never having used one of these strange sponges before.

“What are you doing?”

The warlock chuckled. “Oh, my dear Alexander… You’re in for quite a treat.”
Nearly an hour passed before Magnus had finished doting on Alec and the pristine boy was pure putty in his hands.

He toweled Alec dry, dressed him in clean boxers, and poured him into bed. Then after magicking himself into a dry pair of comfy sweatpants, he sat on the edge of the mattress, stroking the backs of his fingers against Alec’s flushed cheek until the boy’s eyes fell closed.

Magnus waited a few more minutes, then quietly rose, intending to spend the night in the guest bedroom so that Alec could sleep undisturbed. But as he turned to leave, a hand suddenly latched onto his wrist.

He spun back around to find Alec just barely clinging to consciousness.

“Stay…” the boy breathed out.

“Alexander, are you sure? There’s no need to rush things…”

“…Please? I… I don’t wanna be alone.”

Alec’s eyelids were barely cracked open, but he was still watching the warlock through his beautifully long eyelashes, practically holding his breath as he waited for an answer.

After the briefest of hesitations, Magnus couldn’t deny either of them any longer. “Of course, darling.”

He slipped beneath the covers and drew Alec back into his arms where he belonged.

The boy let out a sigh of contentment, nuzzling even closer, then his breathing evened out into the soft little snores that Magnus adored so much.

Magnus laid there silently for a while, basking in the joy of having Alexander back in his life and curled up beside him. Eventually, he allowed his own eyes to close and was asleep within minutes.

Unfortunately, their blissful peace was short-lived.

The darkness outside the window was just starting to give way to light when Alec’s whimpers reached Magnus’s ears.

“Alexander, can you hear me?” Magnus asked, keeping his voice low.

Alec squirmed, whining deep in his throat as his brow furrowed in distress.

Magnus quickly snapped his magic to life and breezed it down the boy’s body, easing his suffering and sending a warm calm along his tensed muscles.

“You’re okay, darling. Settle down… I’m right here. You’re safe.”

He allowed his magic to peter out once he had addressed all he could physically, but continued running his hand up and down the boy’s tense back until Alec unwound beneath his touch and fell slack again, this time collapsing on his stomach, facing away from the warlock.

Magnus raised himself up onto an elbow and leaned over him, making sure Alec was still asleep.
His heart shattered as he brushed a stray tear from Alec’s upturned cheek.

The poor boy simply couldn’t catch a break. Not even in sleep.

Then again, it would’ve been foolish for Magnus to believe that all their troubles would be solved just because the rune itself had vanished. Alec’s pain went much deeper than the skin.

The boy still had a lot of healing to do, mentally and emotionally if not physically. Magnus swore to himself that he would be there by Alec’s side, every step of the way.

The warlock propped his head up with a hand, intent on keeping watch over Alec until he woke naturally. With any luck, that wouldn’t happen until the later afternoon. The boy desperately needed his rest.

But his own exhaustion inevitably won out. The day had been brutally long and taxing for both of them, and the pull of unconsciousness was too great.

As time trickled by, he slowly sank down to his pillow, his free hand splayed protectively across Alec’s lower back. And the rest of the early morning passed uneventfully.

Hours later, Alec was woken up by the sunlight streaming through the curtains, directly into his face. He groaned in annoyance and lifted his head just far enough to turn it towards Magnus.

The warlock was still out cold beside him. He looked beautiful in the filtered light, regardless of how haggard he probably still felt.

Alec wanted to just lay there and enjoy the quiet moment between them, but unfortunately, his bladder had other ideas. Now that he was officially awake, he couldn’t ignore it any longer.

He sighed in disappointment, then began carefully lifting himself off the mattress, trying his best not to wake his boyfriend.

He froze when he felt a slight pressure shift along his spine that he hadn’t noticed before. Glancing back at Magnus, he realized that the warlock was still holding onto him.

_Crap…_

Without his stele, Alec had to resort to his own physical prowess and stealth to get free. He moved at the speed of molasses in winter, starting to sweat between the muscular strain and his ever-growing urgency.

He had one leg and one arm hanging off the bed before Magnus cracked an eye open and bit back a silent laugh.

_Bless the adorable boy for trying…_

He waited until Alec had managed to slide his other leg off the bed, then gave up the game in favor of latching onto the Shadowhunter’s still lingering wrist before he was out of reach.

“And where do you think _you’re_ going?”

Alec’s wide eyes snapped up to lock with Magnus’s, looking like a deer in the headlights, and the warlock had to resist the desire to pull the boy back into the bed and kiss him senseless.

“I just… I needed to…” Alec pointed towards the bathroom with his free hand. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”
“Don’t be sorry. Your little escape attempt was well-worth every second.” Magnus grinned devilishly at him, causing Alec’s eyes to narrow in suspicion.

“How long have you been awake exactly?”

“Long enough to be amazed that you aren’t dancing in place right now. Go ahead, Alexander,” Magnus allowed, releasing the boy’s wrist so Alec could stand up properly. “But hurry back. You’re still on mandatory bed rest.”

“Says who?”

“I’ll have Cat stop by and make the order official if that’s what it takes… But surely, there are other ways to convince you to stay?” the warlock asked suggestively.

Alec leaned back down, looking sexier than he had any right to after the hell Imogen had put him through, and braced himself with both hands on the mattress, stopping just out of Magnus’s reach.

“Well, there may be one thing…”

The warlock sat up a bit straighter, intrigued. “Oh? Do tell,” he requested, slowly closing the distance left between them as he waited for the response.

“Blueberry pancakes,” Alec finished with a cocky smirk, then gave Magnus a quick peck on the lips.

Magnus laughed merrily at his boyfriend’s unexpected sassiness.

“Consider it done,” he beamed, then chased Alec’s lips for one more kiss, his hand going to the back of Alec’s head to pull him closer.

Camille ran her fingers through his disheveled hair, then gripped a handful of it tightly and lifted his head up at an awkward angle, planting a dirty, possessive kiss on his lips. Her fangs descended and pierced his skin just enough to make blood rise to the surface.

Alec jerked back as the memory hit him from out of the blue.

Magnus sat up straighter, looking worried. “Alexander?”

“I’m fine,” he quickly gasped out, then hitched a thumb over his shoulder. “I just… I still have to…”

“Go?” Magnus supplied, the irony not lost on him. It seemed they were doomed to repeat that line for as long as they were together. “Run along then, and I’ll have breakfast ready for you shortly.”

It took all of Alec’s willpower not to bolt into the safety of the bathroom.

SHSHSHSHSH

“Alright. Thanks, Luke. We’ll let him know.”

Jace hung up with a frustrated sigh, inputting the latest data into the Op Center computer. Izzy watched him with concern.

“What’s going on?”

“Luke’s pack caught Valentine’s scent and tracked him down, but they just missed him. He’s still
inside the city.”

“Then he’s still trapped by the wards. This is good news, Jace.”

“Have you ever seen what happens to a wild animal when it’s trapped? He’s not just gonna surrender quietly next time we back him into a corner, Iz. Rest assured he’s planning something. And it’s gonna be bad. Like, biblically bad.”

“Then we just need to find him before he can put his plan into action,” Izzy supplied, ever the optimist.

“Yeah, no pressure… Look, I know he’s still recovering, but we need to let Alec know what’s going on.”

“Agreed. I’ll send him a fire message. We should probably update the Inquisitor as well.”

Jace’s eyes darkened at the mere mention of the woman. “You check on Alec. Let me deal with Imogen.”

SHSHSHSHSH

When Magnus returned to the bedroom with two steaming plates of pancakes and eggs, he found the bed empty.

A quick glance at the bathroom door confirmed that it was open and the light was off. He hadn’t crossed paths with Alec on his way back from the kitchen, which only left one other option.

Magnus set the plates down on the mattress, then quietly made his way over to the balcony. Sure enough, he found the Shadowhunter leaning against the railing, looking down at the bustling world below.

The sight sent a surge of anxiety through the warlock as he remembered Alec standing on said railing not so long ago, about to free-fall to his death thanks to Iris’s spell.

He cleared his throat as he approached. “Alexander? Is something wrong?”

“Izzy sent a fire message,” Alec responded somberly, all traces of the earlier playfulness gone. “Luke’s pack ran into a bunch of Circle members. They got close, but Jonathan and Valentine escaped.”

Magnus nodded in understanding. “Heavy is the head that wears the crown… Let me guess, she told you that the honeymoon is over and you need to go back to the Institute?”

“No, actually. She told me that she was just keeping me apprised, and that I should stay out of it. At least for a few more days.”

“Smart woman. Knew I liked her for a reason,” the warlock teased before placing his hand over Alec’s on the railing, beyond gratified when the boy tensed slightly but didn’t pull away from him again. “But you’re not going to listen to her, are you,” he stated sadly.

“They have to be stopped, Magnus. And I need to be there when that happens.”

Magnus tightened his hold on Alec’s hand. “Always ready to jump into the fire to save lives, even if it means you get burned in the process.”
“You make me sound like some kind of martyr,” Alec muttered, clearly offended.

“Aren’t you, though? Willing to put your life on the line if it means finishing the mission… Dying for what you believe in? Sounds like a martyr to me.”

“I just want this disaster to end before it turns into a war between the Clave and the Downworlders. It’s not like I’m trying to get myself killed in the process.”

“Are you sure about that? Because I’ve seen evidence to the contrary.”

And there it was. The elephant in the room.

Alec let out a slow breath and closed his eyes briefly, summoning the courage it would take to properly address the matter once and for all.

“Some days are harder than others,” he admitted quietly. “But when I was in the bathroom, I remembered a dream I had last night. Bits and pieces of it, at least.”

Magnus certainly knew to which dream the boy was referring.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he prodded delicately.

Alec took a moment to get his thoughts straight, then lifted his head to look straight out at the city. It was pretty from above.

“… I was trapped in the Dumort again,” he began, his voice void of all emotion. “Camille and John were both there, holding me down and… And taking turns. I fought to get away, and eventually managed to break free.

“The main door was locked so I headed for the balcony. I could hear them coming up behind me, trying to drag me back inside. So I climbed onto the railing, and I… I jumped.”

“I see,” was all the warlock could manage to say. It was devastating to hear that even in his dreams, Alec had a suicidal tendency when it came to facing his fears.

“That wasn’t the important part though,” the boy continued.

Magnus quirked an eyebrow at him. “How so?”

_What part of choosing to plunge to his death was not important?_

Alec turned to face the warlock properly, rotating his wrist and taking Magnus’s hand into his own. “I jumped, but I didn’t fall, Magnus. I didn’t fall, because _you_ were there to catch me.”

_Ah._

“Perhaps you remember more from Max’s rune ceremony than you thought,” Magnus offered up as explanation. The visual of wrapping his magic around Alec’s body and lowering him to the ground safely was still firmly embedded in his mind.

If he had been even a second later, he wouldn’t have made it in time. The idea left an icy pit within his stomach.

“No, I… I don’t think it was meant to be taken literally. It was meant to be a reminder.”

Magnus tilted his head in curiosity. “A reminder of what?”
“That no matter how bad things get, you’ll always have my back. And that’s something worth fighting for.”

“So… No contemplating swan dives off of my balcony then?” the warlock hedged, only half-joking as he tried to lighten the mood a bit.

Alec huffed out a laugh. “I guess not. Sorry, but you can’t get rid of me that easily.”

“I’m going to hold you to that, Alexander.”

The boy sobered again quickly, then stepped closer to the warlock and looked him straight in the eyes.

“I’m not going anywhere, Magnus. Not now that I’ve found you.”

Magnus couldn’t help himself. He leaned forward and planted a passionate kiss on his boyfriend’s lips. This time, Alec allowed it.

Only when breathing became a necessity did they finally separate.

The warlock looked up at the boy’s face afterwards and was pleased to find that Alec appeared happier. Lighter. Dare he say it, even relieved.

He wanted to pull Alec into his arms and spend the rest of the day like that, but as the saying goes, if you truly love something, you have to let it go. He drew in a deep breath, then rested a hand affectionately over Alec’s heart.

“If it means so much to you to see this thing through, then of course you have to go back to the Institute. But promise me you’ll do everything in your power to return to me by day’s end.”

Alec offered him a beautiful half smile, the right side of his lips pulling back until his dimple was visible.

“I promise.”

That dimple was a rare sight due to Alec’s stoic nature, but Magnus enjoyed the challenge of bringing it forth. He returned the smile triumphantly.

“Good. But at least come and eat your pancakes before you go off to save the world…”

Alec glanced down at himself. “Pants would probably be good too.”

The warlock pouted in feigned displeasure. “I highly disagree.”

“Magnus…”

“Oh, very well… If you insist. What’s your preference today then? Parachute pants or leather?”

SHSHSHSHSH

As soon as Jace arrived in Alicante, he set off for the Gard. He made his way to the High Inquisitor’s office unnoticed, scaling the building and slipping through a window just as the woman arrived to begin her day.

He waited for her escort to leave before stepping out of the shadows, revealing his presence.
Imogen glanced up at the unexpected movement from the far side of the room, then did a double-take. She slowly rose to her feet once she realized who he was.

“Jonathan… How did you get in here?”

She looked surprised by his sudden appearance, and almost hopeful, which only served to fuel his anger. He sure as hell didn’t break into her office to make nice, if that’s what she was expecting.

Jace stayed perfectly still, the fire in his eyes keeping the woman frozen in place. “That’s the wrong question,” he responded quietly.

She considered that for a moment, then tried again. “Alright then. Why are you here?”

He smirked, clearly pleased that she was quick on the uptake.

“Just wanted to give you fair warning. You caught me off guard when you severed my Parabatai rune, but I won’t be making that mistake again.”

“About that, I can explain…”

“Stop. I don’t want to hear it. In the end, you allowed Alec to live, so I’ll grant you the same courtesy. But as for you and me? We’re done. I don’t care whose blood flows through my veins. I’m a Lightwood now, and if you even think about threatening a member of my family again, it’ll be the last thing you ever do.”

Imogen bristled.

“Are you threatening me, Jonathan?” she demanded with false bravado, her eyes darting towards the closed doors on the other side of the room.

“Oh, it’s not a threat. It’s a reminder. You and I may be blood-related, Imogen, but don’t for one second forget who actually raised me before the Lightwoods took me in.”

“Valentine…” she acknowledged, barely above a whisper as all color left her face.

Jace nodded.

“And he taught me all kinds of fun tricks. For instance, I could kill you at least fifteen different ways before you could even muster the nerve to call for help. And as I’ve just proven, I can get to you anytime, anywhere.

“So stay away from my family. My real family. And if you ever hurt my Parabatai again, I will make sure you live just long enough to regret it. Rest assured, there will be no second warning.

“Oh, and we’re closing in on Valentine. Thought you should know. Good day, Madame Inquisitor.”

He gave her a mocking bow, then disappeared back out the window through which he had arrived, feeling pretty confident that he had gotten his point across.

TBC
Aku Cinta Kamu- Part Two

Chapter Summary

And here it is! The finale's finale!

This chapter is dedicated to all of you wonderful readers who have stuck with me and left inspiring comments that have kept this story going till the very end. Thank you all for your support, and I hope the big finale was worth the wait!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The moment Alec stepped foot back in the Institute, he was descended on by a multitude of Shadowhunters, all of whom were desperate for his guidance.

He answered questions, gave orders, signed papers, and eventually made it to the safety of his own office, only to find a giant stack of neglected work sitting on his desk.

It was going to be a very long day.

Alec resignedly set to it, cursing Valentine even more for being such a monstrous thorn in his side.

Twenty-four hours… That’s all he had missed. But thanks to the Circle leader’s constant movement, there were enough reports to keep him busy for a month.

Hours of grueling toil passed before a knock on his door interrupted his thought process.

Oh well. He was pretty sure he had just read the same sentence ten times anyway, but his overtaxed brain was refusing to ingest the information.

Alec put his pen down and sighed heavily when he realized that his to-do pile was still five times higher than his addressed one. Maybe a quick break wasn’t such a bad idea.

He checked his watch and was surprised by how much time had already passed. It was a little after 2pm and he had missed lunch. No wonder he was having trouble focusing…

“Enter,” he called out, then inwardly groaned when his sister came storming into the room. He knew she would find him eventually.

“Underhill just told me you were in your office, but I told him that couldn’t be true because you were taking a well-deserved day off. And yet, here you are!”

That tone and that pose, with her hands on her hips, were definitely inherited from their mother.

“Hello to you too,” he replied dryly.

“Seriously, Alec… You should still be resting. Jace and I can…”

“I’m fine, Izzy. Most of the damage healed shortly after the Agony rune was removed. I can handle a few aches and bruises. So if you’re only here to berate me for not slacking off, then I’m going to
get back to work.”

Attempting to dismiss her, he picked his pen up again and signed a few more documents that were waiting for his stamp of approval.

Izzy didn’t take the hint though. She studied him for a moment, choosing to make her own assessment of his wellbeing rather than accept him at his word.

“You do seem less pale…” she admitted reluctantly as she approached, rounding the desk and sitting down on top of it, clearly not intending to leave anytime soon. “But it’s not the physical damage that worries me.”

Alec dropped his pen a second time with an exaggerated eye-roll and sat back in his chair, arms crossed defensively to put more space between himself and Isabelle.

“And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“I’m not an idiot, you know. Something really bad obviously happened to you, and no one is talking about it.”

“Good. It’s nobody else’s business,” Alec grumbled.

“I get that. But if you ever decide that you want to talk about it… I’m here for you, big brother. Forever and always.”

Alec forced himself to relax and let his walls down a bit. Izzy was right. She had always been a good listener when he needed to vent, and none of this was her fault. He shouldn’t take it out on her with his snippy attitude.

“I know you are, Izzy. And thanks.”

He dropped his arms to fiddle with his hands in his lap, avoiding eye contact as he considered her offer.

“I guess there is one thing I could use your advice on…” he finally admitted.

“I’m all ears.”

After a moment, he glanced up at his sister through his bangs.

“I’m worried that what happened is going to affect my relationship with Magnus.”

“How so?”

“He uh… He kissed me this morning, and I pulled back. I didn’t mean to though. This image just flashed through my head and took me by surprise.”

“You’ve been through a trauma, Alec. It’s going to take time for those types of wounds to heal.”

“But everything was fine last night!” he ranted in frustration.

“That may be true, but you were also barely conscious last night,” she pointed out. “That’s not really a valid comparison.”

“Fair enough, but I kissed him again shortly after. No flashbacks or issues the second time. It’s completely random and doesn’t make any sense!”
“Triggers can be unpredictable, big brother. Don’t beat yourself up for something you can’t control. It’ll get easier, and if you need to take things slow again for a while, I’m sure Magnus would understand.”

“I know he would. But somehow, that just makes it even worse.” Alec dropped his head into his hands and tried not to cringe when Izzy’s hand landed on his shoulder.

“You still love him, right?”

“Of course I do,” Alec muttered miserably.

“And he obviously still loves you. That’s all that really matters. The rest will work itself out. Make sure you don’t push yourself too far, or too fast. Wait until you’re ready.”

“I should’ve just let Raphael Encanto me. Then maybe things would’ve gone back to the way they were before.”

“Alec, look at me,” Izzy instructed, then waited for her brother to wearily lift his head. “Burying the past doesn’t make it go away. You made the right decision in facing it head-on.”

“It’s not going to be easy, but you’ve got a pretty awesome support system this time around, so don’t feel like you have to face it all on your own. We’ve got your back. Whatever you need.”

The sincerity in her eyes made Alec’s heart ache, so he stood up and pulled his sister into a gentle hug. She nestled into his chest and rubbed his back until the ache dissipated enough for him to breathe again.

Alec closed his eyes in relief and held Izzy tighter, feeling like a weight was being lifted higher off his shoulders with every passing second. The internal pain was mending.

“Thank you,” he whispered against her ebony hair before pressing a tender kiss to her forehead.

A brief knock on the door interrupted their moment mere seconds before the newcomer came bustling in without an invitation, clearly not expecting anyone to be in the office.

Alec reluctantly pulled back from his sister, donning his Head of the Institute cap and hoping like hell that he didn’t look like he was on the verge of tears as he turned to address his visitor.

It was Maryse. Alec blinked at her in surprise.

“Mother?”

She came to an abrupt halt when she saw her son.

“Alec…? What are you doing here? Jace told me you left with Magnus.”

“I did, but I came back a few hours ago to get some work done. Why are you still here though?” he volleyed back in confusion. “I thought you would’ve left for Idris by now.”

She held up the stack of file folders which she had carried in with her.

“Just doing my part to try and lighten the load a bit until you’re back on your feet.”

Alec glanced at his already buried desk and grimaced. “About that… I know I’ve fallen behind a bit, but I swear I will get this Institute back on track as soon as I…”
“Oh, hush. I don’t care about any of that.” She walked right up to him, dumped the folders on the desk, then gripped his biceps, turning him to face her directly. “Let me get a good look at you. How are you feeling? You really shouldn’t be pushing yourself like this…”

Alec shifted uncomfortably from the surplus of attention that he wasn’t used to getting. Before he could reply, Izzy interrupted.

“I told him to take some time off, but he didn’t listen to me,” she announced, holding back a giggle as Alec sent her a death-glare over Maryse’s shoulder.

“I’m fine, Mom,” he insisted, turning his attention back to the older woman. “Really.”

Maryse smiled proudly at him. “Of course you are. You’re a Lightwood, after all.”

Alec subconsciously stood taller at the reminder, then winced as the movement pulled on the abused muscles in his back. Maryse gave him a sympathetic look as she ran her hands soothingly up and down his arms.

“But that doesn’t make you invincible, sweetheart. If you need more time to recover, then you should take it. In fact, why don’t you head back to Magnus’s now and get some proper rest? I’ll finish the paperwork for today before I head out.”

“Head out?” Izzy questioned, sounding disappointed. “When?”

“Tonight,” Maryse lamented. “I had hoped to stay longer, but unfortunately, new orders have already been passed down. I just told Max to pack his things so I can send him to Alicante where your father can keep an eye on him until this Valentine business is over.”

“A-Alicante?” Alec stuttered, a cold dread spreading through his insides. He froze as memories assaulted his mind again.

_Alicant. The demon towers. A shadowy figure climbing over one. Smoke, fire. Izzy stumbling in disorientation, and Max…_

_There was blood. Lots of blood._

_Max wasn’t moving._

“It should’ve been you,” Robert stated plainly, disappointment in his tone and face. “You let this family down again, Alec. And now your little brother is dead, and it’s all your fault.”

“Alec? Alec! Are you alright?”

Alec snapped back to the present to find his mother watching him worriedly.

“Max stays here,” he forced out through a clenched throat.

“What? Why?” Maryse pressed, her concern increasing by the second.

“Alicant isn’t safe. I can’t explain why, but I need you to trust me. Max has to stay here. With us.”

“Are you sure it’s wise to keep him in the Institute? Jonathan has been in this building countless times…”

“And he’s not stupid enough to come back now that his cover has been blown. He wouldn’t make it within twenty feet of the place.”
“But, Alec…”

He took his mother’s hand into his own.

“Mom, please. Promise me.”

Maryse could read the desperation in his eyes, and she nodded. “Alright. Max stays here.”

“Thank you,” Alec rasped.

He let out a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding as dizziness overwhelmed him. He suddenly felt unbalanced and weak on his feet.

Maryse saw him starting to falter and quickly eased him back into his chair.

She leaned down and cupped his cheek to help steady him as he fought his way back from the disorientation.

She frowned at the heat coming off his skin and slid her hand up to check his forehead.

“You still have a bit of a fever…”

“It’s not that bad,” Alec protested. “Just got a little lightheaded is all.”

“Nice try. I think you’ve had enough for one day. Wrap up what you were working on, then go.”

“That’s not necessary, Mother. Really. I’m…”

“Don’t make me call Magnus to come and get you.”

There it was- the hands on the hips.

With the exhaustion creeping up on him again, Alec didn’t have enough energy to put up a real fight. Plus, now that he was actually entertaining the idea, going home to Magnus was exactly what he wanted to do.

“Okay,” he relented. “I only have a few more memos to get through, so I’ll finish those up and take off after that.”

“Good choice. Don’t dawdle now. I’ll go tell Max to unpack, and when I return, I want you ready to leave, understood?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She kissed him on the cheek before straightening up and turning to her daughter. “Isabelle, why don’t you go track down Jace and let him know Alec is alright. He’s been terrorizing the foot soldiers all morning.”

This time, it was Izzy’s turn to roll her eyes. “Sounds like Jace…”

Alec winced. He probably should’ve sought out his brother when he first arrived, but Jace was handling a meeting in the Ops Center on his behalf and Alec wasn’t prepared to interrupt and get hounded by questions he didn’t want to answer.

So instead, he had slipped past, unnoticed by the blond, with every intention of finding him later when things had quieted down a bit. But by then, time had gotten away from him.
Jace was definitely going to kick his ass in sparring at some point for ducking him.

Izzy moved closer and rubbed Alec’s back for a moment. “Feel better, big brother. And keep us posted.”

“I will.”

After Izzy and Maryse left the room together, Alec rolled his chair forward to finish with the small stack of memos he had set aside for himself. He was signing the last one when another knock came at the door.

Seriously?

This time, he groaned out loud, massaging his temples with the thumb and middle finger of his left hand as he tapped the end of his pen against the desktop, praying to the Angel for patience.

He had been so close to going home.

For a brief moment, he assumed it might be Jace, coming to add his two cents to the mix. But Jace wouldn’t have bothered to knock. He would’ve just barged in.

Maybe Underhill then, apologizing for squealing on him to Isabelle…

“Enter,” he directed, then glanced up as the door creaked open.

The hair on the back of his neck rose when he saw who it was. He stood at attention, his hands clenching into fists by his sides as he greeted the short but mighty woman brusquely.

“Madame Inquisitor…”

“At ease, Mr. Lightwood.”

Imogen came to a stop in front of his desk, noticing how tense he became the closer she got. She could hardly blame him, given recent events.

“Relax. I mean you no harm,” she stated. “In fact, I’ve come with happy tidings for you. I’ve decided to resign as High Inquisitor.”

Alec felt like someone had slapped him with a dead fish.

“You… You’re stepping down? Why?”

“It’s quite simple, really. I figure it’s only a matter of time before the Clave hears about the unfortunate incident with the Agony rune. I intend to leave my position before that day comes, and with my good name still intact, if you’ll permit it.”

She wasn’t just quitting then. She was running away. Because of him. And her reputation was his to destroy, should he choose to inform the Clave of her misdeeds.

Suddenly, the prideful woman didn’t seem quite so intimidating to Alec.

“…I’m not sure what to say.”

“You don’t need to say anything. I’ve already made my decision, and I believe it’s for the best.”

“Who will be taking over?”
“I suspect the young upstart, Victor Aldertree. He already has a lot of support from the Council, and I have no doubts that he’ll perform admirably in my stead.”

Alec knew nothing about this Aldertree guy; whether he’d be an asset or a liability when it came to his plans for reuniting the Shadow World. At least with Imogen, he knew where they stood.

And now, he might be able to use that to his advantage.

“Do I have any say in the matter?” he inquired, carefully keeping his voice void of emotion.

“The final decision will be up to the Council, but I’m sure Mr. Aldertree will be properly vetted before he’s given command.”

“I’m not talking about him. I’m talking about you stepping down.”

Imogen’s eyebrows drew together in perplexity.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow…”

Alec drew in a steadying breath, then rounded his desk to face the woman directly.

“In short, I don’t think you should resign.”

The Inquisitor was taken aback. “I have to admit, that’s the last thing I expected you to say.”

“We’re on the brink of war,” Alec stated bluntly. “These are desperate times, and thanks to Valentine, our people are splitting into factions. I need to know that there are still members of the Clave that I can trust.”

“And you’re saying you trust me?” Imogen asked skeptically.

“Not particularly,” Alec admitted. “But you owe me now. Consider this your chance to repay that debt.”

“So this is blackmail then,” she huffed. “I should’ve expected as much from a Lightwood.”

“No,” Alec practically growled. “I am not my father. This is simply my attempt to build an alliance.”

Imogen studied him, intrigued.

“Explain.”

“The way we run things is no longer working. We have to adapt to survive. Unfortunately, many Shadowhunters are set in their ways, and they’ll need some convincing first. I can’t do it alone. I don’t have enough pull. But you do.”

The woman actually looked impressed. “How very political of you.”

“My offer is this: You keep your position, and when the time comes to vote on restructuring, you help me gain support. And in return, no one else will ever hear about yesterday’s events.”

Imogen nodded thoughtfully, then glanced back towards the closed door. Unless Alec was very much mistaken, she actually seemed afraid.

“I’m not sure my grandson will approve of our working together.”

“Let me handle Jace. But if this is going to work, then there’s one more thing I need from you.
Swear to me that you will never ever use that Agony rune on anyone else. Not even to interrogate Circle members.”

Imogen dropped her gaze in shame.

“After seeing the effects of my rune firsthand, you can rest assured that I will not be making that mistake again. My first order of business will be to abolish its use in the Clave.”

“Then I’d say we’re already making progress.”

When she looked back up at him, there was a newfound respect in her eyes.

“It seems that I’ve underestimated you, Mr. Lightwood. A mistake I have no intentions of making again. You were clearly born for this job, and I expect to see great things from you.”

“And I will do my best not to disappoint. Do we have an accord?” Alec stuck out his hand, and Imogen shook it. “Then I believe our business here is complete.”

Alec moved to pull away but stopped dead when the woman caught his forearm.

“Before I go, there’s something else I need to say. Had I been aware of how unstable that rune was, or of the traumas you faced in the past, I never would’ve used such a punishment against you. I don’t know if it even matters at this point, but I am truly sorry for what I did.”

Alec gave her a curt nod.

“It matters. Thank you.”

Imogen bowed her head respectfully. “Good day, Mr. Lightwood.”

She turned and left him to his thoughts again.

The longer he stood there on the far side of his buried desk, the more his skin began to itch and his need to leave grew. The only thing he could think about was getting back home to Magnus.

The second Maryse returned to relieve him of duty, Alec was out the door and headed down the hall towards the exit. He hit the button for the elevator and waited impatiently for it to arrive.

“Were you seriously just going to leave again without saying goodbye?” came a voice from his right.

Shit. Jace…

Alec turned to find his brother leaning casually against the wall, arms crossed and looking expectant.

“Sorry, Jace. It’s just… It’s been a really long day, and…”

“And you want to go home,” the blond finished for him, making Alec wince at the bluntness of it.

“The Institute is still home for me too,” he quickly reassured. “But given everything that’s happened, I just need some time away.”

“I get it, Alec. Seriously, I do. But let’s be honest. This place never really felt like home to you.”

There was no getting anything past his Parabatai. Alec sighed in defeat.
“Jace, I…”

“You don’t need to explain. It makes perfect sense. This place is your job, and as long as you’re here, you feel like you can never let your guard down. Never be yourself. You’re working 24/7, and that’s enough to drive anyone mental. I’m glad you finally found a place to call home.”

“It’s only temporary,” Alec replied. “I’ll be back in a few days. A week, max…”

Jace shrugged.

“Why though? We’ll always be here, Alec. Whenever you need us. But there’s nothing wrong with getting a life of your own. And no rule saying the Head of the Institute has to live on site.”

Alec’s eyes narrowed in puzzlement.

“Why are you saying this?”

“Because you’re happier at Magnus’s place. So maybe you should consider moving in with him. On a more permanent basis.”

The older boy snorted incredulously. “Are you serious? Jace, Magnus and I have never even discussed…”

“He’s going to though. Spoiler alert… He asked my opinion last night while we were sparring. I think he figured you might need some convincing to leave the nest and hoped I’d tag in.”

“And what did you say?”

“I told him if that’s what you want, then that’s what I want for you.” Jace pushed off the wall and moved closer to his brother. “In all the years I’ve known you, Alec, I’ve never seen you smile the way you do when the warlock’s around.”

Alec smiled at the thought alone, proving Jace’s point.

“You guys are good for each other. And I think a change of scenery could be good for you too. Just uh… Don’t be a stranger, alright?”

The naked fear of abandonment in the blond’s eyes nearly brought Alec to tears again.

“Jace, we’re Parabatai. Wherever I go, you’re right there next to me. That’s never going to change.”

The younger boy beamed at him, then pulled him into a bone-crushing hug, which Alec happily returned.

“I love you, buddy,” Jace stated.

“I love you too,” Alec replied sincerely.

“Say hi to Magnus for me,” the blond requested, then clapped his brother on the back before pulling away. “And don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

He winked and Alec shook his head in amusement.

“There’s nothing you wouldn’t do, Jace.”
“Damn right. So go have some fun.”

That was exactly what Alec intended to do.

SHSHSHSHSH

By the time he made it home, Alec was a mess of emotions, spanning from guilt and sadness at the thought of leaving the Institute, to hope and elation at the promise of a future with Magnus.

Everything was changing so quickly around him, and he had gotten swept up in the whirlwind. But there was one constant in his life these days, and he had no intentions of letting him go again.

Magnus was in the kitchen preparing dinner when he heard his boyfriend enter.

“Alexander? You certainly made good time! I’ve barely started putting my ingredients together…”

“I left early,” Alec replied, appearing in the doorway. “Couldn’t wait any longer.”

Magnus raised an eyebrow at him. “Wait for what?”

“For this.”

Next thing the warlock knew, he was being pressed against the countertop, Alec’s lips planted firmly against his, practically devouring him in his desperate need.

After a minute or two, the warlock eased him back slightly to see Alec’s flushed face.

“Not that I’m complaining, darling, but what brought that on?” he asked with a curious grin. “I may need to reenact the events at some point.”

“I spoke to Jace,” Alec panted.

Magnus looked wary. “Interesting segue…”

“And the answer’s yes,” the Shadowhunter finished.

“Wonderful! Might I inquire as to the question?”

“I want to move in with you, Magnus. I want to make things official between us.”

The warlock’s smile grew exponentially at the declaration.

“Well that was easier than I anticipated… I had a whole speech planned and everything! But are you sure you’re ready for such a big step, Alexander?”

“I’m positive. This is where I want to be. This is where I belong. With you.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Magnus beamed, earning another gratifying kiss.

“It smells fantastic in here, by the way,” Alec stated before pulling back to look at the organized chaos on their kitchen counter. “I’m starving.”

Magnus’s face fell as he caught sight of his array of lackluster ingredients again.

“What’s wrong?” his boyfriend asked, sounding worried.

“Nothing. It’s just… Had I known this was going to be such a momentous occasion, I would’ve
prepared something a bit more special than a stir fry for dinner,” he lamented.

Alec shook his head with a grin. “It’s perfect, Magnus, You’re perfect.” He kissed the warlock’s cheek and was thrilled to find the contented smile back on his boyfriend’s lips.

“Well in that case, I suggest we celebrate properly!” With a snap of his fingers, they each had a glass of red wine in hand. “To us,” Magnus toasted, and the glasses clinked together.

Dinner passed pleasantly enough as they both discussed their day. Magnus wasn’t thrilled to hear about Imogen’s unexpected visit, but he agreed that Alec’s compromise with her was for the best.

“You never cease to amaze me, Alexander.”

And with full stomachs and light hearts, Alec felt his exhaustion creeping back up on him. He stifled a yawn with a quick apology, then Magnus magicked the dishes clean and suggested that they head to bed.

Alec was the first to enter their shared bedroom, and when his eyes landed on the large, ornate bed against the far wall, he couldn’t help but freeze up for a moment.

Magnus, who was only a step behind him, placed a hand on his shoulder in concern. “Alexander? Are you alright?”

Alec jumped at the touch, swiveling his head around to lock eyes with the warlock.

“Yeah, sorry. I just…” He trailed off, at a complete loss for words. In truth, he didn’t know why he reacted that way.

Was it thoughts of being strapped down to Camille’s bed, which was similar in size and decor? Or was it the idea of having sex with Magnus again, now that he was officially moving in?

He wasn’t sure he was ready to take that step quite yet.

“You don’t have to explain,” Magnus promised softly. “We don’t need to rush into anything. We have all the time in the world now.”

“I know,” Alec muttered glumly, wishing he could just get past it all and be with Magnus the way he wanted to be. “Logically, I’m aware that it was all a long time ago, but it feels like it was just yesterday thanks to that damned rune.”

“In some ways, it was,” the warlock reasoned. “Those memories were repressed for years, and you never had time to properly confront them before. That would be a confusing situation for anyone.”

“I guess. It’s just… I keep trying to ignore it, but I can… I can still feel her hands on me,” Alec admitted with a shiver of disgust.

“Perhaps I can help with that,” his boyfriend offered.

He snapped the fingers of his free hand to bring some ambiance to life, including the warm glow of candles and the smell of lavender and sandalwood incense, chasing away the dark shadows that lurked in the corners of the room.

The boy tensed up further as he took in the romantic scene before him. He started shaking his head.

“Magnus, I don’t think I can…”
“Shh… It’s alright, darling. We’re not having sex tonight.”

Magnus knew he had made the right decision when some of the tension eased from his boyfriend’s stiff back.

The warlock cautiously placed his free hand on Alec’s left shoulder, mirroring the one on his right. His thumbs gently dug into the knotted muscles at the base of Alec’s neck, taking care not to cause him any additional pain.

“Just relax, and stay here in the moment with me, Alexander. Feel my hands on your skin now. No one else’s.”

He leaned forward and placed a comforting kiss to the same spot on the boy’s neck that he had just loosened, before sliding his thumbs down and out, drawing lazy circles across Alec’s shoulder blades.

“Let me replace those memories with better ones,” Magnus continued with a whisper next to Alec’s ear. “Let me worship you, my love.”

Alec let his tired eyes flutter closed as his breath shuddered out of him, and with it, his remaining anxiety. By the Angel were Magnus’s hands magical…

The warlock shifted his palms down to Alec’s ribs and guided the boy forward until his knees met the edge of the mattress. Then he drifted lower and tugged on the hem of the boy’s shirt in question.

Alec didn’t need any more encouraging from there. He raised his arms and allowed Magnus to remove the garment, then crawled wearily onto the bed. He settled into a comfortable position on his stomach, wrapping his arms around the pillow that he pulled under his head and chest.

Magnus knelt on the mattress beside him and picked right up where he had left off after summoning his massage oils.

He released every knotted muscle he could find as he glided his hands seamlessly up and down Alec’s strong back and arms until the boy felt like he was floating weightlessly through clouds.

Alec’s flesh was so warm now, heated by the kinetic energy of the warlock’s ever-moving hands.

Magnus took his time, tracing every fading scar he could find on Alec’s torso from top to bottom, then followed the path with his lips, kissing each mark gently until the boy moaned deeply in approval.

The warlock smirked against his skin.

“How’re you doing, Alexander?” he inquired, rubbing soothing circles over the boy’s upper back as he laid down next to him, watching his boyfriend’s relaxed face.

Alec blinked his beautiful eyes open just far enough to see the blurry outline of the warlock beside him.

“I love you, Magnus,” he whispered out, making Magnus’s heart soar with delight and affection.

“I love you too,” he stated in return, then waited until the boy’s eyes fluttered shut again.

Alec was going to be okay. They both were. Because love conquers all.
Magnus reached out and gently brushed Alec’s bangs to the side, smiling as his favorite little snores began to rumble from the boy’s throat.

“Aku cinta kamu, my dearest Shadowhunter.”

The End

Chapter End Notes

A/N: That was quite a long ride! Thank you all for sticking with me, and I hope you enjoyed the story!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!